

De Boer, EA
University of the Free State

Bible Study in Geneva: Theological Training for the Preachers to the People¹

*I know there are pious men here who, having no reason to be humble about their learning, would rather miss two sermons than one exposition of Scripture such as are being heard.*²

John Calvin

ABSTRACT

This article argues the historical situation, the purpose, the contents and the functions of the ecclesiastical institution called *la congrégation* in Calvin's Geneva. In doing this primary sources are consulted and a comprehensive view of this significant body is offered. In the critical assessment of these sources it became clear that both the interpretation (study) of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine were the focus of the *congrégation*. Exposition and discussion were essentially connected. As a matter of fact, these Bible studies were intended for ongoing training of the ministers. The purpose of the meetings was indeed to preserve purity and concord in doctrine. This was achieved by the exegeses of Biblical books, homiletically training, related disputations of propositions with a strong accent on doctrine and brotherly censure according to the standards of orthodoxy. The article shows that the *congrégations* also effectuated Calvin's choice of Biblical books to be explained in commentaries, it served as an instrument of instructing lay people (who regularly attended the meetings), the examination of candidates for the ministry and the formulation of doctrine.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ad Fontes, the 'Festschrift' in honour of prof. L.F. Schulze in Potchefstroom, offered the opportunity to highlight the so-called Genevan Consensus on Divine Election of 1551, as it was established in one of the weekly Bible study meetings of the ministers in Geneva with John Calvin presiding as moderator.³ That special meeting of Friday 18 December 1551 was, however, so unique in its pointed *doctrinal* focus (in refutation of Jerome Bolsec's heterodox position) that it

1 The kind permission of the Calvin Studies Society to publish a slightly revised version of the article in NGTT is hereby recognised. It was originally included in the Calvin Studies Society Papers, 2003.

2 CO 13: 434: *Scio hic esse pios homines et eruditionis non poenitendae, qui sibi duas conciones adimant malint quam unam scripturae tractationem quales audiuntur* (letter no. 1294 of 22 October 1549).

3 E.A. de Boer, 'The 'Consensus Genevensis' Revisited. The Genesis of the Genevan Consensus on Divine Election in 1551', in: *Ad fontes. Teologiese, historiese en wetenskaps-filosofiese studies binne reformatoriese kader. Festschrift vir Ludi Schulze*, ed. Erik A. de Boer – Victor E. d'Assonville [Acta theologica 2004, Supplementum 5] (Bloemfontein: Publications Office of University of the Free State, 2004), 51-78.

might leave the reader with a totally false idea of what the *congrégation* – the Friday morning Bible study – really was. History can be distorted by an incident which is so well recorded in documents, especially because it was an out of the ordinary event, caused by an uncommon incident. But the normal routine of each and every week must be known, both to give an accurate account of the ecclesiastical practice of the *congrégations* and to highlight the background which shows that incident as unique.

The purpose of this study is to define the nature, contents, and functions of the ecclesiastical institution called *la congrégation* in Geneva, and, along the way, to compare its character to similar institutions in the Reformation, such as the *Prophezei* in Zurich. The purpose of the *congrégation* is described in the Genevan church order as “to maintain purity and unity in doctrine” (*pour conserver pureté et concord de doctrine*). The method of working in the *congrégation* seems, when we look at the documents, to be no more than training in exegesis. In the following historical description of the *congrégations* in Geneva I try to answer the question: how does the emphasis on doctrine correspond to the working method of expounding biblical books? Or, to narrow my question down to one word: is my translation of the term *congrégations* as “Bible study meetings” accurate?

The secondary literature on the Genevan Reformation and on Calvin’s life and work offers every now and then a glimpse of the nature of the *congrégations*, especially when the case against Jerome Bolsec (1551) is considered. Two publications in the early 1960s stimulated further research into this unique institution: the edition of the *Registers of the Company of Pastors*⁴ and of Calvin’s *Deux congrégations et exposition du Catéchisme*. The Strasbourg scholar Rodolphe Peter pulled this ecclesiastical institution out of its obscurity by the publication of a 16th century edition of two of Calvin’s contributions on Galatians. It is preceded by a lucid introduction of twelve pages which summarizes our knowledge of the Bible study meetings at that time.⁵ It is my purpose to study this ecclesiastical institution in close detail.

How accurate is the picture of the *congrégations* presented in the secondary literature? We find some very unclear definitions of biblical studies. Robert M. Kingdon labelled it as “a type of adult Bible class.”⁶ Other authors regard the *congrégations* as a kind of church service (Heyer, Holtrop) in which a sermon was presented (Neuser). Bernard Cottret gives the following definition: “These

4 *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève au temps de Calvin*, vol. I (1546-1553), ed. Jean-François Bergier (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1964); vol. II (1553-1564), ed. Jean-François Bergier – Robert M. Kingdon (1962); vol. III (1565-1574), ed. O. Fatjo – O. Labarthe (1969); vol. IX (1604-1606), ed. G. Cahier – M. Campagnolo – M. Louis-Courvoisier (1989); vol. X (1607-1609), ed. G. Cahier, M. Campagnolo, M. Louis-Courvoisier (1991), referred to as *RCP* I-III, IX-X. English translation by Philip E. Hughes of the first two volumes in: *The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966. Most translations, given below, are my own.

5 Jean Calvin, *Deux congrégations et exposition de Catéchisme*, ed. Rodolphe Peter (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), p. IX-XX. Other literature on the Bible studies: Wulfert de Greef, *Johannes Calvijn. Zijn leven en werk* (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1989) 108-111; J. Plomp, *De kerkelijke tucht bij Calvijn* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1969), 265, 283-288; Roger Stauffenegger, *Église et société. Genève au XVII^e siècle. Texte* (Travaux d’Histoire Éthico-politique, vol. 41) (Genève : Librairie Droz, 1983), 217-220.

6 R.M. Kingdon, “Popular Reactions to the Debate between Bolsec and Calvin,” in *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag. Festschrift für Wilhelm Neuser zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. W. van ‘t Spijker (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991), 139.

7 Henri Heyer, *L’Église de Genève 1555-1909. Esquisse historique de son organisation* (reprint Nieuwkoop : B. de Graaf, 1974), 65 ; Philip C. Holtrop, *The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination from 1551 to 1555*, vol. 1, book 1 (Lewiston : The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 53 ; Wilhelm H. Neuser ed.,

congregations involved preaching and what we would call today a Bible-reading society, permitting an exchange of views.”⁸

Statements like this indicate that a fuller study of the *congrégations* in the manner of Rodolphe Peter may have its merits. The present essay may serve as an introduction to a future, more comprehensive study.

2. BIBLE STUDIES OR PROPHECY?

When the former bishop, Pier Paolo Vergerio, visited Geneva in 1550, he wrote a report of his impressions of the reformed city. This “letter” was published by Conrad Badius, the printer whom Vergerio may have met in the biblical studies. One of the jubilant passages concerns his attendance at the *congrégation* in St. Pierre and reads as follows:

Every week, on Fridays, a conference is held in the largest church [St. Pierre] in which all their ministers and many of the people participate. Here one of them reads a passage from Scripture and expounds it briefly. Another speaks on the matter what to him is according to the Spirit. A third person gives his opinion and a fourth adds some things in his capacity to weigh the issue. And not only have the ministers done so, but everyone who has come to listen. Thus is being followed what Paul found in the Church of Corinth, and on which he said that, when the brothers gathered, every one of them could say what the Spirit revealed to him; then he was silent, sat down and another began to speak [1 Cor. 14:29-30].

Several elements of this impression of the *congrégation* are worth noting. The first is the prominence of the ministers and their various contributions. The second is the participation of lay members in these Bible studies. A third element to be noted is the clear allusion to Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 14, and to the gift of prophecy. Did Vergerio present an adequate impression of these Genevan Bible studies?

A. The *Prophezei*

I find Vergerio’s allusion noteworthy because the Genevan form of Bible study was called the *congrégation*, *conférence des Escriptions*, or *colloque*, but never *la prophétie*. In Zurich, in 1525, the *Prophezei* was instituted.⁹ The name of this institution is derived from 1 Corinthians 14:29-32. According to Huldreich Zwingli every preacher has the task of a prophet. Knowledge of the biblical

Ioannis Calvini opera omnia (COR), series III, vol. 1: *De aeterna dei predestinatione* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1998), XII.

8 Bernard Cottret, *Calvin. A Biography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), 209f. On p. 296f: “... this resembled what occurred in a university seminar or Bible-study class.”

In November, 1549, Gribaldi sent a letter of introduction to Calvin (*CO* 13: 448, no. 1304), but the Italian bishop did not show up. In the meantime, Vergerio contacted Calvin for a preface to the booklet on the history of Francesco Spiera.

Pier Paolo Vergerio, *Epistola del Vergerio, nella quale sono descritte molte cose della Città, è della Chiesa di Geneva*, 15 July 1550 (J.-Fr. Gilmont, *Bibliographie des éditions de Jean Crespin 1550-1572*, vol. 1 (Verviers : Librairie P.M. Gassen, 1981), 7 (50/11).

9 Heinrich Bullinger, “Wie vnd wenn man Z_riych angehept die Biblisch Lection in dryen sprachen läsen,” in Fritz B_sser, *Die Prophezei. Humanismus und Reformation in Zurich* (Bern e.a.: Verlag Peter Lang, 1994), 7-9; Gottfried W. Locher, *Die Zwinglische Reformation im Rahmen der europäischen Kirchengeschichte* (Göttingen – Z_riich : Vandenhoeck-Ruprecht, 1979), 161-163.

languages was deemed necessary to expound and apply the Scriptures prophetically.¹⁰ In German the word *Offenbarung* is used for “preaching.” The *Prophezei* evolved into the theological faculty.

In Strasbourg Martin Bucer and his colleagues instituted a related form of Bible lectures. In 1526, Bucer proposed to the magistrate that the canonical services be transformed into a *Prophezei*. That is why some form of service around the biblical lectures was maintained. Every morning and evening a service was held with half an hour of singing the Psalms and half an hour of *prophecy* or *christliche Übung* and prayer.¹¹ The place of the canons in these services was taken by preachers, schoolmasters, *kirchenpfleger*, and pious people who wanted to be taught the Scriptures. The synod of 1533 and the *ordonnance* of 1534 codified the *Convent ecclésiastique*.¹² During Calvin’s years in Strasbourg these Bible studies were poorly attended.¹³ But the name, which in the French speaking congregation must have been *la prophétie*, was not transferred to the Bible studies held in Geneva.

B. 1 Corinthians 14

When Vergerio made the connection between the Bible studies which he witnessed in Geneva, and the passage on prophecy from 1 Corinthians 14, he also must have had some knowledge of this institution as it was established in Zurich through Bullinger or in Strasbourg. Did the ministers of Geneva also apply this passage to their Bible studies? The *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* do not mention 1 Corinthians 14 or reflect its wording.

I know of only one instance in which an allusion to 1 Corinthians 14:29-32 was made: in the case of censure against Philippe d’Ecclesia, one of the Genevan ministers. In 1549 a dossier on D’Ecclesia was opened. He was reprimanded for having raised unedifying issues and senseless questions. A file of such lapses had been kept and D’Ecclesia was confronted with it. The Registers tell us that his colleagues decided “that he should be warned not to speak at the Bible studies at all, neither after the one who had expounded, nor when his own turn came round to expound, until the next day of censures.” In a marginal note the secretary of the Company of Pastors added: “The ground [for this] was cited to him from St. Paul: that he who brings nothing of edification ought to keep silent in the church.”¹⁴ This note clarifies that the ministers saw a connection with the Pauline prescriptions regarding prophecy. Still, it considers only the negative part, that is, the imposition of silence. A positive application of 1 Corinthians 14 with regard to the *congrégation* is missing.

What was Calvin’s understanding of prophecy as one of the New Testament gifts of the Spirit to the Church? With regard to the Bible study meetings it is necessary to include the Reformed view of the gift of tongues. Both the Zurich and Genevan theologians saw the Pentecost miracle of Acts 2 as the gift of communicating the Gospel in foreign languages.¹⁵ It was applied to the

10 Cf. Locher, *Die Zwinglische Reformation im Rahmen der europäischen Kirchengeschichte*, 161f; W.P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 39f, 137f, 278.

11 *Martin Bucer Deutsche Schriften*, ed. Robert Stupperich, vol. 2 (Gütersloh – Paris, 1962), 520f.

12 François Wendel, *L’Église de Strasbourg. Sa constitution et son organisation, 1532-1535* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942), 102f, 196-198. On the responsibility of the Convent in matters of preaching, see p. 204.

13 Philippe Denis, « La prophétie dans les Églises de la Réforme au XVI^e siècle, in *Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique* 72 (1977), 292-295.

14 *RCP* I: 47.

15 Leonard Sweetman, “The Gifts of the Spirit: A Study of Calvin’s Comments on 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28; Romans 12:6-8; Ephesians 4:11,” in David E. Holwerda ed., *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 291-297 (273-303).

situation of the Church in the 16th century and the knowledge of the newly discovered biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians (1546) Calvin explained 14: 29-32 without any reference to the Bible studies in Geneva. However, he did apply some features of the text to the situation of the church. On verse 27 he remarks that “the Church can do without tongues and suffer no inconvenience, except where they are helpful for prophesying, as for example Hebrew and Greek are today.” On verse 29 Calvin said, commenting on the limitation of the number of people prophesying: “In the discourse, the interpreter took the place of the prophet, and so that was the chief, and the more frequent, way in which languages were employed.”¹⁶ The interpretation of “language” is the interpretation of prophecy.

What then is the character of prophecy after the time of the New Testament church? Calvin comments: “I bracket revelation and prophesying together, and I think that prophesying is the servant of revelation.” Teaching, however, is associated with knowledge: “Teaching is the way to pass on knowledge.” Calvin’s definition of prophecy states: “prophesying does not consist in the simple and bare interpretation of Scripture, but also includes the knowledge for making it apply to the needs of the hour, and that can only be obtained by revelation and the special influence of God.”¹⁷ According to Calvin prophecy begins as interpretation of Scripture, but only rises to the level of New Testament prophecy in the inspired application to the situation of the church. In Calvin’s view of biblical prophecy the element of predicting future events is also an essential part. But this feature reached its fulfilment in the coming of Christ who was the greatest prophet of God.¹⁸

Thus Calvin would stress “that teachers, in their interpretation of Scripture, should focus on the preservation of sound doctrine, while prophets have the task of applying Scripture to the present situation.”¹⁹ This may explain why in Geneva the phrase *conférence des Escriptions* was favoured, and not *la prophétie*. Both the interpretation of Scripture and the formulation of doctrine were the focus of the *congrégation*.

3. REGULATIONS AND STRUCTURE

The Bible study meetings are poorly documented in the sources, although their aim has been clearly described in the church order. However important the first two volumes of the *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs* are, they do not contain any direct information on or documentation of the Bible studies. That should not surprise us, since a weekly procedure of oral discussion soon

16 CO 49: 528-529. Cf. *Institutes*, 4. 1.12 on 1 Corinthians 14:30: “If a better revelation is made to another sitting by, let the first be silent.” From this it is clear that every member of the church is charged with the responsibility of public edification according to the measure of his grace, provided he perform it decently and in order’. Idem in *Institutes*, 4.8.9.

17 CO 49: 519.

18 Wulfert de Greef, “Calvin on Prophecy,” in Wilhelm H. Neuser, Herman J. Selderhuis ed., *Ordentlich und fruchtbar. Festschrift für Willem van ‘t Spijker* (Leiden: Uitgeverij J.J. Groen en Zoon, 1997), 113-118 (111-128).

19 De Greef, “Calvin on Prophecy,” 123f. Calvin’s exposition of the Old Testament texts, referring to “schools of prophets,” does not have any allusion to the *congrégations* either. In a *congrégation* on Isaiah 1, Calvin said: « Or les prophetes là ont eu don de reveler les choses advenir, comme il est assez notoire. Mais leur office n’estoit seulement de predire ce qui estoit incognu aux hommes, mais de c’estoit de l’appliquer à l’instruction du peuple » (E.A. de Boer, « Jean Calvin et Ésaïe 1 (1564). Édition d’un texte inconnu introduit par quelques observations sur la différence et les relations entre congrégation, cours et sermon, » *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 80 (2000), 382 (371-395)).

became a normal feature in the Company of Pastors, leaving hardly any written traces. It is only when the weekly routine is broken by an incident that the *congrégation* as such and the issues discussed surface in the records and correspondence.

There are also very few transcripts of the contents of the Bible studies. Since the recording of Calvin's lectures and sermons started in 1549, the scribe, Denis Raguénier, also seems to have seen it as his task to make a verbatim report of the *congrégations*, just as he was hired to preserve Calvin's sermons in writing. On the basis of such transcripts four texts were published in the 16th century (one on John 1, two on Galatians 2, and one on election), while the manuscripts of five full expositions survived (four by Calvin on Exodus 1:1-8; Joshua 1:1-5; Joshua 11, Is. 1:1-3; one on Joshua 1:6-11 by Michel Cop), together with a body of nineteen texts on Joshua on which Calvin and Beza gave additional comments in the Bible studies. That gives us a total of twenty-eight texts for a period of fifteen years. In the course of fifteen years the ministers would have held some 780 study meetings. The fact that less than thirty texts survive means that we only have a partial transcript of one in every thirty meetings. And even that average number is highly misleading, since the body of texts on the book of Joshua account for twenty-one of the manuscripts (that is, three full expositions and eighteen additional comments), all of which were recorded in the eight months between June 1563 and January 1564.

The first impression in investigating these Bible studies in Geneva is that the role of John Calvin, the moderator of the Company of Pastors, seems to have been dominant. The texts—some in print, more in manuscript—are almost all transcripts of Calvin's spoken words. The *Vita Calvini* paints the following picture. The first version by Theodore de Bèze (1564) describes Calvin's role in the Bible studies, within the contexts of his weekly activities, in one dash of the pen: "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."²⁰ Beza wrote this in the preface of the commentary on Joshua shortly after Calvin's death. The gaps in the series of *congrégations* on Joshua in 1563 tell us of Calvin's absence.

This general impression is elaborated in some detail in Beza's second *Vita*, in which he used information from Nicolas Colladon. He is more accurate in describing Calvin's part in the Bible studies, again in the context of the reformer's workload: "on every Friday in the conference on Scripture, which we call *la Congrégation*, what he added in explanation after the expositor was like a lecture."²¹ Beza proceeds a few pages further, when he tells of the beginning of the recording of Calvin's sermons and lectures in 1549: "That is why here after I will point out, following the order of time, what books he explained in lectures or sermons, next to what he composed either in the form of a commentary or otherwise, and also what was treated in the *congrégations* on Friday."²²

It is through this source that we know the sequence of biblical books which were studied by the Company of Pastors since 1549, starting with Hebrews. Beza's source must have been

20 CO 21 : 33. In his version of 1575, Beza followed his own version: *diebus Veneris in communi collatione scripturae, quam Congregationem vocamus, iustam paene lectionem habebat* (CO 21: 132). He took up the line on Calvin's perseverance in the account of 1564 (CO 21: 160).

21 CO 21: 66: *tous les Vendredis en la conference de l'Escripture, que nous appellons la Congregation, ce qu'il adioustoit apres le proposant pour la declaration estoit comme une leçon*. Denis Crouzet took this line and wrote on the Bible studies as if John Calvin alone spoke (*Jean Calvin. Vies parallèles* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 261-263, 279, 315).

22 CO 21 : 70f.

Colladon. Together with his parents and uncle Nicolas Colladon arrived in Geneva in 1550.²³ As a student at the Collège de Rive he was present in the *congrégation* of 16 October 1551, in which the Bolsec affair on predestination started. As a devoted student and, later, a trusted colleague of Calvin, he may have kept his own notes on the Bible studies. But the context of this passage on the sequence of biblical books, treated on Friday mornings, points to the work of Denis Raguenier, the scribe of Calvin's sermons. Colladon may have checked the records of the scribe to verify his information.²⁴ While Beza's praise of Calvin's contribution to the biblical studies is general, Colladon's account seems a detailed and reliable source. They both testify that Calvin's contribution, even if he did not present the exposition proper, was "like a lecture."

Another eye witness testimony to the *congrégations* comes from Conrad Badius. The printer-publisher, who was probably a regular visitor at the Bible studies, gave the following description of these meetings in the preface of the volume *Plusieurs sermons* in 1558. The *congregation* is

a certain assembly of the Church which takes place on one of the weekdays, where each one of the ministers, in turn, explains some passage of Scripture, more by way of a lecture than a sermon. This being done, if there is one of the other ministers to whom the Spirit of God has revealed something which contributes to the understanding and clarification of what had been set forth, he is free to speak.²⁵

While Beza highlighted Calvin's prominence, Badius concentrated his description of the *congrégations* on the role of the ministers. In fact, all ministers, including Calvin, had an equal obligation to speak in these Bible studies, so that each colleague had a turn approximately every three months.

A. The Genevan Practice

The first indication of the institution of the Bible studies is dated November 1536.²⁶ The Genevan ministers wrote to Lausanne, to the north of Lac Lemman: "Through Christ we have established

23 Nicolas Colladon, son of the lawyer Léon Colladon, studied in Lausanne (1549) and, after his father Léon and his uncle Germain fled to Geneva in 1550, at the College de Rive (exam in 1552). He became minister in the village Vandoeuvres in 1553, filling the vacancy after the dismissal of Philippe d'Ecclesia (RCP I:160), and was later transferred to the city, probably in the same year. His name is found in the list of witnesses for the trial against Jerome Bolsec (CO 8: 185f). Cf. on Colladon's involvement in the second edition of the *Vita Calvini* Rodolphe Peter – Jean-François Gilmont, *Bibliotheca calviniana. Les oeuvres de Jean Calvin publiées au XVI^e siècle*, vol. III, *Écrits théologiques, littéraires et juridiques 1565-1600* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2000), 34.

24 The question whether all or at least all of Calvin's contributions to the Bible studies were transcribed must be dealt with elsewhere. Raguenier's catalogue does not include any volume on the *congrégations* (SC II: XVf), but volumes like ms.fr. 40a, 40b, and 40c do exist, even though they were omitted from the catalogue.

25 *Plusieurs sermons* is a collection of sermons, preceded by the publication of Calvin's introductory exposition to the Gospel of John: *Or par ce mot de Congregation j'enten une certaine assemblée de l'Eglise qui se fait un des jours de la sepmaine, où un chacun des Ministres en son ordre expose quelque passage d'Ecriture, plus par forme de leçon que de predication; et cela fait, s'il y a quelqu'un des autres à qui l'Esprit de Dieu ait revelé quelque chose faisant à l'intelligence et esclairissement de ce qui a esté proposé, il luy est libre de parler* (CO 35: 591f).

26 Maybe Farel's work in Neuchâtel included some form of the *congrégation*. Farel promoted the conference in a letter of 4 April 1537 to Christoph Fabri in Thonon (A.-L. Herminjard, *Correspondance des Réformateurs dans les pays de langue française* (Genève: H. Georg, 1872), vol. 4, 220). In the classis Thonon, the *congrégations* seem to have been instituted after the example of Geneva (*Correspondence*, vol. 4, 272 n. 6; 299 n. 11). In 1608, when a change in the structure of the *congregation* was contemplated, its institution was recalled: *La continuation d'iceluy depuis 70 ans ou environs, ayant apporté un singulier ornement à ceste Eglise, que tous changements et nouveautez doibvent ester à très bon droit suspects, et surtout en matieres ecclesiastiques* (RCP X: 88).

colloquies.”²⁷ The neighbouring colleagues from the Pays de Vaud were invited to participate on the basis of full equality. The common cause of reformation led to the plan of a broad platform of regular meetings and discussions, in which unity of doctrine was the primary aim.

I suggest that it was through the influence of Guillaume Farel that the idea of Bible studies, as they were practiced in Zurich, was transported to Geneva. Farel’s letters to Christoph Fabri (also called Libertet, a colleague in Thonon) inform us of some events related to the early phase. A man by the name of Dionysius (identified by A.-L. Herminjard as Denis Lambert), also nicknamed “Bacchus” for his diet of wine, disturbed the Bible conferences. A former monk, Lambert had become a pastor in the Bernese territories and demanded to be recognized as such in Geneva. However, he was asked to resign because of undignified behaviour towards his colleagues. “He was admonished by Calvin and asked in the name of the brethren to leave the ministry.”²⁸ This Dionysius even took his wife, who was not without reproach either, to the *congrégation* to plead for her husband.

These Bible studies developed in the surrounding Bernese territories as well. The second synod of Lausanne, held on 14 May 1537, stipulated that the ministers of each of the seven classes should meet once a week for mutual exhortation and Bible study.²⁹ The structure and terminology are very similar to the Genevan practise. In early 1538, Bern managed to sever relations between Geneva and Lausanne: “Our colloquies are forbidden to the brethren and theirs to us,” as Farel wrote.³⁰ The crisis of 1538, resulting in the dismissal of Farel and Calvin, was building. “Bacchus” seems to have played a role in disturbing the relations between Geneva and Lausanne.³¹ From that date participation in the Bible studies was confined to Geneva and its territories.

The Church Order of Geneva

The *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* of 1541 (following the draft of John Calvin) contain the following paragraph, connected with the oath of office of newly elected ministers:

Now as it is necessary to examine the ministers well when they are to be elected, so also it is necessary to have the right order to keep them in their duty. To this end it will be expedient in the first place that all ministers, in order to preserve purity and concord of doctrine among themselves, gather on a set day of the week to hold a conference on the Scriptures.

The following paragraph concerns attendance:

No one should be absent without a legitimate reason. If anyone is negligent in this respect, let him be admonished. As for those who preach in the villages, subordinate to the Seigneurie, they are to be exhorted [1561: our ministers of the city should go and exhort them] to come as often as they can. However, if they default an entire month, it is to be regarded as a very great negligence, unless it is a case of illness or another legitimate hindrance.

27 CO 10b: 73 (no. 40, 21 November 1536; Genevan ministers, *Ex coetu nostro*, to colleagues in Lausanne); Herminjard, vol. 4, 107 (no. 581).

28 CO 10b: 76 (no. 43, Farel to Libertet, 6 Dec. 1536); Herminjard, vol. 4, 121-124 (no. 588).

29 Henri Vuilleumier, *Histoire de l'Église Réformée du Pays de Vaud sous le régime Bernois*, vol. 1, *L'Âge de la Réforme* (Lausanne: Éditions la Concorde, 1927), 285-287; Jean Barnaud, *Pierre Viret. Sa vie et son oeuvre (1511-1571)* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1973), 167.

30 CO 10b: 145 (no. 88, Farel to Libertet, 14 Jan. 1538); Herminjard, vol. 4, 350-352 (no. 678). Also in Calvin's letter to Martin Bucer of 12 January, CO 10b: 144; Herminjard, *Coorespondence*, vol. 4, 349 (no. 677).

31 CO 10b: 78 (no. 44, Farel to Libertet, 16 Dec. 1536); Herminjard, vol. 4, 135f (no. 592).

In the revision of 1561 a passage was inserted on the conference as a means of keeping an eye on each colleague and his duty to study the Scriptures:

In order to recognize how diligent everyone is in his studies and that no one grows lax, each member shall expound by turns the passage from Scripture that comes next [1576: on the day of the *Congrégation*]. When finally the ministers have retreated [1576: separately to the place where they meet]³², each member of the Company shall admonish the one who propounded on what needs contradiction, so that such critique serves him as correction.

The prescriptions of 1541 proceed with a final paragraph – maintained of course in 1561 – on conflicts over doctrine. A closed session of the *Compagnie des Pasteurs*, following a conference, is the first platform to deal with such cases:

If there appears a difference in doctrine, let the ministers come together to discuss the matter. Afterwards, if need be, let them call the elders and those commissioned by the Seigneurie to assist in composing the contention. Finally, if they are unable to come to friendly agreement because of the obstinacy of one of the parties, let the case be referred to the magistrate to be put in order.³³

A few remarks on terminology are in order. The word *congrégation*, a gathering or meeting, is rather vague. A more adequate term for these Bible studies, *conférence des Escriptions*, is seldom used. In some letters, we encounter the term *colloque*³⁴ or, in Latin, *colloquium*. When *congrégation* had become an established term, Beza referred to Bolsec's appearance in *congregationis coetu*.³⁵ The term *congrégation* is also used in the transcripts as the title of the introductory expositions and in the few samples that were published in the 16th century. In these instances the meaning of *congrégation* is the written or published text of *la proposition* (here rendered as "exposition").

The conference for Bible study, where interested members of the Church were present, was followed by a closed session of the ministers in which they discussed various practical matters of ministry. This session is most frequently also called *la congrégation* in the minutes of the *Compagnie des Pasteurs*.³⁶ Censure of doctrine and morals had a place in the quarterly sessions which were called *congrégations generales*³⁷ (held before each celebration of the Lord's Supper -

32 The *Ordonnances* of 1576 put it more clearly: *se seront retirés à part, là où ils s'assemblent* (cf. Jean Calvin, *Deux congrégations*, ed. R. Peter, p. X n. 18, referring to the text of Heyer, *L'Eglise de Genève*, 281).

33 CO 10a: 18 and RCP I, 3 (text of 1541); CO 10a: 96 and OS II: 332 (text of 1561).

34 In the *Leges Academiae* of 1559 we find this double terminology in an article concerning the presence of the professors "à la congrégation et au Colloque des Ministres" (CO 10a: 85). The term *colloque* seems to be applied to the session, following the Bible conference.

35 CO 21: 143f (twice).

36 Emil Doumergue confused the terms when he described the *conférence des Escriptions* as follows: « Cette conférence pastorale devait devenir célèbre dans l'histoire de Genève sous le nom de *Vénérable Compagnie des pasteurs* »; however, he rightly added « et ne doit être confondue avec le Consistoire » (Jean Calvin, *Les hommes et les choses de son temps* (Lausanne : George Bridel, 1917), vol. 5 : 108).

37 RCP I: 145.

38 RCP I: 56-58. For other examples of the use of *congrégation* for the session following the Biblical studies, cf. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, vol. 5: 62, 73. After 1553, the term *congrégation* seems to disappear from the minutes of the *Compagnie des Pasteurs*. It is found once in 1554 (RCP II: 57), twice in 1555 (*en notre congrégation ou colloque*) for the session on the ministers' work (RCP II: 62, 65).

). It should not surprise us that the ministers did not always make a clear distinction between the Bible studies and the following session of the Company of Pastors. In general, the term *congrégation* could be used as an equivalent of the Company of Pastors itself. Following the transcript of the Church order of 1541, the first volume of the Registers begins with a list of regulations from 1546. All ministers signed the document, following the line: *Passé par la congrégation des freres assemblee le vendredi ...*³⁹

C. The Lausanne Classis

The neighbouring Lausanne *classis* (a regional assembly of Churches), in the Pays de Vaud, also had weekly colloquies for the ministers and the people, held on Wednesdays. The Synod of 1537 had instituted the various *classes* in the territory of Bern, which were subdivided into colloquies in 1539.⁴⁰ In the second half of 1549 a huge conflict arose between the ministers of Lausanne and the Council of Bern on the effect of these colloquies. Conflicts, in which Viret and Zebedee were the main persons, seem to have annoyed the Bernese Council so much that they decided to restrict the colloquies to four times per year.⁴¹

At Viret's request, Calvin wrote to Wolfgang Musculus on the matter and strongly advocated the reinstitution of weekly colloquies because every one of the preachers is heard, stimulated, and corrected so that he is equipped to explain the Scriptures to the people: "This is also the best bond to retain consensus in doctrine."⁴² Furthermore, interested laymen were now deprived of a most cherished possibility of studying the Bible. This letter is a unique defence of the Genevan practice from Calvin's perspective. In November the measure was softened; the colloquies in the Lausanne classis were permitted again, probably because of the Academy and its students.⁴³ The frequency could be increased again, but the persons permitted to speak were restricted to one, plus the professors of Hebrew and Greek.⁴⁴ Once again Calvin warned Musculus of the danger of having no colloquies in the other classes of Bern: "Now, the less communication in doctrine, the greater will be the danger of destructive instruction."⁴⁵

Sometime during this conflict Calvin addressed a memorandum on the "conferences of the pastors on Holy Scripture" to the Council of Bern.⁴⁶ He was invited to do so by Viret and the Lausanne ministers.⁴⁷ This document offers the most extensive description of the Genevan institution in Calvin's hand. We present it in the following translation, because it reflects the fullest and most coherent description of the *congrégation* in Geneva:

"Advice on the Conferences of the Pastors on Holy Scripture"

The response which pleased [you,] our renowned Sirs, to give us in writing regarding the conference on Scripture, which we are accustomed to hold weekly, does not correspond at all with

39 RCP I : 21.

40 Jean Barnaud, *Pierre Viret. Sa vie et son oeuvre (1511-1571)* (1911 ; reprint, Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1973), 167; Vuilleumier, *Histoire*, 286.

41 Barnaud, *Pierre Viret*, 351-361; Vuilleumier, *Histoire*, 287-289, 660. No minutes of the classes prior to 1573 have survived.

42 Calvin's letter to Wolfgang Musculus, 22 October (no. 1294, CO 13: 433f).

43 Letter no. 1314 (CO 13: 463-468) and no. 1315 (CO 13: 468-472).

44 The final verdict of the Council of Bern is given on 9 November 1549 (CO 13: 443f, no. 1301). The matter dies down in the correspondence during December.

45 Calvin's next letter to Musculus, 7 December 1549 (no. 1325, CO 13: 490f).

46 CO 13: 435-436 (no. 1295). The document is in Calvin's handwriting. It bears no date, but must be from September 1549. The wording suggests that it was written as a reaction to the verdict of the Bernese Council (CO 13: 374-376).

47 CO 13: 428 (no. 1291).

what the Bernese preachers said to our brother, Master Pierre Viret.⁴⁸ And also because there are in the same response some passages dubious to us, we have thought it best – so as not to undertake anything that does not correspond with the intentions of our Sirs, but instead to follow what you have regarded as good and useful for the up building of the Church – to put in writing point by point the form which we want to keep in our so called conferences, so that – when it is approved by you, our Sirs, as we hope – it will be observed without difficulty and that no one will be permitted to go against it.

[Material regulations]

First, that in the Lausanne *classis*, considering the distance between the places, there be three separate colloquies, so organised that the distance causes no trouble to anyone.

- That each colloquy choose a book of Scripture – one that will be the most useful – to expound.

- That the passage to be treated shall be defined by agreement a week earlier, so that they work on the text ably and no more or less than is deemed good, both for the instruction and the convenience of the brethren.

- That each of the ministers and professors [of the Academy of Lausanne] be bound to take his turn in expounding the passage assigned to him. The aim is to see how diligent each one is in his studies and in what way they explain the Holy Scripture for the edification of the people.

- That he who has put forth his exposition in that capacity shall be admonished personally among the brethren about the faults which have been noted in him, such as if he has made a wrong argument on or exposition of Scripture, or that he does not have the gift of teaching, or that there is another vice that needs reproach.

[Formal Restrictions]

After the passage is expounded by the one whose turn it is, the matter as presented is not to be repeated in order to eliminate all redundancy, but only what has been omitted shall be added by those to whom God has given the grace to do so.

- No matter of discontent which causes debate or dissension shall be stirred up, but they must discuss peacefully what is relevant to the understanding of the passage and to the doctrine which can be deduced. When such a situation occurs, let the dean interfere by imposing silence on the dissenters.

- No topic shall be brought forward against the established reformation.⁴⁹ The one who tries to do so must be reprimanded by the authority of the dean.⁵⁰

- If anyone raises a question on the [doctrinal] consequence of the passage, he shall speak modestly of what God has given him on the subject or wait for the statement on the matter by him who will be chosen by the *classis* as the most able one.

[General Observations]

48 This response, dated 2 September 1549, is found in CO 13: 374-376 (no. 1254). See Viret's letter to Calvin with the request to write to the Council of Bern in CO 13: 427ff (no. 1291).

49 Calvin reacts to a sentence in the verdict of the Council of Bern, sent to the ministers of Lausanne, limiting the colloquies to four times per year "*pourvu toutefois qu'aucun avis ne soit entendu contraire à la dispute de réformation tenue dans notre ville et au serment prêt*" (CO 13: 375 in the translation of Barnaud, *Pierre Viret.*, 352).

50 Pierre Viret was *doyen* or *Decanus* of the *classis* Lausanne. The dean was assisted in his work of supervision of the Churches by four *jurés*. The *decanus* and four *iurati* signed the letters written in the name of the Lausanne ministers (CO 13, no. 1314-1315).

However, no one shall be forced to attend every week under all circumstances.⁵¹ Yet all shall be admonished to be present, except when they have a legitimate reason for their absence, both to profit personally and to censure the one expounding, if necessary. Everything shall serve to attain a pure and simple understanding of Scripture and to draw maximum profit from it for the instruction of all, without sophisticated cleverness and without any dispute and even less controversy.”

This document recalls the history of a conflict in the Bernese territories, but at the same time it reflects the practice and experience of the Genevan ministers. It is written from the perspective of their colleagues in the Lausanne area, but in case they chose to use this document, Calvin’s name or person cannot be detected. It is not clear whether the Lausanne ministers submitted this “Advice” to the Council of Bern or not. It could have been incorporated in the extensive memorandum written by Viret in the name of all the Lausanne ministers.⁵² This memorandum is important, because it was Pierre Viret who worked in Geneva during the early years of the reformation. The colloquies in Lausanne and the *congrégations* in Geneva were almost identical up to the crisis of 1549.

D. Time and place

The time of day when the Bible studies begin is given in the historiography as 7.00 a.m.,⁵³ or 9.00 a.m.,⁵⁴ without reference to a source. It must have been following the dawn service on weekdays (which took place at 6.00 a.m. in the summer and at 7.00 a.m. during the winter). Giving the ministers and the people time to assemble after the morning service, the starting time must have been 8 a.m. in summer and 9 a.m. in winter. On one occasion it is reported during the summer period that the Bible studies could last until around 10.00 a.m.⁵⁵ The sounding of the church bell was the customary summons to assemble.

Following the Bible studies, the Company of Pastors held their closed meeting for business matters. Sometimes this meeting had to be adjourned *à midi après disner* (until midday after dinner).⁵⁶ Thus the whole Friday morning after the early service was reserved for the Bible studies and the deliberations of the Company of Pastors.

Where did these meetings take place? In the early years a note in the records of the Council announced: “Regarding the *congregation*, [it is decided] that it shall not take place in St. Pierre, but at Calvin’s or at [the school of] Rive (whichever one wishes) and to ring the bell, as customary.”⁵⁷ This regulation, half a year before Calvin’s banishment in 1538, did not last long.

51 This could be an allusion to the clause in the last verdict of Bern of 9 November: the Lausanne colloquies can be held more frequently, *ea tamen conditione ut ne quis ad eos extraordinarios conventus cogatur* (CO 13: 444, sub 2).

52 CO 13: 415-417. An analysis is offered by Barnaud, *Pierre Viret*, 354ff.

53 Charles Borgeaud, *Histoire de l’Université de Genève*, vol. 1 (Genève: Georg & Co, 1900), 53; Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, vol. 3: 343, followed by R. Peter, (o.c., p. X).

54 E. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, vol. 6, 17; cf. the reconstruction of J. Gaberel, *Histoire de l’Eglise de Genève depuis le commencement de la Réformation jusqu’à nos jours*, vol. 3 (Genève: Joël Cherbuliez, 1862), 490 (1e tableau); Heyer, *L’Église de Genève*, 65.

55 An indicent, documented in the *Registres du Consistoire*, reports on a regular lay-member, Ayme du Nan, *comme il avoit ouy ung vendredi le presche à S. Gervays et après alla à la congregation où il demora assez longuement*. He is intimidated by someone who says *que c’estoit affaire de quelque riche homme d’aller aux congregations et y demorer jusques à dix heures* (CO 21: 432).

56 RCP I: 76; II: 109.

57 CO 21 : 223: *Touchant la congregation: qu’elle ne ce doyt plus tenyr en S. Pierre, mais chez Calvinus, out az Ryvaz laz où il leur playra, et de sonner laz cloche comment est de coutume* (taken from Reg. du

After his return, the meeting place was St. Pierre again. Doumergue points to *le temple de l'Auditoire* that is the small church Nôtre-Dame-la-Neuve; this could be the case for the years 1557 and following. In 1556, that chapel, which had been closed in 1536, was used as a church again, especially by the Italian and English- speaking refugees. Before that time, St. Pierre was used as a meeting place for the pastors' Bible studies.⁵⁸

In the early 17th century the *congrégation* was reorganized and placed "at the time of the [early morning] service and in the pulpit of St. Pierre".⁵⁹ The Auditoire, used as a place of gathering since 1557, was replaced again by St. Pierre. Since the adjacent Chapel of the Maccabeus⁶⁰ was used as a storeroom, we may assume that the Bible studies took place in the main Church building. The place of the Bible studies was thus easily accessible to the people who had attended the early morning service in the church.

E. Structure or Liturgy?

Bible study meetings such as the *Prophezei* in Zurich and the *christliche Übung* in Strasbourg were instituted to replace the canonical hours. The study of Scripture was held at the traditional hour of the day, and therefore some form of liturgy was maintained. But in Geneva and the Swiss territories the Bible studies were held only once a week. Was it regarded as a form of Church service?

Every meeting was opened by this formulaic prayer:

We will invoke our good God and Father, asking him that he will pardon all our faults and sins and illumine us by his holy Spirit so that we have the true understanding of his holy Word, giving us grace so that we can study it purely and faithfully, to the glory of his name, to the edification of his Church, and to our salvation. This we ask him in the name of his only and beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.⁶¹

The prayer at the beginning of the *Prophezei* in Zurich had the following wording:

Almighty, eternal, and merciful God, whose Word is a lamp to our feet and a light on our paths, open and enlighten our minds, so that we may understand your pure and holy Word and in that which we have rightly understood may we be transformed so that in no way might we displease your majesty, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.⁶²

Conseil, vol. 32, fol. 14). 'Ryvaz' is the Collège de Rive, the Latin school founded by the Genevans after the Reformation of 1536.

58 Nicolas Colladon testified to the *congrégation* of 16 October 1551, in which Bolsec spoke out: *qui se feist en l'église de saint Pierre en la maniere accoustumée* (CO 8: 192). J. Gaberel pointed to the *Auditoire*; Gaberel, *Histoire de l'Eglise de Geneve*, 490.

59 *RCP IX*: 218.

60 The editors of *RCP IX* state that the ministers held their business meeting, following the *congrégation*, in a room above this chapel from the end of the 16th century (o.c., 181 n.234), and not, as has been assumed, in the cloister of St. Pierre (cf. *Saint Pierre, Ancienne Cathédrale de Genève* (Genève, 1891; reprint 1982), 89).

61 CO 8 : 93 (*Priere que les Ministres ont accoustumé de faire au commencement de la Congregation*, heading the publication of the text of the *Congregation de l'élection éternelle de Dieu* of 1551).

62 Z IV : 365 : *Omnipotens, sempiterna et misericors deus, cuius verbum est lucerna pedibus nostris et lumen semitarum nostrarum, aperi et illumina mentes nostras, ut oracula tua pure et sancte intelligamus, et in illud, quod recte intellexerimus, transformeremur, quo maiestati tuae nulla ex parte displiceamus, per Jesum Christum, dominum nostrum. Amen.* Cf. Fritz Schmidt-Clausing, *Zwingli als Liturgiker. Eine liturgiegeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1952), 67f, 142f; cf. Fritz Schmidt-Clausing, "Das Prophezeigebet. Ein Blick in Zwinglis liturgische Werkstatt," *Zwingliana*, vol. 12 (1964), 10-34.

The Zurich and Genevan prayers both concentrate on the understanding of the Word in the Bible study meeting.

Next in the order of the *congrégation* was the reading of the chapter or passage of the Bible chosen for that morning. Surely it was read in French, but we do not know if the Hebrew or Greek text was read as well, as was the practice in Zurich. After the reading from Scripture, the designated minister explained the passage (*la proposition*). The text, written by the scribe, is always headed by the phrase: *Congregation faicte par ...* (and followed by the date). The exposition was not regarded as a sermon. Often it is stated that this exposition resembled a lecture, as they knew it from the school and, later, the Academy.

The *proposant* always ended his exposition by inviting his colleagues to add their comments. For example, Calvin said at the end of his introductory exposition to his projected Harmony of Exodus – Deuteronomy: “I have not expounded the matter as it really deserves, but the brethren to whom God has given more gifts can add to it according to what they perceive to be for the edification of the whole Church.”⁶³ Such a statement might sound obligatory, but it summarizes beautifully the purpose of the Bible study meetings: a collective study of Scripture and recognition of the spiritual gifts, distributed among the ministers. A similar statement is found in the only *congrégation*, surviving in manuscript, by a minister other than Calvin. Michel Cop said at the end of his exposition of Joshua 1:6-11: “This is what God has given me to say briefly on this passage. This passage is really rich and broad and contains grand teaching. Therefore, I beg the brethren to whom God has given much greater gifts than to me to supplement my deficiency, and I ask for assistance as it pleases Him to help me.”⁶⁴

Following the introductory exposition, the discussion began. One of the leading ministers gave the first critique. For example, in October 1551, Jean de St. André gave the exposition, and Farel, on a visit in Geneva, responded. After that, the other ministers and people present could take part in the discussion.

We know very little about these discussions. The few transcriptions reveal only a glimpse of the contributions. Only on the exposition of the book of Joshua is a collection of material preserved. The reactions of the other ministers to the introductory exposition are described in various ways. We find: *ce qui a esté adjoust* or *recite*. Since an *Addition* by Beza (probably because of Calvin’s absence) has been taken down only twice, we cannot say if such descriptions only apply to the reactions by various ministers or also to the closing statements, which were followed by the final prayer. We have transcripts only of Calvin’s closing statements. These are called *Resolution ou conclusion*, *Repetition*, *Sommaire*, or *Conclusion*. Even when the adjectives *briefve* or *sommaire* are used, the additional exposition is always approximately the same length. Therefore, it seems that the terms are synonymous.

The Bible study meeting was closed by a prayer, most often by Calvin. In all texts, printed and in manuscript, which contain *congrégations* or only *additions*, this final prayer is preserved. The

63 Ms.fr. 40b, f. 68b-69a : *Je n’ay pas deduit la chose comme elle meritoit bien, mais les freres ausquelz Dieu a fait plus de graces y pourront adjouster selon qu’ilz cognoistront estre d’edification pour toute l’Eglise,*

64 Ms.fr. 40a, f. 76b: *Voilà que Dieu m’a donné sur ce passage à dire brièvement. Le passage est bien riche et bien ample et contient grande doctrine. Et pourtant je prie les freres ausquelz le Seigneur a fait plus grand’ grace qu’à moy, qu’ilz suppleent à mon défaut, et demande à l’assistance qu’il luy plaise me supporter.* This is not only the one single transcript of a *congrégation* by one of the other ministers, but also the only one to compare “*Ce qui a esté adjousté par M. Calvin*” with (f. 76b-78b). Because some ministers seem to have exaggerated such humility, this formula was restricted in the 1570s to the following words: “*Voilà ce que Dieu m’a donné sur ce passage. Je prie les freres adjouster ce qu’ilz verront estre necessaire pour l’edification de l’Eglise* (RCP III, 104).

prayer started in a customary way: “We thank our good God for the grace he has given us, when it pleased him to bring us to the knowledge of his Gospel, praying ...” The rest of the prayer reflects the contents of the biblical passage. Nearly all prayers end with a passage of intercession for the oppressed churches in France.

Although some form of liturgy was maintained, the Bible studies were not meant to be a church service. Exposition and discussion were essentially connected. Although these Bible studies were intended primarily for the ongoing training of the ministers, the presence and participation of lay people were valued.

4. ONE PURPOSE, VARIOUS MEANS

According to the *Ordonnances*, the Bible study meetings had a single purpose: “to preserve purity and concord in doctrine” among the ministers of the Word. However, this overall purpose was achieved by various methods and means: A) exegesis of biblical books in *lectio continua*; B) homiletical training; C) related disputations of propositions with a strong accent on doctrine; and D) brotherly censure of the exposition in the following session according to the standards of orthodoxy. These aspects must be treated here briefly, but deserve fuller attention.

A. Exposition of Biblical Books

The method chosen to achieve the aim of the *congrégations*, that is, to preserve purity and unity of doctrine, was the study of the Bible—not primarily doctrinal topics. In this respect Geneva followed the lead of Zurich. As in the *Prophezei*, biblical books were studied in *lectio continua*. For the last fifteen years of Calvin’s work in Geneva we know from Colladon’s *Vie de Calvin* the order followed in Geneva: in 1549, Hebrews; from 1549 to 1550, the Catholic Letters; 1550-1553, the Gospel of John; 1553-1555, the synoptic Gospels; 1555-1559, the book of Psalms; 1559-1562, the Harmony of the last four books of Moses; 1562-1563 Galatians; 1563-1564 Joshua; 1564 and following years, Isaiah.⁶⁵

Systematic exposition of entire books of the Bible was an effective method to keep the issue of doctrine close to its source, the Scriptures. It forced every minister to prepare himself for his turn at the exposition, to read Hebrew and Greek on a regular basis, and to explain the biblical text by consulting other exegetical works. In concentrating on one biblical book for a period of, in some cases, several years, they heard each other’s exposition and had an opportunity to advance their knowledge of the texts. The fact that John Calvin was the Moderator did not reduce the input of the other participants. The fact that some of the colleagues, and especially Calvin, were considered more gifted expositors, gave the others a chance to learn from week to week.

The only complete *congrégation* by a minister other than Calvin, which has been both transcribed and preserved, is by Michel Cop (on Joshua 1:6-11), who came to Geneva in 1545. When he died in 1566, the secretary wrote a eulogy on Cop in the Register and mentioned that “among other things, he had helped to form Mr. Calvin in the Hebrew language.”⁶⁶ There were

65 Cf. Peter, *Deux congrégations*, p. XVf ; Jean-François Gilmont, *Jean Calvin et le livre imprimé* (Genève : Librairie Droz, 1997), 375; T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin’s Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), 29-33.

66 RCP III: 11 and note 5. See on Michel Cop: Emil Doumergue, *Jean Calvin. Les hommes et les choses de son temps* (Lausanne : Georges Bridel, 1905), vol. 3, 576-588. He published commentaries on Proverbs (1556) and Ecclesiastes (1558). See Paul Chaix, Alain Dufour, Gustave Moeckli, *Les livres imprimés à Genève de 1550 à 1600* (Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance, vol. 86) (Genève : Librairie Droz, 1966), 29, 31).

other gifted colleagues from whom even Calvin could learn. In 1560 Nicolas des Gallars published the first of his biblical commentaries, *In Exodum, qui secundus est liber Mosis, commentarii* (Genève: Jean Crespin, 1560). On 22 August 1559, a week before the Company of Pastors started their study of Exodus, permission to print had already been requested by Crespin. Des Gallars was still working in Geneva when his book came out; in April 1560, he was assigned to a new task in London. He thus participated in the phase of the *congrégations* when they studied the historical part of Exodus. His expository insights, set down in his commentary, could have contributed both to the Bible studies and to Calvin's own Harmony. Des Gallars offered a complete and running commentary on Exodus. This may have influenced Calvin's suggestion to the Company to take the alternative approach of a Harmony.

It is a pity that hardly any expositions by the other ministers were recorded. For they all had equal obligations and opportunities to expound the Bible in the company of their colleagues. Whatever the personal relations between the colleagues were, their common undertaking of concentrating on the biblical text provided for a weekly chance to meet in spiritual unity. The *congrégations* as Bible studies must have been the core of the sessions held by the Company of Pastors of Geneva and its territories.

B. Homiletical Training

It is clear that the Bible study meetings were closely connected to the task of preaching. The mere fact that the ministers assembled on Fridays following the early morning service suggests such a connection. Colleagues in Geneva regularly heard one another in the pulpit and could thus evaluate each other's sermons from an exegetical and homiletical viewpoint. When they came out of church, the memory of the morning's sermon was still fresh.

Other opportunities to hear and evaluate each other's sermons were provided by the visitations to the parishes in the country by colleagues from the city.⁶⁷ From the Registers it is clear that a position in the city required more talent. For example, when Claude Baudel was elected as minister in 1556, it was noted "that they are afraid that his voice is much too weak to preach in the city ...," and therefore the parishes of Russin and Dardagny are assigned to him.⁶⁸

The distance of the villages to the city made it more difficult to be present in the *congrégations*, which put the village ministers at a disadvantage. Especially during the winter it could be hard for the ministers "from the country" (*les freres de champs*) to travel to the city. On 23 December 1552, the Registers note that a session for censure is postponed until January 1553, "because brothers from the country cannot assemble, owing to the [Christmas] celebration of the [Lord's] Supper and to the glazed frost, which is very heavy."⁶⁹ Picture Geneva and the mountain roads covered in snow and ice! But since their preaching obligations did not involve as many weekday sermons, they could attend the Bible studies as often as required.

The exposition at the beginning of the *congrégation* was not a sermon. However, the fact that Theodore de Bèze noted the manuscripts of the Bible studies in the first catalogue of John

Chaix e.a., *Les livres imprimés*, 43; Jean-François Gilmont, *Bibliographie des éditions de Jean Crespin, 1550-1572*, vol. 1 (Verviers: Librairie P.M. Gasson, 1981), no. 60/6.

Gilmont, *Bibliographie*, vol. 1, 131.

67 The regulations for visitations state that the ministers should chose 'deux de leur congregation' to visit the villages yearly. The first point concerns doctrine: 'pour s'enquerir si le Ministre du lieu auroit mis en avant quelque doctrine nouvelle et repugnante à la puerté de l'Evanglie. The second point concerns preaching: que cela serve pour s'enquerir si le Ministre presche en edification ... (OS II: 335).

68 RCP II: 66f.

69 RCP I: 147.

Calvin's works as "sermons" proves that this was the category most similar to the Bible studies.⁷⁰ The studies were certainly meant to help the ministers prepare for their task of preaching. The exposition of biblical books in *lectio continua* may have resulted in series of sermons on the book which was being expounded in the Bible studies. Since no record of preaching by other ministers was kept, this suggestion remains a hypothesis. The texts, either in print or in manuscript, every now and then contain a reference to preaching. An early remark by Calvin may suffice for the moment to illustrate this. In a letter to the church in Lyon Calvin wrote: "... of our conference, in which a text of St. Paul was read, containing beautiful and rich material, which should be well-known to all those who preach on it, because it is the epistle for the first Sunday of Advent' (Rom. 13:11-14).⁷¹

The passage in the Church Order, stipulating the institution of the bible study meetings, is introduced by the following line: "Further, just as it is necessary to examine the ministers carefully when they are to be elected, it is also necessary to have the right order to keep them in their duty."⁷² That duty is first and foremost the exposition of Scripture in their main task of preaching. Following the paragraph on the Bible studies, the *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* speak of necessary censure. In the category of tolerable, but reproachable sins we find: "Strange ways of treating Scripture which result in scandal; curiosity in searching out empty questions; the propagation of some doctrine or custom not accepted in the Church; negligence in studying and especially in reading the Holy Scriptures." After the section on censure, the number, times and places of the sermons are fixed. This all indicates that the Bible study meetings were also intended as a stimulus for the ongoing task of preaching.⁷³

C. Brotherly Censure

When a minister finished his exposition, his colleagues could add their thoughts. Most often a senior minister from Geneva took the lead in this, while others could react in second and third place. The manuscripts of the *congrégations* do not disclose any critique, but only additional expository remarks. In the session following the Bible study meeting, the colleagues were expected to express their critique of the exposition which had been given by the leading minister.

70 De Bèze included in the first bibliography of Calvin's works the text on election in the category 'Sermons imprimez et qu'on a recueillis quand il preschoit' and *Quelques sommaires des congregations faites sur Iosué, recueillis comme il traittoit les passages* in the category 'Sermons sur le vieil Testament non imprimez' (CO 21 : 47f). In 1575 he added to the first category: *concio in congregatione ad certum locum epistolae ad Galatas cum conciuncula vel exegeti particulae Catechismi ad extremum articulum dominicae orationis*.

71 CO 11:402: *car en nostre congregation où on lisoit ung texte de S. Paul qui contient belle matiere et copieuse, et doibt estre fort commun à tous ceulx qui preschent par dela, pource que cest epistre du premier dimanche de l'advent ...* (no. 397). This passage concerns the appearance of a Carmelite monk from Lyon in the Bible study meeting, who made a negative impression and was refused as a minister. The date of the *congrégation* is given by Herminjard as 12 May 1542 (*Correspondance des réformateurs*, vol. 8: 27). See also letter no. 395 (CO 11: 392ff). The text suggests that the ministers were expounding Paul's letter to the Romans in 1542.

72 RCP I:3.

73 In 1609 a new structure for the Bible studies was contemplated, because there were few lay members left. In the deliberations of the Company we read the following: *que l'usage de la congregation est proprement pour voir quel profit font les pasteurs et la dexterité qu'ils ont à traiter l'Ecriture sainte un chacun au troupeau qui luy est commis* (RCP X, 166). Testing the ability to preach is regarded as the main goal of the Bible studies. Further it is stated *que la congregation avoit jadis esté établie pour descouvrir les esprits, si en ceste Eglise il y avoit aucun qui ne fust orthodoxe en la doctrine*.

Not many cases of censure are noted in the Registers. It is possible that the dismissal of ministers in 1545 (Aimé Champerau, Pierre Delecluse, Simon Moreau) and again in 1546 (Henri de la Mare, Aimé Megret), all before the Company started the Register, was in some measure (apart from the ethical issues) the result of the testing of competence and soundness in doctrine. The case of Philippe d'Ecclesia is the only instance in which we see how the relation between the Bible studies, brotherly criticism, and steps of censure in the following session operated.⁷⁴ It is also the only documented case in which doctrinal deviation played a major role.

When d'Ecclesia became the subject of serious discussion, his colleagues must have been annoyed already for some time. A compilation of erroneous statements during the Bible study meetings had been made (but not noted in the Register): he “maintained various opinions which were not edifying, and he raised futile questions, often turning around or obscuring what had been well declared.” The wording reflects the lines in the church order regarding correctible faults. These statements were read to him, apparently *in extenso*. The Register informs us that “he had frequently been warned in the past to desist from such statements and to speak in a more edifying manner.”⁷⁵ The phase of brotherly criticism, on which we would like to have been informed, is summarized in a few lines.

Then a course of corrective action was chosen: d'Ecclesia was forbidden both a turn in expounding Scripture in the *congrégation* and participating in the discussion. This sanction was to last until the next day of censure that is for three months. If he did not comply, the matter would be brought before the Council. Philippe d'Ecclesia accepted this sanction, but asked his colleagues to keep it quiet (which they promised to do). All parties thus agreed to keep the matter within the bosom of the Company of Pastors.

In fact, this censure isolated d'Ecclesia from his circle of colleagues. It comes as no surprise when we read of his complaints. The ministers decided “that the Company should be purged of him” and to inform the Council.⁷⁶ But the Council did not give in to their wish, but urged reconciliation; however, the ministers set the stakes high by stating “that Master Philippe should not be accepted as a brother or minister in the *congrégation*.” He was now also excluded from the sessions of brotherly censure. In response to his appeal, the decision was reaffirmed that he should not take his turn in presenting an exposition in the Bible study meetings. Still, on order of the Council, d'Ecclesia retained his post as minister of Vandoeuvre. This case of early 1549 died down until after the affair against the physician Jerome Bolsec.

It is in 1551 that a new procedure against d'Ecclesia starts. This time there are ethical charges against him: he did not live up to a promise of marriage and, later, he is charged with usury.⁷⁷ But he is also accused of social contact with the condemned Bolsec. At the same time we observe that d'Ecclesia had been admitted as a full member of the Company again, because he spoke in public in the special *congregation* of 18 December 1551 on the doctrine of predestination and co-signed the circular letter, written to the Swiss Churches in the Bolsec case. In 1552, the contact with Bolsec is held against him. D'Ecclesia admitted his social contact, but also stated that he did not agree with Bolsec in his stand on election. Then d'Ecclesia was confronted with the testimony of a witness to whom d'Ecclesia is to have said “that in the *congrégation*, when he stated his opinion

74 On the various cases of censure against ministers, see J. Plomp, *De kerkelijke tucht bij Calvijn* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1969), 291-302 ; on D'Ecclesia, cf. Plomp, *De kerkelijke tucht*, 286, 289f, 302-309.

75 RCP I: 47.

76 RCP I: 56.

77 RCP I: 76, 144ff.

on the issue of predestination, he had not said everything” (d’Ecclesia denied making the statement).⁷⁸ This is an important point: the ministers expected each other to be honest and to express their individual thoughts. That a heterodox view could not be held is, in the end, the consequence of the desire to achieve doctrinal unity.

In the second phase of charges against Philippe d’Ecclesia, the Council again tried to order reconciliation. But this time the magistrates had to give in to the Company, and d’Ecclesia was deposed from the ministry in January 1553. One additional point should be noted. In connection with this case the Company decided “that henceforward any of the ministers who speaks after the one who gave the exposition shall himself also be censured if necessary, as it applies to him who expounded.”⁷⁹ The critique should be both strict and mutual.

D. Related Disputations

Following the public *congrégation*, the discussion was evaluated in closed session by the Company. This was the time and place for brotherly censure. From 1545 to 1552, however, the ministers also had theological disputations during these sessions.⁸⁰ Questions on doctrine, ethics and ecclesiastical policy were discussed on the basis of Latin propositions. In this method of working, the accent on “purity and concord of doctrine,” the main goal of the Bible study meetings, was more central. Among the forty sets of propositions we find the names of sixteen of the twenty-two ministers for those years. John Calvin’s name is not among those listed, but ten sets are anonymous. These propositions testify to the desire of the Genevan ministers to stand together and formulate their theological position on a wide range of subjects.

We do not know how the topics for discussion were chosen. Ethical questions arose in the course of day-to-day pastoral ministry. But it is also possible that doctrinal issues, which came up in the course of the *congrégations*, were noted for further discussion. In any case, the decision to hold such disputations was closely connected to the overall goal of the Bible studies, as noted in the *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques*. The study of Scripture is to lead to doctrinal unity.

5. MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS

The four means which we have just described had side effects. These are nowhere formally laid down, but can be observed in the sources as accepted and maybe even envisaged functions of the Bible studies. The numbering and topics of the paragraphs in this fourth section correspond with those in the section above. The functions or side effects are: A) the sequence of biblical books expounded in the *congrégations* coincided with Calvin’s program of writing commentaries on the

78 RCP I: 144-152.

79 RCP I: 47.

80 See my essay, “Calvin and Colleagues: Propositions and Disputations in the Context of the *Congrégations* in Geneva,” to be published in the proceedings of the 8th International Congress on Calvin Research, held in 2002 at Princeton Theological Seminary. An annotated translation in English of the *propositiones*, found in RCP I (p.167-182), served as the basis of discussion in the Princeton seminar. It is not clear whether these sessions were open to the public, as Karin Maag suggests in relation to candidates for the ministry (“Calvin’s Academic and Educational Legacy,” in *The Legacy of John Calvin. Papers Presented at the 12th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, April 22-24, 1999*, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids MI: Calvin Studies Society, 2000), 15f). The clause *propositiones inter nos disputatae* seems to point to the session of the Company, following the Bible studies and closed to the public. Maag’s definition of “the *congrégations* or gatherings of ministers and interested lay-people, at which theological theses were presented and defended” confuses the Bible study meetings and the following session of propositions.

Old Testament; B) a number of lay visitors frequented the meetings; C) candidates to the ministry were involved; and D) theological disputations may have served to advance doctrinal formulation.

A. A Trial-run for Calvin's Written Commentaries

When we look at the order of biblical books studied in the *congrégations*, it is noteworthy that Calvin's commentaries on those books were published following their treatment in the circle of the Company. The only exception is Galatians, on which Calvin's commentary had already appeared in 1548. It appears that in 1562 the ministers wanted a New Testament book to interrupt a long series of years in which only Old Testament books had been studied. This interlude provided Calvin with time to finish his commentary on the Harmony, studied in the *congrégations* until 1562 (which appeared in 1563).

The following facts can be deduced from the few sources. The first is that Calvin provided the introduction to each biblical book chosen for study. Among the few transcripts are the introductions to the exposition of the Gospel of John (1550), to the Harmony of Exodus through Deuteronomy (September 1559), to Joshua (1562), and to Isaiah (January 1564). The very fact that Calvin introduced each series indicates that it was he who suggested which book to expound next in the *congrégations*.⁸¹ Moreover, the introduction to the Harmony of the last four books of Moses shows that Calvin prepared the work plan that divided the sections of these four biblical books and presented the model of a Harmony. When the Harmony on the last four books of Moses was granted permission to be printed, the minutes of the Council record this work as "*la concordance des livres de Moïse laquelle a esté traictée en la congrégation*."⁸² The relation between the Bible studies and the commentary was noted. The *conference des Escriptions* produced an important fruit in these commentaries. On 30 November 1563, Calvin wrote: "The brethren have urged me to expound the book of Joshua." He reported that he had only gotten as far as Chapter 3 [that is, in the process of writing],⁸³ while in the Bible studies Calvin and his colleagues had already reached Chapter 21 at that date.

These facts lead to the conclusion that Calvin's colleagues accommodated his program of writing commentaries or, at least, that Calvin used the ongoing study of each biblical book in the *congrégation* to stimulate his own studies.⁸⁴ To be more accurate: the interaction was mutual. In the course of the Bible studies in which all colleagues participated, Calvin could on the one hand profit from their exegesis, and on the other present his own thoughts on the text to his colleagues and confront himself with their critique. It is for this reason that we described the Company's program of exposition first, and only now Calvin's projected work on his commentaries as a secondary function. True, the commentaries are Calvin's work, but at the same time a fruit of the Company's work.

The following parallel suggests itself: Conrad Pellikan published his *Commentaria Biblicorum* in the 1530's on the basis of his expositions in the *Prophezei* in Zurich. John Calvin's work on a

81 So much is stated for the choice of Isaiah in 1564: *Mesmes environs la mi-Janvier, il proposa le commencement du prophete Isaie en la Congregation, estant requis par les autres Ministres, qui par son conseil avoyent prins ce livre-là à exposer après Josué* (CO 21: 96). Cf. De Boer, 'Jean Calvin et Ésaïe I (1564)', 371-395.

82 cf. Gilmont, *Jean Calvin et le livre imprimé*, 89.

83 CO 20 : 199.

84 Cf. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries*, 14f: "The most probable explanation is, not that the commentaries arose out of the *Congrégations*, but that the *Congrégations* were organized to fit in with a commentary that Calvin had begun to write, that he pushed ahead of the *Congrégation's* exposition, and that the *Congrégation* had the first benefit of Calvin's interpretation, no doubt delivered as a summary rather than read verbatim." Cf. Gilmont, *Jean Calvin et le livre imprimé*, 74-77, 89f, 375.

series of biblical commentaries resembles Pellikan's magnum opus in that it was also a study project of the *congrégations* of the Company of Pastors.

B. Instruction of Lay People

The ministers of Geneva and, after 1559, the professors of the Academy⁸⁵ were obligated to attend the Bible studies. Also, student, such as Nicolas Colladon in 1551, may often have been regular participants.⁸⁶ However, a number of lay members also frequented these Friday morning meetings. It seems that in the early years (1536-1541) the *colloques* were intended for ministers only,⁸⁷ but it is clear that after 1541 a wider circle of people met in the *congrégations*. On two occasions the number of people present can be fixed at around fifty or sixty, including both ministers and lay-members; but the number may often have been larger. The number sixty is mentioned in a letter by Calvin. Writing about the *congrégation* of Friday 30 May 1544, Calvin reported to Farel on the demeanour of Sebastian Castellio and noted: "Yesterday there were around sixty people present when the Scripture was studied in the meeting."⁸⁸ The number fifty or more can be established by studying the list of witnesses of Jerome Bolsec's critique during the *congrégation* of 16 October 1551. The names of thirty-one lay-members are listed.⁸⁹ In that year there were eight ministers in the city and ten in the country-side,⁹⁰ which gives a total of almost fifty participants.

The ministers tried to accommodate the many lay participants. When the study of the last four books of Moses was organized "in the form of a Harmony" in 1559, Calvin defended his own composition and laid down a working plan for his colleagues:

Because the topics are so intertwined, it seemed right to our Company to follow a clear order. It is not that we tried to change anything in what Moses said by the Holy Spirit, but it is in order that they who in the following may frequent the Bible studies may have a clear ease and learn better how they should read both the histories and the doctrine, which are so intertwined.⁹¹

85 *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* on « Les Professeurs Publiques » : « Le Vendredi, qu'ilz se trouvent, tant qu'il sera possible, à la congregation et au Colloque des Ministres » (CO 10b: 85; OS II: 373).

86 Maag, "Calvin's Academic and Educational Legacy," 15f.

87 In 1608-1609 members of the city Council proposed a change of time so that they could be present in the *congregations*, but did not have to spend half their morning. They suggested that the dawn service on Fridays and the Bible studies be conflated—as it was eventually decided (RCP X, 167). But in 1608, the ministers still resisted any change, with this argument, for example: *Que s'il falloit venir à quelque changement, seroit beaucoup mieux seant de venir à la premiere institution où les congregations se faisoient en particulier, comme aussi cela se pratique ailleurs et ès Classes voisines* (RCP X, 88). *En particulier* means: "ministers only," without the public, as it was decided in the classes of Lausanne under the pressure of Bern in 1549.

88 CO 11: 721 (no. 554). See on Calvin and Castellio: Hans R. Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio 1515-1563. Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 40f; William G. Naphy, "Calvin's Letters: Reflections on their Usefulness in Studying Genevan History," *ARG* 86 (1995), 78-86 (67-89).

89 CO 8: 185f.

90 William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester – New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 58 (Table 7).

91 Ms.fr. 40a: f. 133a-b: *Or les loix sont esparses (comme d<esja> nous avons dit). Elles ne sont pas toutes écrites d'un fil c<ontinuel n>i par certain ordre. Autant en est-il des autres livres. On verra là des sentences qui appartiennent à la doctrine, et puis il y avoit des histoires meslées. D'autant donc que les choses sont ainsi entrelacées, il a semblé bon à nostre compagnie de suivre un ordre cert<ain>. Non pas que nous attentions de rien changer en ce qui a esté di<ct>é à Moÿse par le Saint Esprit, mais c'est à fin que d'orenant ceu<x> qui peuvent hanter les congregations, puissent avoir une certaine adresse et qu'ils cognoissent mieux [133b] comme ils doivent lire tant les histoires que la doctrine qui sont ainsi entremeslées. Tant c'en faut donc que ceci soit pour empescher qu'on ne lise ce qui a esté*

The fact that twice in the preceding years the lay members had asked for their own forum of Bible studies, in which they could take a more active part, may have prompted the Company of Pastors to accommodate the regular visitors.⁹²

Calvin knew that lay members valued the weekly Bible studies. In relation to the trouble in the Bernese territories on the colloquies he wrote in one of his letters to Musculus:

And not only for the ministers is such training useful, but a number of the people who are lead by an outstanding zeal to understand the Scripture experience part of its usefulness. Maybe there are only a few of those in Lausanne, but because the decree [to suppress the colloquies] is general, I speak of the whole region. I know there are here pious men, who have no reason to be humble about their learning, who would rather miss two sermons than one exposition of Scripture such as they are being heard.⁹³

A rather stunning statement from Calvin who always hammered home the idea that no one should miss a sermon!

Among the lay members of the Bible studies we find a variety of citizens: some born in Geneva and many refugees, doctors and lawyers, schoolmasters (such as Sebastian Castellio) and printers (Conrad Badius, Jean Crespin, Robert I. Estienne), but also artisans.⁹⁴ The *congrégations* seem to have provided for meeting and social contacts for all who wanted to advance their learning and express their dedication to the Reformed faith. Visitors, like the former bishop Pier Paolo Vergerio, found their way to the Bible studies.

The fact that the Bible studies were open to the public also accounts for conflicts in doctrine, which in turn resulted in the writing of reports which pull the *congrégation* from its historical obscurity. The cases of the teacher Sebastian Castellio, who also wanted to become a minister (1544), and the physician Jerome Bolsec (1551) exploded in the context of the Bible studies. Especially in the early years, men with a mission seem to have regarded the *congrégation* as a platform to advance their religious ideas. In his *Contre le secte phantastique* of 1545, Calvin gives an example of sectarians who presented themselves as ministers of the Word and tried to influence the people. He recalls an Antoine Pocquet who bout two years ago [in 1543], having lived in this city for a while and spread his wicked thinking, so acted from the start and sought by subtle means to gain my endorsement in order to advance himself among those who defer in some authority to me, as if I approved of his diabolical errors. Now he did not act his part so well that I was unable to recognize him for a dreamer and madman, as I proved him to be in our *congrégation* ...⁹⁵

When brotherly censure among the ministers was in order, the Bible studies, as places of public discussion, were also the platforms to refute erroneous doctrine in the presence of the people.

escrit par un prophete tant excellent et principal entre tous ceux qui ont vescu souz la Loy, que plustost c'est à fin qu'on se puisse bien guider et que les choses soyent cognues plus familièrement. Car beaucoup ne font que vaguer en lisant Exode, d'autant qu'ilz sont preoccupez seulement de ce qui est là dit. Mais quand nous le lirons, il nous faut mettre la doctrine à part et nous faut aussi lire l'histoire à part.

92 RCP II:59 (in late January 1555), 70 (on 1 January 1557). Karin Maag takes this special form, chosen in 1557, as "monthly disputations"; cf. Maag, "Calvin's Academic and Educational Legacy," 16.

93 CO 13: 433f (no. 1294 of 22 October 1549).

94 See E.A. de Boer, "The Presence and Participation of Lay People in the *Congrégations* of the Company of Pastors in Geneva", in: *Sixteenth Century Journal* 35 (2004), 651/670.

95 CO 7: 163. Calvin used Chapters 23-24 to quote and refute some writings of Antoine Pocquet.

C. Examination of Candidates

The election and examination of candidates for the ministry provides the context of the passage on the *congrégation* in the Genevan church order. The selection and nomination was made by the Company of Pastors. After the Council approved their choice, the candidates were examined. Therefore, we can expect to find a connection between the Bible studies and the theological training and examination of candidates for the ministry.

Candidates were instructed to make two presentations before the Company of Pastors.⁹⁶ Close reading of the *Registers* informs us that the first presentation was always an *exposition*, the second a *predication*. For example, Jean Fabri (although he had already been a minister in Lyon) was instructed to prepare an exposition of 1 John 5:7 for the next day, “à l’heure du midi,” that is, in the session of the Company.⁹⁷ At the end of 1549, the ministers studied the Catholic Epistles in the *congrégations*.⁹⁸ The first text, from 1 John, that Fabri was to expound could fit into the series of epistles studied in the *congregations*. Fabri’s second presentation was a sermon on John 5:24, to be preached before the brethren one week later. During that week Fabri was also examined on doctrine. Finally he was presented to the people in St. Pierre as “minister of the Word.”

It seems that the distinction between exposition and sermon was deliberate. It shows how the Bible studies as such differed from the task of preaching. That distinction also explains why the text chosen for the candidate’s exposition could be chosen from the biblical book which they were discussing in the course of the Bible studies.

Other examples corroborate these conclusions. In 1552, Jean Macar was ordered to expound Psalm 110 and to deliver a sermon on Ephesians 4.⁹⁹ In 1557, Matthieu Grandjean’s text for his exposition was Acts 15, for his sermon 1 Peter 2. Claude du Pont was ordered to deliver an exposition of Psalm 82 (the text of his sermon is not noted), while François Morel, Sieur de Coulogne, expounded Psalm 125 and preached on Ephesians 6.¹⁰⁰ The ministers studied the book of Psalms from 1555 to 1559.¹⁰¹

This procedure of examination is constant throughout the years. In January 1564, the pastors started the exposition of Isaiah, for which Calvin delivered the introductory exposition during the last months of his life. On 10 November 1564, the ministers had probably reached Chapter 29 in their regular exposition of Isaiah. Two candidates for the ministry, Charles Perrot and Jean-François Salvart, were instructed to prepare an exposition (*pour exposer en maniere de leçon and proposer*) of the first verses of Isaiah 29.¹⁰² Apparently the first text was chosen from the Old Testament book they were studying, while the text for the sermon was from the New Testament.

The public in the Bible studies also consisted of a number of possible candidates for the ministry. The principal of the Collège de Rive, Louis Enoch, was elected as minister in 1554 (St.

96 In a letter to Bullinger of 1571 Beza described the ecclesiastical institutions in Geneva and France. In relation to the election and examination of ministers he wrote: *De quorum voluntate facti certiores, bis singulos audimus in nostro coetu concionantes* (Theodore de Bèze, *Correspondance*, vol. XII (1571), ed. A. Dufour, B. Niccolier, M. Turchetti [THR 212] (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1986), ...; also in Kingdon, *Geneva and the French Protestant Movement*, 209 (-215).

97 RCP I : 62: *Et apres qu’il l’eut exposé, les freres luy remonstrerent ce qu’ilz y trouvoient à redire, comme on a acoustumé de fere*. Because the Council initially opposed the election of yet another minister, Fabri could deliver only his exposition on Friday 18 October.

98 CO 21: 71.

99 RCP I: 149.

100 RCP II: 75f.

101 CO 21: 79.

102 RCP II: 110f. Perrot had to deliver a sermon on Romans 6. Perrot and Salvart were further examined *par forme de dispute* on various points of doctrine by Theodore de Bèze.

Gervais).¹⁰³ The tutor of the children of Germain Colladon, Mathieu Grandjean, was promoted to the ministry in 1557.¹⁰⁴ In 1563, Jacques des Bordes, “who held the position of lecturer in philosophy, was ordered to preach in the absence of Monsieur d’Anduze.”¹⁰⁵ In his position as professor of the Academy, des Bordes was obliged to partake in the Bible studies. Now he became assistant preacher. One of the manuscripts from the Joshua series has the heading “Summary of the *congrégation*, presented by Monsieur <des> Bordes on Chapter 23, by Mr. Calvin.” Alas, only Calvin’s closing statements in the *congrégation*, and not des Bordes’ presentation from December 1563 were noted.¹⁰⁶ It seems that it was only in 1564 that des Bordes became minister (at St. Gervais).

The Registers contain a number of testimonies of good Christian conduct, asked of and given by the Company. One such letter concerns Antoine Herault; it provided him with a positive recommendation at the request of the ministers of Neuchâtel (November 1551). The testimony was unanimous: “Heraldus has lived among us in a manner befitting a Christian man. He has been a frequent attendee at the sermons and lectures (*in concionibus et lectionibus*), and has devoted himself to the other exercises of piety.”¹⁰⁷ Does this include a regular attendance at the Bible studies? Having received this letter of recommendation from the Company, Antoine Herault was installed as minister of Valengin, a village in the Neuchâtel area, four months later.

D. Confessional Formulations

We saw that theological discussion of doctrinal propositions was an important part of the *congrégations*. Connected to this function of doctrinal formulation were the various efforts to formulate consensus on the most debated issues between the churches. The fact that such articles on doctrine were written *in extenso* in the Register testify to the importance of these discussions on doctrine in the bosom of the Company of Pastors in Geneva.

In 1549 a set of twenty articles on the sacraments was sent to Bern. There should be doctrinal unity between the churches because, as the Genevan ministers wrote, “some men from our Company are actually serving in churches on Bernese territory, just as on the other hand several of your men are in charge of churches within the dominion of Geneva.” Ministers in remote villages especially suffered from the tensions between Bern and Geneva, as the Registers regularly testify. The articles on the sacraments were signed by all the ministers of Geneva.¹⁰⁸

The most well-known example of doctrinal unity is the *Consensus Tigurinus*, created by Calvin and Bullinger. The Consensus is written in the Register and thereby incorporated in the doctrinal standard of Geneva.¹⁰⁹ A final, but less known example of doctrinal consensus arose out of the doctrinal dealings with Jerome Bolsec (already mentioned in the introduction of this study). The full theological dossier is incorporated in the Registers, but not a text of the consensus. This was formulated in a special *congrégation* on 18 December 1551 at the end of the trial against Bolsec. This time the topic was not a passage from the Gospel of John, which was discussed from

103 RCP II: 67.

104 RCP II: 70f.

105 RCP II: 101. Des Bordes had studied in Geneva since 1562 (cf. Viret’s letter of recommendation to Calvin on the young Jacques des Bordes, CO 19: 379). In 1566 he returned to his native town, Bordeaux. Pierre d’Airebaudouze had been sent to Montpellier.

106 Ms.fr. 40b, f. 141a.

107 RCP I: 77.

108 RCP I: 51-55. Only the name of Philippe d’Ecclesia is missing, probably because he was excluded from the Company and stayed home in the village of Vandoeuvres.

109 RCP I: 64-70.

1550 to 1553, but a public presentation of the doctrine of predestination by Calvin with additional statements from twelve ministers and one of the lay members, Claude Baduel. The ministers regarded the contents of this *congrégation* as their *Consensus Genevenis*. To their regret, they were unable to persuade the other Swiss Churches to condemn Bolsec's teachings as clearly as they had expected in the wake of the Consensus Tigurinus.¹¹⁰ These three examples of doctrinal formulations are connected to the Company of Pastors and the doctrinal aims of the Bible studies.

6. CONCLUSION

The weekly meeting for Bible study must have had a profound influence in making the Company of Pastors into a coherent and competent body. As in Zurich, the ministers of the Word in Geneva took and kept the lead in the Bible studies. However, compared to Zwingli's institution, the character of the *congrégations* in Geneva was less academic. The primacy of the biblical languages, the Septuagint, and the Latin translation of the Bible were left to the ministers' personal preparations. The biblical text was read and the studies were conducted in French so that the public could profit from the discussions. The role of regular visitors was more active than in Zurich, but still restricted to the discussion time. The character of the *congrégations* can be described as ministerial, compared to the academic stature of the *Prophezei* in Zurich and the more democratic form as advanced by John à Lasco in London, Jean Morély in France, and in the later *prophesyings* of the Puritan movement.¹¹¹

We end this essay with a practical question: was the *congrégation* a place where the ministers or visitors felt safe to express their opinions or raise questions? Or was the role of reformed doctrine and the Company of Pastors as a body too suppressive? The answer to this question depended on one's own stand on the role of doctrine. The standard for orthodoxy was the Catechism of Geneva. Yes, there could be censure at the end of the line. But first there was always on-going confrontation with the books of the Bible, opportunity for discussion of doctrine and the stimulus of every colleague presenting on an equal basis both exegesis and propositions. Even the brotherly critique in its regular form must not be seen as "censure," but as part of the process of ongoing education. Thus the *congrégation*, seen in its primary function, was an in-service theological training centre for the members of the Company of Pastors. Observed in the light of secondary effects, these Bible study meetings were a stimulus for the Reformed movement as a whole. They played a role in the writing of biblical commentaries, educating the laity, shaping the

110 The text of this *congrégation* is printed in CO 8:89-140. The manuscript of these presentations, probably written by the scribe Denis Raguenier, has not been preserved. The text was published only in 1562 (*Bibliotheca Calviniana*, vol. 2: 62/6). Often Calvin's book of January 1552, *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione*, is regarded as the "Consensus Genevensis." This is due to a faulty translation of the sub-title of that work: *Consensus Pastorum Genevensis Ecclesiae à Io. Calvino expositus* (translated for example by Wilhelm H. Neuser as "entworfen von Johann Calvin, in: *Johannes Calvin: Von der ewigen Vorherbestimmung Gottes*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Düsseldorf, 1998), 1). A better translation of the sub-title is: "The Consensus of the Pastors of the Church of Geneva [that is: as expressed on 18 December 1551], Explained by John Calvin." I am preparing a fuller chapter on the Bolsec case in the context of the Bible studies and on the *congrégation* of 18 December 1551 as the "Consensus Genevensis."

111 See Denis, « La prophétie dans les Églises de la Réforme, » 289-316. See on Jean Morély his *Traicté de la discipline & police chrestienne* (Lyon : Ian de Tournes, 1562 ; reprint Genève : Slatkine Reprints, 1968), Chapter 4, and Philippe Denis – Jean Rott, *Jean Morély (ca 1524 – ca 1594) et l'utopie d'une démocratie dans l'Église* (Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, vol. 278) (Genève : Librairie Droz, 1993), 78-83. On the Netherlands : F.A. van Lieburg, *De reformatorische profetie in de Nederlandse traditie* (Apeldoorn: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 2001).

development of young ministers and furthering the confessional development of the Reformed.

TREFWOORDE

Calvin
Geneve
Congrégation
Teologiese opleiding
Pastors
Bybelstudie

KEY WORDS

Calvin
Geneva
Congrégation
Theological training
Pastors
Bible study

EA de Boer
Godfried van Seijstlaan 50
NL 3703 BT Zeist
Nederland
Tel.: + 31 306 932781
deboerea@XS 4 all.nl