

The Eldership: Yesterday, Today and Forever?

An examination of the traditional Presbyterian polity and its ongoing relevance and practicability for local churches in twenty-first century New Zealand.

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Preface

When the Rev John Pringle married Miss Clara Chirnside in 1890, he gave her a fine gold ring set with rubies and diamonds. She treasured it for sixty years and on her death it passed to her daughter Vera, my grandmother. Vera gave it to me in 1972 and since then I have worn it every day. It is especially precious because it is a physical connection with my ancestors. Over the years though it has become worn and uncomfortable, and a new section has had to be inserted. It is still recognisable as the same configuration of gems worn by a nineteenth century lady of the manse. But it no longer carries the hallmark to testify to its origins. It is a taonga ¹ - a treasure – but some might say no longer authentic to its history.

The eldership too is a taonga – but one that has needed adjustment over the centuries. Whether it is still authentic to its tradition – and how much more adjustment will be needed to make it fit our post-modern world – is the question I decided to address in a Masters level research paper in 2003. My decision to embark on an exploration of the Presbyterian eldership coincided with a sea change in the local and national Presbyterian Church scene. The PCANZ had embarked on a wide-ranging project to rewrite the Book Of Order, its policy

¹ Taonga - something highly prized, valuables, treasure e.g. huia feathers, H W Orsman, ed., *The Dictionary of New Zealand English* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1997). Page 813

manual. A review of the definitions and duties of eldership was a priority. At the same time the congregation I had served as minister for nine years, was conventionally governed by a wise but ageing eldership who were struggling to cope with the increasing complexity of a busy regional church. Recruitment of leaders for the various teams of the 'Session Council', established ten years before, and of enough new elders to replace those who relocated or retired, was becoming problematical. For those still active, the burden of leadership was becoming unbearable: pastoral visiting, vestry duties for multiple services, and up to three monthly meetings, on top of fulltime work, care of grandchildren or other community work. Our attempts to incorporate new insights into spiritual giftings tended to conflict with a system that traditionally assigned responsibility, but limited authority, to the ministry personnel of the church. By 2003 it was clear that something needed to change.

Yet in Howick we are deeply committed to the theology and practice of Presbyterianism. As a daughter and great granddaughter of Presbyterian ministers I regard the eldership as a precious gift that shares leadership and enables each person in the church family to receive intentional pastoral care. Granted, the inertia and duplications of collegial decision-making can be frustrating but the 'flat hierarchy' of church courts improves the prospects for safety and protection in a world where rogue ministers are becoming an embarrassing liability.

I decided to investigate the roots and branches of our Presbyterian polity, to discover whether it is in fact, as my ancestors and teachers claimed, the authentically biblical and eminently transferable model. There were some

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constraints to my explorations. I did not just want to defend the Presbyterian view, yet it seemed counterproductive to spend a lot of time on other historical polities. The governance of the ecumenical 'Cooperating Venture', a creative attempt to adapt the eldership, was also excluded. The objectives I settled on were an examination of Biblical and historical material on the eldership in the context of a review of 21st century social change, and a qualitative survey of contemporary New Zealand Presbyterian churches. I hoped this exercise in Practical Theology would unearth possibilities for reconfiguring 'the eldership,' as gifted by Scripture and Tradition, to fit with a post-modern church and society. Along the way I hoped to discover some practical clues for reconfiguring the eldership in Howick Presbyterian Church. I am grateful for the support I received from my family, my congregation and from the School of Ministry at Knox College.

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Introduction

Presbyterian Polity and Practicability

The Bible portrays God as a God of order, and a concern for orderly governance of human relationships is eminently biblical.² The leadership tradition of eldership has been known in a generic sense since Old Testament times,³ and the New Testament church clearly relied on a plurality of presbyters for leadership.⁴ For the last four hundred years churches in the Reformed tradition of Protestantism have relied on an analogous non-hierarchical polity to govern local and regional church bodies.

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is a denomination whose provenance lies in sixteenth century Scotland, where the leaders of the Reformation adopted a church government that represented a 'Copernican change' from the monarchical leadership that had been exercised in state and church theretofore.⁵ In contrast to the Protestant Christians of England, who simply adapted the Catholic model of episcopacy, the Church of Scotland based their polity on a conciliar principle where courts or councils take the place of individual religious leaders. A hierarchy of these courts exercised governance in

² Lukas Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches* (Berne: Swiss Federation of Protestant Churches, 1992). Page 134.

³ Myriad Biblical examples are found, eg Genesis 18: 13 - 24, and Acts 14: 23

⁴ David W and Joseph H Hall, *Paradigms in Polity; Classic Readings in Reformed and Presbyterian Church Government* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). Page 5.

⁵ Term coined by Hans Ruedi Weber in the context of the ministry of the whole people of God; Hans-Ruedi Weber, *Living in the Image of Christ* (Geneva: WCC, 1986). Page 71.

widening circles of local, regional and national responsibility. The lowest of these, the Kirk Session, was largely comprised of non-clergy 'elders' enjoying considerable power and initiative.⁶

When Scots settlers emigrated to the young colony of New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century, it was this 'Presbyterian' polity they brought to guide them in the establishment of a Biblical and Reformed ecclesiology.⁷ The Scotland from which they sailed was vastly different from the New Zealand of today.⁸ A changing society prompts contemporary Kiwi Presbyterians to question the relevance of their polity, and its reliance on the historic system of elders to govern the church. Both in New Zealand and elsewhere, churches that follow a conciliar polity based on eldership, increasingly experience tensions and frustrations.⁹ These can be partly explained by massive changes in 'post-modern' Western society – mobility, individualism and the "new voluntarism".¹⁰ As 'new occasions teach new duties', the constraints of a post-modern world necessitate a re-evaluation of the place of the eldership paradigm in the Presbyterian denomination. The abiding motto of the Reformation movement was "*Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*" – a willingness for the church to go on being

⁶ Andrew Herron, *Kirk Lore* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1999). Page 6. Elders are spiritual overseers who in the Reformed tradition work alongside the minister of a parish.

⁷ 'Presbyterian' = governed by elders, from *presbuteros* Greek for elder.

⁸ A largely rural populace, with an agrarian economy and few city centres, previously divided in to geographical parishes by the civil and religious leadership.

⁹ "While the structures of Presbyterianism have served it well, in recent decades a number of points of tension have arisen in relation to organisation, not just matters of theology or ethics." John Roxborough, "Persistent Presbyterianism? Lay Leadership and the Future of Christianity in the West," in *Future of Christianity in the West Conference*, (Otago University: School of Ministry, 2002). Page 6.

¹⁰ Term coined by Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1987). Page 40ff.

reformed under the direction of Word and Spirit.¹¹ As Presbyterian churches in contemporary New Zealand confront the interface between church and community, they are wrestling with these issues.

In the present study, a qualitative cross section of some of the practical experiences, frustrations and tentative solutions of some New Zealand congregations, provided pointers for fruitful theological reflection and practical application. Six interconnected features - Call and Covenant, Councils and Collegiality, and Constraints and Courage - are offered as precious dimensions of the polity to be conserved, if the taonga of 'the eldership' as gifted by Scripture and Tradition is to be reconfigured to fit with a post-modern church and society.

¹¹ See Foreword to Joan S Gray and Joyce C Tucker, *Presbyterian Polity for Church Officers* (Louisville: Geneva, 1986). Page xiii.

Chapter 1

The Eldership in Scripture and Early Christian Tradition

The people of God are called to “go to all the world” with the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹² The testimony of Scripture is that every Christian has a responsibility to implement this God-given mission as a member of Christ’s Body, and a participant in the ‘Priesthood of all Believers.’¹³ The New Testament promises the Holy Spirit’s equipping for each believer to contribute their individual gifts to the corporate life of the people of God.¹⁴ Nevertheless the Bible also clearly testifies that some men and women work in particular ways within this harmony of activities.¹⁵ The Reformed churches identify in Scripture certain permanent ministries, responsible for specific tasks of leadership. Presbyterians find their vocation of eldership, (from the Greek *presbuteros*), in both Old and New Testaments.¹⁶ The eldership is seen as a gift from God for the leadership of the church, with special responsibility for general pastoral oversight of an extended but localised Christian community.¹⁷

From the very beginning of the fellowship of believers in Jesus, patterns of organisation and leadership emerged. Ordinary believers certainly had significant roles in teaching (I Peter 3.15) and ‘charismatic’ worship; Paul’s organic metaphor

¹² Matthew 28: 20

¹³ A term coined by Luther from I Peter 2: 5

¹⁴ See Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982).Section M5

¹⁵ Lukas Vischer, ed., *Eldership in the Reformed Churches Today* (Geneva: WARC, 1991). Page 11

¹⁶ *Presbuteros* and the Hebrew *zagen*, are terms of respect derived from the word ‘beard’, Kevin Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1989). Page 72

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Page 94

assumes a spirit-gifted part for every single member of the Body.¹⁸ Nevertheless he recognised the importance of stability alongside the charismatic life of the church, and urged the Corinthian church to ensure that their corporate life was decently ordered.¹⁹ New Testament scholars largely agree that there existed a plurality of leaders in the local church, and that a loose form of governmental unity was achieved by a ‘conciliar’ structure (rule by councils).²⁰

From this starting point three main systems of governance – Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregational – emerged, and down through history adherents of each model have used Scripture “to justify the superiority of its organisational pattern.”²¹ The abiding view of the Reformed Church is that its Presbyterian polity, marked by a significant dependence on lay leadership, is eminently biblical.²² Today some sources still claim the eldership to be a unique “divinely-revealed concept” of leadership.²³ Others accept that Scripture gives solid evidence for collegial leadership but does not point to one single church order.²⁴ What presbyters did, how they were selected and what authority they held, is a matter of vigorous debate, even within the Reformed family of churches.²⁵ Giles notes that New Testament comments about presbyters are “infrequent and cursory”, and that consequently the literature on early Christian ecclesiology exhibits

¹⁸ I Corinthians 12: 14 - 31

¹⁹ I Corinthians 14: 40

²⁰ Hall. Page 5

²¹ B B Zikmund, *Discovering the Church*, ed. J M Mulder, Library of Living Faith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983). Page 75

²² Roxborough. 2002 Page 6

²³ Keith Bailey, *Servants in Charge* (Camp Hill PA: Christian Publications, 1979).Page 29; see also Hall and Hall, *ibid.* and G B L de Koster, *The Elders Handbook: A Practical Guide for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids MI: Christian's Library Press, 1979). Page 142

²⁴ Vischer, ed., *Eldership in the Reformed Churches Today*. 1991, page 8 and 1992, page 106; see also Paul Beasley-Murray, *Anyone for Ordination?* (Tunbridge Wells: MARC, 1993). Page 23, and David Peel, *Reforming Theology* (London: United Reformed Church, 2002).Page 241

²⁵ Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Page 10, 22

*“an ongoing debate as to whether or not all churches in the apostolic age had leaders called presbyters, about the function of Christian presbyters when they are mentioned, and about the relationship between presbyters and bishops. Only on one point do we find well nigh universal agreement; that Christian presbyters came into the church from Judaism.”*²⁶

The office of the eldership is almost certainly a form of community leadership dating back to the Jewish patriarchs. Prophets may have been erratic, judges temporary, kings unreliable, and priests phony, but the elders remained, even through captivity, a credible and enduring leadership.²⁷ Elders were not just respected older people, but the city fathers, the wise men of the community, who were understood to have a corporate function rather than being wise as individuals.²⁸ In the synagogues of Jesus' day, the elders taught scripture and exercised corporate oversight, alongside the 'special ministers' who managed worship, and collected tithes.²⁹ A "utilitarian committee," comprising the older men of the community, also ruled Greek cities, and Hellenistic Jewish communities too deferred to an eldership.³⁰ The early church adopted this "ready-made form of Presbyterian government" as being both theologically and culturally appropriate.³¹ There is an intriguing suggestion by Powell, that seniority in faith rather than chronological age, was the criterion for leadership in the faith community.³² The

²⁶ Giles. Page 72 and Vischer *Ministry* page 104

²⁷ Bailey. Page 29, 31

²⁸ John Mackenzie, *The Ruling Elder in the Reformed Church* (Melbourne: Presbyterian Board of Religious Education, 1945). Page 5

²⁹ The *archesunagogus* supervised the liturgy and the *hazzan* looked after details such as handing over the scrolls, Giles pages 74 – 76.

³⁰ Douglas Powell, "Ordo Presbyterii," *Journal of Theological Studies* XXVI, no. 2 (1975).Page 302

³¹ R Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity*, ed. John Riches, *Studies of the New Testament and Its World* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994). Page 254, see also J B Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, Revised ed. (London: Macmillan and Co, 1873).Page 190.

³² Powell. Page 290 – 328 He also suggests that the model for the Christian Presbyterate was not synagogue eldership but the Mosaic presbyters of the Pentateuch; the typology was not of a new synagogue but of a new *ekklesia*, a new Israel. Page 304

presbyters (elders) assisted by a second officer, the deacon, provided a two-fold servant leadership modeled on that of Christ himself.³³

Within a century or so, authority had been lodged in a president of this college of rulers, and the bishop or pastor became the top layer of a three-fold hierarchical system reflecting the secular rule of the time.³⁴ Some scholars find evidence for the three-fold order in the late first-century Pastoral Epistles, suggesting it was the result of an evolutionary development.³⁵ Others take the view that structures were combined into different forms in different contemporaneous communities.³⁶ Presbyterians have historically regarded the development of episcopacy with suspicion, and some scholars even dub the 'prelatic' polities as "aberrant forms."³⁷ The interchangeability of *episkopos* and *presbuteros* in the biblical texts is used by Reformed churches to support the view that ministry in the New Testament and early church was a non-hierarchical form based on collegiality and consensus.³⁸ In a context where charismatic and institutional leadership operated side by side, the elders were "a pastoral council with authority to determine issues of importance."³⁹

³³ The office of deacon will not be pursued in any detail here, see Giles, page 50. For the servant leadership of Christ see Mark 10: 45, Matthew 23: 1 – 12, Luke 22: 24 – 27, John 13; 3 – 16. Giles, page 50.

³⁴ The three offices are bishop, presbyter and deacon.

³⁵ 'The elementary lay leadership of the Jewish churches is evolving into religious office...the clergy have arrived.' D H Battley, "Sharing the Priestly Task: The Theology and Organisation of Sharing Ministry between Laity and Clergy in the Anglican Church in New Zealand" (D Min, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1986). Page 98, 100. Giles (1989) argues that the *archesunagogos* and the *hazzan* correspond with the bishop and deacon.

³⁶ Giles (1989), page 27 and Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1987).Page 161

³⁷ Hall. 1994 Page 4

³⁸ Interchangeability is asserted by Lightfoot (1873, page 93) and others, but Giles disagrees, seeing eldership as a status of honour, and episcopacy as a function of local church leadership. See Kevin Giles, *What on Earth Is the Church?* (North Blackburn: Harper Collins Dove, 1995). Page 150.

³⁹ Ibid. Page 188

A number of unifying factors can be identified in the New Testament references to the office of elder: an element of permanency, respect and recognition, authorisation by prayer and/or laying of hands, and in some cases payment and privilege.⁴⁰ Elders were the “normative leaders”, operating under apostolic authority and utilising the gifts of the spirit.⁴¹ This assumption of a collegial leadership underlies the system of government accepted by the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to be ‘agreeable to the Word of God’ and applied to its parishes, councils and assemblies in the “Book of Order.”⁴² It is not the purpose of the present study to further debate the various Biblical paradigms, but simply to take as the point of departure that New Zealand Presbyterians currently follow an order they believe is “not inconsistent with biblical precedents and theology,” an order in essence bequeathed to them by the church Reformers of sixteenth century Europe.⁴³

⁴⁰ Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians*. Page 17

⁴¹ Stuart Lange, "Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders," *Evangelical Presbyterian* 36, no. 3 (1986). Page 8

⁴² The Book of Order has had multiple incarnations but citations will be to the 2003 version.

⁴³ Roxborough. (2002) Page 6

Chapter 2

The Eldership and the Reformation

Presbyterianism takes the view that the early church made no hierarchical distinction between those who 'laboured in the word and doctrine' (I Tim 5: 17) and other members of the Body of Christ.⁴⁴ With the development of episcopacy and the fourth century Christianisation of Roman society, huge changes were set in motion. By the high Middle Ages, church leaders were celibate priests, who exercised sacerdotal privilege, lived in enclosed communities and wore distinctive dress. The church had reappropriated the priestly hierarchy of the Jewish temple, and ordinary believers were no longer involved in the management of the church.⁴⁵ In the sixteenth century, the reformer John Calvin undertook a major repristination of church leadership in Geneva. His contribution was partly in reaction to the doctrinal shortcomings and corrupt structures of the Mediaeval church – and partly stemming from a desire to recover scriptural truth and an apostolic church order. Presbyterians consider Calvin to have “restored the eldership to its proper place”.⁴⁶

The sixteenth century Reformers were deeply influenced by the Renaissance culture of their day, and the intellectual upheaval that epitomised that era. John Calvin knew about Copernicus and “borrowed heavily from Renaissance humanists to create a philosophy that was both grounded in scripture and

⁴⁴ Mackenzie. Page 17, 20

⁴⁵ Ibid Page 20

⁴⁶ Ibid

conversant with new developments around it”⁴⁷. Churchmen like Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were not against structures that included a designated ministry, but vigorously opposed a sacerdotal view of leadership. An important rediscovery for them was the concept of the priesthood of all believers (I Pet 2:5), which accentuated the call of every believer to serve God. The Mediaeval church believed that the imposition of a bishop’s hands effected an ontological change, giving ordained clergy an indelible priestly character.⁴⁸ The Reformers however saw that every believer has a priestly role⁴⁹ and that there are no intrinsic differences between clergy and lay, only a difference in function. John Calvin’s contribution to this shift in thinking was to identify from Scripture the "cardinal principle of Presbyterian polity", the elder as governor, and to develop a conciliar oversight as opposed to a ruling hierarchy of individuals.⁵⁰ In 1559 he published in his famous Institutes:

*From the beginning, therefore, each church had its senate [in French, consistoire], composed of pious, grave, and venerable men, in whom was lodged the power of correcting faults....experience shows that this arrangement was not confined to one age, and therefore we are to regard the office of government as necessary for all ages.*⁵¹

This senate or council was made up of presbyter-elders (French *anciens*), a permanent ecclesiastical office quite separate from civil polity.⁵² Both pastors and elders were presbyters in the biblical sense, but they had distinct functions; pastors were ordained to preach and administer the sacraments, while elders were

⁴⁷ J M Buchanan, *Being Church, Becoming Community* (Louisville: Westminster, John Knox Press, 1996).Page 48

⁴⁸ Described at the Council of Trent as “vicarious identity with Christ”, and “the power and prerogatives of the immortal god”, quoted in Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians*. Page 194

⁴⁹ Hebrews 10: 19 – 22; see Beasley-Murray. Page 124

⁵⁰ Peel. Page 242

⁵¹ Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (1997). *Institutes of the Christian religion*. Translation of: *Institutio Christianae religionis*.; Originally published: Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. (IV, iii, 8).

⁵² Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Page 35

commissioned to provide governance and discipline along with the pastors. This radical departure from episcopacy was a collegial form of guidance that sought to avoid individual and arbitrary decisions.⁵³ In 1543 Calvin had mined the New Testament texts to define four distinct offices in his ecclesiological polity: pastors, teachers, elders and deacons. The local pastors and theological teachers were clergy who were equal without any hierarchy of bishops, the elders were lay governors elected from amongst the magistrates, and the deacons were responsible for practical caring ministries⁵⁴ This has been called Calvin's fourfold ministry; the categories were most likely gleaned from Martin Bucer's 'Kirchenpfleger' polity in Strasbourg.⁵⁵ The polity was later implemented in Reformed congregations in France and Scotland.⁵⁶

A major point of Calvin's Protestant revision was the use of elders for church discipline, a recrudescence which had a profound impact on the norms of Reformed tradition.⁵⁷ The changes, enabled lay people to be involved in the pastoral care of the congregation, and the church to develop a new sense of accountability. The practice of discipline by elders may appear intrusive, but compared with the harsh penitential practices of the Roman church, was arguably

⁵³ Ibid Page 40

⁵⁴ J H Smylie, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1996). Page 24, and Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Page 87 In selecting out these four Calvin was influenced by the hermeneutical assumptions of his time, that signs and wonders such as prophecy were confined to the apostolic age (cf Inst 4,3,4)

⁵⁵ The Kirchenpfleger was an ecclesiastical college with four offices, set up by the City council in Strasbourg under Bucer's influence in 1540. REH Uprichard, "The Eldership in Martin Bucer and John Calvin," *Evangelical quarterly* LXI, no. 1 (1989).Pages 26 – 32. In the Institutes, 4, 3, 4 – 9, Calvin cites Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12.

⁵⁶ de Koster. Page 227

⁵⁷ Vischer 1992. Page 35; Calvin saw the eldership as divinely prescribed, though one English Presbyterian suggests that elders owed their existence not to Scripture or doctrine but to the practical need for church discipline; "only when the office had been found necessary (was) its institution looked for in Scripture," Ross, 1949 quoted in Peel., 2002. Page 251

gracious and pastoral; “far from being legalistic and crippling it was intended to be life giving and spiritually wholesome.”⁵⁸ Knox’s Order of Discipline claimed:

*As the Word of God is the life and soul of this church, so this godly order and discipline is as it were sinew in the body which knits and joins the members together with decent order and comeliness: it is a bridle ...a spur.....the father’s rod ever in a readiness to chastise gently the faults committed and to cause them afterward to live in more godly fear and reverence. Finally it is an order left by God into his church whereby men learn to frame their wills and doings according to the law of God by instructing and admonishing one another yea and by correcting and punishing all obstinate rebels and contemners of the same.*⁵⁹

Thus accountability was one of the core values driving the development of the presbyterian system in Geneva and Scotland. Kirkpatrick interpreted this to mean “the polity of the reformed church is built on sin!”⁶⁰ The Reformers perceived the Catholic rulers (bishops and cardinals) to be untrustworthy sinners; ergo a collective bishop was needed, a committee “less likely to be arrogant and arbitrary” than a self-serving individual.⁶¹ But there was a theological rationale as well, a discomfort with different grades of being Christian. The idea of the consistory/presbytery was a group of equal ministers and laymen acting together as the “corporate bishop” governing the church.⁶²

A second core principle then was the incorporation into the governance of the church of ordinary believers with secular jobs, and regular family and community

⁵⁸ Derek Tidball, *Skilful Shepherds: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1986). Page 192

⁵⁹ Hall 1994. Page 11

⁶⁰ C Kirkpatrick and W H Hopper, *What Unites Presbyterians: Common Ground for Troubled Times* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 1997). Page 131

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² The collective bishop’s activities include ordaining ministers, approving calls, dissolving pastoral ties, planting churches, dissolving or merge churches, providing care and oversight of congregations, selecting and preparing ordinands, sending commissioners to higher governing bodies, receiving and vote on proposed amendments, hearing appeals and resolving conflicts. (personal knowledge)

responsibilities. Elders who engaged in various everyday occupations ⁶³ were selected from the midst of the congregation, so that the government of the church was intimately related to daily life. ⁶⁴ Before long the gap between pastor and people widened as books became available, and Protestant ministers became more biblically literate and pastorally competent. But Reformed churches also had an “opposite vector”, the role played by lay elders and deacons in church administration, to effect a “uniquely participatory and even Proto-democratic” polity. ⁶⁵

A third central principle is that of call: Beasley-Murray includes it in the oldest and most universally held tenets of Reformed teaching. ⁶⁶ In Reformed polity it is the call that makes the minister not the ordination. ⁶⁷ Calvin made a helpful distinction between the inner secret and the outward formal call, the first being the individual’s testimony of vocation and the latter the church’s confirmation and authorisation of that. ⁶⁸ Both elders and pastors were understood to receive a specific and personal divine call; this was formally recognised in ordination, at first only of pastors but within a few years elders too were ordained. ⁶⁹ Thus clergy were not distinguished by an ontological change as with ‘apostolic succession’, but

⁶³ Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). Page 370 lists merchants, cordiners, baxters, smiths, skimmers and cutlers, while Benedict 2002 notes that “in the Scottish rural parish of Stow, one tenth of the elders were village craftsmen, another tenth millers, while the great majority of the body was composed of working farmers.” Page 456-7

⁶⁴ Eugene Heidemann, *Reformed Bishops and Catholic Elders?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970).Page 163

⁶⁵ Benedict. 2002, Page 451

⁶⁶ Beasley-Murray. 1993. Page 129

⁶⁷ Ibid. 1993. Page 130

⁶⁸ Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (1997). *Institutes of the Christian religion*. Translation of: *Institutio Christianae religionis.*; Originally published: Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846. Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. (IV, iii, 11). The question of whether an inner call can legitimately prompt an individual to offer for the eldership does not seem to have been pursued.

⁶⁹ Andrew Melville, "The Second Book of Discipline," in *Paradigms in Polity*, ed. David Hall and Joseph Hall (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1578). III.12. Page 237

rather differentiated by function. Accordingly the Reformed heritage of eldership is a non-hierarchical team of leaders, often with a single chief leader for the sake of order; all are presbyters with oversight but the pastor has a special calling, obligation and privilege of service among peers.⁷⁰

Fourthly, the functional distinction between the teaching and the ruling elder, is a core concept described in Calvin's Institutes, where he cited evidence from key New Testament passages on leadership:

*In the Epistle to Timothy, also, he mentions two kinds of presbyters, some who labour in the word, and others who do not perform the office of preaching, but rule well (1 Tim. 5:17). By this latter class there is no doubt he means those who were appointed to the inspection of manners, and the whole use of the keys.*⁷¹

John Knox in establishing this "presbyterian" polity in Scotland in 1559,⁷² recognised that ministers were elders in a different sense from the laymen who were appointed to assist in administration and discipline. Ministers were devoted to preaching, pastoring, teaching and building a congregation of witnesses.⁷³ The elders had regular jobs but were responsible for the proper conduct of the congregation's affairs. They were not authorised to administer the sacraments but as spiritual leaders and representatives of the people had a vote of equal value with that of the minister. This strand of historic polity is known as the Lay Theory; regional oversight was through superintendents in a kind of "congregationalism

⁷⁰ Bailey. Page 26

⁷¹ Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (1997). *Institutes of the Christian religion*. Translation of: Institutio Christianae religionis.; Reprint, with new introd. Originally published: Edinburgh : Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846. (IV, xi, 1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. *1 Cor. 12:28 and Rom. 12: 8 are also cited*

⁷² These included far reaching changes but were not quite presbyterian; the First Book of Discipline decreed three offices, pastors, seniors, and deacons. Elders were laymen elected for 1 year, and oversight of parishes was by a superintendent. Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*.1992. Page 57

⁷³ Mackenzie. 1945. Page 20

tempered by episcopacy and Erastianism." ⁷⁴ In 1578, a second strand was formed; Melville's expanded polity provided for elders to represent the congregation in all courts of the church. ⁷⁵ Under this Presbyterian theory, the status of elders was raised and like pastors (teaching elders), they were ordained to serve for life. ⁷⁶ Provision was made for four types of ascending assemblies – Session, synod, national assembly and international. ⁷⁷ Knox and Melville's reforms, utilising the presbyterian system of ministry, were in widespread use in Scotland before the turn of the sixteenth century. ⁷⁸ In 1644 The Westminster Form of Church Government written by English Puritans and adopted by the Scots church, wove the strands together and became the definitive document for Presbyterian polity. ⁷⁹ Parishes were geographically divided into quarters for communion visitation and in the nineteenth century the jurisdiction of the elders districts extended to cover poor relief, education and support of overseas missionaries. ⁸⁰ It is clear that in Reformed churches the pastors or ministers never stand alone. They are part of a collegium of elders who share in the governance of the congregation; this ubiquitous office is seen as "the distinguishing sign of the reformed tradition". ⁸¹

⁷⁴ D M Murray, *The Recent Debate on the Eldership in the Church of Scotland* (1990). Page 190

⁷⁵ Elders (Teaching and Ruling) were elected for life and formed the Kirk Session. Elders together formed the presbytery, synod and assembly.

⁷⁶ Though not with laying on of hands and they lost their ability to discipline ministers.

⁷⁷ Melville. 7,2

⁷⁸ Kirk sessions operated in some parishes from the dawn of the Reformation; in most parishes 12 - 25 lay elders met several times a week. The fact that fines were levied for absentees suggest this must have been onerous on men with farms or businesses, but it was rare for anyone to decline the honour of the status. Todd. Page 8.

⁷⁹ See Hall. Page 260 – 278 and Uprichard. Page 36f

⁸⁰ John Roxborough, *Thomas Chalmers: Enthusiast for Mission* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1999). Page 100

⁸¹ Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Page 10

Not all Presbyterians agree with Calvin's conviction that Presbyterian government was divinely prescribed (*ius divinum*).⁸² In 1984 a monograph by Thomas Torrance contended that the office of elder was a fourth century invention having no biblical antecedents, and found "no clear evidence in the New Testament for what we call elders let alone the theory that there are two kinds of presbyter."⁸³ However in 1989 Uprichard critiqued this view by demonstrating how Bucer and Calvin had reappraised the biblical texts and discovered the distinctly presbyterian view of a two-fold eldership.⁸⁴ He rejected Torrance's thesis that the church fathers invented the eldership, but acknowledged there were significant ambiguities in Calvin's polity, which may have later contributed to a reclericalisation in Protestant Europe.

As time went on the differences in practice and theology between Catholic and Protestant did become blurred; "in both kinds of churches the clergy were a class apart; in both their special status was based on divine initiative, (mediated in different ways) and in both certain duties were reserved to them."⁸⁵ John Milton's epithet that "new presbyter is but old priest writ large" suggested Puritan ministers "wielded inordinate power"⁸⁶ and opponents of Presbyterianism in England depicted it as a new form of clericalism where bishops would simply be replaced with thousands of "parish popes".⁸⁷ Still, the constraints were considerable; teaching elders were "beholden to parishioners for their jobs", were called by and accountable to presbyteries, and had to cooperate with the elders who

⁸² IV.3.1 and 8

⁸³ T F Torrance, "The Eldership in the Reformed Church," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984). Page 508

⁸⁴ Uprichard.1989

⁸⁵ Giles, *Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians*. 1989. Page 196

⁸⁶ Ministers were beholden to parishioners for their jobs, were subject to selection before a call and accountability after, and presbyteries took complaints seriously, so ministers had to cooperate with the elders who outnumbered them on the session. Todd. Page 451

⁸⁷ Ibid. Page 452

outnumbered them on Session.⁸⁸ Such clericalisation as did take place in effect included the ruling elders, who were authorised to catechise, counsel, visit, conduct prayer meetings and even hear confessions.⁸⁹ The Second Book of Discipline had made the office a semi-clerical, lifelong appointment, and Sessions, though subject to congregational election, became virtually self-perpetuating. Like ministers, the elders were reviled, abused and assaulted, but "the payoff - status, power and demonstrable piety - seems to have kept most elders on task most of the time".⁹⁰

Calvin did not interpret the New Testament woodenly but with an openness that left room for future consideration and development.⁹¹ He did not insist on a Geneva model in other places, and Knox and Melville in Scotland adapted the polity of rule by elders to their own context.⁹² Presbyterianism held brief sway in sixteenth century Puritan England but was eventually eclipsed by Episcopacy. Nevertheless Reformed churches thrived in Wales, Switzerland, France, and Holland, and missions to Canada, the United States, South Africa, and Australasia ensured that this simple biblical polity spread throughout the world.⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibid. p 369 In Ayr in 1636 the elders led a revolt when the minister knelt for the communion; they also wielded the power of the purse, withholding stipend and prohibiting acts of charity.

⁸⁹ Ibid. Page 371

⁹⁰ Ibid. Page 373

⁹¹ Conditional expressions include "which appears to me" 4/3/4 "experience makes it clear" 4/3/8 "If I mistake not." 4/3/9 J. Calvin, & Beveridge, H.. *Institutes of the Christian Religion.*, Translation of: *Institutio Christianae Religionis*; Calvin Translation Society, 1845-1846.(Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997, accessed 20 June 2003).

⁹² See Hall. Pages 219 and 233

⁹³ L A Loetscher, *A Brief History of the Presbyterians*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978). Page 35

Chapter 3

Eldership in the New World

The arrival of thousands of Free Church Scottish settlers in New Zealand in the mid-nineteenth century brought Presbyterianism to the South Pacific. These resolute pioneers did not subscribe to a high view of the ministry:

The real rock on which the church was founded was the gravitas of the elders,,...settler Presbyterianism was strongly lay in ethos, with a considerable amount of lay preaching, and was centred on the matriarchs and patriarchs in their family homes.... this home based settler Presbyterianism was much closer to the land and to the realities of early colonial society than the more traditional Calvinist doctrine and high churchmanship of the ministers.⁹⁴

Although the elders of the settler churches brought with them the disciplinary measures of their Scots experience ⁹⁵, this aspect of governance gradually decreased in frequency so that “by the end of the century elders rarely exercised such authority...crime was left to the police and sin to the individual conscience.”⁹⁶ On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, Presbyterians in the USA had noticed a shift towards egalitarianism, and debated the office of the elder in order to define it more clearly. In 1831 a pivotal essay by Samuel Miller of Princeton argued for a ruling eldership, to prevent the growth of a clerical caste and the danger of unbridled democracy.⁹⁷ His vision of the eldership was beatific:

The design of appointing persons to the office of ruling elder is not to pay them a compliment; not to give them an opportunity of figuring as speakers in judicatories; not to create the pageants of ecclesiastical ceremony; but to secure able faithful and truly devoted counsellors and rulers of the church; to obtain wise and efficient guides, who shall not only go along with the

⁹⁴ Dennis McEldowney, ed., *Presbyterians in Aotearoa 1840 - 1990* (Wellington: Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, 1990). Page 31. He also notes there a complaint sent back to the Free Church, objecting to an Auckland minister appropriating to himself the rank of “Captain of the ship.”

⁹⁵ Records of transgressors included “Drunkards and fornicators”.Ibid. Page 32

⁹⁶ Ibid. Page 49

⁹⁷ Gray and Tucker. Page 41

*flock in their journey heavenward but go before them in everything that pertains to Christian duty.*⁹⁸

Miller vigorously opposed the use of the term lay for elders – calling the practice “erroneous if not mischievous” - and argued that ruling elders are as much clergy as the teaching elders.⁹⁹ His colleague Charles Hodge argued that elders, though important, were only representatives of the people and need not be ordained, nor required to validate church courts.¹⁰⁰ An influential Southern theologian, James Thornwell, supported Miller’s view, (the Scots church’s ‘Presbyter Theory,’ a high view of elders as outlined in the Second Book of Discipline).¹⁰¹ In the end the American church opted for Hodge’s representational view, corresponding with the ‘Lay Theory’ of Knox’s Scots Confession.¹⁰² The Book of Order adopted by the Presbyterian Church in NZ clearly favoured the Presbyter view; elders are ordained for life, have jurisdiction over the nominations to leadership, and can overrule the non-voting Moderator in Session.¹⁰³ The New Zealand church adopted some hard-won principles from its mother denominations (e.g. the right to choose a minister) and also implemented the Scottish system of elders’ visitation districts, which has been followed for a hundred years.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Samuel Miller, *The Ruling Elder*(The Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, 1832, accessed June 2003); available from www.reformed.org/books/ruling_elder. Page 57

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Page 50

¹⁰⁰ In 1879 the US church decided that a court was not constitutionally valid without the presence of at least one elder, Gray and Tucker 1986, page 43

¹⁰¹ Smylie. Page 86

¹⁰² Murray. Page 189. Smylie notes that Hodge dubbed Thornwell a “hyper *hyper* HYPER high Presbyterian” while Thornwell said Hodge was a “no no NO Presbyterian,” (Page 73). For an insight into the Two Theories, see Coleman’s Matrix in Appendix Four.

¹⁰³ See Regulations 6, 64 and 65, and Appendix D.2. Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, *The Book of Order: Rules and Procedures of the P. C. A. N. Z.* (Wellington: February 2003).

¹⁰⁴ Described in Bailey. Page 74

Ecclesiology in the twentieth century was marked by a worldwide shift towards more egalitarian leadership, and the concept of ministry belonging to the “whole people of God”.¹⁰⁵ The term ‘laity’ was widely agreed to be an unbiblical distinction and the ‘Priesthood of all Believers’ was happily reappropriated.¹⁰⁶ A growing and lively membership sought new ways of being the church; as lay participation increased the Session widened its activities and began to oversee more aspects of congregational life.¹⁰⁷ Presbyterian elders were drawn from a wider pool and became more involved in leadership.¹⁰⁸ A major challenge in polity came in 1970 with the vision of the Plan for Union of five Protestant churches.¹⁰⁹ The Plan opted for a ‘lowest common denominator’ polity that removed ‘ordination for life’ of elders, and was widely perceived to undermine a Reformed view of biblical leadership. Church History Professor Ian Breward opined that “talk of downgrading is unfair, for many of the functions of the eldershipare carried over into the Plan.”¹¹⁰ He reasoned that in any case Presbyterian government was “hardly of the substance of the faith.”¹¹¹ Perhaps the majority differed, for the Plan was defeated, though the ongoing legacy of the initiative was the formation of

¹⁰⁵ Vatican 2 (1962 –5). Catholic theologians like Kung, Donovan and Schillebeeckx and the WCC consultation at Lima (1982) had laid a good foundation for this rethinking, though Presbyterians have noted with concern that the office of the elders is scarcely mentioned in WCC texts. Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Pages 89, 93

¹⁰⁶ Roy McKenzie, "The Implications of the Priesthood of All Believers for the P.C.N.Z.," *Evangelical Presbyterian* 36, no. 3 (1986).Page 32

¹⁰⁷ Veitch in McEldowney, ed. Page 146

¹⁰⁸ Women had been eligible for eldership from 1953; more recent additions were special interest groups like the Maori Synod (Te Aka Puaho) Pacific Island Synod and Asian Council, as well as nominated youth representatives in church courts. McEldowney *ibid*.

¹⁰⁹ In that year Heidemann wrote optimistically of the possibility of “reformed bishops and catholic elders” Heidemann. Page 7

¹¹⁰ Ian Breward, *Unity and Reunion* (Dunedin: Ian Breward, 1972). Page 21

¹¹¹ *Ibid* p 26, but other evangelicals disagreed. In 1972 one wrote “Be a Presbyterian: vote No to Union!” Alex Chisholm, "The Presbyterian Eldership and the Plan for Union," *Evangelical Presbyterian* XXII, no. 2 (1972).

Cooperative Ventures.¹¹² Democratisation has acted as a source of congregational stability and in some cases independence from the national body.¹¹³ Sessions and Parish Councils are now major decision-making bodies and “ministry training” for the whole people of God has become a priority.¹¹⁴ Biblical principles that have undergirded these adjustments in polity include Servant Leadership (Luke 22: 26) Body Ministry (1 Cor 12: 27), team-based structures (Eph 4: 10ff) and “upside down triangles” (I Peter 5: 3), all of which have now become part of the ‘DNA’ of the church.¹¹⁵

Over the centuries, the office of elder in New Zealand and elsewhere, has been modified; “from generation to generation new stimuli and insights have become important, and a variety of models have evolved.”¹¹⁶ In churches in England the rise of the evangelical wing and charismatic renewal stirred lay leadership initiatives.¹¹⁷ In one United Reform Church, where elders had seen themselves as “just a committee” to discuss matters with the pastor and “help him in his ministry”, renewal brought a new appreciation of the role of elders within the congregation.¹¹⁸ Some English Episcopal churches even instituted eldership as a

¹¹² Cooperative Ventures are formed under regulations gazetted in 1960 for the union of Presbyterian, Methodist and/or Anglican congregations. One third of parishes in the PCANZ are CV's.

¹¹³ Veitch in McEldowney, ed. Page 146

¹¹⁴ The Parish Council is the governing body of a Cooperative Venture; its members are treated as elders for the purpose of participation in Presbyterian regional and national courts.

¹¹⁵ The upside down triangle is a reversal of traditional hierarchy; instead of the national church being the top of the pyramid, it is the base which resources the real mission out in parishes.

¹¹⁶ Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Page 73. Henderson's 1974 research into current practices of eldership in reformed churches found the "picture was exceedingly varied." *ibid* Page 20

¹¹⁷ Chris Skilton, *Leadership Teams: Clergy and Lay Leadership in the Local Church*, Grove Pastoral Series (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books Limited, 1999). Page 5

¹¹⁸ The URC is a twentieth century union of the English Welsh and Scots Congregational Churches, the Presbyterian Church of England and the Reformed Association of the Churches of Christ. These elders “embarked on home visits, study groups and prayer services with a new

means of recognising leadership gifts in the congregation, though such experiments in the New Zealand context have not been extensive.¹¹⁹

In 1990 the Swiss Federation of Protestant churches hosted an international consultation of pastors, elders and theologians, to discuss the significance of the eldership for the church today. The Reformed churches had criticised World Council of Churches documents, for the lack of attention to eldership, but the consultation indicated there are serious problems in the contemporary practice of eldership in the Reformed world.¹²⁰ Views on authority and discipline have changed, and most Reformed churches utilise elements of congregationalism.¹²¹ Discipline is no longer exercised deliberately; instead it is entrusted to small groups and other unstructured contexts.¹²² Elders are "no longer guardians...but voluntary spiritual counsellors"¹²³ Not many Presbyterians today would concur with the eloquent assertion from Prof Samuel Wilson at General Council in 1880:

Going to the word of God to reverently learn what form of government Christ has given the church, and pressing out the very essence of all dispensations, and lifting the name right out from the sacred page with the breath of Jehovah on it, we exclaim Presbyterian!...boast they of Apostolic succession, we claim patriarchal succession! The unbroken line of Presbyterianismis older by millennia than the apostles...[beginning with Moses] at Horeb in the light of the burning bush....Moses was sent down to Egypt to convene the Presbytery ...the elders the representatives of the people.¹²⁴

enthusiasm. " John Gunstone, *A People for His Praise* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978). Page 71

¹¹⁹ See Skilton, page 14 and Battley, pages 175 - 227

¹²⁰ Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Page 89

¹²¹ Congregationalism is where decisions in the life of the church are decided by congregational vote. "All denominations seem to be moving in the direction of congregationalism/voluntarism even when their polities remain episcopal or presbyterian" Jackson W Carroll, *As One with Authority* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1991). Page 59

¹²² Vischer 1992. Page 75

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Page 13

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Such attempts to canonise a certain historical form of the office of elder are seen as less helpful today: cultural diversity, hermeneutical insights and ecumenical dialogue have led to new perspectives on the theology of ministry. In each of these “the Spirit has seen fit to move and bless, and in each he has found his work constricted and quenched.”¹²⁵ Twenty-first century Presbyterians need as never before to reassess the office and seek inspiration from a variety of historical and contemporary forms. A major impetus for this need for re-evaluation of the eldership is the sociological phenomenon of postmodernism.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Brian Winslade, *Elders and Their Place in Our Church* (Auckland: New Zealand Baptist Union, 1994). Page 14

¹²⁶ See next chapter for definition.

Chapter 4

The Eldership and a Changing Society

The twenty-first century is a very different world from past eras of Christendom when churches were homogeneous, and leadership needs were simple.¹²⁷ Modern secularisation and democratisation inevitably called into question the clericalism that had characterised the church, but today even more cataclysmic forces of societal change are at work. Population shifts, changing work and gender roles, global pressures, and technological advancements all mean that more than ever before 'new occasions teach new duties.'¹²⁸ The challenges of postmodernity are possibly the most disturbing of these demanding forces, and lead to a search for new forms of community in a new millennium.¹²⁹ In January 2000 Jim Wallis of Sojourners identified some aspects of postmodern ecology in 45 Predictions for the New Millennium; he confidently prophesied that "faith will be defined more by action than doctrine", and that "the old ecumenical structures will gradually dissolve."¹³⁰ Perhaps more ominously, he predicted that as pluralism replaces the challenge of secularism, "many diverse religious and spiritual traditions will have to learn to live with one another."¹³¹ Carroll characterises this era as a time "when the gods of old have been neither abandoned nor replaced, but rather broken into pieces and offered to religious consumers in piecemeal form."¹³²

¹²⁷ B B Zikmund, "The Values and Limits of Representation and Pluralism in the Church," in *The Pluralistic Vision: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestant Education and Leadership*, ed. M J Coalter, J M Mulder, and L B Weeks (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). Page 343

¹²⁸ An oft-quoted line from a hymn; source unknown.

¹²⁹ The era following the Modern era of scientific empiricism.

¹³⁰ Jim Wallis, "45 Predictions for the New Millennium," *Sojourners* 29, no. 1 (2000). Page 8

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Carroll. Page 22

The post-modern world is certainly one in which pluralism is a major feature. Peel, in a helpful table using Gill's work on moral communities, makes a number of contrasts:¹³³

Modernism	Postmodernism
homogenous	fragmented
Society is bureaucratic and uniform	Society is pluralistic and diverse
Reduces all to rational and centralised control	Abandons control and promotes eclectic activity even anarchy
Envisages single unified society	Envisages only diverse societies

The global citizens of a post-modern world tend to reject the absolute truth of dogma and prefer to experience truth; several more features of the era can be added by reference to Sweet, Pujic and Easum:¹³⁴

Modernism	Postmodernism
scientific empiricism	emotion and intuition valid
words and facts	images and symbols
either /or choices	both/and possibilities
hierarchy	organism
bureaucracy	community
control	permission
entitlement to office	authentic leadership
authoritative voices	spiritual coaches
guardians of truth	motivators for mission

¹³³ Peel. Page 3

¹³⁴ Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville: Broadman and Holdman, 2000)., William M Easum and Thomas G Bandy, *Growing Spiritual Redwoods* (Nashville Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1997), Miroslav Pujic, "Process Versus Instant Evangelism," *Ministry* 75, no. 3 (2003).

This analysis of the culture of post-modern pilgrims is summed up by Leonard Sweet in the acronym EPIC: Experiential Participatory, Image-driven and Connected.¹³⁵ He says the churches of the twenty-first century will ignore such radical social change at their peril.

In 1987 the sociologists Roof and McKinney had identified the beginnings of this tectonic shift in the religious landscape; a new religio-cultural order was in the making, where “the old religious and cultural hegemonies” were giving way to “a highly individualised spirituality” which had a significant impact on religious life.¹³⁶ Spirituality was becoming more and more a matter of personal choice, which Roof and McKinney in the American context identified as the “new voluntarism.”¹³⁷ They cited a number of subtle but significant factors that contributed to this expansion of the voluntary principle: the quest for self-fulfillment and the recovery of the experiential, the shift in the locus of religious authority and the demise of institutional power, and the breakdown of ascriptive loyalties.¹³⁸ “Like three cogs turning the same wheel” these add up to an environment where religion is seen as a preference.¹³⁹ Over the last fifteen years denominational pluralism has expanded to a point where people are unconcernedly connected with several

¹³⁵ Sweet. Ibid. Chapters 1 - 4

¹³⁶ Roof and McKinney. The expansion of popular interest in the inner life was seen as healthy by some (“the pursuit of self fulfillment”) and sinister by others (“the culture of narcissism” or a “third disestablishment” between biblical norms and private faith). Page 7, 32. 33

¹³⁷ The New Voluntarism developed from the ‘theological’ voluntarism that epitomised the Arminian focus of the Second Great Awakening. In contrast to Calvin’s emphasis on election and the sovereignty of God, the Reformer Arminius stressed free will, unlimited grace and individual response. The non-conformist churches often favour Arminianism because it endorses a more aggressive evangelistic thrust.

¹³⁸ Roof and McKinney. Page 66

¹³⁹ J R Stone, “The New Voluntarism and Presbyterian Affiliation,” in *The Mainstream Protestant Decline: The Presbyterian Pattern*, ed. M J Coalter, J M Mulder, and L B Weeks, The Presbyterian Presence: The Twentieth Century Experience (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990). Page 127. See also Roof and McKinney. Pages 49 – 50

churches, or are 'mental members' of one that they never attend.¹⁴⁰ A parallel pattern is 'believing without belonging' where those "who left the institutional church in droves" have not become convinced atheists but continue an eclectic spiritual quest.¹⁴¹ These spiritual seekers are concerned with style over substance, but they are also pragmatic: pilgrims seeking a faith that helps them live here and now, and truths that connect with their experience.¹⁴² Paradoxically alongside this pervasive individualism is a growing hunger for connectedness, and a framework of neighborliness, social conscience and spiritual values.¹⁴³ Denominations however no longer provide the primary focus for this connection; the church has moved to the periphery of society.¹⁴⁴ Research undertaken in the Presbyterian Church (USA) found today's religious consumers express a strong loyalty to their particular congregation but resist the label 'Presbyterian'.¹⁴⁵ Undoubtedly this religious eclecticism impacts on attempts to recruit leaders for a traditional polity, and militates against the ability of national entities of mainline churches to survive.¹⁴⁶ The distinctives of ecclesiastical history have become a

¹⁴⁰ "The children may belong to the soccer team in one church, the parents attend a weeknight support group in another and the whole family find their places for Sunday morning worship at a third church." B Shelley and M Shelley, *Consumer Church* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1992). Pages 153 – 156. For mental membership (disaffiliated in practice but still claiming allegiance in census questions) see Stone. Page 125

¹⁴¹ Kevin Ward, "Believing without Belonging: Church in the Aftermath of the 60s," *Reality* 43, no. February/March 2001 (2001). Page 20 Mark Johnstone, *Emerging Church Developments in the 21st Century* (2003), Study Leave Report. Page 22

¹⁴² Buchanan. Page 54. Twenty first century faith gatherers yearn for reality they can experience, disdain the linear reasoning of the sermon, and insist that songs use the 'me' language of the heart. Kirkpatrick and Hopper. Page 93

¹⁴³ Individualism is a term coined by Alexis de Tocqueville 1954 who described a tendency to draw apart from society at large and form a little circle with family and friends quoted in M J Coalter, J M Mulder, and L B Weeks, *The Re-Forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism*, ed. J M Mulder, The Presbyterian Presence (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992). Page 55

¹⁴⁴ Carroll. Page 24

¹⁴⁵ Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks. Page 83

¹⁴⁶ Although beyond the purview of the present study, this dynamic is of critical importance in the Reformed tradition where connections beyond the local church are integral to ecclesiological polity. Key contributing factors are technological adaptability, decentralisation, and collaborative decision-making; see NT Ammerman, "S.B.C. Moderates and the Making of a Postmodern Denomination," *Christian Century* 110, no. 26 (1993). Pages 896,7

matter of opinion; denominational loyalty has given way to the rhetoric of happen – “I just happen to be a Presbyterian.”¹⁴⁷ In the UK too, the Reformed church is experiencing an identity crisis of belief and polity; “more and more people believe what they like rather than follow a party line”.¹⁴⁸ The New Zealand scene may be twenty years behind, but is clearly moving in the same direction; Ward cites individualism, privatism, pluralism, relativism and anti-institutionalism as key features of twenty-first century Kiwi spirituality.¹⁴⁹

The impact of postmodernism on NZ Presbyterian churches has been felt in a number of ways. The mega-church phenomenon, aimed at attracting the unchurched, has led to the dropping of ecclesiastical traditions, and a preference for a populist entertainment style.¹⁵⁰ The decline in theological consensus means polity becomes more important for unity; the PCANZ is currently preparing a book of “guiding confessions” to replace its Subordinate Standards, and ordination vows that will focus on the polity of the church.¹⁵¹ A third factor is the Increase in women clergy, eligible for ordination since 1964, who signify a “transformation in Protestant leadership” which challenges hierarchy and patriarchy in the church.¹⁵² The quantum leap in understanding of personality – style, temperament and gifting – has enabled church members and leaders to better understand their preferred ways of operating and optimal contexts for service.¹⁵³ Fifthly congregations are becoming increasingly individualistic, with an offhand attitude to traditional

¹⁴⁷ Roof and McKinney. Page 66

¹⁴⁸ Peel. Page 2

¹⁴⁹ Ward. Pages 21 - 23

¹⁵⁰ Buchanan. Page 47 See also Carroll. Page 28 - “intensification of voluntarism means supporters have to be wooed...we have tiptoe through the tithe.” Page 28

¹⁵¹ This overrule of individual conscience could be said to be unPresbyterian, (see Coalter 1992 page 288) but the New Zealand church has done it on several matters.

¹⁵² Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks. Page 111. If present trends continue, women may well become a majority among Presbyterian ministers in the twenty-first century.

¹⁵³ Myers-Briggs, Enneagram and Network are well known examples.

Presbyterian customs like quarterly visitation, communion cards, infant baptism, communicant membership and even attendance at Presbytery.

Of maximum import for the eldership is debate on the role of the laity and the meaning of ordination, with which the New Zealand Presbyterian church has been grappling for some years. Some have seen barriers to sacramental leadership as artificial, and in 1989 watershed regulations were passed to allow Elder Administration of the Sacraments, though not without passionate objection from ministers who subscribe to the 'lay theory'.¹⁵⁴ A further widening was approved in 2002 when four Pathways to Ordination were identified, this time with objectors deploring a clericalisation of the eldership.¹⁵⁵ For some people these changes are merely "shifting a problematic boundary rather than addressing the issue of its validity", since not all who seek responsibility and recognition in the exercise of spiritual gifts want to be ordained as clergy.¹⁵⁶ Increasingly, it seems, the traditional frameworks for support and deployment of those who feel called to serve as lay leaders, are not responsive enough to the needs of a changing society.¹⁵⁷

Postmodern pluralism then is the "chief theological and cultural issue of our time" because it assumes that commonality transcends real difference.¹⁵⁸ In ecclesiological terms, the deep cynicism towards institutions and a widespread

¹⁵⁴ Sacramental Issues Group, "A Better Way for the Church," *Crosslink*, May 1989 1989. Page 6

¹⁵⁵ Personal knowledge; see also Lange who in 1986 suspected "sacramentalist and ecumenist motives", as well as a degree of clerical territoriality. Lange. Page 9

¹⁵⁶ Roxborough, "Persistent Presbyterianism? Lay Leadership and the Future of Christianity in the West." Page 7

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ R E Koenig, "Research and Reformation; the Presbyterians' Self Scrutiny," *Christian Century* 110, no. 26 (1993). Page 901

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inclination towards eclecticism is a powerful challenge to those who wish to adhere to a distinctive polity. The results of the post-modern avalanche of diversity on the churches of the third millennium are myriad; the impact on Presbyterian faith communities, whose polity was fashioned in the sixteenth century, is potentially overwhelming.

Chapter 5

The Eldership and Contemporary Practice in New Zealand

The archetypical Presbyterian parish in New Zealand, (and in fact, worldwide) is described by John Roxborough, teacher of Presbyterian studies in Dunedin:

A typical Presbyterian arrangement ..[is a church] led by a “teaching elder” who as “minister of Word and Sacrament” moderates a sessionof “ruling elders” chosen from among the members of the congregation. Both are formally, if not in practice, of equal status in the courts of the church. Both are ordained, nominally at least for life, though only the “ministers” are set apart by laying on of hands by the Presbytery – a regional body composed of equal numbers of ministers and elders from other parishes in the area. Elders are ordained by the congregation by prayer and given a “right hand of fellowship”. Both are required to assent to the government, worship, discipline of the church, and are required to give some form of assent to essential Christian teaching...[in New Zealand] the Westminster Confession of Faith.¹⁵⁹

The New Zealand experience of eldership in a changing society is reflected in a Scots theologian’s comment in 1990: *“a group of elders elected for life represent a permanent authority which may become unresponsive to change in a rapidly changing world”.*¹⁶⁰ This opinion was tested in the present study by measuring tensions and frustrations in a qualitative survey administered to leaders of a selection of twenty medium to large parishes of the PCANZ in August 2003.¹⁶¹ The questions asked were intended to discover the present status of the practice of leadership by elders in a selection of New Zealand Presbyterian churches. Issues such as size of session, duties of elders and scope of authority, methods of recruitment and retirement, and factors affecting willingness to serve, were

¹⁵⁹ Roxborough, "Persistent Presbyterianism? Lay Leadership and the Future of Christianity in the West." Page 5

¹⁶⁰ Murray.1990 Page 191

¹⁶¹ See Appendix One for questionnaire and Appendix Two for data. The selection was made subjectively and aimed to identify parishes where creative changes had been attempted.

canvassed in open questions. A section of the research questionnaire, seeking modifications of the traditional eldership model that local churches have found particularly effective for spiritual leadership and decision making, was identified by the researcher as an area where information was of special interest.

The seventeen leaders who responded on behalf of their parishes were all from New Zealand Presbyterian congregations with the majority of members being pakeha, and in most the leadership group comprised a “college of elders” in some form.¹⁶² In all cases the minister provided the survey data, and in many instances extra material was helpfully included. A number of themes could be identified as common to the experience of Presbyterian parishes striving to adapt the traditional Presbyterian polity in a changing society. The fundamental issue of whether “an authoritarian eldership composed of persons who are elected for life inhibits necessary change in the congregation” expressed itself in the inter-twined contexts of the role of elders, the size of session and the lines of accountability in a parish.¹⁶³

The meaning of the Greek *presbuteros* (literally “bearded ones”, metaphorically “the fathers of the community”) could predispose congregations towards electing patriarchs to the eldership. However the survey results suggested that congregations agree with Powell’s thesis that seniority in faith rather than age is

¹⁶² The two exceptions were: one parish where a parish council had been operating for thirty years, and one where an experimental congregation of students is led by non-elders under the guidance of a minister. The data from the former is included as it aligns easily with the traditionally-led congregations. The second is such an unusual scenario, its input was omitted, though there are accountability issues it raises for the future.

¹⁶³ D M Murray quoted in D Newell Williams, "Consultation on 'the Significance of the Eldership in the Reformed Tradition'," *Mid-stream* vol XXX,, no. no 4, (1991).Page 354

what the Biblical leaders had in mind; elderships exhibited a mix of gender, age and race.¹⁶⁴

Sessions ranged from 8 – 35 elders, in churches with active memberships between 100 and 450. The size of session was alluded to a number of times as being a drawback of the traditional system, especially in large parishes where following the conventional model requires Session to be about ten percent of the size of the congregation. This ratio allows each elder to have a “district” of ten communicant members for whom they are pastorally responsible, as well as the children of those families and ten or so non-members who are also under the church’s pastoral care.¹⁶⁵ The model of parish organisation from which this practice derives was the “Glasgow experiment” of 1818 where the enterprising and practical pastor Thomas Chalmers organised his parish into “defined and manageable units of territory”, where the elders provided spiritual leadership and education, and the deacons administered poor relief.¹⁶⁶ New Zealand’s parishes adopted this pastoral concept of each elder having a flock for which they were responsible; it is a comprehensive system that has often inspired admiration from those of other denominations who cannot mobilise their lay leaders so effectively.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Half had a majority of males, and half had a majority over 60 years old, but all had at least one elder under forty, and four had more than one.

¹⁶⁵ A communicant member is a baptised person who has made a public profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and who has been recognised by the elders of the local church as having a current relationship with their congregation through worship, stewardship, and/or fellowship. The Pastoral Care Register includes anyone on the church’s database, and often equates to the newsletter distribution list.

¹⁶⁶ Roxborough, *Thomas Chalmers: Enthusiast for Mission*. Page 108

¹⁶⁷ Personal knowledge; clearly the same envy is felt in Scotland, see Torrance. Page 503

However most of the parishes surveyed had relinquished the expectations that the elders would do all the pastoral care and contact.¹⁶⁸ Comments included:

- *“Pastoral care is hit and miss; some elders more diligent than others” [Response 1]*
- *“The traditional pastoral visiting structure collapsed some years ago” [3]*
- *“Elders districts no longer work” [9]*

Increasing openness to the ministry of the Whole People of God means the elders of today are expected to exercise more responsibility in the church, at a time when their every day work is also being recognised as a valid Christian service.¹⁶⁹

Roxborough describes the tension: “When volunteer time is at a premium, and both parents usually work, choices need to be made. What for some is an affirmation of gifting and calling, is for others an imposition of unwelcome responsibility.”¹⁷⁰

Many of the respondents mentioned busyness and time pressure as affecting recruitment, retention and deployment of lay leadership. In addition the size of session needed to operate the traditional model in a large church can make building a consensus difficult and time consuming; one parish reported:

A logjam effect at each session meeting. By the time we had a reviewed the decisions of the previous meeting, checked on whether they had been carried out, dealt with any crisis that had arisen during the month, planned details of what was going to happen in the coming month and checked on what was happening in the various areas of activity in the parish we had absolutely no time or energy left for even medium range planning or governance. In reality the minister was held responsible for all that, particularly if it didn't happen And we were losing our best elders as the whole process was killing them.[Response 5]

¹⁶⁸ Only five (2,3,13,14,15) answered yes to the question about elders and intentional pastoral care. The remainder identified teams of pastorally gifted elders, non-elder visitors and home group leaders, and/or employed staff as mechanisms for delivering pastoral care.

¹⁶⁹ Mark Greene, *Thank God Its Monday* (Bletchley: Scripture Union, 1997). Page 100. See also page 8 of G Barnes, *The Forgotten Factor: The Story of Lay People in the Church* (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1991).

¹⁷⁰ Roxborough, "Persistent Presbyterianism? Lay Leadership and the Future of Christianity in the West." Page 6

About half of the Sessions surveyed were of the size that could be dubbed the 'traditional' model (i.e. 10 – 15% of membership), while the remainder had 'slimmed' Session to 2½ – 6%, by focussing on leadership and relinquishing pastoral care to those who were identified as called to, and gifted for, this task.¹⁷¹

A majority of respondents are now using an understanding of spiritual giftings in their deployment of elders.¹⁷² Gordon Miller, a highly regarded commentator on the local church scene, supports this focus:

*In the past we have tended to treat leadership as a kind of prize that we give people for faithfulness and good character regardless of gifting, often ending up with large cumbersome teams of unsuitable people. But this model no longer works; in fact it is the worst.*¹⁷³

The vexed issue of the role of the elder was a common theme. The fact that elders are 'ordained for life' implies a call based on abiding qualities of character, rather than gifts and skills that may be needed at a particular time in the life of a church.¹⁷⁴ In post-modern society the idea of lifelong ordination for eldership - or anything else – may be unrealistic.¹⁷⁵ This especially applies to younger people, who find the idea of ordination for life bizarre and restricting.¹⁷⁶ Parishes surveyed had almost all had refusals from people the Session had prayerfully identified as potential elders. Many of these cited time demands, but other factors – reluctance to commit, preference for own choice of activity, intimidation by role expectation - were also significant:

¹⁷¹ 4, 5,6,7,8,10 and 15; some larger Sessions had also identified pastorally gifted elders.

¹⁷² E.g. using the high profile Willow Creek resource 'Network' - though one minister confessed to not knowing what Network is!

¹⁷³ Gordon Miller, *Growing Great Kiwi Churches*, Affirm Booklet 16 (Tauranga: AFFIRM publications, 2002). P 36

¹⁷⁴ A ruling elder, like a minister of Word and Sacrament, is ordained once only, and thence available to the whole church, needing only to be inducted if they relocate and are identified by a session as called to leadership in the new context.

¹⁷⁵ Roxborough, "Persistent Presbyterianism? Lay Leadership and the Future of Christianity in the West." *ibid*

¹⁷⁶ Personal knowledge; see also Special Commission anent Review and Reform, *A Church without Walls* (Church of Scotland, 2001). "Whole life commitment is an impediment " Page 27

- *“young people don’t like the term or the concept” [Response 10]*
- *“don’t want to be Presbyterian for ever” [13]*
- *“implied it was breadth of responsibility” [12]*
- *“some prefer to limit context of leadership, this can mean they are sidewalk superintendents” [13]*
- *“happy with current level of involvement” [1]*
- *“want to serve in another area” [15]*
- *“lack of self-confidence re role” [1]*
- *“cant do task justice – gifting” [15]*

The issue of retirement also contributed to frustrations with operating under a Presbyterian polity. Because elders are ordained for life, their keen sense of call may foster a reluctance to retire except when prompted by health factors.¹⁷⁷ Nearly all respondents indicated that elders made their own decision about retirement, the exception being where a term of three or six years had been implemented. Two congregations indicated that an annual or three-yearly review of each elder’s involvement had streamlined assessing the timeliness of stepping aside from active eldership.¹⁷⁸ Some utilised the concept of elder emeritus.¹⁷⁹ At the other end of the spectrum several parishes grappled with the difficulty in recruitment by using the associate elder status, or a task force of youth leaders who added perspective and gifts that bridged the gap to the eldership.¹⁸⁰

What elders actually ‘do’ is only broadly defined in the Book of Order, except in a few specific cases where Session is assigned an authority that may fall to the clergy under another polity.¹⁸¹ However the survey found that very few Sessions still undertake these tasks themselves. Only one or two parishes still use the elders to decide Christian education programmes, or to choose worship leaders,

¹⁷⁷ eg 13, 16

¹⁷⁸ 2 and 4

¹⁷⁹ eg 9 and 12

¹⁸⁰ eg 8. 10. 11 13

¹⁸¹ eg choice of organist, Sunday School curriculum, candidates for baptism/membership

and less than half reserve the serving of communion to the elders. Nevertheless the nomination of new elders (to be voted on by the congregation), and decisions about baptism/membership were still virtually always the task of Session. Many omitted an answer the question about discipline of members, despite its traditional importance in Presbyterian polity.

The delegation of specific tasks, like visitation, educational programmes or 'worship-leading', to lay teams or an executive leadership group, is permissible under the Book of Order.¹⁸² All the parishes surveyed now use a small (formal or informal) executive for mundane matters, and for urgent decisions or sensitive matters. Some had found this change required a deep trust and transparency in communication that took time to embed. One minister reported:

It tested our relationships. There were concerns about ...power andsecrecy. The adjustment was difficult.....lingering concerns about the effectiveness of the system and about power and control. The elders now acknowledge they had difficulty letting go of some issues and trusting other people. The [new] role for elders largely failed because leading people is harder than discussing issues in meetings – it is more demandingthe elders meeting did change –...[but] the natural pull was always back to business; meetings were just as frequent and just as long. Overall I think it was the right move, perhaps 75% successful but it was difficult for the elders emotionally. Response 15]

And another observed:

Some elders felt unless they asked the question and heard the answer, they would not be satisfied. This confirmed that we had a structure based on mistrust...and differing understandings about the nature and role of eldership. [Response 4]

Clearly there is a crying need for change. One minister reframed Dr Murray's summary:

¹⁸² Regulation 88 in Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, *The Book of Order*(2003, accessed October 2003); available from www.presbyterian.org.nz/resources/bookoforder.php.

The permanency of this approach [Elders for Life] has recognised problems.... the body of elders becomes too large for efficient functioning....there is no mechanism for accountability or reappointment by the congregation. Neither is there a natural process for stepping down when the need arises....it can prevent a church from shaping its leadership team to ensure it has the appropriate skill set needed for its life and mission in a fast changing society. [Response 4]¹⁸³

The New Zealand church is not alone in its experience of changing times. In the early nineties the PCUSA engaged in a "thorough exercise in denominational self-scrutiny."¹⁸⁴ Each of these tensions was observed in the context of the "gordian knot" of issues that torment mainstream Protestantism.¹⁸⁵ Characterising their predicament as "dark night of the presbyterian soul" the authors suggested a revitalised theology could bind the diverse Presbyterian communion in "identity, common purpose, vitality and flexibility."¹⁸⁶

The Church of Scotland too struggles with a diverse polity; theologian DM Murray describes the historic lay/presbyter argument as an ongoing debate.¹⁸⁷ Recent reports attest that the tension between the different views has never been resolved, but the Panel on Doctrine leans towards the 'lay representational' model as being more flexible and capable of addressing contemporary issues.¹⁸⁸ Clearly there are worldwide parallels to the tensions that affect the implementation of Presbyterianism in New Zealand. However Kirkpatrick in a perceptive summary of

¹⁸³ Cf Murray. 1990 Page 191

¹⁸⁴ Response 3

¹⁸⁵ Koenig. Page 902

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. However this seems unlikely in the light of a 1990 study that showed the PCUSA is in fact two interdependent but distinguishable denominations. Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks. Page 324; Weeks and Fogelmanm found the two strands are the "local congregation" church and the "governing body" church. The relationship between these two and the two strands of elder theory would bear further study.

¹⁸⁷ Murray. Page 191. In the Lay Theory the elder was seen as an elected representative not set apart for life. The Presbyterian Theory sees the eldership as a scriptural office to which one is ordained for life, and uses the teaching and ruling elder distinction. See Appendix Four.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

“*What Unites Presbyterians*” describes the Presbyterian model as having decided advantages despite its unwieldiness. Ministers operate under strict constraints alongside the diverse perspectives, insights, and world views of others in the church.¹⁸⁹ A presbyterian governance enables congregations to collaborate in decisions that fulfill the mission of the church. Statistics show that participation in the Presbyterian movement is keeping pace with world population growth and suggest that by the year 2010, 52 million believers will be governed by this historic polity.¹⁹⁰ However twentieth century secularisation and twenty-first century pluralism pose a significant challenge to its traditional structures of rule by elders.

¹⁸⁹ They can't baptise on their own, allocate use of church property, add to or subtract from the membership, fire the organist or employ a secretary; as moderator of a session that has these powers they can exercise a degree of leadership - but are actually free only to choose the hymns and preach the sermon!! Kirkpatrick and Hopper. Page 132

¹⁹⁰ Special Commission anent Review and Reform. Page 30

Chapter 6

The Eldership and the Challenge to Change

Twentieth century developments in New Testament studies hardly touched the well-trod ground of ecclesiology; scholars tended to accept the conventional wisdom that the various models of the church are incompatible, and seem not to have genuinely engaged with the challenge to integrate thinking for the future.¹⁹¹ Nonetheless it seems that in an increasingly pluralistic twenty-first century, the church is being urged by both its adherents and its detractors to abandon traditional structures, develop multiple forms, and engage in dialogue with other traditions.¹⁹² The international collegium of Reformed churches, the World Alliance, acknowledged in 1992 that "each church has to face the question as to how, and through which structures, it wants to give expression to the essence and mission of the church."¹⁹³ The "wondrous plant" of reformed spirituality has a diversity of branches, but insistence on orthopraxy may have created a closed system where creativity is stifled and the Spirit is quenched.¹⁹⁴ In New Zealand the limitations of the system are demonstrated in tensions and frustrations described by Kiwi Presbyterians; in the present study they revolve around the traditional concept of ordination, the role of the elders, the size of session and issues of recruitment and retirement.

¹⁹¹ D Neill, and Wright, T, *The Interpretation of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Pages 1, 367

¹⁹² Heidemann. Page 8

¹⁹³ Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Page 81

¹⁹⁴ R D Adams, "The Roots of Reformed Spirituality," *Reformed World* 44, no. 3 (1994). Page 122

Otto Pesch takes the story of Little Red Riding Hood as a metaphor for a visionary pastoral strategy, that enables the church to escape being swallowed up by the "legalism of confessional restraint "and emerge free from its "suffocating power".¹⁹⁵ The analogy suggests that hope will only prevail if the greedy "wolf" of tradition dies – and the old ways are abolished. If so, ecclesiological reform must be radical, and the old structures be replaced by new wineskins (Luke 5. 38), lest minor changes become an "inoculation against the possibility of radical reform."¹⁹⁶ Shelley identified the balance between upholding the integrity of the faith community, and responding to the call to mission, as the tension between memories, "*the influences of the past*" and dreams, "*the pressure of the present*."¹⁹⁷ The church, he said, must not cling to its tradition so tightly that it misses opportunities to make contact for Christ in the world.¹⁹⁸ Ultimately all traditions of leadership derive their authority from the presence of the living Christ, whose voice has guided the church in every age to make adjustments that enable it to operate more effectively in its context.¹⁹⁹

This of course is the root meaning of the word Reformation, and the heart of the Protestant Reformation was the willingness to abandon accepted orthodoxy in favour of a new understanding. This "habit of the mind" attested by the principle *Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda* - the church reformed, always requiring to

¹⁹⁵ Otto Hermann Pesch, "Practical Theology Chapter," in *What Big Ears You Have: The Theologian's Little Red Riding Hood* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2000). Page 34

¹⁹⁶ Heidemann. Page 8. See also Les Howard, "Called to Minister," *Evangelical Presbyterian* 36, no. 3 (1986). Page 6

¹⁹⁷ Shelley and Shelley. Page 71

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Campbell. Page 256. For example, in a society of classes, the church became hierarchical and bishops became princes, in a professionally organised society church leaders are seen as qualified therapists, and in a media dominated society, leaders may be forced to assume the personable and spontaneous style of TV celebrities . See Dulles. Page 162

be reformed.²⁰⁰ The Spirit-led church is open to new revelation, and to fresh expression of old truths, so that new insights are not feared, but thoughtfully examined, considered and possibly integrated into fresh theological formulations.²⁰¹ Calvin reformulated Luther's work in this way, shaping it into a form of his own, and acknowledging that within general rules and theological principles, such as order, equality, and accountability, church polity would always be flexible in nature.²⁰² The Reformers themselves would not want today's church to "enshrine in tomb-like rigidity their own historically-bound perspectives"²⁰³ The Scots social reformer Thomas Chalmers, a formative influence on New Zealand Presbyterianism, was ruthless about tradition if it got in the way; it was remoulded or perhaps ignored in favour of freedom for the gospel to function effectively.²⁰⁴ He looked to the Spirit of God, rather than traditional polity, for assurance:

*We may just as well think that a system of aqueducts will irrigate and fertilise the country without rain, as think that any human economy will Christianise a parish without the living water of the Spirit.... Still, it is right to have a parochial constitution, just as it is right to have aqueducts.*²⁰⁵

Contemporaneous with those who advocate radical reform in Presbyterian polity, are some who see a changing society as a threat rather than an opportunity.²⁰⁶ The inertia in a congregation is seen to be of protective value, and the voices of the past, valuable links with its corporate identity.²⁰⁷ To see a return of postmoderns to the values of their forebears may just be a matter of patience, they

²⁰⁰ The term "habit of the mind" used by the Presbyterian theologian Gerrish in Buchanan. Page 48

²⁰¹ Kirkpatrick and Hopper. Page 21. Examples are Feminist Theology, Liberation Theology and Pastoral Psychology.

²⁰² Key principles named in M J Coalter, J M Mulder, and L B Weeks, *The Organisational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, The Presbyterian Presence: The Twentieth Century Experience (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). Page 303

²⁰³ Lange. Page 10

²⁰⁴ Roxborough, *Thomas Chalmers: Enthusiast for Mission*. Page 65.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. Quote from Chalmers' memoirs on page 112

²⁰⁶ See for example the conservative take on eldership in both Hall and de Koster.

²⁰⁷ Gunstone. Page 67

believe, like that of immigrants who watch their children reject the ways of the old country, then see their grandchildren develop a renewed appreciation of the old language and culture.²⁰⁸ Buchanan ably articulates this conservationist perspective:

*"[As] our best thinkers research, analyze, evaluate and write thoughtful tomes on our [Presbyterian] plight, a library shelf full of books assures me that what I am doing is irrelevant, that the future is grim....In the best traditions of academic scholarship they force us to question the old assumptions.... to ask whether God might be doing a new thing in our time.....[but] my proposal is that traditional religion is important...it responds creatively and positively to the questions that are being asked by the culture; questions of meaning and purpose, questions of vocation and values and hope."*²⁰⁹

Defenders of this view observe that tradition is not static or inert, but a living thing that sustains community by reminding us who we are, and that is received with "discovery, surprise, nuance, interrogation and (above all) struggle."²¹⁰ Winston Churchill once claimed that a sign of great society is "the diligence with which it passes culture from one generation to the next", and that not to pass on such a heritage leaves a generation without definition or direction.²¹¹ However it seems the 'dirty word' is not tradition but traditionalism, an unthinking defence of the past, a 'values rigidity' that holds back the future. A helpful distinction is that "traditionalism is the dead faith of living people, but tradition is the living faith of the dead, ...a means for interpreting contemporary experiences."²¹²

²⁰⁸ Zikmund, "The Values and Limits of Representation and Pluralism in the Church." Page 347

²⁰⁹ Buchanan. Page xi

²¹⁰ Douglas John Hall, *Professing the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). Page 257

²¹¹ Quoted by Greg Fleming, "A Civil Society," ed. Howick Presbyterian Church Cafe@eleven Service (Auckland: Maxim Institute).

²¹² Pelikan in Shelley and Shelley.p 72, see also Leith in Stephen W Plunkett, *This We Believe: Eight Truths Presbyterians Affirm* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2002). Page 8

The exercise of updating, clarifying, and reinterpreting tradition in the light of new understanding is described by Old Testament scholar Patricia Willey as “inner exegesis.”²¹³ Using Deutero-Isaiah’s call to remember the former things, alongside the injunction to forget them, she avers that “the test of orthodoxy is in the creative relationship between past and present”²¹⁴. It seems the twenty-first century Presbyterian church is engaged in such a process of inner exegesis, which for all the risks and dangers involved, is an authentic call to reinterpret the Reformed tradition. To do so with integrity will mean attending to “the three tenses of success” - letting the past guide the future, while the future instructs the present.²¹⁵ It will also entail “the twin criteria of theological adequacy” - internal fidelity to scripture, and external credibility in the light of current knowledge.²¹⁶ There are precedents for this exegetical vocation: the twentieth-century decision to begin ordaining women required such a response, as did the experimentation with Cooperating Ventures. In both, the New Zealand Presbyterian church needed to creatively steer the course “between a concern for doctrine/polity which can be hard and legalistic, and a liberalism that undervalues the reformed and catholic heritage.”²¹⁷

The Louisville Presbyterians’ “thorough exercise in denominational self-scrutiny”²¹⁸ concluded in 1992 that “the Presbyterian community is capable of rethinking our

²¹³ Inner exegesis is where a Biblical writer responds dialogically to earlier texts. Patricia Willey, “Sing to God a New Song: Using the Past to Construct a Future,” *Reformed World* 46, no. 1 (1996). Page 40

²¹⁴ Isaiah 46.9f and Isaiah 43.18f. Ibid. Page 46

²¹⁵ Calvin Miller, *The Empowered Leader: 10 Keys to Servant Leadership* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995). Page 22

²¹⁶ Peel. Page 5

²¹⁷ Breward. Page 25

²¹⁸ Koenig. Page 900

Christian life together.... God is not yet finished with the Presbyterian Church.”²¹⁹ Kirkpatrick then posed an intriguing question for the ecclesiological kitchen: “Is an expert chef one who always uses a recipe, or one who understands the ingredients so well a recipe is not required?”²²⁰ The present author prefers the second alternative, since in the end the Bible – and the Book of Order – are not about operational precision but about “making the life of the Christian community possible”.²²¹

²¹⁹ Coalter, Mulder, and Weeks, *The Re-Forming Tradition: Presbyterians and Mainstream Protestantism*.(Page 28, referring to the PCUSA).

²²⁰ Kirkpatrick and Hopper. Page 23

²²¹ Ibid.

Chapter 7

The Practicability of Persisting with Presbyterianism

A spiritually alive and relationally supportive leadership group is said to be a key feature of a healthy congregation grounded on Biblical principles.²²² However New Testament scholars have difficulty identifying a standard format for biblical leadership, and there are indications that the elders of early churches were free “to respond to visions, develop creative partnerships, and initiate indigenous worship” without being controlled by permission or procedures.²²³ Moreover the spirit of the Reformation is about a healthy tension between memories and dreams, continuity and change, order and chaos.²²⁴ This tension can be helpfully compared with the ‘perichoretic’ dance of the Trinity – a dynamic participative relationship characterised by intimacy, equality, gifts and love.²²⁵ A sober assessment of postmodern social change suggests that viable leadership models for the twenty first century church will need to emulate such a dance. Persisting with Presbyterianism in the contemporary world will require a much more organic structure that features authenticity over entitlement, permission over control and motivation for mission over traditional authority.²²⁶

Although there are aspects of the pluralistic ethos of postmodernism that Christians may want to repudiate, there are also features of the culture that can be

²²² Murray Robertson, *Developing an Effective Eldership*(Spreydon Baptist Church, 2003, accessed 21/2/03 2003); available from www.spreydon.org.nz/resources/effective_eldership.asp. Page 2

²²³ Easum and Bandy. Page 110

²²⁴ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (2000). Page 98

²²⁵ George Cladis, *Leading the Team Based Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).Page 4

²²⁶ Easum and Bandy. Page 23

drawn on to enhance mission and connect with seekers.²²⁷ Effective churches today are largely the ones utilising team based leadership – and postmodern faith communities appear to be highly receptive to the spirit-led collaborative style that has been gifted to the church by Presbyterian tradition.²²⁸ However there are aspects of the Reformed tradition that are less acceptable in the permissive, individualistic, choice-oriented popular culture.²²⁹ Can the insights gifted by Scripture and Tradition be reappropriated for a 21st century church? What ingredients are essential for an authentic Presbyterian polity? And can churches reconfigure the traditional recipe for those ingredients to produce an effective and credible local church leadership?

The present research proposes that there are a number of basic ingredients which may be combined in different ways to provide a palatable solution to the tensions and frustrations described in the present study, as leaders struggle to apply Reformation polity in the contemporary New Zealand Presbyterian Church.²³⁰ Different ‘recipes’ mean a diversity of ways for elders to operate, align and govern can emerge as the 21st century church follows the Reformers’ habit of the heart – to be ever reforming, or to use the current catchphrase, transforming.²³¹ However

²²⁷ ibid

²²⁸ Cladis. Page1

²²⁹ Kevin Ward, "Rugby and Church: Worlds in Conflict," *Reality* 53, no. October/November (2002). Page 28

²³⁰ A prior question might be the appropriateness of the term ‘elders’, which for many people is confusing and negative. Its ancient roots may send us to alternatives like gatekeepers, its semantic field to the versatile Greek presbyter; its contemporary equivalent may be found in the widely understood concepts of governor or trustee, and a helpful term from tangata whenua may be “kaitiaki = guardian caretaker manager trustee steward”. Orsman, ed. p 359 However useful these alternatives may be in reframing the task of elders, each has issues of its own, and for Presbyterians fidelity to the biblical and historical heritage counsels the retention of the name elder.

²³¹ Transformational leadership is the theme of many leadership studies today eg Herrington.

this may mean that one traditional ingredient becomes discretionary - the concept of elders' ordination introduced by Melville in 1578.

The source of much of the inertia besetting churches today can be identified as the notion of 'ordination for life' that came into Scots Presbyterianism in the sixteenth century – the “authoritarian eldership” elected for life which “inhibits necessary change in the congregation.”²³² Discussion in the literature has revolved around the notion of relinquishing the ordination of elders, and a number of arguments have been offered in its defence.²³³ To renege on this symbol of the high call of collegiality would be a move in the direction of the Lay Theory, according clergy a status and honour that may discomfit egalitarian Kiwi Presbyterians.²³⁴ Intriguingly the 2003 Task Group rewriting the PCANZ Book of Order is toying with a rich and inclusive definition of ruling elders which almost equates with the Disciples' denominational polity of 'elders as assistant ministers.'²³⁵ The paradox is that giving elders a high status can foster a sense of empowerment within the laity. For Presbyterians, ordination confers no special gift but recognises the gifts that have already been given by God and identified by the church.²³⁶ However ordination, though a fitting recognition of the elder's vocation, should not require a leader to be active in local church governance all their life; even clergy today move in and out of active service in response to changing life contexts.²³⁷ Moreover ordination of elders, in recognising call and commitment, does not rule out the

²³² D Newell Williams, "Consultation on "the Significance of the Eldership in the Reformed Tradition", " *Midstream* XXX, no. 4 (1991). Page 354

²³³ see Appendix Three – Peel's Table

²³⁴ See Appendix Four on Theories

²³⁵ The draft of Chapter 11 refers to the substantial duties of ruling elders as potentially including preaching of the word and administration of the sacraments (personal knowledge). For material on Disciples polity see Vischer, ed., *The Ministry of the Elders in the Reformed Churches*. Page 155

²³⁶ Gray and Tucker. Page 20

²³⁷ eg parental leave, overseas study, poor health, retirement, non-congregational ministry

setting apart of other people to identified ministries e.g. children's workers, pastoral counselors, worship leaders.²³⁸ The 'laying on of hands' used always to be reserved for the ordination of clergy (and in a formal sense still is, in NZ Presbyteries), but today many churches 'lay hands' on a regular basis, for healing, for farewelling, for commissioning. The ecumenist motives that promoted a distinction between ordinations of ruling and teaching elders (a remnant of the lay theory) have been superseded by egalitarian culture.²³⁹

Ordination for life, or as one writer describes it, "for the whole church," does not necessarily imply serving on Session for life.²⁴⁰ The Presbyterian Church in America, in inclining towards the Lay Theory, has long operated a system of selecting governing elders from a pool of the ordained, and this method seems to be working effectively in a Kiwi context as well.²⁴¹ Today's thriving churches are often those which set a mission-focussed agenda, minimising control and "kicking corporate habits."²⁴² The key seems to be not ordination in itself, but a focus on the role of leadership and governance – "doing the right things" and maintaining the core values or 'DNA' of the church.²⁴³ Six staple ingredients of governance can be identified, customised and blended in each local or regional context; these will be considered in three clusters of pairs – call and covenant, councils and collegiality, and constraints and courage.

²³⁸ Roxborough, "Persistent Presbyterianism? Lay Leadership and the Future of Christianity in the West." (page 7) notes the need for a framework for lay leadership other than the traditional context of eldership; possibilities include revival of the role of lay reader, use of the Taiwanese office of evangelist, or the Methodist community-facing diaconate. The notion of intern elders also been tried in NZ and in South Africa. (personal knowledge)

²³⁹ Even Episcopal churches must grapple with the tension between their historic instrumentalism and a democratisation of the laying on of hands.

²⁴⁰ Kirkpatrick and Hopper. Page 133

²⁴¹ Responses 2, 4, 5, 15

²⁴² Easum and Bandy. Pages 9, 12

²⁴³ As compared with "doing things right", Herrington. Page 11. See also Page 127.

Call and Covenant

One of the gifts that Calvin bestowed on the emerging reformation church was a renewed understanding of the concept of call, and his helpful distinction between inner and outer call is just as relevant today as ever.²⁴⁴ All Christians have inner conversations with God, and often experience impulses or passions that drive them towards certain ministry areas. If the church is able to identify and affirm this call, then a resilient working partnership between individual and community can be developed.²⁴⁵ In the permission-giving church culture of the 21st century it may be tempting to accept anyone who has a passion and ‘let them get on with it.’²⁴⁶ The notion of external call however, provides an appropriate means of checking the alignment of call and context, and retains the responsibility of existing leaders to identify qualities of character and vision, as well as gifts and skills.²⁴⁷ It also opens up the possibility of ordination being replaced or complemented by a written covenant that expresses the interchange of gifts and grace.

Covenant is a concept deeply embedded in Presbyterianism.²⁴⁸ In the past, elders were required to sign a Formula submitting to the proper government of the PCANZ, and assenting to the Scriptures and the Westminster expressions of Reformed doctrine and polity, which many elders had never read.²⁴⁹ The new

²⁴⁴ Walter C Wright, *Relational Leadership* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000). Page 2.

²⁴⁵ Easum and Bandy call this the genetic signature or double helix of spiritual life and spiritual calling. *ibid* Page 202

²⁴⁶ *ibid* Pages 162 - 169

²⁴⁷ Max de Pree, *Called to Serve: Creating and Nurturing the Effective Volunteer Board* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2001). Page 54. For qualities of character and relational skills, see Appendix Five – Leadership Template used by the elders of Response 13.

²⁴⁸ God establishes covenant out of the depths of his love grace and forbearance – in response to his loving initiative, certain human behaviours and responsibilities are specified, to serve the Lord and one another. See Cladis. Page 35

²⁴⁹ The Formula is Appendix H-9 Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, (accessed).

Book of Order envisages a much simpler creed or 'focal identity statement' to replace the historic confession, and a promise by ruling or teaching elders to comply with whatever codes and practices are in current use. Despite the fears that this will open a flood gate of liberalism, it could be a helpful move, as it will ensure recruitment of lay leaders who are aligned with the beliefs and practices of the church. The notion of a Covenant opens up wide possibilities for explicating terms of office, areas of responsibility and commitment to maintaining the core values of each local church.²⁵⁰ Presbyterians could learn from the emerging Catholic system, where councils have their own internal rhythm: an extensive discernment process followed by an open-ended term from three to eight years.²⁵¹ Best practice in contemporary society is "participative management based on covenantal relationships"; these fit well with the church's widening understanding of the nature of leadership and the pathways to ordination.²⁵²

Councils and Collegiality

Shared leadership is part of the 'DNA' of the Presbyterian church. Any polity that assigns authority to a single person with no checks or balances cannot be described as Reformed. There will always be a place in a Presbyterian structure for relationship with other congregations and reference to a presbytery.²⁵³ But collegiality can be expressed in a huge variety of ways, not just in the traditional model of a large Session that oversees all of church life. Increasingly Sessions are devolving leadership decisions and exercise of specific ministries to smaller

²⁵⁰ See Appendix Six

²⁵¹ Charles M and Ellen Morseth Olsen, *Selecting Church Leaders* (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2002). Page 28

²⁵² Cladis. Page 38

²⁵³ Gray and Tucker. Page 8

teams, often associating authority and responsibility.²⁵⁴ Calvin's teaching/ruling elders distinction was based on a differentiation in call and gifting; today we have an awareness of many more possible specialisations. Pastoral care, for example, is often better suited to those with a gift cluster in the shepherding, mercy and encouragement area, than those who are gifted leaders, administrators or teachers.²⁵⁵ That grouping is better used in Herrington's "vision community," called to discern God's purpose for the congregation.²⁵⁶ However the leadership-gifted 'trim eldership' (ie fewer than 12 elders) described in many survey responses can only work as effective governance if there is a great deal of trust and transparency - and clearly proscribed boundaries of belief and values that "define the space within which any ministry can begin grow and evolve"²⁵⁷ The fact that "the polity of the Presbyterian Church is built on sin," is borne out by the distrust and disempowerment described in some survey responses.²⁵⁸ What if the collegial decision-making was done in an atmosphere of empowering grace rather than suspicion and fear? What if Presbyterians looked to their Renaissance heritage as much as to the Reformation fathers? If instead of the Theology of Redemption with its focus on sin and fallibility, Presbyterian polity was undergirded by the Theology of Creation – the image-bearing qualities and awesome potential of each believer?

²⁵⁴ "Structures are smaller, networks are bigger": Cladis. Page 24 Response 5 described the PCANZ management structure as "based on the best of late mediaeval and renaissance political thought,....avoiding the pitfalls of emerging democratic thought.... a water tight system of checks and balances....out of a deep suspicion of linking authority and responsibility... best illustrated by the fact that the minister is totally responsible to presbytery... for the mission of the parish, but has absolutely no authority other than who shall preach in the pulpit".

²⁵⁵ "Not all elders are gifted in leadership and not all in pastoral care." Special Commission on Review and Reform. Page 27

²⁵⁶ Herrington. Page 41. See also Greenleaf's classic recommendation for improved governance: "radical reconstruction of trustee bodies so they are predominantly manned by able dedicated servant leaders." Robert K Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, first pub in 1977 ed. (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991).

²⁵⁷ Easum and Bandy. Page 133. Barna describes early warning filters to detect bad decisions.

²⁵⁸ Kirkpatrick and Hopper. Page 130. For distrust see Responses 4, 5, 13 and 15

Could the spirit of Presbyterianism - collaborative leadership - be “a new soulful dance of leadership” around a transforming vision of change?²⁵⁹

Constraints and Courage

Thirdly twenty-first century eldership is about finding a balance between accountability and the freedom to move in response to the Spirit. The Presbyterian Church’s current reworking of the Formula may provide a degree of constraint but increasingly there are codes and protocols that provide for protection of people and of the integrity of the church.²⁶⁰ The survey found that the large majority of ministers surveyed mentioned only the Formula, although the Code of Ethics for Pastoral Care is now widely known and local churches often have protocols for ‘sexual safety’.²⁶¹ One of the core values for church leaders, identified by the PCANZ, is accountability, and Presbyterian leaderships nationwide need to attend to this crucial dimension, which is essential not just for protection, but also for mission and ministry.²⁶² Although the familiar ‘wells not fences’ analogy sees enthusiastic leaders gathering around a common vision, it seems hedges are still needed. Nowadays however they will often be “proscriptive boundaries” rather than “prescriptive mandates.”²⁶³ Leaders in any participative governance model need room to move, to take risks, to try new things; structures that support them must be flexible.²⁶⁴ The Presbyterian Church’s recent initiatives to assess more

²⁵⁹ Graeme Nicholas, *Could Presbytery yet Dance?*(2002, accessed 3/10 2003); available from www.presbyterian.org.nz/resources/mrt/resources/dance.

²⁶⁰ Especially children and youth; PCANZ now has specific policies on this.

²⁶¹ See www.presbyterian.org.nz/spanz/march2003/storypage18

²⁶² Equipping the Leadership policy group, personal knowledge.

²⁶³ Limits beyond which we cannot go, rather than detailed lists of obligations, Easum and Bandy. Page 115

²⁶⁴ E. E. Whitehead and J. D. Whitehead, *The Promise of Partnership: A Model of Collaborative Ministry* (Lincoln: Authors Guild Backinprint.com, 2000). Page 85

rigorously the gifts and contributions leaders have to offer, and to promote regular clarification and review of shared expectations between ministers and leaders, also promise to be a useful basis for renewing motivation and reviewing performance.²⁶⁵ Some of those ordained 'for life' may be given the opportunity to step back, temporarily or permanently.²⁶⁶ This will take courage – but their gifts will not be lost to the church. There are many possibilities for short-term task groups or specialist ministries to utilise their skills. A relevant leadership will also risk opening up aspects of their task to those younger people for whom denominational loyalty is minimal, and the institution of eldership inappropriate.²⁶⁷ These hopeful pilgrims will thrive in a permission-giving culture, where risk, moments of chaos, even failure measure the path to mastery of new skills.²⁶⁸ A courageous leadership will venture out in that unknown territory with “a Bible in one hand and a pompom in the other.”²⁶⁹

The results of a recipe combining these six treasured ingredients will be a renewed vitality and vision:

“I don't think there was anything "unPresbyterian" about it - we kept our congregation fully informed with the changes, and sought their support and valued their input; looking back it was a very positive experience.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ PCANZ Resourcing for Ministry Policy Group (personal knowledge)

²⁶⁶ See Regulation 49, Book of Order 2003, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, (accessed). A recent Church of Scotland study recommends elders now serve for a term. Special Commission anent Review and Reform. Page 27

²⁶⁷ eg By “building a bridge from congregation to session with a task force of young people who brainstormed/dreamed and with Session approval began to implement - out of this many became associate elders.” Response 11

²⁶⁸ Johnstone. Page 41

²⁶⁹ Easum and Bandy. Page 192

²⁷⁰ Response 16

Conclusion
Practicable Presbyterianism

New Zealand Presbyterian polity is based on the conviction that the structures of the church should reflect God's orderly character. From the time of the first Christian fellowships, patterns of organisation and leadership emerged. The New Testament church relied on a plurality of presbyters as leaders, although it may be that seniority in faith rather than age was the crucial determinant. A diversity of offices emerged, but Presbyterian churches worldwide take the view that ministry in the early church was a non-hierarchical form based on collegiality and consensus, a pastoral council with authority to determine issues of importance. At the time of the Reformation, Calvin and Knox advocated a recrudescence of conciliar oversight by elders to replace the conventional rule by a hierarchy of individuals. The Reformers believed accountability could be restored with the use of a collective bishop, a committee of ordinary believers sharing with the clergy in a participatory form of governance that today epitomises Presbyterian polity. The call to eldership came to be formally recognised in their ordination, and lifelong service, and a number of functional differences in office were also identified. It is significant that the early Presbyterians did not interpret the New Testament rigidly but left room for further developments in ecclesiology. Over the centuries new generations have responded to fresh insights by evolving a variety of models. Views on authority and discipline have changed, and Reformed churches often use elements of congregationalism; cultural diversity, hermeneutical insights and ecumenical dialogue have also led to new perspectives.

In the twenty-first century postmodern era, diverse religious and spiritual traditions are learning to coexist in a context of pluralism. A highly individualised spirituality means religion is a preference - and denominations no longer provide the primary identity for church. Authentic leadership is seen as a function of trust and relationality, more than entitlement and credentials. Emerging paradoxically with the consumerism of contemporary culture, there is a longing for connectedness that calls for a missional response. Churches wanting to communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ in this era are struggling with the impact of social change on traditional Presbyterian structures. In the increasingly pluralistic twenty-first century, the church is well advised to review traditional structures, develop multiple forms, and engage in dialogue with other traditions. In a qualitative survey of patterns of eldership in New Zealand in 2003, various tensions were identified and attempts to adapt the traditional Presbyterian polity described. Findings showed that the Presbyterian heritage has much to offer which is compatible with the postmodern age, as long as it is not applied in a static manner, but treasured as a gift that sustains community by reminding us who we are. As the living Christ guides the church in every age, authentic patterns are developed in a dynamic relationship between past and present. Six ingredients of the sixteenth century recipe can be identified as genuine features of a biblical polity, to be reconfigured in a new recipe more relevant to a contemporary church. These ingredients – call, covenant, councils, collegiality, constant and courage – are offered to Presbyterian churches seeking to reappropriate the ancient gift for our own time.

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Peel's table of Pros and Cons of ordaining elders

The Pros and Cons of Ordination of Elders
Peel 2002 page 253

FOR	AGAINST
Widens the nature of ministry and expresses its corporate nature	Devalues the word ordination and the reality behind the word
Emphasises that work of an elder is not just a job or function	Creates a hierarchy within the membership
Has been a valued tradition within our church	Devalues other forms of service
Links us with the World Reformed church family	Confers power and authority in a way which is unhelpful
Reflects the importance of lay authority within the church	Lacks unambiguous biblical warrant
Confers responsible authority ie under God	Places too high a demand on people
Maintains democracy in the leadership of the church	Causes confusion in ecumenical environment
Places the beginning an elder's ministry in act of worship	
Add an extra dimension which is hard to define	

Appendix Four

Coleman's Matrix of Honour-Participation in Church Leadership

Church Leadership described by Honour and Participation
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		Clergy Honour continuum		
		Clericalism.....	egalitarianism	
Lay Participation continuum	democracy	<p>Lay Theory (high participation high clergy honour) FBD Superintendents Representation Elder more like deacons, assist the minister Hierarchical Councils can be clergy dominated</p> <p>CoS Doctrine panel US Presbyterians URC Some NZ clergy²⁷¹</p>	<p>Methodism</p> <hr/> <p>Presbyter Theory (med clergy honour med participation) Melville's SBD High view of all elders but T/R distinction Councils must include elders</p> <p>Disciples NZ Pressies</p>	<p>Non Conformist (low clergy honour high participation)</p> <p>Congregationalists Baptists Some independents</p>
	Monarchy	<p>Episcopacy (high clergy honour low participation)</p> <p>Catholic Orthodox Anglican some Pentecostals Destiny Church</p>	<p>Pseudo-egalitarian (low honour and med/low participation)</p> <p>Sects like Mormon /JW Some Brethren Gateway/Greenlane</p>	

²⁷¹ eg The Sacramental Issues Group 1989

Appendix Five

Example of Leadership Template

Appendix Six

Example of Leadership Covenant
Derived from Cladis 1999 page 160

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