

The Genevan Consistory: Case Files

Sources and Method

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The archive

Three hundred case records drawn from the disciplinary work of the Consistory of Geneva and the pastoral life surrounding it. Each record carries a title, a short historical summary, a narrative closing with the Disposition of the case, a section on context and significance, and a source field naming an edition and a page. Of the three hundred, 166 rest on primary material and 134 on secondary scholarship. Every card carries a page-level locator.

Each case is labeled by the body that heard it: the Consistory, the Small Council, the two together, or a pattern running across many cases. That labeling is the point of the resource, since it is where popular accounts most often go wrong.

Sources

Three works carry most of the archive:

Robert M. Kingdon, general editor, with Thomas A. Lambert and Isabella M. Watt, editors, and M. Wallace McDonald, translator, *Registers of the Consistory of Geneva in the Time of Calvin, Volume 1: 1542 to 1544* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

Jeffrey R. Watt, *The Consistory and Social Discipline in Calvin's Geneva* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020).

Scott M. Manetsch, *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536 to 1609* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Individual cards additionally cite William G. Naphy, Philip Schaff, Robert M. Kingdon, Karen E. Spierling, John Witte Jr., Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, E. William Monter, and Bruce Gordon, along with the Westminster Standards, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and Calvin's Institutes. Scripture is ESV throughout.

How the archive was built

The bibliography came first: the works to be trusted and cited. The assembly and formatting of the three hundred cards against that bibliography was done with the help of Claude, Anthropic's AI assistant, used as one would use a research assistant. Claude also carried the verification labor recorded in this report, under the author's direction and subject to his review. The editorial judgment, the theological framing, and the decisions about what the resource should contain and how it should read are the author's own.

How it was checked

The unit of verification is the quotation, checked against the page the card cites.

Watt is held as verified machine text of the printed pages, which allows exact string matching: a quotation either occurs on the cited page or it does not. The Registers and Manetsch were read directly

from photographs of the printed volumes, with the printed folio number confirmed on each page image before any claim was judged against it. Optical character recognition was tested on those photographs and set aside as unreliable for pages shot at an angle, so the reading was done directly.

The checking covers quoted matter and the page locators that carry it. Where a card cites a work reached through another scholar's footnote, the card says so and names the note.

In August 2026 the whole archive was re-verified from a fresh copy of the live text. Every machine check was re-run from scratch: quotation matching against the Watt text, subject-on-page checks for every Watt-cited card, chronological consistency of the register citations, and photograph coverage of every cited Registers and Manetsch page. Every register and Manetsch citation in the archive, 175 in all, was then read directly against the photographed pages, including the entry heading a reader would look for and every quotation the card carries. Where a checker's flag proved to be the checker's own error, it was withdrawn and recorded as such; where the card was wrong, the card was corrected. Thirty-two cards were corrected in that round: two wrong dates, five quotations not matching their printed source word for word, four misattributed references, five summaries that said more or other than the cited page says, and sixteen citation-precision faults such as a wrong session date or a footnote placed on the wrong page. Every correction was applied to the live text by an occurrence-verified replacement and confirmed by re-reading the saved page.

The final stage is human. Four review worksheets place all 300 cards, with no card omitted and no overlap, before a human reader: each row links the source file, names the page, and gives either an exact search string confirmed to occur on the cited page or the printed entry heading to find in the photograph. Machine checking found and fixed the faults listed above; the human pass is what warrants the archive to a reader, and this report is regenerated whenever the archive's content changes.

After publication, two of the cited books reached the author's shelf and were read against the archive: William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester, 1994; the 2003 reprint keeps the original pagination), and Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (Yale, 2009). The Naphy portions of cards 1, 2, 4 and 7 were verified against photographs of pages 94 to 97, 148 to 153, 159, 168 to 173, 180 to 187 and 194 to 199, and the Gordon portions of cards 8 and 105 against pages 72 to 75, 90 to 91 and 156 to 157, with the index entry confirmed at page 388. Every claim checked was carried by its cited page. One citation fault was found and corrected on the live page: card 8 had cited Gordon by chapter 6, but the Castellio account sits at pages 156 to 157, and the card now cites those pages. Cards 2 and 105 no longer rest on any source the author does not hold. What remains outside direct verification is confined to Guggisberg on card 8, Hughes and Spierling on card 99 (the ordinance text itself is checked against Hughes as quoted verbatim in R. Scott Clark's article), and two chapters of Kingdon and Lambert, *Reforming Geneva*, on card 4; each of those cards says so on its face.

Results

Source	Quotations tested	Confirmed verbatim	Rate
Watt	1,083	1,083	100 percent
Registers of the Consistory	2,168	2,168	100 percent
Manetsch	nine cards	complete	
Archive wide	approximately 3,250	fabrications found: 0	

Fifty-six Register quotations failed on first reading. Every one proved a fault of location rather than invention: the right words standing on a neighboring page, or a quotation running across a page break. Each was corrected on the live page and confirmed on re-reading, which is how the Registers row reached its final figure.

A further test measured what a reader actually does: taking each quotation in the cards resting on Watt alone and checking not merely that it exists in the book but that it sits on the page the card sends the reader to. Twenty-five of twenty-six were verbatim at the cited page.

In the August 2026 re-verification, 51 quotations in Watt-cited cards matched the printed text word for word with zero failures, the subject of every Watt-cited card was confirmed on its cited page, register chronology was clean across 62 independently dated anchors, and all 175 register and Manetsch citations were confirmed against the photographs, including the one quotation drawn from the editors' introduction, checked against a photograph of introduction page xx. The table above gives the final results of the cumulative campaign.

Checking a case yourself

Choose any card. Read its source field, which names an edition and a page. Obtain that edition and turn to that page. Where the archive quotes, the words are printed there as quoted; where it summarizes, the substance is there to be read. The sample below gives ten confirmed quotations to begin with, each verified against the printed page shown.

The archive's content carries a checksum, and every change is applied as a whole-content replacement recorded in a maintained log, so the state of the resource on any given date can be established.

Sample of confirmed quotations

Selected mechanically rather than chosen: the first qualifying quotation from each card resting on Watt alone, one per printed page, in card order. Each was confirmed present, in these words, on the page shown.

Card	Page	Quotation as printed in Watt
9	22	"There are two devils in hell, and Calvin is one of them."
13	35	"Geneva must not be considered a Rome."
17	58	"having grossly blasphemed against God and uttered most heinous words."
18	86	"three or four times every morning for a week"
22	90	"to the hospital to be beaten with rods."
36	179	"in the ditches like a galley slave"
50	20	"the great devil would carry off all the ministers because they have not brought any benefit to the country."
65	210	"for her fault, including having continued to receive the Supper,"
75	173	"make her live soberly and oversee her vocation,"

Card	Page	Quotation as printed in Watt
102	34	“repugnant to the doctrine and discipline administered in this city.”