

# CALVIN'S UNDERSTANDING OF PSALM-SINGING AS A MEANS OF GRACE

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The only music in the Genevan liturgy reformed under the leadership of John Calvin was that of versified vernacular psalm texts sung to simple melodies by the congregation in unison without accompaniment. No hymns were sung. There was no provision for choral or instrumental music. To those acquainted with the rich tradition of Protestant hymn-singing and the contribution of choral and organ works to the experience of Catholic, Lutheran, and Anglican worship, the Reformed use of music seems austere and odd.

For many this sparse use of music reflects Calvin's dour spirit and narrow biblicism. A seventeenth-century Jesuit critic accused him of creating a "completely dry" religion "conformed to his temperament."<sup>1</sup> The most influential of Calvin's detractors has been Orentin Douen, author of *Clement Marot et le psautier huguenot*, a two volume work published in 1878-79. His judgments have dominated appraisals of Calvin's attitude toward music for more than a century.

The pope of Geneva, spirit dry and hard, logician and intellectual to an extreme, Calvin lacked that warmth of heart which made Luther so loveable...his theology without feeling...is the enemy of all pleasure and of all distraction, even of the arts and music.<sup>2</sup>

Historians of church music have continued to rely on Douen. Even Calvin scholars, the editors of the *Opera Selecta*, for example, refer readers to these volumes for information about music in Calvin's liturgy.<sup>3</sup>

Others, however, have defended Calvin, arguing that the austere nature of Genevan music was the result of circumstantial pressures rather than a reflection of his personality. Emile Doumergue, followed by others, most notably Marta Grau and Leon Wencelius, suggest that if Calvin had been able to pursue his musical ideals without the handicaps of external persecution and internal political conflict, Reformed music might have developed more fully.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly, everything that happened in Geneva in Calvin's time did not conform to his wishes. For example, he yielded to Genevan custom which limited the Lord's Supper to four Sundays a year rather than the monthly observance he chose in Strassburg.<sup>5</sup> With regard to music in worship, perhaps it was amazing that Geneva had any at all. The Reformation arrived in the city by way of Berne and Zurich without music in its liturgy. The Genevan city council rejected proposals for psalm-singing first issued by Calvin and Guillaume Farel in 1537, then taken to the magistrates of Berne and approved by a synod in Zurich in 1538.<sup>6</sup> Though psalm-singing was instituted on his return to Geneva in 1541, Calvin was still at odds with the city council concerning the music of the Psalter ten years later.<sup>7</sup>

## Calvin's Efforts to Introduce Psalm-Singing

Nonetheless, even taking such struggles into account, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the practice of church music which developed in Geneva reflected the desires and efforts of Calvin. From the beginning of his work as a reformer Calvin believed in the power of psalm-singing. In the "Article concerning the Church of Geneva, 1537," which he at least co-authored with Farel, we have this proposal:

It is a thing very expedient for the edification of the church to sing some psalms in the form of public prayers through which one may pray to God or sing his praise so

that the hearts of all might be moved and incited to form like prayers and to render like praises and thanks to God with similar affection.<sup>8</sup>

Calvin used similar language at the Synod of Berne (1538) where psalm-singing was one of several matters of church discipline and practice in dispute. Psalm-singing, it appears, was among the issues which led to the departure of Farel and Calvin from Geneva in 1538.<sup>9</sup>

Soon after becoming pastor of the French church in Strassburg, and able to shape the liturgy according to his own preferences, Calvin began work on a Psalter. He fit melodies used in the German church in that city to thirteen metrical psalms by Clement Marot and six psalm texts of his own. The Song of Simeon, the Ten Commandments, and Apostles' Creed, versified by Calvin, were also included.<sup>10</sup> Later editions of the Strassburg Psalter included the liturgy and a preface which reveal Calvin's passion for "discreet songs teaching the love and fear of God."

In these psalms it seems to me that you will have much which will be useful for holy teaching, as well as praises and thanksgivings to God, and exhortations to hope in the divine goodness and mercy. Furthermore you will find in these psalms other things which will serve as a good example to give your neighbor, for stimulating the reading of holy scripture, and as St. Paul teaches us, for singing and speaking psalms to the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

Returning to Geneva on September 13, 1541 Calvin began at once to develop proposals for reconstituting the Genevan church. New ordinances, approved on November 20 by general referendum, show that singing was to be part of the new church order.

It will be a good thing to introduce church songs better to incite the people to pray and to praise God.<sup>12</sup>

The first Genevan Psalter appeared in 1542 with a preface by Calvin. Another edition appeared a year later with an expanded preface, Calvin's fullest statement about liturgical music and music in general.<sup>13</sup> Other editions followed, the final form of the Psalter being achieved with the 1562 edition printed two years before Calvin's death.

Pierre Pidoux's collection of correspondence, city council and consistory records, publication notices and other documents related to the formation of the Psalter shows Calvin's continuing involvement in the development of both texts and music. Calvin encouraged the employment of Marot, then Theodore Beza as "poets in residence" to versify the entire Psalter.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, he strongly supported the office of cantor—teacher and director of music. Calvin sided with Louis Bourgeois, the best known cantor, in a controversy surrounding the psalm tunes he composed for the 1551 edition.<sup>15</sup> Calvin also recommended the publication and use of Bourgeois' treatise on music, *Le droict Chemin*, designed to help people sing the new psalm tunes.<sup>16</sup>

Calvin worked diligently to institute practical measures to foster psalm singing. Before he actually began to develop a psalter Calvin imagined ways to teach such music. Children were the key:

If some children, whom someone has practiced beforehand in some modest church song, sing in a loud and distinct voice, the people listening with complete attention and following in their hearts what is sung by mouth, little by little each one will become accustomed to sing with the others.<sup>17</sup>

This suggestion was incorporated into the 1541 *Ordinances*:

At the beginning one should teach the small children, then with time all the church can follow.<sup>18</sup>

The cantor was above all “he who teaches the children to sing the psalms of David in church.”<sup>19</sup> Children also practiced psalm-singing each day at school. The rules of the Academy of Geneva required students to “exercise themselves in singing psalms” each day following dinner at eleven o’clock.<sup>20</sup> On Sundays between the two services people were encouraged to sing psalms. Families were asked to practice the psalms designated for worship before they came to church. Before the Table of Psalms appeared in the 1549 Psalter, someone from each family was expected to check the notice posted on the church door advertising the psalms scheduled for each service.<sup>21</sup>

With this abundant testimony to his efforts on behalf of psalm-singing, it is hard to reach any other conclusion than this: Calvin knew what he wanted in church music and worked to achieve it. Though many persons were involved in the development of the Genevan Psalter—poets, musicians, pastors, even politicians—this unique liturgical music was ultimately orchestrated by Calvin.

### Calvin’s Musical Rationale

But why did Calvin want this sort of church music? In the “Articles of 1537,” his Psalter prefaces, and the discussion of singing in the section on prayer in the *Institutes*, Calvin provided two answers: psalm-singing was 1) the practice of the early church and 2) useful for stimulating piety.<sup>22</sup> Like other Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century, Calvin wanted to restore the piety of the apostolic age which had been submerged, he believed, in the superfluous and misguided practices of the Roman church. He attempted to design a liturgy “according to God’s words,”<sup>23</sup> and entitled it “The Form of Prayers and Church Song...according to the custom of the ancient church.”<sup>24</sup> Calvin, however, in preparing the Genevan liturgy, was less worried about recovering the original order of the primitive church’s worship, than with the proper understanding and use of it.

Moreover, if we wish to honor truly the holy ordinances of our Lord, which we use in the church, the principal thing is to know what they contain, what they were meant to say, and to what end they tend, so that their use might be helpful and salutary, and as a result, rightly ordered.<sup>25</sup>

Though some rites were clearly instituted by Christ and recorded in the New Testament, the primary concern was that the outer form of the ceremony adequately and appropriately express its spiritual content.<sup>26</sup> The Christian community, Calvin believed, was to order its cultic life in such a way that “all confusion, barbarity, obstinacy, turbulence, and dissension is eliminated.”<sup>27</sup> The same general scriptural guidelines also guided the choice of music for worship.

Calvin’s liturgical and musical views mirrored the thoughts of other reformers, including some Catholics. Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More, as well as Luther and Bucer, argued for a simpler style of worship, where the word of scripture could be more clearly declaimed.<sup>28</sup> Calvin’s musical ideas were widely shared in his time. He was well acquainted with scriptural and patristic *loci classici* with reference to music. He believed that music had great power to arouse human passions, for good or ill.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, this force of music which the ancients knew and the church possessed in apostolic times, was rare in the sixteenth century.

With many Calvin complained of a “murmuring” in the church’s song which rendered the text unintelligible. Sometimes the murmuring was that of monks rushing through the required Latin psalms, sometimes the reference was to elaborate polyphony in which texts overlapped and competed for attention.<sup>30</sup> Instrumental accompaniment only added to the confusion. A simple

vocal music was best, humanist reformers agreed, because it supported the text.<sup>31</sup> Like other reformers, Calvin quoted I Corinthians 14:16 to emphasize the need for “intelligibility.” This meant that prayer, including the music, must be in the language of the people.<sup>32</sup> He emphasized the role of the laity, and, with Bucer, chose to limit music to congregational singing.<sup>33</sup>

In one point, however, Calvin went beyond other reformers. While they stressed the superiority of biblical texts for public prayer, Calvin limited church song to biblical texts. Was this because he was trying to be faithful to the practice of the early church? Certainly. He did believe that the first Christians sang the Psalms of David.<sup>34</sup> However, we must not forget Calvin’s second reason for psalm-singing: this ancient practice stirred piety.

### The Dynamics of Reformed Worship

Though Calvin wanted to purify ceremonies to conform to an apostolic model, his overriding concern was to establish disciplines which would be effective in restoring the quality of piety he imagined had prevailed in the early church. His call for psalm-singing was strongly influenced by his understanding of the process of divine regeneration among weak and sinful humans. Redemption was, of course, God’s work. Persons are justified by faith through the action of the Holy Spirit, then confirmed and increased in this faith by the continuing activity of the same Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

This latter process, sanctification, however, is long and difficult. The Christian life is possible only because Christ is present through word and Spirit in the midst of human tribulations. Though Christians live in the world, they are oriented toward the heavenly life and the fellowship with God which was their destiny before the Fall.<sup>36</sup> This sanctifying action of the Spirit, according to Calvin, was enabled through external aids.<sup>37</sup> Great care must be exercised in the use of these aids: “We may not invent whatever pleases us, adjusting our inventions so that Christ is altered.” Rather, it is for God alone to show us the appropriate pattern, those externals which serve as “a staircase by which the faithful might ascend into heaven.”<sup>38</sup>

For what is the purpose of the preaching of the word, the sacraments, holy gatherings themselves, and the whole external regimen of the church unless they join us with God?<sup>39</sup>

Calvin gave considerable attention to those external aids appropriate for Christian worship using St. Paul’s guidelines from I Cor. 14:40. Variations and changes in practice were permissible so long as the “rule of love” was observed and the “entire use and purpose of observances was referred to the edification of the church.”<sup>40</sup>

Beyond emphasizing the need for appropriate external aids in the process of sanctification, Calvin described the function of these aids in his discussion of prayer, “the fundamental exercise of God’s children.”<sup>41</sup> This analysis is relevant to our topic because psalm-singing was classified as a form of prayer in the “Preface to the Genevan Psalter, distinct from word and sacrament, the other externals of worship.”<sup>42</sup>

In ideal prayer the words were a response to the movement of the Spirit within. Christians pray with “heart and mind” as well as tongue.<sup>43</sup> To pray with “heart and mind” was a total response to the Spirit involving the believer’s centers of feeling and thinking. The heart was the primary contact point for the Spirit. Hardness or coldness of heart barred the movement of grace. But the mind came into play at once, for true piety combined intelligence with feeling. In fact, the heart could not fully respond to the Spirit unless there was understanding. To make prayer possible the mind had to be free from distractions so that it could be focused in devout attention.<sup>44</sup> The sequence in perfect prayer was heart and mind, then tongue.

The tongue was not necessary in prayer, but since the tongue was created to display the glory of God, it was quite appropriate that people should speak their praises. Indeed, when Christians were filled with wonder and praise, prayers often broke forth into speech unintentionally.<sup>45</sup> Calvin also considered the tongue an aid for elevating the mind so that thoughts did not stray in prayer.<sup>46</sup>

Prayer then, in Calvin's view, was more than a response to the Spirit; it was also an external aid to piety. Though affirming with Paul (Rom. 8:26) that the Spirit was "our teacher in prayer," he warned against "waiting listlessly until the Spirit overtake our minds." Calvin urged Christians "to seek the help of the Spirit" so that prayers might be fervent.<sup>47</sup> And the way to this divine aid was through the ordering of common prayers.<sup>48</sup> This human regimen could not command the Spirit, but it could awaken the hearts and minds of sinful people to the work of the Spirit in their midst. In other words, though the ideal sequence in prayer was heart and mind, then tongue, the proper use of the tongue might prepare the affections and thoughts for the action of the Spirit. The way to right prayer was through prayer. And the spoken responses of the Christian community as a whole—genuine responses to the Spirit—might function as vehicles to penetrate languid hearts and distracted minds.<sup>49</sup>

### Psalm-Singing as an External Aid to Piety

Prayers, Calvin believed, might be spoken or sung in worship. Spoken prayers were those given by the presiding pastor. The sung prayers were rendered by the people as a whole—the only corporate verbal expressions in Reformed worship—though the prayers read by the clergy were intended as presentations for the entire congregation.<sup>50</sup> Calvin's identification of psalm-singing as prayer testifies to the importance of music in his liturgy. Psalm-singing, indeed, had extraordinary potential for penetrating the affective centers of worshippers where the Spirit might work sanctification. The "Articles" (1537) declared:

We cannot conceive the advancement and edification which would proceed from it [psalm-singing] except after having experimented. Certainly, as we are doing, the prayers of the faithful are so cold that we ought to be very much ashamed and dismayed. The psalms could incite us to raise our hearts to God and to move us with such ardor that we exalt through praises the glory of his name.<sup>51</sup>

Five years later, after experimenting with psalm-singing in Strassburg, Calvin could state:

And truly, we know through experience that song has great force and vigor to move and enflame hearts to invoke and to praise God with a more lively and ardent zeal.<sup>52</sup>

The Genevan Psalter, Calvin declared in its "Preface," was designed to aid those who desire "to rejoice decently and according to God, to look to their salvation, and to the profit of their neighbors."<sup>53</sup>

Ordering musical externals, of course, required special care because of music's unique power of expression. Like Luther and Bucer, Calvin saw music as a gift of God, but a gift easily abused.

It is true that every evil word corrupts morals, as St. Paul says, but when the melody is with it, this evil penetrates much deeper into the heart and enters within. Just as through a funnel the wine is poured into the vase, so also the poison and corruption is instilled in the depth of the heart by the melody.<sup>54</sup>

"What therefore should be done?" Calvin asked.

The answer is to have songs not only decent, but also holy which should act as spurs to incite us to pray and to praise God, to meditate up on his works so as to love, fear, honor, and glorify him.<sup>55</sup>

And where did one find such songs? “The Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit dictated and gave to him” was the obvious treasury of church music.<sup>56</sup>

By choosing biblical texts the church bypassed a certain potential for perversion. But the Psalms, for Calvin, were more than “biblically safe.” These words of David had peculiar relevance for the church. David marked an important stage in salvation history for Calvin. In David and his descendants Christians could see “the living image of Christ.”<sup>57</sup> The many references to the Psalms in the midst of his New Testament commentaries testify to the centrality of the Psalms in Calvin’s thought.<sup>58</sup> According to Erwin Mulhaupt the Psalms were the only Old Testament texts used for his Sunday sermons. Apparently the Psalms ranked almost as Gospel texts.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, David provided the model for Christian prayer. His concerns were apt intercessions for the church. David showed the church the necessity for allowing the word to work unhampered by human obstacles.<sup>60</sup> In particular, David was the guide to the new song which God gives through the Spirit to his people.<sup>61</sup> The Book of Psalms, according to Calvin, was “an anatomy of all the parts of the soul,” a mirror in which the entire human condition could be seen.<sup>62</sup> At the same time it provided ideal petitions and thanksgivings for Christians,<sup>63</sup> and was the perfect resource both in terms of the needs of one’s own salvation and the needs of one’s neighbor.<sup>64</sup> Calvin’s appraisal of the Psalms was more than objective and scholarly. He testified to the comfort the Psalter had been to him during years of trial, 1549-1554 in an autobiographical note in the preface to his *Commentary on Psalms*.<sup>65</sup>

If prayer could stir the heart to the action of the Spirit, sung prayer was even more effective, particularly when the texts were the Psalms. For these were the words of the Spirit. Calvin quoted Augustine: “When we sing these songs...we are certain that God puts the words into our mouths as if he were singing in us to exalt his glory.”<sup>66</sup>

For Calvin, however, proper church music was not achieved only through the right texts. The melodies had to be selected with similar care so that they were capable of bearing “the weight and majesty appropriate to the subject.”<sup>67</sup>

And certainly if the melody be tempered to that gravity which is fitting in the sight of God and the angels, and when it brings dignity and grace to the sacred actions, then it has value for exciting the spirits of many into true zeal and ardor for praying. Yet care must be taken lest our ears be more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual sense of the words.<sup>68</sup>

Music was among God’s great gifts damaged in the Fall. Through “common grace” artists could flourish outside the elect community, but their exercise of this divine gift could not bring them into fellowship with God. They could not hear the music of the creation. For the elect, on the other hand, redemption through Christ was an opening of ears and eyes enabling persons “to sing with the angels.”<sup>69</sup> In overseeing the development of the Genevan Psalter Calvin seems to have been seeking grace-full tunes as well as texts.

In his first Psalter project in Strassburg, Calvin followed the common practice of fitting known melodies to his chosen texts. But in succeeding editions, both in Strassburg and Geneva, the tunes were designed to fit the texts. Genevan musicians composed melodies for the metrical psalms. In Germany and England, as in our present day hymnals, most texts could be sung to several melodies with matching meters. Not so with the Psalter, where the intention of both the poets and composers seems to have been the uniqueness of each psalm. For the 150 Psalms there were 130 distinct meters, and 110 different melodies. Most of the Psalms, therefore, could only be sung to a particular melody, a melody that was created for that particular psalm. These

melodies, furthermore, because they were newly-composed, did not refer the hearer to any other text, secular or sacred, except its own psalm. The psalm tunes as well as their texts came to have considerable authority in Reformed circles. Composers of elaborate settings of these melodies for voice or instrument would assure their readers that the melodies had not been changed.<sup>70</sup>

Why this “canon” of psalm texts and tunes? To a very great extent Calvin’s purpose seems to have been pedagogical. He hope that the Christian community would memorize these texts so that these words of the Spirit might be a resource for prayer in worship and in any circumstance. The process of internalization was made easier because each psalm was carried by its own melody.

### The Function of Psalm-Singing in Worship

Psalm-singing in public worship, Calvin believed, enhanced the work of the Holy Spirit in a general way, freeing earth-bound human minds and hearts so that they could be lifted heavenward for divine fellowship. However, he seemed to think that certain psalms were best for assisting worshippers at various points in the worship experience. Psalm-singing was done according to a Table of Psalms, prescribing specific texts and melodies for particular portions of the Wednesday morning and two Sunday services. Though Calvin’s rationale was never spelled out, we can surmise several roles psalm-singing was expected to play.

First, the opening Psalm was very likely thought of as an expression of the congregation’s need for divine help, calling the people together confessing the power of God and their own inadequacies.<sup>71</sup> Second, Calvin undoubtedly saw psalm-singing as an aid in preparing the congregation for receiving the word in preaching by stirring hearts from earthly preoccupation. The *Ordinances* of 1561 refers to the psalms sung before and after the sermon as “incitements to prayer and praise.”<sup>72</sup> Calvin hoped that through the power of the Holy Spirit the word might become a living reality in the Christian community so that Christ would be present...as if God were speaking directly with his people.<sup>73</sup> The psalm-singing surrounding the scripture reading and sermon might enhance the Spirit’s work in making the word effective.

Third, this singing was the appropriate response to the good news of God’s salvation. Sounds of praise welled up in believers as they came to know God. Spiritual joy could not be contained. Christ himself, in fact, urged them to make their praise audible, sang with them, and led them in song.

...at the same time God becomes known to us his infinite praises sound in our hearts and ears. And in the meantime Christ urges us by his example to sing them publicly so that they might be heard by more persons. For it was not enough that each one give thanks individually to God for the blessings he has received, unless, making known the testimony of our gratitude openly, we should invite others to do the same. And this teaching is a very strong stimulus enabling us to praise God with a more fervent zeal, for we hear that Christ sings with us and is the chief conductor of our hymns.<sup>74</sup>

This passage emphasized the power of corporate Christian song. Individual Christians did not simply arouse themselves through singing. They were stimulated to give thanks because of the song of those about them.

Fourth, Calvin seems to have regarded psalm-singing as an ideal exercise during the Lord’s Supper where the imagery of “fellowship with Christ” was most explicit.<sup>75</sup> In the Lord’s Supper Christian hearts and minds were lifted above adoration of earthly elements to fellowship with the exalted Christ.<sup>76</sup> Psalms were sung by the congregation during the eating and drinking. In this action the church was united with the angels, experienced the presence of Christ more fully than at any other time, and stood before God. In this moment the alienation of the earthly and the heavenly was overcome. Earthly things, the bread, the wine, and also the words and the music of

the psalms, were employed as God originally intended—for leading persons into the divine presence.<sup>77</sup>

### Psalm-Singing Connecting Church, Home, World

Though the primary purpose of teaching Christians to sing the Psalms was to enable them to join fully in public worship, this musical treasure enriched their private and social lives as well. Reformed Christians were expected to be persons of prayer beyond worship. Note the heading for one edition of the Table of Psalms (1562):

An index for finding the psalms according to their occurrence in the scheduled activities of the church of God, or by which the private person can well find what is the true use of the psalms.<sup>78</sup>

There is considerable testimony that Calvin's pedagogical methods were successful. According to sixteenth century accounts, Huguenot soldiers and sailors were known for their psalm-singing as they carried out their duties, and French Protestant martyrs faced death singing a favorite, or most appropriate, psalm.<sup>79</sup> A seventeenth-century Catholic bishop, Godeau, noted that "to know them (the Psalms) by heart is among them a mark of their communion."<sup>80</sup>

The regenerative effect of the word through the power of the Spirit could reach beyond the church to every aspect of community life. Schools, homes, work places and town squares were settings for psalm-singing. Genevan psalms became vehicles of witness and protest in the 1550s.<sup>81</sup> And in private, Christians could avoid earthly distractions and keep hearts and minds "lifted up" as they sang or hummed psalms. In times of crisis or in the course of ordinary labors, the words of the Spirit could guide persons who had "the songs imprinted in (their) memories so they never ceased to sing."<sup>82</sup>

### The Musical Role of the Reformed Laity

The music of the Genevan church, judged strange and spare by many historians of liturgical music, was, it turns out, an ambitious and radical experiment. Calvin worked with the poets and musicians of the Psalter to employ the ideals of sixteenth-century music theory in the service of recovering the quality of music which he believed to have been that of the early church.

In limiting liturgical music to the Psalms Calvin affirmed an ancient tradition of the church which preferred a liturgical music based on psalmody. Though hymns had value for personal devotion, they were not appropriate for worship. From the fourth century the church developed a music based on the Psalms which came to have an authority akin to Scripture. By the ninth century Gregorian chant was recognized as the song of the Church. Other sacred music was permitted, but only at the periphery. In religious communities the weekly recitation of the entire Psalter was the cornerstone of piety. Monks knew the psalms by heart sung to prescribed patterns of Gregorian tradition.<sup>83</sup>

Catholic reformers in the sixteenth century were concerned with the loss of the Gregorian tradition. More elaborate compositions were replacing the simple chant. The declamation of the biblical text had become secondary. Though Calvin as a "second generation" Protestant reformer, could scarcely join those who called for a restoration of plainsong, he did establish a liturgical music with texts limited to the Psalms and with melodies which had authority. Likewise, in Geneva as in Catholic religious communities, a regular course of Psalms punctuated the liturgy. In Benedictine practice, of course, the entire course of 150 Psalms was to be completed each week, whereas the Table of Psalms in Geneva "completed the course" only twice a year.<sup>84</sup> In contrast to monks, however, Genevan psalm-singers were lay persons with worldly occupations. They could not gather for prayer many times each day.<sup>85</sup> And this fact may point to the most radical aspect of the Genevan musical experiment: the high view of the liturgical potential of the laity.

Prior to the Protestant Reformation, church music was limited to the clergy and trained choirs of musicians. With the introduction of hymn-singing in Lutheran churches, laity found a role in the service. Trained choirs continued to sing more intricate music, but “even the rudest peasant” could join in a German hymn.<sup>86</sup> But in Geneva the laity became “the choir,” playing the liturgical role once reserved for clerics and monks. Calvin did not view the music of the laity as “lesser music,” but with many humanist reformers, saw this simple music as superior to elaborate polyphonic works which obscured the text and mitigated the power of melody. Furthermore, this music which graced their common worship, accompanied these lay persons beyond the gathered community as a resource for continuous prayer as they lived in the world.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>P. Maimbourg, *Histoire du calvinisme*, 1682, pp. 70-71, quoted by Emile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin: Les hommes et les choses de son temps* (7 vol.; Lausanne: Georges Bridel et Cie Editeurs, 1902), II, 479.

<sup>2</sup>Orentin Douen, *Clement Marot et le psautier huguenot* (2 vol.; Paris: A L'Imprimerie Nationale, 1878-79), I, 375.

<sup>3</sup>*Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta* ed. by Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1952), II, 1, n. 1; hereafter abbreviated O.S. For treatments of Reformed music by music historians see Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1941), pp. 208, 257-58; Homer Ulrich and Paul A. Pisk, *A History of Music and Musical Style* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1963), p. 163, and Robert M. Stevenson, *Patterns of Protestant Church Music* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1953), pp. 13-22.

<sup>4</sup>Emile Doumergue, *L'Art et sentiment dans l'oeuvre de Calvin* (Geneva: Imprimerie "atar," 1902), pp. 14-15. Cf. Marta Grau, *Calvins Stellung zur Kunst* (Wurzburg: Buchdruckerei Franz Standenraus, 1917), pp. 4-5, 25, and Leon Wencelius, *L'Esthetique de Calvin* (Paris Societe d'Edition "Les Belles Lettres," 1937), pp. 9, 11, 25, 106, 250.

<sup>5</sup>Easter, Pentecost, the first Sunday in September, and Christmas. See *Project d'ordinances ecclesiastiques*, O.S., II, 344. Likewise, the Genevan order replaced the Absolution used in Strassburg with scripture sentences following the Confession.

<sup>6</sup>"Articles Concernant L'Organization de l'eglise et du culte a Geneve, proposes au conseil par les ministres, le 16, Janvier 1537," hereafter referred to as "Articles of 1537," *Ioannis Calvini Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia*, ed. by Guillaume Baum, Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss (Brunsvigae: C.A. Schwetschke et Filium, 1863-1900), X, 6; hereafter abbreviated C.O. See also "Articuli a Calvino et Farello propositi ad pacem Genevae restituendam," May, 1538; C.O., X, 192.

<sup>7</sup>*Archives d'Etat de Geneve, Registres du Conseil*, 46, fol. 116v., Dec. 15, 1551, in *Le Psautier Huguenot du XVIIe Siecle: Melodies et Documents* (2 vol. Basle, Edition Baerenreiter, 1962), ed. by Pierre Pidoux, II, 53; hereafter referred to as *Le Psautier huguenot*.

<sup>8</sup>"Articles of 1537," C.O., X, 6.

<sup>9</sup>See *supra*, note 6.

<sup>10</sup>"Aulcuns pseaulmes et cantiques mys en chant." Two facsimiles have been made of this Psalter, the first by Mons Deletra, Geneva, 1919; the second, *Calvin's First Psalter*, ed. by R.R. Terry (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1932), has music and text in modern type. The texts of Calvin's psalms are included in C.O. VI, 212-24.

<sup>11</sup>Text given by Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot*, II, 14.

<sup>12</sup>*Project d'ordinances ecclesiastiques*, C.O., X, 26.

<sup>13</sup>"Preface" to "La Forme des Prieres et Chantz ecclesiastiques...selon la coustume de l'Eglise ancienne." O.S., II, 11-18; hereafter referred to as "Preface."

<sup>14</sup>*Archives d'Etat de Geneve, Registres du Conseil*, 37, fol. 243 v, hereafter abbreviated R.C., quoted by Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot*, II, 23. For other texts regarding Beza's selection see *ibid.*, pp. 68-72.

<sup>15</sup>For records of the Genevan Council dealing with this controversy see *ibid.*, pp. 49 ff.

<sup>16</sup>R.C., 44, fol. 379, *ibid.* pp. 47.

<sup>17</sup>"Articles of 1537," C.O., Xa, 12.

<sup>18</sup>O.S., II, 345.

<sup>19</sup>Some form of this description occurs regularly in mention of the cantor in minutes of the Genevan council; see, e.g., Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot*, II, 11.

<sup>20</sup>*Leges gymnasii*, no. 42 (1538), quoted by Theodore Gerold, *Les plus anciennes melodies de l'Eglise protestante de Strasbourg et leurs auteurs*, (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1928), p. 15.

<sup>21</sup>R.C., 41, Fol. 88, May 16, 1546; Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot*, II, 32.

<sup>22</sup>O.S., I, 375; O.S., II, 11; *Institutes*, III.20.31-32. All quotes from the *Institutes* are from the 1559 Latin edition, C.O., II.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>"*La Forme des Prieres et Chants ecclesiastiques...selon la coustume de l'Eglise ancienne*"

<sup>25</sup>O.S., II, 13.

<sup>26</sup>"*Quanquam de externo ritu minus anxie laborandum est modo cum spirituali veritate et Domini instituta ac regula congruat.*" C.O., LI, 69; cited by Wencelius, *L'Esthetique de Calvin*, p. 256.

<sup>27</sup>*Inst.*, III. 20.29.

<sup>28</sup>Calvin's contacts with humanists has been well documented by Quirinius Breen, *John Calvin: A Study in French Humanism* (2nd Ed.; Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1968); François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, tr. by Philip Mairet (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); and John T. McNeill, *History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954). For a recent assessment see William J. Bouwsma, "Calvinism as Renaissance Artifact," in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), ed. by Timothy George, pp. 28-41.

<sup>29</sup>"Preface," O.S., II, 16-17. The dangerous power of music was part of the discussion between Calvin and Farel and the magistrates of Berne in 1538. See note 9 above. Contemporary humanist tracts often speak of the ethical force of music. See Baldassare Castiglione, *Il cortegiano* (1528), in *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. by Oliver Strunk, (New York, W.W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1950), pp. 282-83, and Georg Rhau, *Enchiridion Utriusque Musicae Practicae* (1538) facsimile ed. by Hans Albrecht, *Documenta Musicologica*, vol. I, (Kassel: Barenreiter-Verlag, 1951), A2r.

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<sup>30</sup>*De necessitate reformandae ecclesiae*; C.O., VI, 483.

<sup>31</sup>“Preface,” O.S. II, 18. Henricus Glareanus’ *Dodecachordon*, “the authority” on music theory in the sixteenth century, speaks of the superiority of unaccompanied, monodic vocal music. See facsimile of the 1547 Basel edition, (New York: Broude Brothers, 1967), II, 38, pp. 175-76. The third assembly of the Council of Trent (1562-63) did not remove polyphonic or instrumental music from the liturgy, but urged a simpler, moderate style. See *Acta Concilii Tridentini*, ed. A. Theiner (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Hartel, 1874), II, p. 122, 589.

<sup>32</sup>Proposals for vernacular singing from the Diets of Salzburg and Augsburg were sent to the Council of Trent in 1562. These and similar proposals are discussed by Karl Weinmann, *Das Konzil von Trient und die Kirchenmusic*, (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Hartel, 1919), pp. 13-15.

<sup>33</sup>Gerrit Jan van de Poll, *Martin Bucer’s Liturgical Ideas*, (Te Assen bij: Van Gorcum and Company N.V., 1954), pp. 113-14.

<sup>34</sup>Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

<sup>35</sup>*Catechism*, no. 91; O.S., II, 88. Cf. *Inst.*, III.2.7.

<sup>36</sup>*Inst.*, I.15.6. Cf. *Catechism*, no. 7; O.S., II, 75.

<sup>37</sup>The title of book four of the *Institutes*: “*De externis mediis vel adminiculis quibus Deus in Christi societatem nos invitat et in ea retinet.*”

<sup>38</sup>Comm. on Hebr. 8:5; C.O., LV, 99. Cf. *Inst.*, IV.8.7.

<sup>39</sup>Comm. on Ps. 24:7-8; C.O., XXXI, 248.

<sup>40</sup>*Inst.*, IV.10.28 and 32.

<sup>41</sup>*Inst.*, III.20.21.

<sup>42</sup>“Preface,” O.S., II, 15; Cf. *Inst.*, III.20.21.

<sup>43</sup>*Catechism*, no. 240; O.S., II, 114; Cf. *Inst.*, III.20.29.

<sup>44</sup>*Inst.*, III.20.4. “Preface,” O.S. II, 17.

<sup>45</sup>*Catechism*, no. 246; O.S., II, 115-16.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*Inst.*, III.20.3. Cf. *Catechism*, no. 245; O.S., II, 115.

<sup>48</sup>*Inst.*, III.20.29.

<sup>49</sup>*Inst.*, III.20.31.

<sup>50</sup>“Preface,” O.S., II, 15; Cf. *Inst.*, III.30.31-33.

<sup>51</sup>C.O., X, 6.

<sup>52</sup>“Preface,” O.S., II, 15.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.* p. 17. Cf. Luther's forward to the first edition of the 1524 *Wittenberg Gesangbuch*, *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: H. Bohlan, 1883), XXXV, 475; hereafter abbreviated W.A. See also Bucer's preface to the 1541 *Strassburg Gesangbuch*, *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften*, ed. by Robert Stupperich (Gutersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohr, 1960-), VII, 578.

<sup>55</sup>"Preface," O.S., II, 17.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>*Inst.*, II.6.2. Cf. Comm. on John 12:12-15; C.O., XLVII, 282-83.

<sup>58</sup>Comm. on Rom. 3:4; C.O., XLIX, 48. See also Comm. on Matt. 21:42 and 27:35 (C.O., XLV, 594, 766), which show Calvin's Christological interpretation of the Psalms.

<sup>59</sup>*Der Psalter auf der Kanzel Calvins* (Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1959), p. 19.

<sup>60</sup>Comm. on Ps. 20:2; C.O., XXXI, 208, cited by Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959), p. 289.

<sup>61</sup>Comm. on Ps. 40:4; C.O., XXXI, 406. Cited by Wencelius, *L'Esthetique de Calvin*, p. 251.

<sup>62</sup>*Comm. on Psalms*, preface; C.O., XXXI, 15.

<sup>63</sup>Comm. on I Cor., 14:15; C.O., XLIX, 522.

<sup>64</sup>"Preface," O.S., II, 17-18.

<sup>65</sup>C.O., XXXI, 19.

<sup>66</sup>"Preface," O.S., II, 17.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup>*Inst.*, III.20.32.

<sup>69</sup>Serm. 148 on Job 38:4-11; C.O., XXXV, 372.

<sup>70</sup>See tables of contents and prefaces to various vocal and instrumental settings by composers in the 1560s outlined by Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot*, II, pp. 125 ff.

<sup>71</sup>*E.g.*, Psalms 6, 21, 29.

<sup>72</sup>O.S., II, 345.

<sup>73</sup>Comm. on Is. 46:5; C.O., XXXVII, 441.

<sup>74</sup>Comm. on Hebr. 2:12; C.O., LV, 29.

<sup>75</sup>*Inst.*, IV.17.30.

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<sup>76</sup>*La Forme des prieres*; O.S., II, 48; *Inst.*, IV.17.31. See also Comm. on Acts I:11; C.O., XLVIII, 13-14.

<sup>77</sup>Calvin cites Chrysostom's admonition for Christians to sing psalms that they might associate with the angels. "Preface," O.S., II, 17. On p. 15 of the same work Calvin refers to "the psalms which men sing in the presence of God and his angels." Cf. Sermon 38 on Eph. 5:18-21; C.O., LI, 726.

<sup>78</sup>Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot*, II, 136.

<sup>79</sup>Jean Crespin, *Histoire des martyrs persecutez et mis à mort pour la verité de l'évangile, depuis le temps des apostres jusques à present* (1619) (Toulouse: Société des Livres Religieux, 1885), I, 547-48, 581, 673. See also Charles W. Baird, *History of the Huguenot Emigration to America* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1885), pp. 81, 103, 206.

<sup>80</sup>Quoted by Felix Bovet, *Histoire du Psautier des églises reformées* (Neuchatel: Librairie Generale de J. Sandoz, 1872), pp. 10-11.

<sup>81</sup>See references to incidents in Ville and Lyon in Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot*, II, 51. The most famous "demonstration" of psalm-singing was at Pre-aux-clerics in Paris on May 13, 1558. See *Histoire ecclesiastique des églises reformées au royaume de France (1580)*, ed. by T. Marzial (Lille: Imprimerie de le leux, 1841-42), I, 89-90.

<sup>82</sup>"Preface," O.S., II, 17.

<sup>83</sup>Calvin shared certain ideals with Catholic reformers, including those Spaniards who proposed to the Council of Trent the elimination of all polyphony (see *Acta Concilii Tridentini*, ed. A. Theiner, II, 590). Like other Protestant reformers, however, he was suspicious of the music of the Roman church, even Gregorian chant, because its use was so closely associated with abuses such as masses sung for the dead. Calvin could only opt for a new beginning.

<sup>84</sup>This included two services on Sunday and one on Wednesday. Printed in Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot*, II, 135.

<sup>85</sup>Calvin would have preferred a daily service. *Inst.*, II.8.32.

<sup>86</sup>*Deutsche Messe*, W.A., XIX, 80.