

Calvin: the Worship of God

*"Calvin may rightly be regarded
as among the most influential liturgists in the history of the church."
(Terry Johnson)*



Roman Catholic Worship:

- 1) The Elitism of the Clergy
- 2) The Role of Drama in worship
- 3) The need for a holy space

The "Mass" became the very definition of worship. To reject the Mass was to reject the Church and to reject God.

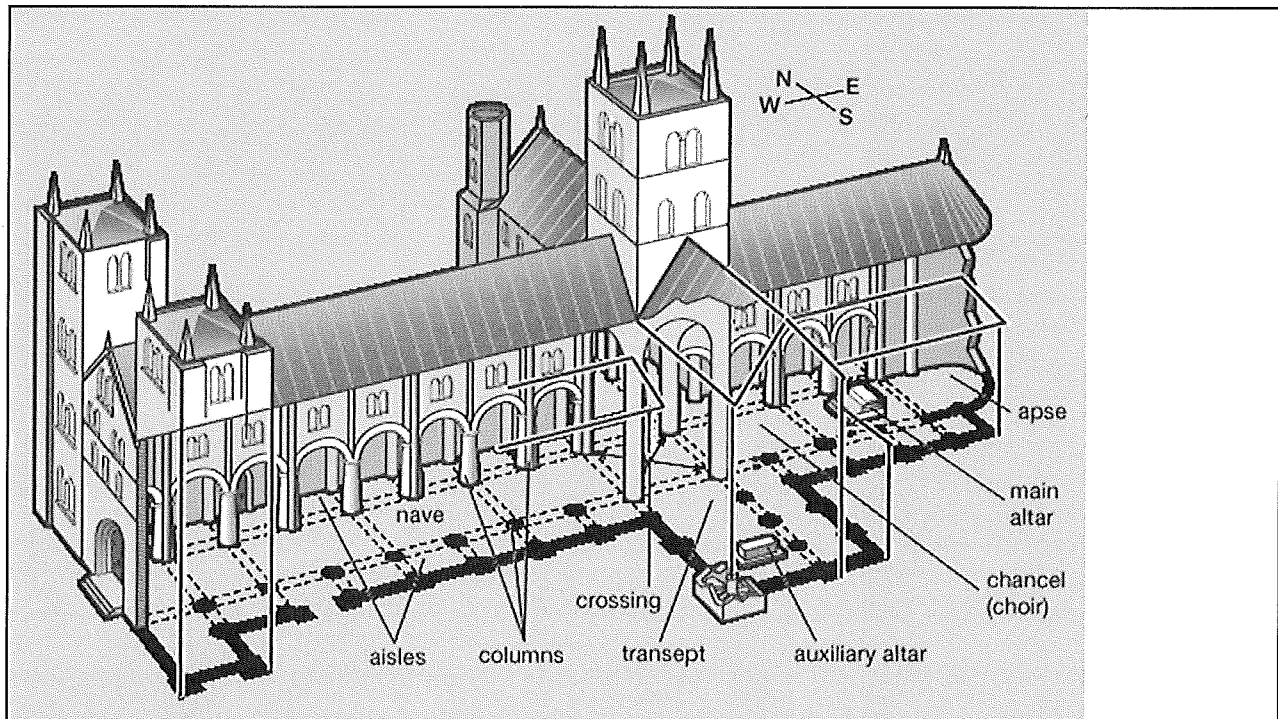
Laon Cathedral, Laon, 13th c.

Roman Catholic Medieval Liturgy

Theme centered on the Christian calendar year

Service conducted in Latin

- Entrance ceremonies -
 - Introit, Kyrie, Gloria in Excelsis Deo, Collect (prayer)
- Service of readings –
 - Epistle, Gradual (chanted/sung t'giving), Alleluia, Sequence (optional), Gospel
 - Sermon (optional), Credo, "Oremus" (call/invitation to pray)
- Sacrifice-Mass –
 - Offertory rites, Eucharistic prayers, Communion cycle
- Dismissal



Calvin, the Liturgist

“Reformation-era theological reform drove liturgical and clerical reform, Reformation theology determined Reformed worship; and conversely, Reformed worship was the nurturing womb from which Reformed piety and practice sprang. Theology, worship, and piety are inseparably linked, neither thriving without the supporting presence of the other.”

T. Johnson

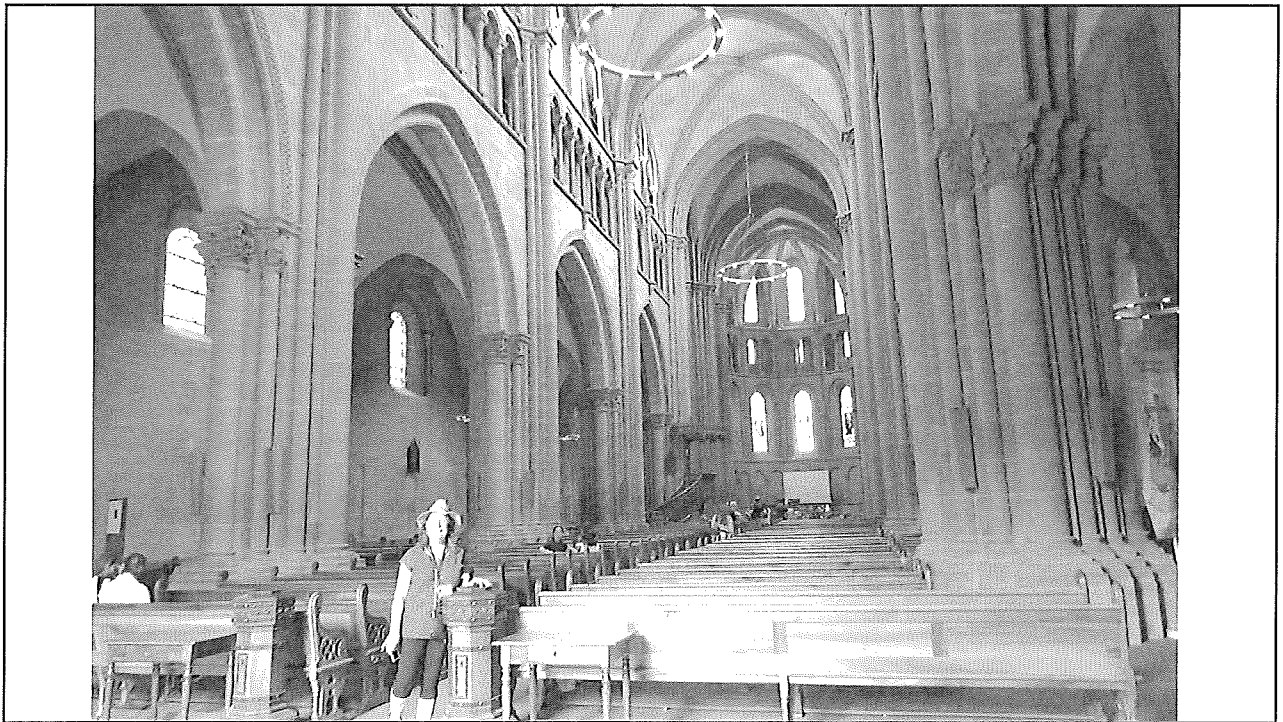
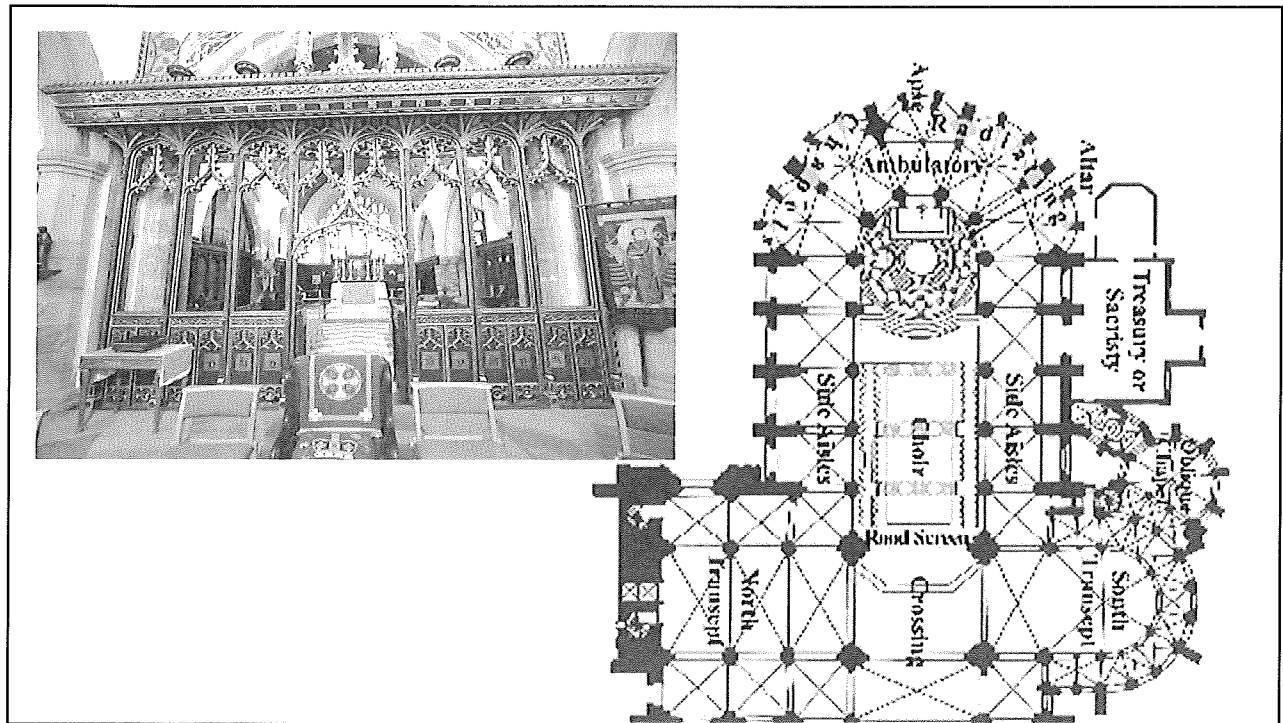


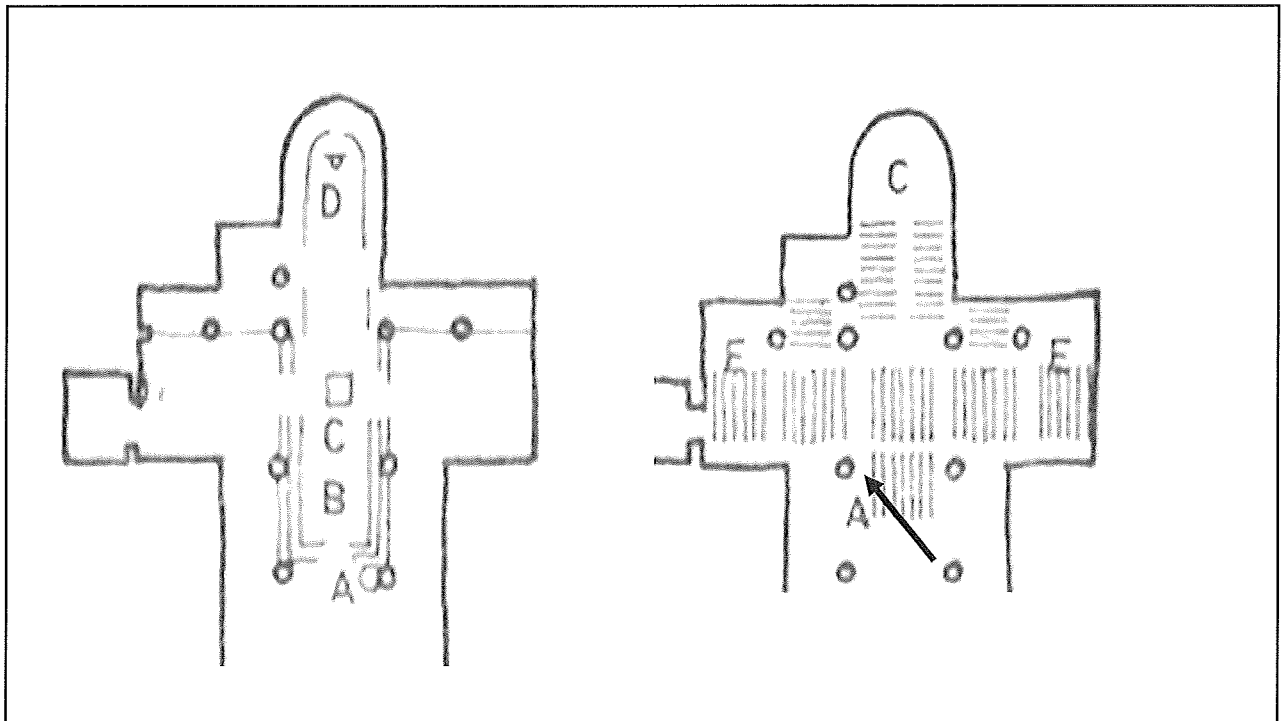
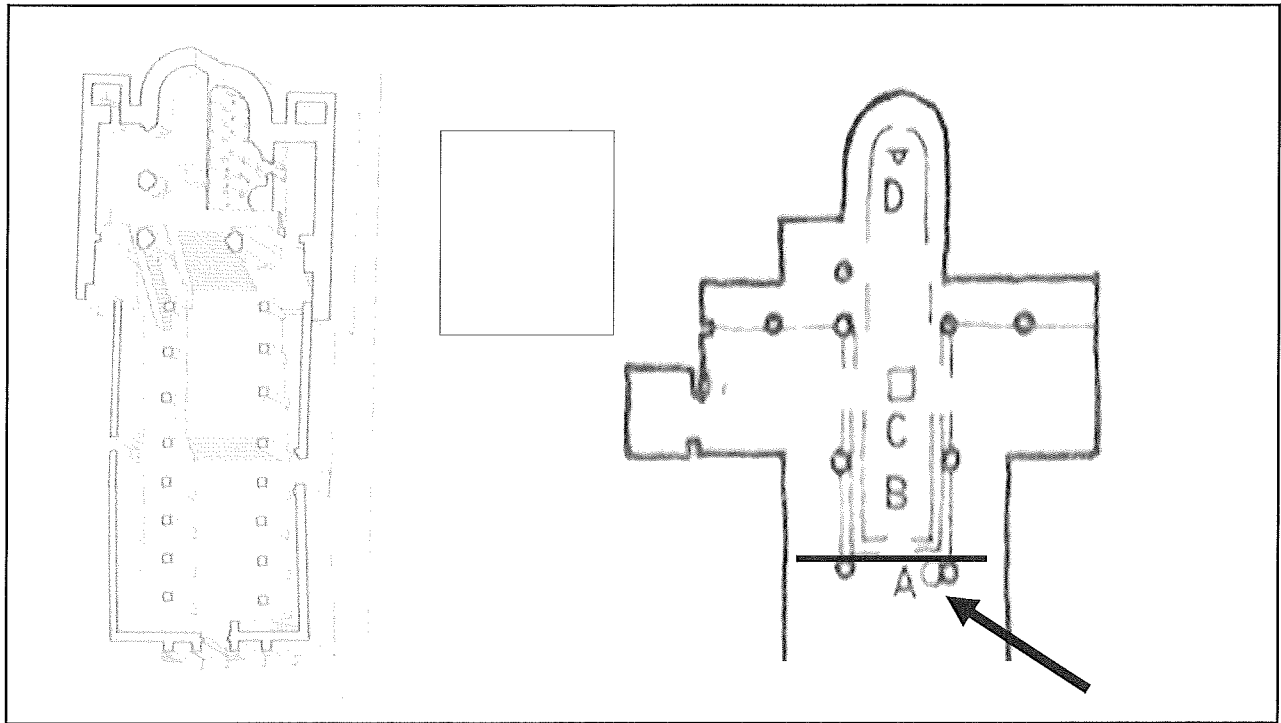
The beginning of the Reformation led to:

- Eliminating the priesthood
- Removing the idols and whitewashing the walls

But the worship of God, itself needed reforming:

- the elimination of drama,
- The incorporation of the people into the very act of worship,
- Rejection of “holy space” in favor of “holy gathering”.





Calvin's vision for the worship of God

The Service of the Word

Call to Worship: Ps. 124:8

Confession of sins

Prayer for pardon

Singing of a Psalm

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture Reading

Sermon

The Service of the Lord's Supper

Collection of Offerings

Prayers of Intercession & Lord's Prayer

Singing of the Apostles Creed

Words of Institution

Instruction and Exhortation

Communion

(while a Psalm is sung or Scripture read)

Prayer of Thanksgiving

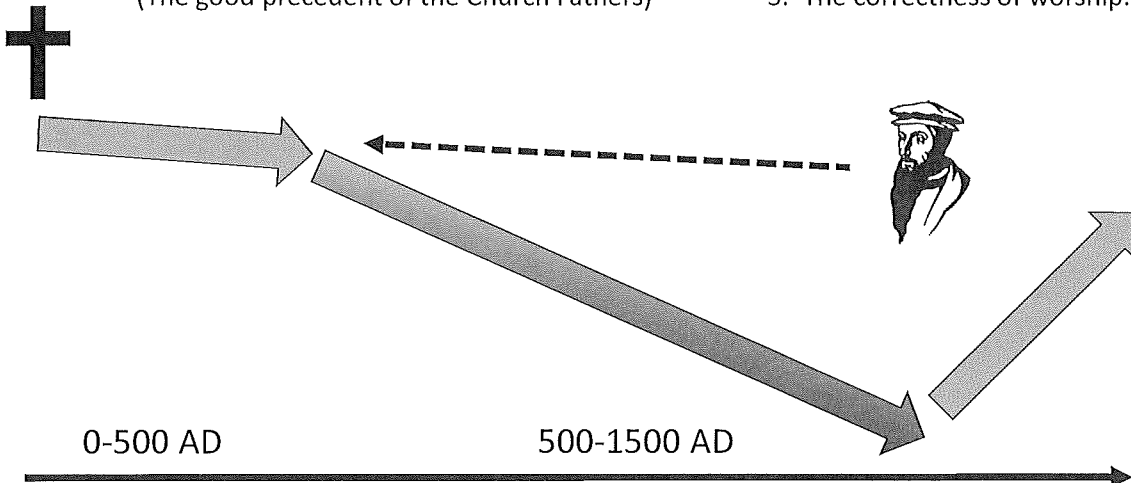
Benediction (Num. 6:24-26)

Reform the church according to:

1. The Scriptures ("Regulative Principle"), but also
2. Church Tradition
(The good precedent of the Church Fathers)

Calvin is concerned to show:

1. The importance of worship,
2. The purity of worship,
3. The correctness of worship.



Worship Music in the Middle Ages

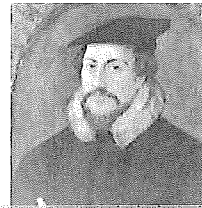
- Gregory the Great (540-604)
 - “professionalized the worship music of the church with the *Schola Cantorum* – choirs of monks who would sing a combination of psalms and man-composed meditations.
 - The organ was introduced into the worship service in the 7th c. (1st instrument in Christian history)
- Charlamagne (742-814)
 - established schools of music
 - encouraged Monastic enrichment
 - compositions focused on the Mass.
 - became increasingly subjective and individually meditative.
 - theme increasingly focused on Virgin Mary and mystical emotion and experience.

The Reformation



Luther

- Grew up in the Roman Catholic Church.
- Trained as a Medieval monk.
- Desire: to reform the church from within.
- Wanted to remove the corruption but retain the elegant forms of worship.
- A musician who wanted to bring music into the worship of God.



Calvin

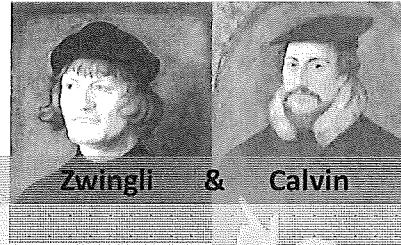
- Grew up in the atmosphere of the Reformation.
- Trained as a lawyer.
- Studied heavily in the Ancient Church Fathers.
- Fled the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in France.
- Aim: to reform the church and culture from the ground up.
- Wrote the first significant Reformed systematic theology.

The Reformation in Worship



Luther

- *Sola Scriptura* - authority
- A monk's sense of devotion & practicality.
- Focus on corruption more than institution.
- Objected to the peasants destroying images/relics.
- Meaning of ordinances not radically changed.



Zwingli & Calvin

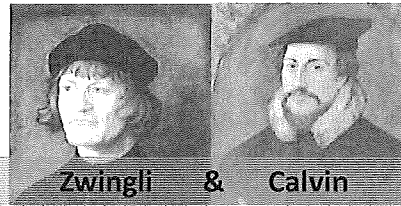
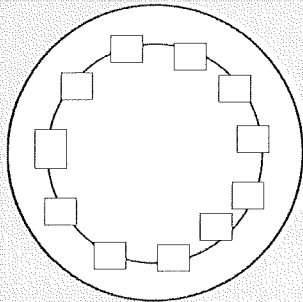
- *Sola Scriptura* - definition
- Both had a pastor's heart and theologian's mind for purity & integrity.
- Focus on theological foundation of thought and practice.
- Required removal of images and relics.
- Radically redefined ordinances.

The Regulative Principle of Worship



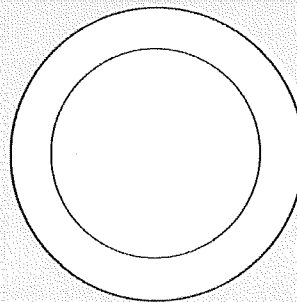
Luther

Whatever is not prohibited may be allowed.



Zwingli & Calvin

Only that which God commands is to be allowed.



The Regulative Principle of Worship



Lutheranism

Whatever is not prohibited
may be allowed.

- Is beauty and creativity not properly offered to God in worship?

"I have been hesitant and fearful, partly because of the weak in faith, who cannot suddenly exchange an old and accustomed order of worship for a new and unusual one."

from An Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg, 1523



Calvinism

Only that which God
commands is to be allowed.

- What God ordains and commands is, by definition, the best and finest.

"... [T]he only legitimate worship is that which he himself approved from the beginning."

from Calvin Contra Sadoleto On the Regulative Principle Of Worship

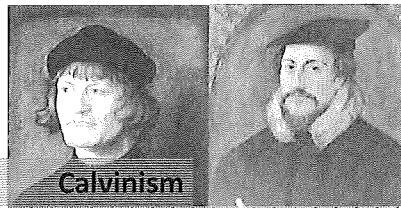
The Regulative Principle of Worship



Lutheranism

Whatever is not prohibited
may be allowed.

- Is beauty and creativity not properly offered to God in worship?
- Is the progression of the gospel in history not to be recognized in Christian worship?



Calvinism

Only that which God
commands is to be allowed.

- Tradition, progress in history do not change the gospel message.
- The Psalms not only speak of Christ's first but also his second coming.

The Regulative Principle of Worship



Lutheranism

Whatever is not prohibited may be allowed.

- Is beauty and creativity not properly offered to God in worship?
- Is the progression of the gospel in history not to be recognized in Christian worship?
- Is culture not to be given expression?



Calvinism

Only that which God commands is to be allowed.

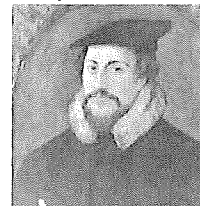
- The worship of God should not seek to conform with cultures for cultures contain the wickedness of man.
- Instead, all cultures are to be made to change and conform to the Word of God.

The Reformation of Music in Worship



Lutheranism

- Luther wrote
 - renditions based on Ps. 12, 14, 46, 67, 124, 128, 130
 - festal hymns
- Martin Bucer (1491-1551)
 - A commentary on the Psalms offering a Christian interpretation.
- Johannes Zwick (1496-1542)
 - Constance Hymn Book, 1540
 - half psalms, half hymns
- 100,000 hymns composed in 3 ½ years following Reformation.



Calvinism

- Calvin remained committed to psalmody exclusively.
- The only exception were a very few canticles (musical renditions of the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, etc.).

John Calvin The Genevan Psalter – 1539

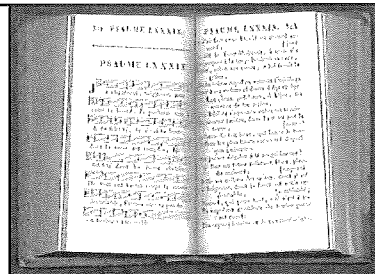


“The psalms incite us to praise God, to pray to Him, to meditate on His works to the end that we love Him, fear, honor and glorify Him. What St. Augustine says is quite true, one can not sing anything more worthy of God than that which we have received from Him.

Therefore, after we have sought on every side, searching here and there, we shall find no songs better and more suitable for our purpose than the Psalms of David, dictated to him and made for him by the Holy Spirit. But singing them ourselves we feel as certain that God put the words into our mouths as if He Himself were singing within us to exalt His glory.”

(from the Introduction)

John Calvin The Genevan Psalter – 1539

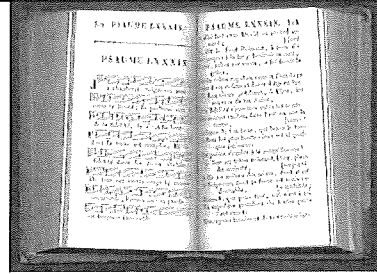


- Regarding psalmody in worship:
 - they served a theological purpose – revealing the doctrines of Scripture, of redemption, etc.
 - they served a didactic purpose – by singing the psalms, the very Word of God is impressed into the heart (Ps. 1:1-2). (Including canticles such as Lord’s Prayer, 10 commandments, etc.)
 - they served a doxological purpose – “the Psalms lead us in the right manner of offering the sacrifice of praise”.

(H. Old)

John Calvin The Genevan Psalter

- Calvin pressed for congregational singing.

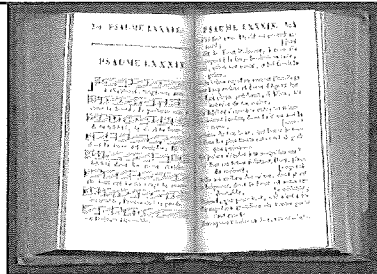


"Among other things which are suitable for men's recreation and for giving them pleasure, music is either foremost, or, at least, must be esteemed one of the most prominent; and we must esteem it a gift of God to us with that purpose."

(Calvin, the preface of the Psalter of 1543).

John Calvin The Genevan Psalter

- But Calvin restricted allowing emotional appeal to dictate the issue of propriety in worship.

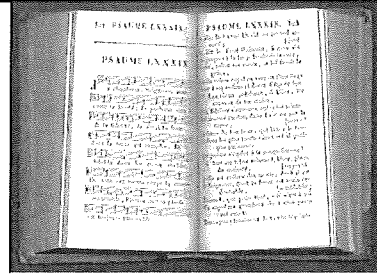


"He recognized that music has the power to mold the hearts of men and can therefore be very dangerous. The use of hymns to spread heresy in the early church is all too somber a reminder of this fact. 'We doubt' says Calvin, 'if there is anything in this world which can more powerfully turn or bend hither and thither the morals of men. ... Our own experience shows a secret and almost incredible power of music to move hearts one way or the other.'"

(H. Old)

John Calvin The Genevan Psalter

- Calvin understood the priority of words over tunes.

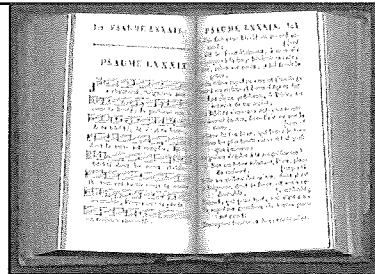


“Calvin seems to have been by temperament at least indifferent to the music and poetry of the Roman Church, and actively hostile to the light songs popular among the French. He would have nothing sung in public worship at Geneva except the words of Sacred Scripture, turned into as close and accurate translations as was humanly possible, and set to grave but beautiful music.”

(J. Crouch)

John Calvin The Genevan Psalter

- Calvin stressed for *a cappella* and united singing.



“Distaste for organs, distaste for hymns, and distaste for part-singing were the typical marks of Calvinistic church music.”

(Stevenson)

“He considered instrumental music ‘senseless ...’ and disallowed harmonies. Only unison singing of the Psalms was permitted.”

(Grime)

Westminster Assembly, 1643 on the Worship of God



“The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.”

(WCF XXI.V)

Westminster Assembly, 1643 on the Worship of God



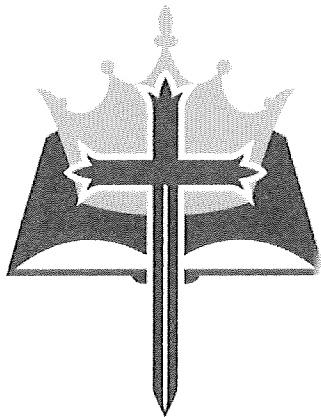
“It is the duty of Christians to praise God publickly, by singing of Psalms together in the congregation, and also privately in the family. In singing of Psalms, the voice is to be tunably and gravely ordered; but the chief care must be to sing with understanding, and with grace in the heart, making melody unto the Lord.”

(The Directory of Publick Worship of God)

“Thus it was that all those in France who felt the need of intimate fellowship with God, all to whom a religion, which was at once inflexible in matters of moral living and which appealed to their reasoning faculties, was a necessity, hailed the *Christian Institution* as the clearest manifesto of their faith, and grouped themselves round the young author (Calvin was barely twenty-six when he wrote it) as their leader.

Those also who suffered under the pressure of a despotic government, and felt the evils of a society constituted to uphold the privileges of an aristocracy, learnt that in a neighbouring country there was a city which had placed itself under the rule of the Word of God; where everyone joined in a common worship attractive from its severe simplicity; where the morals, public and private, were pure; where the believers selected their pastors and the people their rulers; where there were neither masters nor subjects; where the ministers of religion lived the lives of simple laymen, and were distinguished from them only by the exercise of their sacred service.

They indulged in the dream that all France might be fashioned after the model of Geneva.” (Lindsay, p. 159-60)



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“Almost everywhere we find a growing tendency to contrast the purity of Protestantism and the corruption of Roman Catholicism. It found outcome in the famous scene in the *Parlement* of Paris (1559), when Antoine de Bourg, son of a former Chancellor, advocated the total suspension of the persecution against those ‘who were called heretics’, and enforced his opinion by contrasting the blasphemies and scandals of the Court with the morality and purity of the lives of those who were being sent to the stake, - a speech for which he afterwards lost his life.” (Lindsay, p. 160-61)

“In the 16th century mindset, the execution of heretics was a perfectly reasonable strategy to deal with what could be very dangerous.”

Dr. Karin Maag

Dir., H. Henry Meeter Ctr. For Calvin Studies, Calvin College