

FOR GOD AND HIS ANGELS OR MEN AT THEIR TABLES?:
THE CONTEXT AND USAGE OF PSALM-SINGING IN FRANCOPHONE
CALVINISM, 1539-1565

Joshua K. Busman

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Approved by:

Advisor: John L. Nádas

Reader: Philip Vandermeer

Reader: Felix Wörner

ABSTRACT

JOSHUA K. BUSMAN: For God and His Angels or Men at Their Tables?:
The Context and Usage of Psalm-Singing in Francophone Calvinism, 1539-1565
(under the direction of John L. Nádas)

The Genevan Psalter, completed under John Calvin's supervision during the middle decades of the sixteenth century, is arguably one of the greatest achievements in the history of Christian hymnody. From its first Strasbourg publication in 1539 to the complete Genevan psalter of 1562, these simple, vernacular settings of Biblical psalms represent an important and influential body of musical materials, both in the history of Protestantism and in the history of French music writ large. Unfortunately, much of the discussion surrounding the Calvinist tradition of music-making assumes an austere, anti-musical stance that is often (mis)associated with John Calvin's theology. By exploring the intellectual context of Calvin's work as well as comparing a variety of musical settings of one of the most popular metrical psalms (Psalm 9), I hope to present a more complex picture of Calvin and Calvinist musical practice in France in the sixteenth century.

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Introduction

The Protestant Reformation is well-known as a catalyst of musical and liturgical innovation in both Protestant and Catholic communities across Europe. For this reason, musicologists have given the Reformation a great amount of attention, but most of these considerations have centered around the work of the German Reformation and Martin Luther. Undoubtedly, a great deal of the focus on Luther stems from musicologists' larger interests in the Germanic tradition and the clear influence that Luther had on Johann Sebastian Bach. Less work, however, has been focused on the musical implications of the French Reformation under John Calvin. The Genevan Psalter, one of the greatest achievements in Christian hymnody, was completed under Calvin's close supervision during the middle decades of the sixteenth century and has shaped Protestant liturgical music for many centuries. In fact, one of the most easily recognizable hymn tunes in Western Protestantism—the "Old 100th" which is still in common use in many protestant churches as a setting for the Doxology—was composed by Loys Bourgeois for the Genevan Psalter.

Unfortunately, much of the discussion surrounding the Calvinist tradition of music-making assumes an austere, anti-musical stance that is often (mis)associated with John Calvin's theology. Walter Buszin has spoken of "Calvin's indifference, or rather hostility, to music" and Charles Garside has noted the ways in which whole generations of scholars viewed Calvin as "an enemy of all pleasure and distraction, even of the arts

and of music.”¹ Howard Mayer Brown, in an article published posthumously in 1994, noted that Calvinist music had been unexplored by musicologists for so long because the overall aesthetic was so “crippling for musicians.”² Admittedly, Calvinist metrical psalms lack the bombast of Luther’s “Ein Feste Burg,” but they represent an important and influential body of musical materials, both in the history of Protestantism and in the history of French music writ large.

With this thesis, I hope to situate the creation and early usage of the Genevan psalters within a proper sixteenth century context as well as explore their reception among Calvinist communities in Switzerland and the south of France.

¹ Walter E. Buszin, “Luther on Music,” *The Musical Quarterly*, 32 (1946): 80 and Charles Garside, Jr., “Calvin’s Preface to the Psalter: A Re-Appraisal,” *The Musical Quarterly* 37 (1951): 566.

² Howard Mayer Brown. “Ut Musica Poesis” *Early Music History* 13 (1994): 17.

Chapter 1. Music as Graven Image: Calvin's Reformation of Musical Thought

During Martin Luther's nearly ten-month stay at Wartburg Castle following the Diet of Worms, the Reformation project in Wittenberg was taken up by Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, a senior colleague of Luther's at the University of Wittenberg and the man who had awarded Luther his doctorate in 1514. On Christmas Day 1521, Karlstadt performed the first "reformed" mass, and in keeping with the tenets of the Reformation, he did not elevate the Eucharistic elements, he spoke the words of institution in German instead of Latin, he rejected confession as a prerequisite, and he let the communicants take both bread and wine on their own.³ It was just a few days after this historic mass that Wittenberg was beset by the arrival of the so-called "Zwickau Prophets," a trio of radical Reformers who had been recently exiled from Zwickau, a fellow Reformation stronghold in the Electorate of Saxony.⁴ The Zwickau Prophets prompted Karlstadt to attempt more radical reforms and in January 1522, he convened the city council in Wittenberg. Karlstadt implored the council to pass an ordinance which would require the removal of all images and icons from city churches. Karlstadt argued that while the images which adorned the church walls were certainly placed "out of love," they quickly became objects of veneration themselves, rather than serving their intended purpose as vehicles

³ Robin A. Leaver. *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 36.

⁴ Ronald J. Sider. *Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt: Development of His Thought, 1517-1525*. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 161.

for the adoration of God.⁵ On January 24th, 1522, the Wittenberg city council accepted Karlstadt's proposal and just three days later, his arguments were published in a pamphlet entitled, *On the Removal of Images*. Despite the disorderly and sometimes violent reaction that Karlstadt's verbal invective provoked from his parishioners in Wittenberg, his published argument in the pamphlet is essentially a legalistic one rooted in the Decalogue.⁶ The first commandment, which commands "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" and provides explicit warning against the fashioning of "graven images," forms the backbone of Karlstadt's three-part argument. Karlstadt's commitment to this scriptural mandate is strong enough that he even commends local Jewish congregations for their consistent prohibition of images within their temples, a dangerous endorsement to make in the notoriously anti-Semitic environment of the Reformation.⁷

When Luther finally returned to Wittenberg in March of 1522, he gave a sermon explicitly opposing the positions of Karlstadt, saying "What is forbidden here is the adoration and not the making of images...one can have or make images, but one should not adore them."⁸ For Luther, the danger of "graven images" was in their ability to be misconstrued as the personal idolatries of cultic practice, rather than somehow inherent within the images themselves. In his defense, Luther also quoted the first commandment, but offered a different interpretation. For Luther, the prohibition of "graven images" was intended to reinforce the more important command to worship only the one, true God.

⁵ Joseph Leo Koerner. *The Reformation of the Image*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 94.

⁶ Sider, 166-67.

⁷ Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts: The Protestant Image Question in Western and Eastern Europe*. (London: Routledge, 1993), 45.

⁸ Ibid, 19.

Ultimately Luther's interpretation prevailed and within a month of his arrival in Wittenberg, images began returning to city churches. But Karlstadt and Luther's debate over the first commandment continued as the two men traded rebuttals in both sermons and pamphlets throughout the 1520s and 1530s. Their conversations placed the Decalogue front and center and provided both the impetus and the justification for some of the deepest divides between Reformers in the first twenty years of the Reformation.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Ten Commandments, or Decalogue, are generally sourced from Exodus 20:1-17.⁹ Within the seventeen verses which comprise the Decalogue in Exodus, there are no less than twelve distinct statements that might be numbered as commandments. Unfortunately the text does not provide divisions or numberings, though it does suggest in numerous places that the Law of God consists of specifically *ten* commandments.¹⁰ Many church fathers extolled this fluidity, commenting on the way in which this allowed the Decalogue to contain and subsume all other laws. St. Augustine remarked on the wonder he experienced when considering how "the other commandments, which seem to be innumerable, may be reduced to this small number of ten."¹¹ But, despite its proponents, ambiguity within the text has obviously led to discrepancies in how the passage is parsed out and how the commandments are numbered. Regardless of their numbering, however, the commandments are typically

⁹ Though the commandments also appear in Deuteronomy 5:6-21, the two texts are nearly identical in form and content except for the lack of narrative frame in the Deuteronomy text. Since the Exodus text is more frequently referenced in the writings of the Reformers, it will be the case study for this investigation.

¹⁰ The expression "Ten Commandments" is used three times in the Old Testament, in Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13 and Deuteronomy 10:4.

¹¹ Augustine. *Sermons on the New Testament (148–183)*. trans. Edmund Hill. (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 307.

gathered into two “tables” which indicate their orientation. Commandments from the first table are said to regulate the relationship between God and man, while commandments from the second table regulate those between men. The primary dispute among the Reformers arises from varying interpretations of the first six verses of the Exodus text which reads:

(1) And God spake all these words, saying, (2) I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (3) Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (4) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (5) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; (6) And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.¹²

Roman Catholic interpretation, going back to St. Augustine in the fifth century, maintains that all six of these verses are part of a single commandment.¹³ In his Small Catechism of 1529, Luther interprets these six verses in the same way, reducing them to the statement, “You shall have no other gods before me.”¹⁴ Luther’s explanation of the commandment is equally concise, stating that it instructed believers to “fear, love, and trust God above anything else.” In his challenge to Luther’s interpretation, Karlstadt felt that the second half of the commandment was being ignored and that the implications of this marginalized portion of the text involved a radical simplification of corporate

¹² Exodus 20:1-6, King James Version; I have selected the KJV here because it maintains the language of “graven image” which is so essential to the theological discussion of the Reformers and closest to Luther’s rendering of “Bildnis” in the 1545 edition of his translation of the text.

¹³ John Stapleton. “The Ten Commandments” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 4. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908), 153-154.

¹⁴ Martin Luther. “The Small Catechism” in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell. (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2005), 320.

worship and a staunch rejection of the Roman Catholic practices of iconography. Thus he concluded that all images within the church should be destroyed because they violated the first commandment's prohibition of "graven images." Though the opinions of Karlstadt did not prevail in Wittenberg, they did attract the attention of a young Zürich minister named Huldrych Zwingli.

Zwingli discussed the idolatry of "graven images" at length in many of his works, but none of his discussions are so extensive as that of *A Brief Christian Introduction*, published in 1523. Using the insights of Karlstadt and others, Zwingli strongly condemned the use of images within the context of Christian worship, declaring that

We should be taught only by the Word of God; but the indolent priests, who should have been teaching us without respite, have painted doctrines on the walls, and we, poor, simple ones have been robbed of teaching thereby, and have fallen back upon images and have worshiped them.¹⁵

Here Zwingli articulates the core of Karlstadt's insight and demands that the walls of the church be wiped clean. But Zwingli takes the idea one step further; he goes on to declare that "one's god is the one from whom he seeks help," and thus the forbiddance of "other gods" does not simply include the reliance upon icons or the cultic figures they represented (as it had for Karlstadt), but "rather all means of recourse, invisible or visible, which man may employ in times of trouble, anxiety, fear, or despair...any idea, any movement of thought, which is directed not instinctively and immediately toward God."¹⁶

Zwingli's hardline stance won support from other reformers, despite Luther's protests. Among those were Zwingli's Swiss colleagues Martin Bucer and Johannes

¹⁵ Charles Garside, Jr. *Zwingli and the Arts*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 147.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 147.

Oecolampadius, both of whom would help to perpetuate this viewpoint through their influence on the most important Reformer of the next generation, John Calvin.

Calvin's radical interpretive change to the Decalogue was introduced in one of the first publications Calvin made after his conversion to Protestantism, the 1536 edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Whereas Karlstadt and Zwingli had been fighting for the thorough interpretation of a single commandment, Calvin divided the commandment in two, explaining that "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" and "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" stand as two separate and equally important ideas. This "alternative interpretation" of the Decalogue can be found in the writings of the second-century Christian theologian, Origen, who was cited frequently in Calvin's work. Calvin discusses the process of dividing of the Decalogue, saying:

Beyond the common form accepted almost everywhere, I include four commandments under the first table. Not without reason, nor even for a light one, has this been done. For certain authorities divide them differently, erasing the Second Commandment from the number, as related by us, one to which the Lord undoubtedly gave a distinct place as a commandment. Yet they absurdly tear in two the Tenth Commandment, on not coveting the possessions of one's neighbor, which is one single commandment. Besides, one can understand this manner of division was unknown in a purer age from the fact that Origen incontrovertibly set forth this division of ours. Admittedly, the other was found in Augustine's time, but was not approved by all. Surely it pleased Augustine for a very insufficient reason, namely that in the number "three" (if the first table consists of three commandments) the mystery of the Trinity shines forth more clearly... I do not doubt it was by the devil's fraud that this commandment, whereby idolatry is so expressly forbidden, gradually slipped away from men's minds.¹⁷

¹⁷ John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 24-25.

Calvin's rhetorical strategies in this particular passage are very interesting and indicative of larger trends within his output. Particularly of note are his use and disuse of the church fathers, Augustine and Origen. Rather than utilizing a language of "reformation" as Luther did, Calvin uses a language of "restoration," in which the aim is less political or theological than metaphysical. Calvin's evocation of Origen and his comment that this perspective comes from a "purer age" is not a praise of Origen's exegetical skills, but rather is meant to reinforce the sense of self-evidence that should accompany his exegesis. Calvin observes that even Origen—who was frequently maligned and condemned as a heretic by the Synod of Constantinople for his less-than-orthodox stances—recognized the obviously correct division of the Decalogue more than a millennia ago.

In application, Calvin clearly believed the purpose of this second commandment was to condemn idolatry as well as place emphasis on a transcendent God who cannot be subjected to representation or comprehensibility by the senses. The idea of "graven images" quickly became a rallying cry for both Calvinists and Zwinglians in their battle to effectively regulate the use of the arts in worship. Though the debate over the role of "graven images" was centered around the issue of iconography, the same attitudes were applied to the role of sensuous experience in worship writ large. Music, like the visual arts, fell into the category of *adiaphora*, a concept used to indicate things which exist outside of moral law— that is, actions which are neither morally mandated nor morally forbidden. The anti-iconographic arguments drawn from reinterpretations of the Decalogue provided the impetus for wholesale liturgical reform and armed the Reformers

with a consistently Scriptural language with which to demand it. Raymond Mentzer has commented that the actions of the reformation went beyond simply asserting a new set of aesthetic criteria, instead enacting a “redefinition and reconfiguration of sacred space.”¹⁸ Clearly, Luther, Karlstadt, Zwingli and Calvin all saw the role of music in worship as a central question of their respective Reformation perspectives and in each case, an engagement with the first commandment is central to their interpretive projects.

For Luther, the regulative power of the first commandment was not in its ability to dictate which practices could and could not be used in worship, but rather in its ability to remind congregants to whom worship should be directed. Music itself is morally neutral and only gains moral status from its object of adoration. Luther advocated the teaching of spiritual songs, especially to youth, in hopes that it help “to wean them away from love ballads and carnal songs and to teach them something of value in their place.”¹⁹ Luther strongly critiqued those who used the first commandment as a means to condemn the arts, saying, “Nor am I of the opinion that the gospel should destroy and blight all the arts, as some of the pseudo-religious claim. But I would like to see all the arts, especially music, used in the service of Him who gave and made them.”²⁰ This quotation also highlights another aspect of Luther’s endorsement of music, namely that it could not be properly condemned under the label of “graven images.” By definition, a “graven image” is a man-made creation that is designed to approximate God’s glory. Luther’s belief was that

¹⁸ Raymond A. Mentzer, Jr. “The Reformed Churches of France and the Visual Arts,” in *Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition*, ed. Paul Corby Finney. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 201.

¹⁹ Carl Schalk, *Luther on Music*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 33.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 34.

music a “costly treasure given to mankind by God,” which prevents its inclusion in this category. Luther was quite adamant on this point, once commenting that “a person who gives this some thought and yet does not regard music as a marvelous creation of God, must be a clodhopper indeed and does not deserve to be called a human being.”²¹

Karlstadt claimed that music, like other iconic representations in worship, distracted the participants from the true worship of God alone. A performance of the high order which God clearly deserved would require the congregant to be first a musician and only secondarily a proper worshipper. Though he called for the radical simplification of musical practice, he did not follow his own advice, and less than a year after committing his radical thoughts to paper in *A Disputation on Gregorian Chant*, Karlstadt drew up a new liturgy for Wittenberg which retained nearly all of the traditional musical forms, Latin texts and the use of a choir. Despite his hypocritical actions, Karlstadt’s writings continued to inspire Zwingli, who began drafting his own liturgy for the church in Zürich after reading Karlstadt’s work.

For Zwingli, the regulating power of the first commandment is far-reaching and absolute. Because his interpretation of the first commandment had led him to condemn “any movement of thought” that was not immediately directed at God, any endeavor outside of prayer was subject to substantial scrutiny, and the practices of worship and prayer became nearly indistinguishable. The practice of music in the church is external and ceremonial, creating a culture in which spiritual deeds were done to be seen by the world. “True worship must be private and individual,” Zwingli commands, “We sing the

²¹ Ibid, 33.

praise and glory of God not with our voices...but with our hearts.”²² Under Zwingli, the liturgy in Zürich was stripped not only of icons and music, but of everything outside of the sacraments and the scriptures. Pious citizens stripped the churches bare of statues, pictures, stained glass, candles, bones and other relics, while Zwingli himself oversaw the dismantling of pipe organs and the whitewashing of walls. But Zwingli’s ideas regarding music are not simply asceticism that comes with the rejection of iconography, they are also the fullest realization of the Reformation doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Unlike Karlstadt’s critique, which arose to combat abuses of the musical system within local churches, Zwingli’s critique is born out of rigorous Biblical exegesis. Music—choral or instrumental, no matter how religiously inspired, artistically beautiful, or superlatively performed—must be prohibited from worship because Scripture, more specifically the first commandment, has made its existence impossible.

Calvin’s engagement with the first (and later second) commandment(s) resulted in a new theological paradigm which Calvin called “the regulative principle of worship.” The regulative principle states that scripture is used to completely and authoritatively regulate and prescribe the means and objectives of worship. In the wording of the Westminster Confession,

The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.²³

²² Garside, *Zwingli and the Arts*, 44.

²³ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 21.1.

As demonstrated in the first six verses of Exodus 17 considered above, God has the power to determine how he is to be worshipped and to punish or reward his followers according to their fidelity to His ideals. While Lutheran and Roman Catholic liturgists would certainly agree that worship practices ought to be scriptural in the sense of not contradicting the Bible, Calvin insists on a much stricter standard by which anything not explicitly commanded by God in scripture is forbidden. Calvin clearly shared Zwingli's convictions that the rites and ceremonies of corporate worship can easily transform into the forbidden "graven images" of the first commandment and he followed Zwingli's lead in demanding a close circumscription of worship practice.

It is important to note that many of the Reformer's positions, especially those of both Calvin and Zwingli, found grounding in the anti-Semitic climate of the Reformation. Calvin's anti-Semitic rhetoric and its connection to the reform of worship is apparent in one of his homilies on 1 Samuel.

In Popery there was a ridiculous and unsuitable imitation of the Jews. While they adorned their Temples and valued themselves as having made the worship of God more splendid and inviting, they employed organs, and many other such ludicrous things, by which the Word and worship of God are exceedingly profaned, the people being much more attached to those rites than to the understanding of the divine Word.²⁴

By drawing on the common stereotype of Jews as decadent, Calvin demonstrates how the Jews provide the misguided example upon which the corruption of Roman Catholic worship is based. In the writings of Zwingli, he frequently uses the Jews as a straw man in order to establish the validity of his positions regarding worship.²⁵ Much of this

²⁴ John Calvin. *Homiliae in Primum Librum Samuelis*. (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999), 259.

²⁵ Garside, *Zwingli and the Arts*, 44.

rhetoric is rooted in the idea of the “new covenant” enacted by Jesus, which displaced the Mosaic Law of the Jews. This is how the writings of Zwingli, and early writings of Calvin, deal with the issue of biblical precedents for music in worship. While the Old Testament scriptures may show pious Jews engaging in musical worship involving instruments, this is not appropriate for the “new covenant” which governs Christians.

While Calvin’s new second commandment certainly provided him the impetus for liturgical reform, it was not, by itself, sufficient for the task of dealing with music. Calvin’s early writings would seem to suggest that Calvin is reticent about the use of music altogether. In the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* from 1536, Calvin allows the possibility of singing the psalms in corporate worship, but is very clear to restrict them to prayerful reflection, saying “it is fully evident that unless voice and song, if interposed in prayer, spring from deep feeling of heart, neither has any value or profit in the least with God.”²⁶ Even within the context of prayer, Calvin seems eager to eliminate song whenever possible, observing that “the tongue is not even necessary for private prayer” and that “sometimes the best prayers are silent ones.”²⁷

It seems that Calvin’s views on music began to change when he began working more closely with the specific congregations in Geneva and Strasbourg. In the *Articles on the Organization of the Church and its Worship at Geneva*, presented to the Geneva city council in 1537, Calvin argues that the psalms are not simply tolerated, but should be required for corporate worship, declaring that

²⁶ Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1536 Edition*, 74.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 75.

it is a thing very expedient for the edification of the Church, to sing some psalms in the form of public devotions by which one may pray to God, or to sing his praise so that the hearts of all be roused and incited to make like prayers and render like praises and thanks to God.²⁸

His acceptance of music continued to broaden and strengthen during his time spent in Strasbourg (1538–41) with Martin Bucer, and it was in Strasbourg that Calvin first attempted to compile a psalter for use in worship, *Aulcuns Pseaumes et Cantiques mys en chant* ("Some Psalms and Hymns to be sung"), which was published in Strasbourg in 1539. For his revised copy of the *Institutes* which appeared at the end of his time in Strasbourg, Calvin adapted his language regarding song and prayer in accordance with his new attitudes towards music, inserting the sentence "However, we do not say that words or songs are not good, but we value them very highly provided they follow from the affection of the heart and serve that feeling."²⁹ Much of this attitude was engendered by the fundamentally different approach that the Strasbourg reformers brought to liturgical matters. While others sought to adapt or conform existing models to the theological standards of the Reformation, those in Strasbourg, led by Martin Bucer, believed that "the Roman Mass was so corrupt that it could not be revised or re-formed, and therefore new vernacular liturgical forms, drawn up according to the *sola scriptura* principle were required to replace the Latin Mass."³⁰ By all accounts, Strasbourg was a hotbed of liturgical development, with local printing presses bringing out forty-four

²⁸ John Calvin. "Articles on the Organization of the Church and its Worship at Geneva" in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, ed. J.K.S. Reid. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 48.

²⁹ John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion: 1541 French Edition*, trans. Elsie Anne McKee. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 476.

³⁰ Robin Leaver. "The Reformation and Music" in *European Music, 1520-1640*, ed. James Haar. (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press), 2006, 385.

different vernacular liturgies and congregational song collections between 1524 and 1561.³¹ The influence of Martin Bucer's liturgical outline, centering on the rites of confession and absolution, Biblical exegesis, and congregational singing, as well as his increasing preference for metrical psalm singing can be seen on Calvin's later liturgical developments. It is largely thanks to the influence of Bucer and others in Strasbourg that Calvin seems to have supported psalm singing as an integral part of both corporate worship and religious education upon his return to Geneva in 1541.

But despite Calvin's softening views towards music, his earlier anti-iconographic stance towards the visual arts was never relinquished. Because of the deeply imbedded connections between the anti-iconographic arguments rooted in the new second commandment and the regulation of music in the liturgy, Calvin had to find a way to differentiate the visual arts from music in order to restrict his earlier arguments in such a way that music could be considered a productive part of Christian worship again.

Christopher Joby, in his book *Calvinism and the Arts: A Re-Assessment* identifies four central ideas within Calvin's work which help to justify music's inclusion, and visual art's exclusion, from Calvinist worship.³² Firstly, music is more ephemeral than the visual arts, providing an appropriate analogue to the invisible, immaterial God to whom worship is directed. Material objects, which would include visual arts (and later musical instruments), are detrimental because of their ability to distract or detract from this invisible focus. This desire for ephemerality in worship is central to the second argument

³¹ William Young, "Music Printing in Sixteenth-Century Strasbourg," *Renaissance Quarterly* 24 (1971): 486-501.

³² Christopher Richard Joby. *Calvinism and the Arts: A Re-assessment*. (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 55-60.

in favor of music, namely that it is a temporal art that does not persist outside of performance. As soon as one is done with a performance of music, it persists only in the hearts and minds of the parishioners, which are presumably directed towards God. Visual artworks, however, persist with a fixity which may inspire idolatry. Thirdly, music, or at least music as Calvin employs it, gains superiority because of its ability to contain Biblical texts. For Calvin the humanist, texts were central to the conveyance of truth and music was intimately related to language through its inclusion in the *trivium* of the humanist educational system, which I will discuss in more detail below.³³ Finally, Calvin asserts that the act of music-making is always a communal activity, as opposed to painting which is often the expression of an individual. The communal effect of music-making is amplified when one is singing the Psalms because of the frequent use of first-person plural perspective. Even when the Psalms rely on individual, pietistic language, they provide a communal articulation of individual experiences, reminding parishioners that they do not journey alone.

In the summer of 1541, Calvin returned to Geneva, the city that had expelled him less than three years prior. Calvin's exile in Strasbourg was a formational time, with Calvin drawing on the theological and liturgical influence of fellow Reformer Martin Bucer, as well as cultivating a relationship with famed poet Clément Marot, who would eventually contribute the majority of the translations and versifications for Calvin's metrical Psalter. Upon arrival, Calvin quickly went to work, convincing the city council to pass his "Ordonnances ecclésiastiques" ("Ecclesiastical Ordinances") in November

³³ The beginning of Chapter 2 will provide a lengthy description of Calvin's educational background and how this informed his aesthetic stances.

1541.³⁴ With the new ordinances in place and the city council squarely behind him, Calvin set to work on revising his Strasbourg service book (*Aulcuns Pseaumes et Cantiques mys en chant*), which would form the core of the first Genevan Psalter, published the next year.

³⁴ Alister E. McGrath. *A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1990), 79-80.

Chapter 2. Music as Rhetoric: Calvin's Psalter and the Climate of Humanism

With any consideration of Calvin's relationship to the psalter, or even to music in general, it is imperative to keep in mind the humanistic perspective that ultimately guided Calvin's aesthetics. Calvin was educated as a lawyer during a time of great turmoil and controversy in the educational system. This was a time when the new scholarship of humanism made its appeal to the intelligent young men of France, and when humanist ideas were frequently the subject of discussion and debate. More than likely, Calvin was required to have a basic education in music as a part of his training at the University of Paris, but there is no evidence that he ever took particular interest in music or competently played a musical instrument.³⁵ His engagement with music, then, would have been conditioned by his humanistic education, specifically with his rootedness in the *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

Calvin's education began in the provincial Northern French town of Noyon, where his father Gerard served as legal and financial council to the local church, which was still monolithically Roman Catholic when Calvin was born in 1509. Gerard used his connections to the Bishopric in Noyon to secure jobs for his sons, with Calvin's elder brother Charles becoming a priest and John Calvin receiving a benefice from the church when he was only eleven. Additional connections between the Calvins and the de Hangest family, local nobles who controlled the Bishopric of Noyon, ensured Calvin

³⁵ Robert M. Copeland, introduction to *Le droit chemin de musique* by Loys Bourgeois (Ottawa: Institute of Medieval Music, 2008), 8.

continued his education, and by the age of fourteen, Calvin had matriculated at the University of Paris.³⁶ Little else about Calvin's early life is known, though Calvin biographers have spilled much ink on the subject. In the insightful and comprehensive Calvin biography by theologian Alister McGrath, he spends nearly 7 pages recounting the wildly different accounts of Calvin's early life proposed by other biographers.³⁷ Much of these accounts are based on speculation or evidence of dubious provenance, and thus McGrath closes this section by establishing that there are only three facts that can be firmly asserted regarding Calvin's early educational career.

1. Calvin was taught Latin grammar by Mathurin Cordier [who later taught in Geneva under the direction of Calvin].
2. He was then formally affiliated with the Collège de Montaigu [one of the constituent colleges of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Paris].
3. He studied arts, probably with a view to studying theology subsequent to successful graduation.

Upon graduation from the University of Paris (possibly between 1526-28), Calvin went on to study civil law under Pierre de l'Estoile in the city of Orléans. The academic environment in Orléans was markedly different than that of Paris, most notably in the richly humanistic tradition that was established when the law faculty was reformed in 1512. The traditional study of civil law was generally shaped by a two-fold approach. First, one would study the foundational texts of Emperor Justinian the Great, a sixth century Byzantine ruler whose *Corpus Juris Civilis* formed the basis of nearly all

³⁶ W. Robert Godfrey. *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 25.

³⁷ Alister E. McGrath. *A life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 21-27.

contemporary practice of law. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, one would study extensively the nearly endless glosses and commentaries provided to the texts by medieval scholars such as Accursius and Bartholus.³⁸ The contemporary trend of legal humanism, spearheaded in France by the legal scholar Guillaume Budé, demanded a return to the original Roman texts and held the overwhelming focus on secondary sources in disdain. It was within this intellectual climate that Calvin lived and worked until his graduation from the University of Orléans in 1531.

Upon graduation, Calvin moved back to Paris and attempted to establish himself as a humanist scholar, publishing a poorly received and financially disastrous commentary on Seneca's *De clementia* at his own expense in April 1532.³⁹ It was during these tumultuous years in Paris however that Calvin began to apply the high regard for primary sources instilled in him by his humanistic legal studies to the study of Biblical texts and early Christian writers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Calvin insisted that scholars of the Bible go back to the original Hebrew and Greek texts, citing the works of the post-Nicean Church Fathers and medieval commentators only when absolutely necessary. These views put him squarely in line with a growing contingent of Lutheran sympathizers in Paris.⁴⁰ Calvin recounts his "conversion" to Protestantism in his preface to his commentary on the Psalms, published in 1557. In the preface, which serves as a mini-autobiography for Calvin, he says of his experience,

³⁸ Ibid, 51-59.

³⁹ Ibid, 60.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 62-3.

Thus it came to pass, that I was withdrawn from the study of philosophy, and was put to the study of law. To this pursuit I endeavored faithfully to apply myself in obedience to the will of my father; but God, by the secret guidance of his providence, at length gave a different direction to my course. And first, since I was too obstinately devoted to the superstitions of Popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss of mire, God by a sudden conversion subdued and brought my mind to a teachable frame, which was more hardened in such matters than might have been expected from one at my early period of life. Having thus received some taste and knowledge of true godliness I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor.⁴¹

Though the exact details of Calvin's "conversion" are not known, it is clear that it was complete by 1534, when he suddenly resigned his longstanding chaplaincy in La Gésine and decided to leave France for the more Protestant and humanist-friendly city of Basel, Switzerland. It is also clear that Calvin's conversion experience was conditioned by a question of authority. Namely, who had more authority within the life of a Christian: the Church or the Bible? Since Calvin believed that Scripture was necessarily at the center of the Christian life (as discussed in Chapter 1) and his humanist beliefs in primary sources reinforced his need to ravenously study the Bible through his life, he broke with the Roman Catholic church and began his life as a Reformer.

This thumbnail sketch of Calvin's early biography intentionally highlights two aspects of Calvin's ideology that are essential for my consideration of the Genevan Psalter and its role in the Calvinist project: the centrality of humanist ideals in Calvin's academic life and the role that textual commitments played in his initial conversion to Protestantism. As demonstrated in the severity of attitude towards music in the early

⁴¹ Jean Calvin, preface to *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1948), xl-xli.

theological works, Calvin was skeptical of anything outside of the Biblical text soon after his conversion because of the strength of his commitment to faithful exegesis. Music, the use of which could not be straightforwardly exegeted from the New Testament, was a threat to a holistically Biblical conception of the Christian life.⁴² When Calvin finally did allow for the use of music in a worship service, it was tempered by his humanistic education, which led him to engage with “musical poetics” as a subset of the humanist *trivium* rather than the more scientific conception of music which was traditionally situated as the fourth component of the medieval *quadrivium*.

In his 1981 dissertation “Music and Humanism in the Early Renaissance,” Roy Ellefsen comments on the strained relationship between the two educational traditions and how music fit into the newly emerging humanist mindset.

The medieval liberal arts was always a shotgun marriage of two irreconcilable traditions... Because of its importance to philosophers, medieval educators held those four sciences called the *quadrivium* to be superior to the *trivium* which preserved a pale vestige of the classical rhetorical tradition. Speaking of the trivium, the Venerable Bede wrote that “equipped with these arms we should approach the study of philosophy” by which he meant the *quadrivium*. The *studia humanitatis* represented a complete reversal of Bede’s priorities: philosophy was dethroned and poetry (the *trivium*) was crowned. The humanists preserved the quadrivium but demoted it to the less important role formerly held by the trivium. The historical connection between music and natural philosophy guaranteed its place among the newly inferior arts.⁴³

While music certainly did occupy a diminished position in the thought of many humanist thinkers, others continued to engage it seriously, but now as a subset of the *trivium*,

⁴² While there was certainly a precedent for the use of music in the Old Testament, this was tempered by the mistrust of Jewish practice that accompanied the anti-Semitic climate of the Reformation.

⁴³ Roy Martin Ellefsen, “Music and Humanism in the Early Renaissance: Their Relationship and Its Roots in the Rhetorical and Philosophical Traditions” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1981), 193-94.

seeing music primarily as rhetorical. Gary Tomlinson has noted the ways in which musical study in the Renaissance was “suspended between two categories of knowledge: the mathematical arts of the *quadrivium*, in which music had found its intellectual niche since late antiquity and to which it still looked for its theoretical and rational foundation, and the speaking arts of poetry and rhetoric.”⁴⁴ Because of his humanist training, Calvin was more inclined to engage with music from the *trivium*, seeing rhythms and intervallic content of the music, not as mathematics or divinely inspired art, but rather as a vehicle for text. In all of his writings dealing with music, Calvin consistently identifies the two inseparable aspects of text and melody as the constituent elements of “music” as such. This view, rooted in a humanist exposition of ancient thought, is most evident in Calvin’s “Epistle to the Reader” from the beginning of the 1542 psalter, titled *La forme des prieres et chantz ecclesiastiques*.

Now in speaking of music I understand two parts, namely, the letter, or subject and matter, and the song, or melody. It is true that, as Saint Paul says, every evil word corrupts good manners, but when it has the melody with it, it pierces the heart much more strongly and enters within; as wine is poured into the cask with a funnel, so venom and corruption are distilled to the very depths of the heart by melody.⁴⁵

This quotation makes clear that, while music certainly “has great force and vigor to move and inflame the hearts of men”⁴⁶ as Calvin notes earlier in the letter, it is the text which holds the true content of the song. The melody is simply a potent vehicle for conveying it.

⁴⁴ Gary Tomlinson. “Renaissance Humanism and Music” in *European Music, 1520-1640*, ed. James Haar (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2006), 8.

⁴⁵ John Calvin. “Epistle to the Reader” in *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. Leo Treitler (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 366.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 365.

This view of music as rhetoric is strongly evident in a variety of attitudes that surround the production and consumption of the Genevan Psalters.

The close connection between the psalters and the humanist educational program is conditioned by and dependent upon a view of music as primarily rhetorical. Calvin's humanistic agenda did not consist simply of an application of his educational ideals, but also a propagation of them by using the church as a venue for humanistic education. The rise in adult literacy during the period and the new Reformation focus on the "priesthood of the believer" led to vast increases in the number of lay-persons engaging with the Biblical text. Alistair McGrath notes the particular fervor with which many copies of Biblical texts, in French, Latin and Greek, were consumed and collected by members of the French bourgeoisie and the important role that the French translations of the psalms played in this new widespread consumption of the Christian scriptures.⁴⁷ Of particular importance are the French New Testament (1523) and French Psalter (1524) prepared by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, whom Philip Edgcumbe Hughes has called "Calvin's forerunner in France."⁴⁸ As established earlier in the "epistle" which prefaces the 1542 psalter, Calvin regarded the music as being definitely subordinate to the sacred text, which had to be heard and understood above all else. This humanistic notion is most clearly articulated by Pontus de Tyard in his *Solitaire Second ou Prose de la Musique* published in Lyon in 1555. "The intention of music seems to be to give such a melody to the text, that all hearing it will feel themselves moved, and let themselves be drawn to the

⁴⁷ McGrath, 4

⁴⁸ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes. *Lefèvre: Pioneer of Ecclesiastical Reform in France* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984).

affection of the poet.”⁴⁹ Both Calvin and Tyard agree that the text should dominate, in order that its full meaning may be conveyed to the listener. The music must primarily aid in the accomplishment of this process. By learning to sing the psalms, the new believer could learn moral behavior by following the example set by the psalmist (presumably King David) as well as praising God in one’s own language with words that He Himself had inspired.⁵⁰ Additionally, because the Psalms were be sung rather than simply recited, the texts were retained much more easily among the congregations, allowing the faithful to “remember and understand what they sang, which in turn allowed them to sing from the heart.”⁵¹

Furthermore, the musical materials themselves were directly correlated to the syntactical structures of the psalm versifications. Frank Dobbins observes that the musical aims of Calvin’s theology “were realized by setting strophic verse syllabically in regular semibreves and minims, with simple, conjunct melodies devoid of word-painting or melismas.”⁵² The short and long syllables of Marot and Bèze’s French versifications of the psalms that were used in the Psalter were set to music using a rhythmic vocabulary of only semi-breves and minims, which directly correlated to the length of the syllable they set. Many scholars have criticized Calvinist music for this rigid correlation, noting the ways in which it restricts the musical motion, making for austere and somewhat flat musical products. As noted in the introduction, Howard Mayer Brown famously quipped

⁴⁹ Qtd in Charles Garside, Jr. “Calvin’s Preface to the Psalter: A Re-Appraisal,” *The Musical Quarterly* 37 (1951): 576.

⁵⁰ Joby, 53.

⁵¹ Ibid, 54.

⁵² Frank Dobbins, *Music in Renaissance Lyons*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 259.

that the simplicity of Calvinist music presented problems for musicologists because the aesthetic viewpoint was “so crippling for musicians.”⁵³ These melodies, though admittedly bland from a musical perspective, form an almost exact musical response to the syntactical structure of the poetic texts. This can be clearly seen in the 1542 text and melody for the first strophe of Psalm 9, which can be found below in Figure 1.

Figure 1 - Psalm 9 “De tout mon coeur t’exalteray,” First Strophe

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te - ray Sei - gneur, et si ra - con - te - ray
 Tou - tes tes oeu - vres non pa-reil - les Qui sont di - gnes de grans mer - veil - les.

French versification by Clément Marot	English translation
+ - - + + - - + De tout mon coeur t'exalteray, + + + - - + + + Seigneur, et si raconteray + - - + + - - + + Toutes tes oeuvres nonpareilles - + + - - - - + + Qui sont dignes de grans merveilles.	With all my heart I shall exalt thee, Lord, and thus shall retell, All thine unparalleled works Which are worthy of great marvels.

+ represents a stressed or long syllable
 – represents an unstressed or short syllable

A more thorough consideration of Psalm 9 will form the basis of discussion in the next chapter, but a basic consideration of the relationship between music and text is instrumental to understanding the ways in which music functioned as rhetoric within Calvinist communities.

⁵³ Howard Mayer Brown. “Ut Musica Poesis,” *Early Music History* 13 (1994): 17.

The text, which is provided with a scansion and translation in Figure 1, was translated and versified by Clément Marot, a Genevan poet and friend of Calvin. Along with Théodore de Bèze, Marot was responsible for translating and versifying all of the 150 psalms that comprise the Genevan psalters. As can be quickly discerned from a glance at the text and melody, the rhythms of the music and poetry are exactly correlated, with each long syllable set with a semi-breve (here a half note) and each short syllable on a minim (here a quarter note). Formally, the melody and text are also correlated, with each poetic phrase cadencing on the confinalis before returning to the finalis at the end of the strophe. This close connection between the musical and textual materials in the psalter is indicative of the close relationship between music and rhetoric in Calvin's thought.

Not only is the use of the *trivium* as a way to engage music essential to understanding Calvin's aesthetic positions, it also highlights several interesting differences between the approaches of Calvin and fellow Reformer, Martin Luther. Luther, an Augustinian monk, was educated into the climate of ecclesial Scholasticism while Calvin, more than 25 years his junior, was trained in a new tradition of legal humanism. Robin Leaver has noted the ways in which Martin Luther almost overemphasizes music as the most important member of the *quadrivium*. According to Leaver, "Luther went far beyond his predecessors by insisting that in matters concerning expressions of theology—the praise and glory of God—music takes precedence over the other disciplines of the *quadrivium*."⁵⁴ Luther himself notes in his 1538 preface to Georg

⁵⁴ Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music*, 66.

Rhau's *Symphoniae Iucundae*, saying “thus it was not without reason that the fathers and prophets wanted nothing else to be associated as closely with the Word of God as music.”⁵⁵ Even when Calvin made statements similar to Luther, once remarking that music was “either the first, or one of the principal in order to occupy us in that spiritual joy which He recommends to us so much,” Charles Garside reminds us that “this statement is not the extravagant enthusiasm of a musician praising his beloved art, as Luther did so often, but the carefully reasoned and dispassionate statement of a man who was primarily a lawyer, theologian, and philosopher.”⁵⁶ Much of the difference between the two men and their respective approaches to music is ultimately reducible to this conflict between the two education paradigms of the time.

Calvin’s grounding in the humanist tradition had several additional effects on the singing of psalms in the Genevan church. Emphasis on primary sources led to Calvin’s desire to recapture the uses of liturgical song that he saw discussed in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline Epistles and it is this impetus which shapes many of the defining characteristics of Genevan music-making. Because Calvinist music was premised so heavily upon these common commitments, Jeffrey VanderWilt has remarked that the music tended to be fairly homogenous, even across national, ethnic and linguistic barriers.

It is easy to enumerate the characteristics of the Genevan psalms. They were monophonic. The texts were set in metrical strophes. . . In all languages the psalms were sung unaccompanied. . . nonetheless, instrumental accompaniment was almost always permitted in homes and

⁵⁵ Martin Luther, “Preface to Georg Rhau’s *Symphoniae Iucundae*,” in *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), 323–4.

⁵⁶ Garside, “Calvin’s Preface to the Psalter: A Re-Appraisal,” 572-3.

schools. The psalms were irregular but rhythmic. They were composed in half notes and quarter notes. They were strong accented according to the meters of the texts. The tunes rarely exceed an octave in range and were eminently singable. For the Genevan psalter every tune was newly composed. There are few identifiable *contrafacta*. Thus the characteristics of the *stilus calvinisticus*.⁵⁷

While this summary is no doubt an oversimplification and acknowledged by VanderWilt as such, it does highlight several of the most significant features of Calvinist music-making in the sixteenth century.

One significant feature that VanderWilt notes is the Calvinist commitment to monophony and to unaccompanied congregational singing. Calvinist values of simplicity and austerity informed this aesthetic preference as did the commitment to congregationalism. By eliminating the professional choir and musicians and having all members sing in unison, new music needed to be limited in range, eminently singable and rhythmically simple. With these changes, the act of worship was seen to be more faithful to Biblical precedents, but it also became a way for congregations to perform a new egalitarian approach to ecclesial organization on a regular basis. Pierre Pidoux has noted the ways that “this sung psalm is not an *ad libitum* element but an essential part of the service. Were it not there, the element of praise and of adoration would be absent in the service; and the whole assembly would be lowered to the simple role of an audience.”⁵⁸

This division between “audience” and “performer” is precisely the division that the congregationalist trends of which Calvinism was a part hoped to dismantle, with “unison,

⁵⁷ Jeffrey VanderWilt. “John Calvin’s Theology of Liturgical Song,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 25 (1995): 74.

⁵⁸ Pierre Pidoux. “Polyphonic Settings of the Genevan Psalter: Are They Church Music?” in *Cantors at the Crossroads*, ed. Johannes Riedel. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 67.

unaccompanied congregational singing in the vernacular thus [becoming] the only form of service music” and “priestly singing at the altar was abolished.”⁵⁹

As mentioned above, many of the features of Calvinist music are a result of this newfound congregationalism of the Reformation. Prior to the Reformation, it was believed that the church was necessarily an instrument in the confession, absolution and ultimately salvation of individual persons. Luther challenged this perspective with what Alistair McGrath has called “Luther's discovery of the righteousness of God” and the establishment of the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers,” first enumerated by Luther in the early 1520s.⁶⁰ It was this congregationalist focus within Protestant theology and the freedom which it engendered that led to the explosion of personal pietism across the European continent and it is this same personal pietism which is responsible for so many of the distinctive features of Calvinist music.

The fidelity to source texts that drove a reclamation of Biblical practices also led to a focus on Biblical texts as the textual component of congregational singing. While Calvinist psalters are obviously known for their inclusion of metrical Psalms, most Psalters also include metrical translations of other Biblical texts, including the Song of Simeon, the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer. The explicit focus on Biblical texts is obviously a result of the ways in which Calvin regarded the music as being subordinate to the sacred text, which had to be heard and understood above all else.

Further evidence of this focus can be found in the ways that the texts were actually

⁵⁹ Walter Blankenburg, “Church Music in Reformed Europe,” in *Protestant Church Music*, ed. Friedrich Blume et al (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975), 517.

⁶⁰ For a historical exploration of the idea of “the priesthood of all believers” in Luther’s thought, see: Norman Nagel. “Luther and the Priesthood of All Believers,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 61 (1997): 277-98.

deployed within the liturgy. Unlike Lutheran services, where the clergy selected music to coincide with the sermon topic, Calvinists in Geneva used the psalter in a tightly circumscribed schedule which allowed for the singing of the full cycle of 150 psalms twice a year (a cycle lasted 25 weeks).⁶¹ The emphasis was thus on the utilization of and familiarity with the entire corpus of psalms rather than on the preferential use of particular favorites of the clergy or congregation. Use was dictated by the value of the text—which was equal since all were biblical texts—rather than its musical or thematic appropriateness.

Despite its seemingly decreased role, Calvin regarded the musical materials as an important component of the way in which these texts were “distilled to the very depths of the heart by melody.”⁶² Beyond the musical restrictions designed to ensure intelligibility (straightforwardly metrical settings, monophony, congregational singing) there were a host of musical parameters that were dictated by Calvinist attitudes towards music itself. In addition to his identification and distinction of two elements of song (text and melody), it was incredibly important for Calvin to make a clear distinction between the music used for worship and music made for other purposes. In his preface to the psalter he states,

It must always be looked to that the song be not light and frivolous but have weight and majesty, as Saint Augustine says, and there is likewise a great different between the music one makes to entertain men at table and in their homes, and the psalms which are sung in the Church in the presence of God and his angels.⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Calvin, “Epistle to the Reader,” 366.

⁶³ Ibid, 365.

Walter Blankenberg notes the importance of the principle of *convenable au sujet* (“proper to the subject”) that was often evoked in the discussions surrounding the psalters.⁶⁴ This phrase was taken from the final sentence of Calvin’s preface which again implores that melodies used for the psalters “be moderated in the way that we have adopted in order that it may have the weight and majesty *proper to the subject*, and even to be proper for singing in the Church” (italics mine).⁶⁵ VanderWilt cites the lack of identifiable *contrafacta* in the Genevan psalters as evidence of this sharp divide between musical aesthetics. Though the lack of *contrafacta* has been disputed by other sources, even Blankenberg, who argues strongly for the prevalence of pre-existing tunes within the Calvinist tradition, concedes that

The fact that most of the Geneva psalm tunes have their origin in various existing models did not, however, prevent the various melodists from following an editorial concept completely unified in its basic principles and obviously guided by Calvin himself. They developed an entirely original melody type, different from melody types of other Reform regions...It is to that element that they mainly owe their extraordinary effectiveness and widespread acceptance.⁶⁶

But Calvin’s statement from the psalter preface is not interesting primarily for its tight circumscription of “liturgical” music or even its stress on the importance of differentiating this music from other forms of non-liturgical music, which has been frequently noted by commentators on Calvin. More interesting is how this seems to allow for the existence of a sphere of extra-liturgical music-making that is different but not in

⁶⁴ Blankenburg, 517.

⁶⁵ Calvin, “Epistle to the Reader,” 367.

⁶⁶ Blankenburg, 523.

conflict with the liturgical one. It is important here to distinguish the usage of “liturgical” and “non-liturgical” from the more frequently implemented “sacred” and “secular.” With his statement, Calvin is not suggesting that there is a sphere of music-making which could somehow evade theological regulation. Calvin’s theological worldview is too holistic to allow this. What he is suggesting, however, is that music implemented within the church community and that used for personal piety in the privacy of ones home, might be regulated by the scriptures differently. Interestingly, in his 2002 study *Worldview: The History of a Concept*, David K. Naugle observes that Calvin “understood the Scriptures and his reflection upon them to constitute a comprehensive view of things” and suggests that his theology represents one of the first attempts at what the nineteenth century would call a *Weltanschauung*.⁶⁷ Naugle suggests that the development of a Christian worldview “which flows from the theological wellsprings of the reformer from Geneva, John Calvin” is one of the most significant developments in the history of the church.⁶⁸ An exploration of the ways the people negotiated this liturgical/non-liturgical divide will feature prominently in the next chapter.

Calvin’s critics have long decried the ways that his strict limitation on liturgical music created an “anti-musical climate” in the Calvinist movements in France and the Netherlands, but as musicians took the Genevan psalters and pressed them into service in localized worship contexts, they made changes, adaptations and sometimes exceptions to Calvin’s theology. But one must also consider the ways in which Calvin’s theology itself changed as a result of this process of development in local and trans-local contexts of

⁶⁷ David K. Naugle. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 4-5.

performance.⁶⁹ During the last twenty-five years of his life, Calvin's theologies of music were being shaped by the emerging trends developing in local churches and by examining the ways in which people used the psalters, one can come to a fuller understanding of the climate that produced them.

⁶⁹ The work of Charles Garside has been instrumental as both a serious engagement and rebuttal of many of these critiques that have historically been leveled at Calvinist attitudes towards music. See specifically the articles, "Calvin's Preface to the Psalter: A Re-Appraisal" (1951) and "The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music" (1979).

Chapter 3. Music as Piety: Congregationalism and the Use of the Psalter

Upon his return to Geneva in 1541, work on the psalter began in earnest, with close collaboration between Calvin, poet Clément Marot, and composer Guillaume Franc. While the 1539 Strasbourg service book *Alcuns Pseaumes et Cantiques mys en chant* had split the translation duties fairly evenly between Calvin and Marot—Calvin with nine texts and Marot with thirteen—the 1542 psalter contains thirty-two texts by Marot, displacing all but two of the texts translated by Calvin. By 1543, a new book (now lost) containing fifty psalms was published, this time with all of the texts provided by Marot.⁷⁰ While the textual sources are surprisingly easy to determine, mostly due to Calvin’s personal involvement on this end of the process, the origin of the melodies are surprisingly difficult to uncover. The Strasbourg service book seems to have largely consisted of pre-existing melodies by German composers working in Strasbourg in addition to a few that are sometimes attributed to Marot.⁷¹ Of the nineteen melodies found in the Strasbourg book, only one (the famous tune of Matthias Greiter’s *Es sind doch selig alle*) survived in the first Genevan psalter of 1542.⁷² Over the subsequent two decades and in spite of the sudden death of Marot in 1544, a team of writers and composers worked to complete the psalter, which culminated in the publication of the first setting of all 150 psalms in 1562. Genevan publisher Antoine Vincent coordinated

⁷⁰ Blankenburg, 519.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

fifteen different printers to have the 1562 edition simultaneously brought out in Geneva, Paris, Lyons and several other locations.⁷³ A subsequently “revised edition” of the complete psalter was printed in 1565, just a year after Calvin’s death. In this short three-year span, the complete psalter was printed no less than 63 different times by printers throughout the Francophone world.⁷⁴ In fact, a great number of psalters were also being printed in Dutch, thanks in part to the spread of Calvinist aesthetics and theology.⁷⁵ This period of just over two decades, from the publication of the first Genevan psalter until the publication of the revised edition following Calvin’s death, not only saw the development of the “official psalter” but also the creation of a huge number of derivative works which interfaced with the psalter in a variety of ways.

This chapter will explore the ways in which different composers interacted with the psalter by examining a host of variants on Marot’s versification of Psalm 9, *De tout mon coeur t’exalteray*. Though not in the original Strasbourg service book, *De tout mon coeur t’exalteray* was included in the first Genevan psalter of 1542 and quickly became one of the most frequently cited texts (and melodies) within Calvinist circles. The words to verse eleven of the psalm—”Chantez au Seigneur qui habite en Sion, & annoncez ses faits entre les peuples.”⁷⁶ (“Sing the praises of the Lord, who is enthroned in Zion, and

⁷³ Ibid, 518.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ For a full exploration of how Calvinism impacted the aesthetic climate of the Netherlands, see: Phyllis Mack Crew. *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands 1544 -1569*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

⁷⁶ Interestingly, while this text is always attributed as Psalm 9:11 and it is a faithful rendering of the Biblical source texts, the versification used on the title page is not the same French translation of the text that appears within the body of the psalter, which reads “Chantez en exultation Au Dieu, / qui habite en Sion: / Noncez à gens de toutes guises / Ses oeuvres grandes, et exquisés.” This may suggest that the translation used for the title page predates the Marot translation and was taken from another source.

announce his works among the nations.”)—became a sort of rallying cry for the Calvinists, appearing on the title pages of many publications, including the Geneva and Lyon editions of the first complete psalter in 1562.⁷⁷ While this text was certainly appropriate because of its evocation of singing as a means of announcing the work of God, it also carries resonance because of its traditional interpretation as a celebration of David’s victory over the Philistine giant, Goliath. As a preface to Psalm 9 in each edition of the psalter, the writers include a short introduction which states. “This is a song of triumph, in which David gives thanks to God for certain battle he won by the death of his main enemy (some argue that it was Goliath). After this, [the Psalmist] magnifies the justice of God, who avenges His people in the right time and place.”⁷⁸ With the Reformation still in its infancy and the counter-Reformation in full swing, this Old Testament story would have been a potent metaphor for Protestants, reminding them that God had traditionally used the small and powerless to obtain victory, even against seemingly insurmountable odds. The melody of *De tout mon coeur t'exalteray* is also noteworthy because of its remarkable stability within the tradition. It is one of only 12 melodies present in every edition of the Genevan psalter produced between 1542 and 1565. The stability and wide distribution of this particular psalm makes it a perfect candidate for such a comparative study. Many psalm settings within the Calvinist tradition are ignored because of their simplistic musical language or seeming lack of connection to the theology that Calvin exposed in his writings. But an examination of

⁷⁷ Pierre Pidoux. *Le Psautier huguenot du XVIIe siècle*. Volume 2, (Bâle: Bärenreiter, 1962), 132.

⁷⁸ “C'est un chant triomphal, par lequel David rend graces à Dieu de certaine bataille qu'il gagna, en laquelle mourut fon principal ennemi: (aucuns estiment que ce fut Goliath:) apres il magnifie la justice de Dieu, qui venge les fiens en temps & lieu.”

Calvinist musical interactions with this single text will form a profitable example of the ways in which practicing musicians and worshiping congregations dealt with Calvin's theological aesthetics. I will posit that not only do their interactions with the psalters constitute a body of uniquely Calvinist practices, but also that in reifying these principles through weekly performance, local congregations might have helped to shape Calvin's aesthetics in its later forms.

Because the singing of psalms was such a potent way to “funnel” a text to the very depths of the heart, Calvin and his colleagues in Geneva placed a strong emphasis on musical pedagogy, encouraging congregants to learn how to read music and even the basics of music theory in order to properly sing from the psalter, both during the service and for personal piety. At the forefront of this pedagogical movement were two composers, Guillaume Franc and Loys Bourgeois, who together are responsible for a large majority of the tunes contained in the Genevan psalters. Both men served as cantor and *maistre des enfants* at Saint-Pierre Cathedral in Geneva—the seat of Calvin's pastorate—with Franc holding the job from Calvin's return in 1541 until Bourgeois took over around 1545 and served until his subsequent dismissal in early 1553.⁷⁹ The “Ordonnances ecclésiastiques” (“Ecclesiastical Ordinances”) which the Geneva city council passed upon Calvin's return in November 1541 gives some insight into the role of the *maistre des enfants* within the Genevan church structure as well as insight into the role of musical pedagogy within the larger Calvinist project. On the role of musical pedagogy, the “Ordonnances ecclésiastiques” clearly state that

⁷⁹ Frank Dobbins. *Music in Renaissance Lyons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 193.

It will be desirable to introduce ecclesiastical songs in order to better incite the people to prayer and to the praise of God. To begin with the little children shall be taught, and then in the course of time the whole church will be able to follow.⁸⁰

As the musicians primarily responsible for this level of musical instruction, especially of children within the community, Guillaume Franc and Loys Bourgeois would have had prominent positions within the church hierarchy in Geneva and thus it is not surprising that they were instrumental in the creation of the psalters during their respective tenures. In addition to providing a musical opinion on the various technical issues associated with the construction of a psalter, Franc and Bourgeois were also gifted composers, and each contributed heavily to the body of tunes that comprised the various psalters produced in Geneva during these formative years.

One of the most prominent examples of the Genevan pedagogical climate can be found in Bourgeois's theoretical treatise *Le Droict Chemin de Musique* ("The Direct Path of Music"), first published in Geneva in 1550.⁸¹ The title page, like so many others, is adorned by a quotation of Psalm 9:11 and promises to instruct its readers in "the way to sing the Psalms by custom or by skill."⁸² The recto of the same page contains a short encomiastic poem by Simon du Rosier who assures readers that "the pleasant art of music was asleep, wrapped in ignorance: but (thanks be to God!) this trustworthy book assures

⁸⁰ Translated in Pierre Pidoux. "History of the Genevan Psalter, Part 1." *Reformed Music Journal* 1 (1989): 6.

⁸¹ Bourgeois treatise is available in facsimile, prepared by Paul-Andre Gaillard (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1954) as well as a modern edition in English translation, prepared by Robert M. Copeland (Ottawa: Institute of Medieval Music, 2008).

⁸² Loys Bourgeois. *Le droit chemin de musique*, trans. and ed. Robert M. Copeland (Ottawa: Institute of Medieval Music, 2008), 33.

us of its awakening.”⁸³ In his introduction, Bourgeois addresses his book to “all good Christian lovers of music” and states that the purpose of his book is to instruct his readers in “everything which may be required to be well grounded in music and to sing one’s part.”⁸⁴ Thus the focus of this particular volume is primarily on the practical skills necessary for singing, though he promises to cover any material he cannot address in a future volume dealing with the specifics of instrumental technique.⁸⁵ Bourgeois spends the first ten chapters covering solmization and hexachords as well as basic metric and rhythmic issues that an amateur musician would encounter. Although his work shows clear debts to Glareanus, Gafori and others, Bourgeois manages to present a fairly straight-forward orientation to the fundamentals of music, most notably by abandoning the Guidonian hand in favor of a much easier system of *solfège*.⁸⁶ Chapter 11, titled “Of Singing the Text and of the Right Use of Music” begins

After knowing how to sol-fa and intone well, it will be necessary to learn how to sing the text (otherwise called the words), in place of ut, re mi, fa, sol, and la. . . In speaking of the text, I mean a Psalm or a spiritual; for it is not the Christian’s obligation to sing other things. Also, music is not given to us by God for any other purpose than that we should rejoice in Him.⁸⁷

Interestingly, Bourgeois again cites Psalm 9, in defense of his assertions on the uses of music but this time it is the first two strophes rather than the eleventh. Following this

⁸³ Ibid, 34.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 35.

⁸⁵ A further discussion of the implications of Bourgeois statement about this “future treatise” will be explored below.

⁸⁶ Dobbins, *Music in Renaissance Lyons*, 195.

⁸⁷ Bourgeois, 63-64.

positive assertion of musical virtue, Bourgeois launches into a condemnation of the musical improprieties he sees around him, blaming the unpopularity of sacred music on

the grave offense of musicians, who instead of devoting themselves to glorifying God by composing sacred and holy things, prefer to work their heads off in pursuit of such obscene and filthy songs that one ought to be horrified to speak of them, and all the more to set them to music. And nonetheless through ambition...they submit to such base acts, polluting so noble and excellent an art by such villainies and execrations.⁸⁸

The treatise ends with a chapter specifically teaching the singing of a characteristically Genevan setting of Psalm 34 accompanied by eminently practical instructions such as “when the notes are on the low lines and spaces...one is to sing the word underneath them low. And if they are on the middle lines and spaces...” etc.⁸⁹ In his closing remarks, Bourgeois implores his readers to understand “how God in His infinite bounty wishes to chase all shadows and errors from the face of the earth, and to light the world with knowledge and truth.”⁹⁰

Bourgeois’s treatise emphasizes several important points made previously about the role of music in Calvinist communities. Bourgeois’s approach seems to emphasize the importance of text as the conveyor of the content in music as well as strongly reinforcing Calvin’s previously discussed division between liturgical and non-liturgical music. But there are also some potentially interesting divergences from what have traditionally been considered Calvinist practices. Most notably, Bourgeois’s discussion of instruments at the outset of the treatise seems to contradict the strict forbiddance of instrumental

⁸⁸ Ibid, 65.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 66.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 69.

accompaniment that characterized Calvinist liturgical music. The Geneva authorities under Calvin's control did not support instrumental music due to its "lascivious connection with dancing and secular entertainment," but Bourgeois discusses the possibility of writing another treatise on how to play instruments, and thus saves his discussions about mode, canon and composition for this later, though unfortunately non-existent work.⁹¹ In his four-voice settings of Genevan psalter melodies from 1547, Bourgeois indicates that "such music is usually appropriate for all instruments," and he continued to push for the acceptability of this practice in his subsequent collections published in 1554 and 1561.⁹² The clear tension between the mandate of the Calvinist liturgy and the practice of a Calvinist musician brings into relief one of the central issues when examining this repertory, namely the importance of non-liturgical and extra-liturgical music in Calvinist religious life. As referenced in the previous chapter, there is not a prohibition of "the music one makes to entertain men at table and in their homes," but simply a mandate that such music inhabit a different aesthetic space from that reserved for liturgical worship.

The tune for Psalm 9, which first appeared in the 1542 psalter, is mostly likely the work of Guillaume Franc. The melody is reproduced in Figure 1 in the previous chapter along with the first strophe of text underlaid. According to the catalogue found in Nicole Labelle's study of French psalms in the sixteenth century, there were nearly 90 collections that published multi-voice settings of Marot and Bèze's psalm versifications

⁹¹ Dobbins, *Music in Renaissance Lyons*, 195.

⁹² *Ibid*, 260.

between the publication of the 1542 psalter and release of the “official psalter” in 1565.⁹³ Unfortunately, the first extant multi-voice setting of a text and tune from the psalter—a publication by Parisian publisher Pierre Attaignant called *Livre premier contenant xxxi pseaulmes* from 1546—exists only in a defective superius partbook. The first complete manuscript to survive is that of Loys Bourgeois in his *Le Premier Livre*, published in Lyon in 1547. Bourgeois’s setting of *De tout mon coeur t'exalteray* is fairly straightforward, with the traditional Genevan tune in the tenor and a four-voice homorhythmic texture surrounding it. The first two lines are reproduced in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 - Bourgeois, 1547

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te - ray Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te - ray

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te - ray Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te - ray

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te - ray Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te - ray

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te - ray Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te - ray

Bourgeois’s setting of *De tout mon coeur t'exalteray* is rather uncharacteristic of his style throughout *Le Premier Livre*, which frequently employs a more highly-imitative contrapuntal language. However, this note-against-note setting is quite characteristic of Calvinist musical trends writ-large. Many composers wrote four-voice settings of the Genevan psalms, using the tune from the psalter as a *cantus firmus* in the tenor or

⁹³ Nicole Labelle. *Les Différents Styles De La Musique Religieuse En France: Le Psaume De 1539 à 1572*. (Henryville, PA: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 1981), 14-25.

superius voice. Between 1542 and 1565, settings of *De tout mon coeur t'exalteray* in this simple style were published in Geneva, Lyon, Paris and even Rouen by composers such as Clément Janequin, Philibert Jambe de Fer and perhaps most enduringly by Claude Goudimel, whose harmonizations still appear in Reformed (primarily Presbyterian in the United State) hymnals to this day.

One also finds “loosely” polyphonic settings, in which it appears that the note-against-note settings have been simply fleshed out with passing figures and ornamentation. A prime example of this comes from *Les Cent Cinquante Psaumes de David nouvellement mis en musique*, composed by Philibert Jambe de Fer and published in Lyon in 1564. The first two lines of Jambe de Fer’s setting of *De tout mon coeur t'exalteray* are reproduced below as Figure 3.

Figure 3 - Jambe de Fer, 1564

The image shows a musical score for the hymn "De tout mon coeur t'exalteray" by Philibert Jambe de Fer, 1564. The score is written in four parts: Superius (top), Tenor, Bass, and Bass (bottom). The lyrics are: "De tout mon coeur t'exalteray Sei -". The music is in a simple style, with a focus on the text. The Superius part has a melodic line with some ornamentation. The Tenor and Bass parts provide harmonic support. The Bass part has a simple, steady rhythm. The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across multiple notes.

The image shows a musical score for a setting of a psalm. It consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "- gneur et si ra - con - te - ray Tou". The second staff is a lute line with lyrics: "ray Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te - ray Tou". The third staff is a lute line with lyrics: "Sei gneur et si ra - con - te - ray". The bottom staff is a lute line with lyrics: "gneur et si ra - con - te - ray Tou - tes tes oeu -". The music is written in a style characteristic of the 16th-century French lute repertoire, with a focus on linear motion and intricate passing figures.

Jambe de Fer freely composed setting with intricate passing figures but little imitation seems to suggest that it would be appropriately performed on instruments, or perhaps with an individual singing the tenor line and realizing the other three lines with a lute.

Adrian Le Roy, a Parisian nobleman and lute virtuoso who was active from 1551 until his death in 1598, was one of the most important music printers of the Calvinist movement and is responsible for a great number of transcriptions of polyphonic psalms for solo voice and lute which resemble Jambe de Fer's in texture and linear motion.

Slightly more common are the strophic settings of the psalms in tightly imitative polyphony, such as those by Claude Goudimel in his *Les Cent Cinquante Psaumes de David nouvellement mis en musique* (his collection bears the same title as Jambe de Fer's and many other similar collections), published in 1568 by Adrian Le Roy in Paris. The first two lines of his setting of *De tout mon coeur t'exalteray* are given below as Figure 4.

Figure 4 - Goudimel, 1568

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te - ray

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te -

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te -

De tout mon coeur t'ex - al - te -

Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te - ray

ray Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te - ray Tou

ray Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te - ray Tou

ray Sei - gneur et si ra - con - te -

Goudimel, unlike both *Jambe de Fer* and *Bourgeois*, places the Genevan tune in the superius rather than the tenor. Despite the polyphonic texture, Goudimel maintains a relatively syllabic setting, incorporating melisma only in the tenor voice, and even there utilizing it on only two syllables.

The final, and by far the least common type of setting is a motet-style setting, which utilize a highly-contrapuntal style and are often through-composed, rather than strophic. Prominent examples of this type of setting included examples by *Bourgeois* and Goudimel, though *Bourgeois* did not compose a motet-style setting of *De tout mon coeur*

t'exalteray. Goudimel, on the other hand, published eight volumes of motet-style settings between 1555 and 1566, treating all 150 psalms to this type of setting. Figure 5 below shows only the first poetic line of Goudimel's motet-style setting of *De tout mon coeur t'exalteray* from his *Second Livre de Psalmes de David*, published in Paris in 1555.

Figure 5 - Goudimel, 1555

The musical score consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with the lyrics: "De tout mon coeur t'exalteray". The second system continues the piece with the lyrics: "al - - te - ray t'ex - al - - te - ray". The music is written in a style characteristic of the mid-16th century, with a focus on imitative counterpoint and extended melismas.

Of the settings thus far examined, the motet-style settings are overwhelmingly the most freely constructed. Extended melismas predominate the writing and though the counterpoint is imitative between voices, there is not a cantus firmus. This setting by Goudimel does not make use of the Genevan melody to *De tout mon coeur t'exalteray* at

all, preferring instead a series of melodic figures that are developed over the course of a single strophe of text. Like a motet, the setting is divided into parts which are distinguished by their use of common melodic materials. Undoubtedly, settings such as these are influenced by contemporary Parisian styles of motet and chanson writing and represent an engagement between Calvinists and broader musical culture. Some of the implications of this will be considered later in this chapter.

While all of these four-voice settings present conflicts—some more strongly than others—with the Calvinist mandates regarding worship, many scholars have suggested that they might simply represent a localized violation of the rules. While the vast majority of these works include prefaces or instructions in their opening pages which indicate their explicitly pietistic function as private devotionals, their difficulty has led to skepticism. Ludwig Fincher, writing in the first edition of *Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* took this stance in his description of the Calvinist psalm traditions.

Titles and prefaces claim that even the motet settings of Bourgeois and Goudimel are intended for performances at home devotions. In the face of their technical requirements, this is, to say the least, doubtful... the infiltration of the motet and simple psalm settings into the Reformed Church in Switzerland must have taken place.⁹⁴

Finscher goes on to suggest that these liturgical performances must have been realized by utilizing professional instrumentalists or a choir, two things explicitly forbidden in Calvin's writings, due to their connections with Roman Catholicism and their conflict with a strictly congregational hierarchical structure.

⁹⁴ Qtd. In Pidoux. "Polyphonic Settings of the Genevan Psalter: Are They Church Music?", 65.

Pierre Pidoux strongly opposes this interpretation in his 1967 article, “Polyphonic Settings of the Genevan Psalter: Are They Church Music?” drawing primarily on two reasons for its implausibility. Firstly, Pidoux notes the total lack of documentary evidence to support this position, observing that “no testimonies of contemporaries make the slightest allusion to the liturgical performance of the psalm written for various voices.”⁹⁵ He also points to the dearth of reprints of the four-voice settings when compared with the unison settings of the Genevan tunes. After their initial flourishing in the late sixteenth century, many of these editions (including popular settings by noted composers like Goudimel or Claude le Jeune) laid dormant for more than a century before any interest was shown in them again. By contrast, the official psalter of 1565 remained in continuous print during this same interval. Secondly, he notes that the vast majority (excepting Goudimel’s motet-style settings) of the four-voice settings of the psalter are strophic, but they do not provide text underlay for the subsequent verses of text. He notes that these settings treat the first strophe in such a way that it is impossible to sing the text of the other strophes to this music. Only the Genevan melody which serves as a cantus firmus is capable of bearing all the text, and thus it follows that this would have been the only line that was sung.⁹⁶ Pidoux suggests that this might also imply that the other voices were intended to be performed on instruments which he takes as further evidence of their impracticality for liturgical use.

While Pidoux’s arguments are not water-tight, they certainly uncover many of the issues involved in any examination of these extra-liturgical engagements with the psalter.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 68.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

While there is certainly a chance that highly ornate settings were utilized for liturgical purposes, this would be so blatantly contradictory to both the dictums by which the church conducted itself and the nature of the materials from the psalter which formed the basis of these settings. It is surely worth considering the ways in which these settings might have been used by Calvinists at the time and examining the ways in which they interacted directly or indirectly with Calvin himself.

One essential component of the psalters receptions in France and Switzerland was the increasing musical literacy which was fueled partially by Calvinist efforts like Bourgeois's *Le Droict Chemin de Musique*. While music had formerly been a luxury of nobility, this attitude was slowly being challenged by a rising middle-class, especially in France. Richard Freedman comments,

If aristocrats frequently directed music towards their own needs, they by no means held a monopoly on musical expression. The French musical press of the first half of the sixteenth century, although authorized and protected by the dynastic state, nevertheless made music available to a broad and newly literate public...in all its varied forms and settings, music was for Renaissance France both an ornament of daily life and a vital means of making plain the order of French society itself.⁹⁷

This newly French literate public apparently had a strong penchant for Calvinist tunes, because they sold in tremendous numbers. The Genevan tunes even gain popularity outside of Calvinist circles, and it is this phenomenon to which Walter Blankenburg attributes the large number of extra-liturgical engagements with the psalters.

There are, in fact, no records of polyphonic singing during the service in the 16th century. The numerous polyphonic settings of the Genevan Psalter can be explained, so it seems, by the great popularity its melodies rapidly

⁹⁷ Richard Freedman. "France: 1520-1560" in *European Music, 1520-1640*, ed. James Haar (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2006), 170.

achieved even beyond the denominational borders, which were at first not sharply defined.⁹⁸

Blankenburg notes that even during the decades of persecution of Calvinism, many non-Calvinist composers continued to engage with Calvinist musical sources because of their immense popularity.

Among Calvinists in the late sixteenth-century, it appears that these settings got a fair amount of use, especially for home devotionals. Calvin suggests the possibility of the private use of music in his 1543 preface, when he discusses the possibility that “the practice of singing may extend more widely; it is even in the homes and in the fields an incentive for us, and, as it were, an organ of praise to God, and to lift up our hearts to Him.”⁹⁹ Contemporaneous accounts record the diligence and enthusiasm with which Calvinists attended their private performances of the psalms. Pidoux notes that the melodies of the psalter were received with “stupendous enthusiasm” and that “contemporaries were not satisfied with singing them in the churches; they sang them at their work, in the field, on the streets, in their homes, and even in the cabarets—such is the price of popularity!”¹⁰⁰ He also notes their favorable reception among musicians, citing both the number and quality of composers which chose to engage with the psalter during the sixteenth century. In addition their domestic use, some contemporaneous reports suggest they had propaganda value as well. Claude de Rubys, a Catholic lawyer and arch-opponent of Protestants in Lyon, wrote that the Protestants lured the lower

⁹⁸ Blankenburg, 532.

⁹⁹ Calvin, “Epistle to the Reader,” 366.

¹⁰⁰ Pidoux, “Polyphonic Settings of the Genevan Psalter: Are They Church Music?,” 67.

classes with the melody of their “songs of Marot and Bèze” and added that “Satan always used the voices of men and women, singing together melodiously and in musical harmony, as bait to attract women and ignorant people to his cause.”¹⁰¹

With the amount of repetition of the psalms within the liturgical calendar, parishioners were quickly very familiar with the tunes and texts and became quite protective of them. In the early years of psalm singing in Geneva, parishioners would have known the tunes and texts to the fifty psalms published in 1542 by heart since they were the only officially sanctioned settings and remained that way until the publication of thirty-three more in the 1551 psalter. Taking later psalm tables as a guide, the full cycle of psalms from the 1542 psalter could be completed nearly six times in a single year.¹⁰² Because of this, nearly any polyphonic setting or harmonizations of the Genevan tunes, especially those coming about of Genevan printing presses, began with a preface which explained that “the part which one sings in church remains pure in its entirety” and assuring readers that they would find the tune with which they were familiar, despite the change of musical texture. The anecdotal evidence which most powerfully speaks to how protective Genevans became of their tunes is the famous incident between Loys Bourgeois and the Geneva city council in 1551. Following the publication of his *Octante trois psaumes* by Genevan printer Jean Crespin in 1551, Bourgeois was imprisoned for having changed the tunes of some printed psalms without a license. The council

¹⁰¹ Qtd. In Frank Dobbins, “Lyons: Commercial and Cultural Metropolis” in *The Renaissance: From the 1470s to the End of the 16th Century*, ed. Iain Fenlon (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 210.

¹⁰² Obviously the singing of psalms within the Calvinist tradition was not as frequent or dedicated as the tradition of psalm singing in the offices of the Catholic church, which required that all 150 psalms be sung each week, but in vernacular singing traditions of the Reformation, this represents a high volume of interaction with a small repertory of texts and melodies.

complained that the faithful, who had learned the tunes from earlier publications, were disorientated by the new melodies, and they ordered the publisher to stop publication of the book immediately and to burn the prefatory epistle to the reader, in which Bourgeois claimed that not to sing was tantamount to blasphemy. Interestingly, Calvin was only able to exonerate Bourgeois by personally interceding with the council on his behalf, claiming that the melodic changes were merely a “printer’s error” and demanding that the original melodies be restored.¹⁰³ Though he was released from prison the following day, the controversy continued. In the following months, ministers from surrounding communities followed Geneva’s lead and refused to accept the new volume as well. Bourgeois, obviously frustrated by the situation, requested an extended leave in August 1552, to visit Lyons and Paris to publish his psalm settings, but he never returned to Geneva and the council eventually terminated his employment.¹⁰⁴ This colorful anecdote not only demonstrates how protective Calvinist citizens and leaders were of the Genevan melodies, but also how well-known they were, especially in a period during which the psalter was still in a state of flux.

Following his dispute with the Geneva city council (and the subsequent termination of his employment), Loys Bourgeois moved to Lyon and continued to write music for Calvinist audiences. Lyon was a town dominated by Protestants and the music printers there were committed to publishing anything connected to the popular Calvinist psalter. In fact, by the early 1560s printers were bringing out two or three new editions of

¹⁰³ Dobbins, *Music in Renaissance Lyons*, 260.

¹⁰⁴ Idem. “Bourgeois, Loys.” In Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/03721> (accessed April 20, 2011).

the psalter per year to satisfy demand.¹⁰⁵ The success of the psalter in Lyon does not explain, however, the Bourgeois' choice to leave Lyon and move to Paris, sometime before May 1560.¹⁰⁶ Even more strange is Bourgeois' decision to have his daughter Suzanne baptized in the Catholic church of Saint-Côme and his publication of several newly-composed secular chansons which he had previously condemned as "that effeminate music, which is intended to express the voluptuousness or languor of love."¹⁰⁷ By all accounts, Bourgeois seems to have defected from Protestantism in his late life and re-associated himself with more secular musical style.

One interesting, and plausible reason for this move back to these secular styles is the climate in Paris surrounding the settings of Genevan psalms. As early as the 1540s, composers associated with the court (notably Clément Janequin and Thomas Champion) and even with the Catholic church (notably Pierre Certon) and working in Paris were taking the Marot and Bèze versifications of the psalms as the impetus for vocal compositions. Marot, having worked extensively as a court poet for King Francis I, was familiar with poetic tastes of the time and his psalm translations were taken as exemplary of new French sensibilities. Walter Blankenburg has remarked that

In creating a rhyming Psalter, Calvin, on the eve of the Reformation, could take advantage to a certain extent of the trend emerging in France to make poems out of psalms and to sing them, and of the Protestant example of Strasbourg. At the suggestion of King Francis I, Marot, favorite poet of the French court, sent his psalm versifications even to Emperor Charles V; Catherine de' Medici, Marguerite of Navarre, Henry II, and Diane de Poitiers also used these poems sung to

¹⁰⁵ Frank Dobbins. "Lyons: Commercial and Cultural Metropolis," p. 209-10.

¹⁰⁶ Idem, "Bourgeois, Loys," in *Grove Music Online*.

¹⁰⁷ Idem, *Music in Renaissance Lyons*, p. 195

French melodies, which shows that such poems were at first not peculiar exclusively to reformative tendencies. It is not clear what melodies were used—that is, whether they were folk song or chanson tunes—but the later seems more likely, since Marot’s artful verse forms, created out of the spirit of humanism, had a natural relationship to the contemporary French chanson.¹⁰⁸

Though psalms were being set by composers working outside of the Protestant faith, but they clearly served a different function without their liturgical context. This can be seen from a closer examination of one of the institutions in Paris that was most closely associated with psalm settings, Jean-Antoine de Baïf’s Académie de Poésie et de Musique.

In the 1560s, Baïf began experimenting with a new poetic style, the *vers mesurés à l’antique*, in an effort to achieve a closer union of verse and music.¹⁰⁹ One of the texts which he routinely attempted to cast in this new poetic form was the psalms and his own versifications of the psalms were set to music several times, most notably by Jacques Mauduit. The stated purpose of Baïf’s new poetic style was to use the meters of classical poetry in an attempt to revive “the fabled moral and spiritual effects of the ancients.”¹¹⁰ Baïf hoped to achieve his goal by including musicians in the process who would match his new poetic style with a *musique mesurée à l’antique* that was similarly inspired by classical aesthetic ideals. One of the composers closely associated with the Académie was Claude Le Jeune who worked extensively in a variety of style throughout his career, including several polyphonic settings of the psalms (notably the *Dodecacorde*, published

¹⁰⁸ Blankenburg, “Church Music in Reformed Europe,” p. 518.

¹⁰⁹ Frank Dobbins. “Baïf, Jean-Antoine de.” In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/01788> (accessed April 29, 2011).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

in 1598) and a complete homophonic setting of the Genevan psalter published after his death in 1600.

It is interesting that Le Jeune and Baïf were able to collaborate given their wildly different religious affiliations. Le Jeune, a well-known Protestant and the author of a prominent anti-Catholic tract, was forced to flee Paris during the siege of 1590, taking refuge in the nearby Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle.¹¹¹ Baïf, on the other hand, was a fervent Roman Catholic, even writing a sonnet in praise of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572 in which nearly 30,000 Protestants were killed by Catholic forces.¹¹² Le Jeune and Baïf are indicative of larger trends of collaboration between Catholics and Protestants in Paris around the subject of the psalms. Just as Marot and Bèze's psalm versifications were embraced by Catholic composers so too were Baïf's adopted by Protestants and it seems that Baïf's Académie provided a meeting place for the two sides. When Le Jeune was forced to flee Paris in 1590, it was the Catholic composer and fellow Académie member Jacques Mauduit who saved what many consider Le Jeune's masterpiece, the *Dodecacorde*, from the fires of the Parisian riots.¹¹³ The abundance of cross-religious collaboration around a similar set of aesthetic goals in sixteenth century Paris is a largely unexplored topic and one that demands a larger consideration than is properly within the scope of this study.

¹¹¹ Frank Dobbins and Isabelle His. "Le Jeune, Claude." In *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/16365> (accessed April 29, 2011).

¹¹² John A. Wagner. *Voices of Shakespeare's England: Contemporary Accounts of Elizabethan Daily Life*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010, p. 70.

¹¹³ Dobbins and His. "Le Jeune, Claude." In *Grove Music Online*.

Epilogue

The implications of studying the genesis and reception of the Calvinist psalters of the sixteenth century are broad-reaching. Understanding the nature of Calvinist aesthetics and the vocabulary that shaped the debates surround it is essential to any understanding of sixteenth-century France writ large. As Howard Mayer Brown observed in his posthumously published article “Ut Musica Poesis,”

There is yet another connection to be made in studying the simple humanistic music of the later sixteenth century: its relationship with French Protestantism. For there is a curious point of contact between the poets’ views of what an ideal music should be and the Protestant view that sacred or devotional texts should be sung to very simple music so that their words might be better understood—not only the Marot translations of the Psalms but also the many *chanson spirituelles*, hymns and other devotional songs that circulated widely in the Protestant world. These simple musical repertoires, especially suitable for poets and the devout, have been less closely studied than they should have been because they seem to us so crippling for musicians. But if we are ever to understand the complex interplay of music, poetry, ideas and politics we need to set aside aesthetic criteria, however important they normally are to us, in the effort to comprehend better the entire range of musical activity in sixteenth-century France, as well as its effects and purposes.¹¹⁴

Calvinist music of the sixteenth century is a diverse and dynamic repertory shaped by an enthusiastic group of converts to a growing religious tradition. As the music progressed into the latter half of the sixteenth and on into the seventeenth century, increasing conflict and contact with other Protestant and Catholic traditions allowed for the music to continue to develop and contributed to the diversity of composers that were

¹¹⁴ Howard Mayer Brown. “Ut Musica Poesis,” p. 17.

drawn to the psalters made in Geneva. Many of the tunes found in the psalter, as well as some of the harmonizations done by Goudimel and others, can still be found in Protestant hymnals today as congregations continue to sing the psalms on a weekly basis. John Calvin, a man who probably received only a cursory musical education and was a self-professed skeptic of music's over-emphasis in sacred contexts, provided the impetus for what is still considered one of the landmarks of Christian hymnology and a collection that has undoubtedly affected countless generations of composers in Switzerland, France and beyond.

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