The Aesthetics of Song in Calvinist Piety in the Early Reformation (1536–1545)

Christian Grosse

In Revue de l'histoire des religions Volume 227, Issue 1, 2010, pages 13 to 31
Publishers Armand Colin

ISSN 0035-1423
DOI 10.4000/rhr.7557

CHRISTIAN GROSSE
Geneva University

The Aesthetics of Song in Calvinist Piety in the Early Reformation (1536–1545)

Contrary to common belief, aesthetics had an important function in ritual forms implemented by Reformed Calvinist Churches. The impact of aesthetics on Reformed piety rested less on images, considered to be a source of distraction, than on music. By reconsidering the evolution of Calvin's thoughts on the relationship between music and religious services between 1536 and 1543, this study reveals how Calvin came to consider that, by singing psalms, Christians in their devotion could conciliate both a cognitive process guided by the meaning of the words and an affective response triggered by the tune. For Calvin, the spiritual elevation to which religious services should lead was to emerge from the conjunction of these two impetuses.

It is still difficult today to study issues of ritual, the use of art, the senses, and emotion in Reformed religious culture without starting by confronting the ideas and representations that have long determined how these questions are envisioned. In general opinion, the Reformation remains part of an undertaking of rejection of the ritual culture of medieval Christianity. It is thus thought to have founded a religion with anti-ritualism as one of its dominant characteristics. According to this view, by restoring worship "in spirit and in truth," the Reformation attempted above all to center communication with the divine on the word, replacing an essentially collective piety that thrived on gestures and images with a more interior, spiritual, and individual piety. The condemnation of all iconographical representations of the divine is thought to have broken the link between

art and ritual, while iconoclastic violence, which was the practical expression of a religious culture reacting against the materialization of the divine and the conviction that the visible can mediate the believer's relationship with God, is thought to have prevented the eye from taking hold of anything inside churches that were transformed into temples. Stripped of any true ritual and iconographic tools that could help awaken the emotions, Reformed religion, based on *sola scriptura*, is said to have replaced imagination and emotion with rigorous commentary followed by the divine word through the sermon.

In reality, the elements of Reformed worship aesthetics should be located within this tension between the cognitive dimension and the emotional dimension, between speech addressing intelligence and tools directed to the senses. That is the goal of this article. But first it is appropriate to recall the obstacles that persistent clichés raise against the attempt to conceive of ritual and aesthetics together in Reformed religious culture.

The Aesthetic Deficiencies of Reformed Worship

Indeed, the ideas and representations evoked above continue today to be strengthened by similar observations made in discussions within Reformed Protestantism as well as in recent historiographic research. Studies of the relationships between worship and art in Reformed religion have essentially agreed since at least the 19th century in observing that a Reformed deficit in ritual is accompanied by an aesthetic acculturation. "Is worship discussed, either in conversation or in books? Immediately it is invariably put forth that Protestantism smothered the soaring imagination, and thus was mistaken about the nature of man and the effects of worship," François Chapuis wrote in 1834.[1] This observation continued throughout the 19th century and its echoes continue to resonate at the end of the following century, in the writings of both Protestants and historians. Louis-Frédérik Choisy thus regretted at the beginning of the last century the "indifference" of Reformed churches "toward

1. François Chapuis, *Essais sur les réformes du culte public* (Geneva: Impr. Ch. Gruaz, 1834), 24.

aesthetics,"[2] while Jérôme Cottin summed up the state of the issue by indicating that "there exists a general consensus tending to prove that Calvin did not understand anything about images and, consequently, about anything closely or distantly related to them: sacramentaries, liturgy, art, or aesthetics."[3] Observations of Reformation religious architecture seem similar: the literature on the issue is so limited that it appears as the sign, according to Bernard Reymond, of "a kind of asceticism or mortification of the eyes" in Reformed Christianity.[4] The art historian Hans Belting shares this assessment by interpreting "the bare walls of Reformed churches" as "the symbol of a purified and de-sensualized religion that swears only by the word."[5]

We can distinguish several attitudes in these observations. Deploring the "monotony," "gravity," "coldness," "bareness," or "dryness" of their own religion, 19th-century Protestants with "evangelist" tendencies attempted to reconcile religion and aesthetics by trying to reform liturgies or by granting more emphasis to decoration in their temples.[6] Against this tendency, the liberal current claims, on the contrary, that the aesthetic sobriety of Reformed religion to its fullest is the sign of a religion that primarily speaks to intelligence. Eugène Choisy thus bases his defense of the Protestant eucharistic ritual on the opposition between feeling and imagination on the one hand, and speech expressing rationality on the other.[7]

2. Louis-Frédérik Choisy, *Le Culte protestant. Réflexions et suggestions* (Geneva: Van Dieren Éditeur, 1926), 12.

3. Jérôme Cottin, *Le Regard et la parole. Une théologie protestante de l'image* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994), 285.

4. Bernard Reymond, *L'Architecture religious des protestants* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996), 8, 35.

5. Hans Belting, *Image et culte. Une histoire de l'art avant l'époque de l'art*, trans. Frank Muller (Paris: Le Cerf, 1998), 617.

6. See Chapuis, *Essais*, 46. See also François David, *Histoire des liturgies du culte chrétien* (Geneva: Ferdinand Ramboz, 1840), 36, and Eugène Bersier, "Culte," in *Encyclopédie des sciences religieuses*, ed. F. Lichtenberger (Paris: Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1870), II: 530.

7. Eugène Choisy, *La Théocratie à Genève au temps de Calvin* (Geneva: C. Eggimann, 1897), 238. Louis Choisy defends the same position when he acknowledges feeling "serious concern when, during worship, feeling and imagination are put too much into motion, and when one is inclined to neglect conscience." He concludes by emphasizing that "preaching must keep its rank in our worship." Louis Choisy, *L'Adoration dans le culte. Rapport présenté à Genève le 27 septembre 1897 à la seizième assemblée générale de l'union évangélique suisse* (Geneva: E. Beroud, 1887).

A third tendency finally tried, during the first half of the 20th century, to take a position that was both more overarching and more theoretical by trying to reconstitute a positive Reformed theology of the image and to connect this theology to a Protestant artistic tradition.[8] Concerned with returning to the sources, mainly to Calvin's writings, these studies managed to bring together documentation on the subject that had previously remained scattered, but they have essentially apologetic aims.[9]

An assessment of this research remains mixed. At the end of the previous century, Jérôme Cottin still observed, regarding images, that "Protestant theology […] generally did not say anything positive about them, and it has been so since the 16th century, with the well-known but quickly forgotten exception of Luther after 1522." After trying to renew this approach by using semiotics, Cottin must however admit that while it is possible to arrive at "methodological preliminaries" on this issue, it is, on the other hand, too early to formulate a "theological aesthetics" from the Protestant tradition.[10]

What is most striking in all this discussion, beyond the attempt it shows to reformulate positively Reformed culture's relationship to art, is that the specific problem of a Reformed aesthetics of worship is generally only raised as a subtopic to the more general question of the relationship between art and Reformed religion. This problem is thus posed from a point of view that biases the approach and reduces the scope of the conclusions that authors who are interested in it have reached. In the same way that they finally highlight the dynamic and

8. See in particular Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007); Emile Doumergue, *L'Art et le sentiment dans l'oeuvre de Calvin. Trois conférences prononcées à Genève dans la salle de la Réformation, à Lausanne, dans le temple de Saint-François en avril 1902* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970); Léon Wencelius, *L'Esthétique de Calvin* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1937); Paul Romane Musculus, *La Prière des mains. L'église réformée et l'art* (Paris: Editions "Je sers," 1938); Pierre Bourget et al., *Protestantisme et beaux-arts* (Paris: Editions "Je sers," 1945). For a synthetic presentation of this literature and its main orientations, see Philip Benedict, "Calvinism as a culture? Preliminary remarks on Calvinism and the visual arts," in *Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition*, ed. Paul Corby Finney (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 19–24.

9. Observing, for example, that "it has become a commonplace, among many thinkers, that Protestantism was hostile to beauty and to art in all its forms from the beginning, and that since then it has been faithful to this tradition," L. Wencelius announces his intention to "review the trial." Wencelius, *Esthétique*, 10.

10. Cottin, *Regard*, 18.

non-contentious aspect of Reformed religion's ultimate relationship with art, they also try above all to prove that, far from simply rejecting ritual expression, this religion had a positive theology of worship. Once these two demonstrations have been made, the essential part of the task that these authors assigned themselves seems to have been achieved in such a way that a synthesis is no longer necessary.

Moreover, the highlighting of the "iconic" aspect of the sacrament in Reformed doctrine, which recognizes it as a "painting" or a "mirror," has not allowed for an account of the religious aesthetics of the Reformation. It has led, on the one hand, to a semiotics that tries to explain the relationship between the sign and the signified that is part of the image[11] and, on the other hand, to a theology of the divinely instituted means of communication with men.

In order to leave behind both the apologetic viewpoints and the dead-ends that have just been pointed out, we must adopt an oblique strategy of tackling the problem not primarily on the theoretical level, but as it presented itself historically. Then, we will see that in reality Reformed religious aesthetics took shape on a basis other than that of the image. In this regard, the development of Calvinist thought, during the period when the ritual forms of Reformed worship were being established, or mainly between 1537 and 1543, must be considered foundational from the point of view of Reformed tradition.

Genesis of a Reformed Religious Aesthetics (1536–1543)

In the first edition of *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, published in Basel in 1536, Calvin was not at all concerned with liturgical questions. Supporting a eucharistic celebration coinciding with the Sunday worship service, he did admittedly propose, in the chapter on the sacraments, the general lines of a liturgy organized around the sermon and communion. But the order to follow in this celebration was described in only about ten lines. Calvin was more focused on denouncing the "tyranny" that ritual obligations imposed by the Roman Catholic Church exerted over Christian consciences than on exactly defining the outlines of the religious customs that

11. On this semiotics, see, for example, Bernard Cottret, "Pour une sémiotique de la Réforme: le *Consensus Tigurinus* (1549) et la *Brève résolution* (1555) de Calvin," *Annales ESC* 39, no. 2 (1984): 265–285.

were intended to replace the ritual system inherited from medieval Christianity. As he was above all concerned with defending "Christian freedom" and as he had no pastoral responsibilities, he considered that, except for practices that were divinely instituted to attest to the promise of salvation, customs of worship were irrelevant and could therefore be freely determined by each church. In his mind, their forms had their source in history and local traditions; they thus were only marginally related to theology. Refraining therefore from entering into detailed descriptions, Calvin limited himself to establishing general rules: religious practices must always conform to Scriptural recommendations, tend to edify the faithful by not concealing the divine intentions, and respect the principles of simplicity, honesty, and decency.[12] Overall, his thinking is quite summary, and essentially prescriptive; the aesthetic question does not really belong here.

It is only after he was kept in Geneva by Guillaume Farel in 1536 and then invested with a pastoral function that Calvin started assessing the importance of forms of worship and asking himself what ritual forms it was appropriate to use to stimulate the devotion of the faithful. The first elements of a doctrine on the aesthetic aspect of worship came out of these new concerns. Characteristically, this thinking was not devoted to the theme of images or sacraments, but was developed based on music's role in the religious service. The first trace of this thinking is found in a series of measures intended to consolidate the Church of Geneva that Farel and Calvin presented to the Genevan magistrates in January 1537. As a preamble to the "Articles" that contained these proposals, the authors pointed out in particular that "it is very useful for the church's edification to sing some psalms as public prayers […] in order that the hearts of all may be moved and encouraged to form [such] prayers and give such praise and thanks to God with the same affection." Further on, they developed their argument in favor of the introduction of psalm singing in the celebrations at the Church of Geneva. They point out first of all that these celebrations are "so cold, that this should put us into great shame and confusion"; the solution to remedy this coldness seems to come to them from singing: "Psalms will encourage

12. John Calvin, *Joannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (Brunswick, Berlin: Schwestschke and Filium, 1863–1900), I: 3–252, especially 81–90, 102–139.

us to lift our hearts to God and move us to ardor to invoke him and to exalt with praise the glory of his name."[13]

In embryonic form, these short remarks contain most of the elements of a theory of music's function as a vehicle of religious emotion, to which Calvin would give definitive shape in the early 1540s. At this stage at least, the idea is clearly expressed that speech alone does not suffice and that, in order to produce its effects, it needs an aid so that the cognitive effect provoked by the verbal meaning is joined by an emotional effect carried by the music.

During his three-year exile in Strasbourg, between 1538 and 1541, Calvin was influenced by the theologian Martin Bucer who had helped establish a worship service including psalm singing in that city starting in the early 1520s. Calvin, who was in charge of the French community established in Strasbourg, was then working both on developing his theology of music in the context of a new edition of *Institution de la religion chrétienne* and on putting his ideas to the test by introducing to that community's religious services a first group of nineteen psalms, put into verse partly by himself and partly by the poet Clément Marot.[14] At the same time, he refined his liturgical ideas by writing a liturgy for this community whose first edition is lost and which we know by its re-edition.[15]

13. Calvin, *Opera*, 10: 6–12 ("Articles" of January 16, 1537). Religious services were then celebrated in Geneva according to the liturgy of Guillaume Farel (1533) which did not mention singing psalms. See Guillaume Farel, *La Maniere et fasson qu'on tient es lieux que Dieu de sa grace a visites*, ed. Jean-Guillaume Baum (Strasbourg: Treuttel and Wurtz; Paris: J. Cherbuliez, 1959). On the importance of these "Articles" for Calvin's thinking on music and more generally on the development of his theology of music, the best treatment is that of Charles Garside, "The Origins of Calvin's Theology of Music," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69:4 (1979): 1–36. For a more recent study with a more theological perspective, see Jan Smelik, "Die Theologie der Musik bei Johannes Calvin als Hintergrund des Genfer Psalters," in *Der Genfer Psalter und seine Rezeption in Deutschland, der Schweiz und den Niederlanden, 16-18 Jahrhundert*, ed. Grunewald et al (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004), 61–77.

14. *Aulcuns Pseaulmes et Cantiques mys en chant*. Strasbourg, 1539. See the phototypographic reproduction by D. Delétra (Geneva: Jullien, 1919).

15. John Calvin, *La Manyere de faire prieres aux eglises francoyses, tant devant la predication comme apres, ensemble pseaulmes et canticques francoys qu'on chante aus dictes églises…*, [false address:] Printed in Rome on order of the Pope, par Theodore Brüss Allemant, his regular printer, February 15 (1542). For a summary of this period, see most recently Robert Weeda, *L'"Eglise des Français" de Strasbourg (1538-1563). Rayonnement européen de sa liturgie et de ses Psautiers* (Baden-Baden and Bouxwiller: Editions Valentin Koerner, 2004), 13–39.

Called back to Geneva in 1541, Calvin published a new liturgy there the following year, preceded by a short seven-page preface ("Epistre au lecteur") ["Letter to the reader"] in which he justified his liturgical ideas.[16] In 1543, he wrote a new version of this preface along with a study of the role of music and particularly psalm singing.[17] This modified text would subsequently appear at the beginning of all the Reformed Psalters published in French until the 17th century. It had a very wide distribution, especially after the completion of the complete versification of the one hundred and fifty psalms in 1562. For the single year 1562, over thirty thousand copies introduced by this text were printed in Geneva. In that regard, this preface played an essential role in the development and spread of Reformed devotion. Due to its influence and the importance of its contents for understanding the aesthetics of Reformed worship services, it calls for a detailed analysis.

"Inflaming the Hearts of Men": Calvin's Preface to the Psalter

From the beginning, in its first version, this document takes a very clear position on the status of sight in the worship experience. The liturgical standards decreed by God, Calvin writes in the first sentences, were not decreed "only to amuse people with seeing and looking."[18] Right away, Calvin removes the visual aspect of worship, because he considers it to be a source of distraction for the faithful. He therefore tries to situate the debate in an area that seems more essential to him. Recalling the rule that he had already expressed in 1536 that "everything that is done in Church" must be "related to the common edification of all," he defines this process of edification as being first of all of a cognitive nature. The worship service can

16. John Calvin, *La Forme des prieres et chantz ecclesiastiques, avec la maniere d'administrer les Sacremens, et consacrer le Mariage: selon la coustume de l'Eglise ancienne* (Geneva: Jean Girard, 1542), f. a2–a5.

17. Pierre Pidoux, *Le Psautier huguenot du XVIe siècle. Mélodies et documents* (Basel: Baerenreiter, 1962), II: 15–21. Starting in 1543, the "Letter to the Reader" was titled "To all Christians and lovers of the word of God, hail." The preface is cited from Calvin, *Opera*, VI: 165–172.

18. Calvin, *Opera*, VI: columns 165–166. The entire preface occupies columns 165 to 172. All following quotations are from this edition.

therefore only exert the effects that are expected of it on the condition that we "are instructed to have intelligence of everything that has been ordered for our utility." In other words, the first rule that the service must obey is to employ speech that the faithful are able to understand. This beginning paves the way for a long argument, supported by the authority of Saint Paul,[19] in favor of the use of the vernacular in worship services. Every believer's possibility of "being a participant" by replying with an "amen" to a prayer that is "done in the name and in the person of all," the maintaining of "the communion of the Church" by the worship service, can only happen if the service uses the common language. The text insists here on the community value of the service, which constitutes one of the essential characteristics of Reformed liturgical services.

Calvin returns to this reasoning and refines it in a passage devoted to the sacraments. In it, he adheres to the Augustinian doctrine that sacraments are "visible words."[20] He therefore recognizes the "iconic" aspect of the sacrament in the sense that it uses signs and ritual acts that represent spiritual promises in perceptible form. But he immediately adds that unless it is enlightened by speech, the meaning of the sacrament remains inaccessible. Reduced to its function of representation, the sacrament does not produce any intelligible meaning. There is therefore no autonomy of representation in relation to speech. In the sacrament, "there must not only be an external spectacle, but the doctrine must be joined to it, in order to make it intelligible."

These passages from the preface to the liturgy of 1542 confirm that using images to reconstitute the aesthetics of Reformed worship ends up privileging polemical discussions in which a positive doctrine on the subject is rarely expressed explicitly. At first glance,

19. Particularly 1 Co 14, 14–16. "If I pray in a strange language, my voice prays, but my intelligence is without fruit. What is then to be done? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my intelligence, I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my intelligence. Otherwise, if you bless with your voice someone from the simple popular class, how will he say Amen to your blessing? For he does not know what you are saying." *La Bible française de Calvin* (Paris: Ed. Reuss, 1897), 571.

20. On this doctrine and its influence on Calvinist theology of the sacraments and of communion in particular, see Gilian R. Evans, "Calvin on Signs: an Augustinian Dilemma," in *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism: A Fourteen-Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles*, ed. Richard C. Gamble (New York and London: Garland, 1992), X: 153–163.

it appears that judging by these same passages we must agree with all those who judged that the Reformation destroyed all sense-based expressions in the worship experience by reducing it to simple instruction. In this view, Reformed culture would thus be effectively dominated by the primacy of the homiletic commentary of the divine word and therefore essentially characterized by its logocentrism. But the preface also considers another important element.

In his introduction, Calvin proposes a definition of devotion—or "good affection toward God"—that joins two elements; we have thus far only treated one of them. According to him, this "affection" constitutes an "intense movement, proceeding from the Holy Spirit, when the heart is directly touched, and the understanding illuminated." We will leave aside here the more theological part of this definition, which reminds us that human abilities are too weakened by sin for the faithful to be able to count on them when they speak to the divine: this communication depends above all on the initiative and activity of the Holy Spirit.[21] If the analysis so far has focused on the importance of speech for the "illumination" of the intelligence and therefore on the cognitive aspect of the worship experience, this is because this aspect is the one that Calvin developed as a priority and to which he devoted the entire first part of his preface. He approached the second aspect, concerning the participation of the "heart" and emotion in this experience, only in the conclusion of the first version of this preface. Then he evoked it in only a few lines, but these are the lines that he developed fully in the expanded edition in 1543.

In 1542, Calvin wrote "hastily," in a hurry to give the Church of Geneva both a liturgy and a catechism.[22] At that time he limited himself to defending the introduction of psalm singing into the Church's liturgical practices by emphasizing, on the one hand, that he had learned (in Strasbourg) "by experience that singing has

21. Regarding the participation of the "understanding" and the "heart" in prayer, Calvin points out that "both languish down here, or, to put it more exactly, fail, or are turned the wrong way. That is why God, to remedy such debility, gives us his Spirit as master, which teaches us and says what we are allowed to ask, and governs our affections." John Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, ed. Jean-Daniel Benoît (Paris: Vrin, 1957–1963), III: XX, 5.

22. On the conditions of the writing of these texts, see Calvin's own statement in the farewell speech that he wrote for the other ministers a few days before dying (Calvin, *Opera*: IX, c. 894).

great strength and vigor to move and inflame men's hearts, to invoke and praise God with a more vehement and ardent zeal," and also by strengthening, on the other hand, the distinction between profane music as an instrument of enjoyment and psalm singing in Church, which is characterized by "weight and majesty." This is the defense that he returned to in 1543. He then aimed to determine to what extent music can be used in worship services in a way to stimulate the devotion of the faithful. Here, Calvin pursued ideas that he had expressed as of 1536 in *Institution de la religion chrétienne*. In the chapter on prayer, he had mainly insisted on the required preparations of the faithful during prayer. The forms taken by prayer—simply pronounced aloud or supported by singing—appeared there as secondary. On the other hand, he considered it essential that prayer come from an interior impulse toward the divine: "The principal part of prayer," he wrote, "lies in the heart and the spirit," and further in the text he defined it as an "interior desire."[23]

The entire addition of 1543 focuses on the role that music, and more specifically singing, can play to accompany this impulse that is the origin of communication when the divine. While, as we have seen, the Holy Spirit constitutes the true source of this movement, singing nevertheless represents a precious aid. Calvin already recognized this in 1542. The following year he tackled a demonstration of this by indicating how singing must be regulated to fulfill this function.

The pages that were added in 1543[24] were the fruit of a long maturing process on the subject to which both reading and the experience in Strasbourg contributed. Calvin summarized a debate on the virtues of music and the dangers of its use in worship, which goes back to Antiquity and the Church Fathers, Augustine and Chrysostom in particular, and which was relaunched by the humanists and then by the reformers; there are echoes in particular of the debate opposing the reformer Huldrych Zwingli, who rejected music in the profane world, and the Strasbourg reformer Martin Bucer, who, on the contrary, made it part of religious services.[25] The stakes of this debate,

23. Calvin, *Institution* 1536, III, XX, 29; Garside, "Origins," 8.

24. Calvin, *Opera*, vol. 6, c. 169–172.

25. H.P. Clive, "The Calvinist Attitude to Music, and its Literary Aspects and Sources," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* XIX (1957): 80–102, 294–319; XX (1958): 179–207.

according to Calvin's synthesis of it, reside in the dangerously ambivalent nature of the effects of music on human sensibility.

Like most of those who took sides in this debate and together with the humanists especially, Calvin observes that music has "a secret and almost incredible virtue to move hearts in one way or another." A "gift of God" to allow man to be entertained and enjoy himself, it must therefore be "moderated" in order to "let it serve in all honesty and so that it is not an occasion for us to give free rein to dissolution." If the effects produced by music are channeled, it can be a way to support the process of elevating hearts to God, to whom devotion must tend: music can thus be a way "to amuse us and withdraw us from the seductions of the flesh and the world."

To Calvin's mind, psalm singing offers a means of exercising this essential moderation of music while still benefiting from its virtues. His reasoning was based on the distinction between the two components of singing: the "letter" and the "melody." With these two elements, singing can bring together the two movements that constitute devotion, according to Calvin's definition of 1542. While the letter appeals to intelligence and invites a cognitive process, melody touches the heart and invites an experience located on the emotional level. But in order for this convergence to take place, several conditions are still required. The nature of the words that are sung is clearly essential. Indeed, to Calvin's mind, through the very ambivalence of the suggestive power of music there is great risk that singing could function as a stimulus to sin if the melody is associated with bad words. Any words of that kind, Calvin indicated, "pervert good morals, but when the melody is with them, this pierces the heart much more strongly and enters inside. Just as through a funnel wine is poured into a vessel, in the same way the poison and corruption are distilled to the deepest of the heart by melody."

It is at this point that, for at least two reasons, psalm singing appears as the only solution. Calvin restates first of all regarding this the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*: "No one can sing things worthy of God unless they have received them from him: this is why, even if we roam everywhere to search here and there, we will not find any songs that are better or more appropriate to do this than the Psalms of David, which the Holy Spirit told and made for him." Only words inspired by God are compatible with the religious service. For liturgical usage, versifications of biblical texts

are therefore allowed, while original compositions are put aside. This position ends the production of hymns intended for worship services in the Reformed tradition: while in the early stages of the spread of Protestant ideas in French-speaking Switzerland a small body of songs had taken shape and the writing of hymns had continued, before the liturgical changes of the 18th century these songs never entered into the Reformed Psalter that contains all the texts used for worship.[26]

In the second place, psalm singing places the believer in a devotional position where he disregards himself and his ability to exist in a creative manner in relation to God. Renouncing the expression of praise or prayer addressed to the divine in his own terms, he limits himself to borrowing the words inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus converts himself into an instrument that God himself uses for his own glorification: when we sing psalms, Calvin explains, "we are certain that God put the words into our mouths, as if he himself sang in us to exalt his glory." We will see that this form of dispossession of the self is also at the heart of the progression that the liturgy codifies.

In order for psalm singing to bring together intelligence and emotion, it is also necessary for the relationship between these two aspects of the religious experience to be properly regulated. Calvin indicates clearly on this subject that it depends on the meaning of the letter to channel the emotion, which is by its nature ambivalent, that the melody triggers. He starts by acknowledging that "spiritual songs can only be well-sung from the heart." For prayer as for singing, the involvement of an interior movement constitutes a necessary condition. But this is immediately nuanced: "Now the heart requires intelligence." This is, according to Calvin who bases this thought on Augustine, exactly what creates the difference between the singing of birds and that of men: unlike the first, who "will sing well, but […] without understanding, […] the particular gift of man is to sing, while knowing what he is saying." In this double movement supposed by singing, there is therefore really a hierarchy: "After intelligence, the heart and affection must follow."

26. See, for example, the *Cantiques spirituels* of Maturin Cordier (Geneva: 1557) or the *Saincts cantiques* of Théodore de Bèze (Geneva: 1595). See on this subject Jean-Daniel Candaux, *Le Psautier de Genève, 1562-1865* (Geneva: Bibliothèque publique et universitaire, 1986, ch. 10), and Anne Ullberg, *Au Chemin de salvation: la chanson spirituelle réformée (1533–1678)* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala Universitet, 2008).

We find here the undeniable Reformed primacy of speech that determines a form of devotion that is first defined in cognitive terms. But the preface shows at the same time that intelligence alone is not enough. The concepts made by the letter are not truly imprinted in the heart of the believer unless his sensibility is also engaged in devotional movement. In other words, *docere* and *movere* are just as inseparable and necessary to each other in psalm singing and prayer as they are, as Olivier Millet has shown, in the rhetoric of divine communication with men through the Scriptures and in preaching.[27] This signifies, however, that if there is a hierarchy of intelligence and emotion, there is also interdependence between the two components of the devotional movement. Even if he submits the movements of interior religious emotion to the control of a discourse addressed to intelligence, the Reformed service is not therefore reduced to speech and clearly appeals to the involvement of the emotions of its participants. The role of psalm singing is both to stimulate and to give shape to this emotion.

A last condition is still necessary for letter and melody to function in a complementary manner in singing. Returning to a recommendation that he had inserted in 1542, Calvin emphasizes in the conclusion to the new version of his preface that there must be a relationship of similarity or adequacy between the words that are sung and the melody that carries them: "Regarding melody, it has seemed the best advice that it should be moderated, in the way that we have done in order to bear the weight and majesty appropriate to the subject." This doctrine, which is coherent with humanist conceptions of music in the 16th century,[28] concretely imposes the requirement of equivalence between the rhythm of the text and that of the music: for this reason, each syllable has a single note of music composed for the Psalter that corresponds to it.[29] In this way, the control that the letter must exert over the melody is also achieved.

While it is expressed in the preface to define exactly the relationship that must exist between the letter and the melody, this doctrine

27. Olivier Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique de la parole. Étude de rhétorique réformée* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1992), especially 207–224.

28. Clive, "Calvinist Attitude," XX: 102.

29. John D. Witvliet, "The Spirituality of the Psalter: Metrical Psalms in Liturgy and Life in Calvin's Geneva," in *Calvin and Spirituality. Papers Presented at the 10th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, May 18-20, 1995* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Studies Society, 1998), 103–104.

has a more general application in reality. The Calvinist conception of the form of ecclesiastical ceremonies is regulated according to this same doctrine. The watchword is the notion of "majesty."[30] In the same way that the "majesty" of the letter, that is, of the biblical text of the psalms, must find a reflection in the melody that sets it to music, so the ceremonies adopted by the Church must take on a form that is like the mirror of the subject to which they are related. On this condition, they can point toward divine majesty itself and thereby inspire the interior movement that is the source of devotion.[31]All in all, in this regard there is hardly any difference between the functions of psalm singing and those that any ceremony should take on.

In the revised version of *Institution de la religion chrétienne* that he published in Geneva in 1545, two years after writing the second version of the Psalter preface, Calvin developed his doctrine of ceremonies, gathering in this way in his theological summum the fruit of his recent thoughts on these issues. Explaining in the passages that were added to this edition regarding how to understand his recommendation that liturgical acts respect a general rule of "honesty," he specifies that "honesty tends to this, that when one institutes ceremonies to give reverence and majesty to the sacraments [the Latin version writes more generally: *rebus sacris*], the people are moved as by an aid to honor God. Secondly, that there should appear gravity and modesty."[32] We find here, therefore, the same terms as those that were used in the preface of 1543, but which have been granted a more general scope this time.

Organizing the Elevation of Hearts: The Liturgical Progression

When all the conditions that were just discussed are brought together, psalm singing can be part of a progression that we can now reconstitute more schematically. All the texts that have been

30. On the definition of this notion in the Calvinist conception of rhetoric, see Millet, *Calvin*, 241–247.

31. In the 1560 edition of *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, Calvin writes: "Let us know, therefore, that no one is ever duly ready and disposed as is appropriate for prayer, unless he is touched by the majesty of God, in order to present himself to him with all earthly thoughts and affections removed" (III, XX, 5).

32. *Institution* 1545, III, XX, 5.

analyzed describe a movement that starts with an interior state characterized on the emotional level as a "desire" for the divine. While the Holy Spirit contributes to it, psalm singing stimulates this impetus by awakening an initial emotion; if it can take on this function, it is because by borrowing the words inspired by God, the believer reduces his own contribution to silence. The text of the psalms then guides and directs his intelligence and the formal proportion is respected between the style of the words and the style of the music. In this way the believer is engaged in a movement characterized as an "elevation" toward the divine.

This devotional progression closely reflects the progression accomplished by the eucharistic liturgy. As the culminating moments of the liturgical year, intended to renew at regular intervals a process of deepening of faith, the four annual celebrations of the Lord's Supper in the Reformed church connect the liturgy of preaching to that of communion. Thus linked, these two liturgies employ a discourse that frames an interior experience. Without entering into all the details, we can recall that after an invocation that emphasizes human dependence on the all-powerful divine, this experience begins with a confession of sin by which the faithful recognize themselves, faced with divine "majesty," as "useless to any good." The service thus opens with a liturgical act that implies that the participants renounce their ability to bring any other contribution to their relationship to God than this renunciation itself. With this confession, they place themselves in a position of interior void that predisposes them to the "desire" for the divine and allows them to sing with the very words inspired by God.

Moreover, the entire setting in which the celebration takes places issues an identical message: the absence of images, the white walls, and the benches that forbid moving around are not just evidence of Reformed iconophobia, but are all conceived as arrangements intended to remove sources of distractions and to invite the faithful to concentrate on the worship service through a form of interior silence: "Let us not make noise when God is speaking: but let him have such authority over us, that we keep silence for him in such a way that we know that everything he says to us is just," Calvin told his listeners in a sermon from March 1553.[33]

33. Calvin, *Opera*, XXXII, c. 598, sermon on Psalm 119 (March 26, 1553).

The liturgical sequence continues immediately with the singing of a psalm. After the prayers, the recited formulas (Our Father, Decalogue) and the sermon, which explain successively how the worship experience should be experienced, the liturgical preparation of communion concludes with a new prayer whose center is the *sursum corda*, the appeal made by the minister to the elevation of hearts toward God and to moving beyond the signs that the sacrament presents in order to grasp the truth to which it testifies. The faithful are thus invited to experience communication as a vivification of faith, which the liturgy defines both as the fruit of knowledge and as the "enjoyment" of a truth.[34]

The essential part of Reformed worship aesthetics resides finally in this movement of elevation that culminates in the eucharistic *sursum corda*. Issued from the meeting of a cognitive experience and an emotional experience, this movement can only be truly carried by forms of worship that are able to closely link sense and sensibility. To Calvin's mind and according to the theological and liturgical tradition that he helped to found, psalm singing has the specific quality of making these two experiences coincide. This confidence placed in singing ultimately harks back in this tradition to the combined valorization of speech and hearing as instruments of communication with the divine on the one hand,[35] and to a suspicion of images on the other. On this doctrine, Calvin was in line with two of his closest collaborators. Thus, Théodore de Bèze expressed a point of view that was dominant among Protestants when he wrote that "hearing is an infinitely more useful organ for understanding all things in our intellect, than sight,"[36] while Guillaume Farel expressed an opinion that also found consensus when he considered that it is sufficient "that the Church be decorated and adorned with Jesus Christ and the word of his Gospel and his holy Sacraments."[37]

Christian.Grosse@unil.ch

34. Calvin, *Opera*, VI, c. 173–202.

35. "Protestant thought grants predominance to what is related to hearing; it considers it as superior to what is related to the eye, which is seen as the opposite." Reymond, *Architecture*, 49.

36. Théodore de Bèze, *Questions et réponses chrestiennes* (Geneva: Eustache Vignon, 1584), 7–8.

37. Guillaume Farel, *Du Vrai Usage de la croix…* (Geneva: Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1865), 157.