

2. The Concept of Worship

It is hard to categorize all the reformers along the same lines. They were all biblically centered but Calvin was certainly the leader in this field. Things not expressly taught in the Bible he regarded as being unnecessary if not evil. Therefore he saw the importance of the Psalms as "god-given" worship. He felt that God could only be worshipped on His own terms..and he had provided the public song in the Psalter. He did not favor musical instruments.. ..they were used in the Old Testament because the Jews were a people who had not come to full age and so had many teaching aids that the mature church did not need.

It is not possible to prove that Calvin favored only the Psalms. He himself wrote some poems undoubtedly to be sung. But in worship he heavily favored the Psalter--..very heavily. I have not read enough to feel absolute in this...but I have read a good many arguments about it and all authors seem to use the same passages to argue for differing points of view...so you can see that perfect clarity is not in view.

But this concept of Calvin's on worship made the use and service of the Psalter mandatory if not exclusive.

3. The Mechanics of employing the Psalms in the singing church.

- a. The first need is for a meterizing of the Psalms...putting the words of the Psalms into meter.

Meter is the poetic term describing the accentuation of verse. It consists of a combination of stressed syllables and unstressed syllables. (But this is not a time for instruction in poetry.) Without meter it is impossible to sing with any freedom. Common meter is a line of 4 accented syllables followed by a line of 3 accents...Long meter is 4 and 4...Small meter is 3 and 3 and there is nearly an infinite number of variations.

--Calvin himself did some of this. The bulk of it for the Psalter was done by Marot (d. 1544) and Beza (d. 1605).

--Naturally it has been done by a bunch of people since!

- b. The second need is for singable, usable tunes.

--Calvin opposed harmonic singing so only a melody line was needed for his taste.

--The French Psalter appeared between 1543 and 1562

--The musicians included some German writers and the French musician L. Bourgeoise...plus others.

--But the idea was to produce a tune that could be learned, sung without an instrument, and yet be a credit to the Gospel message...not a cacophony or diminished sounds. (We may pause here and try to sing Psalm 36 as written by Greiter, about 1550...we may, I will see how weary you look and decide at the time.)