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*This is the expanded version of a speech that was given at the Convocation evening of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, September 11, 2009*

The year 2009 marks the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Calvin. His significance has been highlighted and evaluated at countless conferences all over the world. It will be no surprise that during this Convocation evening we will focus on an aspect of Calvin's legacy.

I would like to discuss Calvin's legacy with respect to church music, and more specifically, his view of the use of musical instruments during the worship service. Not only is this a fitting subject for a celebratory occasion like this, it is also a highly relevant topic. We still have discussions about the use of musical instruments: is the church organ the instrument of choice for Reformed worship, or should there be room for other instruments such as pianos, guitars, flutes, and trumpets as well?

Our topic is also interesting because it appears that in this area the Reformed tradition has deviated from Calvin. As Reformed people we like to think that we

# Church Music in Calvin's Tradition (Part 1 of 3)

stand in Calvin's tradition, but in this case the Genevan Reformer might frown upon our current practices. Calvin endorsed congregational singing but he did not allow the use of musical instruments, not even an organ. As you may know, this is still the practice in some Presbyterian churches. You may hear a cantor leading the congregation in singing but no organist.

Even in Reformed circles there are voices suggesting that it was a mistake to introduce musical instruments to the worship service. Dr. R. Scott Clark recently questioned the rationale for the use of musical instruments, stating: "It seems nearly impossible to see how one can say that Scripture requires the use of uninspired praise and instruments in Christian worship. The introduction of musical instruments into Reformed worship marks a retreat from our confession on grounds that are less than compelling."<sup>1</sup>

What are we supposed to do in worship? Stick to the church organ? Add other musical instruments? Remove all musical instruments from the worship service, including the organ? Let us see whether Calvin can give us some guidance here.

## Calvin's principles

Calvin's view regarding church music may be summarized as follows: First, he believed that music is a gift of God which needs to be used for the praise of God and for the pleasure of man. In his well-known Preface to the Genevan Psalter (1543) he says: "Now among the other things which are proper for recreating man and giving him pleasure, music is either the first or one of the principal; and it is necessary for us to think that it is a gift of God deputed for that use."<sup>2</sup> This quote illustrates that Calvin had a positive view of music. He considered music to be one of the most beautiful aspects of God's creation. At the same time Calvin was mindful of the fact that we are living after the Fall and that God's gifts can easily be misused. Therefore, music needs to be used in a responsible way.

Second, Calvin believed that we should distinguish between the role of music in everyday life and the role of music in the worship service. In everyday life music can be used for recreation and pleasure but in the worship service it is a different matter. When believers gather for worship, they draw near to God and they come into the presence of God and his angels.



This astounding reality should determine the character of the singing and the melodies that are used. The melodies which we use should not be frivolous but have a certain dignity. Calvin used the words *poids et majesté* (weight and majesty) to describe the character of worship music: "Care must always be taken that the song be neither light nor frivolous; but that it have weight and majesty (as St. Augustine says), and also, there is a great difference between music which one makes to entertain men at table and in their houses, and the Psalms which are using the Church in the presence of God and his angels."

Third, Calvin believed that singing in church should be seen as a form of praying. In the same Preface he says: "As for public prayers, there are two kinds: the ones with the word alone, the others with singing." Thus, it should be done with the required reverence. Care should be taken that nothing detracts from directing our thoughts to God, not even the beauty of the melodies that are used! Everything must contribute to the reverent character of this "covenantal conversation" between God and his people.

Fourth, Calvin strongly believed that singing should be done by the congregation – not by the clergy or a choir. Calvin had no problem with choir singing on other occasions and I am sure that he would have enjoyed the singing of a children's choir on an evening like this. But on Sunday it is a different matter. The worship service is a meeting between God and his people. Therefore the

singing should be done by the whole congregation.

Fifth, Calvin emphasized that one cannot sing unto God unless the content of the song is clearly understood. Referring to the Apostle Paul's words about singing and making music in our heart to the Lord (Eph 5:19), Calvin commented: "Spiritual songs cannot be well sung save from the heart, but the heart requires intelligence" (perhaps better translated as: understanding). Since understanding is so important, Calvin abolished the use of Latin from congregational singing and insisted that singing be done in the common language of the people.

Sixth, Calvin believed that the content of the songs should be biblical and, as much as possible, taken directly from the Word of God. For this reason he preferred the psalms: "When we have looked thoroughly, and searched here and there, we shall not find better songs nor more fitting for the purpose, than the Psalms of David, which the Holy Spirit spoke and made through him." With these words Calvin does not necessarily condemn the singing of hymns but he clearly favours the singing of the Old Testament psalms.

Finally, Calvin believed that moderation should be a guiding principle for singing during the worship service. If the music becomes too rich and beautiful it might start drawing attention to itself and distract the mind from concentrating on the content of the words. Hence, Calvin arranged that psalms should be sung without accompaniment of instruments. He

also determined that the congregation would sing in unison (everyone singing the same line). He feared that polyphonic singing would distract the mind and make it more difficult to concentrate on the words of the psalm.

For singing outside the context of congregational worship Calvin allowed more elaborate forms of music. In that context he had no problem with the use of musical instruments and he endorsed Claude Goudimel's initiative to compose four-part harmonizations of the psalms.

### Genevan Psalter

With these principles in mind Calvin established a new tradition in the ministry of praise. During his stay in Strasbourg he had heard the German speaking congregation sing metrical versions of hymns. Calvin was impressed and desired to apply this approach in his own church. He wanted local congregations to be able to sing the psalms in their own language.

In order to do this, the text of the psalms had to be paraphrased and reworked into metrical versions for which new melodies were composed – melodies that were not only beautiful but also easy enough to be sung by the whole congregation. Involving skilled artists, such as the poet Claude Marot and the composer Louis Bourgeois, Calvin was able to oversee the production of the complete Psalter – all 150 psalms – using 124 newly composed melodies. An impressive effort and a project of lasting influence!

We have become so used to singing psalms in metrical versions

in our own language and with singable melodies, that it is difficult for us to appreciate the enormous impact of the Genevan Psalter. At the time it was a revolutionary development in worship. Up until that point singing had been done by the clergy, in Latin, using melodies that were perhaps beautiful but too difficult for the person in the pew. Now, for the first time, the members of the congregation were able to sing the psalms in their own language.

The 150 psalms became popular among Huguenot believers in France. The fame of the Genevan psalms spread to other countries as well. Petrus Dathenus used the Genevan melodies to make a complete Psalter in Dutch. If we were able to go back in time and visit a Reformed worship service in The Netherlands four hundred years ago, we would hear the congregation sing the psalms in Dutch with the Genevan melodies. Cantors (*voorzangers*) were used to lead the congregation in singing. The psalms were sung in iso-rhythmic fashion (long notes with equal length, *hele noten*) at a slow tempo.<sup>3</sup>

From the start of the Reformation in The Netherlands there was discussion about whether it was appropriate to use church organs during worship. Early synods (Dordrecht 1574, Middelburg 1581) advised against the use of organs.<sup>4</sup> Over time, however, the situation changed and the organ came to be accepted as a valuable instrument to accompany congregational singing. Today it is difficult for us to imagine that there has ever been a time that Reformed people sang without organ accompaniment, but that is the way it was in the early seventeenth century!

It can still be impressive to go back to the old way and sing the psalms without accompaniment of musical instruments. A few months ago I had a "Genevan experience" when I was leading a worship service in Grand Valley, Ontario. There was no power in the building because a squirrel had chewed through the power line. The squirrel was lying outside the building, electrocuted, and the congregation was huddled inside, in darkness, forced to sing a capella! It was an enlightening experience. The congregation's



## Church News

Called by the church of Chatham, Ontario

**Rev. J. VanWoudenberg**  
of Guelph, Ontario.

Called by the church of Grand Rapids, MI, USA:

**Rev. T.G. Van Raalte**  
of Winnipeg (Redeemer),  
Manitoba

Called by the church of Smithville,  
Ontario:

**Candidate Ken Bergsma**

singing sounded fresh and powerful! Indeed, many of the Genevan melodies are quite able to function well without accompaniment.

In the next article we will evaluate Calvin's approach to the (non-) use of musical instruments in worship.

<sup>1</sup> R. Scott Clark, *Recovering the Reformed Confession. Our Theology, Piety, and Practice* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing 2008), 266-269.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *La Forme des Prières et chantz ecclesiastiques*, 1543. In: *Ioannis Calvinii opera quae supersunt omnia*. Vol. 6, p. 166-171. English translation available at [www.ccel.org/ccel/ccel/eee/files/calvinps.htm](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/ccel/eee/files/calvinps.htm).

<sup>3</sup> Jan Smelik, *Gods lof op de lippen: Aspecten van liturgie en kerkmuziek* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2005), 121.

<sup>4</sup> Acts of the Synods of Dordrecht 1574 and Middelburg 1581. See F.L. Rutgers, *Acta van de Nederlandse Synoden der zestiende eeuw* (2nd edition, Dordrecht, 1980), 174, 409.





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# Church Music in Calvin's Tradition (Part 2 of 3)

*This is the expanded version of a speech that was given at the Convocation evening of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, September 11, 2009*

Many Reformed people are surprised to hear that John Calvin was opposed to the use of musical instruments in worship services. We all know that the Psalms call on believers to praise the Lord with the accompaniment of lyres and harps and other musical instruments. So why would the Genevan Reformer be opposed to it?

First of all, we should note that Calvin was not alone in his opposition to the use of instruments. This had been the prevailing attitude for the first thousand years of church history! The church fathers thought that the use of musical instruments was part of temple worship in the old covenant. Since temple worship has been abolished in the new covenant, they felt that the role of musical instruments has come to an end as well. The early Christian church followed the example of the synagogue where no musical instruments were used.

There was another factor involved as well: The church

fathers knew how music functioned in pagan worship as a vehicle for ecstatic behaviour, prophetic trance, and orgiastic dance.<sup>1</sup> They did not want to go there!

The church fathers were not just concerned about the use of musical instruments. They were concerned that even singing as such might become a distraction from worship. Augustine describes his struggle with the beauty of singing in his *Confessions* (Book 10, chapter 33). He testifies how sometimes the chanting of the melody moved him more than the content of the song and how he felt guilty about that.<sup>2</sup>

It should be no surprise that Calvin, who generally liked to follow the example of the church fathers, followed their cautious approach to the use of music as well. He was afraid that the use of music during worship would merely serve human pleasure and enjoyment and thus get in the way of true worship.

## **"Ludicrous" organs**

In Calvin's case another aspect needs to be mentioned. He was alarmed by what he had seen in the Roman Catholic Church. He had witnessed how the preaching of the gospel was overshadowed and pushed aside by the

abundance of rituals and ceremonies. Whether Calvin has ever heard organs being played in church is difficult to say, but he does refer to the playing of organs in some of his writings. In a sermon on 1 Samuel 18:6 (the account of the women who came out to meet the victorious David with songs and music), Calvin criticized the Roman Catholic Church for its "ridiculous and foolish imitation" of ceremonies of the old covenant. The Roman Catholics thought that it would add to the festive character of worship "if they added organs and many other similar ludicrous things."<sup>3</sup> In reaction to the deformation of worship which Calvin saw in the Roman Catholic Church, he designed an approach to worship that would allow the preaching of the gospel to receive full attention.

When we read such statements, we are inclined to ask what Calvin did with all those passages in the Old Testament where God's people are called upon to sing the Lord's praises with the accompaniment of harps and lyres and other musical instruments. After all, even the Psalm for the Sabbath day (Psalm 92) mentions the use of lyres and harps!

Calvin reflected on such passages and offered a theological explanation for his negative view of the use of musical instruments in worship. A typical example is found in his commentary on Psalm 33:2 ("Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skilfully, and shout for joy.") Calvin acknowledges that musical instruments were used in the temple worship and that they served to stimulate believers to vigorous praise of God. But he maintains that musical instruments should not be used in worship today, for two reasons.

First, Calvin argues that musical instruments belong to the shadows of the old covenant that have since been fulfilled in Christ:

We may not indiscriminately consider as applicable to ourselves, every thing which was formerly enjoined upon the Jews. I have no doubt that playing upon cymbals, touching the harp and the viol, and all that kind of music, which is so frequently mentioned in the Psalms, was a part of the education; that is to say, the puerile instruction of the law: I speak of the stated service of the temple.<sup>4</sup>

This passage illustrates that Calvin saw instrumental music as something that belonged to the old dispensation, the "immature" stage of the covenant. In his opinion the use of musical instruments is comparable to the burning of incense, the lighting of candles, and other shadows of the law. Such things ought to be abandoned by the Christian church.

Second, Calvin argues that instrumental music is not fitting for the sober kind of worship which is pleasing to God. In his commentary on Psalm 33 he writes that people are fond of "outward pomp" and the noise of

instruments, but that God is pleased by "simplicity." This is an important word. In Calvin's thinking simplicity goes together with "intelligibility." Whatever is done in worship must be simple and understandable so that the whole congregation may be edified. In this context Calvin refers to the warnings of the Apostle Paul against speaking in tongues (1 Cor 14). Why does Paul warn against speaking in tongues? Because nobody understands it and nobody is edified. Well then, doesn't the same apply to instrumental music? It may be beautiful but it does not have an intelligible message and hence it does not serve the edification of the congregation. In Calvin's opinion, then, to use musical instruments during the worship service is "not only unadvised zeal but wicked and perverse obstinacy."

### Evaluating Calvin's approach

Let us briefly evaluate Calvin's rationale for the non-use of musical instruments. His first argument was that instrumental music has been abolished with the fulfillment of the old covenant in Christ. This argument raises the question in what sense instrumental music has been fulfilled. We confess that sacrifices and ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ, and that all shadows have been fulfilled (BC, Art. 25). At the same time we believe that teaching and singing and other elements of old covenant worship have not been abolished but continue to play an important role in new covenant worship. Singing is even part of heavenly worship (see the Book of Revelation).

With respect to sacrifices, it is not difficult to understand why they needed to be abandoned. Sacrifices foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice of Christ. Once

that ultimate sacrifice had been brought, the old covenant sacrifices were obsolete. But the singing of God's praises is something different. It was fitting in temple worship in Jerusalem and it continues to be fitting in the worship of the congregation of Christ (the temple of the Holy Spirit). If singing is appropriate in both covenants, why would instrumental accompaniment not be? This question remains unanswered.

What shall we say about Calvin's argument that instrumental music resembles speaking in tongues and should be avoided according to 1 Corinthians 14? Dr. Klaas Schilder commented: "It was too strange, this argument from the Scriptures."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, it appears that categories have been mixed up here. Speaking in tongues was a kind of speaking that was unintelligible to the congregation and threatened to take the place of prophesying and preaching. The Apostle Paul mentioned that speaking in tongues might cause visiting unbelievers to draw the conclusion that the Christians in Corinth were out of their mind (1 Cor 12:23). Instrumental music is something totally different. It is intended to support and enhance the singing of God's praises. It does not take the place of "intelligible" speaking or praying, but rather supports it.

In summary, Calvin's theological arguments against the use of musical instruments do not convince. It sounds like he was trying to find arguments because he was afraid of what might happen if we start using musical instruments in worship. This concern as such, however, needs to be appreciated! We may not agree with Calvin's rigorous measures, but we should appreciate his concern that music is so powerful

that it can do damage. After all, it is true that music has the power not just to enhance and support worship but also to distract from worship. Who has not had the experience that the organist's or pianist's playing was so dominant, hectic, frivolous, or even beautiful, that we forgot about what we were singing and focused on the musical accompaniment?

In reflecting on Calvin's approach to instrumental music we should take into account that he worked within a specific historical context. Over the last 450 years there has been an enormous development in terms of musical instruments and accompaniment. We know that good musical accompaniment can do much to stimulate lively and vigorous congregational singing. This is an experience which Calvin never had and which may partly explain his reluctance to allow musical instruments in worship. Calvin may have heard organs being played but he had never heard the organ being used to accompany congregational singing. I would speculate that Calvin, had he been able to experience how a musical instrument can enhance congregational singing, would have taken another approach to our subject.

### Further observations

Reflecting further on the use or non-use of musical instruments in worship, it appears that two aspects need to be taken into account. On the one hand, we have the abundance of calls in the Old Testament to praise the Lord with the accompaniment of musical instruments. This needs to carry weight in our reflection on Christian worship. On the other hand, it is true that there is no

injunction in the New Testament to use musical instruments. There are explicit calls to sing the Lord's praises during worship (Eph 5, Col 3) but no exhortations to use musical instruments (although musical instruments continue to be mentioned in Revelation). Perhaps there was a practical concern here: it would have been difficult to expect every house congregation to use musical instruments.

How to reconcile these perspectives? I suggest that two principles may be drawn from the biblical evidence. First, congregational singing is essential in Christian worship. Second, the use of musical instruments is allowed, perhaps even recommended, but not essential.

Those of us who have travelled to other countries and visited churches in other parts of the world may have experienced how congregations can sing powerfully without the accompaniment of musical instruments. Listen to the four-part singing of African congregations and you would not want them to introduce musical instruments to their worship tradition. Their singing is beautiful the way it is.

At the same time musical instruments can be a real enhancement to communal singing. It is helpful to note the liturgical developments in the old covenant in this respect. The Lord allowed room for liturgical development. Moses did not institute singing and musical instruments for the worship in and around the tabernacle. Centuries later king David organized a significant expansion of temple worship by introducing choir singing and musical instrument and it was pleasing to the Lord. Could something analogous not be

## Church News

Declined the calls to Denver, CO, and Grand Rapids, MI, USA:

**Rev. T.G. Van Raalte**  
of Winnipeg (Redeemer),  
Manitoba

Accepted the call to Surrey,  
British Columbia:

**Rev. T.G. Van Raalte**  
of Winnipeg (Redeemer),  
Manitoba

assumed for the development of worship in the Christian church? The use of musical instruments was not ordained by the apostles. But would the Lord not allow the enhancement of worship music and be pleased with it, just like it happened in the old covenant?

In the next article we will draw conclusions and applications from what we have discussed so far.

<sup>1</sup> James McKinnon, article "Musik und Religion: Alte Kirche und Mittelalter," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Vol. 23 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 453.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick. Oxford World's Classics paperback 1992, p. 208

<sup>3</sup> Translated from Ioannis Calvini *opera quae supersunt omnia*, Vol. 30, p. 259. Dutch translation of this passage available in H. Hasper, *Calvijs beginsel voor den zang in den eredienst*. Vol. 1. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff), 407.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the book of Psalms*. Transl. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 537-538.

<sup>5</sup> "Het was ook waarlijk al te vreemd, zulk een beroep op de Schrift." K. Schilder, "Orgelspel," article originally published in 1925. Reprinted in *Om Woord en Kerk*. Vol. 2 (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1949), 93.



# Church Music in Calvin's Tradition

## (Part 3 of 3)

*This is the expanded version of a speech that was given at the Convocation evening of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, September 11, 2009.*

Our churches come from a tradition that respected the church organ highly as an instrument of congregational worship. Since the eighteenth century Reformed church leaders have praised the positive effect of the church organ on congregational singing. In a book on worship published in 1911, Dr. Abraham Kuyper stated that there is "nothing objectionable about organ music, provided that the church council makes sure that the organists do not try to push themselves to the fore. Their task is to lead, support, regulate, and promote the singing. The organ should never assume the right to let itself be heard. It has to serve the singing of the congregation" (*Our Worship*).

Dr. Klaas Schilder was an accomplished organist himself. He believed that the organ can really enhance the quality of worship, provided the organist plays well and has a good understanding of liturgical principles. The older generation among us will remember how Schilder admired the skills of organists such as Jan Zwart. Schilder

famously described Zwart's playing as "prophesying from the organ bench."

It may be good to point out that Kuyper and Schilder were prepared to give instrumental music a broader role than just the accompaniment of congregational singing. Kuyper believed that there is no biblical rule in this respect and that the church may use its spiritual discretion to decide whether there is room for independent instrumental music and choir singing. As long as church arrives at such decisions by using "spiritual motives" it will be well, he said.


Kuyper and Schilder supported the independent role of musical instruments during worship as long as it served and enhanced the congregation's fellowship with the Lord. Practically speaking, this would be organ playing before and after the service, during the collection, and during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Schilder even suggested that the organ could be used to allow for a moment of congregational meditation after the sermon: "I would be much in favour of a brief and tender piece of organ playing after the sermon" (*Om Woord en Kerk*, Vol. 2, p. 36).

### Conclusions and suggestions

In previous articles I have described and evaluated Calvin's principles for music in worship. I conclude with a number of conclusions and suggestions regarding the use of musical instruments in worship.

First, it is helpful to remember Calvin's distinction between music for the worship service and music for other occasions. The special character of the worship service as a meeting between God and his people leads to an emphasis on the *congregational singing* of God's praises. This is based on biblical guidelines, such as given by the Apostle Paul: "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph 5:19, Col 3:16). In the letter to the Hebrews the whole congregation is encouraged to "continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15). Whatever we do in worship, we need to follow Calvin's lead and maintain the priority of congregational singing.

This puts a certain restriction on the use of musical instruments and choirs in worship. There is no such restriction, however, for concerts and other meetings. It is great that we



have a rich tradition of choir singing and that there are many well-trained musicians among us. Let us continue to cultivate this tradition. It is a strong support basis for our worship on Sundays.

***We need to follow Calvin's lead and maintain the priority of congregational singing***

Second, Calvin thought it wise to abandon choirs and musical instruments from the worship service. This is understandable given the situation in the church in his time but it is not something that necessarily follows from biblical principles. We agree with men like Kuyper and Schilder that instrumental music can be used to stimulate congregational singing. But then we should strive for quality playing. It is important that accompanists are sufficiently skilled so that their playing will facilitate (not frustrate) congregational singing. Parents, stimulate your children to take music lessons and encourage them to learn to play such instruments that can be used to accompany congregational singing!

Third, if the churches expect musicians to accompany the singing of the congregation, the churches should also support liturgical training for accompanists. It is great if someone can play a musical instrument but there is a difference between playing and accompanying. In order to accompany

congregational singing a musician needs a good understanding of liturgical principles (what is a worship service, what is the function of congregation singing within the service, what is the specific function of the opening Psalm, the Psalm that is sung after the reading of the law, etc.). Our sister churches in The Netherlands have a society of church musicians which offers courses for aspiring accompanists (Society of Reformed Church Musicians, <http://www.eredienst.com/de-vereniging.html>). It would be good if we could have such courses here in Canada as well.

Fourth, we should be mindful of Calvin's concern that the preaching of the gospel is the primary means of grace. The Holy Spirit works faith primarily through the proclamation of God's Word. It has always been a characteristic of Reformed church buildings that the pulpit occupies centre stage. I mention this specifically because in many churches around us we see a trend towards "musification of worship." A large part of the worship service is led by the worship band and its leader. Sometimes the assumption seems to be that the ministry of praise is a tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit to create faith. An Australian theologian has commented that music has almost become "a new means of grace" (Dr. Barry Chant, "Retuning the Church"). This is illustrated by what you see in church: if there is a pulpit on stage, it is a lectern that is dwarfed by the drum set and other instruments of the worship band. Let's not move in that direction.

Fifth, we need to take into account that cultural aspects play a role in determining what is appropriate in worship. Calvin was

aware of the fact that different times and different cultures will lead to different traditions of worship. In his *Institutes* he wrote that the Lord has revealed to us his will with respect to appropriate worship but that "He did not prescribe in detail what we ought to do." In Calvin's opinion the Lord "did not deem one form suitable for all ages." Hence, "Because He has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones."

***In order to accompany congregational singing a musician needs a good understanding of liturgical principles***

Calvin was not afraid to introduce something new into the worship service. The Genevan Psalter was something new, even revolutionary. As much as Calvin was convinced that he was doing the right thing, he did not think that the Genevan way was the only way. He expected that new times and different cultural settings would lead to the development of different liturgical forms.



Thus, there is nothing wrong with the situation that churches in different cultures have different practices. We do not need to be concerned if Christians in South America prefer the guitar while we in North America are used to organs and pianos. We should also recognize that there is a cultural aspect to the Genevan melodies. Try to teach African people to sing these melodies and you will find that it does not work. These melodies are too foreign to them. This is not a problem as long as African people use African melodies that are fitting for worship. Calvin would probably have said: I don't care what melodies you use, as long as you use worthy melodies that convey the sense of dignity that characterizes the worship service.

Sixth, the principle that singing is a congregational activity can help us to find direction with respect to the question what instruments are suitable for worship. In this context it may be helpful to reaffirm that the church organ is an excellent instrument for the accompaniment of congregational singing. One does not have to be Reformed to say this. Professor Harold M. Best, an evangelical theologian and musicologist, recently stated that "the organ is the most naturally supportive instrument for singing that Western culture knows of. Its very design and its intelligent use in hymn singing are meant to accomplish one purpose: to support singing by the intelligent use of registers to fill in the cracks – to provide both an underpinning and a blossom to the work of the congregational voices. The result is a synergy: the whole is

greater than the sum of the parts. People are moved to heartier song without being overpowered or displaced, and their natural untrained voices are significantly validated and enhanced" ("Traditional Hymn-Based Worship" in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum. Six Views.*)

***There is no need to idolize the organ but it is also short-sighted to say that the organ is outdated and needs to be replaced by other instruments***

Let us work responsibly with the organ tradition which we have. There is no need to idolize the organ but it is also short-sighted to say that the organ is outdated and needs to be replaced by other instruments. The sustained sound of the organ provides a strong foundation for congregational singing.

This does not mean that the organ is the only instrument that can be used to accompany congregational singing. Pianos and guitars can be used profitably as well, especially now that we have the technological means to amplify the sound of such instruments. Other instruments tend to have their

limitations. Flutes and trumpets can play the melody of a song but they do not offer a harmonic foundation upon which the singing of the congregation can rest. Percussion instruments enhance rhythm and excitement but they do not offer support for melody and harmony.

An additional problem with using other instruments than organ or piano is that you need more instruments to acquire the same effect. You will need an ensemble of musicians or a worship band to get the job done. Soon you will have a group of people on stage with – almost inevitably – the risk that the emphasis on the *congregation singing* is replaced by an emphasis on the *ensemble/band performing*.

Seventh, we will do well to remember Calvin's principle that singing is a form of praying. The singing congregation directs its thoughts to our Father in heaven and to the Lord Jesus Christ who is seated at his right hand. Anything that might distract from this activity should be avoided and resisted – even if that means restrictions on the use of musical instruments.

We would honour Calvin's concerns best if we remember the biblical exhortation to the congregation to "continually offer to God a sacrament of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb 13:15). What a blessing it is that the whole congregation can take part in this ministry of praise! It is beautiful if musical instruments can support and stimulate the congregation in this ministry of praise.

