CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CALVIN AND MAROT ON THE PSALMS

Having established the main aspects of Marot’s view on the Psalms as reflected in his dedicatory epistles, we now turn to Jean Calvin, who substantially enlarged his prefatory epistle to GE42 to accompany the Church edition of GE43, of which the hymnal part consisted exclusively of Marot’s Psalm paraphrases and some prayers. A comparison of their ideas on the same topics might be helpful to sharpen our view on Marot’s theological position.

13.1 Calvin’s preface to the Psalms

No copy of the original Geneva Church Book of 1543 (Psalms and liturgical forms—GE43m) has survived, but the text of the preface (Epistre au lecteur) appears in many of the subsequent editions, always with ‘De Genève, ce 10 de Juin, 1543’ as the subscription.¹ One particularity of this preface makes it very interesting for our research. Calvin’s text consists of two parts, of which the first was published in 1542 as preface to the Geneva Church Book (GE42). In this preface Calvin for the first time deals in extenso with the order of the Sunday service, the administration of the Sacraments and other ecclesiastical rituals, in the end devoting a section to public prayer and the Psalms.² It is not an incomplete (unfinished) preface, but perfect as it is, a fact often overlooked by commentators. On the occasion of the publication

¹ The bibliographical uncertainties about this copy were discussed in ch. 2.4.2. Quotations from Calvin’s text are from CO 6, 165–72, an edition based on ST45 (destroyed in 1870). The oldest extant copy containing the 1543 addition is GE51 (discovered in 1966 and thus unknown to CO, OS, and Pidoux; see GLN-219). ST48 placed Marot’s poems in front; LY48/49 did not contain any preface; GE54 is introduced only by a poem of De Bèze.

² The Psalms form only part (albeit a large part) of this liturgical service book: La forme des prières et chansons ecclésiastiques, avec la manière d’administrer les Sacrements, et consacrer le Mariage, selon la coutume de l’Église ancienne, ([Genève, Jean Girard], 1542), GLN-41; Facsimile Reprint, 1959, by P. Pidoux.
of GE43m Calvin must have felt impelled or challenged to add a substantial section on the use of song in general and the singing of Psalms in particular. The arrival of Marot in December 1542 certainly was no minor event in Geneva. That a shift in orientation in the treatment of the Psalms or a development in the view on music between GE42 and GE43m might have occurred should not be excluded in advance, nor should internal contradictions be wiped out or harmonised too quickly. Therefore, we will start with an assessment of the contents of GE42, without referring yet to GE43m, which will be treated afterwards in order to assess what might have incited Calvin to add this lengthy text to his original preface.

13.1.1 The preface of GE42

In the preface to GE42 Calvin’s main concern seems to have been to explain (and defend against existing and/or expected criticism) the basic concepts behind the new form of the Genevan liturgy. The first target group is the Christian Church of Geneva and the Geneva magistrates, without whom Calvin (and the other Genevan pastors) could not move forward, but behind Geneva Calvin also descries the rest of Christianity.\(^3\) The main lines regarding the use of song in liturgy had already been drawn in the liturgical paragraph of the *Articles concernant l’organisation de l’Eglise et du culte à Geneve proposés au Conseil par les Ministres* (written probably in 1536, discussed by the Council on 16 January 1537).\(^4\) They were summarised after Calvin’s return in the Church order (*Ordonnances Eclesiastiques*) of 20 November 1541, in which we read that it is commendable to introduce the singing of ‘chants ecclesiastiques’ in order to incite people to pray and praise God, and that children should be trained in singing them so that they can be deployed as precentors in church.\(^5\) Both ideas echo the liturgi-

\(^3\) “Combien que ce Livre ne profitera pas seulement au peuple de ceste Eglise: mais aussi à tous ceux qui desireront scavoir, quelle forme doyvent tenir et suyvre les fideles, quand ilz conviennent au Nom de Jesus Christ.” (CO 6, 169). This suggests that his first essay in *liturgicis* is meant to be epochal, as, indeed, it was.

\(^4\) CO 10/1,5–14; the general idea: 10/1,5; the paragraph itself: 10/1,12.

\(^5\) CO 10/1,15–30. “Il sera bon d’introduyre les chants ecclesiastiques pour myeulx inciter le peuple a pryer et louer Dieu. Pour le commencement on apprendra les petis enfans, puy avec le temps toute l’esglise pourra suyvre.” (26). This phrase appears oddly in the middle of the ‘ordonnance’ concerning matrimony. In the 1561 edition these two phrases have been slightly amended and placed separately, under the heading *Des chants Ecclesiastiques*. The activities of the Council in the spring of 1543