"EPITOME OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, MIRROR OF GOD'S GRACE, AND COMPLETE ANATOMY OF MAN": IMMANUEL TREMPELLIUS AND THE PSALMS

Kenneth Austin

The importance of the book of Psalms in the sixteenth century can hardly be overstated. For a start, it was widely translated into the vernaculars of Europe, including German, English, Dutch and French. In addition, commentaries on some or all of it were composed by, among others, Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples (1509), Johannes Bugenhagen (1524), Conrad Pellican (1527), Martin Bucer (1529), John Calvin (1557) and Theodore Beza (1579). While Desiderius Erasmus only wrote on eleven of the Psalms, these were in fact the only parts of the Old Testament to which he devoted his exegetical attention. For his part, Martin Luther engaged with this text on numerous occasions throughout his career: he delivered two sets of lectures on the Psalms in Wittenberg in 1513–1515 and 1518–1521, produced a German translation of the Psalter in 1523–1524, wrote a commentary, Four Psalms of...
Comfort, in 1526, produced a revised translation of the Psalter in 1531, and offered further commentaries and sermons on individual Psalms during the 1530s.\(^5\)

However, it is apparent that it was the Reformed tradition, above all, with which the Psalms came to be most closely associated. As Bruce Gordon has recently noted, the Psalms were of particular importance for John Calvin.\(^6\) In 1537, Calvin had persuaded the Genevan Council to incorporate the singing of Psalms within worship, and during the 1550s he lectured on them regularly. In 1557, he produced his own commentary on the book; perhaps tellingly, he used the preface to provide the only autobiographical account of any great length (in the course of which, he identified himself with David, the author of the Psalms).\(^7\) Especially following the metrical translation into French of Clément Marot and Theodore Beza – 27,000 copies of which were apparently sent into France from Geneva\(^8\) – the singing of Psalms, whether marching into battle, facing martyrdom, or in the seemingly endless conflicts over sacred space, came increasingly to be seen as a crucial element of Reformed identity.\(^9\)

Various commentators have also emphasised the extent to which Calvin's interpretation of the Psalms marked a break with previous exegetics.\(^10\) Most recently, G. Sujin Pak has focused particular attention on the

---


\(^7\) Jean Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, ed. James Anderson, 4 vols (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845–1847), volume 1, preface. See also Gordon, *Calvin*, pp. 1–46, which draws heavily on the autobiographical elements of this text.

