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# Pro Rege

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Volume 7 | Number 4

Article 6

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June 1979

## Six Psalms of John Calvin (Book Review)

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### Recommended Citation

Magee, Noel (1979) "Six Psalms of John Calvin (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 7: No. 4, 28 - 29.

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A quarterly faculty publication of  
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

ness to Chapman, he does seem to be aware of the problem with the traditional "proofs" of Christianity; see Part I.)

Furthermore, if the Christian is indeed more than an intellectual or rational understanding of such basic questions (with the "right" answers of course), it is to be wondered if such understanding will necessarily deepen the faith of the Christian. However, when such understandings

find concrete and vital embodiment in our lives, they may deepen our faith and contribute to the development of the "Christian mind" in an orthodox Christian community which is too often anti-intellectual.

Given the above provisos, this book is worthy of consideration, especially for those in positions of leadership.



*Six Psalms of John Calvin* (words by John Calvin, translated by Ford Lewis Battles, harmonizations by Stanley Tagg.) Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978. Reviewed by Noel Magee, Associate Professor of Music.

The musical publication of *Six Psalms of John Calvin* is a gratifying achievement since it makes available nearly forgotten texts and melodies of the Calvinist heritage in a modern musical setting. The melodies with Calvin's versifications of these Psalms first appeared in *Aulcuns pseaulmes et cantiques mys en chant*, published in Strasbourg in 1539. Four tunes were composed by Mattheus Greitter, one by Wolfgang Dachstein; the composer of the sixth is unknown. They now reappear in Ford Lewis Battles' anthology of writings by Calvin entitled *The Piety of John Calvin*, with harmonizations by Stanley Tagg. The music is also published separately from the rest of the anthology for use in performance.

Mr. Tagg has honored the plainness of the original melodic and rhythmic style in both his accompaniments for the unison singing of four of the six Psalms, and in his polyphonic choral arrangements of the other two, whose verses alternate with unison congregational singing. Although the clear, spacious layout of the words and music is praiseworthy, it would have been helpful if the choral parts had been printed for keyboard, with the suggestion "for rehearsal only," assuming that a *cappella* performance is intended for verses sung by the choir.

The arranger-composer has creatively used Renaissance as well as pre- and post-Renaissance compositional devices, but he has permitted his musical vocabulary of mild dissonances to reflect the ear and mind of a 20th-century musician. The old tunes receive this treatment without having their own grace hindered. Canonic writing flows

so easily (though perhaps not so easily perceived in the compositional working stages), that it is as if the tunes were originally conceived with this contrapuntal texture in mind. Each line maintains melodic interest that was obviously generated by the original melody. Occasional cadences on open fifths as well as cross-relations lend to the spirit of archaism. In short, the fusion of the older with newer musical sonorities is so well-balanced that if one does not respond favorably to the one quality, he will certainly be charmed by the other. However, the real beauty of Tagg's arrangements lies in the integration of the two.

The texts of Calvin reflect his piety, but the musical settings in this anthology do not. Nor does the essay of Chapter 6, "Metrical Psalms Translated by Calvin," written jointly by Battles and Tagg, present the total picture of Calvin's piety with respect to music. It is only suggested that "although the early Psalters contain only texts and melodic lines, there is no reason to hold that accompaniments were not employed." (p. 141).

There is no mention of Calvin's opposition to part-singing or use of accompaniment in the services, a position which he held throughout his roughly thirty years of leadership, and which was adopted by a number of Calvinist churches. A Ph.D. dissertation, unavailable for corroboration, and Calvin's *Institutes* are cited to support the claim for accompaniments. The passage referred to in the latter does not speak to this issue of performance practice. (If anything, Calvin's remarks in this context should be interpreted to suggest unison singing,

but they say nothing about accompaniments.) Calvin's statements regarding music in general and performance practice in particular are recorded in various sources, but of special importance is his "Epistre au lecteur" in *La forme des prières et chants ecclésiastiques* of 1542, not the *Institutes*. Fortunately, even in Calvin's own day, not everyone held the same convictions against accompanied or polyphonic hymn or Psalm settings, and there exist large collections of these which were, in Calvinistic circles, designated for home and devotional use, a practice which could well be reinstated today, although not to the exclusion of worship service music.

However, since the purpose of the anthology is to present the piety of Calvin, it would seem appropriate that his position with respect to music be more adequately presented, even though his regulations are no longer widely accepted. Consideration of his views today justifiably results in attributing guilt to Calvin for, in effect, propagating the isolation of "sacred" music from music in general, and subsequently for secularizing musical aesthetics, the effects of which much of the Christian community still feels acutely. \* In an era when Christians are attempting

to claim all areas of life for Kingdom use, it is embarrassing to try to reclaim something rejected by the eminent leader of Calvinist Reformed faith. It is easier to ignore his disavowal, but doing so does not present a thorough perspective.

These musical settings of Calvin's versified Psalms should be acquired by church choir directors and Christian music educators interested in tradition, good texts, and good music which is not too difficult. They are suitable for both children's and adult choirs, separately or combined. The choirs could teach the melodies to congregations, but permission is required to reproduce the text, presumably even for this purpose. This collection should do more than revive some very beautiful old tunes and texts. It should focus attention on the richness of Psalm texts, and both encourage and challenge other Christian musicians to use modern translations and paraphrases as well, and to set them in an accessible, artistic, modern musical language.

\* Victor Gebauer, "Theology of Church Music, Reformers," in *Key Words in Church Music*, Carl Schalk, ed. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1978, pp. 339-340.



*The Idea of Justice in Christian Perspective*, by Jan Dengerink. Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1978. \$2.95 pb. Reviewed by James W. Skillen, Associate Professor of Political Science.

Jan Dengerink is known to many Christians in the U.S. and Canada. A Dutch professor who is presently active on several fronts with the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy headquartered in his country, Dengerink has lectured at Calvin, Dordt, Trinity Christian, Gordon and other Christian colleges in North America. He spoke at the Second International Christian Political Conference held at Dordt in 1978, and he has been active in the International Association for Reformed Faith and Action and in the work of the *International Reformed Bulletin*. He completed his doctoral work at the Free University of Amsterdam and served in the administration of that university for many years.

If one is familiar with the history of philosophy or the history of political and legal thought, and if

one is also acquainted with the Christian legal philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd, then this little book will be a fruitful challenge. Dengerink presupposes a great deal on the part of the reader as he briefly surveys the history of the idea of justice in the West from the ancient Greeks to the twentieth century.

But even for advanced students the book may prove to be difficult because of its compact style and its lack of contextual explanation and elaboration. Dengerink deals very abstractly with legal and philosophical concepts, giving little if any historical or political information about the authors that he discusses or about the time periods that he covers.

Moreover, the author actually deals only quite generally with the idea of justice and with his