

## CHURCHES IN FEDERATION

### *Reflections on the Good Things of Churches in Federation*

With such a title one might expect a (other) heavy piece on church unity or rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. Even though such topics need to be discussed and have consequences for our life, it is also good to reflect on the blessings we have as Church federation. Recently our family traveled from British Columbia to Ontario. In addition to the change of pace and in spite of the heavy, muggy, hot weather, we were confronted with many wonderful experiences. Of course the strengthening of family bonds were of particular interest to us personally, but the ecclesiastical activities we encountered and experienced might help to reflect on the bond we enjoy as church federation.

First there are the worship services. As a visitor one goes to church with a variety of anticipations. It is interesting to listen to a minister who you seldom hear. The singing also varies considerably from congregation to congregation. There is a great diversity of church buildings and a variety of congregation sizes. Yet it is comforting and pleasant to be faced with the reality that God is always at work in so many places, where we seldom or never come, gathering for Himself a royal priesthood, a holy nation.

When you come together as congregation every Lord's Day you see the same people. You know them and their idiosyncrasies. At times you may see them more as individuals with all their warts and blemishes than brothers and sisters of the same household of faith. But when you visit a city far away and go to church there, you don't know the people, but you do know them as brothers and sisters in the Lord. Such a realization gives comfort and joy.

On two Lord's Days we were privileged to hear four different ministers and visit five congregations. Although we noticed differences (especially that in larger congregations visitors are less likely to be approached than in smaller ones) we were edified by the preaching in all cases. The communion of saints was also heartily expressed by (mainly) enthusiastic singing.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May we joined a large gathering in the Ancaster church building to listen to the Sursum Corda choir of Hamilton and the Voice of Praise choir of Smithville.

The program was opened with the Antiphonal Celebration by Handel. The choirs were lined along opposing walls of the church building giving a wonderful effect. During the evening we were also treated to a beautifully interpretive Improvisation of Psalm 68 very well played by J. Van Ieperen on the organ.

The strong presence of the Psalms only enhanced the evening. Congregational singing as well as choral arrangements of some of the Psalms, by the well known Goudimel and Mr. Chris Nobels from the church at Brampton, gave clear indication of the love for the words God gives us to praise Him with.

A few days later we attended a meeting where both Dr. J. Faber and Dr. P. Y. de Jong spoke about the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches. This meeting was part of the ongoing discussions about unity in the Ontario South Classic Region. Several

consistories from both federations have been having discussions together. The evening we attended was a public information evening.

Both speakers were well acquainted with the topics and the meeting was well-attended. Several questions were asked and answered after the speeches. But once again we were struck by the desire to work towards a unity based on truth and not on compromise. At the same time we could also taste a true desire to work together to achieve what in many places still seems so far from reality.

Not many days later we joined about 1800 Canadian Reformed people in a theatre in Hamilton to listen to and join some 475 students from Canadian Reformed schools throughout Ontario in song. This second Choralfest ever, went off with hardly a hitch. At one point half the students were lost in the dungeons of the building, but after a few minutes they smilingly appeared and joined their mates on the large stage, filling it to capacity. The music and song were very beautifully performed. Everyone is to be congratulated with a job well done.

Finally, but certainly high on our list of things to do, we regularly visited Synod Fergus. There we listened as the tri-annual major assembly of the churches in Canada came together to start their deliberations. We also joined other interested brothers and sisters at as many of the open sessions as we could manage. We noticed a brotherly atmosphere of cooperation as well as a sincere desire to work carefully and diligently on behalf of all the churches.

Our trip was a success. It allowed us to take a break from the hectic schedule of our regular activities. But it also provided us with a visitor's view of the church at work. We were encouraged by the reminder that our heavenly Father continues to work throughout our land, throughout the world, gathering and defending His church.

PdB

#### HIGHLIGHTS OF SYNOD FERGUS - 1998

For the interest and perusal of our readers we pass on some of the highlights of SYNOD FERGUS, 1998. These items come from the Acts of Synod as they have been placed on the Synod web page of the Internet.

*Concerning the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (RCN) Synod adopted, among others, the following recommendations:*

To mandate the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) as yet to inquire about the matters of the "blessing elder" and the word "inform" in Rule Three of the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the RCN.

To mandate the CRCA to discuss the points raised above.

*[Editors notes: It is not clear what is meant by "the points raised above". Our interpretation would be that it includes all the Observations and Considerations. Of greatest interest among these is the Observation that "The church at Guelph brings to Synod's attention statements made by certain ministers in the RCN which they believe to be in conflict with Scripture, the Reformed Confessions and in violation of the Form of Subscription. They refer to an article published in Reformed Perspective dealing with homosexuality. They question whether the commitment to the authority*

*of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions is being upheld. They also cite a series of articles in De Reformatie addressing alleged deviation from Reformed doctrine regarding Christ's suffering on the cross, the concepts of eternal death and of substitutionary atonement. They question whether the Form of Subscription is being upheld." This is followed by the Consideration that "Synod agrees with the concerns expressed by the church at Guelph...."]*.

To inform the churches that if there are concerns about relations with churches with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship they should address those concerns directly to the CRCA.

With regard to the *Reformed Churches in the United States* (RCUS) Synod adopted, among others, the recommendation(s): To decline the invitation of the RCUS at this time to enter into a fraternal relationship (sister church relationship) of ecclesiastical fellowship.

To give the following mandate to the CRCA:

2. To resolve the matter of proper supervision of the Lord's Supper so that only those who confess the Reformed faith will be admitted.
3. To discuss the matter of Sunday observance and the doctrine of the church.
4. To seek clarification of the concept of "erasure".

Synod adopted, among others, the following recommendations regarding the ICRC: To mandate the CRCA to make and support membership recommendations at ICRC for those churches only with which we have official sister-church relations.

To mandate the CRCA to convey to the next meeting of the ICRC that the Canadian Reformed Churches disapprove of the change made in the Constitution Article IV.1.a and to recommend that this Article be changed in such a way that the concerns of the CanRC are addressed.

The Committee for the *Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity* was mandated "to discuss and develop a proposal as to how to proceed in encouraging federative unity."

In the matter of the ERQ Synod adopted, among others, the following recommendation: To re-appoint the committee for contact with the ERQ with following mandate:

1. To clarify and discuss the points raised in Consideration B in view of the concerns raised by the churches.

These points are:

1. The nature and status of the deacons and deaconesses;
2. The matter of liturgical forms, order of worship, supervision of the pulpit and Lord's Day observance;
3. The fencing of the Lord's Table and possible different practices among the various congregations;
4. The need for confessional binding for members and office bearers;

5. The differences in the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship of the ERQ and CanRC;
6. The question whether federative unity is possible or not.

In response to an appeal from the Church at Grand Rapids the CRCA is mandated to further investigate "the practices regarding the fencing of the Lord's Supper and confessional membership in the PCK and report to the next Synod.

With regard to the matter of women voting Synod decided "not to appoint a committee as requested by the council of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington-East.

In the matter Bible Translations Synod decided "To continue to leave it in the freedom of the churches if they feel compelled to use other translations that received favourable reviews in the reports."

Regarding the ongoing discussions with the *OPC* Synod adopted the following recommendations:

That Synod decide:

To express regret once again and to remind the appellants that Synod 1980 (Acts 1980, Article 97, C, 1, p. 69) already did so when it expressed "regret that the evaluation of the divergencies, as discussed in the letter of April, 1976, was not explained in detail by the Synod Coaldale 1977, before stating that these divergencies 'do not form an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.' (Acts 1977, Article 91, Consideration h)"

To affirm that the Evaluation of Divergencies presented to Synod 1986 by the CCOPC is the document which provided the grounds for the 1977 decision to recognize the *OPC* as a true church.

That no new grounds for declaring previous decisions contrary to Scriptures, confessions and the Church Order have been brought forward. Moreover, that the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards are not such that they prevent Ecclesiastical Fellowship but they are divergencies about which there can continue to be discussions among those who belong to Reformed Churches.

To acknowledge gratefully the desire of the *OPC* to be faithful to the Scriptures and defend the reformed heritage.

To note with thankfulness that the *OPC*, by terminating the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCNA has taken a clear stand in maintaining the truth and authority of the Word of God, and has removed another obstacle for the Canadian Reformed Churches to come to ecclesiastical fellowship with the *OPC*.

To adopt the Proposed Agreement as amended here below as the basis for Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the *OPC*, and to instruct the CCOPC to pass it on to the CEIR for adoption by the General Assembly:

*Concerning Fencing the Lord's Table:*

The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord's Supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession chap 29, 8) This implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith and confirmation of a godly life is required. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

#### *Concerning Confessional Membership*

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible as the patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it.

Should the General Assembly of the OPC adopt the Agreement on Fencing of the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership as stated above, to invite the OPC to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, according to the adopted rules for this relationship.

To instruct the CCOPC, as a sub-committee of the CCCA, upon the adoption of the above by the OPC, to initiate Ecclesiastical Fellowship according to the adopted rules, and to inform the churches and the next General Synod accordingly.

That any further discussion re differences in confession and church policy must take place within the relation of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The intention of such discussions will be mutual upbuilding in the faith to 'maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, (Eph.4:3; cf. Report of the CCOPC to Fergus 1998, p. 3).

If the General Assembly of the OPC does not adopt the above, to reconsider the present relationship of ecclesiastical contact with the OPC at the next General Synod. In that case, the CCOPC must make recommendations to the next General Synod.

#### ADOPTED

The chairman notes that this is a historic moment in the life of the Canadian Reformed Churches as a decision has been made which will hopefully serve the Orthodox Presbyterian Church well and will bring this matter to rest in the churches. He notes with gratitude the fact that this difficult decision could be made unanimously.

*Regarding the BOOK OF PRAISE* Synod decided:

To lay the matter of an alternate melody and harmonization of Hymn 1A to rest and to discharge the Committee of this mandate

To mandate the Committee to prepare the Book of Praise with an Overleaf Musical Notation, and to present this revision to the next General Synod.

To mandate the Committee to prepare the Prose section of the Book of Praise with NIV Bible references, and to present this revision to the next General Synod.

To mandate the Committee not to proceed with changes to the Psalms and Hymns.

The following appointments are made:

**BOARD OF GOVERNORS:**

Academic Committee: Eastern Canada: D.G.J. Agema (2001), W. den Hollander (2001), P.G. Feenstra (2001). Alternates: (in order) G. Nederveen, P. Aasman, C. Bosch. Western Canada: R. Aasman (2004), J. Moesker (2007), J. Visscher (2001). Alternates: (in order) R.A. Schouten, W.B. Slomp, E.J. Tiggelaar.

Finance and Property Committee: br. M. Kampen (2004) br. W. Oostdyk (2007), br. H.J. Sloots (2001), br. W. Smouter (2007), br. J. VanderWoude (2004).

**COMMITTEE OF RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD:**

Rev. E. Kampen (convener) (2001), Rev. C. VanSpronsen (2001), br. H.A. Berends (2001), br. H. Hoogstra (2007).

**COMMITTEE OF CONTACT WITH CHURCHES IN THE AMERICAS**

RCUS Subcommittee: Rev. J. Moesker (convener) (2004), Rev. K. Jonker (2007), br. W. Gortemaker (2004), br. A. Poppe (2007)

ERQ Subcommittee: Rev. P.G. Feenstra (coordinator of CCCA and convener ERQ) (2004), Rev. A.J. Pol (2007), br. W. Oostdyk (2004), br. John Boot (2001).

OPC Subcommittee: Rev. J. deGelder (convener) (2004), Dr. N.H. Gootjes (2001), br. G. Nordeman (2001), G. VanWoudenberg (2004).

**COMMITTEES FOR THE PROMOTION OF ECCLESIASTICAL UNITY:**

East: Dr. J. DeJong (2004) (Convener), Rev. W. den Hollander (2001), br. F. Westrik (2007). West: Rev. R. Aasman (2001), Rev. W.B. Slomp (2007), br. P. VanWoudenberg (2004).

**STANDING COMMITTEE FOR THE BOOK OF PRAISE:**

Rev. C. Bosch (convener) (2007), Rev. B.J. Berends (2001), sr. C. VanHalen-Faber (2004), br. T.M.P. VanderVen (2007).

**COMMITTEE ON BIBLE TRANSLATIONS**

Rev. P. Aasman (2001) (convener), Dr. W. Helder (2007), Prof. J. Geertsema, Dr. C. VanDam.

**COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL WEB-SITE:**

Br. T. Flach, Br. J. Hoogerdijk, Rev. R.E. Pot, Rev. G.H. Visscher (coordinator)

CONVENING CHURCH FOR NEXT SYNOD: NEERLANDIA (MAY 2001)

[Summarized by PdB]

## **Confessional Membership**

*By Rev. B. J. Berends*

Some years ago I had the occasion to speak with a teacher of one of our Christian (i.e. Reformed) Schools. He expressed his concern that the members (young people!) make constant references to the Three Forms of Unity but do not give (are unable to give) text and verse from the Word of God. In response I said that it was good to hear that members and especially the younger ones were able to quote from those summaries of Holy Scripture with such familiarity, for that had not yet been my experience.

Nevertheless, this teacher saw the danger of “confessionalism” everywhere, that is, the danger of placing the confessions of the Church above or on par with the Word of God. When asked for concrete examples he gave one from his own life. The Christian College he had attended in the past had demanded a statement of faith as well as a letter of reference from his minister at the time of enrollment. As a result he had to see his minister to obtain that letter of reference, and at the same time he used the opportunity to ask his opinion regarding that statement of faith. “How should I fill that in?” he asked. “And you know what he said? That minister said, ‘The Three Forms of Unity! Tell them, that you believe what’s in the Three Forms of Unity.’”

I could hear his indignation coming through clearly. Obviously, pure confessionalism! Still, I was so bold as to let him know that I didn’t see much wrong with that answer, and asked him, “what had you expected him to answer and how have you filled it in yourself?”

“Well, that I believe the Word of God . . . that I believe Jesus Christ to be my personal Saviour.”

“Yes,” I responded, “but everybody at that College could have said that. Would they then have really known what you believed? Don’t you think it would have been better to tell them that you were a Calvinist (in distinction from being evangelical / Pentecostal / (ana) Baptist / Arminian!), that you were one of those who (still) adhered to those five points of Calvinism, as expressed by that well-known acronym T.U.L.I.P., and as confessed by you and I in the Canons of Dort as members of the Church? According to me, such a statement would have told that College a lot more.”

In the ensuing discussion I could not convince this teacher of using the Three Forms of Unity as they were intended to be used: to let others know exactly what we as members of the Church believe on a variety of Biblical doctrines. I pointed out that most of the articles of our Confession begin with “we believe!”

Of course, it is a matter of going back and forth: this is what the Word of God says, and this is why we believe this (i.e. the three Forms of Unity!) . . . this is what we believe because the Word of God

says this, and this, and this. Indeed it is as Rev. G. van Dooren used to say, the confessions constitute but “a pail of water out of an immense ocean.”

After all, we don’t read those forms at the dinner table (just imagine!), but read the Bible, and that every day, collectively and personally. (Although, I would advise the families, the members, to keep the confessions close at hand, so that we don’t have to start anew with interpreting the Bible, but thankfully make use of what the Lord already has given us in the way of insight and understanding via the confessions of the church, to prevent the re-appearance of those age-old heresies as refuted in them.)

Anyway, I considered it a very sad situation to hear a teacher from a Reformed Church and from a Reformed School speak so negatively about the use of the Reformed Confessions. It reminded me about the discussion back in the eighties between several teachers and Rev. Cl. Stam, as prompted by that change in our Forms from “summarized in the articles of the Christian Faith” to “summarize in the confessions.” (See Clarion Vol.37, 1988, p.76, 79, 231, 233)

As a member of Cloverdale Synod 1983 I am partly responsible for that decision. I am still grateful that with the use of the word “confessions” this Synod stated unequivocally that every member of the church is called to adhere to the Word of God as we have learned to confess it in the Three Forms of Unity.

I remember how a delegate exclaimed: “It’s time we work that away out of the world!” (Literal translation from the Dutch) What did we have to get rid off, you ask? Well we got rid of the wrong notion that only the office bearers and not the “common” members have to adhere to the Three Forms of Unity.

Synod Cloverdale, in response to correspondence suggesting such notions, simply said, “away with that wrong distinction between clergy and laity. Away with the notion that only office bearers have to state that they will adhere to the confessions, and then not “in so far as” but “because” they agree with the Word of God. (See below!) All the members are called to do so, and from their youth they are instructed accordingly, in keeping with those important baptismal vows given by their parents. For many years they are instructed in the Three Forms of Unity, until they are ready to make them their own. And on that basis they make public profession of the faith in the midst of an assembly of Christ’s catholic church.

That’s why we can speak of having “confessional membership” in those American/Canadian Reformed assemblies/churches. No, we didn’t always have to broadcast that fact. That simply wasn’t necessary. But over against church federations which do not as yet demand such a confessional membership we have learned to stress the need for it. They cannot but benefit from it and at the same time we can confirm this good practice for ourselves.

Furthermore, how could we as members of the church ever insist on having our office bearers sign a subscription form, promising to uphold the confessions of “our” church, without having to do it ourselves? How could we appoint office bearers from our midst unless we know that they are able and willing to sign that official confirmation of what unites us together under

Christ our Head, as members of His one Body, the Church? What other guarantee do we have of maintaining those “solas” of the Reformations, Secessions, and Liberations: sola Scriptura, sola Gratia, sola Fide,” which in short means: everything in Christ?!

We, as so-called ordinary members, insist on such an official statement of adherence to our confessions by our office bearers. Otherwise we simply do not want them. We have learned our lesson from what happened to that Subscription Form during the time leading up to the first as well as the second Secession!

In 1816 a new subscription form was adopted in the Dutch Reformed Church to allow more freedom of expression by the office bearers. Instead of having to declare that they would adhere to the Three Forms of Unity because they agreed with the Word of God they were now allowed to declare that they would adhere to “the adopted Forms of Unity” in so far as they agreed with the Word of God. They also stated that the churches had never adopted the Canons of Dort.

In 1854 the subscription form was changed once again. This time the declaration to accept the “essence and the principle points” of the confession was considered sufficient. And a third change came about in 1883. The office bearers now only had to promise “to promote the interests of God’s kingdom.”

As everybody can see these changes left the door wide open to an individualistic/subjectivist approach to Scripture and confession. It gave office bearers the freedom to interpret the Scriptures as they saw fit and to ignore the confessional expressions on them by the church.

As a result there were two secessions from this church, one in 1834, and another one in 1886, both of which involved the adoption of the old subscription form. It was made clear that a truly Reformed church will not tolerate office bearers, however pious they may sound, to pursue the route of freedom, the freedom to interpret God’s holy Word as they see fit.

With our subscription form we clearly express our rejection of those individualistic/subjectivist approaches to Scripture and confession. If there are questions about the church’s understanding and interpretation of Scripture then we clear them up together, in an orderly way, in the adopted ecclesiastical way, to the honour of our Head, Jesus Christ, and for the protection and wellbeing of His church.

And what we as members of the church then demand from our office bearers we demand no less from ourselves. That’s why we go to Catechism, to learn to confess the true and complete doctrine of salvation contained in those Three Forms (which of course includes the Creeds - see art. 9 of our Confession and Lord’s Day 7 of Heidelberg Catechism).

To be sure, none of the delegates of Synod Cloverdale deemed the change necessary for themselves. They knew that the confessional adherence by members and office bearers alike was already expressed by that phrase “and taught here in this Christian Church.” For where else is this officially taught and expressed other than in the Three Forms of Unity? Therefore, contrary to the opinion of some present day journalists this binding to the Three Forms of Unity by all the members, this “confessional membership,” was a spiritual fact of life in the Church of Christ ever since the great Reformation. The members did not suffer because of the twelve articles, the

Apostles Creed, of what they confessed on the basis of it in the Lord's Days 8 - 22 of the Heidelberg Catechism, but because of what they confessed on the basis of Scripture as their faith in those Reformed confessions as a whole.

Think of the struggle to come to unity with respect to the scriptural doctrine on the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man as spelled out and now confessed in the Canons of Dort by every confessing member of "our" Reformed churches. Just think of the mode of thinking in the evangelical churches, which even leads to the promotion of the "free will"

of man, of man as a free moral agent, and the denial of the covenant of grace as the basis of God's dealings with us, according to its promises and demands, as also so clearly demonstrated by the baptism of "our" infants.

I hope that everyone feels (will feel) as passionate as I on this matter of "confessional membership," on this unity we have with fellow members of the Church, a unity based on what we officially confess with respect to that infallible Word of our God. It really worries me that leaders in our midst are minimizing its importance in view of the discussion we have on this very topic with the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches (OPC) and other church federations.

I consider this "confessional membership" to be the only proper basis on which we may and can work together as distinct federations of the one Catholic Church of Christ. We want to hold each other to those standards adopted, not just by the clergy (office bearers) but also by the laity (common members) of the Church. It will prevent the questionable variety in theory and practice across the line in a number of church federations.

To me, this whole matter of "confessional membership" touches that Scriptural axiom: "Hold fast what you have received!" Therefore, it would touch the blessing of the Lord on "our" churches for the future. For I believe that, in view of our particular heritage, any deviation from the Confessional binding to Scripture cannot but lead to deformation.

## **The Structure of the Psalter IV**

### ***Part 4 / Conclusion***

*By Rev. K. Kok*

We also have to note that the Book of Psalms is a book. Now, that may not sound terribly profound, but it is not how we usually approach the Psalms. We do not say, "Psalms, chapter 113," the same way that we say, for example, Romans, chapter 11." And, when we read Romans, we assume that there is a connection between chapter 7 and chapter 8. Yet, we assume no such connection in the Book of Psalms. Psalm 120 is supposed to have nothing to do with Psalm 119 and certainly nothing to do with Psalm 135. No, they are just these little (or, in some cases, not so little) songs. When we pick up a hymnal we may find "O Sacred Head Now Wounded" and that has nothing to do with "I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art." They are just separate songs bound together. There may be a loose gathering around a theme, say Christmas, but even then there is no internal connection that leads you from "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" to "A Great and Mighty wonder." It

does not matter which comes first and neither is hurt if the other one is not there at all. In the past, the church's practice was to read and/or sing the Psalms in order. Today, they are used randomly and piecemeal, usually tied, at least vaguely, to the sermon.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, that is a strange approach to God's Word. God is the Author of Scripture and He is the One Who placed the Psalms in the order in which we have them.<sup>11</sup> It would seem natural to conclude that the order is important; in fact, the very order of the Psalms is a part of God's revelation of Himself in Scripture. Only our sentimentalized use of the Psalms as expressions of our inner states before God keeps us from seeing this. As we read through the Psalms, we notice that there is an order to it, or, at least, the human authors and collectors God used thought there was an order to the Book. The Psalter is divided into five books of unequal lengths; it is divided into collections. This certainly should direct us to looking for some sort of structure to each of the books, as well as to the book as a whole.

We also see that, at the very minimum, there are relations between some of the Psalms. We know that Psalms 9 and 10 form a single alphabetic acrostic in which each line starts with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 9 begins this way and Psalm 10 ends this way. The acrostic is not a complete one, but it is there. Further, except for Psalms 1 and 2, Psalm 10 is one of two Psalms in the first book of the Psalter that does not have a title. This seems to indicate that the title of Psalm 9 also applies to Psalm 10. If you read the two together, you find that they form a unity. We also know that Psalms 42 and 43 are united by a common refrain, and probably should be read together. Here again, Psalm 43 is one of only two Psalms in the second book of the Psalter that does not have a title, so it probably shares a title with Psalm 42. We also know that some Psalms are, with minor variations, repeated. For example, Psalms 14 and 53 are virtually identical, but show up in different books of the Psalter, in, dare we say, different contexts? If the Book of Psalms is not a unity, why duplicate Psalms? After all, no self-respecting hymnal publisher would print "Joy to the World" twice in the same hymnal. Further, Psalm 108 is made up of parts of Psalms 57 and 60 put together. Why would this be, if the Book is simply "Israel's' hymnal," or the soul's autobiography?

Now, we all know that Psalms 120 - 134 share a common title, "Song of Ascents." We also know that Psalms 113 - 118 were considered a unity by the Jews, the great Hallel. Psalms 148 - 150 also can be used one after the other as one large Psalm, a kind of Final Hallel. We could also note how Psalm 33, the other Psalm in the first book without a title, takes up and completes the thought of Psalm 32:8; or what to do with Psalms 70 and 71? Psalm 70 is just a reiteration of Psalm 40:13 - 17. Why bother? Yet, if Psalm 70 is the introduction to Psalm 71, the other untitled Psalm in the second book of the Psalter, then it makes sense. David takes what he wrote earlier and extends it in a new context.<sup>12</sup>

All of this ought to make us sensitive to an order to the book of Psalms, to connections between Psalms. All these connections between Psalms, the division of the Psalter into books, and the titles of the Psalms should make us re-think our approach to the book. Here, I should probably state a prejudice: I believe that the titles to the Psalms are as old as the Psalms themselves and are part of the text of scripture.<sup>13</sup> It is a shame that they are relegated to small print in most English Bibles.

Unfortunately, I cannot think of a good way to add them to metrical versions of the Psalms, but, then, we do not sing selah either!

By Rev.K.A.Kok

#### Notes

10This is not to argue for the older practice; Scripture does not bind us to any particular practice. Yet, I do wonder if our current sermon-centric worship robs us of some of the fullness of biblical worship - although I hasten to add that the sermon is certainly of great importance to biblical worship.

11This, to me, is the death knell for the arguments that the arrangement of the Psalter into books, as well as the duplication of some Psalms, or parts of Psalms in the Psalter, is due to Jewish liturgical practices and, thus, the argument runs, irrelevant for our use of the Psalms. So what? God is the Final Author of Scripture. He superintended the way in which it was put together and ordered. Therefore, He designed the order of the Psalter as a book. Jewish liturgical practices are irrelevant one way or the other for our use of the Psalms. What we do have is the canonical form or the book, determined by God, which we must take seriously.

12 See G.H.Wilson, the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter, SBLDS 76 (Chico, California: Scholars press, 1985), p. 131.

13For a full, if dry, discussion of this, see Robert Dick Wilson, "The Headings of the Psalter," The Princeton Theological Review 24 (1926): 1-37, 353-395.