

## CONFESSIONAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE

### *On Being Reformed Today*

In the September 12<sup>th</sup> issue of Reformed Polemics we discussed Rev. J. Visscher's article, "Being Reformed Today." (a) We mentioned that "we are appreciative of and gladdened by Rev. Visscher's affirmation of what it means to be Reformed; what the qualities are that best describe a reformed person; what a 'reformed, biblically based believer is.'" We noted that "this kind of 'constructive' discussion will hopefully create a new awareness and appreciation of the richness of the Reformed faith..." We also noted that his "comments made on the point of the reformed believer being 'confessional' and 'constructive' could be the impetus for some further comment and continued public and open discussion." We therefore take this opportunity to continue that "public and open discussion," for "the peace among church members and among churches is promoted when that which divides them is kept from advancing because it is discussed in public."

Apparently there are people "among us" who perhaps will agree that being "confessional" is one of "the qualities that best describe a reformed person," but when they are asked to demonstrate this necessary quality in connection with the confessions of the Church, they "want little or nothing to do with them." They claim to be Reformed, but they do not want to be bound by the Reformed confession of Scripture. This unusual situation is no doubt due to the fact that some people, as Rev. Visscher suggested, no longer know what the word "reformed" means. It is then also doubtful that there is a proper understanding of what it means to be "confessional." In such circumstances it is always fitting to review what "reformed, biblically based believers" have said or written about the confession(s) of the Church and what it really means to confess or to be confessional.

In his book, "Het Historisch Fundament," J. Munneke writes that "the foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ. He bought her with His blood and she has no other foundation. We believe in the Christ, who has revealed Himself in His Word. He is the Christ of the Scriptures. If we say that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Church, we may also say that the Bible is the foundation of the Church. On the word of the apostles and prophets Christ builds His Church... "However, "the Church is not only built on the Word, she also has to proclaim that Word; she must carry it out into the world. The Church is the 'pillar and bulwark' of the truth. Nearly every time Paul uses the word 'truth' he means God's Word. Christ also uses that word in the same sense, 'Thy Word is truth.' The truth is diametrically opposed to the lie. If anyone wants to know the truth, he has to go to the Church. The Church has received the Word of God, and she must be a 'pillar and a bulwark' of the truth." (b)

Munneke notes that "to be and to remain a pillar and bulwark the Church must keep (or guard) the Word of God. She must protect it against falsification by the lie. The Church has to keep the Word pure by guarding it against heresy, and confessing the Word of truth, and the truth of the Word. To confess then means to say the same thing as the Word. It is a repetition of the Word. Not a repetition in the same sense of parroting or reciting. If you parrot or recite someone's words, it is not necessary to agree with them. This is totally impossible when you confess.

Confessing and believing are inseparably bound. Paul says, 'With the heart man believes and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved' (Rom. 10:10). Believing with the heart and confessing with the lips cannot be separated. For this reason the Belgic Confession begins with the

words, ‘We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth...’”(c) Simply put: We cannot believe without confessing; we cannot confess without believing. If we believe, we must confess, and if we confess we must believe. “One confesses to salvation, and therefore it is a necessity. Confession is made with the mouth but it comes from the heart. It is a matter of the lips but no less so of the heart. What I confess, that I champion. If I sincerely confess that Jesus is my Saviour, I know with all my heart that He saved me. When Paul in Gal. 1:8, 9 speaks about the preaching of the gospel, it is already a confession of the Word. What else is preaching but a repetition of the Word? Confession has rightly been called the ‘amen’ of the Church, the amen to the Word.” (d)

The Word then must be confessed. Munneke points out that “in a confession the Church pronounces what she holds for truth according to the Word of God. Confession is a personal matter. Do we not believe with the heart and confess with the lips? At the same time it is a communal matter! The Church is built on the confession! If God’s Word is given to the Church, then the keeping (guarding) of the Confession of the Word is a matter of the Church as a community. Rightly so, it has been said, ‘The congregation of believers (the Church) has, in a common belief, confessed God’s truth. She has sought a common formulation of that truth.’” (e) That “common formulation” of what we as “reformed, biblically based believers” believe and confess is commonly known as “the Reformed confession of Scripture.”

According to Prof. P. Bijsterveld, this confession is necessary: “1) To give a true and authentic survey of the confessed doctrine of the Church, so that all slander of the opposition can be denied. 2) To witness publicly against the world and to the honour of God. 3) To preserve unity among the churches of the same confession. 4) To preserve the purity of faith and to prevent the spread of heresies. 5) To pass on the true religion to the next generation, so that they can propagate and develop it. 6) To show what in history has been held as the truth” (quoted by J. Munneke).

Finally, Munneke writes that “after the foregoing it is no longer difficult to call the confessions the historic foundation of the Church. The Scriptural foundation, as we have seen, is the word of the apostles and prophets. If, however, the Church maintains that scriptural element in the confession (the repeated word), then we may also call the confession the repeated Word and the historic foundation of the Church. The confession ‘takes its authority from Scripture.’ It does not want to be anything but an interpretation of Scripture, in conformity with the Word of God... For that reason the expression ‘On the basis of the confession’ means to a Calvinist nothing else than in the basis of the Word.” (f)

We might say that “after the foregoing” several things should, by now, be quite clear. To be Reformed means to be biblical or Scriptural. Being Reformed is not a matter of preference, but a matter of the truth of God’s Word. The congregation of believers (the Church) has, in a common belief confessed God’s truth. She has sought a common formulation of that truth. To confess means to say the same thing as the Word. Confessing and believing are inseparably bound. If we believe we must confess and if we confess we must believe. One confesses to salvation, and therefore it is a necessity. And, being Reformed, we gladly and thankfully affirm that what the Church, in her confessions, has summarized as the truth of the Word of God is also our confession; we joyfully bind ourselves to the confession in order to be bound to Scripture. We willingly and “wholeheartedly” subscribe to the Reformed confession of Scripture. Such is then the proper

Reformed and biblical perspective on how we as truly “reformed, biblically based believers” should view the confession(s) of the Church; on what it really means to confess or to be confessional.

However, as we stated previously, and as Rev. Visscher also confirmed, there are those among us who “want little or nothing to do with them” (the confessions, RD). In fact, Rev. Visscher says more. He writes: “Now it strikes me that the church has always had to steer a steady course between the two dangers of “confessionalism” and “anti-confessionalism...,” between “those who think that the confessions are on par or above the Word,” and “those who want little or nothing to do with them...,” between “those who idolize them and those who ignore them...” And, says Rev. Visscher: “In this regard I am convinced that we have both types of extremists in our midst.” He then adds that “both are positions that need to be avoided at all costs.”

A few constructive comments are required. We certainly agree that we need to avoid both positions (confessionalism and anti-confessionalism) at all costs. We do not discount the possibility that there are (and have been) people who “think that the confessions are on par or above the Word,” or people “who idolize them.” That, however, is not the main reason that some people have left or are leaving the Canadian Reformed Churches. Quite the contrary! They leave (withdraw) because they no longer want to be bound by the confession of the church; they no longer want to subscribe to the Reformed confession of Scripture; they are convinced that “confessional membership” is both unbiblical and unrealistic. And they freely express their views.

The fact that these kinds of sentiments can be found among us, and are at times even openly and publicly expressed, would suggest that it certainly is not confessionalism that is currently our first and foremost concern. Neither is it likely to be the chief cause of deformation or decline in our churches. That doesn’t mean that there are no so-called “confessionalists,” and that confessionalism is simply not a concern, and will never be a consideration. We should, however, also keep in mind that the “constructive” call for a return to the confessions, directed toward “those who want little or nothing to do with them,” constitutes for some church members ample cause to accuse their fellow brothers or sisters of being confessionalists; to classify their urgent appeal for confessional orthodoxy as confessionalism. They of course make these unfounded accusations because they unfortunately do not know (anymore) what it means to be Reformed or confessional.

What does it mean to be Reformed? Or, “What is reformation?” The answer to this question, K. Schilder once declared, “is ultimately so plain and ordinary that it almost amazes us.” He then proceeded to tell us what reformation is - return to the confessions! “We want to begin with the belief that our thinking IS ordered by the reading and acceptance of Scripture - as opposed to being ordered by a theologian or by anyone else, or by ourselves.” (g) The basis for what we confess is not first and foremost our subjective views and experiences, but the truth of the Word as summarized in our confessions. Reformation then is a return to the confessions. Dr. J. C de Moor (1929) in one of his sermons declared: “In their confessions and in the defense against erroneous teachings..., the Reformed churches possess a most precious treasure. They must always be careful to guard this treasure, and they will always have to exert themselves to unmask the lie.” (h) These were well-considered words, and these “confessional and constructive” words retain their value today - also for our Canadian Reformed Churches.

Ron Dykstra

(a) Being Reformed Today, Rev. J Visscher, Information, June 27/98

(b-f) Het Historisch Fundament (The Church and the Confession), J. Munneke, Diakonia, June 1989.

(g) (h) Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church, Rudolf Van Reest, Inheritance Publications (p.150 & p.55).

## **DEATH PENALTY - YES or NO?**

Yesterday, on the BBC, I heard that four Caribbean countries are about to reintroduce the death penalty. In the Netherlands more than half the population is in favour of bringing it back. This issue was also raised by Nederlands Dagblad a few weeks ago when it gave an extensive review of a small booklet published by the youth organization of the SGP (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij). These are positive developments, especially when it becomes increasingly clear that the death penalty is a Biblical teaching. Still, many people are left with questions. What exactly does the Bible say about this subject?

In Rom. 12:19 the apostle Paul says: 'Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."' He is quoting from Deut. 32:35. In chapter 13 of this letter to the Romans Paul explains (among other things) how the Lord uses the governing authorities to punish evil-doers. Paul says, 'there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.' He applies this by warning that people in authority punish evil on God's behalf, and puts it even stronger when he says that the authorities are 'the servant(s) of God to execute His wrath on the wrongdoer.' (Rom. 13:4).

There are two important points to note here.

1) The Bible indicates that every governing authority serves on God's behalf. Just like in present day Canada, the Netherlands or Australia, so also in Paul's days, the Romans would not have realized this fact. But even a non-Christian authority is, without its knowledge, in the service of God to avenge evil. The crux of the matter is that on the last day God will require an account from every governing authority: Have you followed my command to withstand evil or have you allowed it to continue? It is clear that the government of Canada, the Netherlands and Australia will be dumb-founded. Just consider the drug trade and the prostitution that continues. Or think of the murder of so many unborn children. Not to mention the promotion of homosexuality as an alternate life-style.

2) The task of our present day governments (and their justice systems) is to avenge evil on God's behalf. God has placed governing authorities in this world, in the first place, to execute His wrath against evil. That is their primary task.

Now when we hear the word "revenge" we give it a negative connotation. That's because we immediately equate it with our personal revenge - something which is not permitted in society nor in the Bible. No, personal revenge is not permitted. But when the governing authorities mete out punishment against evil, this is "revenge" in the Biblical sense. Why - Because in the Bible punishment always has to do with restitution or compensation for the injury. Whenever an evil deed has been done, someone has been disadvantaged. This disadvantage must be recompensed by means of the punishment. The punishment must be of equal worth to the deed that caused the

injury. This is pictured by the two scales seen in the left hand of Lady Justice. An evil deed brings the scale out of balance. An appropriate punishment must return the scale to the balanced position.

Appropriate punishment is not always the return of what, for example, has been stolen. There was also the disadvantage and concern induced by the act itself, not to mention any other potential consequences. It is for this reason that the Lord commands that a thief repay double of what he has stolen (Exodus 22:7). The return of that which was stolen along with a 100% fine is the revenge, the compensation which the Lord requires for the victim. Such a fine would, then, not be paid to the authorities, but to the victim himself. He is the one injured by the wrong that was done. That is putting things right!

This principle forms the background for the Biblical expression: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth (Deut. 19:21). In other words, each sinful deed must receive an equally fitting punishment. This is a rule with a judicial context. That's why the Lord Jesus turned so sharply against the Pharisees when they used this rule as an excuse to justify personal revenge (Matt. 5:38-39).

Now it is true that the demand (an eye for an eye) and the principle of restitution do mean that when a victim loses a body part, he may demand that the perpetrator's same body part be removed as punishment. If your neighbour plucks out your right eye, then, according to God's law, you may demand from the judge that his right eye also be removed (Lev. 24:19-20; Exod. 21:23-25). Although this sounds horrible, we should understand that in practice it very seldom happened.

Why not? Even though the principle of applying this type of punishment remains, the Lord gives the victim the alternative of exchanging the revenge with a fine. In other words, instead of demanding the right eye of the perpetrator, the victim may demand a monetary fine. Of course, the victim will benefit much more from a fine (which he gets - not the government) than the right eye of the perpetrator - there's not much he can do with that.

The gospel is also based on these same principles. All of what I have said to this point touches the crux of the message of the Bible. God is perfectly righteous and concerns Himself with setting evil right. An appropriate punishment must follow wrong-doing. That also applies to the gospel. On the last day when God will appear as judge of this world He will not be able to excuse sin. He, too, must avenge all sin against His holiness. The only manner in which to avoid His punishment is to ask Jesus Christ to accept that punishment on our behalf. And that's what He has done in His crucifixion. And by placing faith in Him we may exchange our guilt with His innocence. He pays for our sins. He carries the burden of God's wrath against our sins. The principles that God has instituted for dealing with social evils are precisely the same as those in effect with the message of the gospel. When we lose sight of the one, eventually we will not be able to see the other either. How we view restitution in society will have a direct impact on how we view the gospel.

#### *Substitution for the Death Penalty in God's Law*

Although the Bible contains only a few instances where it speaks directly about substitution of a fine for the literal punishment meted out, there are many indirect references concerning this. (We shouldn't forget that the 5 books of Moses contain only a selection of the laws which God revealed to Moses.)

The possibility of converting a punishment into a fine also exists for certain capital crimes in God's law. In Exodus 21:29 ff we read that if the owner of an ox that is known to be dangerous does not guard it properly, and the ox kills someone, then the ox must be put to death and the owner also receives the death sentence. But then, in verse 30 we read:

"If a ransom is laid on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is laid upon him."

The defendant (the nearest of kin to the victim) may demand, instead of the death penalty, a monetary fine.

From the book of Proverbs we learn that the same possibility of substitution exists for adultery. The prescribed punishment for adultery is the death penalty (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Prov. 6:32-35 (cf. 13:7-8) warns us that the plaintiff (the injured marriage partner) in an adultery charge could become so angry that he would not even be prepared to consider a fine in place of the death penalty. We see that the right to insist on having the official sentence executed remains with the plaintiff.

'He who commits adultery has no sense; he who does it destroys himself. ... For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge. (i.e. with a lawsuit) He will accept no compensation, nor be appeased though you multiply gifts.' (i.e. even if you offer him a fortune as redemption).

Still, there are also some crimes for which the Lord says no redemption money may be accepted. We read in Numbers 35:31ff:

"Moreover you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death; but he shall be put to death. And you shall accept no ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to dwell in the land before the death of the high priest. You shall not thus pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of him who shed it."

It is important to note the context here. The matter under discussion concerns a premeditated murder. Num.35:22ff indicates that when a murder occurs by accident the perpetrator may flee to a designated city of refuge and remain there until the death of the High Priest.

The question comes to mind why the punishment here may not be substituted with a fine. Could it have something to do with the fact that man is created in the image of God? The honour of God Himself is assaulted by the act of murder. His image is destroyed. This consideration is particularly clear at the institution of the death penalty for murder in Gen. 9:6.

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image."

Were there also other crimes for which the death penalty was compulsory? Considering it was left to the accuser (or plaintiff) to choose for a substitutionary fine or not, we may conclude that where there is no direct plaintiff the prescribed punishment must be executed. This would certainly be the case for crimes in which God Himself is the plaintiff, i.e. with crimes clearly committed against God such as idolatry (Deut. 13; Lev. 20:2); public blasphemy (Lev. 24:10ff; cf. H.C. Q/A 100);

witchcraft (Lev. 20:6, 27; Exod. 22:18) and working on the Sabbath (Exod. 31:15). Consideration of such deeds as crimes will, of course, only take place where society is clearly Christian.

The question may also be asked whether it is wise to promote the death penalty in a non-Christian society. Wouldn't that incur risks? A non-Christian justice system could easily misuse such a punishment. The simple answer of the apostle Paul is that such an argument did not hold enough weight over against the principle of restitution that the Lord Himself has given, a principle that necessarily includes the execution of the death penalty. In Rom. 13:4, after Paul has explained that all authorities are instituted by God to execute His wrath, His vengeance over evil, he says ...

"But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain; he is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer."

In the olden days (as well as today) the sword was the symbol for the execution of justice, up to and including the most severe punishment, the death penalty (for which the sword was needed). For this reason Lady Justice does not only carry the scales in her left hand but also a sword in her right hand.

As with everything, so also with the death penalty, misuse can still occur. On the last day judges will also have to give account for this to the Lord. But that does not prevent Paul from stating that heathen rulers also carry the responsibility of making proper use of the death penalty. Don't forget that, in the end, Paul was also (unjustly) sentenced to death by the Roman authorities.

#### *The Death Penalty and Forgiveness*

As a Christian judge, how would you have to deal with a criminal who not only confesses to murder but also asks for forgiveness? This argument is often used, not only to oppose the death penalty, but actually - when you think about it - to oppose all social punishment in cases of penitence and request for forgiveness. The problem becomes critical in the case of the death penalty because the life of the sorrowful criminal will be taken; while, if his sorrow is real, the danger to society has disappeared.

The chink in the armour of this argument lies in that last sentence. Biblical punishment is not primarily focused on removing danger from society. That is, indeed, the fundamental idea behind our modern day system of imprisonment. We throw the criminals behind bars. It makes us feel safer. But, as we have seen above, the Bible is interested in restitution. Crime is punished in order to recompense the victim for his damages. That is Biblical retribution.

The Lord expects that along with true sorrow for sin or crime committed, the desire will arise to set things right. Restitution belongs with the request for forgiveness. The one can not exist without the other. For this reason the Lord commanded that restitution had to be made before someone could bring a guilt offering in the temple in order to receive forgiveness for a sin committed against someone's property (Lev. 6:1-7). Only after payment of restitution was made (and in this case with an additional 20% fine for perjury) was the wrong-doer permitted to go to the temple to ask for forgiveness (Lev. 6:5). Payment of the lawfully demanded restitution is a prerequisite for forgiveness from the Lord.

That principle remains valid for us today. Before we may dare to approach our Lord for forgiveness we must have gone to our neighbour to restore the breach our sin has caused. This general principle must also be applied in specific cases where the judge has issued a specific sentence. We may not just go to the Lord and ask for forgiveness. It is true that we no longer need an intermediary priest or sacrificial animal. When we seek forgiveness we may pray to God directly by way of our mediator and high priest, Jesus Christ. He is, at the same time, our sacrificial lamb. He has died for our sins, sacrificed on the cross. But the principle remains in force: First restore the relationship with our neighbour that our sin has spoiled, only then pray for forgiveness.

This principle must also be applied when the restoration for our sin demands the death penalty. That's why Paul could declare to the judge:

“If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death;” (Acts 25:11a)

If the death penalty is correctly demanded against us then we shall (as difficult as it might be) accept this punishment as God's required restitution for our sin. We will be able to do that because we know that in Jesus Christ there is also forgiveness. In such a case we will receive that forgiveness by handing over our earthly life in accordance with God's law. And that forgiveness means that our Lord will receive our soul and assures us of the promise of everlasting life with Him in glory.

These principles also mean that if we were ever to fall into sin by committing a capital crime (according to God's law), we would still, in faith, be prepared to accept the consequences of it. If our society demands a different (lighter) sentence, then we will still realize that God has demanded something more severe. In faith there should arise within us a deep awareness of the seriousness of our crime in God's eyes, and the willingness, should we be in different circumstances, to accept His punishment. At the same time we may thank Him abundantly that He, in the given circumstances, has set us free from the required punishment. That should lead to an even more humble attitude toward Him, and a zealous desire to henceforth serve Him from the heart.

Dr. R. D. Anderson (Translated, with permission, by PdB)

## **THE STRUCTURE OF THE PSALTER**

NB. This is the continuation of a study of the Structure of the Psalter by Rev.K.A.Kok which was started in Reformed Polemics last year.

[Let us briefly digress to make a few comments about acrostic Psalms. A number of Psalms are arranged alphabetically. Since this is virtually impossible to show in translation, we may only be familiar with Psalm 119, which is arranged in 22 sections of eight verses and which works its way through the Hebrew alphabet. Yet, this pattern is also found in Psalms 9-10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145. Psalm 1 begins with the first letter off the alphabet and ends with a word beginning with the last letter.

Now, this seems to be more than simply a clever poetic device. Some of these Psalms are about God's word. Faith in God's Word and obedience to it results in blessing; unbelief and

disobedience bring the curse. This is the thrust of the “alphabet of Psalms 1, 37 (which is an expansion of Psalm 1), and 119. Psalm 25 is a prayer in the face of danger, the alphabet of God’s protection. Psalms 111 and 145 are alphabets of praise to God and Psalm 112 is an alphabet of blessing. These Psalms emphasize that God’s Word embraces all things, that God is the “Alpha and Omega,” the Alphabet of our existence. It is by this Alphabet that we are judged, by which we live, and in which we find gladness. God’s Alphabet, that He is the Alpha and Omega, is something we may call upon in time of need. The way the Psalms themselves are put together force us to look for some greater structure.]

That brings us to a closer look at the division of the Psalter into five books. This division into five parts reflects a structure that is found in several covenant renewals in the Bible, particularly the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>14</sup> Now, Deuteronomy is, in many respects, the document that summarizes the renewed covenant. It briefly tells what God did to deliver Israel and then sets the nature of the covenant renewed through Moses. The book also looks forward to Israel’s life in the inheritance Yahweh is giving them. In much the same way, the Book of Psalms may be seen as the document of the covenant renewed with David. And central to this covenant renewal is the Ark of the Covenant.

The central event of David’s kingship is the search for the Ark and bringing it to Jerusalem. The Ark is the earthly throne of God. The cover of the Ark is the place where the blood of atonement was placed on the Day of Atonement. What happens in 1 Samuel is the destruction of the previous covenant administration. As 1 Samuel opens, we see a defiled and decayed priesthood that is defiling both the people of God and the Tabernacle of God. God cuts off the defiled priesthood so all that is left is a little boy with the name, “The Glory (of Yahweh] Has Departed.” The Ark itself goes into the exile deserved by Israel. But in exile, God defeats Dagon, humbles the Philistines, and returns to Israel with much spoil.

Yet, while the Ark returns from exile, it is not restored to the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle, but the Ark remains in Kiraith-Jaraim. Israel can have no Day of Atonement, because the Glory of Yahweh has not yet returned to His dwelling. Since the cloth covering the Ark when it left the Tabernacle was the veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, there was not even a Most Holy Place, or a Holy Place for that matter, during this time. The Tabernacle was an empty shell. There are no Days of Atonement from the time Samuel was a little boy until the time of David, maybe even the time of Solomon. The Ark of the Covenant was in exile. But as the books of Samuel end, the Ark is brought to Jerusalem. The Ark being brought to Jerusalem was the sign that Yahweh was the Great King and David was His prince, His nagid. We would expect then that the five books of the Psalter would correspond to how God makes the covenant to have His House, His Palace, built.

When God comes to make covenant with His people, there are usually five things He says/does with them. First, He declares Who He is. Second, He explains that He has delivered them from darkness to light. Third, He gives His laws to them. Notice that the announcement of salvation and God’s promise always precedes the giving of the Law.<sup>15</sup> Fourth, He promises to bless their obedience and punish their disobedience. Finally, He arranges for the future enforcement of the covenant by ensuring its continuity.

This gives a kind of rough and ready outline of the five books of the Psalter. The first book runs from Psalms 1 to Psalm 41. It consists of two introductory Psalms and then 37 Psalms of David, counting Psalms 9 and 10, and Psalms 32 and 33 as one Psalm each. The dominant theme here is that Yahweh is God and He is establishing a new creation in David. Notice how Psalm 3 and Psalm 4 move from morning to evening where the typical old covenant progression is from evening to morning. This is a new covenant idea. The second book begins with Psalm 42 and ends with Psalm 72. The first eight Psalms are by the David-appointed Levites. In scripture, the number eight is connected with resurrection, the coming of the new creation, and so forth.<sup>16</sup> The remaining Psalms are by kings, David and Solomon. After the introduction by the David-appointed Levites we go from the king to the king's son. And throughout the book, we find an emphasis on God showing His faithfulness to His Anointed and establishing the Anointed's rule, the kingdom of the Anointed son

In the third book, Psalms 73-89, all but one of the Psalms is by the Levites; the lone exception, Psalm 88, is by David. Here there is an emphasis on priestly themes, the idea of entering in and the requirements for dwelling before God, especially the obedience required for the king. The fourth book begins with Psalm 90 and ends with Psalm 106. Most of the Psalms here are untitled, although David wrote two of them and Moses wrote one. What is especially telling in the fourth book is the kingly emphasis. Yahweh is the Great King Who brings blessing and judgment. These are Psalms of God implementing His rule.

Finally, there is the fifth book, Psalms 107-150. Yahweh has built His House of people, His Temple of Praise. He then promises that He will bring His people to their promised inheritance. The dominant note is praise from the Hallel of Psalms 113 -118 to the Final Hallel of Psalm 150. David plays a prominent role here. He teaches the people what God's salvation means (Pss.108-110), he provides four of the Psalms of Ascent (122, 124, 131, 133), and he teaches the people how to pray (Ps. 138-145). And at the end of each of these "Davidic sections," there are untitled songs of praise. This structure may indicate a kind of antiphonal worship where David's words are answered by a response from the people. At any rate, David is, again, the Anointed of God, who points to the Great Anointed to come.

The Book of Psalms begins with the word "blessed" - "Blessed is the man." This places the whole book in the context of sabbath, festival worship. What is of central significance in the Psalms is the call to worship. It is the call to Yahweh's heavenly host, constituted in the Anointed, to gather around His throne. Even more, it is the call to be the throne of praise. The Psalms, then, deal especially with public, corporate worship, under the priests, with the son at David at the head of his people. The Psalter comes in the context of the son of David, the people who are a Temple, and worship, that is, in the context of Christ Jesus, His church, and her public, corporate worship.

Now these are just a few, tentative ideas. But I do believe that we must take seriously the Book of Psalms as a book - as a book revealing the coming of Jesus Christ, Great David's Greater Son.

Rev. K. A. Kok

14 See G. Van Rongen *The words of the Divine Great King* (London, Ontario: ILPB, 1973), pp.1-10; Meredith Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 21-75. This approach is not the only way to view covenant renewal, but it is a helpful way.

15 This is why, in a Reformed liturgy, the reading of the Law should follow the confession of sin and assurance of pardon. In Reformed theology, God, in His love, brings us to Himself and places us in His kingdom. Only then does He give us His Law as the guide for our life before Him. The promise always comes before the demand. This is the pattern of Exodus. God brings Israel up out of Egypt and brings them to Sinai; He declares them to be His people and only then does He give the Law. To place the Law before the promise may be good Lutheranism and good Puritanism, but not good biblical theology.

16 See Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. A.E. Moorhouse (Portland, Maine: The Faith Press, 1966), pp 60 ff.; Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, Indiana; University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), chapter 16.