

22.7 REPORT OF THE DEPUTIES: “UNANIMITY ON THE WHOLE MATTER OF THE VERSIFICATION OF PSALMS” (Artt 55, 250, 257)

- A. Dr DG Breed delivers the Report.
- B. **Decision:** The Report is referred to Commission Liturgical Matters 2.
- C. Rev DJ Bakker reports on behalf of Commission Liturgical Matters 2.

D. REPORT

1. Matters that Synod should note

Assignment (Acta 2006:739)

“It is clear that a stressful situation has develop in the GKSA since psalm versification has been approved. During the Synod the many Petitions of Protest testified of the fact that there is no unanimity regarding the matter of Psalm versification.

It is the desire of everyone in the church that we should come to a full comprehension of and clarity on Psalm versification so that our unision and love for each other may grow and increase.

With this the undersigned propose that there should be an open conversation between the protesters, those interested in the matter and the experts (Old Testament scholars, bibliologists, scholars of dogmatics, literary scholars and musicologists), facilitated by dr DG Breed, and that they look at the difference in view thoroughly. We believe that if those involved sit around a table and listen to each other in a brotherly manner, the Lord will lead us to clarity, full understanding and peace, and we will find each other in this matter. May the end result of this Synod bring peacy to our churches.”

Understanding of the assignment

The Deputies understood this assignment not to be a covert attempt to deal with the protests against the Synod decision, which would be contrary to Church Order articles 31 and 49.

The Deputies also understood that the assignment was not an attempt to give the protestors a chance to merely air their complaints so that they can be dropped. The “unity”, “clarity” and “understanding” that is referred to, is understood to mean that unity is riched by receiving clarity and understanding on what the Lord demanrev from this situation according to his Word.

It is clear that the work of these Deputies is related to the work assigned to Deputies during Synod 2006 to “identify the issues underlying the grounrev of protest [against the Psalm versification]”, and therefore there has been frequent contact with these deputies by means of the mutual attendance of meetings and discussions between the chairpersons.

Execution of the assignment

1.3.1 Meetings

In carrying out the assignment the Deputies initially had to spend much time calming the emotions, persuading those involved of the meaningfulness of discussions, and reaching agreement on the modus operandi. Some of this “footwork” is not reported in detail. There is just a short report of the eight meetings held.

1.3.1.1 First meeting

Shortly after Synod 2006 a meeting was arranged with the ministers who provided guidance in the protests against the Psalm versifications that served at the Synod. At this meeting all the brothers considered the manner of carrying out the assignment from Synod. The meeting considered who the “protestors” and “those interested in the matter” are, and who would be invited as “experts”. There was agreement that those from the GKSA who collaborated with the versification of the Psalms should be invited as experts. There was also agreement that those people who gave guidance in the protests regarding the versification will receive an invitation to participate. There was furthermore agreement that due to the

sensitivity of the matter, “those interested in the matter” will be involved at a later stage when there has been progress with the “listen to each other” part.

1.3.1.2 Second meeting

Shortly after the first meeting the Deputies met with the Deputies Liturgical matters. The Agenda was the same as with the first meeting. There was agreement on who would act as “Old Testament scholars, bibliologists, scholars in dogmatics, literary scholars and musicologists”.

1.3.1.3 Third meeting

At the beginning of 2007 (29-31 January) a meeting was held during which there was a discussion between the “protestors” and the “experts”. At this meeting there was a number of ministers who guided the protests against the Psalm versifications in the past. As “experts” rev Johannes Bingle, proff Dries du Plooy, Heilna du Plooy and Herrie van Rooy, PWG du Plessis, Piet Roodt, dr Rassie Smit and rev Arnold Mulder were present.

During this meeting an overview was provided of the process of the versification – different work groups/commission, the process of evaluation and revision, and the requirements for adjudication namely: fidelity to the text, literary and musical quality. The guidance in this conversation was mainly taken by prof Herrie van Rooy.

After that the process of text to song was elucidated. Eluciation was given regarding the process of versifying the text. The influence of the music and the literature in the process was highlighted. Psalm 1 was shortly referred to as example. Both the Totius and Cloete text were discussed in terms of the limitations of melody, rhyme pattern, division of material into verses and lines, the presentation of the content even though the detail does not quite feature enough. During this part of the discussion the use of God names, possible omissions in the versification and the use of “terminologies” such as “covenant” were covered. Consequently attention was paid to fundamental protests against the versification. Attention was paid to the “Messianic psalms”, “revenge psalms” and the possibility of a “strange theology” in the versification.

Prof Heilna du Plooy provided a perspective on how language and music affected the versification. The development of the language, literary theories and poetry were highlighted. The characteristics, nature and style of modern Afrikaans poetry were also highlighted.

Rev Arnold Mulder then provided a few perspectives on the important role that the music played in the versification.

After the discussion those present all agreed that the discussion was meaningful, but also acknowledged that it did not solve the problem. The need was expressed that further discussions should take place in which specific matters will receive attention, especially “fundamental” matters that were elucidated in the discussion.

1.3.1.4 Fourth meeting

A fourth meeting was held in 2007 during which a few retired professors were included who already made their protest against the versification known in writing. During the discussion the Deputies asked prof Jorrie Jordaan and rev Danie Snyman to be of assistance with the meeting. The majority of matters discussion and the third meeting were discussed at this meeting as well. The emeriti promised at the end of the discussion to formulate their protests in writing and to send it to rev Danie Snyman (which they indeed did).

1.3.1.5 Fifth meeting

The Deputies requested the protesting brothers who were present at the third meeting to send the matters for further discussion to rev Danie Snyman in written form (like the emeriti). Rev Danie Snyman was requested to sort the information he has received with the assistance of dr Gerard Meijer so that an orderly discussion can result from it. The two brothers did this with great thoroughness

and they made certain from the “protestors” beforehand that their sorting of the matters is correct. It was clear that matters pertaining to the Messianic character of the Psalms had to receive preference during discussions.

It was agreed that the Deputies together with rev Danie Snyman will have discussions with prof Herrie van Rooy (as part of the group of “experts”) with this assortment as Agenda, and will then have a discussion with the protestors with the results. The meeting with prof Herrie van Rooy took place and it was decided to present amongst other things the following statements to the protesting brothers in order to ascertain to what degree there are differences and agreements. These statements were directly related to the matters that concern the brothers:

- 1.3.1.5.1 The entire Old Testament, including all Psalms, is Messianic in the sense that the entire Old Testament points to Christ. The entire Old Testament results in Christ and finds its final purpose in Christ. Manners in which it points to Christ can be amongst others the following: revelation historical continuation that ends in Christ; specific themes/lines that reach their deepest meaning in Christ; typology; analogy; prophecies that point to the person or the kingdom of the Messiah; promises that are fulfilled in Christ; contrat; etc.
- 1.3.1.5.2 Some parts of the Old Testament are directly Messianic and some are indirectly Messianic. Many parts of the Old Testament are neither directly nor indirectly Messianic, but Messianic as described in 1.3.1.5.1.
- 1.3.1.5.3 Directly Messianic means that the relevant chapter/pericope/verse/sentence firstly and/or exclusively deals with the promised Messiah and also had such a message regarding the Messiah for the original readers/hearers.
- 1.3.1.5.4 Indirectly Messianic means that the part had meaning for its own time, but then also points to the Messiah or finds special fulfilment in the Messiah.
- 1.3.1.5.5 It is possible that Reformed exegists that hold the same view of Scripture can differ on the question of whether a certain part is directly or indirectly Messianic and on the question of in which way(s) an indirectly Messianic part points to Christ.
- 1.3.1.5.6 Prof van Rooy feels that Psalms 2 and 110 are indirectly Messianic and not directly. Parts of Scripture that he does view as directly Messianic include Isaiah 8:23-9:6 and Malachi 3:1.
- 1.3.1.5.7 In the statement on the Old Testament (“as it presents itself”) the Holy Spirit is the actual Subject of this phrase.
- 1.3.1.5.8 If the statement (that has been made in the past) “Psalm 110 is not a Messianic Psalm” means that Psalm 110 does not point to the Messiah at all, it is rejected in the light of point 1. If it means that Psalm 110 is not directly Messianic, one can argue about this difference in interpretation (whether the Psalm is directly or indirectly Messianic).
- 1.3.1.5.9 A New Testamental quote of an Old Testamental part that indicates that a specific Old Testamental part refers to the Messiah, does not necessarily mean that that part is directly Messianic (as defined in 1.3.1.5.3 above).
- 1.3.1.5.10 There are different ways in which the Messianic character of the Psalms can be relayed in versification, for instance:
 - (a) it can present the Messianic expressly at each Psalm (Luther);
 - (b) with Psalms that are quoted in the NT as fulfilled in Christ it can present the fulfilment explicitly (for instance in capitals);
 - (c) with Psalms that are accepted as directly Messianic, it can present the Messianic explicitly;
 - (d) it can present the Psalms in their Old Testament form, in other words without any explicit referent to Christ.
- 1.3.1.5.11 The 1936 versification has a combination of (b) and (c) above. The 2001 versification worked with c and d, but felt that no Psalm is directly Messianic.

1.3.1.5.12 It is clear that the statement of prof Cloete (“Psalm 110 is not a Messianic Psalm”) did lead to misunderstanding. The protestors probably read more into the statement than what was intended and based on the statement brought an accusation of a false theology against the versification. However, this accusation has been denied by the co-workers of our church consistently, and was dismissed by the Synod of 2006 with the rejection of petitions of protest that made this point.

1.3.1.6 Sixth meeting

The result of the discussion between prof Herrie van Rooy (as part of the group of “experts”), rev Danie Snyman and the Deputies were sent to the “protestors” in writing. A meeting was held early in 2008 with the aim of relaying the result of the discussion with Prof. Herrie van Rooy. At this meeting a number of the ministers who took the leadership with the protests against the versification were present. In addition to what the brothers received in writing they were fully informed by rev Danie Snyman and the Deputate regarding the discussion with prof Herrie van Rooy. The discussion of above-mentioned statements had as consequence that the problems that the protestors had with the versification could be more clearly defined. Although much time was put aside for this conversation, it was clear that further discussions had to be had with the brothers. It was decided that it would be beneficial if the brothers prepared a concrete evaluation of the versification of Psalms 1 and 2 for the following meeting.

1.3.1.7 Seventh meeting

The Deputies decided in the light of several factors that it would be important to have a meeting in Namibia regarding the versification in the process of carrying out Synod's assignment. This was firstly decided because the GK Aranos handed in a protest with Synod in 2006 against the versification. They therefore form part of the “protestors”. Secondly, it was not possible to involve the GK Aranos with all the previous meetings due to the distance (however, the minister of the GK Aranos was present at the meetings in South Africa). It was clear from discussion with ministers from Namibia such as revs Johannes Bingle, Marthinus Snyman and dr Callie Opperman that a meeting in Namibia was necessary. In April 2008 such a meeting was held in Windhoek.

Rev Danie Snyman was asked by the deputies to also attend the meeting in Windhoek. On the first day of the meeting the deputies only met with GK Aranos. The other Church Councils of the Gereformeerde Kerke in Namibia were requested to send two members to the meeting to attend the second day of the gathering together with the minister and one elder if there were still members in the particular congregation who were uneasy with the versifications. During the meeting the following was discussed:

- (a) the progress already made in the other meetings (in South Africa),
- (b) the statements formulated with prof Herrie van Rooy (see 1.3.1.5)
- (c) matters that the brothers of Aranos and other brothers put on the Agenda.

1.3.1.8 Eighth meeting

In August 2008 the Deputies had a further meeting where a number of ministers (involved with the protest) were present. One brother took part by means of telephone conference facilities. The Deputies also requested rev Danie Snyman to attend the meeting.

As part of the preparation for the discussion the brothers who were invited received an article by prof Herrie van Rooy published in *HTS 60(3) 2004 755*. The title of the article is: *Die nuwe Psalmomdigting: Die Messias weggelaat? (The new Psalm versification: The Messiah omitted?)*

A document of prof Herrie van Rooy entitled “Inligting vir gesprek oor die Psalms” (Information for a discussion on the Psalms) was also sent to the brothers.

As agreed beforehand the brothers prepared an evaluation of Psalm 1 and 2. In the discussion the brothers indicated several matters that persuaded them that

the versification of the Psalms did not agree with Scripture and confession. The greatest problems occurred with the versification of Psalm 2, specifically concerning the question of whether it is true to Scripture and confession if it does not clearly show that the Psalm points to Christ. It was decided at this meeting that the deputies had to attempt to organise a meeting with Prof Herrie van Rooy and other experts where the brothers' views regarding the versification of Ps 2 could be discussed. The Supplementary Agenda will report on this in detail if necessary.

1.4 *Progress to "find each other in this"*

1.4.1 Relationships

The Deputies want to express their thanks to all the "protestors, those interested and experts" who attempted to "gain clarity, a full understanding and peace, and to find each other". Although there was at times a radical differences in views, nobody ever acted in an unbrotherly manner towards each other at any of the meetings. However, this does not take away the fact that at other times (when the Deputies were not present) things happened between those involved that made the task of the Deputies more difficult. It can be reported with gratitude that the brothers were once again willing to continue with the discussions after they were consulted and because unity based the truth is important to them.

1.4.2 "Insight"

1.4.2.1 Knowledge of the work on the versification

The fact that there could be thorough discussion during the last three years led to more clarity and understanding regarding the work on the versification. Proff Herrie van Rooy, Dries du Plooy, Heilna du Plooy, PWG du Plessis, revs Johannes Bingle, Arnold Mulder, dr Rassie Smit and brother Piet Roodt provided much information regarding:

- (a) different work groups/commissions that were involved with the versification,
- (b) the process of evaluation and revision that was followed with the versification,
- (c) the different participants to the versification,
- (d) the requirements stated for evaluation namely: fidelity to the text, literary and musical quality,
- (e) the influence of the music and literature in the proces of versification,
- (f) how language and music influenced the versification
- (g) the important role that music played in the versification.

1.4.2.2 Fundamental matters

Although the other matters are important, it was clear to the deputies that protests against the versification mostly deal with the question of whether the Psalms are true to Scripture and confession. Later discussions placed emphasis on getting clarity about this. Matters emphasised in these discussions are:

- (a) The Messianic character of the Psalms and how it was relayed in the Psalms.
- (b) The relationship between the Old and the New Testament and how this relationship was taken into consideration and relayed in the versifications.
- (c) What of the original text has to be included in a versification and how this was done in the versifications.

By means of the "experts" the Deputies first paid attention to getting clarity on which principles were valid regarding the above-mentioned three matters and how they were applied in the versifications.

When the principles and their application were argued in general, much agreement could be reached. There was for instance agreement that the entire Old Testament, including all Psalms, are Messianic.

However, when the principles were argued in detail and the application of the principles were discussed, differences came to the fore. There was a difference on the question of whether it is Scripturally founded to make a distinction between

parts of Scripture that are “directly Messianic” and parts of Scripture that are “indirectly Messianic”.

The Deputies tried to ascertain if and when the different Synods considered these matters when differences occurred. It was very difficult to use the decisions of Synods as such a criterion in a finer judgement and in a detail discussion due to the following reasons:

- (a) Several Synods have taken decisions on this over the years.
- (b) Some of these decisions are affected by a Petition of Protest that succeeded at a next Synod.
- (c) Decisions that have been taken are often formulated very generally as part of a larger decision.
- (d) Important verdicts on principles with regard to versification can also be found in Petitions of Protest that have succeeded or been rejected.

It was therefore clear to the Deputies that there is a need for “peace and quiet in our churches” on the versification and that there is a great need for a clear decision by the churches with regarding to the versification. It would certainly be important that such a decision should formulate and summarize the previous Synod decisions well and also that it deals with details about which questions still exist.

However, there are certain decisions of Synod on fundamental matters about which there is no unclarity and with which the protestors do not agree. When these decisions were explained and motivated by the “experts” and the brothers still did not get any peace with it, it as agreed that the brother will have to follow the route of a Petitions of Protest against these decisions.

1.4.2.3 Matters of church polity

It was clear to the Deputies that the protestors are unhappy about the manner in which the versifications were approved by Synod and also about the manner in which the Petitions of Protest against the decisions on the versifications were handled. It was the resolve of the Deputies to pay attention to these matters that lie on the terrain of church polity after the fundamental matters had been concluded. The discussion of the fundamental matters took so much time that there was really not time to pay attention to matters of church polity.

Decision: Note taken of 1.1 to 1.4.2.3.

2. Matters that Synod should decide on

In the light of all the preceding the Deputies recommend:

That Synod expresses its thanks towards all the “experts” as well as the “protestors” for their attempt to come to unision on the matter of Psalm versification by working with the Deputies.

Decision: Approved with great appreciation.

That Synod expresses its regret that the aim of Synod 2006 to reach “clarity, a full understanding and peace, and to find each other in this” has not been fully reached.

Decision: Note taken

That Synod acknowledge in the light of 1.4.2.2 above that there is a need for a clear Synod decision regarding the principles that should be valid during a versification and that Synod should appoint Deputies to do a study and to report to the next Synod.

That these Deputies:

summarize and formulate all the previous Synod decisions on versification, ascertain if there are principles that did not occur in the decisions regarding versification and if so, make recommendations at the following Synod, and ascertain whether there are principles that has to be spelled out for the sake of the “unrest” that has developed in churches (and probably also for the sake of new versifications that may be done in future), and make recommendations to Synod.

Decision: These Deputies do not receive any assignment again.

Motivation:

1. It was a unique assignment.
2. The assignment had a reconciling character to find unision regarding the whole matter of the versification of Psalms and this was done to the best of the ability of the Deputies. It is trusted that the foundation has been laid for reconciliation and that God will work it (1 Cor 3:6 and Eph 4:32).

Decision: Approved.

That the valuable information that has come to the fore in the execution of the assignment of the Deputies and prof Herrie van Rooy should be published.

Decision: Approved.

A special word of thanks and appreciation for the unselfish and thorough work of dr DG Breed in the execution of the work.

Decision: Approved.