

PSALMS FOR WORSHIP - AN ASSESSMENT

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What a pleasant task this has been! It was taken on at late notice when others, probably better qualified than I, were unable to spare the time to review *Psalms for Worship*. I accepted the job with some trepidation, knowing a little of the controversy the material has stirred, and I realize I will probably please no one by the following comments. However, I was surprised to find afresh how moving the Psalms are as I read them in their new form. Don't take my word for it. Read through the first couple of Psalms now. Notice that the subject is no longer "man", nor "he who ..." (1:1,3), but "those" and "they". No longer will we have to change male-oriented language for more inclusive terms as we read, often doing so erratically and destroying the rhythm in the process. This is the major, and I think the most valuable innovation, adopted as a result of the 1984 General Synod ruling on inclusive language: "all language used should be deliberately inclusive".

Some will say that the process has not gone far enough. While God is not referred to by the use of masculine pronouns ("he", "him"), there are references to God as "Lord" and "king". The growing number of worshippers who find gender-specific language used of God objectionable will not find *Psalms for Worship* congenial in this regard. Psalm 89:26 also retains a reference to God as "father", from the mouth of the Davidic king. But, in 68:5, "He is father of the fatherless" is now rendered "Guardian of orphans"; and instead of reading "as a father pities his children" we will in future read "as parents have compassion ... so do you Lord" (103:13).

In general the effect of adopting inclusive language is to make the Psalms more personal. Statements may be turned into forms of address. Rather than "I cry aloud to the Lord and he answers me", we read "I cry aloud to you O Lord: and you answer me" (3:4). "He drew me up from the desolate pit ... He put a new song in my mouth" becomes "You lifted me out of the horrible pit ... and you put a new ..." (40:2-3).

Also, rather than God caring for "him", we now read that God cares for "us" (8:4). This use of plurals instead of masculine singular forms of expression certainly enhances the suitability of the psalms for corporate worship. For instance: "Blessed is the man ..." becomes "Blessed are those who fear the

Lord" (112:1), and "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is gracious" is rendered "We give thanks to you O Lord for you are gracious" (118:1).

Among the numerous changes that illustrate concern for clarity of expression rather than exact reproduction of the Hebrew idiom is: "such a one stands by a promise given: though it be at personal disadvantage" (15:5), rather than the Revised Standard Version's "who swears to his own hurt and does not change". In 31:9 "you have set my feet where I may walk at liberty" renders "you have set my feet in a broad place". That is not to say that Hebrew idiom and imagery are not preserved. "One day speaks to another" in 19:2 (although the more literal "day to day pours forth speech" has more vigour), and "great bulls of Bashan" still feature in 22:12 ("show-winners" in Aotearoa New Zealand parlance).

On the other hand, I applaud the retention of the active image of "putting trust (in the Lord)" in 2:12, an expression of the Coverdale and Gelineau versions, rather than the more exact but defensive image of "taking refuge (in the Lord)" (RSV and NEB). Mistrust is at the root of human separation from God according to Genesis 3. The *Psalms for Worship* rendering suggests movement toward the source of life rather than retreat from life's turmoil.

Parallel phrases, which are an important feature of classical Hebrew poetry, are also preserved. The phrases are similar in the first and second half-lines of 95:1:

*"O come let us sing/to the Lord:
let us shout with joy/to the rock of our salvation".*

In 18:16 the first and the second halves of each line are similar:

*"the bed of the sea was laid bare/
the foundations of the world were uncovered
at your rebuke O Lord/
at the blasting of the breath of your displeasure".*

(But why "displeasure", when the Hebrew reads "nostrils"? Is there embarrassment at the image of God snorting in anger? Here the influence of the Coverdale version is again in evidence.)

Psalm 37:21 offers one of many examples in which contrasting thoughts are expressed in parallel phrases:

*"the wicked person borrows but does not repay/
but the righteous is a generous giver".*

In 29:1 a phrase is repeated in the second line, but also added to:

*"ascribe to the Lord/you heavenly powers
ascribe to the Lord/all glory/and might".*

This is sometimes called stair-like parallelism. Alternatively, the second line may be shorter than the first, as in 6:1:

*"Lord,/do not rebuke me/in your anger
do not punish me/in your wrath".*

The above examples also serve to illustrate the rhythmic character of classical Hebrew poetry. This cannot always be conveyed in translation. But metrical considerations, to render *Psalms for Worship* suitable for chanting, have probably determined the form of some passages. For instance, the literal translation of the Revised Standard Version "his eyes behold, his eyelids test, the children of men" is rendered "Your eyes are upon humankind/you take our measure at a glance" (11:5). This more elegant elaboration is justified by the New English Bible translation, which has had considerable influence on the compilers of *Psalms for Worship*.

A number of the psalms are acrostics, in which each verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. This feature of sophisticated Hebrew style is not easily duplicated in translation, but it is the reason for dividing Psalm 119 into twenty-two sections (the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet).

Worshippers will be pleased to see that the most familiar psalms have been treated with care so as to avoid jarring changes. Psalm 23 is readily recognisable. And Psalm 37:25 is still thoroughly objectionable as a pious observation of someone who has not personally experienced the lot of the poor: "I have been young and now I am old: but never have I seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging their bread". Also, the printing has been very well executed. With relatively few half-verses running on to two lines, each second half-verse indented, and spaces between each verse, the psalms are visually attractive and easy to read.

Psalms for Worship is not a new translation from the original Hebrew scriptures. That is acknowledged by the compilers in their introductory notes. The "first edition", as it might be called, of *Psalms for Worship*, was included in the *Orders of Service* published by the Provincial Commission on Prayer Book Revision in 1982. There it was said to be a "conservative revision" of Miles Coverdale's version of the psalms.¹ C.S. Lewis has written that "a sound modern scholar has more Hebrew in his little finger than poor Coverdale had in his whole body".² He worked from the Latin version of the psalms, and from some German translations. But the beauty and balance of Coverdale's rhythmic English has ensured his version's popularity for over 400 years, even in the face of other more accurate translations. And the compilers of *Psalms for Worship* have used a variety of other versions to correct errors in Coverdale's work while also updating its archaic English.

In reality, no translation is perfect. Not only is it impossible to render exactly the meaning of words in one language into those of another, but a glance at the footnotes of the Revised Standard Version or its equivalent will indicate a few of the many passages where the Hebrew text could be read in more than one way, or where it has been corrected by reading Greek, or Syriac, or other translations. In not a few instances, neither the Hebrew nor the ancient versions in other languages make sense, and scholars have had to literally make intelligent guesses as to their meaning. Discoveries of very old copies of the scriptures, as in the Dead Sea caves at Qumran, and of ancient literature from related peoples such as the Phoenicians at Ugarit, have aided considerably in understanding the psalms this century.

It is also important to remember that the psalms are poetry and should not be expected to yield their meaning with the cold clarity of, say, documentary prose. The allusiveness of poetic imagery and language permits different people to share the poet's glimpse of reality in quite different ways.³ In a number of places in *Psalms for Worship* the word "head" has been substituted for "horn". The sense of "being promoted" is adequately conveyed by "raising up the head" (as in the butler's dream - though not the baker's! - as interpreted by Joseph, Gen. 40:13,19). But to anyone familiar

¹ *Orders of Service* (1982), p 55.

² *Reflections on the Psalms* (London:Fontana 1961), page 13.

³ See further Peter R Ackroyd, *Doors of Perception - a guide to Reading the Psalms* (Leighton Buzzard:Faith Press 1978), page 38-43.

with the symbolism of horns for strength and even royal power elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures (especially Daniel 8), Psalm 148:14 "you have lifted up your people's head" (PFW) implies "you have made your people strong or prosperous". And in 92:10 "you have exalted my royal power" is the fuller sense of "you have lifted up my horn/head". Fortunately the natural tendency to clarify obscurities has not been overwhelming, so, for example, we are left to puzzle over what it means to say that a friend has "lifted a heel against me" (41:9).

All these things considered, *Psalms for Worship* appears to me to be a responsible rendering of the biblical psalms, maintaining continuity with the great Anglican heritage of psalmody, while moving the Church toward inclusive language in an appropriate manner. The offering of Maori language alternatives in some psalms (e.g. 136, 146-50) is modest but timely. And I think the compilers deserve much gratitude for these aspects of their work.

However, not all the biblical psalms have been included in *Psalms for Worship*. All of psalms 58 and 83 and selected verses of twenty others have been omitted as "not suitable for use in the corporate worship of the Church".⁴ Most of the omissions express the desire for vengeance against enemies, whether they be enemies of God, of the king, or of the worshipper: "reduce my enemies to silence and bring destruction on all who oppress me" (143:12, NEB), "because they pay no heed to the works of the Lord or to what his hands have done, may he tear them down and never build them up!" (28:5, NEB).

Some readers will be glad to have such words omitted. There will no longer be the temptation to read the verses bracketed for possible omission from readings instead of concentrating on the set passage! But the complete omission of such a large number of passages in *Psalms for Worship* seems to contradict the compilers' introduction: "The wide appeal of the psalms rests on their ability to give words to some of our deepest feelings in the face of life's experiences. Whether for joy, worship and exaltation, or degradation and rejection, or hope, faith, love, anger, or despair, the psalms contain verses that reflect such moods. In them the various writers expressed to God the thoughts of their heart and spirit. The richness of the psalms still speaks to us and in them we too can find words to match many

⁴ A New Zealand Prayer Book (Auckland:Collins 1989), page 195.

of our moods and express them before God. In turn God can still address us through these psalms".⁵

These are very fine sentiments and accurately describe the function of the psalms as a whole. But - and it is a very big but - New Zealand Anglicans apparently should not express sentiments of revenge or hatred to God in worship. People experiencing degradation, anger and despair may well think thoughts of vengeance and recompense. But they will not find the words to express them in *Psalms for Worship*. The impression is thereby given that these are not psalms for people really at the end of their tether. Rather, they appear to be for those who have resolved their resentments and their feelings of injustice, and who would not want to identify with others whose experiences of life give rise to such feelings. This is an expurgated version of the psalms, excluding as out of place, if not as unworthy, the cries of those who are the broken victims (Luke 4:18) of the world.

Some will say this is an exaggeration, that the passages omitted would not be used even if they were printed. The latter may be the case. But the deliberate exclusion of passages as "not suitable for use in the corporate worship of the Church" makes me want to ask - Who says so, when the Church for two thousand years has deemed them at least worthy of inclusion along with the rest of the psalms? The Prayer Book Commission has performed an act of censorship that has grave implications. Their example sets a precedent for excising passages of Jeremiah from the Lectionary. Such doubts and longings for vengeance as that ungentle-man expressed are no less shocking than the omitted psalms, (see for example Jer. 10:25; 11:20; 12:1-3; 15:15; 20:12). Ezekiel's description of the Church (at least, in Old Testament terms, the people of God) as lascivious harlots (chapters 16 and 23) will certainly have to go, and the battle once fought over the inclusion of the pessimistic Ecclesiastes in the scriptures could well be resettled with a similar verdict of "not suitable for use in the corporate worship of the Church", despite the fact that many Christians find it one of the most refreshingly honest books in the bible.

In a very wise defense of the so-called "unsuitable" passages in the psalter, Bernard Anderson writes: "the question is whether these all too human cries

⁵ A New Zealand Prayer Book, page 195.

have a place in man's speech to God".⁶ Noting that the enemies against which the psalms rail were regarded as the enemies of God, and threatened God's creation, Anderson continues: "We can understand the intention of this language in our time when people, perhaps more than at any other period of human history, find themselves to be the victims of structures of power, of antagonisms or prejudices embodied in social customs and behaviour, of tremendous social forces or 'isms' before which the individual feels helpless. ... The psalmists' cry for vindication may be closer to our own lives than we realize."⁷ Anderson argues that the Hebrew word usually translated "vengeance" should more appropriately be rendered "vindicate" or "save", for it presupposes a covenant relationship of which God is the Judge or Vindicator. He concludes that in the so-called imprecatory or cursing psalms "Man cries out for justice in the social structures of human society - a justice which would somehow give corporate expression to love".⁸

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the prominent German theologian executed by the Nazis in 1945, advocated the daily use, especially in morning and evening devotions, of all the psalms. It was his view that we should not "pick and choose" for "otherwise we dishonour God by presuming to know better than he what we should pray".⁹ In another place he wrote of the imprecatory psalms: "Can we as Christians pray these psalms? ... The enemies referred to here are enemies of the cause of God, who lay hands on us for the sake of God. It is therefore nowhere a matter of personal conflict. Nowhere does the one who prays these psalms want to take revenge into his own hands. He calls for the wrath of God alone (cf. Romans 12:19). ... The prayer for the vengeance of God is the prayer for the execution of his righteousness in the judgment of sin".¹⁰ God's vengeance did not strike the sinners of course. Instead it struck the one sinless man who stood in the sinner's place, namely God's own Son. "Thus the imprecatory psalms lead to the cross of Jesus and to the love of God which forgives enemies. ... Thus the

⁶ Out of the Depths - the Psalms Speak for Us Today (Philadelphia:Westminster 1974), page 62f.

⁷ Anderson, *op cit* page 63f.

⁸ Anderson, *op cit* page 64.

⁹ Quoted by Bernard Anderson, page 62.

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Psalms: the Prayer Book of the Bible (Minneapolis:Augsburg 1970), page 57.

carrying out of vengeance becomes grace for all people in Jesus Christ."¹¹

Peter Ackroyd also advises against "picking and choosing what appeals to us", and observes: "the expurgating of the biblical text to remove all that is uncongenial has the disadvantage that we are then less able to appreciate the range of biblical thought and so the less likely to gain full insight into the claims it makes".¹² Commenting on Psalm 109 verses 8-10, which are omitted from *Psalms for Worship*, he notes, "[It is not] appropriate to dismiss such sentiments as improper, sub-Christian; they derive from a life-setting that was violent and harsh. They are no more violent than the saying attributed to Jesus, calling for judgment: 'it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea' (Mark 9:42), a saying which is to be measured in terms of protest against evil rather than in terms of literal fulfilment. Perhaps, even if we find such poetry as Psalm 109 unacceptable ... we should respect the emotional heat which calls forth such protest, and see it as a witness to the intensity of the struggle against evil and oppression and dehumanisation. All too often these become for us too familiar for more than passing interest."¹³

Walter Brueggemann too states that "the cries of vengeance ... are foundational to a life of faith in this particular God".¹⁴ The psalms of negativity honestly recognize that there is an untamed darkness in our life that must be embraced before the gift of new life can be received. By turning the psalms into expressions of Christian piety they may be robbed of their power to convey God's presence in the midst of our darkness and disorientation.

The views of these four scholars alone - and many more could be quoted - call in question the wisdom of the excisions made from *Psalms for Worship*. The passages omitted are integral to many of the psalms of complaint (of which more will be said later). They may correspond to deep-

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *op cit* page 58f.

¹² Doors of Perception, page 83. See n 3.

¹³ Doors of Perception, page 85. See n 3.

¹⁴ The Message of the Psalms (Minneapolis:Augsburg 1984), page 11.

felt emotions of worshippers. And should they present the user with an ethical dilemma, that may well be a point of exploration and growth.

A matter related to that of the excised passages is the decision of the Prayer Book Commission to alter numerous references to "Zion" and "Israel" in the psalms. Only six of the thirty-eight occurrences of the word "Zion" appear in *Psalms for Worship*. Instead "Jerusalem" is used, or "holy mountain", or "holy city" (see 9:11; 20:2; 135:21). Over a third of the occurrences of the word "Israel" have also been changed,¹⁵ to read "God's people" or "your people" (14:8; 25:21). It is true that three references to "Israel" have been added to clarify the original Hebrew text (68:13; 81:16; 105:36). But the significant reduction of the number of references to both Israel and Zion has given rise to considerable anxiety on the part of the Jewish community both in Aotearoa New Zealand and overseas. They see the changes as an attempt to delegitimize the Jewish attachment to the land of Israel, mindful of the attempts by some German Christians - allied with the National Socialist movement - to de-Judaize the faith earlier this century. From the 1920's it was recommended that hymnbooks and liturgies be purged of all Jewish expressions; the term "people of God" was to replace "Israel" and churches were urged to rid themselves of Jewish names such as "Zion".¹⁶ Denials of any such political motivation behind the changes, from members of the Prayer Book Revision Commission,¹⁷ were not at all persuasive when it was found that the author of one of the denials had in a previous paper referred to "the potential link between 'Zion' and Zionism, whereby it was claimed that the psalms could be read as supportive of a particular political stance. ... As with the case of 'Israel' there were various levels of meaning that had to be considered. In the light of the wish to avoid potential Zionist connotations, references to 'Zion' in the sense of 'the nation of Israel' were modified."¹⁸ Other members of the Commission stated that the references to Israel and Zion had been altered at the behest of Palestinian Christians who were concerned at the identification some people make between Zion in the scriptures and the contemporary state of Israel.

¹⁵ Specifically 24 out of 62 instances have been changed: details from a paper prepared by the Rev Darryl Milner, Vicar of Northcote, for the Auckland Council of Christians and Jews, November 1987.

¹⁶ Donald G Bloesch, *The Battle for the Trinity* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publishing 1985), page 74f.

¹⁷ "Some Comments on 'Israel' and 'Zion' in *Psalms for Worship*", February 11, 1988.

¹⁸ " 'Israel' and 'Zion' in *Psalms for Worship*", December 11, 1987.

The Auckland Council of Christians and Jews, whose attention had been drawn to the matter by concerned Anglican members, considered the matter at length. The changes to "Israel" and "Zion" are deeply offensive to Jews, not only for their political significance but because they suggest a cavalier attitude to scripture on the part of the compilers of *Psalms for Worship*. Jews have no objection to people translating the psalms for use in Christian worship if that is done with respect for the psalms' historical context. "But", it was said, "if people want to change scripture to make it 'liturgically appropriate', as the Commission claims, they should write their own psalms." An analogy was drawn to the use of Maori taonga. "It's like taking a carving and painting it a different colour, because the old colour doesn't appeal today." Aware of current Anglican sensitivity to the feelings of Maori people, New Zealand Jews are asking why the same sensitivity is not being shown to their spiritual treasures.

A number of groups, including solely Christian organisations, made representation to members of the 1988 General Synod, urging that *Psalms for Worship* not be adopted for use in their present form. In the event, the necessary two-thirds majority voted for adoption, but it was significant that most Maori representatives either opposed the motion or abstained from voting. The Maori Archdeacon of Auckland said "he could culturally identify with the Jews and the transgression of their cultural, historical and spiritual tongue"¹⁹.

I must admit to being taken aback by the strength of feeling this issue has raised. I would not previously have been averse to some changes for reasons of clarification, and inclusiveness. Indeed in six instances in the Psalms in the *Good News Bible*, "Israel" and "Zion" have been paraphrased without objection.²⁰ But the scale of change is far greater in *Psalms for Worship*, extending even to the canticles used in the Prayer Book. This, with all that has been said about the reasons for the changes, make it difficult for people to accept the claim that the Commission was simply seeking to use "politically neutral terms".²¹

¹⁹ The New Zealand Herald, Auckland, May 27, 1988.

²⁰ 9:14; 68:26; 69:35; 78:59; 126:1; 136:14.

In 9:14 "Jerusalem" is read for the literal "gates of the daughter of Zion" and in 68:26 "descendants of Jacob" is read for "Israel's fountain". Both are helpful clarifications.

²¹ "Some Comments on 'Israel' and 'Zion' in Psalms for Worship", February 11, 1988, page 3.

Two comments from members of the Auckland Council of Christians and Jews at a meeting with a representative of the Commission are still pertinent:

"Rosemary Ruether (a Roman Catholic theologian) says we Christians have always taken over the Hebrew scriptures for our own ends, but in the light of the Holocaust we cannot do that again."

"The Psalms are not, as the Commissioner has said, 'expressions of what we really want to say to God'. There are other forms of prayer for that purpose. The Psalms link us with the people of God through the ages, in their hopes as well as in their despair. We reduce them if we change them to suit the mood of our day and our own political context."

I understand that on the grounds of both the excisions referred to previously and the changes to "Israel" and "Zion", the 1989 Auckland Synod, while welcoming the *New Zealand Prayer Book*, regretted the adoption of *Psalms for Worship*, and has invited its representatives on General Synod to take steps to have authorized a new version of the Psalms, "which upholds the integrity of the original Psalter while maintaining the principles of inclusive language". The aim is to have it eventually replace *Psalms for Worship*. I think that would be in the best interests both of the Church and of relations between Jews and Christians in Aotearoa New Zealand.

A third reason why I think only qualified approval can be given to *Psalms for Worship* is the lack of any guidance as to the function and structure of the psalms either individually or as a whole. We can understand much about biblical ways of life and understanding of God from the psalms, and every opportunity should be taken to open windows on their structure and meaning. In view of the potential circulation of the Prayer Book the failure to take such an opportunity is very unfortunate. To indicate what I mean, some general background to the psalms is needed.

The word "psalm" comes from a Greek term for a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. It translates a Hebrew word of the same meaning (*mizmor*), which occurs some fifty-seven times in the titles of the biblical psalms. In the Hebrew bible, the book of Psalms is called "praises" (t'hilim), which comes from the same word as "Hallelujah" ("praise the Lord"). But by no means all the psalms are psalms of praise.

The origins of the biblical book of Psalms is long and complicated. Prior to 587 B.C., when the temple built by Solomon was destroyed and the people of Jerusalem were taken into exile in Babylon (2 Kings 25), it is likely that the temple and other significant places of worship outside Jerusalem had their own collections of songs to accompany services, whether of thanksgiving, or of grief at misfortune, or to mark significant occasions in personal or national life. At some stage these collections were combined to make the present biblical book of Psalms, which has sometimes been called "the Hymnbook of the Second Temple" that was built in Jerusalem after the Jews returned from exile. It is unclear when the last of the psalms to be included were written, but, whether in the fourth or the second century B.C., it was a long time between then and the composition of the oldest psalms, some of which may go back to the time of David. Unfortunately, the Hebrew titles of the psalms, (which quite wisely have been omitted from *Psalms for Worship*), are not very enlightening. For example, in the *Revised Standard Version* of Psalm 37:1 we read: "To the Choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave." The terms used in such titles are not clearly understood and the attempts to link the psalms with historical events are elements of pious interpretation from a relatively late period. They may hinder as much as help the worshipper to grasp the circumstances the psalms are addressing.

Also, unlike modern hymn books, there are no sections, marking off songs appropriate to Morning, Advent, Prayer and Penitence, Confirmation, etc. (to take a few of the section headings from *Hymns Ancient and Modern*). Psalms of quite different kinds and contents are found side by side. This makes the consecutive reading of *Psalms for Worship* a rather confusing mix of ideas if there are no introductory notes prefixed to each psalm. I realise the absence of such notes follows the example of the *Book of Common Prayer*, but if it is worth updating the language of Coverdale it is surely worth going the extra mile and - without turning the Prayer Book into a commentary or study manual - giving the intelligent worshipper some assistance in identifying the context of the psalms.

How much more helpful it would be if worshippers were advised, in a general preface of a few pages, about the background to the psalms, the main types and their general structure. Each psalm could then be given a brief title indicating its main theme, its classification - complaint, hymn, thanksgiving, etc., and it could perhaps be divided into its main components.

This need not involve the detail of either the Gelineau version,²² or the Jerusalem Bible version,²³ but they are admirable examples of efforts made to enable worshippers to identify with the psalmists, which is, after all, the stated aim of *Psalms for Worship*.

Various ways of classifying the psalms have been suggested over the centuries, almost as many as there are translators! But since the work of Hermann Gunkel earlier this century there has been a significant consolidation of ideas. Gunkel tried to discern the setting of each psalm in the life of the ancient Israelites. Many scholars have since refined his work and will continue to do so. But basically most now distinguish between the following major types of psalm:

- complaints made by individuals, or by communities
- thanksgivings made by individuals, or by communities
- hymns of praise
- royal psalms
- minor kinds, including liturgies for entering holy places, pilgrimage songs, prophetic and wisdom psalms.

I do not have space here to outline the structure of all these types, but the most common - the complaint made by an individual - generally has an introduction calling on God for help. The main section describes some problem facing the worshipper, followed by a prayer for deliverance, or a confession of sin, or a protestation of innocence. A wish for restoration to good fortune, or a cry for vindication against enemies, may also be included. Sometimes the complaint suddenly changes to thanksgiving, possibly as a result of a priestly or prophetic word assuring the deliverance of the afflicted worshipper (e.g.22,60)²⁴.

²² The Psalms - a new translation from the Hebrew arranged for singing to the Psalmody of Joseph Gelineau, notes on the Psalms by A Jones and L Johnston (London:Fontana 1966).

²³ The Jerusalem Bible - the Psalms for Reading and Recitation ed. A Neame (London:Darton, Longman and Todd 1969).

²⁴ The following are possible introductions to these psalms:

Psalm 22 From despair to hope

A personal complaint. A sense of abandonment by God, sickness, and rejection (vv 1-21) give way to new confidence and a vow to proclaim salvation (vv 22-27). A promise of God's help, spoken by a priest or prophet, may once have linked the two parts of the psalm.

Psalm 60 With God we shall yet triumph

A community lament. An appeal to God after defeat (vv 1-5) is followed by a prophecy of recovery and the expansion of Israel and Judah's borders into those of their enemies (vv 6-8). A second plea to God concludes on a note of confidence (vv 9-12). Verse 9 may be the words of a Davidic monarch.

The thanksgiving psalm begins with a cry to God, the main section going on to describe some distress experienced in the past and the worshipper's deliverance from it. A vow to praise God may conclude the psalm (e.g.30, 124)

Both complaints and thanksgiving psalms generally address God directly (in the second person). Hymns speak about God (in the third person). At least they do in the Hebrew original. The use of inclusive language hides this distinctive feature, but the content of hymns is readily enough recognised. They declare God's greatness as shown in nature (e.g.8,104) and the history of Israel (e.g. 105,136).

Most of the psalms are dramatic liturgies. For congregations to merely read alternate verses, as is customary, is to grossly neglect the psalms' potential for enlivening worship and communicating their messages of hope and trust and wonder at God's power, beyond every conceivable trial and suffering. Parts should be taken, processions made (24, 122). Appropriate words of assurance should be composed to link complaint and thanksgiving in those psalms which contain both. Brief times of silence could be kept to mark changes of scene and mood. And even someone as tone deaf as I am can bang a simple percussion instrument (a stick with loosely nailed bottle tops?) to make music for the Lord (149, 150) if the occasion is suitably informal.

It is not always easy to decide whether certain words belong in the mouth of a priest, or a chorister, or which of these directed the liturgy. But words from God (perhaps originally uttered by a prophet) can be readily distinguished, as can those of the worshipper(s) - whether monarchs or commoners - bringing their sacrificial gifts and joining in the songs appropriate to their needs.

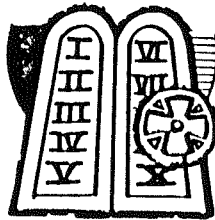
It would also be important in general introductory notes to say something of the special relationship in which the monarchs stood with God, and of the monarch's representative function in temple worship. When the monarch worshipped there was a sense in which everyone worshipped, hence the importance of the royal psalms.

God, as a kind of "Director General of the Heavenly Council" (Ps.82) was appealed to by worshippers against their enemies. And, as Norman

Gottwald has emphasized,²⁵ their words frequently reveal a world of socio-economic oppression. Some wealthy members of the community used their social position to increase their power, ruthlessly extorting the poor, bringing false accusations against them and bribing judges into the bargain (10,52,109,140). As in our own day social injustices were perpetrated on the assumption that there was no ultimate reckoning - for, in the view of the extortioners, "God will not call us to account" (PFW 10:14).

The faith of the psalmists was thus forged by suffering and doubt, as well as by the inspiring stories of God's guidance handed down by their forebears, and the urging of prophets, priests and the wise to walk in right ways. In the psalmists' company, our own courage to hope and pray and work for a just and peaceful nation and world is strengthened. And I think a suitably introduced edition of *Psalms for Worship* would have made their company more readily accessible.

Keith Carley



²⁵ The Hebrew Bible - a Socio-literary Introduction (Philadelphia:Fortress 1985), pages 538-40. For general background and commentary on specific psalms, see also A.A. Anderson, Psalms 1-72 and Psalms 73-150 (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans 1972).