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**“Les veilles Afriquaines ou les Pseaumes de David mis en vers François”
A first religious and literary writing from South Africa.**

1. INTRODUCTION

In the course of 1700, Pierre Simond, the pastor of the Huguenots at the Cape of Good Hope requested permission to return to the Netherlands. Permission was refused due to the fact that his congregation wanted him to stay on until a successor for him had been appointed (VC 15: Dagregister 1699-1701, 27 November 1700).

On the 5th of March 1702 he once again applied for permission to return to the Netherlands. In this application he writes that he had already started to break up his whole household at Drakenstein, the place where his congregation was, about 60 km from the current Cape Town (VC 169, Brief van Pierre Simond aan WA van der Stel, 5 Maart 1702). He lived on the farm Bethlehem in the small valley between the Simonsberg and the Banghoek mountains next to the Dwars River. In this letter he mentions that he has a secret reason for wanting to return to the Netherlands. This secret reason seems to be the fact that he wanted to present his translation of the Psalms in rhyme to the Walloon Synod so that synod could choose which translation corresponded most with the original Psalms and which would best serve the glorification of God and the building up of the church (VC 169, Brief van Pierre Simond aan WA van der Stel, 5 Maart 1702). In the letter he also begs the Political Council not to bring about his ruin by refusing him permission to depart from the Cape. He was prepared to leave everything behind in the hope that his rerhyming would be accepted by synod. This would not only bring great happiness to himself but also provide enough to support his family with (VC 169, Brief van Pierre Simond aan WA van der Stel, 5 Maart 1701).

Eventually permission was granted. On 9 April 1702 he delivered his last sermon at the Cape (C598, Dagregister 1702, 9 April 1702). On the 16th of May 1702 Simond and his family, his wife and their five children, departed for Europe on the Abbekerk (C507, Uitgaande Stukke 1701-1703, 16 Mei 1702).

On the 3rd of May 1703 at its meeting in Utrecht the Synod of the Walloon Churches in the Netherlands decided not to consider or publish the translation of Simond nor that of a dr Scalberge of London since they had already taken a decision on the issue in 1702 (Articles resolués au Synode des Eglises Wallonnes des Provinces Unies des Pays-Bas, assemblé à Utrecht le 3 May et jours suivans 1703, art XLII). But more about this in the next paragraph.

With this translation of the Psalms in rhyme by the Huguenot pastor Pierre Simond a first work of theological and literary nature since the coming of Reformed churches to the southern tip of Africa in 1652 was created and presented to churches in Europe. This fact makes the work not only very valuable for the history of South Africa; it also gives us a deeper insight into and understanding of the history of the Huguenots who were prepared to flee to the far corners of the world for the freedom of their religion.

2. FROM THE HISTORY OF PSALMRHYMINGS IN THE REFORMED WORLD

- 2.1 In 1562 a rhyming of all one hundred and fifty Psalms by Clement Marot and Théodor de Bezè was published in Genève. In 1578 a new edition of these rhymings was published with about 70 changes to the text. This came about as the result of a review in 1569 of the Bible translation. This new translation was also published in 1578 by Jérémie Planchard.
- 2.2 In 1646 a second review of the psalmrhymings by Marot and Beza took place, this time by Giovannis Diodati. This review was not well received in the French speaking churches.
- 2.3 After this a complete revision of the psalmrhymings was undertaken by Valentin Conrart in 1674 that set him the goal to modernise the language of the rhymings without changing the melodies. The work was done with the consent of the French Churches. Conrart was a committed Huguenot and also the first secretary of the French Academy. When he died in 1675 the work was completed by his friend Marc-Antoine De La Bastide, a Huguenot refugee pastor in England (Vigne, 1998:4). In 1677 an experimental edition of the first fifty-one Psalms was published. The rhyming was very well received in France and a complete edition of all one hundred and fifty Psalms was published in Paris in 1679 with an edition in Genève by Jean Pictet and Samuel Widerhold and in 1681 an edition by Herman Widerhold (Le Pseautier de Genève 1562-1865, 1986:54-59).
- 2.4 The increase in the persecution of the Huguenots in France and the eventual revocation of the Edict of Nantes in October 1685 brought about that the reception of the new rhyming by Conrart and De la Bastide was delayed in the French speaking congregations. At the same time French-speaking congregations outside of France started to grow as a result of the refuge. In the Netherlands there was a strong growth of the Walloon Churches.
- 2.5 In 1698 the Vénérable Compagnie des Pasteurs in Genève accepted the rhyming of Conrart and De La Bastide for their congregations. They also requested the Walloon Churches in the Netherlands to do the same. This request was not well received, it was seen as the request from a Reformed Rome. As a matter of fact in 1700 the request was rejected in strong language by the Walloon Synod meeting in Rotterdam. At the same time Synod accepted plans for an own rhyming of the Psalms. Five congregations – Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Den Haag (the Hague), Leiden and Delft – were appointed to each rerehyme thirty of the Psalms (Articles resolu au Synode de Rotterdam, le neuvieme Septembre et jours suivans de l'annee dix-sept ans: Bibliotheque Wallonne, stukke nr 60). The precondition for this new rhyming was that the old rhyming must be available next to the new rhyming so that those who had the old text in their hearts and minds would not be hurt and could sing the old text. Already at the very next Synod of 1701 all kinds of questions and problems were identified. Firstly there was no clarity on what the Synod of 1700 exactly decided. Secondly the magistrates did not want to give permission beforehand for a rerehyming. Apparently they were afraid of what could happen to the Datheen rhyming in future and they also did not want to create unrest among the people. Thirdly there was the attitude of the heirs of Conrart and De La Bastide who felt that the work of their forefathers was being rejected and they demanded compensation. All of this brought about that the Synod of 1702 decided to stop the whole project of revising the rhyming of the psalms. It was only by 1720 that the question of a new rhyming for the Walloon Churches in the Netherlands came up again. This time they decided on an updated edition of Conrart and De la Bastide (Knetsch 1991:156-157).
- 2.6 Meanwhile the rhyming of Conrart and De la Bastide was used by many French-speaking congregations outside of France although it did not have the same acceptance as the 1562-rhyming. The result was that more and more of the French congregations in foreign countries

started to work on their own rhyming of the Psalms (Le Pseautier de Genève 1562-1865, 1685:54-59).

3. ABOUT LES VEILLES AFRIQUAINES

- 3.1 In spite of the fact that the 1702 synod of the Walloon Churches in the Netherlands decided not to continue with a new Psalm rhyming Simond decided to have his rerhyming published. This happened in 1704 under the title *Les Veilles Africaines ou les pseumes de David mis en vers Francois* published by Cornelle de Hoogenhuisen of l'Eglantiers-gragt in Amsterdam for the author. The title *Les Veilles Africaines* indicates that the work was done during the nights on his farm Bethlehem in the small valley between Simons Berg and the Banghoek mountains between Stellenbosch and the Berg River valley. In the last section of the book, the *Avertissement*, Simond indicates that after the publication of the book he wanted to change the title but since it was only an attempt he withheld his judgment on what the title would be (Les Veilles 1704, Avertissement).
- 3.2 For many years it was known that the rerhymings of Simond was published in Amsterdam, but it was only in 1997 that a copy of the work was found in the National Library of Russia in St Petersburg. After this became known the library of the University of Stellenbosch obtained a photocopy of the book in 1998. This is currently on exhibition at the Huguenot Museum in Franschhoek. The Institut Claude Longeon of the University of St Etienne in France has a microfilm (Pseume, Bulletin de la recherche sur le Psautier Huguenot, no 14, Novembre 1997,9).
- 3.3 The question can be asked how it came about that this book landed up in St Petersburg. One possible explanation can be that it was used by a refugee Huguenot congregation in St Petersburg and in this way eventually landed up in the National Library. Two reasons make this possibility unlikely. The first being that it was only from 1723 that there was a Huguenot congregation in St Petersburg. In 1746 this congregation merged with the German Reformed congregation in the city (Kämmerer 1978:35). It is unlikely that rerhyming of the Psalms, published in 1704 with a very small number of prints would still have been in use by 1723. The second reason why it is unlikely that the book came from the congregation in St Petersburg is the inscriptions written by hand on the front page of the booklet. Inscriptions that look like "Psalterium Carmenius"; "hinc NB", "cum musicus" and "Thalique omnes" or "Ps alique 'n omnes". According to the friendly staff at the polygraphic section of the National Library in St Petersburg these inscriptions were made by Bishop Józef Andrej Zaluski. Zaluski was born at Czerks near Warsaw in 1702. He died in 1774. Together with his older brother Andrej Stanislw (1695-1755) they started the well-known Zaluski Library in Warsaw in 1747. This library was equal to other well-known libraries in Europe of the time such as the Wolfenbütteler library in Germany and the Imperial Library in Vienna (Gatz 1990:584-584). During the course of the eighteenth century the Zaluski Library acquired more than 400 000 volumes. Józef Andrej was a very meticulous librarian and bibliographer and it was he who made the inscriptions on the Simond edition for the book to be taken up in their collection – the notes were in other words, bibliographical notes. In 1795 after the suppression of the Kosciuszko Uprising and Poland's loss of independence, the Russian Empress ordered that the whole collection be taken to St Petersburg and this was how it happened that the Zaluski books, including the Simond rerhyming, landed up in St Petersburg. In 1920 following the Peace of Ryga most of the books were returned to Warsaw and formed the bulwork of the reconstructed National Library. Not all the books and documents were however returned to Warsaw. Those that were returned were destroyed in

1944 after the capitulation of Warsaw. After the war the Zaluski Library was reconstructed. Sadly these books were destroyed through vandalism during the Second World War. The Simond book fortunately for South Africa remained behind in St Petersburg. This is really the remarkable story of the journey of a book from the Banghoek Mountains at the southern tip of Africa in 1699 to the Netherlands of 1704 and from there to Warsaw and St Petersburg in Russia where it surfaced again in 1997 – two hundred and ninety seven years after it was published and just about disappeared from the face of the earth. In 2002 a limited edition of a facsimile of the original copy was published in South Africa.

- 3.4 The pages of *Les Veilles* are about 9 centimetres wide and 15 centimetres long. On the front page just below the title there is a drawing of a vine with below that the place of printing and the name of the publisher. To the right hand side of the vine there is a stamp, most probably that of the National Library of St Petersburg. The original edition probably had a soft cover. The hard cover pages of the copy in St Petersburg dates from the fifties or sixties of the 20th century. It is of a yellow background with red and green lines in a scribbled pattern. The four corners of the cover pages are covered with a light green printers cloth while the back of the book is of a dark blue printers cloth. The paper of the original book is rather thick and is cream coloured. On some of the pages, as on page 69, the printing of the previous page shows through, as if embossed. The book actually consists of three parts. The first fourteen pages have no numbers and is the foreword, the *Preface* by Pierre Simond. For the sake of reference they are referred to as Preface 1-14. The second part consisting of 130 numbered pages contains the rerhyming. The third part, which is the last two pages and is also not numbered, has the heading *Avertissemen* (notice or notes). It contains a number of notes with regard to the Foreword and the rerhymings. Specific Psalms are often mentioned. Right at the end there are two paragraphs with corrections. The total number of pages of the book is 146 pages. On page 128 the number of Psalm 143 is wrongly given as 43. Simond himself says in the foreword that he rerhymed only the first fifty-one Psalms. The printed copy however contains Psalms 1-51, 74, 79, 103, 130, 137, 143, the Ten Commandments and the song of Simeon. The copy, in other words, contains 57 Psalms and two songs. On page 116 after the rerhyming of Psalm 51 there is a note by Simond that in order to fill the remaining paper he also included the other Psalms. In the end it was not just other Psalms but also the two songs.
- 3.5 Apart from the fact that Simond's little book was taken up in the library of the Zaluski brothers it is also mentioned in two other works. The one being the work by Jean Visch *Les Pseaumes de David en vers nouvelle version. Dans laquelle on a retenu les expressions de Marot & De Beze autant que l'usage moderne a pu le permettre*, published in Utrecht in 1706. In the Preface of this work the author mentions that it can be said that in certain places he changed the meaning of the translations of Marot, de Beze and De La Bastide. His answer to these accusations is that he had the right to do this in order to remain true to the holy text. He then refers to Psalm 8 verse 4 (5), which according to him refers to the Son of Man. He consulted various French translations in rhyme but none of them mentions the Son of Man. He finds this amazing since this Son of Man has great power and authority according to the Psalm. According to Visch it cannot but refer to Jesus Christ. Psalm 8:4 must be read in conjunction with 1 Cor 15 and the letter to the Hebrews chapter 2. He came to this viewpoint after a discussion with a learned theologian. And then he says that the only other translation that he found that gives a true version of Ps 8:4 (5) is a translation with the title *Les Veilles Afriquaines* which was published two years earlier. It would have been good if the author of this work knew the French language, the rules of poetry, the Hebrew and the power of that language equally well because then his translation would have been the best of all. Simond's translation of Psalm 8:4 reads as follows

*“Qu’est ce de l’homme, alors dis-je en moi-même,
 Qu’il t’en souviennne , ô Majesté suprême ?
 Qu’est-ce du fils de l’homme, ô Dieux des Cieux,
 Que de son bien tu te montres soigneux?”*

The second book in which Simond’s work is mentioned is in *Voyages et aventures* (1708) by the French traveller Pierre Leguat who visited the Huguenot community at Drakenstein in 1698. He mentions that by the time of his visit Simond had been working for some time on a translation of the Psalms in rhyme or at least correcting to the best of his ability that of Marot and Bèze. Although this information confirms that people knew of the existence of Simond’s work it does not correspond with the fact that Simond himself mentions that he only started working on his translation in rhyme in 1699. Denis is of opinion that Leguat may have met Simond after his return to Holland and taken cognisance of his book (Denis 2001,203).

- 3.6 Simond describes his work in different ways in the Preface. On Pages 1,5,6,7 and 13 of the Preface he speaks of his work as “une nouvelle version des Pseaumes” – a new version of the Psalms or a new translation of the Psalms (Cassel 1964:750). Conrart and also Visch use the same word for their work. Denis quotes the following from Conrart’s *Livre des Pseaumes* “The necessity of this work comes from the fact that since the old version major changes have occurred in our language.” He therefore decided to readjust Marot and Bèze’s old “version”, that is to adapt the language without bringing any change to the meaning or to the meter of the verse (Livre 1677:aiiv in Denis 2001,203). This gives a good idea of what Simond himself also wanted to do. On page 3 he says his aim was to “express better the force, beauty, and simplicity of the originals.” Also on page 3 of the Preface Simond writes that he translated the Psalms in verse – “j’eus traduit ce Pseaume en verse”, on page 4 he says that he translated a few Psalms every day (de traduire toujours quelque Pseaumes). On page 6 he characterises his work as “rhymed prose” because he wanted to stay as near as possible to the original. On page 8 he speaks of “la Piece entiere” while on page 11 he says that he wanted to give “form” to the songs.
- 3.7 The question can also be asked as to which literature Simond had available for his translation of the Psalms. On page 3 of the Preface he writes that when his children pointed it out to him that Psalm 50 had five verses in the new text instead of four as in the old text he compared the two with the text in prose to see whether the old version left something out and whether the new version added something “je voulous voir, en les confrontant l’un & l’autre, avec la Prose, si l’ancienne Version avoit laissé quelque chose du Texte, ou si la nouvelle y avoit ajouté “. The “prose” which he mentions was apparently the so called Genevan Bible published in Geneva in 1588 under the authority of the pastors and professors of the city, a version often described as “the version of our common Bible” (la Version de nos Bibles communes). In the *Avertissement* in his notes on Psalm 7 Simond refers to “la Version de nos Bibles communes”. From this reference we can gather that Simond used the Genevan Bible in his work. In the same notes on Psalm 7 he also mentions Calvin’s translation of the Psalms, which was published as part of his Commentary to the Psalms, a version that was followed by Marot. Also in the same note he mentions that he consulted Diodati’s version of the Psalms. We also know that he used the Conrart and De La Bastides version of 1679. So apart from the Genevan Bible Simond had the books of Calvin and Diodati for his translation of the Psalms. Most probably he also had a Hebrew edition of the Bible. In the preface he often refers to the “original” which points to the fact that he read the original Hebrew. This is confirmed by the reference that Visch makes to his knowledge of Hebrew. (Visch 1706,13).

4. THE PREFACE OF LES VEILLES AFRIQUAINES: HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL REMARKS

In the Preface to *Les Veilles Afriquaines* Simond gives us some social, historical and spiritual information about himself, his work, his family, social conditions and the times in which they lived. He writes about Conrart and De La Bastide, the rerhyming of the Psalms, God and His Word, his family and their conditions at the Southern tip of Africa.

4.1 Simond's view on the work of Conrart and De la Bastide

- 4.1.1 Simond writes that in the beginning of June 1699 he read an article in the *Gazette Francoise* about England and that the King of England was going to allow new Psalms to be sung (Preface,1704:2). The king of England at that time was William of Orange, the same person to who Simond dedicated his sermon *La Discipline de Jésus-Christ*. Simond's maternal grandfather rendered good service to the grandfather of William, Prince Frederik Hendrik who ruled the tiny principality of Orange where Simond grew up in Nyon. Simond gathers from where he read in the *Gazette Française* that this refers to the Psalms of Conrart and De la Bastide and that the English King was going to allow these Psalms to be sung in the French Churches in his Kingdom (Preface,1704:2). From the article he also gathered that those Psalms would soon be sung in Holland and in all the reformed churches where the French language was used (Preface,1704:2). It was only some time later that he heard from a French officer on an English ship that the Psalms of Conrart and De la Bastide were hardly sung anymore and that it was all about new rhymings of the Psalms that the King was going to allow (Preface,1704,3). This encouraged him to do his own rerhyming of the Psalms.
- 4.1.2 Because Simond thought that it was the Psalms of Conrart and De la Bastide that was going to be allowed he decided to put the "old Psalms aside and teach his children the new Psalms (Preface,1704:2). Most probably the "old psalms" refer to the rhyming of Clement Marot and Theodor Beza. From this information we can conclude that those "old Psalms" were sung in the Drakenstein congregation at least up until the middle of 1699. We know that the rhyming of Conrart and De la Bastide was also available. Simond also informs us that he had certain reluctance towards the new Psalms because he did not find in them that which he really sought (Preface,1704:2). Nevertheless he continued with his intention because he believed that a person must be adaptable towards a thing, which was in any case going to be common practice in the Churches.
- 4.1.3 The following Sunday that coincided with Pentecost 1699, Simond, as was his custom, gave his children a Psalm as task for the next week. The children themselves asked for Psalm 50. They then discovered that the new Psalm – i.e. the one of Conrart and De la Bastide – had five instead of four verses like the old one. Simond himself then compared the two texts to see if the old one perhaps left something out or whether the new one perhaps added something. He came to the conclusion that both texts were not all that good. This inspired him to take up his pen and see if something better could not be done (Preface,1704:3).
- 4.1.4 After experiencing much pleasure from his first attempt he went ahead in the days after Pentecost with his own rerhyming. As he continued he came to the conclusion that the Conrart and De la Bastide version was wanting on quite a few points (Preface,1704:3). Still under the impression that these Psalms were being sung in England and would shortly be sung everywhere, made him sad.

- 4.1.5 Simond declares that he never would have undertaken the task if he knew that the church leaders in Genève were contemplating changes to the text of Conrart and De la Bastide. He also would not have done the work if he knew that other, very capable persons were working hard on a revision of the old Psalms. In no way did he want to compare himself with those learned gentleman. For them he had a respect that he did not ask for himself (Preface,1704:10).

4.2 Simond's views of what he wanted to achieve with the rerhyming and how he saw the Psalms.

- 4.2.1 When Simond discovered in June 1699 that the rhyming of Conrart and De la Bastide differed from the rhyming of Marot and Beza he compared the two texts and came to the conclusion that both texts were wanting. With a sigh he said to himself "Lord is it not possible to do better than this." (Preface,1704:2). He took up his pen and within half an hour he translated Psalm 50 into verse more or less the same as in the printed form. The ease with which he did it, the pleasure that it gave him and above all the grace and support that he experienced from God with his first attempt encouraged him to resume the exercise the following day. During the days thereafter – in other words in the days after Pentecost – he continued working and it became easier and gave him even more pleasure.
- 4.2.2 Through his study of the Psalms of Conrart and De la Bastide, Simond came of opinion that the power, beauty, and simplicity of the original Psalms could be expressed in a much better way. (Preface,1704:3). He continued to translate some of the Psalms but without any formal plan and simply for the pleasure that it gave him. He had no intention to publish his work because he thought that the version of Conrart and De la Bastide was already in use. Eventually he laid down his pen to stop a work that would bear no fruit and that would be to the detriment of his other studies.
- 4.2.3 Some time after June 1699 Simond heard from a French officer on one of the English ships at the Cape of Good Hope that the Psalms of Conrart and De la Bastide were not being sung at all. On hearing this he felt a great joy and pondered on how God had led him to write a new version of the Psalms. He also reflected on the support from God that he experienced with the few that he had already written. He also writes about "other matters" in which he experienced the guidance of God but caution keeps him from expanding on this (Preface,1704:3). In his article "South Africa's first published work of literature" and its author Pierre Simond, Randolph Vigne tells us that in June 1699 four English me-o'-war put into Table Bay, bound for Surat. On board one of the ships was Sir William Norris, King William's newly appointed Ambassador to the Great Mogul. They were well received with all imaginable Civility. They sailed for India on 3 July after Norris and the officers had visited the Governor in the Company's Gardens to bid a final farewell (Vigne,1998:12-13).
- 4.2.4 He also reflected on how it could be that God who usually chose weak instruments for His greatest works had chosen him for this task. He humbled himself before God and fervently asked for the help of His Spirit. He started to work as best as he could on this new version of the Psalms. He did it with more courage than before and also with a degree of hope that if God granted him the grace to complete it successfully that it would serve to glorify Him and contribute towards the building up of His church (Preface,1704:4).

- 4.2.5 He carried on with the work and as he progressed his hope was strengthened. He experienced the support of Gods grace in such a concrete way that he often shed tears of joy. He completed the project within three months while not neglecting a single function of his ministry (Preface,1704:4). In this we see something very special of Simond's relation to God and of his very strong feeling of calling not to neglect his work in the congregation.
- 4.2.6 With regard to his style of work he writes that in the beginning he committed himself to stay as near as possible to the original version of the Psalms. He was of opinion that his version had to correspond exactly with the original if it was to be good that it override all other considerations. The result of this was that he created nothing more than rhymed prose (Preface,1704:4).
- 4.2.7 On his arrival in Europe he submitted some of his work to persons there. They found so many faults that contravened the rules of poetry that he realised he was too much of a novice in this genre of writing to undertake such a work. He lost hope that he would ever be able to get it ready for publication (Preface,1704:4).
- 4.2.8 Then, some time later, when he at least expected it, God fortuitously laid the new Method of Port Royal in his hands, the text of which dealt with the Rules for French Poetry. He read and reread the rules with special dedication and started to strongly correct himself according to the rules and the advice of them who were willing to point out his errors. It seems then that Simond rewrote the work that he did in South Africa according to the Rules for French Poetry. The Port Royal, of which he writes, refers to the Jansenist School, which in the time of Louis XIV, had great influence, also in the French Academy that laid down the rules for literature.
- 4.2.9 About the Psalms as such Simond declares that he is especially attached to them as heavenly songs which the church has always deemed to be of the most valuable from the treasure of the Holy Scriptures. About his rerhyming he says that with all his heart he wanted them to be coloured to such a degree by French and be in such in accordance with the French poetry that nothing would harm them and that nothing of their natural beauty would be lost. It was also his wish that the rerhyming would not be cold or colourless; not too low or slow, not crude or shocking, not pompous or ornate, not dark ambiguous but solemn and sublime, full of meaning, wisdom and dedication. He wanted Gods Spirit to suffuse all of it – He, who dictated the originals to the prophets – so that the rerhyming would express simplicity, grace, gentleness, power and greatness. If these aims could be achieved there would be no reason for the ridicule that so many worldly people, “our opponents constantly have for our old Psalms”. The new Psalms must contain nothing, that in any way would shock or repel sensitive people; it must rather call for and encourage piety, comfort and strengthen good souls and inspire all fruitful pious practices of spiritual life (Preface,1704:8-9).
- 4.2.10 Simond was also of opinion that the Psalms as songs of praise would make themselves loved and appreciated by all those people who were intent on loving and appreciating beautiful things and who do not maliciously misuse their reason and disparage that which is pious (Preface,1704:9-10).
- 4.2.11 For Simond the psalms were indeed holy because the Holy Spirit shines from them and they surpass in beauty, eloquence, loftiness, simplicity and brilliance, the most polished and finished passages from Antiquity as well as the contemporary (Preface,1704:9-10). For this reason he thinks that it would be possible to produce a version for use in the French churches, that if they could retain their power and beauty, would express the most useful and important thing in words to glorify God's name, glorify the church and

would be useful for the conversion of people (Preface,1704:9). By means of the heavenly beauty of the songs of praise, that plays such an important role in religion, the opponents of the Reformation would be reprimanded in their consciences and be compelled to admit and proclaim that God truly is with the Reformed churches (Preface,1704:9-10).

- 4.2.12 Simond pleads with other translators of the Psalms in verse, not to find any mischief in him having ventured to have his work published. More versions will make it possible for the church to choose the version that they assess to be closest to the original and also the most suitable to glorify God and to serve the edification of people (Preface,1704:11).
- 4.2.13 It seems that by 1704 Simond had a complete translation of all 150 psalms ready for publication but he had a secret reason not to present all of them at that time for publication. Therefore he presented only the first fifty (sic) psalms because from them one could easily evaluate what the rest would be like. If the first section was well received the rest will follow shortly after (Preface,1704:11).
- 4.2.14 Simond presented his version to the public with a spirit that hesitated between fear and hope (Preface,1704:11). He trembled at the thought that it might be, the least among the brothers and servants of the Lord that would give shape to the songs of praise through which the church would praise God while in truth it was a work that demands the diligence and intellect of the Angels themselves. At the same time he was convinced that he did not undertake the work because of presumptuousness or arrogance but because of the unique providence of God – this was his reassurance. It was God who allowed him to start the attempt, who made it possible for him, who led him through His providence and who created various possibilities to strengthen his hand when it started to become weak (Preface,1704:12).
- 4.2.15 In the last part of the Preface he once again writes that he experienced God in his grace quite perceptibly while working on the translation. This gave him the hope that through God's blessing his version would serve to glorify and edify His church (Preface,1704:12). He saw it as the providence of God that put it in his heart to start work on a new version of the psalms in a far corner of the world at a time when all the French churches in Europe were in turmoil and divided about a Psalm book – one group wanted to keep the old Psalm book, the other wanted to receive the new one. For him this was the reason why it pleased God to lead him to the wilderness of Africa and to subject him to various extremely difficult tribulations. Like David also other holy men created most of their songs of praise in deserts and in profound anxiety. He in his solitude with many tribulations found himself in almost a similar situation so that in a simple way he could express the movements of the chastised spirit of one of God's servants (Preface,1704:13). Simon indeed experienced many tribulations during his stay at the Cape. There were his differences with the Governor Simon van der Stel which resulted in him and his flock losing favour with the Governor; his realisation that the dispersal of his flock amongst the other farmers of the Berg River Valley would ultimately lead to the loss of their language and identity. Then there was also the quarrel with Jacques de Savoy one of the prominent Huguenots that came to South Africa (Vigne 1998:9-11).
- 4.2.16 Lastly he expresses the hope that if his work were approved people would recognise God in it. He requests that his work not be rejected without further examination. It must not be asked beforehand whether something good can come from Nazareth. Like Philip he wants to say "Come read and see" there is no desert in Africa or anywhere else, no matter how dry and barren, where God does not pour out the waters of his grace, as it

pleases Him. The Father of the Light distributes his gifts as He thinks fit and that He often works through the lowest instruments and through those of whom people expect the least, so that all the glory belongs to Him. Simond therefore asks that people prove all things and retain what is good, according to the apostle Paul's instruction (preface,1704:14).

4.3 Simond about God and His Word – the Psalms

- 4.3.1 Simond starts the foreword to his rerhyming of the Psalms by stating that he does not know how successful the work will be that he is doing for the public. Be it as it may he feels that he must refuse all honour that might be due to him; all must be attributed to God. This should be the language of all who have written about religion and piety (Preface,1704:1).
- 4.3.2 It was God's providence that bound and led him to attempt a new version of the Psalms in the African wilds (Preface,1704:1).
- 4.3.3 When Simond heard that he was wrong about the Psalms of Conrart and De la Bastide he felt a great joy and pondered on how God had led him to write a new version of the psalms and the support he had already experienced with the few he had already written. When he started thinking that God had chosen him for this work he humbled himself before God and fervently asked for the help of His Spirit for the work on the new version of the Psalms (Preface,1704:5).
- 4.3.4 God allowed him to experience the support of his grace in such a concrete way that he often shed tears of joy (Preface,1704:6).
- 4.3.5 When he discovered Port Royal, he sees it that God fortuitously laid the new method of Port Royal in his hands (Preface,1704:7).
- 4.3.6 He saw his work of the rerhyming of the Psalms as a calling from God and the work as of particular importance for glorifying God and for the welfare of his church (Preface,1704:7).
- 4.3.7 If he knew that proficient people were hard at work on a new version of the Psalms, Simond declares, he would never have undertaken the task. But, he says, it was God, whose Spirit moves at will, who saw it fit to put it in his heart to work on the new version and it was His grace that allowed him to complete the work before he heard of other people who also attempted the task (Preface,1704:10-11).
- 4.3.8 Simond is quite sure that he did not undertake the work out of presumptuousness or arrogance. He was led and bound to it in a way in which he discovered God's unique providence. It was God that allowed him to start the work when he himself had not the least idea to undertake it; when he was so new in the practice of writing poetry. It could have been only God who made it possible for him and who led him through His providence and created various possibilities to strengthen his hand when it started to become weak (Preface,1704:12)

4.4 About himself, his family and Africa

- 4.4.1 In reflecting on how it came about that he started rerhyming the Psalms Simond tells us that it was his custom to give his children a task for the week. For Pentecost 1699 his children asked for Psalm 50 (Preface,1704:2) This small piece of information reveals a significant insight into the way in which Simond and his wife raised their children. The reaction and request of the children also reveals a very positive attitude from their side.

- 4.4.2 About Africa he says that he had never seriously written poetry and would never have had the courage or even the thought of attempting a new version of the Psalms especially not in the African wilds to which Gods providence had led him and where nothing external could have motivated him for such an under talking (Preface,1704:1). Towards the end of the Preface he concedes that his coming to the wilderness of Africa was the providence of God to prepare him and make him available for the task. Just like David and other holy men created most of their songs of praise in deserts and in profound anxiety he was in a similar situation in the wilderness of Africa (Preface,1704:13-14).
- 4.4.3 On writing how he heard from a French officer about the Conrart and De la Bastide Psalms not being sung he tells us that he lived in lonely quarters about fourteen hours away from the Cape of Good Hope (Preface,1704:5). He tells us that he got this knowledge without leaving his lonely quarters, from which we can gather that the French officer came from the Cape of Good Hope to the Berg River Valley where Simond lived on the farm Bethlehem between Stellenbosch and Drakenstein where the French Church was – not that it was much of a church at that time.
- 4.4.4 Simond describes the Berg River Valley, the place in South Africa where he started his rerhyming of the Psalms as a place of solitude (Preface,1704:5) and as the wilderness of Africa (Preface,1704:10). Vigne writes about this “wilderness” in the following way: “The refugees had much to contend with. A two-day journey from the Cape, over wild country where elephants and lions were still seen, they lacked transport, found timber extremely scarce and water often at a distance, with the Berg River impossible to ford in the rainy season. Early harvests failed and the establishing of vineyards and olive groves was a slow process.” (Vigne,1998:8). Governor Simon van der Stel in the same time writes in a letter that the Huguenots who settled there had to till land, which had never been cultivated since the beginning of creation. Nevertheless for him this becomes the place of inspiration for his translation in verse of the Psalms of David and inspires him to give his work the title of *Les Veilles Afriquaines ou les Pseaumes de David mis en vers François*. The title reminds one of the Summer Christmas Carol which we have as part of our new hymnbook nowadays; it is really out of Africa.

5. In Conclusion

- 5.1 In *Les Veilles Afriquaines* we have a fine example of the first reformed theology for publication practiced in South Africa after the coming of reformed theology to the southern tip of Africa in 1652. It is also the first example of a work of literature created in South Africa – although it was eventually published in Amsterdam. Randolph Vigne sees it only as a work of literature, which it surely was but it certainly also was a good example of theology. The view of Phillipe Denis that it was “probably the earliest piece of biblical scholarship ever produced on the African continent” does not keep in mind the rich theological heritage, which Africa has, from theologians such as Augustine.
- 5.2 The *Preface* to *Les Veilles Afriquaines* shows that there was a lively interaction between what was happening in French Churches in Europe and England and the wilds of Africa. On the one hand there seems to have been good contact and communication while at the same time it was not all that good and it apparently took a long time for Simond to find out exactly what was going on with regard to the rerhyming of the Psalms in the French Churches.
- 5.3 The *Preface* tells us about the loneliness and tribulations that those first settlers in the Berg River Valley experienced.

- 5.4 We learn a lot about the spiritual and theological convictions of Simond – his view on Scripture, how he experienced the providence and guidance of God and what he saw as characteristic of the Psalms. We also get to see him as theologian with definite views on the message of the Bible theology for instance with regard to the Son of Man in the Old Testament. Although far away from the libraries of Europe he had his books in the far off African wilderness, which he consulted for the work for the work, he undertook.
- 5.5 We learn about Simond's attitude towards his work and how he kept himself busy with study while not forsaking his duties in the congregation. He was diligent and did not forsake his duties in the congregation because of his rerhyming of the psalms. That was the reason why he did this work in the evenings after his task of the day – the reason for the title *Les veilles Afriquaines*! Although he considered changing the title in a next edition it is good that the title was kept for that first edition. It characterises this rerhyming in a very special way.
- 5.6 One gets a small insight into the way in which the Simond's educated their children. It is clear that the psalms were well-known and beloved material in that household, not in the least with the children.
- 5.7 We do not have many original documents from the Huguenots that came to South Africa. It was and is therefore difficult to determine what they thought and what motivated them in life. *Les Veilles Afriquaines* opens a valuable window in this regard, not only for South Africa but also for all the descendants and students of the Huguenots. For centuries we knew of *Les Veilles Afriquaines* but we knew nothing more until the only known existing copy was discovered in St Petersburg. Suddenly we knew more – not only about Pierre Simond but in a sense also more about the more or less two hundred and fifty Huguenots that came with him as his flock. The little book tells us more about his deepest thoughts, his convictions, motivations, hopes and fears, his trust in God thereby also telling us about the flock that he shepherded for fourteen years at the Cape of Good Hope – during which time he wrote *Les Veilles Afriquaines*.
- 5.8 But there is even more. Recently Simond's rerhyming of all one hundred and fifty Psalms – that of which he writes in *Les Veilles* – was discovered in the Wolfenbüttel Library in Germany. It seems that the rhyming of the first fifty Psalms (sic) was indeed received favourably and this encouraged him to publish his rerhyming of all 150 Psalms in 1711 with the publisher Balthasar Le Francq in Lille under the title *Les Pseaumes de David mis en vers Francois*. The title pages is also a quotation from 1 Thess 5:21 "Eprouvés toutes choses: Retené ce qui est bon." Once again another chapter is opened in the fascinating history of the Huguenots of South Africa.

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