

Liberty University

School of Music

**The Impact of Psalm Singing in Corporate Worship in the Canadian Reformed Churches:
Perspectives of the Congregants**

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the School of Music
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Worship Studies

by

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Abstract

The Canadian Reformed Churches¹ have a rich history of Psalm Singing, which originated in the 16th-century Reformation, continuing the early church and biblical tradition. Their first Synod in 1954 prioritized singing psalms, initiating the development of an English Psalter containing all 150 Psalms.² After almost seventy-five years, Psalm Singing characterizes worship in over seventy congregations and church plants in Canada and the USA. Despite this tradition and culture of singing psalms in multigenerational worship, General Synods of the Canadian Reformed Churches have received continuous requests to add more hymns or other songs in the past twenty-five years. The arguments tend to change with every Synod, leaving uncertainty about the congregants' motivations. Because church leaders submit these requests, the considerations of congregants are unknown. Besides understanding the motivations for song selection, it is essential to consider the relationship between song and theology because changes in the song selection may affect the church's theology in the future. Psalm Singing in other Reformed church federations faded while their theology changed, which raises the question whether the Canadian Reformed Churches might follow this trend. This qualitative case study explores the theological and generational factors contributing to the requests to add more songs by surveying congregants' understanding of the Psalm Singing tradition and its theological background.

Keywords: Psalm Singing, Canadian Reformed, Congregants, Worship

¹ The *Canadian Reformed Churches* may unofficially be referred to as *Canadian and American Reformed Churches*.

² “Acta van de Nationale Synode van Homewood van de Canadian Reformed Churches a.d. 1954 gehouden te Carman, Manitoba,” accessed September 13, 2023, 91, <https://canrc.org/documents/8232>.

Dedication

Johann Sebastian Bach wrote S.D.G., *Soli Deo Gloria* [To God be the glory] before adding his name at the end of his compositions. Similarly, I dedicate this study to God's glory, to be a blessing to his people, and to contribute to the building of his church.

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18 ESV.)

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Psalms 25:4 says, "Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths" (ESV.) God changed my initial plan to study musicology, church music, or organ by closing doors, leaving one door open to the Doctor of Worship Studies program at Liberty University, and redirecting my focus from the details of church music to its predominant context of worship. Thanks be to Him!

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Following the Second World War, immigrants from the Netherlands desired to join a Canadian church that reflected their theology. Based on a tradition of taking Scripture as the norm and guide for worship, the immigrants desired to sing primarily psalms in worship.¹

Irreconcilable differences in some doctrinal principles between Presbyterian and other Reformed churches in Canada resulted in the establishment of the Canadian Reformed Churches in 1950, growing to 70 churches by 2023.²

The Canadian Reformed Churches follow the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW), which means that, in principle, public worship is designed and carried out as God specifies in Scripture.³ According to 1 John 4:19 (English Standard Version), “We love because God first loved us.” Likewise, in worship, believers should worship because He first called them. Scripture also guides singing in worship; therefore, the Canadian Reformed Churches decided to use a specific song selection. They agreed only to use a selection of songs in worship per the Canadian Reformed Church Order, Article 55, which states: “The metrical Psalms adopted by General Synod as well as the hymns approved by General Synod shall be sung in the worship services.”⁴ After establishing the Canadian Reformed Churches in 1950, the church members reviewed existing North American hymnals but found that these did not meet their requirements. These

¹ Gilbert van Dooren, ed., *Op Weg Naar Een Engelse Reformatorische Psalmbundel* (Smithville: Canadian Reformed Publishing House, 1954), 9.

² James Visscher, ed., *Yearbook Anno Domini 2023* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2023), 304.

³ Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please: A Guide to Reformed Worship* (Carman, MB: The Study, 2020), 30.

⁴ Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, *Book of Praise, Anglo Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 2014), 657.

requirements resulted from the RPW, and they determined other songbooks did not accurately reflect Scripture. In other cases, there was a practical concern, indirectly related to the RPW, when metrical psalms contained different tunes for part of a psalm, making it unlikely to sing the entire psalm. Subsequently, they desired to create a songbook that included rhyming of all 150 Psalms and a limited number of hymns.⁵ Following the church tradition in the New Testament and the church in the first centuries, the Reformed churches continued to sing primarily psalms in worship.⁶ Although other North American hymnals contained metrical psalms, the Canadian Reformed Churches insisted on including all 150 Psalms completely. The Canadian Reformed Churches do not advocate for exclusive psalmody but believe that Scripture also supports singing other songs. This belief is evident in the first complete edition of the *Book of Praise*, published in 1972, which included all 150 Psalms and 62 hymns. The hymns included confessions, canticles, and free hymns from the Lutheran and English traditions.⁷ The 1984 revised edition of the *Book of Praise* contained an updated hymn selection and was considered the conclusion of the project started by Synod Homewood (1954).⁸

Over the years, the language changed, and knowledge and understanding increased. Canadian Reformed Churches addressed lyrics that could more accurately reflect scripture and updated wording that was archaic or reflected an awkward style.⁹ In addition, there was a desire

⁵ Gilbert van Dooren, ed., *Op Weg Naar Een Engelse Reformatorische Psalmbundel* (Smithville: Canadian Reformed Publishing House, 1954), 53–54.

⁶ Derek W.H. Thomas, *Let Us Worship God: Why We Worship the Way We Do* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2021), 97–105.

⁷ Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, *Book of Praise, Anglo Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 1972), 270–342.

⁸ *Acts of General Synod 1983 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 1983), 144.

⁹ Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, “Reports to General Synod Smithers 2007,” accessed September 22, 2023, 198–9, <https://canrc.org/documents/8030>.

to add more hymns. These concerns led to a new songbook project, resulting in the publication of the second edition of the *Book of Praise* in 2014, increasing the number of hymns to eighty-five. All churches adopted this 2014 edition, while the schools incorporated it into their curriculum.

Following the publication of the second edition of the *Book of Praise*, Canadian Reformed Churches continued the pursuit of adding more hymns, submitting requests to the General Synod Dunnville (2016).¹⁰ In a previous decision, the General Synod Chatham (2004) set a limit of 100 hymns approved for singing, suggesting that most of the singing in worship should be from the Psalms.¹¹ Because the new selection of 85 hymns in the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* left room for fifteen more, some churches requested to fill this space—other requests related to removing the limit of 100 hymns. There were also requests about the psalm selections to include substitute versions of the psalms. These requests resulted in the release of alternate versions of some psalms and a selection of hymns by Synod Edmonton in 2019. The next Synod (Guelph 2022) received concerns from local churches, expressing concerns that the proposed alternative psalms do not reflect the Scriptural context of the psalms.¹² Synod Guelph 2022 did not make any decisions regarding songs but extended the testing period until the next Synod Aldergrove in 2025.¹³ Canadian Reformed congregations continue to test these songs and provide feedback to the next Synod.

¹⁰ *Acts of General Synod 2016 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2016), 113–17.

¹¹ *Acts of General Synod 2004 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2004), 120.

¹² Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise “Report to GS 2022 from the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise (SCBP) - Supplement 2 Psalms and Hymns,” Accessed September 24, 2023, 3–4, 9–10, 13, 25. <https://canrc.org/documents/9164>.

¹³ *Acts of General Synod 2022 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2022), 67.

The immigrants of the Canadian Reformed Churches left their churches in the Netherlands. Still, they maintained a relationship with their church federation, the *Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt* (GKv), as a sister church, which is commonly called “ecclesiastical fellowship.” Gert van den Brink points out that in the past two decades, the GKv changed their interpretation of Scripture, also referred to as hermeneutics, under the influence of culture and made it dependent on the culture.¹⁴ The GKv allowed multiple explanations of some parts of Scripture, resulting in, among others, the acceptance of people living in a homosexual relationship. Therefore, having warned and admonished the GKv since 2008, the Canadian Reformed Churches ended their ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKv in 2019. The GKv churches had a tradition of Psalm Singing, evident in their use of the 1773 *Statenberijming*¹⁵ until 1984, when they published a new songbook. Since 1999, the GKv steadily increased the hymn section, reaching the summit in 2019 when their Synod removed all collective regulations on song selection.¹⁶ As a result, the GKv’s Psalm Singing in worship diminished significantly resulting in the increase of singing other songs.¹⁷ This change coincided with the church’s changing theology.

¹⁴ Gert van den Brink, “Schriftgezag en Vrijheid van Exegese,” [The Authority of Scripture and Liberty of Exegeses] in *Het Woord in Geding*, ed. P.T. Pel and H.J. Room (Lunteren: Drukkerij AMV B.V., 2022), 69.

¹⁵ In the middle of the 18th century, provincial governments requested the Dutch Parliament to initiate the publication of a new rhyming of the psalms and some hymns. This Psalter, generally called the *Statenberijming* (State-rhyming), was released in 1773. This publication was a compilation of the best works of poets. Today, several Dutch church denominations still use this rhyming in their worship services.

¹⁶ Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, “Acta Generale Synode Ede 2014–2015,” accessed September 23, 2023, 71, <http://kerkrecht.nl/sites/default/files/Acta%20GS%20Ede%202014-2015.pdf>.

¹⁷ Joost Smith, “Verloren generatie,” *OnderWeg* 9, no. 10: 2.

The Christian Reformed Churches in North America (CRCNA) were also psalm-singing churches.¹⁸ However, the first 1934 *Psalter Hymnal* contained over 140 hymns.¹⁹ The CRCNA selected these hymns because they had “already endeared themselves to the hearts of our people.”²⁰ Their members liked some hymns more than others, and the church added them for that reason to their songbook. The preface of this Psalter states a concern that singing psalms could eventually cease—“We feared that in an environment where the psalms are seldom sung, the introduction of hymns in public worship would lead to the neglect of those deeply spiritual songs of the Old Testament which the Church should never fail to use in its service of praise.”²¹ It is unsure if this concern indicates that the churches seldom sang psalms in 1934. Officially, the CRCNA continued singing some psalms but did not remain psalm-singing churches. Over the years, the CRCNA also moved away from the inspiration and authority of Scripture and began to teach the Arminian view of the love of God. They also began to accept the theory of evolution, which compromised Scripture as the infallible Word of God. A publication in South Africa addressed a decision by the Reformed Churches in South Africa to allow more free hymns in worship for the first time in its history. The authors raised concerns that the singing of human-composed hymns could introduce false doctrine and threaten the church’s identity.²² Frank Page and Lavon Gray affirm:

¹⁸ *Acta der Synode 1930 of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee, 1930), 146.

¹⁹ Publication Committee of the Christian Reformed Church, *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: Publication Committee, 1934).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, iii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, iii.

²² Simon N. Jooste and Johannes C. Potgieter, “The Contested Legacy of Singing God’s Inspired Songs in the Reformed Churches in South Africa: The Regulating Role of the Word from Dordrecht to Totius and into the Present,” *In Die Skriflig* 54, no. 2 (2020), 8.

Today, the supply of theologically unvetted worship songs is vast. Continued use of these songs in worship through the next decade will lead to the continuing breakdown of the distinct theological characteristics that defined churches for decades in favor of a convergent theology integrating beliefs from across the theological spectrum. That a growing number of Christians indicate they are customizing their faith, not following any one theological belief system, confirms this integration of beliefs.²³

Given the historical and Biblical background, this thesis posits that there is a relationship between the church's songs and its theology.

Statement of the Problem

A committee appointed by the 1954 Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches investigated “the whole matter of a rhymed version of the psalms in the English language”²⁴ to report to the next Synod. In their publication, the committee defined what a *Reformed Psalter* looks like,

Een bundel, waarin Gods Woord belijgend door de gemente gezongen wordt in de liederen des Verbonds en des Koninkrijks, verkondigend Gods grote werken door de eeuwen heen verricht, gezongen op een wijze die overeenkomt met de majesteit zijner grootheid [A bundle, wherein the congregation confesses in singing through songs of the Covenant and Kingdom, proclaiming God's mighty works through the centuries, using tunes that reflect the majesty of his greatness.]²⁵

The denomination published its completed *Book of Praise* in 1984. After fifteen years, the first requests to increase the number of hymns arose.²⁶ In 2004, Synod Chatham agreed to limit the number of hymns to 100 “since Psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the

²³ Frank S. Page and L. Lavon Gray, *Hungry for Worship, Challenges and Solutions in Today's Church* (Birmingham: New Hope Publishers, 2014), 124.

²⁴ “Acta van de Nationale Synode van Homewood van de Canadian Reformed Churches a.d. 1954 gehouden te Carman, Manitoba,” Accessed September 13, 2023, 91, <https://canrc.org/documents/8232>.

²⁵ Gilbert van Dooren, ed., *Op Weg Naar Een Engelse Reformatorische Psalmbundel* [Transitioning to an English (language) Reformed Psalter] (Smithville: Canadian Reformed Publishing House, 1954), 9.

²⁶ *Acts of General Synod 1998 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 1998), 180.

Reformed churches.”²⁷ Despite the addition of more hymns in 2013,²⁸ Synod Guelph (2022) received several requests to lift the limit on the number of hymns.²⁹ There seems to be a division in thinking about the priority of Psalm Singing in the churches, illustrated by two requests at Regional Synod West in 2021. One request was to lift the cap on the number of hymns, and the other was to add to the Church Order a statement that the psalms should have “a principal place in the singing of the churches.”³⁰ Regional Synod East 2018 received a request that would allow local churches to decide which songs to sing in a worship service.³¹ This seems to contrast the 2007 Synod Smithers’ concerns regarding the doctrinal direction of the GKv, including their proportion of hymns to psalms, experiencing a “discomfort with the fact that a church known for its emphasis on Psalm Singing, as also reflected in the proportion of psalms and hymns in the past, has made a rapid shift to having a vast number of hymns available for worship.”³² Developments in the GKv led to a discontinuation of the ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKv in 2019.³³ The Canadian Reformed Churches today display characteristics similar to those of the

²⁷ *Acts of General Synod 2004 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2004), 120.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 229–33.

²⁹ *Acts of General Synod 2022 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2022), 58–61.

³⁰ “Acts of Regional Synod West 2021 of the Canadian Reformed Churches,” accessed September 27, 2023, <https://canrc.org/documents/9072>.

³¹ “Acts of Regional Synod East 2018 of the Canadian Reformed Churches,” accessed September 28, 2023, <https://canrc.org/documents/8909>.

³² “Acts of Regional Synod East 2007 of the Canadian Reformed Churches,” accessed September 28, 2023, <https://canrc.org/documents/8023>, 80–85.

³³ “*Acts of General Synod 2019 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2022), 40.

GKv.³⁴ The Canadian Reformed Churches and the GKv have the same cultural context and spiritual DNA. Arjan de Visser concludes, warning that the Canadian Reformed Churches could “end up having a membership that is perhaps *culturally* Reformed but not *theologically* Reformed, and therefore vulnerable to various kinds of influences” [emphasis original].³⁵ This research seeks to provide insight into the influence of culture or theology on the membership, focusing on Psalm Singing in worship. The Canadian Reformed Churches did not accept existing English language songbooks because of their incomplete representation of Scripture, and the Canadian Reformed Churches expressed concerns about the direction of the GKv introducing more hymns at the expense of singing psalms. However, the requests to the Canadian Reformed Churches General Synods seem to push in the same direction of singing more hymns and contemporary songs and having alternates for psalms that do not reflect the psalms’ essence. Just as the CRCNA Synod declared their desire to continue singing the psalms, the Canadian Reformed Churches do not want to terminate Psalm Singing. Just as the Canadian Reformed Churches expressed concerns with the vast increase in the number of hymns in the psalm singing GKv, the Canadian Reformed Churches desire now to increase the hymns to more than 100, and some of their churches desire to choose their own songs.

Statement of the Purpose

This doctoral thesis provides insight into the views of Canadian Reformed congregants about their churches’ singing practice as psalm-singing churches and their understanding of its Scriptural foundation through surveys and interviews. Submissions to the recent General Synods

³⁴ Jack Moesker, “What Led to the Changes in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKv)?” *Clarion* 68, no. 13, 380.

³⁵ Arjan de Visser, “Impressions from a Visit to the Dutch Churches (GKv),” *Clarion* 68, no. 15, 431.

do not seem to align with previous positions and statements in the denomination. General Synods only deal with submissions, and not all churches interact with the General Synod. Therefore, it is unclear if what is submitted to or decided at the General Synod has the backing of the majority of churches. Moreover, fewer people may express their thoughts and concerns to their church leadership due to declining literacy and writing skills.³⁶ Subsequently, it is uncertain if the Synodical decisions resonate with the congregants.

Significance of the Study

Singing influences society. Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1655–1716) says, “If a man were permitted to make all the songs, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation.”³⁷ In a church community, the songs sung in corporate worship may influence the people more than their Creeds and confessions, and therefore, the theology of the songs should align with the theology of the church. Scripture speaks about the influence of songs in worship as a means of teaching, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16, ESV). Because singing influences people’s minds and teaches theology, it is imperative to understand the motivations for the desire to change the song selection in the Canadian Reformed Churches and the conditions for changes.

The Canadian Reformed Churches originate from a tradition of Psalm Singing in worship. In the past twenty-five years, churches have requested to add other songs. These requests follow a pattern of requests submitted within other Reformed, psalm-singing churches

³⁶ United for Literacy, “Adult Literacy Skills for Success: National Report 2022,” accessed September 12, 2023, https://www.unitedforliteracy.ca/getmedia/44cba824-0daf-4e29-8367-cbb3b4539aba/2022-United-for-Literacy-Adult-Report-EN_.pdf.

³⁷ George W. T. Omond, *Fletcher of Saltoun* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2010), 95.

in the past. In those churches, the psalms were still available to be chosen in corporate worship, but practically, they sang anything but the psalms. Some denominations with Reformed and Presbyterian roots shelved the psalms altogether, while others may sing psalms besides hymns.³⁸ Although the psalms were the backbone of Christian worship throughout the centuries, Ray Van Neste concludes that the psalms in many parts of the church today have been lost.³⁹ Emily Brink notes that the addition of hymns over the years in the Christian Reformed Churches has confirmed the concerns that hymns could replace the psalms.⁴⁰ Some churches that increased the singing of other songs not only lost the singing practice of psalms but also changed their theology. The issue is that reducing the singing of psalms in worship may ultimately influence church theology. This influence of songs in worship on the theology of the church is not limited to the Reformed churches. Page and Gray write, “Danger emerges when key doctrinal beliefs gradually erode or theological views defining a group are lost. Unfortunately, our worship songs may be a primary driver in this loss of theological integrity.”⁴¹ Churches holding onto the infallibility and inerrancy of God’s Word and truth in worship must realize the significance of changes to church agreements involving song selections.

³⁸ Robert Copeland, Harry Boonstra, Norman Kansfield, Hugh McKeller, Arlo Duba, and John Frame. “We Used to Sing Only Psalms - What Happened?” *Reformed Worship*, no 3. (1987), 39.

³⁹ C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste, *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 1.

⁴⁰ Emily R. Brink, “Where Have All the Psalms Gone? Reclaiming Our First Love” *Reformed Worship*, no. 74, (2004), 2.

⁴¹ Frank S. Page and L. Lavon Gray, *Hungry for Worship, Challenges and Solutions in Today’s Church* (Birmingham: New Hope Publishers, 2014), 124.

Research Question and Sub Questions

In 2018, leadership in certain Canadian Reformed Churches requested major assemblies to change the Church Order to include more songs beyond the approved psalms and hymns,⁴² which would remove the safeguard for local decisions that may not be well thought out.⁴³ Even when requests were granted, church members were dissatisfied, which resulted in new requests. The Canadian Reformed Churches display characteristics similar to the GKv,⁴⁴ which changed their hermeneutics under the influence of culture in the past two decades and made them dependent on the culture.⁴⁵

Research Question 1: What do 21st-century Canadian Reformed congregants in British Columbia understand about Psalm Singing?

The cultural demographics of the present-day Canadian Reformed Churches differ vastly from the founding church members. The Dutch immigrants after the Second World War were primarily agriculturalists because, for the first four years, only agriculturalists were permitted to immigrate to Canada. In 1948 and 1949, more than 80% of the Dutch immigrants were farmers.⁴⁶ The Canadian Reformed Churches were founded in 1950. The makeup of these churches with first-generation immigrants resulted in a church membership with specific skills and knowledge and a primary frame of reference based on their country of origin. The 21st-

⁴² “Acts of Regional Synod East 2018 of the Canadian Reformed Churches,” accessed September 28, 2023. <https://canrc.org/documents/8909>.

⁴³ Acts of General Synod 2019 of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2019), 119.

⁴⁴ Jack Moesker, “What Led to the Changes in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKv)?” *Clarion* 68, no. 13: 380.

⁴⁵ Gert van den Brink, “Schriftgezag en Vrijheid van Exegese,” [The Authority of Scripture and Liberty of Exegeses] in *Het Woord in Geding*, ed. P.T. Pel and H.J. Room (Lunten: Drukkerij AMV B.V., 2022), 69.

⁴⁶ Michael Dennis Fallon, “People of The Covenant: Dutch Reformed Immigration Dito Canada After World War II,” (PhD Thesis, The University of Guelph, 2020), 386–91.

century congregants live in a different society, possess new knowledge and skills, and have a North American orientation. This leads to the second research question:

Research Question 2: What factors influence 21st-century Canadian Reformed congregants' perspectives on song selection?

Research Plan

This research is an explanatory qualitative case study. Carrying out qualitative research contributes to gaining in-depth and narrative inferences to the research questions and effectively addressing the research objectives.⁴⁷ This research relies on information shared by participants but focuses on the event of Psalm Singing in worship, the related decisions, and decision-making processes. John W. Creswell identifies that case studies explore processes, activities, and events.⁴⁸ Bill Gilham states that a case could involve an individual, a group, an institution, a community, or a combination.⁴⁹ This research involves congregants; however, the decisions of major assemblies, such as a General Synod, also play a role. Jan Dul adds that a case study takes place in a real-life context,⁵⁰ which is the case in this research, taking place between General Synods that discuss matters pertaining to this research. This research considers the historical backdrop and Scriptural foundation as context. It surveys a diverse target group, aligning with

⁴⁷ Vibha Pathak, Bijayini Jena, Sanjay Kalra, "Qualitative research." *Perspectives in clinical research*, 4(3) 2013, 192, <https://doi.org/10.4103/2229-3485.115389>.

⁴⁸ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, And Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 187.

⁴⁹ Bill Gillham, *Case Study Research Methods* (London: Continuum 2000), 1.

⁵⁰ Jan Dul and Tony Hak, *Case Study Methodology in Business Research* (Amsterdam: Butterworth-Heinemann/Elsevier, 2008), 4.

the holistic approach to case studies by Piet Verschuren⁵¹ and Gary Thomas.⁵² The case study approach is appropriate as this research aims to understand the congregants' perspective on Psalm Singing in the Canadian Reformed Church Federation. It generates the expected results based on the real-life experience of Canadian Reformed congregants.

Qualitative narrative data was collected from a representation of the congregants in the Canadian Reformed Churches. The sampling size was determined using the DEJA tool.⁵³ The non-probability sampling method included the Canadian Reformed Churches in western Canada. This research included a selection of churches of different sizes, urban or rural settings, and older and more recent years of their institution. The research applied purposive sampling, and specific characteristics determined the selection of churches and congregants. It is unlikely that the research result accurately represents all churches.

People from sixteen churches in British Columbia and Washington State took part in the survey. These churches cover rural and urban areas, ranging from 76 to just over 600 members. The information for the churches was sourced from the 2023 Yearbook of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the church federation's website, www.canrc.org, which contains real-time updated information. The people were invited, based on their age, to ensure the representation of younger members, people with families, and older members. Thematic survey questions related to the Scriptural understanding of singing in worship, the understanding of the

⁵¹ Piet Verschuren, "Case Study as a Research Strategy: Some Ambiguities and Opportunities" *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 6, no. 2, 121–39, (2003): 137.

⁵² Gary Thomas, *How to Do Your Case Study: A Guide for Students and Researchers* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 23.

⁵³ Syanda Alpheous Mthuli, Fayth Ruffin & Nikita Singh "Define, Explain, Justify, Apply (DEJA): An Analytic Tool For Guiding Qualitative Research Sample Size," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 25:6, 2022, 809–21, DOI: 10.1080/13645579.2021.1941646.

psalms as the songs of Jesus, the understanding of worship, the understanding of the purpose of the Church Order, and the understanding of church federation. The collected data was coded in Microsoft Excel and analyzed using thematic analysis.⁵⁴ As a result, the researcher determined trends in groups of respondents' thoughts and views on Psalm Singing in the Canadian Reformed Churches, which provided insight into the level of alignment between the groups.

Definition of Terms

General Synod: The General Synod is a meeting of all churches that takes place once every three years. Its members are delegates from the Regional Synods. The local Classes delegate members to a Regional Synod. A Classis is a meeting of neighboring churches that meets every three months.⁵⁵

Psalm Singing: Singing of metrical Psalms from a Psalter that contains all 150 Psalms in their entirety.

Regulative Principle of Worship: "We are not to worship him in any other manner than he has commanded in his Word,"⁵⁶ or to worship God only "on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible."⁵⁷

Church Order: The systematically organized set of rules.⁵⁸ The Church Order functions to maintain good order in the church of Christ, regulating the offices, assemblies, worship services, supervision of doctrine and sacraments, and church discipline.⁵⁹

Other Songs: Hymns and contemporary songs that could be based on Psalms or Scripture verses.

⁵⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, (2006): 77–101.

⁵⁵ Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, *Book of Praise, Anglo Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 2014), 655–66.

⁵⁶ "Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 35," in *Book of Praise, Anglo Genevan Psalter*, Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 2014), 552.

⁵⁷ David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 20.

⁵⁸ Pieter Coertzen, *Church and Order: A Reformed Perspective* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peters, 1998), 46.

⁵⁹ Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, *Book of Praise, Anglo Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 2014), 647.

Summary

Historically, the Canadian Reformed Churches have primarily sung Psalms in worship based on a tradition of taking Scripture as the norm and guide for worship. In the past twenty-five years, major assemblies of the Canadian Reformed Churches received requests to add more hymns, contemporary hymns, and alternate tunes for the psalms; additionally, minor assemblies dealt with requests to remove the vetting of songs by major assemblies. It is unclear why local Canadian Reformed Churches desire changes and if an altered theology or understanding of worship is the cause. The purpose of this thesis is to provide insight into the thoughts, considerations, and opinions of Canadian Reformed congregants regarding the Scriptural direction to sing Psalms in worship, the unity with the church of the ages in singing Psalms, the local tradition, and their experience in singing in worship. As churches follow the agreed processes and procedures in dealing with requests and appeals, and the major assemblies deal primarily with requests by church leaders, this research provides insight into the congregants' views, opinions, and considerations regarding singing and music in worship.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the existing sources related to Psalm Singing, focusing on Reformed churches, particularly the Canadian Reformed Churches. The first part examines the Regulative Principle of Worship as the framework for Psalm Singing in worship. Starting in Scripture and ending in North America, the second part summarizes Psalm Singing. The last section provides a synopsis of three Reformed Church federations that share the same roots.

Regulative Principle of Worship

In his letter to Sadoletto, defending the Reformation, the Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) said, “There is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a preposterous and perverse worship of God.”¹ Calvin’s views on worship are often identified as the Regulative Principle of Worship. James Montgomery Boice defines this principle as worship based on biblical revelation and according to the doctrines of the bible.² Reformed confessions provide more specific definitions for the Regulative Principle of Worship.³ However, the Westminster Confession is most comprehensive in article 21: “But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under

¹ John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. by John C. Olin (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 59.

² James Montgomery Boice; Lane T. Dennis; Eric J. Alexander, *Whatever Happened to The Gospel of Grace? Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 188.

³ *Belgic Confession of Faith*, Article 32; *Heidelberg Catechism*, Question and Answer 96.

any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.”⁴ The Reformed principle of *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone) also regulates Reformed churches in worship. Just as nothing should be added or taken away from God’s Word, nothing should be added or taken away from God’s instructions for the worship of his people.⁵ H. B. Charles provides context to this principle in worship when he says, “It does not matter what people see, think, or say. It only matters that the Lord is pleased. May we never forget that we gather not to please ourselves or to please others. We worship to please the Lord.”⁶

Reformed churches are not exclusive in this view. A. W. Tozer, an Evangelical pastor and author, asserts, “nobody can design their own pattern of worship or worship God any way they please. The pleasure here belongs to God alone. The One who created us to worship also has decreed how we shall worship Him.”⁷ Tozer is clear that worship must conform to God’s pleasure. Humans cannot create such worship because they are sinful and fallen, although they may have good intentions. Intentions are not good enough. People are to submit to the authority of God’s Word, learn and obey the Word, and not neglect any part of it.⁸ Tozer refers to Revelation 4:11 (King James Version), “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”⁹ God

⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Lawrenceville, GA: PCA Committee for Christian Education & Publications, 2007), 99–100.

⁵ Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please. A Guide to Reformed Worship* (Carman, MB: The Study, 2020), 29.

⁶ H.B. Charles Jr., *On Worship: A Short Guide to Understanding, Participating In, and Leading Corporate Worship* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 17.

⁷ A.W. Tozer, *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship*, ed. James Snyder (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009), 53.

⁸ Ligon Duncan, *Does God Care How We Worship?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2020), 65.

⁹ A.W. Tozer, *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship*, ed. James Snyder (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009), 37.

created all things for His pleasure, and people should live to please God. More Scripture passages support the idea that worship should please God. Wes Bredenhof refers to Colossians 1:10a (English Standard Version), “so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him,” and 2 Corinthians 5:9, “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.” Knowing how to please God in worship requires understanding who God is. A proper view of God is crucial to worship. Ligon Duncan says that Scripture is the rule of how to think about God, and how people worship determines whom they worship.¹⁰ The object of worship is evident in worship. According to Bredenhof, many churches think little about how to worship God, suggesting that today’s principle could be that good motivations please God, or that God is pleased when churches are getting people through their doors.¹¹ However, pleasing God only happens when he is worshiped His way. In worship, worshippers do not determine what happens; Jesus does. Bredenhof states that Christ as the head of the church has profound implications for worship: “Only he can call the shots.”¹² Gerard van Rongen echoes Christ’s authority in worship.¹³ Christ’s authority extends to the songs in worship, as the songs are a part of the elements of worship (the what of worship), as opposed to the circumstances of worship (the how of worship). Cory Griess explains:

There is a difference between elements and circumstances. The elements of worship are the actual things we do. They are the *what* of worship: singing, praying, reading Scripture, etc. The circumstances are what attend those elements. They are the *how* of

¹⁰ Ligon Duncan, *Does God Care How We Worship?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2020), 29.

¹¹ Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please. A Guide to Reformed Worship* (Carman MB: The Study, 2020), 38

¹² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³ Gerard van Rongen, *Zijn Schone Dienst: Studies Over De Gereformeerde Liturgie* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1956), 28.

worship: tunes of songs, length of prayers, place and time of meeting, etc. They are not the things we do, but how we do them.¹⁴

D. G. Hart and John R. Muether add, “The elements of worship are the ‘what’ of worship, the fixed and unchanging parts of the worship service.”¹⁵ Bredenhof shares circumstances are not governed by Scripture but by wisdom and discretion informed by Scripture.¹⁶ Discovering what God wants his people to sing in worship and pleases him, R.C. Sproul asks, “If God Himself were to design worship, what would it look like?” to which Sproul answers by referring to both the Old and New Testament.¹⁷ The Regulative Principle for Worship has consequences for the songs in corporate worship. Terry Johnson specifically asserts that the songs should include Psalms and that the psalms should provide a model for Christian worship songs.¹⁸

The Singing of Psalms in Corporate Worship

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that singing the Word in corporate worship “serves to widen the spiritual horizon, make people see their little company as a member of the great Christian Church on earth, and help them willingly and gladly to join their singing, be it feeble or good, to the song of the Church.”¹⁹ Joel Beeke asserts that Psalm Singing creates

¹⁴ Cory Griess, “The Regulative Principle of Worship (2)” *The Standard Bearer* 88, no. 19: 449.

¹⁵ D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 86.

¹⁶ Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please. A Guide to Reformed Worship* (Carman, MB: The Study, 2020), 37.

¹⁷ R.C. Sproul, *How Then Shall We Worship? Biblical Principles to Guide Us Today* (Colorado Springs CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 15–21, 123–24.

¹⁸ Terry Johnson, *Reformed Worship: Worship that is According to Scripture* (Welwyn Garden City: EP Books, 2015), 36.

¹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (Durham, NC: HarperOne, 1978), 61.

unity among Christians as it unites the believers with the church of Jesus Christ of all times and places.²⁰ He explains that in the Psalms, the church sings the exact words that David, Isaiah, Daniel, Jesus, and the Apostles used to worship God. Gerard Vos agrees with Beeke. He comments that today's worship experiences a "vital unity" with the saints of the Old Testament, for "we are sons of the prophets and of the *diatheke* God made with Abraham."²¹ Bradley Johnston takes this a step further, saying that the church joins in singing with Jesus and his Apostles, for these are the songs they sang and promoted "in synagogues (e.g., Acts 13:32–39; 17:1–3) and churches (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) across the Roman Empire."²² Johnston adds that Jesus and his apostles quoted the psalms more than any other Old Testament book in their preaching and writing.²³ In singing psalms, the church unites with Jesus in heaven. In reference to Augustine, Schuman speaks about the unity of the one body with its Head in heaven and the members on earth, sometimes expressing praise and sometimes lamenting through the familiar voice of the psalms.²⁴ The psalms also speak about this unity themselves. Connecting the psalms to history, today, and the time to come, Beeke points to the multi-generational prophetic vision of the psalms, in, for example, Psalm 78:3–8, Psalm 79:13 or Psalm 145:4. In singing psalms, the church reaches out to the next generations and, as such, passing on the legacy of Scriptural worship. Beeke quotes Psalm 102:18 (KJV), "This shall be written for the generation

²⁰ Joel Beeke, *Why Should We Sing Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 23.

²¹ Gerardus Vos, "Eschatology of The Psalter," in *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 332.

²² Bradley Johnston, *150 Questions About the Psalter* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014), x.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁴ Paul Oskamp and Niek Schuman, *De Weg van de Liturgie: Tradities, Achtergronden, Praktijk* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1998), 172.

to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord.”²⁵ Keith and Kristyn Getty also connect the past to the present in singing psalms. They identify first the vision the psalms provide of who God is. As modern hymn writers, the Gettys identify the difference between the psalms and contemporary music, which is not refrains, repetition, length, or the use of the I-pronoun but the breadth and depth of the character of God and how the people find their place within that.²⁶ Second, they explain that the psalms show God’s people how to deal with the circumstances of life because the psalms are honest, embracing the realities of life and singing through them.²⁷ As there is a vertical unity between Christ and the church, the psalms also create a horizontal unity between Christians. Johnston explains that the psalms are “a powerful glue that binds the entire church of Jesus Christ together.”²⁸ This glue has special characteristics, as the psalms include more lament and imprecatory songs than songs of praise. Michael Lefebvre points to the unity in Psalm Singing between Christians in all times and places, as lament and imprecatory psalms help to remember and to pray with and pray for persecuted Christians around the world in their afflictions.²⁹

Despite these qualities, John Witvliet remarks that there is relatively lukewarm enthusiasm for the psalms in worship in North America.³⁰ When Ray Van Neste writes about introducing the singing of psalms, he comments, “In many parts of the church today, the psalms

²⁵ Joel R. Beeke, *Why Should We Sing Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Heritage Books, 2015), 25.

²⁶ Keith and Krystin Getty, *Sing!: How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, And Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 45.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 45–46.

²⁸ Bradley Johnston, *150 Questions About the Psalter* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014), xi.

²⁹ Michael Lefebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Glasgow: Bell & Bain, 2010), 131.

³⁰ John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), xiii.

have largely been lost,” and “a practice well known to our forebears but lost in our circles today.”³¹ Richard Wells and Van Neste do not specifically address the cause for losing Psalm Singing. Witvliet suggests that people do not like the music, and he suggests more creativity in musical forms.³² Scott Aniol identifies an underlying issue causing the neglect of Psalm Singing in worship: people’s lack of understanding of the purpose of the psalms and inability to recognize the deliberate canonical organization of the psalms.³³ While Aniol’s reason seems to be a solvable issue of knowledge, Bruce Waltke points to what influences people: today’s culture. He states that while the church sang the psalms for over three thousand years, and the psalms were a source for doctrine and truthful praise, Psalm Singing is shrinking fast today because of “the secularism of the human spirit, which seeks all satisfactions on this one planet, instead of seeking them from the Creator who made heaven and earth.”³⁴

Solutions to resolve these issues are diverse. Chris Gordon’s approach to solving the absence of Psalm Singing is “a positive view and appreciation of the benefits of Psalm Singing.” He hopes people will start singing psalms again because they see how joyful, freeing, and protective it is to sing God’s Word back to him.³⁵ Addressing the knowledge aspect, Aniol starts with the principle that God gave his people the psalms, not merely to find a mood that agrees with today’s culture but rather to form people. Aniol resolves that people must recognize God’s

³¹ C. Richards Wells and Ray Van Neste, *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 1–2.

³² John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), xiii-xiv.

³³ Scott Aniol, “Unsung Songs: Why Don’t We Sing Psalms Anymore?” July 2, 2022, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://g3min.org/unsung-songs-why-dont-we-sing-psalms-anymore/>.

³⁴ Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 37.

³⁵ Chris Gordon, “Why Do We Fight Psalm Singing?” July 2, 2022, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://agradio.org/blog/why-do-we-fight-psalmsinging>.

purpose for using the psalms in their lives and worship through the formative intent of the psalms.³⁶ Bredenhof echoes this formative purpose of the psalms, “The church without Psalm Singing is impoverished because it misses out on the regular use of a powerful, Christ-focused part of God’s Word given us not only for praise but also for instruction and admonition.”³⁷ Wells refers to the fourth-century pastor and scholar Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (339–197), who called the psalms a “Gymnasium for the Soul” (*Animarium Gymnasium*). When God’s people sing the psalms, they subsequently transform the singers, toning and sculpting their souls. “Whereas gymnasiums offer differentiated exercises to train our biceps, abs, guts, and hamstrings, the psalms offer a variety of spiritual ‘exercises’ to train us to offer praise and thanks, express lament, and penitence, and arouse hope and trust.”³⁸ This process of transformation changes people. Similarly, N.T. Wright calls the psalms “agents of change,” identifying that change is occurring within the singers and through the singers as they minister in this world as changed people. Wright states that singers and listeners are taught a Christian worldview “in which past, present, and future, heaven and earth, creation and new creation all overlap.”³⁹ Because of their formative nature, the psalms influence who people become. Witvliet asserts that the psalms are the source for a better understanding of the Christian faith’s DNA and to realize a more profound experience of worship.⁴⁰

³⁶ Chris Gordon, “Why Do We Fight Psalm Singing?” July 2, 2022, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://agradio.org/blog/why-do-we-fight-psalmsinging>.

³⁷ Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please. A Guide to Reformed Worship* (Carman, MB: The Study, 2020), 75.

³⁸ C. Richards Wells and Ray Van Neste, *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 10.

³⁹ N.T. Wright, *The Case for The Psalms: Why They Are Essential* (New York, NY: HarperOne, an Imprint of HarperCollins, 2026), 164.

⁴⁰ John D. Witvliet, *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 13.

Hymns in Reformed Worship

The psalms are intended for use in worship, as they were given for worship, and the church has always used them in worship. Bredenhof explains, “Singing psalms in worship is one of the distinctives of the Reformed churches.”⁴¹ In the Reformed churches, some federations advocate exclusive psalmody,⁴² but most Reformed churches also sing hymns. John Calvin titled the first edition of the Genevan Psalter *Aulcuns pseaulmes et cantiques mys en chant* (“Some Psalms and Hymns Placed in Song”). The hymns in this publication were canticles, with the lyrics taken from Scripture. Karel Deddens expands the selection of hymns in Reformed worship to include free hymns, considering the permitted use of free prayers in the church.⁴³ Old concludes that Calvin had no objections to singing hymns in other churches but set a preference for singing psalms in his own church.⁴⁴ Therefore, besides the psalms, most Reformed churches’ songbooks include hymns as well. Calvin included the Ten Commandments, the Song of Simeon, and the Apostles’ Creed in his first publication of his songbook in 1539.⁴⁵ Upon request, the 1618–19 Synod of Dordrecht decided what churches should sing in corporate worship: the 150 Psalms, the Ten Commandments, The Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed, and the songs of Mary, Zechariah, and Simeon, while the Prayer for the Preaching, which is not found in

⁴¹ Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please. A Guide to Reformed Worship* (Carman MB: The Study, 2020), 63, 67.

⁴² Derek W.H. Thomas, *Let Us Worship God: Why We Worship the Way We Do* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2021), 101.

⁴³ Karel Deddens, *Waar Alles Van Hem Spreekt : Bezinning Op De Eredienst* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1981), 84.

⁴⁴ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), 52.

⁴⁵ J.A. van der Meiden, *Calvijn en het Kerklied: Een Studie van H. Hasper* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1987), 35.

Scripture, was left to the freedom of the churches.⁴⁶ In 1773, twelve hymns were approved for corporate worship: besides the existing hymns, a morning prayer, a prayer before a meal, a thanksgiving song after a meal, and an evening song were added.⁴⁷ In their first completed denominational songbook (1984), the Canadian Reformed Churches included 65 hymns containing renditions of Scripture passages, part of the confessions, Lutheran hymns, and others.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the singing of hymns is not without concern. Alan Strange comments that in Sunday worship, hymns have eclipsed psalms. He says: “The loss of Psalm Singing is quite remarkable, especially in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, whose liturgies historically consisted of either mostly or exclusively of psalms.” Beeke explains that the change from singing psalms to singing hymns started in the late eighteenth century when Psalm Singing virtually disappeared from English-speaking churches.⁴⁹ Referring to this period, Arlo Duba concludes with Horace Allen that the cause for Presbyterians to depart from Psalm Singing was the popularity of the Watts and Wesley hymns.⁵⁰ While Strange, Beeke, and Duba make their observations by looking back in history, William Romaine warned against this development before it took place. In 1837, Romaine shared his concerns with Watts’ hymns for the future of singing psalms in the churches: “My concern is to see Christian congregations shut out divinely

⁴⁶ Jaco van der Knijff, *Heilige Gezangen: Herkomst, Ontwikkeling en Receptie van de Lofzangen in het Psalmboek van Dathenus en de ‘Enige Gezangen’ in de Staatsberijming van 1773* (Apeloorn: Labarum Academic, 2018), 234.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 342.

⁴⁸ Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, *Book of Praise, Anglo Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 2014), 314–417.

⁴⁹ Joel Beeke, *Why Should We Sing Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), 1.

⁵⁰ Arlo Duba, “We Used to Sing Only Psalms—What Happened?” *Reformed Worship* (March 3, 1987).

inspired psalms, and take Dr. Watt's flights of fancy; as if the words of a poet were better than the words of a prophet, or as if the wit of man was preferred to the wisdom of God."⁵¹ The singing of hymns and their relationship to the psalms was also a point of contention in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. After some churches unlawfully allowed a hymnal in the church services in the last 19th and early 20th century, Abraham Kuyper said,

Dien bundel, () ook maar even met onzen Psalmbundel te willen vergelijken, is dan ook kinderspel. Verguld blik en echt goud kennen elkander niet. () En toch die laag staande bundel is door de toongevende mannen schier onverwild zoozeer op den voorgrond geschoven, dat één Psalmversie op zes, zeven Gezangverzen langen tijd bij de meeste predikanten regel was. () De Gezangen stalen het hart, en van de Psalmen werd het hart vervreemd [When you compare the poetic and religious quality of the hymns with our Psalter, the former looks like a child's play. Gilded tin and real gold have nothing in common. And yet the inferior hymnal was quickly given such prominence by persons in leadership that for a long time, most ministers chose one Psalm to six or seven hymns. And the psalms used were usually a few that were generally well-known, sometimes no more than two dozen, and they were chosen repeatedly. Hymns stole the scene and Psalms were mainly forgotten.]⁵²

The first concern Kuyper raises here relates to the illicit use of these hymns. These hymns were unlawful for the corporate worship service because the church polity required the songs to be evaluated and approved first. Page and Gray share similar concerns regarding the singing of unvetted songs in worship from a Southern Baptist perspective, "Continued use of these songs in worship through the next decade will lead to the continuing breakdown of the distinct theological characteristics that defined churches for decades in favor of a convergent theology integrating beliefs from across the theological spectrum."⁵³ When discussing hymns, Robert G. Rayburn shares this issue: "We are concerned here with the corporate worship of God. This is why we are

⁵¹ William Romaine, *The Whole Works of the Late Reverend William Romaine, A.M.* (London: Thomas Tegg & Son, 1837), 963, 968–70.

⁵² Abraham Kuyper, *Onze Eredienst* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1911), 59–60.

⁵³ Frank S. Page and L. Lavon Gray, *Hungry for Worship, Challenges and Solutions in Today's Church* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2014), 124.

concerned for the highest and best of musical praise when the congregation lifts its voice in sacred song. Because God must be worshiped in truth, every line of a hymn must be consistent with Scripture.”⁵⁴ Kuyper adds that people holding to the truth of Scripture and the Reformed confessions generally prefer psalms and that those who had drifted away idolized hymns.⁵⁵ Hendrik Hasper is more rigorous and wants the churches to disconnect from the 18th-century legacy and remove the word *hymn* from the church vocabulary because of his concern for the Scriptural truth of the songs. His more profound concern is the next generation, which grows in a devouring world.⁵⁶ The second issue Kuyper raises is the balance between psalms and hymns. Old shares this concern, saying that the church has not always kept a balance between the psalms and “hymns of human composure.”⁵⁷

Psalm Singing in Scripture

During King David’s reign, the Israelites started to sing. When the Ark of the Covenant returned to Jerusalem, God’s people sang parts of Psalm 96 and Psalm 105 (1 Chronicles 16). More officially, David tasked the Levites with singing where the Ark rested in Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 6) and created a formal commandment to sing and make music in 2 Chronicles 29:25 and 35:15. When David transferred the kingship to his son, Solomon, he established a large group of 4,000 singers and 288 worship leaders (1 Chronicles 23:5; 25:1, 3, 6, 7). Gerard van Rongen points to 1 Chronicles 16:7, which says that at that time, David commands to give thanks to the Lord in singing for the first time, with reference to the “Davidic Law” in reference to

⁵⁴ Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in The Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 227.

⁵⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Onze Eredienst* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1911), 60.

⁵⁶ Hendrik Hasper, *Een Reformatorisch Kerkboek* (Leeuwarden: A. Jongbloed N.V., 1941), 48.

⁵⁷ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), 55.

worship as people may mention the “Mosaic Law” in reference to the Torah.⁵⁸ The reformation of worship at the laying of the foundation of the second temple (Ezra 3:10) and at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 12:45–46) show that the songs of worship were not a matter of choice. Beeke explains that there was freedom in the wording of prayers but no freedom regarding the words of songs. He concludes that the principle of corporate worship in the Old Testament requires inspired songs authorized for that purpose.⁵⁹ There is little knowledge about the details of the singing, music, and musical instruments from the time of the first temple, as this temple was destroyed and the Israelites were taken captive. The musical traditions of this second temple are assumed to have influenced synagogical worship, where psalms alternated with the prayers and Scripture readings and *Mishnah* in the liturgies for the Sabbath and weekdays.⁶⁰ Moore writes that the psalms have been called the “hymnbook of the Second Temple.” Every psalm used in the temple service had to be from the Psalter. God’s people repurposed psalms for new festivals and did not write new songs.⁶¹

Worship in synagogues included the psalms when Jesus walked on earth. He sang the psalms with his disciples, and he referred to the psalms in his sermons. Beeke concludes that Jesus believed in the inspiration and authority of the psalms.⁶² He adds that throughout his

⁵⁸ Gerard van Rongen, *Met Al De Heiligen: Liturgie In Hemel En Op Aarde III* (Barneveld, De Vuurbaak, 1990), 87.

⁵⁹ Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio, *Sing A New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for The Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 81.

⁶⁰ Rudolf Boon, *De Joodse Wortels van de Christelijke Eredienst* (Amsterdam: Van der Leeuw-Sichting, 1968), 87; Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in The Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 86.

⁶¹ Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 25.

⁶² Joel Beeke, *Sing A New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for The Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 135.

ministry, Jesus never indicated that the psalms should be replaced, that his followers should create new songs, or gave a promise that the Holy Spirit would lead people to do so. “As a result, there is nothing like the Book of Psalms in the New Testament.”⁶³ William Binnie recognizes significance in the mention of Jesus and his disciples singing the *Hallel* on the night of his betrayal. As the psalms accompanied the expiring ordinance of the Passover into the new ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, the psalms itself passed from the old to the new dispensation.⁶⁴ Beeke points to 1 Corinthians 14:26 (New King James Version), which expresses the normality of singing psalms in worship: “How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”⁶⁵

Psalm Singing in the Early Church

Following the traditions of the Old and New Testament, the Christian church continued singing the psalms.⁶⁶ The persecution of the Christians by Rome in the first centuries restricted the singing in worship and the use of instruments.⁶⁷ However, there are comments from other areas indicating that Christians sang the psalms. A Jewish-Christian bishop to a North Syrian

⁶³ Joel Beeke, *Sing A New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for The Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 136.

⁶⁴ William Binnie, *The Psalms: Their History, Teachings, and Use* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1886), 376.

⁶⁵ Joel Beeke, *Sing A New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 135.

⁶⁶ Derek W.H. Thomas, *Let Us Worship God: Why We Worship the Way We Do* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2021), 101.

⁶⁷ Dirk W.L. Milo, *Zangers en Speellieden* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre N.V., 1946), 75.

congregation instructed: “If you yearn for songs, you have the psalms.”⁶⁸ Church fathers in the first three centuries referred to the psalms regularly in sermons and other writings, for example, to defend the Christian doctrines.⁶⁹ In the fourth century the catacombs in Rome were abandoned and the church gained freedom through the Edict of Milan in 313. The church became the state church under Constantine the Great (272-337).⁷⁰ The travel journal of the nun, Egeria, gives insight into the church’s life in the Middle East and in Jerusalem in particular. Deddens points out the singing of psalms, hymns, and antiphons, even on weekdays.⁷¹ With the Scripture readings, the psalms and antiphons were relevant to what the church commemorated or celebrated that day.⁷² Deddens also refers to an Armenian manuscript about the fifth-century worship in Jerusalem, mentioning specific psalms and when these were sung or recited.⁷³ Many sources make clear that the psalms were a central part of worship in the early church.⁷⁴ The congregation sang the psalms. Egeria specifically mentions in her journal, “Three psalms were sung in such a way that all could participate.”⁷⁵ The practice of singing psalms in worship, as Egeria described, never ended. Derek W. H. Thomas remarks that the worship of the church included Psalm Singing for two millennia since the emergence of the New Testament church,

⁶⁸ Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 40.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 41–7.

⁷⁰ Dirk W.L. Milo, *Zangers en Speellieden* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre N.V., 1946), 78.

⁷¹ Karel Deddens, *Annus Liturgicus: Een Onderzoek naar de betekenis van Cyrillus van Jerusalem voor de Ontwikkeling van het ‘Kerkelijke Jaar’* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1975), 93.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 125–30.

⁷⁴ Philip W. Webb, “A Defense of Psalm Singing: Solutions to Contemporary Practice” (DMA Diss., University of Kentucky, 2023), 48–49.

⁷⁵ Lester Ruth, Carrie Steenwyk, and John D. Witvliet, *Walking Where Jesus Walked: Worship In Fourth-century Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 27.

while the 16th-century Reformation reestablished the singing of psalms by the congregation in their own language.⁷⁶

Psalm Singing and the 16th Century Reformation

The 16th-century Reformation resulted in giving the Scriptures a central place in worship. People were eager to learn the gospel, listening to preachers who explained the Scriptures in their language.⁷⁷ The central role of Scripture also affected other aspects of worship, such as the singing. In 1524, the Reformer Martin Bucer (1491–1551) pointed to the importance of the lyrics of the songs agreeing with God’s Word. He said:

Wir gebrauchen in der gemein gotes keins gesangs noch gepets das nit aus götlicher schrift gezogen sey, und dieweyl was in der gemein gottes gehandelt würt jedermann in gemein besserlich sein soll, betten noch singen wir nichts dann in gemeiner teutscher sprach, das der ley gemeincklich möge Amen sprechen, wie das der geist gottes lernet [In the church of God, we do not use a song or prayer not originating in the holy Scriptures. And, because it is better for all people in God’s congregation, we sing or pray only in the common German language, allowing people to respond together in Amen, as God’s Spirit instructs.]⁷⁸

In 1537, Calvin presented the government of the city of Geneva with the concept of a Church Order. He provided a more detailed reasoning: “We desire the singing of psalms in the church as we have examples in the old church; and following the testimony of Paul, who stated that it is good to sing. Singing of psalms can lift our hearts unto God.”⁷⁹ Luther composed tunes for Scripture passages in addition to psalms and hymns. Deddens explained that Calvin’s congregation in Strassburg sang psalms, Scripture passages set to music, and other songs, such as

⁷⁶ Derek W.H. Thomas, *Let Us Worship God: Why We Worship the Way We Do* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2021), 100–1.

⁷⁷ Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), 68.

⁷⁸ Martin Bucer, *Grund und Ursach* (Köpfel, 1525), 36.

⁷⁹ Dirk W.L. Milo, *Zangers en Speellieden* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre N.V., 1946), 90.

the hymn *Salutation à Jesus-Christ*, Lord's Supper hymns, confessions of sins, and confessions of faith.⁸⁰

In England, the 1562 *Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter* or the 1696 *Tate and Brady Psalter* were the only authorized Psalters for Anglican corporate worship, while an authorized *Scottish Psalter* was published in 1564.⁸¹ When Presbyterians immigrated in large numbers to North America, they took along the *Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter*. At the same time, the immigrants to Plymouth brought the Ainsworth, a Psalter specifically prepared for fugitive congregations in the Netherlands.⁸² Within twenty years after their arrival in Plymouth, Massachusetts, they published the *Bay Psalm Book*, which was the first printed book in the American colonies, Johnston remarks, pointing out the importance of singing God's words in corporate worship.⁸³

God's people sang the psalms from at least the time of King David in the 10th century before Christ until the 17th century after Christ; Lefebvre remarks that while other songs supplemented the psalms, they never replaced them. He concludes that only in the 18th century were attempts made to replace the psalms in corporate worship.⁸⁴ The songs that started to replace the psalms came from different sources, but Isaac Watts (1674-1748) had a major influence; he is called "the Father of English Hymnody."⁸⁵ Watts was convinced that the singing

⁸⁰ Karel Deddens, *Herstel kwam uit Straatsburg* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1986), 78, 97.

⁸¹ Joel R. Beeke and Anthony T. Selvaggio, *Sing A New Song: Recovering Psalm Singing for The Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 64.

⁸² Waldo Selden Pratt, *The Music of the Pilgrims, A Description of the Psalm-book brought to Plymouth in 1620* (Boston, MA: Oliver Ditson Company, 1941), 7.

⁸³ Bradley Johnston, *150 Questions About the Psalter* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2014), x.

⁸⁴ Michael Lefebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Glasgow: Bell & Bain, 2010), 23.

⁸⁵ Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul: 150 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing, 2011), 31.

in the church ought to express the New Testament and the thoughts and feelings of the singers rather than those of the psalm writers.⁸⁶ Watts disagreed with the principle of the Reformation that the church was to sing Scriptural Psalms. Watts struggled with, for example, Psalms 26, 27, and 28 as they are “contrary to the new commandment of loving our enemies.”⁸⁷ He considered part of the psalms to “darken our sight of God the Savior,” and “fit only to be sung in the worldly sanctuary,” resulting in “worship growing dull.”⁸⁸ Watts identified “many deficiencies of light and glory” in the psalms.⁸⁹ He stated that God’s people must go beyond the words of Scripture to express devotion and thanksgiving, and the psalms were only to be used in worship if they had Christian content.⁹⁰ Lefebvre expands on the differences between the singing in Watts’s congregation in Southampton and Calvin’s congregation in Geneva:

In Watts’s description quoted earlier, Psalm Singing “awakes regret...and uneasiness” in the congregation. But the Genevan churches of Calvin’s day found “great consolation and edification” in Psalm Singing, as earlier noted. This contrast suggests that there was a different expectation of praise songs between the two periods - an expectation which the psalms beautifully satisfied in Calvin’s Geneva and a different expectation which the psalms actually offended in Watts’s England.⁹¹

People understood the singing of God’s Word in the psalms differently in Watts’ time. Watts explained that the singing of psalms awakens regret and uneasiness, listing three issues. First, the psalms by themselves were not appropriate or sufficient for corporate worship of the

⁸⁶ Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012), 120.

⁸⁷ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D. in Nine Volumes*, Vol. XI (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1813), 127.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 127–128.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹⁰ Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2012), 121.

⁹¹ Michael Lefebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Glasgow: Bell & Bain, 2010), 27.

New Testament church; second, most regular Christians could not sing from the heart because they did not understand the text of the psalms; third, Psalm Singing could not edify the singer or glorify God because the singing in corporate worship was so bad.⁹² Erik Routley calls Watts the “Liberator of English Hymnody,” suggesting a contentious approach to replacing the Scriptural Psalms in worship.⁹³ Aniol confirms Watts’ second point in today’s context, as he claims the central reason for contemporary neglect of the Psalter is not understanding God’s inspired Word in the Book of the Psalms, most evident in the favoritism of the Psalms of Comfort and Psalms of Praise. Aniol suggests that the average Christian would identify “praise” as the overall theme of the Psalter.⁹⁴ Wenham acknowledges that today, many churches in Britain and America never sing the psalms, and some seminaries do not study the psalms in their curriculum. Wenham states that without psalms, worship will be a limited experience, creating a “harmful imbalance in praying and singing.”⁹⁵ Also pointing the finger at seminaries, neglecting instruction about singing in worship, Rayburn states, “the evangelical church has been sadly impoverished” as a result.⁹⁶ Bonhoeffer acknowledges the impact of singing psalms on the church, “Mit dem Psalter geht einer christlichen Gemeinde ein unvergleichlicher Schatz verloren, und mit seiner Wiedergewinnung werden ungeahnte Kräfte in sie eingehen [Where the Psalter is abandoned, an

⁹² Esther Rothenbusch Crookshank, “Foreword,” in *The Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs of Isaac Watts*, (Frisco, TX: Doxology and Theology Press, 2016), xii–xiv.

⁹³ Erik Routley, “Christian Hymns: An Introduction to Their Story,” Track 7, Isaac Watts, *The Liberator of English Hymnody* (Lawrence Township, NJ: Rider University, 1980).

⁹⁴ Scott Aniol, “Unsung Songs: Why Don’t We Sing Psalms Anymore?” G3 Ministries, August 8, 2022, <https://g3min.org/unsung-songs-why-dont-we-sing-Psalms-anymore/>.

⁹⁵ Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 40.

⁹⁶ Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in The Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), 230.

incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian church. With its recovery will come unexpected power.]”⁹⁷

Psalm Singing in the Netherlands

Following the 16th century Reformation, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands sang psalms in worship. The 1618–19 General Synod in Dordrecht confirmed the singing of primarily psalms in worship. In 1773, the government-approved *Statenberijming* was released, which is still used by conservative Reformed church federations in the Netherlands today.⁹⁸ Other Reformed churches use other Psalters with updated lyrics which were published in the past century.⁹⁹ One of these church federations is the GKv. Almost all members that started the Canadian Reformed Churches in 1950 came from this church federation.¹⁰⁰ For the first 50 years, the churches maintained a good ecclesiastical relationship. This changed when the GKv started to make changes that were inconsistent with the Reformed doctrine and principles. In 2001, the Canadian Reformed Churches expressed their concern that the GKv seemed to be drifting away from the Reformed paths “as is evident in the increase in the number of hymns which historically has come at the expense of the singing of the psalms.”¹⁰¹ In addition, they shared a concern

⁹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Das Gebetbuch der Bibel: Eine Einführung in die Psalmen* (Bad Salzuflen: MBK-Verlag, 1961), 12.

⁹⁸ Karel Deddens, *Waar Alles Van Hem Spreekt : Bezinning Op De Eredienst* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1981), 78; Jaco van der Knijff, *Heilige Gezangen: Herkomst, Ontwikkeling en Receptie van de Lofzangen in het Psalmboek van Dathenus en de ‘Enige Gezangen’ in de Staatsberijming van 1773* (Apeloorn: Labarum Academic, 2018), 503.

⁹⁹ Hans Bloemendal, *Een Psalm, Een Lied* (Goudriaan: Uitgeverij De Groot, 1998), 14.

¹⁰⁰ James Visscher, “Year in Review”, *Clarion* 67, no. YE.

¹⁰¹ *Acts of General Synod 2001 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2001), 242.

about weakening Scriptural language in liturgical forms.¹⁰² Following new developments in the GKv, the next Canadian Reformed Synod in 2004 expressed concerns about the decision to have an unlimited number of hymns, which “reflects the importance—and even the priority—of the psalms.”¹⁰³ As the Dutch developments continued, the 2007 Canadian Synod shared their concern about the vast multiplication of hymns.¹⁰⁴ The issues were not limited to the hymn increase but also included theological issues in the explanation of Scripture and theological concerns in the lyrics of the hymns.¹⁰⁵ The Dutch Synod of 2014–15 decided not to regulate the songs in worship anymore.¹⁰⁶ In the discussion preceding this decision, the Synod remarks: “Gesteld kan worden dat in de kerk van vandaag wel van alles vastgesteld kan worden, maar veel gemeenten gaan hun eigen weg. De praktijk gaat zich wel vormen [It can be concluded that in the church of today, matters can be regulated, but many churches make their own decisions. The reality will shape itself].”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the reality shaped itself. Jan Smelik observes that in a number of churches, contemporary songs replaced the psalms and hymns almost completely.¹⁰⁸ Roeland Scherff is dumbfounded how churches, from one to another Sunday, can discontinue singing psalms while they used to sing primarily psalms.¹⁰⁹ Gert van den Brink comments that

¹⁰² *Acts of General Synod 2001 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2001), 243.

¹⁰³ *Acts of General Synod 2004 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2004), 41.

¹⁰⁴ *Acts of General Synod 2007 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2007), 84.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰⁶ Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, “Acta Generale Synode Ede 2014–2015,” accessed September 23, 2023, 71, <http://kerkrecht.nl/sites/default/files/Acta%20GS%20Ede%202014-2015.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁰⁸ Jan Smelik, “Oud en Nieuw,” *EREdienst* 44, no. 1: 3.

¹⁰⁹ Roeland Scherf, “Popmuziek serieus nemen,” *EREdienst* 50, no. 6: 17.

the underlying issue of changes in the GKv is a circumstantial interpretation of the Scriptures, resulting in an unstable, inconsistent explanation of Scripture.¹¹⁰ These developments in the GKv resulted in several Reformed churches in the world suspending or breaking their sister church relationship with the GKv, as acknowledged by the GKv at its Synod in 2020.¹¹¹

Psalm Singing in the Christian Reformed Church

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) was founded in 1857 by Dutch immigrants, based on concerns following a church merger, which included their desire for sound doctrinal preaching and singing psalms in worship.¹¹² In response to a desire for more hymns, the 1930 CRC Synod warned against the danger of neglecting the psalms, Izerd van Dellen shares, confirming the principle that psalms should predominate in every worship service.¹¹³ Yet, to end the churches' requests for more hymns "for a long time to come," the Synod decided to add "a large number of hymns."¹¹⁴ However, it did not end the discussion. Bert Polman confirms that the 1957 edition increased the number of hymns further.¹¹⁵ Describing a further decline of Psalmody and a rise of seeker-sensitive worship in the period 1970 to 1990, Polman concludes that in worship today, "everyone does what is right in their own eyes" without a sense of

¹¹⁰ Gert van den Brink, "Schriftgezag en Vrijheid van Exegese," [The Authority of Scripture and Liberty of Exegeses] in *Het Woord in Geding*, ed. P.T. Pel and H.J. Room (Lunteren: Drukkerij AMV B.V.), 69.

¹¹¹ Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, *Acta Generale Synode Goes 2020*, accessed September 23, 2023, 109-14, <https://ngk.nl/download/21334>.

¹¹² Christian Reformed Churches of North America, "History," accessed December 1, 2023, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/history>.

¹¹³ Izerd van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary Being a Brief Explanation of the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941), 283–84.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹¹⁵ Emily R. Brink and Bert Polman, *Psalter Hymnal Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1998), 117.

denominational identity, liturgical awareness, or biblical worship principles.¹¹⁶ Emily Brink looks back, confirming that the concerns about being drawn away from Psalm Singing were valid because Psalm Singing has virtually disappeared. She points out that the danger of not singing psalms is “cutting ourselves off from our biblical roots” and calls the CRC to return to singing psalms in worship.¹¹⁷ Nuiver also looks back and identifies the core issue of Psalm Singing in the CRC. He says, “We have lost Psalm Singing because we have lost a sense of who we are.” He elaborates by pointing at the heritage, unity with the previous, current, and future generations, and generational unity within the congregation.¹¹⁸

Psalm Singing in the Canadian Reformed Churches

From the start, Psalm Singing was a priority for the Canadian Reformed Churches, and a comprehensive overview of the existing Psalters was needed to assess the available English Psalters. Therefore, the first Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches appointed a committee to review the availability of metrical psalms in the English language.¹¹⁹ This committee first answered the question of what a Reformed Psalter looks like. They defined this as a song selection, wherein the congregation confesses to singing through songs of the covenant and kingdom, proclaiming God’s mighty works through the centuries, using tunes that reflect the

¹¹⁶ Emily R. Brink and Bert Polman, *Psalter Hymnal Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1998), 119.

¹¹⁷ Emily R. Brink, “Where Have All the Psalms Gone? Reclaiming Our First Love,” *Reformed Worship*, No. 74, (2004): 2.

¹¹⁸ Matthew Nuiver, “The Psalter Hymnals Through the Years,” *The Outlook*, 55 no. 2, 2005: 12.

¹¹⁹ “Acta van de Nationale Synode van Homewood van de Canadian Reformed Churches a.d. 1954 gehouden te Carman, Manitoba,” accessed September 13, 2023, 91, <https://canrc.org/documents/8232>.

majesty of his greatness.¹²⁰ This definition includes the psalms, but not exclusively. The committee explains that in the spirit of Calvin, a Reformed church songbook also includes the “Psalms” of the New Testament: from the Epistles and Revelation.¹²¹ Yet, the characteristic part of a Reformed songbook is the collection of the 150 Psalms. Bredenhof states that Psalm Singing is one of the aspects that define the identity of Reformed churches, and although this sets them apart from many others, it links their identity with the Early Church.¹²²

The Canadian Reformed Churches collectively defined and agreed to a Church Order, which is a systematically organized set of rules that have validity for the churches involved. A Church Order can be described as the law of the church.¹²³ The Canadian Reformed Church Order regulates the singing in worship in Article 55: “The metrical psalms adopted by General Synod as well as the hymns approved by General Synod shall be sung in the worship services.”¹²⁴ The singing of the 150 Psalms in worship is characteristic of the Canadian Reformed Churches and extends to the church families and Reformed schools. Kent Dykstra, a high school principal, shares that the familiarity of the students with the psalms and hymns benefits their use at school, starting at the lowest grades. However, he continues, the central reason to use the church songs at schools is that the psalms and hymns help to express the identity of the Reformed schools, as the psalms and hymns are confessional: “In using these songs, we confess the Triune God to our children and teach them to use his Word in praise and

¹²⁰ Gilbert van Dooren, ed., *Op Weg Naar Een Engelse Reformatorische Psalmbundel* (Smithville: Canadian Reformed Publishing House, 1954), 9.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²² Wes Bredenhof, “Psalm Singing Churches? (Part 3 of 3),” *Clarion* 58, no. 12: 279.

¹²³ Pieter Coertzen, *Church and Order: A Reformed Perspective* (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1998), 46.

¹²⁴ Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, *Book of Praise, Anglo Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 2014), 657.

confession of who He is.”¹²⁵ Pointing out how the psalms strengthen the relationship between church, home, and school, Bredenhof explains that the school’s memory work includes and emphasizes psalms, which practice is guarded and encouraged by the parents.¹²⁶ Psalm Singing is a component of the identity of the Canadian Reformed Churches, their members and families, and their Reformed schools.

Although the singing sets the Canadian Reformed Churches apart, and Psalm Singing is part of the churches’ identity, desires for change have surfaced. Synod Fergus (1998) received requests to expand the hymn section, and Synod Neerlandia (2001) created a formal mandate for the *Standing Committee of the Book of Praise* (SCBP) to receive and evaluate submissions for more hymns and create a proposal for future synods.¹²⁷ Unclear about the outcome of the mandate and considering the predominant place of the psalms in Reformed worship, the SCBP proposed a limit of 100 hymns, which the next Synod adopted.¹²⁸ The following Synod received more letters from churches with concerns about adding hymns,¹²⁹ eventually leading to a new edition of the *Book of Praise* (2014), which included 20 new hymns, increasing the hymns from 65 to 85.¹³⁰ This addition of hymns in a newly released songbook was not satisfactory. The next Synod of Dunnville (2016) received letters from churches requesting the continuation of

¹²⁵ Kent Dykstra, “The Book of Praise: A Music Textbook?” *Clarion* 61, no. 13: 342-44.

¹²⁶ Wes Bredenhof, “Psalm Singing Churches? (Part 3 of 3),” *Clarion* 58, no. 12: 278.

¹²⁷ *Acts of General Synod 2001 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2001), 111.

¹²⁸ *Acts of General Synod 2004 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2004), 122.

¹²⁹ *Acts of General Synod 2007 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2007), 106–9.

¹³⁰ *Acts of General Synod 2013 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2013), 263–64.

proposing new hymns, which led to a renewed mandate “to work with the churches towards a new augment, expanding and revising the present hymn selection.”¹³¹ Synod Chatham (2004) agreed to a limit of 100 hymns “since psalms have a predominant place in the liturgy of the Reformed churches.”¹³² Some churches requested Synod Smithers (2007) to remain below this number when adding hymns.¹³³ Regional Synod East and Regional Synod West adopted each an overture requesting Synod Guelph (2022) to remove the limit of 100 hymns.¹³⁴ Although Regional Synods represent all Classes, which, in turn, represent all churches, more than half of the churches found it necessary to write directly to the Synod, which decided not to follow the request to remove the limit of 100 hymns. The Acts of Synod Guelph summarize, “Many of the churches appreciated how the hymn cap flows from the principle of the predominance of psalms in Reformed liturgy.”¹³⁵

Rick Ludwig identifies Article 55 of the Church Order as a festering issue, not unifying but possibly “the church’s Achille’s heel.” He asks rhetorically, “Have the churches agreed to be bound to one songbook without any opportunity for local augmentation?” His reasons include

¹³¹ *Acts of General Synod 2016 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2016), 116.

¹³² *Acts of General Synod 2004 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2004), 120.

¹³³ *Acts of General Synod 2007 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2007), 106–8.

¹³⁴ “Press Release of Regional Synod East (Hamilton - Cornerstone), November 11, 2020,” accessed September 27, 2023, <https://canrc.org/documents/8873>; “Press Release of Regional Synod West (Smithers), November 1, 2021,” accessed September 27, 2023, <https://canrc.org/documents/8909>.

¹³⁵ *Acts of General Synod 2022 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2022), 58–61.

references to outreach and newly written songs, and he requests that churches make their own choices based on their local circumstances regarding the songs in worship.¹³⁶

Summary

The singing of psalms in corporate worship is grounded in Scripture. Psalms are formative for the faith and unifying with God's people of all times and places. Throughout history, churches have continued the singing of the psalms, and some churches continue to do so at present. However, in the 18th century, ideas developed that Scriptural Psalms should not be sung in worship. As a result, many churches do not sing psalms anymore today. Although singing psalms in worship was part of the identity of Reformed churches in America and the Netherlands, they ceased to sing psalms. Psalm Singing was a priority when the Canadian Reformed Churches were founded, and Psalm Singing is part of their identity today. However, their ecclesiastical assemblies deal with requests that favor hymns rather than psalms, and individual members publicly express their disagreement with church decisions.

¹³⁶ Rick Ludwig, "A Load of Care," *Clarion* 72, no. 11: 415-17.

Chapter Three: Methods

Introduction

The singing of psalms in worship was an essential point for the foundation of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In the past 25 years, requests for changes to the singing of psalms in relation to hymns and the agreement on what to sing in worship have been challenged at major assemblies. Churches also address the general Synod directly, making arguments against overtures of major assemblies that represent them. Representing the membership, church leaders make decisions about what is sung in worship through major assemblies on behalf of the church members. However, it is unknown to which degree the congregants support, reject, agree, or disagree with overtures, requests, or letters by their leaders and major assemblies.

This research explored the opinions about singing psalms in worship of Canadian Reformed congregants in the province of British Columbia and Washington State. A survey among the congregants gave insight into their understanding of principles, history, background, and expectations for congregational Psalm Singing. This chapter addresses the relevance of this study by reviewing the research design, research questions and hypotheses, setting, participants, procedures, data analysis, and summary.

Design

This research utilized a qualitative design. According to Alan Bryman, the primary goal of this method is “to view the social world through the eyes of the people they study.”¹ This research was a case study to give insight into the Canadian Reformed congregant’s opinions

¹ Alan Bryman, Edward Bell, and James, J. Teevan, *Social Research Methods, Third Canadian Edition* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2012), 140.

about Psalm Singing in corporate worship. Creswell and Creswell define a case study as “a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time.”² The last General Synod (2022) rejected overtures submitted from the churches through the major assemblies after reviewing direct responses from those churches,³ leaving uncertainty about the church members’ opinions. A survey was developed with questions regarding the members’ opinions about Psalm Singing in corporate worship. Because a primary reason for instituting the Canadian Reformed Churches was the desire to sing mostly psalms in worship,⁴ other survey questions inquired about the understanding of the role of Psalm Singing in the churches. What happens in corporate worship is guided by Scripture and directed by the Regulative Principle of Worship. The participants shared their understanding and opinions, as these are foundational to the principle of Psalm Singing. Four multiple-choice questions concluded the survey, validating some of the essay questions. The responses provide insight into congregants’ views and opinions about Psalm Singing in corporate worship in relation to decisions by the major assemblies and in relation to the founding principles of the churches.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to answer these research questions:

² John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, And Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 327.

³ *Acts of General Synod 2022 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2022), 58–61.

⁴ “Acta van de Nationale Synode van Homewood van de Canadian Reformed Churches a.d. 1954 gehouden te Carman, Manitoba,” accessed September 13, 2023, 91, <https://canrc.org/documents/8232>.

Research Question 1: What do 21st-century Canadian Reformed congregants in British Columbia understand about Psalm Singing?

Research Question 2: What factors influence 21st-century Canadian Reformed congregants' perspectives on song selection?

Participants

Having almost 20,000 members, all Canadian Reformed Churches were too large of a sample size to survey. Therefore, the survey's focus was on churches on the West Coast. To ensure the respondents included only members of these congregations, one of the first survey questions required identification of church membership. Another question identified the age bracket of the participants, as opinions may differ per generation. As church leaders' views might be influenced by their leadership role, and church musicians' views could be influenced by their expertise and interest; these groups were also identified through the survey's initial questions. These identifications gave insight into the balance of respondents in these groups.

The sixteen churches included in the survey had 2,689 communicant members.⁵ Communicant members are commonly of the ages 18 and over⁶, which was also the target group of this survey. Of this group, 316 responded to all questions. This analysis only included participants who completed the surveys. On average, 12 percent of the communicant members took part, the highest being Sardis CanRC, with a 17.5 percent participation rate, and the lowest Lynden ARC, with a 5 percent participation rate.

⁵ James Visscher, ed., *Yearbook Anno Domini 2023* (Winnipeg MB: Premier Printing Ltd., 2023), 7.

⁶ William den Hollander and Gerhard H. Visscher, *Children and the Church: Do Not Hinder Them* (Hamilton: Publication Foundation of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, 2019), 61.

Table 1. Completed surveys by church as a percentage of the confessing members

Church	Incomplete	Completed	Confessing Members	Participation Rate
Abbotsford CanRC	-	12	185	6.5%
Abbotsford Pathway Christian	-	20	128	15.6%
Aldergrove CanRC	3	43	252	17.1%
Chilliwack CanRC	3	12	167	7.2%
Cloverdale CanRC	-	17	98	17.3%
Houston CanRC	1	9	114	7.9%
Langley CanRC	17	62	490	12.7%
Langley Refuge Church	1	13	91	14.3%
Langley Willoughby Heights CanRC	4	12	99	12.1%
Lynden ARC	-	8	160	5.0%
Nooksack Valley ARC	2	11	95	11.6%
Sardis CanRC	-	29	166	17.5%
Smithers CanRC	10	25	179	14.0%
Surrey Maranatha CanRC	4	8	59	13.6%
Vernon CanRC	8	13	144	9.0%
Yarrow CanRC	-	21	224	9.4%
Total	53	316	2,651	9.0%

Participants were asked about their age bracket to identify if the shared opinions in this survey represented a particular age group more than others. The groups that stood out were the highest, ages 78+ (4%), and the lowest, ages 18–28 (14%), while the age groups in between had a balanced representation.

Table 2. Completed surveys by age group

Age bracket	Completed Surveys	Percentage
Ages 18-28	40	14%
Ages 29-43	71	24%
Ages 44-58	94	32%
Ages 59-77	98	33%
Ages 78 and higher	13	4%
Total	316	

The target group included congregants ages 18 years and over, which included people in leadership positions representing the congregation in the church federation. The question about

the participant's office bearer status showed that most respondents (74%) were not in leadership in the past three years.

Table 3. Completed surveys by office bearer status

Current or recent (past three years) office bearer	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	81	26%
No	235	74%
Total	316	

Participants included church musicians whose responses could be influenced by their knowledge or experience. Most respondents (90%) were regular church members.

Table 4. Completed surveys by musician status

Status	Respondents	Percentage
Current church musician	32	10%
Regular church member	284	90%
Total	316	

Setting

The Canadian Reformed Church Federation comprises 72 independent congregations and church plants with about 20,000 church members. The three-member churches in the United States are called American Reformed Churches. This study was conducted among the congregants of the Canadian and American Reformed churches in British Columbia and Washington State, which have 4,500 members, amounting to 22.5 percent of the total membership of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The two American Reformed Churches included in this study are not treated differently or mentioned separately, as these churches operate as Canadian Reformed Churches. Although the churches in Ontario represent half of the federation's membership, the makeup of the Western churches is comparable. For example, both East and West have churches with small and large memberships; some churches were established

in the 1950s and some in the past decade, and most churches respect the church federation agreements. In the East and the West, a few churches do not always use vetted songs in worship as agreed within the church federation. Confessing members of the Western churches participated in an online survey; there was no formal setting where the participants came in to answer the questions.

Data Collection Method

The survey targeted the Canadian Reformed Churches in the province of British Columbia and Washington state. The annual handbook of the Canadian Reformed Churches, the federation's website, and local church websites provided contact information. The researcher invited congregants of the sixteen churches to participate in the survey through the local church leadership. The email and poster contained a link to the study, which was designed on the Qualtrics platform. The survey was anonymous, as no data was collected to identify the respondents.

Procedures

The Institutional Review Board at Liberty University identified this research to be exempt. The invitation emails and posters to take part in this research study were sent to the churches' ministers and administrative staff in the first week of January 2024. Responses were requested before the end of the month. The survey closed at midnight on January 31, 2024. Of the 441 interactions with the survey, 123 incomplete responses were excluded. The church membership question included an option "other" in case the survey reached participants outside the target group. As a result, two responses were excluded, as they were not members of a church in the target group. Some responses did not answer the question or provide thoughts about

related matters. In those cases, only the part of the response that answered the question was considered when developing themes.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher has been a church musician in the Reformed Churches for more than four decades, first in the Netherlands and since 1998 in Canada. He obtained a Royal Canadian College of Organists Colleague degree and is pursuing a doctoral degree in Worship Studies at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA. In the Netherlands, the researcher was involved in a liturgical and church musical renewal process, which included implementing liturgical changes in the local congregation. In preparation for a new songbook for the Canadian Reformed Churches, the researcher was appointed a musical advisor to the *Standing Committee of the Book of Praise* from 2007 until 2016, which included conducting a series of musical workshops in the Canadian Reformed Churches across Canada on behalf of this committee. The researcher is also familiar with other church musical traditions through a past assignment as an organist in the Evangelical Lutheran church and his present role as an executive member of the Vancouver Centre of the Royal Canadian College of Organists. The researcher has a master's degree in business administration and is an adjunct professor at Trinity Western University in Langley, BC.

Data Analysis

This study analyzed the participant's responses to the questions. The researcher considered the position of Psalm Singing in the Canadian Reformed Churches in the longer and broader church historical context and the historical context of the organization, including recent developments. The researcher reviewed the responses to determine their validity, categorizing responses that interacted with the questions and those that did not. The coding was accomplished

using Microsoft Excel, using an inductive approach. Evaluation of the coded responses provided insight into the respondents' understanding of the survey questions and their views. The researcher followed a thematic analysis process. Maguire explains that this process identifies themes that form vital or interesting patterns in the data, providing an opportunity to address the research or say something about issues.⁷ The researcher could interpret the data and make sense of it through thematic analysis. In that process, a distinction was made between semantic and latent themes. Braun defines semantic analysis as an interpretation of organized and summarized semantic themes, trying to identify significance of the patterns and their meanings.⁸ The latent approach adds a different dimension, as Brown describes, identifying underlying assumptions, ideas, concepts, and ideologies, requiring the researcher's interpretation to develop themes.⁹

Summary

This case study involved congregants of the Canadian Reformed Churches in British Columbia and Washington State, who shared their views and opinions about Psalm Singing in corporate worship. Participants interacted anonymously with an online survey. The researcher transcribed, coded, and synthesized the responses, developing an amalgamation of the narrative relevant to the research questions.

⁷ Moira Maguire and Brid Delahunt, "Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars," *Dundalk Institute of Technology* 8, no. 3, (2017): 3353.

⁸ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, (2006): 84.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

This chapter shares the survey results to find answers to the research questions. An inductive data analysis approach was used to review the survey questions' responses and extrapolate themes and issues. The survey findings are shared in the order they were presented in the survey, followed by a summary.

Survey Findings

The survey findings are based on 316 responses to the open questions in the survey. While responses varied in length, themes were extracted from their comments, which were then grouped and counted. Some respondents brought forward multiple themes, which were identified individually. Few responses reflected an opinion that did not interact with the question. These responses have been noted but were not included in the themes.

Why Sing Psalms?

The first question asked church members why the psalms are sung in corporate worship. Although the question was phrased, "Why do you think we sing psalms in corporate worship?" generally, the respondents did not just share their opinions but also shared their knowledge about Psalm Singing, including overviews of the history of Psalm Singing, Scripture references, quotes from Scripture, and quoted stanzas of psalms. These responses were framed in what people know, have learned, and understand about singing psalms. For example, several respondents referred to Eph. 5:19 and Col 3:16 as God's command to sing psalms.¹ A respondent

¹ Respondent ID: R_5rHsdDMDLcZzdOJ, R_1mkvdG9xxeIBmJ6, R_30TeAX8Vdso3ysy, R_1ZK90aAPruFfRbl, R_3GvlzJNZoLqEam5

commented: “The book of the psalms is the most quoted bible book in all other parts of Scripture,” and suggested the psalms “connect the dots” or are “the glue bringing Scripture together.”² Another respondent pointed to the relationship between God and his people, “Psalms are the songbook that God has given to us. They reflect the covenantal nature of our relationship to God.”³ A different respondent pointed to the past, “We unite with God’s covenant people of the past 3000 years.”⁴ A person mentioned, “Psalms speak of the immense comfort that there is for the humble believer,” quoting the rhymed version of Psalm 62 in the *Book of Praise* (2014), “In God alone, my soul finds rest—for in HIS faithfulness I trust; From HIM alone comes my salvation” [emphasis original], and Psalm 139, “LORD, YOU have searched me, heart and soul. My inmost thoughts - YOU know them all” [emphasis original].⁵

The diversity of themes resulting from this question indicated a multifaceted response. The most substantial responses provided reasons for what the psalms are: part of the inspired Word of God, biblical, or given by God (35%). For that reason, one respondent stated, “All Christian churches should sing psalms,”⁶ while another argued that “psalms should be at the core of musical praise and worship.”⁷ A person commented that the Canadian Reformed Churches are “people of the Word” and that the psalms are valued as part of God’s Word.⁸

² Respondent ID: R_30TeAX8Vdso3ysy

³ Respondent ID: R_7CPsx8fwQJih0ZX

⁴ Respondent ID: R_6IQsXGkEVTf0yR5

⁵ Respondent ID: R_7Pc06QDdeO3LVwA

⁶ Respondent ID: R_1ZK90aAPruFfRbl

⁷ Respondent ID: R_6FaMV8tjrVKrF8R

⁸ Respondent ID: R_1CepFirt4UNHAvi

The second theme identified the impact of singing psalms: to praise or glorify God (24%). Related themes included that singing psalms is commanded in Scripture (5%) and singing God's words back to him (7%). A respondent explained, "We are taking words directly from the book of Psalms in the Bible, the Holy Word of God, and using them to sing His praises. What better way to worship the Lord than by singing Him Psalms of Praise."⁹ The aspect of praise was emphasized by others, "To praise God and give Him the glory,"¹⁰ "to praise and worship GOD,"¹¹ "to praise the Lord and glorify His name,"¹² and "the psalms sing God's praise."¹³ Other respondents stated that the psalms are a gift from God, as "the words that God has given to us as reminders of His Word and promises,"¹⁴ and "He has given us (psalms) for our comfort and for the purpose of praising Him. What better way than with the words He has given us."¹⁵ Some respondents shared that the lyrics of the psalms focus the worshipers on God.¹⁶ Another person shared, "We can literally take God's own words on our lips and in our hearts and, in a sense, become closer to him and mirror his image in a very profound way."¹⁷ Taking this one step further, a person stated about singing psalms, "We KNOW it will be pleasing to God as it's his Word" [emphasis original].¹⁸

⁹ Respondent ID: R_5FKi3gRFwuQksQd

¹⁰ Respondent ID: R_5fSBXMmI9f40T8l

¹¹ Respondent ID: R_7ZI9MFBdYeTJ5oA

¹² Respondent ID: R_7EYZGroqIJCxphH

¹³ Respondent ID: R_1k0z3FqjfBfObm1

¹⁴ Respondent ID: R_1PYIRYxjS152P4y

¹⁵ Respondent ID: R_7TZjEkAnmN8bzc5

¹⁶ Respondent ID: R_7CPsx8fwQJih0ZX

¹⁷ respondent ID: R_6qV1CACiMTQAHeN

¹⁸ Respondent ID: R_18Hym1lHTGTjUhn

A third theme evolved around what the psalms mean for the church people: Psalm Singing allows people to express their emotions (7%). Some respondents listed specific emotions, “sorrow, gratitude, repentance, and praise and joy,”¹⁹ “joy, sorrow, confusion, assurance, fear,”²⁰ “praise, thanks, pain, sorrow, trouble, evil,”²¹ and “praise, plead, lament, and adore.”²² Other respondents mentioned that the psalms help express emotions, “realign our thoughts and emotions to better serve Him,”²³ and in Psalm Singing, people are “reflecting God, His character and our emotions as we relate to our God.”²⁴ Another respondent shared that psalms help people “to correctly express our emotions and needs and praise to God, conforming them to his will and word.”²⁵ In this comment, the thought from the previous theme resurfaced that Psalm Singing also edifies the congregation (4%). A person confirmed: “Psalms are to learn about who God is through the words and to blend all of that through music in unison.”²⁶ Another respondent said, “We sing psalms so we may grow in faith and be comforted, encouraged, and strengthened to bring our needs before the Lord and thus also praise God and give him thanks. Through singing we grow closer to God and honor him as our God and father.”²⁷ Applying edification to worship, one person shared, “Singing psalms is preparing for worship while being

¹⁹ Respondent ID: R_6P00liP5xJnjlZW

²⁰ Respondent ID: R_3R40zLRfx4rRjkl

²¹ Respondent ID: R_2qjqarQyN4ZXRSY

²² Respondent ID: R_1fCmijq3TaxqKaK

²³ Respondent ID: R_7b82M7ksIYOMpwZ

²⁴ Respondent ID: R_3MJOs5nTAleygCI

²⁵ Respondent ID: R_73ABDOUVy8uNX0Z

²⁶ Respondent ID: R_1cARcEP6zkhYwkx

²⁷ Respondent ID: R_72ci9zP42RAjjAn

part of a divine experience with brothers and sisters in Christ, saints, and the spirit of God.”²⁸

The edification of the congregants through the singing of psalms as part of the Word is consistent throughout the ages.²⁹ Respondents identified the positive aspect of tradition. Two comments read, “People love tradition,”³⁰ and “Tradition made Psalm Singing helps us focus.”³¹

A fourth theme showed that the people have no other option than to sing psalms because that is the church’s tradition (7%), which was related to a comment that the Church Order stipulates Psalm Singing (1%). Respondents gave probable reasons for singing psalms in worship, “Because it is what traditionally has been done among God’s people,”³² and “because traditionally that’s what we do,”³³ and a single word response, “tradition.”³⁴ Another person elaborated, “Tradition, security, desire for uniformity. Maybe even a bit of fear.”³⁵ Along the same lines, a respondent shared, “We continue to, because of traditions and a fear of branching out to songs.”³⁶ A one-sentence response remarked about singing psalms in worship, “I don’t know why: its old-fashioned.”³⁷

²⁸ Respondent ID: R_31ZNYbdaC1Imx6O

²⁹ Respondent ID: R_1UgW6Yl9gSbgG8v,

³⁰ Respondent ID: R_1CepFirt4UNHAvi

³¹ Respondent ID: R_1ElXyzsAAYw6k6r

³² Respondent ID: R_1ayLaF2rr7HOfw5

³³ Respondent ID: R_6zj6uJvuxlEfXbL

³⁴ Respondent ID: R_6HBr2JCYkZWYzDS, R_7QHD2yyEFdgBlMI, R_5Xq6hzuxGsRUDZf, R_62MiMUqoCJIW4dc, R_3dz6Ygp7NyecFlc, R_18zwSGXRJaRWkCe

³⁵ Respondent ID: R_1MloaetupéhGOKZ

³⁶ Respondent ID: R_6x2NdKhgdt7LB5v

³⁷ Respondent ID: R_5QAAQufsoT4BZnP

The last theme that respondents brought forward in this question was unity (2%). Respondents emphasized the unity in singing psalms with the church of all ages or times.³⁸ Other participants explained the unity Psalm Singing creates in the congregation, “Singing psalms is a means of congregational unity in worship,”³⁹ and “We together in one voice praise and glorify God.”⁴⁰ Pointing to the vertical connection, a respondent added, “Psalms unite us to God today.”⁴¹ These responses indicated a perspective of Psalm Singing rooted in Scripture beyond the local congregation and the present time.

The Value of Singing Psalms

The second question asked, “What value, if any, can be found in our church’s practice of Psalm Singing?” The most prominent theme placed the value in singing Scripture as the Word of God (27%), closely related to the value of knowing God’s Word through singing the psalms (14%). A respondent explained, “We sing songs that contain sound doctrine and express a wide range of emotions,”⁴² while another suggested that when selecting songs not based on Scripture, “we tend to sing only what we want to hear.”⁴³ Another person related to this by saying, “Psalm Singing includes the whole counsel of God.”⁴⁴ Knowing God’s Word through singing the psalms leads to “know better the mind of Christ, stand in awe and wonder, strengthen the faith,” a

³⁸ Respondent ID: R_6rjUukQ91OphEqy, R_1iPwzIpTfoiHapL

³⁹ Respondent ID: R_3PV7SMsq0z5uPvP

⁴⁰ Respondent ID: R_3P5M4q91k2XF69w

⁴¹ Respondent ID: R_3TMitob6yKMI4vG

⁴² Respondent ID: R_1iPwzIpTfoiHapL

⁴³ Respondent ID: R_1ayLaF2rr7HOfw5

⁴⁴ Respondent ID: R_3V3AxwvMa5c6hEt

respondent testified.⁴⁵ Another participant shared a value for the future, “Singing the words found in the Bible makes it easier for me to remember the psalms, to be able to recall them when I need the comfort and peace needed in this life.”⁴⁶ Knowing God’s Word through the singing of psalms made another person share, “The psalms give us words to praise God—teaching us about his nature, helping us to respond to that revelation, and also helping to form and articulate our own thoughts and turn them towards God in petition and praise.”⁴⁷

Another subtheme was to worship God (17%), which also was a significant theme of the first question. Respondents commented, “Psalms are a focused way of praising God. They are Christ-centered and do not focus on human feelings,”⁴⁸ “Glorify God alone, not ourselves,”⁴⁹ and “Psalms can be used as prayers that we sing, and they are a wonderful way to praise God.”⁵⁰

A second central theme was related to the congregation. One value of Psalm Singing was having the ability to express human emotions toward God (15%). A respondent related singing psalms to personal circumstances, such as health concerns, memory loss, and loneliness.⁵¹ Another person experienced singing emotions to God in the psalms as “a form of well-rounded prayer and praise.”⁵² A respondent shared that learned expressions of emotions can be directed to

⁴⁵ Respondent ID: R_6qV1CACiMTQAHeN

⁴⁶ Respondent ID: R_7IZiGmOPHTjWXUB

⁴⁷ Respondent ID: R_7bPLke4tlKusDY3

⁴⁸ Respondent ID: R_1iaQEhYuzsGr0Hf

⁴⁹ Respondent ID: R_1KI9OIsGjF93OGi

⁵⁰ Respondent ID: R_7ERtYSc2ZDSHuLD

⁵¹ Respondent ID: R_2qjqarQyN4ZXRSY

⁵² Respondent ID: R_5fSBXMmI9f40T8l

God in times and circumstances when He makes his people go through difficulties.⁵³ The psalms can also address personal emotions, as a person concluded their response to this question, “You know, in a distressing time, it’s such a comfort to know that at ALL times, our GOD, is in control of the world situation!!” [emphasis original].

Emotions were also mentioned in the third theme: unity within the congregation and unity with the church of all ages (14%). The responses shared a united approach to God’s throne in a common expression of emotions, “express our joy and gratitude together, as well as our sorrows.”⁵⁴ The comments about expressing emotions overlapped the unity of the congregation and the unity of the generations, as Psalm Singing “binds the generations—we all know them.”⁵⁵ Other respondents added, “Young and old all know the same songs,”⁵⁶ and the value of Psalm Singing is the “participation of all ages.”⁵⁷ Bringing emotions to God’s throne unites the congregation in multigenerational worship as children join their parents and grandparents using the same words.⁵⁸ One respondent shared the impact of Psalm Singing within the generations, “It creates respect in the congregation.”⁵⁹

Several respondents (5%) emphasized that singing psalms is pleasing to God. A participant remarked, “We are worshipping God with His own Words,”⁶⁰ and another respondent

⁵³ Respondent ID: R_7qkWoaJGXOMG6te

⁵⁴ Respondent ID: R_5zYiILThHgaNDvb

⁵⁵ Respondent ID: R_5nBJbzUrY5rQ19l

⁵⁶ Respondent ID: R_1CdkCn34sVR7GpC

⁵⁷ Respondent ID: R_1rZ8fiwnKP28jVx

⁵⁸ Respondent ID: R_5mtHDXkxOdVAb6h

⁵⁹ Respondent ID: R_4Yncttj8B92mCwl

⁶⁰ Respondent ID: R_5K2N3d2DC9hZtAV

explained, “We know these psalms are pleasing to God because he already has put them in his inspired word. So thus, we know our singing is pleasing to God. It’s not about making ourselves feel good,”⁶¹ “By singing the psalms, we can be sure we are praising God in a manner that pleases Him,”⁶² and “God is pleased to hear the praise and supplication of His people.”⁶³ It is appropriate to sing psalms to praise God. Another respondent asserted, “We are singing the words God has given us. The topics the psalms cover show us what is appropriate to sing about when worshiping our God and calling on his name. There seems to be a psalm for every situation in life (sorrow, rejoicing, struggles, etc.).”⁶⁴

A small percentage (3%) believed that Psalm Singing had little or no value. A respondent indicated, “The psalms are losing value as their language has become obsolete and confusing.”⁶⁵ Others stated the psalms are “irrelevant,”⁶⁶ “Very old, so not for me.”⁶⁷ Another asserted, “I don’t see any value,”⁶⁸ which someone elaborated, “I see little value in this practice, especially if Psalm Singing is prioritized to other songs.”⁶⁹

⁶¹ Respondent ID: R_5IWep8JTPLEJTyU

⁶² Respondent ID: R_52KY0up7HaNIMRv

⁶³ Respondent ID: R_30TeAX8Vdso3ysy

⁶⁴ Respondent ID: R_5wt6ACWB2lc46li

⁶⁵ Respondent ID: R_6x2NdKhgdt7LB5v

⁶⁶ Respondent ID: R_5QAAQufsoT4BZnP

⁶⁷ Respondent ID: R_6ZCeWp6BZIIBftW

⁶⁸ Respondent ID: R_5Xq6hzuxGsRUDZf

⁶⁹ Respondent ID: R_7lKaQgR7GPS0X6Q

Singing All Psalms in Today's Culture

Narrowing in on the previous question about the value of Psalm Singing, the next question asked, “Do you think singing all psalms in corporate worship is a valuable practice in today's culture?” This question was more specific about singing all psalms rather than a few favorite ones and explicitly related to today's culture. The chart below component of the responses indicated that two-thirds of the respondents recognized the value for today while the remaining one-third did not. The comments gave further insight into the respondent's thoughts.

Do you think singing all Psalms in corporate worship is a valuable practice in today's culture?

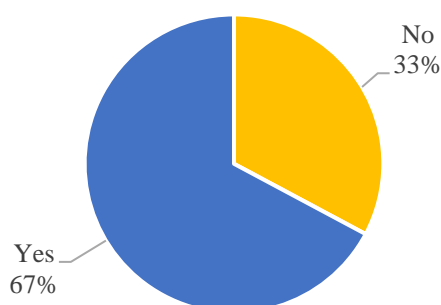


Figure 1. Psalm Singing in Today's Culture

Value

Most respondents identified that singing all psalms is valuable in today's culture. The primary theme evolved around the psalms as God's Word. Most respondents stated that the psalms were God's Word (23%). A person responded, “Absolutely! If it can be found in the Bible, then it is relevant for today. The Word of the Lord does not lose relevancy as time goes

on.”⁷⁰ Another respondent stated, “It should not be up to us to decide what is relevant to our church(es) and what is not.”⁷¹ Furthermore, someone commented, “Yes. Just like all of God’s Word, the psalms also are not just meant for when they were written.”⁷² Two respondents referred to Ecclesiastes, “Psalms are not outdated. There is nothing new under the sun,”⁷³ and, “There is nothing new under the sun. What the psalm authors experienced we also deal with today.”⁷⁴ A respondent wondered, “Are we saying to God, ‘Well, part of your Word isn’t really in tune with our world?’”⁷⁵ Another person seemed to give a response to this question, “Psalm Singing is very valuable no matter our culture. God nor his Word changes in culture, and singing His psalms shouldn’t change either.”⁷⁶

The second largest group added that the psalms are part of Scripture to teach people how to respond to culture, which could be counter-cultural (16%). A respondent commented, “The Word has not changed! We do not need to change to ‘fit in’ with today’s culture.”⁷⁷ Another response said, “With today’s immoral culture, it is even more important than ever to stay close to Him, and one way is by singing His Words.”⁷⁸ Another person explained, “We learn about our sin and misery, the law of God, our salvation, how to praise God, reasons to love God, God’s

⁷⁰ Respondent ID: R_5FKi3gRFwuQksQd

⁷¹ Respondent ID: R_7n6fTe4R6ERNNcd

⁷² Respondent ID: R_1DcmCSGu4OGPRs5

⁷³ Respondent ID: R_6aJnXhWRgMwBg0r

⁷⁴ Respondent ID: R_3CjeaJQxEof0Yjk

⁷⁵ Respondent ID: R_5HABHDnezC51mju

⁷⁶ Respondent ID: R_6FrG1naDX33Ndc7

⁷⁷ Respondent ID: R_31umRVGGh9aElkz

⁷⁸ Respondent ID: R_87qESq1Qv2a5qgk

judgment, mercy, forgiveness, sacrifice, and more. We need to learn and know about all of this in order to gain wisdom and understanding of our Father.”⁷⁹

The third-largest group focused on the timelessness of Scripture and its application to any culture, often referencing the timeliness of God (9%). A respondent explained, “God our Father has not changed, nor have our needs changed. Culture may have changed, but culture does not dictate how we are to serve and honor our God and maker.”⁸⁰ Another respondent referred to Scripture, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and the message that we hear in the psalms is part of that.”⁸¹ Someone commented, “The Bible is God’s inspired and timeless Word, which confronts (and has confronted) every culture since the time these psalms were written. How could they then not be relevant today? ‘God’s truth abides still.’ The Bible does not bend to the culture, but the culture is always called to bend/bow to the lordship of Christ.”⁸² The first three themes represent almost 50 percent of the responses that identified a value in Psalm Singing in today’s culture.

⁷⁹ Respondent ID: R_11BAStMcn4d2uEb

⁸⁰ Respondent ID: R_3MULd8fuZiICiI1

⁸¹ Respondent ID: R_6n0dTEzdxOPvWPw

⁸² Respondent ID: R_5e4stt3M3BKyJiu

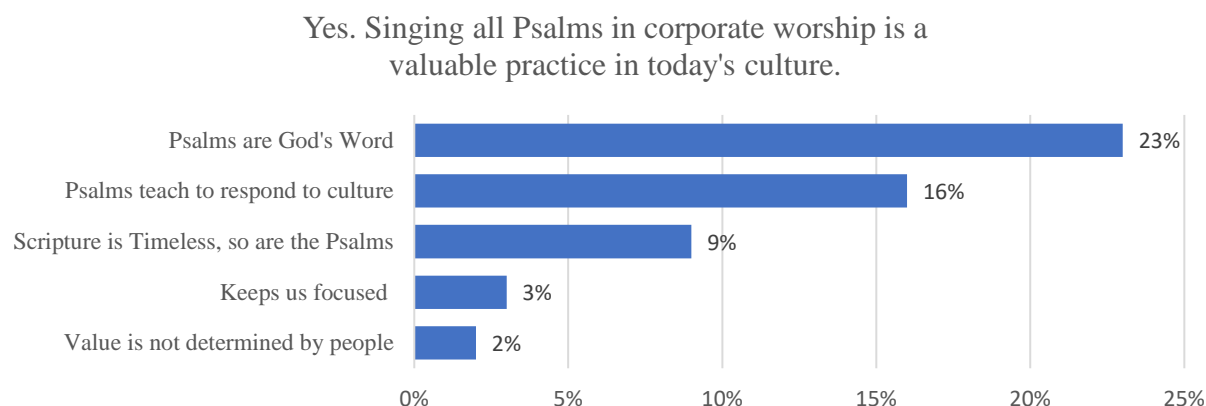


Figure 2. Value of Psalm Singing in Today's Culture

The third theme in the responses evolved around the focus (3%). Respondents classified the value of singing all psalms in today's culture as threefold: keeping people focused on God, other believers,⁸³ and the church and God's work in the church in history.⁸⁴ Focusing on God, a respondent shared, "Singing psalms puts the emphasis on God to praise Him for what He has done as He is still doing today, instead of praising ourselves for how wonderful we are."⁸⁵ Another person agreed, "Singing psalms is a valuable practice in today's culture because it ties us to the Word and is God-centered and not man-centered."⁸⁶ Another person added, "Psalms are usually focused on God's justice, grace, mercy, and love for mankind."⁸⁷ A respondent characterized today's culture as self-absorbed,⁸⁸ and another added that today's Christian culture

⁸³ Respondent ID: R_7rvNleTtEgZeWNh, R_6uD7TbRNqOlc9rz

⁸⁴ Respondent ID: R_1HhFxbIH6ZMco6S, R_5AHH8GuZ2xKBhCa

⁸⁵ Respondent ID: R_6jSsQDcobPg96U

⁸⁶ Respondent ID: R_5AHH8GuZ2xKBhCa

⁸⁷ Respondent ID: R_7EMvGoDug2os9VL

⁸⁸ Respondent ID: R_3PoywNcveeq7df4

is defined by a “happy theology where God is all love and mercy.”⁸⁹ One respondent commented that “the psalms are focused on God instead of ourselves,”⁹⁰ while another added that although today’s culture emphasizes God’s love, the psalms highlight “all attributes of God.”⁹¹ Several comments focused on other believers, such as, “A psalm might not apply to me at the moment but may to someone else. We must share each other’s burdens and victories.”⁹² Respondents asserted that the nature of singing psalms unites people as the application also requires a focus on others. As another respondent emphasized, that focus extends to the church of all places.⁹³ Someone else shared that the psalms also describe “the emotions and struggles of Christ and his church” and connect us with Christ and the church in any circumstance.⁹⁴

The part of the question related to today’s culture led to a more minor, secondary theme (2%) that people’s opinions or preferences do not determine the psalm’s value in today’s culture. One comment read, “Sure. Just because culture changes, doesn’t mean our worship should.”⁹⁵ A respondent added, “In today’s culture, it is important for us to see God for who he is. Singing all psalms helps us to understand all aspects of the Gospel.”⁹⁶ Another respondent acknowledged that some of the psalms may have a challenging message, “Each psalm has a unique place in

⁸⁹ Respondent ID: R_5VIsiEvGRfMbewL

⁹⁰ Respondent ID: R_1EveHT2ewqxgH0y

⁹¹ Respondent ID: R_12xuYKE9tNSuBYA

⁹² Respondent ID: R_7rvNleTtEgZeWNh

⁹³ Respondent ID: R_2QPCJ18ZJNqJDxf

⁹⁴ Respondent ID: R_1HhFxbIH6ZMco6S

⁹⁵ Respondent ID: R_62E86CJDOiqDUjC

⁹⁶ Respondent ID: R_5VIsiEvGRfMbewL

Scripture. They are valid and valuable in any culture as God’s Word transcends all culture.”⁹⁷

Another person explained, “We are to serve God in our culture, as our culture must be governed by our belief system, namely governed by God’s infallible and perfect Word.”⁹⁸

Several comments did not directly respond to the question but related to the value of Psalm Singing in today’s culture. One respondent observed a diminishing value if ministers select only their or the congregation’s favorite psalms⁹⁹ or do not explain why a psalm is selected in worship.¹⁰⁰ The perceived value of singing psalms disappears if the psalms are not understood and explained.

No Value

One-third of the respondents did not see a value in singing all psalms in today’s culture. The recurring word in the responses (9%) was “irrelevant.”

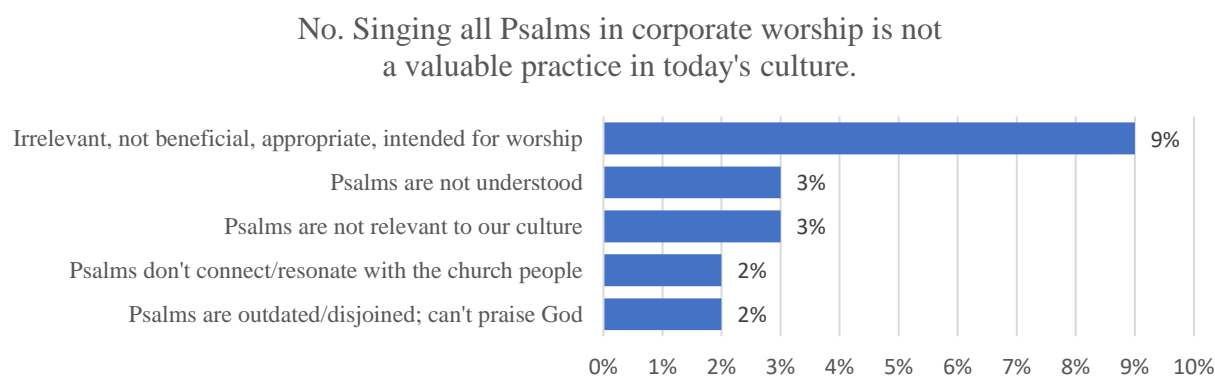


Figure 3. No Value of Psalm Singing in Today’s Culture

⁹⁷ Respondent ID: R_3MULd8fuZiCiI1

⁹⁸ Respondent ID: R_72ci9zP42RAjjAn

⁹⁹ Respondent ID: R_7My5VezXeq0zvRs

¹⁰⁰ Respondent ID: R_3wQNCcgElxKiKT8, R_1ev0h8aGdpZn4hr

Most of these responses stated that singing all psalms has no benefits, making statements like, “There are many psalms that, I think, are inappropriate for the worship services we have today,”¹⁰¹ and “Many psalms are of limited value.”¹⁰² One respondent asserted that singing the psalms “does not connect with the church of all ages: past, present, and future.”¹⁰³ Other respondents shared that not having a value is partly related to the limited nature of the psalms as “they don’t represent the New Testament”¹⁰⁴ or do not reflect today’s society.¹⁰⁵ Another person shared that the psalms are equally limited, as they “don’t touch every life situation or topic”¹⁰⁶ and “don’t lift people’s spirits.”¹⁰⁷

Some comments included statements without further explanation. For example, the assertion that the psalms are “difficult in content, harder to understand.”¹⁰⁸ Another response stated, “Analogies in the psalms are 5000 years old and mean little to nothing.”¹⁰⁹ A related comment was to the point: “Psalms are old-school,”¹¹⁰ with no other information provided. One respondent commented that the psalms turn people off “because we don’t understand why we sing them.”¹¹¹ Another comment added that “the wording of the psalms is outdated or

¹⁰¹ Respondent ID: R_6MbSyCrgXreCsgl

¹⁰² Respondent ID: R_6rTLLDhYbMRHoIk

¹⁰³ Respondent ID: R_58MsCCdEKU33Cyl

¹⁰⁴ Respondent ID: R_1CepFirt4UNHAvi

¹⁰⁵ Respondent ID: R_3FGqLMIPYUAgSGZ

¹⁰⁶ Respondent ID: R_12KcqvAc2wpJLtf

¹⁰⁷ Respondent ID: R_6ZCeWp6BZIIBftW

¹⁰⁸ Respondent ID: R_4EAqHPoy6TMknML

¹⁰⁹ Respondent ID: R_4DobDwC7ZlZxQMF

¹¹⁰ Resppndent ID: R_5Xq6hzuxGsRUDZf

¹¹¹ Respondent ID: R_3V3AxwvMa5c6hEt

disjointed.”¹¹² In the comment that contemporary churches find Psalm Singing “too boring,”¹¹³ it was unclear if the Canadian Reformed Churches were considered contemporary.

A respondent concluded, without referencing the intended target group, that someone “not well-versed in Scripture” may have “difficulties understanding the psalms.”¹¹⁴ Another person questioned whether it was “lovely to sing psalms when people did not grow up with Psalm Singing.”¹¹⁵ A specific reason for their concern was given by two respondents who commented that the psalms’ content “is foreign to modern unchurched ears and not helpful in an outreach context,”¹¹⁶ and seekers do not relate to most of the psalms.¹¹⁷ Another person identified a concern, “Too much richness” in content can be overwhelming.”¹¹⁸

Relating to today’s culture, a respondent commented, “We live in a depressing world, and we don’t need to add depressing psalms to it.”¹¹⁹ Other respondents classified the psalms as “inappropriate for the worship services today” and considered “the wording of the psalm outdated or disjointed, ineffective in corporate worship.”¹²⁰ Another respondent believed the psalms “don’t really resonate with people today,”¹²¹ particularly “the imprecatory psalms are

¹¹² Respondent ID: R_7EYZGroqIJCxphH

¹¹³ Respondent ID: R_6YVvXQW8qc7oX3H

¹¹⁴ Respondent ID: R_71WXAjyjq6No80s

¹¹⁵ Respondent ID: R_5jU0meYCFvIOcIp

¹¹⁶ Respondent ID: R_6rTLLDhYbMRHoIk

¹¹⁷ Respondent ID: R_1c1C1V5K4vCI5hL

¹¹⁸ Respondent ID: R_18Hym1IHTGTjUhn

¹¹⁹ Respondent ID: R_5jcRmJTuiPYdcNr

¹²⁰ Respondent ID: R_7EYZGroqIJCxphH

¹²¹ Respondent ID: R_5M55TtVPDTggviR

poorly received or understood.”¹²² Other respondents agreed, as “some psalms are far too rooted in violence and aggression,”¹²³ and “about violence/revenge.”¹²⁴ Another respondent had the same thoughts: “I don’t want to sing psalms about bringing judgment and retribution on our enemies.”¹²⁵

Respondents suggested alternatives to singing psalms and commented that we should be singing “other songs relevant to our culture today,”¹²⁶ as “many beautiful hymns” are available.¹²⁷ Several reasons were given, such as songs written after the psalms, “relevant to our contemporary context,”¹²⁸ and the availability of “other inspired songs in today’s culture.”¹²⁹ Respondents argued, “We have the Holy Spirit now, so many things have changed because of Christ, while psalms were written in Old Testament times,”¹³⁰ “Jesus is not directly mentioned,”¹³¹ and “the psalms do not cover every aspect of God from every angle.”¹³²

¹²² Respondent ID: R_18TVaUP6hrGLrf0

¹²³ Respondent ID: R_6x2NdKhgdt7LB5v

¹²⁴ Respondent ID: R_1rYgfDmM7VAb31Y

¹²⁵ Respondent ID: R_5fSBXMmI9f40T8l

¹²⁶ Respondent ID: R_5QAAQufsoT4BZnP

¹²⁷ Respondent ID: R_6FybNMVUMDJ2cey

¹²⁸ Respondent ID: R_18zwSGXRJaRWkCe

¹²⁹ Respondent ID: R_6QKla9qNTM5NaSk

¹³⁰ Respondent ID: R_1Env8zuv0wKhRfL

¹³¹ Respondent ID: R_5YxZici1K4X5lyQ

¹³² Respondent ID: R_1CepFirt4UNHAvi

Some respondents strongly opposed singing psalms, sharing their refusal to sing “Psalms about bringing judgment or retribution on our enemies”¹³³ or “the imprecatory psalms.”¹³⁴ Some responses included specific examples of psalms that are not understood and disconnected from the present reality, stating, “the psalms seem irrelevant to 90% of the audience,” giving examples such as Psalm 133, about the oil flowing from the beard of Aaron, or Psalm 122, mentioning “how we sing going up to Jerusalem, garments rolled in gore.”¹³⁵

General Synod Approves the Songs in Worship

The Canadian Reformed Churches established that all churches, through their major assembly, the General Synod, collectively validate the selection of songs for worship. The chart shows that the majority of the respondents (72%) considered this a good policy, 19 percent disagreed with it, and 9 percent were indifferent or unsure.

¹³³ Respondent ID: R_5fSBXMmI9f40T8l

¹³⁴ Respondent ID: R_1k0z3FqjfBfObm1

¹³⁵ Respondent ID: R_71WXAjyjq6No80s; “Garments rolled in gore” is not found in Psalm 122 but a reference to hymn 19 in the *Book of Praise* (2014) which is based on Isaiah 9:2-7. The quote relates to Isaiah 9:5, “Every garment rolled in blood.”

The General Synod approves the songs to be sung in the worship services.

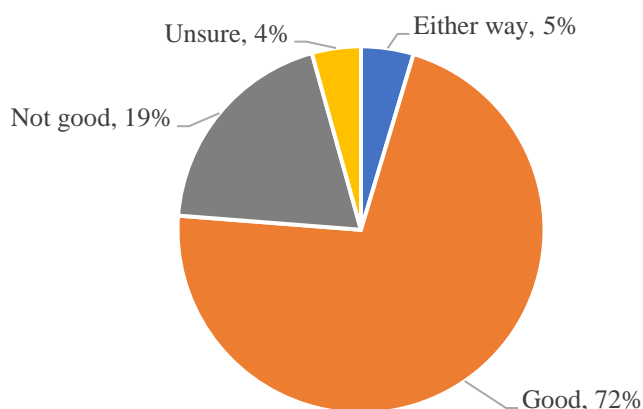


Figure 4. Synod Approval of Worship Songs

Disagreement

The central theme in disagreeing responses (19%) was that the churches should decide individually, citing that the policy is restrictive, authoritative, overreaching, hierarchical, and unhealthy, and churches want more autonomy and freedom. A person commented, “I think it is a bit silly that a group of men that meets every 3 years get to have the final say of what goes in the hymnal. It’s like veto power.”¹³⁶ Another respondent shared, “I believe we are able to make our own decisions about which songs we sing based on our knowledge of scripture,”¹³⁷ echoed by another person, “Local churches should have autonomy to make decisions beyond the edicts of Synod.”¹³⁸ Several other respondents agreed, “Seems to me they are micromanaging the whole

¹³⁶ Respondent ID: R_6MbSyCrgXreCsgl

¹³⁷ Respondent ID: R_6V4sEtqNpYoDJUc

¹³⁸ Respondent ID: R_7f0CCSSLOh0gcbP

issue. Making something academic that doesn't need to be,"¹³⁹ and, "It's time to restore the authority of local congregations."¹⁴⁰ Likewise, another person stated that the agreed policy is "a top-down approach to Church governance, which is anti-Canadian Reformed."¹⁴¹ Others called the policy "Unnecessary, rather obsessive, and a barrier to the work of the Church,"¹⁴² "too rigid and unworkable,"¹⁴³ and "It is an overreach of power. There are so many rules out of fear of the 'slippery slope.'"¹⁴⁴ While several responses mentioned hierarchy, one compared the Reformed structure with the Roman Catholic structure: "I believe the Canadian Reformed federation is far too close to the Catholic hierarchy."¹⁴⁵ Some people shared their feelings, "I strongly disagree with the Church Order,"¹⁴⁶ "I am truly sad about that,"¹⁴⁷ "Council can't be trusted to approve songs outside of the *Book of Praise*—Ridiculous,"¹⁴⁸ and "I think it is a terrible practice."¹⁴⁹ Further elaborations in these responses shared the desire to use people's talents,¹⁵⁰ to have the

¹³⁹ Respondent ID: R_696LYASHcpFJ4CW

¹⁴⁰ Respondent ID: R_5v2rQ97lORhub5Y

¹⁴¹ Respondent ID: R_375tEoEdmsMu4EN

¹⁴² Respondent ID: R_5pltEqQCBMaIToa

¹⁴³ Respondent ID: R_18TVaUP6hrGLrf0

¹⁴⁴ Respondent ID: R_1rYgfDmM7VAb31Y

¹⁴⁵ Respondent ID: R_5YxZici1K4X5lyQ

¹⁴⁶ Respondent ID: R_1nBgmXUyOt1ZL9Z

¹⁴⁷ Respondent ID: R_6ALKHp4arOWXXL8

¹⁴⁸ Respondent ID: R_1rYgfDmM7VAb31Y

¹⁴⁹ Respondent ID: R_7QQLleWilhUmMXs

¹⁵⁰ Respondent ID: R_740WqZz4qCHWSsx, R_1MloaetupehGOKZ

congregants evaluate and choose songs,¹⁵¹ to have the leadership evaluate and choose songs,¹⁵² and to have the music team select the songs for worship.¹⁵³

Although not asked, respondents shared other changes they would like to see if there would be more freedom for the local churches. For example, “There are a lot better songs to sing, like they have in the Christian Reformed Churches,”¹⁵⁴ or “I much prefer the newer songs that are sung on the radio or in more Evangelical churches.”¹⁵⁵ Others spoke favorably about utilizing a band and a choir in worship as in other churches.¹⁵⁶ Sub-themes in this category included the need to add more songs¹⁵⁷ and the assumption of fear, power, and tradition¹⁵⁸ among church leadership.

Agreement

Responses in agreement with this policy (72%) identified two dominant themes. The first theme was unity as a feature of the federative relationship. Although respondents acknowledged that it is difficult to please everyone and that the process can take too long, the recognizable unity of churches within the same federation was considered essential. Respondents commented, “We are part of a common group of churches,”¹⁵⁹ “It keeps the federation a *federation* [emphasis

¹⁵¹ Respondent ID: R_6DYO83FXvbDR5XW, R_6J93zWCLUDymhFT

¹⁵² Respondent ID: R_32KCH1guUfxO0zG, R_3ynzR7ZqgCJj3wZ, R_1fCmijq3TaxqKaK

¹⁵³ Respondent ID: R_5QAAQufsoT4BZnP

¹⁵⁴ Respondent ID: R_6ZCeWp6BZIIBftW

¹⁵⁵ Respondent ID: R_5jcRmJTuiPYdcNr

¹⁵⁶ Respondent: R_6ALKHp4arOWXXL8

¹⁵⁷ Respondent ID: R_5jcRmJTuiPYdcNr, R_6ALKHp4arOWXXL8, R_740WqZz4qCHWScx

¹⁵⁸ Respondent ID: R_1rYgfDmM7VAb31Y, R_1CdkCn34sVR7GpC, R_5YxZici1K4X5lyQ, R_1rYgfDmM7VAb31Y, R_6MbSyCrgXreCsgl

¹⁵⁹ Respondent ID: R_3PaA2d6l2dhe9up

added] and not a group of individual churches. There is cohesiveness no matter where you go to church,”¹⁶⁰ and “It creates a sameness in the Churches which is worthwhile contributing to a sense of a larger church.”¹⁶¹ Pointing to the consequences if the churches are not in agreement, a person responded, “It provides for uniformity throughout the federation which binds us together. Leaving it up to the local congregations leads to fragmentation.”¹⁶² Pointing to a voluntary identity across churches, as a respondent said, “That General Synod does that, helps with the church federation’s identity. And that is what we’ve agreed to in our Church Order.”¹⁶³

Several respondents remarked that the expertise and knowledge about music, theology, and many other aspects are beyond the knowledge and expertise of the local church leadership. Therefore, the General Synod, representing the churches, should use experts. A respondent commented, “Musicians are involved in initial selection for addition into the *Book of Praise*, which is important as well—since not all ministers are musically literate, musically experienced or musically educated.”¹⁶⁴ Another person responded to the theological aspect, “I really appreciate that!! They are careful to make sure that only biblically-sound songs get incorporated” [emphasis original].¹⁶⁵ Another respondent agreed, “I believe this to be a good practice as the delegates chosen to Synod should be men well-versed in Scripture and Scriptural decision making.”¹⁶⁶ Pointing to the available expertise, another respondent said, “Heavy HEAVY

¹⁶⁰ Respondent ID: R_1rZ8fiwnKP28jVx

¹⁶¹ Respondent ID: R_6P00liP5xJnjlZW

¹⁶² Respondent ID: R_5HdiQGCLbbRoMRJ

¹⁶³ Respondent ID: R_1LHyFBi0VO24rgc

¹⁶⁴ Respondent ID: R_2QPCJ18ZJNqJDxf

¹⁶⁵ Respondent ID: R_7Pc06QDdeO3LVwA

¹⁶⁶ Respondent ID: R_3P5M4q91k2XF69w

consideration should be given to the opinions of those that are more studied in this area. People who are musical, who are well versed in ancient languages, and who have studied the psalms should have their opinions heavily weighed in on. Synod needs to MUTUALLY SUBMIT to these people” [emphasis original].¹⁶⁷ Another person commented on the importance of the vetting process, “For the purposes of federative unity I think it is important that we sing the same songs. It also means that, generally, the most theologically astute men of our federation are vetting the songs for biblical accuracy and for keeping heretical songs out of our churches.”¹⁶⁸

Responses also indicated their appreciation for unity in singing among the generations. Some of the terms that stood out in the responses were: a practice to be commended, cohesiveness, collective agreement, curbing of individual preferences, and essential for the well-being of the federation.

The second theme was a theological unity of churches within the federation expressed in the songs in worship. A respondent commented,

I think it is necessary and good practice. There is a real danger that we are enticed to follow the “ways of the world,” sing songs that are not Scriptural but follow the “I like them because they make me feel good” culture. This is a problem: we lose our Reformed identity because we could start singing Mormon, Anglican, Pentecostal, and other such songs which can lead us into following false religion.¹⁶⁹

Another person reacted, “I believe that this is good practice. Through this practice the churches must go through the process to ensure that what we are singing in the worship service is based on God’s Word. If left to the individual churches, I fear many songs could be approved

¹⁶⁷ Respondent ID: R_6psxE4RqLtLDvYO

¹⁶⁸ Respondent ID: R_7e5tbyBFDW5ejda

¹⁶⁹ Respondent ID: R_1jV5BmcR0ckUesT

that are not based wholly on God’s Word.”¹⁷⁰ Others were concerned that individual preferences and desires for worship songs may weigh heavier than the doctrinal standard.¹⁷¹ One respondent said that this process is,

essential, particularly to keep our singing in worship theologically correct. There needs to be some “control,” or you will get everything “under the sun,” different in every congregation. As evidenced by denominations that do not practice this approval process, selections that are “not controlled or approved,” especially over time, will not necessarily be useful or helpful or appropriate or theologically correct. What is the assessment of our worship in spirit and truth then?¹⁷²

Describing the process and its purpose, a participant commented, “I think it is a good process. Songs are first vetted in our churches, we as members can comment, and then they are approved. It serves as a guard against songs being picked just because they are popular today. Worship is a serious thing and the songs we sing should not be picked lightly or in a harum scarum fashion.”¹⁷³ One respondent mentioned, “I believe it’s a good practice to keep as protocol protects our federation from the risk of going astray from preaching the true gospel. See what happened to the Christian Reformed Churches.”¹⁷⁴

A person added that an agreement between all churches in a federation benefits the local church leadership, as, for example, emotional arguments or personal relationships could cloud decision-making: “Agreed. Not all Christian songs should be sung as they aren’t honoring our Father. Having a leadership team, who doesn’t look at things from a personal/emotional point of

¹⁷⁰ Respondent ID: R_69zLMAXoQddVyU1

¹⁷¹ Respondent ID: R_5HABHDnezC51mju, R_16RP37vEI09bNzb

¹⁷² Respondent ID: R_2QPCJ18ZJNqJDxf

¹⁷³ Respondent ID: R_52KY0up7HaNIMRv

¹⁷⁴ Respondent ID: R_7X1zJMrfRdg160I

view, can decide based on what God instructs to us in His Word and Confessions.”¹⁷⁵ Another respondent shared the benefit of this practice in the church federation, “This practice has to be commended. Through this method, everyone in the federation has an equal voice. Nobody lords it over another, no congregation lords it over another.”¹⁷⁶ Another respondent gave a similar insight, “A Synod devotes a lot of time discussing and deciding these matters, with a lot of input from many sources. We do well to accept these decisions, and if we find Biblical proof that a wrong decision has been made, it can be appealed.”¹⁷⁷ Regarding the purpose of the practice, someone commented, “The Church Order is an agreed upon document by all churches in the federation, and it should not become a document that each church can interpret differently to make it fit their vision or direction they may be seeking. This can undermine the intent of the Church Order, lead to friction, and, at the same time, call into question a local church’s true commitment to the agreed-upon document.”¹⁷⁸

Acknowledging the purpose of unity in the Church Order, one respondent commented, “It can create unity, but that is not really the case anymore as more and more churches do their own thing.”¹⁷⁹ Another person said,

This helps maintain consistency in the federation. Sadly, this is becoming more difficult for Synods to deal with, as they get confronted with requests for a wider and wider spectrum of songs. I think the situation regarding music is like a weathervane in the federation, and I don’t like what I hear and see. I don’t understand why people who don’t appreciate Canadian Reformed ways don’t just go elsewhere. Why do the rest of us have to change for their preferences?¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Respondent ID: R_31ZNYbdaC1Imx6O

¹⁷⁶ Respondent ID: R_72ci9zP42RAjjAn

¹⁷⁷ Respondent ID: R_7t2mbun7AdPlwiZ

¹⁷⁸ Respondent ID: R_3rGOqxMUAAoHAG5

¹⁷⁹ Respondent ID: R_3CjeaJQxEof0Yjk

¹⁸⁰ Respondent ID: R_6aJnXhWRgMwBg0r

Another participant relayed similar concerns,

If each church became so autonomous that they did not abide by Synod's decisions, then we would cease to exist as a federation! Sadly, this is already beginning to happen! Some churches in our federation desire to remain part of the federation but are *so* different that it's hard to recognize them as part of the federation. If these churches want to do things differently than what Synod has decided, then they should "break" from the federation and not try to change the federation!¹⁸¹

Another respondent commented, "We are a federation of churches, and as such we should strive to reflect that in our worship. If a congregation cannot bind themselves to these regulations, then they do better to call themselves a 'Community Church.'"¹⁸²

Confirming the federative unity, someone responded, "I think that is a good practice. It's important that as a federation we worship along the same lines. We are not stand-alone churches (although we do not have a hierarchy and have some independence). If each church decided what they would sing, we could be all over the map."¹⁸³ Reminiscing of the church days of the past, a respondent added, "The article per se isn't causing the issues, but the desires of some to go beyond the *Book of Praise*. I miss the days of uniformity in the Canadian Reformed Churches, but I don't see an easy way to 'put the genie back in the bottle,' so to speak."¹⁸⁴

Regulative or Normative

The question about the Regulative or Normative Principle of Worship provided definitions of each principle. The Regulative Principle of Worship was defined as "Scripture regulates what is permissible in corporate worship." The Normative Principle of Worship was

¹⁸¹ Respondent ID: R_7uwcylub6whZRHQ

¹⁸² Respondent ID: R_7t2mbun7AdPlwiZ

¹⁸³ Respondent ID: R_1HGN1a8BHE789Gs

¹⁸⁴ Respondent ID: R_6OBPm3vg9LK89Zs

defined as “What Scripture does not forbid is permissible in corporate worship.” The following chart shows that most respondents agreed with the Regulative Principle of Worship (60%).

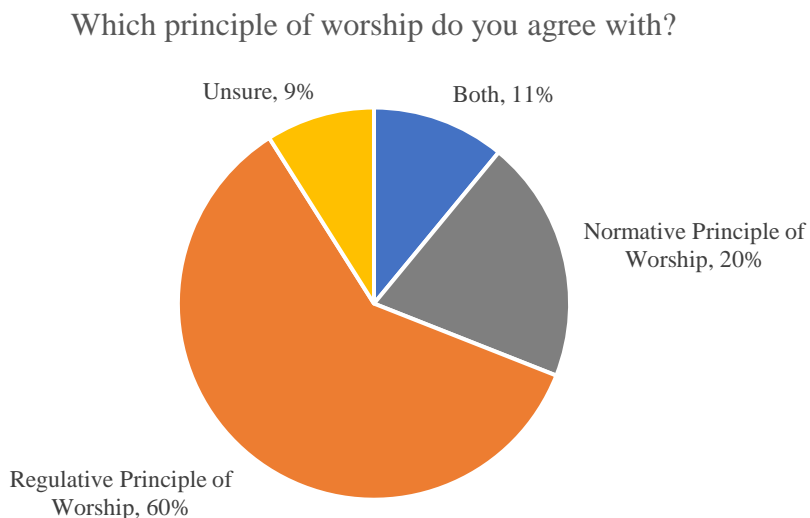


Figure 5. Principle of Worship

The central theme in these responses was the human inability to choose what is right. Although there is the desire to do good, sin is always present. Respondents generally agreed that limitations are beneficial to remaining faithful and that additions seem to have a track record of becoming unfaithful. Several responses included an indirect reference to 1 Corinthians 10:23, mentioning that they prefer the Regulative Principle because not everything that could be done in worship is helpful or builds up. A respondent said, “Regulative because our minds are sinful and can be easily misled.”¹⁸⁵ Another person warned, “In general, I think taking a normative approach towards any doctrine can be dangerous. It’s difficult to say that anything not explicitly forbidden in the Bible is therefore allowed—this opens the door to much confusion and a

¹⁸⁵ Respondent ID: R_5IWep8JTPLEJTyU

slippery slope, even outside of things concerning worship.”¹⁸⁶ Other people pointed to Scriptural examples, “Corporate worship must follow the 2nd commandment, and Scripture is full of warnings about people adding their own worship practices and the dire consequences,”¹⁸⁷ and “Not try to do as little as we can to still get a (pass), or find loopholes allow us to do things based on our own desires or feelings. We are to worship God on his terms (like Abel did), not our terms (like Cain did).”¹⁸⁸ Providing an example, another respondent shared a concern,

Our worship has always been based on the regulative principle. Normative principle is prone to open our worship form to what is desired by men rather than prescribed by God; which is the focus of our worship. It may further be said that some churches in the US practice “Christian Pole Dancing” in the worship service because it is not forbidden in the bible. Do we need to discuss this principle further?¹⁸⁹

Another participant shared, “I think human nature will always attempt to conform worship to fill their own desires for praise instead of searching the Scriptures to find out what God requires for worship and praise. It’s not about how we feel during worship, it’s about God getting what is due to Him.”¹⁹⁰ Figure 6 shows that almost two-third of the respondents agreeing with the Regulative Principle of Worship (64%) pointed to people’s sinful nature.

¹⁸⁶ Respondent ID: R_3R40zLRfx4rRjkl

¹⁸⁷ Respondent ID: R_73ABDOUVy8uNX0Z

¹⁸⁸ Respondent ID: R_52KYOup7HaNIMRv

¹⁸⁹ Respondent ID: R_1gUXu3t2QBk23GN

¹⁹⁰ Respondent ID: R_3jLzGyBUUde4OQ1

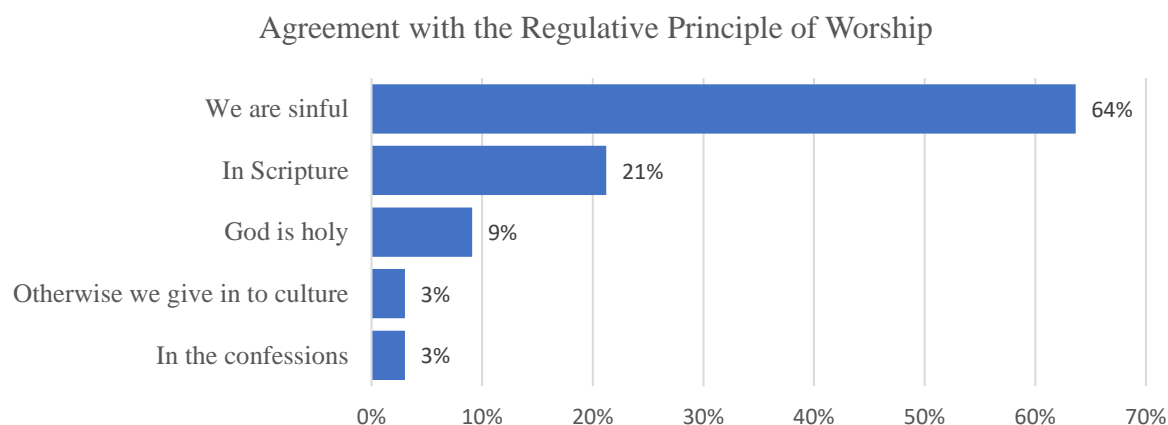


Figure 6. *Regulative Principle of Worship*

Another theme related to the first theme was the holiness of God. Several respondents agreeing with the Regulative Principle of Worship (9%) stated people cannot determine how to worship the holy God properly. “God is Holy. He has told us how he wishes to be worshipped. We must obey,”¹⁹¹ a respondent commented. Another person stated, “God is a God of order and holiness and needs to be worshipped in that way.”¹⁹² God’s holiness determines how people should worship as another person responded, “The Lord has shown himself to be Holy and we are to understand and acknowledge that. We are to worship him as he has called us to, not worship him how we want to.”¹⁹³

Scripture was another theme (21%). God’s Word is the primary reference in determining what worship is and what it looks like. One respondent mentioned, “God’s Word defines how he wants to be worshipped,”¹⁹⁴ while another said, “God gave the Bible as his Word for us, so we

¹⁹¹ Respondent ID: R_1pXvvFIYJPUtReo

¹⁹² Respondent ID: R_5OTDKmD31cTCumR

¹⁹³ Respondent ID: R_87VHPgAwrUV6zIJ

¹⁹⁴ Respondent ID: R_5TF4wuTk0T7T4ZG

should follow it when worshipping.”¹⁹⁵ One person expressly referred to Scripture, “since Hebrews 10:19–25 outlines what we are to be doing in worship.”¹⁹⁶ Another respondent mentioned the Confessions, “The Reformed confessions spell out the Regulative principle in places like Lord’s Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism (Question and Answer 96) as well as in Article 7 of the Belgic Confession which states that ‘The whole manner of worship which God requires of us’ is written in at length.”¹⁹⁷ Another person pointed out that Regulative also means liberty: “Regulative principle of worship as it provides consistency and maintains scriptural guided practices, which does give us much liberty.”¹⁹⁸

Some respondents (8%) indicated they were unsure about this question. Some of these respondents asked questions to understand the meaning and application of these principles. For example, “Regulative worship sounds good but is not practiced: we do not use all instruments mentioned in Scripture, nor dance, nor kneel. Normative worship: not sure about that—does that include Christian Rock music then as well?”¹⁹⁹ Other people responded, “unsure,” “no opinion,” “skip,” “too confusing,” “don’t know enough,” or “no opinion.”

Other respondents did not make a choice but selected “neither” (1%) or “both” (10%). Most of these responses included an explanation. Essentially, these respondents chose the Normative Principle of Worship but were concerned that there would be no limitations or restrictions. For example, “Both. For the full expression of the Christian and the recognition of

¹⁹⁵ Respondent ID: R_6zj6uJvuxlEfXbL

¹⁹⁶ Resppndent ID: R_1HhFxbIH6ZMco6S

¹⁹⁷ Respondent ID: R_1ZK90aAPruFfRbl

¹⁹⁸ Respondent ID: R_7EYZGroqIJCxphH

¹⁹⁹ Respondent ID: R_7ZI9MFBdYeTJ5oA

the presence of God,”²⁰⁰ or “There is a lot of gray area in scripture about worship. Some comes down to each person’s conscience.”²⁰¹ Hinting at recent developments, one respondent commented, “Probably some of both - and I think that is already happening.”²⁰² Indicating neither, respondents commented, “The Holy Spirit leads us also in our choices for worship,”²⁰³ and “Scripture really gives us few guidelines how the worship services should be conducted.”²⁰⁴ Another respondent shared, “Both are flawed principles. I do not agree with either.”²⁰⁵

The respondents who preferred the Normative Principle of Worship (20%) brought up a central theme: the assertion that Scripture is silent about how we should worship in the 21st century. For example, respondents commented, “God does not tell you how to worship,”²⁰⁶ “It doesn’t say in Scripture what is permissible or not,”²⁰⁷ “To worship in church is not specifically prescribed by God in the bible,”²⁰⁸ “Scripture does not give a prescription for worship and there are few directives,”²⁰⁹ and, “If he wanted it done very specifically, would he not have commanded it? Would Jesus not have talked to the disciples about it?”²¹⁰ One respondent pointed to the gained worship freedom through the coming of Christ, “In the New Testament

²⁰⁰ Respondent ID: R_6lABWWT2LOebbIt

²⁰¹ Respondent ID: R_5oeHvqgfHmD7OsV

²⁰² Respondent ID: R_6v6ZwnMVgxAipy7

²⁰³ Respondent ID: R_5v2rQ97IORhub5Y

²⁰⁴ Respondent ID: R_37T00y5yk5QVG8h

²⁰⁵ Respondent ID: R_1SBLnMF8ykQafAy

²⁰⁶ Respondent ID: R_6x2NdKhgdt7LB5v

²⁰⁷ Respondent ID: R_33a7KWIOvls6uQ8

²⁰⁸ Respondent ID: R_31dbtUc4Exj2k93

²⁰⁹ Respondent ID: R_5gbwKiK4PVQWZVY

²¹⁰ Respondent ID: R_18Hym1IHTGTjUhn

times, Jesus freed us from living a life filled with following laws. God doesn't give a list of rules for this as He did to the Old Testament people. Jesus' work on earth freed his people from living a life of laws. Following a regulative principle to me would be Old Testament. Normative is the New Testament way.”²¹¹ A recurring statement was that church people can make their own decisions, choices, and interpretations of worship.

Other sentiments acknowledged Scripture speaking about worship, but interpretations of worship that follow Scripture were considered “too rigorous,”²¹² pharisaical,²¹³ and irrelevant to culture.²¹⁴ Respondents expressed the need for “freedom”²¹⁵ and a dislike for “tradition”²¹⁶ and restrictions,²¹⁷ as one person wrote, “Regulative principle is too restrictive and against Christian liberty.”²¹⁸ The following chart shows recurring and overlapping themes of restrictions, freedom, and application.

²¹¹ Respondent ID: R_1fCmijq3TaxqKaK

²¹² Respondent ID: R_375tEoEdmsMu4EN

²¹³ Respondent ID: R_58MsCCdEKU33Cyl, R_1ElXyzsAAYw6k6r

²¹⁴ Respondent ID: R_1c1C1V5K4vCI5hL, R_3wQNCcgElxKiKT8, R_6NVZRcPpRt5iR5w

²¹⁵ Respondent ID: R_7pWgu6i4VxkKPsP, R_5YxZici1K4X5lyQ, R_4DobDwC7ZIZxQMF

²¹⁶ Respondent ID: R_6FybNMVUMDJ2cey

²¹⁷ Respondent ID: R_1jTEtV9gNV4pU8l

²¹⁸ Respondent ID: R_6IQsXGkEVTf0yR5

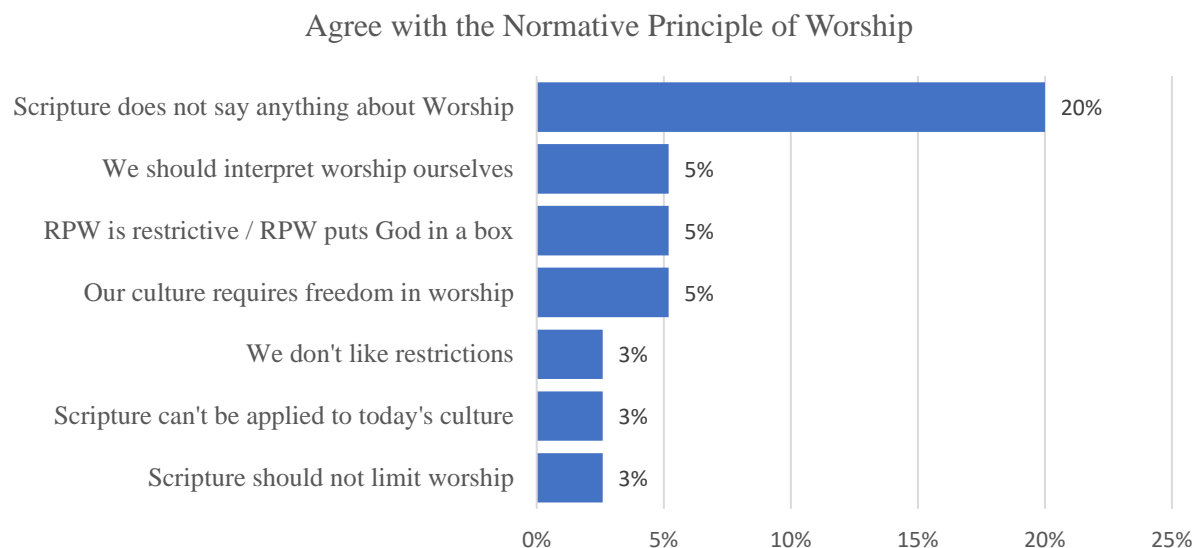


Figure 7. Normative Principle of Worship

Another argument for the Normative Principle of Worship was that we should be able to worship as other “Bible-believing, Jesus-following churches all around the world.”²¹⁹ The respondents believed the diversity in worship worldwide reflects that Scripture does not specify worship, and our church’s liturgy “is not dictated in Scripture.”²²⁰

Some comments provided more insight into the people’s thoughts on the Normative Principle of Worship. One person was concerned that the Canadian Reformed Churches “risk the chance to become cult-like” when following the Regulative Principle of Worship.²²¹ Another response shared that the “Normative Principle of Worship allows for some creativity. Even

²¹⁹ Respondent ID: R_57rNOLs2ZDUCc2B

²²⁰ Respondent ID: R_6MbSyCrgXreCsgl

²²¹ Respondent ID: R_6psxE4RqLtLDvYO

believers’ versus infant baptism, and our ideas of open and closed Lord’s Supper tables has lots of room for differences.”²²²

The Purpose of Psalm Singing

Respondents were asked their opinion about the purpose of singing psalms in worship. The majority of respondents were positive about singing of psalms. Figure 8 shows that three percent of the responses was negative or unsure about the purpose of Psalm Singing.

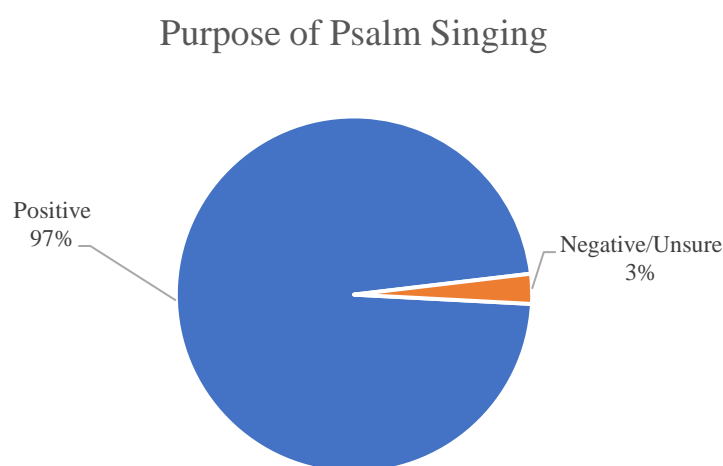


Figure 8. Purpose of Psalm Singing

Most respondents agreed that the purpose is to give thanks, praise, glorify, and worship God (59%). Some of the many responses included, “To give ‘all worth’ and glory to God,”²²³ “One purpose is the praise of our King,”²²⁴ “To praise and glorify God. It is our thankfulness to

²²² Respondent ID: R_1F2PNeWVhWuJdEh

²²³ Respondent ID: R_3V3AxwvMa5c6hEt

²²⁴ Respondent ID: R_6BajEbpqntqTFC9

God!”²²⁵ and “To glorify and praise our God in a way that pleases Him according to His scriptures.”²²⁶ Several comments specified what glorifying God means. For example, “To glorify God in the expression of praise, thanksgiving, confession, lament and so forth,”²²⁷ “ACTS: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication,”²²⁸ “to sing praises, to speak (sing) aloud our prayers, our confessions, our contemplations, our struggles, our acceptance,”²²⁹ “The purpose is to bring glory and praise to our God as it strengthens us, comforts us and encourages us,” and “worship God in fear and reverence.”²³⁰

Figure 9 shows people-related sub-themes that addressed the impact of Psalm Singing on the congregation. Respondents stated that Psalm Singing has a purpose in focusing on God, praying to God, communicating with God, and sharing emotions (14%). A respondent shared, “To express our emotions and hearts to him, using his words while being joined in harmony with our brothers and sisters in Christ.”²³¹ Another person said, “To respond to God in praise, to express emotion to our creator.”²³² A respondent commented, “The psalms cover the entire range

²²⁵ Respondent ID: R_3iEZvzgEZ9PQj3X

²²⁶ Respondent ID: R_7gSFMQLV5OSLbLE

²²⁷ Respondent ID: R_1ZK90aAPruFfRbl

²²⁸ Respondent ID: R_1pXvvFIYJPUtReo

²²⁹ Respondent ID: R_6P00liP5xJnjlZW

²³⁰ Respondent ID: R_8E7pWnRG8Xalqq8

²³¹ Respondent ID: R_6IQsXGkEVTf0yR5

²³² Respondent ID: R_5SwUABaVWR6pGI4

of human expression needed to respond to God with our praises, cares, and supplications. The goal to use the psalms would be to worship God in fear and reverence.”²³³

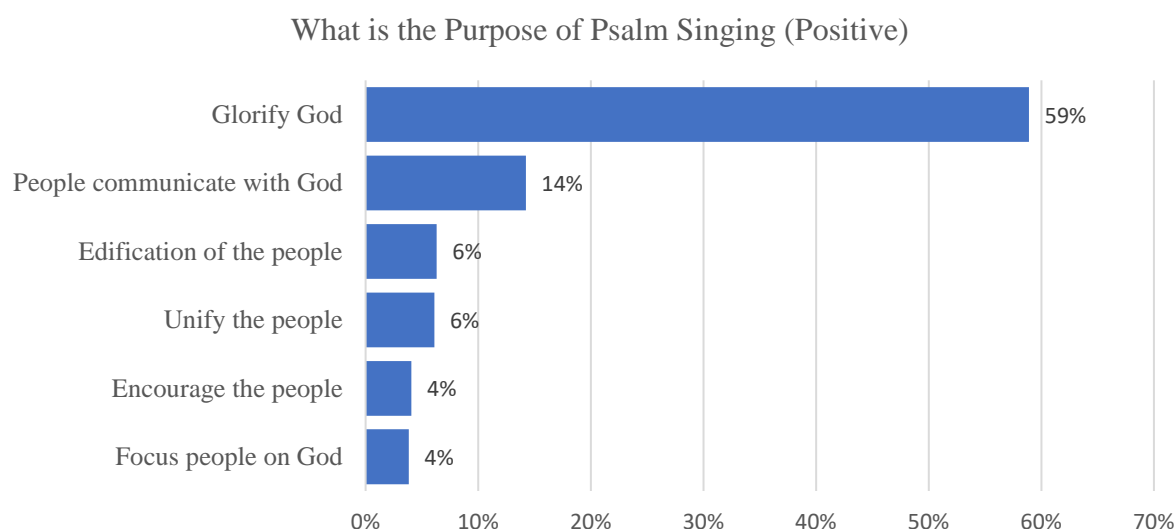


Figure 9. Purpose of Psalm Singing - Positive

Other respondents recognized the purpose of singing psalms as being edified and learning more about God as the object of worship. For example, “Psalm Singing sets our hearts and minds on God, it allows for self-evaluation, it’s essentially praying to God,”²³⁴ and “To praise God; to regain our perspective of who we are and who God is.”²³⁵ Another person shared, “Infusing God’s Words into our minds and hearts through song is part of worshipping Him. Music is how we ‘hide God’s Word’ in our hearts. Having His Word in our minds and hearts is then incorporated into our lifestyle, thinking, decisions, behavior, relationships, etc.”²³⁶

²³³ Respondent ID: R_8E7pWnRG8Xalqq8

²³⁴ Respondent ID: R_11BASTMcN4d2uEb

²³⁵ Respondent ID: R_5hGh5bQfSXPGMnY

²³⁶ Respondent ID: R_2QPCJ18ZJNqJDxf

Respondents recognized a unifying factor (6%) in learning and singing psalms together as people of all generations, across the church federation, and with Christians worldwide singing God’s Word. A respondent commented, “To share the inspired words of the psalms sung by many before us, and with us, and after us,”²³⁷ which someone else worded as “to unite voices with saints above and below.”²³⁸ Another respondent said about the present, “Psalm Singing is bringing people together, preparing for worship.”²³⁹ Psalm Singing creates spiritual unity, a respondent explained, “Singing psalms in worship should unite the congregation in allowing the Holy Spirit to use our voices to worship God. This is the primary reason and the most important.”²⁴⁰

Some respondents mentioned the encouragement singing psalms gives to God’s people (4%). For example, singing psalms is “to stir one another up for praise.”²⁴¹ Several respondents stated that singing psalms is singing “praise to God and encouraging one another.”²⁴² A comment elaborated on encouragement: “Psalm Singing is to encourage God’s people to use the words of Scripture—inspired by God Himself!—to express praise, sorrow, fear, doubts, gratitude, and many other thoughts and feelings that we experience in this life in a way that points us to the Lord and helps us not to look to ourselves but to the Lord for help and protection.”²⁴³

²³⁷ Respondent ID: R_3ynzR7ZqgCJj3wZ

²³⁸ Respondent ID: R_3wQNCcgElxKiKT8

²³⁹ Respondent ID: R_31ZNYbdaC1Imx6O

²⁴⁰ Respondent ID: R_1MloaetupéhGOKZ

²⁴¹ Respondent ID: R_30TeAX8Vdso3ysy

²⁴² Respondent ID: R_17WMFBJ1UBOvGqT, R_5vfiwoHrqeok4Ct, R_7TZjEkAnmN8bzc5, R_5CHQV23xkbbCQHM

²⁴³ Respondent ID: R_6tT3Ggc6EBETOr7

Figure 10 shows a breakdown of the themes of responses with a different perspective on Psalm Singing (3%). Some indicated that the purpose of Psalm Singing is to satisfy a “custom and tradition,”²⁴⁴ and is “a part of the heritage that the Canadian Reformed Churches are not willing to give up.”²⁴⁵ Another respondent phrased Psalm Singing as “the old Canadian Reformed style,” which needs to be updated. This respondent elaborated about singing psalms, “life was much more depressing back in the day and does not help anybody to be that way today.”²⁴⁶

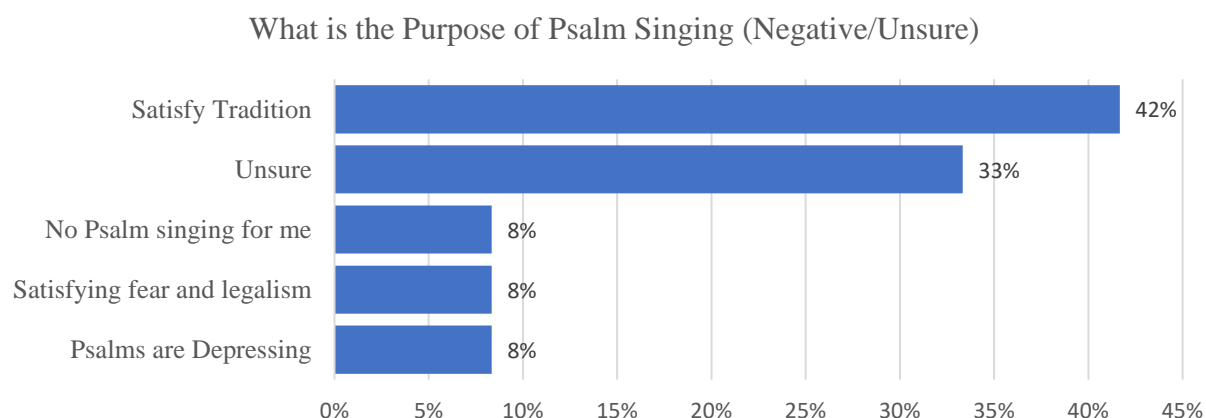


Figure 10. Purpose of Psalm Singing - Negative or Unsure

Others did not know the purpose of singing psalms, responding, “Unsure.”²⁴⁷ A person suggested, “half kidding,” the church sings psalms only to keep older, more traditional members happy.²⁴⁸ Along the same line, another respondent remarked, “The purpose of singing the psalms

²⁴⁴ Respondent ID: R_5Xq6hzuxGsRUDZf

²⁴⁵ Respondent ID: R_57rNOLs2ZDUcc2B

²⁴⁶ Respondent ID: R_5jcRmJTuiPYdcNr

²⁴⁷ Respondent ID: R_7QHD2yyEFdgBIMl, R_6MbSyCrgXreCsgl, R_7SIC327xA2zngex, R_7vwxBkzKbe2LXc5

²⁴⁸ Respondent ID: R_3FGqLMIPYUAgSGZ

is to maintain a sense of being comfortable with what is, for no real good reason. That is legalism.”²⁴⁹

Singing Psalms of Stanzas

The next question asked the respondents their opinion about the practice of Psalm Singing, as the Canadian Reformed Churches have a tradition of singing fragments of the psalms rather than the complete psalm or a more significant portion of the psalms. Figure 11 shows that most respondents (54%) agreed with singing individual stanzas, while others (33%) preferred to sing an entire psalms. Some responses (12%) were indifferent to singing stanzas or psalms.

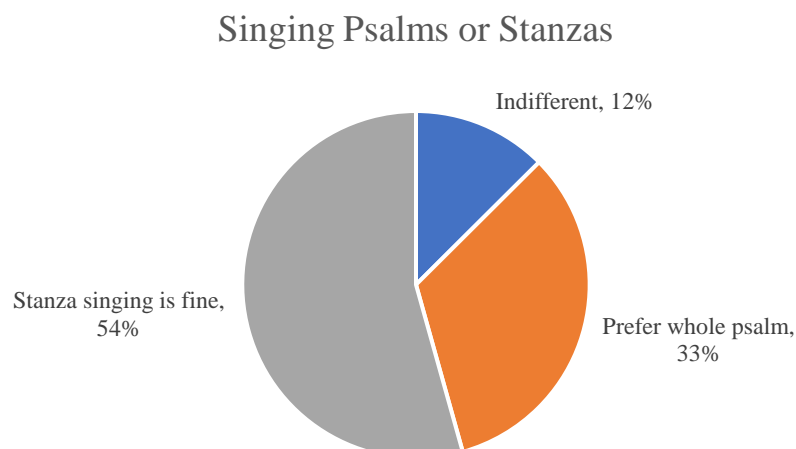


Figure 11. Singing Psalms or Stanzas

Singing Stanzas

The central theme (25%) in the responses favoring the singing of stanzas was about the worship application of a stanza compared to a psalm. The text of a stanza may not represent the

²⁴⁹ Respondent ID: R_5QAAQufsoT4BZnP

meaning of the psalm but might be easier to apply to a moment in the worship service than a psalm, was the sentiment. A respondent shared, “Each psalm is an entire composition, but stanzas can be used singularly or grouped to support a point.”²⁵⁰ Another person shared, “It’s welcome where it fits. But if at least some stanzas are relevant to the spirit/theme of the worship that service that is sufficient.”²⁵¹ Several reactions commented, “We don’t need to sing all stanzas.”²⁵²

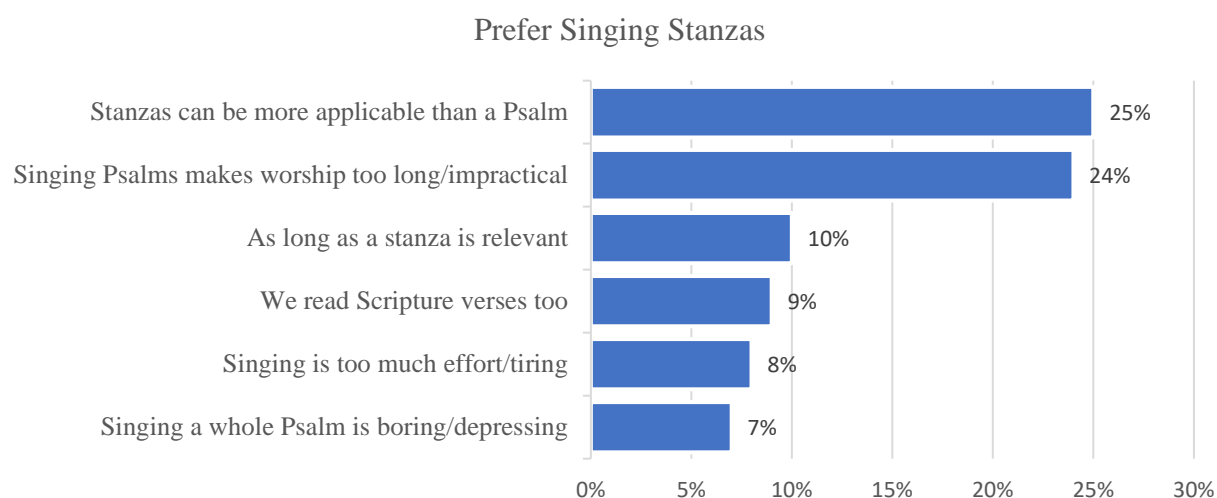


Figure 12. Preference for Singing Stanzas

The second theme was the concern about the increased duration of the worship service (24%). A respondent suggested a maximum length of a service, “I think we should sing an

²⁵⁰ Respondent ID: R_2QPCJ18ZJNqJDxf

²⁵¹ Respondent ID: R_7gSFMQLV5OSLbLE

²⁵² Respondent ID: R_3FGqLMIPYUAgSGZ, R_3nhx8vJkRWkXbRn

amount to keep the worship service an hour.”²⁵³ Another person commented about singing psalms, “That would add a lot of time to the service in some cases.”²⁵⁴

The relevancy of individual stanzas within the worship service was the third theme (10%). Respondents indicated that individual stanzas could be applicable to the sermon where a psalm may not be applicable.²⁵⁵ Another person suggests, “I think it is often wise to sing only some stanzas of a psalm,” indicating that not all stanzas apply.²⁵⁶ Another respondent comments, “I’m in favor of selecting those stanzas that apply to the message. Singing all the stanzas, especially with some of the psalms, in my opinion is ridiculous and completely unnecessary.”²⁵⁷

Respondents justified the singing of stanzas in the third theme (9%), commenting that short Scripture passages are also read in corporate worship. A respondent agreed with singing stanzas, “just like Scripture verses can be discussed in isolation of a chapter.”²⁵⁸ Another person said, “We do not always read the whole Scripture astute at once.”²⁵⁹ A respondent commented, “Just as we do not read through the entire Bible every church service but pick and choose Scriptures - the same can be done for psalms: pick and choose.”²⁶⁰

²⁵³ Respondent ID: R_5K2N3d2DC9hZtAV

²⁵⁴ Respondent ID: R_7478yQxBzAri52h

²⁵⁵ Respondent ID: R_57rNOLs2ZDUCc2B, R_3EzTJJXqMcdT1ia

²⁵⁶ Respondent ID: R_1ioHWK5fhpqb6Hn

²⁵⁷ Respondent ID: R_5M55TtVPDTggviR

²⁵⁸ Respondent ID: R_153i5Qrxyo6b5mh

²⁵⁹ Respondent ID: R_6BajEbpqntqTFC9, R_5pltEqQCBMaIToa

²⁶⁰ Respondent ID: R_7Eoyudf8UW5RUUnU

Several respondents (8%) shared that singing a whole psalm “would be too much.”²⁶¹ The last theme asserted that singing all stanzas of a psalm is boring, “singing the whole psalm can get monotonous and people get frustrated, makes people lose focus,”²⁶² and tends to be depressing (7%), “I don’t enjoy depressing songs: one verse of that would be enuff [sic].”²⁶³ Others commented: “When many stanzas are chosen my attention wanes the longer we sing.”²⁶⁴ Arguments (15%) favoring only singing stanzas expressed a fear of having to sing Psalm 119 continuously from beginning to end.

Singing Psalms

Figure 13 shows comments favoring singing psalms (52%) pointed primarily to the context of psalms.

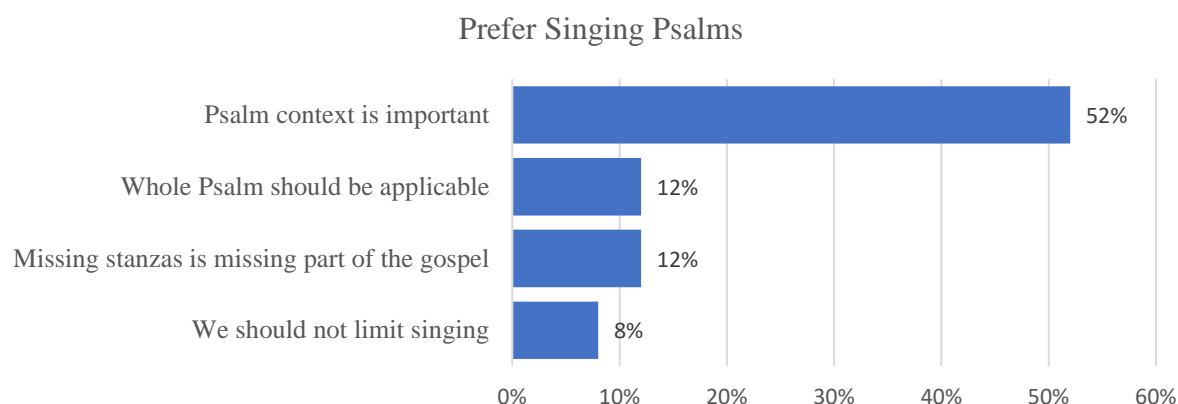


Figure 13. Preference for Singing Psalms

²⁶¹ Respondent ID: R_58MsCCdEKU33Cyl, R_7QQLleWilhUmMXs, R_7lKaQgR7GPSoX6Q, R_77jJyPD68rXzzCm

²⁶² Respondent ID: R_5BVicqlITfiO5zR

²⁶³ Respondent ID: R_5jcRmJTuiPYdcNr

²⁶⁴ Respondent ID: R_5VO0tQ0tALrbTzQ

A respondent commented, “It is generally more beneficial to sing the whole psalm in the worship service to get a full picture. The psalms are written usually as a movement and are cohesive from start to finish.”²⁶⁵ Another echoed, “You rarely get the whole story of what the psalm is saying.”²⁶⁶ Some responses mentioned the context, “Singing more stanzas or the whole psalm gives a better context. A lot more psalms could very well be sung in their entirety in the worship service, only a few perhaps not,”²⁶⁷ and “I would prefer that we sing the whole song to get the whole context,”²⁶⁸ repeated by someone else, “It would be nice to be able to sing the whole song to get the full context.”²⁶⁹ A person said, “I see great merit in becoming more aware of the overall content (and richness) of the various psalms. Because of length this may create challenges, but in principle it’s a legitimate desire.”²⁷⁰ Another response mentioned the flow, “Singing the whole psalm provides better context and flow. It is preferable.”²⁷¹ Another respondent shared this preference: “As much as possible, we should sing the whole song! We should not avoid the “hard” stanzas, or just choose the familiar ones. ‘All of Scripture is profitable!’ Paul wrote to Timothy.”²⁷² Respondents were passionate about singing whole psalms rather than stanzas: “I love when we sing all verses but understand it isn’t always possible,”²⁷³

²⁶⁵ Respondent ID: R_3R40zLRfx4rRjkl

²⁶⁶ Respondent ID: R_6Fzbd6TDGO1HcjT

²⁶⁷ Respondent ID: R_30TeAX8Vdso3ysy

²⁶⁸ Respondent ID: R_4Hq6Uhm5Uz0DhE

²⁶⁹ Respondent ID: R_5tAu6ZRvDyS5Ji8

²⁷⁰ Respondent ID: R_1mkvdG9xxeIBmJ6

²⁷¹ Respondent ID: R_5sTsKpoyfoLmLZ8

²⁷² Respondent ID: R_12xuYKE9tNSuBYA

²⁷³ Respondent ID: R_7YAZ1XXGQjUy1e9

“I’d love to sing all the stanzas of most psalms, with a few exceptions, the obvious being Psalm 119,”²⁷⁴ “I enjoy singing so I would love to sing whole psalms,”²⁷⁵ “I do like singing the whole song,”²⁷⁶ and “It is sad. I prefer to sing the whole psalm!”²⁷⁷

Responses indicated a sense of realism in acknowledging that, like Psalm 119, longer psalms are unlikely to be sung entirely in corporate worship. Several respondents acknowledged that parts of longer psalms can be sung in segments, “I would prefer singing the whole psalm if at all possible. However, at times, it may require the breaking of a longer psalm into sections for practical time constraints.”²⁷⁸

Respondents also asserted that psalms should be relevant and applicable to the worship service (12%), such as, “Singing whole psalm[s] is good to do sometimes but not always necessary. Good to sing stanzas applicable to the sermon,”²⁷⁹ and, “That would depend on how long the psalm is and if it related to the sermon.”²⁸⁰

Some respondents (12%) compared psalms to Scripture and concluded that part of Scripture is excluded when excluding stanzas. One respondent shared, “Don’t like missing the gospel in-between versus [sic]. If a song is too long, pick three stanzas in a row.” Two respondents had a similar comment, “A pet peeve of mine would be singing three out of the four

²⁷⁴ Respondent ID: R_6FrG1naDX33Ndc7

²⁷⁵ Respondent ID: R_5VIsiEvGRfMbewL

²⁷⁶ Respondent ID: R_5lmICgmzDMhYRrn

²⁷⁷ Respondent ID: R_1Env8zuv0wKhRfL

²⁷⁸ Respondent ID: R_5CHQV23xkbbCQHM

²⁷⁹ Respondent ID: R_7sSfWSdEvIFJvzX

²⁸⁰ Respondent ID: R_7IE9MYY650QDIdL

or five verses belonging to the song. Why not sing all stanzas?”²⁸¹ and, “I always wonder why we may sing three stanzas out of four—we are missing something”²⁸² The comparison between Scripture and the psalms led other respondents to state that psalms should be sung in their context as Scripture should be read in its context.²⁸³

Some respondents identified possible reasons why people would prefer stanzas instead of psalms. One person commented that some stanzas (and some entire psalms) are not sung because they “don’t fit our sensitivities.”²⁸⁴ Another response stated that people are no longer used to reading more extensive portions of Scripture as “it has become harder to discern the meaning and pay attention to the words.” It concluded that this extends to being unable to grasp the meaning of psalms and finding it difficult to sing through an entire psalm.²⁸⁵ A respondent pointed out that people do not like to sing certain stanzas²⁸⁶ because they do not like the lyrics of certain stanzas.²⁸⁷ Some respondents did not appreciate the selectivity in only singing stanzas of psalms, “Each psalm addresses specific matters in our life with God, yet we pick what we think is pertinent,”²⁸⁸ “The current practice of picking and choosing just a few stanzas should be expanded to include more stanzas and even the whole psalm as much as possible,”²⁸⁹ and “I

²⁸¹ Respondent ID: R_7IZiGmOPHTjWXUB

²⁸² Respondent ID: R_52IEmlvCpXlEqFX

²⁸³ Respondent ID: R_6rTLLDhYbMRHoIk, R_12xuYKE9tNSuBYA

²⁸⁴ Respondent ID: R_5hGh5bQfSXPGMnY

²⁸⁵ Respondent ID: R_7bPLke4tlKusDY3

²⁸⁶ Respondent ID: R_5hGh5bQfSXPGMnY

²⁸⁷ Respondent ID: R_3gToSr4ILoRB8HE

²⁸⁸ Respondent ID: R_1SDg7u4ksdKThT9

²⁸⁹ Respondent ID: R_1SBLnMF8ykQafAy

think that it is important not to pick and choose parts of psalms to achieve a man centered purpose but to do so to get a good context of the Word.”²⁹⁰

Another respondent reflected on the personal preferences and commented, “Interesting that often the ‘new songs’ are sung completely.”²⁹¹ Another person made the same assertion: “We tend to sing a few stanzas of the psalms, but generally we sing whole hymns,” expressing the desire to have this practice reversed.²⁹²

Other Questions

Any Other Comments

Following these questions, respondents could share anything else that may have come to their mind. Numerous comments elaborated on responses to previous survey questions, stating and clarifying their position. For example, one respondent mentioned, “If the Canadian Reformed Churches were to abandon Psalm Singing, I would seek a church that still does!”²⁹³ In contrast, other respondents asked why the church insists on predominantly singing songs of the old covenant²⁹⁴ and not moving on from only “singing about the shadows of Christ.”²⁹⁵

Referring to using psalms in worship, another respondent questioned whether the church self-righteously overturns God’s rules by placing the psalms above other worship songs, “The historic and currently ‘established’ viewpoint of the psalms reminds me of the Pharisees. The

²⁹⁰ Respondent ID: R_5AHH8GuZ2xKBhCa

²⁹¹ Respondent ID: R_6lABWWT2LOebbIt

²⁹² Respondent ID: R_1rshN2Ndzm9AXaV

²⁹³ Respondent ID: R_3Msbbi6yY7Jea7Q

²⁹⁴ Respondent ID: R_5M55TtVPDTggviR, R_5liYCz2ibpKvd8w

²⁹⁵ Respondent ID: R_5QAAQufsoT4BZnP

church has to be careful not to put their ‘rulings’ on worship above the rulings of God blocking out other amazing songs and opportunities to praise the Lord. Psalms are not the all-and-only songs and should not be risen above other songs.”²⁹⁶ In contrast, another person commented, “I think it is very difficult for sinful people to praise God perfectly,”²⁹⁷ and pointing at hymns, another person commented, “The danger with many hymns is sentimentality/my feeling or experience focus rather than God focused, Him speaking to us,”²⁹⁸ while another respondent shared, “It is awesome. We have an amazing gift from our forefathers in that the psalms can be sung easily. I feel that this is often overlooked and criticized because ‘it is boring, too slow, olden day words, olden day music, or hymns are better.’ Try reading the words and let me know if it is boring still.”²⁹⁹

The topic of tunes was one of the dominant themes in the responses. Some respondents were passionate about singing the psalms in worship: In a specific comment about the tunes, a respondent said, “I LOVE the psalms and the richness of them, including the Genevan tunes!!!” [emphasis original].³⁰⁰ “We love, value, and appreciate the psalms,”³⁰¹ and “Our psalms are a precious treasure.”³⁰² On the other hand, referring to seekers, a respondent commented, “Many psalms are not liked and outdated/archaic and/or have terrible tunes.”³⁰³

²⁹⁶ Respondent ID: R_6x2NdKhgdt7LB5v

²⁹⁷ Respondent ID: R_6wcAUe0bjAXhugg

²⁹⁸ Respondent ID: R_5rHsdDMDLcZzdOJ

²⁹⁹ Respondent ID: R_6qV1CACiMTQAHeN

³⁰⁰ Respondent ID: R_5yfkYI3x1VqCCA

³⁰¹ Respondent ID: R_12xuYKE9tNSuBYA

³⁰² Respondent ID: R_37T00y5yk5QVG8h

³⁰³ Respondent ID: R_1c1C1V5K4vCI5hL

The second central theme was the skill of the accompanist. One respondent commented, “I love the accompaniment and emotion it can add to the praise,”³⁰⁴ another person shared, “A good musician will make the Psalm Singing more enjoyable and beautiful.”³⁰⁵ More candidly, a respondent stated, “A less skilled musician CAN destroy the congregation’s engagement via poor tempo, domination or inability to lead” [emphasis original]. At the same time, another person said, “The accompanist can make it or break it. If God’s praises are played at a funeral dirge [sic] pace: it is horrible.”³⁰⁶ The musician’s skill level plays an important role in the worship experience. One person explained, “For example, a generally slow or emotionless organ player changes the experience to be less joyful. Someone (a single skilled player) or several people (more instruments) who can enhance the psalm with their skills, add so much more in how I would experience worship. To me this is a huge part in praising God through our music and singing.”³⁰⁷

Several contrasts appeared in responses about the practical side of accompaniment. For example, “piano accompaniment would go a long way for a better musical experience for me,”³⁰⁸ and “I find the piano much easier to sing with.” In contrast, others commented, “piano is a poor substitute for an organ,”³⁰⁹ and, “Continue to use organs as much as possible.”³¹⁰ Different views were also expressed in the instruments used for accompaniment. While one respondent

³⁰⁴ Respondent ID: R_7rvNleTtEgZeWNh

³⁰⁵ Respondent ID: R_7P5zSVn83OzaSIp

³⁰⁶ Respondent ID: R_6psxE4RqLtLDvYO

³⁰⁷ Respondent ID: R_3F5T7hoMAXVLwpX

³⁰⁸ Respondent ID: R_1k0z3FqjfBfObm1

³⁰⁹ Respondent ID: R_72ci9zP42RAjjAn

³¹⁰ Respondent ID: R_4yIIQhbED64hEpb

appreciated other instruments, “The psalms can be made even more beautiful with a more refined focus on how they could be complemented with other instruments created for other instrumental accompaniment.”³¹¹ Another respondent shared an appreciation for the limited use of instruments, “I’m thankful we don’t have more than a piano and organ accompanying the singing,” emphasizing that the voices of the people are most important and not the musicians accompanying.³¹²

Commenting about their own church’s songbook, the *Book of Praise*, respondents also had different opinions. Some people shared, “We have such a beautiful treasure in our *Book of Praise*, and it makes me sad some people want to throw parts of it away,”³¹³ “We have a very rich compilation of Psalms and Hymns in our *Book of Praise*, of which I am very thankful for. We teach them to our children regularly and I hope they find the depth and truth of God’s Word in them to sing them all their lives as well,” and “I LOVE our *Book of Praise* and don’t see a need for more choices” [emphasis original].³¹⁴ Others had a different opinion, “There are several books already in print such as the *Trinity Psalter* and the *Book of Psalms For Worship* by Crown & Covenant,”³¹⁵ “We should have the same Psalter as the United Reformed Churches with the *Trinity Psalter*,”³¹⁶ “There are so many great psalm songs out there by Brian Doerksen or lots by

³¹¹ Respondent ID: R_5e4stt3M3BKyJiu

³¹² Respondent ID: R_11BAStMcn4d2uEb

³¹³ Respondent ID: R_5pPQm0zZ9bCVIOx

³¹⁴ Respondent ID: R_7YAZ1XXGQjUy1e9

³¹⁵ Respondent ID: R_5gbwKiK4PVQWZVY

³¹⁶ Respondent ID: R_7bMnqJhDI4DM8hj

Shane & Shane, the Getty's,"³¹⁷ and "Just the other day I was singing Boney M, 'The Rivers of Babylon'—much better than our version."³¹⁸

The diversity of topics brought forward identified that church members had issues that played a role in their worship experience, and they did not always agree with the musical practice within their church and church federation. The reactions showed solid opposing views.

Opinion Questions

The survey concluded with four opinion questions that related to the open questions. The first question was, "Do you think the Old Testament Psalms still apply in the 21st Century?" Figure 14 shows that most people (83%) said, "Definitely yes," while 9% responded "Probably yes." While some people were unsure (6%), a few respondents said, "Probably not" (1%) or "Definitely not" (1%).

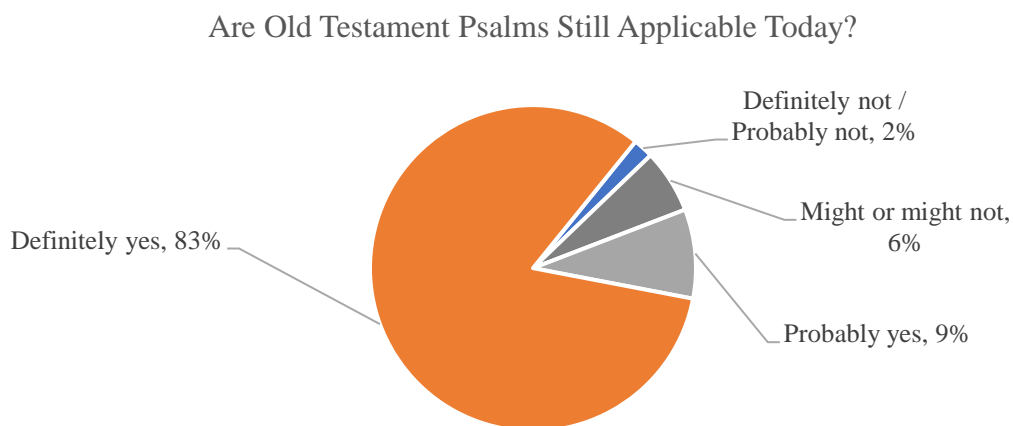


Figure 14. Are Old Testament Psalms Still Applicable Today?

³¹⁷ Respondent ID: R_7IE9MYY650QDIdL

³¹⁸ Respondent ID: R_71WXAjyjq6No80s

The second question asked, “Do you think songs in corporate worship should always be strictly based on Scripture?” Figure 15 shows that most of the respondents (72%) agreed that such songs should definitely be strictly (53%) or probably (24%) based on Scripture. While some respondents were unsure (15%), others had the opinion that songs should not (4%) or probably not (4%) strictly be based on Scripture.

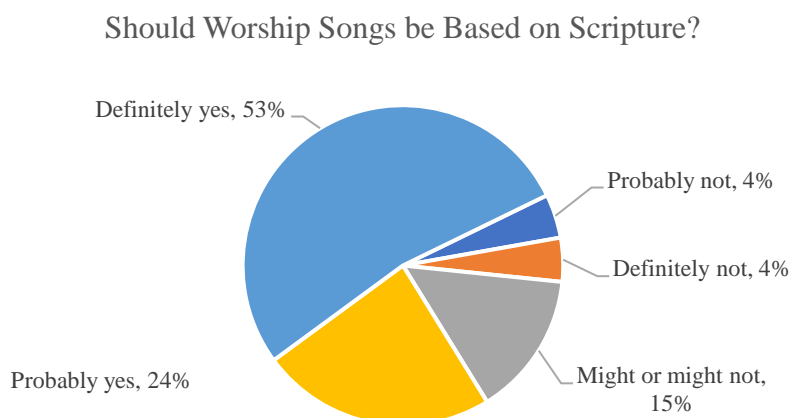


Figure 15. Should Worship Songs be Based on Scripture?

Next, the participants shared their opinion about worship songs, “Are worship songs (a) songs God provided and likes to hear us sing, or (b) songs God’s people wrote and like to offer God? Figure 16 indicates that less than half (46%) of the respondents think that worship songs could include God’s and people’s songs. Some respondents thought worship songs were songs only (12%) or most (38%) provided by God. Others believed worship songs should always (5%) or mostly (10%) be written by people.

Worship Songs are (a) God-provided and desired by God
or (b) People-created and offered to God

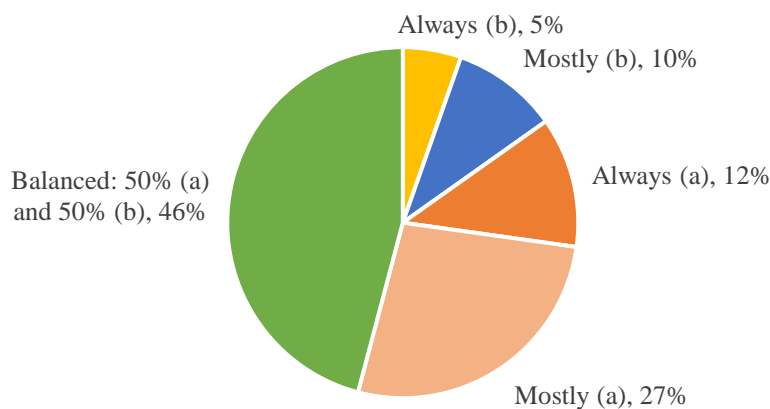


Figure 16. Are Worship Songs God's or People's

The fourth question was about the future of the churches, questioning if the next generation of Canadian Reformed Churches should continue to sing psalms. Most respondents (92%) indicated, "Definitely yes." Figure 17 shows that some people (5%) were indifferent, and others (3%) did not want the next generation to sing psalms.

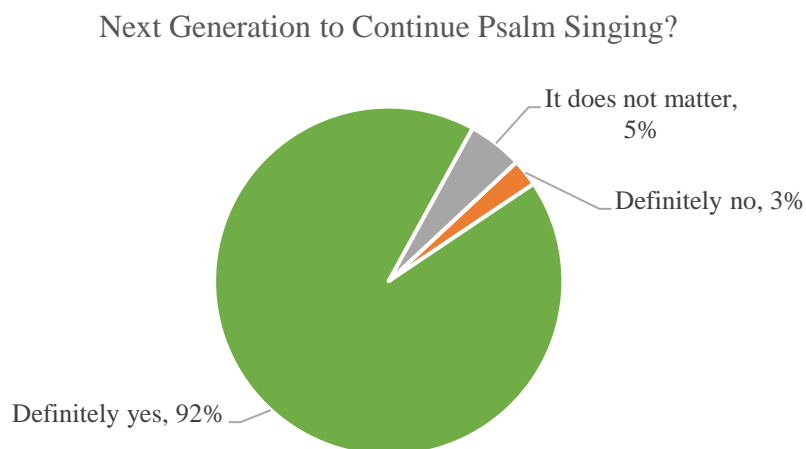


Figure 17. Should the Next Generation Continue to Sing Psalms?

The last question asked respondents' reaction to the statement, "Our songs may not always reflect Scripture accurately, but when sung with a pure and humble heart, God can use imperfect songs to bring glory to his name."

Figure 18 shows that the respondents were divided over the four options. Some respondents completely disagreed (22%) or partly disagreed (17%) with this statement. The other respondents ultimately agreed (31%) or partially agreed (30%).

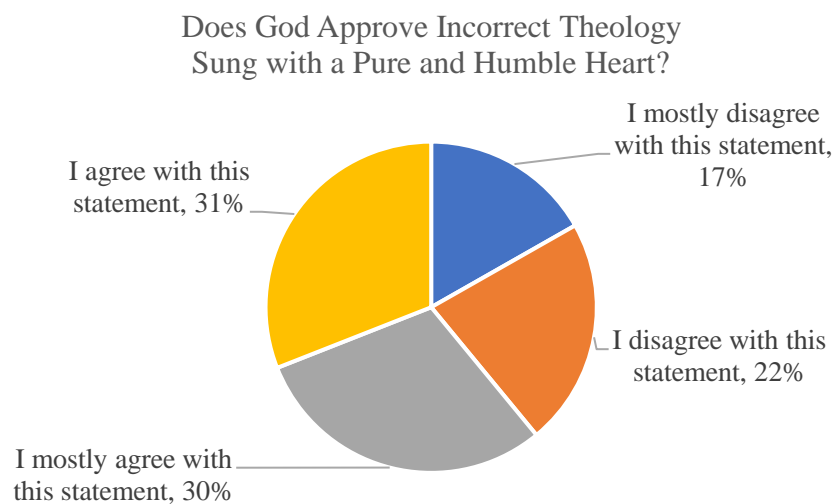


Figure 18. Does God Approve Incorrect Theology Sung with Humble Hearts?

Of the opinion questions, this question displayed the largest division, with 37% of the respondents disagreeing and 61% agreeing with this statement.

Summary

This qualitative research study examined the Canadian Reformed members' opinions about Psalm Singing in worship. The first question could be considered a knowledge question that could be answered without a personal application to worship. In contrast, the subsequent questions became more specific to the practice of Psalm Singing.

There were different reasons as to why the Canadian Reformed Churches sing psalms in corporate worship. Most responses were compatible, relating to God, Scripture, worship, the congregation, the church, and previous and future generations. Still, some comments expressed fundamentally different views: factors of tradition, old-fashioned tradition, fear of change, or security of holding on to the past. Most participants recognized the value in the Canadian Reformed Churches' tradition of singing psalms, while a few respondents did not see any value. The thoughts expressed by the people recognizing a value and those that do not were contradictory.

The responses to the third question indicated a more significant separation. The question focused on the present culture and clarified the singing of whole psalms rather than a fraction of a psalm. Responses indicated two opposing sides. While one argument claimed the psalms to be God's Word, teaching people how to respond to culture, the counterargument stated that the psalms are outdated, irrelevant, and inappropriate in today's culture. The arguments and language of respondents recognizing the value of singing all psalms in today's culture continued to refer to God, Scripture, and the congregation. In contrast, the arguments that see no value were primarily opinions and statements.

Participants were asked their opinion about the article in the Church Order in which their church agreed only to sing vetted songs in worship. The responses indicated strong, opposing views. While people in favor pointed out that a church federation implies unity and alignment of sung theology with Scripture is crucial, people against this agreement stated that local churches should decide, adding their desire to sing songs of their own choice and the perception of tradition, fear, and control among those disagreeing with them. While the favorable responses

shared benefits for all churches and members of the churches, the opposing responses shared personal opinions, which indicated foundational differences in respondent's perspectives.

What happens in corporate worship in the Canadian Reformed Churches is based on the Regulative Principle of Worship described in the Scripture and summarized in the Confessions. The people in agreement acknowledged the holiness of God, the sinfulness of people, and the subsequent need for God to define how he wants to be worshipped. However, almost one-third of respondents disagreed with the Regulative Principle of Worship, stating that Scripture does not address worship in the New Testament and expressed the need for freedom in corporate worship and the aversion to restrictions.

The next question asked about the purpose of Psalm Singing. Most responses pointed to glorifying God, unifying the congregation, and encouraging one another. Few responses were critical of the purpose of Psalm Singing, mentioning satisfying tradition, fear, legalism, or nothing. The overwhelming majority of the reactions identified a positive purpose of singing psalms.

The next question addressed a practice in the Canadian Reformed Churches to sing fragments of psalms rather than psalms. For example, Psalm 1 has three stanzas; omitting the third stanza means excluding the verses about wickedness and judgment. When singing only the last stanza of Psalm 130 about the hope in the Lord, the reason for the hope, from the depths through redemption, is left out. Most of the responses favoring stanza singing were practical: the length of the worship service or becoming tired of singing. However, some comments stated that contemporary songs and hymns are often sung entirely regardless of their length, indicating that selective singing of stanzas is specific to the psalms. Other responses explained that isolating a stanza could have a different application than the psalm's context, and some respondents were

concerned with the depressing context of some stanzas. On the other hand, the context of the psalms was the most important reason for the people in favor of singing the psalms entirely. These responses also pointed out that Scripture is read in its context and that skipping stanzas means skipping part of the gospel. In contrast, some people who favor singing individual stanzas argued that Scripture passages are usually also read out of context in worship services. Some respondents favored singing whole psalms to include positive stanzas, while others favored singing stanzas to exclude negative stanzas. This indicates that these respondents evaluated the psalms by separating the praise or lament parts.

Most respondents (75%) used the opportunity to leave additional comments or thoughts. It included copies of email conversations, bullet points, and, in some cases, several paragraphs, and the responses showed the importance of this topic for the respondents. The responses revealed a strong contrast between respondents' opinions. Most opposing views were mutually exclusive. Some respondents made comments related to their knowledge of different opinions, "I do believe that this will never be resolved. I doubt our church will ever have satisfaction in a decision about how we use psalms and other songs in worship,"³¹⁹ and "The psalms are Biblical words. However, in the Canadian Reformed Federation, there is a growing divide (schism?) about what we can and should sing."³²⁰ The last opinion question also shared congregants' different opinions, suggesting that songs that do not accurately reflect scripture would be acceptable to God when sung with the right intentions.

The responses indicated different opinions on singing psalms in worship, including opposing opinions. Some comments included Scriptural references or references to the

³¹⁹ Respondent ID: R_1MloaetupéhGOKZ

³²⁰ Respondent ID: R_1ElXyzsAAYw6k6r

Confessions or the Church Order, while others were statements and personal opinions. Some comments shared passion, concern, and appreciation for the Canadian Reformed Churches as psalm-singing churches, while others expressed misunderstanding, disrespect, and unbelief. Although some respondents seemed to desire a complete overhaul of the singing tradition in the Canadian Reformed Churches, most people shared a desire to treasure what the churches have presently. One respondent explained, “There is benefit in singing the psalms to memorize the Bible and draw comfort from their words. There is a value in tradition and being grateful for our church upbringing. There is a blessing in singing psalms rooted in years and years of history.”³²¹

³²¹ Respondent ID: R_3xPCg1TXwdx9ZHk

Chapter Five: Discussion

Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to understand better the opinion of the Canadian Reformed congregants about the singing of psalms in corporate worship. From the start, the Canadian Reformed Churches prioritized Psalm Singing as a distinctive feature of Reformed worship. However, in the past two and a half decades, some churches requested changes to their singing practice.

This survey provided a comprehensive understanding of the thoughts, motivations, and concerns of Canadian Reformed Church members. The survey participants represented all churches in the classes Pacific East and Pacific West. These churches, with their diverse characteristics such as size, location, and focus, are a microcosm of the Canadian Reformed Church federation. The responses to the research questions, therefore, provided a broad and reliable insight into the congregants' thoughts about Psalm Singing in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Chapter Four reflected the respondents' thoughts based on survey questions. This chapter discusses the survey findings, summarizing the congregants' views, the limitations of this study, recommendations for further research, and the implications for practice.

This research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What do 21st-century Canadian Reformed congregants in British Columbia understand about Psalm Singing?

Research Question 2: What factors influence 21st-century Canadian Reformed congregants' perspectives on song selection?

Summary of Findings

General Observations

The surveyed congregants' understanding of Psalm Singing is diverse and intriguing. While most respondents agree on the reason for singing psalms in worship, as the psalms are the Word of God, they hold different views about the value of Psalm Singing in today's culture. Some assert that the psalms teach people to respond to culture, while others argue that the psalms are irrelevant and not understood in today's culture. This diversity of perspectives is also evident in the views on the principle of worship, with some agreeing and others disagreeing with the church's confession regarding the Regulative Principle of Worship. This disagreement is further confirmed by the opinion among some that worship songs do not have to be based on Scripture and that singing songs that do not reflect God's Word accurately is acceptable. Notably, one-quarter of the respondents disagree with the churches collectively regulating the songs in worship.

Most congregants are like-minded regarding the conceptual aspects of the purpose and value of singing the psalms in worship. They share the same priority of Psalm Singing in worship as the first-generation Canadian Reformed Churches and agree with their church's confession about who determines the elements in corporate worship. However, some opinions differ about the practice of Psalm Singing in worship, the selection of songs in worship, and what or who determines corporate worship.

Most people who value Psalm Singing in corporate worship express God's Word as the source, the purpose, and the command to sing psalms to the praise and glory of God. The words are directed to God in song, while the act of singing psalms unifies the people. Although these respondents focus on directing Psalm Singing to God, they do not explicitly mention spiritual

formation as a reason for singing psalms, as the church fathers and Reformers assert. Some respondents who do not value Psalm Singing in worship focus on the purpose of Psalm Singing from their perspective, without references to Scripture.

The second research question deals with other factors influencing congregants' views on song selection in worship. The results show that the tunes of the psalms are one of the two primary factors. The congregants' opinions about the tunes are vehemently opposed. Adjectives include *terrible*, *outdated*, *difficult*, versus *familiar*, *beloved*, and *precious*. Suggested solutions to resolve issues include replacing the tunes, adopting other churches' hymnals, singing unfamiliar tunes more frequently, explaining song choices in worship, and better accompaniment. The accompaniment is the second factor that plays a significant role for congregants in worship. Most respondents mentioning the accompaniment as negative or critical also share a negative experience in worship or singing. These responses identify the skills of the accompanist as the root cause, evident in leading singing too slowly, too high a volume of accompaniment, absence of dynamics, monotone accompaniment, insensitive of lyrics, or an overall inability to lead the singing. Many of the comments about accompaniment include comments about the tunes, suggesting that there might be a relationship between the congregants' opinions about the tunes and the skills of the accompanist.

Research Findings

This research shows understanding and knowledge among respondents in their references to Scripture, including the psalms, the Confessions, Canadian Reformed writings, church history, and local practices to support the singing of the Psalms in worship. Most congregants understand why the church sings the psalms and the value of singing the psalms in corporate worship. Most congregants agree that Psalm Singing is part of the Canadian Reformed Church identity and

culture, “We are a Psalm Singing church.”¹ Most respondents agree that Psalm Singing signifies “who we are.” Respondents recognize the relationship between the church’s doctrine and the doctrine in the songs. They agree with Bruce Waltke’s assertion that the psalms are a resource for doctrine and truthful praise among the views favoring Psalm Singing, which considered Scripture the source for the songs to glorify and praise God.² The respondents accept the psalms as part of God’s Word, and singing the lyrics of the psalms focuses on God in worship. This view supports Ligon Duncan’s statement about God as the object of worship.³ Most respondents agree that the psalms teach who God is. In corporate worship, the singing of God’s Word in the psalms has an edifying effect. This view aligns with Keith and Krystin Getty’s view that the psalms are a source of God’s knowledge.⁴ The responses share the reality that psalms may not be the preferred songs of worshippers, and some songs may be challenging. Most congregants find that singing God’s words back to him is necessary as people are sinful and unable to please God by nature. These views on the purpose of singing psalms align with H.B. Charles,⁵ A.W. Tozer,⁶ R.C. Sproul,⁷ and Wes Bredenhof⁸—to please God.

¹ Respondent ID: R_3dddXiTWpDCGeTJ

² Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 37.

³ Ligon Duncan, *Does God Care How We Worship?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2020), 29.

⁴ Keith and Krystin Getty, *Sing!: How Worship Transforms Your Life, Family, And Church* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2017), 45.

⁵ H.B. Charles Jr., *On Worship: A Short Guide to Understanding, Participating In, and Leading Corporate Worship* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 17.

⁶ A.W. Tozer, *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship* ed. James Snyder (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009), 53.

⁷ R.C. Sproul, *How Then Shall We Worship? Biblical Principles to Guide Us Today* (Colorado Springs CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 15.

⁸ Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please. A Guide to Reformed Worship* (Carman MB: The Study, 2020), 38-39.

The findings indicate a dominating opinion that the churches sing the psalms to sing praise, indicating that the psalms are songs of praise. Asserting that most Christians today consider the psalms primarily to be songs of praise, Scott Aniol points out that most psalms do not have a praise character.⁹ However, because most respondents prefer singing select stanzas of the psalms, their allusion to psalms as songs of praise may refer to stanzas rather than psalms. Some respondents also share that psalms are *irrelevant, not understood, depressing, too rich in content, too long, and do not resonate with church people*, solidifying Richard Wells and Ray van Neste's allegations why people do not sing psalms anymore, as "Psalms are irrelevant for today, not to their taste, too difficult, too long, too complicated or too old."¹⁰ The respondents confirm Robert Godfrey's concerns that the psalms are complex and "many Christians fail to study and use the psalms in our time. Our hearts and minds are not saturated with the psalms as the hearts and minds of earlier generations of Christians were."¹¹ People do not understand the psalms anymore and do not want to sing what they do not understand. Respondents follow a similar reasoning, as Gordon Wenham explains, discussing the changes resulting from the Enlightenment, "If you cannot understand it, you cannot accept it."¹² Some respondents conclude that the psalms are not useful because people do not understand them. Michael Lefebvre points out that not understanding the psalms does not mean they are not useful, but it means the

⁹ Scott Aniol, *Musing on God's Music, Forming Hearts of Praise with the Psalms* (Douglasville, GA: G3 Press, 2023), 6.

¹⁰ C. Richards Wells and Ray Van Neste, *Forgotten Songs* (Nashville TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 77–78.

¹¹ W. Robert Godfrey, *Learning to Love the Psalms* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2017), 13.

¹² Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed, Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 86.

“desperate need” for the churches to relearn them.¹³ Some respondents comment on violence, aggression, metaphors, and shadows in the psalms as songs of the Old Covenant. These comments reflect Isaac Watts’s sentiment, “Some of the psalms are almost opposite to the spirit of the gospel; many of them are foreign to the state of the New Testament and widely different from the present state of Christians. Thus, by keeping too close to David, the veil of Moses is thrown over our hearts.”¹⁴ Martin Luther has a different perspective on the psalms: “The Psalter ought to be a dear and beloved book, if only because it promises Christ’s death and resurrection so clearly, and so typifies His kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom.”¹⁵ John Endres refers to Luke 24:44–45 (ESV) when he explains that early Christians saw that the psalms proclaimed who Jesus was, as Jesus himself testified.¹⁶

The research shows different opinions and views on pleasing God in worship. Respondents were given this description of the Regulative Principle of Worship: “Scripture regulates what is permissible in corporate worship,” aligning with the Reformed Confessions, James M. Boice,¹⁷ A.W. Tozer,¹⁸ Wes Bredenhof,¹⁹ and Gerard van Rongen.²⁰ The collective

¹³ Michael Lefebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Glasgow: Bell & Bain, 2010), 150.

¹⁴ Isaac Watts, *The Works of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D. in Nine Volumes*, Vol. XI (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1813), 127.

¹⁵ Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company and The Castle Press, 1932), 385.

¹⁶ John C. Endres and Elizabeth Liebert, *A Retreat with the Psalms: Resources for Personal and Communal Prayer* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2001), 217.

¹⁷ James Montgomery Boice, Lane T. Dennis, and Eric J. Alexander, *Whatever Happened to The Gospel of Grace? Rediscovering the Doctrines That Shook the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 188.

¹⁸ A.W. Tozer, *The Purpose of Man: Designed to Worship*, ed. James Snyder (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2009), 53.

¹⁹ Wes Bredenhof, *Aiming to Please. A Guide to Reformed Worship* (Carman MB: The Study, 2020), 39.

²⁰ Gerard van Rongen, *Zijn Schone Dienst: Studies Over De Gereformeerde Liturgie* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1956), 28.

agreement about what to sing in corporate worship results in most responses expressing concurrence, mentioning the unity of the church federation, and keeping the theology in the songs aligned with Scripture. The respondents often connect the unifying aspect of Psalm Singing to the local church and the church federation. Some respondents mention the element of unity with the church of all times. Only one respondent highlighted that singing the psalms unites with the church in heaven and with the church's Head, Jesus Christ.²¹ Yet, this is a crucial aspect of Psalm Singing for the church, which Johannes C. Sikkel describes as, “De Psalmen zijn *haar Psalmen* in de mensenwereld, in the gemeenschap met haar Hoofd Jesus Christus [The Psalms are *her Psalms* in the world, in communion with her Head, Jesus Christ].”²² A few comments mention the unity in singing psalms with Christians around the world, however, unity with persecuted Christians is not mentioned. Michael Lefebvre points out that especially imprecatory psalms could apply to circumstances of persecution.²³ This could explain why several respondents are negative about imprecatory psalms, and some refuse to sing them.

More than one-third of the respondents do not agree that God in his Word determines how to conduct worship. Because these congregants effectively disagree with the church's confessions, understanding their views is important. These responses show a different understanding of Scripture as they assert that Scripture is silent about worship, contrasting with Scripture itself. In John 4:24, Jesus says that worshipers must worship in spirit and truth. Derek Thomas refers to several passages in the Old and New Testament, specifically to 1 Corinthians,

²¹ Respondent ID: R_3wQNCcgElxKiKT8

²² Johannes Cornelis Sikkel, *De Heilige Schrift En Haar Verklaring, Inleiding Tot de Verklaring Der Heilige Schrift Als Het Woord Gods* (Amsterdam: J.W.A. van Schaik, 1906), 37.

²³ Michael Lefebvre, *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Glasgow: Bell & Bain, 2010), 131.

where Paul explicitly addresses practices in worship.²⁴ Some respondents also express their desire to shape worship themselves, wanting freedom and disliking restrictions and regulations, as well as rules found in Scripture. The desire for autonomy comes back in the question about the Church Order, where the churches have agreed collectively on which songs they want to sing in corporate worship. The responses communicate a desire to end the agreement, partly because people desire to sing songs of their own choice. These respondents believe that *fear, power, and traditionalism* motivate this collective arrangement. Narrowing in on the purpose of Psalm Singing, respondents express similar thoughts: *to satisfy fear, legalism, and tradition*. Responses share a disagreement with the Regulative Principle of Worship suggesting Scripture does not apply to today's culture. The respondents assert that Scripture does not apply to culture on the topic of worship. Furthermore, these respondents state that today's culture requires more freedom in worship, referencing the culture's influence on worship. Some participants consider the psalms disconnected from today's culture, asserting that the psalms are *irrelevant, obsolete, or not beneficial anymore*. These views are what Michael Walters describes as the "autonomous nature of modern and postmodern culture, in which the individual is supreme," when worship is defined as "whatever works for me."²⁵ John Davis raises awareness of the thread modernity and post-modernity pose "to the integrity and depth of the Christian experience of worship."²⁶ He suggests, "True worship only begins when one surrenders his or her autonomy and control."²⁷

²⁴ Derek W.H. Thomas, *Let Us Worship God: Why We Worship the Way We Do* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2021), 36–37.

²⁵ J. Michael Walters, *Can't Wait for Sunday* (Fishers, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006), 53.

²⁶ John J. Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God, An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

The congregants' responses display their desire to take control and exercise autonomy as the local church.

In this context, some respondents indicate that people's lack of understanding of the psalms makes them unsuitable for today's worship. Robert Godfrey points out, "Christ is everywhere in the Psalter. Those who do not see Him there do not understand either the Psalter or the Scriptures as a whole."²⁸ J.I. Packer concludes that the lack of knowledge of Christians today is one reason why worship has become so flabby.²⁹ This research cannot identify whether people consider the psalms irrelevant to today's culture because of this lack of understanding of the psalms.

Another survey question indirectly touches on people's understanding of the psalms by asking if they prefer the singing of psalms or stanzas of psalms. More than half of the respondents agree with singing stanzas instead of the whole psalm. Most of the arguments are practical concerns, such as too much singing is *tiring, boring, impractical*, or the worship service would be *too long*. Respondents favoring singing psalms use arguments relating to the message of the psalms, and point out that the context is necessary, and, as the psalms are part of Scripture, not singing an entire psalm is not singing part of Scripture. This study cannot assess if the lack of understanding of the psalms results from singing select stanzas and being exposed to the message of a stanza rather than singing a psalm and being exposed to the entire message of the psalm.

The outcome of this study indicates that the principle of singing psalms in worship is accepted based on Scriptural principles and traditions, and most respondents value singing psalms in corporate worship. The desire to please God by singing his Word back to him aligns

²⁸ W. Robert Godfrey, *Learning to Love the Psalms* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2017), 256.

²⁹ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 83.

with the intent of the first generation to establish psalm-singing churches and their efforts to create a songbook that includes all 150 Psalms. Most respondents approve of a collective approval of songs for worship. Almost all respondents want future generations to continue Psalm Singing in corporate worship. However, some respondents consider Psalm Singing contentious in today's culture. A minority of the respondents do not like, for example, the lyrics of the psalms, the tunes, and does not agree with the vetting of songs for worship, and worship guided only by Scripture.

Limitations

This research was conducted among congregants of the Canadian Reformed classes Pacific East and Pacific West, which is a limitation. A replication of this study in the province of Ontario, where most Canadian Reformed Churches are located, could give a more accurate view of the federation. Of the sixteen churches, the two with the lowest responses could have been approached before the survey closed, which may have better balanced the overall response rate per church.

The responses showed a smaller percentage of older participants. As the online format of the survey could be a factor, personal interviews or focus groups could address this concern, as the participants would not be using technology.

Another limitation is the formulation of the questions. Some respondents placed the questions in a personal context, which resulted in interpretations that did not always respond to the question. In some cases, the respondent added to the question, changing the intention of the question, rather than taking the question at face value. Background information about what the researcher intended could have helped the respondents to shorten their reactions.

No research of this kind has been done before, and the results of this study cannot be compared with previous results. Therefore, it is not possible to identify the development of congregants' views over time.

A reasonable assumption is that most respondents knew the researcher personally, through his role as a church musician or through social media. This may have impacted the responses. The researcher is a church musician within the Reformed churches and exposed to other church liturgical practices. His perspective may have influenced the analysis of the responses.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study was the first of its kind in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Because it only included the Western part of Canada, a replication of this study in another part of Canada or among all churches may give a better perspective of all congregants. Based on this study's findings, effective quantitative research could be considered.

This study shows that musical accompaniment affects the worship experience, possibly influencing the congregants' opinions about tunes. There may be another relationship between accompaniment skills and singing more or fewer stanzas. Subsequently, singing a few stanzas instead of a whole psalm or a more significant portion of a psalm may influence the congregants' understanding of the meaning of the psalms. It would be of value to know if these relationships exist and how strong they are. If the churches collectively change their songs and singing practices without understanding the root cause of the concerns leading to the changes, it may cause negative consequences.

Canadian Reformed Churches have less than 600 members per church, spread over almost 3,000 miles, some in remote areas, facing unique and specific challenges regarding

musical education and development. The Canadian Reformed Churches do not have a training program for accompanists, and the churches provide no formal musical support to each other within the federation. A comparative study regarding the accompaniment, skills, education, training, and the impact of accompaniment in corporate worship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and, for example, Presbyterian Churches that make use of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians could give insight if the Canadian Reformed Church could benefit from an official organization supporting the church musicians.

Further study could give insight into congregants' and church leaders' knowledge and understanding of what Scripture and the Reformed Confessions teach about worship. Such research is relevant because the survey results showed opinions that conflict with Scripture and confessions.

Authors of the Canadian Reformed tradition contend primarily to sing psalms based on historical reasons, scriptural precedents, and tradition. Because the psalms are a part of Scripture, the reasons for Psalm Singing should also emphasize the spiritual formation of the congregants. Further research could study what the Church Fathers and Reformers said about the formative role and purpose of the psalms and the correlation between the impact of Scripture reading and the impact of Psalm Singing in corporate worship. Such research could also include the singing of other Scripture parts through the Canticles.

Implications for Practice

The implications of this research are relevant for pastors in charge of the worship service, church leaders, accompanists, and congregants.

Pastors

The views of the Canadian Reformed congregants on Psalm Singing relate to the pastors as their song selection affects the worship experience of their flock. Pulpits may have the inscription on the speaker's side, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12:21), which is realized through Scripture reading, preaching, and singing (Colossians 3:16). Most congregants appreciate the singing of psalms in corporate worship. Congregants realize they sing God's words in the psalms in unity with each other and the church of all times. Psalms are relevant to most respondents, although they realize the lyrics may not always be easy to understand. Some congregants shared that the context of Psalm Singing is irrelevant because the pastor's reading of God's Word does not reflect its context either. Although congregants appreciate Psalm Singing and consider Psalm Singing primarily to bring praise and glory to God, they do not understand the purpose of lament and imprecatory psalms or parts of the psalms. Congregants do not always understand why a song was chosen, as pastors rarely explain the reason for the song selection.³⁰ A respondent shares that they do not know why they sing what they sing; however, "the ministers, I am sure, put a lot of thought into which verses they choose."³¹

Pastors may affect the congregation more through the song selections by selecting entire psalms or larger sections of psalms and approaching singing and Scripture reading contextually. Spiritual formation occurs also in singing, and pastors can balance this formation by singing whole psalms or larger selections of the psalms, including the lament and imprecatory psalms, as the Reformed custom was until the 20th century.³² The congregants appreciate the singing of

³⁰ Participant ID: R_4Hq6Uhm5Uz0DhE, R_52IEm1vCpXlEqFX, R_3V3AxwvMa5c6hEt,

³¹ Respondent ID: R_7n6fTe4R6ERNNcd

³² C. van der Waal, *En Zij Zingen Een Nieuw Lied, Over Psalmen en Gezangen* (Oudkarspel: Drukkerij De Nijverheid, 1978), 17–20.

psalms, but pastors do well in explaining why they selected the songs so that people sing with understanding: when they sing with their heart and mind, singing in worship cannot be a formality. Godfrey says it in this way, “As the church together comes to appreciate the Psalter and is led more deeply into it by their leaders, Christians will grow together in wisdom and devotion.”³³

Church leaders

Church leaders in the Canadian Reformed Churches are responsible for the worship service, which includes singing and accompaniment. Most respondents understand the purpose of singing psalms in worship and want to continue this practice. Most respondents concur with the agreement that the churches collectively select the songs for corporate worship. Most respondents agree that the psalms are relevant in today’s culture. However, this research also shows a divided flock regarding the understanding of the value of singing psalms in worship, the relevance of singing psalms, who calls the shots in worship, and the acceptance of sung theological inaccuracies in worship. The views prioritizing what the worshipers need and want may not be widespread, but these opinions are in strong contrast with the Scriptural and historical perspectives. As music and worship are local responsibilities, the elders may want to share relevant Scriptural knowledge and engage in a dialogue with their members proactively.

Subsequently, church leaders are also responsible for the musical accompaniment in worship and how musicians carry out their duties. Congregants are generally satisfied with the type of accompaniment. However, this research shows concerns regarding the musician’s skill level, as it impacts the worshippers in singing, their views on Psalm Singing, and their

³³ W. Robert Godfrey, *Learning to Love the Psalms* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2017), 256.

participation in worship. Elders may not have the musical expertise to assess their local environment, but they can define their vision for musical accompaniment in their congregation. Church leaders could collaborate with other churches to find solutions and access resources inside and outside the Canadian Reformed Churches. One respondent remarks that an accompanist can make or break corporate worship,³⁴ which indicates the importance of music in worship. As Luther says in his preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae iucundae*, "We can mention only one point (which experience confirms), namely, that next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise."³⁵ Frederik Mull points to a more critical reason, referring to the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12, that the congregants exercise their office of all believers through singing in corporate worship.³⁶

Accompanists

Respondents communicate that the accompaniment of their singing is vital to their participation in worship. Most congregants appreciate Psalm Singing in worship. Some respondents shared unfamiliarity with some tunes. Accompanists can highlight the psalms and unfamiliar tunes in their pre-service playing during the offertory. The accompaniment may affect the position of worshipers' hearts in singing, understanding of the lyrics, their appreciation for the tunes, and their overall experience of worship. Some respondents experience the accompaniment of the singing as encouraging and lifting up the singing, but most comments share concerns about the musical accompaniment. Congregants expressed specific issues, such as

³⁴ Participant ID: R_6psxE4RqLtLDvYO

³⁵ Ulrich S. Leupold, *Luther's Works, Vol. 53, Liturgy and Hymns* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1965), 323.

³⁶ Frederik Mul, *Van Synagoge to Nieuwtestamentische Eredienst* (Enschede: J. Boersma: 1979), 74–82.

slow singing, high volume of instruments compared to the volume of the singers, dullness in accompaniment, and accompaniment without sensitivity to the lyrics. Musicians might benefit from listening to their accompaniment, as most churches share recordings of worship services online. They can benefit from comparing their accompaniment with the accompaniment of other musicians in other churches. Musicians have the option to use existing resources outside the Canadian Reformed Churches. Several organizations share practical resources about congregational accompaniment for organ and piano, such as the Royal Canadian College of Organists, the American Guild of Organists, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, and the Presbyterian Association of Musicians. In local settings, church musicians can regularly meet and learn from each other. If musicians have educational needs, lack resources, or have concerns about their instruments, they could proactively bring this up with their church leaders.

Congregants

This study shows congregants share different opinions about, for example, the value of Psalm Singing in corporate worship, the relevancy of Psalm Singing in the 21st century, the criteria for songs in worship, and the criteria for what is acceptable in worship. Respondents share different views on how the church federation functions, the church's history, and future direction. Some views are based on personal opinions. For these reasons, a dialogue between congregants and church leaders may be helpful in determining a position and direction regarding worship and singing in worship. Congregants may also benefit from a reorientation on worship, singing, and music in worship based on Scripture and the Confessions. Reformed resources, such as books and magazines such as *Clarion*, may help in this process. The results of this survey indicated that online communication could not provide context or feedback in a dynamic interaction as face-to-face communication.

Concluding Remarks

Congregants generally agree about the purpose of singing psalms and the coherence of views with the identity and culture of the Canadian Reformed Churches as psalm-singing churches. Most respondents understand Scriptural reasons for Psalm Singing, the value of Psalm Singing in the 21st century, and the need to agree on which songs may be sung in worship collectively. Most congregants experience unity within the church federation in doctrine, worship, and singing. This survey also shows different opinions regarding the relevance of Psalm Singing, what Scripture says about worship, what is acceptable in worship, the Church Order, and the law and governance within the Canadian Reformed Churches. Although a minority, these views show a strong, seemingly unchangeable opinion based on views and personal experiences.

Various respondents lament a growing division among congregants and churches in the federation. Psalm Singing has been a priority of all churches in common from the start, and, as Kent Dykstra comments, the psalms are part of the Canadian Reformed identity and culture.³⁷ The differences among congregants expressed in the survey show that not all members share this identity anymore, suggesting the Canadian Reformed Churches could be heading in a direction that Matthew Nuiver describes as “having lost a sense of who we are.”³⁸ Frank Page and Lavon Grey affirm that songs and worship are part of a church’s identity, stating that diversity is a good thing.³⁹ They state that churches must determine who they are. The statement, “If it works for someone else, it should work for us,” sells the church short of God’s calling and presents

³⁷ Kent Dykstra, “The Book of Praise: A Music Textbook?” *Clarion* 61, no. 13: 342–4.

³⁸ Matthew Nuiver, “The Psalter Hymnals Through the Years,” *The Outlook* 55 no. 2, (2005): 12.

³⁹ Frank S. Page and L. Lavon Gray, *Hungry for Worship, Challenges and Solutions in Today’s Church* (Birmingham: New Hope Publishers, 2014), 47.

obstacles to unifying the church.”⁴⁰ Participants who desire churches’ autonomy in song selection advocate for the current freedom in the GKv in the Netherlands, where the Psalm Singing has diminished.⁴¹ Respondents share that some churches “do their own thing”⁴² in worship and song selection already, a development comparable to the Christian Reformed churches, which Bert Polman describes as “everyone does what is right in their own eyes” without a sense of denominational identity, liturgical awareness, or biblical worship principles.⁴³ This echoed the GKv Synod’s concerns, as their churches made their own decisions regardless of what they collectively agreed upon as a federation.⁴⁴ The respondents’ descriptions assimilate Harry van Wijk’s portrayal of the preceding gradual development in the GKv,⁴⁵ resulting in losing Psalm Singing in worship. The survey respondents’ opinions confirm Jack Moesker’s observation that the Canadian Reformed Churches display similar characteristics as the GKv.⁴⁶ Congregants’ disagreement with the confessions, asserting Scripture does not give any direction regarding worship today, and considering the psalms as part of God’s Word obsolete seems to support Arjan de Visser’s concern about a membership that is not theologically Reformed and is vulnerable to other influences.⁴⁷ Respondents state that unity is an important aspect of Psalm

⁴⁰ Frank S. Page and L. Lavon Gray, *Hungry for Worship, Challenges and Solutions in Today’s Church* (Birmingham: New Hope Publishers, 2014), 47-48.

⁴¹ Joost Smith, “Verloren generatie,” *OnderWeg* 9, no. 10: 2.

⁴² Participant ID: R_6aJnXhWRgMwBg0r, R_3CjeaJQxEof0Yjk

⁴³ Emily R. Brink and Bert Polman, *Psalter Hymnal Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: CRC Publications, 1998), 119.

⁴⁴ *Acta Generale Synode Ede 2014–2015*, 74,
<http://kerkrecht.nl/sites/default/files/Acta%20GS%20Ede%202014-2015.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Freddy Gerkema, “Harry van Wijk Over Breed En Diep In Kerklied En Muziek,” *OnderWeg* 3, no. 1.

⁴⁶ Jack Moesker, “What Led to the Changes in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKv)?” *Clarion* 68 no. 13: 380.

⁴⁷ Arjan de Visser, “Impressions from a Visit to the Dutch Churches (GKv),” *Clarion* 68, no. 15, 431.

Singing. Other respondents advocate for diversity and autonomy instead, pointing negatively to the characteristics of uniformity in a church federation. It is unclear what the motives are of some congregants who are part of the church federation but do not accept its identity and culture expressed in Psalm Singing and aspects of the Confessions and church order. This could also be a topic for further research.

Summary

From the start, the Canadian Reformed Churches collectively prioritized Psalm Singing, which shaped their identity and culture. The churches' continuation of a tradition of millennia of Psalm Singing distinguishes them in North America. However, in the past few decades, churches have requested changes concerning songs in worship. In 2025, the Canadian Reformed Churches will commemorate their 75th anniversary. Around their 75th anniversary, the Christian Reformed churches and the GKv made changes that eventually removed Psalm Singing from their corporate worship.

This research assessed the congregants' views on Psalm Singing in the 21st century, including questions about the church's principles of worship and their agreement on collectively vetting the songs for corporate worship. Most congregants favor singing psalms in corporate worship and generally understand the purpose and value of singing psalms. Most congregants like to understand the psalms and why they were selected in worship, while some suggest singing the psalms more completely to increase understanding. The collectively agreed selection of songs is acceptable to most people, and the collaborative process regarding the songs is acceptable. Some congregants have concerns about the relevance of singing psalms in corporate worship, the authority of Scripture in determining the elements of worship, the functioning of the church federations, and the cultural applicability of Psalm Singing. Some congregants desire the

independence of churches from each other in song selection and worship and freedom from the liturgical uniformity that defines the church federation. Although other factors influencing the opinions on Psalm Singing include the attitudes toward the tunes, which intersect with concerns about the accompaniment, the overall opinion about Psalm Singing is the desire to continue singing psalms to glorify God, to please him, to understand him, and to edify one another.

Psalm Singing means singing the songs of Jesus. It also means singing with him as he sings God's praise amid the congregation (Hebrews 2:12). The lyrics are God's Word and sweeter than honey (Psalm 119:103) as God's people recognize the voice of Jesus, just as sheep recognize the voice of their Shepherd (John 10:27).

Jesus shared with the Samaritan women at the well that worship must be done *in spirit and truth* (John 4:24). God has no pleasure in Canadian Reformed Churches singing the psalms purely upholding a tradition: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me" (Matthew 15:8). Psalm Singing in worship requires people's heart, soul and mind, regardless of the circumstances. May the hearts of worshipers confess and acknowledge with David that "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" (Psalm 51:17) and join David in thanksgiving and praise, "I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever" (Psalm 86:11).

Appendix A: IRB Exemption Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 8, 2023

Frank Ezinga
Hanna Byrd

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-672 Psalm Singing in the Canadian Reformed Churches

Dear Frank Ezinga, Hanna Byrd,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Q1.1 Of which Canadian or American Reformed Church are you a member?

- ☐ Abbotsford CanRC
- ☐ Abbotsford Pathway Christian
- ☐ Aldergrove CanRC
- ☐ Chilliwack CanRC
- ☐ Cloverdale CanRC
- ☐ Houston CanRC
- ☐ Langley CanRC
- ☐ Langley Refuge Church
- ☐ Langley Willoughby Heights CanRC
- ☐ Lynden ARC
- ☐ Nooksack Valley ARC
- ☐ Sardis CanRC
- ☐ Smithers CanRC
- ☐ Surrey Maranatha CanRC
- ☐ Vernon CanRC
- ☐ Yarrow CanRC
- ☐ Other _____

Q1.2 What is your age bracket?

- ☐ 18-28
- ☐ 29-43
- ☐ 44-58
- ☐ 59-77
- ☐ 78+

Q1.3 Are you a Canadian Reformed Church Office Bearer or have you been an Office Bearer in the past 3 years?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

Q1.4 Are you involved in accompanying the congregational singing on Sunday as a musician?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes

Q2.1 Why do you think we sing Psalms in corporate worship?

Q2.2 What value, if any, can be found in our church's practice of Psalm Singing? Please explain.

Q2.3 Do you think that singing all Psalms in corporate worship is a valuable practice in today's culture? Why or why not?

Q2.4 Our General Synod approves the songs to be sung in the worship services. What do you think about this practice?

Q2.5 Regulative Principle of Worship = Scripture regulates what is permissible in corporate worship. Normative Principle of Worship = what Scripture does not forbid is permissible in corporate worship. Which Principle do you agree with and why?

Q2.6 What do you think is the purpose / goal of singing Psalms in worship?

Q2.7 What do you think about singing only a few stanzas versus singing the whole Psalm in the worship service?

Q2.8 Anything else you like to share about Psalm Singing in corporate worship.

Q3.1 Do you think the Old Testament Psalms are still applicable in the 21st Century?

- ☐ Definitely not
- ☐ Probably not
- ☐ Might or might not
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ Definitely yes

Q3.2 Do you think songs in corporate worship should always be strictly based on Scripture?

- ☐ Definitely not
- ☐ Probably not
- ☐ Might or might not
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ Definitely yes

Q3.3 Are worship songs (a) songs God provided and likes to hear us sing, *or* (b) songs God's people wrote and likes to offer God?

- ☐ Always (a)
- ☐ Mostly (a)
- ☐ Balanced: 50% (a) and 50% (b)
- ☐ Mostly (b)
- ☐ Always (b)

Q3.4 Should the next generation in Canadian Reformed Churches continue to sing Psalms?

- ☐ Definitely no
- ☐ It does not matter
- ☐ Definitely yes

Q3.5 Statement: "Our songs may not always reflect Scripture accurately, but when sung with a pure and humble heart, God can use imperfect songs to bring glory to his name."

- ☐ I agree with this statement
- ☐ I mostly agree with this statement
- ☐ I mostly disagree with this statement
- ☐ I disagree with this statement

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