

Psalms for Singing: A 21st Century Edition

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It is hard to find information on this psalter, whether it be from its own website or others. I do not think a good review can be done without extensive use of the psalter and I just simply do not have the time to devote to this particular one so will give my impressions and findings so far. It is available for purchase from both [Crown & Covenant](#) and from [Covenanter Books](#).

Background

The psalter was produced by and primarily for the use of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland. My understanding is that the practice of their 1979 version had been to use the old 1650 Scottish Metrical Version and simply add new versions to it, but in 1990 they decided to completely update the psalter. From the preface:

In 1990 a Petition was brought to the Synod of the R. P. Church of Ireland urging Synod, ‘to commission the Psalmody Committee to proceed with a modern version of the Psalter with the utmost haste.’ The Committee had already been giving serious thought to this matter and in its report to the Synod had asked it to advise, ‘on the whole matter of future revision.’ Synod subsequently commissioned the Committee to proceed with a complete revision of the 1979 Psalter. The following year Synod approved the following strategy:—

1. The words must be an accurate translation of the original.
2. The meaning must be readily understood. Thus archaic language must be replaced and contorted syntax eliminated. Awkward and contracted words should be avoided.
3. While we should strive for rhyme we should not be limited by an absolute necessity for it.

4. New tunes with new metres should be incorporated. It was later agreed that unused tunes be deleted.
5. Some well-loved Scottish Metrical versions should be retained side by side with the revisions.
6. This strategy should be applied to versions currently available rather than starting from scratch with only the Hebrew text. (It was later agreed that the main resources for revision groups should be Hebrew interlinear text, the New American Standard Version and the New International Version, together with the past and current Psalters of the R. P. Church of Ireland and the R. P. Church of North America and the revised versions of the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. The co-operation of the last three bodies in giving permission to use ideas and portions is gratefully acknowledged.)
7. As new versions become available these should be sent round the congregations for use, comment and helpful suggestions.

Translation practices

As noted in the preface and committee strategies, the psalter is largely a compilation of versions from various psalters used by other denominations rather than a completely new translation. This is evident both by the meters chosen for various psalms and even the tunes, many of which I was quite familiar with. The words were slightly altered from the versions I knew but whether that was for better or worse I do not know without studying it in more detail.

Like most psalter revisions, the committee had a goal of eliminating contorted syntax. This was largely successful but there are a surprising number remaining. For example in Psalm 119 Part 22A “True to your word, me wisdom give”.

They do include a number of regularly used SMV selections but not too many to be overwhelming. This was a good choice since the goal was a new psalter.

Archaic language appears to have been removed completely, except for the historical selections which seem to always be a second or third version of the psalm.

Formats

The version I bought was a slim, cloth-bound split-leaf version, with a glued binding. The paper is a little thinner which helps on size. The pages are

generally easy to turn and nicely set and seems relatively well-constructed but I do wonder how well this would stand up to regular congregational use.

It is very nicely typeset and quite pleasant to look through. Several indices are included but they are fairly simple. There is one at the front which lists Psalms by category (Laments, Penitential, and Praise) and at the rear there is one metrical index of tunes and one alphabetical.

My main complaint with the format is that there does not seem to be any recommended tune selections for a given psalm. I suppose it is easy to pencil this in but I would suspect that different congregations will choose widely different tunes. This may be the current practice of the denomination and so not a problem for them but I really appreciated the tune recommendations found in *Sing Psalms* that would offer some consistency from congregation to congregation.

Music

From a brief look through the music it looks very easy to follow, nicely set, and offers a wide variety. Since this was a compilation and revision of other psalter versions I do recognize a lot of the tunes. I really do not have much to comment on this particular aspect except to say that it looks quite useable.

Conclusions

This is clearly a labor of love by an entire denomination and has much to commend it. I particularly like that the work was split up between many committees that were trained in the work and that this work was sent around to congregations for testing and approval before being put into use. I think we could learn from that example, even as they undoubtedly were following the Scottish Church's practice with the development of the 1650 psalter.

It seems like this is suited more to a particular denomination and their history but also appears to be quite accurate and easy to use. Aside from some minor things that makes *Sing Psalms* superior, I am not sure which psalter I would recommend: both appear to be excellent choices but the *Sing Psalms* has a higher physical quality. Without using both extensively I could not say which would be the more accurate to the text as both seem to follow the original quite closely.