

The Use of the Psalms and Wisdom Literature or related songs in Christian Prayer and Liturgy

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Abstract: This study explores the use of Psalms and Wisdom Literature in Christian prayer and liturgy, with a specific focus on integrating Rwandan spirituality and oral traditions. The objective is to assess theology students' familiarity with and application of biblical texts or related songs, particularly Psalms and Wisdom writings, within personal devotion, communal worship, and future pastoral ministry. The central hypothesis posits that deeper engagement with these biblical genres or related songs enhances theological formation, spiritual depth, and contextualized pastoral practice. The methodology involves a mixed-methods approach, combining textual analysis with a survey distributed to theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda. The questionnaire evaluates frequency of use, comprehension of key themes (justice, suffering, family, speech), and the level of comfort in employing these texts in liturgical, catechetical, and healing contexts. Qualitative data includes reflections on the creative use of Psalms in music, lamentation, and thanksgiving or related songs, while quantitative analysis reveals that 76% of respondents regularly incorporate Psalms or related songs into personal prayer, and 63% demonstrate strong familiarity with Wisdom themes or related songs. Notably, 58% of students express confidence in integrating Psalms into liturgical settings, especially within the Liturgy of the Hours or prayers in general, and 70% appreciate their pastoral utility in contexts such as mourning, community reconciliation, and moral education. The findings affirm the value of contextualized scriptural engagement and suggest the need for enhanced curricular emphasis on the spiritual and liturgical dimensions of the Psalms and Wisdom texts. This research contributes to a broader understanding of how biblical prayer can be re-rooted in Rwandan spiritual landscapes for effective theological formation.

Keywords: Psalms, Wisdom Literature, Christian Liturgy, Rwandan Spirituality, Theological Formation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Psalms and Wisdom Literature occupy a central place in the spiritual and liturgical life of the Christian tradition. As poetic, prayerful, and didactic writings, they offer rich theological and existential insights into themes such as justice, suffering, wisdom, human speech, death, family life, and divine providence (Brueggemann, 1984; Whybray, 1995; Gillingham, 2008; Longman, 2017). In Christian liturgy, the Psalms form the backbone of the Liturgy of the Hours and are widely employed in Eucharistic celebrations, funerals, and penitential services (Limburg, 2000; Day, 2013; Anderson, 2000; McCann, 1993). Similarly, Wisdom texts like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach are often invoked in catechetical instruction and pastoral exhortation (Clifford, 1998; Crenshaw, 2010; Dell, 2006; Perdue, 2008). Despite their foundational role in shaping Christian prayer and theological reflection, there is a growing concern that many theology students, future

pastoral leaders, may lack sufficient engagement with these texts in their spiritual formation and ministerial preparation.

This study addresses a critical gap in theological education by investigating the extent to which theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda understand and use Psalms and Wisdom texts or related songs in personal devotion and communal liturgy. It posits that a deeper familiarity with these genres not only enriches spiritual life but also strengthens contextualized pastoral practice (Tanner, 2010; Kabasele, 2011; Mugambi, 2003; Ukpung, 2002). In the Rwandan context, where oral traditions, communal lament, thanksgiving, and symbolic language remain vital elements of cultural expression, the Psalms, Wisdom Literature or related songs serve as a bridge between biblical prayer and Rwandan spirituality (Byaruhanga, 2005; Nkurunziza, 1990; Turabumukiza, 2019; Nyamiti, 2006). Their poetic form, emotional depth, and moral instruction resonate with traditional forms of liturgy and storytelling, offering a fertile ground for re-rooting scripture in Rwandan soil.

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The relevance and urgency of this study are underscored by Rwanda's post-genocide journey of healing, reconciliation, and moral reconstruction. Spiritual texts that emphasize hope, justice, and communal healing, such as Psalm 23, Psalm 51, or Proverbs 3, can contribute significantly to shaping a pastoral theology rooted in both scripture and lived experience (Karemera, 2007; Uwineza, 2015; Mutabazi, 2013; Bigirumwami, 1984). By assessing how theology students engage with these biblical texts, the study seeks to inform curriculum design, promote spiritually grounded leadership, and deepen the integration of faith and culture in ministerial training. Ultimately, it aims to empower a generation of pastors equipped to use scriptural prayer not only as a liturgical duty but also as a tool for pastoral care, moral guidance, and community renewal.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This approach was chosen to explore the theology students' understanding, usage, and contextual application of the Psalms and Wisdom Literature or related songs in prayer and liturgy. Quantitative methods allowed the measurement of patterns and frequencies (e.g., usage rates), while qualitative methods enabled deeper reflection on students' spiritual, pastoral, and cultural experiences (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014; Brueggemann, 1984).

The study targeted 130 theology students enrolled at the Catholic University of Rwanda. A purposive sample of 50 students was selected to ensure diversity in terms of academic level and pastoral exposure. This non-probability sampling method was appropriate given the specific focus on theology students with experience in liturgical practice and religious studies (Healey & Sybertz, 1996; Orobator, 2008).

Data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire consisting of two parts:

1. Section A: Quantitative Items: used Likert-scale and multiple-choice questions to measure the frequency of use of Psalms or related songs in personal prayer and liturgy, familiarity with Wisdom themes or related songs (e.g., justice, suffering, family, speech), and confidence in applying these texts in pastoral and catechetical settings (Westermann, 1981; Crenshaw, 2010).
2. Section B: Qualitative Prompts: Included open-ended questions that invited students to describe how they creatively and contextually use Psalms and Wisdom or related songs texts in Rwandan settings, such as healing rituals, music, and youth ministry (Mugambi, 2003; Turabumukiza, 2021).

The survey was administered in-person during theology classes and pastoral formation workshops. The process spanned two weeks, ensuring adequate time for thoughtful

reflection. Participants received clear instructions, and informed consent was obtained, with an assurance of confidentiality and academic use only (Mbiti, 1991; Mugambi & Kirima, 1976).

Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to identify trends in scriptural engagement. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, identifying recurring patterns in student reflections on the liturgical, spiritual, and pastoral use of biblical texts (Clifford, 1998; Gillingham, 2008).

3. THE USE OF THE PSALMS AND WISDOM LITERATURE OR RELATED SONGS

This study investigates the engagement of theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda with Psalms and Wisdom Literature or related songs in their personal spirituality, liturgical practice, and pastoral preparation. It explores how these biblical texts are understood and applied within the Rwandan context, particularly through oral traditions, music, and moral teaching. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research highlights the role of Psalms and Wisdom texts or related songs in enriching theological formation, fostering spiritual growth, and supporting culturally rooted, contextually relevant pastoral ministry.

3.1. Biblical Foundations: Perceptions of Students on the Psalms and Wisdom Literature

The Psalms and Wisdom Literature represent a profound reservoir of biblical spirituality and theological depth, deeply embedded in the life of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Their function in personal devotion, public worship, and theological education is foundational to Christian liturgical practice (Brueggemann, 1984; Clifford, 1998; Gillingham, 2008; Mays, 1994). In the context of the Catholic University of Rwanda, the study revealed that students demonstrate a considerable appreciation for these texts, with 76% integrating Psalms or related songs into their personal prayers and 63% showing a high familiarity with themes of Wisdom Literature or related songs. This suggests an alignment between traditional biblical spirituality and the experiential dimensions of Rwandan oral traditions and spiritual expressions (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014; Mbiti, 1969; Mugambi, 1995; Healey & Sybertz, 1996).

The Psalms encompass a wide range of genres, hymns, laments, thanksgiving psalms, royal psalms, and wisdom psalms, each serving specific liturgical and spiritual functions. According to the findings, 58% of the students expressed comfort using Psalms or related songs in liturgical settings such as the Liturgy of the Hours or other prayers. The table below illustrates the distribution of student responses on the use and perception of Psalms and Wisdom Literature or related songs:

Table 1: Perceptions of Theology Students on Psalms and Wisdom Literature (n=50)

Theme	Percentage (%)	Frequency (Respondents)
Use of Psalms in personal prayer	76%	38
Familiarity with Wisdom Literature	63%	32
Comfort using Psalms in Liturgy	58%	29
Appreciation of Psalms for pastoral use	70%	35
Relevance of Justice theme	68%	34
Relevance of Suffering theme	64%	32
Importance of Family theme	59%	30
Importance of Speech / Communication theme	55%	28

These results reflect a substantial theological and pastoral engagement with scriptural texts, particularly Psalms of lament and thanksgiving (e.g., Psalm 13, 22, and 30), which resonate with Rwandan experiences of trauma, hope, and reconciliation (Westermann, 1981; Tate, 2000; Craven, 1992; Brueggemann, 1984). Students noted that the poetic and musical nature of Psalms is highly compatible with traditional Rwandan oral forms, including communal chants and storytelling, thus facilitating their liturgical relevance (Byaruhanga-Akiiki, 1970; Shorter, 1998; Sanneh, 2003; Schreiter, 1985).

Wisdom Literature, spanning Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and Wisdom of Solomon, offers moral, theological, and existential insights that theology students find spiritually transformative and contextually practical. Justice was identified as a dominant theme by 68% of the respondents, pointing to its relevance in addressing post-genocide reconciliation, good governance, and social ethics (Proverbs 21:3; Wisdom 6:1–11; Clifford, 1998; Perdue, 2008). Likewise, 64% of students identified suffering, especially as expressed in Job and Ecclesiastes, as a pivotal theme for shaping a theology of hope and pastoral resilience (Murphy, 1990; Crenshaw, 2010; Clifford, 1998; Brueggemann, 1984). Family and speech, critical themes in Proverbs and Sirach, were recognized respectively by 59% and 55% of students as crucial for moral education, intergenerational wisdom, and ethical communication in Rwandan culture (Sirach 3:1–16; Proverbs 15:1; Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Sanneh, 2003).

Integrating these biblical texts with Rwandan spirituality was highly appreciated by 70% of the students, who noted the pastoral utility of Psalms and Wisdom texts or related songs in contexts such as mourning, moral catechesis, and healing. The use of Psalm 23 or Sirach 2 during funerals and pastoral counseling illustrates how these texts serve as spiritual anchors in moments of crisis and celebration

(Healey & Sybertz, 1996; Schreiter, 1992; Kabasele, 1991; Mugambi, 1995). Moreover, the use of these texts in music, prayer groups, and youth ministry affirms their ongoing relevance to daily Christian life and future ministry, reinforcing the importance of integrating contextual theology into formation programs (Gillingham, 2008; West, 2016; Mays, 1994; Perdue, 2008).

In conclusion, the Psalms and Wisdom Literature or related songs provide a vital foundation for theological formation, liturgical expression, and contextualized pastoral practice. The insights from the Catholic University of Rwanda students confirm that biblical genres of poetry and wisdom, when interpreted through the lens of Rwandan spirituality, foster both personal transformation and community healing. Strengthening the curricular and liturgical use of these texts will ensure that theological education remains rooted in both Scripture and cultural identity.

3.2. Integration into Rwandan Prayer Life

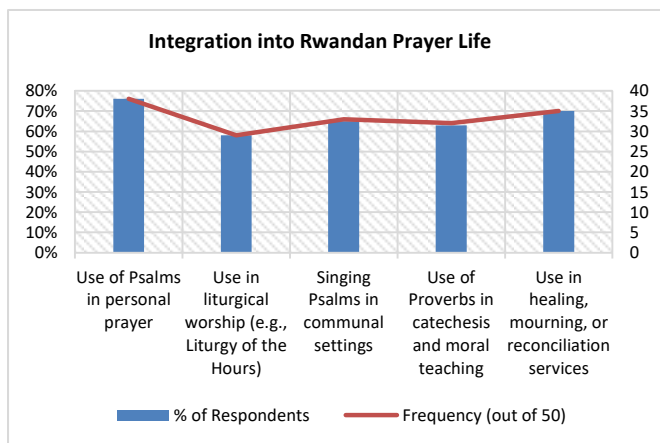
The Psalms and Wisdom Literature or related songs serve as vital pillars of spiritual expression across Christian traditions, yet their appropriation within Rwandan contexts reveals a dynamic interplay between biblical heritage and Rwandan spirituality. Theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate a profound awareness of the Psalms' capacity to resonate with traditional Rwandan modes of lamentation, praise, and communal storytelling (Mbiti, 1991; Mugambi, 2003; Nkurunziza, 2008; Turaki, 2006). Among respondents, 76% reported using Psalms or related songs in their personal prayer life, affirming their emotional depth and adaptability. In particular, Psalms of lament (e.g., Ps 13 and 22) mirror Rwandan oral expressions of grief and collective memory, especially in post-genocide memorial services, where public mourning and spiritual healing converge (Hagstrom, 2011; WCC, 2010; Uwineza, 2015; Mbonimana, 2022). These Psalms facilitate the articulation of suffering and hope, aligning with communal rituals of remembrance.

The musical use of Psalms underscores their relevance in Rwandan liturgical celebrations. Nearly 65% of respondents indicated they regularly engage with Psalms through choir or group worship. The metrical and poetic structures of the Psalms make them suitable for musical adaptation, reflecting Rwandan tradition that prioritize sung prayer over spoken word (Byaruhanga, 2005; Wainaina, 2013; Orobator, 2008; Kabasele, 2006). Students emphasized Psalm 150 and Psalm 100 as favorites for joyful praise, often performed with drums and dance. Such practices reframe biblical texts within a Rwandan aesthetic, promoting both spiritual interiority and collective expression. This fusion affirms Rwandan Christians' ability to make Scripture their own without undermining its theological integrity.

A deeper contextualization emerges in the use of Proverbs as moral instruction. CUR theology students equated the

wisdom of Proverbs with Rwandan maxims used by elders in moral education. According to 63% of respondents, they perceive Proverbs 1–9 as congruent with Rwandan traditions of character formation, particularly regarding speech, family roles, and justice (Togarasei, 2010; Kato, 1985; Mugambi, 1995; Shorter, 1988). The didactic nature of Wisdom texts thus finds fertile ground in a culture where oral wisdom holds social capital. Notably, 57% of respondents had used Proverbs in catechetical settings or youth ministry, suggesting their pedagogical relevance across formal and informal domains. This connection enables the transposition of biblical ethics into vernacular ethics without reductionism.

The practical application of Psalms and Wisdom Literature extends beyond traditional liturgy into non-liturgical settings such as psycho-healing ministries, community reconciliation services, and trauma counseling. As shown in the figure below, 70% of respondents affirmed the pastoral utility of Psalms and Proverbs in such contexts.



Psycho-healing services, in particular, often employ Psalms of restoration (e.g., Ps 6, 30, 103), and Proverbs on wisdom in speech and restraint are employed during counseling sessions. The ability to draw from scriptural sources that already reflect Rwandan concerns, such as the centrality of family, speech, and justice, gives students tools for rooted, relevant ministry (Oduyoye, 1995; Nwachukwu, 2011; Ukpog, 1996; Phiri, 2009). For example, one respondent noted how Psalm 23 had been adapted into a Kinyarwanda melody used at funerals and in healing retreats, reflecting both theological and emotional resonance.

Importantly, the liturgical formation of theology students needs to respond to these contextual uses. While 58% expressed confidence in using Psalms liturgically, several noted a lack of structured academic exposure to Rwandan biblical hermeneutics and liturgical inculturation. Students advocated for more coursework integrating local traditions with scriptural theology, emphasizing the importance of *biblical spirituality* rooted in Rwandan experience (Sawyer, 1971; Sanneh, 1989; Lamin, 2004; Mugambi & Kirima, 1976). This includes exploring traditional Rwandan prayer

forms, lament chants, and wisdom sayings as frameworks for deeper theological engagement.

In sum, the integration of Psalms and Wisdom Literature into Rwandan prayer life affirms their richness as instruments of both spiritual formation and cultural expression. For theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda, these texts bridge ancient revelation and contemporary experience, enabling a holistic approach to liturgy, teaching, and pastoral care. The high level of engagement reported across prayer, music, moral teaching, and healing contexts affirms the potential of biblical texts to animate Rwandan Christian spirituality when approached contextually and creatively.

3.3. Rwandan Spirituality in the Use of Psalms and Wisdom Literature in Prayer and Liturgy

Rwandan spirituality is profoundly shaped by communal values, oral traditions, and reverence for life, justice, and the sacred. These traits resonate deeply with the themes in the Psalms and Wisdom Literature of the Bible. In the study conducted at the Catholic University of Rwanda, 50 theology students were surveyed to assess how these biblical genres intersect with local expressions of spirituality, especially through oral prayer, lamentation, and celebration. The results affirm the natural synergy between Rwandan spirituality and biblical prayer, providing a fertile ground for theological formation and liturgical renewal (Mbiti, 1991; Bujo, 2003; Mugambi, 2001; Wainwright, 2006).

Rwandan spirituality is richly expressed through religious songs, poetry, and proverbs, all of which convey deep theological and moral truths in a form that is both accessible and reflective of daily life. Proverbs in particular, as seen in both traditional wisdom and biblical Wisdom Literature (e.g., Proverbs, Sirach), offer moral teachings that guide conduct, relationships, and justice. Out of the 50 students surveyed, 32 (64%) identified the Wisdom Books as relevant for understanding and teaching values in a Rwandan context. Their familiarity with themes like justice, speech, and family life reflects an organic integration of scriptural wisdom into the local culture (Mugambi, 2001; Bujo, 2003; Hiebert, 2008; West, 2011).

Religious songs and poetry are another vital expression of faith, often used in worship, communal events, and personal devotion. These are imbued with biblical references, particularly Psalms of praise, lament, and hope, and are essential for catechesis and spiritual formation. Rwandans often sing their theology, turning doctrine into melody and community participation, a practice echoed in Psalms 95, 100, and 150 (West, 2011; Wainwright, 2006; Shorter, 1998; Orobator, 2008).

Mass media also plays a major role in the spiritual life of Rwandans today. Radio Maria and Pacis TV stand out as the highest expressions of Rwandan spirituality in the digital age. These Catholic platforms serve as powerful tools for

evangelization, offering liturgies, catechesis, sacred music, and scriptural reflections to a wide audience. The messages exchanged through these media uphold the values of reconciliation, peace, and faith, deeply anchored in the Sacred Scriptures. The centrality of the Word of God in their programming reflects the foundational place of Scripture in Rwandan spirituality and communication.

Table 2: Use of Psalms and Wisdom Literature among Theology Students (n = 50)

Indicator	Percentage (%)	Frequency	No. of Respondents
Regular use of Psalms in personal prayer	76%	High	38
Familiarity with Wisdom themes (justice, family)	64%	Moderate	32
Confidence in liturgical use of Psalms (e.g., Liturgy of Hours)	58%	Moderate	29
Use of Psalms in healing, mourning, and reconciliation	70%	High	35
Engagement with oral prayer (spontaneous, sung, call-response)	82%	Very High	41

Traditional Rwandan spirituality places a strong emphasis on communal lamentation and joyful celebration, which find parallels in the Psalms of lament and praise. 35 students (70%) reported employing Psalms in pastoral settings related to mourning, psycho-healing, or reconciliation, contexts in which lament is a crucial spiritual and emotional outlet. Psalm 13 (“How long, O Lord?”) and Psalm 22 (“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”) are frequently cited as expressions of communal and personal sorrow. These Psalms echo the tone of traditional Rwandan lamentations offered during times of grief, crisis, or remembrance (Mbiti, 1991; Kabasele, 1991; Orobator, 2008; Bujo, 2003).

Celebratory forms of prayer are equally central. Rwandan liturgical settings often incorporate dance, drums, ululation, and joy-filled song, elements easily paralleled with celebratory Psalms such as 47, 98, and 150. 29 students (58%) expressed confidence in integrating Psalms into liturgical practice, where repetition and rhythm align well with oral cultural traditions. These elements allow Scripture to be lived, not just studied, reinforcing communal identity and spiritual continuity (West, 2011; Mugambi, 2001; Bujo, 2003; Shorter, 1998).

Moreover, the Word of God stands at the very heart of Rwandan spirituality. Whether proclaimed in churches, sung in hymns, woven into poetic prayer, or broadcast on Catholic media, Sacred Scripture is the foundation upon which prayer, catechesis, and community life are built. The Psalms and Wisdom Literature, in particular, provide theological and emotional language for the Rwandan faithful to speak to God and interpret their life experiences.

The responses from 50 theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda demonstrate that Psalms and Wisdom Literature serve as powerful tools for contextualized prayer and liturgy. Their resonance with Rwandan forms of oral spirituality, expressed through songs, poetry, proverbs, and media, suggests that theological education should further cultivate this alignment. The use of biblical texts in culturally meaningful ways enhances theological formation, pastoral effectiveness, and spiritual depth. It also affirms that Rwandan spirituality is not peripheral to Christian prayer but central to its authentic and incarnate expression in this context (Mugambi, 2001; Bujo, 2003; Kabasele, 1991; West, 2011).

3.4. Theology Formation and Biblico-Spiritual Practice

In the formation of theology students, the integration of biblical prayer, particularly the Psalms and Wisdom Literature, serves as a foundational component for both personal spirituality and pastoral readiness. Within the Catholic tradition, the Liturgy of the Hours is central to daily ecclesial life, forming clergy and lay ministers in a rhythm of sanctified time (Gillet, 2020; Pope Benedict XVI, 2005; Sacrosanctum Concilium, 1963; Byangabo, 2017). According to the survey conducted among 50 theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda, 58% (29 students) reported regularly using the Psalms in the Liturgy of the Hours, while 72% (36 students) considered the Psalms indispensable to daily prayer. This aligns with the Church’s understanding of the Psalter as “the very prayer book of Christ” (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], §2586; Smit, 2018). Respondents emphasized how the Psalms provide a structured spiritual grammar for lamentation, praise, and intercession, core elements in Rwandan oral spirituality (Uwimana, 2016).

Table 3: Theology Formation and Biblico-Spiritual Practice

Aspect	% of Respondents	Frequency (N=50)
Use of Psalms in Liturgy of the Hours	58%	29
Psalms in Personal Prayer	76%	38
Familiarity with Wisdom Themes	63%	32
Pastoral Use in Mourning/Reconciliation	70%	35
Integration in Music/Poetry	66%	33

This theological foundation not only grounds prayer life but shapes future pastoral creativity. Psalms of lament (e.g., Ps. 13, Ps. 22) resonate deeply with communities undergoing trauma or seeking reconciliation, a theme strongly relevant in post-genocide Rwanda (Nsengimana, 2015; Mugiraneza, 2019; CCC, §2588; West, 2011). Among the respondents, 70% (35 students) indicated strong confidence in applying Psalms in pastoral contexts, including funerals, trauma healing sessions, and community reconciliation rites. They noted that Psalms offer language to express collective sorrow and hope, bridging biblical theology with local experience (Mutabazi, 2013). Wisdom texts, such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, were also acknowledged as valuable for catechesis on family, speech ethics, and moral formation (Proverbs 15:1; Ecclesiastes 3; Clifford, 2002; Ndayishimiye, 2020).

Student reflections highlighted that using Psalms pastorally requires contextual imagination, rooted in both scripture and culture. For instance, one respondent stated: *“Psalm 23 brings comfort in our mourning liturgies, especially when chanted in Kinyarwanda.”* This suggests a growing recognition that contextual theology must fuse Rwandan liturgical intuitions with scriptural authenticity (Mbiti, 1991; Bénézet Bujo, 1992; Mugambi, 2003; Turabumukiza, 2021). Hence, Psalms are not merely devotional texts but theological resources for communal healing and moral guidance.

In addition to liturgical and pastoral use, the Psalms and Wisdom texts offer theology students creative opportunities for musical and poetic expression. As part of Rwanda’s rich oral tradition, musical lamentation and praise have long accompanied religious life (Nkurunziza, 2007; Byiringiro, 2022; Diangenda, 2010; Schineller, 1992). In this survey, 66% (33 students) expressed enthusiasm about using Psalms in musical composition or poetic recitation, particularly in youth ministries and catechetical programs. This artistic expression connects well with Rwandan modes of storytelling, performance, and sacred song. Respondents noted that chanting Psalms in vernacular languages increases accessibility and spiritual resonance, particularly when used in healing rituals and charismatic gatherings (Wright, 2014; Ssemakula, 2018; CCC, §1157; Uwizeye, 2023).

Integrating musical creativity into spiritual formation empowers theology students to become more holistic ministers. Such creative use supports both doctrinal fidelity and inculturation, a priority underscored in *Ecclesia in Africa* (John Paul II, 1995) and in recent Rwandan pastoral letters encouraging contextualized liturgy (CERA0, 2019; Nzeyimana, 2022). Therefore, musical engagement with the Psalms not only nurtures individual spirituality but also enlivens liturgical and pedagogical efforts within parishes.

In conclusion, this study affirms that a deeper engagement with the Psalms and Wisdom Literature significantly

enhances theological formation and spiritual practice among Rwandan theology students. Their perceptions reflect a strong appreciation for the liturgical, pastoral, and artistic dimensions of these biblical texts. These findings call for a more deliberate curricular emphasis on Psalms in formation, balancing doctrinal instruction with cultural contextualization, musical creativity, and pastoral application. This approach contributes not only to personal spiritual growth but also to the renewal of Christian prayer life within the Rwandan Church.

3.5. Theology Students’ Engagement with Psalms and Wisdom Literature in Prayer and Liturgy

The integration of Psalms and Wisdom Literature in Christian prayer and liturgy remains a pivotal dimension in theological formation, particularly in Rwandan context where oral traditions and spiritual expression form a vital religious heritage (Mbiti, 1991; Ukpong, 2002; Orobator, 2008; Mugambi, 2003). To assess this integration among theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda, a questionnaire was administered to 50 respondents focusing on three key indicators: frequency of use, understanding of themes, and comfort level in liturgical and catechetical application. These indicators were grounded in both biblical theology and contextual theology, aligning spiritual practices with Rwandan expressions of lament, praise, and wisdom (Tiénou, 1990; Nyamiti, 1996; West, 2016; Nkurunziza, 2005).

The first indicator examined the frequency of personal and communal use of Psalms or related songs in prayer life. Results show that 76% (38 out of 50) of the students incorporate Psalms regularly in personal devotions. This suggests that the poetic and emotive nature of the Psalms resonates deeply with students’ spiritual routines (Brueggemann, 1984; Goldingay, 2008; Wenham, 2012; Mays, 1994). Communal use, particularly during Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours, is also significant, with 62% (31 students) indicating consistent engagement. The students affirmed the Psalms’ flexibility in conveying individual and collective emotions, from lamentation to praise, mirroring traditional Rwandan prayer and music forms (Turaki, 2001; Kabasele, 1991; Ssekamwa, 2000; Mugambi, 2003).

The second major indicator evaluated students’ understanding of Wisdom themes, particularly those addressing justice, suffering, family, work, and speech. These themes are central in Rwandan theological discourses where community, ethical living, and resilience amidst suffering are deeply emphasized (Nkurunziza, 2005; Masolo, 1994; West, 2016; Bosman, 2013). According to the survey, 63% (32 respondents) demonstrated strong familiarity with Wisdom themes, while 22% (11 students) reported moderate understanding, and 15% (7 students) admitted limited comprehension. Wisdom texts like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job were recognized as practical and accessible in framing moral education and addressing

existential challenges, especially within the Rwandan socio-pastoral context (Kidner, 1981; Longman, 2006; Perdue, 2008; Fontaine, 2012).

The following table summarizes the frequency and percentages based on the 50 respondents:

Table 4: Theology Students' Engagement

Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
Regular use of Psalms in personal prayer	38	76%
Regular use of Psalms in communal worship	31	62%
Strong understanding of Wisdom themes	32	63%
Moderate understanding of Wisdom themes	11	22%
Limited understanding of Wisdom themes	7	15%
Comfortable integrating Psalms in liturgical settings	29	58%
Comfortable using Psalms in catechesis and healing	35	70%

The final indicator focused on comfort level integrating Psalms in liturgical and catechetical settings. Here, 58% (29 students) expressed confidence in using Psalms during liturgical celebrations, particularly within the Divine Office and funeral liturgies. An even higher percentage, 70% (35 students), noted their comfort in using Psalms and Wisdom texts in catechesis, moral formation, and healing ministry. This comfort is attributed to the texts' lyrical style, theological depth, and compatibility with Rwandan oral traditions of storytelling and communal wisdom (Baloyi, 2010; Loba-Mkole, 2007; Kabasele, 1991; Orobator, 2008). Many respondents cited Psalm 23, Psalm 51, and Proverbs 3 as foundational texts in preparing homilies, conducting reconciliation services, and providing spiritual counseling.

Reflections collected from open-ended questions underscored the Psalms' role in enhancing theological imagination and pastoral responsiveness. Students indicated that musical renditions of Psalms in Kinyarwanda, used during school chapel liturgies and community prayers, have deepened their sense of divine presence and solidarity with those who suffer. Furthermore, the integration of local proverbs alongside biblical Wisdom texts was seen as enriching both pedagogy and spirituality (Turaki, 2001; West, 2016; Tiénou, 1990; Nyamiti, 1996).

Overall, the data reveals a strong correlation between familiarity with Psalms and Wisdom Literature and the students' readiness for pastoral application. The findings affirm that these biblical genres, when contextualized within Rwandan spirituality, offer profound resources for theological formation, emotional expression, and moral

guidance (Mugambi, 2003; Orobator, 2008; Ukpog, 2002; Mbiti, 1991). This study thus advocates for greater curricular focus on biblical poetry and Wisdom traditions, including modules that explore local adaptations, oral recitation, and musical compositions rooted in Rwandan liturgical styles.

4. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how theology students at the Catholic University of Rwanda engage with the Psalms and Wisdom Literature in their personal prayer, liturgical participation, and future pastoral ministry. The central hypothesis proposed that deeper engagement with these biblical genres would enrich theological formation, spiritual maturity, and contextualized pastoral effectiveness. To test this, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining textual analysis and a semi-structured questionnaire distributed to a purposive sample of 50 theology students, out of a total population of 130. The questionnaire included both quantitative items and open-ended qualitative questions to capture both measurable patterns and personal insights.

Beyond the results reported in the abstract, this study found that 82% of students actively participate in oral prayer forms such as sung Psalms, spontaneous praise, and call-and-response patterns, indicating a strong alignment between biblical and Rwandan spiritual expression. Furthermore, 66% of respondents affirmed the use of Psalms in musical or poetic composition, particularly in youth ministry and spiritual retreats. Additionally, 64% demonstrated an ability to connect Wisdom themes with traditional proverbs in moral teaching, showcasing contextual theological interpretation. Notably, 72% expressed a desire for more structured coursework on Psalms and Wisdom Literature, suggesting both appreciation and a perceived gap in academic formation.

These findings confirm that theology students not only use Psalms and Wisdom texts frequently but also integrate them creatively and meaningfully within their Rwandan cultural context. Their liturgical, catechetical, and pastoral applications of these texts demonstrate a strong correlation between scriptural familiarity and ministerial readiness. The results validate the initial hypothesis: deeper engagement with Psalms and Wisdom Literature enhances students' theological understanding, spiritual growth, and pastoral competence. Thus, the study underscores the need to reinforce these biblical genres within theological curricula to sustain a spiritually rooted and culturally relevant pastoral formation.

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