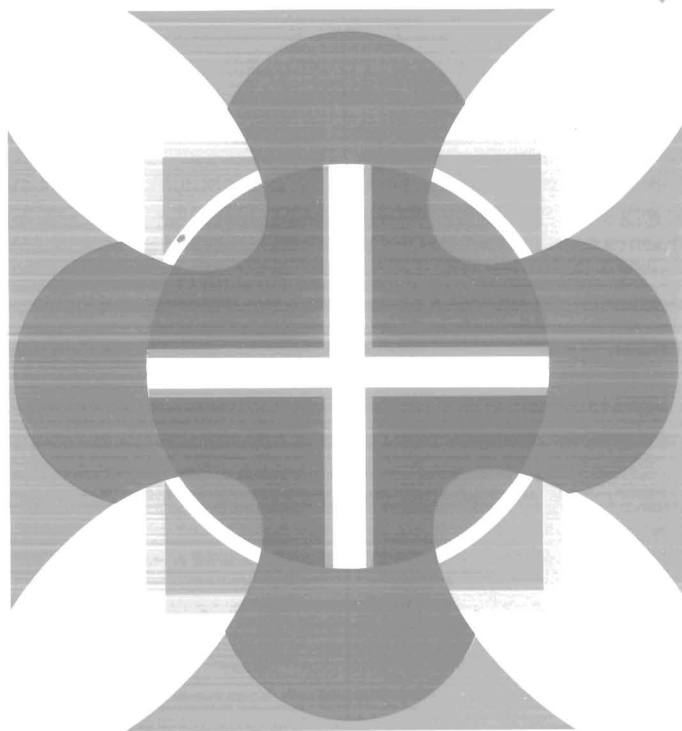


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Additional Remarks on the New Lectionary

We will have our tri-cycle before Christmas. "It's in the bag," the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship announces, and they will have it hanging at that place where you fire up your sermons in time for your Advent preparation. Whether you view the Commission as Jolly Old St. Nick, or just old, will no longer alter the fact; but whether you decide to accept the gift and use it at the altar is one of your fall decisions of more than usual moment.

Your decision is significant for the people you serve in your parish as well. Whatever possibilities for good lie in the use of the new lessons for each Sunday, their release depends in most cases on preacher's choice. There are no rubrics here. Rubrics are the one defense the nave has over against the chancel. The Lutheran Church has to varying degrees accepted the binding force of rubrics in chancel practice. But there has been no attempt made to set up rubrics to regulate relations between the pew and the pulpit. Liturgical custom has strongly suggested that the historic series of lessons be employed each Sunday for the Epistles and Gospels and for the Old Testament lessons. Liturgical custom has leaned definitely in the direction of urging that the Gospel for the day be expounded in the sermon. But preachers have generally operated on the principle that "no one tells me what to preach in my pulpit." This might well be the season of the year to instill a spirit of unselfish giving in the hearts of preachers—don't keep this tri-cycle to yourself; let your people have a ride. It really is their pulpit too.

The burden of this introduction to the new series is that in its use lies a tremendous opportunity for creating a new sense of life in the body, the church; a new eagerness to grow in the Word; and a new awareness of the significance of time in the Church Year. The multitude of new lessons suddenly lying about your study may seem at first to be without form, or even void; but as you shape them into sermons and Sunday themes and with the Spirit give them breath, they can increase the "living souls" that make up the brotherhood.

Take the sense of life in the body, the church, first. The historic series of lessons has been read and reread in most of our

churches since they were founded, and before that, of course, in the parishes from which the forefathers came to found them. Where that has been understood and appreciated, it has been a tremendous force for enabling Christians to realize that they are part of a body larger than their own organization. For many people and for too many preachers, however, the fact of the recurring lessons has been little more than a matter of convenience—"We want to use some lessons; why not these?" The introduction of a new series provides the opportunity—necessitates an approach—to convey an increased awareness of the fact that we are doing *the church's* liturgy each Sunday. These lessons need explanation in the light of the inter-Lutheran nature of their origin. But they will demand as well the clarification of the connection with the Roman Catholic three-year sequence (see *CTM*, November 1971, and the preceding article in this issue). They will readily suggest connections to the new lectionaries in the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and United Church of Christ denominations. And they will Sunday after Sunday bring about thought on the comparable lessons that were used for so many years in the historic series. If the pastor capitalizes on the possibilities of making the church come alive as he introduces the new series, it will almost certainly pay off in increased interest on the part of his parishioners.

Take the new possibility for growth in the Word. The basis of the selection of the new lessons is primarily the desire to expand the exposure to the Bible. The three-year nature of the series is primarily the result of the fact that there are three synoptic gospels. The lessons are deliberately chosen to include as much of the New Testament as possible and to include supporting selections from as many books of the Old Testament as possible. It is true that experience warns that less than half of the members of a given congregation will be present to hear all the lessons all of the Sundays. But there will be many who will be led to a deeper study of Scripture as a result of this widened exposure. Many more will at least hear more Scripture than they have previously. And the remaining members can be helped to realize that they are missing something when they

are missing.

Another element that will aid in such growth in the Word should not be overlooked. A new sequence of proper lessons on any Sunday provides a perfect opportunity for every clergyman to present a theme before the service begins. His sermon will dominate the direction of the thrust of the day. If he shares that direction with his people before the service begins, they will have some hope of relating the other lessons to the main accent. And if the pastor helps them to understand that their objective ought to be to appropriate the strength of these lessons for their own life's application of the theme, his summary will be more helpful than if he simply tells them about the content of the lessons. His goal should be to tell them what they should be about more than what the lessons are about. The result should be that every service increases growth through the Word.

Finally, take the matter of a new awareness of the significance of time in the Church Year. Here, more than elsewhere, lies the weakness of the new sequence—the Achilles heel of St. Nick. Since the premise for lesson selection is chiefly Biblical, the significance of the days and the seasons which we have learned and shared over the years automatically becomes secondary. For a quick check, and to supply you with an immediate help toward getting started, try the lessons for the four Sundays in Advent and compare the accents which result with those you have been accustomed to making through the historic series. Hang an Advent wreath in your mental room and identify the significance of each candle as you light it. The Advent lessons in Cycle C are these:

Advent I Jer. 33:14-16
1 Thess. 3:9-13
Luke 21:25-36 or
Luke 19:28-40

Advent II Mal. 3:1-4
Phil. 1:3-11
Luke 3:1-6

Advent III Zeph. 3:14-18a (. . . day of festival)
Phil. 4:4-7
Luke 3:7-18

Advent IV Micah 5:2-4
Heb. 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-45 (46-55)

If you have helped people remember that the second candle reminds us of the second coming, you will have to find a different mnemonic gambit. And that is but a sample of the kind of thing that will happen throughout the Church Year. It will not be as noticeable in the "after Pentecost" season—if anywhere, the revision of the Year has failed us in not making that season more noticeable—but it will still be a fact. If the three historic lessons and nothing much else were what made a "Sunday after Trinity" be itself in the old series, then a complete change in the three lessons will completely alter the accent of the day.

This is the opportunity, however. Now everyone will be ready to hear the announcement, to read the bulletin and parish paper that seeks to line up the lessons and show the "mystery" of the day. If pastors will include in these continuing announcements the kind of accent that focuses on "the sanctifying of time," by the end of the next three years parishes will increasingly come alive by "living the Church Year!" The objective is to make the Word material of the Sunday determinative of the living pattern for the following week. We do this as part of our inheritance for the major feasts. The week following Christmas is Christmas Week. Easter Week works the same way. We have not done as well with Pentecost Week, but it does not take much to make it successful. Of course, they have taken the names away—there is more hope for making Quasimodogeniti Week come alive than to get much resounding significance out of Easter II. And the best that can be done for the Gesimas is now to issue in print the invitation we have been spreading by word of mouth that the historic lessons and traditional propers of Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima will be utilized next spring in a small cave in the Ozarks.

It will be important, if the values of the Church Year are not to erode, that some of the many customs that help to make the church time memorable and impressive be preserved and strengthened. Where such observances have been an important part of the life of a parish, they should be adapted to the variations the new lessons and calendar will bring. But for those parishes in which little has been

done to utilize the involving and integrating powers of Church Year customs, the introduction of a new series provides good opportunity to suggest new ceremonies. And proper ceremonies will contribute new insights to those who learn to celebrate God's involvement in time and life on our earth.

A final word about the resources that will become available to assist you in the introduction of the new lectionary. For those of you who receive the red pocket memorandum and date book from Concordia Publishing House, there will be included a listing of the new ILCW lessons of Cycle C together with more familiar series. This third series will be the sequence to be employed beginning with Advent of 1973 in order to integrate the Lutheran congregations with the Roman practice which has been going on for some years. The calendar will also reflect the new arrangements of the Church Year. For those readers whose names do not appear on CPH's Christmas list, the commissions on worship of the Lutheran denominations can supply a list of the complete sequence at a nominal charge. As evidence of our conviction that this is an important potential in parish life, and as a way to discover how many of you are using the homiletic helps we print, this journal will send a list of Cycle C to anyone sending in a request with a self-addressed stamped envelope. As has been noted in the article preceding this, the ILCW has available for purchase by summer's end *Contemporary Worship 6*, which will include not only the lessons but the proper psalmody for the Sundays which the commission is proposing as well as the Collects in new translation and helpful indices.

The Ashby Calendar in its various versions (The Ashby Co., Erie, Pa.) will supply specific liturgical data along with the basic new information. These calendars surpass most of those supplied by the local mortuary if your objective is to involve the parishioners in the life of the church.

The Board of Publication of the Lutheran Church in America (Fortress Press, 2900 Queen Lane, Philadelphia, Pa. 19129) has announced a number of helps. The new lectionary series, leaflets containing the RSV text of the three appointed lessons plus the text of the appointed psalms printed out for antiphonal or responsive

reading and the text of the newly prepared collects can be ordered in multiples of fifty. *The Lessons: Series C* is the title of a new single volume for pastor and congregation that will include the new lessons in a heavy paper cover. *Celebrate*, which will be based on the new lectionary and will include a new text for the Confession of Sins and the Prayer of the Church together with a brief statement on the day and its significance, and the psalm and a collect, is available in multiples of fifty. A weekly church bulletin related to the new series is also available. In addition, Fortress will have available the first of the new paperback series titled *Proclamation, Aids for Interpreting the Lessons of the Church Year*. The Advent-Christmas cycle, the Epiphany cycle, Lent and Holy Week will follow one after the other together with individual booklets on the rest of the year. This series includes exegetical and homiletical treatment of the lessons for each Sunday. A total of 24 books is planned over the next three years. The price is listed as \$1.95.

Augsburg Publishing House announces *Augsburg Sermons*, sixty sermons on the Gospel texts from series C. Preachers from the ALC, LCMS, and LCA are included (available August 6 at \$7.95). The house will also issue a 104-page paperback titled *The Lessons*, which will include the text of the three lessons for each Sunday in RSV. A 16-page booklet titled *Lectionary Themes* will supply thematic introductions to the series C Gospels to assist the preacher in sermon preparation. The *ILCW Lectionary* will include the complete three-year lectionary with rationale, prayers of the day and season, new psalmody, Scripture index to the lectionary, and a color calendar.

Concordia indicates that the *Concordia Pulpit* for 1976 will use the Gospels for series B. An *Annual of Devotions* for laymen is scheduled for September 1974, and will work with the new lessons as the source for daily devotional material.

In a previous issue the Fides Press publication *Guide for the Christian Assembly* has been mentioned. It is a nine-volume revised version of the previous series of the same name now set up to cover all three cycles of the Roman lectionary. It develops the liturgical exegesis, doctrinal exposition, and pastoral application for

each set of lessons. Since the Roman sequence is the pattern which the new ILCW lectionary follows, many of the Sunday treatments will be useful for Lutheran clergy. (Fides Publishers, Inc., Box F, Department R, Notre Dame, Ind. 46556)

CTM proposes to deal with the individual Sundays of the C cycle during the

coming year. The focus of these studies will be on analyzing the theme for the Sunday that develops out of the new combination of three lessons. Homiletical suggestions will be supplied in our traditional helpful fashion. We will value your contemporary helpful comments.

George W. Hoyer