

## THE NEW LUTHERAN LECTIONARY

In the May 5, 1918, issue of The Northwestern Lutheran a brief article appears on the Book of Hymns which had been recently published by the Wisconsin Synod. Some comments and explanations are given on the Order of Morning Service included in the hymnal. Among the comments is this one: "We believe the average church-goer will thank us for not putting in more than one Scripture Lesson." If this is an accurate observation, then the average church-goer is not going to appreciate the new Lutheran Lectionary. For this Lectionary proposes that there be three Scripture readings each Sunday.

How many readings should there be each Sunday? How long should they be? Which readings should be chosen? Shall there be a one-year, two-year, or three-year cycle of readings? Shall all the churches of our synod be encouraged to use the same readings each Sunday? These are all matters which to some extent are adiaphora and not everyone will agree on the answers to these questions. But about one thing we will certainly agree: an essential element of our worship must be the use of the Holy Scriptures. Through the Scriptures God proclaims what He has done for us and our salvation. The Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to create and build up faith in Christ as our Savior from sin. Our doctrine of the Word makes it necessary that we be vitally concerned with the use of the Word also in our public services of worship. Therefore this is a fitting topic for consideration at this first meeting of the Wisconsin Conference: The New Lutheran Lectionary.

### I. A historical review of the development of the readings in the service

Let us begin by going back to the reading of the Scriptures in the Jewish synagogue. The rise of the synagogue in the exilic period and afterwards intertwines with the growth of public reading of the Scriptures among Jews. Interestingly, a single Hebrew word can have either meaning: קָהָל originally meant "calling together" or "assembly" (Greek: *synagogē*), but it came to mean "reading", especially of the Scriptures, and even "teaching the Bible" (Exodus 12,16; Nehemiah 8,8). Claus Westermann comments: "The term says that the writings which it embraces exist to be read. The form of worship molded by the reading of the Scriptures apparently goes back to the Babylonian exile. After the destruction of the temple, it became the form of worship in the Jewish community. The reading of Scripture is central in Jewish worship." (1)

Two lessons were read in the synagogue service. For the first the Pentateuch, the torah, was divided into one hundred and fifty portions which were read in continuous course, thus providing one lesson for each week in a three-year cycle. The technical name for each of the lessons was seder or parashah, meaning "section". The second lesson, from the prophets, was known as haphtorah, that is "dismissal", as being the end of the reading. The lessons were first read in Hebrew and then translated into the vernacular Aramaic, and were followed by an explanation of their significance. This three-year cycle is known as the Palestinian cycle. Another in which the law was read in one year is called the Babylonian cycle. The Psalms, 150 in number, may also have been divided into a three-year cycle. (2) Tables of lessons, in both ancient and modern Judaism, are available in the Jewish Encyclopedia or in The Synagogue Lectionary and the New Testament, by R.G. Finch.

The evidence of the New Testament indicates that the Old Testament Scriptures were regularly read in the synagogue. Luke 4,16ff, shows that Jesus received the scroll from the ruler and read a passage from Isaiah 61, and then preached on its significance. The lesson from the law would have been read before Jesus began. Acts 13,14ff, also speaks of the reading of the law and the prophets, followed by an invitation given to Paul and his friends by the ruler of the synagogue to say a word of exhortation. It seems that the Qumran community followed a similar procedure of reading the Scriptures and then having comments on them. In 1 Timothy 4,13, Paul says to Timothy: "devote yourself to the public

reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (NIV). The Greek word for "public reading" is anagnosis (a Greek lectionary is called an anagnōseis). There are other references to public reading of the Scriptures in 2 Cor. 3,15; Col 4,16; 1 Thes. 5,27; Rev. 1,3. Paul is encouraging Timothy to continue the practice of reading the Scriptures in the service. Because this was the custom in the synagogue, perhaps some of the radical anti-Jewish persons in the church were calling this into question (the beginnings of Marcionism). Here we see the principle established that we should not reject something just because our opponents may be using it. The matter must be judged on its own merit. The Christian Church did not reject the reading of the Old Testament.

However, very shortly Christians began to read their own writings in addition to the Old Testament at their gatherings. Already in the 50's and 60's Paul urges that his letters be read to the assembled congregations (1 Thes. 5,27; Col. 4,16). The next bit of evidence we have about the readings in the service comes from Justin Martyr (died 166). In his description of the first part of the service (Apology I,67), he says that all in the towns or the country gather for the celebration. "The memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits." Then the reader ceases and the president speaks, "admonishing us and exhorting us to imitate these excellent examples." The service then continues to the communion of the people.

It is difficult to tell just what writings Justin is referring to. The "memoirs of the apostles" perhaps refers to the entire NT and the "writings of the prophets" to the Old. It does appear that there was as yet no fixed lectionary; reading continued till the people had all assembled.

During the early centuries of the church it is quite obvious that a variety of practices prevailed as to which readings were used in the services, how many, and how they were selected. It is not likely that the reading of the Old Testament followed the selections of the Jewish synagogue since these emphasized the torah to such an extent. In some places there must have been a continuous reading from Sunday to Sunday until an entire book was finished. In other places weekday services were also held and perhaps a different pattern was followed. In some areas of France and Spain a mosaic type lesson is found with short selections or verses put together from various parts of the Scripture. Tatian (110-172) produced a harmony of the four Gospels which was no doubt intended for use in the public service. In Syria two lessons from the Old Testament and two from the New were read in the 4th century. The churches in France, Spain, and Milan, Italy, did include a lesson from the Old Testament. The church at Rome in the 5th century did not but had only an epistle and gospel reading.

Continuous reading seems to have been the most common practice at first. But soon this continuous reading was interrupted for the great festivals of the Lord, such as Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost; and for the feast days of the martyrs. On such days passages were selected to fit the celebration. Augustine speaks of reading from Acts between Easter and Pentecost. Ambrose states that the holy week readings are to include Job and Jonah. Attempts have been made to work out the lectionaries used by some of the great preachers, such as Ambrose and Augustine, by drawing up a table of the Sundays of the year with the biblical material used from week to week. It appears, however, that these 'lectionaries' were very individual, and it is difficult to say how widely they were followed. In any case there is no suggestion that the same passages were used year after year. Augustine himself remarks that some persons were upset because he made changes in the accustomed readings which the people expected to hear.

The first attempt, at least for a diocese, to fix definite readings for a part of the year was in Gaul in the middle of the fifth century where two lists of readings are extant. Both of these were, however, only for special seasons, not the whole year. (3) From the same period a Greek lectionary is known. The church at Jerusalem had a fixed set of readings for some parts of the developing church year as is indicated by the catechetical lectures of Cyril of Jerusalem. (4)

The so-called historic pericopes are supposed to have stemmed from the hand of Jerome (340-420). The source is presumed to be the Comes Hieronymi, whose authorship is debated by many modern scholars. The Comes is first mentioned by name in a document dating from 471. The Comes provided for three lections, one from the Old Testament, one from the Gospels, and one from the other New Testament books. During Carolingian times, this lectionary was revised by Alcuin. By this time the continuous reading principle had been abandoned as had also the use of the Old Testament lesson. This was due mainly to the growing influence of the liturgical practices of the church of Rome. There the readings were in general shorter and the Old Testament had been dropped. (5) I suspect that the barbarian invasions and the decreasing literacy of the people and clergy had something to do with this cutting back of the reading of Scripture.

When manuscripts of the Bible were used for the liturgical readings, the beginning and end of the passage to be read were indicated by means of signs or words and a title usually written in the margin. Lists of passages to be read were also made and inserted in the Bibles. Books containing the full text of the pericopes arranged according to the calendar began to appear, at the latest, in the 5th century. These lectionaries (called comes, companions) were cheaper and more handy than entire Bibles and soon became very popular. These early lectionaries are helpful in the textual criticism of the Bible.

The Roman system of readings was at first fixed only for the Advent, Christmas Lent, and Easter seasons. The propers for the Sundays after Epiphany and Trinity (Pentecost) were not the same each year. (6) The worship leader had to make a choice from a series of optional propers for these Sundays. Some areas did set up proper readings for all Sundays of the year, but these were not universally accepted in the church. It should also be remembered that the original scheme probably included pericopes for Wednesdays and Fridays as well as Sundays. This may account for the fact that some important passages of Scripture are not included in the Sunday series which has come down to us. (7)

Luther Reed points out that we must recognize three types of lectionaries: 1) those of the early middle ages, before the general recognition of the Festival of the Holy Trinity; 2) those of a later period, from the 13th to the 15th centuries; 3) the 16th century lectionaries of the Lutheran churches, the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, and the Roman Missal. The lectionaries of the second period accepted the Festival of the Holy Trinity, and this, instead of the festivals of Pentecost and of a few important saints (Peter, Paul, Lawrence, Michael etc.) soon came to dominate the final half of the church year though the Roman church still continued to number these Sundays "after Pentecost". The Lutheran Church, though in general keeping to the most ancient use, climaxed the process of development by establishing propers for all the Sundays that may occur in the Trinity season. (8)

The Reformers took various attitudes towards the pericopes. Martin Luther's most familiar comments on the readings are found in his Formula Missae of 1523 (LW 53,23f). He writes, "After this the Epistle is read. Certainly the time has not yet come to attempt revision here, as nothing unevangelical is read, except that those parts from the Epistles of Paul in which faith is taught are read only rarely, while the exhortations to morality are most frequently read. The Epistles seem to have been chosen by a singularly unlearned and superstitious advocate of works. But for the service those sections in which faith in Christ is taught should have been given preference. The latter were certainly considered more often in the Gospels by whoever it was who chose these lessons. In the meantime, the sermon in the vernacular will have to supply what is lacking. If in the future the vernacular be used in the mass (which Christ may grant), one must see to it that Epistles and Gospels chosen from the best and most weighty parts of these writings be read in the mass."

Luther never got around to making such a revision of the pericopes. In the Deutsche Messe (1526) he gives one reason for retaining the system of pericopes. "This is one of the reasons we retain the Epistles and Gospels as they are

given in the postils--there are so few gifted preachers who are able to give a powerful and practical exposition of a whole evangelist or some other book of the Bible." (LW 53,78) He was not opposed to others preaching on complete books. "For the Epistles and Gospels we have retained the customary division according to the church year, because we do not find anything especially reprehensible in this use. And the present situation in Wittenberg is such that many are here who must learn to preach in places where this division is still being observed and may continue in force. Since in this matter we can be of service to others without loss to ourselves, we leave it, but have no objection to others who take up the complete books of the evangelists. This we think provides sufficient preaching and teaching for the lay people. He who desires more will find enough on other days." (LW 53,68)

Efforts were made to establish a new system. A church order from Prussia, in 1525, enjoins: "For the Epistle lesson the Pastor shall read a whole chapter or one-half from the New Testament, beginning with Paul, through all the Epistles and Acts of the Apostles, facing the people, reading distinctly in German.... Afterwards the Deacon or Priest shall read a chapter, or one-half of the Gospel, beginning with Matthew to the end of John, the same way as the Epistle." (9)

Though in general continuing the historic series, the Lutherans made a few changes. They appointed eschatological texts (selected by Luther from Viet Dietrich) for the 25th to 27th Sundays after Trinity. They also followed Luther's suggestion in appointing the story of the Transfiguration for the 6th Sunday after Epiphany as a fitting climax to this season.(10) There was no set of Old Testament lessons established because the Old Testament was not read as a separate lesson in the churches influenced by Roman liturgy. Incidentally, the use of the term "pericope" to refer to set Scriptural lessons is of 16th century Lutheran origin (cf. the work of Brenz, Pericopae evangeliorum expositae 1566). (11)

A comparative study of the pericopes for the last half of the church year shows that with the possible exception of the Epistle and Gospel for Trinity 3, no particular combination of Epistle and Gospel has been absolutely maintained throughout the centuries in the Roman, Lutheran, or Anglican lectionaries. The Lutheran Church, on the whole, followed the revision of Alcuin more closely than did the Anglican Church. The Roman Church established her official lectionary at the Council of Trent in 1570. Throughout most of the Trinity season the old Roman epistle readings differ by one Sunday from our Lutheran readings. Reed has a comparison of the Lutheran, Roman, and Anglican readings in his The Lutheran Liturgy, pp. 438ff. Zwingli, Hünzer, Calvin, and Bulliger all abolished the pericopic system in favor of some other pattern of Scripture readings.

To some extent the retention of the traditional pericopes developed into a confessional controversy in Europe. The Lutheran Westphal proposed to Calvin in the sacramental controversy that the pericopes be sanctioned as sermonic basis. Calvin replied with an attack upon them, declaring that the one ground for their retention was their convenience for the preacher. The Lutherans defended the pericopes. Though they were not blind to their defects, they felt the system served the needs of the congregations. The preachers needed helps, and collections of sermons on the pericopes existed; the postils were in great use by preachers. The Lutherans emphasized that preaching should deal with the necessary truths of salvation, a result better obtained by dealing with selections rather than with whole books. So the Lutheran sermon brought about retention of the old pericopes. (12)

During the age of rationalism and pietism there was growing criticism of the pericope system. Spener regretted the restriction of the preacher which the use of the pericopes had brought about, so that often essentials had to be dragged in by the hair. Mosheim, Reinhard, and Herder all criticized the system on the basis of their own experiences and for practical reasons. In the middle of the 19th century the criticism increased with the publication by Ernst Ranke of a historical study of the origins of the system. He reached the conclusion

that, apart from some lections for the chief festivals, a great part of the pericopes were set for purposes, days, feasts, and actions which have fallen into disuse or even into oblivion, that they belonged to a church year which coincided only in part with our own. It was pointed out that only fragments remained from the old pericope systems and that no special wisdom underlay the selections for many of the Sundays of the year, especially in the non-festival half of the year. (13)

Efforts to remedy the situation were made in many areas. In Bavaria Gottfried Thomasius (d. 1875) worked out a new system of preaching texts. In the Rhineland Karl Nitzsch (d. 1868) was commissioned to set up a new system which was adopted in Prussia. Hanover designed several new orders. So did Wuerttemberg, Saxony, and other churches. The Eisenach Conference of 1852 approved its committee's selection of pericopes known as the Eisenach Pericopes. These as well as others are familiar to us from Paul Nesper's Biblical Texts where a total of 14 series are listed.

Here in America the situation was very fluid among the Lutherans. In general there was no great effort to retain the historic readings. The Liturgie oder Kirchen Agende published in Baltimore in 1818 specifies only a reading of "the Gospel, Epistle, or any other suitable selection from the Scriptures." (14) The immigration of confessional German Lutherans in the mid-19th century, the influence of Loehe, and some revival of confessionalism among the eastern Lutherans, especially Krauth, did produce a growing interest in liturgical matters and increased use of the historic pericopes. The Common Service Book of 1888 and 1917, prepared by the United Lutheran Church, was very influential in setting the liturgical patterns among English speaking Lutherans. With the publication of The Lutheran Hymnal by the Synodical Conference in 1941, also our Wisconsin Synod churches in general have followed the practice of reading the historic lessons. This then is the review of the development of the readings in the service up to the modern lectionary reform movement.

## II. Lectionary revision and The Church Year Calendar and Lectionary

Even the most earnest advocates of the historic series of readings admit imperfections. Reed points out some of these. "Some of the great parables are missing....Some of the Lessons for Lent represent medieval rather than evangelical ideas. The Epistle for the 4th Sunday in Lent misses a magnificent climax by not including one verse more (Gal 5,1). The Gospel for Easter, and the Collect and the Epistle as well, are inadequate for this great festival....The Gospel for Trinity Sunday is the historical and appropriate Gospel for the octave of Pentecost....The desirability of including Old Testament lessons is also frequently expressed." (15)

The article on "pericope" in The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge written by Caspari says that the task of providing a new lectionary is something which the Protestant Church should no longer defer. These words were written many years ago. Some suggestions are made as to what this new lectionary should contain. It should continue to be based upon the church year, the year of our Lord. In producing this new lectionary "the experiences of the past should be utilized, especially the fact that the serial reading of the Bible has not maintained itself. Indeed, this sort of reading is based upon a wrong principle, inasmuch as all books of the Bible are not equally suited for the edification of the congregation, which last is one aim of the Church in its reading of Scripture. On this account the Church will install pericopes, that is, a fixed and obligatory system of lections." Martin Luther would have agreed that not every part of the Scripture is equally edifying for the average congregation. It does seem to be desirable that the church have a pericope system.

Some efforts have been made over the years to effect lectionary reform. These were quite extensive in the last half of the 19th century in Germany. The result was a great multiplication of pericope systems (59 different series

were tabulated for the ILCW). (16) These new series were used quite extensively for preaching purposes but did not replace the standard readings in our services. It took the centralized authority of the Roman Catholic Church to bring about some decisive action in the matter of lectionary reform.

The stimulus for such reform came from Vatican II. I should like to quote from the Documents of Vatican II several significant passages. "For the sacred Scriptures contain the word of God and since they are inspired, really are the word of God; and so the study of the sacred page is, as it were, the soul of sacred theology. By the same word of Scripture the ministry of the word also takes wholesome nourishment and yields fruits of holiness. This ministry includes pastoral preaching, catechetics, and all other Christian instruction, among which the liturgical homily should have an exceptional place" (Revelation 24). "(1) In sacred celebrations there is to be more reading from holy Scripture, and it is to be more varied and suitable. (2) Since the sermon is part of the liturgical service, the preferred place for it is to be indicated even in the rubrics, as far as the nature of the rite will allow; and the ministry of preaching is to be fulfilled with exactitude and fidelity. The sermon, moreover, should draw its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources" (Sacred Liturgy 35). "The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy Scriptures will be read to the people over a set cycle of years....The homily, therefore, is to be highly esteemed as part of the liturgy itself" (Sacred Liturgy 51.52).

This call for a greater use of the Scriptures in reading and preaching resulted in the preparation of a new Lectionary for Mass (LM), approved in 1969. Concerning this revision Pope Paul VI says, "The revision of the lectionary was indeed a wise directive, aimed at developing among the faithful an ever-increasing hunger for God's word, the word which leads the people of the new covenant to the perfect unity of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are fully confident that priests and faithful alike will prepare their hearts together more earnestly for the Lord's Supper, meditating more thoughtfully on sacred scripture, nourishing themselves daily with the words of the Lord. The fulfillment of the wishes of the Second Vatican Council will be the inevitable consequence of this experience of God's word: sacred scripture will become a perpetual source of spiritual life, an important instrument for transmitting Christian teachings, and the center of all theological formation."(17)

The Lectionary for Mass follows a three-year cycle. It restores the Old Testament readings for every Sunday and major festival. Its readings are arranged according to two principles: an approach to a kind of continuous reading and a thematic approach in the festival season. It restores the ancient reading of the Acts between Easter and Pentecost. It assigns one of the synoptic gospels for each year, filling in with lessons from John. The Sundays after Epiphany and Pentecost are called Sundays of the Year.

Among Lutherans there has been discussion of lectionary revision for some time. The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW), an organization of representatives from the churches belonging to the Lutheran Council in the U.S.A., was authorized to produce a new or revised lectionary. This has resulted in the publication of The Church Year Calendar and Lectionary in 1973.

So far as the calendar revision goes, two major changes were made which will effect the present church year: 1) the Epiphany season was extended three additional Sundays thus eliminating the three Sundays of pre-Lent; 2) the Sundays in the last half of the year are numbered "after Pentecost" rather than "after Trinity". The Festival of the Holy Trinity is retained on the First Sunday after Pentecost.

With regard to the lectionary the ILCW presented two series of pericopes: 1) a revision of the historic pericopes completed in 1971. This is a one-year lectionary with Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel assignments for all Sundays and major festivals. Considerable changes have been made in the Old Testament

selections and less extensive alterations have been made in the Epistles and Gospels. Proposals from other lectionaries were considered, especially the German and Scandinavian Lutheran revisions then in progress.

2) The other lectionary is a three-year system of Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel lessons for Sundays and all festivals. The antecedent for this lectionary is Lectionary for Mass (LM). Not all readings proposed in the LM were accepted by the Lutheran revisors for the new lectionary. About one-sixth of the readings in the Lutheran lectionary are totally different from LM. Since this three-year cycle is getting the most attention and would make the greatest changes in our readings, our Commission on Worship has requested that this lectionary be studied. So we will concentrate on it rather than on the one-year revision.

The three-year cycle of readings is numbered A, B, and C. Series C is being used this church year 1974. In selecting Gospels, a basic principle assigns the gospel of Matthew to series A, Mark to series B, and Luke to series C. Since Mark is shorter than the other synoptics, more of John is included in series B. John is also used in the other two years. In series A, 47 selections are from Matthew, 6 from Luke, and 16 from John. In series B, 37 selections are from Mark, 8 from Luke, 3 from Matthew, and 23 from John. In series C, 52 selections are from Luke, 3 from Matthew, and 14 from John.

The Epistles also follow a pattern. Readings from a single epistle for certain portions of the church year extend over a period of three to sixteen weeks, but they are selective, not woodenly continuous. Thus, Advent and Lent traditionally have their own thematic choice of Epistles while two great blocks of the church year, the Epiphany and after-Pentecost seasons, have Epistles assigned by books. For Sundays of Easter, specific books are also assigned for six weeks each year from writings appropriate to the Easter season (1 Peter, 1 John, Revelation). In the non-festival half of the year there is not always a correspondence with the Gospel. The books used in the three years are as follows: Series A - 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Romans, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians; Series B - 1 Corinthians again, 1 John, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, James, Hebrews; Series C - Galatians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Philemon, 2 Thessalonians, Revelation, and repeating from before, 1 Corinthians and Hebrews.

The First Lesson from the Old Testament most often relates to the Gospel. There are times when it was chosen to relate to the Epistle and sometimes to both. There is no pattern of continuous reading in the Old Testament. These readings were always selection because of their relationship with one of the New Testament lessons. Most often used of the Old Testament books is Isaiah. During the Easter season the Old Testament is not read but rather selections from the Book of Acts.

A study of the ILCW Year B readings shows that 82% are identical or essentially the same as the LM readings. Quite often the only difference is either an expanded or shorter reading (judged essentially the same). Of a total of 201 readings, 112 are identical, 54 are essentially the same, and 35 differ. Those that differ are mainly when the LM uses the Apocrypha or has a special emphasis on a Sunday which the Lutheran Church does not share (e.g., 2nd Sunday in Lent = Transfiguration in LM; Pentecost 2 = Corpus Christi in LM). The three series (A,B,C) have the same readings each year on the following days: Christmas, Name of Jesus (January 1), Christmas 2, Epiphany, Epiphany 1 (Baptism of Jesus - the parallel Gospel accounts are used), Ash Wednesday, Good Friday (except Epistle), Easter Evening or Monday, Ascension.

The Church Year Calendar and Lectionary also contains new Collects in contemporary language and suggested Psalms which might replace the historic Introits and Graduals. The Psalm selections are usually of much greater length than our present Introits. The ILCW publication has an extensive introduction and several very useful indexes (both lectionaries, the Psalms, Collects, and special days which are suggested for those who want them).

### III. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and lectionary revision

Our Synod did not, of course, take part in the work of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. Our own Commission on Worship has, however, been following the work being done and bringing this to the attention of the Synod. The 1973 convention adopted the following resolutions on the subject New Lectionary:

"a) That the Commission on Worship be requested to give careful scrutiny to the ILCW lectionary;

"b) That the listing of readings in this lectionary be made available to the pastors of the Synod, and that the various pastoral conferences be urged to study the lectionary during this next year;

"c) That the question whether to adopt the three-year cycle of readings of the ILCW lectionary come before the districts of the Synod in their conventions next summer;

"d) That the Synod in Convention, 1975, take final action on this matter;

"e) That the matter of the new liturgical calendar be deferred until the question of the lectionary has been resolved." (18)

The Commission has continued to give careful scrutiny to the ILCW lectionary; the listing of readings has been made available to the pastors of the Synod with an introduction and additional comments in Focus on Worship (1974,1); some conferences have studied this matter and several districts passed resolutions concerning the new lectionary this past summer; and the matter will undoubtedly come before the Synod convention next summer. We assume, of course, that if our Synod should recommend these readings, we would supply our own introduction and necessary commentary.

One of the members of the ILCW lists these advantages of the new lectionary:

- 1) restoration of readings from the Old Testament to the regular Sunday worship;
- 2) regaining the use of Acts (and large portions of Revelation);
- 3) return to a kind of 'in course reading' of various books of the Bible;
- 4) tripling the amount of Scripture regularly designated for reading in worship services. (19)

One notes from this list that the increase in the use of Scripture is the great advantage. Luther was cautious about increasing the number and variety of lessons in his day because of the ignorance of the preachers and people. Today after 400 years of educational efforts by our Lutheran Church, we ought to be able to give our people a greater variety in the Scripture readings used in our services. These additional readings will help to enrich the knowledge of the Scriptures. This is especially true if we make some comments on the readings either in our worship folders, Bible class, or in the service. In addition those among us who find the historic series deficient and so make their own selections, may be more satisfied with this new lectionary. This would be an advantage.

There may also be an advantage to our Synod in recommending the ILCW lectionary for reasons of publication. Adopting this series would enable our Northwestern Publishing House to supply materials which may be used in congregations outside our Synod. We in turn may find some helpful worship materials coming from the other Lutheran and independent publishing houses based on the new lectionary.

There may be some practical considerations which would cause us to refrain from recommending this new lectionary. Our people are familiar with the old readings and some will miss hearing them each year. There are some few readings omitted in the new lectionary which were part of the old. Some of the Gospel readings will appear in a parallel account. Luke 2,41-52, should be read in Year C on the Sunday after Christmas (this is probably a printing error in the lectionary). The following old Gospel readings are missing: John 8,46-59 (L 5), John 16,16-23 (Ea 3), John 16,23-30 (Ea 5), Mark 8,1-9 (T 7 - the feeding of the 5,000 does occur twice), Luke 19,46-59 (T 10), Matthew 24,15-28 (T 25), and Matthew 11,12-15 (Reformation). There are 11 old Epistle readings missing: Romans 6,19-23; Galatians 3,15-22; 4,21-31; Ephesians 3,13-21; 6,10-17; 1 Thessalonians 4,1-7; 1 Peter 2,11-20; 3,8-15; 4,7-11; 1 John 3,13-18; Revelation 14,6f. Some of the other old Epistles have verses missing (a total of four). Overall there has been a great increase in the number and variety of Gospels and Epistles.



There are some who favor a one-year cycle of readings because they consider it good for the congregation to hear the same readings year after year. They would more likely favor a revision of the historic series. Sermon texts then are usually chosen from a different series or free texts are used. In the Roman Church the readings are meant to serve each Sunday as the basis of the homily. Hence the three-year cycle is a distinct advantage for them to give variety in their preaching. There is in my opinion also a real advantage for us Lutherans to preach on one of the pericopes read as a lesson. This helps greatly in tying together the entire service. One also has the opportunity to thoroughly explain at least one of the readings. The adoption of a three-year lectionary with three lessons per Sunday gives one a nine year sermon text cycle. This certainly offers much variety and rich fare.

If we were to adopt the new lectionary there is the problem of what to use for Introits since our old Introits and Graduals do not often fit the new readings (there is some question as to how well they always fit the old!). This matter of the Introits must be dealt with whatever course we follow. Music may be effected to some extent. Those who follow the hymn of the week plan would have to make some changes. These are practical matters which could be worked out.

There has also been concern in some areas that offense might be given by rushing into the general recommendation of the lectionary at this time. We would have to make clear that the reason for our recommendation of this new lectionary after careful study was the value we found in it for the congregations of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and not simply because we want to jump on an ecumenical bandwagon.

Some have raised the question as to whether the recommendation of this new lectionary to our churches would not parallel the situation at the time of the Leipzig Interim when the Wittenberg theologians, in order to escape persecution for themselves and the evangelical churches, agreed to reinstate certain Roman ceremonies which in themselves were neither right nor wrong (adiaphora). The opponents contended that "under no circumstances can this be done with a clear conscience and without prejudice to the divine truth, even as far as things indifferent are concerned, in a period of persecution and a case of confession, especially when the adversaries are attempting either by force and coercion or by surreptitious methods to suppress the pure doctrine and gradually to insinuate their false doctrines into our churches again" (FC SD X,3). Article X of the Formula of Concord rejected the position of the Wittenberg theologians. The recommending of this new lectionary and use by our churches would not be parallel, however, because no one is forcing us to do this. No other church body has asked us to do this. We will suffer no form of persecution if we continue to use the historic readings. We would not be accepting this new lectionary as a step toward closer union with either Roman or other Lutheran churches; we would accept this new lectionary because we considered it an improvement over the old. We would manifest a true spirit of ecumenicity with no sacrifice of the truth of God's Word. This was a spirit which characterized Martin Luther: to be ready to accept from others what we find good and valuable and not contrary to our confession.

Whatever set of readings is used, three things are important when the Scriptures are read: 1) the language must be intelligible. The version must be in the language of the people. 2) the lection must be read so that it is understood. Pastors must read well. This is an art to practice until it is mastered. 3) the purpose of the lesson must be made clear. If it is indeed a "lesson", then there must be something to be learned. Let us in some way make clear what this is. Either in writing or orally this should be stated as clearly as possible. Having the entire reading printed out in the worship folder or having pew Bibles will be a help and enables people to prepare for the reading and reflect upon it.

There is no question that the use of a new lectionary would make for some changes in the worship life of the churches of our Synod. There would also be some questions raised about what we are doing. But certainly these changes will be small compared with what the early church had to go through and what the churches of the Reformation had to go through. This new lectionary may indeed serve as a way in which our Lord, who has caused all Holy Scripture to be written for our learning, will help us the better to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of the holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which He has given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. May God's Spirit guide us in our deliberations upon this question of the recommendation of the new lectionary.

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Janesville, Wisconsin  
October 7, 1974

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