

# The Proposed Calendar and Lectionary

Roger T. Beckwith

The Liturgical Commission's report *The Calendar, Lectionary and Rules to Order the Service*,<sup>1</sup> shortly to come before the General Synod, has a considerable history behind it. It is a revision of another report of the Commission's, *The Calendar and Lessons for the Church's Year*,<sup>2</sup> published eight years ago, which was itself a revision of the Joint Liturgical Group's publications on the calendar and lectionary. When the 1969 report was given its first airing at a special session of Church Assembly in February 1969, one speaker proposed that consideration be deferred for five years, and his wish has virtually been granted. In the meantime, however, some of the material from the 1969 report has been brought piecemeal before the General Synod and authorised for use, namely, certain parts of its lectionary (as attached to the Series 3 and Series 2 Revised services), and its Rules to Order the Service. Moreover, its proposals about the calendar were debated, and in important respects amended, by the General Synod in February 1974. The new report is the Liturgical Commission's revision of the whole of the 1969 material (apart from collects) in the light of these debates and of its own further reflections.

The earlier report was considered in some detail in an article published in *The Churchman* in Summer 1970. There is no need to repeat here all the material in that article. The old report tackled a worthwhile task with considerable ability and care, and in some respects the new report is an improvement on the old one. In particular, as a result of the General Synod's 1974 debate, Ascension Day and Trinity Sunday have been reinstated in the same position of importance that they have in the Prayer Book, and so has Epiphany. Some other criticisms which the earlier article made of the proposed calendar have not been met, however, and these are scrutinised in sections 1 and 2 of the present article, together with two new calendrical proposals. The lectionary was given unstinted praise in the earlier article, but deeper reflection and practical experience of it have led many to doubt whether its ingenuity is not outweighed by important defects. In Autumn 1973 *The Churchman* carried an article by John Tiller, urging that the Sunday lessons are too brief, that their total coverage of Scripture (even on a

two-year cycle) is too small, and that continuous reading from Sunday to Sunday of a single book ought to be restored, in place of the idea of a Sunday theme. This is done for more than half the year in the new lectionary of the Church of Rome, which is based upon a three-year cycle. It will be found that Mr. Tiller's reactions are not unique, for the writer of section 3 of the present article criticises the proposed lectionary in a basically similar way. The weekday lectionary has also drawn criticism from its users, but this is not discussed in the present article.

Apart from the calendar and lectionary, the Rules to Order the Service in the new report (pp.24-26) should not be ignored. Here, perhaps, some words from the 1970 *Churchman* article may be quoted:

The Rules for such matters as the transference of holy days when they coincide are certainly not as 'few in number' or as 'plain and easy to be understood' as those of the Prayer Book. They are, on the contrary, somewhat reminiscent of 'the number and hardness of the rules called the Pie', which Cranmer, in his statement *Concerning the Service of the Church* at the beginning of the Prayer Book, expresses such concern to get away from. It is true that twentieth century clergy, unlike those of the sixteenth century, are blessed with publishers who will draw up annual calendars and apply the rules for them, but it is surely better not to be dependent on this kind of help.

In its introduction, the Commission gives as the reason for these very complicated rules, that 'There is demand for definition in matters which the Prayer Book does not define, and the Rules to Order the Service are our response to this demand'(p.8). Surely, this demand ought not to be given in to. On the contrary, it is decidedly arguable that the 1662 revisers, by their rubrics, have already tied up more loose ends than is really necessary; and the Liturgical Commission, elsewhere so excessively permissive in their rubrics, could have been expected to agree that this is so. Why, then, are their Rules so different from their practice on other occasions? Can it not be left to the discretion of the parochial clergy to decide which of two coinciding holy days is the more important, and whether to transfer the less important or to combine them? And if they transfer it, need they be told precisely which day to transfer it to, regardless of local conditions? In the present charismatic age especially, the Church of England is not wholly made up of pettifogging ritualists, who wish to have detailed calendrical guidance for every conceivable eventuality. Seeing, therefore, that these Rules are not the same as those authorised by the General Synod in 1973, but a further revision, now is a golden opportunity to throw them out and to call for a much simpler set. About four rules would be sufficient, instead of the proposed eighteen.

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## 1. Unreformed Holy Days.

In place of the Prayer Book's two classes of holy days (red-letter, which are to be observed liturgically, and black-letter, which are not), the report gives us three main classes. These are (i) Principal Holy Days (all Sundays, together with Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Ascension Day), (ii) Festivals and Greater Holy Days (roughly corresponding to the rest of the red-letter days), and (iii) Lesser Festivals and Commemorations (very approximately corresponding to the black-letter days). Days of the first class are to be observed liturgically, and days of the other two classes may be: liturgical provision is made for them all. It is therefore important that all these days should be suitable for liturgical observance, and should not be like the less suitable of the black-letter days, in the Prayer Book calendar, which appear to have been introduced mainly for purposes of identification and secular convenience, and were not in any case intended to be observed liturgically. This is the more important, since the report proposes that the new calendar should be substituted for that in the Book of Common Prayer, and should not simply be an alternative (p. 8, para. 9).

Two observances retained from the earlier report which call for severe criticism are All Soul's Day on November 2nd (pp. 20, 67), which by its very name distinguishes the souls in purgatory from the saints in heaven, and 'Thanksgiving for the Institution of Holy Communion' (p.69), which is the 1928 Prayer Book's name for Corpus Christi, the festival of transubstantiation. This is not given a date, since it is a movable feast, observed in the Church of Rome of the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. As was remarked in the 1970 *Churchman* article,

All Souls' Day and Corpus Christi were instituted by the medieval Church for the precise purpose of inculcating medieval doctrine, and are celebrated by prayers and masses for the souls in purgatory and by the adoration of the reserved sacrament. They can therefore have no place in the liturgy of the Church of England.

A new observance, which has called forth much criticism in the press (criticism which was summed up in the *Church Times* editorial for 16th July 1976), is the proposed festival, simply called 'The Blessed Virgin Mary', on August 15th. This is included in the list of the Greater Holy Days (p.19). August 15th is the date on which the Church of Rome celebrates Mary's bodily assumption; the compilers of the Prayer Book were therefore wise to drop this date even out of their list of black-letter days, and if it were restored now (and as a red-letter day), after the Church of Rome has raised the belief in the assumption to the level of a dogma necessary to salvation, this would be a very serious step indeed. The arguments by which the Commission support their proposal (p. 6) are an echo of those used in a

memorandum circulated to the Liturgical Commission and the General Synod by the secretary of the Church Union in 1971, criticising the Commission's earlier report for not including the feast of the Assumption; though whether he was even speaking for all Anglo-Catholics may be doubted. These arguments could scarcely receive a better reply than was given by John Tiller in a letter to the *Church Times* for 16th July 1976:

I hope that the General Synod will not fail to challenge the basis upon which the Liturgical Commission is proposing to introduce a major festival into the calendar on August 15. They argue that 'the festival of the Annunciation is widely regarded as a festival of our Lord and not of our Lady, and upon this understanding of the matter it follows that the Church of England has no festival devoted to the Blessed Virgin herself.'

On this basis one could also argue that we have no festival devoted to St. Paul, since his conversion is a matter of what our Lord did on the Damascus road. Surely we never devote a festival to a saint alone, but rather to the glory of our Lord.

I am aware that the Annunciation is part of the Nativity cycle, but the precise reason for honouring the Virgin is because of her place in that work of God; and it is extremely tendentious of the Commission to argue that 'there ought to be a festival . . . which related to the whole of her life, and not simply to some incident in it.' What we do know about 'the whole of her life,' and what to do they mean by reducing the events of the Incarnation to 'an incident'?

To suppose that a saint's day must refer to the whole of a life, or even to the end of a life, is quite erroneous. No one is proposing that we ought to have a red-letter day for the martyrdom of St. Paul or the beheading of John the Baptist. And, even if they were, it would only serve to emphasize the most pernicious tendency apparent in this matter of August 15. It is the beginning of a reintroduction of that process of duplication and multiplication of days for individual saints which the compilers of the Book of Common Prayer regarded as so inhibiting to the regular prayer life of the Church of England. We should be very cautious indeed about enlarging the number of red-letter days.

Finally, the Commission deny any connection with the unwarrantable dogma of the Assumption, which is commemorated by the Roman Church on the same date. It is therefore strange that they insist on keeping to what is these days a most inconvenient date for their proposed festival.

What it means in practice is that the parochial clergy will have to set about finding someone to take a thinly-attended weekday celebration at a time when they and many of their brother clergy, not to mention the laity, are likely to be away on holiday.

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If the Commission had proposed raising the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary from black-letter to red-letter status, there would probably have been comparatively little objection. This commemorates a biblical event, is unassociated with false doctrine, and falls as a somewhat less inconvenient time of year. But, when all is said and done, there is no good reason for being dissatisfied with the Annunciation.

The Commission's three festivals of All Souls, Corpus Christi and the Assumption (two of them disguised under other names, and the third given another name as an alternative, p.67) are further examples of its professed and irresponsible policy of deliberate ambiguity about doctrine.

### Notes

1. GS 292, London, S.P.C.K., 1976, 85pp., £1.95.
2. London, S.P.C.K., 1969, 95pp., £0.52½.

### Robin A. Leaver 2. Celebrating the Reformation.

For some years many Anglican Evangelical churches have unofficially celebrated the Reformation on the Sunday nearest October 16, the date Bishop Latimer and Ridley were martyred in 1555. With the publication of the Report giving proposals for a new calendar and lectionary <sup>1</sup> there is a move to make such observances official, and not only on October 16: March 21 is proposed for Cranmer, October 6 for Tyndale, and December 31 for Wyclif. But the most revealing proposal is that for October 31: 'Saints and Martyrs of the Reformation Era'. But all is not what it seems. It is not intended as an unequivocal celebration of the events which led to the formation of the Reformed Church of England. With typical Anglican double-think, the members of the Liturgical Commission explain themselves: 'We believe that this will provide an opportunity to commemorate those who were loyal to their beliefs on both sides of the Reformation controversy.' <sup>2</sup> Thus one can imagine the bizarre situation of one parish celebrating the lives and witness of such men as Thomas More, Stephen Gardiner and Reginald Pole, while in an adjoining parish the congregation is honouring John Bale, John Hooper, John Jewel, etc. However, the Report makes no reference to the reasons why the date of October 31 has been chosen for this ambivalent honouring of Reformation personalities. The date has clearly been taken over from Lutheran usage, and, if the proposal is accepted by the General Synod, will challenge the uniqueness of the Lutheran calendar <sup>3</sup>.

Within Lutheranism October 31 was chosen as it marks the anniversary of Luther's publication of his 95 Theses concerning the sale of indulgences in 1517 <sup>4</sup>. Traditionally this action has been seen as the public beginning of the

Reforming movement. Luther himself always saw the beginning of the Reformation in the publication of the 95 Theses <sup>5</sup>. During Luther's lifetime Bugenhagen included an annual thanksgiving service for the progress of the Gospel in the Church Orders he drew up for Brunswick, Hamburg and Lübeck, <sup>6</sup> but the first October 31 Reformation celebration apparently did not occur until 1617, on the centenary of Luther's protest. Many German towns and cities had their own way of marking this significant anniversary, but in Dresden, the capital of Saxony and the centre of Lutheranism at the time, the celebrations were extensive. The centrepiece of the Dresden celebrations took place in the Court Chapel of the Elector of Saxony. The order of worship drawn up for the occasion <sup>7</sup> established the form which was basically followed in later generations by other cities for their celebration of the Reformation.

Such celebrations lapsed during the period of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) and it was not until 1667 – that is, on the 150th anniversary of the Reformation – that the Reformation festival was re-introduced at the command of Elector Johann Georg II of Saxony. <sup>8</sup> In time October 31 became gradually accepted as the day to celebrate the Reformation and was eventually included within the calendar of the church year for the churches of Lutheran Germany.

The Saxon liturgy, *Agenda, das ist, Kirchenordnung für die diener der kirchen in herzog Heinrich zu Sachsen fürstenthum gestellet*, first issued in 1539 and enlarged the following year, understandably offered no propers for Reformation Day. Thus in 1617 and subsequently the Collect for the dedication of a church in the Saxon *Agenda* was pressed into service for Reformation Day:

O Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank Thee from the depths of our hearts, that Thou has given us the Holy Gospel and hast revealed Thy Fatherly heart: We beseech Thee, that in Thine unfathomable mercy Thou wouldest graciously keep us in the blessed light of Thy Word, and through Thy Holy Spirit lead and guide our hearts, that we may never falter but be firmly established thereby, and thus become eternally blessed; through Jesus Christ, Thy Beloved Son, our Lord. Amen. <sup>9</sup>

The Epistle chosen for the day was 2 Thessalonians 2:3-8, which speaks of 'the man of lawlessness . . . the son of perdition' who 'takes his seat in the temple of God proclaiming himself to be God . . . and the Lord Jesus will slay him . . . by His appearing.' The passage was selected because Luther had identified the 'son of perdition' with the Antichrist and equated the Antichrist with the papacy. <sup>10</sup>

The Gospel lection was not taken from the Four Gospels but instead from the book of Revelation, chapter 14:6-8. This passage speaks of 'another

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angel . . . with an eternal Gospel to proclaim'. The background for this choice of Scripture is to be found in the funeral sermon for Luther which the Reformer's colleague preached in Wittenberg on February 22, 1545. In this sermon Bugenhagen identified Luther as the angel in *Revelation 14* who had 'an eternal Gospel to proclaim.'<sup>11</sup> This became the subsequent Lutheran interpretation of the passage.<sup>12</sup>

In contemporary Lutheranism a variety of collects and lections are used for Reformation Day. In America most of the Lutheran bodies have used a collect which is found in the 1539/40 Saxon *Agenda* as the collect for Wednesday Vespers:<sup>13</sup>

Lord God, our heavenly Father, pour out Your Holy Spirit upon Your faithful people. Keep them steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and comfort them in all temptations, defend them against all enemies of Your Word, and bestow on the church Your saving peace, through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>14</sup>

An alternative collect is permitted:

Almighty God, by the preaching of Your servants, the Reformers, You made the light of the Gospel shine clearly. Grant that we may know its saving power, faithfully defend it against all enemies, and joyfully proclaim it, for the salvation of men and the glory of Your Name; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>15</sup>

The Scripture lections can be tabulated thus:<sup>16</sup>

	CSB	EKG	TLH	SBH	ILCW	LH
OT	—	—	—	1Sam3 <sup>19-41</sup>	Jcr31 <sup>31-34</sup>	Isa55 <sup>1-11</sup>
Ep.	Gal2 <sup>16-21</sup>	Rev14 <sup>6-7</sup>	Rev14 <sup>6-7</sup>	Rom3 <sup>21-28</sup>	Rom3 <sup>19-28</sup>	Rom3 <sup>20-28</sup>
		or				
		Rom3 <sup>20-28</sup>				
Gos.	Jn8 <sup>31-36</sup>	Jn2 <sup>13-22</sup>	Matt11 <sup>12-15</sup>	Jn8 <sup>31-36</sup>	Jn8 <sup>31-36</sup>	Jn8 <sup>31-36</sup>
Psa.	46	—	46	46	46	46

The rationale of these passages is easily explained. In 1 Samuel 3 the call and preaching of Samuel is compared to the call and preaching of Luther; Jeremiah 31 and Isaiah 55 speak of the new covenant of grace, which was the rediscovery of the Reformation; Galatians 2 and Romans 3 are statements of the doctrine of justification, the touch-stone of Luther's theology, indeed, it was Luther's translation of Romans 3:28 which could be said to be the key-note of the Reformation: 'We hold that a man is justified by faith *alone* apart from works of law.'<sup>17</sup> In the choice of John 2 the Reforming movement of the Church is compared with Christ's cleansing of the Temple, and in Matthew 11 Luther's ministry is compared with that of John the Baptist. In John 8 Jesus tells His disciples that if they continue in

His Word they 'will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,' and God's Word, truth and freedom were among the watchwords of the Reformation. Then, of course, Psalm 46 is the Psalm which gave birth to the battle hymn of the Reformation, Luther's *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*.

Historically Reformation Day among Lutherans has not been celebrated simply as St. Luther's Day. The underlying mood has been one of thanksgiving and prayer – thanksgiving for the recovery of the true understanding of the Gospel as revealed in the Word of God, and prayer for grace to preserve the truth of this revealed Gospel. It is not the day for glorifying Luther, or any other Reformer, but rather a day for glorifying God who has used men such as Dr. Martin to preserve His Gospel of grace and forgiveness in Christ. Within Lutheranism the day has been seen as an annual reminder that the church will fail if it does not stand on God's Word, God's truth and man's freedom in Christ.

The Liturgical Commission in their Report on the calendar and lectionary have done less than justice to the Lutheran tradition; they have taken over the date but have rejected the unique content. To suggest that it 'will provide an opportunity to commemorate those who were loyal to their beliefs on both sides of the Reformation' is to trivialise the Reformation debate. The debate was not about how tenaciously and stubbornly certain individuals stuck to their dogmatic guns. It was rather concerned with this fundamental question: What is God's plan of salvation for mankind? In the sixteenth century two different answers were given to that question: both cannot be right.

No doubt the ambivalent approach to October 31 suggested in the Liturgical Commission's Report will be explained as an ecumenical gesture. If so, it is likely to misfire. Catholics may be appeased but Lutherans will be offended. Indeed, not a few Anglicans will take it as further evidence that many present-day Anglicans prefer to seek the lowest common theological denominator rather than rise to the genuine on-going Reformation debate, which has to do with the nature and purpose of God's will in the redemption of contemporary man, whose need for God's grace remains the same as it did in the sixteenth century.

### Notes

1. *The Calendar, Lectionary and Rules to Order the Service* (GS 292), p. 20f.
2. *Ibid.*, p.7.
3. "The Lutheran Liturgy is unique among the churches of the world in appointing a Festival of the Reformation": L.D.Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959<sup>2</sup>, p.569. "It is the only day in the calendar



- peculiar to the Lutheran Church”: *Contemporary Worship 6: The Church Year Calendar and Lectionary* (= ILCW), Minneapolis, etc.: Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship, 1973, p.147. However, in Lutheranism Reformation Day is a major festival whereas the present Church of England proposal makes it only a ‘lesser festival’.
4. The historicity of Luther’s act of nailing the theses to the door of the Castle in Wittenberg on October 31 has been called into question in some recent Luther research; see for example, E.Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted: Luther Between Reform and Reformation*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968. But there is no sufficient ground for rejecting the traditional view that Luther actually nailed the theses to the church door; see K. Aland, *Martin Luther’s 95 Theses With the Pertinent Documents from the History of the Reformation*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967; F. Lau, ‘The Posting of Luther’s Theses – Legend or Fact?’, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, Vol. 38 (1967), pp. 691-703.
  5. See, for example, Aland, *op. cit.*, pp. 77, 79, 81.
  6. Reed, *Ibid.*
  7. H.-J. Moser, *Heinrich Schütz, His Life and Work*, trans. C.F. Pfatteicher, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959, pp. 98ff.; C. Mahrenholz, ‘Heinrich Schütz und die erste Reformations jubiläum 1617’, *Musicologica et Liturgica, gesammelte Aufsätze zu seinem 60. Geburtstag*, ed. K.F. Müller, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1960, pp. 196-204.
  8. *Leipziger Kirchen Andachten . . . Das Gebetbuch oder Ordnung des gantzen Öffentlichen Gottes-Dienstes durchs gantze Jahr*, Leipzig: Caspar Würdig, 1694, p. 103.
  9. *Agenda, Das ist Kirchen-Ordnung . . .*, Leipzig: Friedrich Lanckischens Erben, 1712, p. 178.
  10. See, for example, Luther’s marginal comment on the passage: “the rule of Antichrist is Christendom, by which he gets his commandment esteemed more highly than God’s commandment and service”: WA. Deutsche Bibel, Vol 7, p. 254.
  11. *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, Vol. 21b, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1904, col. 3416.
  12. In 1642 a quarto edition of Luther’s Bible was published at Wittenberg. A Roman Catholic compositor, who was obviously familiar with the Lutheran interpretation of the passage, altered the words “ein ewig Evangelium” (an eternal Gospel) in Revelation 14:6 to read “ein new Evangelium” (a new Gospel); see T.H.Darlow and H.F. Moule, *Historical Catalogue of the Printed Editions of Holy Scripture in the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, Vol. 2/1, London: BFBS, 1911, p. 499. The interpretation is recalled in the Lutheran Church of East Germany in that the theme for Reformation

Day is "Das ewige Evangelium" (The Eternal Gospel); see H-W. Niemann, *Predigtlieder zu den sechs Predigtreihen der Lutherischen Liturgischen Konferenz*, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1969, p. 81.

13. *Agenda*, 1712, ed., p. 158.
14. ILCW, p. 147. Versions of the same prayer are to be found in: *The Common Service Book of the Lutheran Church* (=CSB), Philadelphia: The Board of Publication of the United Lutheran Church in America, 1919, p. 124; *The Lutheran Hymnal* (=TLH), St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1941, p. 84; *Service Book and Hymnal* (=SBH), Minneapolis: (Eight Lutheran Bodies), 1958, p. 113.
15. ILCW p. 147. Versions of the collect appear in CSB and SBH. The Lutheran Church of Australia uses a variation of it: "Almighty and everlasting God, who hast shown mercy to us and hast restored to Thy Church the pure light of Thy Gospel: Keep us, we beseech Thee, in sound doctrine, that we may steadfastly believe and worthily follow Thy saving Word, and finally by its holy comfort depart in peace and joy; through . . .": *Lutheran Hymnal* (=LH), Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973, p. 94.
16. EKG = *Handbuch zum Evangelischen Kirchengesangbuch*, ed. C. Mahrenholz, et al, Vol. I/1, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1954, pp. 240.; cp. the preaching texts given in Niemann *Loc. cit.*
17. See further R.A. Leaver, *Luther on Justification*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975, pp. 16-24.

### O. Wright Holmes 3. The Suggested Lectionary.

We already have several official lectionaries, setting out which portions of scripture should be read at Morning Prayer and at Evening Prayer on Sundays (and weekdays). There is one of 1871, printed in the Book of Common Prayer; there is the Table of 1922, as revised in 1928 and in the 1928 Book; there is the 1961 Lectionary approved by the Convocations (not by the Church Assembly; it started life as a Measure, but failed to survive as such); and now another draft lectionary for this field is submitted for the consideration of the General Synod in GS 292. In 1871, whereas the 1662 practice of reading practically all the Old Testament each year was retained, the New Testament was to be read twice instead of three times, and the lectionary shortened. For good measure, in 1944 a further revision of the BCP lectionary, with new alternative lessons for Sundays, was issued (further revised in 1946) and in 1956 a full revision was issued for experimental use, of which the 1961 lectionary is a further revision. The *Acts of the Convocations*, published in 1961, has four pages of Convocation rulings on the subject.

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In GS 292 the Liturgical Commission tell us, 'the foundation of a complete lectionary for all services *must necessarily* be (italics mine) the lessons for the Eucharist on Sundays and other major festivals'. These centre, the Commission explains, in themes chosen for each Sunday, and it instances improvements it proposes in its earlier work. For the 'post-Pentecost' period — a term which the General Synod has voted against — the biblical passages were *first* selected, and then arranged so that some general progression of theme emerged. To the theme concept, thus arrived at, the concept of reading lessons in course (i.e. in their biblical sequence) has been intentionally subordinated. Also, some of the 1961 lections have been removed from MP/EP use 'since the Commission's proposals laid a prior claim to many of its lessons'. It is conceded that 'in consequence there are a number of occasions where the connexion of the lessons with the Sunday theme, or even with each other, will seem rather tenuous'. Not all will be equally happy with this line of argument, but the Commission sets out, in pages 70-80 of its report, what the resultant provision would be, so far as MP and EP and other services are concerned. This enables us to see where these lines of approach would take us, and the material thus provided will lead some to consider that further thought is required.

I am one for whom lectionaries have long had an attraction. Way back, I devised one, which served, for a long time, a young people's church; later I produced one which serves the inter-denominational services of the Staff Chapel at London's County Hall — both admittedly earthed rather than academic. All this led me to mark up later what the 1961 Table included, and what it left out, and to contribute to the debate in Church Assembly at that time. There are many who, though they have not full resources for scrutiny, will attach great importance to what is included in a lectionary and what is omitted, if only because many sermons are based on the lessons; and the beliefs of churchpeople, and of occasional worshippers, will be influenced by what is chosen for reading and expositions, or what is passed over. My concern, in this article, is for the balanced instruction of those who attend MP or EP, the 'church of the nation', as distinct from those attending the Holy Communion, who may be thought of as constituting the more fully committed.

There are churches in which MP and EP are not important elements in Sunday worship, but in a great many churches they are, and my travels have taught me that the 1961 Table is very widely used. The Commission rightly comment that 'one agreed lectionary with an assured expectation of life would be a great gain', but for us to reach this we shall need one of real excellence that will commend itself widely.

A number of excellent passages are proposed for addition to the 1961

Table. These include two readings from the later life of Jacob; the principle of delegation (Exod. 18); a specimen of the Levitical laws; a passage about unwitting sins (Num. 15); the brazen serpent story – though quite divorced from its Dominical exposition in John 3; the year of release (Deut. 15); the demand for a king; the kindness to Mephibosheth; the ascension of Elijah; the temple restoration under Joash; the decree of Cyrus and extra readings in Nehemiah; the calls of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But those who study pages 70-80 in the document will need to note that many passages listed for reading would be heard only on days and at times when few are likely to attend, or when the lection will be omitted unless three, not two, passages are read at the Holy Communion. For example, the table shows:

1 TIMOTHY			2 TIMOTHY		
1.12-2.8	T14	EP1	1.1-14	T13	MP1
2.1-7	T14	HC2	2.1-19	T19	MP1
6.6-end	T8	MP2	3.10-end	Oct.18	MP
6.6-19	AW	MP	3.14-4.5	Adv.2	HC2
6.6-19	Sept.21	EP	3.14-4.8	Adv.2	EP1
			4.1-11	Apr.25	HC
			4.1-18	Oct. 18	EP

(Note: 1 = Year 1, etc.

T= Trinity

AW= Ash Wednesday)

Only on five of these occasions is there a Timothy reading in a two-year cycle for MP/EP, for few of the laity can be at MP on Ash Wednesday or St. Luke's Day, or at EP on St. Matthew's Day or St. Luke's Day. More may be free to attend HC on St. Mark's Day, but on Advent 2 the Timothy reading is advised for omission unless three lections are used. Only 78 verses of 196 in Timothy will be heard, and of the epistle to Titus – none.

If we give ourselves more elbow-room by providing a three-year cycle, many more worth-while passages can be found a place. Examples, in no particular order, are Haggai 1 (reason for economic straits); Acts 12 (Peter's release); some of the experiences of Joseph; 2 Kings 7 (the evangelistic lepers at the siege of Samaria); something about Absalom; the sickness of Hezekiah and his conduct after his recovery; Saul's disobedience over Amalek; some material from Titus and Esther; more than 44 verses out of 132 in the Johannine epistles; more than one third of Galatians; more than 25 verses of the 184 in 1 and 2 Thessalonians; and the moral issues in 1 Corinthians.

All our lections should be easy ones for folk to understand as they listen. Most are, but are all? For many, those who broadcast on radio and television have applied new skills to make apprehension simple, and our

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congregations are less used to bringing great concentration to what is read in church. Something valuable is lost, moreover, when the Nehemiah story, or 1 Kings 19, or the career of Solomon, the experiences of Jonah or the framework of Job are scattered over a two-year cycle and morning and evening readings.

Should given lections always be tied to the morning, or always tied to the evening? Apart from the fact that many worshippers attend church on Sunday once only, there are parishes where amalgamations necessitate mornings only, or afternoons only, or evenings only. To take a very simple case, why should we still require the Whit Sunday readings of Romans 8 to be used, the first part always in the morning and the later part always in the evening?

As noted above, the Commission has said that some of the 1961 lections have been removed from MP/EP since its proposals laid a prior claim to many of these lessons. Hence there would be very little for MP/EP about the Resurrection (recorded in four gospels); and nothing about the Ascension, the Transfiguration, the blessing of the children, Peter's confession, the walking on the water, healings of the paralytic, of the lunatic child and of the daughter of Jairus (all in three gospels); nothing about the Temptation, the volunteers (Lk. 9:57ff.), divorce and marriage or the Baptist's death (among passages in two gospels); and nothing about the Magi, the Ten Virgins, 'God so loved', the lost sheep and coin, Zacchaeus, 'Let not your heart be troubled', the unmerciful servant, the mission of the seventy, the 'gradual miracle' (Mk. 8:22ff.), and Luke's shepherds and angels (among material occurring once).

Compared with the 1961 lectionary, the passages we would lose include, in other parts of the Bible, Lot's choice, finding Issac's bride, Esau cheated, all of Joseph, Caleb, Rahab, Endor, the fall of Samaria and of Zedekiah, the Lord's challenge to Job, the appeal of Wisdom, three Daniel chapters, much of Habakkuk, all of Acts 1, the Pentecost story, the end of Acts 2, four stories of Paul's life, large parts of Ephesians, all three passages in the epistles about duties in family and working life, and large parts of James.

Regarding the Psalter, the Commission explains that in relation to Sunday MP and EP it has provided from 15 to 25 verses for each service. The psalms included number 117, those not included being left out 'usually because it was felt that their content was better expressed in another psalm'. The Commission has tried to reconcile two opposing principles; that the congregation should be given the chance to become familiar with the most rewarding psalms; and that most of the psalms should be used at least once a year.

The psalms proposed for the most frequent use are 15, 24, 43, 126 and

150. Most of the psalms omitted treat of the godly beset by foes. This element in the psalter is notably under-represented in the selection, and much more has been omitted beyond the imprecatory passages. Three long historical psalms (78, 105 and 106) are represented by only eleven verses out of a total of 163. Psalms 111, 134 and 138 are conspicuous omissions. The summary in Appendix 2 of GS 292 shows what is left out.

For three reasons, we may be urged to take the Commission's proposals as they stand; that they are too intricate to disturb; that they are only for an experimental period; and that ecumenical co-operation would be hampered if we did not. But the proposals do not coincide with the lectionary of the Roman Church, and other churches do not use a lectionary as fully and carefully as we do. Our own contribution to ecumenical discussions must be based on the very best that we can devise, and GS 292 is not the best that we can devise.