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Editorial

In this issue, we explore the use of Scripture in worship, both in the structure of lectionaries and in the placement of readings within the liturgy.

Sr Margaret Ghosn, mshf, presents an intriguing comparison of the Maronite and Roman Catholic liturgical cycles, and in doing so opens up a tradition unfamiliar to many of us; and Rev'd Dr Charles Sherlock considers the variable ordering of lectionary readings within the liturgy of Australian Anglican congregations.

As this is the last issue of *AJL* that I will edit, I want to thank all those who have contributed to its life, whether by writing papers and book reviews, providing scholarly critiques of others' writing, or by subscribing and providing feedback.

I commend the new editorial team to you, and look forward to reading future issues.

Inari Thiel
Logan City

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Roman Catholic and Maronite Lectionaries: a comparative study

Margaret Ghosn mshf

Introduction

With the dawn of the Second Vatican Council, the importance of the Divine Liturgy was evidenced. Along with the recognition of a Liturgy where all participated, there emerged a new understanding of the importance of the Lectionary:

Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects, and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration and their force, and it is from the scriptures that actions and signs derive their meaning. Thus to achieve the restoration, progress, and adaptation of the sacred liturgy, it is essential to promote that warm and living love for scripture to which the venerable tradition of both eastern and western rites gives testimony.¹

As both eastern and western rites were to promote ‘love of scripture,’ this paper sets out to describe how the Roman Catholic and Maronite Catholic lectionaries provide systems of readings for the calendrical structure of the liturgical year. The paper offers a foundational understanding of the Maronite Lectionary, by comparison with the Roman Catholic Lectionary and outlines variations between the two.

¹ Austin Flannery O.P Ed., ‘Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*’ in *The Documents of Vatican Council II* (N.Y: Costello Publishing, 1982), paragraph 24.

Seasons in the Church

The Liturgical Year celebrates Seasons in the Church, which tell the story of the important events in the life of Jesus. The Church also includes special Feast Days to its calendar, which celebrate the lives of saints and other important events. However the Second Vatican Council emphasized that the feasts of the Lord be given preference over feasts of the saints since:

Holy Mother Church is conscious that she must celebrate the saving work of her divine Spouse by devoutly recalling it on certain days throughout the course of the year... within the cycle of a year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from the incarnation and birth until the ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord.²

The Roman Catholic Lectionary marks the various Seasons of Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time I, Lent, Easter Triduum and Ordinary Time II. The First Sunday of Advent (four Sundays before Christmas) marks the beginning of the liturgical year. It then proceeds into the various seasons. The liturgical year ends with the Feast of Christ the King.

The Maronite Catholic Lectionary also marks various Seasons, however these vary and include the Glorious Birth of the Lord, the Epiphany, Great Lent and Passion Week, Glorious Resurrection, Pentecost and ends with the Season of the Glorious Cross.³ Table 1

² Flannery, 'Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*,' paragraph 102.

³ Anthony J Salim, *Captivated by your Teaching*, (E. T. Nedder Publishing: Arizona, 2002), 135-139.

sets out the divisions of the Seasons according to the two Catholic lectionaries.

Table 1 The Seasons of the Liturgical Year in both the Roman Catholic and Maronite Catholic Churches.

Seasons in the Church	
Roman Catholic	Maronite Catholic
	Sundays of the Church (1-2 weeks)
Advent (4 weeks)	Season of the Glorious Birth of the Lord (7 weeks, including Christmas)
Christmas and Epiphany (2 weeks)	
	Season of Epiphany which includes three commemoration Sundays (1-7 weeks)
Ordinary Time I (6-8 weeks)	
Lent (6 weeks)	Season of Great Lent (7 weeks)
Triduum (3 days) – Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday	Passion week
Easter (8 weeks)	Season of Glorious Resurrection (7 weeks)
Pentecost Sunday (1 week)	Season of Pentecost (Up to 18 weeks)
Ordinary Time II	
	Season of the Glorious Cross (7 weeks)

Cycles of the Lectionary

The Order of Readings provided by the Lectionary of the Roman Missal, differs to the Maronite lectionary. The Roman Catholic

Lectionary follows both a Sunday Cycle and a Weekday Cycle. The Sunday Cycle occurs over three years and is denoted by the letters A, B and C. Each year follows through one of the Gospels, with Year A as the year of Matthew, Year B is Mark, and Year C is Luke. The Gospel of John is proclaimed on particular Sundays in each of the years, including Christmas, Lent and Easter. The passion narratives found in John however are given a higher degree of exposure than the earlier chapters. Also in Ordinary Time a notable omission is the gospel of John. As Koester notes:

the Fourth Gospel appears sporadically throughout the lectionary, claiming a premier role on festival days, dominating the Easter season, and making occasional guest appearances. Yet since there is no “Year of John,” those who preach from the lectionary face the formidable task of capturing this “maverick” gospel without the opportunity for an extended pursuit over a twelve-month period.⁴

So despite a three year cycle having more scope to teach than a one year cycle, the place of John’s Gospel remains controversial. Since the gospel of John is a compelling witness to Christ, it ought to command a full hearing.

Returning to the Order of Readings the weekdays follow a two year cycle numbered I and II. Year I is read on odd numbered years, while Year II is read on even numbered years. In the Roman Catholic lectionary, the first Reading is usually chosen from one of the Books of the Hebrew Scriptures with a thematic relationship between the

⁴ Craig R. Koester, ‘The Fourth Gospel in a Three-Year Lectionary’ in *Word and World* 10/1 (1990):22.

first Gospel and the first reading. The Second Reading is chosen from the Epistles in the Christian Scriptures or the Book of Revelation. The ‘Lectionary for Mass: Introduction’ noted:

The course of readings in the Proper of Seasons is arranged as follows. Sundays and the solemnities of the Lord present the more important biblical passages. In this way the more significant parts of God’s revealed word can be read to the assembly of the faithful within a reasonable period of time. Weekdays present a second series of texts from Scripture and in a sense these complement the message of salvation explained on Sundays and the solemnities of the Lord. But neither series in these main parts of the Order of Readings – the series for Sundays and the solemnities of the Lord and for weekdays – depends on the other. The Order of Readings for Sundays and the solemnities of the Lord extends over three years; for weekdays, over two. Thus each runs its course independently of the other.⁵

Along with the Roman Catholic, the Maronite Catholic Lectionary cycle affixes texts to seasons and festivals of the church year. The texts speak out of literary and historical contexts in ways appropriate to the season.

From the Crusades through to the 16th century and onwards contact with the Western Church led to Latinisation. However following the Second Vatican Council in the 1960’s the Maronites were encouraged to reform their Liturgy. The Patriarchal Liturgical Commission and the Institute of Liturgy began reviving the authentic Maronite Liturgy

⁵ John M Huels (ed), ‘Lectionary for Mass: Introduction’ in *The Liturgy Documents. A Parish Resource*. Volume 1, 3rd Ed. US: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991, no. 65.

with the revision of the Divine Liturgy in 1992, followed by the Lectionary in 1993.⁶

Unlike the Roman Catholic Lectionary, the Maronite Lectionary is a one year cycle and includes Readings that are connected throughout the Sunday and weekdays. It incorporates Gospel accounts from all four evangelists throughout the one year. Yet little of each of the Gospels are read and the Cycle is often described as repetitive, year after year. However at the recent Maronite Synod it was canvassed that there may be added in the future a second reading, to reflect more deeply the richness of the Word. A more accentuated problem is that in the Maronite Lectionary there are no Readings from the Hebrew Scriptures. The Readings at the Divine Maronite Liturgy are the First Reading chosen from a Christian Scripture Epistle, Acts, or the Book of Revelation. This is followed by the Reading of a Gospel Passage with a thematic relationship between the two. Table 2 sets out the Sunday Gospel Readings for the Maronite Catholic yearly cycle.

⁶ History of the Maronites. <http://www.tanbourit.com/religion.htm> accessed 29/08/2008

Table 2 The Seasons and Gospel Passages used in the Maronite Catholic Lectionary

Season	Gospel Passages
Renewal and Consecration of the Church (1-2 weeks)	Consecration of the Church – Mt 16:13-20 Renewal of the Church – Jn 10:22-42
Season of the Glorious Birth of the Lord (7 weeks)	Announcement to Zechariah – Lk 1:1-25 Announcement to Mary – Lk 1:26-38 Visitation of Mary – Lk 1:39-45 Birth of John the Baptist – Lk 1:57-66 Revelation to Joseph – Mt 1:18-25 Genealogy of Jesus – Mt 1:1-17 Birth of the Lord – Lk 2:1-20 Finding of Jesus in the Temple – Lk 2:41-52
Season of Epiphany which concludes with three Commemoration Sundays	Weeks of the Epiphany Sunday of the Deceased Priests – Lk 12:42-48 Sunday of the Righteous and Just – Mt 25:31-36 Sunday of the Faithful Departed – Lk 16:19-31
Season of Great Lent and Passion Week (7 weeks)	Cana Sunday – Jn 2:1-11 Ash Monday Cure of the Leper – Mk 1:35-45 Cure of the Haemorrhaging Woman – Lk 8:40-56 Parable of the Lost Son – Lk 15:11-32 Cure of the Paralytic – Mk 2:1-12 Cure of the Blind – Mk 10:46-52 Palm Sunday & Passion Week – Jn 12:12-22
Season of Glorious Resurrection (7 weeks)	Resurrection Sunday – Mk 16:1-8 New Sunday

<p>Season of Pentecost (Up to 18 weeks)</p>	<p>Sunday of Pentecost – Jn 14:15-20 Holy Trinity Sunday – Mt 28:16-20 Followed by up to 16 weeks focusing on Spirit & Mission Fifth Sunday – Calling of the Disciples – Mt 10:1-7 Sixth Sunday – Sending of the Disciples – Mt 10:16-25 Seventh Sunday – Sending of the 72 Disciples – Lk 10:1-7 Eighth Sunday – Spirit of the Disciples – Mt 12:14-21 Ninth Sunday – Mission of the Disciples – Lk 4:14-21</p>
<p>Season of the Glorious Cross (7 weeks)</p>	<p>Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross – Jn 12:20-32 First Sunday after the Feast– Sons of Zebedee Mk 10:35-45 Second Sunday – Persecutions - Mt 24:1-14 Third Sunday – False signs - Mt 24:23-31 Fourth Sunday – Good and bad servants - Mt 24:45-51 Fifth Sunday – Ten Bridesmaids - Mt 25:1-13 Sixth Sunday – The Talents - Mt 25:14-30 Seventh Sunday - Feast of Jesus the King – Mt 25:31-46</p>

Preparation for Christmas

The Maronite Lectionary commences in November and depending on when the first Sunday falls in the month, the Dedication to the Church could be one or two weeks in length. These two Sundays focus on the Consecration and Renewal of the Church. If the first Sunday is early

in November, then two Sundays are dedicated to the Church. Otherwise, a later date to the first Sunday in November means both the Consecration and Renewal of the Church are celebrated in the first week of November. From there the official Seasons begin. For both the Roman Catholic and the Maronite Catholic Lectionaries, the official start to the Seasons commences with the Season of preparation for Christmas.

Advent, as it is termed in the Roman Catholic Liturgy, derives from the Latin *adventus* (going before), indicating that the spirit of Advent is about pointing towards Christ's return and as John the Baptist cries out a time to 'Prepare the way of the Lord.' The 'General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar' states:

Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ's first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ's Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation.⁷

Therefore in Advent, each gospel reading has a distinctive theme. The first Sunday of Advent recalls the Lord's coming at the end of the time. Focus on John the Baptist is placed in the second and third Sundays, and the events that prepared immediately for the Lord's birth are placed in the fourth Sunday. The Hebrew Scriptural readings, mainly from Isaiah, are prophecies about the Messiah and

⁷ Huels, 'General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar,' no. 39.

the Messianic age. The Christian Scriptural readings serve as exhortations and proclamations. As noted in Table 1, preparation for Christmas is celebrated as the First Season. Though called 'Advent' in the Roman Catholic Tradition, it is referred to as the Season of the Glorious Birth (previously known as the Season of Announcements) in the Maronite Tradition.

In the Maronite Lectionary, the Season of the Glorious Birth of the Lord, commences immediately after the week(s) of Dedication to the Church. The Sunday Gospel passages recount week by week, the announcements leading up to the Birth of Christ. These include the 'Announcement' to Zechariah and Mary, as well as the 'Revelation' to Joseph. Proceeding Christmas and before entering the Season of the Epiphany, the Sunday focuses on the Finding of Jesus in the Temple.

The Season of Epiphany and Ordinary Time I

Following on from the Season of the Glorious Birth, the Maronite Catholic Liturgy celebrates the Season of Epiphany, which falls on the 6th of January. For the Eastern Churches, the Epiphany is the Baptism of Jesus. In contrast the Roman Catholic Liturgy celebrates the Epiphany as the presentation of the Magi and their gifts to the child Jesus, while the Sunday falling after 6 January is the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Yet 'Epiphany' as 'Manifestation' is common to both West and East Churches. However, in the Roman Catholic lectionary, Ordinary Time I is the Season that follows Christmas, though there is debate as to whether the Sundays leading up to Lent

should be regarded as the Season of Epiphany. Dr Wilkinson notes that:

If these weeks are treated as “Ordinary Time”, in her opinion, the result is a loss of cohesion and impetus to the Liturgical Year. *RCL* displays the tension here by “headlining” *The Season of Epiphany* with *Ordinary Time* in parenthesis. It also gives ear to the other, older, traditions attached to Epiphany by making the *First Sunday After the Epiphany* the *Baptism of the Lord*, and including the account of the marriage feast at Cana in the lections for the *Second Sunday After the Epiphany* in year C. Therefore, in common with *RCL* the “season” carries from the Feast to the “doors of Lent”.⁸

The Season of Epiphany in the Maronite Lectionary runs for 1-7 weeks, depending on when Easter falls. If Easter is later in the year, then the Epiphany Season is extended.

Weeks of Commemoration

Three weeks prior to entering the Lenten Season is three weeks of Commemoration. The first of these Sundays is the commemoration of the Deceased Priests. The Second week of commemoration is given the title of the Righteous and Just, which is equivalent to All Saints day in the Roman Catholic Liturgy that is celebrated on the 1st of November. The Maronite Catholic liturgy celebrates all those who have led lives of righteousness and justice, whether they are named saints or not. This is celebrated throughout the entire week. The proceeding Sunday and the week that ensues, is a commemoration of All the Faithful Departed. This is equivalent to the Roman Catholic

⁸ Anglican Cycle of Prayer <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acp/lectionary.cfm> accessed 2/9/08

Liturgy for All Souls Day, which falls on the 2nd of November. However due to the Latinization of the Maronite Catholic Church over the centuries, and the fact that the Maronite Catholic Church in Australia is surrounded by Roman Catholic Churches, the celebration of the Feast day for saints and for the departed are often recalled and celebrated on both occasions, with distinctions blurred.

The Season of Lent

For both the Roman Catholic and Maronite Catholic Churches, Lent is an important time, a type of retreat when the faithful renew their baptism, by associating with Christ's struggle. As concerns the gospel readings in the Roman Catholic lectionary, they are arranged as follows:

The first and second Sundays retain the accounts of the Lord's temptations and transfigurations, with readings, however, from all three Synoptics.

On the next three Sundays, the gospels about the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus have been restored in Year A. Because these gospels are of major importance in regard to Christian initiation, they may also be read in Year B and Year C, especially in places where there are catechumens.⁹

In commencing the Seasons on a Sunday, in the Maronite Church, the purpose is to have a tight calendar with no 'empty' days. So unlike the Roman Catholic Rite, where Lent commences with Ash Wednesday, for the Maronite Catholic Rite, the Season of Lent begins

⁹ Huels, 'Lectionary for Mass: Introduction,' no. 97.

on the Sunday with the focus on the Gospel passage of the Wedding at Cana. It is followed immediately with Ash Monday, which officially begins the Season of Lent and fasting. However, once again, in Australia, numerous Maronites celebrate Ash Wednesday in their local Roman Catholic Parish rather through attending Maronite services for Ash Monday.

In the Maronite Lectionary, the Sunday Gospel passages throughout Lent focus on the healing and forgiving powers of Jesus, a reminder that Lent is a time to transform one's life, just as the water was changed to wine in the Sunday Gospel that marks the entry into the Lenten Season. It reminds the faithful of the eternal wedding feast they are called to through Christ's Resurrection.

Holy Week begins with Palm Sunday for both Churches. The Paschal Triduum, celebrated in the Roman Catholic Liturgy, includes Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. In the Maronite lectionary Great Lent begins with a rigorous fast on Ash Monday while Holy Week provides liturgical experiences of the most sublime poetry, music, art and ritual.¹⁰

The Seasons of Easter and Pentecost

In the Roman Catholic Liturgy, Easter is called the Great Week, the week of seven weeks, or the Great Sunday.¹¹ It ends at Pentecost and

¹⁰ Roccasalvo, *The Eastern Catholic Churches: An introduction to their worship and spirituality*, 24-31.

¹¹ Jean Lebon, *How to understand the Liturgy*, (London: SCM Press, 1987), 90.

the Season runs for fifty days, which are celebrated in joy as one feast day. The Roman Catholic Rite, marks Pentecost for a week, however the following Sundays are often called ‘after Pentecost’ under the Revised Common Lectionary.

The Season of the Resurrection is seven weeks long in the Maronite Lectionary and the Gospel passages focus on the appearance of Jesus to the disciples. The Eastern Churches celebrate the feast of the Resurrection of the Lord as the main event of the liturgical year. The faithful greet one another with the refrain, ‘Christ is risen!’¹²

This Easter Season is followed by the longest Season in the Maronite Catholic Lectionary, that being Pentecost. This recalls the emphases on the Holy Trinity dominant in Eastern Rites and as evidenced through the repeated invocation to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, throughout the Maronite Divine Liturgy. Many of the Sunday Gospel Readings are selected around the discourses in John’s Gospel concerning the sending of the Paraclete. As one enters deeper into the Pentecost Season, the Sunday Lectionary shifts the focus towards the choosing of the disciples, their sending out, and their mission.

The Seasons of Glorious Cross and Ordinary Time II

Most Seasons begin on a Sunday, while the Feast of the Glorious Cross falls on 14th September, which recalls the event of the Cross revealed to Emperor Constantine. The feast day constitutes the first

¹² Roccasalvo, *The Eastern Catholic Churches: An introduction to their worship and spirituality*, 24-31.

week in the Season in the Maronite Lectionary. This Season focuses on Judgment Day, with its emphasis on forthcoming persecutions as depicted in Matthew's Gospel. The Liturgical Year ends on the last week in October, and similar to the Roman Catholic Lectionary, the last Sunday is titled 'Christ the King.'

In the Roman Catholic Lectionary the Season of the Glorious Cross is replaced by the Season of Ordinary Time II. This occurs between the Easter and Christmas cycles. The 'General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar' notes:

Ordinary Time begins on Monday after the Sunday following 6 January and continues until Tuesday before Ash Wednesday inclusive. It begins again on Monday after Pentecost and ends before evening prayer I of the First Sunday of Advent.¹³

Therefore Ordinary Time II is the longest Season in the Roman Catholic Lectionary. Like to the Maronite Lectionary, the last Sundays of the Roman Catholic Lectionary are centred on Christ's return. Thus it meets up with the Season of Advent as a forethought to Christ's incarnation.

The Comparisons – a summary

The Maronite Catholic Lectionary is made up of six official Seasons (Birth of Jesus, Epiphany, Lent, Resurrection, Pentecost and Glorious Cross). They recount the important events in the life of the Church.

¹³ Huels, 'General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar,' no. 44.

The Roman Catholic Lectionary also consists of Seasons that are both similar as well as differing to the Maronite Catholic Lectionary (Advent and Christmas, Ordinary Time I, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time II). Constituting the longest Season in the Maronite Catholic Lectionary, is the Season of Pentecost. This highlights the Eastern Churches' emphasis on the Holy Spirit. In the Maronite Church, the Eucharist is called the Divine Service of the Holy Mysteries and for the Eastern Churches in general, according to Roccasalvo, there is a sense of the sacred and transcendental. The liturgical service exhorts the faithful to celebrate the liturgy with heartfelt praise, gratitude, mercy and need. This is done with dignity, carefully preserving the sense of mystery and transcendence.¹⁴ So the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist represents the high point of the week.

Another significant variation is that the Maronite Lectionary is based on a one year cycle, while the Roman Catholic Liturgy has two separate lectionaries, one for weekdays and one for Sundays. The lectionaries are over 2 and 3 years respectively. The Lectionary is carefully selected in both Rites and with purpose and intent as the 'General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar' states:

The present Order of Readings for Mass, then, is an arrangement of biblical readings that provides the faithful with knowledge of the whole of God's word, in a pattern suited to the purpose. Throughout the liturgical year, but above all during the seasons of Easter, Lent, and

¹⁴ Roccasalvo, *The Eastern Catholic Churches: An introduction to their worship and spirituality*, 24-31.

Advent, the choice and sequence of readings are aimed at giving the faithful an ever-deepening perception of the faith they profess and of the history of salvation.¹⁵

The Readings are selected from both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures in the Roman Catholic Lectionary but only from the Christian Scripture for the Maronite Catholic Lectionary. This short cycle of the lectionary has been suggested to be insubstantial in providing the fuller picture of Christ's earthly ministry. The omitting of readings from the Hebrew Scriptures and the limited number of Readings from the Christian Gospels that the listeners hear on a yearly cycle, fails to 'unfold the whole mystery of Christ.' If the faithful attending the Divine Liturgy only hear limited accounts of the Gospel and Readings, how are they to come to know more of Christ as:

Sacred scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily...¹⁶

A revision of the length of the cycles, the Readings selected and the number of Readings, requires greater and careful consideration, if the Liturgy is to provide through the Hearing of the Word, a greater knowledge of Christ. The Maronite Catholic Lectionary ought to consider the three Roman Catholic lectionary style as well as a selection of Readings from Hebrew Scriptures, so that using a

¹⁵ Huels, 'General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar,' no. 60.

¹⁶ Austin Flannery O.P Ed., 'Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*' in *The Documents of Vatican Council II* (N.Y: Costello Publishing, 1982), paragraph 24.

Lectionary means the people hear most of the Bible proclaimed and preached upon as the years unfold.

Other differences between the lectionaries include the allocated time and length for celebrating the feast of the saints (Week of the Righteous and Just), the Remembrance of all souls day (Week of the Faithful departed) and the time for receiving Ashes (Monday or Wednesday). Table 3 below depicts differences between the two lectionaries.

Table 3 Differences observed between the Lectionaries

Item	Roman Catholic Lectionary	Maronite Catholic Lectionary
Sunday Cycle	3 year cycle	1 year cycle combining weekdays and Sundays
Weekday Cycle	2 year cycle	
Hebrew Scriptures	One Reading	Not selected
Letters of the Christian Scriptures	One Reading	One Reading
Gospel Reading	One Gospel read per year	All Gospels selected throughout the year
All Saints Day	First of November	Week of Righteous and Just – Two weeks before Lent
All Souls Day	Second of November	Week of Faithful Departed – One week before Lent
Epiphany	Visit of the Wise Men – 6 th January	Baptism of Jesus – 6 th January

Ordinary Time	Yes. I and II	No
Feast of Christ the King	Last Sunday of the Year	Last Sunday of the Year
Receiving of the Ashes	Ash Wednesday	Ash Monday
Seasons in the Lectionary	Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time I, Lent, Easter Triduum and Ordinary Time II	Glorious Birth, Epiphany, Lent, Resurrection, Pentecost and Glorious Cross

Despite the variations in the Roman Catholic and Maronite Catholic lectionaries, the different Western and Eastern spiritualities, and at times what appear to be limitations of the lectionaries, overall a carefully studied lectionary offers the congregation a well rounded understanding of Jesus' ministry and the life and mission of the Church.

Each Church is unique in the way the Seasons depict the important events in the life of Christ's earthly ministry, and the early Church. According to West, the Roman Catholic Lectionary:

opts to spread before the people a 'richer fare' of Scripture, a grand biblical feast, organised into digestible piece and patterns. The essential structure for this is provided by the synoptic gospels, from which the Lectionary takes the gospel reading in each of three subsequent years. To this are added huge swaths of the Second Testament writings and a small percentage of the First Testament.... The Roman Catholic Lectionary seeks to inform them (the faithful)... the Roman Catholic Lectionary seeks to expose Catholic Christians to Scripture in its variety of perspectives and breadth of scope.¹⁷

¹⁷ Fritz West, *The German Lutheran and Roman Catholic Lectionaries: A Historical-Comparative Study*. Liturgical Ministry 13(Fall 2004): 189.

The three-year cycle in the Roman Catholic Lectionary was designed over the one year system, so as to make more texts available. In this respect the three-year cycle has been a positive move to the Roman Catholic Lectionary. Nevertheless, the lectionary, be it over a one year or a three year cycle, does not exhaust scriptural resource, as is evidenced by the omission of much of John's Gospel.

At the same time the Eastern Churches' emphasis on the Season of Epiphany and extended Season of Pentecost, allows focus on mission and calling. Furthermore the Maronite Liturgy, which belongs to the Antiochene Tradition and is a West Syro-Antiochene Rite, there is a profound reverence for the Word of God and recognition of its power and source of spiritual nourishment.

As it stands both lectionaries possess a unique characteristic style of Scriptural Reading, and attention to the liturgy, where the Word of God is read and heard out of different contexts.

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The H.F. Leatherland Exhibition

The Melbourne College of Divinity, in conjunction with the Australian Academy of Liturgy, invites submissions for the 2009 'H. F. Leatherland Exhibition'.

In anticipation of the *Societas Liturgica* Congress, to be held in Sydney in August 2009, the theme of the 2009 Exhibition is 'Celebrating the Liturgical Year in Australia'.

Details of the award are as follows:

- The value of the Exhibition is \$500.
- The Exhibition, which is offered every two years, is open to any person in Australia currently enrolled in any of the following MCD degrees: BTheol; MDiv; MA by coursework; MTS.
- Students of other Australian theological colleges and consortia who are enrolled in equivalent degrees are also eligible to apply.
- The Exhibition may be awarded for an essay of 5,000 words on a subject in the field of Liturgical Studies, as approved by the MCD and the Victorian Chapter of the Australian Academy of Liturgy.
- In order to qualify for the Exhibition an essay must be judged to be of at least Distinction standard by two examiners, one of whom will be appointed by the MCD, and the other of whom will be appointed by the Victorian Chapter of the Australian Academy of Liturgy.
- The MCD and the Chapter reserve the right not to award the exhibition in any year.
- The essay may draw directly on material submitted in fulfilment of other course requirements but, in that case, is to be specifically prepared for the purposes of the Exhibition.
- The essay must contain a bibliography, and be referenced according to MCD style guides.
- Two copies of the essay shall be submitted. A third copy of any essay for which the Exhibition is awarded will be deposited in the H. F. Leatherland Collection of the Dalton-McCaughy Library in the United Faculty of Theology, Parkville, Victoria.
- The *Australian Journal of Liturgy* has the first right of publication of any essay submitted for the Exhibition.

The closing date for submission of essays is 1 June 2009.

Submissions should be addressed to:

Rev. Professor Robert Gribben
C/- Melbourne College of Divinity
21 Highbury Grove
Kew 3101

Reading the Scriptures Decently – and in order

Charles Sherlock

Let us reverently hear and read holy scripture, which is the food of the soul. Let us diligently search for the well of life in the books of the Old and New Testaments ...

Let us ruminare, and, as it were, chew the cud, that we may have the sweet juice, having spiritual effect, marrow, honey, kernel, taste, comfort and consolation of them.

Thomas Cranmer, Homily on Scripture

Setting the scene

Some years back I was at a ‘middling high’ Anglican eucharist at which the Gospel was read, the congregation standing, followed by the epistle and the sermon (for both of which the congregation sat). The sequence felt quite odd. On another occasion one reading was followed by a psalm, then the creed, prayers and communion; the Gospel was read after the post-communion hymn, followed by the sermon (people from the next service entered during the hymn). To a traditional ‘prayer book’ Anglican of evangelical conviction, for whom the public reading and hearing of holy scripture remains focal in public worship, this was all rather disconcerting!

Then I began to hear of similar practices in other congregations, especially in less ‘formal’ services, as well as occasional strident insistence that the congregation remain seated for the Gospel reading in the holy communion service. At first I suspended judgement:

churches in western cultures are in a time of flux, if not crisis: worrying about when, how and in what order we read the scriptures seems to matter little in a mission context in which ‘fresh expressions’ of church are being sought.

On further reflection, wider and deeper issues began to emerge. The pattern by which a church regularly reads the holy scriptures says a good deal about its view of their status and nature. It is one thing to accept that ‘all scripture is inspired by God and useful for instruction’ (2 Timothy 3.16), another to demonstrate this in the choice and arrangement of readings. It is clearly impossible to read everything, and different patterns are appropriate for Sundays and weekdays, not least because of length: including two chapters each Sunday would take two decades, though both Testaments can be comfortably read on a daily basis over two years.¹

When it comes to what is read in regular Sunday services, factors such as time-pressures, embarrassment about the readings’ content, or shifts from oral to more (usually electronic) visual cultures, can mean that readings are cut short, ‘filleted’, or reduced to the few verses on which the sermon is based. Even where a better diet is given, the

¹ I became more deeply aware of the practical issues involved as the member of the Liturgy Commission of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia who carries the lectionary portfolio, and is thus closely involved in the production of the annual Lectionary booklet which brings together the tables for Sunday and Feast-days, Daily Morning & Evening Prayer, Daily Psalms, and Daily Eucharist readings. Discussion on the Commission about the principles undergirding the selection of readings – ie moving from doctrinal ‘theory’ about the scriptures to principles undergirding their actual use (noting that 2 Timothy contains both elements) made me realise how little the latter were generally understood or reflected upon.

traditional order of Old before New, and the Gospel reading coming as the climax in the eucharist, is being disregarded. To what extent do these issues matter?

Anglican practice: mere custom or expression of principle?

Readings from the holy scriptures have been central to every act of corporate Christian worship from the earliest days. As a Jew, Jesus heard the scriptures read in the synagogue, and interpreted them to both the people in general (eg Luke 4.14ff), to his disciples (eg Matthew 5-7) and in hot debate with the scholars of his day (eg Mark 13.13-37). To this practice, early Christian communities added the custom of hearing the stories of God's 'good news' as taught and lived by Jesus, soon gathered into the canonical Gospels. Letters from Paul, Peter and other apostolic figures were circulated and read in other churches (cf Colossians 4.16, 2 Peter 3.15-16).

These precedents shaped the customary practice which the Church of England inherited at the Reformation: daily psalmody and brief sentences, with epistle and gospel readings at the eucharist. Cranmer did not change the latter practice, but wholly transformed the former by proving that the whole Psalter is read systematically each month, together with a systematic annual pattern of daily readings from both Testaments as the opening section of the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* (see *Concerning the Service of the Church*, printed in the front

section of the BCP 1662).² Anglicans thus became used to hearing two or more readings from the scriptures in each service. *The Book of Common Prayer* lectionary (and its successors) provides a comprehensive pattern of daily readings covering the whole of the New, most of the Old Testament and some of the Apocrypha every year, in addition to an Epistle and Gospel reading in the Holy Communion.

In modern Anglican prayer books (including *An Australian Prayer Book* 1978, and *A Prayer Book for Australian* 1995), Morning Prayer, Litany and Holy Communion – the standard provision in BCP, relaxed after 1871 – are combined into one service. Sunday and Festival readings are taken from the Old / First Testament (or Acts in Easter), the New Testament's letters, and the Gospels, together with psalmody. This pattern of readings is based on the *Revised Common Lectionary*, an ecumenical adaptation of the 'Three-Year' system introduced by Rome from 1969. On Sundays over three years (A, B and C), substantial coverage is given of the Gospels and New Testament letters, plus significant passages from Acts and Revelation, and a representative 'sampling' of the Law (Year A), Former Prophets and Writings (Year B) and Latter Prophets (Year C) of the Old Testament.³

² See further C.H. Sherlock, 'Food of the Soul: Thomas Cranmer and Holy Scripture', *Aust Journal of Liturgy* 2/3 (1990) 134-141.

³ See *The Revised Common Lectionary* (London: Canterbury Press, 1992) for full tables, commentary and the history of development of this system.

While admirable for its attention to scripture, some find this system of up to four readings for a main Sunday service to be an indigestible, overly-rich diet. How does this discipline relate to ‘fresh expressions’ of church? Is one reading enough? Who should choose what is read? Does the order of readings matter? And are the scriptures best ‘heard’ by being listened to, read along with, seen or acted out? How does preaching relate to the readings?

This brief paper offers responses to some of these questions.

Hearing the scriptures in stereo

“Having just one scripture reading enables me to get across one simple message,” I was told by one Anglican minister recently. Apart from probably underestimating the congregation, such a viewpoint hears wants the scriptures to be heard in ‘mono’. Yet the Christian tradition has always set two or more readings for corporate worship. Here the scriptures are heard in ‘stereo’ as it were – one passage feeds into and out of another, encouraging a ‘bifocal’ perspective. Where one reading only is used, it has probably been chosen by the preacher, and its ‘reading’ is likely to be framed by the preacher’s concerns more than heard in its own right. For a lecture, Bible study or evangelistic meeting this approach carries weight. But for a regular Sunday or other main service, this narrows the congregation’s diet and raises the danger of choice based on clergy predilections.

The English Reformers, as noted earlier, sought to bring back the scriptures to the centre of public worship, as the fundamental means by which God's people feed on Christ. As Article VI memorably begins, 'Holy scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation...', creating the expectation that readers will hasten to discover such necessities of true life. And, rather than entrusting interpretation in the first place to priests and scholars, they insisted that the primary way to understand the scriptures was by comparing scripture with scripture (cf Article XX). These principles undergird the inclusion in services of the Word (such as Morning Prayer or Evensong) of a reading from each Testament, and readings from both epistles and gospels in Holy Communion. As indicated above, contemporary lectionaries blend these structures into a three-fold system of Old / First Testament / Acts, epistle, and gospel (plus psalmody). This can be a bit much on some occasions, and selection from the range offered may need to be made, for example, when many children are present, or for a baptism service: but the 'stereophonic' principle still applies.

In more contemporary theological terms, the 'conversation' between passages drawn from different parts of the scriptures is intended to draw us to a dynamic hearing of God's Word written. As with Christian prayer, this 'conversation' reflects the dynamic, triune nature of the living God, and the living Word of God. Reducing the conversation to a monologue runs the danger of 'flattening' our

understanding of the scriptures – and possibly diminishing our understanding of the God revealed in the God’s Word written.

Moving from First to New Testament

The order in which lessons are read has followed two patterns – Old / First Testament before New in Morning & Evening Prayer (with both surrounded by psalms and canticles), and Epistle before Gospel in Holy Communion. As noted above, *AAPB* and *APBA* combine this in the order O/FirstT, psalm (responding to the O/FirstT), Epistle, Gospel, followed by the sermon and Creed.

Is there something special about this ordering? Given that the sermon follows the Gospel (whether immediately, or after the Creed), some argue that preaching at the eucharist should always be from the Gospel. But if the sermon is preached primarily from the OT lesson, could the order be Epistle, Gospel, OT, sermon, psalm? Or if the sermon is on the Epistle, could the order be OT, psalm, Gospel, Epistle, sermon? Several interacting principles are involved.

Changing the order so that a New Testament lesson precedes an Old / First Testament reading undercuts the relationship between the Testaments. Indeed, the term ‘Old’ runs the risk of seeing the canonical Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures as secondary, un-Christian or superseded. With good reason many scholars prefer to describe them as the ‘First Testament’, reflecting their standing as the original written revelation of God, accepted as such by Jesus and the early

churches. On the other hand, for Christians to describe the gospels, epistles and Revelation as the ‘Second’ Testament would be decidedly unhelpful: they remain the ‘New’ Testament, dependent for their understanding on the ‘First’. The use of such asymmetrical terms may look odd, but it emphasises both the necessity, distinctiveness and inter-relationship of both Testaments in Christian faith and scripture.⁴

The priority of the Gospels

What then of changing the order of epistle and gospel reading from the New Testament? Associated with is this the long-standing custom – required in BCP and successive Anglican prayer books – that the people stand to hear the Gospel reading. Some object to this practice, on the grounds that it lends greater importance to the Gospels than other sections of the scriptures. And it could also be argued that since the Gospels precede other books in the traditional arrangement of the New Testament, this order is permissible or even preferable when it comes to reading in church.

Perhaps the most appropriate response to such an objection is to ask, “Which scriptures would you translate first into the language of a people who have just begun to have the Gospel preached to them?” Or, “Which scriptures would you read first to young Christian children?” Or, “Which scriptures would you recommend to a person

⁴ Cf. Hebrews 8-10, and Paul’s interesting use of ‘first’ (*protos*), ‘second’ (*deuteros*) and ‘last’ (*eschatos*) Adam in relation to understanding what it means to be human in Christ (1 Corinthians 15.42ff).

enquiring about Christian faith?” In most cases the relevant answer would be ‘one of the Gospels, since they speak of Jesus Christ’. Such questions illuminate the reality that some passages of scripture *are* more important than others. The issue of what texts are crucial at a particular time calls for spiritual discernment related to pastoral need, social context and theological situation in view.⁵ This discernment will have both corporate and personal dimensions: corporate, since the reading of the holy scriptures is an ecclesial activity, and individual, since clergy have a personal calling to ensure that their reading takes place within the people of God (cf *Concerning the Service of the Church* again).⁶

The Gospels thus have a priority in both Christian practice, and their placement within the New Testament. Neither perspective brings into question the inspiration of ‘all scripture’. If the Gospels come first in the New Testament because the latter presents them to readers to be read first, their reading forms the climax of hearing scripture in the Ministry of the Word in the Holy Communion because they are the key to ‘all scripture’.

⁵ See further G.C Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) chapter 6 for a careful discussion, from a Reformed perspective, of ‘central’ texts in interpretation. It is important to note that I am not arguing that any passage of scripture can be ignored or excluded from the canon – far from it: genealogy may appear pointless to literate westerners, for example, but is central for understanding identity for many from oral cultures. But if all texts are equal, then (to paraphrase George Orwell), some texts are more equal than others.

⁶ The primacy of an ecclesial context for readings the holy scriptures is brought out well in the Faith & Order text, *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, available at www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/iv-interpretation-the-meaning-of-our-words-and-symbols/a-treasure-in-earthen-vessels-an-instrument-for-an-ecumenical-reflection-on-hermeneutics.html

In the interpretation of the scriptures as a whole, the teaching and example of Jesus Christ according to the Gospels is central – in theological terms, the living Word is the key to the Word written. Interpretation, and thus preaching, is more than a quantitative or logical summation of scriptural texts: at best, it involves the qualitative discernment of the revelation of God’s ways and will, centred in the person of Jesus Christ. Whether or not the Gospel reading is the basis for the sermon, its propinquity serves to orient the preaching around Christ as heard in the Gospel.

‘Stand up! Stand up for Jesus!’

The custom of standing to hear the Gospel in the eucharist is sometimes contested, as noted above. Some point out that the congregation normally remains seated if the New Testament reading at Morning or Evening Prayer is from the Gospels: why then stand to hear the Gospel reading in a eucharistic setting?

Standing has the practical value of encouraging *listening* as well as reading – indeed, it discourages following along with a pew Bible. The latter custom may be helpful when a reading from the prophets or an epistle is in the form of an argument rather than a narrative, or to follow a didactic address. It less helpful, however, when priority is given to listening, not least to the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. And *standing* to listen to the words and deeds of Christ in the context of the sacrament of the eucharist pushes us beyond *my* to *our* listening. It indicates the tangible response *we* are called to make to

Christ, as a body: not only the personal assent of mind and heart, but a public, corporate commitment to hear and follow Christ *together* as we prepare to gather at the Lord's table. Further, in the context of the eucharist, standing indicates the *sacramental* character of the Word read, the 'outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, given unto us by Christ, as a means whereby we receive the same' (ie Christ), as the BCP Catechism puts it. The table of the Word thus converses rather than competes with the table of the Lord.

In this light, it is rather 'odd' to stand for the Gospel, then to sit to hear a different passage from which the sermon is to be preached. Reversing the received order so that the Gospel is not next to the sermon will almost certainly mean that it is perceived as one of several readings, whose order and inter-relation is deemed not to matter. Such practices run the risk of reducing the formative impact of a congregation hearing the Word *together*, to a process of collective cognition for a group of people who happen to be in the same place at the same time. This is not to deny that the task of Christian education is highly important, especially in a mission context: not every Christian is familiar with or at home in the scriptures. But it does raise questions about the extent to which education 'according to the scriptures' is formative and transformative, rather than merely informative.

Teaching and meditating upon the scriptures is a vital part of the formation of Christian disciples. But, this paper has argued, the order

and manner in which they are heard in congregational worship are crucial to the formation of the members of Christ's body, *as* a body, not as a mere collective. Personal learning is good, but it is not the same as the dynamic, corporate movement represented by standing for the climactic Gospel reading, to hear Christ together in the 'audible Word', as together we move to encounter Christ in the gospel enacted, the 'visible Word'.

Conclusion

Custom is not always the best guide to the future: tradition can become a fossil rather than a torch. But if this reflection rings true, it lends weight to customary practice when it comes to reading and hearing the holy scriptures. Hearing in stereo, following the movement from First to New Testament, and entering into the sacrament of the living Word, audible and visible – these are the means by which God's people may receive God's holy Word, both individually with mind and heart, and corporately as members together of Christ's body.

Book Review

Gerard Moore, *Lord, Hear Our Prayer. Praying the General Intercessions* (Sydney: St Paul's, 2008) ISBN 978-1-921032 99 8, pb, pp 64.

This short, readable book aims to help Roman Catholics appreciate more deeply, and enter into more fully, the 'General Intercessions' which form part of the post-Vatican II rite of the Mass.

The book has three main sections. The first offers a short account of the origins and history of Christian petitionary prayer, before tracing its shift of location from the eucharistic prayer in the Tridentine Mass, to its current place between the Ministry of the Word and the Lord's Supper. Moore offers a two-fold theological basis for this shift – petition as our response to the Word, and its offering as the work of the baptismal community as Christ's royal priestly people, themes which pervade the book. This section concludes with responses to questions which some Roman Catholics may ask (some of which may horrify some Protestants!): "Is there a role for the 'Hail Mary'?", for example.

The second part discusses the General Intercessions in their particular liturgical contexts – the eucharist, Good Friday, Hour services – before an accurate comparison is made with current Australian Anglican and Uniting rites. Part three offers responses to practical questions – ministers, 'performance' issues, children, with a longer

section on the variety of patterns available, as well as composing petitions afresh.

There is much wisdom in this brief book, which offers a good example of how liturgy integrates scripture, history, theology, context and people. The author has written out of wide pastoral experience, scholarly knowledge, and consultation with other pastors and scholars (including Anglican and UCA clergy). It concludes with a brief scholarly bibliography.

Though written for a Roman Catholic context, this book's grounding in theological first principles, Australian context, ecumenical openness and pastoral sensitivity make it valuable for a wider readership. And Moore manages all this without descending into a vague 'niceness'.

— *Rev Dr Charles Sherlock*

Contributors

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Charles Sherlock has taught theology and liturgy in Australia and overseas for at least three decades, most notably at Ridley College. A member of the Liturgical Commission that prepared *A Prayer Book for Australia*, he has been engaged in ecumenical theological dialogue as a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, the Inter-Anglican Standing Committee on Ecumenical Relations, and the Faith & Unity Commission of the National Council of Churches of Australia.



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