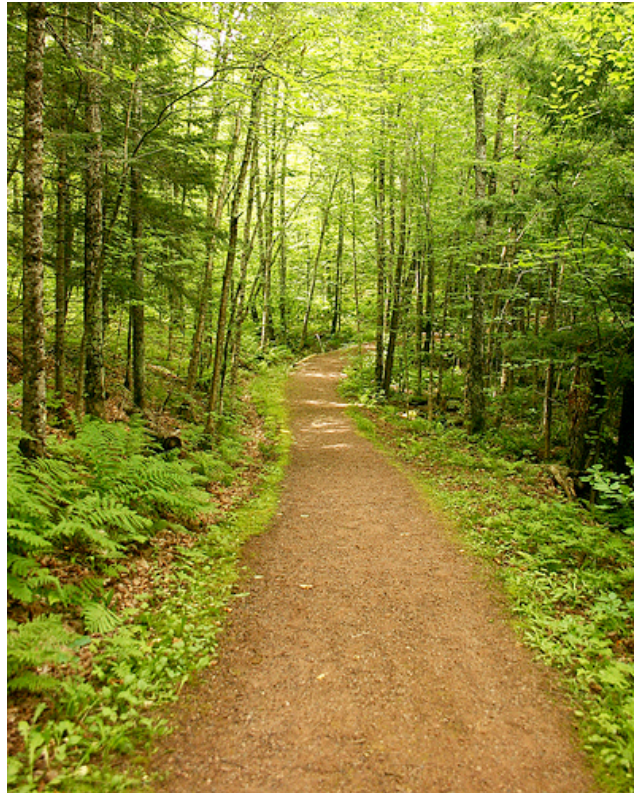


The Path of Understanding

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The Development of Lectionaries and their use in the Lutheran Church



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20 A little over a year ago one of the brethren posted to the listserve “Koren” ten reasons to abandon preaching from a lectionary. Knowing the pastor who made the post and appreciating his wry comments, as I read through the reasons I gave thanks to God that I was numbered among men with such wit and education that one of them could produce such a skilled parody of Free Church mentality. Leaving
25 the lectionary behind would among other things, he wrote, give you the freedom to encourage lay Bible reading, to shape and cast a vision for your church, to create rather than conform, and allow preachers to share what God is teaching them. *It sounds just like something from RIM, I thought to myself. I wish I was this clever.* Two days later the senior pastor at Parkland left on my desk a copy of the magazine
30 *Worship Innovations*, opened to that issue’s feature article: “The Lectionary Captivity of the Church: Ten Reasons to Kick the Lectionary ‘Habit’.” Of course, my first reaction was one of relief, since my ego was soothed that the ten reasons had been plagiarized and I was still as clever as I had always thought myself. Then my colleague paid for his folly of setting me off on a favorite hobby horse, having to
35 listen all the next week to my exposition on the evils of abandoning the lectionary and church year.

 It is not my intention to preach the same sermon to you, since a casual questioning of the clergy among our fellowship would likely show that the vast majority, if not all of us follow a lectionary cycle in our preaching. Despite the title of
40 the article cited above, we understand that the lectionary is not the iron-clad restrictive captivity some may attempt to portray. Even an extremist like myself realizes that events occur in the life of a congregation such as mission festivals,

Christian Education Sunday, and anniversaries that compel a departure from the pericopal readings. Indeed, such occasional departures are within the best traditions
 45 of lectionary preaching, since the lectionary was never meant to be a forced march, but a path that each year would walk the Church through her festivals and visit the chief doctrines of the Faith. Occasional side trips only enhance the journey.

Thus like most customs and traditions within the Lutheran Church, the use of a lectionary as the foundation and guide for our preaching needs no apology.
 50 Rather, it is a custom that finds its roots in the earliest traditions of the church and has proven itself over the centuries. It is its casual abandonment by the Reformed and unfortunately, some Lutherans, that warrants an explanation.

The History of the Lectionary

55 Christian congregations of the first century took their cues for the divine service from the worship practices of the synagogue, which used a lectionary to determine the readings for the service. This reading of Scripture was called the **מִקְרָא**, which originally meant “calling together,” but came to refer especially to the reading and sometimes teaching of Scripture.¹ While there was some variation in
 60 practice, usually there were two Scripture readings in each service. The first was from the Torah, divided into 150 parts to be read *lectio continua* in a three year cycle,

¹Nehemiah 8:8 is a good example of this, as **מִקְרָא** is used twice in the verse, once with each meaning. “They read (**וַיִּקְרְאוּ**) distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading (**בְּמִקְרָא**).”

then a second lesson from the Prophets². Some synagogues may have also used a three-year cycle for the reading of the Psalms. The lessons having been read, they would be preached upon by a rabbi. Perhaps the best example we have of this is
 65 from St. Luke 4:16–21, the account of Jesus preaching at the synagogue in Nazareth. The Isaiah scroll is handed to Him, and He unrolls it to the reading from the Prophets for the day, reads the lection, and then preaches on it.

That this practice was carried over into the worship of the Christian church is seen from references made to it, such as that given in 1 Timothy 4:13, “ἕως ἔρχομαι
 70 πρόσεχε τῇ ἀναγνώσει, τῇ παρακλήσει, τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ..” St. Paul’s use of ἀναγνώσει is very descriptive, since it is the word consistently used in the Septuagint to translate נקרא. Thus the first part of the passage could also be translated, “Until I come, give attention to the lection....” As early as the 50’s and 60’s, Christian congregations began to supplement the readings from the Old
 75 Testament with readings from the writings of the Apostles. In passages such as 1 Thessalonians 5:27 and Colossians 4:16, Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and apparently aware of it, tells these churches that his letters are to be read in the service (again using ἀναγνώσει, so perhaps “be lections”) then circulated to other neighboring congregations that they may use them as well. As the Gospels
 80 were written and circulated, they too were read in public worship. As is to be expected, the practice of reading Scripture was rather consistent. Justin Martyr (d.

²These weekly divisions were called *sedarim*, and you will find them in the right margins of the *Biblia Hebraica*. The beginning of each section is marked with ׀. In Babylon the tradition became to read through the Torah every year, and thus new divisions were set up, the *parashoth*. These are marked under the ׀ with ׀׀.

166) wrote in his Apology “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has
 85 ceased, the president [presiding minister] verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.”³

While the basic practice of reading Scripture and preaching from it was common, what was read and how much was not. In some places there was a continuous reading from Sunday to Sunday until a book was finished. Some areas of
 90 Spain and France used lessons made from a mosaic of Scripture, piecing together short selections from various parts of Scripture.⁴ Some churches used harmonies of the Gospels and read from them. And while some places read two lessons each Sunday, others read as many as four. Overall, *lectio continua*, the continuous reading
 95 of a book from Sunday to Sunday, seems to have been the prevailing practice in one form or another.

However, as the church year developed, the practice of *lectio continua* waned. Already in the first century the Church was celebrating Easter, which soon became the celebration of Easter and Pentecost, which soon became the celebration of Lent, Easter, Pentecost and Epiphany, which soon... well, you get the idea. By the fourth
 100 century the festival half of the church year as we know it (Advent – Pentecost) was generally established, complete with days set apart for commemoration of saints and martyrs. These festivals and commemorations required their own readings and

³Roberts, Alexander & Donaldson, James, eds. *The Ante-Nicean Fathers*. American Edition. New York: Christian Literature Co., 1906. I. p. 186.

⁴This may be the origin of liturgical pieces such as the *Ave Maria*.

thus interrupted the *lectio continua*. As the “interruptions” became less the exception and more the rule, *lectio continua* gave way to prescribed readings. So that the pastor
 105 would know what the prescribed reading was, bishops had indices prepared, which gave not only references but showed the first and last words in each lesson. An assigned portion of Scripture was known as η περικοπή, the pericope⁵, as it was the portion of Scripture “cut out” from the Scriptures for that day. Because books other than the Bible were sometimes used (e.g. lives of the saints, martyrologies, sermons
 110 or writings of noted preachers, etc.), many bishops and church fathers also produced books called *comes*, sort of a pericope and sermon help book all in one. These books included not only the readings for each day, but often some commentary as well. Some *comes*, commentary and all, may even have been prepared so that they could be read during the service, functioning as Ante-Nicean church postils.

115 It was not long before books were prepared with the lessons actually written out, saving the step of having to look them up elsewhere; epistles written out in an *epistolarium*, the gospels in an *evangelarium*. A book with a complete set of lessons was called a *lectionarium*.⁶ Most of these were incomplete by today’s standards in that they usually had assigned propers only for the festival half of the year with a
 120 selection of optional readings and propers for the rest of the year to be used at the discretion of the pastor. The same was also true for the Epiphany season, since it

⁵Technically, a *pericope* is either an index of the readings for the church year (e.g., p. 199-203 in the ELH) or one of the selections therein, a *lectionary* is a book that has all the readings written out. Today *lectionary* is used with both meanings and *pericope* is relegated to use only in papers like this one.

⁶Today the lectionaries are not nearly as important to liturgical studies as textual studies, since they played a huge role in the transmission of the New Testament text. Get out your Greek NT and notice how many times you see “*Lect.*” or “*l*” in the critical apparatus. Today some 2000 of these are extant, the second largest group of manuscripts.

wasn't until the fourth century that Christmas and Epiphany became distinct festivals.

125 The Historic Lectionary

What we know today as the Historic Lectionary comes to us from the *Comes Hieronymi* (Jerome). The date and authorship of this document is disputed, however at the very latest it was written by someone in 471.⁷ Having the name of Jerome attached to it made this document influential on its own, but when it was included
 130 in the Leonine Sacramentary⁸ it became a standard text for the Western Church. Even then, it provided assigned readings only for Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. The rest of the year was still covered by optional propers included in the *comes*, or by the whim of the local bishop or pastor.

Three hundred years later, Charlemagne decided to standardize liturgical
 135 practices in his domain, and as part of this had his religious advisor Alcuin⁹ do a revision of the *Comes Hieronymi*. What Alcuin basically did was take the Gregorian Sacramentary, the current standard in Rome, and introduce it to Charlemagne's

⁷If you're like me and Early Church History is somewhat a blur, Jerome lived c. 342–420. Thus if Jerome did write the *comes* ascribed to him it could have a date as early as 382 (the date he began working as secretary to Pope Damasus). The importance of whether Jerome wrote the *Comes Hieronymi* is significant in that if it actually did come from Jerome it may be that he was simply copying an earlier lectionary, making the Historic Lectionary even more historic (i.e., Is it a product of the Early Church or Early Middle Ages?). You may safely think of this as the liturgical equivalent of the Northern/Southern Galatia debate.

⁸A *sacramentary* was the altar book of the Middle Ages. It contained a pericope, the propers for the church year, a number of masses and some other prayers. There were three very important sacramentaries produced: the Leonine, Gelasian and Gregorian. Even though they bear the names of famous popes (Leo the Great, 440–461; Gelasius I, 492–496; and Gregory the Great, 590–604), we don't really know who compiled them. Each, however, built on the one previous, and together served to standardize worship practices in the Western Church. In the 11th century someone will get the bright idea to put together a portable version of the sacramentary and the missal will be born.

empire. This was a monumental step in church history, since it standardized worship in the Western Church and put everyone west of the Carpathians literally
140 on the same page, at least for the festival part of the year. And because he was seeking to shorten the service, Alcuin introduced two major changes in the lectionary. First, he eliminated the reading of the Old Testament lesson. Secondly, he shortened many of the epistle and Gospel readings. Where before a lesson could have been as long as two or three chapters, now it was usually a single account from
145 a gospel or section from an epistle that dealt with a specific topic. There were probably a number of reasons for both these changes, but what is likely the main one was the decreased literacy of both people and clergy effected by the barbarian invasions.

The next major change to the lectionary would not come until the 13th
150 century and the establishment of the last generally accepted major festival of the Church: Trinity Sunday. This festival soon came to dominate the second half of the church year, and with that came the establishment of assigned propers for the entire year. In itself this was not new; some places had actually established year-round propers as early as the 4th century. But the High Middle Ages saw the strengthening
155 of both monarchies and the papacy, both of which liked to have unified practice. The era of *cuius regio eius lectio* was over, and with the general adoption of the Sarum

⁹Alcuin (c. 735–804) was an English cleric who served as an advisor to Charlemagne. He was a chief force behind the Carolingian Renaissance, which would set the stage for The Renaissance.

Missal at the end of the 13th century the liturgical practice of the Western Church, year round, was governed by the Historic Lectionary.¹⁰

So well constructed and established was this practice that even during the
 160 upheaval of the Reformation it remained intact. The Reformation never really asked
 the question “Should the lectionary be changed?” only whether it should be used.
 As might be expected, men like Zwingli and Müntzer abolished the use of
 lectionaries along with the observation of the church year. Calvin took a somewhat
 more restrained approach, abolishing both church year and lectionary but
 165 substituting a *lectio continua*, since he saw homiletical value in having some sort of
 assigned reading. The Lutherans, true to form, only wished to abolish or reform
 those things which obscured Christ or promoted false doctrine. The lectionary did
 not fall into either of these categories, and thus was retained with only slight
 revision by the Lutherans: They added propers for Trinity 25 and 26, eschatological
 170 lessons meant to connect the end of life with the end of all things. They also moved
 the commemoration of the Transfiguration from the fixed date of August 6 to the
 last Sunday after Epiphany, a fitting climax of the season which celebrates the
 manifestation of the glory and deity of Christ.

This was not to say there was not criticism from the Lutherans. In a letter to
 175 his friend Nicholas Hausmann in Zwickau, Luther described the liturgical service in
 Wittenberg and commented about the readings:

¹⁰Though it wouldn't be until the Council of Trent that the Roman Church actually enforced and stabilized its use.

180 After [the collect] 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
 185 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
 190 lacking.”¹¹

As critical as Luther’s comments seem to be, they should be taken with a
 grain of salt. Considering the times he was perhaps over-sensitive to anything which
 seemed to detract from *Sola Gratia*. Indeed, in the end we see that even Luther took
 himself with a grain of salt, since despite his comments Luther himself prescribed
 195 the use of the Historic Lectionary in both the *Formula Missae* and *Deutsche Messe*,¹²
 and all Lutheran altar books continued in their use of it. Even the Augsburg
 Confession and the Apology testify to its official use in Lutheran congregations,
 when in speaking about tradition and the Church the Lutherans stated: “Many
 traditions are kept on our part, for they lead to good order in the Church, such as the
 200 Order of Lessons in the Mass [i.e., the lectionary] and the chief festivals.”¹³ “We keep
 traditional liturgical forms, such as the order of the lessons, prayers, vestments,
 etc.”¹⁴ The next 400 years of Lutheran liturgical life (and that of the Roman
 Catholics, and Anglicans) was governed by the Historic Lectionary. It served as the

¹¹Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works: Liturgy and Hymns*. American Edition. Helmut T. Lehmann, ed.
 Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1965. vol. 53. p. 23f.

¹²cf. *ibid*, p. 68f.

¹³Article XXVI, ELH p. 21.

¹⁴Apology, XXIV.1

basis for our postils and devotional books, our hymnody and church music, and
 205 even until the mid 20th century was the index for every Lutheran hymnal.

To be sure, other lectionaries were prepared. In 1896 the churches of the
 Prussian Union known as the Eisenach Conference produced a lectionary,
 popularized in the United States by Dr. R. C. H. Lenski and his notes on the series.
 The Synodical Conference produced a series which was adopted in 1912. The
 210 Scandinavian Lutheran Churches produced a three-year lectionary in 1868.¹⁵ Yet
 often these were produced not to supplant the Historic Lectionary but to
 supplement it, usually as alternate texts for preaching.¹⁶ The patterns and themes of
 the Historic Lectionary were maintained.

Advantages & Disadvantages

215 The fact that the Historic Lectionary has been in use over six hundred years is
 much to its credit. It means that there are plenty of resources for it, including many
 written by the Lutheran Fathers. Luther's Church and House Postils, as well as the
 sermons of Bugenhagen, Gerhard and Walther all follow the Historic Lectionary.
 Devotional books such as that by Bishop Laache and Luther's Family Devotions
 220 followed the Historic Lectionary, with the intent that worship in the home would be
 an echo of what had been heard in church that Sunday, and so that those kept from
 public worship (and in the 18th & 19th century when these books were printed, that

¹⁵This is the one in *The Lutheran Hymnary* and *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*. You will notice the first year is the Historic Lectionary.

¹⁶A good example of this would be the *Perikopenbuch zur Ordnung der Predigttexte*, Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1966, which provided for six series of texts to be used as preaching texts in connection with the usual Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons. A bit more accessible (and in English) is Ernst Wendland's *Sermon Texts*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House. 1984. On p. 10 he alludes to this same point.

would for the most part have meant settlers in the New World) would have yet one more connection to the Holy Christian Church.¹⁷ Much of our hymnody was

225 influenced by the Historic Lectionary, which is why a number of Lutheran Advent hymns mention the triumphal entry.¹⁸ This effect was compounded by the fact that Bach used its propers in composing his church cantatas. Six hundred years also means that there has been time to work out most of the bugs. Unlike other lectionary series (except those based on the Historic series), the propers for the day always

230 match up with the readings, enhancing the theme for the day, and the lessons within each season flow together to create a seasonal theme. Indeed, of all the lectionaries the Historic is the most well-organized; there is even method in the seeming madness of the Trinity season.¹⁹ What is perhaps the greatest asset today is the fact that it is a one year lectionary. If *repetitio mater studiorum est*, then here is where you

235 will find the most *repetitio*. This is especially an advantage in our era of decreased biblical literacy.

At the same time, because it is a one year series, it uses a limited number of texts. The Historic Lectionary grew during times when it was common to have

¹⁷These are both excellent devotionals, well worth having not only for family worship but for sermon preparation, sick calls and faculty devotions. The Laache devotional is currently out of print (Kyrie Eleison!), however Prof. Mark DeGarmeaux is working on a new translation of it (Te Deum Laudamus!). The Luther devotional is actually a compilation of excerpts from the writings and sermons of Luther done by Pr. Georg Link in 1877. It has recently been translated into English by Pr. Joel Basely, and last I checked was available from the Bethany Bookstore. Also worth mentioning is a somewhat abridged version of the Luther devotional entitled *Luther For the Busy Man*, printed by the Lutheran Church in Australia

¹⁸Look in any Lutheran hymnal and it's likely to be a number close to 30%. "Come, Thou Precious Ransom Come," "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates," "O How Shall I Receive Thee," "Wake! The Welcome Day Appareth," "The Advent of Our King," "O Bride of Christ, Rejoice," "Rise, Children of the Kingdom," all make overt reference to the triumphal entry. This may not seem like a large percentage, but it was enough so that when the ILCW was planning their Advent readings they were forced to include this account as an alternate reading for Advent 1.

¹⁹See Appendix A

services on days like Easter Monday, which may also explain why some lessons are
 240 now omitted.²⁰ Perhaps the most glaring of these is the parable of the prodigal son.

The Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW)

In 1956, only fifteen years after the production of *The Lutheran Hymnal*,
 Lutheran church bodies in the United States were seeking a revision of that book. In
 245 1965 the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod resolved to appoint a commission which
 would work with other Lutheran church bodies to produce a new common hymnal,
 a contemporary heir to *The Lutheran Hymnal*. To that end, on February 10, 1966
 representatives of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, the American Lutheran
 Church and the Lutheran Church in America met in Chicago and formed what
 250 would become the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW).²¹ It was later
 joined by representatives of the Slovak Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church
 of Canada (ELCIC).²² In pursuing the production of a new hymnal, the ILCW
 produced a number of worship resources for trial and use in congregations. These
 were distributed through the publication of a series entitled *Contemporary Worship*.

²⁰Some have postulated that the custom of having daily services may also explain this, but evidence would suggest otherwise. At a Lutheran city church the practice would have been: A Sunday morning mass where the pastor preached on the gospel lesson, then Sunday evening vespers where he preached on the epistle; on Monday and Tuesday he would have had matins and preached on the catechism, Wednesday matins would have been a series on St. Matthew or sometimes another synoptic; Thursday and Friday lessons from the epistles, then Saturday afternoon vespers preaching from the gospel of John. Thus the services followed more of a pattern than any pericope (c.f. *Luther's Works* vol. 53, p. 68 ff). Plus, the weekday services were looked upon much like the daily chapel at Bethany College. While the entire parish was welcome, these services were conducted especially for the benefit of the students and professors.

²¹Our synod sent observers to this first meeting: Prof. Julian Anderson, Pr. Eivind Unseth and Mr. Stanley Ingebretsen. (1966 Synod Report).

²²Technically, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada had been part of these proceedings from the beginning as the Canada district of the ALC. Later when they became independent they joined the ILCW as an independent body.

255 *Contemporary Worship 6*, produced in 1973, dealt with the church year and calendar
and introduced two new lectionaries. In this volume the commission wrote:

260 “In recent years...there has been a widespread restiveness
with the appointed readings, a great deal of experimentation,
and a desire for either reform of the pericopes or a completely
new lectionary. This concern is not simply the product of
change in society and church; it has deeper roots. It reflects a
variety of influences in current theology, social-ethical
involvements, developments in worship practice, and
265 especially the influential biblical theology movement of recent
decades.”²³

In discussing revision there had been some debate regarding the merits of
going to a multi-year series, “on whether loyalty to our heritage, conformity with
world Lutheranism generally, and reverence for the Western lectionary tradition
270 should prevail, or whether agreement with our sister churches in America
demanded a three-year series.”²⁴ The latter concerns prevailed. One of the outcomes
of Vatican II had been the publication of the *Ordo Lectionum Missae* in 1969, the new
three-year series that supplanted the Historic Series in the Roman Catholic Church.
The next year the Protestant Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church and United
275 Church of Christ adopted the *Ordo* as a basis for new lectionaries in their churches.
Thus in September of 1970 the ILCW simply followed suit, expressing its preference
for a three-year series. In 1971 the ILCW published a revised one-year series, and
two years later published their *magnum opus*, a new three-year series, patterned after
the Roman *Ordo*. The ILCW three-year series somewhat returned to the practice of
280 *lectio continua* with the basic principle of assigning a synoptic gospel to each year.

²³*Contemporary Worship 6: The Church Year Calendar and Lectionary*. Prepared by the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House; Philadelphia: Board of Publications of the Lutheran Church in America; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973. p. 13.

“Year A” focuses on the Gospel of Matthew, “Year B” on the Gospel of Mark and “Year C” on the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel of John is used in all three during the Sundays after Easter and also serves to supplement St. Mark in Year B. In an effort to re-introduce the reading of the Old Testament, a First Lesson, usually selected from
 285 the Old Testament, was assigned to each Sunday which was to coordinate with the Gospel reading. The exception to this is the Sundays after Easter, where selections are chosen from Acts. Epistles were also assigned to each year to be read *lectio continua*, and thus no special effort was made to coordinate the Epistle with the Gospel selection.

290 In choosing selections, the committee asked itself a number of questions.

Chief among them were:

- ❶ Can this passage be expounded meaningfully today, can one preach relevantly on it?
- 295 ❷ Do the readings as a whole reflect the whole counsel of God?
- ❸ Is the reading exegetically defensible? Are there textual problems in the Hebrew or Greek which render the meaning of a passage uncertain?
- 300 ❹ Is the reading ecumenical? How widely is it used to express past usage and current practice?²⁵

The committee also stated a “sensitivity to the hazards in certain texts (e.g., misunderstanding in terms of anti-Semitism, if not carefully explained).²⁶

This series quickly became popular in Lutheran circles, evidenced by the fact
 305 that within fifteen years of its release Lutheran publishing houses were no longer producing worship materials based on the Historic Lectionary. Like most common

²⁴*Contemporary Worship* 6, p. 14.

²⁵*Contemporary Worship* 6, p. 16.

resources, there are now actually several versions of the ILCW lectionary in print. It was adapted somewhat by the LC-MS for publication in *Lutheran Worship*, and also by the Wisconsin Synod (WELS) for publication in *Christian Worship*. The *Evangelical*
 310 *Lutheran Hymnary* uses essentially the same version of the one found in *Lutheran Worship*. For the most part the variations in the different versions are minor, often focusing on the length of the reading (e.g. Should we read all of St. John 9, or just selected verses?).

Advantages & Disadvantages

315 Upon publication of the lectionary in 1973, the ILCW itself pointed out what is often cited as its greatest advantage: a larger selection of texts, thus exposing a congregation to a wider range of Scripture. Many pastors welcomed the opportunity to preach on a new variety of texts. The general practice of *lectio continua* used in the series can give a congregation a chance to get the flavor of a book, which can
 320 especially be helpful in the gospels. And with the popular acceptance of the series there are now a number of sermon helps and worship materials based on it.

The greatest disadvantages to the ILCW are its origin and length. The series was created by an inter-Lutheran group that is theologically liberal, and its theology often shows up in their selections for readings. In general, the ILCW omitted
 325 readings that speak directly of the deity of Jesus (St. John 8:46–59 is not in the ILCW), of miracles done by the apostles, and often allows for the omission of readings that condemn sins such as adultery and homosexuality. The most glaring omission is the lack of any texts which deal with the judgment of sinners.

²⁶*Contemporary Worship* 6, p. 17.

Traditionally, these readings were used on the Second-Last Sunday of the Church
 330 Year, but now they are either omitted or listed as optional. The one exception is the
 parable of the sheep and the goats, but this was likely retained because it retains the
 possibility for moralizing.

In fairness, I also examined the ILCW lectionary found in the *Evangelical
 Lutheran Hymnary*, where most of the optional, “offensive” material has been
 335 restored as part of the readings, and where the judgment day readings are listed for
 the Second-Last Sunday. If you are getting bulletins and worship materials from
 Concordia or Northwestern, you are using a version of the ILCW similar to this
 one.²⁷ However these cleaned-up versions essentially make optional readings
 primary; they hardly ever restore omissions.

340 And just as the brevity of the Historic Lectionary is both good and bad, so is
 the length of the ILCW three-year series. Parables and accounts that would have
 been heard every year are now heard once every three years, and if one follows the
 preaching cycle are preached on only once every nine years. Also, except for most of
 the Sundays during the festival part of the church year, the thematic approach to
 345 Sundays has been lost. It should also be noted that the argument of “the more Bible,
 the better” is not without its fallacies. On the surface, this seems a good, even pious
 idea. But the motivation behind this was a Higher-Critical notion of Scripture: that
 within the Bible is contained the word of God, and the function of a lectionary is to
 insure that the classic texts are transmitted to the next generation.²⁸ This is quite a

²⁷The version in *Christian Worship* actually has some minor variations in readings.

²⁸In his book *Scripture and Memory: The Ecumenical Hermeneutic of the Three-Year Lectionaries* (Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), Dr. Fritz West expounds quite a bit on this, especially

350 departure from Luther's doctrine of Scripture as *was Christum Treibt* (what brings Christ to us), and also why the trend in the use of the Old Testament in these lectionaries is toward seeing it as an independent lection from the "Hebrew Scriptures," rather than as a typological commentary on the Gospel reading.

355 **The Revised Common Lectionary**

As popular as the ILCW three year series is, it may become one of the most short-lived lectionary series. Two years after the formation of the ILCW, representatives of the ELCA, ELCIC and LC-MS had joined an ecumenical group called the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT). Composed of biblical, linguistic
360 and liturgical scholars from various Christian denominations, their purpose is to prepare worship texts and materials for use in North America, including lectionaries. In 1978 they sponsored a meeting in Washington DC whose purpose was to form a committee which would reconcile the differences between the various denominational uses of the three year series. In 1983 they published the *Common*
365 *Lectionary*.

The biggest change they brought about to the three year series was the revision of Old Testament lessons. Previous lectionaries had taken a typological approach to readings from the Old Testament, selecting texts with reference to their New Testament fulfillment. The CCT "raised serious questions about the Roman
370 lectionary's 'typological' use of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures,"²⁹ and thus for

on the idea that Scripture and the lections are that which transmit the "communal memories" of the church.

²⁹*The Revised Common Lectionary: Consultation on Common Texts*. Wood Lake Books, Inc., Winfield, BC, Canada. 1992, p. 16.

the *Common Lectionary* proposed a pattern of semicontinuous readings, essentially independent from the Gospel Lesson. For Year A, twenty Sundays were devoted to readings from the Pentateuch, followed by three Sundays of Ruth. In Year B fourteen Sundays were devoted to the life of David and four Sundays of Wisdom literature. Year C has ten Sundays devoted to Elijah and Elisha, and fifteen Sundays on the Major Prophets. According to the CCT, "The lessons are still typologically controlled by the gospel, but in a broader way than Sunday by Sunday, in order to make possible semincontinuous reading of some significant Old Testament narratives."³⁰ The semicontinuous readings were not used on major festivals or during seasons such as Advent or Easter, and during the other parts of festival half of the year some attempt was made to use continuous readings that enhanced the theme of the season. The CCT also included the reading of a Psalm in the lections, and adopted the practice of the Episcopal Church of replacing the "Sundays after Pentecost" with "Propers" keyed to the civil calendar (e.g., instead of the "Ninth Sunday after Pentecost," you now have "Proper 11, to be used on the Sunday between July 17 and 23 inclusive.").

The *Common Lectionary* was first used on a trial basis by a number of Lutheran and Episcopal congregations, and was officially adopted by the Anglican Church of Canada in 1985. Yet it also received a number of criticisms, directed especially from Lutheran, Episcopal and Roman Catholic sources. They noted:

- ❶ There were still a number of insubstantial differences between the Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran lectionaries that needed to be reconciled,

³⁰ibid, p. 76.

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② Further efforts should be made to strengthen the relationship between Old Testament and Gospel Readings,

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③ That confusion is caused within the congregation by the use of three unrelated readings, and

④ That the use of a Psalm and three lengthy readings in a single service is too much for the average congregation to embrace.³¹

In response to these criticisms, the CCT undertook a revision of the *Common*

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Lectionary, and in 1992 published the *Revised Common Lectionary*. The criticisms of Old Testament selections were addressed by the production of three versions of the RCL. There is a Roman Catholic version which at times uses readings from the Apocrypha for the Old Testament Lesson. There are then two Protestant versions, one in which the Old Testament lesson is matched to the Gospel lesson, and one with the semicontinuous Old Testament readings. Added to this were more stories of women of faith. The CCT also took the chance to further evaluate and eliminate texts which, "when taken out of their cultural and religious context of the Ancient Near East, may be misunderstood by late twentieth century congregations."³²

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At this writing the RCL has been officially approved for use and essentially adopted by the Episcopal Church, the ELCA and ELCIC. It is the official lectionary of the United Methodist Church, Presbyterians, United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ. Because of its general adoption by the ELCA, the RCL is currently the most widely used lectionary in American Lutheran churches (Just look which reading is listed first in your AAL calendar).

³¹Evanson, Charles, "An Examination of the Revised Common Lectionary." Review for the LC-MS Commission on Worship. January, 1996. p. 6.

420 *Advantages & Disadvantages*

The advantages of the RCL are the same as those mentioned for the ILCW, with the addition mentioned by the editors of having a truly ecumenical lectionary. The disadvantages are also similar, however with the RCL they are more pronounced. Its preparation was heavily influenced by higher criticism and liberal

425 theology. Where the ILCW tended to omit or edit, the RCL simply does it. No sections that may seem anti-Semitic are used, such as St. John 11:45-53 or the stoning of Stephen. The sections that speak against homosexuality are conspicuously omitted, as well as verses that warn of false prophets.³³ So seriously flawed is the RCL from both a hermeneutical and liturgical standpoint that it would be difficult to

430 sanction its use in a Lutheran congregation. The LC-MS Commission on Worship has reviewed the series and is recommending against its use in their congregations. The Wisconsin Synod has not made a statement for or against the RCL, and while they recommend the version of the ILCW found in *Christian Worship*, Northwestern Publishing House is currently considering making the RCL available on bulletins

435 and bulletin inserts, especially for their non-WELS accounts. And while at this writing neither Concordia nor Northwestern Publishing House has plans to officially switch to it, its use is gaining momentum. If your church is currently using an ILCW lectionary it may be worth the effort to periodically examine the readings and see if they match what is printed in on pages 199-201 in the *ELH*. If they don't

³²*The Revised Common Lectionary*, p. 78. Examples of these easily "misunderstood" texts would those which deny the pastoral office to women, address the sins of adultery and homosexuality, and speak of false prophets.

³³See Appendix B for a complete listing of omissions and edits.

440 match, it may be that the publishing house has for convenience sake (and, very likely, commercial reasons) switched over to the RCL.

Conclusion

You are as likely to find the perfect lectionary as you are to find the perfect
445 Bible translation. Like translations, it may be said of lectionaries that some are better than others, that inevitably you end up dealing with factors of taste and individual preference, and that even the worst of them is probably better than nothing at all.

Yet we should be aware of one other point of comparison: that just as there is no such thing as a theologically neutral translation, so there is no such thing as a
450 theologically neutral lectionary. This is especially true of the three year lectionaries published in the past thirty years. Created by committees with definite theological leanings, these lectionaries often display an agenda which at times finds itself at cross purposes with confessional Lutheranism. Considering this, it may be worthwhile to re-examine the use of the Historic Lectionary. Its use was a tradition
455 that united generations of Christians, and one which was perhaps too quickly cast aside. This is not to say that using a three year lectionary will not allow you to preach Christ crucified and thus consign your flock to hell. It is to say that these lectionaries have weaknesses of which we should be aware, and for which those who use them will need to compensate.

460 Which lectionary we use (or even whether we use a lectionary, for that matter) is certainly an adiaphoran, but this does not make it an unimportant matter. Thus in choosing a lectionary for use in the divine service, we should remember we

are choosing a catechetical tool. A lectionary is to be more than a means to dole out parcels of Scripture, it is to be a path of understanding, a guide for both pastor and
465 congregation through the whole counsel of God. Guided by the use of a good lectionary our faith is well-nourished and we grow in our faith and in our understanding of our Lord. God be praised for His glad tidings!

Soli Deo Gloria!

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Appendix A

Organization of the Historic Lectionary

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It is too bad that the organization and themes in the Historic Lectionary are often missed, since knowledge of them can aid in the work of the pastor and can aid the parishioners in their worship. The pastor who knows how the Sundays work together in a season can use that information effectively in planning the services and his sermons. The parishioner who is told the theme of a particular Sunday can begin to make sense of what the hymns, introit, collect gradual and readings are talking about (This is especially helpful for children). The strong, thematic organization of the Historic Lectionary is perhaps its greatest asset, especially when it is often lacking in other lectionary systems.

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Completely addressing the organization of the Historic Lectionary is out of the scope of this paper, but one example is not. In the Historic Lectionary, the Christmas and Epiphany seasons are connected and compliment each other: Christmas focuses on God becoming man, Epiphany on the revelation that this man is God.

Sunday	Theme	Gospel
Christmas Day	The Word Made Flesh	St. Luke 2:1-14, The Birth of Christ
Christmas 1	The Promise Fulfilled	St. Luke 2:33-40, Simeon & Anna
Christmas 2	God's Gracious Protection	St. Matthew 2:13-23, The Flight into Egypt
Epiphany	The Visit of the Magi	St. Matthew 2:1-12, The Visit of the Magi
Epiphany 1	The Son of God	St. Luke 2:41-52, The Boy Jesus in the Temple
Epiphany 2	The Lord of Gladness	St. John 2:1-11, The First Miracle
Epiphany 3	The Savior of the Nations	St. Matt. 8:1-13, Jesus Heals a Leper and the Centurion's Servant
Epiphany 4	Lord of Nature	St. Matt. 8:23-27, Jesus Calms the Storm
Transfiguration	The Transfiguration of Our Lord	St. Matt. 17:1-9, The Transfiguration

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On Christmas we hear that God has become man, the following Sunday we hear how this is in fulfillment of God's promise. Not only that, we hear Simeon allude to Jesus' death, and the gospel lesson ends with a verse telling us that Jesus "grew and became strong". Christmas 2 then recounts the flight into Egypt. God is born, He is subject to death, and indeed in His weakness must flee Herod lest He be killed, all vivid testaments to Christ being "true man".

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Then comes Epiphany, whose focus is really not so much that Jesus has come to save Gentiles, but that the glory of God is manifested in Christ. Magi follow a start to worship Him, the boy Jesus testifies to "being about His Father's business," then the first miracle,

then the healing of disease, then the calming of the storm. Each account shows the divinity of Jesus, and each more than the one before until the full divinity of Jesus shines forth at His Transfiguration. Some years you also have an Epiphany 5, whose reading is the parable of the tares among the wheat, ending with Jesus saying He is the Judge of all the earth, who will cast the tares into the fire and gather the wheat into His barn.

Now compare this to the organization of the ILCW. The theme seems to be retained for Christmas, but Epiphany has been separated from Christmas, beginning with the Baptism of Our Lord followed by a selection of accounts from the early ministry of Jesus. In other words, it becomes little more than a shorter version of the Pentecost season.

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For further study of the organization of the Historic Lectionary, I would suggest trying to find these books ("try to find," because most are out of print):

Backer, Bruce R. *Lutheran Worship* (course syllabus). New Ulm, MN: Dr. Martin Luther College, 1988.

Gehrke, Ralph. *Planning the Service: A Workbook for Pastors, Organists and Choirmasters*. Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press. This may still be available.

Horn, Edward T. *The Christian Year*. Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press. 1957.

Lindemann, Fred. *The Sermon and the Propers*. 4 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958. This is an especially good set, and well worth finding. His sermon outlines are often pietistic, but he does a great job showing how all the propers work together to enhance the theme of both the season and the Sunday. He also includes sermons by the Lutheran Fathers on the minor festivals.

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Reuning, Daniel G. ed. *Church Year Workbook*. Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press. This may still be available, call the Concordia-Ft. Wayne bookstore.

Appendix B

ILCW/RCL Omissions and Edits

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The omissions and edits are listed by year. In the chart are those common to both the ILCW and RCL. Below the chart are those which occur only in the RCL. If a reading is listed as omitted, it was included in a previous version of the lectionary and later removed, or was simply omitted from the reading, following the guidelines of the editorial board. The guideline given in parenthesis following the selection.

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Series A

Sunday	Lesson	Problem
Lent 1	Gen 3:1-7	Omits vss 8-15, thus you don't have God speaking to Adam & Eve. Even odder is the omission of 3:15. (vss 8-15 show up later at Proper 5 B)
Trinity Sunday	Gen 1:1-2:3	While 2:3 is a natural ending, keep in mind that Historical Criticism sees the rest of Gen 2 as a second creation account. Note that RCL includes v. 4 in their reading. ILCW also provides Deut. 4:32-34, 39-40 as an alternate reading, though this is probably because it is shorter.
Pent. 2/Prop. 4	Mt 7:(15-20) 21-29	ILCW allows for the omission of v 15, "beware of false prophets." RCL simply begins at v. 21.
Pent. 21/Prop 23	Mt. 22:1-10	Omit last three verses of the lesson, where the king throws out the man without a wedding garment, and which contain " <i>For many are called, but few are chosen.</i> " This certainly makes it a much easier text to preach on, but should we really be editing Jesus' parables? Moreover, the editing shows a higher critical understanding of the parable, trying to make it a parallel of Luke 14:16-24.

555 RCL Omissions and Edits

First Sunday in Lent, omit Rom. 5:12-15: " Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned – for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" (Is this to downplay original sin?)

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Pentecost 14/Proper 16, omit Rom 11:13-15: " I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (Anti-Semitic?)

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Omit Rom. 13:1-7: "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that
575 exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you
580 good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. Give everyone
585 what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor."

Omit Mt. 23:37-39: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen
590 gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Anti-Semitic)

595 Series B

Sunday	Lesson	Problem
Easter 2	Acts 3:13-15, 17-26	Omits v 16: "By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through Him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see."
Trinity Sunday	Jn 3:1-17	It is odd that this reading should be used on this Sunday, since ILCW complained that the John reading was inadequate for Trinity Sunday. Go figure.
Pent. 9/Prop. 11	Eph 4:1-7, 11-16	ILCW omits vss 8-10, which can lead to a misunderstanding of this text.
Pent. 16/Prop 18	James 2:1-10 (11-13) 14-17	Allows for the omission of the section that condemns adultery.
Pent 20/Prop 22	Mark 10:2-16	Surprise! They include the Mark section condemning divorce. Go figure.

600 RCL changed Pentecost 8/Proper 10 from Mark 6:8-13: "Calling the Twelve to Him, He sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were His instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." (It likely
605 that the missionaries calling a people to repentance was found offensive.)

Omit Eph 5:22-31: "Wives, submit to your husbands..."

610 Series C

Sunday	Lesson	Problem
Epiphany 7	1 Cor. 15:35-38, 42-50	Omits v 39-41: "All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor." Likely because this is a difficult section.
Lent 3	Ex 3:1-8a, 10-15	The only reason I can think that they omitted vs 8b is because of the hard names. But why omit vs 9? "And now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them." BHS doesn't list any textual problems. Difficult passage?
Pent 4/Prop 6	2 Sam 11:26-12:10, 13-15	ILCW & RCL omit vss 11-12, though this is probably to make it a more appropriate reading for the worship service ("This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.' "
Pent. 8/Prop 10	Lk 10:25-37	Vss 23-24 were probably included by the early church to insure this parable was properly understood as showing our inability to do good and our reliance on the Gospel. Vs 25 is a natural starting point, but it also makes it easier for a moralistic interpretation of this parable. In fact, there is even a special collect for this day in ILCW & RCL: "Lord God, use our lives to touch the world with your love. Stir us, by your Spirit, to be neighbor to those in need, serving them with willing hearts; <i>per...</i> "
Pent 9/Prop 11	Gen 18:1-10a (10b-14)	ILCW allows for the omission of the last 4 verses, RCL simply cuts them. This is the section where Sarah is listening at the tent and laughs at the promise of a son. Note that many modern commentators on Genesis treat this section as an interpolation, and say it unfairly characterizes Sarah. So much for inspiration.

RCL OT reading for Christmas 1, 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26, is a rather odd choice for this day. I suppose they saw it as a parallel to the reading of the boy Jesus, but this shifts the theme of this Sunday from being on Christ to being about children in the Bible.

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For Lent 5 Series C, RCL substitutes Jn 12:1-8 for Lk 20:9-19 (The parable of the land owner). This is probably because the Lk account is directed specifically against the Jews and is highly messianic ("The stone which the builders rejected..."). Jn 12 is the account of Mary anointing Jesus' feet.

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For Easter 2 Series C, the ILCW reading was Acts 5:12, 17-32. RCL is Acts 5:27-32. Very likely this is because vs 12 says the apostles were doing miracles, and vss 17-26

are account of an angel freeing the apostles from prison. Remember, one of the RCL's objectives is to remove readings with "textual difficulties".

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Also on Easter 2, where the ILCW had Rev. 1:4-18, RCL shortens it to Rev. 1:4-8. Vss 9-18 are St. John beholding the Risen Christ, testifying to His deity and His resurrection. "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

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For Easter 4, the ILCW reading had been Acts 13:15-16a, 26-33. This was probably thought a bit anti-Semitic, and Acts 9:36-43 is substituted by RCL (Dorcas, which has Peter raising her from the dead).

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Easter 5, RCL substitutes a nice reading (Acts 11:1-18) for an anti-Semitic one (Acts 13:44-52).

Easter 6 RCL substitutes Acts 16:9-15 for Acts 14:8-18. The Acts 14 account has Paul performing a miracle.

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Easter 7, ILCW had Rev. 22:12-17, 20. RCL has Rev. 22:12-14, 16-17, 20-21. It is suspicious that both should omit vss 18-19 ("I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.") But the agenda of the RCL becomes very clear with their omission of vs 15 ("Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.")

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ILCW reading for Pentecost 5/Proper 7 was Lk 9:18-24 (Peter's great confession). RCL omits this reading.

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ILCW Pentecost 6/Proper 8 is 1 Kings 19:14-21. RCL emends this to 19:15-16, 19-21. Verse 14 states the Children of Israel forsook God's covenant, vss 17-18 are God telling Elijah to kill the false prophets.

Pentecost 7/Proper 9 RCL allows for the omission of Galatians 6:1-6 from the epistle reading, the section that speaks about dealing with one caught in a sin.

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In the Gospel lesson for this Sunday, RCL omits Luke 10:11-12, probably because it speaks of the last day as a day of judgment ("it will more bearable on that day for Sodom than on that town [which rejected any of the 72]")

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Pentecost 14/Proper 16, ILCW has Luke 13:22-30, RCL substitutes Luke 13:10-17. 22-30 speaks of the last day as a day of judgment, Jesus saying "Make every effort to enter through the narrow gate." etc.

- 670 Pentecost 20/Proper 22, ILCW has Luke 17:1-10, RCL shortens to 17:3-10. (Vss 1-2 are: "Jesus said to His disciples: 'Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin.'") It may be they thought it an interpolation from Mt 18
- 675 (though UBS 4 doesn't note it) or that it seemed it didn't go with the section. Notably, Mt 18:1-10 (the parallel to Lk 17:1-2) is also omitted from ILCW and RCL.

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