

A Lectionary for One Reading Each Day

The report of Section II (Called to Live and Proclaim the Good News) of the 1998 Lambeth Conference refers more than once to the reading and study of the Bible and calls for creative engagement with the lectionary(1). Some bishops at the Conference hoped that a one-reading-per-day lectionary might be attached to the Anglican Cycle of Prayer without delay.

In the meantime, Dr. Carol Wilkinson was working on daily prayer resources intended primarily for lay people. Her initial approach involved the provision of a system of one-a-day lections arranged by themes. She intended that each reading should be able to 'stand on its own' and not require familiarity with its context. She then applied the same principle to a second system of readings, which is much more closely related to the seasonal patterns of the church's year. She also developed a system of psalmody which is influenced by the approach of *The Joint Liturgical Group: The Daily Office*.

After discussion at a meeting sponsored by the International Anglican Liturgical Consultation a group of IALC members studied Dr. Wilkinson's proposal, offered some points for amendment, and recommended that it be adopted on an experimental basis. This second 'non-thematic' lectionary is now attached to the Anglican Cycle of Prayer as it appears on the Anglican Communion website, along with proposed psalms. Both readings and psalms may be extended in accordance with personal or local needs. Users should note that there are two methods of numbering psalm verses, one based on the Hebrew text and one on the Septuagint, and they may have to make appropriate adjustments. Some Roman Catholic translations have a different method of numbering the psalms themselves. Psalm references in this lectionary are based on the NRSV.

Dr. Wilkinson writes, 'In the case of both of the lectionaries I did a great deal of background reading into the origins of the liturgical seasons and the history of the attachment of certain lections to particular seasons(2). I also studied every available lectionary at my disposal including *The Revised Common Lectionary (1992)*, *Alternative Service Book 1980* (daily and weekly), *Celebrating Common Prayer, Promise of His Glory (Church of England)*, *A New Zealand Prayer Book* (the weekly thematic lectionary), *the Joint Liturgical Group 4 year Lectionary* (in use in the Baptist Church), *Joint Liturgical Group: The Daily Office*, and lectionaries published by *the Liturgical Conference* (ecumenical) in their seasonal journals. Thus 'armed' I detail below, in seasonal order, the rationale for the lections. It is important to note that both lectionaries were composed on a 'book by book' basis, although I did have in mind an 'overall' schema for the whole work. Thus, the lections are concentrated around a season rather than being constructed for a whole year; for example, during Lent, Job and Romans are read over the course of three years of the lectionary.

'There are some points of contact with the Sunday readings in The Revised Common Lectionary which will be discussed below as they occur in the lectionary

'In the use of the non-thematic lectionary in the stand-alone version I would recommend that Year 1 commence at the same time as Year A of RCL. Full provision has been made for the season of Epiphany and Ordinary Time, which may vary in

length (particularly Epiphany). The lections set for All Saints to Advent begin on the Sunday nearest to All Saints.

'I have tried to ensure that a passage of scripture is not read more than once in a year. Although I dare say that I have probably not been entirely successful in this endeavour.'

Advent

Scholarly opinion is divided as to the exact origins of this season. Some would hold that it is a Western invention, but there are Eastern practices that parallel the western concepts attached to the preparation for the 'coming of God'. For example, the Syrian Churches keep four or five Annunciation Sundays prior to the feast; in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Thomas Hopko(3) points out that although the western concept of the 'two comings' does not have an overt place in the Orthodox prefeast liturgy, it is implicit in 'virtually all of the songs, hymns and lections'. So although the exact motivation is unknown it is not unreasonable to assume that it developed out of a natural desire to prepare to celebrate the Feast of the Incarnation (and possibly Epiphany) by a time of fasting, prayer and meditation. There would appear to be some evidence of a 'fast before the feast' in fourth and fifth century Gaul and Spain, but Advent was not observed in Rome until the sixth century. Some have suggested a link between the Roman fast of the tenth month (one of the quarter fasts of the Roman Church) and Advent. However, much remains a matter of conjecture where the development of this season is concerned. It was, therefore, some time before Advent, under various influences, gained its dual character of a penitential time of preparation for Christmas and of looking forward to the second coming of Christ.

In approaching the selection of readings for Advent the question was how to hold together these 'two comings' and provide some links to the RCL. In *Advent 1* the RCL readings (all years) speak of the hope of Israel (Isaiah) and the necessity of preparedness for the Parousia. The readings for *Advent 4* look very definitely towards the birth of Christ. In preparing the lections for these two weeks Dr. Wilkinson recalls that she was greatly influenced by Neil Alexander's words, 'Few things are more important for the continuing growth and renewal of Christian life and faith today than the recovery of a profound sense of *holy waiting*'(4). So, whereas in *Advent I*, she tried to draw out the implications of the RCL *Advent 1* readings by the use of selected readings from Isaiah and, in year 1, Revelation, accompanied by a continuous reading of Colossians (Year 2), Thessalonians I (Year 3) She consciously resisted anticipating the celebration of Christmas by continuing the readings in *Advent I* in *Advent IV*, i.e., Isaiah, Daniel (Year 2) Zechariah, and Malachi (Year 3), Revelation (Year 1), Colossians (Year 2), I & II Thessalonians and Philemon (Year 3).

In the RCL for *Advent 2*, the gospel is given over to passages that concern John the Baptist. In order to provide a backdrop to these readings about such a pivotal figure in the New Testament, the lections for *Advent II* have been selected (for the three years) from I & II Kings which contain the Elijah saga. Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Annunciation is the focal point for the RCL gospel in *Advent 3*. It seemed appropriate to complement RCL here by choosing passages from the Old Testament that draw

attention to the place of women in the biblical narrative. Ruth, Esther and Judith are very different characters. Ruth, ever faithful and, significantly, David's ancestor; Esther, a queen and saviour of her people; Judith, a woman of action, firmly in the tradition of the Judges of Israel. Each making a significant contribution to the life of Israel.

Christmas

In the early Church the feast of the Resurrection was the focal point of faith in Christ. It was not until the fourth century that a celebration of the birth of Jesus found a place in the liturgy. Today, the length of the season may encompass only one Sunday after Christmas before the celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany. *RCL* concentrates on the traditional lections for the Christmas season. However, Dr. Wilkinson resolved to avoid the familiar in favour of a selection of the great salvic passages from Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah. As a complement and a contrast to this schema is a reading of Philippians; a Christian community experiencing all the trials and tribulations common to the early Church. The final lection of Year 3 is a reading from Titus concerning the saving grace of Christ.

The Christmas season runs for the full 12 days of the feast, to the eve of Epiphany

Epiphany

Epiphany is widely regarded as the older feast. A common explanation is that the Eastern Church celebrated the birth of Christ on 6th January, a feast kept on 25th December by the Western Church. After the upheavals and schisms of the third and fourth century, when peace returned to the Church both festivals appear to have been celebrated by most churches. This explanation is satisfactory *if* Epiphany is regarded primarily as a celebration of the birth of Jesus. However, there is some evidence from Clement of Alexandria to suggest that in its older form Epiphany also marked the Baptism of Jesus. Epiphany was also associated with the first miracle at Cana.

There is no evidence to suggest that Epiphany was a season in its own right; it was a feast, with an accompanying octave. The *RCL* raises this point (p. 14) i.e., is this Ordinary Time, as in the Roman lectionary, or are these Sundays leading up to Lent to be regarded as an Epiphany season? Dr. Wilkinson carefully considered the work of Talley and Alexander and studied the *RCL* lections for this period. 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'. The 'season' is here devoted to the main theological thrust of the Epiphany i.e., the revelation or manifestation of God (to the Gentiles). A significant proportion of the lections are devoted to continuous readings from the Epistles. In Year 1, Ephesians and

I Corinthians; Year 2, Galatians, the remainder of Colossians, and II Corinthians; Year 3, I & II Timothy, Titus, I & II Peter, and all of the Johannine Epistles. There is a significant shift in the nature of the readings in the three weeks of Epiphany IV, V, and VI. In the thematic lectionary running in the main text to *The Hallowing of Time* these weeks concentrate on Christ the Teacher. Dr. Wilkinson wanted to provide an Old Testament background to Jesus' teachings and so selected readings from Proverbs, Wisdom, Sirach and Ecclesiastes. However, it is notable that in RCL for the corresponding Sundays in Year A, and two out of three Sundays in Year C the gospel may be classified as 'Jesus' teaching Ministry'. The lections then return to the Epistles for the remainder of the season.

Lent

Lent proved to be problematic. There are a number of strands of tradition attached to this season, each demanding attention. The preparatory fast before the feast; the final period of catechesis for those to be baptised at Easter; the restoration of penitents into full communion with the Church (a final preparatory fast). The association of the Lenten fast with the time Jesus withdrew into the wilderness is a later development. The question was which of these threads to draw together? Dr. Wilkinson finally decided to follow the 'traditional' strand of Lent as a season of penitence and self-denial and this is reflected in the thematic lectionary in the main text.

However, when Dr. Wilkinson came to the non-thematic lectionary she says she paused for thought. Might there be a way of incorporating some element of catechesis into the schema, and if so, what part would the Old Testament have? Lections from Romans were present in each of the years in the RCL during Lent. Reading these passages and, subsequently, the whole of Romans it seemed an appropriate choice, given that ethical teaching is of some significance in this epistle. James is similarly concerned with the practical living out of the Christian life. Having given significant space to the 'wisdom' books during Epiphany she looked to the book of Job, with its perennial struggle with the question 'why do the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper?', as an interesting complement to Romans and James.

Holy Week

The lections for Palm Sunday (the triumphal entry) appear in different years than in RCL. They were chosen deliberately in the light of the passages selected for the rest of Holy Week. The Isaianic passages devoted to the sufferings of the servant and the Johannine account of the passion occur in all three RCL cycles. Many parishes also have a dramatic reading of the passion from one of the gospels. It was, therefore, a question of providing lections which would provide a sombre backdrop to Holy Week without duplicating any of the perhaps all too familiar passages. Dr. Wilkinson was most influenced here by passages such as Matthew 23: 37, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophet and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! (// Luke 13: 34). Therefore, all the readings for Holy Week, with the exception of those for Palm Sunday, are taken from the Old Testament and reflect on

the sufferings of the great prophets of Israel. To accompany these passages psalmody is abandoned in favour of 'canticles' from the book of Lamentations.

Easter

The season of Easter marks a significant divergence of the ways between the RCL and this lectionary.

The lectionary for this season had to give due weight to the Old Testament background to the passion narrative, i.e., the Passover and the idea of a 'pilgrim people' (who journey to Jerusalem every year for the festival), and to celebrate the triumph of the resurrection. Consequently, the epistle to the Hebrews which explores the concepts of 'sonship', the high priesthood of Christ and the nature of his sacrifice his sacrifice are read over the first three weeks of the season. Revelation succeeds Hebrews in Easter III, with lections devoted to Christ triumphant, the second coming and the promise of eternal life. In Year 1, Exodus opens with the account of the birth of Moses (Ch. 2) and the semi-continuous narrative takes us through the origin of Passover, the flight from Egypt, the journey through Sinai, the giving of the 10 commandments and the reestablishment of the covenant. The account of desert wanderings of the Israelites is continued in Years 2 with a heavily edited reading of Numbers (Year 2) and Deuteronomy (Year 3). A break occurs in the lections on the Thursday of Easter V for Ascension Day. Pentecost Sunday, similarly has its own, unrelated, lections.

Ordinary Time

In common with the Easter season, Ordinary Time bears little relation to RCL.

The idea behind the lectionary for this season is relatively simply; to provide for a continuous reading of the synoptic gospels and Acts, together with passages from the Old Testament which would draw the reader into the 'story' of the people of Israel. A notable omission is the gospel of John. The inclusion of this gospel would have resulted in the absence one of the synoptics, but which one? Furthermore, the lengthy discourses did not easily lend themselves to reasonable and coherent division, and RCL uses John extensively during Holy Week and Year B (of which there has been some criticism). The solution appeared to be to omit John from Ordinary Time, but use the early chapters for the period from All Saints to Advent (see below).

Instead of commencing the lectionary in Year 1 with the gospel of Matthew Dr. Wilkinson thought that it would be more interesting to look at the 'beginnings' of Israel and the Church by a reading of Acts and the stories in Genesis. These books 'run out' in Week 25 and we then move on to the gospel of Mark (the earliest of the synoptics) and Joshua. In Year 2, we continue with Mark and move on to Judges, through I & II Samuel and in Week 14 commence the reading of Matthew. Week 20 takes us into I & II Kings which continues into Year 3. In Week 4 of Year 3, Matthew is moving towards the passion narrative and we take up the book of Jeremiah, which latterly accompanies the gospel of Luke (from Week 13). Readings from the prophet Ezekiel join Luke at Week 22 until the close of the lectionary at Week 28.

It is hoped that the Old Testament readings do justice to the great sweep of Israelite religious history, without which the gospels and Acts would not be possible.

As noted in the text, the psalms for Ordinary Time are adapted from The Table of Psalms appearing in The Daily Office by the Joint Liturgical Group.

All Saints to Advent

The season of Advent is extremely short and it is generally overwhelmed by Christmas by its second week. Would it be possible to give the four weeks from All Saints a more meditative, reflective feel and introduce some Advent concepts through the use of passages from Isaiah?

Dr. Wilkinson says she had been concerned that the gospel of John is not represented in the lectionary under consideration. One idea that occurred was to offer the fourth gospel as an alternative track to Job or Romans during Lent. However, this could prove problematic in a lectionary that is designed to be simple to use. Having examined RCL and listed all the readings from John in their respective years it seemed that the passion narratives were subject to a high degree of exposure, whereas the earlier chapters of the gospel were somewhat neglected. With this in mind and also with the desire to introduce a pre-Advent flavour to this area of the lectionary, Dr. Wilkinson combined selected readings from the earlier chapters of John together with passages from Isaiah. This is, perhaps, an interesting amalgamation that allows for a sustained reading over three to four days of some of the challenging chapters of John juxtaposed with readings of an Advent character from Isaiah.

The cycle of psalms continues on from the end of week 28 in the pattern recommended by the JLG.

Readers are invited to use this lectionary as an exercise in daily Bible-reading, or as part of their daily prayer. Their feedback is warmly welcomed. They are asked only to use the lectionary for some reasonable length of time and then send an email message commenting on problems they have encountered or on helpful patterns they have discovered. Please send comments to lectionary@anglicancommunion.org.

1. *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998*, Morehouse Publishing, Harrisburg PA, 1999, p. 153, etc.

2. Notably, Thomas Tally, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1991; J Neil Alexander, *Waiting for the Coming: the liturgical meaning of Advent, Christmas & Epiphany*, The Pastoral Press, Washington DC, 1993; Kenneth Stevenson, *Jerusalem Re-visited: the liturgical meaning of Holy Week*, The Pastoral Press, Washington DC, 1988; Robert Taft S.J., *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, 1993; George Guiver C.R., *Company of Voices - Daily Prayer and the People of God*, SPCK, London, 1988; Thomas Hopko, *The Winter Pasca - Readings for the Christmas Epiphany Season*, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, New York, 1984

3. *The Winter Pasca*, p. 90.

4. *Waiting for the Coming*, p. 4.