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# A New Calendar and Lectionary

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AT THE BEGINNING of 1969, the Church of England Liturgical Commission published one of its most elaborate and adventurous reports, *The Calendar and Lessons for the Church's Year* (SPCK, 95 pp., 10s. 6d.). The proposals contained were given a preliminary airing at a special session of Church Assembly in February 1969, where their radical character was duly noted, and one speaker proposed that consideration be deferred for five years! Certain elements of the proposals have now been included in the Commission's report *Common Prayer 1970*, which comes before the House of Laity for a vote in July this year, and legislation embodying the whole of the earlier proposals is said to be under preparation, so that it can be submitted to the new General Synod. The proposals are far from simple, but they deserve study both because of the amount of thought that has clearly gone into them, and because of the influence that the calendar and lectionary have upon the faith and worship of the Church.

The public reading of Holy Scripture and the observance of annual festivals are two of the most prominent and ancient features of Christian worship. The former is undoubtedly the more important, for it is by the public reading and exposition of Scripture that the word of God is ministered and the gospel proclaimed in Christian congregations. It goes back to the commands given in the Old and New Testaments (Deut. 31: 9-13; 1 Thes. 5: 27; Rev. 1: 3) and to the practice of the Jewish synagogue (Lk. 4: 16-20; Acts 13: 15,27; 15: 21; 2 Cor. 3: 14f.). The importance which Cranmer attached to it, and the part which it played in the English Reformation, are manifest to every reader of his statement 'Concerning the Service of the Church' at the beginning of the Prayer Book.

The Christian year has neither the same authority nor the same importance. Nevertheless, it has a recognisable background in the commemorative festivals of the Old Testament, and the fact that Christ died and rose at the Passover and sent the Spirit at Pentecost are

intelligible tokens of the propriety of observing a Christian Passover and Pentecost at Easter and Whitsun. The further fact that Christ is recorded to have gone up to Jerusalem for a festival of purely human institution—that of the rededication of the Temple by Judas Maccabaeus (Jn. 10: 22)—implies clearly enough that the Church may do likewise, by instituting and observing appropriate commemorations of its own; and as soon as the legalistic insistence on the observance of the Jewish year, of which we read in Gal. 4: 9-11 and Col. 2: 16f., had ceased to be a danger, the Church actually began to do so. Easter appears to have been the earliest Christian festival to be observed, but the fifty days from Easter to Whitsun were being kept not long afterwards, and then Christmas, which was variously observed on December 25 and January 6. Trinity, the crown of the Christian year, came last. In time, Easter developed into the twin observances of Good Friday and Easter Day, the fifty days into Ascension Day and Whitsunday, and the two Christmas festivals were each given their own significance. A concurrent development was that of the festivals of martyrs and apostles, and by the time of the Reformation such a number of often dubious saints were being commemorated, and such a number of public holidays were involved, as to interfere seriously with the orderly reading of Scripture and the duty of earning one's living (2 Thes. 3: 7-12). Hence the severe pruning which then took place.

Once a calendar has been adopted, it is bound to affect arrangements for the public reading of Scripture. Cranmer's intention was to prevent it affecting these arrangements too much. At Holy Communion, he was for the most part content with the seasonal epistles and gospels for Sundays and holy days which he found in use—a free selection, and not a particularly good one, with no pretence to be orderly or representative. At Morning and Evening Prayer, however, he aimed at the continuous reading from day to day of the psalter and all the other books virtually entire, together with some parts of the Apocrypha. Daily attendance at these readings was the aim, and there was consequently no interruption of them on Sundays—only on the red-letter holy days, which were all of them biblical commemorations. As early as Elizabeth's reign, however, it was found necessary to make some special provision for Sundays, and recent revisions of the lectionary have carried this further, giving Sundays a complete set of independent lessons and psalms (see, for example, the lectionary in the proposed Prayer Book of 1928). In addition, since the lessons that Cranmer appointed are somewhat longer than today seems wise, the idea was adopted in the 1871 lectionary (that now printed in the Prayer Book) of reducing the number of times that the New Testament is read in the daily course from thrice a year to twice a year; and in the 1955 lectionary, reissued in 1961 and now in general use, a similar principle was applied to the much more restricted Sunday course of readings, by spreading it over two years.

Even so, these modern lectionaries have not given real satisfaction. Perhaps the most important reason for this is that Holy Communion is being held more and more commonly at one of the main hours of Sunday worship, displacing Morning or Evening Prayer. The long-delayed revision of the Communion lectionary has thus become urgent, and in the course of this revision room needs to be found for the Old Testament lesson and psalm which were supplied by the service displaced. In order to achieve a measure of integration with the other main Sunday service, and thus encourage those who can to attend church twice a Sunday, the lectionary for Morning and Evening Prayer needs to be revised in combination with the other, and in revising it one needs to bear in mind the new factor that wherever Holy Communion has displaced one of these services from the more popular hours of worship, even those who attend church twice a Sunday will not be present at Morning *and* Evening Prayer but only at one or the other. Any revision which takes account of all these factors must obviously be a major undertaking.

The Anglican calendar is likewise in need of attention. For one thing, a decidedly peculiar collection of black-letter days was reinserted into the calendar in Elizabeth's reign for purposes of identification and secular convenience: no-one was supposed to observe these days liturgically, and until the 1928 proposals no lectionary provision was made to enable people to do so, but nowadays many people do. For another thing, the historical sequence from Christmas to Whitsun is disrupted by the anomalous position of Innocents' Day, the Presentation in the Temple and the Annunciation (originating, as they did, not as festivals of our Lord but as saints' days). Again, several great events in our Lord's ministry are ignored—notably his Baptism and his Transfiguration, which are certainly no less significant than his Circumcision or his Presentation in the Temple. Finally, as Canon Leatham urged in *Guidelines*, the Creation of the world and the whole Old Testament preparation for the gospel are improperly excluded from the Christian calendar.

### *An Ecumenical Enterprise*

IN addressing itself to these difficult problems, the Liturgical Commission has made some effort to proceed on an ecumenical basis. This is a laudable aim, since the Christian calendar is undoubtedly a matter both of interdenominational and of international significance. The Commission has consequently done much of its work through the Joint Liturgical Group, an interdenominational body drawn from various Churches in England and Scotland (not Wales), which has been operating since 1963, and has the Commission's vice-chairman and chairman as its chairman and secretary. However, one cannot help regretting that

the Joint Liturgical Group is not a more widely representative body. The Churches most needing to be consulted on this matter are those which already observe the Christian year and follow a calendar approximating in some degree to that of the Church of England, such as the other Churches of the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran Churches and the unreformed Churches, whereas the only Church represented on the Joint Liturgical Group which comes into any of these categories is the Scottish Episcopal Church, the remainder being semi-liturgical or non-liturgical bodies. Even the Church in Wales (which is currently experimenting with its own revision of the calendar!) is not represented. It is true that there is an observer from the Church of Rome, so to this extent the admonition of the Lambeth Conference that 'unilateral action in regard to the liturgical year . . . is to be avoided' has been observed (*The Lambeth Conference* 1968, SPCK and Seabury, 1968, p. 135, endorsed in Resolution 52); it is true also that no Church can be bound by the decision of another in such matters, and that there must always be a difference between a reformed and an unreformed calendar; but it seems strange that in this day and age the Church of England and the Church of Rome should be engaged at the same time on revising their respective calendars and lectionaries and should show as complete a disregard for each other's doings as the end-products (whatever their merits) seem to reflect. (For a useful account of the provisions of the revised Roman calendar and lectionary, which were prepared at the wish of the Second Vatican Council and are now in force, see the *Clergy Review* for October and December 1969.) Even more surprising is the lack of consultation with the other Churches of the Anglican Communion: all that seems to have been done is to have some superficial discussion after the 1968 Lambeth Conference, when the English proposals were already finished and in part published. It is hard to think that it will not strike another unnecessary blow at the links between the Anglican Churches if the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church take unilateral action in altering the seasons of the Christian year, contrary to the express wish of the Lambeth Conference (which, if it applies to relations between the Anglican Churches and the Church of Rome, certainly applies *a fortiori* to relations between one Anglican Church and another). Previous experience would not lead one to expect that the Liturgical Commissions in many Anglican Churches will follow the example of that in the Church of the Province of South Africa and simply borrow the English proposals, especially as the Church in Wales and the Church of Ireland have been working on revisions of their own. It is still not too late for consultation, but consultation will certainly be fruitless if the English proposals are presented on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, and once Church Assembly or the General Synod has been persuaded to agree to them the time for consultation will be past.

Three publications on the Joint Liturgical Group lie behind the

Liturgical Commission's report on *The Calendar and Lessons*. These are *The Calendar and Lectionary* (OUP, 1967), containing a calendar for the Christian year and a lectionary for Holy Communion; *The Daily Office* (SPCK and Epworth, 1968), adding collects, a lectionary for weekdays and a weekday psalter; and *An Additional Lectionary* (SPCK and Epworth, 1969), adding a lectionary for a second Sunday service. No table of psalms for Sundays has been produced by the Group, nor has it made any provision for holy days in the week (with the exceptions of Christmas, Good Friday and Ascension Day). These are the spheres in which the Commission has worked independently.

The Joint Liturgical Group's calendar, its two Sunday lectionaries and its collects are reproduced, with minor amendments, in the Commission's *Calendar and Lessons* report. The Group's weekday lectionary and weekday psalter are not reproduced, but it is important to note that this is simply for financial reasons (p. 18)! What the Commission's report says on pp. 30, 32, 93-95 makes it perfectly clear that the weekday lectionary and psalter are integral parts of the Commission's proposals, so members of Church Assembly and the General Synod will not be able to judge the proposals properly without consulting *The Daily Office* as well.

### *The Proposed Lectionary*

ONE of the main problems which faced the revisers in producing their lectionary system, it was pointed out earlier, was to adapt it to a situation in which Holy Communion is being held more and more at one of the main hours of Sunday worship, replacing either Morning or Evening Prayer. They have applied themselves to this task with energy and ingenuity.

Four important changes have been made. First, all the courses of lessons are spread over two years, so as to provide the maximum scope without making the lessons unduly long.

Secondly, Old Testament lessons and Psalms, as well as Epistles and Gospels, are provided for Holy Communion, so as to fit the service better for use at one of the main hours of Sunday worship. One of the three lessons (Old Testament, Epistle or Gospel) sets a connecting theme for them all, but those who wish need use only two lessons, provided they do not omit the 'controlling' lesson. The same theme as at Holy Communion runs through the two lessons (Old Testament and New Testament) for the second Sunday service. There is no continuous reading of the same books of the Bible from Sunday to Sunday, as there is from day to day in the weekday lectionary, but there is an orderly succession of themes.

Thirdly, the lectionaries are realistic enough to envisage only two main Sunday services, not three. However, since the lectionaries now

cover two years, it is possible to adapt them to various patterns of Sunday worship by using both years' readings in the *Additional Lectionary*, if necessary, every year. The basic pattern is Holy Communion plus Morning or Evening Prayer, but Holy Communion plus Morning and Evening Prayer is also possible, and so is Morning and Evening Prayer without Holy Communion, though in the third case the coverage of Scripture is inevitably less satisfactory.

Fourthly, the weekday lectionary appoints only three lessons (Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel) for each day, not four. This surprising change is made not so much to provide for a daily eucharist as to conform to the revised structure proposed for the daily offices (now reproduced in *Common Prayer 1970*), whereby Old and New Testament lessons are read in the morning, but only the latter in the evening. If, however, the Church of England decides to retain the four-lesson structure of Morning and Evening Prayer, this can easily be provided for by directing that the Old Testament lessons for the two years be used in a single year.

The coverage of Scripture in the lectionaries seems good, and there is a minimum of duplication. Alternatives are provided to most passages from the Apocrypha. One criticism might be that there is an unnecessary number of breaks in the *lectio continua* on weekdays.

### *The Proposed Calendar*

HOWEVER, it is impossible to judge the lectionary adequately without considering the calendar on which it is based. Turning now to the calendar, we again find ourselves confronted with a remarkably adventurous piece of work. It has five seasons: the Sundays before and after Christmas, the Sundays before and after Easter, and the Sundays after Pentecost. This *prima facie* simplicity is, however, somewhat deceptive.

The beginning of the Christian year is moved forward to late October. There are nine Sundays before Christmas, not four, thus making room for the Creation and the Old Testament preparation for the gospel, the absence of which was mentioned earlier as one out of four present defects of the calendar. This new provision is admirably executed, and in executing it the Second Advent has not been excluded, though it is confined to a single Sunday. To the last four Sundays before Christmas, the conventional nomenclature of the 'Sundays in Advent' is added as a subtitle. This, no doubt, is a concession to current practice which can later be dropped, though many people, probably, would prefer such names as 'Advent' and 'Lent' to colourless new names like 'the Sundays before Christmas', 'the Sundays before Easter'. Advent has had various lengths at different times and places, and there is no real reason why the name could not be extended to all

nine Sundays before Christmas. It is also worth pondering whether a tenth Sunday ought not to be added to make room for Remembrance Day.

The Epiphany season, always something of an anomaly, is fairly successfully assimilated into the Sundays after Christmas. When, however, one reaches the Sundays before Easter, one finds trouble beginning.

The three pre-Lent Sundays (Septuagesima, Sexagesima and Quinquagesima) have been included in the Sundays before Easter. Certainly, some change needed to be made here, since a period of preparation for a period of preparation has no claim to be retained. In the new Roman calendar, the observance of these three Sundays is simply abolished, with the result that they become an indistinguishable part of the preceding season. By including them instead in the following season, the Commission has done nothing to remove the present anomaly, since the result is that Lent, which is retained as a distinct season of self-denial, begins in the middle of the Sundays before Easter, thus making these Sundays in reality two seasons, not one. It would surely have been better to have merged the pre-Lent Sundays into the Sundays after Christmas, where their proposed Sunday themes would have followed on perfectly happily.

There is a similar difficulty with the Sundays after Easter and the Sundays after Pentecost. Ascension Day falls towards the end of the Sundays after Easter, and the Sunday after Ascension Day, called here the sixth Sunday after Easter, has the Ascension of Christ as its Sunday theme. No-one, surely, can fail to see that this is the present brief Ascension season, needlessly and unsuccessfully disguised as part of the post-Easter season.

The Sunday after Pentecost is, of course, Trinity Sunday. The remaining Sundays of the Christian year have been renamed, however, as Sundays after Pentecost, not Sundays after Trinity. What this has in its favour except novelty and agreement with the post-Reformation practice of the Church of Rome is difficult to see. Even in the Church of Rome, as the Joint Liturgical Group concedes (*The Calendar and Lectionary*, p. 10), some of the monastic orders number the Sundays from Trinity, not Pentecost; and Rome, of course, with its four-Sunday Advent, has about twenty-six Sundays after Pentecost, not about twenty-one; so the agreement is far from exact. It is true that the Eastern Churches have no Sundays after Trinity, but this is only because the Eastern Churches have no festival of Trinity either. The practice of the monastic orders shows that the custom of numbering the Sundays from Trinity Sunday is not a purely Protestant one, and it is, in fact, a mediaeval custom of North-European countries which the Lutheran and Anglican Churches have for good doctrinal and liturgical reasons maintained. To disguise Trinity Sunday by giving it as its main title 'the Sunday after Pentecost', and to rename all the

Sundays following in the same way, is to do what the *Church Times* has rightly described as playing down the doctrine of the Trinity at a time when it needs to be stressed. It is also to create once more a delusive impression that one is dealing with a single season when one is really dealing with two seasons.

The Sunday themes of the post-Pentecost season would suit a post-Trinity season equally well, so here again what one is criticising is simply a matter of nomenclature, which could be altered without destroying the new calendar itself.

So much for the number and names of the seasons. Another most important innovation in the new calendar is that weekday observances are nearly all made optional, the sole exceptions being Christmas, Good Friday and Ascension Day. This change has been made not simply in deference to the non-Anglican members of the Joint Liturgical Group, but also in recognition of the fact of the non-observance of other red-letter days in many Anglican parishes. Some of the important weekday observances have therefore been transferred to Sundays (John the Baptist, the Annunciation, the Wise Men, the Presentation in the Temple), and the Baptism and Transfiguration of Christ have been added, thus meeting a second defect of the present calendar, listed earlier. The weekday dates for such festivals have not been abolished, but their observance on weekdays can be expected to lapse, now that they are duplicated on Sundays. It is to be hoped that occasions like the Circumcision, the Conversion of St. Paul, Ash Wednesday, Holy Week and All Saints' Day, which are not duplicated, will not automatically lapse with those which are. One result of making weekday festivals optional is to alleviate a third defect of the present calendar which we listed, the imperfect historical sequence. The proposed Sunday sequence is more or less true to history, but not quite. The Presentation in the Temple is put after the visit of the Wise Men, not before it, and the Temptation in the Wilderness understandably remains at the first Sunday in Lent, instead of following Christ's Baptism in the Sundays after Christmas.

The themes for many Sundays are not, of course, historical events, but these also seem well chosen, and help to provide a good coverage of scriptural teaching through the lectionaries.

An important consequence of revised Sunday themes is revised Sunday collects. Nearly half the Prayer Book collects have been wholly dispensed with (including many derived from Roman sources, incidentally). It would be interesting to know what further plans the Commission has for these superb prayers. That they should simply disappear from Anglican worship is unthinkable.

Of the four defects of the present calendar which we listed, the one dealt with least satisfactorily is the black-letter days. The Commission proposes no less than three separate lists of optional weekday observances. The first list, 'Greater Holy Days' (p. 25), roughly corresponds

to the red-letter days of the present calendar. The second list, 'Lesser Holy Days' (p. 26f.), is a pretty thorough revision of the black-letter days of the present calendar. The third list (p. 15f.) is for local observance, and consists mostly of the names of post-Reformation worthies. As all three lists are of optional observances, and as collects and readings are appointed to cover all three (not just the first), the distinction which the Commission makes between them may not in practice count for much. One is thankful to find so few superstitious festivals, as compared with those included in the 1928 Prayer Book and in *Alternative Services: First Series*, but since provision is made for the festivals in all three lists to be observed, superstitious ones ought to be excluded altogether. The Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary (p. 26), an event of which we know nothing except from the late legends described on p. 87f. of M. R. James's *Apocryphal New Testament* (OUP, 1924), certainly ought not to be here. Still less tolerable is All Souls' Day (pp. 27, 87), which by its very name distinguishes the souls in purgatory from the saints in heaven. 'Thanksgiving for Holy Communion' (p. 89) is not given a date, as it was in the 1928 Prayer Book, but is simply a disguised form of Corpus Christi, the festival of transubstantiation. All Souls' Day and Corpus Christi were instituted by the mediaeval Church for the precise purpose of inculcating mediaeval doctrine, and are celebrated by prayers and masses for the souls in purgatory and by the adoration of the reserved sacrament. They can therefore have no place in the liturgy of the Church of England.

The 'Rules' given on pp. 30-32 for such matters as the transference of holy days when they coincide are certainly not as 'few in number' or as 'plain and easy to be understood' as those of the Prayer Book. They are, on the contrary, somewhat reminiscent of 'the number and hardness of the rules called the Pie', which Cranmer, in his statement 'Concerning the Service of the Church' at the beginning of the Prayer Book, expresses such concern to get away from. It is true that twentieth century clergy, unlike those of the sixteenth century, are blessed with publishers who will draw up annual calendars and apply the rules for them, but it is surely better not to be dependent on this kind of help.

All in all, one would be glad to see this revised calendar, in an amended form, brought into use in the Church of England, not only for its own sake, but also for the sake of the excellent lectionaries which depend upon it, and which could then be brought into use as well. However, one earnestly hopes that the Church of England will not be in so much of a hurry to adopt them that the possibility of amendment and of consultation with other Churches will be excluded. A thing that is good deserves both to be shared with others and to be made better still.