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Nos Non Abolere Ordo Lectionum:

The History of the Historic Lectionary as Retained by the Lutheran Church

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Abstract

The history of the Historic Lectionary from a Lutheran perspective provided great insight into its development and retention in the 21st century. This paper reviews the long history of the Historic Lectionary, previously *the lectionary* of the Western church, and compares its value in light of recent lectionary developments. This study reveals a Lutheran perspective in light of the lectionary debate in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and succinctly sets forth centuries of lectionary history in the West.

Keywords: lectionary, liturgy, historic, one-year, three-year, Lutheran, Catholic, Jerome, Gregory the Great, Alcuin, Vatican II

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Nos Non Abolere Ordo Lectionum

At the outset we must again make the preliminary statement that we do not abolish the Mass, but religiously maintain and defend it. For among us masses are celebrated every Lord's Day and on the other festivals, in which the Sacrament is offered to those who wish to use it, after they have been examined and absolved. And the usual public ceremonies are observed, *ordo lectionum*, of prayers, vestments, and other like things. (Apology of the Augsburg Confession XXIV 1, Latin substituted in, emphasis mine)

Ordo lectionum, the order of lections. The Reformers in the 16th century corrected many abuses from the Medieval church but they did not abolish the Mass, nor did they abolish the *ordo lectionum*. At the time of the Reformation, this order of lections is what we today call the Historic Lectionary. It was retained among the Lutherans because they saw its value for preaching and teaching, and the unity it brought to the church — a unity that was desperately needed in that time. But not just a unity for time, but a unity for the church catholic across a millennium.

A generation ago, a new lectionary emerged among liturgical churches (Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, United Church of Christ) and others: the Three-Year Lectionary. Among the Lutherans there is still debate over which to use; in the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) both are permissible, yet the Three-Year lectionary is most prevalent. Now, a tricky situation is brought to those who favor the Historic Lectionary: be united with the historic practice of the church for the past 1300 years, or be united with the majority of churches here in time.

The purpose of this paper is to lay out the origins and history of the Historic Lectionary, compare it to the Three-Year Lectionary, and once again reassert the intentions of the reformers: unity for the church catholic, historically and locally.

Literature Review

Historical Precedent for Lectionary Use

The practice of reading Holy Scripture in public worship can be traced back to Moses in Exodus when he read the Book of the Covenant to the Israelites (Exodus 24-27). It is also known that the Jews in their synagogues read “the Law and the Prophets” (Acts 13:15), and that even Jesus read from the book of Isaiah on the Sabbath in the synagogue (Luke 4:16-17). Thus, it is no surprise that the church followed after Jesus and the Jews by reading Scripture publicly.

It is fairly well agreed upon that the pre-Christian Jews typically read *lectio continua* (continuous reading over time). Baudot (1910) describes the ancient synagogue readings as being one part from the Pentateuch and another from the prophetic books: “the distribution was made in such a manner as to ensure the complete reading of the two parts of the Bible during the year” (p. 5). However, Spaeth (1906) goes farther:

[T]he reading of Moses and the Prophets in the synagogue was not continuous, but in sections appointed for the different Sabbath days, we have practically in the service of the synagogue already a system of Pericopes, that is of selected Scripture passages for public reading, called Parashes and Haphthars. (p. 48)

Therefore, a precedent does exist for lectionary readings even before the Christian church organizes its liturgical life. So it follows that the early Christians could have, or would have also adopted this practice too. Cron (1970) is quick to point out, however, that there is no definitive evidence for direct influence of the Jewish lectionary on the early church (p. 19).

Regardless of this possibility, it is certain that the early Christians retained three things from their Jewish background: a holy day set apart for worship, and the two feasts of Passover and Pentecost. The Jewish day of rest is the Sabbath and the early Christians still observed this day, in fact, Cron says it was their habit to worship daily (p. 17). Nevertheless, since Sunday became the day that Christians celebrated their Lord's resurrection, eventually the Sabbath lost its significance (p. 18).

The feasts of Passover and Pentecost would have certainly been important to the primitive church due to the Passover coinciding with Christ's passion, death, and resurrection; and Pentecost coinciding with the coming of the Holy Spirit. It is fairly well agreed upon that the annual celebration of Jesus' resurrection would have been celebrated along with the weekly celebration every Sunday, as recorded by Justin Martyr (c. 155-157, p. 186). However, there is some disagreement on the celebration of Pentecost in the early church. Willis (1994) states that Pentecost does not become its own special Sunday until after 313 (p. 79). Dix (1947) argues positively that the primitive church did celebrate the two annual feasts, "the Pascha and Pentecost" early on (p. 335). Notwithstanding, it is a fact that Pentecost was a feast celebrated before Christ, was celebrated by Jesus and his followers, and is a feast that Christians today still celebrate.

These two great feasts would have constituted the first assigned readings in the church calendar, as Baumstark (1958) points out:

On the most solemn days of the liturgical year the use of lections freely chosen and having reference to the Feast of the Day was too natural not to have been the rule.

Moreover, there were models for this method in the practice of the Synagogue. (p. 122)

Furthermore, Cron remarks, "... a Lectionary, in the more restricted sense of readings appointed for specific days, had its beginning in the early Paschal and Pentecost celebrations" (p. 22).

These points are exceptional considering so little is known about the first three centuries of the early church, and although there is no direct evidence for lectionary-use there is plenty of circumstantial evidence for the impetus of one.

The Origins of the Historic Lectionary

Orders of pericopes were coherent systems, designed by competent individuals in a specific historical period. They were conceived as ritual means of keeping alive the sacred texts from a divine point of view, and again, as ritual means of perpetuating cultural memory from a human point of view. It is not enough for a sacred text to exist merely physically in scrolls and codices, or mentally in the consciousness of the believers. It must be recited aloud, penetrate the cosmos with the vibration of its sound. It must be recalled, *again and again*, brought to the minds of those who are responsible for accommodating themselves to its values and for handing it over to the next generation.

(Földváry, 2021, p. 11-12, emphasis my own)

"Tradition" literally means "to hand down" from the Latin, and nothing is more important to Christians than to *tradition* the faith over to their children. The origins of the lectionary have now been covered, what is it that was *traditioned* to us today?

Tradition holds that the Historic Lectionary as we know it today originated with St. Jerome, who, at the request of Pope Damasus († 384) prepared the first lectionary, the *Liber Comitis* (a.k.a. *Liber Commicus*, *Liber Comicus*, *Comes*, *Comes Hieronymi*, *Comes Jerome*, and *Roman Comes*). This tradition was held because "[w]hatever church book exists...must have emanated from the hand of the Holy Doctor, or at least received corrections and been perfected

by his hand” (Ranke 1847, as cited in Baudaot, 1910, p. 23). Baudaot writes in 1910, “Nowadays this opinion is abandoned” (p. 32). However, according to Spaeth and Ring there is no reason to seem to doubt the validity of this claim (p. 49; 1998, para. 11).

The *Liber Comitis*’ oldest complete manuscripts can be dated to the 11th century, with several partial fragments from the 9th and 11th century, although its contents suggest it is from the 6th century (Baldwin, 1983, par. 1; Baudaot, 1910, p. 33). Manuscripts of the *Liber Comitis* were sometimes found with a preface, a *Letter to Constantius of Constantinople*. This letter is commonly attributed to Jerome, as per its place in the *Patrologiae* (Migne, 1865), hence dating the letter to the late 4th century. Yet, Morin contradicts the assertion of the authorship of the letter, and by proxy its dating (Morin, 1890, p. 417). The letter was most likely written by Bishop Victor of Capua to Bishop Constantius of Cosenza (not Constantinople) in response to Constantius’ request to use Victor’s Comes (Morin, 1890, p. 423; 1898, p. 246). This then puts the dating of the letter, and thus the lectionary written by Victor, since lost, around c. 540. This date is determined by comparing the the *Codex Fuldensis*, written in c. 540, to the *Liber Comitis* (Baudaot, 1910, p. 24; Morin, 1890, p. 423).

At first it might not seem very important that the letter ascribed to Jerome turns out to not be from him, however, this is not the case. Bishop Victor of Capua and Bishop Constantius of Cosenza live in Italy, and thus would have been at the center of liturgical development in the West. If Bishop Victor was sharing his lectionary in the mid-6th century, then the use of a lectionary by this point is not foreign, and in fact the norm. Although this letter is wrongfully appended to the *Liber Comitis* it only strengthens the argument that the contents of the *Comitis* is from the 6th century, especially if other lectionaries were being developed around that time. It follows also, that if one bishop is seeking to copy a lectionary from another bishop, then two

things are proved: 1) the church is seeking unity in form, and 2) that the order of pericopes were originally dependent on the bishop's choice (Baudaot, 1910, p. 22; Willis, 1968, as cited in Cobb, 1978, p. 185).

Seeking Unity in Form

At the end of the 6th century a Benedictine monk, by the name of Gregorius Anicius, was crowned Pope of Rome. Pope St. Gregory the Great is known in the field of liturgiology for his liturgical reforms during his papal reign (590-604) for which he is most famously known for Gregorian chant. Special attention was given to the standardization of the lectionary during his reforms (Frere, 1934 & 1935, as cited in Willis, 1994, p. 111). Although Gregory's original copy of the lectionary seems to have been lost, it can be fairly well determined by a comparison of manuscripts before and after his reforms that Gregory did not create his lectionary out of thin air, but rather formed one from existing lectionaries surrounding Rome.

The spread and acceptance of this new Roman Lectionary among the West was slow and many churches retained some form of local variation, especially the most prominent churches (Cron, 1970, p. 40; Spaeth, 1906, p. 49). Where the Roman Lectionary did thrive can also be attributed to St. Gregory: the Anglo-Saxon Mission.

In 596, the Anglo-Saxon Mission was initiated by Pope Gregory in order to Christianize pagan England. St. Augustan of Canterbury was sent by the Pope to bring the Gospel to the Anglo-Saxons, equipped with Rome's latest and greatest liturgical resources, including the new Roman Lectionary (Walker, 1985, p. 224). Unlike the rest of Christian Europe that was still wrestling with local liturgical traditions and Gregory's reforms, England, being pagan, did not have any local lectionary traditions to oppose the Roman Lectionary; only later did the Neapolitan Pericopes compete. As mentioned before, even though many went along with St.

Gregory's lectionary reforms, many still retained their local traditional order of lessons, including the church in Naples. Morin (1893) credits Abbot Hadrian for pointing out that the liturgical lessons of Naples were favored in England and that the church in England followed them in preference to the Roman, as is evident in the Venerable Bede's homilies on the Gospels (Morin, 1893, p. 115).

At the same time Bede was active in the Anglo-Saxon Mission in England in the 8th century, the Catholic Faith was sent to Christianize the Germans, under St. Boniface, known as the "Apostle to the Germans." Among the many missionaries accompanying St. Boniface was a monk by the name of Burchard, later the Bishop of Würzburg. Tradition holds that the Würzburg lectionary, henceforth called *Würzburg 700*, served St. Burchard during his bishopric ("Comes Romanus Wirziburgensis," Mid-7th Century). *Würzburg 700* is the oldest surviving Western lectionary. This lectionary would have been produced early to mid-7th century, and would have accompanied St. Burchard on his mission to Germany.

As previously stated, the English Catholics favored Neapolitan liturgical resources, including the lectionary; however, due to its coexistence with the Roman Lectionary, there are many overlaps of the Neapolitan and Roman influence in *Würzburg 700* (Morin, 1893, p. 115). To what degree the influence of both traditions had on *Würzburg 700* is uncertain at this time, be that as it may, a preliminary look at *Würzburg 700* and the *Liber Comitis*, as rendered by Migne, show remarkable similarity and any difference will warrant another paper but will certainly not disprove the author's intent on showing the historical continuity of the lectionary.

The importance of the timeframe in which Germany was Christianized cannot be understated. Just as England's uniformity in the lectionary came from their lack of pre-

Gregory traditions, so too was it with the Germans, except more so. Time solidifies liturgical practice. By the time St. Boniface and St. Burchard start their mission there is no evidence for a competing lectionary among them, no Neapolitan or Roman lectionary, just *Würzburg 700*. Thus, it would seem the Germans became Christians under one common lectionary; this may help to explain why during the Reformation their missals reflected that same uniformity (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Map of Lectionary Movement circa 700

The final lectionary event in this era includes the first Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne, and his religious advisor, Alcuin. Around 800, Charlemagne commissioned Alcuin to edit the Roman Lectionary (Cron, 1970, p. 40). Charlemagne's purpose in doing this was to standardize the lectionary, having control of a majority of Europe allowed him, unlike Pope Gregory, to spread the Roman Lectionary across the West (p. 48).

In summary for this era, the Western church predominantly used the *Liber Comitit* as its lectionary due to the belief it was written by Jerome. Pope Gregory standardized the lectionary for the Roman Church but was ineffective in carrying it out among the most prominent churches (i.e. Milan and Naples). Where the Roman Lectionary did take root was in Rome, England, and by proxy Germany. Where Gregory failed in spreading the Roman Lectionary across Europe, Charlemagne succeeded. Lastly, *Würzburg 700* is the reason Germany was founded upon the

Roman/Neapolitan Lectionary and due to the Anglo-Saxon Mission in Germany was why the lections differed so minutely in the centuries following.

We Do Not Abolish the Lectionary

During the Middle Ages of the Western church, there was little development in the lectionary besides the important addition of Trinity Sunday, adopted by Rome in 1334. A minor aspect of lectionary development during this period was the addition of more saints days and other festivals into the existing calendar. Luther later removed the celebration of most of these saints days.

Although Luther severely cut the celebration of many saints days and non-Biblical festivals, the Lutheran Reformers retained the church year and the lectionary handed down to them. Zwingli and Calvin abandoned the church year and the historic lectionary while Luther, and later Anglicans, retained it (Ring, 1998, para. 14). Work done by *The Lutheran Missal* (2019) has confirmed that *Würzburg 700* is an 80-90% match with Reformation Era missals, as well as modern Lutheran sources in *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) and *Lutheran Service Book* (2006). What this shows is that the Lutherans did not just say they retain the pericopes as in Article XXVI of the *Augsburg Confession* (1530b, line 40) and Article XXIV of the *Apology* (1530a) but also in practice across Germany and on until the modern period. The spirit of the Reformation is shown in the retention of the Historic Lectionary: to keep those traditions that are helpful to the teaching of the faith and to reform or abolish that which obscures Christ and the Gospel. Thus, the only additions made to the church year by the Lutherans were propers for Trinity 25 and 26, and the change of the Transfiguration from August 6th to the last Sunday after Epiphany, “a fitting climax of the season which celebrates the manifestation of the glory and deity of Christ” (Ring, 1998, para. 15).

At this point, it is important to bring up a common accusation against the Lutherans, which is that Luther did not approve of the Historic Lectionary, “The Epistles seem to have been chosen by a singularly unlearned and superstitious advocate of works” (Luther, 1523, pp. 23-24). Despite Luther’s highly critical assessment of the Epistles in the Historic Lectionary, which can be attributed to the time in which he wrote (Luther in 1523 would have been hypersensitive to any hint of moralizing or works righteousness), he later endorses and prescribed the Historic Lectionary in his *The German Mass and Order of Service* (Luther, 1526, pp. 68-69). Not to mention Luther’s endorsement of the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, as previously mentioned, which encouraged the retention of the Historic Lectionary.

In 1570 the Council of Trent produced the Roman Missal, *Missale*. The intent of the *Missale* was to restore the Mass *ad pristinam sanctorum Patrum normam ac ritum* [to the pristine standard and rite of the Holy Fathers]. According to Howell (1978), this goal was not achieved because Trent lacked the means of achieving it; as the science of liturgiology had yet to be begun and they contained manuscripts that contained many errors. “Thus the Tridentine Commission preserved in their ‘reformed’ missal many texts and rites that were in fact foreign...” (Howell, 1978, p. 242).

After the subsequent *Missale* of Trent, it is reasonable to ask which Order of Pericopes is older: the Lutheran Order or the Roman Order? Future work being done by *The Lutheran Missal Project* will eventually be able to answer that definitively, but until then the work done by Spaeth will have to suffice, “A study of [the *Homiliarium* of Charlemagne and two manuscripts of the *Liber Comitis*] will convince the impartial reader that ... the Pericopes as found in our Lutheran Order [are] the oldest and most correct historical arrangement” (Spaeth, 1906, p. 59).

The Rise of the Ahistoric Lectionary

“Thus Trent ushered in four centuries of rigidity and fixation; it was an era of rubricism.”

(Howell, 1978, p. 241)

Following the Council of Trent, the liturgical developments in the Church of Rome ceased entirely until 1962 when the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Vatican II) convened. Pope Paul VI ordered a new missal to be developed, the new *Roman Missal*, which finished its task in 1970. Accompanying the new *Roman Missal* was the *Ordo Lectionum Missae* [Lectionary for Mass] of 1969, the new Three-Year Lectionary, to replace the Historic Lectionary of the *Missale*. The impetus for creating such a lectionary comes from Article 51 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], “The treasures of the bible [sic] are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years” (“Sacrosanctum Concilium,” 1963).

In a three part series documenting the development of the lectionary during Vatican II, Hazell (2017) recounts the stages that led into revising the lectionary and then creating a new lectionary.

During the Antepreparatory Period of Vatican II (1959-1961), those who were entitled to attend the upcoming council were asked to submit their views on what doctrinally needed to be addressed. Of those who submitted their letters to the Holy See, only 5% thought the lectionary needed a reform, of those 5% only a quarter (1.25% of the whole) suggested a multi-year lectionary (Hazell, 2017a, paras. 9-10). The first drafts for the various constitutions of Vatican II were written in the early 1960s during the Preparatory Period in which the Central Preparatory Commission proposed various systems of a multi-year cycle but inevitably left the issue up to the

council or the post-Conciliar Commission (Hazell, 2017b). The draft that was finalized by the council has already been cited above. Hazell argues that from the interventions during the council, and what was ratified in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Three-Year lectionary following Vatican II was not what the Fathers of the council had envisioned saying, "... not one Father seems to have any radical rearrangement of the existing cycle of readings in mind, or that they thought that the existing cycle would disappear completely in any future reform" (Hazell, 2017c, par. 13). On a basic level it appears that the post-Conciliar Commission did follow Article 51 in creating the *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, however, according to the letters from the Fathers and the wording of Article 51 it may be argued that the Three-Year Lectionary was not the solution to the desire of opening up the riches of the Bible to the laity.

At the same time that Vatican II was convening, the British protestant churches and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) began on making their own lectionaries. The British formed the Joint Liturgical Group (JLG) in 1967 and produced a two-year cycle focused on creating a lectionary with a Trinitarian structure. They perceived a deficiency in the Historic Lectionary: the lack of focus on the first-person of the Trinity, the Father, in the church year (West, 2014, pp. 4-5).

The LWF launched a global lectionary initiative in 1968 to correct the presumed inadequacy of the Historic Lectionary. Although they sought to revise the Lectionary for suitability and comprehensibility in this modern age the Lutherans still wanted to retain their heritage which was thematically tied to the Historic Lectionary: German chorales, Bach's cantatas, preludes, symphonies, the hymn of the day, etc. West (2014) states, "The Lutheran Church valued the readings of the historic lectionary for being a constitutive part of the cultural fabric and a vestigial sign of the unity of the Western church" (p. 6). Thus, the LWF produced a

new lectionary based on the Historic Lectionary with a six-year preaching cycle, primarily to supply a variety of preaching texts, a common complaint during this period (West, 2014, p. 6-7).

Of these three lectionaries, the Roman Three-Year took root in America among Protestants. The year following the promulgation of the *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, the Episcopal Church, Presbyterian Church, and United Church of Christ adopted the *Ordo* as a basis for creating a new lectionary. That next year the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Worship (ILCW), a group comprised of North American Lutheran church bodies in order to develop a common service book, followed suit with other protestant church bodies in addressing the lectionary. Among the ILCW the same sentiments and concerns were found among them as in the LWF: “...whether loyalty to our heritage, conformity with world Lutheranism generally, and reverence for the Western lectionary tradition should prevail, or whether agreement with our sister churches in America demanded a three-year series” (Contemporary Worship 6, as cited in Ring, 1998, par. 23). The latter prevailed, in 1973 the ILCW published a new three-year series modeled after the *Ordo Lectionum Missae*. Ring points out its popularity “within fifteen years of its release Lutheran publishing houses were no longer producing worship materials based on the Historic Lectionary” (par. 26). Later, it was adopted somewhat by the LCMS for their hymnal *Lutheran Worship* (1982), after withdrawing from the ILCW, and somewhat by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) for *Christian Worship* (1993) (Ring, 1998, par. 26)

In 1975, five years following the ILCW Three-Year Lectionary, the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT) organized as an ecumenical group, and was formed to encourage dialogue to create a Three-Year lectionary based on the *Ordo Lectionum Missae* for various Christian denominations. In 1983 the CCT published the *Common Lectionary* in order to reconcile the differences of the many lectionaries in use across denominations. Shortly thereafter many

criticisms arose from Lutherans, Episcopalians, and Roman Catholics. Thus, the CCT published the *Revised Common Lectionary* (RCT) in 1992, with three versions: the Roman Catholic version which included the Apocrypha, and then two protestant versions that had a semi-continuous or topical Old Testament series. The RCL is the official lectionary of the Methodist Churches, Presbyterians, United Church of Christ, and Disciples of Christ. It is in general use by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the LCMS (Ring, 1998, paras. 31-36). There has also been encouragement from within the Roman Catholic Church to drop the *Ordo* in favor of RCL (Sloyan, 2000, p. 34).

After 400 years of using the Historic Lectionary since the Reformation, what caused these groups to suddenly cast it aside and build anew? Since the mid-20th century, at least five lectionaries (only the ones mentioned here, other more insignificant lectionaries existed in the 19th and 20th century) have been created to achieve unity among Christian churches, the last of which has three versions. Can it truly be argued that the Three-Year Lectionary united anyone, any more than the Historic Lectionary united the whole Christian church for nearly 1300 years? Are the complaints of the 20th century true to the deficiencies of the Historic Lectionary, or rather do they point to a deficiency in the men who could not see the value of the traditional lectionary handed down to them by their fathers?

Comparison

Surveying the full and relevant history of the lectionary leads to a comparison of the arguments for and against both the Three-Year and Historic Lectionary.

The Three-Year Lectionary

The most popular remark in favor of the Three-Year Lectionary is its majority use and its seemingly ecumenical uniformity across church bodies. This assertion must be granted to those

in its favor, for there is no other lectionary that has been more popular in the past 60 years among the various Christian denominations than the Three-Year Lectionary. However, two counter points can be made: 1) it is not the majority use of the universal church across 2000 years of church history, and 2) although it is used by the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, etc. there are still three versions of the RCL Three-Year Lectionary for any to choose from, detracting from its ecumenical use. Regardless of these two points, the Three-Year is still widely used among many denominations and is used by the majority of congregations in the LCMS. Because of this, we should not neglect the benefits of uniformity among these churches, even one of pseudo-uniformity.

A further point in favor of the Three-Year Lectionary is that it restored the practice of liturgical preaching from a lectionary. In the early and mid-20th century dissatisfaction with the Historic Lectionary was brewing. In wake of this dissatisfaction, a form of *lectio selecta* emerged wherein the pastor would preach on a separate text other than the one assigned for that day. As a response to this practice many and various lectionaries crept up to offer alternative texts (such as the six-year cycle promoted by the LWF), and perhaps these perceived inadequacies could have been dealt with by careful reconsiderations of pericopes in the Historic Lectionary (as the LWF intended). However, a more drastic response occurred in the advent of Rome's new lectionary. Consequently, lectionary preaching was restored in the name of ecumenism at the cost of the rich lectionary tradition that already existed but lacked appreciation by the current age.

The last of the arguments for the Three-Year series stems forth from the previous complaint, for the practice of preaching on any given text came forth from the limited scope of the Historic Lectionary. This complaint, that the Historic Lectionary doesn't contain enough of the Bible, misunderstands the purpose of a lectionary. A lectionary is meant to convey the most

important doctrines and teachings of the church in order to sanctify the Christian and to weekly proclaim the forgiveness of sins through the life of Christ. The Historic Lectionary does this over the course of one year because that is the natural unit by which we measure time at the expense of fewer readings. The Three-Year Lectionary certainly achieves the catechetical nature of a lectionary but attempts to achieve this over too long a time frame in which the natural repetition (the mother of learning) in the Historic Lectionary is lost in the Three-Year Lectionary.

The Historic Lectionary

Among those who favor the Historic Lectionary, the most common argument in favor of its use is its historicity, evident by the name given it. The retort to this claim, until recently, was that there was no such thing in the history of the church, that each did what was right in his own eyes in regards to the readings at Mass. Hopefully, this paper and the work being done by *The Lutheran Missal Project* buries that claim once and for all (Scamman, 2021). The Historic Lectionary is definitively as old as *Würzburg 700*, 1300 years ago, and potentially as old as the *Liber Comitis* which could find its origins in the 6th century—1500 years ago.

The second argument in favor of the Historic Lectionary is that it developed naturally and was corrected by the church over generations. This argument should further be confirmed by the history laid out in this thesis. The Historic Lectionary as we have it today finds its origins naturally flowing out of the Jewish lectionary practices before and then into the early church, from there the local practices of bishops culminated in the *Roman Lectionary* under St. Gregory, and since his time, the Historic Lectionary has gone through many hands and souls who sought to perfect the readings of the church year. For centuries no one sought to create his own lectionary but to reform it, whether to a net positive or not there is no precedent for creating new

lectionaries, let alone ones that are multi-year. Those in favor of the Historic Lectionary seek to defer to the wisdom of the church fathers and to retain this treasure of the church.

Among Lutherans, the Historic Lectionary should be most prized, for no other Christian tradition has such a bountiful history of liturgical material that grew out of the Historic Lectionary: Bach's cantatas for every Sunday of the church year (minus Advent and Lent), preludes, symphonies, motets, and the development of the Hymn of the Day. The readings from the Lectionary inspired such a magnanimous corpus of music that to eliminate them in order to capitulate to the Three-Year Lectionary would be to fall on one's own sword. Further, the exhaustive resources of sermons and homilies from Luther, Gerhardt, and other Lutheran and non-Lutheran Church Fathers provide a great resource to not only the preacher but also to the academic and layperson alike.

Perhaps one of the Historic Lectionary's greatest strengths, yet not considered very often, is its ability to be learned. Every Sunday, besides the ones in Trinitytide, are named after one of the Latin words in the Introit for that Sunday, which sets the tone and theme for the day (ex. Jubilate is the name for the third Sunday after Easter meaning "Rejoice," this name fits the joyous season of Easter). The naming of these Sundays is especially helpful in attempting to remember them as well as cluing one into its theme. As time goes on, the name, theme, and readings of these days will inherently begin being tied together in one's memory. Such that, over the course of ten years one person will have heard the same Introit, Gradual, Alleluia/Tract, Hymn of the Day, and collects (all of which stem from the Lectionary) ten times. Contrast this to the Three-Year Series in which after ten years one person will have only heard those propers for every Sunday three times in nine years, and a fourth for one of the series in the tenth year. This problem of *learning* the biblical stories is only exacerbated more so in the Three-Year Series for

those with infrequent attendance. Worshippers will appreciate patterns and experience a natural flow of “church time” as the readings from the year prior begin to approach again, continuing the natural flow from Advent to Christmas to Epiphany to Septuagesima to Lent to Easter to Pentecost and to Trinity, only to begin again. This one year repetition is important to the experience of the church year but also in learning the key stories and pericopes of the life of Christ and His redeeming work.

A Return to Catholicity

[The Historic Lectionary’s] profile was highest in the Lutheran church Though a part of the Roman Catholic mass for more than a millennium, until 1962 its pericopes had to be read in Latin The Anglican Church also obscured [the readings], though differently. Since the usual form of Sunday worship was Morning Prayer, its readings were customarily heard. The historic lections were read only four times a year when the Eucharist was celebrated In the Lutheran Church, on the other hand, these readings were a regular feature of liturgical life. (West, 2014, p. 6).

I have already indicated the rich liturgical life which spawned from the Historic Lectionary in the Lutheran Church. However, the implications for returning to the Historic Lectionary are not only limited to the Lutheran tradition but all Western denominations that find the origin of their liturgical rites in Latin Western Christianity.

The Lutherans and Anglicans retained the Historic Lectionary after the Reformation because they saw no reason to fix that which was not broken. Four-hundred years later a broad variety of denominations decided to fix it or even start anew: why? Perhaps in wake of industrialization and urbanization, the need to innovate spread to all areas, including the lectionary, or perhaps it has something to do with the rise of Historical Criticism as hinted at in

Sloyan (p. 31). The final answer is still unknown and certainly deserves its own study. Whatever the case may be the point is that for 400 years after the Reformation a few arms of Protestantism retained the unity of the Lectionary with Rome and each other, perhaps vestigial, but still unity in uniformity. Although Vatican II and the Three-Year Lectionary attempted to achieve unity in liturgy among Protestants and Roman Catholics, I argue that it is a superficial unity compared to the universal unity of the Historic Liturgy among Western Christendom that unites Protestant and Papist alike before the Reformation, for it is the history and lectionary of the church catholic.

Conclusion

The Historic Lectionary finds its life in those who use it. The origins of lectionary use are found in pre-Christian Jewish traditions, as we have seen, and developed over time, under careful critique, through many hands, and across continents. Every addition and subtraction retains the spirit of the lectionary while enriching it for future generations. As seen with Pope Gregory the Great and Alcuin, the Historic Lectionary passed through some of the greatest liturgical minds the church has ever seen with the intention of uniting Christendom. The old maxim *Lex Orandi Lex Credendi* (The law of worship is the law of belief) rings true in the case of the lectionary. For the bishops of old, popes, scholars, and even reformers all saw the importance of unity in the pericopes of the church. Granted, even the Three-Year Series cannot be shunned for seeking unity in form, even if that unity only resides within this era.

The use or lack of use is not prescribed in Holy Scripture, however, it is the historic practice of the church. And if we are to defer to our fathers in whether or not we use a lectionary, why do we not defer to their wisdom in which lectionary to use?

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