

## Teaching the Whole Counsel of God

*“I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20.27)*

*“Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD”  
(Deut 8.3)*

When Paul said farewell to the elders of the church in Ephesus, he claimed that he had taught them ‘the whole counsel of God’. The pastor’s vocation to preach and teach the gospel is the noblest calling, and to teach it accurately and completely must surely be every pastor’s ambition, but what does ‘the whole counsel of God’ mean for us today, and how can we plan our preaching and teaching Sunday by Sunday to play our part in fulfilling that?

This paper is the summary of my reading and thinking during a Sabbatical in 2022, and various conversations in the years before. I will consider what Paul meant, and what other guidance scripture might hold on the breadth of our teaching; I will briefly review Church practice and the emergence of lectionaries and calendars, and offer a critique of them, before outlining an approach which is already widely used in many Evangelical churches today, and suggest some principles by which to shape and evaluate them. My aim is not to find schematic perfection, but to allow the reading and preaching of scripture to bring new vitality to our churches.

### **What did Paul mean by the ‘whole counsel of God’?**

Paul first visited Ephesus briefly at the end of his second missionary journey, and promised to return (Acts 18.18-21). His full visit is described in Acts 19. Luke describes his encounter with disciples who had been baptised in the name of John rather than Jesus, and had no knowledge of the Holy Spirit: they had certainly not been taught the whole counsel of God! Paul spent 3 months preaching ‘about the Kingdom of God’ in the Synagogue, as was his standard missionary method, before withdrawing to the lecture hall of Tyrannus where he gathered ‘the disciples’ and held daily sessions of instruction. Paul stayed in Ephesus for at least 2 years according to Acts 19.10, and in Acts 20.31 Paul claims it was 3 years. Acts 19 also describes the disturbance about Artemis (Diana) of the Ephesians: Paul’s teaching included denial of the reality of idols. Paul then sailed to Macedonia for 3 months before his final meeting with the elders of the church of Ephesus, when he called them to meet him at Miletus. Luke himself was present (**we** went to Miletus’ Acts 20.15) so his account is first-hand.

What did Paul think he had taught them? It would be helpful to read through Acts 20.17-38.

- i. v.20 “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable” (ESV), ‘helpful’ (NIV). This echoes Paul’s warning to Timothy (2 Tim 2.14-15) to handle rightly (ὀρθοτομοῦντα) the word of truth, and ‘avoid quarrelling about words (λογομαχεῖν), which does no good but only ruins the hearers.’
- ii. vv 29-32 Paul is confident that he has prepared them to face fierce wolves, and warned them of the danger of internal division, “men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after

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them”(v.31). Paul is confident that God’s word of grace will be able to build them up and ensure the inheritance of those sanctified (v.32).

- iii. The basic gospel content of his teaching is specified in Acts 20.21: “repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”, which he also describes as “the gospel of the grace of God” in v.24 and “proclaiming the kingdom” in v.25.

If Paul spent 3 years in Ephesus arguing daily with Jews in the Synagogue and with pagans in the hall of Tyrannus, this was his longest period of uninterrupted ministry, giving him ample time to develop his thinking and make a full and clear presentation of the gospel. It is worth noting that Paul achieved his objective by daily teaching, not just relying on weekly instruction on the sabbath or Lord’s Day.

What then is the ‘whole counsel’ v.27 (πάσαν τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θεοῦ *pasen boulen*)? Luke uses the word ‘*boule*’ twice in his gospel and frequently elsewhere in Acts: in Luke 7.30 the Pharisees rejected the *purpose* of God for themselves, in Luke 23.51 Joseph of Arimathea rejected the *decision* of the Sanhedrin to condemn Jesus. Elsewhere the word is used in 1 Cor 4.5 (God will disclose the *purposes* of the heart), and perhaps most significantly in Eph 1.11: “ In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the *counsel* of his will.” *Boule* can mean purpose, decision, or counsel, but to speak of the *whole counsel of God* suggests a wider vision of God’s ultimate purposes, the ‘world-embracing dimensions of the gospel’ (Tannehill 1990), ‘the saving purpose of God for the human race’ (Barrett 1998), ‘the whole plan of God for humanity and the created order revealed in the scriptures and fulfilled in Jesus Christ.’ (Peterson *Acts of the Apostles* Apollos 2009). ‘If Paul had not announced the whole purpose of God, he would bear guilty responsibility for the death of some, for he would be presenting a gospel that excluded some’ (Tannehill). Paul’s earlier sermon in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13.16-41) presents an Old Testament overview, touching on Moses, Saul and David, before speaking of John the Baptist and Jesus. Paul sets out the cosmic scope of his gospel presentation in two particular epistles. Paul’s meeting at Miletus followed his 3 month stay at Corinth, during which he surely wrote the epistle to the Romans, in the winter of 56-57AD (Acts 20.3 Paul “stayed three months. Because some Jews had plotted against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia.” (Romans 15.25 “Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the Lord’s people there.”).

If *Romans* is Paul’s explanation of the gospel of God’s salvation for Jew and Gentile, he is claiming to have taught the Ephesians nothing less. His later letter to the Ephesians (which I consider Pauline, though not necessarily addressed to Ephesus) is another explanation of the cosmic significance of the gospel. In explaining the scope of the gospel to Jews and Gentiles, Paul clearly made heavy use of the Old Testament, but the ‘whole counsel’ of God does not necessarily mean a complete exposition of all the teaching of Jesus, or the text of the Old Testament.

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### What other guidance do the scriptures give us?

As we consider what it means for us to teach the whole counsel of God, perhaps in more settled situations than Paul's missionary travels, we would do well to remember Jesus' parting instruction to his disciples: in John 21 Jesus told Peter three times to "Feed my sheep" (Jn 21.15-17), and in Matthew 28.20 to teach the disciples "to observe all that I have commanded you". In Luke 24 Jesus teaches the disciples, both on the Emmaus road and in the upper room, how he fulfils the Law, Prophets and Psalms. Teaching the whole counsel of God would seem to require us to teach everything that Jesus commanded, and how the Old Testament is fulfilled in Christ.

We might also reflect on the Mosaic commands in Deuteronomy 8.3:

"Man does not live by bread alone, but by **every** word that comes from the mouth of the LORD"  
and Deuteronomy 31.10:

"At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, <sup>11</sup> when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. <sup>12</sup> Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law."

It is not enough to teach the gospel once: it must be repeated regularly to remain in our memories and to be passed onto the next generation. Ezra 8 shows us this practice of repeated reading being restored, and the role of preaching to explain what was read. The full reading of the Law (Deuteronomy or the Torah) was too big a task for any sabbath (it would take 5 hours to read the 28,832 words in Deut at 100 words per minute!), and so a special festival was needed.

### How has the Church historically sought to teach the whole counsel of God?

#### A brief history of reading and preaching Scripture:<sup>1</sup>

The Old Testament people of God could not meet God face to face, but encountered him through his word. They were urged to write his words 'on their hearts, teach and talk about them with their children, bind them on their hands, heads and doorposts.' The priests and Levites had to teach as well as sacrifice. Prophets and wise men brought them a living word of application, and the institution of the synagogue eventually emerged as the place for reading and explanation every Sabbath. The reading of the whole Law by Ezra over 8 days (Nehemiah 8) is the first clear evidence of a liturgy of the Word, but it may point to a practice developed in Babylon by the exiles. Different practices emerged among the Jewish communities in Babylon, Palestine and Egypt. In the 2nd century AD Rabbis Meir and Judah debated whether the Law should be read continuously on a day by day or Sabbath by Sabbath pattern. GF Moore (*Judaism I.* Harvard 1958 p299) calculates this would cover the Torah in either 2 years or 5 years. Eventually a three year pattern of 154 Torah readings (sederim) emerged in Palestine and a 1 yr pattern in Babylon. A second reading from the prophets was added later, and Acts 15.21 seems to be the earliest evidence of this pattern. The earliest account of a synagogue service is actually Luke 4.16-30, when Jesus at Nazareth seems to be free to choose his reading from Isaiah 61, and makes no reference to a

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Hughes Oliphant Old (The reading and preaching of the Scriptures Vol 1: Eerdmans 1998)

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reading from the Torah which should have preceded it. Torah readings were in Hebrew, and followed by translation/paraphrase into the local language, with some explanation. A tradition of seven readers, each reading no more than 3 verses emerged, so that 21 verses of Torah were read each sabbath.

Jesus' ministry was pre-eminently that of a preacher. He taught inside synagogues, in the open air, and daily in the Temple when in Jerusalem. He clearly held the Law and Prophets in the highest regard, and he took pains to demonstrate that his gospel of the Kingdom fulfilled the scriptures. On the Emmaus Road and in the Upper Room 'beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.' (Luke 24.27, 44). Perhaps then for the first time, the disciples understood what he meant.

Jesus commanded his disciples to preach the gospel and make disciples, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28.20). The disciples of Jesus were expected to know and pass on the teaching of Jesus, and in due time they were written down.

It would have been natural for the earliest Christian meetings to follow the basic shape of Synagogue meetings, with reading of the Old Testament scriptures and interpretation in the light of Christ. The apostolic sermons of Peter, Stephen and Paul to Jewish or mixed audiences, reported by Luke in Acts, are always concerned to demonstrate how Jesus fulfils OT prophecy.

Paul's instructions to Timothy support this insight into early Christian worship: "devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4.13), which at the time could only have meant the reading of Old Testament texts followed by Christian interpretation and application. Paul assures Timothy that "all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable.. that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3.16). This building up to completion and active good work is our goal in feeding the sheep, and the implication is that it requires the whole of scripture.

Paul also describes a church meeting at Corinth: "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. (1 Cor 14.26), suggesting that there was considerable freedom in the choice of hymns and readings.

After the New Testament period the *Didache* ('Teaching of the Apostles' 80-110AD) suggests that there was still daily worship and teaching, led by a team of prophets and teachers, who are called "your high priests" (13.3) as well as bishops and deacons with a teaching ministry, and a weekly Lord's Supper. The *Didache* speaks of *the Gospel of our Lord* in a way that suggests it is now a fixed text - perhaps Matthew's gospel.

**Justin Martyr** (100-165) describes early Christian worship in his *Apology*, written to a non-Christian audience:

"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits: then when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things."

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The reading of scripture is clearly central, but first place is now given to ‘the memoirs of the apostles’ which could refer to both the gospels and Apostolic letters, ‘The writing of the Prophets’ suggest a continuing place for the reading of the Old Testament.

**Tertullian** (150-225) describes worship in his *Apology*: “we come together for the solemn recounting of the divine words to consider what might be intimated or learned about the quality of the present time. To be sure, by these sacred words we nurture faith, we inspire hope, we establish piety, we make discipline more intense, by the teaching of definite moral principles” (Apol 34.3) Finally **Hippolytus of Rome** (170-236) in his stodgy *Apostolic Constitutions* describes the continuing practice of daily preaching at Morning prayer in churches in the city of Rome, or 2-3 times a week in smaller, rural churches.

Hugh Oliphant Old explores some early sermons in his fascinating book *The reading and preaching of the Scriptures* (Vol 1: Eerdmans 1998). 2 Clement (c.125AD) is an exposition of Isaiah 54.1. Melito of Sardis’ Easter Sermon (c180) is an exposition of Exodus 12 and evidence of the development of Easter as the first distinctive Christian feast beyond the Lord’s Day itself.

**Origen** (185-253) was the first Christian scholar to set out his hermeneutical method. He preached daily through books of the bible during his ministry at Caesarea, and Latin translations of some of his sermons survived the purge by the emperor Justinian in the 6th C, so we have his work on Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Though we might not support his allegorical method, we should admire his commitment to teaching the whole counsel of God, and heed his rebuke to the idlers who come only on the Lord’s Day and other feasts:

“Unless, therefore, you come daily to the wells, unless you daily draw water, not only will you not be able to give drink to others, but you yourself will also suffer a thirst for the word of God.. I entreat you who are always present in this place where the word is preached, listen patiently while we admonish a little the negligent and idle.. Tell me, you who come to Church only on festal days, are the other days not festal days? Are they not the Lord’s days? It belongs to the Jews to observe religious ceremonies on fixed and infrequent days. And for this reason God says to them: “I cannot bear your new moons and sabbaths and great days. My soul hates the fast day and festival and your feast days” (*Sermons on Genesis 10.3*).

Chryostom continued this tradition in Constantinople.

### Calendar & Lectionaries:<sup>2</sup>

When Constantine ended the persecution of the Church within the Roman Empire, the Church grew rapidly, and a church calendar emerged, bringing lectionaries with it. First Lent, then Advent and Christmas appear, with various lectionaries of 3 or more readings: in Syria around 380 there were 5 scripture readings- from the Law, prophets, epistles, Acts and Gospel! By the 6th Century bible readings were being published in calendrical order as “comites”, bound together, or separately as *evangelaries* and *epistolaries*, which was undoubtedly convenient, but severed the selected readings from their biblical context. William Skudlarek comments: “When lectionaries do begin to make their appearance (or, if not lectionaries, then at least evidence for the practice of reading certain parts of the bible at certain times of the year: Acts before Pentecost, Acts &

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<sup>2</sup> Here I am indebted to *The Sunday Lectionary: Ritual Word, Paschal Shape*: by Normand Bonneau OMI (Liturgical Press Minnesota 1998)

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Revelation between Easter & Pentecost, Genesis during Lent, Job & John in Passion Week), that appearance was due to the development of the liturgical year.”<sup>3</sup>

Catechising the masses no longer followed the intensive process of the pre-Constantinian church, and popular devotion led to new pressures, as local saints jostled for space in the calendar. The authors of the Revised Common Lectionary note that “A constant pattern seems to be that the later additions of special days and feasts tended to obscure the simplicity of the original Sunday texts, so that after every few centuries, the calendar needed to be simplified and pruned in order to manifest its earlier clarity”<sup>4</sup>

By the Middle Ages, the readings were still being said by the priest in Latin, though some priests sought to bring an English paraphrase: I was delighted to discover that the Lindisfarne gospel, written in Latin, contains an interlinear translation into Old English! But not all priests would have the education to do this, and scripture became a closed book for many, being read in a tongue ‘not understood of the people’.

**The Reformation** transformed the church on both sides of the resulting division.

**Martin Luther** translated the scriptures into German, and sought to restore the centrality of bible reading and preaching in his pamphlet *Concerning the Order of Public Worship* (1523).

“A Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God’s word and prayer, no matter how briefly, as Ps 102 says, and 1 Cor 14.”

He expected continuous reading through of the Old Testament in daily sections of between half to two chapters, with preaching on part of the reading, taking 30 minutes in all, and then prayer with psalms to complete the hour. Luther recommended the reading of the New Testament in the evening. “And although these daily services might not be attended by the whole congregation, the priests and pupils, and especially those who, one hopes, will become good preachers and pastors, should be present”. On Sundays Luther expected the whole congregation to attend twice. “In both services there should be preaching for the whole congregation, in the morning on the gospel for the day, in the evening on the epistles; or the preacher may use his own judgment whether he would want to preach on a certain book or two. If anyone desires to receive the sacrament at this time, let it be administered at a time convenient to all concerned.”<sup>5</sup>

The Puritan **Westminster Directory** (1644) called for reading one full chapter from each testament on every Sunday.

**Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) oversaw the Reformation movement in England as Archbishop of Canterbury. He championed the introduction of the first English Books of Common Prayer, the authorisation of an English Bible, and he suffered martyrdom to defend the Reformation doctrines he had restored. Cranmer explained his rationale in the Prefaces to the 1549 and 1552 Prayer Books.

“For the [ancient fathers] so ordred the matter, that all the whole Bible (or the greatest parte thereof) should be read ouer once in the yeare, intending thereby, that the Cleargie, and specially suche as were Ministers of

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<sup>3</sup> William Skudlarek (The Word in Worship *Abingdon* 1981)

<sup>4</sup> The Revised Common Lectionary: Consultation on Common Texts (Abingon 1992) p.9

<sup>5</sup> Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings p 445-447 (ed Timothy F Lull: Fortress Press 1989)

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the congregacion, should (by often readyng and meditacion of Gods worde) be stirred up to godliness them selves, and be more able also to exhorte other by wholsome doctrine, and to confute them that were aduersaries to the trueth. And further; that the people (by daily hearing of holy scripture read in the Churche should continually profite more and more in the knowledge of God, and bee the more inflamed with the love of his true religion. But these many years passed this Godly and decent ordre of the auncient fathers, hath been so altered, broken, and neglected, by planting in uncertain stories, Legendes, Respondes, Verses, vaine repetecions, Commemoracions and Synodalles, that commonly when any boke of the Bible was begon: before three or foure chapiters were read out, all the rest were unread. And in this sorte the boke of Esaie [Isaiah] was begon in Advent, and the booke of Genesis in Septuagesima: but they were onely begon, and never read thorow.”

According to Shawn Strout<sup>6</sup>, Cranmer’s first reform was to restore the principle of *Lectio Continua* for the reading of the daily office (Royal 7 B IV: 1542) by simplifying the structures of the daily office. This required a radical simplifying of the Calendar, removing nearly all Saints’ days other than those of New Testament apostles and evangelists. His second principle was to restore the liturgy and reading of scripture to the vernacular, as St Paul would have wanted:

“And moreouer, whereas S. Paule would haue suche language spoken to the people in the churche, as they mighte understand and haue profite by hearing the same; the seruice in this Churche of England (these many years) hath been read in Latin to the people, whiche they understood not; so that they haue heard with theyr eares onely; and their hartes, spirite, and minde, haue not been edified thereby.”

He also wanted to promote national Christian unity by having all people reading the same scripture at the same time, rather than following a variety of schemes that then existed, at Sarum (Salisbury), Hereford, Bangor, York and Lincoln. The Sarum liturgy was the most popular, but complex with many short readings (nine at festivals), including legends.

Cranmer’s daily lectionary covered all the books of the Old Testament in full, except Ezekiel, 2 Chronicles and the Song of Solomon, and most of the Apocrypha. The New Testament readings included almost every chapter from the epistles, but omitted Revelation and used the gospels only lightly, and *lectio continua* readings mostly ignored the saints days.

Cranmer produced a complete one year Sunday lectionary for Holy Communion with a psalm, which may have been modelled on the old Sarum Lectionary (this needs to be checked), and in the 1552 revision whole chapter readings from an epistle and gospel for each Sunday, and for the remaining Saints’ Days. The 1662 Prayer Book shortened the communion readings considerably, and introduced a second one-year Sunday Lectionary for morning and evening and prayer, which ran semi-independently of the Daily Lectionary.

The Reformation had its counterpart in the Roman Catholic Church: Pope Clement VII asked Cardinal Francesco in 1529 to reform the Breviary, and in 1570 **The Council of Trent** produced a new *Missale Romanum*, with a one year cycle of two readings for Sunday, still in Latin. Only 3 were from the Old Testament, 3 from Acts, and none from 2 Thessalonians and Revelation. On average 16.8 verses of scripture were read each Sunday.

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<sup>6</sup> Shawn Strout: Anglican and Episcopal History [Vol. 87, No. 3 \(September 2018\)](https://www.jstor.org/stable/26532536), pp. 307-324 published By: Historical Society of the Episcopal Church <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26532536>

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**Vatican II** (1962-1965) transformed the Roman Catholic church and influenced many other churches. The Church Calendar was greatly simplified. One working group (Coetus XI) was tasked with producing a new lectionary with a much greater range of scripture. They consulted many other lectionaries, including Protestant examples, and paid attention to critical scholarship. In their new **Sunday Lectionary** (1969) they decided that the Paschal Mystery (the death and resurrection of Jesus at the heart of the gospel) should be the unifying theme rather than a history of salvation, or systematic theology. They settled on a 3 yr cycle, so that each year focussed on one Synoptic gospel, and John was used mainly at Festivals. They chose readings to fit the broad themes of the Festal seasons (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter) and in Ordinary time introduced a pattern of semi-continuous readings through the gospel of the year and a separate strand of readings from the epistles. They included an OT reading, typologically linked to the gospel, for every week of the year. This was a huge improvement on the 1570 lectionary. Normand Bonneau (*The Sunday Lectionary: Ritual Word, Paschal Shape* Liturgical Press Minnesota 1998) helpfully explains the principles of harmony, correspondence or theme used in choosing the accompanying readings to the gospel.<sup>7</sup>

The Sunday readings now averaged 21.8 verses (up from 16.8 in 1570): 10.5 from a gospel, 5.8 from the Epistles and 5.5 verses from the Old Testament. The new lectionary included readings from 32 of 45 Old Testament books (including the Apocrypha), and 24 of 27 New Testament books. Over the 3 year cycle the congregation would hear 5.7% of the Old Testament, 41.3% of the Epistles, 55.7% of Matthew, 61.4% of Mark, 58.2% of Luke and 61% of John. Bonneau admits that this is effectively a Canon within a Canon, a eucharistic bible for Sundays: "The Sunday Eucharist cannot pretend to be the first and foremost occasion for the faithful to be exposed to and become familiar with the scriptures. The Lectionary presupposes an adequate acquaintance with the Bible. It serves an anamnetic purpose, to recall and evoke the key moments and reflections of the history of salvation centred in the paschal mystery." (p.49). Some texts are omitted as being too difficult for pastoral reasons. Verses are omitted to make easier sense, shorten the reading, and avoid 'difficulties'.

Other churches in North America (Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian) quickly adopted and adapted the Sunday Lectionary, until in 1992 the **Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)** appeared. It shares the same calendar, pattern of 3 readings and 3 year cycle, but its readings are sometimes longer, and it provided an alternative set of semi-continuous Old Testament readings for ordinary time. In Year A (Matthew) the OT focus is on the major narratives from Genesis, in year B (Mark) on the Davidic Covenant and Wisdom literature, and in year C (Luke) on a chronological (rather than canonical) sample of Prophets, with special attention to Jeremiah.

The **Joint Liturgical Group** in Great Britain had produced a 2 year lectionary in 1967, which was incorporated into the ASB in 1980, but its thematic approach was quickly found to be tiresome, and

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<sup>7</sup> Bonneau p.45-7 on the modalities of harmony, correspondence and theme



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it proposed a four-year lectionary in 1990, including a year for John<sup>8</sup>, but the Revised Common Lectionary is now established as the leading ecumenical lectionary worldwide.

**Flexibility within the Lectionary:** the RCL, unlike its Roman Catholic parent, is not intended solely as a Eucharistic Lectionary. It sets out a primary set of readings for the Principal service of the day. The readings for ordinary time (between Trinity and Advent, Epiphany and Lent) offer an alternative set of semi-continuous series from OT books and epistles, so that a preacher could focus on the epistle or Old Testament reading in different years, if it was felt the gospels were becoming too familiar.

The RCL also provides readings for 2nd and 3rd services, which I have not analysed, but I believe are used only in Cathedrals and other very large churches. According to "*The Christian Year*" (CHP 1997) the 2nd service lectionary is primarily for Sunday evening services, and the 3rd service lectionary offers shorter readings, suitable for an office. They are not intended as an alternative to the Principal readings in the morning.

Church House Publishing also included short sermon series for ordinary time in '*New Patterns for Worship*' (CHP 2002 pp107-123). The rubric states that ministers may, with the permission of the PCC, also develop their own material for ordinary time, but are required to stay with the RCL during the closed seasons- see Appendix One for details.

Are there not enough options here? Many pastors need clear guidance on what to read and preach, particularly when they are new to ministry, and congregations need protection from the biases and obsessions of their ministers.

### Critique of the Calendar and Lectionary -

Nevertheless the triumph of the RCL is not complete. Every preacher working with the lectionary will have wondered, "why did the reading stop there, or omit those verses?" Many will have been frustrated at the lack of continuity from one week to another, and the subsequent need to explain afresh the context. Every biblical book was shaped into its current canonical form by someone, an author or editor, with a purpose in mind (even if we sometimes struggle to grasp their rationale!), and we believe the writers were guided by the Holy Spirit. To disturb that canonical ordering inevitably creates dislocation. The gospels in particular are likely to have been written with the gathered church in mind. Continuous and consecutive reading (*Lectio Continua*) was surely the writers' intention, and the early church, like the Jewish Synagogue, clearly practised *lectio continua*.

The Church Calendar has strengths. It is helpful to remember every year the key events of salvation history in the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus, and a calendar gives stability and shape to the passing years of our life, just as the natural seasons and the agricultural calendar do. The secular alternatives - Winterval, (the feast of conspicuous consumption), Red Nose Day, Halloween, Pride Month etc, do not have the depth of the Christian year and will not pass the test of time. But the church calendar developed later than the canon of scripture, and its demands

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<sup>8</sup> Joint Liturgical Group *A Four Year Lectionary* (Canterbury Press, Norwich 1990)

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seriously dislocate *lectio continua*. The Christmas season is extended too long, and presses too hard on Easter. Do we need to celebrate Jesus' circumcision, presentation in the Temple, visit of the Magi and baptism (but not in that chronological order!) as well as his birth every year, when not every gospel bothers to record them? The seasons of the Christian Year have given us a rich heritage of music and liturgy which I would not wish to lose, but the themes of these seasons are often fuzzy. Is Advent about the Second Coming, or the First? Is Lent a season for discipleship, penitence or the Passion? The preface to *The Christian Year* (CHP 1997) claims that "The Christian year, with its cycle of seasons, provides the Church with its most compelling way into the mystery of faith", but I think that we need another Cranmer to bring radical simplification and set us free to hear the whole counsel of God, and let God's whole word do its work of reviving churches that are in serious decline, especially those churches who stick rigidly to the lectionary. Contra Bonneau (the Sunday lectionary 'presupposes an adequate acquaintance of the bible'), we can no longer assume a wider knowledge of the scripture in an increasingly secular society. Part of the sickness of the Church today is the inadequate diet of scripture on which she is fed, a judgment of God upon us for silencing its challenging and uncomfortable truths

**Cultural Crisis:** This sickness has spread from the Church into Western culture, which is rapidly losing its Christian foundations. Paul Kingsworth<sup>9</sup> believes that our culture has been fractured and inverted, turned upside-down. He says that the way to heal it is "through story and ritual. The work of the age of inversion is not to fight puny online battles, or to look for victory in some imagined political settlement or brilliant new ideology. Our wounds are much deeper than that. Our stories are cracked at their foundations, and as a consequence we are afloat in a fantastical world of our own making: grasping at freedom, entirely enslaved. The antidote to this is to dig down to those foundations and begin the work of repair. We are going to have to learn to be adults again; to get our feet back on the ground, to rebuild families and communities, to learn again the meaning of worship and commitment, of limits and longing." In other words, we need to know our story- as the ancient people of God on their pilgrimage. That means that Sunday by Sunday we need to read and preach the great story, and so equip people to read it more deeply in groups and families.

Timothy Slemmons (*YEAR D: a Quadrennial Supplement to the Revised Common Lectionary* Cascade Books 2012) writes:

"A rediscovery of Scripture is widely recognized as a common element, if not the primary attendant, of genuine reformation. Reform is virtually synonymous, or at least synchronous, with some fresh and inspired appropriation of the written revelation. The well-known assertion in the "Constitution on the Liturgy" [Vatican 2] should be recalled: "The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly." (p3)

'Scripture not only encourages preservation of and attention to the whole witness, it also warns in the starkest possible terms of curses and calamities that will befall those who forget, dismiss, scorn, deny, diminish, or otherwise discount the revelation.' (p5)

Slemmons quotes Revelation 22.18

"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this

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<sup>9</sup> <https://unherd.com/2022/07/the-west-needs-to-grow-up/> accessed 30 August 2022

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prophecy, God will take away that person's share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book".

So let us examine **the weaknesses of the RCL**, focussing on the use of the gospels.

The concept of the gospel of the year was a great improvement on what came before, but it leaves no year for John, whose material is therefore squeezed into the year of Mark or used at festivals.

The RCL recognises the limitations of a three year cycle, and does not attempt to repeat stories (pericopes) if a version of the story is used in another gospel in another year (part of the Triple Tradition), but that makes its omission of material common to all three gospels all the more puzzling, and one begins to suspect another agenda.

- i. The controversies of Jesus with religious authorities are neglected- perhaps they set a dangerous precedent of challenging t abuse by religious authority, which we would have done well to heed, as recent scandals have made all too clear.
- ii. The apocalyptic passages and their clear warning of judgment are neglected - too difficult for modern priests and congregations to face?
- iii. Nor does it manage to use all the material unique to a particular gospel in the appropriate year: the narrative of the birth of John the Baptist is unique to Luke, but omitted. Most of John chapters 5,7,8 and 18 are omitted.
- iv. Sequential teaching by Jesus is frequently fragmented. The sermon on the Mount in Matthew is a particular casualty. Likewise the farewell discourse in John is scattered across three years.
- v. Most seriously the Passion narrative-the account of the trial and execution of Jesus, which lays bare the sinful heart of humanity in disciples, religious and secular authorities, and forms the climax of every gospel, is compressed each year into a single long reading on Palm Sunday, which effectively precludes any preaching. Of course we hope that worshippers will make use of Holy Week when the story is retold in smaller instalments, but a Sunday lectionary must be able to feed the churchgoer who does not yet attend mid-week, or has not developed a habit of personal bible reading.

Various schemes to **supplement the Lectionary** have therefore been proposed. Steve Thorn outlines some of them at [Christian Century: What's the text: Alternatives to Common Lectionary](#) 16/10/2013. I focussed on Timothy Slemmons, and found his critique of the RCL very helpful. He gathered all the unparalleled lections from the gospels in years A- C and created a **Year D**, which could be used after years A-C, or instead of one year in every three, if remaining in synchronisation with the wider church were considered important. His scheme works through the Passion narrative over ten weeks. culminating on the Sunday before Advent (Christ the King). He admits that Year D feels very different from the others, and I do not know anyone who has adopted it. While admiring his ingenuity, I do not believe that the flaws in the RCL can be corrected by an additional year.

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### What are the alternatives to an Official Lectionary?

What will the preacher do, who does not follow the instruction of the institutional church? We might pray for the Holy Spirit to guide us, perhaps week by week not knowing where He will lead us, and this seems to have been the method of Charles Spurgeon, the prolific Baptist preacher of the 19th Century.

The Spirit seems to lead some to preach systematically through books of the Bible, using the principle of *Lectio Continua*. John Stott underlines the value and history of systematic exposition in his classic work *"I believe in Preaching"* (Hodder & Stoughton 1982 pp.315-20). Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached 232 sermons on Ephesians between 1954 and 1962- to great acclaim. Others have been less successful. John Buchan's novel *WitchWood*<sup>10</sup> portrays Mr MacMichael, who 'was aye a pious and diligent minister... I've heard that he preached for a year and six months on Exodus 15 and 27, the twelve wells and the three score and ten palm trees of Elim, a sabbath to ilka well and ilka tree... I've a notion that he was never very strong in the intellectuals!'

Others set their star on discerning the needs of the congregation and **preach topically**. Tim Stanley is the founding Pastor of North Point Community Church in Atlanta. In his book *"Deep & Wide"* (Zondervan 2012) he sets out his approach with candour:

"While all scripture is equally inspired, it's not all equally applicable to all age groups." He chooses preaching material on the basis of what his audience perceives as relevant, so that it may be 'extraordinarily helpful' for each age group and life stage. He argues against the view that "since all scripture is equally inspired, it all needs to be taught. To adults anyway. And I wholeheartedly agree. It all needs to be taught- *somewhere*. But not everywhere. Specifically, not in big church. And not in Sunday School or in small groups. And the truth is, nobody in a local church setting actually teaches the entire bible to anybody." (p188), a claim based on his calculation that if you taught a chapter of scripture a week, it would take 23 years to preach through the bible.

"Nobody actually preaches or teaches verse-by-verse to the same congregation. Everybody picks and chooses and skips and skimps and cuts corners and "runs out of time".. "Am I responsible to teach the "whole counsel of God", as it sometimes called? Yes. The entire Bible? Only if you plan to say at your current church for at least 22 years without missing a Sunday".

North Point has three levels of bible training for leaders, but on Sundays he chooses scriptural themes, narratives and principles that address the specific issues his community face, and each year includes teaching on marriage, money, generosity and other topics.

Others may feel that the Spirit guides them through the headlines of the day, in seeking to be prophetic, but often this degenerates into political commentary. Karl Barth believed that a preacher should hold the bible in one hand, and the newspaper in the other, but he attacked the concept of 'relevant preaching': "Pastors should aim their guns beyond the hills of relevance"<sup>11</sup>... There will be times when a planned sermon has to be changed because of a major world event such as the outbreak of a pandemic, but these should be rare occasions. There will be other occasions when a very different congregation is expected to attend, and a different approach

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<sup>10</sup> John Buchan *Witch Wood* (Nelson 1948; pp21-22) quoted by Alex Motyer *Look to the Rock* p1

<sup>11</sup> Karl Barth *Homiletics* (Westminster 1991) pp93-96

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required - the big occasions of Christmas, Remembrance, Harvest, Baptisms or Confirmations, and unless the sermon series was planned to incorporate these occasions, an interruption to the plan is wise.

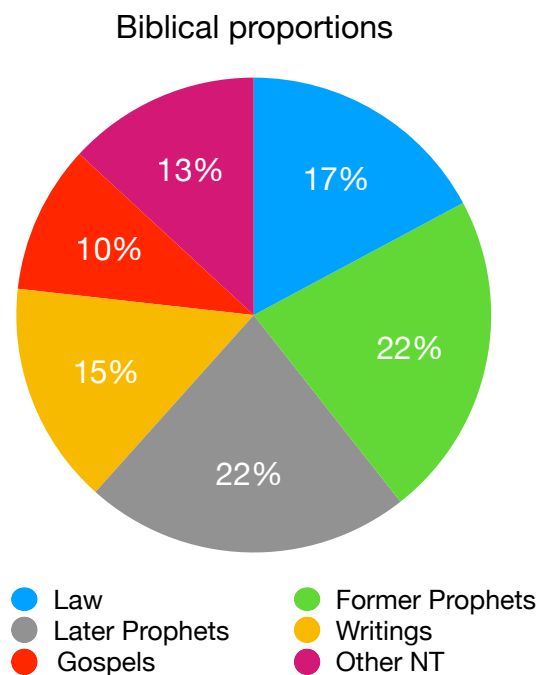
But I believe that we need to plan to teach as much of the bible as possible.

### Preaching the Whole Bible?

Tim Patrick and Andrew Reid (*The whole counsel of God*: Crossway 2020) are concerned that when most of the bible is not taught to God's people, it leads to a lack of interest or confidence in reading the parts that are never preached. They see the sheer size of the bible not as a problem, but a good and generous gift of God. They identify the consequences of not teaching the whole bible as creating i) a canon within a canon, ii) an unbalanced theology, iii) a diminished gospel and iv) a failure to grasp the overall message of scripture. They identify the danger in topical ('relevant') preaching plans like Stanley of limiting the text's voice to answering our own questions, rather than challenging our questions with the wider scope of the whole counsel of God. They discuss the need for biblical and systematic theology to understand the bible, and introduce the concept of *Gospel theology* (98) as a coherent message through the whole bible, under the headings of Christology, atonement and eschatology. In ch 6 they explain the need for long-term planning, and the dividends it brings, and apply the analogy of the balanced diet to the bible, which comprises different 'food groups'. They suggest using the traditional categories (of Law, Former Prophets, Later Prophets, Writings, Gospels and rest of the NT), and giving to each category one-sixth of a year, so that each year contains a sermon series from each division, following on from the last series in that division the previous year (*in seriatim*).

The chart shows the actual percentage of the bible in each category, so their division gives a slight weighting in favour of the gospels and against the former and latter prophets, but it is a clear and simple scheme. In this way they believe that the whole bible can be taught in a balanced way over a 35 year period. They give a worked example for one year, but not all 35!

They acknowledge the practical challenges involved in dealing with long books and difficult texts, admit that their challenge is 'audacious and outrageous', and accept that for a range of very understandable and practical reasons, "many, if not most, preachers will never be able to achieve complete success." Their relentless focus on covering the whole bible allows them little scope for topical or seasonal preaching.



## Teaching the Whole Counsel of God

I admire their commitment to teaching the whole of scripture but I fear that the average congregation does not yet have the stomach for a diet that is 2/3 Old Testament to 1/3 New: typical congregations need to hear each gospel taught more often than once in 35 years, even if there is a gospel series every year. Against Patrick and Reid, and with Stanley, I don't think that the average congregation needs to wrestle with some parts of scripture on Sunday - the genealogies, more detailed ceremonial laws, or prophetic oracles to the nations, though these should be covered by a daily reading scheme for those with a deeper commitment to learning the whole counsel of God. Yet the average congregation does need to taste something regularly from the whole range of scripture, and hear it preached upon, so that they can begin to understand and appreciate it.

### Finding a/the Balanced Diet?

Many other writers on preaching use the same analogy of a balanced diet. Our bodies need a balance of protein, carbs, vitamins, fibre etc, and there are many diets on offer today, but what sort of balance does our spiritual diet need? Do we need a variety of literary genres, or of Law and Gospel, Grace and Judgement, History and Wisdom, Old and New Testament? An overview of salvation history, or tour of our church's systematic theology? All preaching should focus on Christ, for all scripture points to him, the fulfilment of the whole, our prophet, priest and king, but any dietary scheme devised by human wisdom - personal or ecclesiastical - will inevitably be limited and flawed, so I am drawn to search for a scheme that drives us to read as much of scripture as possible, and thus encounter the whole counsel of God. Let scripture decide what a balanced diet is, and what themes emerge. I submit that a systematic effort to read and preach all scripture, the inspired word of God, is the safest and surest means of finding a biblical balance in teaching the whole counsel of God, and ensuring that every important theme is covered, including the ones we haven't yet noticed. So here are the principles which I have identified.

1. **The Whole Counsel of God:** The word of God is meant to be read not just on Sunday, but daily, and at greater length and depth on special occasions. The RCL admits that its Sunday readings cannot hope to cover all scripture, and all schemes should recognise this limitation, but as Patrick and Reid point out, if Sunday readings never touch on certain books, those books are effectively devalued. In planning our Sunday reading and preaching, we must also encourage and enable daily reading and small group/family study, perhaps co-ordinated with the Sunday readings, as well as special occasions for teaching, akin to the Israelite festivals, such as Bible Conferences, Christian Camps and Holidays (Keswick, New Wine etc). A movement to restore the whole counsel would therefore require a daily lectionary, a Sunday reading plan and guidelines for special conferences.
2. **Lectio Continua.** The best way to study the scriptures is to follow the order in which the biblical authors (and editors) composed them, on the humble and charitable assumption that they and the Holy Spirit knew more about their material than we do now. There are occasions for seasonal and thematic preaching, but most of the time we should follow whole books through in order. Gospels and NT epistles should be read in full. Semi-continuous series may be necessary to make the larger OT books accessible.

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3. **Longer Scripture Readings.** Many Evangelical churches have only one bible reading, often remarkably short. This was not the ancient practice. The RC Sunday Lectionary suggests three relatively short readings (OT, NT, gospel) and a psalm, with an average of 21 verses of scripture a week. Without explanation of the connections between these readings, I fear that this just confuses people. The RCL lengthened the epistle and OT readings slightly, but left the gospels about the same length. [I do not have precise statistics]. I propose one main reading each Sunday, which should be longer than the RCL has accustomed us to hear: in gospel terms it can include more than one pericope, as these short sections are often connected by a theme - eg Mark's sandwich constructions, a collection of healings, or short parables- and preachers can focus on one pericope if they wish. I have set out a table of longer lections for the gospels at Appendix One, most of which we have now tried at PPT. Matthew can be covered in 56 lections, Mark in 30, Luke in 52 and John in 39. Longer readings for OT narrative also enable the richness of the story to be heard. There is value in one supporting reading, which could be a short gospel reading if the main reading is from the OT or an NT epistle to support the Christological connections. These readings can include psalms, but their use in worship is a topic for another day. The RCL remains a useful guide to finding appropriate readings.
4. **A repeating Pattern through the years:** Few people stay in the same church for 35 years. The rate of change ('churn') will vary: a student church might expect students to stay for 3 years, or with young people renting for short periods. A church with families of school-age children, home-owners and retirees would have a much slower rate of change. I am aware that the congregation in Bovey is now substantially different from the one I started with 22 years ago.
5. **The priority of the gospels.** The Mosaic command to read the Law every 7 years was intended to remind each generation of the foundations of their faith in the Torah. I consider that the gospels have the same foundational status for the Christian church, and so need to be repeated more frequently. Although I want to increase exposure to Old and New Testament texts, the gospels should command the biggest share of teaching time. This gospel weighting for the main Sunday service is important for the instruction of newer members of our churches, but should be counter-balanced by a weighting towards the Old Testament and other New Testament books at second services and in daily reading patterns. Given the number of lections suggested above, one could develop a 10 year cycle of readings, in which reading the gospels through completely would take 3/7 of the time (3 yrs for Matthew and Luke, 2 for John and Mark), leaving 2/7 for other NT texts and 2/7 for OT)
6. My preference is for a **Seven Year repeating pattern**, as suggested by Deuteronomy 31. Although Slemmons proposed an extra lectionary year, he was also attracted by the biblical pattern of a seven year scheme: "While the number of years making up a lectionary cycle invites various opinions, one would think a truly biblical observation of the LORD's temporal rhythms should be shaped by the sabbatical (seven-year) cycle, something for the neglect of which Israel and Judah suffered terribly (2 Chr 36:17-21). It seems to me that James A. Sanders' (Canon and Calendar pp259-263) vision for a complete canonical lectionary could easily be fulfilled in a seven-year model,

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something that scripture itself envisions, even commands.” (198 of 8022 Kindle edition). Therefore I propose covering Mark in one year, Luke, Matthew and John in two years (total seven), and breaking them into natural blocks, ideally of 6-8 weeks, between which OT and NT series can be inserted. The gospels as main reading would fill more than half the year, unless one chose not to read every part of every gospel in any seven year cycle. One could choose one year to cover the Passion in one dramatic reading, and dividing it up in another gospel and year, or exploring the Apocalyptic teaching more fully another year, or not reading the full texts in the Triple tradition every time they come round (eg feeding of the 5000, healing of Jairus’ daughter). If we take two years to work through most gospels, or half a gospel each year, we still have space for substantial OT and NT series. The spreading of a gospel over two years also has particular implications for the main seasons around Christmas and Easter, for I do not propose repeating gospel texts as the main readings at Christmas and Easter.

7. **A seven-year pattern for the Old Testament?** I started this study project with the original intention of focussing upon the Old Testament, but quickly realised that I needed to establish a foundation on the reading of the gospels. The Old Testament cannot be fitted into even a seven year pattern. Patrick & Reid’s suggestion of a series every year from each of their categories (Law, Major & Minor Prophets and Writings), would enable the congregation to hear something different from each section, but I fear that having six different series ‘on the go’ every year may be as confusing as trying to read six different books at the same time! My alternative proposal to their division, since I have given the lion’s share of the time to the gospels, is to include a semi-continuous OT series each year from one of seven divisions, to match the 7 year pattern of the gospels, so that over the course of seven years, the congregation will gain a sense of the sweep of the OT story and writings, and likewise to include an exposition of a complete NT epistle and a section from Acts in each year. Over the course of several 7 year cycles, more of each OT division will be covered. I tentatively propose dividing the OT into a mix of historical epochs and genres. The table below sets out the books covered, and the page count, taken from the RSV, gives a sense of the size of the divisions. I do not here attempt to break down any one year cycle into a preaching plan, but if 2/7th of a year is available, that would be about 14 weeks, perhaps in two blocks. The short preaching series in ‘New Patterns for Worship’ might be a starting point, and the Proclamation Trust are publishing a helpful “Teaching” series on different Old and New Testament books. For instance, David Jackman (*“Teaching Isaiah”* Christian Focus 2010) suggests five short series (of 5-6 sections) which would give good coverage of the broad sweep of this massive OT prophet.



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Year	Range	OT pages	1st Cycle	2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle	4th Cycle
<b>A</b>	From Eden to Sinai: Genesis - Exodus	1-128	Creation & Fall: Gen 1-11	Abraham & Isaac: Gen 12-	Jacob & Joseph	Exodus 1-19
<b>B</b>	From Sinai to Shiloh: Lev- Ruth	129-270	Law & Tabernacle	Wilderness	Deuteronomy	Conquest & Judges
<b>C</b>	Prophets & Kings: 1 Sam- 1 Kgs/1Chron	271-399*	Samuel & Saul (1 Sam)	David (2 Sam)	Solomon & division (1 Ki)	Kings & prophets (Elijah)
<b>D</b>	Exile & Return: 2 Kgs/Chron-Esther	367*-497	Decline & Fall- 2 Chron	Daniel	Return- Ezra & Neh	Esther
<b>E</b>	Wisdom & Worship: Job- Song	498-682	Job	Psalms (1)	Proverbs	Ecclesiastes
<b>F</b>	Greater Prophets: Isa - Lamentations	683-837	Isaiah (1)	Isaiah (2)	Jer (1)	Jer (2) & Lam
<b>G</b>	Lesser Prophets: Ezek - Mal	837-968	Ezekiel	Northern Prophets	Southern Prophets	Exilic Prophets

- 8. A seven-year pattern for the rest of the New Testament?** I have not had time to develop this aspect of my scheme, but if there are 2/7ths of the year available for other NT texts, I would want to explore the possibility of using one for an annual series through Acts and Revelation, and the other for an epistle, splitting major epistles like Romans, 1 & 2 Cor, Hebrews into 2 sections, perhaps over two years.
- 9. Preserving the Seasons.** I do not want to abandon the major seasons of Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, but I am not willing to sacrifice the principle of *Lectio continua* to keep the precise pattern of special Sundays that have developed. If we take two years to cover each gospel, I suggest starting a gospel series around Christmas, and using its material in order. So we would start *Luke* and *Matthew*, which have substantial material on the nativity, in Advent, earlier than *John* or *Mark*, which might wait until Epiphany. In that first year we would follow non-gospel material during Lent/Easter, such as the Exodus story, Servant songs in Isaiah 40-55, or messianic psalms, and explore the meaning of Easter from NT material such as Rev 1-4, 1 Cor 15, then follow the gospel passion narrative in the second year. For Advent in the first year, one might focus on OT prophetic material looking to the promise of a Messiah, or NT epistles such as 1-2 Thessalonians or Revelation, and in the second year work through the Apocalyptic material from the gospel. The table below shows how the gospels might be divided into blocks and fitted around the years and seasons

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Year	Advent	Xmas	Epiphany	Ordinary 1	Lent	Easter	Ordinary 2
<b>Matthew (1)</b>	1.1-19	2	3-4	not Mt	5-7 (Serm Mt)		8-13
<b>Matthew (2)</b>	24-25		14-20		26-27	28	21-23
<b>Mark</b>			1-3	4-8	14-15	16	9-12
<b>Luke (1)</b>	Mk 13/ Lk 1	2	3-6.16	6.17-8	not Lk		9-11
<b>Luke (2)</b>	12-13		14-16		22-23	24	Lk 17-20
<b>John (1)</b>	Lk 21	Jn 1	2-3	4	not Jn		Jn 5-6, 7-8,
<b>John (2)</b>	Jn 9-10		Jn 11-12		18-19	20-21	Jn 13-17

### Preliminary Conclusion:

I am grateful for the opportunity to read widely and explore the possibilities for teaching the whole counsel of God. I will gladly receive any criticism, constructive or otherwise. I must make it clear I am outlining principles for incumbents to devise their own long-term, local preaching plan, not laying down a rigid lectionary. What matters most is that more scripture is (better) read and expounded on Sundays in a way that is accessible to congregations, and will renew our churches and increase their impact on society.

Graham Hamilton 10 December 2022

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### Appendix One: The Gospels in longer lections

Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
1.1-17	1.1-28	<b>1.1-25,57-80</b>	Jn 1.1-18
1.18-25	1.29-2.12	<b>Lk 1.26-55</b>	Jn 1.15-34
2.1-12	2.1-12	<b>Lk 1.56-80</b>	Jn 1.35-51
2.13-23	<u>2.13-3.6</u>	<b>Lk 2.1-20</b>	Jn 2.1-12
3.1-17	3.7-35	<b>Lk 2.21-38</b>	Jn 2.13-25
4.1-17	4.1-34	<b>Lk 2.39-52</b>	Jn 3.1-21
4.12-25	4.35-5.20		Jn 3.22-36
	5.21-43	Lk 3.1-20	Jn 4.1-26
5.1-12	6.1-13	Lk 3.21-4.12	Jn 4.27-42
5.13-20	6.14-29	<b>Lk 4.14-39</b>	Jn 4.43-end
5.21-37	6.30-52	<b>Lk 4.40-5.11</b>	
5.38-48	6.52-7.23	Lk 5.12-26	Jn 5.1-30
6.1-18	7.24-8.10	Lk 5.27-6.16	Jn 5.31-47
6.19-34	8.11-26		Jn 6.1-40
7.1-12	8.27-9.13	<b>Lk 6.17-36</b>	Jn 6.41-70
7.13-29	9.14-32	<b>Lk 6.37-49</b>	
	9.33-50	Lk 7.1-17	Jn 7.1-52
<i>Mt 8.1-17</i>	10.1-16	<b>Lk 7.18-35</b>	Jn 8.1-11
Mt 8.18-9.13	10.17-31	<b>LK 7.36-50</b>	Jn 8.12-30
Mt 9.10-34	10.32-45	<i>Lk 8.1-21</i>	Jn 8.31-58
Mt 9.35-10.16	10.46-11.10	8.22-39	
Mt 10.11-23/42	11.11-36	8.40-56	Jn 9.1-41
<i>Mt 11.1-19</i>	12.1-27		Jn 10.1-21
Mt 11.16-30	12.28-44	9.1-17	Jn 10.22-42
Mt 12.1-21	13.1-37	9.18-45	
Mt 12.22-37	14.1-26	9.46-62	11.1-45
Mt 12.38-50	14.27-52	<b>10.1-24</b>	11.46-12.19
Mt 13.1-23	14.53-15.15	<b>10.25-37</b>	
Mt 13.24-43	15.16-47	<b>10.38-11.13</b>	Jn 13.1-35
Mt 13.44.-52	16.1-20		Jn 13.31-14.14
Mt 14.13-36		11.14-36	Jn 14.15-31
Mt 15.1-20		11.37-54	Jn 15.1-17
Mt 15.21-39		12.1-21	15.18-16.11
Mt 16.1-12		12.22-48	Jn 16.12-33
<b>Mt 16.13-28</b>		12.49-13.9	Jn 17.1-12
Mt 17.1-23		13.10-35	Jn 17.13-26
Mt 17.24-18.14			
Mt 18.15-35			
<b>Mt 19.1-15</b>		Lk 14.1-24	Jn 18.1-27

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Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Mt 19.16-30		Lk 14.25-35	Jn 18.28-19.16
Mt 20.1-16		<b>Lk 15.1-32</b>	Jn 19.16-38
Mt 20.17-34		<b>Lk 16.1-17</b>	Jn 19.39-20.9
Mt 21.1-22		<b>Lk 16.19-31</b>	Jn 20.10-22
Mt 21.23-45		Lk 17.1-19	Jn 20.23-31
Mt 22.1-14			Jn 21
Mt 22.15-46*		17.20-18.8	
Mt 23.1-39		Lk 18.9-30	
Mt 23.29-39*		18.31-19.10	
Mt 24.1-28		Lk 19.11-44	
Mt 24.29-44		19.45-20.19	
Mt 24.45-25.13		Lk 20.20-21.4	
Mt 25.14-30		Lk 21.1-24	
Mt 25.31-46		Lk 21.25-38	
		Lk 22.1-23	
Mt 26.1-30		Lk 22.24-62	
Mt 26.31-56		22.63-23.25	
		Lk 23.26-49	
Mt 27.1-26		23.50-24.12	
Mt 27.27-61		Lk 24.13-50	
Mt 27.62-28.15			
<b>Mt 28.16-20</b>			

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### Appendix Two: The legal status of Lectionaries in the Church of England

Ministers in the Church of England are required by Canon B1 to use only the forms of service in the Book of Common Prayer and those forms approved by Canon B2, B4 and B5a. According to Canon B2.3 (ii) The term 'form of service' includes collects, rules and the lessons designated in any Table of Lessons, but Canon B4A Of the approval of collects, lectionaries and tables of rules to order the service was repealed on 17 Feb 1994 by Amending Canon 17.

The "Christian Year"( Church House Publishing 1997) discusses 'alternative lectionary provision' on p.248.

"The RCL is recommended as the *normative* lectionary provision. However there is a desire in the Church of England for a more flexible approach to the reading of scripture. This has led to a number of churches, some of them very large church communities, abandoning the lectionary altogether in favour of packages of readings exploring biblical issues or other matters of faith. Such churches are encouraged to use the authorised lectionary, but even those who use an authorised lectionary may need to be able sometimes to explore packages of material in a different way. The Lectionary Year is divided between 'closed' and 'open' seasons. The closed seasons are the periods from Advent to the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, and from Ash Wednesday to Trinity Sunday. These periods have been so designated in *A service of the Word*. In these periods no departure from the RCL lectionary is allowed, and the Church will move together through the high points of the Christian year."

The tone is confusing - is conformity merely ' encouraged' or is any departure 'not allowed'?

This instruction is repeated in Lectionary Rules in *Common Worship* (Church House Publishing 2000) p.540:

" During the period from the First Sunday of Advent to the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, during the period from Ash Wednesday to Trinity Sunday, and on All Saints' Day, the readings shall come from an authorized lectionary. During Ordinary Time (i.e. between the Presentation and Ash Wednesday and between Trinity Sunday and Advent Sunday), authorized lectionary provision remains the norm but, after due consultation with the Parochial Church Council, the minister may, from time to time, depart from the lectionary provision for pastoral reasons or preaching or teaching purposes."

In *New Patterns of Worship* (Church House Publishing 2002) the section on Planning a Service of the Word specifies that there should be at least two readings from the bible. "The readings are taken from an authorised lectionary during the period from the Third Sunday of Advent to the Baptism of Christ, and from Palm Sunday to Trinity Sunday", which is a significantly shorter period than that specified in Common Worship.