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The Lectionary Series from the Revised Common Lectionary: Cycle B

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I commend the book especially to preachers and seminary students. Here is an adept summation of the challenge faced by preachers who are deep into the transition zone of a major cultural and communicational shift; here is also solid and practical help in re-designing an appropriate homiletic.

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The Lectionary Series from the Revised Common Lectionary

Cycle B, NRSV

Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing Co., Inc., 1993

145 pp.

CSS has provided here the complete lections—First Lesson, Second Lesson, Gospel, and Psalm—for Cycle B of the Revised Common Lectionary. Lections for a “Liturgy of the Palms” are included following those of Passion/Palm Sunday. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is used. It is an indispensable tool for worship leaders, lectors, and preachers.

Lectionaries, of course, predate Christianity, and so it is not at all surprising that Christians continued the practice. In the fourth century, for example, the *Apostolic Constitutions* report a lectionary with five lessons: Law, Prophets, Epistles, Acts, and Gospels. Lectionaries, in Christianity as well as in Judaism, no doubt began when appropriate scriptural texts were sought for festivals: what shall be read at Passover? What at Good Friday- Easter?

The Revised Common Lectionary began when in 1983 a group of “non-liturgical” Protestant churches (among them the Presbyterian, United Methodist, and United Church of Christ) adopted a “Common Lectionary” which had been prepared by the Consultation on Common Texts, an ecumenical forum for consultation on matters of worship renewal, especially of English language liturgical texts. The Revised Common Lectionary of 1992 represents intense evaluation and study by some 19 denominations; it is expected that Lutherans and Episcopalians will proceed also to adopt it. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is currently “field testing” it. I certainly encourage its adoption, for at least three reasons. (1) It presents a much more sequential and coherent use of the Old Testament, especially in the “Pentecost” season, providing a sequence from the Moses tradition in Year A, from David in Year B, and from major prophets in Year C; (2) it goes a long way to remedying the notable absence of biblical women by including narratives about Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Leah, Miriam, Deborah, Lydia, the woman with the issue of blood, the Syrophenician woman, the woman of Proverbs 31, and Hannah (See Carol Schlueter’s “The Gender

Balance of Texts from the Gospels: The Revised Common Lectionary and The Lutheran Book of Worship," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, June, 1993); (3) use of it will harmonize Lutherans with Anglicans and the many Protestant churches now using the Common Lectionary.

Disconcerting for Lutherans and Roman Catholics will be the disappearance of "Sundays after Pentecost" and "Sundays in Ordinary Time" respectively, in favor of "Proper 4" through "Proper 28".

CSS's edition of the Cycle B lections is laid out in a large, 8.5 x 11 inch, plastic-spiral-bound volume that lies flat when opened. The lections for any given Sunday or Festival are printed on two facing pages, so that one need not turn a page but can peruse First Lesson, Second Lesson, Gospel, and Psalm in one glance and in that order (exceptions are Passion/Palm Sunday, and Good Friday). It is thus an excellent study edition. Generous margins are also a study convenience.

I emphasize that this is a *study* edition. Though the lay-out is ideal for nervous lectors, in worship the lections should be read from a large Bible. It is imperative that the preacher always recover the full context of a lection by reading it in the Bible (See Eugene L. Lowry, *Living With the Lectionary: Preaching Through the Revised Common Lectionary*, Abingdon, 1992). Besides, this edition is drab and uninspired in design. Hopefully, as the Revised Common Lectionary becomes acceptable, some publisher will create a truly handsome volume, containing all three cycles.

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Commentary on the Lutheran Book of Worship

Philip H. Pfatteicher

Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress Press, 1990

558 + xvii pp. \$41.95

The first question to ask yourself is this: do you need this book at this price? Maybe you don't. It is a book about the LBW. And, if you think that the LBW at 17 is approaching old age, then Pfatteicher's commentary will be of historical interest only. On the other hand...

This book follows on Pfatteicher's other LBW-generated volumes: *Manual on the Liturgy* (1979), *Festivals and Commemorations* (1980), and *Commentary on the Occasional Services* (1983).

Its structure parallels the LBW rites. After a brief historical introduction to Lutheran worship books, and some technical information on publication and sources, he takes us in detail through Baptism, Holy Communion, the propers of the Church Year, Daily Prayer, the shorter prayers and liturgies, Service of the Word, the Athanasian Creed, Marriage, and the Burial of the Dead.