

Review

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR AND LECTIONARY REFORM.

By A. Allan McArthur. S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 1958, 160 pp., 25s.

This is a sequel to Dr McArthur's former book, *The Evolution of the Christian Year*, which was received with great interest. To some extent this is an expansion of the last chapter of that book and especially of its suggestions for a reformed Christian Year, but there is a great deal that is fresh and of the greatest importance for all who are concerned with lectionaries—a group which should include all ministers of the Church.

The first part is "The Christian Year and the Proclamation of the Word of God", and here the author says much that needs to be said and repeated. First he lays down as a foundation the unity of Word and Sacrament. The Roman Church underestimated the Word, and though the Reformers recovered this unity, it was lost owing to the influence of Puritanism in the second half of the 17th century, and since then the emphasis has been too much on Word and too little on Sacrament. The solution to many of our modern difficulties lies in "the recovery of the primitive tension of co-existence, the unity and common centrality of Word and Sacrament". Hence Dr McArthur goes on to emphasize the need for order in the proclamation of the Word, and shows how a lectionary can help in this. He criticizes severely the "disorderly subjectivism" which lies behind the choice of lessons in many cases. Orderly reading is a cardinal principle to be recovered. But what order? He says firmly, the order of the Christian Year, which involves a lectionary which will make manifest the Biblical Revelation of the Triune God. The six focal points of the Year are Christmas and Epiphany, Good Friday and Easter, Ascension and Pentecost, and these must form the foundation of the structure of the lectionary.

The second part is an examination of early lectionaries which reveal three structural types, the Christian Year beginning with Easter, or with Christmas, or with Advent. From this it appears that the traditional Year is "a half-

year", while the remainder of the Year uses lessons chosen without any clear dogmatic or liturgical pattern.

So we come to the structure of the "Peterhead Lectionary". Here we can only indicate the general principles involved. The traditional Christian Year conforms generally with the second article of the Creed, and the fundamental conception of the Peterhead Lectionary is that the liturgical cycle should fill the whole year, manifesting the whole sweep of the Christian religion according to the order of the Credo. And so we have this outline.

I. The Revelation of God the Father—(1) Creation and Providence (6 Sundays beginning with October); II. The Revelation of God the Son—(2) The Incarnation (6 Sundays of Advent, Christmas Day and the Sunday after Christmas); (3) The Ministry and Passion (Sunday before Epiphany commemorating the Baptism, 9 Sundays in Epiphany, 5 in Lent, Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Good Friday); (4) The Resurrection, Ascension and Second Coming (Easter Day, 4 Sundays after Easter, Sunday before Ascension and Sunday after Ascension); III. The Revelation of God the Holy Spirit—(5) The Church and the Christian Life (Whitsunday. 18 Sundays after Pentecost); (6) The Christian Hope (Second Last and Last Sundays after Pentecost). It is noted that the number of Sundays after Epiphany and after Pentecost will vary.

Days of Saints and Martyrs are omitted with one exception, that of Dedication or Anniversary of the Church, and such Sundays as Mothers' Day, Industrial Sunday, and other "inventions of a misguided religious zeal or a diligent commercialism" are roundly and rightly condemned.

On this scheme there is a complete lectionary, for one year only, and the reader will have to examine and test it for himself. He will find it both interesting and useful.

Three questions arise—I. Advent is to have six Sundays instead of the normal four. If that is adopted by one section of the Church, some will be celebrating the First Sunday when others are celebrating the Third. If we use Sundays after Pentecost instead of Sundays after Trinity to which we have been accustomed, that would involve adopting the Roman as against the Anglican. Will not this be a source of some confusion?

2. Will not the omission of Saints' Days, while no doubt justified in a lectionary based on biblical revelation, seem to be an impoverishment of the Christian Year?

3. An examination of the lectionary—and this examination is greatly assisted by the tables provided at the end of the book—shows that even with this arrangement, a large part of the Bible is never read. Of the Old Testament only 13 per cent. is used—the Psalms are not included in the lectionary. Esther, Canticles and six of the Minor Prophets are not used, while of Leviticus only one per cent. is used, and of Ezekiel only two per cent. Of the Gospels and Acts together 63 per cent. is used, of the Epistles only 30 per cent., while II Thessalonians, Philemon, II John and III John are not included. While the Lectionary certainly uses more of the Bible than many ministers use in public worship, is it not a loss that so much is omitted, even allowing that the omitted passages are of less importance?

There can be no doubt, however, that this book will be a serious challenge and will demand careful study and consideration, on the part of all branches of the Church that are seeking a renewal of the Christian Year. Dr. McArthur is to be congratulated on his industry and imagination, and even those who do not accept all his suggestions will be grateful to him.

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