

Dreaming of a Revised Catholic Lectionary: Proposing a Way Forward

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I dreamt that the *Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments* (CDW)¹ had orchestrated an update of the 1969 Catholic liturgical year and Lectionary—*Ordo Lectionum Missae* (OLM).² The way Pope Francis chooses to dream inspires me to dream of a twenty-first-century liturgical retelling of the divine story.³

This is more than creating new lectionaries to serve specific issues such as women or a new liturgical Season of Creation in September. As a context to address any particular issue, a revised liturgy needs to capture the totality of God's work, as presented by Pope Francis, particularly in *Laudato Si'* (LS), where his analysis links the often siloed spheres of ecology, economics, politics, society and spirituality. The CDW could muster bishops, scholars, believers in

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1. The name of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments was recently changed to the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. To avoid cumbersome switches between these names in this article in reference to the work by this body, I shall refer to it consistently as the Congregation for Divine Worship or the CDW.
2. Cf. Felix Just, 'Various Editions of the Catholic *Lectionary for Mass*', *The Roman Catholic Lectionary*, <https://catholic-resources.org/Lectionary/Editions.htm>.
3. Julian Coman, review of *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, by Pope Francis, *The Guardian*, 29 November 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/nov/29/let-us-dream-by-pope-francis-review-the-holy-father-of-fraternity>.

the pews, women and men, to update the liturgy as a service to Christ's mission for the twenty-first century. It could orchestrate a five-year liturgical renewal project that helps Catholics to discern mission engagement with modern social movements in the light of Scripture. This article looks at steps along the way.

In 2008 the Synod of Bishops on the Bible wrote:

Proposition 16: Lectionary: recommended *that an examination be carried out of the Roman Lectionary to see if the current selection and ordering of the readings is truly adequate to the mission of the church in this historical moment.*⁴

Scripture has been the bedrock of an evolving Christian tradition over two millennia and liturgical prayer powerfully expresses that tradition, *source and summit*. In a type of liturgical counterpoint, the Lectionary needs to engage with the lives of believers in the world today, nourishing and challenging them, and inspiring in them a vision to move forward in a journey of salvation. This project is about both the architecture of the entire liturgical year and a planned revised Lectionary that covers a range of biblical texts that help answer the liturgical needs of people today. The reform is about more than making ecological-, female-, or other-linked additions. It is much more than picking a translation.⁵

The liturgy has formative power to nourish the faithful. Pope Francis often speaks of Sunday Eucharist as key to binding the faithful as one in the mission of Christ Jesus.⁶ From the Lutheran tradition in Europe, Jeppe Bach Nikolajsen writes on the formative power of the liturgy in a post-Christian society.⁷ The world has changed radically since 1969, most clearly expressed in modern movements. An updated Lectionary would carry through its purpose of helping believers discern where the Spirit is active today.

This article looks at these issues:

- (1) Gifts of the 1969 Catholic liturgical reforms
- (2) OLM limitations and mistakes in selecting scriptural texts
- (3) Inclusion of a September *Season of Creation* in the liturgical year
- (4) A theology of *God Suffering With*

4. John L. Allen, 'Synod: Final Propositions of the Synod of Bishops on the Bible', *National Catholic Reporter*, 27 October 2008, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/synod-final-propositions-synod-bishops-bible>.

5. Thomas O'Loughlin, 'A New Lectionary: Is It a Matter of Picking a Version?', *Pastoral Liturgy* 51, no. 3 (2021): 1–5, <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=pastoral-liturgy>.

6. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (2013): 'the liturgical proclamation of the word of God, especially in the Eucharistic assembly ... surpasses all forms of catechesis' (n. 137).

7. Jeppe Back Nikolajsen, 'The Formative Power of the Liturgy: The Church as a Liturgical Community in a Post-Christian Society', *European Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (2014): 161, https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=en&user=Sa8_FwUAAAAJ&citation_for_view=Sa8_FwUAAAAJ:roLk4NBRz8UC.

- (5) The use of ecological and inclusive language
- (6) A method for selecting Scripture for a revised Lectionary
- (7) A better mechanism for updating the practices of worship.

(1) Gifts of the 1969 Catholic Liturgical Reforms

The four major documents of Vatican II should be read as a whole—Church (LG), Revelation (DV), Liturgy (SC), Church Today (GS).⁸ Together they map a radical pastoral mission for the people of God guided by the Holy Spirit in a new era. Liturgical reform was the first fruit. Annibale Bugnini documented the multitude of people and planned efforts involved in Roman liturgical reform from 1948 to 1975.⁹ He identified six principles for liturgy—it should:

- be a prayer experience for believers that immerses them in God’s mystery
- act as the summit and font of church community life
- embody full, conscious and active participation
- manifest the church as a sign of communion in action
- show substantial unity but not rigid uniformity
- follow sound tradition but allow for legitimate progress.

To serve these pastoral needs, in just four years, new lectionaries were sculpted and used from Advent 1971. The decreed change was obligatory. Its goal was to form believers who could go into the world with confidence and compassion, carrying a positive message about God active in the universe. In light of the 2022 Australian Plenary’s proposals, starting a process to write a new Lectionary designed to help meet twenty-first-century pastoral needs could be a step forward.

(2) OLM Limitations and Mistakes in Selecting Scriptural Texts

Scholarly criticism by Catholics and Protestants point to limitations within the 1969 Lectionary.

Sister Patricia Fox OSB has analysed how the Lectionary downplayed the role of women in salvation history and fell into gender stereotyping.¹⁰ She identified lectionary omissions of important female leaders, and worse, the selective deletion of significant verses. Fox based her criticism on textual analysis of the Lectionary and not ‘ideology’. Global Sisters Report continues to explore factors limiting official roles for women in the church.¹¹

8. Mark Coleridge, at the National Liturgical Conference, Wollongong, 2014.

9. Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy, 1948–1975*, ed. M. J. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990).

10. Ruth Fox, ‘Women in the Bible and the Lectionary’, *Liturgy* 90, May–June 1996, Archdiocese of Chicago, <http://womensordinationcampaign.org/articles/2019/12/26/women-in-the-bible-and-the-lectionary-ruth-fox-osb>.

11. Global Sisters Report: A Project of *National Catholic Reporter*, <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/content/about-global-sisters-report>.

A second major Catholic criticism revolves around the need to offer Scripture that more explicitly helps Christians facing a global environmental crisis. Pope Francis, in his 2015 encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, developed Catholic teaching on the environment, going beyond his two predecessors and the 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.¹² To help implement his vision Francis formed the *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development* (DPIHD).¹³ The DPIHD primarily has a social teaching role, so it directly promotes few liturgical resources. The CDW, by contrast, has the primary role to play in that area. So far it has been silent.

Other criticisms have revolved around the absence of effective mechanisms to incorporate ongoing liturgical reforms that face the challenges of modernity, postmodernity and evolving philosophies. The important goal of what is termed *inculturation* limps.¹⁴ A centralising Roman Curia, complicated by liturgical 'culture wars', has limited the role of conferences of bishops to make needed local adaptations.

Ecumenical discussions preceded the development of the 1969 OLM. While mainstream Protestant Churches praised OLM as a model for telling a fuller story of Jesus Christ, inspiring better preaching and hymn writing, they noted limitations. North American Churches in 1992 published a Revised Common Lectionary (RCL).¹⁵ Some English-speaking and other-language-speaking Protestant Churches published editions of the RCL, adding suggested local, complementary readings.

The RCL helped correct the downplaying of the role of women in salvation history and the lack of reference to feminine images of God. It also initiated a process to link Scripture and ecological awareness. In 1967 Lynn White Jr published 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', which blamed Christian thought for provoking ecological abuse. That claim has been refuted by ecumenical and interfaith scholarly dialogue such as that hosted by the *Laudato Si'* Institute, Oxford, and the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.¹⁶

Protestant scripture scholars continued to lament the lack of ecological sensitivity in the Lectionary so that the liturgical challenge to help face a global environmental crisis remains. In 1990 the World Council of Churches meeting

12. Francis, *Laudato Si'*, On Care for Our Common Home (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2015).

13. The dicastery's home page is <https://www.humandevlopment.va/en.html>.

14. International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation* (1988), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html; Dennis M. Doyle, 'The Concept of Inculturation in Roman Catholicism: A Theological Consideration' (2012), *Religious Studies Faculty Publications* 102, University of Dayton, https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1099&context=rel_fac_pub.

15. Consultation on Common Texts, 'The Revised Common Lectionary [1992]' excerpts, http://www.commontexts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/RCL_Introduction_Web.pdf.

16. Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2008), chap. 7; *Laudato Si'* Research Institute, '*Laudato Si'* Integral Ecology Collection', <https://lsri.campion.ox.ac.uk/laudato-si-integral-ecology-collection>; Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, <https://fore.yale.edu/>.

asked that the voice of the Spirit speaking through nature be better recognised, and it celebrated this in its final liturgy.¹⁷ Norman Habel and the ecumenical Earth Bible Project founded in Adelaide was one group that responded to this challenge.¹⁸

Objections to RCL variants have ranged from the scholarly to the simplistic, and have sometimes been mocking in tone: it was too gospel-centred or too complex; it must address wider social issues.¹⁹ Aware of the need to avoid the two extremes of rigid uniformity and of a ‘free for all’ in suggesting texts for preaching, one commentator gave a backhanded compliment, writing, ‘The RCL is the worst form of systematically reading the Bible as church, except for all the others’.²⁰

(3) Inclusion of a September Season of Creation in the Liturgical Year

Ecological insights were at the heart of Adelaide-based Norman Habel’s proposal to start an officially recognised liturgical *Season of Creation*. His schema covers the four Sundays of September, concluding with St Francis of Assisi Day, held on or near the feast of St Francis, 4 October.²¹ Many Protestant and Catholic Churches worldwide took up and developed the schema.

Writers such as Ernst M. Conradie argue that a proper understanding of creation can be found in the theology of the entire Lectionary as the ‘economy’ of God.²² In 2016, Catholic Kevin Urwin made a similar argument.²³ Such appeals to tradition seem to ignore historical developments in creating liturgical seasons. That Advent helps deepen the meaning of Christmas, and Lent of Easter, indicates that parts of the economy of salvation need extra liturgical emphasis. That Orthodox Christians have designated 1 September as the beginning of the liturgical year witnesses to the fact that believers can construct different liturgical ways of remembering the work of God throughout a year.

17. Martin Robra, ‘It Was Prophetic for the WCC to Focus on Climate Change Already in 1990’, *WCC News*, 9 March 2020, <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/it-was-prophetic-for-the-wcc-to-focus-on-climate-change-already-in-1990>.

18. Norman Habel, ‘The Earth Bible Project’, *SBL Forum*, July 2004, <https://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=291>.

19. Sarah H. Wilson, ‘The Ten Top Reasons the Lectionary Sucks and Five Half-Assed Solutions’, *Mockingbird*, 3 December 2019, <https://mbird.com/2019/04/the-top-ten-reasons-the-lectionary-sucks-and-five-half-assed-solutions>.

20. Bosco Peters, ‘Criticise Revised Common Lectionary?’, *Liturgy: Spirituality—Worship—Community*, 3 September 2015, <https://liturgy.co.nz/criticise-revised-common-lectionary>.

21. Season of Creation, *The Season of Creation*, <https://seasonofcreation.com/about/the-season-of-creation-story/>. See also Norman C. Habel, David Rhoads and Paul Santmire, eds, *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011).

22. Ernst M. Conradie, ‘Unravelling Some of the Theological Problems underlying Discourse on Nature’, *HTS Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020), abstract, <https://philpapers.org/rec/CONUSO>.

23. Bill Patenaude, ‘A “Season of Creation” and the Fourth Eucharistic Prayer’, *Catholic Ecology*, 24 August 2016, cites Kevin Irwin, <https://catholicceology.net/blog/season-creation-and-fourth-eucharistic-prayer>.

However, the Habel model caused some misgivings: searching to find the voice of nature in the Scriptures may be pushing the texts too far in a quest for direct teaching; its focus on particular natural phenomena each Sunday could lead to an emphasis on themes of ecological ethics and responsibility. Explorations continue.²⁴ In 2017 I published *Eucharist and 'Laudato Si'* as a way of combining the designated OLM Sunday readings over its three-year cycle with celebrating a Season of Creation during September.²⁵ It takes the loving outreach of God and fickle human responses as expressed in the covenants as a way to explore multiple and evolving *God-earth-humanity* relationships (LS 66). It interprets the OLM readings using a LS lens. As a resource for the liturgical years A, B and C it was designated as *Catholic* because it used the existing Lectionary. But many texts do not easily lend themselves to reflect the Pope's call for *integral ecology*, so exposing limitations. A more radical approach would take seriously the Pope's 2013 mission exhortation for pastors to address real-life issues in the eucharistic assembly.²⁶ Pope Francis advanced Catholic thinking when, with Patriarch Bartholomew, he declared 1 September to be a day of prayer on care for creation.

Globally, Catholics are experimenting with ways to promote *Season of Creation* celebrations.²⁷ In 2020, Vatican dicasteries, church agencies and conferences of bishops together organised what they termed an *operational process* for the implementation of *Laudato Si'*.²⁸ The CDW was not involved and missed an opportunity to liturgically help meet the evolving pastoral needs of believers. Just how to bring *integral ecology* into liturgy may be contested, but the need to celebrate a new liturgical Creation Season in September is a growing consensus. Trying to bend the existing September Sunday readings to serve a Season of Creation undermines both. It disrupts the rhythm of OLM and hobbles the celebration of this new season.

Cooperation in creating a Lectionary for a Season of Creation could begin the process of rewriting the entire Lectionary worthy of the twenty-first century. As a starting point in selecting new readings, Columban Mission has published a three-year series called *7 Days of Creation: A Scriptural Reflection*.²⁹

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24. Charles Rue, 'A Proposal for a Season of Creation in the Liturgical Year', *Australasian Catholic Record* 93, no. 2 (April 2016): 159–72. The article suggests a liturgical way to help bring *Laudato Si'* to life in church communities.
25. Charles Rue, *Eucharist and 'Laudato Si'* (Niddrie, VIC: Columban Mission, n.d.). See also <http://www.columban.org.au/resources/a-catholic-season-of-creation-sundays-of-september>.
26. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*: 'The preacher also needs to keep his ear to the people and to discover what it is that the faithful need to hear' (n. 154).
27. Brian Roewe, 'What Is the Season of Creation?', *Earthbeat: Stories of Climate Crisis, Faith and Action*, 28 August 2020, <https://www.nronline.org/news/earthbeat/what-season-creation>. See also *Laudato Si'*, <https://www.laudatosi.org/ecumenical/season-of-creation/>. Offices of Caritas New Zealand, Southern Africa, Asia and Oceania promoted the Season of Creation.
28. Cf. <https://www.laudatosi.org/laudato-si/good-practise/holy-see-vatican-city/>.
29. Charles Rue, *7 Days of Creation Reflection-Retreat: Scripture and Prayers* (Essendon, VIC: Columban Mission, 2020). See also <https://www.columban.org.au/media-and-publications/liturgical-resources/>.

Debate sometimes becomes a theological one: God as creator, the first article in the Creed.³⁰ Since tradition holds that nature is the first book of God's revelation, some liturgists have proposed reviving the practice of Ember Days as a way to recognise creation, but this has gained little traction. Debate about the place of suffering in Christian theology provokes deeper reflection.

(4) A Theology of God Suffering With

Writers such as Margaret Daly-Denton warn that some environmentalists and Christian theologians can at times seem overly optimistic.³¹ Scripture does not shy away from suffering. The phrase *integral ecology* in *Laudato Si'* reminds us of the pain of people pushed to the fringes by environmental neglect and laments the suffering of natural species pushed to extinction. Looking at creation through 'rose-coloured' glasses can lead to both distorted eco-theology and distorted liturgical practice. A desire to see only the beauty of earth can overlook the suffering of the totality of species struggling to survive. Australian Geographer and Aboriginal man Michael-Shawn Fletcher warns well-meaning environmentalists against idealising wilderness as a space without struggle or as a place without people.³²

The Psalms and Prophets constantly link the suffering of earth itself with the birth of Israel. The Gospels link the death of Jesus to apocalyptic calamity as the earth groans in pain.³³ The Gospel of John and the Apocalypse probe 'the suffering of the Lamb'.³⁴ One scholar suggests four 'takeaway themes' from Bible stories that help believers address suffering: prohibition marks limits; fragility and failings; feeling *with*; and parables as dialogue about reality.³⁵

The last book of Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation*, reviews major authors who help grow a Christian understanding of suffering within the God-earth-

30. Regina A. Boisclair, 'Lectionary Selections and Ecological Concern: A Contribution to Dialogue', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 77–84; excerpt at <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/588077/summary>.

31. Margaret Daly-Denton, 'Laudato Si' and the Reinterpretation of Scriptures in Light of the Ecological Crisis', in *Laudato Si' and the Environment: Pope Francis' Green Encyclical*, ed. Robert McKim (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2019), chap. 8; abstract at <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429492068-8/laudato-si-reinterpretation-scriptures-light-ecological-crisis-margaret-daly-denton>.

32. Cf. Michael-Shawn Fletcher, Rebecca Hamilton, Wolfram Dressler and Lisa Palmer, 'Indigenous Knowledge and the Myth of "Wilderness"', *Find an Expert*, 11 October 2021, University of Melbourne, <https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/news/32167-indigenous-knowledge-and-the-myth-of-%E2%80%98wilderness%E2%80%99>.

33. *Centre for Action and Contemplation*, 'One Great Act of Giving Birth', 2 November 2016, <https://cac.org/one-great-act-giving-birth-2016-11-02/>.

34. Francis J. Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020).

35. Giovanni Cucci, 'The Bible as Cultural Gift: Four Words for Today', *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 3 May 2021; sample at https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/the-bible-as-a-cultural-gift-four-words-for-today/?fbclid=IwAR1PAzKxr_w85znW_aAuEYAu0XBxilYwLcGnQ8XqdlIOClenoE35yb0cdl.

humanity link (LS 66).³⁶ The incarnation of Jesus ties humanity to God-given redemption more deeply than does creation alone. It embraces human agency. This approach goes beyond a stand-alone *New Creation Story* to include salvation in Christ. It sees the suffering in predation and extinction as integral to the evolutionary process. This view goes beyond simply blaming human sin as the cause of suffering to see it as part of the deep tissue of planetary life. With the cross of Jesus, God identifies with suffering and gives it meaning.

Edwards is not alone in exploring the role of suffering in God's creation plan. He cites several authors. Niel Gregersen sees creation as a transforming process integral to God's sharing God's own life. Elizabeth Johnson weds incarnation to the *loving-kindness* covenants of God where God self-empties. Celia Deane-Drummond focuses on where science and faith intersect as a theological drama, with evolving creation as the first act. Christopher Southgate writes that God chooses to be constrained, choosing to co-suffer in Christ's transforming death until the end of eschatological time.

Edwards writes that the phrase 'God suffers with' is key. This guards the belief that God is transcendent. If not, God would not be able to enter into a suffering world. Edwards concludes that four truths are needed for God to *suffer with*: (1) creation has to have its proper autonomy; (2) God feels with the process; (3) resurrection is a promise that sets creation free; and (4) humans must choose to participate in God's transforming acts as co-redeemers.

(5) The Use of Ecological and Inclusive Language

Learning *ecological language* is a major way to respect the insights of ecological scientists, opening up a dialogue that is fruitful to all sides (LS 62). To help protect the health of the planet, its processes and all it upholds, the findings and language of ecologists need respect. Australia has been blessed for a century by the work of Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) scientists cooperating with universities and business to advise political decision-makers as humanity searches for deeper knowledge to live by.³⁷ Listening to Indigenous peoples and the way they tell stories can be part of liturgy, just as the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) has listened in its field.³⁸ The language of story is central to the River above Asia Oceania Ecclesial Network (RAOEN), which was set up in 2020 by the Federation of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of Oceania and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences.³⁹

36. Denis Edwards, *Deep Incarnation: God's Redemptive Suffering with Creation*. Duffy Lectures in Global Christianity (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019).

37. See, e.g., CSIRO, *Natural Environments*, <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/natural-environment>. *Bloomberg Green*, a daily newsletter, links environmental and financial issues. See <https://www.bloomberg.com/green>.

38. BOM, *Indigenous Weather Knowledge*, <http://www.bom.gov.au/iwkw/>.

39. RAOEN, <https://www.raoen.org/>; Barbara Fraser, 'New Asia-Oceania Church Network Pursues Sustainable Common Home in Vast Biome', *National Catholic Reporter*, 3 February 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/new-asia-oceania-church-network-pursues-sustainable-common-home-vast-biome>.

One modern challenge is the weight of ‘royal language’ in Scripture and liturgical prayer. While understandable, given the cultural roots of both, the time has come to recognise its limitations in expressing the intimate relationship between God, earth and humanity (LS 66). Scripture itself offers a trinity of alternatives: Creator as spouse calling us as co-creators; the Saviour called his followers friends while giving himself as the Lamb slain; the Spirit enlivens truth and builds community. Missiologists are exploring ‘kinship’ as a modern way to escape the literalism of ‘kingdom’ terminology and unlock a deeper understanding of God.⁴⁰

Learning the language of social sciences, especially *relationship*, is intimately tied to learning ecological language. The language of relationship abounds in Scripture: *love and infatuation, birth and death, embrace and ecstasy, family and children, friendship and fidelity*. In *Laudato Si’* Pope Francis has linked multiple social spheres that break down a silo mentality to speak of relationships and connections. Using the Cardijn method of analysis (see, judge, act), he points to (sees) and links both environmental and social problems, uses the light of the Gospel to identify causes (largely social), and offers examples of active responses. This process leads to an *encounter with Christ* within a real and living community of believers, where relating to God in prayer is central (LS 217).

An important note: a major difficulty for many women is the continued use of non-inclusive language, in the secular world and the church.⁴¹ The Catholic bishops of New Zealand began to address English translations of the Roman liturgy in 1997.⁴² A patriarchal mentality persists in many cultures but church liturgical practice could witness to a more sensitive approach if it made *inclusive language* obligatory in translations and liturgical prayers.

(6) A Method for Selecting Scripture for a Revised Lectionary

Vatican II set criteria in selecting readings for a new Lectionary. It kept the traditional liturgical seasons but expanded and rearranged texts and feast days. Pastoral relevance was a guiding principle. While the reform was not perfect, it cast the light of faith on the contemporary world in a new way (GS 10). It is a function of religion to critique society and offer commentary.⁴³

Which approach is chosen to explore the totality of creation in Scripture is important to avoid distortions. A purely human focus can forget billions of years

40. See Anthony Gittins, ‘Beyond International and Multicultural: Intercultural Community Living’, *Spiritan Horizons* 12, no. 12 (Fall 2017), <https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=spiritan-horizons>.

41. ‘Inclusive Language’, in *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inclusive_language.

42. New Zealand Catholic Bishops’ Conference, *Gender Inclusive Language*, 30 November 1997, <https://www.catholic.org.nz/about-us/bishops-statements/gender-inclusive-language/>.

43. ‘The Functionalist Perspective on Religion’, in *Boundless Sociology*, Course Hero, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/the-functionalist-perspective-on-religion/>.

of chaos and suffering as the universe unfolded, falling back into human-focused idealism. No one isolated scriptural text can be defining of God's loving creative outreach—even texts from Genesis, the Psalms or Job. Pope Francis reminds us not to forget care and compassion to *hear the cry* of both the human poor and all creatures as kin. One commentator invites us to revise our mindset when praying the Our Father.⁴⁴

Working from the five covenants is one way to capture both the creative outreach of God in self-giving and human responses. God is ever faithful in spite of the foibles of the human heart. The call of Pope Francis for *integral ecology* demands a love-response more than performance of moral duty (LS 77).

Granted that the covenants give the scriptural background to the human journey, lectionary reform needs a method to tease out principles of pastoral relevance in facing twenty-first-century issues. A systematic reflection on church social teaching (CST), and its scriptural underpinnings, is one way to help organise a revised Lectionary.⁴⁵ The most recent official update of CST was by the *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development* (DPIHD) when, in 2020, it launched a global church 'action platform' to implement *Laudato Si'*.⁴⁶ Prayer suggestions in the program betray an absence of liturgical expertise in its preparation. Some conferences of bishops, such as those in Asia and Oceania (who are working together), are creating local responses.⁴⁷

CST continues to evolve—same-sex friendships and chosen childless marriages ... An example of expanding church social concerns comes from the German bishops' comments on blessing same-sex relationships.⁴⁸ Sean McDonagh warns people of faith about the implications of evolving artificial intelligence: 'we cannot stumble into the future with these powerful technologies in an ethics-free environment'.⁴⁹ Also evolving are the nature and

44. Collin Cornell, 'How to Pray the Lord's Prayer with All Creatures', *National Catholic Reporter*, 19 April 2022, https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/how-pray-lords-prayer-all-creatures?utm_source=NCR+List&utm_campaign=ad88f58215-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_04_21_08_33&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6981ecb02e-ad88f58215-230653690.

45. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html.

46. See <https://www.laudatosi.org/laudato-si/action-platform/>.

47. Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, *The RAOEN Launch: Towards a Church Dialogue and Collaboration for Forests, Oceans, and Peoples of Asia and Oceania*, <https://www.humandevlopment.va/en/news/2021/the-raoen-launch-for-forests-oceans-and-peoples.html>.

48. James Roberts and Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, 'German Bishops "Not Happy" with Same-Sex Blessing Rules', *The Tablet*, 16 March 2021, https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/13952/german-bishops-not-happy-with-same-sex-blessing-rule?fbclid=IwAR33Yr2GjX_Lv20TPwF_Y2faZhXS06RE3nxFl-hAOux-y1W-6Jtlv8S9H9A.

49. Seán McDonagh, *Robots, Ethics and the Future of Jobs* (Dublin: Messenger, 2021). The 2021 Reith Lectures by Stuart Russell, on BBC Radio 4, address artificial intelligence: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/1N0w5NcK27Tt041LPVLZ51k/reith-lectures-2021-living-with-artificial-intelligence>.

style of faith communities in the twenty-first century. Trusting less in institutions, many believers grow new forms of ecclesial belonging and worship.⁵⁰ Catholics grow in the expectation of being able to both speak and be heard with *synod-style cooperation*. The keynote speaker at the 2022 Australian Academy of Liturgy Conference concluded her presentation saying, ‘Be prepared to be surprised’.⁵¹

To retain the traditional liturgical remembrance of God’s loving action and the way it nourished the human journey, a revised Lectionary based on criteria gleaned from the covenants and evolving Catholic social teaching would help. The demands of an evolving human odyssey remind us that the church is called to revise the Lectionary periodically to aid its reflection in faith and prayer.

(7) A Better Mechanism for Updating the Practices of Worship

Catholics look to the CDW to orchestrate liturgical reform as well as maintain the discipline of the sacraments. That is its story.⁵² The Vatican II decree, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, set the goal of consultation across Rites and ecumenically, and the work begun by teams to reform the liturgy under Annibale Bugnini set an example of mustering needed global scholarship. That example lives on within the current Australian Church.⁵³ Officially organising a twenty-first-century revision of the Lectionary would pastorally benefit both the evolving internal spiritual health of the church community and its mission in the world.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* lays out the overall rules for any adaption of the Roman liturgy.⁵⁴ The instruction itself sets an agenda for the CDW as a guardian of a 400-year-old tradition developed since the Council of Trent (GIRM 15). It names key points in liturgical development: the central place of the Eucharist (27), ordering biblical readings to proclaim salvation history (57), and keeping the Gospel as the high point of celebration (60). The instruction lays out ways of CDW practice: local dioceses or conferences of bishops can propose adaptations (386), but any changes must be approved by the Holy See (390). The instruction sees cultural needs as a prime reason for any

50. Elle Hardy, Mark Jennings and Jacqueline Grey, ‘What Do Pentecostals Believe?’, interview by James Carleton, *God Forbid*, 6 February 2022, ABC, Radio National, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/godforbid/what-do-pentecostals-believe/13739968>.

51. Cf. Amelia Koh-Butler, ‘2022 Conference Keynote: Contextual Liturgy’, *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 18, no. 1 (2022): 3–12.

52. The dicastery’s home (index) page is https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/index.htm.

53. Debra Vermeer, ‘Choosing the Word: How and Why Mass Readings Are Chosen’, *Catholic Outlook*, Diocese of Parramatta, 28 April 2020, <https://catholicoutlook.org/choosing-the-word-how-and-why-mass-readings-are-chosen/>.

54. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2003), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20030317_ordinamento-messale_en.html.

adaptation (395) so that they confer a ‘genuine and certain benefit’ (398). However, the integrity and unity of the Roman Rite must be preserved (399).

Currently, many believers see a lack of ongoing liturgical reform as a betrayal of the spirit of Vatican II, even of the instruction itself, and, worse, as a source of alienation.⁵⁵ Proposals for change in the Roman Rite liturgy as it currently is have met with limited success. For example, liturgical experiments in India post-Vatican II have been limited largely to externals.⁵⁶ The hunger for liturgical *inculturation* in African Churches has led to an experimental Zaire rite, a development encouraged by Pope Francis.⁵⁷ Since 2017, Thomas Reese SJ has written on the need to update the liturgy, and suggests five steps forward: ‘the church needs a better process for developing and rolling out changes in the liturgy’.⁵⁸ More recently, he offered specific suggestions.⁵⁹ He focused on structural reform of the CDW itself, but did not propose a rewrite of the Lectionary. However, anything less might be regarded as tinkering at the edges. Commenting on the ‘crumbs’ offered to women in allowing them to be lectors and acolytes, Sr Patty Fawkner SGS wrote, ‘the church breathes with but one lung, speaks with one lip’.⁶⁰

In 2013 the Pope asked for pastoral relevance in the liturgy to help believers fulfil their mission to the world.⁶¹ Bishops globally and the CDW have the power to orchestrate a twenty-first-century reform of the liturgical year and its Lectionary, if they have the will.

55. Catholics for Renewal, <https://www.catholicsforrenewal.org/>.

56. Mathew N. Schmalz, ‘The Roman Rite in Tribal North India’, *Catholics and Culture*, 28 October 2020, <https://www.catholicsandcultures.org/roman-rite-tribal-north-india>. See also Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, <https://www.johnwijngaards.com/indian-liturgy/>.

57. Crux Staff, ‘Zaire Rite Was ‘Hugely Important’ Step in True Liturgical Inculturation’, *Academic Says*, *Crux*, 12 January 2021, <https://cruxnow.com/interviews/2021/01/zaire-rite-was-hugely-important-step-in-true-liturgical-inculturation-academic-says>.

58. Thomas Reese, ‘Reforming Catholic Liturgy Should Be Like Updating Software’, *National Catholic Reporter*, 12 September 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/reforming-catholic-liturgy-should-be-updating-software>. Reese’s article spells out his suggested five steps forward.

59. Thomas Reese, ‘Ideas for the Future of Catholic Liturgical Reform’, *National Catholic Reporter*, 15 April 2021, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/signs-times/ideas-future-catholic-liturgical-reform>.

60. Patty Fawkner, ‘While We Can “Celebrate Small Victories”, Our Church Deserves So Much More’, *Catholic Outlook*, Diocese of Parramatta, 1 April 2021, https://catholicoutlook.org/while-we-can-celebrate-small-victories-our-church-deserves-so-much-more/#disqus_thread.

61. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, nn. 135–59. ‘The Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love’ (Francis, LS 236).