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Christian Year

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Christian Year

Robin Knowles Wallace

The Christian year is as a framework that situates human existence within the overarching narrative of God's creation and salvation. The Christian, or liturgical, year sets human lives within God's story of creation and salvation, sanctifying moments, days, years, and lives. Calendar and hourly time become God's time as the Christian year encompasses and intermingles past, present, and future.

Following the key themes of this encyclopaedia, this entry will provide an overview of the scriptural roots of the Christian year, along with its historical development in communities within a range of traditions, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant. Note that the present diversity of theologies and practices of Christian communities throughout the world makes it impossible for one essay, even focused on only one practice, to comprehensively present all understandings.

The diversity of humanity is exhibited in the Christian year through a variety of debates arising from the value that a church or tradition might place on observing various holy days; how the Christian calendar is related to other calendars; whether the gospel and the Christian year itself is considered countercultural, assimilated to colonizers' calendars, or accommodated to Indigenous calendars; and how much society and environment should affect an understanding of the Christian year. The theological implications of this practice of 'hallowing our days' through observing the seasons of the year centred around Jesus (Paschal mystery/Easter and incarnation/Christmas) are a constant reminder of God's presence. The practice of the Christian year and some interactions with science and the natural world will be considered. Ultimately, the Christian year is an ever-deepening cycle which, alongside or in contrast to the seasons of nature, can grow faith in individuals and communities now and into the future.

Keywords: The Christian church, Christian year, Liturgical year, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Pentecost, Ascension, Lent, Advent, Time, Worship, Prayer

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1 Introduction

It needs to be said at the very outset that the liturgical year is more than a calendar: it is a carousel of sayings and stories, songs and prayers, processions and silences, images and visions, symbols and rituals, feasts and fasts in which the mysterious ways of God are not merely presented but experienced, not merely perused but lived through. (Searle 2000: 59)

Chronos, 'before' and 'after' time as described by Aristotle, and *kairos*, the right thing at the right time, both take on a sacramentality through observance of the Christian year (Frankovich 2000; for more, see Delahaye 2016). This idea is reinforced by the multi-layered concepts of *anamnesis* where, from one perspective, remembrance enters the present and claims reality (for example, in Communion/Eucharist in the phrase '[d]o this in remembrance', Luke 22:18–20), and *prolepsis*, the realization that God's eschatological future has entered this present time and makes claim on humanity (for example, in '[t]he kingdom of God is among you', Luke 17:21; Stookey 1996). 'Memory speaks to hope and hope speaks to memory', as living through the Christian year gives Christians and their communities a framework of distinctiveness, week by week, season by season, and 'allows the liturgical community to pass again and again through cycles of remembrance and hope' (O'Donnell 2015: xi, 190).

2 Scripture

Genesis begins with the story of creation, set within a framework of time: evening, morning, and a rhythm of days of work and rest. The time of Sabbath is important for the Jewish people, as are certain yearly remembrances such as Passover. Jesus followed the rhythm of time set in the Hebrew scriptures, keeping Passover, while challenging what it meant to keep Sabbath.

2.1 Roots in Hebrew scriptures

Throughout the Hebrew scriptures there is a sense that God blesses time, through the acts of creation, in sanctifying yearly festivals, and in noting times for prayer. General examples of this understanding include the Genesis creation stories and Eccl 3:1 ('For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven'). Genesis begins with an account of the days of creation, including the seventh day which God hallowed for rest (Gen 2:1–3). In Genesis, 'day' begins at sundown ('evening and morning were the first day', Gen 1:5) and Sabbath is designated as sundown Friday evening to sundown Saturday. When the Law is codified into the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15), Sabbath-keeping is prioritized in the third commandment.

The Psalms speak of morning and evening prayer (e.g. Ps 88:13 and Ps 141:2), as do some of the prophetic books (e.g. Ezra 9:5; Dan 9:21). Deuteronomy 8:10 mentions prayer after a meal, and Jesus followed the Hebrew pattern of prayers around meals (Matt 26:26; Mark 8:7; 14:12; Luke 22:19). Another practice related to prayer and seasons of life described in the Hebrew scriptures is repentance in dust, ashes, and sometimes sackcloth (e.g. Isa 58:5; Job 42:6; Lam 2:10).

As God interacted with the Hebrew people, both seasonal and yearly times of remembrance, thanksgiving, atonement, and celebration began to be practised. Celebrations often followed seasons of planting and harvest; yearly festivals acknowledged significant historic events and provided for cleansing of the community.

One signature event of current Jewish practice is the Passover, which gained many of its customs after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. The roots of Passover are described in Exodus 12:1–28, as the Israelites left enslavement in Egypt and headed towards freedom and the land God promised them. Given the Synoptic Gospels' setting of the Last Supper as a Passover meal (Matt 26:17–19; Mark 14:12–16; Luke 22:7–13) and the John 13:1 setting of that meal before Passover, early Christianity followed Jesus in transforming that 'meal' into a more frequent – sometimes weekly, sometimes daily – ritual as the community gathered around Jesus and gave thanks to God (see O'Loughlin 2015).

Following Passover, ancient Israel celebrated seven weeks of grain harvests (Exod 34:22), which culminated in the Festival of Weeks also known as Pentecost (for fifty days). Later, the Hebrew people celebrated this time for remembering God's gift of the law, the Ten Commandments, given at Mount Sinai. The gathering of Jews in Jerusalem from many countries for Pentecost in the year of Jesus' resurrection was transformed by the Holy Spirit's presence (Acts 2:1–11). Other than the reason for the gathering of persons on the day of the Jewish celebration of Pentecost, there are no links between this Jewish celebration and the Christian Pentecost.

2.2 Rooted in the New Testament and growing with different practices

While it is tempting to search in scripture for antecedents for all Christian holy days and rhythms, contemporary liturgical scholars are clear that the liturgical year developed gradually and erratically, often in local ways rather than global. It takes almost eight hundred years for the Christian year to acquire the basic shape the church still keeps. The shape of the week, sabbath-keeping, and holy days have general roots in Hebrew scriptural practice. The observances that led to the Christian year also expressed Christians' need to develop their identity in contrast to the surrounding practices of other religions.

The earliest Christians kept the same seven-day pattern of (Saturday) Sabbath practice as the Jewish people around them, but also celebrated the day of resurrection (Sunday), the first day of the week (Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1). While they sometimes kept both ‘sabbaths’, by the end of the first century Sunday became the preferred day for worship and ‘breaking bread on the first day of the week’ (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; and non-canonical sources). The ‘eighth day’, mentioned in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, described the Christian Sabbath as a day beyond regular time, pointing to that day when Christ would come again and God would reign (Adam 1990: 40–41). This image found shape in some early baptismal fonts with eight sides, where one was baptized into Christ and into new creation (Acts 2:38; Rom 6:4; Col 2:12). With the early church’s weekly focus on the resurrection, Sunday provided a rehearsal both for life lived out in the week to come and also practice for everlasting life ultimately lived ‘around the throne of God’. In the twenty-first century, it is notable that Seventh-Day Adventists still keep Saturday as their Sabbath. And, in keeping with the Genesis idea that night comes first in the accounting of ‘days’ (and in acquiescence to modern lifestyles), it is not uncommon for Christian worship services to be held not only on Sunday mornings in honour of resurrection but also on Saturday evenings.

The early church practised times of daily prayer both communally and individually. One simple pattern was praying the Lord’s Prayer (also known as the ‘Our Father’) at morning, noon, and evening. Over time that practice was expanded by those who were ascetics or part of religious communities (nuns, monks, ammas, abbas) to encompass multiple fixed times of daily prayer. The historic seven canonical hours, also known as the Liturgy of the Hours, are called matins and lauds (counted as one hour), prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, and compline.

One practice of early Christianity observed down through the ages derives its roots from the biblical understanding of sunset as marking the beginning of the new day: evening services or night ‘vigils’ have been important holy times, particularly before Easter and Christmas. Vigils are often contemplative times of prayer and waiting, though they may end with celebration and noise, particularly at Easter.

2.3 Scriptural lectionaries old and new

A Christian lectionary is a compilation of scripture readings for each Sunday and holy day of the Christian year, generally one reading each from the Hebrew scriptures, Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels; lectionaries may also include daily readings. There is often a typological relationship between at least two of the readings. Certain scriptures have become almost traditional for Easter, Christmas, other holy days, and for the preparatory seasons, while scriptures designated for Ordinary Time may include continuous reading through particular books of the Bible. Lectionaries have existed throughout the centuries, often recorded in worship books, and they reflect the diversity of the ecumenical

community. Lectionaries are closely intertwined with the seasons and festivals of the church, as may be seen in the trilogy (subtitled *Advent/Christmas/Epiphany*; *Lent/The Sacred Paschal Triduum/Easter time*; and *Sunday two to thirty-four in Ordinary Time*) by Adrien Nocent, *The Liturgical Year* (2013; 2014).

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council introduced the Common Lectionary, a three-year cycle of readings for worship, focusing on one of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) in each year and interspersing the Gospel of John through all three years to replace their former one-year, New-Testament-focused cycle. Protestants quickly followed suit, with some using the Roman Catholic lectionary and others adapting it, particularly during Ordinary Time. Due to criticisms about which sections of scripture were not included, an ecumenical revision was created in the 1990s (Revised Common Lectionary, RCL) and additional optional readings have been included in more recent times (e.g. <https://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu>). After several decades of use of the RCL, two alternative lectionaries, the Narrative Lectionary and a Women's Lectionary, are currently also being used in some English-speaking countries.

Begun by two Luther Seminary professors in 2010, with input from congregations across the United States and Canada, the Narrative Lectionary is a four-year cycle of scripture readings for September through May, following the narrative sequence of scripture. September through mid-December centres on the Hebrew scriptures; Christmas to Easter focuses on one of the four gospels; Easter to Pentecost readings are drawn from Acts and the Epistles. The influence of the Christian year, according to the website, can be seen in the foundational use of Hebrew scriptures leading up to Advent, focusing on Jesus between Christmas and Easter, and then on the early church (www.workingpreacher.org).

Various attempts to centralize the presence and implied presence of women in scripture, along with translations of biblical texts which give a diversity of interpretations for God's name, have occurred over several decades. One recent attempt is that of Wilda Gafney, a womanist biblical scholar and Episcopal priest. She has developed a one-year lectionary, *A Women's Lectionary for the Whole Church* (2021), with volumes published and forthcoming of readings that can be added to the RCL, all of them consistent with the Christian year.

3 Communities and believers

Information on the gradual development of the liturgical year comes from various documents from the early church. For example, the eighth chapter of the first-century *Didache* speaks of praying the Lord's prayer three times a day and fasting on the fourth day and Friday (Milavec 2003; O'Loughlin 2010). Fourth-century baptismal homilies tell of preparation practices for baptism and Eucharist during Lent, and then explain the Easter Vigil (Yarnold 1971). Ninth-century sources for the Eastern church, hymnodists

Joseph and Theophane and the Palestinian Sinai Book of Hours, note a weekly schedule of observances: 'Monday and Tuesdays are considered penitential, Wednesdays and Fridays are dedicated to the Cross, Thursdays to the Mother of God, and Saturdays to the martyrs' (Velkovska 2000: 169); other options appear in other manuscripts.

Sunday by Sunday, observing the resurrection, the early Christians were formed in worshiping communities and, as these communities grew and became more established, they gradually began marking seasons and yearly events from the stories of Jesus Christ. Different locales gave emphasis to different holy days and seasons as meaning and theology developed in those particular communities.

For the most part, the weekly celebration of Sunday retained its resurrection emphasis and centrality. However, debates arose, particularly between the Eastern and Western churches, over dates for celebration and some of these differences continue to this day. It is important to note that the East/West division is not a totally clear one, and within Eastern/Orthodox Christianity there are dozens of different families of churches, supranational, national, and autonomous; in the same way the term 'Protestant' includes numerous families of churches and many independent families of churches as well. For example, the Orthodox liturgical year begins 1 September, and the Western liturgical year begins with the moveable first Sunday of Advent. Western churches have tended to focus on Easter/Pentecost and Christmas, while the Orthodox liturgy includes among its great feasts the Marian feasts developed during the fifth century (see Schmemmann 1974: 83–86):

- 8 September – Birth of the Mother of God (*Theotokos* or God-Bearer, Mary)
- 14 September – Exaltation of the Cross
- 21 November – Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple
- 25 December – Christmas
- 6 January – Epiphany
- 2 February – The Holy Meeting of the Lord (also known as The Presentation [of Jesus])
- 25 March – The Annunciation
- Sixth Sunday of Lent – Entry into Jerusalem
- Easter Sunday – The Resurrection
- Ascension Thursday – Ascension
- Second Sunday after the Ascension – Pentecost
- 6 August – Transfiguration
- 15 August – The Dormition of Mary (her 'falling asleep') or her Assumption (into heaven)

3.1 Seasons around Easter and Pentecost

For at least the first 150 years of the Christian movement, the yearly observance of Easter was considerably less important than its weekly observance. At the same time, two different practices grew up around the yearly observance – one focused on the resurrection of Jesus on the Sunday after the Jewish Passover, the other focused on

Jesus' death during Passover. Historically, the validity of the practice of early Christians using the Quartodeciman reckoning of the date of Easter has been debated. This practice remained linked to the yearly rhythm of Passover, on the fourteenth day of the Hebrew month Nisan, giving followers of that practice – primarily in Asia Minor – the name Quartodecimans, for the number fourteen. The fourteenth day of Nisan could occur on any day of the week. In contrast, there are reasons to believe that Romans were always celebrating Easter on a Sunday as early as 165, as claimed by Greek bishop and historian of Christianity Eusebius (c.260/265–339), and that Sunday practice may have happened in Alexandria and Jerusalem even earlier. Equally, there are reasons to believe that the yearly Sunday observance of Easter derived from the Quartodeciman celebration, which was older. One of the topics addressed by the Council of Nicaea in 325 was the date of Easter, which was then set on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the spring equinox (21 March). Part of the contention around the two manners of setting the date for Easter was that days for fasting were determined by the date of Easter, so some Christians were fasting while others were not. The practice of Quartodeciman reckoning disappeared some fifty years after the Council.

Currently, the debate about the date of Easter is a marker that divides the East and Orthodox churches from the West and its primarily Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. Some Orthodox churches still rely on the Julian calendar, while the rest of the world adopted the Gregorian calendar as advances in astronomy pointed out misalignments between the Julian calendar, the sun, and earth (see [section 4](#)). Eastern Orthodox churches also tend to assign their Easter date for a time following Passover, using the biblical understanding that the Last Supper was a Passover meal (the Synoptic Gospels) or that Jesus' crucifixion happened during the time that the lambs were killed and prepared for Passover (the Gospel of John). The Western dates for Easter no longer necessarily align with Passover, depending more on the Nicaean focus on the spring equinox.

In the years since 2000, the Western and Orthodox Easters have coincided several times – 2010, 2011, 2014, and 2017. This more frequent coincidence has sparked some discussion about the two 'sides' of this debate settling on a single way of computing the date for Easter. But, like many long-standing traditions, this difference appears not to be going away soon. (For a comprehensive ecumenical study on the variety of dates for Easter, including the 1997 Aleppo Statement and other proposals, see Groen 2011.)

In the Western church the three 'holy days', or Triduum, follow the final drama of Holy Week through to the celebration of the resurrection. The Triduum has been defined over the centuries as either beginning with Good Friday and going until sundown on Easter Sunday with the Emmaus Road story (Luke 24:13–35) or beginning on Thursday evening with the Last Supper and going through the Easter Vigil (up to sunrise on Easter

Sunday); in some times and places Easter followed the Triduum. However the Triduum was calculated, Patrick Regan notes in his study of the

1969 [Roman Catholic] Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the Calendar, Easter Sunday no longer follows the Triduum [...] but is part of it [...] This is the apex of the liturgical year. From it Lent and Easter Time [up to Pentecost] derive their identity. (Regan 2012: 302)

Holy or Maundy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper and foot-washing. Good Friday, the day of crucifixion, while solemn and sober, is also a day of gratitude for forgiveness and salvation.

Over the course of the fourth century, stational liturgies (those occurring in various geographical places of remembrance) developed during the week leading up to Easter (recounted in pilgrimage journals such as that by Egeria, c.380). Around Jerusalem, Golgotha was the site of Good Friday's crucifixion remembrance while the Church of the Holy Sepulchre commemorated both Christ's time in the tomb on Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday's resurrection. Over time, the 'stations of the cross' moved from being commemorated at specific places around Jerusalem to being set up where congregants could move from place to place around local worship spaces or church grounds. By the Middle Ages and up through today, twelve or fourteen 'stations' or events along the Way of the Cross, also called the Via Dolorosa, are held in Orthodox, Catholic, and other churches in both the East and West and are often marked by sculptures or other artworks which appear seasonally or year-round.

Palm Sunday (Matt 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–11; Luke 19:28–44; John 12:12–19), like the stational liturgies, began in the fourth century with a procession from Bethany to Jerusalem on the Sunday before Easter and then spread out to the rest of the Christian world over the next three centuries.

The idea of a season of fasting, prayer, and preparation for the celebration of Christ's resurrection at Easter took longer than the individual holy days of the Triduum to be firmly established. By the third century, fasting on the Friday and Saturday before Easter moved into what is known today as 'Holy Week'. By the fifth century (or perhaps earlier) there were practices of three weeks of fasting before Easter at Rome, Jerusalem, and other places around the Mediterranean, while in Greece and Alexandria a six-week fast was observed. Before baptism became clearly situated at Easter in the second half of the fourth century, these weeks of fasting may have been related to the present-day Lenten themes of penitence and meditation on Christ's death, or perhaps not (Bradshaw and Johnson 2011: 92; see Buchinger 2010: 44–45 for contrasting understandings). In some

regions there was a fast commemorating the forty-day fast of Jesus (Matt 4:1–2; Luke 4:1–2) following his baptism, celebrated around Epiphany; it is possible that this is the fast that is eventually folded in with a pre-Easter fast that becomes Lent (for more, see Buchinger 2010: 24–29).

As the season of Lent gradually developed in the Western church into forty days, with Sundays being ‘little Easters’, various configurations appeared in different regions. Sometimes the final two weeks of Lent are known as Passiontide, reflecting on the work of the cross. Sometimes the Fifth Sunday in Lent is designated as ‘Passion Sunday’. In other times and places the Sixth Sunday in Lent combines Palm and Passion Sunday, particularly important in modern times as weekday worship attendance dwindles – without Good Friday’s commemoration of the crucifixion, it becomes imperative to focus on the crucifixion during at least one of the Sundays before Easter. In the Eastern church, the season of fasting and preparation before Easter is called the Great Lent and varies from the Western season in length and beginning, in part because of the different dates for Easter mentioned above.

In whichever way Lent is currently configured, in the early days of the church it became a season culminating in baptisms at Easter and a season of reconciliation where persons who had been excommunicated (kept from Eucharist because of sin) could, through prayer, fasting, instruction, and almsgiving, be restored to ‘full communion’. In solidarity with converts, and in a general sense of penitence as Christians focused on the cross in this season, often the whole church participated in these practices (for background on Lenten practices, theology, and structure in the Western church, see Nocent 2014). The modern idea of ‘giving up’ something for Lent derives from ancient practices of fasting, but, as prayer and almsgiving are also important practices to recapture, at different times churches have added midweek prayer services and community practices of good works. And, as Nocent points out, fasting was not only from food, but from sin (2014: 39–40).

Lent originally began on a Sunday, sometimes called Quadragesima (fortieth day) Sunday, but in the West the beginning of Lent eventually moved to Ash Wednesday, a public day of penance. When the practice of excommunicating individuals fell into disuse during the 700s–900s, Ash Wednesday and Lent itself became penitential times for the whole congregation.

During the ‘Great Fifty Days’ from Easter to Pentecost there was no kneeling during prayers and no fasting, decreed at the Council of Nicaea and emphasized by Tertullian, as Christians continued to celebrate the resurrection every day (Frankovich 2000: 66–67). In contemporary lectionaries, readings from Acts about the emergence of the church replace the Hebrew scripture readings for these days (while a Psalm is still included). In

the Eastern Church, 'Pentecost is amongst the greatest of all feasts and in it the revelation of the Holy Trinity is complete' (Evdokimov 2004: 52).

In the fourteenth century the Western Roman Catholic church added Trinity Sunday, extending the Great Fifty Days with an octave (eight days) after Pentecost. 'Ember days' of prayer and fasting were already in place from at least the fifth century during this week following Pentecost. In some Eastern churches the Sunday after Pentecost is celebrated as All Saints' Day; in other Eastern churches All Saints' may be commemorated on the first Friday after Easter Sunday or on 11 September. Roman Catholics and many Protestant churches have celebrated All Saints' on 1 November since the ninth century.

Ascension, the fortieth day after Easter when the resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives (Acts 3:1–11), began to be celebrated after the end of the fourth century. Because the fortieth day falls on a Thursday, once Easter settled into being a Sunday observance churches celebrating only weekly worship began observing Ascension on the Seventh Sunday of Easter, a week before Pentecost.

3.2 Seasons around Epiphany and Christmas

The celebration known as the Epiphany or the Theophany (both relating to 'God's appearance') began in the East and was celebrated almost everywhere in the Christian world after the 300s. This holy day marked three separate events in the life of Jesus: the arrival of the Magi and thus the revelation of Christ beyond the local area of Bethlehem (Matt 2), Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist in the river Jordan (Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–23; attested to in John 1:29–33), and Jesus' first miracle of changing water into wine at a wedding in Cana (John 2:1–11). Originally one celebration, the West eventually split the single commemoration into three celebrations of 6 January (the twelfth day of Christmas) for the arrival of the Magi, the following Sunday for baptism, and the second Sunday after that for the first miracle.

The earliest reliable indications of the celebration of Christmas as the birthday of Jesus are found in 354 in a calendar of Furius Dionysius Philocalus, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (c.155), which states that martyrs' death dates are their birthday into heaven and thus to be celebrated, and in a list of Roman bishops 'arranged as if 25 December is the beginning of the year' (Roll 2000: 274–275). With the sparseness of evidence for this festival and its slowness to appear uniformly across the early and medieval church, scholars from the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries settled into two hypotheses. The first, the 'history of religions hypothesis', suggests that Christmas 'took over' the Roman sun-god festival at the winter solstice. The second, 'the computation hypothesis', 'computed' that Jesus' death happened on 25 March, which was also his conception, and his birthday would therefore have happened on 25 December (similarly, there has been reasoning in the Eastern church using the date of 6 April for Jesus'

death and thus 6 January for the celebration of his birth). Each hypothesis has its lack of confirmation and flaws, and to this day the two have vied for credibility; some liturgical scholars suggest that both theories could be simultaneously true (Roll 2000: 290).

While this debate about Christmas dates took place primarily in the Western church, the Eastern church which first celebrated the Epiphany/Theophany on 6 January has maintained that day for its celebration of the incarnation. Since the Western church also celebrates the Epiphany, albeit in a less festive way than it celebrates Christmas, this debate is not as contentious as the debate over the date of Easter each year.

The Encounter in the Temple on 2 February, also known as the Presentation, when the Holy Family were greeted and acknowledged by Anna and Simeon in the Temple at Jerusalem (Luke 2:22–38), is celebrated in Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican churches. For these churches the Presentation is important in helping to proclaim Jesus's manifestation, beginning at the Nativity, going through the Epiphany, to the Baptism of Christ and on to the Presentation (Adam 1990: 149–152).

Advent, a creation of the Western church, developed through the fifth and sixth centuries, looking to the past and to the promises made at the incarnation (the Messiah promised in Hebrew scriptures; 'peace on earth, good will among people', Luke 2:14) and looking to the future fulfilment of those promises (see Regan 2012: 1–8 for discussion of the terms *adventus*, *parousia*, and *epiphaneia* in the first centuries of the church and before). In the East, the time before the celebration of the Theophany is often considered a Marian season, with commemorations of the annunciations to Zechariah and Mary, the visit between Mary and Elizabeth, the birth of John the Baptist, and the annunciation to Joseph (Bradshaw and Johnson 2011: 159). As with Lent, regional differences in the length of Advent, its focus, symbols, and colours vary from the four Sundays before Christmas that the West primarily celebrates to other periods of time up to six weeks in the East. That ambiguity continues to the present day.

Particularly in the northern hemisphere and Western church, consumer cultures bump up against the church's focus on the Christian year. Over the last twenty years the proposal of The Advent Project (which grew out of the Episcopal Church in the United States and the North American Academy of Liturgy, a society of ecumenical liturgical scholars) for a seven-week Advent is now implemented by various congregations and denominations, to match the eschatological tone of the lectionary from mid-November onwards. The presentation of this option for congregations has not stopped the debate on whether Christmas carols may be sung during Advent in churches (as in stores) or what colours are appropriate for particular Sundays. This stretching of the season can allow for more time to contemplate the incarnation and for a relaxation of some of the hustle and bustle of the season (Petersen 2017).

3.3 Sanctoral cycle and other changes, particularly by Protestants

Remembering and honouring the saints and martyrs of the church was a frequent practice in the first centuries of the church. Yearly anniversaries of the death of persons martyred for their faith or honoured for their leadership or piety took place in local cemeteries and then in churches. In the fourth century, congregations around Jerusalem began commemorating important figures from the gospels and the epistles. Gradually other saints' feast dates became more regularized. The calendar of saints' days was a cycle overlaid on the liturgical year and together gave examples for following Christ as persons before had done.

In an appeal to scripture's lack of emphasis on 'saints' (other than the epistles addressing entire congregations as 'saints'), the sanctoral cycle was one of the practices eliminated by some Protestant churches, beginning in the sixteenth century. In some of those churches, saints' days were replaced by a single annual commemoration, All Saints' Day, rather than individual days for the many saints throughout history.

During the Reformation and beyond, some churches also moved away from celebrating Christmas (and thus Advent). Another example of simplification is that when John Wesley (1703–1791) prepared *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (1784) he arranged the Christian year readings into fifteen 'Sundays after Christmas', then two Sundays before Easter, rather than Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, and Lent. Only five holidays were given 'proper Psalms' in this collection by Wesley: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Whitsunday (Pentecost), though Trinity Sunday appears in the general readings section. Currently, many Pentecostal churches, some churches focused on contemporary worship, and some churches focused on only those practices which occur in scripture have basically dropped the Christian year as guidance for their worship planning and practices.

3.4 Traditions of fasting and prayer

As early as noted in the eighth chapter of the first-century *Didache*, Christian fast days were 'Wednesday and Friday, [and] are consciously distinguished from the Jewish fasts on Monday and Thursday' (Milavec 2003; O'Loughlin 2010). Friday observances of fasting were early linked to the remembrance of Jesus' crucifixion, but days of fasting were not uniform across geographic regions during the first centuries in Christianity, particularly (as noted above) during the differing seasons of Advent and Lent.

Evening prayers have continued, with Evensong still held at least weekly in cathedrals across Great Britain and elsewhere. In other traditions, midweek services or 'prayer meetings' are held on various weekday evenings, particularly during Lent and Advent.

Orthodox and Eastern rite Catholic Churches may offer the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified (Eucharist with distribution of elements consecrated at the Sunday liturgy) during Lent (Schmemmann 1974: 45–49).

3.5 What about Ordinary Time?

As the Christian year in the West was marked out by preparatory seasons before Easter and then before Christmas (Lent and Advent), followed by a celebratory time that ended with Pentecost or Epiphany, the ‘in between’ weeks became known as Ordinary Time. ‘Ordinary’ was derived from the ‘ordinal’ numbers used to calculate Sundays – for example, the first Sunday after the Epiphany or the eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

While Ordinary Time may not carry the excitement of festal seasons and days, each Sunday is a celebration of the resurrection and week by week the church shapes attendees’ discipleship. As the abstract of Mathias Augé’s essay on Ordinary Times notes, ‘the liturgical year [...] is the main way of proclaiming, implementing, and assimilating the mystery of Christ’, and that includes Ordinary time as well as other seasons (Augé 2018: 161).

Several of the Orthodox feasts, celebrated also by Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and others, are found in Ordinary Time.

- Transfiguration (Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36; 2 Pet 1:16–18) has traditionally been celebrated on 6 August, but most Protestants now celebrate it as the pivotal Sunday between Ordinary Time after the Epiphany and Lent.
- The moveable feast of Corpus Christi can occur as early as 21 May or as late as 24 June, as it is observed on the Thursday or Sunday after Trinity Sunday to commemorate the institution and gift of Eucharist. Some Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches keep this holy day, while others, including Protestants, tend to fold that commemoration into Holy/Maundy Thursday during Holy Week.
- Rising out of the Social Gospel movement in the United States, the season of Kingdomtide, begun in 1937, emphasized Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of God and encouraged good works. It was observed by some Protestant churches for the latter half of Ordinary Time between Pentecost and Advent. By 1992, the United States *United Methodist Book of Worship* claimed to be the only denomination still using the term (1992: 409).
- Exaltation of the Cross or Holy Cross Sunday is celebrated in some Eastern and Western churches on or near 14 September. It dates from 335 when the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was dedicated by Emperor Constantine, with the cross growing in use as a symbol of Christ’s victory over death.
- World Communion Sunday began in a Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the United States in 1933 and spread through Protestant churches

in the US (where, most often, communion was not celebrated weekly). Originally called Worldwide Communion Sunday, it focuses on the global connections of the church at Christ's table despite denominational differences and geography. The first Sunday of October is usually its celebration.

- Reign of Christ or Christ the King Sunday is the final Sunday before Advent and, like Transfiguration in Protestant churches, it now serves as a pivotal Sunday between seasons in the West for many churches. The origins of this day lie in 1925, as Pope Pius XI, concerned that recognition of Christ as Lord of all seemed particularly urgent, designated the last Sunday in October as the feast of Christ the King (Adam 1990: 177). To highlight eschatological aspects of the gospel, in 1970 its observance was moved to the last Sunday before the beginning of Advent, and by then it was also being celebrated in Protestant churches. Feminist voices resisting an assertively masculine array of titles for Christ, plus concerns for decolonialization of its title while attempting to keep its focus, have led to its being called 'Reign of Christ Sunday' or 'Majesty of Christ Sunday' in some churches which observe it.

3.6 The formational power of practising the Christian year

'Doctrines are often read by only a few learned [persons]; feasts move and teach all the faithful', noted Pope Pius XI in 1925 (Adam 1990: 177). So, in Christian congregations observing liturgical seasons and holy days, communities and individuals are formed by the incarnation of Jesus through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Rather than simply portraying the Christian year as a linear sequence or a pie chart of colours, a spiralling model better expresses how, year by year, communities and individuals grow in faith, understanding, and immersion in the anamnesis of Jesus Christ and God's work in the world. Faith deepens and new insights are gained as each season and holy day is experienced. As Catherine Pickstock notes, 'the time of liturgy is intensely open', and its openness is 'predicated upon a protocol of redemptive return, not of an anterior "essence," but of that which is both before and after, and repeated with difference' (Pickstock 1998: 21). This 'redemptive return' is the destination Philip Pfatteicher is speaking of as he says that '[t]he liturgical year is not endless repetition, for [Christian] time has a goal, a destination [...] The journey of the liturgical year leads us at last into the very heart of God' (2013: 345, 350).

3.7 Looking globally at some contemporary practices of the Christian year

Secular calendars which have been developed by nations and businesses come into conflict fairly often with the liturgical year, and so the church must continue to choose who it will serve –businesses with investments in sales for Christmas and Mother's and Father's Days, the patriotic holidays of the nation, or the continuing story of salvation through Jesus Christ? It is always the task of the church to call congregants back to God's

values and God's big story, within which a culture's story and each individual's story fit (Knowles Wallace 2011: 23–24, 26; Larson-Miller 2014). The consumerism around Advent and Christmas in the West has led to a particular variety of challenges for the Christian year (see discussion above about The Advent Project).

One easily observable example of current differences in the wider Christian community's practices through the Christian year may be seen in the use of 'liturgical colours'. White is believed to be the only colour used until at least the fourth century in worship leaders' clothing and fabric in the worship space (robes, stoles, and paraments). Colours represent different things in different cultures, thus there is a wide variety of colour schemes for the liturgical year that have developed over the centuries. Colours for seasons and holy days were not standardized within regions or traditions until the end of the twelfth century, when Pope Innocent III named white, red, black, and green (Pierce 2006: 847). These basic colours have been expanded in places to include purple, violet, blue, maroon, rose, yellow, and gold, and many other colours.

At various times in history, in congregations which deemphasized the Christian year, altar guilds and others responsible for the furnishings of worship spaces often were the keepers of 'traditional' colours and their changes through the seasons of the Christian year. In times of present debate about the problematic symbolic association of equating white with goodness and black with sin or evil, some worship leaders and congregations are reconsidering what their colour associations mean culturally, as well as visually and in worship texts, and how these things have been implicitly shaping our understandings of each other and of God.

In a similar manner, increasingly, colonial influences on worship around Christian practices and their limitations in expressing the gospel are being considered. These emerging understandings have their roots in liberation theologies, decolonial and postcolonial thought, and in growing sensitivities to the practices of various cultures, inclusion, and welcome. Some of these ideas were given impetus by the 1996 'Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture' which came out of the Lutheran World Federation and quickly gained acceptance by many other Christian traditions. Its emphasis was on the ways that worship is transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural, and cross-cultural (<https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/nairobi-statement-on-worship-and-culture-full-text/>).

In the northern hemisphere and Western church, decolonizing and postcolonial practices sometimes begin with land acknowledgements in worship and emphasize welcome to immigrants (and some places, across racial divides), helping to sensitize 'white' congregations to the residue of the problems of colonization, and as evidence of the Spirit's continuing actions in the world (Whitla 2022). Listening to previously unheard voices and then giving space for local practices led by those for whom they are authentic

is vital. In one sense, this attention is a return to early church attention to local thought and customs; incarnation means that God in Jesus comes to each particular place. For other current global examples of attention to particularity and incarnation, particularly in the southern hemisphere where Christianity is growing rapidly, see section 4 below, on interactions between the Christian year and the natural world.

Hybridity describes worship that both adopts traditional – often colonial – liturgies and draws on local cultural elements. Many congregations have found that adding voices, languages, colours, actions or movement, and/or symbols to their practices of the Christian year has been a helpful way to address some of these concerns. Worship practices that are being reconsidered include liturgical texts and songs, musical instruments used or not used, and kneeling and other prayer postures. These inclusions and choreographic decisions express indigenous and contextual imperatives. As one example tied to the Christian year, the Christian Churches of Java and the Indonesian Christian Church during the holy days from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost have been influenced by Muslim practices of fasting which begin at sunrise and end after sunset (Widiasih and Rachman 2022: 59) rather than fasting for twenty-four hours. Other examples include the Advent practices of Las Posadas (service of shelter or inns for the holy family), originating in Mexico and spreading throughout Hispanic congregations, and the dawn masses known as *Simbang Gabi* (Night Mass), *Misa de Gallo* (Rooster's Mass), or *Misa de Aguinaldo* (Gift Mass) celebrated by Filipino Catholics which take place over nine days to mark the nine months of Mary's pregnancy (Ofrasio 2017: 88). Similarly, Stations of the Cross on Good Friday or during Holy Week have occasionally been moved off church grounds to mark various governmental and community spots where people meet Jesus or feel his sorrow and intercession (prisons, offices of immigration, food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, etc.).

4 Theology and the Christian year

4.1 Explicit theology

As early as the 400s, then expanded upon and deepened, particularly in the last two centuries, the concept of *lex orandi, lex credendi* – 'the law of prayer is the law of belief' – has provided the theological perspective that the liturgy of the church is a norm of faith. While this was originally meant to acknowledge the importance of what is said and done in the liturgy as setting a larger standard for theology, it also acknowledges the back-and-forth nature of belief and practice. Prayer gives language for belief, belief strengthens prayers and broadens them by challenging who and what is prayed for (see De Clerck 1994 for a deeper understanding of the evolution of this phrase). In the late twentieth century, two alternate phrases were added to *lex orandi, lex credendi*, both meant to signify its impact on Christian life. The first, *lex agendi*, acknowledges that what is prayed and what is believed sets the agenda, the ethics, and actions for how Christians live. As

Kevin Irwin notes, this phrase helps to 'insure that one of the aims of all liturgy is not lost. That is to put life into perspective from the lens of the Paschal Mystery' (2002: 66). The second, *lex vivendi*, is even more clear that what is prayed and what is believed should and does show forth in living; Irwin's article concludes by saying that *lex orandi* and *lex credendi* always imply a *lex vivendi* (2002: 67). In whatever way this phrase is set forth, it acknowledges the living interaction between worship and belief that shapes Christian theology and believers' daily lives throughout the Christian year.

Formed and adapted through various traditions of the church, experienced weekly, seasonally, and yearly through worship and observance of holy days, the Christian year continues to reveal the nature of the Trinity's interaction with creation, even as human reason attempts to describe and understand that interaction. From creation in Genesis to the end-times described in Revelation, God is proclaimed as the creator of time, the omnipresent holder and companion of all time. As humans live through the Christian year at different personal ages, as well as stages in the life of the world, time moves from something linear to that of a deepening spiral, through days, weeks, months, and years. The interaction of God's presence in time deepens understandings of the past as well as of what will yet come in the future.

Observance of the Christian year is one of the strongest resources the church has for its distinctive focus on Jesus Christ as the source of Christian theology and identity. When someone becomes a Christian, if their community is following the Christian year, they will naturally be immersed in the incarnation, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus and in theological understandings of the faith.

Although many congregations do not use the words 'Paschal Mystery', these words are the theological and experiential heart of what happens through Jesus Christ and in the Christian year. As Alexander Schmemmann said, 'in terms of its spiritual principle and foundation, [...] Pascha truly opens our understanding of time [...] Paschal joy is, therefore, the beginning of Christian experience' (1974: 78–79). Originally focused on Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, the phrase 'Paschal Mystery' has been expanded in some instances to include all of Christ's actions on behalf of human salvation. The weekly remembrance of the resurrection on Sunday, within the observance of the whole Christian year, helps Christians understand sin, forgiveness, salvation (soteriology), and new life through Jesus Christ, through the lens of the Paschal Mystery.

By coming into human time in human form in Jesus, God redeemed all time, making it holy in ways that are experienced in the Christian year. The weeks leading up to Christmas and the multitude of theological themes around that Vigil and Day point to the words of the prophets and the reign of justice promised with God's Messiah, as well as hope for Christ's return when creation will be judged and restored.

While the Holy Spirit appears in readings throughout the Christian year, one primary focus on the Spirit is during Lent and Holy Week, in the readings from the Gospel of John and then in the readings from Acts that occur each week in the Revised Common Lectionary from Easter through Pentecost, and often Trinity Sunday. Ordinary Time following Pentecost, with theological themes and symbols related to the Spirit, also gives Christians a better understanding and experience of pneumatology.

With its constant reminders – of the Creator who made the world, infused with the holiness of time from the beginning of Genesis to the end of time; of the Incarnate One who lived and died within human time and gave it fresh meanings (such as that all human beings are deeply loved by the Creator, sins are forgiven, and eternal life is promised); and of the Spirit who shapes the beloved community – the Christian year reveals more and more of the mystery of the Trinity, three-in-one and one-in-three.

Prolepsis is the realization that God's future (eschatology) has entered this present time and makes a claim on humanity. For Christians, the liturgical year grounds the church within this theological understanding that time is not one-dimensional. One liturgical scholar and practitioner describes the liturgical year as 'actualization of the past for the sake of the future' (Nocent 2013: 14). Another points out that the birth of Jesus is 'theophanic and salvific [...] the mystery of the incarnation is already the paschal mystery, and Christmas is a feast of redemption' (Regan 2012: 8). God's future reaches into creation's now, so that Christians live between what is and what is not yet. There is a glimpse of God's eschatological future of justice and mercy, built on promises kept in the past and promises yet to be fulfilled. The focus of Advent on the Second Coming of Christ, as well as the First, is one example of this, but the liturgical year is filled with focus on God's reign and the future to which we are drawn in Jesus Christ.

4.2 Implicit theology

Daily times of prayer acknowledge the omnipresence and ongoing everyday revelation of God. Keeping Sabbath, whether on Saturday evening or Sunday, is a weekly reminder that God is holy and to be honoured. Annual holy days and seasons help to give the year a God-centred rhythm. Ultimately, God directs human use of time and fills all time with Godself.

The Christian year is filled with reminders that God values, loves, and cares for humanity, as shown throughout the Christ event. The sacraments of Eucharist and baptism focus that care and its attendant gifts of grace whenever they are celebrated. The use of elements from God's creation (water, grain, fruit), processed and accompanied by human work and imbued with the Spirit's presence and the salvation offered through Jesus

Christ, is an important – often implicit – reminder of God’s relationship with human beings mediated through the created world.

The rhythm of Eucharist and its shifting theological emphases throughout the Christian year together shape the various dimensions in which Christ meets Christians in this meal (e.g. incarnation and Paschal Mystery). Participation in the sacrament of communion can take place from as often as daily in Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox churches, sometimes with ‘presanctified gifts’ or ‘reserved sacrament’ (Schmemmann 1974: 45–49), to once a week in many traditions, to monthly or quarterly in others. As Henry Shea notes

the past is not only enfolded into a liturgical present that embodies in eucharistic celebration what has been accomplished in Christ, but insofar as it builds up its participants into what is to be, the future is also drawn into the present and thereby hastened as the liturgy advances toward the realization of the life of the world to come. (2022: 226)

Baptism’s connections with water derive in part from the importance of water for human life in drinking and washing. In the early church, baptisms at rural conversion sites happened sometimes almost immediately following conversion, but in towns and cities more often after one- to three-year catechumenates. The preferred times for baptism came to be associated theologically with key points in the Christian year: at the Easter Vigil (dying and rising with Christ as a major theological theme of baptism), at Pentecost (connecting baptism to pneumatology and ecclesiology), and whenever Jesus’ baptism was celebrated around Epiphany (traditional and historical understandings of discipleship). Eight-sided octagonal pools and baptismal fonts have been linked with theology around the ‘eighth day’ (Adam 1990: 40–41), as have six-sided hexagons linked with the crucifixion and soteriology, counting Sunday as the first day of the week (Stauffer 1994: 59–60).

Clearly, baptisms in the early church were linked to the Christian year; that is less the case in many of today’s churches. As theology around baptism and salvation evolved in the Middle Ages, into understandings that the unbaptized might go to hell or purgatory (or limbo in the case of infants), baptizing infants became a priority and was done within days or weeks of the birth. This practice separated the liturgical year from baptism. In the Reformation, some Christians again began relating baptisms to the Christian year and to the other major sacrament of Eucharist, shaping their fonts more like communion chalices. With the Enlightenment, practices were again mixed.

While Easter, Holy Week, and Lent focus on the theological concepts of the Paschal Mystery (death, forgiveness, salvation, and resurrection) and Christmas, Epiphany, and Advent focus on incarnation (the advocacy of God through Jesus for human beings’ salvation), the theology in Ordinary Time can be much more diluted and differentiated

week by week. Readings and prayers during the Ordinary seasons after the Epiphany and after Pentecost may connect with theological themes from the holy seasons, but more often they vary. The Eastern churches which focus their observance around various mysteries of faith (for example, Schmemmann 1974; the Ethiopian Church, Fritsch 1999; and the Syro-Malabar Rite, Madhavathu 2015) give even more continuous theological shape to these seasons than the Western church.

In more recent times, parts of the Western church – primarily in the United States – have made adaptations to the longer Ordinary season after Pentecost by adding the season of Kingdomtide to focus on theological themes of the reign of God (see above). Some English-speaking regions now also observe a Season of Creation as awareness of the earth's ecological crisis and God's intended goodness in creation finds voice in churches (see below).

5 The Christian year's interactions with science and the natural world

The Christian year, God's time throughout believers' lives, provides interactions not only with faith but also with science and the natural world. One prime example of interaction between science and the practice of the Christian year comes from the early 1200s. Franciscan friar Roger Bacon lamented that 'the liturgical calendar was in such a state of disarray that it was a serious barrier to the spread of Christianity' (quoted in White 1994: 59). The inaccuracies of the Julian calendar (discovered by computations using the astrolabe and other scientific instruments) made the computation of the date of Easter for the Western Church extremely difficult; at least eighty 'learned treatises on the subject were written between 526 and 1003 by theologians' (quoted in White 1994: 60). Bacon argued that this was a problem for the mission of the church, particularly for monks, as observing prayers, fasting, and worship were how they fulfilled their vocation, and if, for example, Lent did not have precise dates, how could the monks properly observe it? Nearly three hundred years later (and following the use of the albidion and the rectangulus, both more accurate astronomical instruments), the calendar was corrected under Pope Gregory and set as the Western world knows it today (for more of the effect of calendars – Julian, Gregorian, and Meletian – on the Christian year, see Groen 2011: 354–359).

Within the liturgical year, the Paschal season (Easter, Lent, and Pentecost) is tied to the lunar calendar, while the incarnation (Christmas, Epiphany, and Advent) has been related to the solar calendar, an example from the natural world of God's majesty over all creation. As Christianity moved north from the moderate weather of the Middle East, and as the Victorians (following traditions from Prince Albert's Germany) began to adorn Christmas with trees, carols, and candles, winter became a central theme of the incarnation. Likewise, Easter in northern Christianity became associated with the earth's

rebirth in spring. When colonizers took Christianity to lands further south, these images, songs, and practices went with them, even though those symbols ran counter to what was happening in the natural world during these liturgical seasons.

Recently, as Christianity has grown exponentially in the southern hemisphere and as colonial practices are more often seen as suspect, these old connections between Christianity and the natural world are being examined and replaced by fresh understandings. Three examples will suffice: Shirley Erena Murray, from New Zealand, wrote 'Carol our Christmas, an upside-down Christmas;/snow is not falling and trees are not bare' in 1992. Bruce Theron, speaking about his South African context in 2017, suggested that, rather than candles in the darkness, more appropriate themes in his bilingual context would be the stars of the Southern Cross and pilgrimage, as Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem and then to Egypt. At Easter, when nature is dying in the southern hemisphere, there comes a reminder that scripture is meant to be countercultural, even counter to the natural world (Theron 2017).

Consideration of the intersections of science, economics, and solidarity in justice and compassion for the earth has brought a Season of Creation into focus within the Christian year. One of the advantages of such a season is that 'Christians can learn from the empirical method of scientists in observing natural systems and cosmic cycles just how earth embraces and nurtures' (Rue 2016: 172).

The practice of an ecological season by Australian Catholics (drawing on Pope Francis' vision expressed in the 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*, but with proposals and practices beginning in the early 1990s), and by others in different regions and churches, has often occurred from 1 September to St Francis Day on 4 October, in part because of the length of that 'Ordinary' season for Roman Catholics and Protestants. For the southern church, this puts the Season of Creation into springtime and new growth. A Season of Creation can also help to recapture the spirit of earlier Rogation and Ember Days observed in the northern hemisphere. Rogation Days were days of intercession and fasting for healthy crops; they often included processions around a parish's boundaries. Ember Days were sets of three days each spread throughout the Christian year for fasting, perhaps related to farming, later sometimes related to ordination and prayer for vocations to the ordained ministry.

6 Future of the Christian year

In the liturgical year, as in every artistic masterpiece, everything holds together, every image reinforces the close-packed work so that several levels are experienced simultaneously. The fullness of the symbolism of the year may not always be readily apparent, but upon continued examination and reflection the symbols yield riches of

suggestion. Some of the meaning may in fact lie hidden perhaps for generations until it rises again to conscious perception. Such is the wonderful treasury of the Church. (Pfatteicher 2013: 10)

Not only is there a richness in the Christian year, but some of its meanings and treasures seem also to be cyclical, waiting to be 'discovered' by the next generation. Changes in patterns of church growth, both in Pentecostalism and in the southern hemisphere, may continue to shift thinking about the Christian year so long dominated by the northern hemisphere and its climate and seasons. Churches may find new meaning in new celebrations and let go of some older ones as some regions experience deep changes in the rhythms and investment in weekly worship after the global pandemic.

As climate change accelerates, some seasonal symbols from nature may change and a Season of Creation may be instituted or lengthened in some areas and parts of the church. The import of climate change on daily lives is beginning to force humanity to realize more deeply our dependence upon nature. Pfatteicher notes that

the liturgical year brings the two often-forgotten facts together [our dependence on nature and our baptism], and properly understood, preserves the connection between the baptized children of God and their situation as children of the earth. In remarkable and diverse ways the church's Year of Grace teaches us again and again who we are. (2013: 3)

Politics continues to affect Christianity and practices such as the Christian year. In the midst of the Russia-Ukraine war, the parliament of Ukraine voted to move the official Christmas Day state holiday from 7 January (Julian calendar) to 25 December to 'abandon the Russian heritage of imposing Christmas celebrations' (Lukiv 2023).

New creation offered in baptism, change, the mix of past, present, and future are all part of the past of the Christian year, its present, and its reach into the future. God's vision is not yet realized; the end times are not yet here. So, as creation continues to grow toward God and the church lives through the Christian year,

[t]he liturgy conjoins past and future in a present that is at once anamnestic and proleptic. To an extent this movement coincides with the natural tendency for memory and gratitude to give life to and focalize hope: the anamnesis of the paschal mystery re-presents what we hope to be completed in the future, when the life and love of Christ, crucified and risen, will suffuse the whole of the new creation, integrating it into one great communion as the body of Christ. (Shea 2022: 226, discussing *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 106 and 1 Pet 1:3)

Throughout history, the Christian year developed unevenly in various regions of the church and changes have occurred with some regularity. As in the beginnings of the church, the Christian year will not remain static but continue as a guide, helping humans in all manifestations of time participate and live more fully into God's story of love and redemption, as experienced through Jesus Christ and strengthened by the Spirit, Three-in-One, and One-in-Three.

Attributions

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