

THE RECEPTION OF PAUL IN THE NEW LECTIONARY

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Introduction

To merely say the words “Vatican II” is to call to mind the reform of the Roman liturgy. Although the Second Vatican Council dealt with many issues and called for the renewal within tradition of many areas of the church, arguably none are as widely known as the liturgical reforms: for example, Pope Paul VI’s promulgation of what we now refer to as the “Ordinary Form” of the Mass, the expanded use of the vernacular (rather than Latin) in the liturgy of the Latin Rite, and the now widespread custom of the priest praying the Eucharistic prayers *versus populum* (“toward the people”).

Nevertheless, as momentous as these changes were in the wake of the Council, a case can be made that one of the most dramatic changes was the reform of the *Roman Lectionary*: the official selection of readings from Sacred Scripture that are proclaimed and preached upon during the Liturgy of the Word.¹ A revised Lectionary, which had been called for by the Second Vatican Council, was officially promulgated by Pope Paul VI on May 29, 1969; it began to be utilized by the entire Roman Catholic Church on November 28, 1971, the First Sunday of Advent.² In the words of Adrien Nocent, one of the members of the commission charged with revising the Lectionary: “Without a doubt, the massive introduction of Scripture in the missal constitutes *the most spectacular renewal of the Council’s liturgical reform*.”³ Intriguingly, this ‘spectacular’ and extensive revision of the Lectionary is also one of the least

1 Following popular parlance, throughout this essay, when I refer to “the Lectionary” (in the singular), I am referring to *the Lectionary for Mass*, with a particular focus on the Lectionary for Sundays and Solemnities. Although important, I will not discuss the Lectionary for Masses on Saints’ days, ritual Masses, Masses for various occasions, votive Masses, etc. Nor will I be discussing the Lectionary designed for the Liturgy of the Hours.

2 Normand Bonneau, *The Sunday Lectionary: Ritual Word, Paschal Shape* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 21–29. For Vatican II’s call for the restoration of a “fuller, more varied, and more appropriate approach to the reading of Scripture,” see the Constitution on the Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §§ 35, 50.

3 See, Bonneau, *The Sunday Lectionary*, 3 (emphasis added), quoting and translating Adrien Nocent, “La parole de Dieu et Vatican II,” in *Liturgia, opera divina e umana: studi sulla riforma liturgica offerti a S. E. Mons. Annibale Bugnini in occasione del suo 70° compleanno*, eds. Pierre Jounel, Reiner Kaczynski, and Gottardo Pasqualetto (Roma: Edizioni liturgiche, 1982), 136. See also Scott Hahn, *Letter & Spirit: From Written Text to Living Word* (New

controversial liturgical reforms.⁴ Not only was the new Lectionary widely (if not universally) regarded as a success, but it was so successful that, within only a few years it was adopted in various forms by Presbyterian, Anglican, and Lutheran Christians for use in their respective ecclesial communities, culminating in what is now known as the “Revised Common Lectionary.”⁵

In this essay, I will focus on one small but significant part of the new Lectionary: *the reception of Paul*—that is, the utilization by the Lectionary of the thirteen traditional Pauline letters, as well as the epistle to the Hebrews.⁶ As I hope to show, in addition to the well-known changes to the Lectionary such as the introduction of the Old Testament readings to the Sundays and daily Mass and the three-year cycle of Synoptic Gospel Sunday readings, there is another, no less significant aspect of the new Lectionary that is often overlooked (and, as a result, often misunderstood): namely, the retrieval of the ancient practice of *the semi-continuous reading of the Pauline letters and Hebrews*, in (1) the three-year cycle of Pauline readings for Sundays in Ordinary Time and (2) the two-year cycle of Pauline readings for Weekdays in Ordinary Time.

As we will see, a case can be made that the reception of Paul in the new Lectionary is both one of the most significant changes and, somewhat paradoxically, one of the greatest failures of that same Lectionary. The reason for the failure: the Pauline letters are not often preached, and, if they are, are not often preached according to the principles of selection by which they were chosen. In the words of Catholic New Testament scholar Frank Matera:

Paul’s letters play an important role in the New Testament and in the Roman Lectionary. Of the twenty-seven writings that make up the New Testament, nearly half are attributed to Paul, and, on Sundays of Ordinary Time, the second reading is usually taken from his letters. *Despite the importance of Paul’s letters, his teaching is seldom proclaimed from the pulpit.*⁷

York: Doubleday, 2005), 2: “I believe . . . that the most significant change came about in 1969, with the introduction of the revised lectionary.”

4 Hahn, *Letter & Spirit*, 3–4.

5 See “Consultation on Common Texts,” in *The Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992).

6 Due to the traditional attribution of Hebrews to Paul in the Western tradition, I consider it fitting here to include it in our discussion. On the question of how the new Lectionary deals with the authorship of Hebrews, see below. Due to limited space, I will focus only on the how the new Lectionary utilizes the letters attributed to Paul; I will not focus on how the life of Paul as described in the Acts of the Apostles is utilized by the new Lectionary.

7 Frank J. Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 1.

Why is this the case? What role *should* Paul play in the proclamation of the Word? And how was the new Lectionary designed in order for Paul to be preached? In order to answer these and other questions, we will first need to familiarize the reader with the principles of selection and reception of the Pauline letters and Hebrews in the new Lectionary, before going on to analyze strengths of how the Pauline corpus is selected and received to some of the difficulties the new Lectionary currently faces when it comes to actually preaching Paul.

I. The Reception of Paul in the Roman Lectionary of 1570

In order to put our analysis of the new Lectionary into a proper historical context, it will be instructive first to briefly examine the reception and use of Paul in the *pre-conciliar* Roman Lectionary. For the sake of space, we will restrict ourselves to the use of Paul on Sundays, without looking at the readings for Weekdays.

In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, one of the fruits of the Council of Trent was the promulgation of a single standard Lectionary for use in Roman Catholic liturgy throughout the world. This Lectionary, known as the *Missale Romanum* of Pope Pius V, was promulgated in the year 1570 and continued to be utilized in a virtually unchanged form all the way up until 1971, with the promulgation of the Missal of Paul VI.⁸ Below is a table of the selections of Sunday readings for all of the major Sundays in the liturgical year (readings from Paul are in italics):

The Use of Paul in the Post-Tridentine Lectionary (One-Year Cycle)

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
1st Sunday of Advent	<i>Rom. 13:11–14a</i>	Luke 21:25–33
2nd Sunday of Advent	<i>Rom. 15:4–13</i>	Matt. 11:2–10
3rd Sunday of Advent	<i>Phil. 4:4–7</i>	John 1:19–28
4th Sunday of Advent	<i>1 Cor. 4:1–5</i>	Luke 3:1–6
Sunday in Christmas Octave	<i>Gal. 4:1–7</i>	Luke 2:33–40
Holy Family	<i>Col. 3:12–17</i>	Luke 2:42–52
2nd Sunday after Epiphany	<i>Rom. 12:6–16</i>	John 2:1–11

8 For a brief history, see Bonneau, *The Sunday Lectionary*, 3–19.

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
3rd Sunday after Epiphany	<i>Rom. 12:16c–21</i>	Matt. 8:1–13
4th Sunday after Epiphany	<i>Rom. 13:8–10</i>	Matt. 8:23–27
5th Sunday after Epiphany	<i>Col. 3:12–17</i>	Matt. 13:24–30
6th Sunday after Epiphany	<i>1 Thess. 1:2–10</i>	Matt. 13:31–35
Septuagesima Sunday	<i>1 Cor. 9:24–27; 10:1–5a</i>	Matt. 20:1–16
Sexagesima Sunday	<i>2 Cor. 11:19–33; 12:1–9</i>	Luke 8:4–15
Quinquagesima Sunday	<i>1 Cor. 13:1–13</i>	Luke 18:31–43
1st Sunday in Lent	<i>2 Cor. 6:1–10</i>	Matt. 4:1–11
2nd Sunday in Lent	<i>1 Thess. 4:1–7</i>	Matt. 17:1–9
3rd Sunday in Lent	<i>Eph. 5:1–9</i>	Luke 11:14–28
4th Sunday in Lent	<i>Gal. 4:22–31</i>	John 6:1–15
Passion Sunday I	<i>Heb. 9:11–15</i>	John 8:46–59
Palm Sunday (Passion Sunday II)	<i>Exod. 15:27; 16:1–7; Phil. 2:5–11</i>	Matt. 26:1–27:66
Easter Sunday	<i>1 Cor. 5:7–8</i>	Mark 16:1–7
Easter Octave	<i>1 John 5:4–10</i>	John 20:19–31
2nd Sunday after Easter	<i>1 Pet. 2:21–25</i>	John 10:11–16
3rd Sunday after Easter	<i>1 Pet. 2:11–19a</i>	John 16:16–22
4th Sunday after Easter	<i>James 1:17–21</i>	John 16:5–14
5th Sunday after Easter	<i>James 1:22–27</i>	John 16:23–30
Ascension Octave	<i>1 Pet. 4:7b–11</i>	John 15:26–16:4
Pentecost Sunday	<i>Acts 2:1–11</i>	John 14:23–31
Most Holy Trinity	<i>Rom. 11:33–36</i>	Matt. 28:18–20
2nd Sunday after Pentecost	<i>1 John 3:13–18</i>	Luke 14:16–24

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
3rd Sunday after Pentecost	1 Pet. 5:6–11	Luke 15:1–10
4th Sunday after Pentecost	Rom. 8:18–23	Luke 5:1–11
5th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Pet. 3:8–15a	Matt. 5:20–24
6th Sunday after Pentecost	Rom. 6:3–11	Mark 8:1–9
7th Sunday after Pentecost	Rom. 6:19–23	Matt. 7:15–21
8th Sunday after Pentecost	Rom. 8:12–17	Luke 16:1–9
9th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Cor. 10:6–13	Luke 19:41–47
10th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Cor. 12:2–11	Luke 18:9–14
11th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Cor. 15:1–10	Mark 7:31–37
12th Sunday after Pentecost	2 Cor. 3:4–9	Luke 10:23–27
13th Sunday after Pentecost	Gal. 3:16–22	Luke 17:11–19
14th Sunday after Pentecost	Gal. 5:16–24	Matt. 6:24–33
15th Sunday after Pentecost	Gal. 5:25–26; 6:1–10	Luke 7:11–16
16th Sunday after Pentecost	Eph. 3:13–21	Luke 14:1–11
17th Sunday after Pentecost	Eph. 4:1–6	Matt. 22:34–46
18th Sunday after Pentecost	1 Cor. 1:4–8	Matt. 9:1–8
19th Sunday after Pentecost	Eph. 4:23–28	Matt. 22:1–14
20th Sunday after Pentecost	Eph. 5:15–21	John 4:46–53

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
21st Sunday after Pentecost	<i>Eph. 6:10–17</i>	Matt. 18:23–35
22nd Sunday after Pentecost	<i>Phil. 1:6–11</i>	Matt. 22:15–21
23rd Sunday after Pentecost	<i>Phil. 3:17–21; 4:1–3</i>	Matt. 9:18–26
24th Sunday after Pentecost	<i>Col. 1:9–14</i>	Matt. 24:15–35
Christ the King	<i>Col. 1:12–20</i>	John 18:33–37

A cursory examination of the 1570 Lectionary of Pius V reveals at least three features worth highlighting.⁹

First, the 1570 Lectionary is on a *one-year cycle*. The readings listed above would be proclaimed and preached upon every year, on the same Sunday.

Second, and equally important, the Lectionary of Pius V only has *two readings*: (1) the New Testament epistle and (2) the Gospel reading. As we will see momentarily, this stands in stark contrast to the new Lectionary, which consists of three Scriptural readings: Old Testament, New Testament epistle (or Revelation), and a passage from one of the Synoptic Gospels.

Third and finally, and most important for our purposes, in the older form of the Lectionary, the readings from the Pauline letters (which include the letter to the Hebrews, since it was explicitly attributed to Paul) seem to be chosen according two different principles. On the one hand, some of the Pauline readings are chosen according to *thematic correspondence* with the Gospel or feast day. For example, the selection for the 1st Sunday of Advent—“Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed (Rom. 13:11–14a)—is clearly chosen to correspond to the theme of the advent of Christ (Luke 21:25–33). On the other hand, some of the Pauline readings appear to be chosen according to a principle of *semi-continuous* reading. For example, the selections for the 6th–8th Sundays after Pentecost seem to be chosen in order to take the faithful through a few key passages from Romans in order (Rom. 6:3–11, 19–23, 8:12–17).

When it comes to the reception of Paul, one of the key strengths of the 1570 Lectionary is that the faithful are consistently and repeatedly exposed to a fairly large number of key passages in Pauline letters.

9 For further analysis, see Bonneau, *The Sunday Lectionary*, 18–19.

II. Key Features of Pauline Readings in the New Lectionary

When we compare the reception of Paul in the 1570 Lectionary of Pius V with the reception of Paul in the 1969 Lectionary of Paul VI, several aspects immediately stand out as key features of the Sunday readings: (1) the three-year cycle of Pauline readings for Sundays in Ordinary Time, (2) the selection of Pauline passages for Sundays in Ordinary Time according to the principle of “semi-continuous reading” (Latin *lectio semicontinua*); (3) the thematic selection of Pauline readings for festal seasons and solemnities according to the principle of “harmony” between readings; and (4) the treatment of Pauline authorship in the introductions to the Second Readings.

As we will see, in each of these areas, there have been significant developments in the way the Pauline corpus is received by the Church and presented to the faithful in the Eucharistic liturgy.

1. The Three-Year Pauline Cycle: Sundays in Ordinary Time

When it comes to the reception of Paul in the new Lectionary, by far the most significant and dramatic development in the wake of the Second Vatican Council is the introduction of a *three-year cycle of readings taken almost entirely from the Pauline epistles*, for use on Sundays in Ordinary Time. Although many people are familiar with the three-year cycle of readings from the Synoptic Gospels for Sundays in Ordinary Time—Matthew (Year A), Mark (Year B), and Luke (Year C)—the three-year cycle of *Pauline* readings seems to be far less known.

In the Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship’s official introduction to the new Lectionary—*The New Lectionary for the Readings at Mass, Ordo Lectionum Missae* (2nd ed., 1981)—the three-year cycle of Second Readings for Sundays in Ordinary Time is tabled as follows¹⁰ (I have added the chapters to make clearer exactly which sections of the letters are being covered):

10 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of *Ordo Lectionum Missae* contained herein are taken from Dennis J. Murphy, M.S.C., *The Church and the Bible: Official Documents of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Pauls/Alba House, 2007), 442–503. For the official Latin text, see *Ordo Lectionum Missae: Editio Typica Altera* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981). See also “Lectionary for Mass: Introduction,” in *The Liturgy Documents: A Parish Resource*, ed. Elizabeth Hoffman, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991), 127–164.

The Three-Year 'Pauline' Cycle
Second Reading (Sundays in Ordinary Time)¹¹

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Year A</i>	<i>Year B</i>	<i>Year C</i>
2nd	1 Corinthians 1:1–3	1 Corinthians 6:13–15, 17–20	1 Corinthians 12:4–11
3rd	1 Corinthians 1:10–13, 17	1 Corinthians 7:29–31	1 Corinthians 12:12–30
4th	1 Corinthians 2:1–5	1 Corinthians 7:32–35	1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13
5th	1 Corinthians 2:6–10	1 Corinthians 9:16–19, 22–23	1 Corinthians 15:1–11
6th	1 Corinthians 3:16–23	1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1	1 Corinthians 15:12, 16–20
7th	1 Corinthians 3:16–23	2 Corinthians 1:18–22	1 Corinthians 15:45–49
8th	1 Corinthians 4:1–5	2 Corinthians 3:1–6	1 Corinthians 15:54–58
9th	Romans 3:21–25, 28	2 Corinthians 4:6–11	Galatians 1:1–2, 6–10
10th	Romans 4:18–25	2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1	Galatians 1:11–19
11th	Romans 5:6–11	2 Corinthians 5:6–10	Galatians 2:16, 19–21
12th	Romans 5:12–15	2 Corinthians 5:14–17	Galatians 3:26–29
13th	Romans 6:3–4, 8–11	2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13–15	Galatians 5:1, 13–18
14th	Romans 8:9, 11–13	2 Corinthians 12:7–10	Galatians 6:14–18
15th	Romans 8:18–23	Ephesians 1:3–14	Colossians 1:15–20
16th	Romans 8:26–27	Ephesians 2:13–18	Colossians 1:24–28
17th	Romans 8:28–30	Ephesians 4:1–6	Colossians 2:12–14

¹¹ Adapted from Murphy, *The Church and the Bible*, 500, and Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul*, 184–186.

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Year A</i>	<i>Year B</i>	<i>Year C</i>
18th	Romans 8:35, 37–39	Ephesians 4:17, 20–24	Colossians 3:1–5, 9–11
19th	Romans 9:1–5	Ephesians 4:30–5:2	Hebrews 11:1–2, 8–19
20th	Romans 11:13–15, 29–32	Ephesians 5:15–20	Hebrews 12:1–4
21st	Romans 11:33–36	Ephesians 5:21–32	Hebrews 12:5–7, 11–13
22nd	Romans 12:1–2	James 1:17–18, 21–22, 27	Hebrews 12:18–19, 22–24
23rd	Romans 13:8–10	James 2:1–5	Philemon 9–10, 12–17
24th	Romans 14:7–9	James 2:14–18	1 Timothy 1:12–17
25th	Philippians 1:20–24, 27	James 3:16–4:3	1 Timothy 2:1–8
26th	Philippians 2:1–11	James 5:1–6	1 Timothy 6:11–16
27th	Philippians 4:6–9	Hebrews 2:9–11	2 Timothy 1:6–8, 13–14
28th	Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20	Hebrews 4:12–13	2 Timothy 2:8–13
29th	1 Thessalonians 1:1–5	Hebrews 4:14–16	2 Timothy 3:14–4:2
30th	1 Thessalonians 1:5–10	Hebrews 5:1–6	2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18
31st	1 Thessalonians 2:7–9, 13	Hebrews 7:23–28	2 Thessalonians 1:11–2:2
32nd	1 Thessalonians 4:13–18	Hebrews 9:24–28	2 Thessalonians 2:16–3:5
33rd	1 Thessalonians 5:1–6	Hebrews 10:11–14, 18	2 Thessalonians 3:7–12

Notice here that, ordinarily, each of the letters of Paul is being read through during the Sundays of a single liturgical year. The two exceptions are 1 Corinthians and Hebrews, the former of which is spread over the course of three years at the beginning of the cycle and the latter of which is divided between two years.¹²

12 According to the Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship, the rationale for this

Even more significantly, notice *the almost entirely Pauline character* of the three-year cycle. These readings, commonly referred to as the “Second Reading” in the Sunday Liturgy, are chosen almost exclusively from the fourteen letters traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul: Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, and the epistle to the Hebrews (regarding questions of authorship, see below). There are no selections, for example, from 1–2 Peter, 1–3 John, Jude, or the book of Revelation during Sundays in Ordinary Time. The sole exception to the “Pauline” character of the Second Reading for Sundays in Ordinary Time is the five-week period during which the letter of James is read (22nd–26th Sundays, Year B). Apart from this, it is the Apostle Paul who has the place of preeminence when it comes to the proclamation of the word of God to the faithful in the Eucharistic liturgy during Sundays in Ordinary Time.

2. *Semi-Continuous Reading of Paul: Sundays in Ordinary Time*

As a close reading of the table above reveals, the letters of Paul are not only read on a three-year cycle like that of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Paul’s letters are also chosen according to the same basic principle as the Synoptic Gospels: the principle of “semi-continuous reading” (Latin *lectio semicontinua*).¹³ As we will see below, this principle is utilized not only for the Pauline readings on Sundays in Ordinary Time, but also for Weekdays in Ordinary Time.

With regard to Sundays in Ordinary Time, the organizing principle can be clarified by comparing the words of the Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship regarding both the Gospel readings and readings from the New Testament epistles during Sundays in Ordinary Time:

1. *Gospel readings.* Beginning with the Third Sunday, there is a semi-continuous reading of the Synoptic Gospels. This reading is arranged in such a way that as the Lord’s life and preaching unfold the teaching proper to each of these Gospels is presented. (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 105)

2. *Readings from the apostles.* There is a semi-continuous reading of the Letters of Paul and James. (The Letters of

is as follows: “Because it is quite long and deals with such diverse issues, the First Letter to the Corinthians has been spread over the three years of the cycle at the beginning of Ordinary Time. It was also thought best to divide Hebrews into two parts; the first part is read in Year B and the second in Year C” (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 107).

13 See *ibid.*, 107.

Peter and John are read during the Easter and Christmas seasons). (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 107)

In other words, the contemporary Lectionary is not only designed so that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke can be preached through in order over the course of a cycle of consecutive Sundays. The Lectionary is also designed so that the *Pauline letters* can be preached through in order over the course of a cycle of consecutive Sundays.

In order to illustrate more clearly how the principle of *lectio semicontinua* is being deployed with the Pauline letters, consider the following table of the Sunday Readings selected from what is arguably Paul's most theologically rich writing: the letter to the Romans. In this table, I give the specific details of exactly which passages from the letter are being read and which topics are being highlighted:

The Letter to the Romans—Lectio Semicontinua
(Sundays in Ordinary Time, Year A)

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Topic</i>
9th Sunday	Rom. 3:21–25	Justification by Faith Apart from Works of the Law
10th Sunday	Rom. 4:18–25	Abraham's Faith Was Credited to Him as Righteousness
11th Sunday	Rom. 5:6–11	God Proves His Love for Us That While We Were Still Sinners Christ Died for Us
12th Sunday	Rom. 5:12–15	Original Sin and Adam, the Type of the One Who Was to Come
13th Sunday	Rom. 6:3–4, 8–11	Baptism into Christ's Death: Dead to Sin and Living in Newness of Life
14th Sunday	Rom. 8:9, 11–13	Not in the Flesh but in the Spirit: "Put to death the deeds of the body"
15th Sunday	Rom. 8:18–23	All Creation Awaits the Redemption of Our Bodies
16th Sunday	Rom. 8:26–27	The Spirit Intercedes: We do not know how to pray as we ought
17th Sunday	Rom. 8:28–30	Predestination: All things work for good for those who love God

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Topic</i>
18th Sunday	Rom. 8:35, 37–39	No Creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ
19th Sunday	Rom. 9:1–5	Paul's Anguish for His Fellow-Israelites
20th Sunday	Rom. 11:13–15, 29–32	The Gifts and the Call of God are Irrevocable
21st Sunday	Rom. 11:33–36	God's Judgments Inscrutable and His Ways Unsearchable
22nd Sunday	Rom. 12:1–12	Offer Your Bodies as a Living Sacrifice: Do not be conformed to this world
23rd Sunday	Rom. 13:8–10	Love of Neighbor: the Fulfillment of the Law
24th Sunday	Rom. 14:7–9	Live or Die: We belong to the Lord

Note well that the reading of Paul's letters is decidedly *semi*-continuous. It is not a complete reading of the letter to the Romans. For example, Romans 1–2 are entirely omitted; the reading starts with Romans 3 and the famous section on justification by faith apart from “works of the law” (Rom. 3:21–25). Along similar lines, all of Romans 7 (Paul's famous introspection about life ‘under the law’) and Romans 10 (the equally famous discussion of the salvation of Israel) are omitted. Notice also that, unlike the selections from the Synoptic Gospels, which are ordinarily excerpted as complete episodes (or *pericopae*), the portions of Paul's letters that are read in the liturgy are not complete chapters or even complete ‘units’ from the letters. Instead, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments explicitly states that, with regard to the excerpts from the letters of the apostles, “Only readings that are *short* and *readily grasped by the people* have been chosen” (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 107).¹⁴

Nevertheless, the readings from the Pauline letters are clearly chosen so that some *sixteen weeks* are devoted to taking the faithful through key texts in Paul's *magnum opus*: the letter to the Romans. The working assumption seems to be, in theory at least, that the homilist is being invited to preach through Romans (or any other of the Pauline letters) over the course of this extended time period during Sundays in Ordinary Time.

¹⁴ Emphasis added.

3. Semi-Continuous Reading of Paul: Weekdays in Ordinary Time

With regard to *Weekdays in Ordinary Time*, the principle of semi-continuous reading also governs the order and selection of Pauline texts for the First Reading. In the case of Weekdays, however, the selection of Pauline texts is somewhat haphazard, scattered across the two-year cycle of First Readings (Year I and Year II).

The reception of Paul during Weekdays in Ordinary Time can be illustrated by the following Table (I have italicized the Pauline letters):

The Letters of Paul—Lectio Semicontinua
Weekdays in Ordinary Time¹⁵

Week	<i>First Reading Year I</i>	<i>First Reading Year II</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
1st	<i>Hebrews</i>	1 Samuel	Mark 1:14–2:17
2nd	<i>Hebrews</i>	1 Samuel	Mark 2:18–3:21
3rd	<i>Hebrews</i>	2 Samuel	Mark 3:22–4:41
4th	<i>Hebrews</i>	2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1–6	Mark 5:1–6:34
5th	Genesis 1–11	1 Kings 1–16	Mark 6:53–8:10
6th	Genesis 1–11	James	Mark 8:11–9:13
7th	Sirach	James	Mark 9:14–10:16
8th	Sirach	1 Peter, Jude	Mark 10:17–11:33
9th	Tobit	2 Peter, 2 Timothy	Mark 12:1–44
10th	<i>2 Corinthians</i>	1 Kings 17–22	Matthew 5:1–37
11th	<i>2 Corinthians</i>	1 Kings 17–22; 2 Kings	Matthew 5:38–6:34

¹⁵ Adapted from James Socias, *Daily Roman Missal, According to the Roman Missal*, 3rd edition (Woodridge, IL: Midwest Theological Forum, 2010), xxxviii.

<i>Week</i>	<i>First Reading Year I</i>	<i>First Reading Year II</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
12th	Genesis 12–50	2 Kings; Lamentations	Matt. 7:1–8:17
13th	Genesis 12–50	Amos	Matt. 8:18–9:17
14th	Genesis 12–50	Hosea; Isaiah	Matt. 9:18–10:33
15th	Exodus	Isaiah; Micah	Matt. 10:34–12:21
16th	Exodus	Micah; Jeremiah	Matt. 12:3–13:30
17th	Exodus; Leviticus	Jeremiah	Matt. 13:31–14:12
18th	Numbers; Deuteronomy	Jeremiah; Nahum; Habakkuk	Matt. 14:13–17:20
19th	Deuteronomy; Joshua	Ezekiel	Matt. 17:22–19:15
20th	Judges; Ruth	Ezekiel	Matt. 19:16– 23:12
21st	<i>1 Thessalonians</i>	<i>2 Thessalonians; 1 Corinthians</i>	Matt. 23:13– 25:30
22nd	<i>1 Thessalonians; Colossians</i>	<i>1 Corinthians</i>	Luke 4:16–6:5
23rd	<i>Colossians; 1 Timothy</i>	<i>1 Corinthians</i>	Luke 6:6–49
24th	<i>1 Timothy</i>	<i>1 Corinthians</i>	Luke 7:1–8:15
25th	Ezra; Haggai; Zechariah	Proverbs; Ecclesiastes	Luke 8:16–9:45
26th	Zechariah; Nehemiah; Baruch	Job	Luke 9:46–10:24
27th	Jonah; Malachi; Joel	<i>Galatians</i>	Luke 10:25– 11:28

Week	First Reading Year I	First Reading Year II	Gospel
28th	<i>Romans</i>	<i>Galatians; Ephesians</i>	Luke 11:29– 12:12
29th	<i>Romans</i>	<i>Ephesians</i>	Luke 12:13–13:9
30th	<i>Romans</i>	<i>Ephesians</i>	Luke 13:10–14:11
31st	<i>Romans</i>	<i>Ephesians; Philippians</i>	Luke 14:12–16:15
32nd	Wisdom	<i>Titus; Philemon; 2–3 John</i>	Luke 17:1–18:8
33rd	1 and 2 Maccabees	Revelation	Luke 18:25– 20:40
34	Daniel	Revelation	Luke 21:1–36

For our purposes here, three aspects of this somewhat complex arrangement of Weekday Readings stand out as important.

First, as the table above makes clear, when it comes to Weekdays in Ordinary Time, there is a two-year cycle for the First Reading (Old Testament, New Testament epistles, and Revelation) and a one-year cycle for the Gospel (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

Second, and even more important, the Scriptural readings for Weekdays in Ordinary Time are chosen according to the principle of *semi-continuous reading*, but in two *independent* tracks: the First Reading (OT, NT epistle, Revelation) and the Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke). One reason it is important to emphasize the semi-continuous and independent nature of these Weekday readings is that experience suggests that it is not widely understood. Indeed, contrary to popular practice, *during Weekday readings in Ordinary Time, there is no deliberate thematic correspondence between the First Reading and the Gospel.*¹⁶ Thus, there is no need for the homilist to attempt to draw a

16 For what it is worth, in my own experience, homilists often go to great lengths to draw (often strained) connections between the First Reading and the Gospel during Weekdays in Ordinary Time when there is absolutely no need to do so. Indeed, as *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 69 states, the two-year cycle of First Reading is “governed” by the principle of “semi-continuous reading.” There seems to be some confusion here with the role of the First Reading during “seasons with their own distinctive character,” when the governing principle is in fact that of “harmony.”

connection between, for example, the daily reading from Paul and the Gospel. No connection was intended by the framers of the Lectionary.

Third and finally, in the two-year cycle of First Readings for Weekdays in Ordinary Time, the Pauline letters and Hebrews are given *remarkably extensive coverage*, even when compared with the Old Testament readings. For example, Hebrews and Romans each get four weeks of coverage (Year I), 1 Corinthians and Ephesians each get three weeks of coverage (Year II), and 1 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, Galatians get between one and two weeks of coverage (Year I and II). Obviously, this schema provides ample time for the homilist who would like to preach through a particular letter of Paul in order during Weekdays in Ordinary Time. In theory, for example, one could construct a series of homilies on the letter to the Romans that would cover some twenty days over the course of four weeks (Weeks 28–31, Year I). Once again, we see the remarkably Pauline shape and content of the new Lectionary.

4. *Thematic Readings of Paul: Festal Seasons and Solemnities*

A fourth aspect of the new Lectionary that bears highlighting: the Pauline letters do not only figure prominently during Sundays and Weekdays in Ordinary Time. They are also an important part of the New Testament readings during the festal seasons of Advent and Lent, as well as major solemnities and feast days like those of Pentecost, the Most Holy Trinity, the Body and Blood of the Lord (a.k.a. *Corpus Christi*), etc.

Unfortunately, limitations of space prohibit us from engaging in a detailed investigation of how the Pauline letters are received during the festal seasons and on major feast days and solemnities.¹⁷ For our purposes here, it will suffice to highlight the main principles of selection and some examples.

First, during festal seasons and solemnities, passages from the Pauline corpus are chosen according to *the principle of “harmony”*—that is, a kind of thematic correspondence between readings.¹⁸ This stands in contrast to the Pauline readings during Sundays in Ordinary Time, in which the principle of selection is that of semi-continuous reading. Consider the following example of the use of Paul’s letters for the Second Reading during Sundays in Advent (Year A):¹⁹

17 For further discussion, see especially Bonneau, *The Sunday Lectionary*.

18 See *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 66.3, which identifies the chief principles of selection as “the principles of ‘harmony’ and of ‘semi-continuous reading’” (Latin, “*compositionis harmonicae*” vel “*lectionis semicontinuae*”).

19 Topical summaries slightly adapted from the helpful volume by Kris D. Stubna, *Opening the Scriptures: A Guide to the Catechism for use with Sunday Readings* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2002).

The Pauline Letters in Festal Seasons—the Principle of Harmony
Sundays in Advent (Year A)

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Old Testament</i>	<i>Psalm</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Gospel</i>
1st Sunday	Isaiah 2:1–5 Nations Stream to Zion	Psalm 122 Let us go to the Lord's house!	<i>Romans</i> 13:11–14 The time is near; awake from sleep	Matthew 25:37–44 Days of Noah: Stay Awake! Son of Man is Coming
2nd Sunday	Isaiah 11:1–10 Shoot from Jesse's Stump	Psalm 72 The Future King's reign of justice and peace	<i>Romans</i> 15:4–9 Together, Jews and Gentiles glorify the Lord	Matthew 3:1–12 John the Baptist: "Repent, the Kingdom is at hand!"
3rd Sunday	Isaiah 35:1–6, 10 The Coming of God	Psalm 146 Lord, come and save us!	James 5:7–10 The coming of the Lord is at hand	Matthew 11:2–11 John the Baptist: "Are you the One who is to come?"
4th Sunday	Isaiah 7:10–14 The Virgin shall be with child	Psalm 24 Let the Lord enter; he is the king of glory	<i>Romans</i> 1:1–7 The Gospel of Christ: descended from David, but God's Son	Matthew 1:18–24 Joseph's Dream: Isaiah's Prophecy of a Virgin Conceiving now fulfilled

As even a cursory examination of this table shows, the selections from Paul's letter to the Romans during the Sundays of Advent in Year A are clearly chosen to correspond with the Advent themes of preparation for the Second Coming of Christ, repentance in the face of the coming of the Kingdom of God, the birth of the Messiah, etc. Moreover, unlike the vast majority of Sundays in Ordinary Time—in which the Second Reading is taken almost exclusively from the traditional Pauline corpus (including Hebrews)—the Second Reading during *festal seasons* such as Advent is taken from a much

wider selection of the apostolic letters. In the table above, the letter of James provides the reading for the third Sunday in Advent (Year A).²⁰ In any case, what is true of the reading of Paul during Advent in Year A is also true of other seasons: the primary principle of selection is thematic correspondence.

Second, during major solemnities, passages from the Pauline corpus are likewise chosen according to *the principle of “harmony”* with the Old Testament and Gospel readings. Once again, this is significantly different than Sundays in Ordinary Time. Consider the following examples:

The Pauline Letters on Select Solemnities: the Principle of Harmony
(Year A)

Day	First Reading	Psalm/ Canticle	Second Reading	Gospel
Ascension of the Lord	Acts 1:1–11 After 40 Days, Jesus Ascends	Psalm 47 God mounts his throne to shouts of joy!	Ephesians 1:17–23 God has seated Christ at his right hand and placed all things under his feet	Matthew 28:16–20 Great Commission: “All authority in heaven and one earth has been given to me”
Pentecost	Acts 2:1–11 Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost	Psalm 104 Lord, send forth your Spirit and renew the earth!	1 Cor. 12:3–7, 12–13 Different spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit	John 20:19–23 Jesus breathes on the disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit”
Most Holy Trinity	Exodus 34:4–6, 8–9 God reveals his name to Moses	Daniel 3:20–23 Glory and praise forever!	2 Cor. 13:11–13 Grace of Christ, love of God, fellowship of the Holy Spirit	John 3:16–18 God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son

20 Indeed, during the Easter Season, the readings are deliberately taken from the Petrine corpus (1 and 2 Peter) and the Johannine corpus (1 John and the book of Revelation). See *Ordo Lectionum Missae* 100.

Day	First Reading	Psalms/ Canticle	Second Reading	Gospel
Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ	Deut. 8:2–3, 14–16 The Lord fed you with food in the desert	Psalms 147 Praise the Lord, Jerusalem!	1 Cor. 10:16–17 The cup of blessing and bread we break are a communion in the body and blood of Christ	John 6:51–58 Jesus in Capernaum: my flesh is real food, my blood real drink

Once again, even a short list of examples such as these suffices to make clear that during special solemnities and feasts, excerpts from the Pauline letters for Sunday readings are chosen according to a principle of thematic correspondence with the other readings in question (First Reading, Responsorial Psalm, and Gospel), as well as the overarching mystery being celebrated by the solemnity or feast in question (the Ascension of Jesus, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, etc.). In this way, the reading from Paul acts as a kind of thematic or theological “bridge” between the first reading and the Gospel.²¹ At the risk of overemphasizing the point, this too stands in contrast to the use of Paul during Sundays and Weekdays Ordinary Time. This kind of thematic selection is utilized *only during festal seasons, feast days, and solemnities*.

5. Pauline Authorship: The “Announcement” of the Letters

One final feature of the reception of Paul in the contemporary Lectionary that represents a development involves the attribution of authorship in the introductions to the second reading proclaimed by the lector. These introductions are referred to as the “announcement” (*inscriptio*) of the text.²²

On the one hand, in contemporary biblical scholarship there is now widespread scholarly doubt about the authorship of six letters in the Pauline corpus, now commonly referred to as the six “disputed” letters of Paul—Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus.²³ Nevertheless, in the announcement of the Second Reading, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments states that: “The traditionally ac-

21 Bonneau, *The Sunday Lectionary*, 45.

22 *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 120.

23 See, for example, Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 585–680, who treats the six disputed Pauline letters, or “deutero-Pauline” letters, together.

cepted titles for books are to be retained, with the following exceptions . . .” (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 122). None of the New Testament letters explicitly attributed to Paul are excepted. As a result, the announcements of the texts of the six disputed letters of Paul are as follows:

- A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians
- A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians
- A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians
- A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy
- A reading from the second Letter of Saint Paul to Timothy
- A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to Titus²⁴

Here we see the Lectionary following the tradition, going back to the earliest church fathers, of attributing even the pastoral epistles to Paul himself. Intriguingly, by retaining the attribution of these disputed letters to Paul, the Lectionary was somewhat ‘ahead of its time.’ In twenty-first-century Pauline scholarship, there seems to be a growing number of commentators arguing for the Pauline authorship of these disputed epistles.²⁵

On the other hand, when it comes to the epistle to the Hebrews—regarded by many (though not all) Church Fathers as the “fourteenth” letter in the Pauline corpus—the contemporary Lectionary makes no such attribution.²⁶ Instead, it avoids the question of the authorship of Hebrews and simply identifies the audience to whom the epistle is addressed: “A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews.”²⁷ This is in keeping with the instruction of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments:

The title is to be the Book of Lamentations and Letter to the Hebrews, with no mention of Jeremiah or Paul (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 122).

24 See Socias, *Daily Roman Missal*, 1202, 1205, 1605, 1436, 1511, 1634.

25 See, for example, Douglas A. Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014); N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1.60; Michael A. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 501–502; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Anchor Yale Bible 35A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 55–90.

26 For patristic disagreement over the Pauline authorship of the letter to the Hebrews, see, for example, Origen, *Homilies on the Letter to the Hebrews* [cited in Eusebius, *Church History* 6.25.13–14]; Eusebius, *Church History* 6.1–3; 6.20.3; Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men* 5.59.

27 See Socias, *Daily Roman Missal*, 1509.

This represents a marked change from the 1570 Lectionary of Pius V, in which the letter to the Hebrews was introduced as a letter written by *Paul* to the Hebrews. Once again, we have here clear evidence of the influence of modern biblical scholarship on the form and contents of the contemporary Lectionary.²⁸

III. Strengths of the Contemporary Lectionary

With these key features of the reception of Paul in the contemporary Lectionary in mind, we can now analyze some of the strengths and the weaknesses of how the Pauline letters and Hebrews are utilized in the Lectionary. We shall begin with the strengths, which are several.

1. Greater Exposure to Pauline Letters and Hebrews

It seems indisputable that the new Lectionary fulfills the Second Vatican Council's express goal of exposing the faithful to a greater portion of Scripture. According to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Council desired that "the rite of the Mass" be revised in such a way that:

The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative part of the sacred scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years. (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, §51)

When it comes to the Pauline writings, the new Lectionary certainly seems to provide this "richer fare." Consider once again the fairly extensive spread of the three-year cycle: in Year A, readings from 1 Corinthians, Romans, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians are proclaimed; in Year B, readings from 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Hebrews are proclaimed; and in Year C, readings from 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, Hebrews, Philemon, 1 and 2 Timothy and 2 Thessalonians are proclaimed.

This richer exposure is also clear when we contrast the post-Tridentine one-year cycle of Sunday readings from the Pauline epistles, which consisted of some forty-nine passages from the Pauline writings (including two passages from the letter to the Hebrews), with the new three-year cycle of Sunday readings, which consists of some 87 passages from the Pauline letters (plus seven passages from the letter to the Hebrews). If we include the letter to the

28 For discussion of the authorship of the letter to the Hebrews, see Albert Vanhoye, S.J., *The Letter to the Hebrews: A New Commentary* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2015); Harold Attridge, *Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 1–5.

Hebrews in our count, the Lectionary of Paul VI almost *doubles* the number of passages that are read to the people from the Pauline letters and Hebrews.

From an ecumenical perspective, in a post-Reformation context, this kind of heightened exposure to Paul for Catholics provides a valuable opportunity for Catholic views of Paul to be shaped in a properly liturgical and ecclesial context.²⁹

2. Retrieval of Patristic Approach to Preaching Paul Semi-Continuously

In keeping with the principle of patristic *ressourcement* that was one of the driving forces behind the Second Vatican Council,³⁰ the new Lectionary also retrieves the patristic practice of not only preaching through the Gospels according to the principle of *lectio semicontinua*, but of preaching through the letters of Paul according to the same principle of *lectio semicontinua*. As Pope Benedict XVI pointed out in one of his general audiences during the Year of Saint Paul:

It is above all important to note that *Saint Paul's letters very soon entered the liturgy*, where the structure prophet-apostle-Gospel is crucial for the form of the Liturgy of the Word. Thus, thanks to this "presence" in the Church's liturgy, the Apostle's thought immediately gave nourishment to the faithful of every epoch.³¹

Although sometimes forgotten, the practice of preaching the Pauline letters in a semi-continuous manner is very ancient indeed, going back to the time of the early church fathers.³²

Perhaps the greatest example of this comes to us from the writings of the Eastern father John Chrysostom (ca. AD 349–407), whose "commentaries" on every single Pauline letter (including the letter to the Hebrews) are in fact transcriptions of actual *homilies* that he preached on every extant letter of Paul while archbishop of the church in Constantinople.³³ Consider the following catalogue of his homilies on Paul:

29 See David E. Aune, ed., *Rereading Paul Together: Protestant and Catholic Views on Justification* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

30 See Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, eds., *Vatican II: Renewal within Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), esp. ix–xv.

31 Benedict XVI, "Saint Paul's Life and Legacy," General Audience, February 4, 2009, Paul VI Audience Hall, in Benedict XVI, *Saint Paul* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009), 128–129 (emphasis added).

32 See Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, *The Patristic Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

33 See Margaret M. Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet: John Chrysostom and the Art of Pauline Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 5: "Chrysostom

*Homilies of John Chrysostom: the Pauline Letters*³⁴

Letter	Number of Homilies	Principle of Selection
Romans	32 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
1 Corinthians	44 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
2 Corinthians	30 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Galatians	6 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Ephesians	9 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Philippians	15 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Colossians	12 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
1 Thessalonians	11 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
2 Thessalonians	5 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Philemon	3 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
1 Timothy	18 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
2 Timothy	10 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Titus	6 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Hebrews	34 Homilies	Semi-Continuous

Notice here the sheer *number* of homilies preached on Paul by Chrysostom. According to Margaret Mitchell, the extant corpus of Chrysostom's writings includes over two hundred and fifty homilies on the Pauline epistles alone.³⁵ Also significant is the remarkable *length* of Chrysostom's homilies on the Pauline letters: these were not brief "reflections," but lengthy exegetical homilies devoted entirely to expositing the message of the Apostle Paul as contained in his letters. Notice also that, in every case, Chrysostom preached through a particular letter of Paul, in the order in which it was written, according to a principle of semi-continuous reading. In this way, Chrysostom imparted to his ancient congregation a robust familiarity with the context and contents of the Apostle Paul's preaching and teaching, as well as its application to their lives.

The upshot of this patristic background to the construction of the three-year cycle of semi-continuous reading of Paul is that—in theory at least—the post-Vatican II Lectionary provides the homilist with the opportunity to preach through a particular letter of Paul in the same way that some of

is undoubtedly the most comprehensive commentator on the Pauline epistles from the patristic era."

34 For a complete English translation of John Chrysostom's homilies on the Pauline letters (including Hebrews, which he attributed to Paul), see Philipp Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, 14 vols., reprint (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), vols. 11–14. For a critical edition, see Frederick Field, *Sancti patris nostri Joannis Chrysostomi, Interpretatio omnium epistolarum paulinarum*, 7 vols., Bibliotheca Patrum (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1849–62).

35 Mitchell, *The Heavenly Trumpet*, 2.

the early Church fathers did. In other words, when it comes to Sundays in Ordinary Time, the new Lectionary appears to envision a situation in which, for example, a homilist could construct the following sequence and number of homilies on Paul:

*The New Lectionary: Preaching Paul Semi-Continuously*³⁶

Letter	Number of Homilies	Principle of Selection
Romans	16 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
1 Corinthians	19 Homilies	Semi-Continuous ³⁷
2 Corinthians	8 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Galatians	6 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Ephesians	7 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Philippians	4 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Colossians	4 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
1 Thessalonians	5 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
2 Thessalonians	3 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Philemon	1 Homily	Semi-Continuous
1 Timothy	3 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
2 Timothy	4 Homilies	Semi-Continuous
Hebrews	11 Homilies	Semi-Continuous ³⁸

Although not quite as extensive as the homilies of Chrysostom, the new Lectionary nevertheless provides the preacher (who is so inclined) to devote a remarkably large number of homilies to the exposition of the letters of Paul and the epistle to the Hebrews in semi-continuous fashion. For example, as we noted above, the selection of these readings according to the principle of *lectio semicontinua* seems to envision, for example, the homilist preparing a series of sixteen homilies on Paul's letter to the Romans alone.³⁹

3. Opportunities for Moral Exhortation: Paul on Life "in Christ"

Finally, but by no means least significantly, the new Lectionary also gives homilists abundant opportunities to draw on the moral teaching of the Apostle Paul in order to instruct the faithful regarding "life in Christ."

36 I have tallied up a cumulative number of homilies based on the table for Sundays in Ordinary Time given above following the order of Pauline writings in the New Testament canon. To see how these break down according the three years, see the table above.

37 Note: 1 Corinthians is split over three years: 1 Cor. 1–4 (Year A), 1 Cor. 6–11 (Year B), and 1 Cor. 12–15 (Year C).

38 Note: Hebrews is split over the course of two years: Heb. 2–10 (Year B) and Heb. 11–12 (Year C).

39 For an example of how this might be done, see Frank J. Matera, *Preaching Romans: Proclaiming God's Saving Grace* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

Consider, then, the following examples of key passages from the Pauline letters and Hebrews that deal with life in Christ:

Moral Life in Christ
Key Passages from Paul in the New Lectionary

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Topic</i>
2nd Sunday Year A	1 Corinthians 1:1–3	Universal call to holiness: all are “called to be holy”
9th Sunday Year A	Romans 3:21–25, 28	All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; justification by grace through faith
22nd Sunday Year A	Romans 12:1–2	Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice; do not be conformed to this world but transformed
23rd Sunday Year A	Romans 13:8–10	Love is the fulfillment of the law
2nd Sunday Year B	1 Corinthians 6:13–15, 17–20	The body is not for sexual immorality (<i>porneia</i>), but for the Lord; You are a temple of the holy spirit
12th Sunday Year B	2 Corinthians 5:14–17	In Christ we are a “new creation”; the old has passed away
14th Sunday Year B	2 Corinthians 12:7–10	My grace is sufficient for you; power is made perfect in weakness
18th Sunday Year B	Ephesians 4:17, 20–24	Put off the old nature of your former way of life; put on the new nature; be renewed in the spirit of your minds
21st Sunday Year B	Ephesians 5:21–32	Be subordinate to one another; husbands and wives be as Christ and the Church
4th Sunday Year C	1 Corinthians 12:31–13:13	Faith, Hope, and Love. . . . The greatest of these is love.

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Topic</i>
13th Sunday Year C	Galatians 5:1, 13–18	Freedom, love, and the fulfillment of the law; live by the Spirit, not by desires of the flesh
18th Sunday Year C	Colossians 3:1–5, 9–11	You have died; your life is hidden with Christ in God; do not lie to one another. . .
23rd Sunday Year C	Philemon 9–10, 12–17	Welcome Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother in Christ
26th Sunday Year C	1 Timothy 6:11–16	Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, gentleness; keep the commandment unstained until the coming of Jesus Christ
33rd Sunday Year C	2 Thessalonians 3:7–12	Avoid idleness; anyone unwilling to work should not eat

This is only a sampling, taken only from Sundays in Ordinary Time. Nevertheless, it demonstrates quite clearly that one of the principles of selection governing the new Lectionary was the utilization of passages in Paul that contain the apostolic proclamation of new life in Christ, spanning a wide variety of themes such as the universal call to holiness, the theological and moral virtues, sin, grace, justification, and many other topics.

One important reason to highlight the particularly *Pauline* shape of the opportunities for moral exhortation in the new Lectionary is that it demonstrates how neglect of preaching the Pauline epistle can be a direct factor in neglect of preaching about Christian virtue and the moral life in Christ. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the need for more “‘thematic’ homilies treating the great themes of the Christian faith,” including “life in Christ.”⁴⁰ To be sure, the Gospels themselves contain plenty of ethical and moral teachings of Jesus.⁴¹ However, given the context in which Paul was writing his epistles to churches formed largely of converts from Gentile paganism, what one scholar has referred to as “moral formation” inevitably plays a quantitatively greater

40 See Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 46.

41 See, for example, Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2008), 3.1; Richard A. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007). Although dated, still helpful is Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Moral Teaching of the New Testament*, trans. J. Holland-Smith and W. J. O’Hara (New York: Seabury, 1965), 11–67.

role in the Pauline epistles than it does in the Synoptic Gospels, which often presuppose (rather than explicate) Jewish codes of moral conduct under the old covenant.⁴²

IV. Difficulties with the New Lectionary

In addition to the various strengths of the new Lectionary, there are also several notable difficulties—some might say weaknesses—when it comes to the preaching of the Pauline letters and the epistle to the Hebrews in particular. Four of these difficulties stand out as prominent.

1. “Silence from the Pulpit”: the Pauline Texts Are Rarely Preached

One particularly grave challenge facing the use of Paul in the new Lectionary is the fact that, for whatever reason, the Second Reading for Sundays in Ordinary Time is simply often *not preached*. In his recent book on *Strategies for Preaching Paul*, the distinguished American Catholic New Testament scholar Frank Matera begins his study with the following sobering declaration:

Nothing is more central to the Church than preaching the gospel. . . . Few have preached the gospel with the intensity and insight of St. Paul. . . . *It is unfortunate, then, that there is such silence from the pulpit when it comes to preaching from the Pauline texts.* Whether it be from lack of familiarity with Paul’s theology, or fear of it, preachers rarely preach from his letters, even though he is, perhaps, the most profound writer in the New Testament.⁴³

I know of no empirical studies that can confirm or falsify Matera’s assertion about the “silence from the pulpit” when it comes to the preaching of Paul in Catholic circles. For what it is worth, however, over the last seven years of teaching courses on the Pauline letters and Hebrews in a Roman Catholic Seminary, I have consistently surveyed my classes—which consist of students of diverse nationalities and backgrounds—regarding their experience of homilists focusing their preaching on the Pauline texts. Over the years, the overwhelming response confirms Father Matera’s diagnosis: Catholic preachers “rarely preach” from the letters of Paul.

If this anecdotal evidence is correct, the question arises: *Why* are the Pauline letters so frequently ignored in Catholic preaching? As Matera suggests, there are probably several factors at work. One may be a simple lack of familiarity with Paul’s theology. Contemporary Catholic congregations

42 See James W. Thompson, *Moral Formation according to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

43 Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul*, vi.

are indeed “familiar with the Gospels but not with the epistles.”⁴⁴ Moreover, especially since the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation, many Catholics have regarded (rightly or wrongly) the Apostle Paul as the domain of Protestant preachers and teachers. In the words of Matera:

Paul’s theology often sounds strange to Catholic ears since Catholics have not been reared on Pauline concepts such as justification by faith, nor does Paul’s teaching play the central role in their piety that it does in Protestant piety.⁴⁵

Another cause may be legitimate reticence to take up the admittedly dense, complex, and often downright difficult teaching of the Apostle. After all, already in the New Testament, we have the apostolic declaration regarding Paul’s letters that “There are some things in them hard to understand” (2 Pet. 3:16)! However, I would suggest that a third possibility may actually be the most significant factor for the hesitancy to preach on Paul: ignorance of the rationale behind the three-year cycle of Pauline readings.

2. Lack of Awareness of the Three-Year Cycle of Pauline Readings

A second major difficulty—perhaps *the* major difficulty with the reception of Paul in the new Lectionary—is the apparent lack of widespread awareness that, during Sundays in Ordinary Time, the Pauline texts are *not* chosen to the principle of harmony. That is, they are not chosen to correspond to the Old Testament and Gospel readings. Instead, the Pauline texts for Sundays in Ordinary Time *are* chosen according to the principle of *semi-continuous reading in a three-year cycle*. For this reason—and this is of supreme importance—the *three-year cycle of Pauline epistles are on a completely independent track from that of the three-year cycle of Gospel readings*. Consider once again the words of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments:

The principles governing the Order of Readings for Sundays and the solemnities of the Lord are called the principles of ‘harmony’ and of ‘semi-continuous reading.’ One or the other applies according to the different seasons of the year and the distinctive character of the liturgical seasons. . . . Harmony of another kind exists between the texts of the readings for each Mass during Advent, Lent, and Easter, the seasons that have a distinctive importance or character.

In contrast, the Sundays in Ordinary Time do not have a distinctive character. *Thus the texts of both the apostolic and*

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1–2.

gospel readings are arranged in an order of semi-continuous reading, whereas the Old Testament reading is harmonized with the gospel. (Ordo Lectionum Missae, 66–67)⁴⁶

In other words, for Sundays in Ordinary Time, there are two separate tracks of semi-continuous reading going on simultaneously:

1. *Synoptic Gospels*: three-year cycle, *correlated* with the OT reading
2. *Pauline Letters*: three-year cycle, *not correlated* with the OT reading

Again, many informed Catholics are very much aware that the Synoptic Gospels are on a three-year cycle of semi-continuous reading that corresponds to the Old Testament. However, based on my experience in the classroom, these same Catholics are often completely unaware that the readings from the Pauline letters are also on a three-year cycle of semi-continuous reading, or that the Pauline reading does not correlate either with the Old Testament reading or with the Gospel of the day.

Now, it must be admitted that it is precisely the complexity of the multiple independent (yet simultaneous) tracks of readings, as well as multiple principles of selection at work in the new Lectionary that frankly lends itself quite easily to such confusion about the role of the Pauline letters. After all, as we saw above, during Festal Seasons such as Advent and Lent, the Pauline texts are in fact chosen according to the principle of harmony with the other readings, both Old Testament and Gospel. As a result, it is understandable that a homilist might assume that the same is true of the Pauline readings throughout the year. However, this is simply not the case. During Sundays in Ordinary Time—which comprise the vast bulk of the Lectionary year and the primary method of exposure to the letters of Paul—the readings are semi-continuous.

In my opinion, the end result of this complex situation is a widespread lack of awareness that the Second Reading is on an independent three-year cycle. This lack of awareness leads to the homiletical practice of either (1) ignoring the Pauline epistle completely because it is not clear how it “fits” with the other readings or (2) attempting to “force” a connection between the Pauline epistle and the Old Testament reading and the Gospel, even though during Sundays in ordinary time there is *no deliberate connection between them*. Couple these difficulties with (3) the overwhelming success of the three-year cycle of Synoptic Gospel readings and the natural tendency to give priority to

46 Emphasis added.

the accounts of the life of Jesus as fulfilling the Old Testament and you have the perfect recipe for the almost complete overshadowing of the three-year cycle of readings from the Pauline letters and Hebrews.

3. *Brevity of the Pauline Passages: Lack of Context and Content*

A third major difficulty facing the reception of Paul in the new Lectionary can be summed up as follows: unlike the pericopes from the Synoptic Gospels, which are almost always read in full, passages from the Pauline letters and Hebrews are often dramatically abbreviated, both by being taken out of their epistolary contexts and through the omission of verses within the text itself.

In the introduction to the new Lectionary, the Congregation for Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments explains the rationale for the partial approach to the Second Reading as follows:

Omission of Texts. The omission of verses in readings from Scripture has at times been the practice in many liturgical traditions, including the Roman. Admittedly such omissions may not be made lightly, for fear of distorting the meaning of the text or the intent and style of Scripture. Yet on pastoral grounds, it was decided to continue the tradition in the present Order of Readings, but at the same time to ensure that the essential meaning of the text remained intact. One reason for the decision was that otherwise some texts would have been unduly long. (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 77)

Only readings that are short and readily grasped by the people have been chosen. (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 107)

Although practical considerations make both of these principles understandable, the brevity of the passages selected stands in real tension with the principle of semi-continuous reading by which they are chosen and according to which they are presumably supposed to be preached. As Frank Matera rightly points out: "It is difficult to follow Paul's line of thought because his letters are heard in bits and pieces over the course of several weeks."⁴⁷

In order to see this tension clearly, one need only compare the semi-continuous reading of the Pauline letters on Sundays in Ordinary Time with the semi-continuous reading of the Synoptic Gospels on Sundays in Ordinary Time. Whereas the Synoptic Gospel texts are normally cited in full as pericopes largely in keeping with the order and context in which they occur, the Pauline passages are often (if not always) radically abbreviated, leaving

⁴⁷ Matera, *Strategies for Preaching Paul*, 1.

out extensive sections connecting one Sunday passage to the other as well as extensive (and often essential) verses within the selected texts themselves! Consider, for example, the selections from Paul's extremely important letter to the Galatians, as it is read semi-continuously:

Paul's Letter to the Galatians
Sundays in Ordinary Time, Year C

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Second Reading</i>	<i>Topic</i>
9th Sunday	Gal. 1:1–2, 6–10	Beginning of Letter: Against those who Pervert the Gospel
10th Sunday	Gal. 1:11–19	Paul's Former Life and God's Revelation
11th Sunday	Gal. 2:16, 19–21	Justified by Faith, Not by Works of the Law
12th Sunday	Gal. 3:26–29	In Christ, there is Neither Jew nor Greek
13th Sunday	Gal. 5:1, 13–18	For Freedom Christ Set Us Free
14th Sunday	Gal. 6:14–18	Crucified to the World: A New Creation

On the one hand, the new Lectionary affords the homilist the opportunity to deliver six sequential homilies on Paul's brief but monumental epistle to the church at Galatia, treating topics such as the gospel, the apocalyptic appearance of Christ to Paul leading to his conversion, justification by faith apart from "works of law," the unity of Jew and Greek in Christ, the freedom of life "in Christ," and the reality of becoming a "new creation" in Christ.

On the other hand, several of these texts are ripped rather radically from their context, or are missing key verses that actually give them their meaning. To take but one example: consider the reading from the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, regarding the freedom of life in Christ and the difference between life in the "spirit" and life according to "the flesh." I have placed the omitted verses in *italics*:

For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery. . . .¹³ For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you go on biting and devouring one another, beware that

you are not consumed by one another. 16 I say, then: live by the Spirit and you will certainly not gratify the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh has desires against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you may not do what you want. 18 But if you are guided by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 *Now the works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, 21 occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.* (Gal. 5:1, 13–23 [NABRE])

One can legitimately ask of this Lectionary reading: how is the congregation supposed to understand what Paul *means* by the freedom of “life in the Spirit” (as opposed to the slavery of life “in the flesh”) if it is precisely the concrete examples of the “works of the flesh” and the “fruits of the Spirit” that are omitted?

Such omissions of the Pauline context—and, in some cases, the very contents—put a real burden on the preacher of the Pauline passages (and an even greater burden on the congregation) to reconstruct the context and contents of the text in question. In the absence of a Bible in every pew—a thing that churches utilizing the contemporary lectionary may do well to consider⁴⁸—this lends itself to taking the Pauline epistle text out of context and may be one contributing factor in homilists continuing to force a connection with the much longer Gospel passages via the principle of harmony, even though the Pauline texts were not selected according to this principle.

4. Elimination of the “Hard Sayings”: the Pastoral Reading of Paul

The fourth and final challenge presented by the new lectionary involves its tendency to eliminate many (if not all) of the “hard sayings” of Paul. Regarding the selection of difficult passages in Sacred Scripture in the Lectionary, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments has this to say:

48 I personally know of a Catholic pastor who purchased copies of the New American Bible to be placed in every pew precisely so that, while he is preaching, the congregation can open their Bibles and read along in the full context. This is a very effective way to both surmount some of the limitations faced by the Lectionary’s need to keep passages brief and, at the same time, familiarize Catholics with how to find their way around the Bible as the source of the Lectionary readings.

Difficult Texts. In readings for Sundays and solemnities, texts that present real difficulties are avoided for pastoral reasons. The difficulties may be objective, in that the texts themselves raise complex literary, critical, or exegetical problems; or, at least to a certain extent, the difficulties may lie in the faithful's ability to understand the texts. But there could be no justification for depriving the faithful of the spiritual riches of certain texts on the grounds of difficulty if its source is the inadequacy either of the religious education that every Christian should have or of the biblical formation that every pastor should have. Often a difficult reading is clarified by its connection with another in the same Mass (*Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 76).

Although the introduction to the new Lectionary does not give any specific examples of difficult Pauline texts that are omitted, anyone familiar with the Pauline corpus will quickly recognize that many of the so-called "hard sayings" of Paul have either not made it into the final form of the Lectionary or have been relegated to the status of "optional" through the use of "short forms" of the reading.

For example, the new Lectionary relegates the following passages in Paul to the status of "optional" by way of a longer and shorter reading:

***Difficult Sayings of Paul
Relegated to the Status of "Optional"***

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Long Form</i>	<i>Short Form</i>
Feast of the Holy Family	Colossians 3:12–21 Family life in the Lord: Wives, husbands, children	Colossians 3:12–17 Omits any references to wives, husbands, and children
26th Sunday Year A	Philippians 2:1–11 Have the same attitude as Christ Jesus: 'Christ Hymn' on Jesus taking the form of a slave	Philippians 2:1–5 Omits the 'Christ hymn' on Jesus taking the form of a slave
32nd Sunday Year A	1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 Do not grieve as those who have no hope; we who are alive will be "caught up" together with Jesus at his Coming	1 Thessalonians 4:13–14 Omits reference to the coming of Jesus and being "caught up" together with him

<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Long Form</i>	<i>Short Form</i>
15th Sunday Year B	Ephesians 1:3–14 Christ chose us in him; before the foundation of the world; “destined” according to the purpose of God’s will	Ephesians 1:3–10 Omits references to be “destined” in according to the purpose of God’s will
21st Sunday Year B	Ephesians 5:21–32 “Be subordinate to one another”: Wives, be “subordinate” to your husbands; husbands, “love” your wives as Christ loves the Church	Ephesians 5:2a, 25–32 Omits references to mutual subordination as well as wives being “subordinate” to their husbands; addresses only husbands

Although practical considerations of length may be in play here, a case could be made that it is precisely the “difficult” verses that, from a pastoral perspective, should be the object of discussion rather than omission. Think here of the importance of the contemporary need for proper catechesis on such matters as the relationships between Christian husbands, wives, and children in the family (Col. 3:12–21; Eph. 5:21–32); the “equality” of Jesus Christ with God (Phil. 2:1–11); a properly Catholic (as opposed to non-Catholic) view of predestination (Eph. 1:3–14); and a properly Catholic (as opposed to the “Rapturist”) interpretation of Paul’s teaching about the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of time (1 Thess. 4:13–14).

With that said, at least with the longer and shorter versions, the homilist has the option of addressing Paul’s sometimes difficult but nevertheless significant teachings. When it comes to many of the difficult passages in the Pauline letters, the ordinary fate is omission from the new Lectionary altogether. Consider the following examples:

“Difficult” Sayings of Paul: Omitted from the New Lectionary

Romans 1:26–32	Homosexual relations between men and women are “contrary to nature” and God’s law
Romans 2:12–16	Gentile “doers” of the Law will be justified; they show the law is written on their hearts
Romans 9:6–33	Predestination: God has made both vessels of wrath for destruction and vessels of mercy for glory

1 Corinthians 3:10–15	Some will only be saved “as through fire”
1 Corinthians 7:1–9	It is better to marry than to “burn”
1 Corinthians 7:10–11	Prohibition of divorce and remarriage; those who separate must remain single or be reconciled
1 Corinthians 7:12–16	Pauline ‘privilege’; Christians married to unbelievers are not bound if the unbeliever divorces
1 Corinthians 11:2–6	Men should pray with heads uncovered; women with heads covered
1 Corinthians 11:27–30	Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily eats and drinks judgment upon himself
1 Corinthians 14:1–33	Speaking “in tongues” and prophesying in the congregation
1 Corinthians 14:34–36	Women should keep silent in the churches
1 Corinthians 15:29–30	Baptism “on behalf of the dead”
2 Thessalonians 2:3–12	Christ will not come until the “apostasy” takes place and “the Lawless one” is revealed
1 Timothy 2:9–15	I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; women will be saved through motherhood

As we’ve already noted, there are very many of these “difficult” passages in the Pauline corpus: the New Testament itself attests such difficulties: “There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:16). Hence, caution in regard to the proclamation of Paul is both justified and, in some cases, perhaps necessary.

On the other hand, given the access people nowadays have to the Bible via the internet and other forms of digital media, and given the growing use of precisely these “hard sayings” by atheistic critics of Christianity and others, one wonders if the idea of simply eliminating the difficult passages is really the best strategy.⁴⁹ All too often, the practical effect of such elimination will mean

49 See, for example, the use of difficult passages in Scripture to discredit Christianity by leaders of the now burgeoning movement known as the “new atheism,” for example, Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006); Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007); Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004).

that a person's first exposure to such passages will often be in the context of individual reading, apart from any guidance from the Church, or in the context of criticism of Christianity. Both of these can be unnecessary causes for stumbling. Moreover, certain of these passages that are omitted from the new Lectionary—such as Paul's admonition against partaking of the Eucharist "unworthily" or without "examining oneself" (1 Cor. 11:27–30)—are of such pressing pastoral relevance to contemporary Christian practice that one wonders how they were ever omitted in the first place.⁵⁰ Indeed, a strong case could be made that, *precisely from a pastoral perspective*, these are the very passages of Scripture that the faithful need to have *explained* to them by competent ministers who have been trained in the art of interpreting Scripture in the threefold light of the whole canon, the living tradition, and the analogy of faith—both for their own growth in understanding and so as not to be led astray by those who would misinterpret these Pauline texts or use them to attack the Christian faith.⁵¹

V. Conclusion

When it comes to the reception of Paul in the contemporary lectionary, there have been several remarkable developments in the wake of Vatican II—developments that consist of both important strengths and several weaknesses that are still in need of being surmounted.

On the one hand, the new lectionary is strikingly Pauline. It exposes the faithful to a remarkably large amount of material from the Pauline letters, especially by retrieving (in a somewhat modified form) the patristic method of *lectio semicontinua*, both during Sundays in Ordinary Time and in the first readings of daily masses during Ordinary Time. It also consistently employs key passages from Paul, especially during the special liturgical seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter, often using Paul as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. In this way, the teaching of Paul continues to be heard loud and clear through the apostolic churches of the world.

On the other hand, the post-conciliar lectionary presents several real challenges to preaching Paul, which seem to have hindered the principles of selection from being realized. For one thing, there is the mixed manner of Pauline selection: *lectio semicontinua* is employed during Sundays and daily

50 It is worth noting here that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* quotes 1 Cor. 11:27–29 *in full* as the biblical foundation for the practice of "examin[ing]" one's "conscience" before receiving the Eucharist and the proscription that "anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion" (CCC, 1385).

51 For a Protestant perspective attempting to explain these (and other) difficult teachings of Paul, see Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of Paul* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1989). I know of no similar resource explaining difficult passages in Paul from a Catholic perspective.

liturgies, while the principle of *harmony* is employed during the seasons of Advent, Lent, and Easter. This seems to have led to some confusion about the role of the Pauline letters, especially on Sundays. Moreover, there is a marked tendency to avoid certain “hard passages” in Paul by means of simple omission or by recourse to the “shorter versions.” From a pastoral point of view, in which the homily is not the place to take on difficult texts, this is somewhat understandable. At the same time, however, it means—practically speaking—for many of the lay faithful, these “hard sayings” will never be explained from a Catholic perspective, creating something of an “exegetical vacuum” into which other, non-Catholic (and sometimes anti-Catholic) readings will often rush in.

Despite these challenges, the reception of Paul in the new Lectionary is truly a remarkable achievement and a gift to the Church. Indeed, a case can be made that, despite the relative neglect into which the preaching of the Pauline epistle has fallen in the post-conciliar period, the Lectionary of Paul VI contains virtually everything necessary for *a renewal of Catholic preaching on Paul*—provided that those entrusted with preaching the Scriptures grasp both the principles of selection by which the Pauline letters were arranged and, of course, the context and contents of the gospel once proclaimed throughout the world by the Apostle to the Gentiles.