

# The Prayer Book Society of Canada Newsletter

Advent 2012

## Prayer Book Anniversary Celebrations in Victoria, BC

*By Ian Alexander  
Reprinted from the October  
2012 issue of the Diocesan  
Post.*

It's been a long time (if ever) since the vestry book at Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria recorded over a hundred communicants for an early Saturday morning service, as it did this past September 8<sup>th</sup>. All the more surprising when you realize that the occasion was a strict and stark recreation of a 350-year-old liturgy: "The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion", precisely as laid down in the text and rubrics of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The Bishop presided from the north end of the table, while at the south end his assistant, the Rev. Dr. David Neelands, Dean of Divinity at Trinity College in Toronto, intoned the full Ten Commandments, read hortatory Offertory Sentences while the collection was taken up, and delivered in its entirety the Third Exhortation, which warns of the dire consequences of receiving Communion in a state of

unworthiness ("divers diseases and sundry kinds of death").

This was the first in a weekend-long series of events at the Cathedral, organized to mark both the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (England)

the considerable media attention devoted to the activities.

Following the Saturday morning service, there was a panel discussion on aspects of the history and influence of the Prayer Book. Speakers



*The 1662 BCP Communion service, Bishop James Cowan speaking*

and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1962 Book of Common Prayer (Canada). The Prayer Book Society in the United Kingdom provided resources in the form of posters and booklets, while members of the Vancouver Island chapter of the Prayer Book Society of Canada swelled the ranks of Cathedral parishioners and other interested participants from around the city, across the diocese, and beyond – some doubtless attracted by

included Father Neelands, the Rev. Dr. Richard Leggett, formerly Associate Dean of the Vancouver School of Theology, and the Rev. Canon Herbert O'Driscoll. In his closing remarks, Canon O'Driscoll said, in part: "The more our journey is taken in a cultural wilderness, the more important it is to recapture a sense of our common life, that very quality that is expressed in the words 'common prayer.'"

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The weekend was consciously intended to celebrate a Canadian anniversary, and not just an English one. (The Canadian BCP says “1959” on the title page, but was not formally promulgated until 1962.) In token of this,

Sunday morning’s 11 o’clock Eucharist (at which the Venerable Bruce Bryant-Scott presided and Father Neelands preached) used the familiar “red book”, without the many small but significant alterations and adjustments that have become the norm at the Cathedral’s “traditional” Communion services – no need for a pew leaflet, just this once!

The weekend climaxed with another of those specially designed festive choral services which have become a popular highlight of Cathedral life, featuring readings, prayers and music associated with the Book of Common Prayer through the centuries, beautifully sung by St. Christopher

Singers. The former Primate, the Most Rev. Andrew Hutchison, carried in procession the Cathedral’s precious 19<sup>th</sup> century facsimile of the original 1662 manuscript of the Prayer Book, which was physically

historical nostalgia. It honoured a living legacy, which lies at the heart of what it means to be Anglicans – “people of the book”. The Book of Common Prayer has been called “the greatest treasury of worship and

devotion in the whole of Christendom”. It also emerged out of a period of religious upheaval and questioning even greater than our own. As the Introduction to the Book of Alternative Services (alternative to what? to the BCP, of course!) reminds us: “The work of liturgical reform is never finished.”

Whichever book(s) we use, may our prayer be that which the then Primate of the Anglican Church of

Canada, H.H. Clark, incorporated into his Preface to the 1962 Canadian Prayer Book: “that those who use [them] may become more truly what they already are: the People of God, that New Creation in Christ which finds its joy in adoration of the Creator and Redeemer of all”.



*Branch members admire the display of antique Prayer Books*

attached to the Act of Uniformity, passed that year by the British Parliament, and is still in legal force today.

Like the Cathedral’s week-long “Biblethon” for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the King James Version last fall, this year’s Prayer Book weekend was much more than an exercise in

## **A Quiet Day in the Country: “Be Still and Know That I Am God”**

*By Brian Munro and Becky Creese, Grand Valley Branch*

As part of the celebration of the Prayer Book anniversaries occurring in 2012, St. John’s Church in Elora, Ontario invited the Reverend Gavin Dunbar of St. John’s Church in Savannah, Georgia to lead the annual parish retreat on November 3 and to deliver the Smyth Lecture the day

following. Grand Valley members, who well remember Fr Dunbar’s visits to Elora some twenty years ago, wished to be part of and support this event, and so it was arranged that the branch’s annual meeting would follow the retreat on the Saturday. Fr Dunbar is well known to many of us, so suffice it to say he is Canadian by birth, was educated in Toronto and Halifax, ordained in Nova Scotia and

served as parish priest of Ecum Secum, Nova Scotia before moving to Savannah, to St. John’s where he later became the rector succeeding Fr William Ralston (another staunch Prayer Book supporter). He is currently president of the American Prayer Book Society.

The parish retreat was held at “The Retreat”, a splendid facility built and

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operated by Chris and Jean Houston in the country west of Milton. The building incorporates parts of an old stone barn foundation in the main meeting hall. There is also a large living room, dining area with kitchen and guest bedrooms. The grounds have some other buildings as well and a farm with some animals. All this is available for retreats, meetings etc., and simply has to be seen.

After Morning Prayer the first session examined the challenge of silence. Fr Dunbar began with a quote from T.S. Eliot's poem "Ash Wednesday":

*Where shall the word be found,  
where will the word  
Resound? Not here, there is not  
enough silence.*

Silence is critical to spiritual life and in silence we can become truly aware of God. A story was told of the writer Patrick Leigh Fermor visiting a monastery which practised silence, and the difficulties he had in adjusting to this. Eventually, after many struggles, silence started to become natural to him and he developed a heightened awareness of God's presence in his life as a result. Most of us cannot go this far but we can take time each day to turn off electronic devices, make a family compact to allow time for silence, let go of worries, irritations and anxieties (as best we can) and try to imagine Christ being there with us. The audience then broke up to try the experiment for about twenty minutes. (It was much more challenging than we anticipated!)

The next session looked at Morning and Evening Prayer. Cranmer intended the Offices to be the daily prayer of the people and not just a clerical or monastic duty. The parish priest was required to say Mattins and Evensong in church and the bell was to be rung in order to call the people to join him in hearing the Word of God and praising Him. The Prayer Book is centred on this immersive experience of the Word, the lectern being the focal point. As we know, the Bible is read through

completely during the year, if the Offices are recited daily, and all the Psalms are said each month. The collect for the Second Sunday in Advent prays that we may "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" the Scriptures. Cranmer's phrasing urges us to ruminate or "chew the cud" on what we have read or heard. We can read and reread a chosen phrase or a Psalm, let them lie upon our minds and wait upon God. As we do, our



*The Revd. Gavin Dunbar*

wills and affections become mastered by the Word, the Word of God in us. Fr Dunbar suggested that, since in many churches the daily Offices are no longer said, groups of parishioners might try to restore this, and gather in the church or in their homes to say Morning or Evening Prayer once a week or more, as they are able.

After lunch Fr Dunbar introduced us to the Three R's. No, not the usual ones, but Renouncing noise, Receiving the Word of God and Responding to God. These three correspond to the deep logic of conversion; they are the building blocks of the Offices. In repentance (the Confession) we renounce false gods (the noise of the world) and acknowledge our need. In the reading of the lessons we receive the Word of

God and grow in faith, and in the Canticles we respond in acts of praise. The received Word of God enters our souls and we respond in prayer. One way of responding in prayer, if we take the Word seriously, is in the Prayer Book Litany, the centerpiece of our asking. We might consider making this a regular part of our devotions. On that note the session then ended with a recitation of this same Litany, a most appropriate conclusion to a spiritually rewarding day.

After this Grand Valley members gathered in the living room, with its big free-standing fireplace, for the branch's annual meeting. The usual suspects were returned to office (with one or two changes), reports were received, and plans were laid for next year's activities. Then came a quiet time together and finally, for those remaining, off to a restaurant near Guelph for supper.

The next day Fr Dunbar preached at morning services in Elora and in the afternoon delivered the annual Smyth Lecture entitled "Like Eagles in this Life: The Ascending Spiral of Prayer in Classical Anglican Worship". Now I do not intend to try to summarise this lecture; even with the help of notes that were taken I am sure I could not do it justice. Fortunately it will be published and a recording was made that will be available on CD. I would suggest that it might be a very worthwhile activity for a branch meeting to hear this lecture and to have a discussion group afterwards. (Contact the Grand Valley Branch for details.)

It was simply a very rewarding and thought provoking two days. Thanks to Fr Gavin Dunbar for being with us, to Fr Patrick Patterson and the people of St. John's, Elora for their welcome to us, and to Chris and Jean Houston for hospitality at their establishment in the country. Thanks also to Becky Creese for taking the detailed notes upon which this report is based.

## *The Journey of the Magi* by T.S. Eliot

"A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey, and such a long journey:  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter."  
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,  
Lying down in the melting snow.  
There were times we regretted  
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,  
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.  
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling  
And running away, and wanting their liquor and  
women,  
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of  
shelters,  
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly  
And the villages dirty, and charging high prices.  
A hard time we had of it.  
At the end we preferred to travel all night,  
Sleeping in snatches,  
With the voices singing in our ears, saying  
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,  
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;  
With a running stream and a water-mill beating the

darkness,  
And three trees on the low sky,  
And an old white horse galloped away in the  
meadow.  
Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the  
lintel,  
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,  
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.  
But there was no information, and so we continued  
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon  
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,  
And I would do it again, but set down  
This set down  
This: were we led all that way for  
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,  
We had evidence and no doubt. I have seen birth and  
death,  
But had thought they were different; this Birth was  
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.  
I should be glad of another death.

*A commentary on the above poem,  
by Desmond Scotchmer.*

In 1927, the American-born poet  
T. S. Eliot declared himself to be  
"royalist in politics and anglo-  
catholic in religion" and was  
received into the Anglican Church.  
In that same year he became a  
British Citizen.

These were significant events in  
the cultural, intellectual and  
religious life of not just England,  
but of the entire English-speaking  
world. T.S. Eliot was one of the  
leading cultural and intellectual  
voices of the age: his two great,  
extremely influential poems "The  
Waste Land" (1922) and "The  
Hollow Men" (1925) had  
articulated the intellectual and  
spiritual despair of the modern  
world after the First World War.

In "The Hollow Men", the ghosts  
of civilization reach out for  
spiritual meaning from the arid  
intellectual desert in which they  
find themselves:

Here is the dead land  
This is cactus land  
Here the stone images  
Are raised, here they receive  
The supplications of a dead  
man's hand  
Under the twinkle of a fading  
star.

But meaning remains beyond their  
grasp. They try to remember the  
prayer of their forebears, the ruin  
of whose civilization they have  
inherited, but they cannot pray:  
they have forgotten even the very  
concept of prayer, let alone the  
words:

*For Thine is the Kingdom*

For Thine is  
Life is  
For Thine is the

*This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the world ends  
This is the way the word ends  
Not with a bang but a whimper.*

Some sixty years before Eliot,  
Matthew Arnold, himself one of  
the great voices of his own age,  
had in his poem "Dover Beach"  
already articulated a growing  
Victorian sense that belief in God  
and the certainties of the Christian  
religion were fading in the  
English-speaking world. Standing  
at night on the beach that lies at the  
gateway to England (and all it  
symbolizes), and listening to the

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withdrawing tide receding over the shingles he laments:

The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and  
round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright  
girdle furled.  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long,  
withdrawing roar,  
Retreating, to the breath  
Of the night-wind, down the  
vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the  
world.

Arnold fears that God does not exist at all, and that the long years of Christian faith have been an illusion.

Thus Eliot's conversion is noteworthy. From disbelief, intellectual impotence, and spiritual aridity, he had moved to a new position. That new position is articulated in the poem "The Journey of the Magi", written in the same year as his conversion.

The opening lines are taken from a sermon preached by Lancelot Andrews, Bishop of Winchester, to King James I at Whitehall in 1622.

A cold coming they had of it at this time of the year, just the worst time of the year to take a journey, and specially a long journey in. The ways deep, the weather sharp, the days short, the sun furthest off, in *solistio brumali*, 'the very dead of winter'.

The poem is a monologue spoken by one of the Magi, now an old man, looking back on his distant journey. The harsh, relentless rhythms of the poem and intensely vivid images draw the reader directly into the Magi's remembered experience. It was a long and arduous journey, in the dead of winter, in the face of the hostility of nature and the

contempt of man, and the cruel indifference of a world that was unwilling to understand. The camels are refractory, the camel herders seek their liquor and women, the towns they pass through are dirty and hostile, their inhabitants exploitive, and full of derision: "...the voices singing in our ears, saying that this all was folly". The weariness of the journey is vividly contrasted by a momentary flashback to "The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces/And the silken girls bringing sherbet."

At the beginning of the poem's second section, there is a shift in mood: the cold and snow melt away as they descend into the temperate valley "smelling of vegetation", but reminders of the world's cruelty and indifference are everywhere:

Then we came to a tavern with  
vine leaves over the lintel  
Six hands at an open door  
dicing for pieces of silver  
And feet kicking the empty  
wine skins ...

So many images packed into so few lines! The inn recalls the Nativity itself; the vine leaves, the Eucharist and the passage from St John's Gospel (15:5) "I am the vine, you are the branches"; the lintel, the blood of the paschal Lamb smeared on the lintels of Israel and foreshadowing Christ's blood shed on the Cross; the dicing for pieces of silver, both Judas' betrayal, and the soldiers dicing for Christ's robe; the feet kicking the wineskins, the mockery Our Lord had to endure before the Crucifixion; and the three trees on the horizon, the crosses on Calvary.

But there was no information,  
and so we continued  
And arrived at evening, not a  
moment too soon

Finding the place, it was (you may say) satisfactory.

The Magus remembers the details, and knows something momentous has happened, understanding that he has been a witness to the passing away of the old dispensation, and the birth of the new, but its full significance is closed to him. He now looks forward to his own death, because he has become alienated from his own people and their gods, and his spirit is restless.

Like the Magus, Eliot has come to believe in that strange Epiphany, like the Magus, his birth into faith has been "hard and bitter agony". Like the Magus, having undergone his conversion, he is now an exile, "no longer at ease here" surrounded by an "alien people clutching their gods".

Over eighty years separate us now from the appearance of "The Journey of the Magi", a distance greater than that which separated Eliot from the publication of "Dover Beach". But Eliot's poem has a deep relevance for modern believers. From our vantage point a decade into the twenty-first century, we can see clearly how the fallout from the loss of faith articulated by Eliot and Arnold has devastated the religious landscape of the contemporary world. Like the Magus, faithful Christians are surrounded by an alien people clutching their gods. Anglicans have in general been ill-served by their leaders, whose voice in response to the receding tide of faith has been, shall we say, uncertain at best. All too often the response of their church has taken the form of a total capitulation to the spirit of the age.

Eliot's Magus, for all that he finds it difficult, considers the revelation of the new dispensation "satisfactory". He has come to understand that he is an exile, a

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sojourner here on earth, like the Prophets of old “not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off...and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth.” (Heb. 11:13).

So here, then, it seems to me, is the message of this great poem for us, as we approach Advent, 2012.

Like the Magus we must continue on our own journey to faith, exiles and sojourners, guided by the star, with the voices of derision singing in our ears. Faithfulness and patience are all that are asked of us. But we need to make sure it is a *faithful* patience, faithful to the witness of Scripture and of the saints who have gone before us,

and not the fruitless running after the false gods of the age, or the meaningless supplications of a dead man’s hand to the stone images of Eliot’s “Hollow Men”.

“Tarry thou the Lord’s leisure, be strong, and let thy heart take courage, and wait upon the Lord.” (Ps. 27:16).

## The Bishop of London on the BCP

*A sermon preached by the Bishop of London, the Rt. Revd. Richard Chartres, at St. Paul’s Cathedral, London, England, on the occasion of the celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, held on May 2, 2012. Bishop Chartres is the Episcopal Patron of the English Prayer Book Society.*

Archbishop Cranmer commandeered Old St Paul’s on Whitsunday 1549 to demonstrate the new English liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer. The Lord Mayor and the worthies of the City of London were present but the Bishop of London boycotted the occasion which was further marred by the failure of the Select Preacher to turn up.

Today the presence of their Royal Highnesses, the Lord Mayor *locum tenens*, the Archbishop of Canterbury (this time in harmony with the Bishop of London) and a host of witnesses from all over the world, together testify to the historic and enduring significance of the Prayer Book tradition as we celebrate the 350th anniversary of the 1662 edition.

The Prayer Book in English was the centrepiece of an audacious cultural revolution. Stephen Gardiner, the Bishop of

Winchester, was one of those critical of the scheme to introduce an English liturgy. He dismissed the argument that it was desirable for the language to be “understood of the people” and the mode of conducting the services such as to render them audible. The bishop protested that “it was never meant that the people should indeed hear the matins or hear the mass but be present there and pray themselves in silence”: that the barriers of language and audibility were actually conducive to genuine devotion.

This protest from one of the most intelligent conservatives of the day illuminates the radicalism of what was published as the First Book of Common Prayer. It was an audacious attempt to re-shape the culture of England by collapsing the distinction between private personal devotion and public liturgical worship in order to create a godly community in which all and not just the clergy had access to the “pure milk of the gospel”. The result would be a sense of English nationhood crystallising around the biblical narrative of God’s dealings with the children of Israel.

And what English! Tyndale’s translation of a large part of the Bible and Thomas Cranmer’s Book of Common Prayer made of English a language fit for sacred

themes and devotion. Cranmer’s was a very distinct achievement. Whereas Tyndale was the heir to previous experiments in turning the Scriptures into English going back to Wycliffe’s version, there had never been a liturgy in English.

But one of the functions of a liturgy is to preserve words and the possibility of an approach to God which is hard or impossible to express in the language of the street.

Cranmer distilled his liturgy from his studies of the Christian past and especially of the patristic period – the first five centuries; the springtime of the Church.

In the Preface to the First Book of Common Prayer, of 1549, he appeals to the authority of the “auncient fathers” as a guide in liturgical matters. Queen Elizabeth I, in her letter to the Roman Catholic Princes of Europe, amplified the point “that there was no new faith propagated in England, no new religion set up but that which was commanded by Our Saviour, practised by the Primitive Church and approved by the Fathers of the best antiquity”.

But the liturgical inheritance was drastically pruned and simplified. The accent was on *hearing* and *understanding*, not on *seeing*, as in

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the theatre of late mediaeval religion.

There was, however, growing opposition to any set form of liturgy. The Puritans valued spontaneity and the unpremeditated devotional voice and privileged original sermons and prayers over readings from liturgical texts. They also resented the traditional sources from which the Prayer Book was composed.

The survival of symbols like the ring in marriage and the signing of the cross in baptism was attacked as was even the simplified version of traditional clerical vesture. Milton excoriated traditional vestments as “gagaws fetched from Aaron’s old wardrobe”.

The agitation against the Prayer Book led to its suppression during the Commonwealth but the sufferings of Prayer Book loyalists during that period gave the book a powerful aura which contributed to its restoration with the monarchy. Our Book of Common Prayer was annexed to the Act of Uniformity which received Royal Assent in May 1662 and so became a part of the law of England. It remains a doctrinal standard for the Church and an indispensable part of our identity.

In a book published in 1662, Simon Patrick comments on the rites and ceremonies of divine worship and approves “that virtuous mediocrity which our church observes between the meretricious gaudiness of the Church of Rome and the squalid sluttishness of fanatic conventicles”. Of course we would be too polite to say such things now but the Prayer Book offers a simple and moderate system for a whole life from baptism to last rites and seeks in its rubrics and ceremonies to embrace the whole person and not merely the cerebellum.

In more recent times both the Bible and the Prayer Book have been more and more edited out of public discourse and increasingly also expelled from school. Cultural amnesia is supposed to be a gateway to a kinder and more tolerant world while there has also been a cult of the new-fangled.

There was a fascinating example of the lingering antipathy to our cultural and religious inheritance in the reaction to the Royal Wedding in Westminster Abbey last year. In the acres of commentary in the secular press there was no criticism of the couple’s decision to use the



*The Rt. Revd. Richard Chartres*

traditional language form of the service. Then a week later the Church Times published letters from clergy expressing exasperation “that the language of the liturgy remained buried in the past” and “that once again the opportunity to present the church in a more up to date way was missed”.

A week after that, however, another clergyman wrote to point out that the three who had decried the “stuffy service” were born respectively in 1960, 1951 and 1937. The royal couple (born 1982) had chosen the service and the author of the letter observed that “it would appear that nothing dates so rapidly as yesterday’s modernity”.

Thanks to the labours of the Liturgical Commission the influence of the Prayer Book in the new Book of Common Worship is more prominent and we still have direct access to the original.

There is a challenge in every generation to distinguish between *tradition*, the living stream of spirit filled wisdom, and *traditionalism*, which is the obstinate attachment to the mores of the day before yesterday.

We live at a time when there is an urgent need to articulate a fresh narrative about the English nation now enriched as it is in this great cosmopolitan city with people who bring their own distinctive narratives. After the financial crisis what we seem to be offered so frequently is the prospect of a return to “normality” defined in exclusively economic terms. Is it not already clear that we must prepare for a new normal, a narrative about Our Island Story which is realistic about our changed place in the world but which contains the seeds of hope?

The Book of Common Prayer which immerses us in the whole symphony of scripture; which takes us through the Psalms every month; which makes available in a digestible but noble way the treasury of ancient Christian devotion has a beauty which is ancient but also fresh. If our civilisation is to have a future the roots must be irrigated and the texts which we choose to pass on to our children have the power to create a community which does not merely dwell in the flatlands of getting and spending but which sees visions with prophets, pursues wisdom with Solomon and lives with the generosity of the God who so loved the world that he was generous and gave himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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