



The Prayer Book Society of Canada
National Chairman - The Rev'd Dr. Gordon R. Maitland

Michaelmas 2021

Dear friends and supporters of the Book of Common Prayer,

As I began to write this letter, news came that the once-controversial Episcopal Bishop of Newark, John Shelby Spong, had died on September 12 at the age of 90. I remember that Bishop Spong was often mentioned in the literature of the Prayer Book Society in its early days when he was at the height of his fame and notoriety. In the 1980s and 1990s Bishop Spong was looked up to by liberal and progressive Anglicans everywhere, and was often invited to events in Canada to expound his view that traditional theistic Christianity was literally unbelievable and thus should be abandoned by anyone who was as enlightened as he was.

However, Bishop Spong was never an original or deep thinker, and the kind of theology that he espoused was actually no different from ideas already found in the Unitarian and Deistic literature that appeared in the last decade of the 17th century. Spong was simply an old-fashioned Enlightenment skeptic who, as it seemed, sought notoriety as a means of promoting his many books. It is worth noting that despite his prolific writing and his frequent invitations to various events, in his two decades as the Bishop of Newark (1979-2000) his diocese decreased in baptized members by more than 40%. Evidently this was not a successful church growth strategy for someone who claimed that he was trying to save Christianity from itself (as demonstrated by the title of one of his most well-known books, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*).

The enthusiasm for Bishop Spong felt by progressive-minded Anglicans was somewhat diminished in the wake of the 1998 Lambeth Conference when he made openly racist remarks regarding the African bishops in attendance. Spong confronted a number of African evangelical bishops, calling their views on the Bible "superstitious", for which he was forced to apologize by the then Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Frank Griswold. By the early 2000s Bishop Spong was no longer being invited to Canada by Anglicans, but was still popular with the United Church of Canada. Thus it is not surprising that he was asked to write the foreword to the book *With or Without God* by the atheist United Church minister Greta Vosper.

As the Lord Jesus himself told us, we can make no definitive pronouncement on anyone's final state (not even Bishop Spong's) once they are dead (Matthew 7.1-2). We must recall, though, what is written in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10.31).

In contrast to the lamentable lack of belief displayed by the late Bishop, I am happy to point out that our newsletter this month contains two articles that are strongly Bible-affirming. There is a very interesting interview with a young woman in Montreal who has created an online resource cross-

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referencing the Prayer Book with Biblical passages; and there is also an article on the new option offered in our BCP app of restoring the portions of the imprecatory (cursing) psalms that were omitted in our 1962 Prayer Book, explaining the rationale for doing so. As Christians, we assert that in our Lord Jesus Christ we have received a definitive revelation of the person, will, and character of God. The Bible (both Old and New Testaments) bears witness to our Saviour Christ, and thus we confess that the Almighty has been pleased to reveal more of his divine will in that holy book than he has by any other means. Proclaiming this fact is part of the work of the Society.

The year 2022 will mark the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the 1962 Canadian Book of Common Prayer by General Synod. By contrast, the first Canadian BCP officially lasted only forty years, from 1922 to 1962. This is certainly an anniversary that we will want to mark, and further details will appear in our next few mailings.

As many of you will know, July 2022 will see the next General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in Calgary. Although that might seem a long way off at this point, we need to make preparations now for a successful presentation at General Synod. We will have to rent space in the displayers' hall in Calgary and we must make plans to produce new literature and promotional items to educate people about the Prayer Book. In order to accomplish this, we will need your ongoing financial assistance. We know that things have been tough for many people over the course of this pandemic and that you may not have the means to keep up your usual donation. Nevertheless, no matter how small the amount, anything that you can spare will be thankfully received and faithfully applied toward the work of the Society.

Finally, I would urge everyone who has not already done so to please sign up on our website to receive our quarterly mailings electronically via Mailchimp. Signing up is very easy. Simply connect to our website, www.prayerbook.ca, and on the top navigation bar you will see a tab labelled "Connect". In the drop-down menu under "Connect", click on the link "Stay in touch". On this page you will find an area labelled "Subscribe" where you can enter your name and email address. Needless to say, the database of emails will be kept strictly confidential and your email will not be given to any third party without your explicit permission. Signing up in this way will help to reduce the regular operating expenses of the Society by lowering our mailing costs, which will in turn make more money available for our special projects. Our hope is that it will also allow us to communicate with our supporters more frequently than we are able to do with printed newsletters.

I hope and pray that the good Lord will continue to bless you, whatever your station in life, and that this Thanksgiving season of the year will be a joy to your families, despite the pandemic restrictions that we continue to live with.

Your faithful servant in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gordon R. Maitland". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "G" and a small cross at the end of the last word.

The Rev'd Dr. Gordon R. Maitland