

Newsletter

Michaelmas 2021

From the Society's New Episcopal Visitor

(To our delight the Rt. Revd. Michael Hawkins, Bishop of Saskatchewan, consented to take on the role of Episcopal Visitor to the PBSC earlier this year. Here he writes warmly about his appreciation for the Prayer Book and his association with the PBSC since its early days.)

I was deeply honoured, early in 2021, to receive an invitation to become the PBSC's Episcopal Visitor. If anyone is wondering what an Episcopal Visitor is, this involves my acting as liaison between the Society and the House of Bishops, and providing ongoing advice and encouragement to the PBSC National Council. I am very pleased to have this opportunity of writing to the membership at large of the Society.

First, perhaps I should say a few words about my background. The Prayer Book has been central to my spiritual life ever since my undergraduate days at King's College in Halifax. At that time, in the early 1980s, I helped to write some of the commentaries on the Daily Office readings that were being published by St. Peter Publications. While doing my M.Div. at Trinity College in Toronto starting in 1985, I served under Canon Robert Greene at St. Bartholomew's Church, which as you may know is still a bastion of the BCP. Both of the parishes in which I subsequently served in Nova Scotia were exclusively Prayer Book – Pugwash and River John, and Petite Rivière and New Dublin. In 2001 I came to St. Alban's Cathedral in Prince Albert to serve as their rector; St. Alban's is still three-quarters Prayer Book. And now, as the bishop of Saskatchewan, I serve a diocese that uses mostly the BCP. Our Cree parishes use it almost exclusively.

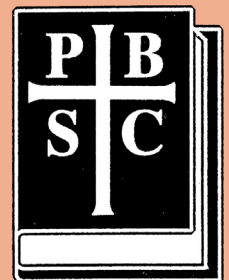


Bishop Michael Hawkins

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I think that the Prayer Book is essential for Anglicanism. Without that distinct heritage and patrimony, that we learn from and grow into, there is no reason for us to exist as a separate stream within the Church. I think that the Prayer Book is the way that we've been given to connect to our catholic and reformed tradition. There's a givenness to the BCP in our history, and there's a givenness to Prayer Book worship, which I think is compelling. It's in the givenness of things that we find our freedom, that we find the way to serve the Lord. The verse in the great hymn "New every morning" by John Keble which runs, "The trivial round, the common task, / Will furnish all we ought to ask, / Room to deny ourselves, a road / To bring us daily nearer God" reflects the English spirituality that flows through the Prayer Book, which sees not in choices, but in the givenness of things, the hand of God. And that's something, I think, that we all need a lot more of.

Part of that givenness of Prayer Book worship involves the use of lectionaries, both for the daily offices and for the Eucharist. Lectionaries are one way in which we follow the teaching of St. Peter, which is that no Scripture is a matter of private interpretation (2 Pet. 1:20). Traditional Anglicanism insists that we must always read the Scriptures with the whole Church, so for that reason lectionaries are very important. Our Prayer Book Eucharistic lectionary has come down to us almost unchanged from the one used in the undivided western Church; similarly, the Daily Office lectionary, in which, for example,

we read Isaiah in Advent and Genesis in pre-Lent, harkens back to the most ancient times of Christianity. The newer Revised Common Lectionary, which is now in such widespread use, has the appeal that it is broadly ecumenical, but it constitutes a major break with our tradition and history; because at the time that it was developed a deliberate decision was made not to read the Scriptures with the early Church Fathers. By maintaining the Prayer Book lectionary we are grounded in a tradition of reading the Scriptures alongside people of our own time, but also within the whole 2000-year-old framework of Scriptural study in the Christian church.

I think that penitence is also a key aspect of the Prayer Book. Where we are now, in our context, both ecclesiastically and politically, there are endless battles of one form of self-righteousness against another. And I think that common penitence, which has a strong understanding of social sin – of corporate sin, but then also of corporate identity – is foundational. I think that one of the most moving points of the Prayer Book Communion service is when the priest kneels with the people at the moments of penitence and humility – at the confession, and at the Prayer of Humble Access. In those moments, there is no distinction between priest and people. And that is community-building. Also, the Prayer Book is uniquely gifted in being a reformed liturgy that holds out the teaching of *simul justus et peccator* – that is, we are at the same time justified and yet sinners. And that precludes self-righteousness. The tragedy for

some of us who adhere to the Prayer Book is that we've become self-righteous about adhering to the Prayer Book! The Prayer Book itself gives no quarter to that kind of thinking.

To be sure, there are certain things in the Prayer Book that we have to grow into. For example, its objectivity. We pray for "all sorts and conditions of men", we have a general thanksgiving, we have a general confession. The modern move towards particularity is something that I have sympathy for, but I think the pendulum has swung a good deal too far in that direction, so that people think that if you don't mention in prayer everybody, every circumstance, every detail specifically, you didn't pray for them. If we think that we need to inform an ignorant God about what is going on in the world, we're mistaken! There is also the extravagance of some of the language in the Prayer Book. Where it grates or bothers us, for example in some of the penitential language, that is something that we need to reflect upon. Much of this kind of language is taken directly from the Scriptures, after all. Spiritual maturity comes through struggling with these things, thinking about them, living into them – as with much of the language in the psalms – rather than just rejecting them. I think of the Prayer Book as being like organic, whole grain bread. It takes more effort to chew and digest it, but it's much better for our systems than that fluffy white sandwich bread.

I have been a supporter of the PBSC's work ever since it was founded. I was a seminarian in Toronto from 1985 to 1988, so I

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was there when the PBSC was first formed, and got to know all of its founding fathers, one of whom was Canon Robert Greene under whom I was serving at St. Bartholomew's as I mentioned before. (Canon Greene's military record, his parish ministry, and his incredible advocacy for the poor were and are an inspiration to me.) And I definitely participated in the protest movement phase of the Society. I still remember, after I moved back to Nova Scotia, preaching a sermon at a Prayer Book Society gathering and afterwards getting hauled up to the bishop's office because of reports about what I had preached! During those years the Society made many outstanding contributions to the liturgical debates. Issues were raised about alternative liturgies that lacked for example the reformed doctrine of Christian penitence; concerns were raised about the proper expression of Christ's redeeming work, the "one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world". The Society faced a daunting challenge to preserve a place for the Prayer Book, even the right to use it. And I would say that although this sort of pressure has waned over the years, efforts to suppress the Prayer Book still continue in many places, and this is something that I have publicly

called my episcopal colleagues out on, and will continue to do.

On the whole, though, I think that it is as a renewal movement, and as a movement of prayer, that the PBSC has done its most impressive work. So I could not more fully support the current tone and direction of the Society. Projects such as the introduction of the new prayer "For Reconciliation with the Jews", which was a really stellar piece of work, have totally changed the church's general view of us. These days no one sees us as an enemy – they see us as a particular group with a particular charism and interest. And the Society's production of the new BCP app has been a real game-changer, and it showed remarkable leadership. It demonstrates that the Society wants to support and encourage clergy and lay people in maintaining a discipline of daily prayer and Scripture reading, while at the same time holding out the wisdom and the ancient tradition of what we have received in our Prayer Book. The app has proven to be a gift to the entire church, not only the Anglican Church of Canada but also beyond, particularly during the current pandemic. It's certainly been a life-saving gift to me these past six months. As many may have heard, I was hospitalized with COVID-19 and in isolation for a while, and quite ill; and in my foggy mental

condition it was a real blessing to be able to pull up this easy-to-use app on my cellphone and pray the daily offices. So I'm extremely excited about it.

In conclusion, I would like to say that alongside clergy such as Canon Greene, my appreciation for the Prayer Book has been fuelled by some stellar and exemplary lay figures who have been advocates for it. To name just one example, I remember with gratitude Jerry Fultz, who was a founding member of the Nova Scotia branch of the Prayer Book Society. He was my lay reader for eight years, and like a grandfather to my children. Many other lay members of the Prayer Book Society have been an inspiration to me. I like to remind people that the first English martyr, St. Alban, was a layman! The Prayer Book Society over its existence has been fuelled by a certain amount of clergy fire, but it has been lay folk who have carried out the lion's share of the organizational work. In fact there is something particularly lay-driven and lay-exemplary about English spirituality as a whole. And so, the examples of so many lay people saying their prayers, holding their Prayer Books, having it by their bedsides, continues to be deeply inspiring, and that's the kind of devotion that I want to encourage and to be a part of.

Correction: In the obituary of Ian Robinson which appeared in the last issue of the PBSC newsletter, it was stated that copies of his books could be ordered from Edgeways Press. Unfortunately, Edgeways Press has ceased operations. Used copies of Mr. Robinson's publications may be ordered from online book dealers.

“The Scriptural BCP”

(Newsletter editor Diana Verseghy recently interviewed Arlie Coles, the developer of a new online resource designed to demonstrate how thoroughly Scriptural the Prayer Book is. Arlie tells how this project grew out of her interest in linguistics and computer science.)

Please describe this new project for us.

“The Scriptural BCP” is a digitization and web upload of an 1839 publication, *The Book of Common Prayer: With Marginal References to Texts in the Holy Scriptures*, which was produced by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) of the Church of England. It is basically an annotated copy of the 1662 BCP. Alongside each collect, exhortation, canticle, versicle, etc., there is a column containing exhaustive chapter-and-verse citations of all the scriptural passages that are referenced in it. However, the original book is not very user-friendly, since readers must look up each of the numerous references themselves and attempt to hold them in their minds while considering the connection to the BCP text. The online format of “The Scriptural BCP” instead allows the user to click on the text of the BCP content and at once read all the related scriptural references together. It can be found here: <https://cwtc.gitlab.io/scriptural-bcp/index.html>

Wow, what inspired you to take on such an enormous task, and how did you accomplish it?

It actually wasn't as difficult as it might seem, and it was really quite an absorbing project! To backtrack a bit: some time ago I was helping to design a new service booklet for my parish in Montreal with the goal of adding some gentle explanation -- the parish in question (St. John the Evangelist's) is quite high-church, and knowing when to



Arlie Coles

stand, sit, kneel, as well as why who is doing what, can be a bit opaque for a newcomer. I showed a draft to my mother in Texas, who had become an Anglican coming from a non-liturgical tradition. She suggested that one way to make the booklet more accessible would be to add a few scriptural references, since people new to high-church liturgy might be wary of unjustified ritual. I thought this was a good idea, remembering for example the clear quotations

of Isaiah chapter 6 in the *Sanctus*, of Matthew chapter 15 in the Prayer of Humble Access and so on. For fun and to jog my memory of anything else obvious to add, I went looking for any BCP annotated with scriptural references and found the 1839 book, which had already been scanned and made available online at “archive.org”. But the quantity of references was just overwhelming! Plus, the book was hard to use, since the reader had to look up each reference in turn.

It struck me that this was a fantastic resource in a non-ideal medium (of course, that was all that was available at the time it was written). I had a good enough grasp of some computer science techniques that made a transfer to the web easy. The only manual work involved was transcribing the marginal citations of the 1839 book. (I tried to make use of machine learning, that is, digital pattern recognition techniques, to process the text automatically, but that was unsuccessful due to typos, inconsistencies and ambiguities in the original book.) However, once I had done this, it was quite straightforward to program software to use the citations to fetch copies of the Bible texts from online sources, and generate web pages from this. So to me, the project was just the right intersection of things I love and want to perpetuate, and things I knew how to do.

Tell us a bit more about your background. How did you come

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to acquire your enthusiasm for the Prayer Book tradition?

Having had parish homes first in the Episcopal Church of the USA and later in the Anglican Church of Canada, I can say that the BCP heritage has made a great difference to my life. I am a cradle Episcopalian, and was shaped by the Prayer Book without knowing it. As a very young child I grew up in a parish in Texas that used Rite II (that's the contemporary-language rite) of the 1979 American Prayer Book, and from there I climbed the "high-church ladder" as a matter of my own taste, gravitating towards Rite I. And we were given the space to climb that ladder, and there was always instruction about how to do it. I came to admire how the BCP held the high and low church parishes together, and Rite I opened up the history of the whole prayer book tradition to me. In retrospect, I really didn't realize how fortunate I was to grow up in such a supportive environment! And for the past several years that I've lived in Montreal, I have been a member at the Church of St. John the Evangelist, which uses the 1962 Canadian BCP as the basis of its Anglo-Catholic liturgy. I love it.

And how did you end up coming to Montreal?

Well, McGill University had exactly what I wanted to study. They had a really excellent programme for computer science together with linguistics. And there was also a financial incentive; it was actually cheaper to do this great programme in Canada than it would have been to find something of similar quality in the States. After I earned my bachelor's degree, I

discovered an outstanding M.Sc. program in machine learning on offer at the University of Montreal. So it was the right place, right time for me to continue on in grad school in the same vein. And after I graduated I landed a job as a research scientist at Nuance Communications, a company with a longstanding presence in Montreal, where I work in deep learning research for speech and language applications.

To digress for a few moments – many readers of this article will not be familiar with the terms “machine learning” and “deep learning”. Could you just briefly explain what they are and how they work?

Sure. Machine learning is a form of artificial intelligence that involves building a computational tool to handle huge volumes of known data, automatically learn its patterns, and then apply what it has learned to unknown data to make inferences about it for a specific task. A tool that has been well “trained” on large volumes of data can notice subtleties or common elements in new data that humans might have more trouble seeing. For example, it has been used to help identify which works were written by the same author. What makes some machine learning “deep learning” is the use of certain “layered” algorithms, such as neural networks, that can learn to detect more and more complex information – patterns within patterns. The area that I specialize in, which is connected with linguistics, is actually a very large sub-field within the deep learning / artificial intelligence world. I work at a company that does a lot of business in

automatic speech recognition, specifically for the medical context. So for example when a doctor and a patient meet for an appointment, they can record their conversation and then pass the recording on to the technology, which can then separate out what the doctor and the patient each said, and generate all the required paperwork. It leaves more space for the human connection.

You mentioned earlier that you had tried to apply machine learning to your “Scriptural BCP” project. A tool like that could also be used to produce something like Biblical concordances, couldn't it – you know, those huge books that used to contain enormously detailed Scriptural cross-references?

Yes indeed. I do think there's a large overlap between what we can do with this type of technology and what we can do for fields that have a long textual history. The Christian tradition is one of these, and in our Anglican world for example we have the Biblical texts and the Prayer Book texts that are all intertwined. As I said, one thing that the deep learning lets us do is handle enormous quantities of text and extract information about them in some way. I haven't really been able to dig into as many side projects on this as I would have liked. But I think there's a lot of unexplored territory as to what AI could do in a church context, by way of pointing out links between things, or just helping us study them better. For example, there's a variety of theological themes that could be explored – it may be interesting to train a machine at some point to take a particular allusion in some part of a text

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and delve into what theological connections it may have to other texts that on the surface might not be obviously related. Machines can tell us things like this if they're constructed and trained in the right way. So that's one example.

Your other area of specialization, alongside computer science, has been linguistics; does that also resonate with your appreciation of the Prayer Book?

Very much so. As a linguist I've gained a deep appreciation for the importance of one's native language. People have a special

relationship with their mother tongue. You know, we are built to do language. When babies hear the sounds of human speech, those sounds are literally built into their brains. If certain sounds aren't heard on an ongoing basis, as in the case of a different language that they only hear for a while, those sounds can get pruned away, labeled as "not my language", at very early points in the development of their brains as they grow. But the sounds of the mother tongue really get baked in, in a significant biological way. So it's not just my aesthetic interest or emotional response that makes

me enjoy hearing the liturgy in English; it has a core meaning for me exactly because of that visceral attachment to it. The Reformation impulse to get things into the vernacular has really come alive to me; I've realized what an intimate gift it is, facilitated by people like Tyndale and Cranmer, to worship God in my own language using some extremely well-trod paths - a tradition that, in adulthood, I better understood that not all have had! I firmly believe that the Prayer Book tradition is unifying, intimate, and well-justified.

Should They be Wiped Out of the Book of the Living? Restoring the Omitted Portions of the Imprecatory Psalms

(By the Revd. Chris Dow)

In Psalm 69:29, David prays this curse against his adversaries: "Let them be wiped out of the book of the living". Sixty years ago, this verse and others like it were wiped out of our Prayer Book Psalter. They can now be restored in the *Common Prayer Canada* app.

The Book of Psalms, as we all know, contains beautiful songs of praise, thanksgiving, repentance and petition. What is disconcerting to many people is that they also contain passages of imprecation or cursing, calling down misfortune upon the enemies of the psalmist, rejoicing at their downfall in sometimes quite chilling terms. The most severe verses from the imprecatory Psalms were omitted from the 1962 Canadian Prayer Book, such as Psalm 58 in its entirety, Psalm 69:22-28, Psalm

109:6-20, and Psalm 137:7-9. The Roman Catholic Church performed a similar excision of their Psalter for the 1971 Liturgy of the Hours, going even further in deleting all of Psalm 137, not just the last few lines.

The editorial decision to expurgate these verses reflects a theology of psalmody from the 1950s that was uncomfortable with the violent imagery and vindictive sentiments expressed therein, which is understandable given the trauma of two World Wars. This aversion to imprecation was famously expressed by C.S. Lewis in his chapter on "The Cursings" in his 1958 book *Reflections on the Psalms*:

... we must not [...] yield for one moment to the idea that, because it comes in the Bible, all this vindictive hatred must somehow be good and pious

[...] The hatred is there – festering, gloating, undisguised – and also we should be wicked if we in any way condoned or approved it, or (worse still) used it to justify similar passions in ourselves.

Nevertheless, even Lewis did not advocate for deleting the "bad parts" of the Psalter, admitting that we must "make some use of them". Though well-intentioned, the decision of the liturgical revisers to take scissors to the Psalter is now widely considered to be misguided. We must recall St. Paul's teaching that "... whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Subsequent Anglican Psalters, including those of the 1979 Episcopal Book of Common Prayer and the 1985

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Book of Alternative Services, present the full text of the Book of Psalms.

The *Common Prayer Canada* app now gives users the option to re-insert these missing portions and pray through the complete and unabridged Psalter while using the 1962 Canadian Book of Common Prayer. The restored verses are supplied from the 1964 Revised Psalter of the Church of England, which is similar in tone and character to the 1962 Canadian Psalter. Grateful thanks are due to Professor Jesse Billett of Trinity College, Toronto, for his expert assistance in this endeavour.

The combined 1962+1964 Psalter can be viewed in the app's Psalter tab by changing the "Psalter Version". It can also be selected for the Daily Offices in the Advanced Settings for Morning and Evening Prayer. (The 1962 Psalter as printed in the Prayer Book is still the default setting.)

Here is the complete list of restored verses: Psalm 55:15; Psalm 58 (all); Psalm 68:21-23; Psalm 69:22-28; Psalm 104:35a; Psalm 109:6-20; Psalm 137:7-9; Psalm 140:9-10; Psalm 141:6-7. (Note that these verse numbers reflect the numbering found in standard Bibles. The numbering in the BCP Psalter is sometimes different, since it frequently splits a long verse into two shorter verses.) In each of these Psalms, when the 1964 option is selected, subsequent verses are re-numbered accordingly.

The imprecatory Psalms are admittedly shocking and can seem repellent, particularly to those praying them for the first time. On what basis can we ask

God to judge and punish our enemies in the ways so vividly described in these Psalms?

It is important to notice that the imprecations are not arbitrary and impulsive calls for unrestrained vengeance, but specific requests for the wicked to receive in themselves what they have inflicted upon others. This symmetrical exchange is especially clear in Psalm 109: *His delight was in cursing; let curses come upon him* (Ps. 109:16).

Thus these Psalms are not barbaric screams of blind rage. They are carefully crafted prayers that draw deeply from the imagery and themes of a central narrative trajectory in the Bible: namely, the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15, God's promise that the seed of the woman – Christ and his saints – would crush the head of the serpent. To pray the imprecatory Psalms is to trust and engage in the outworking of this promise: *the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet* (Rom. 16:20).

Here are five ways and reasons to pray the imprecatory Psalms:

First, pray them against yourself! As the Prayer Book reminds us, we need to "acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness" (p. 77) and continually mortify our "corrupt affections" (p. 180). In the words of the forgotten fourth verse of the great Christmas hymn, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*: "Rise the woman's conquering seed / bruise *in us* the serpent's head". Praying the imprecatory Psalms is a sobering spiritual exercise of self-reflection and repentance.

Second, pray them on behalf of those who are abused, exploited and persecuted by the wicked.

Third, pray them for the sake of the wicked, that their ways would be thwarted before matters get worse – not least for the wicked themselves! Psalm 58 is an urgent call for God to intervene and stop the ungodly before their evil and violent plots can be fully realized: *Before they bear fruit let them be cut off like a briar* (Ps. 58.9). Strange though it may seem at first, to pray the imprecatory Psalms is to obey our Lord's command to *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (Matt. 5:44).

Fourth, pray them because doing so puts your enemy in the hands of God, thus lifting the burden of resentment off your shoulders, relieving you of the desire to take revenge (Rom. 12:19).

Fifth, pray them because it is your God-given privilege and responsibility to participate in Christ's victory over evil. *Such honour have all his saints* (Ps. 149:9).

To learn more about the imprecatory Psalms, follow these links:

<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/03/sing-the-mean-psalms>

<https://soundcloud.com/mere-fidelity/the-imprecatory-psalms-with-trevor-laurence>

<https://soundcloud.com/user-812874628/episode-406-addressing-objections-to-imprecatory-psalms>

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