

The Prayer Book Society of Canada Newsletter

Michaelmas 2025

Impressions of General Synod 2025

(By the Rev. Canon Dr. Gordon Maitland, National Chairman of the PBSC)

As most of our readers are aware, the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada took place this past June in London, Ontario. What follows in this article is not a systematic recounting of all that happened at Synod. The *Anglican Journal* has published a good report relating what events took place and what legislation was considered. What I want to offer here are my own reflections as to what was important in relation to the Book of Common Prayer and to the Church's worship in general, and what may be intuited regarding our future as an institution or denomination.

However, before relating these reflections, I want to thank everyone who helped to contribute to the production of new display materials to enhance our booth at General Synod: a table cloth, a backdrop curtain, and a standing banner. Our own Kerry Dickson (our website custodian) designed these items and we are most thankful for her work. I also want to thank Fr. Chris Dow, Mtr. Allie McDougall, and her husband Davis Whittington-Heeney, for their assistance in staffing the PBSC booth. These three coworkers are much younger than I am, and thus projected the positive optic that the PBSC was not just for geezers such as myself.

Our display booth was in a prime location at this Synod. We were facing the tables at which the delegates ate their meals and so we had a "captive audience" so to speak. We had some busy traffic at meal times – everyone from youth delegates to bishops. We did not have any hostile encounters from people who stopped by, which is a contrast to many years ago when some delegates would berate us for being a "backward" influence in the church. It would appear that we are now an accepted part of the ecclesiastical landscape for those who attend General Synod. The display item that people were most intrigued by were the sample copies of *The One-Year Lectionary*, a project initiated by National Counsellor Fr. Ben von Bredow and just published last year. The idea of having a book with Old Testament lections added to the existing epistles and gospels in the BCP eucharistic lectionary appears to have been attractive to a number of people, especially clergy. One cleric even ordered his copy from Amazon as we were speaking to him!

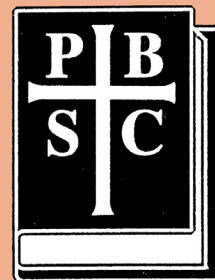


The Revd. Gordon Maitland and the Revd. Chris Dow at the PBSC booth at General Synod

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One of the most remarkable exchanges that I had was with a youth delegate, who asked if we were selling copies of *These Our Prayers* which was compiled by Fr. Robert Mitchell of St. Olave's Church in Toronto. This book is a compilation of collects from the BCP (and a few other sources) arranged topically for people to use on an occasional basis. He informed me that "all the youth delegates" had copies of this book and were enthusiastic about using it! While this may have been hyperbole, I was still fascinated to discover that more than a few of the youth delegates would be interested in using a book of traditional language prayers. Although we did not have copies of this book to sell (it is still available online) I did tell this young person that the PBSC had contributed financially to its production. I can only hope that knowledge of what is contained in *These Our Prayers* will lead these young people to look at the source of most of these prayers, which is of course our Book of Common Prayer.

I was privileged to be asked by the worship planning committee of General Synod to celebrate one of the early morning Eucharists during Synod using the BCP. Thus, at 7:30 am on the morning of June 24 (The Nativity of St. John the Baptist) the Eucharist was celebrated (eastward facing no less!) using the Prayer Book. I thought for sure there would be some controversy or pushback for doing this, but not a single voice was

raised in protest. Perhaps because attendance at these early morning celebrations was voluntary, those who might have been opposed simply stayed away. It is worth mentioning that a second early morning Eucharist using the BCP was celebrated several days after the one I presided at. It is certainly heartening to see the BCP actually used at our national Synod, and not simply ignored altogether as it has been at some previous General Synods.

I think everyone is aware that one of the chief items of business at this General Synod was the election of a new Primate. It was a truly electrifying moment during this procedure when, at the instigation of a youth delegate from the Diocese of Ontario, a request was made to add a new name to the list of nominees when it was apparent that none of the four initial candidates was garnering the support of the majority of delegates. As you know, this resulted in the election of the Rt. Revd. Shane Parker of the Diocese of Ottawa as the 15th Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada. Although I don't know Bishop Parker's views on the Book of Common Prayer, I do not get the impression from those I have spoken to that he is in any way hostile to the BCP. He certainly needs our prayers as he faces the unenviable task of reorganizing and downsizing the National Office, while at the same time dealing with the mess left to us by the previous General Secretary of the ACC.

There were relatively few motions that were related to the Church's liturgical rites at this General Synod. The Anglican Church of Canada has committed to the idea of adding to the Church Calendar a "Feast of Creation" on the first of September (or on the nearest Sunday to that date) which was an ecumenical idea first floated by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, earlier this year. It remains to be seen how much traction this proposal will receive. The only other liturgical matter was the authorization of a second stream of Old Testament lessons in the post-Pentecostal season of the Church Year which are to be found in the Revised Common Lectionary. The ACC initially endorsed only one stream of OT lections in the post-Pentecostal season, but this motion gave approval to both streams of lections. In a future article I hope to address the question of how "Common" the Revised Common Lectionary really is in light of the many options that are available when using it.

I believe that our presence as a Society at the latest General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada was helpful and edifying for many of the delegates. We are pleased that there are people who are discovering the variety of things that we have to offer to Anglicans of all stripes in Canada. It is yet another hopeful sign of better things that may come to pass.

BURSARIES AVAILABLE

Each fall, the PBSC makes available a limited number of bursaries of up to \$1000, for Anglican students engaged in religious studies who value the Book of Common Prayer, use it in their daily prayer life, and wish to support its continuing use in the Anglican churches in Canada. Students in the ordination stream are particularly encouraged to apply. This year the deadline for applications is November 1st. Students wishing to be considered for one of these bursaries should submit a copy of their curriculum vitae and the names, addresses and phone numbers of two references, together with a covering letter explaining their interest in this bursary and in the Book of Common Prayer, to the chair of the PBSC Bursaries Committee, Dr. Diana Versegghy, at the following email address: diana.versegghy@sympatico.ca. Candidates will be interviewed by the Bursaries Committee via Zoom in mid to late November, and awards will be made in mid-December.

A Prayer to Satan?

(By the Revd. Chris Dow, PBSC National Vice-Chairman. This is excerpted from his essay “A Curious Prayer and the Inversion of Scripture” which appeared in the magazine “Covenant” in June 2025.)

Drawing on biblical imagery in prayer is powerful. It mirrors back to God his inspired Word and demonstrates how Scripture soaks into our imagination and shapes the language we use to speak to God. There are many shining examples of scripturally saturated prayers in the Anglican tradition. Among the greatest is the Collect for Ash Wednesday, in which we ask God to “create and make in us new and contrite hearts”. This sums up the spirit and purpose of the Lenten season by blending David’s penitential plea (Ps. 51:10) with Ezekiel’s prophesy of the new covenant and new creation (36:26). Such biblically informed prayers serve God’s people well.

Yet there is a collect in use in the Anglican Church of Canada that draws on Scripture in a troubling way. While it is difficult to frame this observation without seeming inflammatory, the most objective reading of the prayer suggests that it is addressed to the one responsible for the actions it describes—actions that are spoken of in a favorable light. In this case, that one would be Satan. The prayer in question is Collect II for the Sunday between July 24 and 30 in Year A, which may be found in Alternative Collects for the Years A, B, and C in the Revised Common Lectionary (p. 37): *“Scandalous God, you sow weeds among the crop, raise bread with impure yeast, offer treasure without price and cast a net that catches good and bad: throw down our idols of purity and possession, so that you might reveal in us your wide-*

branching love; through Jesus Christ, the stumbling block. Amen.”

The second line of this collect is a clear reference to Matthew 13:24-30, Christ’s parable of the weeds. There is no ambiguity in that parable. Jesus speaks of one sowing good seed, and another, “an enemy”, who comes and sows weeds among the wheat. For good measure, Jesus even explains the parable and explicitly identifies both the weeds and their sower: “the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil.”

Next the collect makes another biblical allusion: “bread with impure yeast”. But here again, this is imagery Jesus uses to warn against the Pharisees and Sadducees, the impure yeast symbolizing the corrupting influence of religious leaders who mislead people (Matt. 16:6, 11-12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1). Some may object to this inference, pointing out that Jesus elsewhere uses leaven to describe the growth of his kingdom (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:21), but if these are the passages to which the prayer is alluding, why emphasize that the leaven is “impure”? The reference is unambiguous—as is Jesus’ meaning.

Yet another biblical reference is made to the dragnet that catches fish of every kind (Matt. 13:47-50). Strangely implying that the net was cast directly by God, not human fishermen, no mention is made of the bad fish being sorted and thrown away. Christ explains, again without ambiguity, that the bad fish are the “wicked” who, at the end of the age, will be taken out from among the righteous and cast into a “blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”. It is staggering how much Scripture this prayer draws upon and inverts.

Yet although the presence of such a prayer in our authorized liturgies is certainly troubling, Anglicans in Canada should not despair. Consider the letters to the churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia in the Book of Revelation (2:8-11; 3:7-13). These were also written to identify the influences of the enemy in the churches. But notice that the tone of these letters is affirming, and their purpose is to encourage Christians not to “fear”, to endure “tribulation”, to keep “the word of [Christ’s] perseverance”, and to “overcome”.

It’s also wise to remember that our Anglican formularies anticipate strange developments and departures from the faith. Article XXI states that “General Councils” and synods of the Church “sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God” because they are fallible assemblies “whereof not all be governed with the Spirit and Word of God”.

Finally, although this prayer was authorized by General Synod in 2019, the 1962 Book of Common Prayer remains our standard of doctrine and worship, and it contains over 60 references to the devil that warn against him and pray for his downfall. For example, in the Great Litany we pray that God would work “to strengthen such as do stand; to encourage the faint-hearted; to raise up those who fall; and finally to beat down Satan under our feet.”

I pray that Satan will be beaten down through an effort to remove this deeply problematic collect, or at least discourage its use. But if this does not happen shortly, there is comfort in the very parables to which it alludes. Their consistent message is that God is sovereign, and the matter will be sorted “at the end of the age” (Matt. 13:40). Even so, may that time come quickly (Rev. 22:20).

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