

## An Evangelical Christian's Journey to Prayer Book Anglicanism

*(By the Ven. Brody Albers, Archdeacon of Prince Albert in the Diocese of Saskatchewan. He was a PBSC bursary recipient during the three years of his studies at theological college; he has been a long-time supporter of the PBSC and is now a member of the Society's National Council.)*

When I first went to Briercrest College and Seminary in southern Saskatchewan in 2013, I was on the hunt for a church to attend during my time there. After several Sundays of hopping around churches both in Caronport where the College is located and in nearby Moose Jaw, a friend invited me to St. Aidan's Anglican Church for worship one Sunday. Though I was "church-shopping" at the time, I did not consider the Anglican church a viable option. What I had heard of Anglicans during my time in the Evangelical Protestant church of my youth was not favourable: it appeared that they were something like the Roman Catholics, and we were all deeply suspicious of the Catholics. I thought that I would take up my friend's invitation, view the spectacle, and continue on my way the next Sunday looking for my perfect church. I have been an Anglican ever since.

It was during my time at St. Aidan's that I encountered the Prayer Book tradition, though it was not what was used on Sundays. However, even though, like many parishes, St. Aidan's employed the Book of Alternative Services on Sundays, the underlying spirituality was thoroughly Prayer Book. Daily offices were read from the BCP, and when I joined the vestry at the parish, our vestry retreat worship was from the Prayer Book. During those years I was also involved in a daily office "plant" of sorts at Briercrest College, where the BCP office of Evening Prayer was made available on campus for



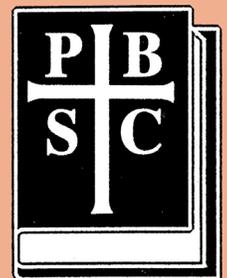
*The Ven. Brody Albers*

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students of Briercrest and other interested people a couple of times throughout the week. It was in leading this initiative that I first experienced Prayer Book spirituality in a robust, regular way, and through which I first felt a clear call to holy orders in the Anglican Church myself.

What I have come to appreciate deeply about the Book of Common Prayer as an Evangelical Protestant turned Anglican is the BCP's steadfast insistence on the Holy Scriptures as the ultimate authority for our faith, worship, and practice. As I have studied the scriptures more and more, I have come to recognize this: what has been passed on to us in the Prayer Book tradition is a thoroughly biblical pattern of worship, prayer, and living. The English reformers, Cranmer in particular, were deeply and acutely attuned to the scriptures in a way that modern Christians have not been able to fully appreciate in our contemporary society which too often likes to claim that we know better than our forebears.

This is reflected regularly in my ministry as a parish priest. When I come to the pulpit, my aim is to bring the scriptures to the pulpit and proclaim what they say. Of course, there is always the preacher's own interpretation at work and that cannot be entirely avoided, but as much as possible I see it as the task of the preacher to let the text say what the text wants to say. As I turn to the scriptures and seek to bring out their wisdom for a new generation, I have often found that the Prayer Book has beaten me to the task.

For example, on Ash Wednesday I wondered what to say to my congregation about fasting. How does one obediently follow the scriptural pattern of fasting given to us in the Old and New Testaments? The Prayer Book, it turns out, has provided what I believe to be a deeply biblical pattern in its table of Fasting, Abstinence and Days of Solemn Prayer found on page xiii. These instructions for fasting that are set out for us in the Prayer Book tradition neither fall prey to the severity of the late Middle Ages that the reformers rightly railed against, or the laxity of our own time that simply cannot be supported by the scriptural data. The BCP as a rule always seeks to strike a biblical balance in matters of faith, worship, and practice. Is it a perfect book? By no means! But it does a remarkably good job at striking that balance and I find it a much better guide to living that balance than my own frail reason.

Another great example of this principle is the Anointing of the Sick which is found beginning on page 585. The service opens with the lesson from James 5 in which St. James instructs those who are sick to call the elders of the church "and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord". Many people miss the rubric which says, "Where possible, it is desirable that more than one Priest should take part in the administration." Unfortunately, in a many places in the Anglican Church of Canada having "more than one Priest" is often *not* possible, but it shows that the scripture lesson from

James 5 is being taken seriously even as the Prayer Book outlines the practice.

The point is that for those who are serious about *sola scriptura* and want to take what the Bible says seriously, it is hard to find a better system of worship, prayer, and practice than the Book of Common Prayer. What is a worthwhile tradition? The BCP looks to the Bible to answer that question. What is worthwhile practice? Again, the BCP does the same; it looks to the Bible to answer every question about faith, morals, and practice.

I am so thankful for the work of the Prayer Book Society in steadfastly promoting the understanding and use of the BCP in our Anglican Church of Canada. After all, I have heard since I became an Anglican the phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* – meaning "the law of prayer is the law of belief", that is to say what we pray is what we believe. It is no coincidence, I think, that as we have moved away from the Prayer Book in almost every Anglican parish in this vast country, the consequence seems to be less alignment of our church with the plain meaning of scripture. If we are to be a church which is faithful to the Scriptures, we need to be a church which not only prays the words of Scripture but prays and lives *scripturally* as I've described; and the PBSC is doing its part to ensure that this inheritance is not lost for the next generation of Christians in the Anglican Church of Canada.

## Choral Evensong Re-Introduced at St. John's Portsmouth (Kingston, Ontario)



*(By the Revd. Robert Porter, rector of St. John's. Photo used by permission of the Trinitas Youth Choir.)*

On Friday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, the choir of St. John's Anglican Church, Portsmouth, celebrated BCP choral evensong with the support of the Trinitas Youth Singers, the culmination of a partnership that began this fall. The youth singers meet weekly in the church to practice beautiful sacred music and perform two recitals each year. They also participate in Anglican worship twice a year.

The Thanksgiving-inspired service included choral psalms, motets, and canticles by Berthier, Goss, Homilius, and Wedd. Many commented on how lovely and deeply rich it was to once again sing the evening office, while others participating for the first time eagerly asked when it was happening again.

I became enamoured with BCP worship when I attended St. Thomas, Huron Street, Toronto, during my time at Wycliffe College. The Prayer Book Society supported me with an education bursary in my second year. Currently, I serve at St. John's, Portsmouth, which has a long tradition of a weekly BCP sung service. It has been a delight to return to the poetic, solid, and richly spiritual worship of the BCP. I am grateful that the Prayer Book Society has again supported my studies in the Doctorate of Ministry program at Tyndale University, Toronto, with an education bursary this year. It is a joy to witness other generations joining in the rich tradition of the BCP, ensuring that the beauty and depth of worship will continue to inspire us.

## How “Common” is the Revised Common Lectionary?

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

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Roman Catholic Church produced a new order of Mass (the *Novus Ordo*) along with a new lectionary to go with that Mass. The 1,500-year-old lectionary in the old Mass provided readings over a one-year period. The new lectionary spread a larger selection of readings over a three-year period. Other churches followed suit and developed their own three-year lectionaries. The final product of these revisions in the English-speaking world was entitled the **Revised Common Lectionary** (RCL), and it is the lectionary most used in the Anglican Church of Canada today.<sup>1</sup>

One of the reasons for adopting the RCL was the ecumenical dream that Roman Catholics and Protestants would be using the same readings at the Eucharist Sunday by Sunday, and thus they could share biblical and homiletic material when producing sermons. The shared pattern of eucharistic readings would help draw together Christians who were otherwise estranged for theological and

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<sup>1</sup> When the *Book of Alternative Services* was first published in 1985 it contained an earlier recession of the Revised Common lectionary. This was replaced with the current Revised Common Lectionary in the 1990's.

historical reasons. This is an admirable vision in and of itself, and we can certainly pray that anything that could reduce the old enmities between various churches would bear charitable fruit. However, if ecumenical commonality is one of the reasons for the existence of the RCL, just how “common” is it? In other words, are English-speaking Christians of different denominations really using the same lectionary? Sadly, this is not the case, and this essay will show how profound differences in biblical interpretation have resulted in multiple options which undermine any real sense of commonality.

A fulsome understanding of how the three-year RCL is supposed to work is found in the guide, *The Revised Common Lectionary*.<sup>2</sup> This book was produced by the members of the committee that actually compiled the RCL. In the book they explain why they made the choices that they did in regards to the lections. What this book reveals is that there are two different streams of Old Testament lections (and corresponding psalms<sup>3</sup>) in

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<sup>2</sup> The Consultation on Common Texts, *The Revised Common Lectionary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> “The psalm is a congregational response and meditation on the first reading, and is not intended as another reading. Where a choice of first readings is given, especially in the Sundays after Pentecost, the corresponding psalm or canticle should also be used.” [*Revised*

Ordinary Time between Pentecost and the Reign of Christ the King. In one stream of Old Testament readings, the reading is linked to the Gospel passage. In the other stream, the reading is not linked to the Gospel and follows a pattern of semicontinuous reading through various Old Testament books. This means that different congregations can choose different patterns of Old Testament readings in the post-Pentecost season, which immediately calls into question how this makes for a “Common Lectionary”. We will return to this point later.

At first glance, this use of different streams of Old Testament readings would appear to simply be one more symptom of the modern tendency to provide a never-ending plethora of options for congregational use. But, in fact, these two different patterns of Old Testament usage stem from profound differences as to how the Old Testament is to be interpreted. Traditionally, Christians have viewed the Old Testament through a particular interpretive scheme or lens. It is understood that the Old and New Testaments together point to Jesus Christ; i.e., that God’s self-revelation in Christ is to be found everywhere in the Bible. The Old Testament contains figures, types, and prophetic utterances that foreshadow or point to the coming

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*Common Lectionary*, p.11]. This is why the psalm automatically changes when the Old Testament lection is altered.

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Messiah. These anticipations of the Christ then find their fulfillment in the Lord Jesus. Such ideas are nicely summed up in the following passage by Eugen Pentiu:

All in all, from the earliest period, orthodox or catholic Christianity in its appropriation of the Jewish Scriptures followed the apostle Paul in the view that Christ himself is the unity of the two covenants, having broken down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles, and reconciled both in his body by means of his cross (Ephesians 2.14-16).<sup>4</sup>

This happens to be the traditional Anglican understanding of the Jewish Scripture as well, as can be seen in Article VII of the 39 Articles of Religion:

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises.

When the Roman Catholic Church first constructed the three-year lectionary, those who compiled it chose Old Testament lessons (and the corresponding psalm) that complemented or foreshadowed, or was a contrast to, what was being proclaimed in

<sup>4</sup> Eugen J. Pentiu, *The Old Testament in Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.20.

the Gospel lection. In other words, they followed the traditional understanding that the Old Testament reading was as much about Christ (prophetically speaking) as were the New Testament readings.

So when the committee that constructed the RCL first published their lectionary, it followed the same principles as the Roman Catholics did. The Old Testament lection was linked to the Gospel lection. However, when the committee sought feedback to the common lectionary, there were those who objected to the idea that the Old Testament should be read in accordance with traditional principles of interpretation.<sup>5</sup> It would appear that some people wanted the Old Testament reading to stand on its own; i.e., that interpreting the Jewish Scriptures as pointing to Christ was an “artificial” reading into the text of something that was not there. This was in line with modern critical-historical principles of Biblical interpretation which tried to situate the text in its original context. Evidence of these competing interpretive frameworks can be seen in translations of the Scriptures as well. A traditional translation of Genesis 1.2 reads as follows:

The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1.2 RSV)

However, in the NRSV the text is translated thus:

<sup>5</sup> *Revised Common Lectionary*, pp.16-17

The earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1.2 NRSV).

While it is true that the same word in Hebrew can be translated as “wind”, “breath”, or “spirit”, the first translation above is in accordance with traditional Biblical interpretation (the Triune God was at work in creation) while the second translation is in accordance with modern critical-historical interpretation (since the ancient Jews didn’t know about the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, it is wrong to read this back into the text).

Confronted by two different schools of thought as to how the Old Testament should be interpreted, the committee that revised the lectionary decided to appease both factions by having two different tracks of Old Testament readings in the post-Pentecost season: one track where the first reading is related to the Gospel, and another track where it is not. However, it should be noted that in the seasons of Advent, Epiphany, Lent and Easter, the RCL uses only the traditional scheme of interpretation, and the Old Testament lection is related thematically to the Gospel lection. Thus, even if a cleric chooses to use the modern scheme of interpretation in the post-Pentecost season, he or she will still be using the traditional scheme of interpretation from Advent to Pentecost. In such cases a schizophrenic hermeneutic (that is, interpretive framework) in regards to the Old Testament will be imposed on the

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congregation – hardly an edifying spectacle for those seeking to understand God’s word!

It says something about the mindset of those in the national office of the Anglican Church of Canada that when they first authorized the RCL in the 1990s, they only included the modernist track of Old Testament readings. This is why the eucharistic lectionary in the BAS, the bulletin insert sheets with the readings, the Canadian Church Desk Diary, and McCausland’s Order of Divine Service only present one track of Old Testament readings in the post-Pentecost season, and not the two track RCL actually published by the Consultation on Common Texts. This situation only changed at the last General Synod in 2025 when the church finally authorized the other track of Old Testament readings. That was done because many clerics (including the author of this paper) had mistakenly thought

that the traditional interpretive track of Old Testament readings had also been authorized in the 1990s and could thus be used, even if it was not printed in the BAS. It is this author’s experience that the Old Testament lections are much shorter in the traditional track of readings, and crafting a sermon is much easier because the Old Testament lection (and corresponding psalm) are related to the Gospel reading, thus presenting a more coherent set of lections for exposition.

This brings us back to the original question posed in this essay, how “common” is the Revised Common Lectionary? Not only are there two different tracks of readings in the post-Pentecost season, but these two tracks represent two different ways of interpreting the Old Testament. How can a church proclaim the Scriptures with any sort of integrity if it cannot agree on something so fundamental as

how to relate the Old Testament to the New Testament? As our Lord himself said: “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand.” (Matthew 12.25 ESV).

Thus, if one must use the RCL, it is recommended that one use the traditional hermeneutic track of Old Testament readings, rather than the modernist one. Alternatively, one could use the eucharistic lectionary found in the BCP together with the supplementary Old Testament readings that have been published by the Prayer Book Society of Canada (see our website). Those Old Testament readings were intentionally chosen to be in accordance with a traditional hermeneutic. In this way, one can be faithful to the way in which the Jewish Scriptures have been interpreted by faithful Christians since the founding of the Church by our Lord.

### ***PBSC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING***

The Annual General Meeting of the Prayer Book Society of Canada will be held via Zoom on Saturday, May 9<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 pm EDT. Further details, the Zoom link and various supporting documents will be posted on our website at this link: <https://prayerbook.ca/agm-2026>. The annual Chairman’s and Treasurer’s reports will be presented, and the meeting will elect up to twenty National Councillors.

Nominations are invited for the positions of National Chairman, Vice-Chairmen, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Recording Secretary. Nominations for these positions must be received by April 15<sup>th</sup>, since these officers are elected by the National Council. Nominations are also invited for the positions of Councillor and Honorary President, and these will be elected at the AGM. Nominees for all positions must be members of the PBSC, and nominations require a mover and a seconder, both of whom must also be members of the PBSC. Nominations are to be sent to the national Communications Coordinator, Diana Verseghe, at 12 Sherbourne Dr., Maple, ON, L6A 1G8. (Email address: [diana.verseghe@sympatico.ca](mailto:diana.verseghe@sympatico.ca).)



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