

Case Study: South Africa

Background: as we outlined in the Final Report each Regional Group took forward the overall aims of the BILC project in the manner seen as appropriate for their Region. The South Africa Regional Group wanted to develop a methodology for answering the question, 'How do people read the Bible?' that drew all the dioceses in South Africa and could act as the foundation for further engagement with Scripture that took the evidence seriously. They did this by means of two residential workshops and this Case Study outlines the processes they used and offers the tools they devised as possible resources for other provinces or dioceses. The Regional Coordinating Group drew together representatives from most of the dioceses in South Africa for these workshops. This Case Study draws on the full reports of these workshops produced by the coordinating group and agreed by all participants.

Phase 1 - how do we discern and document what is actually happening

As participants were drawn from a large number of dioceses it started with an ice breaker in which participants had to 'catch a taxi' i.e. they had a very short period of time to do three things:

- (i) introduce themselves
- (ii) share their favourite bible verse
- (iii) talk about why they were present at the workshop and what expectations they had was used at the beginning of the session.

It was explained that Phase1 of these workshops was to address the question of how we discern and document what is actually going on across the dioceses in terms of Anglican reading of the Bible. The task of the regional coordinating group [these workshops] was to train trainers, to be a reference point, and to be an analysis point.

The aim of the workshops was to explore ways in which the Bible is read and as it progresses into Phase 2, ways in which the Bible might be read so that it is 'a meeting point rather than a site of conflict.' Though this is an Anglican Communion wide project emphasis was placed on the benefits for the local diocesan contexts, these benefits being independent of whether or not the project actually works at the Communion level.

Phase 1 was looking for rich data reflecting the diversity of contexts across the dioceses and needed the help of the diocesan representatives to gather this data ideally through the observation of existing study groups, but where this was not possible through the observation of newly formed groups. The key emphasis in this phase was to listen and so the regional coordinating group had developed various instruments to assist with observing the study groups and capturing relevant data.

The diocesan representatives were not expected to be leaders in the groups observed, but simply to listen and gather, and in this process provide the data for the regional coordinating group to analyse.



Instruments designed by the Regional Coordinating Group

[These can be found in the appendices to this Case Study and can be downloaded from either the memory stick accompanying the BILC Final Report or the Anglican Communion website]

Group profile – an instrument for analysing the nature of the group undertaking the Bible exploration.

The Bible Reading Matrix – an instrument for observing what took place in the Bible exploration. It has three sections:

- (1) the Setting of the Bible Study
- (2) the Use of the Bible
- (3) the Narrative Report

Personal influences on reading the Bible – an instrument to encourage participants to be conscious of aspects of their lives that influence the way they approach Scripture.

In order to test out these instruments and familiarise participants with them there was a session that took the form of a fishbowl exercise in which half the group undertook a Bible study and the other half of the group used the Bible Reading Matrix to observe the participants. Also, at the end of this session all participants were asked to complete a narrative report of their observations and to fill out the **Personal Influences on Reading the Bible questionnaire**.

The next session focused on reviewing the variety of responses to the **Personal Influences on reading the Bible instrument** and debriefing the **Group Profile** and the **Bible Reading Matrix**.

Attendees were reminded that we are not evaluating the group but documenting the group's process of Bible study.

Phase 2 – Reflecting on what is actually happening and moving forward

The workshop in this phase began with responses to work undertaken in local groups. The following comments taken directly from the verbatim notes of the workshops give a flavour of this work:

- The passion and understanding the participants had for connecting the Bible reading to literary works, many of which spoke powerfully to them of the themes they discovered in the passage being studied.
- So called 'ordinary' people being interested in the Anglican Communion and how the project fits into what is going on around the Communion. This was different from prior experiences of Anglicans being more congregational in outlook.
- The experience of sharing in the Bible Study and going into the rural areas. Encouraging to find people bringing their own Bibles to the studies and participating – not wanting to finish.
- The eagerness of lay people to study the Bible and the depth with which they would go into. Their willingness and openness to agree to disagree when different interpretations arose.
- Interesting to see how students struggled to move out of the classroom and read more ordinarily, a demonstration that they took seriously what they have studied. Having observed activists already engaging in the river clean-up it was interesting that the first half of the Bible study consisted of a report back on activities.



- The fellowship around the scriptures was striking. The scriptures drew the group together. Those participating were comfortable to share and to hold to different viewpoints without any fear of correction or attack from someone else in the group.
- It was interesting to see just how clued up people were on the contextual issues. There were different interpretations, but space was given for these differences – a testimony to the spirit of Anglicanism – no cause for division as such differences might have been in a different group.
- It was a battle to find a group doing an actual Bible Study, as opposed to a cell group using materials in which the Bible was used. Out of the experience of being part of the project, some of the groups said, “Wow! We should be doing this more often.” In one group the presence of an observer has led to the possible identification of an eyesight problem on the part of one of the participants and this may have a profound impact on this person’s life.

Three common themes emerged that are expanded in the Regional Reflection of this group in the Final Report

- (1) the excitement around reading the Bible
- (2) the role of the Bible in creating community
- (3) the challenge of trying to find existing Bible Study Groups – Anglican groups in South Africa are using the Bible but not necessarily studying the Bible itself.

A further reflection emerged with regard to Anglicans and the lack of Bible Studies. ‘Perhaps Anglicans are not used to listening to and valuing their own story, and that the enthusiasm for this project that encouraged more Bible Studies may reflect their experience of having their stories listened to and valued as part of the observation process.’

More specific reflections on the use of the ***Bible Reading matrix in Phase 1.***

Participants noted the certain difficulties:

- It was difficult simply to observe without being drawn in to participation – either through one’s own desire to participate or through questions directed
- Some clergy resisted allowing observers into their parishes
- There was a reliance on group leaders to do all the work
- The writing process seemed to inhibit participation – some Bible study members seemed to feel they were being judged when writing was going on
- Reliance on other people to set up Bible studies sometimes met with failure
- Bible study participants often moved away from the text, despite the attempt by facilitators to bring people back to the text
- The diversity of languages in some dioceses made observation difficult
- It was difficult to follow the matrix and observe. There was a need to become familiar with the matrix
- Especially in setting where the observer was known, participants tended to try to draw the observer in to answer questions
- Where clergy were facilitators they sometimes silenced or corrected other members of the group

The Regional Coordinating Group, wishing to build on the observations of Phase 1, introduced Contextual Bible Study [CBS] as a way to move forward. [A fuller explanation of CBS can be found in the ‘Further resources’ section at the end of this Case Study.]



Phase 2 was designed to take things forward and one way was by facilitating CBS within these groups. The Regional Coordinating Group produced background notes and questions on three passages for use in Phase 2. [These are included in the appendices that follow this Case Study]. The workshop undertook a Bible Study using the CBS approach based on the Genesis 1:25-31 outline.

- the text was introduced and read the text aloud, inviting participants to allow an image to appear. The text was then read in another version and participants again asked to allow an image to appear. Those who chose to describe their images did so and their words were recorded as accurately as possible on a flip chart.
- Participants were then divided into two groups and asked to participate in a pre-prepared Bible study. Thereafter reporters from each group reported back on the groups' discussions, again using notes kept on a flip chart.

There was then a reflection on the CBS. The typical CBS process was described as moving from Community consciousness (the imaginative exercise in response to the first reading of the text) to a close reading of the text and back to community consciousness. The first exercise allows the facilitator to perceive what is the received wisdom of the community and to hear what issues may be going on there. The recording of all that is said is especially important where participants may be unused to being heard and allows them to see that their words matter. Questions 2 and 3 of the prepared CBS take the readers back to the text. This allows the text to have its own voice. Questions 4 to 6 then take the group back to community consciousness. They require concrete reference to the circumstances of the community. In this instance the writing of a prayer is one concrete action invited.

Additional materials:

Articles - Contextual Bible Study

The Regional Reflection and Regional Reports from the East Africa Regional Group



Appendices:

- (1) *Group Profile form*
- (2) *Bible Reading matrix*
- (3) *Personal influences on reading the Bible*
- (4) *Outline of background notes and questions for the Contextual Bible Study*

All these forms are available to download as either Word or PDF documents from the memory stick or the Anglican Communion website.

[1] Group Profile form

Bible in the Life of the Church Workshop
Group Profile

Name of Church Group			
Diocese			
City/Town/Village			
Total Present	Women	15 - 35	
		36 - 60	
		61 and beyond	
	Men	20 - 35	
		36 - 60	
		61 and beyond	
Total			
Socio-economic situation of the group (please tick one)		Low income	
		Middle Income	
		High Income	
What is/are the mother tongue/s of the group?			
In what language/s was the bible read and discussed?			
How long has the group been meeting?			
Average educational qualification (please tick one)		School leaver	
		Graduate	
		Post Graduate	



[2] Bible Reading Matrix

Biblical text or texts used:

Date:

Observer's name:

Distinctive features of the Bible reading event	Comments
A: The setting of the Bible study	
1. Is there informal fellowship before and/or after?	
2. Is there worship (prayer, singing etc.)? When?	
3. Is there use of a formal liturgy? Is it Anglican?	
4. Is there personal sharing prior to or after the Bible study itself?	
5. What kind of facilitation is used? To what extent does everyone in the group participate? How is authority exercised? What kind of group dynamics operate?	
6. Did anything else strike you about the overall 'shape' and process of the Bible study?	
B: The Bible study, focussing specifically on the use of the Bible	
7. Does everyone have a Bible?	
8. What translations or versions of the Bible are used?	
9. At what point in the whole Bible study process does the group actually turn to the Bible?	
10. Is the Bible read aloud? Is the process shared or done by an individual?	
11. Does the group follow the reading in their own Bible?	
12. What happens immediately after the Bible has been read? What is the overall structure of the Bible study?	



13. During the Bible study is there any focus on the historical or sociological background of the text? Are any additional resources used for this, including reference to the original languages?	
14. During the Bible study is there any focus on the detailed literary structure or characteristics of the text?	
15. During the Bible study is there any focus on the central themes of the text?	
16. To what extent does the focus remain on the selected text, to what extent is the larger literary context referred to, and to what extent does the group shift its focus to other biblical texts? Does the group try to find coherence across scripture as a whole?	
17. To what extent are theological frameworks used to interpret the text?	
18. Are any other resources like study guides, etc. used?	
19. What role does the leader/facilitator play with respect to the Bible?	
20. What kinds of contribution do the rest of the group make with respect to the Bible?	
21. Does the group offer more than one interpretation of a biblical text? How does the group respond to multiple interpretations?	
22. In what ways is the biblical text connected to the issues of the groups' context? What are the contextual features that the group engages with? Eg. Cultural issues, gender, HIV, crime, etc.	
23. What weight is given to the text and what weight is given to the context?	
24. What kinds of authority does the Bible seem to have in the Bible study process?	
25. Does the group and/or individuals move from Bible study to action in any way? When?	
26. Did anything else strike you about the role of the Bible in the Bible study?	

C: Narrative report [Please summarise the information from the matrix, analysing what interpretations (content) emerged and how (process) they emerged.]



[3] *Personal influences on reading the Bible*

Each one of us brings to our reading of the Bible all the influences of our personal history. This exercise is designed to help us identify what these influences are and the effect they may have on the way we read and understand the Bible.

The questions below are to help you identify these influences so that you can share some of the answers with others. You will not be asked to share anything that you do not want to!

First encounters

What were my first encounters with the Bible? Where did I first hear it read? By whom?
Was there a Bible in my home? Who read it? When?
How was the Bible viewed in my home?
What was my own attitude towards the Bible?
When did I own my first copy of the Bible? In what language, translation and version?

Church history and the Bible

Where and when did I first go to church? What denomination?
How was the Bible used at church? Who read it?
In what language was the Bible read? Is this my mother tongue?

Formal study of the Bible

Do I, or have I ever, participated in a Bible study group?
What influence has that study had on the way I now read the Bible?

Conflicts and the Bible

Was there a time when I became aware that the Bible did not “speak” to me? or when I felt the message of the Bible was not relevant to my life? What were the circumstances?

My identity and the Bible

Does my ethnicity, gender, social class, education, culture influence my reading of the Bible? How?

Life crises and the Bible

Was there a time in my life when I went through a major crisis and the Bible was a resource to me? What was that time?
How did I use the Bible?
How has my use of the Bible at that time continued to shape the way I read it today?

Present relationship to the Bible

When and where and how frequently do I read the Bible today?
In what translation/ version?
Do I read with the assistance of study guides/ commentaries? What role do the sermons I hear play on my interpretation of the Bible?
How do I view the Bible today?
Do I use the Bible as a source of divine guidance? How? In what circumstances?
What influences the way I read the Bible today?



Looking back

Can I identify common threads in my relationship to the Bible?
Where have there been changes in my relationship to the Bible?

Looking forward

As I review this exercise, what has surprised me?
Are there aspects of my relationship to the Bible I want to explore more? What are they?

As I become aware of the influences on my reading of the Bible, is there anything I might want to change so that I become a more adequate reader of the Bible?



[4] Outline of background notes and questions for the Contextual Bible Study

[a] Bible Study 1 - Genesis 1:25-31

The facilitator invites someone to read the biblical text aloud, and then asks the following question:

1. Listen to this text being read aloud. What picture comes to your mind as you listen to this text?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then asks the following question:

2. What words are used in verses 26 and 28 to describe the relationship between humans and the environment, and what kind of relationship do they seem to imply? Compare how different translations translate these verses.

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then reads the following short input, and asks the group the question that follows:

In the Hebrew language the word usually translated as 'to rule' ('*radah*' in Hebrew) and the word usually translated as 'to subdue' or 'to have dominion over' ('*kabash*' in Hebrew) can have a very harsh meaning. Biblical scholars have reflected on these words ('*radah*' and '*kabash*'), wondering whether they can be understood in a different way. Some biblical scholars have argued that the words need not be understood here in their normal harsh sense. They suggest that because these words are associated with creatures (*humans*) who are made in the image of God, who is revealed here as creating and caring, these words might be understood to convey the notion of 'to shepherd' ('*radah*') and 'to take possession of/to stand within' ('*kabash*'). The basic idea of this interpretation is that human beings are God's representatives on earth, being located within the environment ('*standing within it*') and caring for it ('*shepherding it*').

Other biblical scholars point to a similar word in verse 16, '*mashal*' ('*to rule*'). Here is clear that the idea of 'ruling' or 'governing', repeated three times, is not meant in a harsh way. The sun and the moon are created "to give light on the earth". They are made to do good to the earth and not damage (*see verses 14-18*). The basic idea of this interpretation is that human beings are 'to rule' in the same way as the sun and the moon 'rule'.

Other scholars place this narrative in its ancient historical setting. They argue that the ancient Hebrews who wrote Genesis 1 were responding to ancient Babylonian creation stories. In the Babylonian stories of creation 'the sun' ('*shamash*') and 'the moon' ('*yareah*') were gods! So these biblical scholars suggest that Genesis 1 might be responding to and critiquing the Babylonian understanding. In Genesis 1 "the greater light" ('*the sun*') and "the lesser light" ('*the moon*') (verse 15) are clearly "made" (verse 16) by God, and they are certainly not gods. The main point of verses 26 and 28 according to these scholars is that it is humans who are 'in control' of the earth, under God, and not the Babylonian gods! The basic idea of this interpretation is that humans are agents, under no other gods, except God.



3. How does this information help us to understand the relationship between humans and the environment in Genesis 1:25-31?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then asks the following question:

4. What are the most common understandings of the relationship between humans and the environment in your local parish and community? In what ways are these common understandings helpful or harmful?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then introduces the following task:

5. In groups of two write a prayer that expresses what this Bible study has 'said' to you about the relationship between humans and the environment. Share these prayers in a time of prayer together.

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then asks the following question:

6. What other practical things could we do to respond to this Bible study?

[b] Bible Study 2 - John 2:13-22

The facilitator invites the participants to reflect silently on their context:

1. What makes up the environment you live in?

After a couple minutes the facilitator invites the participants to share their thoughts about the environment they live in, using a 'brainstorming' or 'pop corn' style in which everyone is encouraged to share.

When participants have had a chance to share fully, the facilitator uses the following questions to help participants further describe the environments in which they live.

2. What value do you place on the environment you live in? How do you personally take care of it?

The facilitator invites someone to read the text aloud. The participants listen to the text being read aloud.

After a brief pause to allow participants to think about the text, the facilitator uses the following questions to invite initial responses to the Bible reading:

3. What kind of setting or location does the action take place within?

4. Who are the key characters in the text?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then reads the following short input, and asks the group the questions that follow:

For the Jewish people the temple was a sacred place. God was understood to dwell in the Holy of Holies. The waters which watered the earth were believed to flow from the altar in the temple. The worship in the temple played a vital role in the fertility of the harvest, the regularity of the rain, and all the good experienced in creation. God was present here in the temple in a special way. It was a place where all people could come to worship God as the maker of heaven and



earth.

In our text it is Passover - the time when Jewish people from all over the world would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the Exodus from Egypt. Traditionally these pilgrims would have brought animals with them to sacrifice in the temple, but by the time of our story many of the pilgrims would have had to buy animals when they arrived in Jerusalem. Only animals declared 'clean' by the temple authorities could be offered as sacrifices. At the time of our text the buying and selling of animals had moved into the outer courts of the temple itself. These courts were for everyone, including the Gentiles - those who were not Jews. Pilgrims would have to change their money because the priests associated the images on the coins with idolatry, and so they would have to use the temple-based money-changers to change their money into temple currency and then pay to buy 'clean' animals sold by temple-based traders. All these economic activities were controlled by the priests in the temple.

5. How do the various characters relate to the temple in this story?

6. Why is Jesus upset about the way the moneychangers and sellers of animals make use of the temple environment?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then asks the following question:

7. How do you and others in your community exploit your environment?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator reads John 2:15-16 again and invites the participants to consider concrete responses to the treatment of the environment in their own context by asking the following question:

8. What are you going to do in your community as a result of reading this text?

[c] Bible Study 3 - Romans 1:18-23

The facilitator invites someone to read the biblical text aloud.

When the participants have listened to the biblical text, the facilitator then reads the following short input:

This passage is part of Paul's larger argument that all human beings are equal before God, both in their sinfulness and also in terms of a loving God's concern for their salvation. Jews and Gentiles stand on an equal footing before a God who has no favourites. In chapter 1 Paul begins by agreeing that the Gentiles are sinners (something his Jewish hearers would agree with), but then goes on in chapter 2 to show that the Jews, who should know better because they have the Law, are just as much sinners as the Gentiles.

The facilitator invites someone to read Romans 1:18-23 aloud again. Those with different translations are encouraged read their translation aloud as well. The facilitator encourages the participants to try to remember where the versions differ.



The facilitator then reads the following input out aloud once or twice, until people have understood it:

A key theme in this passage seems to be that God reveals something ('the gospel', 'God's righteousness', 'God's eternal power and divine nature') and makes the truth known, but human beings constantly seek to cover up something ('the truth'), to suppress it, to hide the way things really are.

The facilitator then invites the participants the following set of related questions:

1. What do you think Paul means by hiding the truth?
2. What is hidden?
3. How do you think it relates to the knowledge of God through creation (vv. 19-20)?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator then reads the following input out aloud once or twice, until people have understood it:

Paul is writing to people in Rome and he sometimes uses ideas well-known to people educated in that culture, based on the teaching of a group of philosophers called Stoics. The Stoics argued that the Word (Logos) of God is what created the material world and remains inside the world, giving it its laws and its ethical framework. Therefore God and God's purpose can be known through studying the world. John's Gospel has a similar idea about the creation of the world by the Word spoken by God (John 1:1-14). So for Paul the world reflects God's 'eternal power and divine nature', visible to all with eyes to see. Paul uses this well-known and widely accepted Stoic idea to challenge the Romans. If God can be known by everyone through nature, why do they refuse to see and acknowledge God?

The facilitator then invites the participants the following set of related questions:

4. What does Paul's argument say about the importance of the created world and our relationship to the environment?
5. In what way do you believe that nature reflects the Creator?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator or someone else reads the verses 18-19 again, and then reads the following input out aloud once or twice, until people have understood it:

Here Paul argues that God can be known (at least in part) through the natural world he has created. In some way the world reflects the God who created it. This argument could be seen as making a connection between 'suppressing the truth' revealed in what God has created and the 'wrath of God' against those who conceal that truth.

The facilitator then invites the participants the following question:

6. In what way might the natural disasters which have resulted from the wasteful use of the world's resources somehow be God's 'built in' warning signals to human beings against destroying the earth which God created and which makes God known?



When the group has responded fully, the facilitator reads verses 22-23b: 'Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images'. The facilitator then invites the participants the following question:

7. In our world today, what might it mean to 'exchange the reality' of a good and beautiful world reflecting God's glory for 'copies' or 'images' of that glory?

When the group has responded fully, the facilitator invites the participants to discuss the final question:

8. What challenges and tasks does this text call Christians to with respect to the environment?

