

The story of the BILC project

BILC began its formal life with a [resolution](#) passed at ACC-14 in 2009. The initial work was undertaken by a Steering Group made up of biblical teachers and scholars from different parts of the Anglican Communion who formed Regional Groups to explore the Bible together.

Phase 1: 2009-2012

This is how the report [Deep Engagement; Fresh Discovery](#) described the work of this phase of the BILC initiative:

Methodology and Broad Conclusions from the Regional Groups

The project was very clear in its expressed aims that it wished to try to build a series of pictures of how Anglicans across the Communion actually engage with and interpret Scripture. That is, to first be descriptive rather than prescriptive.

To achieve this goal the Steering Group encouraged groups across the Communion to participate in a series of explorations and engagements with Scripture, observe what happened, report back on these experiences, and reflect on their significance for the Communion.

To achieve this what was needed was:

- a regional mix of participants across the Communion;
- two issues that would focus these explorations and engagements;
- a core set of Scripture passages for participants to engage with;
- methods of observation and reporting; and
- a forum to reflect on the possible significance of these reports.

Regional Groups

Time and resources limited how many regions of the Communion the project could work in. In the end the project set up eight Regional Groups offering insights from East Africa, North America, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Australia, South Sudan, Cuba and South East Asia (Hong Kong and the Philippines). Their reflections are contained in the [Regional Reflections](#).

The first five Regional Groups had a coordinator who joined the Steering Group together with theological consultants who facilitated work in the other regions. The coordinators worked in their region in a variety of ways, using both established groups and those constituted especially for the project, and the approaches each took sought to be appropriate for each region. These differences can be seen in the [Regional Reflections](#) and the fuller Regional Reports [see [Archive Materials](#)].

Issues to be Explored

As outlined in the aims of the project, the Steering Group decided to identify 'two major contemporary issues'. It wanted these to be such that they were likely to throw up a diversity of views, be issues that would be seen as central to our life together as God's people involved in God's mission, and be generally accepted as such by the wider Communion. After wide discussion of various possibilities, the Steering Group focussed on the Fourth and Fifth of the Communion's '[Five Marks of Mission](#)'. These became the basis of the two Case Studies for the project.



Core Scripture Passages

For each Case Study the Scripture passages chosen spanned both Testaments and the Apocrypha and included different genres of Biblical literature – history, wisdom, prophecy, gospels, letters etc. The Steering Group also suggested a series of questions for groups to start their engagement and explorations.

Methods of Observation

These varied from region to region but some helpful tools emerged that are offered for wider use across the Communion. The intention was not to attempt a detailed empirical or evaluative study but to gather a series of snapshots and stories. The nature of the observations can be seen in the Regional Reflections. The tools and exercises some groups used can be found in the additional material sections throughout the report.

Forum for Reflection

This was a major role assumed by the Steering Group which met three times during the project: to set up the whole project and plan the first Case Study (London, England, November 2009); to reflect on the outcomes from this and plan the second Case Study (Durban, South Africa, November 2010); and finally reflect on both the Case Studies and prepare the outline of this Report (Woking, England, May 2012). The Regional Reports [see [Archive Materials](#)], [Regional Reflections](#), the report on the November 2010 meeting [see [Archive Materials](#)] and [Deep Engagement; Fresh Discovery](#) are the fruits of those reflections.

Phase 2: 2012-2016

Following the enthusiastic reception of [Deep Engagement; Fresh Discovery](#) at ACC-15 in Auckland in 2012 a further [resolution](#) was passed asking that its work continued. The work was developed in a number of ways culminating in this tool-box:

Broadening and expanding the educational resources

One of the aims of BILC had always been to seek out good educational resources that encouraged a deeper engagement with Scripture. [Deep Engagement; Fresh Discovery](#) gathered together a range of these resources and BILC was asked in Phase 2 to both expand these and broaden the places from which they were drawn. This has been achieved to some degree with the present array of resources but as BILC continues the tool-box is not closed. [See Can I contribute to the BILC tool-box?](#)

Study Guide to what the Anglican Communion has said about the place of the Bible in its life

In Phase 1, alongside the work of the Regional Groups, BILC reviewed what the Anglican Communion had already said about Scripture through its Lambeth Conference resolutions, official reports and reports of our ecumenical conversations [see [Extracts Document](#)]. Early on in Phase 2 three of the original Steering Group – Charles Sherlock, David Allen and Stephen Lyon – collaborated to produce a [Study Guide](#) on the [Themes and Principles](#) that emerged from this review. This seeks to offer passages of Scripture and questions to enable a group to see how the principles of engaging with Scripture might be applied to different parts of the Bible. This Guide was also translated into [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

Reading the Bible Together Across the Communion

Work in Phase 1 undertaken by Ellen Davis in South Sudan pointed towards the great benefits that might come if, as a Communion, we intentionally found opportunities to explore the Bible together. [See the section in [Regional Reflections](#): Moving towards a Genuinely Intercontinental Mode of Reading Scripture Reflections of the work in South Sudan]. Ellen was asked to continue this work by drawing together an international group of Biblical scholars from Africa, North America and the UK who ‘met’ 16 times via



Skype and face to face in the UK to develop this work. The fruits of this work are in:

- [Engaging with Scripture together across the Communion](#)
- [Bible Study outlines on Ruth and Jonah](#)
- [Seminary conversations](#)

[E mail conversations on issues and questions about how we view and engage with the Bible](#)

Phase 1 of BILC deliberately did not attempt to enter into discussion about some of the fundamental issues that are at the heart of the differences across the Communion in relation to Scripture. In Phase 2 BILC decided to try and address some of these questions but in a manner that was in keeping with the processes BILC has already used – relational, conversational and inviting enquiry. So BILC attempted to set up five E mail conversations between three biblical scholars for each question inviting them to ‘talk together electronically’ about some fundamental questions concerning Scripture.

In the end BILC managed to enable four conversations on the following questions:

1. What is it that makes an approach to biblical authority and biblical interpretation distinctively Anglican?
2. What does the Bible say about itself?
3. Differences in hermeneutic method are sometimes put forward as reasons for divergence over what Scripture teaches. To what extent is this the case?
4. 'Attentive' or 'responsible' readings of Scripture are ways of paying heed to what they teach, while avoiding simplistic or misleading interpretations. How necessary and helpful are such approaches? In employing them, how might dependence on theories about interpretation be avoided?

The method we used was a three-stage conversation with opening comments, followed by two reflection pieces. Two conversations were completed and the other two stalled at some point in this process. The full report on these is in [E mail conversations](#) together with a short comment piece.

[Fresh Approaches to our Engagement with Scripture](#)

During Phase 2 the Coordinator came across a number of educational resources that were proving helpful in the situations for which they were written. Often those who wrote them did not think they were anything special or different. The Coordinator sought ways that some of these resources might be made more widely available or adapted for use with congregations. While it can sometimes be invidious to single out particular resources in this category the following are worth looking at:

- [Norwich Maps](#)
- [BIBLE360](#)
- [Exploring the Gospels side by side](#)
- [Looking at the Bible in a reflective way](#)
- [Light for our Path series](#)

[Workshops](#)

Finally, throughout Phase 2 the Coordinator was invited to lead workshops in many parts of the Anglican Communion. While, through these, he shared some of the insights and resources that BILC was pulling together, he also learned a great deal from those he worked with. He experienced their enthusiasm for the Bible, their joys and, at times, frustrations as they encouraged others to engage more deeply with Scripture and was able to learn from them about both the challenges of their ministries and the ways they met those challenges. BILC hopes these contributions enrich your ministry.



Phase 3: 2016 onwards

The work still continues. This tool-box is only the beginning and needs to be opened up, used, added to as time goes on. The Bible will always hold a central place in the life of the Anglican Church but we need to ensure that our practice matches rhetoric.

Stephen Lyon
Coordinator of BILC
2009-2016

