

ACC-15 – Bible in the Life of the Church (BILC)

Deep engagement; Fresh Discovery: the Bible in the Life of the Anglican Communion

At ACC-14, held in Jamaica in 2009, the following resolution was passed that gave birth and shape to the BILC project. It was:

- To explore how we, as Anglicans actually use the Bible by sharing experiences of using the Bible to explore two major contemporary issues;
- To distil and develop from these explorations the working principles of Anglican hermeneutics;
- To produce resource materials for use at all levels of Christian education;
- To provide a guide to significant literature on this topic; and
- To offer a report and make recommendations to ACC 15.

Since 2009 the project undertook four major tasks to fulfil the mandate given by ACC-14. These were that:

1. It created a network of Regional Groups across the Communion, each facilitated by a regional coordinator, to participate in explorations of Scripture providing a series of windows into how different regions engaged with and interpreted the Bible.
2. It reviewed what the Anglican Communion has already said about Scripture through its Lambeth Conference resolutions, official reports, reports of our ecumenical conversations.
3. It commissioned a piece of empirical research based on a number of existing studies exploring how 'ordinary Anglicans' [We use of the term 'ordinary Anglicans' to refer to members of the Church who claim no formal theological education or training] view and understand the Bible.
4. It collected a range of resources that would enable the church, at all levels, to engage more deeply with Scripture.

The outcomes from each of these tasks is fully outlined in the Final Report but in summary, the findings have the following core message that we offer, through ACC-15, to the whole Anglican Communion:

Anglicans love the scriptures of both Old and New Testaments; these have a central place within our common life. For 500 years or more we have valued their availability in vernacular translation and treasured them in our worship. They speak to us, and the societies in which we live, in many ways - permeating our liturgy, Bible study, preaching, commentary, story-telling, song, scholarship, dance, music, and art. The nature of these encounters differs from context to context, adding to both the variety of interpretations and the complexity of the interpretive process.

The richness of these encounters was explored in this project by our investigation of how Anglicans around the world approach the Bible. This involved workshops in different parts of the Communion, a questionnaire survey, a literature survey of official Anglican statements and documents, and academic reflections by Anglican scholars.

A major finding of these investigations is that how Anglicans engage with the Bible turns out to be just as important as its content. This perhaps unnerving claim does not contest the unique place and authority which the scriptures have in Anglican life, but it does point up the significance, perhaps thus far overlooked, of the contexts in which and processes by which they are heard and read.

The Bible in the Life of the Church project, while finding some decline in biblical literacy, above all encountered the sense of excitement, discovery and challenge that comes from reading the scriptures together. This Report seeks to capture the work of the project and, through its narratives and the resources offered, invites us, as a Communion, to deepen our love of the Bible and the rich treasures its pages offer.

The Report itself is too heavy to send to each of you individually but there will be a copy waiting for you – together with a memory stick full of further resources gathered together by the project's Steering Group. However, the [almost] final draft of the Report can be seen on the Anglican Communion website at:

www.aco/communion/acc/meeting/acc15/downloads.org

Our suggestion is that you **do not** print it off but read it on your computer screen. We also ask if you could find the time to look at it before your departure for Auckland and perhaps particularly read the Foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Introduction by the Steering Group's Chair, Archbishop David Moxon, who will introduce the work of BILC and this Report in Auckland, and Sections 1-3 in detail and then glance at the range of extra resources which will be on the memory stick outlined in Section 4.

In closing, like any report, this one could simply gather dust on the shelves of those who receive or buy it or it could act as a springboard for further action, activity and influence within the life of the churches of the Communion. In his foreword Archbishop Rowan is clearly not of the 'dust gathering' persuasion as he says,

"One of the things that I personally hope this project will help us develop in the Communion is a wider and fuller biblical literacy, in which the outlines of the one great story of creation and redemption will be clear. To be a biblical Church is surely to be a community that lives out this great story day by day and commends it to people everywhere as the most comprehensive truth possible about the nature of God and God's world. May God use this work to further that end, in our Communion and in all communities of his people."

[Archbishop Rowan Williams in the Foreword to *Deep engagement; Fresh Discovery: the Bible in the Life of the Anglican Communion*, the final Report of the BILC project]

See the full report of the Bible in the Life of the Church at:

www.aco/communion/acc/meeting/acc15/downloads.org