Bible in the Life of the Church Survey
Report for the Steering Group: May 2012

Introduction
This is a brief report on the survey work that has been done under the auspices of the Bible in the Life of the Church project over the last year or so. After the Durban meeting it was clear that quantitative work would not be possible or appropriate at this stage in all Provinces, but that it might be worth trying to extend the previous studies on Anglicans in England to other parts of the Communion. To this end a questionnaire was designed that used some of the instruments developed and tested in the Church of England. Although there were likely to be some compatibility issues with using this in other cultures, it was decided it would be more productive to build on tried and tested instruments rather than risk untested ones in an extensive survey of this kind.

The aim, then, was to see if existing measures of Biblicism, literalism, horizon separation and horizon preferences could be used more widely in the Anglican Communion. The intent was to develop questionnaires online and in paper format, in both English and Spanish. The paper questionnaire was designed to be completed by congregations (possibly as part of worship services), so that information from individuals could be linked to information from a shorter 'church' questionnaire that would be completed by one person per church. Information from individuals would be linked to church-level data using postal or zip codes.

Procedure and Method
We had hoped that churches would use the questionnaire as part of a 6 week study, and that results could be fed back to them. In the event, take up of paper questionnaires was low, and there have been insufficient returns from any one congregation to make it worthwhile feeding back results to particular church. The main take up has been online, with 1468 replies so far. With the paper questionnaires this gives a sample of just over 1500.

The questionnaire started with the test passage, from Mark 9:14-29 (the healing of a boy with an evil spirit), which was followed by around 70 questions that measured particular ways of interpreting the text or the Bible generally, and gather background information about respondents.
Measuring Beliefs about the Bible.
Page five of the paper questionnaire had the Bible scale – twelve items relating to the veracity, authority, inerrancy and exclusivity of the Bible. Items were scored so that a high score (maximum 60) indicated a conservative attitude toward the Bible (Biblicism) while a low score (minimum 12) indicated a liberal attitude toward the Bible.

The Bible contains truth, but it isn’t always true
I have never found the Bible to be wrong about anything
Some parts of the Bible are more true than others
Christians can learn about God from the writings of other faiths
Once you start doubting bits of the Bible, you end up doubting it all
You can’t pick and choose which bits of the Bible to believe
The Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct
The people who wrote the Bible created stories to explain things they didn’t understand
If the Bible says something happened, then I believe that it did
I use the Bible as the only reliable guide for life
The Bible contains some human errors
Science shows that some things in the Bible cannot have happened

Measuring Literalism
This section, on page six, was perhaps the most controversial for some respondents because it asked if a range of biblical 'events' actually happened or were fictional stories. Some respondents felt this crude view of literalism was inappropriate... while others welcomed being asked. The items included 10 used previously and a further 6 that were added to see if events linked with doctrinal orthodoxy (e.g. bodily resurrection, virgin birth and ascension) were more likely to be believed a have actually happened than miracles with less doctrinal 'weight'.

David killed a giant called Goliath
Jonah was in the belly of a fish (or whale) for three days
Jesus’ mother was a virgin when she conceived Jesus
Moses went to Pharaoh and threatened terrible plagues
Noah built an ark and filled it with animals
Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead
Adam and Eve lived in a garden called Eden
Jesus fed 5000 people with two fish and five loaves
Joshua destroyed the walls of Jericho
Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth
Jesus calmed a storm by commanding the wind and waves to be still
Jesus was transfigured on a mountain with Moses and Elijah
Jesus turned water into wine
Jesus rose from the dead in bodily form
Jesus healed a paralytic lowered through a roof
Jesus ascended into heaven

For comparability with previous work, the ten items in the original scale were used to create the literalism scale, with a lowest possible score of 10 and a highest score of 50.
Measuring Horizon Separation

The test passage was used mainly to examine issues of horizon. I use this term to refer to the different 'worlds' of the Author, Text and contemporary Reader. The items on page three of the questionnaire were designed to see how far participants noticed the separation of their world from that of people in the biblical narrative. There were 10 items with a 5-level response ranging from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly.

Agreeing with these items was taken to suggest a high level of horizon separation:
- The boy had epilepsy
- I find this story hard to relate to my life
- I cannot imagine this happening today
- This story has little to say to our society today
- People understood the world differently in those days

Agreeing with these items was taken to indicate a 'fusion' of horizons:
- The boy was possessed by an evil spirit
- I trust what the Bible says about the boy’s illness
- This is the straightforward reporting of a miraculous healing
- This story makes sense to me, even in our culture
- These people are just like us

By scoring each response it was possible to create a scale of Horizon Separation, with a high score indicating horizon separation, and a low score horizon fusion.

Measuring Horizon Preference

Page four of the questionnaire had eight forced-choice questions with three choices in each. Respondents were prompted by 'This story shows us…' , and then for each of the eight questions had to choose the one answer they preferred, where one item related to the author horizon, one to the text horizon and one to the reader horizon. Preference for a particular horizon was indicated by how many times a person chose items related to that horizon (minimum possible 0, maximum possible 8). A high score in one horizon implied a low score in at least one of the other two horizons.

Author-type choices:
- The writer’s fellow Christians could not always heal people.
- The writer believed that Jesus was able to perform miracles.
- The writer encouraged his readers to have faith in Jesus.
- The writer was trying to dispel the fear of evil in the early church.
- The writer wanted to denounce his faithless generation.
- The writer believed that prayer could exorcise demons.
- The mind of the original writer.
- The writer had compassion for the sick and demon-possessed.

Text-type choices:
- Why the disciples were not always able to heal people.
- Jesus was renowned in his lifetime as a powerful worker of miracles.
- Jesus encouraged the father’s weak faith.
- Jesus overcame the people’s fear of evil.
Jesus was sometimes angry with the faithless people he met.
Jesus believed that his disciples must pray if they were to heal.
The attitude of Jesus to his generation.
The compassion Jesus had for the sick and demon-possessed.

Read-type choices:
Why people are not always healed when we pray for them today.
Jesus performs miracles today.
God encourages us today when our faith is weak.
Through Jesus, we need not fear evil today.
God is sometimes angry at our lack of faith today.
Prayer is vital for a successful healing ministry today.
What it means to be a faithful disciple today.
That we should have compassion for the needy people we meet.

Background information
This included country of residence, age, sex, ordination status, educational experience, theological educational experience, frequencies of church attendance, prayer and bible reading. There were three scales to measure Theological Stance (Liberal versus conservative), Charismaticism and Church Tradition (Catholic versus Evangelical).

The Sample
Given the nature of the take-up of the survey (overwhelmingly online) the sample reflected a particular group on mainly 'western', educated and religiously committed Anglicans. Around 48% were from the USA, 15% from New Zealand, 13% from the UK, 12% from Australia, 6% from Canada and 3% from South Africa. The remaining 3% were from 25 different countries including Egypt, Mexico, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Jamaica and Germany.
The majority were men (54%) and 71% were lay people. The ordained respondents included 16 bishops. Age ranged from less than 30 to over 90, with the majority being in their 50s or 60s. Educational levels varied, but most had either a graduate (25%) or post-graduate degree (53%), with 31% having a degree in theology or biblical studies. Many of the respondents were thus highly educated and not necessarily 'ordinary' readers.
This was a religiously committed sample: 92% attending church at least weekly, 79% praying daily and 46% reading Scripture daily.

In terms of theological stance, most (but by no means all) respondents were towards the 'liberal' rather 'conservative' end of the scale, and a majority were closer to the 'not charismatic' and 'catholic' ends of the scales. These scales have been extensively and intensively studied in the UK, but it is not clear how they operate elsewhere. Nonetheless, most respondents completed them, and the indication is that in this sample they were broadly understood to mean the same as in the UK.

Clearly this sample is not typical of the Anglican Communion as a whole. However, it is a reasonably large sample and includes a range of people with quite different backgrounds. If it fails to tap into some sections (perhaps large sections) of Anglican opinion, it may nonetheless reflect the sort of people who have engaged elsewhere with the BiLC project.
Summary of Results
The results have been collated and analysed, and a slightly more detailed summary will be given at the meeting. This is intended simply to highlight the key findings.

1. The levels of Biblicism, literalism and horizon scores were generally reflective of the kinds of levels expected from studies in the UK. Not so much the actual levels per se but the fact that the predictors of these levels were those shown to be important in other samples: education, theological stance, church tradition etc. In other words, given the nature of the people in the sample, the results were what might have been predicted from earlier work. In some cases the results were strikingly similar, with the same patterns emerging for different aspects of biblical engagement.

2. It seems that for this section of the Anglican Communion, which might be broadly classified as 'western', 'educated' and religiously committed, how they engage with the Bible (in terms of the measures used here) can be predicted from their particular theological location, church tradition, and general educational levels. In some cases, engagement is shaped by other factors such as country of residence, age, ordination or specifically theological education, but these effects are relatively small compared with the others. Education has a powerful influence, but this varies between traditions, with evangelicals tending to resist the effects of education on their beliefs about the Bible and its literal truth.

3. Education may make it harder for people to apply texts to their own context, but this is mitigated by particular experiences. For example, in the case of the test passage on an exorcism, Charismatics were more able to see the relevance of this text to their lives than non-Charismatics.

Future Work
The survey has given me confidence that at least within a particular sub-set of Anglicans, the instruments used have some usefulness and meaning. It would be good to try them out on a broader range of Anglicans, especially those who have lower educational levels than the present samples. I suspect that the results within broadly 'western' cultures in the Anglican Communion are likely to the in line with what we now know.

There are two main avenues in which quantitative work needs to go:

1. Examining non-western cultures. This is a priority, but one that will not be easily achieved. It can build on the qualitative studies of groups that have been part of this programme, developing instruments that are appropriate and that tap into the key ways in which people from different sorts of reading cultures engage with the Bible.

2. Looking at more sophisticated reading strategies among western cultures. The aspects of engagement used in the current survey are important to many Anglicans, but they are not the only ways in which the Scriptures have meaning. There are specifically Anglican ways of understanding texts, and these could be examined in more detail. I am not convinced that erudite or sophisticated hermeneutical strategies are understood by many Anglicans in western cultures, but it would be interesting and useful to find out if this is so. How do Anglicans handle tricky texts? How do they bring biblical moral insights to bear on complex moral issues?

The BiLC survey has been a important stepping stone on the way to better understanding Anglicans and the Bible. Limited as it has been, it has enabled some basic questions to be answered with more certainty and with wider validity beyond the Church of England.