Regional Reports - Cuba

The Bible in the Life of Church project.
Cuba User Group report 1

November 2010

In Cuba, as member of the Consejo Diocesano of the Dioceses we met with their participants and we explained the objectives of the project and the steps to follow in this first period applying the suggestions of the Study of Case 1.

We can say that the project aroused general interest. At the moment we have users groups in Santiago de Cuba in the “Santa Maria Virgen” Episcopal Church under the direction of the Rvdo. Halbert Pons Santana; in Florida, Camagüey, in the Episcopal church under the direction of the Rvdo. Aurelio de la Paz and his wife Mrs. Susana Sarraf; in Limonar, Matanzas, in “San Felipe Diacono” Episcopal Church under the direction of the Dr. Rvda. Marianela de la Paz; in the Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas, under my direction; and in Havana, in the Congregation of “La Santisima Trinidad” Episcopal Cathedral, under the direction of the Rvdo. José Angel Gutiérrez and the bishop Rvdma. Griselda Delgado del Carpio.

All these groups already celebrated the organization and study meeting.

Report about the work carried out by the user group of the community of “San Felipe Diacono” Episcopal Church in Limonar, Matanzas.

Limonar is a small town in the province of Matanzas, located at 30 km away from Matanzas city. It is a very poor region with not many economic resources. It was a sugar producing region until the Sugar Mill shot down and an important source of employment for those living there disappeared.

This little church named “San Felipe Diacono” is one of the poorest communities of the Episcopal Church in Cuba and one of the first non roman catholic church established in Cuba, together with “Fieles a Jesus” Episcopal church in Matanzas. It has very peculiar characteristics that make this project of
the Bible in the Life of the Church really interesting: this community is made up of 25 women and two men. Most of the women are black, between 30 and 50 years old, who attend the church since they were children, which means that they are Episcopal by tradition. Besides, they practice religions of African origin in their houses, as Santeria, since Limonar is one of the places where this Cuban religious practice developed greatly in times of slavery.

In these conditions, the Anglican tradition in the Episcopal church of this small town of Limonar have shown their ability to accept diversity and dialogue with a popular religious practice as Santeria, which is widely practiced in Cuba.

When we met for the first time to organize the user group, we asked them to bring to the meeting the verse of the Bible that they considered most important in their lives. The Eucharist key issue was the Bible in the life of the Church. Then, in the Liturgy of the word we used little pieces of cloth of different colors, so that each could put a piece of cloth next to altar when reading her biblical text and talking about its meaning in her life. So we started to put all the pieces of cloth that represented the way in which a text from the Bible had acted in the lives of these women. In the end, we had a piece of cloth made up of different colors, full of everyday experiences that they shared along with the biblical text we asked them to bring.

We compared that colorful cloth with the Bible: the Bible is a book full of memories that reflect the faith of a people, their walking in dialogue and relation with God, their interpretation of the events of their lives and history to the light of faith and spirituality. They are also memories of liberation, organization, resistance and survival to different forms of domination. They are memories that passed through oral tradition and liturgical celebration of many generations and turned into living memory and sacred literature of a people, the people of Israel and then, the sacred book of all Christians.

First it was the history of the people of Israel and later that of the first Christian communities, with their questions and their conflicts, the factors that gave birth to the Bible.
We explained the project of the Bible in the life of the Church in a very simple way, and it was welcome. We shared ideas, and we committed to work together as a community to exchange experiences about the way in which we use the Bible as Anglican community.

We finished this first meeting making a circle and using only one word we answered to the question:

**What is the meaning of the Bible in my life as an Anglican Christian?**

The answers were very eloquent: Hope, faith, Way, Bred of Life, Commitment, Truth, Salvation, Love, Life, Trust, Security, Liberation, Justice, Word, Action.

The second meeting was about the study of the passage of Genesis 1-2.

The study of this passage gave us the opportunity to prove how the dialogue of the Anglican Christian tradition and the influences of popular religiousness is settled.

It was very interesting to learn about the respect for nature these people feel and how they see God in nature, so its sacred character makes them respect and protect the creation.

The Bible then becomes a way to establish an interreligious dialogue.

The method we used was the Popular Reading of the Bible, which is a method that allows us to read the Bible as a reflection of the history today. The main objective is not to interpret the Bible, but to interpret our lives with the aid of the Bible.

That is, reading the Bible from our own situation, a reading in search for clues of justice, liberation and life. It is a vivid reading of the Bible looking not for a source of knowledge, but of life.

The users group formed in the Evangelical Seminary of Matanzas with Episcopal students and some professors contrasts with the group of Limonar.
This group from the Seminary is an academic group formed by five Episcopal students of bachelor’s degree in Theology (one of first year, two of third year, and two of fourth year) and three Episcopal professors (a professor of Bible, Old Testament, Rvdo. Ivan Gonzalez; a professor of Practical Theology, Rvda. Dr. Marianela de la Paz and one of Systematic Theology, Dr. Clara Luz Ajo).

This group has also have two meetings, one of organization and one of study, using the same passage of Genesis 1-2.

The results have been interesting. The diversity of the group has allowed us to observe different reactions towards the use of the Bible:

- Students are over-critical and demanding. They use exegetic methods. They are somewhat critic of the Popular Reading of the Bible method.
- Those with less experience and more Protestant tendencies sacralize the Bible. Those with Roman Catholic tendencies are less conservative.
- The Bible is used only when needed. Episcopal students do not always walk with the Bible under their arms.
- It is not common to look for passages. Some are clumsy when looking for a text in the Bible.
- In general terms, Episcopal students do not cite the Bible as a recipe to solve problems.
- They use exegetic tools and books as dictionaries, interpreters of the Bible, etc.
- For the interpretation of Genesis 1-2 they checked Latin American hermeneutists as Carlos Mestre, Sandro Gallazzi, Ivone Gebara, Jose Severino Croatto and Milton Schwantes.

Through the study of the text the groups arrived to the following conclusions:

-We are an important part of the creation. As humans beings we felt superior to the rest of the creation. We have mistreated the creation; we are destroying life
in the earth. Now we understand that we are not superior to anything because we cannot live without the sun, without the water, without the plants, without the animals, etc. We have to change our anthropological perspective of superior beings in the creation.

-God, the mysterious force of life that inhabits within us, impels us, scares us, and attracts us, live in us and with us. Its creative force is intimately present in everything. We feel the mysterious force of the spirit present in every existing being and in everything we do. We are part of a Sacred Body.

-We have to interpret the creation as the continuous liberation of the divine energy in everything and in every human being, and to assume in a collective way our local responsibility for the creation of the world and of ourselves.

-In the personal, we have to mature experimentally in the prayer, in the meditation, in the everyday actions, that we are a responsible constituent element in the creative process.

-This will lead us to express these convictions in the wider social and political relations, in the eating habits, in the habits of hygiene, in the liturgies, in the arts, in friendship, in the theological production, etc. They are roads of salvation of all the lives.

Clara Luz Ajo
THE BIBLE IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Report to the Steering Group Meeting - In Latin America

Report 2 – May 2012

We continue our contact with the Commission for Theological Studies in Latin America and the Caribbean (CETALC, in Spanish), sharing with them the results of our meeting in Durban, sending them texts chosen for the year 2011, and exhorting participants of this Commission to get involved in the project, working with the new texts and new emphasis, which are quite relevant for the Latin American context. We always find that the bishops and laypersons of CETALC are willing to work with the texts, although in reality the project has not been accepted with much enthusiasm in this Region.

In September of 2011, we met in São Paulo, Brazil, with the General Secretary of the Anglican Province of Brazil, Rev. Arthur Cavalcante and with Rev. Dr. Pedro Triana Fernández, one of the Coordinators of the Centre for Anglican Studies (CEA, in Spanish) who oversees all the work concerning Theological Education of the Anglican Church in Brazil. We had a pleasant conversation with them at the Church of La Trinidad, whose rector is Rev. Cavalcante. There we spoke about the project *The Bible in the Life of the Church*, and we left the texts to be studied in 2011.

I feel that the Latin American Region, due to its many social, economic and political problems, along with the economic crisis that more intensely affects the countries in this area, has not been able to effectively participate in the development of a project that we understand is very important to the Anglican Communion and especially to our Latin American Region.

**Work carried out by the Groups of Users in Cuba**

In Cuba, the project *The Bible in the Life of the Church* was always well accepted within some communities of the Dioceses. But specifically in the year 2011, the Organization of Episcopalian Women (OMEC in Spanish) introduced within their annual Work Plan the study of the Biblical texts we chose in Durban, as an emphasis in the work of women at the Diocesan level. That is to say, this time the women were the ones who carried out this work, and during the entire year the selected texts were studied in all the communities of the Cuban Dioceses as part of the work of the OMEC.

Those studies were supported by trained facilitators within the laity and clergy in each region.

During the Episcopalian Women’s Convention, in March 2012, where we were able to gather the results of the studies carried out by the women in their respective communities throughout the whole year of 2011.

In all these meetings the women, with the assistance of some reverends and lay facilitators, were the ones who carried out the study of the texts. In the Evangelical Seminary the group was formed by Episcopalian students and professors.

The texts studied were:

- Unjust Gender Structures
  - Matthew 15:21-31
  - Luke 2
  - Galatians 3:23-29; 1 Timothy 2:1-15
• Unjust Economic Structures
  o Psalm 73; Luke 1:39-58
  o Luke 6: 17-38
  o Isaiah 58; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Through the study of the texts and this whole process of contact with the Bible we can summarise some results which we consider important in view of our interest in analysing how we Anglicans read and use the Bible.

-Firstly, studying the Bible as Anglicans from the Latin American perspective, and specifically the Cuban context, we have felt that all this time of study has constituted a dynamic process through which the Bible is converted in the Word of God for each of us as we discover its relevance in our lives and in the midst of the social, cultural and political problems that surrounds us in our particular context.

-The Bible for the Cuban Anglicans is a book that is laden with memories. They are memories which reflect the faith of a people, their journey in dialogue and relationship with God, their interpretation of the events of their life and history in the light of faith, and through their spirituality.

-Those memories of liberation, organisation, resistance and survival in the face of different situations and forms of domination, speak to us today in our own life situation, our problems and conflicts, our joys and sorrows, our struggles to transform our world into a world of love, brotherhood and sisterhood.

-In the unfolding of this whole process of reading the Bible as Cuban Anglicans, our communities have carried out a contextual, ecumenical, corporate reading of the Bible, in keeping with the Anglican ethos, and springing from the current ecclesial and social Cuban perspective.

-It is precisely on the basis of the experiences, commitments and needs of the persons who participate in the dynamic interpretive process of the selected texts that we feel that the Bible becomes the Word of God for our TODAY, lighting our path and guides us to develop visions of hope, liberty, justice, equity and love towards all human beings, our world, our Universe.

-We try to establish the relationship between Bible and Life, or better yet, the Bible at the service of all that produces Life. And since the issue is not simply interpreting the Bible but rather interpreting Life with the help of the Bible, the Biblical strength and vitality spring from the corporate reflection of the groups that carried out this exercise with the texts. These persons, who belong to the communities of the Episcopal Church throughout the whole Cuban territory, are committed to the affirmation of Life for which the Bible constitutes an important source of wisdom.

-During this entire process, thanks to that union between Bible and Life, the community rediscovers and affirms itself in the certainty that, in the same way that God was with the people of the past, God is with us today in our present struggles for a more just and better world.

-The texts related to the unjust gender structures challenge us to find paths of equity in the relationships between men and women; paths of equity in our social, cultural and ecclesial structures. Characters such as Tamar, Lydia, the Syrophenic woman and the slave prophetess challenge us. They all have a story which is repeated today in our communities, in many of our contexts.

-The Bible shows us paths to equity and justice through unconventional characters, irregular
persons, women who show daring attitudes of defiance, who invite us to look at the margins of the official history, asking ourselves about the social gender relations, the circulation of power between men and women.

-The Bible shows us the message of the Good News through the body of the young, poor women. They create utopias that are in keeping with their desires and their struggles.

-Concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus, we are challenged to know and study her, not in the corner and margin of the gospels that narrate the infancy of Jesus. We have to look at the body of Mary. The defiant body, the woman of marginality, she announces a different messianism; one of justice, and not of domination.

-The texts related to unjust economic structures challenge us to find, in the way of Jesus Christ, the equilibrium between loving our neighbor and loving ourselves. They challenge us to share food with the hungry, shelter the poor homeless vagabond, clothe the naked, and not turn our backs on our brother or sister. They challenge us to celebrate life around the table, a table with a place for everyone.

-As Anglicans, we believe that our God is a God who embraces everything, so “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female” (Galatians 3:28). The Spirit of Wisdom, who inhabited Jesus Christ, also inhabits our Universe, and the Spirit is Life, so the expression of spirituality is the dignity and defense of all life. Today this spirituality discovers the ecological dimensions of our responsibility with respect to peace, justice and the integrity of all created things.

We thank God for this experience in which we have been united with our brothers and sisters from many parts of the world within the Anglican Communion by means of the reading of the Bible.

Clara Luz Ajo