Introduction

The members of the East African Regional Group hail from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. The planning of the groups work is done by its members from St. Paul’s University as it was difficulty to get people from other countries because of the distance and cost of travelling.

An outline of the Group’s Work

1. Contextual Bible Study with Professionals (Theologians, Biblical Scholars and Environmentalists)

2. Contextual Bible Study with Ordinary Laity who read the Bible in their mother tongue

3. An Environmental Educational tour with St. Paul’s Anglican Students

Contextual Bible Study with Professionals

The contextual bible study with professionals was held from 28th June to 3rd July 2010 at Jumuia Country Home and Conference Centre in Limuru, Kenya. The Invited participants were from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania.

Contextual Bible Study with Ordinary Laity

The group’s second activity has not yet kicked off due to an important, urgent and pressing family issue the coordinator was attending to, and whose process has begun but to continue until the second week of March 2011. This activity will be spearheaded by the coordinator and five other people (two lecturers and three students) of St. Paul’s University in selected local congregation from different parts of Kenya during the last two weeks of November 2010 and two in the first two weeks of December 2010. The main purpose of doing this is to correlate the views of the participant of the aforesaid contextual bible study (who were mainly professionals in their own right) with the views of ordinary laity and who read the bible using their mother tongue. The other aim is to make the contextual bible study with the ordinary
laity a community-directed initiative that will give people of all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to create a nurturing environment.

**Educational tour with St. Paul’s Anglican Students**

The environmental educational tour has been scheduled on 6th November 2010 at the Thompson Falls in Nyahururu. The topic for discussion and practically appraised from the surrounding environment is, “The Anglican Minister and the Environment”. The discourse will also reflect on the recently emerging disaster risks (i.e., climate change) and its effects on the environment with special reference to unusual weather conditions in Nyahururu. It is a wakeup call for the Anglican Minister to discern and highlight the hazards for such climate change in a tropical area.

**Reflections on the issues raised by what has already been done**

As noted above, the four-day contextual bible study with professionals has already been accomplished. All days began with devotion followed by a brief introduction of the book from which the text was derived. On the first day, the coordinator gave a summarized report on the background of the project, its purpose and aim, its structural framework, the role and core task of the regional group, which is to enable processes of biblical engagement with the 5th Mark of Mission of Worldwide Anglican Communion, i.e., “To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth”. Texts relevant to the core task were read, discussed and interpreted using resources from the participants’ cultural context. The obligation to maintain, sustain and safeguard God’s creation in an orderly manner was jointly endorsed. This was informed by the primal ways through which the community cared for the creation. It was felt that the East African Anglican community as well as the entire worldwide Anglican Communion should borrow from the primal societies in order to make the 5th mark of mission achievable.

The workshop was a landmark event since it was the first of its kind to critically look at the ways in which the church had used the bible in an attempt to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth. It was noted that the church in the region had done very little on this mission and if biblical texts on

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1 In Nyahururu a hailstorm resembling falling snow was noted and which many believe resulted from the plunder and pollution of the environment and which is a foretaste of climate change.
creation were ever used, it was only to teach and discuss the doctrine of creation among theologians and students. For that reason, the workshop provided a wake up call to the participant and to the church in East Africa with regard to the 5th mark of mission for the Worldwide Anglican Communion. All the texts that were read and interpreted challenged the participants in particular and the church in general to make it possible for the natural process to replenish and renew our ecological home. The participants emphasized on the need for the church to not only consider the saving souls as her singular mission but also to consider saving the planet earth as paramount. This is because human beings cannot be saved anywhere else apart from the world in which they live.2

The point which the majority of the texts brought home is that God’s creation, which includes human being, is mutually dependent on each other. In that case, to fail to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth is to quicken the extermination of the human race. Indeed the redemption and survivor of human beings depends on the redemption of creation as Romans 8: 18-23 seems to imply. It would be erroneous to think that redemption only belongs to human beings since it is not just believers who will be delivered from corruption (1 Cor. 15: 42, 50) but also the non-human creation. Almost all texts that were discussed seemed to agree with the Pauline view in Romans 8: 18-23 that the creation must be redeemed so that humanity may have a fitting environment. This fitting environment is achievable since the redemption of creation means that the creation will once again begin to fulfil the role for which it was intended. So what emerged very strong was the idea that human beings, as the most rational part of God’s creation, have a responsibility to tend and care for the non-human creation, which is instrumental to, and a guarantee of their survival.

Helpful insights that may help us to focus on the work we are undertaking

As noted above, insights from the East African primal religion and worldview were very instrumental into the understanding and interpretation of the texts read during the contextual bible study. The point that came out very strongly was that in primal

2 Cf. John 3: 16-17, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him”.
societies, creation was approached and treated with awe and reverence, devoid of exploitation. Before cutting a tree, the spirits of a tree had to be appeased lest they could get angry and revenge. The same applied to hunting and fishing expedition. The implication is that if one cuts a tree then there is need to plant more. If human beings eat animals, birds or fish, they must not put their existence to jeopardy since the future generation equally needs them. This idea is widely held in other primal societies outside East Africa. Immediately after the contextual bible study workshop, the coordinator attended an international research seminar on Christian scholarship whose theme is “primal religion as the substructure of Christianity” in Samoa. In one of the outings to “the great Island of as Savai” (as the Samoans who live there call it), we were informed that the Samoa people do not eat pigeons messily. According to the Rev. Dr. Featunai Ben Liuanaa (A Samoan delegate), Samoans eat pigeons only between October and January, despite the pigeon being a delicacy. The reason for this is that they should not have the pigeons de-populated so that the future generation may not be at loss. This is a valuable tool from primal religion that could beneficially help the pursuit to safeguard the creation and to revive and sustain the life of the earth.

Having read the texts, the participant noted a longing to return to the primal days. This was especially enthused by Romans 8: 18-23 where setting the creation free from bondage was interpreted as returning creation to the former glory it enjoyed in Genesis 1 where the beauty of creation is eulogized. The general consensus was that there were ample tools in the primal religion and worldview that can give a better understanding of biblical texts, especially with regard to the relationship between the Creator and the creation and between different creations. This means therefore that insights from the primal worldview and religion may help us to focus on the work we are undertaking. As a result, it is critical that we begin to dialogue with primal religion and worldview, which has untapped resources that are radically helpful in engaging the 5th mark of mission.

During the time of the contextual bible study noted above, it was noted that biblical scholars and theologians have not been quick to write papers on environmental issues even when the bible has a lot that can shed light on how to safeguard the creation. The ordinary laity has not been strongly incorporated in the hermeneutical
discourse. For that reason, they have also not keenly engaged with the fifth mission of the Worldwide Anglican Communion. There has therefore been disconnect as to how Christians in East Africa claim to own the bible and on how they use it to safeguard, sustain and renew life on earth. The need to continue with contextual bible studies arose but this time not only with professionals but also with the ordinary laity. What emerged therefore was the necessity to read the bible together with the ordinary laity and professionals and which was dubbed as “The Pamoja\textsuperscript{3} Reading of the Bible”. This was seen as a helpful insight that can help us focus on the work we are doing, especially in the East African Region.

**Conclusion**

Judging from the concluded work, the Bible in the Life of the Church Project is earth-shaking. It has the potential to revitalize the way in which the Worldwide Anglican Church read the bible in engaging all its five marks of mission. In particular, East African Regional Group engagement with the fifth mark of mission in the concluded contextual bible study proved beneficial to the understanding of the relationship that is needed between the Creator and the creation as well as between all the creations. It was a wakeup call that raised several questions especially on the extent to which Christians have used the bible to safeguard the creation and to renew the life of the earth and the extent to which theological institutions have integrated environmental and ecological issues in their curricula. It was noted that there were scarce sermons preached so as to enlighten the Christians the importance of engaging with the fifth mark of mission. We hope to engage the issues raised and which were found to be lacking in the life of the church as we undertake activities outlined above as number, especially 2 and 3 making them continuous rather than a one time activity.

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\textsuperscript{3} ‘Pamoja’ is a Swahili word meaning ‘together’
Introduction

The East African Regional Group held its second contextual bible study workshop at Jumuia Conference and Country Home, Limuru from June 27th to July 2nd 2011. Participants were drawn from Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania. Unfortunately, this time there was no participant from Burundi and Uganda, though they had been invited. Stephen Lyon of the Anglican Consultative Council Head Office and the Coordinator of the Bible in the Life of the Church Project and Joseph Crockett of the American Bible Society were in attendance. Their contributions were very helpful and highly appreciated.

The CBS began with a devotional bible study every day. Its core task was to engage with the fourth mark of mission of the worldwide Anglican Communion. It engaged with Scripture to see how Anglicans have used scripture on the themes of ‘unjust gender structures’ and ‘unjust economic structures’ and what scripture says about the same themes. These themes were discussed ‘as aspects of the fourth Mark of Mission of the Anglican Communion, “To seek to transform unjust structures of society”.

Understanding Contextual Bible Study

CBS was introduced as an interactive study of biblical texts that brings the context of the reader and the context of the Bible into dialogue, for the sake of transformation. The participants were introduced to the 4Cs of CBS. These were enumerated as outlined below.

i. Context

This refers to the real life situation of the readers and their real life experiences. This becomes very prominent in choosing themes of the bible study. For instance if the theme chosen is HIV and AIDs, the lead question is on what does the bible say on the same.

ii. Community

The emphasis here is that the bible is read in community rather than individually. This process requires that the voices of all are listened to and engaged with critically. This makes CBS a process of engagement rather than “teaching”. It is a process of sharing knowledge and resources from the side of the facilitator and the participants.

iii. Criticality

This is the ability to use tools of biblical studies to understand the text, despite the sacred nature of the bible. This is because the bible human beings wrote it, translated it and interpreted it in times and contexts different from our own. The emphasis here is not just knowing the answers, but also asking the “right” questions.

iv. Change

The inevitable question that the above 3 Cs begs is, so what? This is a relevant question because CBS always has transformation as its end-goal. In other words, CBS challenges people to a point of wanting to make a difference in their churches and communities. A plan action therefore is the culmination of CBS.
Design and Features of a Successful CBS

The design and feature of a successful CBS were also brought in the limelight. As for the design, the following was noted.

i. CBS is designed along traditional hermeneutical principles, which includes exegesis, interpretation and translation.

ii. As Gerald West explains, CBs has a three-step approach, namely, reading behind the text – what is the socio-historical background of the text, reading in the text – literary approach and reading in front of the text , asking what does this text mean in our context – reader response approach. These modes of reading are divided into two types of questions:

a. Literary or critical consciousness questions, which they draw tools from biblical studies; for example, who are the characters in the text? What are they doing, saying and feeling?

b. Community consciousness questions; which seek to drive tools from feelings, experiences, and resources of the community.

On the features of a successful CBS, the following was noted.

i. A CBS must always create or provide a safe space where participant talk openly and confidentially so as to establish relationships of trust.

ii. A CBS must be creative for instance through storytelling, drama, singing, case studies, etc

iii. A CBS must be challenging, that is, participants must feel that they have been challenged to think about their faith.

iv. A CBS must be sensitive to culture, context, church theology, etc, though not in a patronizing way.

v. A CBS must be empowering. The point here is that all the responses of each and every participant must be written down where it can be seen by all, for instance on a flip chart or on a board. This helps in making everyone to feel he or she is important as well as his or her contributions.

vi. CBS must have a measured transformation. The point here is that at the end of CBS there is an Action Plan motivated by the question, what are we going to do?

Finally, it was noted that CBS always takes into consideration two assumptions:-

i. Bible plays a central role in communities of faith

ii. CBS is a tool, it cannot solve all problems, but it helps open up the process to discuss issues which are important in church and society

Reading of Texts on Unjust Gender Structures

A brief description of the gender background of the texts that had been chosen for engagement with the theme of unjust gender structure was given. It was noted that in biblical times, gender relations were not egalitarian and women were regarded as inferior to men. The key texts that were read for unjust gender structures were Numbers 27: 1-11 (which was read alongside Numbers 36: 1–13 and I Timothy 2: 8–15 (read alongside Galatians 3: 23–29). Among other things Numbers 27: 1–11 was said to be about inheritance, justice and women. However, further discussions revealed that the text even though it was about inheritance, land in traditional Israel and in the East African context did not belong to the individual but to the community. The person who may have been regarded as the owner only held that land in trust to the community. Any member of the community therefore was free to cultivate the land. The problem however is that those who held the land in trust on behalf of the community were men and not women. The daughters of Zelophehad were therefore within their rights to inherit their fathers land. The reasons given for this were that, they wanted the land or the inheritance for identity, for the continuity of their father’s name and for future survival. The issue that emerged is that legal, social and cultural structures prohibited women in biblical times to inherit or to hold land in trust of the community. But through advocacy via women’s agency, these unjust gender constructed structures were challenged through a religious leader and the right of women to hold the
land in trust of the community was established. Incidentally, the majority of women participants in the CBS were widows. One of them narrated the difficulty times she had when her husband died. She lost the land they had jointly bought with the husband but which was registered under the name of her husband to her brothers-in-law. However, her brothers in law were unable to take away the land that was registered under her name and the one jointly registered on her name and that of her husband’s name. The text was therefore welcome as a tool that can be hermeneutically used to liberate women who are oppressed through some unjust legal, cultural, social and religious structures.

1Timothy 2: 8–15 was key text that informed the study of unjust gender structures. Among other things, it was noted that the text was about power and submission as well as ecclesiastical hierarchy. In this situation, men had authority over women and they had more privileges than women. Women were culturally conditioned to accept their status and role in the society as normal. The church of the time seems to have emphasized a patriarchal social order wherein men and women were to participate differently. Men were expected to teach, exercise authority and to enjoy a superior position and status as well as to enjoy their privilege. In his treatment of the Genesis story of creation, the author of 1Timothy was deemed to have been inaccurate in his reading of the Genesis text (3: 6–7). He seems to imply that it is Eve who sinned while in Genesis both Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. The author seems to have been using scripture to justify his own position and to manipulate the same scripture to argue his point. As such, 1Timothy 2: 8–15 was seen as a text that had the potential to create unjust gender structures, especially in moving women to a secondary position and questioning their leadership role in the church. The general consensus was that the text has been used to silence women since it is in the bible and it is taken to be the truth. This raised the question whether everything in the bible is truly biblical and truly Christian. The idea of reading the bible literary was thus discouraged since such reading of the text for it makes it very difficult for non-ordained women to hold or discuss any contrary view or opinion than the literal printed words. This seems to have vouched for a hermeneutical principle that reads such biblical texts critically and contextually but not literary.

The text was regarded to be a double-sided sword that can both oppress and liberate women. It was noted that approaching verse 8 as part of the entire discourse rather than as two separate narratives, the verse is liberating to women if they are physically abused. On the other hand, the text oppresses women, rendering them powerless and dismantling their self-worth. The general feeling was that the way in which the text represents Adam and Eve is different from the way they are presented in Genesis. It was also noted that the idea of “dressing modestly and decently” is culturally relative since what is appropriate dressing is always contextually and culturally conditioned. It was also felt that childbearing is not a means to salvation hence this is one of the texts in the bible that should not be interpreted literary but contextually. This is because the problem is not about dressing but the way society sees and uses women as tools and property. The author seems to be providing means to use and a strategy to control women. He was offering to his cultural milieu a way of addressing men’s personal perceptions and indiscretions. The principle of allowing scripture to interpret scripture was prominent. The life, teachings and death of Jesus on the cross as presented in the gospels was brought to the foreground as demanding men and women to live in faith, love and holiness. Other Pauline texts were cited as key in the interpretation of the text. Among them was Galatians 3: 28 … there is neither male or female in Christ, and Romans 16 where Paul regards women as partners in ministry and Ephesians 6 where mutual submission between men and women is encouraged. It was suggested that the church should demystify the text by recounting and explaining the reality and context within which the text was produced. The church should also use the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus as a central hermeneutical principle and also create a space where people can engage one in dialogue, identifying and voicing different views and solutions;

Reading of Texts on Unjust Economic Structures

The CBS also engaged texts on unjust economic structure. The session began with a belief introduction of the economic background of the bible. A similarity was noted between the world that produced the bible and the contemporary world that has received the bible, on matters of money, wealth and possessions. It was also noted that land was a key economic pillar, which was distributed
equally since the community owned its products. But this changed when Jews demanded a monarchy like that of the Canaanites, who regarded the king as a son of god who collected a portion of the products of peasants on behalf of the god. This led to unjust economic structures and as a result of which the pursuit of wealth was fraught with potential problems, which made it easy to view the wealthy people with moral and spiritual scepticism. In tradition Africa, land belonged to the community and an individual could hold it in trust on behalf of the community. However, this changed during the colonial era when individual ownership of land was validated through issuance of title deeds. This brought about land insecurity and many people were left landless hence becoming poor and living a life of poverty.

The key text that the participants engaged with included Amos 8: 4-8 and Mark 10: 17-34. Amos was located within the context of the 8th Century BCE, during which the national wealth was at its peak. Economically, this was the golden age but the ordinary people were the most misused and overlooked. Indeed, the more economic growth brought about greater economic exploitation. Amos portrayed God as one who gets enraged by economic injustice. He gets enraged because economic life and any other form of social organization is a matter of justice and justice is close to God’s heart. God was enraged because once again, God’s chosen people, the elect were stiff-necked. Secondly, oppression amongst God’s people by God’s people, corruption and exploitation by religious and political leaders were rampant. He was also angry because robbing the poor and needy, who were still in want, was on the increase and corruption was conducted in God’s name. Alongside Amos, the participant also read Isaiah 3: 13–15. The background information indicated that Prophet Isaiah was not exaggerating since in his time the economic oppression of the poor was rampant like in the time of other prophets. This was happening despite the fact that structures had been put in place to provide for the poor in Israel. These included the Covenantal Law (Exodus 21-24), religious practices, such as tithes, offerings and grieving as well as socio-political structures, such as the year of the Jubilee when all debts were forgiven. Despite these, Israel’s heart was more focused on economic progress and accumulating more wealth than the worship of God hence they worship with their lips but their hearts are far from God. It was also noted from the reading of Mark 10: 17–34 makes it clear that our relationship with one another is as critical as our love to God (as verse 1 implies).

The issue that emerged strongly was on the relationship between wealth and poverty as well as the relationship between the rich and the poor and their place before God. It was noted that in East Africa (as well as the USA), a very small percentage of the population (no more than 3%) controls the majority of the wealth. The division of labour is globally restructured so that multi-national corporations have more power than nation-states in the accumulation and distribution of wealth. The rich and the poor are like water and kerosene since they do not mix at all. This results in twisted, inauthentic communications and mistrust. The poor have been programmed by religion to believe that poverty carries with it a special state of blessing and that the rich are also specially blessed by God (cf. prosperity gospel). Issues of distributive injustice were raised, noting that money is made on the backs of the poor but too little benefits and resources return to them.

The church was found to be on the crossroads when it comes to using the bible in the attempt to eradicate or minimize poverty and the gap between the poor and the rich. The church seems to have failed to define and redefine the problem of poverty in her context. The church leadership and administration has not worked productively to accommodate the interests and concerns of youth who are vulnerable to poverty due to the lack of employment opportunities. Though the development arm of the Anglican church of Kenya, popularly known as the Christian Community Services (CCS) has been working tirelessly towards development and programmes that would empower people vulnerable to poverty, it has been a donor-funded system. Its effort to eradicate poverty may become very unlikely when and if donor funds dry up since for a long time CCS has perpetuated the donor-dependent syndrome. What is now needed is revolutionary movement that would bring about a paradigm shift from the dependency on donor-funded agencies to self-empowerment through investment, management and generation of self-developed resources. The Church has a role to keep advocating and fighting for the poor in the Church and society. There is a variety of ways in which the church can use to advocate for the poor and eradicate poverty. These included constant and proper use of the Bible to engage unjust economic structures. The church should constantly advocate for the transformation of unjust economic systems first in her own sphere and then in the government. She should always make use of the biblical witness and connect the same with today’s contextual realities.

Reflections on the Experience of the CBS
Several observations emerged from the CBs.

1. There was a hermeneutical link between unjust gender structures and unjust economic structure. This is because land has always been a key economic pillar and where women are denied opportunities to utilize land their economic survival is jeopardized. Secondly, if women are denied some job opportunities just because they are women, then their economic survival is endangered.

2. There was a gap between what we believe to be the Bible and the way in which we use it.

3. It also emerged that the vernacular translation presented some ambiguities to a reader and sometimes they gave a clear understanding as to what the text conveyed. The translation of scriptures in the language of the participant emerged as a significant hermeneutical principle seeing that it can bring about a totally different understanding of the text in different language groups. Perhaps the following questions are essential when it comes to the translation of the text. Are there any significant differences between various translations? Has anything been lost or obscured in the process of translation?

Other reflections were focused on the way East African Anglicans handle the Bible. The following points came out distinctively.

1. The participants appreciated the way they had done the work; the way the questions guided them in examining and looking at the texts and appreciated the need to introduce the CBS approach to their individual contexts.

2. They also noted that the way the bible in their individual local settings is contrary to how it was used in CBS. Workshop where they read and gained deeper meanings of the scriptures. They appreciated the ways in which they had spoken to the text rather than having the bible speak to them reading and re-reading the text to see if the questions they were asking were the concerns the text was addressing.

3. They also noted that critical questions helped them to give a close, careful, examination of the text saying that they were able to challenge the text and also the text challenged them.

4. They appreciated the fact that when everyone is an interpreter and when full participation occurs, they were able to hear the meanings being made by other.

5. Those who always preach were challenged with regard to the view that that the interpretation of scripture is the way one sees it because from interactions of the CBS scripture means different things to different people. They recognized that the lens through which they read the bible is their experience but the group participation made them hear the scriptures through the lens and experiences of others.

6. They appreciated the nature and function of questions in the CBS since some moved them to more deeply explore the text while other questions led them to analyse the text or persona and social our voices. Critical questions do have particular functions in the creation of meanings.

**Conclusion**

All in all, the CBS was rated helpful and beneficial. It was inspiring since it helped in touching different aspects of life and connected the Bible with various aspects of people’s existence. It was therefore a vehicle to connect the bible to everyday life; a tool for capacity building for both the clergy and the laity. The general feeling was that the plenary discussions of the CBS were helpful.

Almost all participants agreed that it has been some time since they had participated in structured learning that linked the biblical world and the context in which the bible is read. It also helped in noting the similarities and differences between the world of the bible and life today.

**The Rev. Dr. Kabiro wa Gatumu**