

Reading the Bible in Context

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The Bible transforms lives. The Bible is recognised and welcomed by Christians as the Word of God. It invites us to reflect on how it leads to liberation, intimacy with God and transformation. As people read the Bible they bring to the text their own history with its joys and problems arising from the hard reality of their lives. The Bible seems to be a mirror, a 'symbol' (Hebrews 9:9; 11:19) of what they experience. A profound connection can be established between the Bible and that life. In reality, this is a way of reading very similar to the reading done by the first Christian communities (cf. Acts 1:16-20; 2:29-35; 4:24-31) and by the Holy Fathers.

It is crucial to read the living text of scripture prayerfully and with discipline. There are several methods for reading and interpreting the Bible. They are 'useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.' (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

See - Judge- Act

One method is used in many parts of the world and is known as Contextual Bible Study or Popular Reading of the Bible, or even 'Reading the Bible with new eyes'. It has its origins in the interface between socially engaged biblical scholars and ordinary Christian 'readers' of the Bible (whether literate or not). A version of it has its origins in the See-Judge-Act method, where the Bible study process begins with analysis of the local context (Seeing), and then re-reads the Bible to allow the biblical text to speak to that context (Judging), and then moves to action as we respond to what God is saying (Acting). (See further <https://www.ycw.ie/resources/see-judge-act-resources-2/>)

Social analysis enables us to understand our reality; re-reading the Bible enables us to judge whether our reality is as God intends it to be; and our plan of action enables transformation to take place. So there are three components to this hermeneutical process, confirmed by Scripture: analysing the signs of the times in our particular context (Luke 24:13-24); re-reading scripture corporately within these contextual realities in order to discern God's perspective on those realities

'And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?"... Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.'
Luke 24.17, 27

Always ask the questions: What does God want us to do? What actions are we called to engage in? What do we learn from the reading and studying?

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(Luke 24:25-28); and then to respond in action (Luke 24:29-35), working with God to bring about God's will in our context, 'on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6.10). (See Section 2 of *God's Justice: Just Relationships* at www.anglicancommunion.org/theology/theological-education/theological-education-resources.aspx in the section 'Gender Justice')

This suggestion for a hermeneutical process is a useful way of structuring and shaping our reading of the Bible. It provides the overall shape to a hermeneutic that leads to understanding and transformation. But the threefold process itself requires the recognition of the importance and practice of 'facilitation'. Facilitation is made up of the processes that enable every participant to feel safe and to have the opportunity to participate fully.

Another important component of a participatory and enabling learning environment is the 'infrastructure of faith'. Faith is a vital component of all Christian learning and transformation. As we work together for just gender relationships, we should work within faith-full liturgy, whether formal or informal, including singing, praying, and other rituals.

Dialogue is the vital virtue that binds the threefold pedagogical process, facilitation, and the infrastructure of faith. Dialogue is a profound engagement with each other and with context. Dialogue is more than polite conversation or an educational technique. Dialogue is a transformative practice, transforming our relationships and our contexts.

All of this must be framed in a liturgical

and spiritual environment. It is important to start and close the session, if it is done in a group, with a prayer, lighting candles and/or a simple litany.

In groups facilitation is a key component, for the success of the process. For example, look at Jesus' behaviour and actions on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Pay specific attention to 'group process', the set of skills and resources that enables each person to participate fully in learning and transformation together.

Here is a step-by-step guide:

1. Take the initiative to approach and gather people
2. Match the pace to the group.
3. Start by asking "What are you talking about?", what is going on in your life and community socially, politically, economically and religiously?
4. Keep silence to provide safe space for people to share. Encourage sharing.
5. Read the text more than once and, when possible, in different versions.
6. With the chosen text ask questions of the text to help people "dig in" to its detail and texture.
7. Work in small groups when possible. Record responses on paper and acknowledge the feedback.
8. Create spaces for sharing.
9. Always ask the questions: What does God want us to do? What actions are we called to engage in? What do we learn from the reading and studying?

The Bible in the Life of the Church

The joy and challenge of being Anglican is that we engage with faith and Scripture in different ways. This can be both exciting and enriching but also difficult and confusing. Bible in the Life of the Church or BILC seeks to offer signposts of understanding as we journey together.

BILC is work that has been going on across the Anglican Communion since 2009. Its purpose is to help us engage more deeply with the Bible. To help us to do this BILC has gathered together a tool-box of educational resources. The contents of the tool-box come from all over the Anglican Communion and are designed to help everyone from provinces, dioceses, congregations, small groups and individuals to deepen our understanding of the Bible.

- Courses for Lent
- Courses of several sessions
- Study day outlines from different contexts
- Finding a different approach to Bible study
- Resources to help us make more of Scripture in our worship
- Case studies
- Articles on different aspects of our understanding of scripture
- Videos on different aspects of our understanding of Scripture
- Email conversations between Biblical scholars from different theological viewpoints

'I see this project as utterly foundational for our life together:

I can hardly stress that enough.' Archbishop Justin Welby

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/the-bible-in-the-life-of-the-church.aspx> www.bilc.org



Umoja/Together

This is '**Asset-Based Church and Community Transformation**' (ABCCT), a family of approaches that encourage churches to work *in* and *with* communities. The goal is to see poverty reduced holistically and sustainably - to bring life in all its fullness. All involve the church working *with* the community rather than *for* the community, recognising the huge assets it already possesses. The process begins with Bible studies which help local churches discern how they can be part of God's mission in the world, of *bringing in* and *living out* the Good News of the Kingdom. It is now found in many Anglican

difference.

Difference is a 5 session course that explores what it means to follow Jesus in the face of conflict and see transformation through everyday encounters. It has been commissioned by the Archbishop of Canterbury
<https://difference.rln.global/>

Resources Bulletin

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