

ISB ANNUAL REPORT 1990

Background

The Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB) is a project which began in January 1990. The aims of the ISB are the following:

Given that the Bible has played and will continue to play a significant role in the life of Christians in South Africa the primary aim of the ISB is to establish an interface between biblical studies and ordinary readers of the Bible in the church and community which will facilitate social transformation. More specifically, the aims of the ISB are: to develop creative and contextual Bible study materials and processes; to set up a network of contextual Bible study groups throughout South Africa; to train facilitators for contextual Bible study groups; to reflect on the way in which the Bible is read by the poor and oppressed and through this to facilitate the transformation of theological education; and to work for social transformation in South Africa.

Bible Study Process

The core of ISB's work in 1990 has been a local ISB Bible study group in Pietermaritzburg. This group was non-racial and consisted of trained and untrained readers of the Bible. The purpose of this group was to do contextual Bible study together, to reflect on what we were doing, and to prepare material which would be of use to others. The format of the Bible study varied, but there was always interaction between the insights of biblical studies and the insights of ordinary people.

The ideas and material emerging from this process were then taken and workshopped by a smaller group made up of participants from the larger Bible study group. The task of this smaller group was to produce contextual Bible study material which reflected the interface between biblical studies and the ordinary reader. The material produced by this group was usually tried out in the larger group and then reworked.

In addition to this process the Bible study material produced by the Pietermaritzburg ISB Bible study group was often used by other Bible study groups. The comments and suggestions of such groups were then also incorporated into the Bible study material.

In other words, the material produced by the ISB emerges from an ongoing process of group Bible study and reflection. The process includes dialogue between trained and untrained readers of the Bible, but because this relationship is often an unequal one there is a deliberate attempt to allow the material to be extensively shaped by ordinary readers as the process continues.

The process of developing contextual Bible study material is continuing in the work the ISB has been asked to do by a task force of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). UCCSA requested the ISB to work with them in preparing some contextual Bible study material on Exodus within the See Judge Act method.

Studies on chapters 1-15 of the book Exodus formed the basis of the Bible studies described above. Some of these Bible studies were used by the UCCSA in the launch of their pastoral plan in May 1990, in which the ISB participated (see below). These Bible studies are now being used by groups in the various regions of UCCSA.

Other Bible studies from this series were used at the ISB Workshop in November 1990 (see below).

The ISB hopes to publish a further and complete edition of the Exodus Bible study material early in 1991.

Consultation

A major part of 1990 was spent consulting with organisations, communities, and churches that are involved in some way in grassroots Bible reading. The purpose of this extensive consultation has been to delineate more carefully the work of the ISB and to network with similar initiatives.

The consultation process included the following:

1. Research trip to Johannesburg (January).

Consulted with:

C.B. Powell Bible Centre (UNISA);
Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC);
Khanya African Independent Churches Theological Training and Research Institute;
Ubulungisa Project (Christian Citizenship Department of the Methodist Church;
Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT);
St John the Baptist Extension Seminary;
Victims of Apartheid (VOA);
South African Council of Churches (SACC);
Church of the Province of Southern Africa Mission Department;
Young Christian Workers (Soweto).

2. Research trip to Cape Town (February).

Consulted with:

Department of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town;
Theological Exchange Programme (TEP);
The Ecumenical Action Movement (TEAM);
Churches Urban Planning Commission (CUPC);
Broken Wall Community;
University of the Western Cape (Seminary);
Centre for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa.

3. Research trip to Brazil (April).

Brief itinerary:

Rio de Janeiro: visited a Baptist seminary (mainly students), ISER (Institute for the Study of Religion), and a South African exile.

S^{ao} Leopoldo: visited a Lutheran seminary (mainly staff, but some students), CEBI (popular Bible movement resource centre), CECA (popular socio-political resource centre), a theological publishing house, a local newspaper, a local pastor, and CEM/CRE (media development for the Lutheran church).

S^{ao} Paulo: visited a sister who works among workers in the alternative trade union movement and in a Base Christian Community (BCC), the Independent Presbyterian Seminary, CEDI (similar to CEBI and CECA in one organization working mainly among protestants), a catholic priest involved in worker ministry, some workers, CEBI, the Methodist Seminary, the bibliographical project, and key people in the Bible movement (eg. Milton Schwantes).

Recife: visited a Catholic layperson involved in Base Christian Communities and teaching theology, CEBI, CENAP, and key people in the popular movements.

4. Regular consultation with the Ilimo community project in the Amaoti squatter community in Inanda (March to present).

5. Consultation with various groups in Britain, Germany and Switzerland (June).

6. Consultation with the Ecumenical Documentation and Information Centre for Eastern and Southern Africa (EDICESA) and representatives from the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) (including twelve African countries) in Harare, Zimbabwe (July).

7. Consultation with a variety of service organisations working with grassroots communities during the ICT Conference (July).

8. The major consultation during 1990 was the ISB Workshop on "The Bible and Social Transformation: Liberating Bible Study with Grassroots Communities" (November) (see below).

9. Research trip to the Eastern Cape (January 1991).

Consulted with:

Order of Ethiopia, CPSA, in Kwanobuhle;
Catholic Development Centre in Umtata;
UCCSA in Port Elizabeth.

ISB Workshop

The major consultation during 1990 was the ISB Workshop on "The Bible and Social Transformation: Liberating Bible Study with Grassroots Communities" (November). This consultation brought together many of the organisations, groups, and communities with whom we had consulted earlier in the year.

In addition, the aims of the Workshop were the following: to encourage contextual Bible study in South and Southern Africa; to find out what is happening in the field of contextualized Bible study; to explore what we mean by contextualized Bible study; to talk about networking; and to do Bible study together and to evaluate the experience, the resource and the process.

In line with our commitment to an interface between biblical studies and the community the Workshop was planned together with the Ilimo community project in Amaoti.

The Workshop was attended by people from all over Southern Africa; some of them came from service organisations, some from grassroots communities, some from universities and seminaries, and some from churches.

One of the recommendations of the Workshop is that an Ad Hoc Committee together with the ISB co-ordinate the work of contextual Bible study in Southern Africa. The focus of this work over the next two years is to be on: the training of people in biblical and theological skills; the training of facilitators; the development of contextual Bible study material; and the collecting of contextual Bible study material.

The result of this year-long process of consultation is that the ISB now has clarity on the needs in the community and the church and on the specific role that the ISB can play in meeting these needs. More importantly, this process of consultation has resulted in other organisations working in this area recognising that the ISB has a distinct contribution to make.

Other ISB Projects

1. UCCSA Project (January-May).

The ISB worked closely with a task force of the UCCSA in preparing the launch of the their pastoral plan. As a part of this preparation there was regular consultation with the task force on their needs. The Exodus Project arose out of a request from the UCCSA task force for Bible study material on the Exodus.

The ISB was involved in the launch itself in which the ISB was given a day to run a workshop on contextual Bible study.

The ISB is still involved in this project. The UCCSA task force has asked the ISB to monitor what is happening in regions in the area of contextual Bible study as a result of the May launch. The ISB is also concerned to monitor the way in which the ISB Bible study material is being used in regions at a grassroots level as we hope to learn from this process. This phase of the UCCSA Project began in January 1991 with a visit to the Eastern Cape.

2. Workshop with EDICESA and the AACC on right-wing religious groups and alternative literature (July).

The ISB was invited to participate in this workshop because of our work in the area of contextual Bible study. The workshop demonstrated that needs in Eastern and Southern Africa for contextual Bible study material are enormous. There was a very positive response to the work and material of the ISB. Many of the participants at this workshop attended the ISB Workshop in November. The ISB has been invited to a further consultation in Harare in February 1991.

3. Seminars at the Federal Theological Seminary and the Evangelical Bible Seminary of Southern Africa on Popular Bible Reading Methods (August).

The ISB was invited to conduct a number of seminars in the area of contextual Bible study methods at these two seminaries. At both seminaries it was recognised that there was a need to train ministers and lay people to produce material for and to facilitate contextual Bible studies.

4. Road to Damascus Project (August).

The ISB was asked to assist a group preparing Bible studies for the "Road to Damascus" document.

Academic research

In addition to these projects the ISB has been involved in academic research in the area of contextual biblical studies. Gunther Wittenberg has been working throughout the year on the Exodus Project. This work has not only been used in the ISB Bible study but has also formed an integral part of his undergraduate and post-graduate teaching. In addition, he presented a paper in this area at the September HSRC Conference on "The Relevance of Theology in the 1990s entitled "Contextual versus historicist hermeneutics with special reference to Exodus 1-14".

Gerald West, full-time researcher of the ISB, has also integrated his ISB research on the role of the ordinary reader and his undergraduate and post-graduate teaching. He too presented a paper arising from this research at the HSRC Conference on "The challenge of ideologiekritik: the biblical text as a site of struggle".

Both Gunther Wittenberg and Gerald West were asked to contribute to a collection of essays on Democracy edited by Professor K. Nürnberger. Gunther Wittenberg wrote on "Authoritarian and participatory decision-making in the Old Testament" and Gerald West on "The Role of Contextual Bible Study in Developing Democratic Processes in South Africa".

The work of the ISB is included as an Afterword to the forthcoming book by Gerald West: Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context, Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg, 1991.

Other papers arising out of the ISB research will be published in academic journals in due course.

Gunther Wittenberg, Gerald West, and Jonathan Draper have integrated the work of the ISB with their academic teaching in Biblical Studies at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. The work of the ISB has also attracted postgraduate students who want to do MA and PhD research in this area.

Collaboration with the Centre for Adult Education (CAE)

The ISB works closely with the CAE in the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. At present the ISB contracts work to the CAE media worker and to their language specialists. The ISB has developed this relationship to facilitate the development of creative, educational, and accessible contextual Bible study material.

Future plans

The work of the ISB in 1990 has only been possible because of the extensive funding that the ISB has received from both local and overseas sources. The funding for 1990 has enabled us to establish quite clearly that there is a need throughout Southern Africa in both the church and the community for contextual Bible study material and processes which comes from the interface between biblical studies and ordinary readers of the Bible.

The work we have been involved in during 1990 must continue. Already there are a number of requests for the ISB to become involved in a variety of projects. At this stage, however, the ISB needs to do the following.

1. The ISB needs to access its staffing requirements in order to fulfill the immediate tasks.
2. The ISB needs to clarify the organisational structures which have been developing this year. In particular, the functions of the Board of Trustees and the Advisory Board need to be spelt out more clearly. The constitution needs to be finalized.
3. The ISB needs to prioritize the projects in which it could be involved over the next three years.

Advisory Board / Board of Trustees

The Vice-Principal (Finance and
Technical Services), University
of Natal

Professor B. Gourley

The Dean of the Faculty of Arts,
University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg

Professor T. King

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Theological Seminary

Rev. J. Wing

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The Rector of Lutheran Theological
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Management Committee

Director
Representatives of the Department
of Theological Studies

Professor G. Wittenberg

Dr. J. Draper
Dr. G. West

Co-opted members

Rev. V. Mdlalose
Rev. A. Mkonza
Mr. R. Mmapoo
Ms. M. Nürnberger

Staff

Director (not paid by ISB)
Full-time Researcher
Part-time Administrative Assistant
Part-time Educationist
CAE Staff on Contract

Professor G. Wittenberg
Dr. G. West
Mr. D. Phungula
Ms. M. Nürnberger
Mr. S. Maslamoney
Ms. K. Lockett