

DIOCESAN SYNOD MOTION

CONFIDENCE IN THE BIBLE

A background paper from the Diocese of Chelmsford

'That this Synod requests Dioceses, Deaneries and Parishes to adopt some symbol of our confidence in the Bible for our nation (such as "The Year of the Bible" recently in France), noting that the 400th anniversary in 2011 of the Authorised Version would be an obvious opportunity.'

1 Introduction

This motion originated in Havering Deanery (Dio. Chelmsford) after a Bible Society survey which highlighted a lack of reading and studying the Bible (see 2.1). The motion was presented to Havering Deanery and then to the Chelmsford Diocesan Synod in an attitude of sadness, penitence and resolve: sadness that the Bible is so under-valued among our congregations; penitence that we have neglected God's Word and resolve that we should seek to gain a higher regard for Scripture both for ourselves and for the nation as a whole.

In its journey from Deanery to Diocesan to General Synod, the wording of this motion has undergone some amendment. The proposer of the motion will therefore offer Synod insight from the debates that have already surrounded the motion to clarify its purpose and substance.

Support for this motion would achieve the twin goals of :

- indicating to the Church of England as a whole a confidence in and commitment to the Bible and its study as fundamental to the life of the church, and
- issuing a clarion call to parishes, deaneries and dioceses to use the 400th anniversary year of the King James Bible as an opportunity for reading, teaching and presenting the Bible with renewed vigour.

2 Surveys

2.1 Taylor Nelson AGB, 1997 for Bible Society: based on a random sample of 776 regular (at least monthly) churchgoers in England and Wales.

- 39% read Bible once or less in last year (inc. 18% who had never read the Bible)
- 25% read Bible maximum of once per month
- 36% read Bible once or more per week

These figures relate only to private Bible reading; they do not include reading the Bible or hearing it read, e.g. in Church services or study groups.

2.2 ComRes, 2007 for Bible Soc. & others; (published 9.02.08):

Taking the Pulse; Is the Bible alive and well in the Church today?

Based on a random sample (weighted for variables) in England and Wales, of 1731 church leaders and 1929 church attendees; 5 focus groups were interviewed in depth.

Among the findings were:

- Only one in seven churchgoers is *very confident* in their Bible knowledge.
- The Bible challenged 91% of church leaders and three quarters of churchgoers to live differently, and most people felt 'encouraged' when they read it.
- Two thirds of Christians thought the Church should work towards a society that takes the Bible more seriously, and should promote it more widely.

3 Articles of Religion

The accompanying paper written by Dr Martin Davie (Theological Consultant, House of Bishops) identifies the Articles relevant to this motion (Articles 6, 7, 19 20 and 21).

His paper also indicates the relationship between scripture and doctrine as defined in the Canons, and points out the way in which the Book of Common Prayer and the 1662 Ordinal make scripture central to the liturgy and ministry of the church.

The references to Common Worship and to the Lambeth Resolutions and ecumenical agreements that his paper also contains give additional support to the thrust of this motion.

4 The authorised King James Bible and its antecedents:

4.1 The Coverdale Bible (1535)

Matthew's Bible (1537)

The Great Bible (1539)

The Geneva Bible (1557 [NT], 1560 [whole Bible])

The Bishops' Bible (1568)

The Rheims-Douai Bible (1582 [NT], 1609-1610 [whole Bible])

4.2 The Authorised King James (1611)

In January 1604, the newly crowned King James I of England convened the Hampton Court Conference where a new English version of the Bible was conceived in response to Puritan reservations regarding earlier versions.

The translation was first published in 1611 and has continued to be published ever since in a variety of different editions which have contained a range of minor alterations and updates.

In the Book of Common Prayer (1662), the text of the *Authorized Version* replaced the text of the *Great Bible* and as such was "authorized" by Act of Parliament. As Dr Davie's paper notes, the Authorized Version remains one of the versions that is judged suitable to be read in public worship in the Church of England.

5 Well-known references to the Bible

The Church of England authorised services give a central place to the Bible:

- Ordination of Deacons (Priests): "Receive this Book, as a sign of the authority given to you this day to speak God's word to his people. . . . (. . . to preach the gospel of Christ . . .)"
- Consecration of a Bishop: "Receive this Book; here are words of eternal life. Take them for your guide, and declare them to the world. . . ."

- The Coronation service includes the words, “This book, the most precious gift this world affords.”

We are reminded that St. Paul tells us, “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.” (Col. 3: 16; NIV); and that, ‘All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.’ (2Tim. 3:16,17 T.N.I.V.); the writer of Hebrews says, ‘the word of God is living and active’ (Heb. 4: 12; NIV).

6 France – The Year of the Bible

6.1 2003 was designated *Année de la Bible* by French Protestant bodies who joined together to encourage a national rediscovery of the message of the Bible. Under the heading *Chercher et Trouver* (Seeking and Finding) they encouraged a rediscovery of how the Bible has shaped France’s culture and history since the Reformation.

6.2 Amongst the achievements of *Année de la Bible* were the distribution of 30,000 Bibles, 100,000 New Testaments and 200,000 Gospels. In addition, 100,000 “Seek and Find” boxes containing a New Testament, a video of the *Jesus* film and a brochure giving Bible reading tips were given away.

6.3 Further information on *Année de la Bible* can be found on various websites including www.france-mission.org

7 2011 Trust

Since this motion was sent to Chelmsford Diocesan Synod and then to General Synod there have been significant developments including the establishment by the Bible Society of the 2011 Trust to organise and promote events celebrating the 400 years of the KJB.

The Patron is HRH The Prince of Wales and Vice-Patron, The Rt. Revd. and Rt. Hon. Richard Chartres, Bishop of London.

Several initiatives, events and projects have been planned so far with a focus on: The Cultural Consequences of the King James Bible; 400 years of the KJV; The Bible in the 17th Century. An International Conference is planned, a month’s exhibition at Winchester College and a celebration service at Westminster Abbey.

8 The Motion

8.1 In February 2008 Mr Timothy Cox (Blackburn) moved the following amended motion, which was overwhelmingly carried by the Synod:

‘That this Synod, believing in the importance of Scripture, desire that anyone entering a church building or attending a church service should have easy and unfettered access to one of the versions of the Bible referred to in the note by the House of Bishops on Versions of Scripture dated 9th October 2002 or one of the versions of the Bible that may be used by virtue of the Prayer Book Versions of the Bible Measure, and would request all dioceses to take steps to give effect to this desire in their churches.’

8.2 This current motion has progressed in parallel with that of Mr Cox and offers Synod a further opportunity to indicate its confidence in the Bible and to give a lead in commending it to the nation.

In passing this motion, Synod have the opportunity to issue a clarion call to church leaders (both ordained and lay) to seize the opportunity of the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible as a springboard for activities that teach the Bible, promote its usage in personal and public church life and grow national awareness of and confidence in it.

8.3 It is intended that this motion might lead to a variety of 'symbols' being adopted. Examples might include:

- offering Bibles in all parish church pews/seats for Sunday worship by the end of 2011
- sponsoring a Bible awareness raising project in every parish / deanery during 2011
- offering financial support from PCCs and churches to projects such as 'Walk Through the Bible' or the 2011 Trust
- promoting Lent projects that involve focussed reading of the Bible
- offering prayer and financial support to national initiatives from the Bible Society, Scripture Union, CPAS, the Evangelical Alliance (Bible Fresh) et al
- the introduction of Bible based evangelistic courses such as Emmaus, Christianity Explored and Alpha in parishes and deaneries as yet unfamiliar with them
- the promotion of Bible reading notes in parishes hitherto unfamiliar with such resources

8.4 It is to be hoped and prayed that the legacy of this motion might be a Church re-dedicated to the Word of God and a nation made more fully aware of the Bible's place in our history, culture and spiritual life.