

<p>Institution: University of Roehampton</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: Panel D, UoA 33 Theology and Religious Studies</p>
<p>Title of case study: Congregational Hermeneutics and h+ Making Good Sense of the Bible</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study details the impact of theological ethnographic research on the biblical hermeneutics of two contrasting congregations, which was subsequently developed to identify the importance of hermeneutical virtues for Bible reading. Conceptualising biblical hermeneutics in this innovative way has allowed it to be more easily integrated into notions of discipleship and Christian education. Through liaising with Bible Society, a biblical hermeneutics course for Christian communities (h+) was developed in parallel with the second phase of research. The impact of the research through the h+ vehicle has been of significant spiritual, cultural and educational benefit, reaching across Christian denominations, parachurch agencies, congregations, facilitators, participants, and the communities that they serve.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research underpinning this case study was carried out by Dr Andrew Rogers (Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, 2009 to date). The first phase of the research (Jan '04 to March '09) analysed and evaluated a broad range of hermeneutical practices within two contrasting congregations (Rogers 2007, 2009). Concepts and recommendations from the first phase were developed in a second phase of research at the University of Roehampton (from September 2009, and on-going). This second phase consisted of preparing papers for conferences and seminars (e.g. Ecclesiology and Ethnography network in January 2011, Society for the Study of Theology in April 2011) and writing two articles for publication from September 2011 to May 2012 (Rogers 2013b) and January 2012 to May 2012 (Rogers 2013a). This writing, teaching and subsequent facilitator training of the h+ course for churches (from January 2010 to September 2011) had a symbiotic relationship with the development of the research.</p> <p>The second phase enabled the analytical framework for 'congregational hermeneutics' to be formalised in terms of beliefs, goals, processes and mediators (Rogers 2013a). Further examples of that framework can be found in Rogers 2013b (which also demonstrates how such an analysis can be revealing for better understanding of evangelical identities). There have been very few academic studies of congregational hermeneutics (or 'ordinary' readers of the Bible), especially in the UK, hence the significance of such a framework. Recommendations from the first phase were also developed in the second through refining the notion of hermeneutical virtue further for an understanding of 'hermeneutical apprenticeship' in churches (Rogers 2013a). So the 'honest' reader learns to examine their own horizons when engaging with Scripture, and the 'courageous' reader learns when they need to challenge certain hermeneutical practices. The research shows something of the structure of 'lived hermeneutical virtue within a congregational story' (Rogers 2013a:124). Furthermore, such a virtue account links hermeneutics to discipleship, with the implication that growth in hermeneutical virtue is not just for experts but for all Christians.</p> <p>Rogers 2013b synthesises and brings greater focus to the first phase material on transforming horizons. That is, what change, potential and actual, was associated with the different hermeneutical configurations in each congregation? A number of transformative dynamics are identified, for example, the valuable role of 'organic theologians' in the churches. Such material also underpins aspects of the h+ course.</p> <p>In summary, the second phase research conceptualises biblical hermeneutical education in a way that seeks to broaden reflective engagement with the Scriptures in Christian communities, leading to impacts such as those described below.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>Rogers, Andrew, 'Reading Scripture in Congregations: Towards an Ordinary Hermeneutics', in L. Bretherton and A. Walker (eds.), <i>Remembering our Future: Explorations in Deep Church</i>, Milton</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

Keynes: Paternoster, 2007, 81-107.

Rogers, Andrew, 'Congregational Hermeneutics: Towards Virtuous Apprenticeship', in J. Astley & L. Francis (eds.), *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2013a, 117-127. REF2.

Rogers, Andrew, 'Congregational Hermeneutics: A Tale of Two Churches', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 28 (3), 2013b. DOI: 10.1080/13537903.2013.831657

4. Details of the impact

Initial contact with the Bible Society was through partial funding of the first research phase. Andrew Rogers started working for Bible Society in March 2009 fulfilling the role of 'ordinary hermeneutics researcher' (until August 2011). The Bible Society was interested in the findings of the first phase of research and asked Rogers to explore the range and quality of biblical hermeneutics resources for 'ordinary' Christians. This led into the second phase of the research from September 2009, where Rogers began preparing a hermeneutics course for churches which drew on both first and second phase research.

The pilot project, known as 'Pathfinder', involved nine churches around England engaging with a number of Bible Society offerings, especially the hermeneutics course which became known as *h+*: *Making Good Sense of the Bible*. Rogers wrote and taught the course in a London church between January and April 2011, and trained a Bible Society colleague, Mike Simmonds, to teach *h+*. *h+* was then taught at eight further churches over the next year across a range of denominations. Beyond Pathfinder, there were a number of iterations of revision and development for *h+* up until its publication as a facilitator's guide and participant's guide in September 2011. The Bible Society also invested in a video to accompany the course, which included illustrative material and expert opinion on hermeneutical matters. From March 2011, *h+* moved towards a facilitator model of delivery, starting with a training day for the **Anglican Diocese of Coventry**. Church leaders were invited to attend with a view to becoming facilitators of *h+* themselves. The training day was refined for a more general church audience in Swindon in June 2011. Subsequently, Mike Simmonds has taken over the training programme for *h+* facilitators, with over 250 church leaders having undergone such training in England, Ireland and the Balkans (to July 2013).

In its final form *h+* constitutes a 10 session course on biblical hermeneutics for Christian communities. The stated aim is 'to enable participants to make good sense of the Bible for themselves, in the church and in the world, through learning, practising and mediating key hermeneutical virtues and skills'. The virtues of perseverance, confidence, honesty, faithfulness, humility, courage, openness, and community structure eight of the ten sessions. 'Passing it on' is a theme running throughout *h+*, since it is designed to have an impact beyond its immediate participants. The main topics include: making the case that hermeneutics is an indispensable element of Christian discipleship; introducing the notion of hermeneutical virtue; addressing some standard objections to hermeneutics; examining one's own horizons in relation to the Bible; introducing key hermeneutical concepts; looking at the world behind, within and in front of the text (i.e. the emphases on author, text and reader); putting hermeneutical virtues and skills together to tackle a contemporary issue (e.g. homelessness); and learning hermeneutics from the whole body of Christ.

The impact of *h+* demonstrates broad reach and marked significance for its beneficiaries. In terms of reach, the key outputs are the published *h+* guides (657 participant guides sold so far); the *h+* website and blog; the *h+* booklet distributed in the Bible Society's *Bible in Transmission* journal (circulation to approximately 17,000 church leaders); *Word in Action* features (60,000+ circulation); the *Deep Engagement Fresh Discovery* report of the Anglican Communion (1,500 print copies); article on the Anglican Communion news service website; article in the Church of England Reader magazine (circulation 10,000); and all those who have participated in the course or training events so far.

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The beneficiaries of h+ are the participants, trained facilitators, congregations and their communities, and denominational and parachurch organisations. Many of these beneficiaries have spoken of the significance of h+ for them and their churches or organisations. The *Anglican Communion News service* speaks of h+'s educational and spiritual benefit through enabling participants to 'think for themselves' and take a 'greater, deeper part in the life and mission of their churches' (S2). There are many testimonials about h+ from participants, some noting the course as 'an accessible focus for Christian discipleship', others noting the need for more advanced courses such as h+ that 'treats the ordinary reader as a thinking being' (S3). From the earliest pilot stage of h+, feedback indicated evidence of significant impact on understanding and practices (IC2). For example, one participant changed their Bible reading practices, whilst another spoke of the course turning the Bible from 2D to 3D, making the 'text alive', leading to a stronger relationship with God. Others found the latter a 'liberating' aspect of h+. Some participants noted the change in Bible engagement in the church after h+, so context and critical reflection were mentioned. One leader spoke of the confidence h+ had given him in his preaching, and others spoke of its impact on their preparation (S8).

Those training to be facilitators largely provided evidence of congregational impact, particularly in terms of Christian discipleship strategies at the congregational level. There have been many examples of facilitators planning to incorporate h+ into training for leaders in their congregation(s), deaneries, circuits and ecumenical groups. One life coach spoke of running h+ to help people 'use the Bible more intelligently in their lives at work' (S13). Text and video testimonials from congregants, leaders and academics speak of h+'s broader significance. One church leader commented 'I've seen the impact not only on myself, but also on people in the congregation' and another spoke of h+ extending his social life and 'inquisitiveness' about the Bible. David Roche recommends h+ for all church leaders since h+ has 'listened to what is happening in our culture' and so enables Christian communities to 'get a grip of what we are doing with the Bible'. Another thought it would 'grow biblical literacy' in their church. Darren Blaney appreciated h+ particularly for moving participants to action in the later sessions through using the pastoral cycle (S4).

At the denominational and parachurch level, the **Bible Society** is a key beneficiary of the research. h+ was run at their HQ with a very positive response (IC4&5), and they have made h+ a key plank of their Bible advocacy strategy (S3, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12). h+ is one of their core responses to declining biblical literacy and engagement in England and Wales, and as such there is significant benefit in terms of facilitating engagement with a key text in our cultural heritage. The **Anglican Communion's** 'Bible in the Life of the Church' (BLC) project ran from 2009-2012 in eight regions around the world (S1, S2). With a strong focus on process, the final report 'highly recommended' h+ which it described as 'ten steps towards a deeper engagement with Scripture', and reported testimony from participants saying h+ 'freed them up to ask questions' and gave them 'curiosity and confidence to dig deeper into the text' (S1, IC3). The reach of the impact is indicated as follows: 'the Bible Society in conjunction with the Bible in the Life of the Church project is inviting Anglicans across the world to join in the h+ programme' (S1:p49, IC3&5 for on-going situation). Dr Helen Cameron, head of public affairs at the **Salvation Army**, attended one of the first h+ facilitator training events. She then ran h+ twice for her senior colleagues with a particular focus on theological reflection, starting with homelessness (S5). The effect on participants was 'a sense of confidence that theological reflection is something that employees can take part in'. h+ drew attention to the hermeneutical skills they already had, which could also be 'put to the service of theological reflection'. It is noted of Cameron that 'after doing the h+ session on homelessness, her church paused to take stock of their own response to the issue' (S12, IC1). Finally, the **Congregational Federation's** theological programme runs a Level 6 module on Ordinary Theology, in which h+ and the research outputs underpinning it feature (S7).

Further indicators of reach include the fact that 250+ facilitators have been trained and 657 participant guides have been sold to date, which indicates that h+ has run in many more locations beyond the initial 9 pilot churches. The nature of the impact, as has been seen, is spiritual, in terms of a deepening of faith; educational, in terms of enriching the hermeneutical practices of Christian communities; and cultural, in terms of enhancing engagement with the Bible which forms a significant part of British cultural heritage.

Impact case study (REF3b)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Anglican Communion, *Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery: Report of the Anglican Communion "Bible in the Life of the Church" project*, 2012, available: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/ministry/theological/bible/docs/pdf/FULL.pdf> (downloadable, 1500 copies printed and distributed throughout the Communion)
2. Anglican Consultative Council, 'Bible course equipped lay leaders to "think for themselves"', *Anglican Communion News Service*, July 2013, available at: <http://www.anglicannews.org/news/2013/07/bible-course-equipped-lay-leaders-to-think-for-themselves.aspx>
3. Bible Society, *h+ Making Good Sense of the Bible: 10 Steps to help your church do Bible better*, Swindon, Bible Society, 2013.
4. Bible Society, 'h+ Making Good Sense of the Bible', 2013, available at: <http://www.hplus.org.uk/> (especially 'Home' tab promotional video and 'Get Involved: What they say' tab)
5. Cameron, Helen, 'Reflection on the challenges of using the pastoral cycle in a faith-based organisation', Chester, *BIAPT conference paper*, July 2012, available at: <http://www.biapt.org.uk/documents/HelenCameronSS12.pdf>
6. Christian Resources Exhibitions, h+ stand (Mike Simmonds can supply additional details), available at <http://www.creonline.co.uk/> (10,000+ visitors to CRE)
7. Congregational Federation, 'BA (Hons) Practical Theology – Long Project in Ordinary Theology', available at: <http://www.congregational.org.uk/module-descriptions-and-booklists/ba-hons-practical-theology-1> (research and h+ on the reading list)
8. Hunt, Cheryl, Evaluation of the Pathfinder project, December 2012. (Andrew Rogers also has a copy).
9. Pfundner, Michael, 'Getting to grips with the Bible', *Word in Action*, Spring 2012, 10-11, available at: http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/uploads/content/wia/files/WiA_2012_Summer.pdf (circulation 60,000+)
10. Rogers, Andrew with Mike Simmonds, *h+ Making Good Sense of the Bible (Facilitator and Participants' Guide)*, Swindon: Bible Society, 2011 (657 participant's guides sold by 31/7/13)
11. Rogers, Andrew, 'h+ Making Good Sense of the Bible', *The Reader*, Autumn 2011, pp21-22, available at: http://www.readers.cofe.anglican.org/u_d_lib_pub/m1083.pdf (circulation 10,000)
12. Simmonds, Mike, 'Delving Deeper into Scripture: Word on the Street', *Word in Action*, Spring 2013, p10-11, http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/uploads/content/wia/files/WiA_2013_Spring.pdf (circulation 60,000+)
13. Simmonds, Mike, Feedback forms from a selection of h+ facilitator training days – Chichester, Bristol, Nottingham, Malvern (confidential).

Corroborators:

1. Head of Public Affairs, Salvation Army
2. Evaluator of Pathfinder.
3. Coordinator of the 'Bible in the Life of the Church' project (*Deep Engagement Fresh Discovery*), Anglican Communion.
4. h+ consultant, Bible Society.
5. h+ project manager, Bible Society.