

# News from Bible Society

*Transmission* is provided free by Bible Society as part of our mission to equip the church to live out the Bible's message. We also work creatively and with passion to show that the Bible resonates with issues today – and to make Scriptures available where there are none.

**Paul Williams**  
Chief Executive



Church of England Sunday-morning attendance has always held a fascination for religious correspondents. It is a kind of theological litmus test of the strength (or otherwise) of Christianity in Britain. In *Sun-speak*, 'news of who's in the Anglican pews' provides journalists with proof that faith in Britain is on its last knees – or at least, in terms of its ageing demographic – a sturdy walking frame.

The fact that many Christians are not Anglicans or that many attend mid-week services in coffee shops and home groups, does not support the narrative and so is conveniently ignored.

This edition of *The Bible in Transmission* provides a rich, nuanced and very welcome antidote to this kind of superficial narrative. Such an antidote is needed because it is all too easy for Christians today to believe the superficial media narrative. We can easily become convinced that the Church is experiencing inevitable decline as a result of the triumph of secularism and postmodern relativism. Ironically, I find this belief quite embedded in Christian circles even as the so-called 'secularisation thesis' has been roundly rejected by historians and sociologists over the last few decades, and secular individualism described as 'failed' or in need of an entire 'reappraisal'.<sup>1</sup>

Our culture is characterised by fragmentation, a loss of cultural memory and a loss of rooted identity. Loneliness is a powerful and growing aspect of experience for many people. Though our culture may be post-truth it is not post-spiritual. There is what Peter Berger has called a 'de-secularisation' of the West and a growing spiritual openness.<sup>2</sup> This context – one of enormous opportunity for the Western Church – is better reflected in the articles in this volume than in the superficial media narrative.

But the wider loss of cultural memory and rooted identity has also impacted Christianity in Britain. For many Christians in Britain, we have forgotten who we are and are losing touch with our

roots. Nowhere is this more evident than in the growing ignorance and loss of confidence in the Bible among church-going Christians – even those who consider themselves 'Bible-believing.' Just as wider cultural narratives are fragmenting and incoherent, we find that many Christians today tend to engage with Scripture in atomised ways. Proof texts and favourite passages are focused on for what comfort and hope can from them, but many struggle to relate their faith to all of life or to navigate the increasingly fractious culture wars that, sadly, fragmentary proof-texting can contribute to.

In her editorial, Chine McDonald cites American researcher David Kinnaman as saying that this problem 'stems ultimately from the failure of the Church to impart Christianity as a comprehensive way of understanding reality and living fully in today's culture.' I share this conviction.

Our heart at Bible Society is to invest and partner with the church to help recover and grow confidence in the Bible in ways that will not simply change our feelings and knowledge base, but change the conversation in wider society and our behaviour within it.

This year, Bible Society begins a journey which will focus on giving back to the church through research, resources and partnership. We want to foster and model collaborative mission and help church leaders develop fellowship, grow confidence and build unity around the Bible. We are developing resources designed specifically to help millennials, church leaders and Christians in work integrate their faith and ministry with all of life and live missionally in whatever context God has placed them.

*The Bible Course* and *Word on the Go* are two such resources we have developed over the last year and which have seen meaningful impact and positive responses from churches and individuals.

The Bible Course, written by Andrew Ollerton, is an interactive eight-session

course which helps people engage more deeply with the big drama of scripture. It shows how the key events, books and characters in the Bible all fit together to reveal the big picture and its relevance to life.

*Word on the Go* is a set of fun, bite-sized introductions to the Bible, designed for Catholics, which helps make Scripture more accessible in daily life through liturgy, prayer, group study and a Scripture 'crash course'.

Over this next financial year we will also be investing in research to underpin our future goals. We want to listen and learn, to discover what the Church needs, and what obstacles prevent real Bible engagement.

Please pray for all the staff at Bible Society as we travel on this journey. We want God to bless and guide us as we seek to hear from him.

Please also pray for our work with churches across England and Wales as we all seek to grow in knowledge, engagement and passion for God's word.

And, who knows, perhaps we will find religious correspondents reporting a real growth in faith in this country and using more than numbers to evidence it.

Paul Williams is Chief Executive at Bible Society. If you would like to email him, you can contact him at [paul.williams@biblesociety.org.uk](mailto:paul.williams@biblesociety.org.uk)

1. George Monbiot, 'Neoliberalism is creating loneliness. That's what's wrenching society apart,' *The Guardian*, 12 October 2016.

2. Peter Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).