The 2012 report on the project: Deep Engagement; Fresh Discovery

In the introduction to this report the Chair of the project's Steering Group, Archbishop David Moxon, wrote this,

> "The Anglican Communion has always cherished Scripture and given it a central place in its life. This emphasis was historically summed up in Article 6 of the 39 Articles, "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation" and is confirmed by the way Scripture is so heavily drawn on in our liturgical life. In recent years the Communion has sought to handle the diversity of opinions in relation to moral and ethical issues. However, in turning to Scripture for insights we have discovered that we reach different conclusions as to the way forward. This raised the question as to whether we might benefit, as a Communion, by exploring in some depth the way we go about this engagement with and interpretation of Scripture."

So in 2009 the "Bible in the Life of the Church" (BILC) project was mandated by the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) at its meeting in Jamaica. The aims of the project were over the next three years to:

- explore how we, as Anglicans, actually use the Bible by sharing experiences of using the Bible to explore two major contemporary issues;
- distil and develop from these explorations the working principles of Anglican hermeneutics;
- produce resource materials for use at all levels of Christian education;
- provide a guide to significant literature on this topic; and
- offer a report and make recommendations to ACC 15

To fulfil these aims the project undertook four major pieces of work:

1. It created a network of Regional Groups across the Communion, each facilitated by a regional coordinator, to participate in explorations of Scripture providing a series of windows into how different regions engaged with and interpreted the Bible.
2. It reviewed what the Anglican Communion has already said about Scripture through its Lambeth Conference resolutions, official reports and reports of our ecumenical conversations.
3. It commissioned a piece of empirical research based on a number of existing studies exploring how 'ordinary Anglicans' view and understand the Bible.
4. It collected a range of resources that would enable the church, at all levels, to engage more deeply with Scripture.

This report contains the fruit of this work and comes from the Steering Group of the project. Its core message was described in the following way:

> Anglicans love the scriptures of both Old and New Testaments; these have a central place within our common life. For 500 years or more we have valued their availability in vernacular translation and treasured them in our worship. They speak to us, and the societies in which we live, in many ways - permeating our liturgy, Bible study, preaching, commentary, story-telling, song, scholarship, dance, music, and art. The nature of these encounters differs from context to context, adding to both the variety of interpretations and the complexity of the interpretive process.

> The richness of these encounters was explored in this project by our investigation of how Anglicans around the world approach the Bible. This involved workshops in different parts of the Communion, a questionnaire survey, a literature survey of official Anglican statements and documents, and academic reflections by Anglican scholars.
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> A major finding of these investigations is that how Anglicans engage with the Bible turns out to be just as important as its content. This perhaps unnerving claim does not contest the unique place and authority which the scriptures have in Anglican life, but it does point up the significance, perhaps thus far overlooked, of the contexts in which and processes by which they are heard and read.
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> The Bible in the Life of the Church project, while finding some decline in biblical literacy, above all encountered the sense of excitement, discovery and challenge that comes from reading the scriptures together. This Report seeks to capture the work of the project and, through its narratives and the resources offered, invites us, as a Communion, to deepen our love of the Bible and the rich treasures its pages offer.

But the report went on to also say what the report was not:

> NOT a total picture of what happens across the Communion – but a series of snapshots, a collage. Its value is in the stories it offers, the examples it shows, and the resources it promotes.
> NOT a set of answers to the question, "How do Anglicans engage with ***and*** interpret the Bible?" – but a mirror or checklist, a set of questions and encouragements to challenge us, as Anglicans, to think further.
> NOT a prescribed programme or way forward – but a toolbox or collection of ideas, approaches and resources to dig deeper into the process of our engagement with Scripture.

This core message is then expanded in six main sections:

Section 1 – Methodology and broad conclusions from the Regional Groups
Section 2 – Regional Reflections
Section 3 – Review of Anglican documents and the empirical research
Section 4 – Resources, exercises, study courses, case studies and other ideas
Section 5 – Reflections on the project by an 'Anglican Outsider'.
Section 6 - Acknowledgements and Thanks

In addition, we have created appendices on the web or on the memory stick accompanying the paper Report that include a rich variety of background material which informed the creation of the report or add additional insights to its findings. [Most of these resources are available in this tool-box.]

The title of this Report - Deep Engagement, Fresh Discovery - is both descriptive and aspirational. As you will see, deep engagement with Scripture leading to new insights and inspiration is alive and well in the Communion and comes in many different clothes and colours. Yet, it is also true to say that Anglicans are not engaging as deeply as our forebears and official documents suggest we might. Our hope is that through the stories told, examples offered and resources made available we might 'raise the bar' of our

engagement for the sake of both God's Kingdom and Christ's Church. As you will see from the Core Message that follows this Introduction this Report comes with the express desire to "invite us, as a Communion, to deepen our love of the Bible and the rich treasures its pages offer." We offer it to the Communion as a gift that might enrich our life together.

Archbishop David Moxon
Chair of the Steering Group,
Bible in the Life of the Church Project
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The full text of Deep Engagement; Fresh Discovery