

Report on the Document “The Gift of Authority”

ANGLICAN STUDIES CENTER
THE EPISCOPAL ANGLICAN CHURCH OF BRAZIL*

Editorial Note: “The Gift of Authority” (GA) is the third agreed statement on authority produced by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC).¹ It builds on ARCIC’s earlier work on authority, released in 1976 and 1981. “The Gift of Authority” examines outstanding matters about which there had not previously been consensus, including the complementarity of conciliarity and primacy. On the basis of its studies, ARCIC states that there is “sufficient agreement on universal primacy as a gift to be shared, for us to propose that such a primacy could be offered and received even before our churches are in full communion” (para. 60).

In 1999 the Anglican Consultative Council commended GA to the provinces of the Anglican Communion for study and response by 2005. To date, official responses from the Church of Ireland, the Episcopal Church in the USA, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Church of England, and the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil have been published.

The report that follows has been edited for greater clarity, and some citations have been added.

Background

The document “The Gift of Authority” came into being in 1998, the fruit of work done by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). It is a text that attempts to find points in

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¹ *The Gift of Authority*. London: Catholic Truth Society; Toronto: Anglican Book Centre; New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1999. The earlier statements, *Authority in the Church I*, *Elucidation of Authority I*, and *Authority in the Church II* were published as part of ARCIC’s Final Report.

common around ecclesiological questions. In the years following its publication, the document has been the subject of analysis by various theologians of those two Christian denominations. Subsequently, the Anglican Consultative Council requested that the provinces of the Anglican Communion study the document and issue an official response.

The Anglican Studies Center (ASC) took on the responsibility for this study in our country. During 2002 we held three regional meetings, with bishops, clergy, and lay persons participating. They met for two days of deep study, critical analysis, and debate on the document. The meetings were held in Santa Maria (with representatives of the three southern dioceses: Southern, Southwestern, and Pelotas) in June 2002, in Recife (with representatives of the Dioceses of Brasília and Recife) in August 2002, and in São Paulo (with representatives of the Dioceses of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília, and of the Missionary District of Amazônia) in September 2002, with a total of forty-one participants. At each meeting representatives were chosen to write a final report on the studies. A meeting of this group was planned for February 2003. However, because of steep increases in airfares and other unexpected expenses, the meeting could not be held. Thus the coordinator of the ASC was charged with the task of writing a preliminary text, with the help of Bishop Sumio Takatsu, and of distributing it to representatives of each meeting so that they could add their comments and suggestions. After receiving these suggestions, a final report was prepared by the Drafting Commission. It is now presented to the House of Bishops and the Executive Council of the Synod of the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil.

Methodology

The following methodology was adopted for the three regional meetings:

At the outset all the participants named by their respective dioceses received copies of the document "The Gift of Authority," as well as studies of the document already in circulation on the Internet. The recommendation was that all the materials be read before the meeting.

During the meetings, the time was divided into study periods, worship, and a sharing of experiences. At all the meetings, the Holy Eucharist was led by one of the participants, with the homily being the responsibility of Bishop Naudal Gomes (Santa Maria meeting),

the Rev. Jorge Aquino (Recife meeting), and the Rev. Samuel de Souza (meeting in São Paulo).

The theological consultants at the meetings were the Rev. Jaci Maraschin, member of ARCIC, and the Rt. Rev. Sumio Takatsu, member of the House of Bishops. The opening lecture, delivered by Maraschin, attempted to describe the scope of the work of ARCIC and the controversial points of discussion. The first study session, led by Bishop Takatsu, revolved around the first section of the document, analyzing especially the concept of authority. Maraschin was responsible for leading the study of the second section, "The Exercise of Authority in the Church." Bishop Takatsu led the study of the third section, "Agreement in the Exercise of Authority: Steps Towards Visible Unity." After each study period there were tightly focused discussions in smaller groups, followed by a plenary session. Conclusions were reported so that the reactions of the different groups could be compared and questions asked of the consultants, and where possible, a consensus position achieved was to be included in the final report.

The questions studied by the groups followed a design sent by the office of the Anglican Communion: (a) the relationship between Scripture, tradition, and the exercise of authority in the Anglican Communion; (b) collegiality and the role of the laity in making decisions; and (c) the Petrine ministry of universal primacy. Generally speaking, the question was: "To what extent does 'The Gift of Authority' reflect the understanding and practice which the Anglican Communion has received?"

The evaluation by the participants highlighted the positive point that the meetings provided much more than just an opportunity to study an international document. They were also important in deepening our understanding of ecclesiology and in reaffirming our Brazilian Anglican identity.

Each group handed the coordinator of the ASC (the Rev. Carlos Calvani) its conclusions in writing. Taking this material as a foundation and doing our best to be faithful to the conclusions of each group, we compiled the report that follows and now share it with all of the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil for information, analysis, and reaction.

About ARCIC

1. We were happy to note at the outset that the existence of ARCIC is in itself a great sign of unity. We support continuing this di-

alogue with the Roman Catholic Church, noting especially that this dialogue should be strengthened at the provincial level, in dioceses and in parishes.

2. On the other hand, we were puzzled that the Anglican representatives to ARCIC are nominated to the Archbishop of Canterbury. We understand that the appointments are to be made by the archbishop, but they should be made on the basis of recommendations from provincial synods and authorized by the Anglican Consultative Council. This would guarantee greater representation of the various currents of Anglicanism.

3. We also regretted the lack of representative lay persons and women among the Anglican members of ARCIC. This fact argues against one of the previous declarations of ARCIC, which appears in the preface to "The Gift of Authority": "the recognition that, thanks to their baptism and their participation in the *sensus fidelium*, lay persons constitute an integral part of the decision-making power of the Church."²

4. We were also puzzled by the preponderance of theologians from the Anglo-Saxon world in ARCIC. We suggest that future Anglican members on the Commission be chosen from clergy and lay persons from every continent, observing a balance of gender, ethnicity, and theological current.

Scripture, Tradition, and the Exercise of Authority

5. We recognize first of all that authority in the church is a gift from God and, as such, should be at the service of the fellowship of human groups and the integrity of creation. In ecclesial relations authority should be exercised keeping in mind the eschatological horizon of the Kingdom of God. The understanding of authority as a gift comes from Christ himself who "came not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:35-45). For this he left us an unequivocal example when he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13). The same Lord declared: "whosoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:43-44). Beyond that, authority is given to preach and to cure, to bless and to exorcise, in the way Christ did. Authority is an exercise of power that should not serve primarily the person exercising it, but rather serve the well-being of

² *Authority in the Church: Elucidation* (1981), para. 4.

the community and the salvation of all people. The danger lies in power's becoming despotic, instead of deriving from God.

6. Beginning from this point, we feel that the document touches very superficially on this biblical principle (para. 9), setting it aside in favor of an excessively juridical view centralized in the ministry of bishops, thus reinforcing the notion that authority has to do with administrative and decision-making power. Beginning with chapter 2, in all discussions of authority lay persons, deacons, and priests are categorized as those upon whom the authority of the church is exercised. This is reflected in the phrase: "Decisions taken by the bishop in fulfilling these functions have an authority which the faithful have the obligation to respect and accept" (para. 36).

7. The consensus of the participants in our discussions is that the document only partially reflects the Anglican view of the relationship between Scripture, tradition, and authority. The critical point is the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of the role of *magisterium* that tends to centralize judicial authority in one person. We reaffirm our commitment to the Reformation principle of "free examination of Scripture," together with the need for constant encouragement of biblical research and exchange between scholars of Scripture, in order to avoid a claim that the right to define the single correct interpretation of biblical texts belongs to any one person or event.

8. We highlight also the lack of objectivity in the document in its reference to the concept of truth (para. 41-44). The idealistic conception of truth that predominates introduces and supports the authority of the *magisterium* in the definition of doctrine. In this sense, we disagree with the affirmation that "the Church may teach infallibly" (para. 42).

9. We understand that infallibility is a relatively recent concept in the history of Christian theology. It only became relevant in the nineteenth century as a conservative reaction to rationalism, liberal theology, and scientific theories of the time, especially the theory of evolution. The concept of infallibility was articulated by Vatican I as applying to certain statements by the pope. It was later adapted by Protestant fundamentalism to affirm the "infallibility of the Bible." We point out that for many centuries the church renounced that concept as unnecessary, preferring to refer to the "authority of the Word," the concept of the indefectibility of the church, and the assurance of the help of the Holy Spirit in crisis situations. Based on the promise of Christ that the gates of hell will not prevail against the

church, we believe that the church is, indeed, indefectible but not infallible. Otherwise, the church would not need its well-established penitential order. We find the concept of infallibility inadequate. At the same time, we affirm our faith in the authority of Scripture and in the help of the Holy Spirit to the faithful gathered in *koinonia*. We reject any suggestion of the infallibility of the *magisterium* either of the church or of episcopal ministry.

10. The analysis made in GA of the exercise of authority in the Roman Catholic Church seems not to match historic reality. It becomes essential to discuss how far the decisions of Vatican Council II have really been implemented and observed in the Roman Catholic Church.

11. We highlight the need to deepen the concept of tradition (para. 14 and following). The Anglican understanding of tradition affirms that tradition is a dynamic principle, not something fixed in the past that should be followed without question. We believe that the church is still perfecting itself and maturing every day in the knowledge and love of Christ and the fullness of divine revelation. This implies that the church should be open to questioning old interpretations that may have fossilized as tradition and may impede us from hearing what the Holy Spirit says to us today. In this sense, we question the quite clear implication in GA that tradition must include the Petrine primacy as it is understood by the Roman Catholic Church (para. 47).

Collegiality, Conciliarity, and Laity

12. The document offers various possibilities for reconsidering how authority has been exercised in the Anglican Communion. We recognize, for example, that the Anglican Communion is in general more participative than the Roman Catholic Church at parish, diocesan, and provincial levels. However, at all our meetings the question was raised about the way in which the Archbishop of Canterbury is chosen. Since the time of Henry VIII, this has been done through nomination by a head of state, without the participation of Anglican leadership spread across the globe. It is worth noting that the views of the thirty-nine primates of the Anglican Communion were heard in the nomination of the present archbishop, Rowan Williams (104th in the line of succession from Augustine of Canterbury). Even so, the present practice not only damages, but also brings into question, the

Anglican concept of dispersed authority; and we recognize that, in this instance, the Roman Catholic Church has something to share with us in reference to the process of electing the pope.

13. We understand that it is necessary to reconsider and emphasize the role of lay persons in the collegial and conciliar exercise of power. As this is one of the marks of our Anglican identity, we affirm that our churches urgently need to deepen and review the form this participation tends to take. Participation of the laity should be encouraged on diocesan and provincial levels in preparation for the Lambeth Conference and for the meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC). We further emphasize the importance of theological training and sharing of documents at every level of the church, in order to improve discussion about living out the gift of authority in the Anglican Communion, and especially in the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil.

14. Anglicans should seek, deepen, and broaden the participation of lay persons in the Anglican Communion, even if this biblical, theological, and pastoral conviction might distance us a bit from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, as happened after the first women's ordinations. This is the right path to follow, because we desire, in fact and by right, that the Anglican Church should be an inclusive community in which the love and compassion of Jesus teach us to welcome all persons, especially the excluded.

15. In general, it was observed that GA's proposals were inadequate on the subject of synodality. This area requires continuing and deepening study and dialogue (ecumenical and interreligious) in order to arrive at a possible theological consensus and the sharing of ministries. In the Christian tradition the bishop is a symbol of unity. But the unity of the church is expressed not only through the episcopal ministry, but also through various assemblies which include clergy and lay persons.

16. Both traditions involved in this dialogue have much to share. However, at the same time and in the same way, both have many challenges and expectations to meet:

- For the Anglican Communion, a sociological revision of the concept and practice of synodality becomes necessary so that synodality can express and live out full communion and the "royal priesthood" exercised by all of the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10).

- For the Roman Catholic Church, a revision of the biblical-theological model of priestly ministry is necessary. The ordination of women should be thought about in the light of the Pauline understanding that condemns any and all discrimination. For all the baptized have “clothed themselves with Christ” (Galatians 3:25-29) and become “one body and one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:4-6).
- For the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil, greater participation of laity is needed in discussions and decisions about doctrinal, liturgical, and administrative questions. Our practices of dispersed authority would be stimulated and fortified through the study of GA.

Universal Primacy and Petrine Ministry

17. We are puzzled that GA refers to the Petrine primacy as something already resolved and accepted in the theological world. We found the arguments justifying the primacy of the bishop of Rome quite weak (para. 46-47). Even a good many Roman Catholic exegetes understand that at least the church of Jerusalem was led by James and not by Peter. Some recognize that the community of the Beloved Disciple, later identified as the apostle John, maintained different traditions from the group in Jerusalem. In general terms, the identification of Petrine ministry with the concept of universal primacy, beginning with Matthew 16:16, is a theological mistake. We affirm that the primitive church maintained its unity in the confession of Peter (“You are the Christ of God”) and not in the person of Peter.

18. We disagree with the claim that “the primacy of the bishop of Rome . . . is a gift to be received by all the Churches” (para. 47). It is our understanding that there are insufficient theological reasons to recognize the primacy of the bishop of Rome, although historical reasons might be cited. The exercise of a universal jurisdiction centralized in the bishop of Rome is incompatible with the Anglican concept of dispersed authority.

19. On the other hand, some participants felt that it would be possible to accept the primacy of the bishop of Rome, as long as this was only an honorary primacy. The great majority of the participants are convinced that we need to reconsider the concept of universal primacy and the question of Petrine ministry when considering proposals of unity. Some of the participants emphasized that a rotating system should be adopted among the great Christian traditions. In

this way, for each period primacy would be exercised by a different Christian tradition. For the moment, we reaffirm our commitment to communion with the ministry of unity and primacy of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the other structures of the Anglican Communion.

20. In GA there are two concepts that should be treated separately: the Petrine ministry and the universal primacy. The second does not necessarily arise from the first. Some participants assert that the Petrine ministry was invented by the Church of Rome in order to justify its absolutism and its hegemony over the other churches of medieval Europe.

21. We understand that, were it necessary for the greater unity of the church to institute a universal primacy, such a primacy should be honorary and collegial in nature, rather than jurisdictional. It should not involve the unilateral declaration of dogmas of faith. Furthermore, it must respect the traditions and socio-religious-cultural contexts of the local churches.

22. We agree unanimously that the apostolic ministry is more important than the Petrine ministry. Anglicans can only recognize a Petrine primacy as a gift of God to the extent that the exercise of that primacy is not a pretension to Petrine power, but rather is a genuinely apostolic Petrine service.

Other Observations on the Document

23. The document implies that the "true" church is the Roman Catholic Church, in which resides the totality of grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit; and that the Anglican Church, like a rebellious daughter, should return to Roman jurisdiction and authority.

24. We were puzzled by the statement that "Anglicans have shown themselves willing to accept anomalies in order to maintain communion" (para. 56). We reject the unhappy choice of that rather blunt expression, in which the meaning of "anomaly" is never specified. Are ordination of women and optional celibacy "anomalies" from the Roman Catholic point of view? GA displays great temerity in implying that accepting papal primacy means turning away from the recognition of women's ministry and of marriage options for clergy.

25. We believe that the teachings of Vatican Council II on the laity and on collegiality were never sufficiently implemented in the Roman Catholic Church (para. 57). We note that the Roman Catholic Church insists on disciplining with "obsequious silences" those theo-

logians who demonstrate opinions at odds with the Curia's. The practice of interference, on the part of some Vatican offices, in dioceses and seminaries, especially in Latin America, does not reflect adequate respect for the exercise of authority through *episcopé*.

26. Historically, the practice of the Roman Catholic Church does not offer any guarantee that "a universal primacy will welcome and protect theological investigation and other forms of seeking the truth" (para. 61), as the text of the document declares. Our understanding is that, as long as the Roman Catholic Church maintains obsolete and medieval institutions like the "Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," there will not be sufficient liberty for theological investigation.

27. We question the conclusion that "Anglicans are open to and desirous of the recovery and re-reception, under certain clear conditions, of the exercise of universal primacy by the Bishop of Rome" (para. 62). Such a declaration should not have been made by Anglican members of the Commission without broad consultation with Anglican clergy and laity.

28. We are surprised also by the fact that the document several times suggests that Anglicans should recognize the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as universal primate, but at no time does it mention *Apostolicae curae*, the declaration signed by Leo XIII in 1896 which declares that Anglican ordinations are "absolutely null and utterly void." Although the authority of our ministry does not depend on Roman Catholic recognition, but rather on Him who called us and commissioned us, we feel that it would be a great sign of the unity of the church and a great stimulus to the ecumenical movement if the Roman Catholic Church, exercising its juridical power, were to admit the error of Pope Leo XIII and recognize publicly the validity of Anglican ordained ministry.

29. In general, the majority of the participants agreed with the words of Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng: "My general impression is that the document attempts to divert the Anglican Communion from the Via Media toward the Via Romana . . . the attempt is to justify the Roman ideology of papal infallibility and of the episcopacy, which date back to the nineteenth century, and make them palatable for Anglicans." Küng adds: "In spite of their good intentions, the document does a disservice to ecumenism."³

³ *The Tablet*, June 19, 1999, 865.

30. We conclude that, despite its virtues and disquieting questions, GA does not totally reflect the diversity of Anglican ecclesiology, nor of our healthy tradition of dispersed authority. GA apparently was based on Roman Catholic presuppositions. It is apparently directed not toward the search for authentic unity, but rather toward capitulation of the Anglican Communion to the Roman Catholic Church, through an "Amen" given not to the authority of Jesus Christ, but to the pretensions of the Roman Curia.

31. Finally, we reiterate our support for continuing the bilateral dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and with other Christian confessions. We hope that the next group of Anglican theologians on ARCIC will be more attentive to the beauty of the diversity that exists in the Anglican Communion, so that their work may mirror vigorously and clearly our baptismal theology, our ecclesiology, and the value of the laity in our church.

