

ARC-USA Response to the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission's "The Gift of Authority"

The Gift of Authority at this Moment of History

1. The world situation has changed radically since the publication of *The Gift of Authority* in 1999. This change has affected the context in which we now read the agreed statement of ARCIC. We nevertheless believe that the commitment to ecumenical relations among Christians has a positive contribution to make in times of conflict and vulnerability. In this context the bishops of our two churches have expressed their concern for peace in our country and in the community of nations.

2. The members of ARC-USA, representing our two churches, have met for their regular semi-annual meeting, March 27 - 30, 2003, to formulate their assessment of *The Gift of Authority* and to suggest ways in which our Churches ought to move ahead, theologically and practically, toward the goal of full communion. In this endeavor we hope to further one of the purposes of ecumenism: to ensure on earth what St. Augustine called *tranquillitas ordinis*, the tranquility of order. (cf. John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 2003, 6)

Strengths of "The Gift of Authority"

3. The Gift of Authority finds its reflections on authority upon the Christological substance of the Gospel: the Good News of Jesus Christ who is God's "Yes" to humanity and humanity's "Amen" to God's Truth. Though the confession of Jesus Christ is certainly present in other ARCIC statements, it is nowhere underscored in such a deep and creative way. We find this confession especially important at a time when the ecumenical movement itself risks shipwreck because of what the late Jean-Marie Tillard characterizes as "an erosion of the basis of koinonia by a fragmentation of faith in Christ" ("Ecumenism: The Church's Costly Hope," *One in Christ* 35 [1999], 224).

4. Thus The Gift of Authority insightfully reconfigures the consideration of scripture and tradition by presenting them as joint witness to Jesus Christ who is the fulfillment of all God's promises. Hence Christianity stands forth clearly as a religion not of the book, but of the person of Jesus Christ. From this acknowledgement the statement's welcome doxological and mystagogical tone proceeds.

5. All authority in the Church, whether the *sensus fidei* of the whole people of God or the episcopate of the bishops, is in service to this witness of faith to Jesus Christ who alone is the Light of the nations—*lumen gentium*. He is the Truth of God which the whole Church receives and which it proclaims.

6. The Gift of Authority recognizes that this witness of faith needs visible vehicles of synodical discernment and articulation: conciliar, collegial, and primatial (cf. ¶ 45). It rightly calls for the active participation of the whole body of the faithful in this discernment, drawing upon that *sensus fidei* which is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit. But the statement, faithful to our common episcopal tradition, accords a special role and responsibility to the bishops, who exercise

episcopate, the “ministry of memory” (¶30) and of witness within the community. The collegiality of their ministry is rightly emphasized.

7. Since the whole Church is in service to the witness of Jesus Christ, the promise of Christ that the Spirit will maintain the Church in truth grounds the possibility for authoritative judgments regarding the content of the faith that are preserved from error (¶42). Here, The Gift of Authority’s Christological perspective adds further depth to its consideration of this issue.

8. The Gift of Authority sketches a rich ecclesiology of communion, in which the many and varied gifts of the community are integrated into the Gift who is Jesus Christ himself to the honor and glory of God.

Concerns Regarding “The Gift of Authority”

9. The idealism and optimism of the document, though praiseworthy, do not take sufficiently into account the concrete difficulties on the path to full agreement regarding the matters under discussion or the historical instances of authority’s abuse.

10. We find that the prominent role and theological understanding of the office of bishop in The Gift of Authority are at a remove from our actual experience, though for different reasons for Roman Catholics and Anglicans. On the side of Anglicans the document appears to exaggerate the independent role of the bishops and downplay the role of priests and laity. On the Roman Catholic side, the document seems not to take into account the exercise of Roman supervision that on occasion tends to limit the ability of bishops to serve in the role as the vicars of Christ in their own local churches.

11. Furthermore, the role and participation of the laity, while affirmed, is not probed in depth, and what is affirmed does not fully reflect the experience of either of our churches. For example, The Gift of Authority ¶ 39 says that the decisions of an Anglican diocesan synod can stand only with the diocesan bishop’s consent; this is not the case with regard to diocesan conventions and councils of the Episcopal Church. On the Roman Catholic side the document understates the relative lack of structures that would enable effective lay participation in decision making (Cf: ¶54, 57).

12. The document affirms the importance of “synodality” in our two traditions (¶34), but does not sufficiently explore the difference in the two churches’ history and present experience. In both traditions the full potential of synods has not been adequately realized. For example, in the Roman Catholic Church the present code of canon law limits the decision-making authority in diocesan synods to the bishop. In the Anglican Communion the unilateral actions of individual bishops, dioceses, and provinces undermine the reality of synodality. Such differences require further examination.

13. The restoration of communion with the bishop of Rome as universal primate is an ecclesiological goal that many Anglicans would welcome, but its present implementation would be premature since Anglicans and Roman Catholics are still looking for the reformed

understanding and practice of primacy that Pope John Paul II both acknowledges as needful and encourages (*Ut Unum Sint*, 95-96).

14. Paragraph 42 in *The Gift of Authority* explains what is meant “when it is affirmed that the church may teach infallibly.” It adds that “such infallible teaching is at the service of the Church’s indefectibility.” However, the theological understanding and ecclesial implications of the doctrine of infallibility and its relationship to indefectibility need to be further clarified. Anglicans have serious reservations about the doctrine of infallibility.

15. Paragraphs 60 to 62 call attention to Universal Primacy as a gift that the Roman Catholic Church can share with other churches. The document does not place commensurate emphasis on the rich Anglican tradition of lay participation in the deliberations of the church, which is also an important gift to be shared.

Ecclesiological Issues Requiring Joint Investigation

16. In seeking to take further steps toward full communion, we need to continue the exploration that was begun in *Church as Communion* (ARCIC II, 1991) of how our churches understand full communion. What would be the essential elements of “full communion” between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church?

17. What would full communion between the Anglican Churches and the Bishop of Rome necessarily involve? How would a papal primacy be exercised fully according to the principles of communion, collegiality, and subsidiarity?

18. Could a restored communion be patterned on the communion that existed between the Eastern Churches and the Church of Rome during the first millennium? Could the restoration of communion between the Anglican Communion and the Bishop of Rome be accomplished in such a way that the traditions of the Anglican Churches would be maintained and the Anglican Churches would enjoy a relative autonomy in relationship to Roman jurisdiction?

19. Ecclesial reception has played a role in the recognition that certain doctrinal decisions have been preserved from error. Could further ecumenical study of that role contribute to convergence on the notion of infallible teaching in the service of the church’s indefectibility?

Concrete Steps for Participating Together in Interim Structures of Authority

20. *The Gift of Authority* proposes that, even before full communion, our two Churches “make more visible the *koinonia* we already have.” ARC-USA agrees that sharing in interim structures of authority at the international and the national level would be positive in the current situation and in the future. As representatives of our two Churches in the United States, we suggest an expansion of the “specific practical aspects of sharing episcopate” proposed in ¶ 58-59.

21. *Ad Limina Visits*

Among the concrete steps suggested in the document is that Anglican bishops now join their Roman Catholic colleagues on ad limina visits to the Holy See. We agree that such joint visits would now testify to three things:

The relationship of our Churches has moved to a deeper, more positive level in the “real, but imperfect communion that we already share.”
Ecumenical solidarity at this time of vulnerability is real and visible.
The bishops of both of our Churches need opportunities for deeper acquaintance with one another at this moment of rapid transition in the world situation.

22. Synods of Bishops

We recommend the regular participation of some Anglican bishops in the Synods of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church.

23. The Lambeth Conference

At the Lambeth Conference, Roman Catholic visitors are currently designated as “Ecumenical Participants.” We propose that, until full communion is achieved, Roman Catholic bishops be designated as “Roman Catholic Bishop-Delegates” with voice and participation in all Conference activities, but with no vote.

24. The Anglican Consultative Council

We propose that Roman Catholic clergy and laity, as well as bishops, be invited to the meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council.

25. Episcopal Church House of Bishops

We propose that Roman Catholic bishops be invited to attend the meetings of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church as “Roman Catholic Bishop-Delegates,” with voice and participation in all House of Bishops activities, but no vote.

26. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

We propose that Episcopal bishops be invited to attend the meetings of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as “Episcopal Bishop-Delegates,” with voice and participation in all conference activities, but no vote.

27. Episcopal Church House of Deputies

We propose that Roman Catholic clergy and laity be invited to the meetings of the House of Deputies of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church as “Roman Catholic-Delegates,” with voice and participation in all House of Deputies activities, but no vote.

28. Plenary Councils and Diocesan Synods

We propose that Episcopal clergy and laity be invited to participate in Roman Catholic plenary councils and diocesan synods as “Episcopal Church-Delegates,” with voice and participation in all activities, but no vote.

Conclusion

29. We recognize that some of the thorny theological issues raised by The Gift of Authority have not been addressed in our response. We are convinced, however, that the most productive context for dealing with outstanding divisive issues is a relationship of mutual understanding, trust, and affection. Friends will always take each other's statements in the most positive light. Therefore, we are grateful for The Gift of Authority's invitation to deepen our relationship. We remain strongly committed to this effort.

March 29, 2003