

COUNCIL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

**THE GIFT OF AUTHORITY: REPORT TO THE
GENERAL SYNOD**

1. *The Gift of Authority* (GA) is the most recent of the four agreed statements produced by the second phase of the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). GA has proved to be the most difficult of the four (indeed of all of ARCIC’s work) to evaluate. It builds on the earlier work of ARCIC on authority, which the Synod considered in 1986, and sets it in a sophisticated rhetorical framework. The discussion of GA in the wider Church suggests that there is no consensus about its merits. The CCU’s motion does not attempt fully to resolve the ongoing debate, but puts down some important markers about the context and content of further Anglican – Roman Catholic theological dialogue.

The beginning of ARCIC

2. In spite of earlier informal initiatives (such as the Malines conversations), Anglican – Roman Catholic dialogue at an official level became possible only after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Vatican II recognised elements of ‘church’ in Christian bodies that were not in communion with the Roman Catholic Church and committed that church to the search for Christian unity through the ecumenical movement.
3. When Archbishop Michael Ramsey visited Pope Paul VI in 1966 they agreed to the setting up of what shortly became the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission.

ARCIC was (and remains) committed to ‘the restoration of full organic unity’ between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. Its distinctive method was (and remains) to seek ‘to discover each other’s faith as it is today and to appeal to history only for enlightenment, not as a way of perpetuating past controversy’ (Preface to the Final Report).

4. ARCIC first met in 1970 and published its first statement (on ‘Eucharistic Doctrine’) in 1971. Further statements, on ‘Ministry and Ordination’ and on ‘Authority in the Church’, together with several ‘Elucidations’ followed. The work of ARCIC in its first phase (ARCIC I) concluded with the publication of the *Final Report*, which included the earlier statements, in 1982.

Debate on The Final Report of ARCIC I

5. Following discussion in the dioceses, the General Synod debated the contents of the Final Report in November 1986 (see GS Misc 384). Its discussion was resourced by the report of the Faith and Order Advisory Group (FOAG) *Towards a Church of England Response to BEM and ARCIC* (GS 661; BEM being of course the Faith and Order Commission report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 1982). The Synod found the statement on ‘Eucharistic Doctrine’ together with its ‘Elucidation’ to be ‘consonant in substance with the faith of the Church of England’. It judged the statement on ‘Ministry and Ordination’ together with its ‘Elucidation’ to be ‘consonant in substance with the faith of the Church of England’ and to provide ‘a firm basis upon which to move towards the reconciliation of the ministries of our two communions’.

6. The Synod recognised that the two statements on ‘Authority in the Church’, together with the ‘Elucidation’ of the first statement, indicated a degree of ‘convergence’ rather than actual ‘consonance’ between Anglican and Roman Catholic understandings. It decided that there was ‘sufficient convergence on the nature of authority in the Church for our communions together to explore further the structures of authority and the exercise of collegiality and primacy in the Church’.
7. The Synod went on to call for (a) ‘a proper recognition of the place of the laity in the decision-making processes and ministry’ of the Church; (b) ‘a more adequate treatment of the Roman Catholic Marian and Infallibility dogmas’ and (c) further attention to be given to ‘the case for a universal primacy necessarily based at Rome, including the official Roman Catholic claim that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ on earth...’.
8. The responses of the Provinces of the Anglican Communion to the Final Report were collated for the 1988 Lambeth Conference and included in *The Emmaus Report* (1987). Resolution 8 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference was substantially on the same lines as the General Synod motions: endorsement in principle of the Eucharist and Ministry/Ordination statements; a more cautious welcome for the Authority statements and encouragement to continue in the same direction and with the same agenda. The Lambeth Conference also wished ARCIC to look at the practical working of a universal primacy as envisaged by ARCIC, its relation to episcopal collegiality, and the question of the ordination of women.

The work of ARCIC II

9. ARCIC II has so far published four statements and there is one still to come. The first of these *Salvation and the Church* (1986) dealt with justification and ecclesiology. It underwent a partial process of study and evaluation in the Anglican Communion and the Church of England and was commended for study by the 1988 Lambeth Conference. It is widely recognised to have made real progress in a crucial area that historically has kept Anglicans and Roman Catholics apart.
10. The second statement was *Church as Communion* (1991), which has been circulated to Synod members as a resource for this debate. This statement was not so much an attempt to reconcile differences as an exploration of a major ecumenical theme that had to some extent already provided the framework for the work of ARCIC I. The language of ‘communion’ derives from the New Testament Greek word *koinonia*, which is also translated ‘fellowship’, ‘sharing’, ‘participation’. In its general sense *koinonia* stands for the mutual involvement of persons in a good greater than themselves. In Christian theology it refers to the communion that Christians have with God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit and – because of this – the shared life of Christians with one another (e.g., 1 John 1.3; Acts 2.42).
11. Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics recognise that communion is grounded in the sacrament of baptism, with its confession of the apostolic faith and gift of the Holy Spirit, and that it receives a fuller expression in the Eucharist (‘Holy Communion’). Communion is sustained by all the God-given means of grace, especially the ministry of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments and the exercise of pastoral responsibility. Our experience of

communion with God and with one another can grow and be enriched, or it can weaken and become diminished.

12. Anglicans and Roman Catholics alike are familiar with the idea that there are degrees of communion between churches: though our communion is very real, it remains imperfect and can become impaired. Both acknowledge that there is an imperative to make communion deeper and more full. Communion is a profoundly spiritual, indeed mystical, idea because it concerns our participation in the blessed life of God the Holy Trinity through grace. But in this world it requires institutional expression ('bonds of communion'). The structures of the Church are intended to preserve and promote communion and this is the test by which they should be measured.
13. The third statement of ARCIC II was *Life in Christ* (1994) on Roman Catholic and Anglican moral teaching. This has not undergone a guided process of study and evaluation in either communion. A complete list of ARCIC meetings and agreed statements, with hyperlinks to the statements can be found on the following website address:
http://www.prounione.urbe.it/dia-int/arcic/e_arcic-info.html.
14. The official Roman Catholic position on the ordination of women has meant that ARCIC has not been able to undertake a study of that issue as requested by the 1988 Lambeth Conference.
15. The fifth statement of ARCIC II, on which it is currently working and with which it will bring its work to a conclusion, is on the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Scripture, tradition and devotion.

The Gift of Authority: Background and process

16. GA was published in May 1999; the CCU briefly reported to the Synod at the time in GS Misc 560 and subsequently in GS Misc 586. Since then, GA has been studied in the Faith and Order Advisory Group (FOAG), English ARC (Anglican – Roman Catholic Committee), the Theology and Unity Group of Churches Together in England, and in various ecumenical forums.

17. The Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations (IASCER) has given attention to GA and has requested that faith and order bodies throughout the Communion comment on GA as the first stage of a process of study and evaluation in the Communion (the second stage involving synodical debate is due to begin this year). The CCU has sought to adhere to the process and timetable set by IASCER.

18. The Faith and Order Advisory Group has published a volume of essays, representing a range of views among its members. *Unpacking the Gift* (GS Misc 697) was circulated to Synod members as a resource for a debate in the future. It includes useful scene-setting, some searching analysis of the method and arguments of GA and discussion of its ‘reception’. At this stage, FOAG has not formulated a definitive verdict on the report.

19. A Private Members Motion in the name of the Revd Jonathan Baker has gathered considerable support. The CCU’s official motion attempts to incorporate as much of Fr Baker’s three-clause motion as possible and in fact the preamble to part 2 of the CCU motion echoes it.

20. In its role of providing advice to the CCU, FOAG has considered Bishop Colin Buchanan's Grove Booklet *Is Papal Authority a Gift to Us?*. The paper that FOAG commissioned from Canon Peter Fisher and Dr Martin Davie is available from Mrs Angela Doe in the CCU office (Angela.Doe@c-of-e.org.uk).
21. The House of Bishops responded, in co-operation with FOAG, to the papal encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* of 1995 in which Pope John Paul II invited views from ecumenical partners on the primacy exercised by the Bishop of Rome. The House's statement *May They All Be One* (CHP, 1997) was a response to this invitation. It remains one of the most substantial responses to *Ut Unum Sint* and addresses the issues raised by papal primacy, covering similar ground to GA and beyond.
22. The House's statement *The Eucharist, Sacrament of Unity* (CHP, 2001), again prepared in co-operation with FOAG, was a response to *One Bread One Body* issued by the Roman Catholic Bishops Conferences of England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland in 1998. It not only deals with eucharistic theology and discipline, but touches on several issues at stake in the dialogue between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, including the validity of Anglican Orders and Eucharists and the relation of the Church of England to the pre-Reformation Church in England.

The Gift of Authority: the CCU's motion

23. The CCU is not inviting the Synod either to approve or to reject GA as a whole. It does not believe that a simple Yes or No verdict is appropriate. The issues addressed in GA overlap substantially with the matters on which the Synod voted in 1986 and it would not make sense to re-run that

debate now. The CCU believes that the theological dialogue should continue and that a further phase of ARCIC will need to tackle the difficult issues that GA has not resolved. There also remains the question of the ordination of women, on which the Anglican-Orthodox Theological and Doctrinal Commission has been doing useful work.

24. The CCU is convinced that the difficult theological issues are best addressed in the context of the developing relationships of fellowship (*koinonia*) between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in many contexts and at various levels. Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy and laity work together locally in witness and study and in Churches Together bodies. They are brought together in the national ecumenical instruments (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and Churches Together in England) and their component representative gatherings, commissions and working groups. They also meet formally in English ARC whose programme combines joint theological study with formal visitations of situations, such as educational institutions, where the two churches work together. Anglicans and Roman Catholics are bound together not only in baptism but through marriage in 'inter-church families', of whom Pope John Paul II said, 'You live in your marriage the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity.'
25. Alongside ARCIC, the CCU's motion recognises the role of IARCCUM (the International Anglican – Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission). This body arose from the meeting of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops from around the world jointly hosted by Archbishop George Carey and the then President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Cassidy, at Mississauga, Toronto, in 2000. It seeks to give episcopal

guidance to relations between the two communions, both in practical forms of collaboration in mission and in theological engagement. One of IARCCUM's projects is the preparation of a digest or synthesis of the whole of ARCIC's work for study, evaluation and decision by the two communions.

Authority and primacy

26. The issue of authority is highly topical for both Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Both communions are wrestling with issues of authority. ARCIC is surely right to remind us that true authority is a gift from God and that the search for it is an imperative for the churches. The concept of primacy is familiar to Anglicans, being attributed, for example, to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in slightly different ways. The Primates Meeting is one of the instruments of the Anglican Communion.

27. The primacy that is currently exercised by the Bishop of Rome has several aspects including some that are not mentioned at all in GA or are not clearly differentiated:

- world leadership of Christian example and prophetic witness; an international focus for the Christian faith and a personal impetus for evangelisation;
- teaching authority (the magisterium): one that is to be received without questioning by the faithful; that may be exercised with or without the college of bishops; and that may or may not be said to be irreformable or, exceptionally, infallible;
- supreme canonical authority in relation to the making of church law;

- headship of the college of bishops (which cannot function without its head) and the appointment of bishops to dioceses throughout the world;
- the sole authority to convene councils, including General Councils, to preside over them and to confirm, or not, their decisions;
- jurisdiction: a jurisdiction that is ‘universal’, that is to say over all local churches (dioceses), their laity, clergy and bishops; ‘ordinary’, that is to say the Bishop of Rome is effectively the bishop of every diocese, ‘the ordinary’; and ‘immediate’, that is to say without intermediate structures of decision-making or appeal.

Jurisdiction

28. The issue of papal jurisdiction was discussed in ARCIC I’s statements on authority, but is not addressed in GA, which appears to envisage an ‘ideal’ universal primacy. However, GA suggests that the sort of universal primacy that it envisages, one that is ‘exercised in collegiality and synodality’, is ‘a gift to be shared’ by Anglicans and could be ‘offered and received even before our churches are in full communion’ (GA 60).

29. Undoubtedly, ‘full communion’ could not be achieved until the question of the validity of Anglican Orders and eucharistic celebrations (that are not of course accepted by the Roman Catholic Church) had been resolved. GA seems to imply that the universal primacy that it envisages could be accepted to some extent by Anglicans prior to the resolution of those issues. Orders and Eucharists are related to canonical authority or jurisdiction. Does GA mean that the authority of the Bishop of Rome should be accepted by bishops and clergy whose orders he does not recognise and

whose eucharistic celebrations he calls into question? The question that is left unasked and unanswered in GA is: what are the implications of the universal, ordinary and immediate jurisdiction, claimed by the Pope, for the further steps towards Anglican acceptance of papal primacy that GA advocates? The CCU motion identifies this *lacuna* in GA as a major issue that has not been resolved.

Infallibility

30. In ARCIC I and in GA the issue of infallible teaching authority is discussed in relation to the whole Church, to General Councils, to the college of bishops and to the papacy. The question of infallibility is related by ARCIC to the uncontroversial doctrine of the indefectibility of the Church (through divine preservation it will always retain the fundamental truth of the gospel) and to the reception of authoritative teaching by the faithful. In GA ARCIC has attempted to deliver the further consideration of infallibility that was requested by the General Synod in 1986.
31. However, GA invites a fundamental question about its presentation of infallibility (especially in paragraphs 42 and 47). Is it premised on the official teaching (as set out in *Pastor aeternus* at Vatican I, 1870-71) and the current practice of the Roman Catholic Church (sometimes described as ‘creeping infallibility’)? Or is ARCIC envisaging a reformed universal primacy of the future in which, given proper structures of consultation, the teaching ministry of the Bishop of Rome could be recognised by Anglicans as ‘wholly reliable’? The tendency to elide the actual and the ideal in ARCIC’s ecclesiology has frequently been queried. Is the language of GA at this point descriptive or prescriptive? The CCU’s motion asks for this element of ambiguity to be resolved.

Ecumenical consistency

32. The exposition of universal primacy in GA undoubtedly reflects aspects of the Roman Catholic tradition as it has developed over the past millennium. Some commentators have claimed that a Roman Catholic agenda is dominant in GA. It is less clear whether the witness of the Anglican tradition, from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards, and that of other Churches shaped by the Reformation, together with that of the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, has been taken seriously. For example, the Moscow (1976) and Dublin (1984) agreed statements of the Anglican-Orthodox international dialogue have something to say about universal primacy and the notion of infallibility. In the interests of faithfulness to our own tradition and consistency with our ecumenical dialogues the CCU's motion calls on ARCIC to show that the case it has been making with regard to papal primacy is 'consonant in substance' with the faith of the universal Church as the Church of England has received it.

33. The motion before the Synod re-affirms the Church of England's commitment to the cause of visible unity and recognises the role of ARCIC and IARCCUM; acknowledges the importance of authority issues to Anglicans and Roman Catholics and the differences of conviction that cut across denominational lines and gives encouragement to practical developments in shared life and mission at every level. The motion then goes on to question the omission of the issue of papal jurisdiction from GA and the element of ambiguity in its treatment of authoritative teaching. Finally, the motion challenges ARCIC to show

that its proposals do justice to the Anglican inheritance of faith and to what we have agreed with other ecumenical partners. Thus without short-circuiting complex theological discussions or attempting to do ARCIC's work for it, the motion pin-points three areas of concern and requests ARCIC to respond as part of its future programme of work.

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