



PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO
PER LA PROMOZIONE
DELL'UNITÀ DEI CRISTIANI

STATEMENT FROM THE CO-CHAIRMEN OF THE ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION

For the launch of The Gift of Authority, 12 May 1999

Westminster Abbey, London

1. The background: Official Anglican-Catholic Dialogue at an international level

In March 1966 the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Michael Ramsey, paid an official visit to Pope Paul VI in Rome. This inaugurated a new era in relations between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church, with the emphasis on Christian charity and sincere efforts to remove the causes of conflict and re-establish unity. They decided to set up an official international dialogue whose work might lead to the unity in truth for which Christ prayed. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) took up this task in 1970. It is an international dialogue whose specialist members have been officially appointed to represent the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church worldwide.

Three main dialogue topics were initially given to ARCIC: the Doctrine of the Eucharist; Ministry and Ordination; and Authority in the Church. Various Agreed Statements, issued as the Commission carried out this work, were published together in 1981 as The Final Report and presented to the two Churches for evaluation and reception. The Anglican Communion gave its official response in a resolution at the 1988 Lambeth Conference. The Catholic Church responded in 1991.

Since the publication of The Final Report ARCIC has produced Agreed Statements on other important matters, on which it was asked to enter into dialogue by Pope John Paul II and Archbishop Robert Runcie when they met at Canterbury in 1982. The Gift of Authority which is published today is the fourth Statement from this second phase of ARCIC's work.

We are happy to be launching this document in a location which dates from the time before our divisions. We hope this new Statement will contribute to their healing. It is a document for Anglican and Catholic Christians in the many countries throughout the world where they live together. So it has already been sent to Anglican Primates and the Presidents of Catholic Episcopal Conferences and is being made available translated into several languages, and on the worldwide web.

2. Why has ARCIC produced another statement about authority?

Even before the dialogue began it was obvious that authority in the Church would require considerable attention. Authority, particularly the authority of the Bishop of Rome, had been a key element in the division that occurred at the time of the English Reformation. For four centuries the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church developed their structures of authority in separation from each other, and Anglicans lived without the ministry of the Bishop of Rome.

The Final Report of 1981 devoted two Agreed Statements and an 'Elucidation' to the subject of authority in the Church. They already document considerable agreement which has been acknowledged by both our Churches: about how authority operates in the Church; about the particular role of bishops; and, very importantly, even about the significance of the Bishop of Rome in a reunited Church and the place his ministry has in God's providential plan for his Church.

Why, then, has ARCIC now returned to this issue?

Firstly, because The Final Report itself recognised that, despite the considerable progress achieved, some serious issues had still to be resolved.

Secondly, because the official Anglican and Catholic responses to The Final Report both requested ARCIC to do so. They indicated that the Statements in The Final Report provided a good foundation for further dialogue. The principal points they put to the Commission are mentioned in paragraph 3 of The Gift of Authority.

A third reason is that this further Statement will, it is hoped, contribute to the discussion of authority that is taking place in both Churches. Anglicans have been asked by the 1998 Lambeth Conference to reflect and study important questions about authority in the Anglican Communion raised in The Virginia Report, which was prepared for the Conference. Among these questions is the issue of universal authority in the Church. Pope John Paul in his 1995 Encyclical *Ut unum sint* has also called for a patient and fraternal dialogue about the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome so that it can be accepted by all.

Finally, unless we can reach sufficient agreement about authority, which touches so many aspects of the Church's life, "we shall not reach the full visible unity to which we are both committed", as Archbishop Carey and Pope John Paul II said plainly when they met in 1996.

3. What sort of statement is The Gift of Authority?

It is the product of five years of dialogue, patient listening, study and prayer.

The Commission has responded to the requests of our respective authorities. With their authorisation, it is now published as a Statement agreed by the Commission and put before our Churches for reflection and discussion. The Statement builds on all the previous ARCIC work on authority – hence its subtitle, Authority in the Church III. It therefore needs to be read alongside those earlier Agreed Statements. It is a closely argued, rich text, with every sentence important in leading towards its conclusions. It therefore will need careful study and reflection in our two Communion.

It is important to understand what the commission members have attempted to do: they have tried to express what they believe flows from our common shared faith; in other words, the members have engaged in dialogue as best they can as representatives of their two Churches, not engaging in a kind of negotiation but attempting to express together what they believe faith demands.

The title of the new document gives a very important orientation. Rightly understood, authority in the Church is God's gift, to be received gratefully.

A scriptural image, taken from St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, is repeatedly used to keep before our minds the ultimate purpose of authority. Authority serves the Church's remembering of the "Yes" God has given to humanity in Jesus Christ and enables its members to respond with a faithful "Amen", as they walk Christ's way.

Then, agreement about how authority is exercised at various levels in the Church's life is outlined, including how the whole people of God bears the Tradition across space and time, and the particular role bishops have in discerning and articulating this faith of the Church and ensuring that all the Churches are in communion.

The document expresses agreement that the college of bishops can come to a judgement that, faithful to Scripture and consistent with apostolic Tradition, is free from error (cf. N. 42). This duty of maintaining the Church in the truth is "one of the essential functions of the episcopal college" (N. 44).

The Statement builds on the agreement about the Bishop of Rome in ARCIC's previous work, and offers agreement about his specific ministry within the college of bishops concerning the discernment of truth, which has been such a source of difficulty and misunderstanding. It seeks to make clear how in certain circumstances the Bishop of Rome has a duty to discern and make explicit, in fidelity to Scripture and Tradition, the authentic faith of the whole Church, that is the faith of all the baptised in communion. The commission believes that this is a gift to be received by all the Churches and is entailed in the recognition of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

4. What happens next?

The detailed study of this Statement will evidently offer challenges to both our Churches, regarding how authority is exercised in them. Some of these challenges are mentioned in the latter part of the document. The Commission's task has been to enter into dialogue on an important and difficult issue. It believes it has arrived at further agreement which it offers to our Churches. It is for our authorities to decide in time if they do recognise our faith in this new Agreed Statement and how to address its consequences.