



A COMMENTARY
ON THE GIFT OF AUTHORITY
OF THE ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC
INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION
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The Gift of Authority seeks to deepen and extend agreement about one of the most difficult topics which faces the ecumenical movement. The document itself frankly acknowledges this, and yet does not shrink from taking a courageously positive stance:

There is an extensive debate about the nature and exercise of authority both in the churches and in wider society. Anglicans and Roman Catholics want to witness, both to the churches and to the world, that authority rightly exercised is a gift of God to bring reconciliation and peace to humankind.¹

If this text were to have no other fruit than simply to associate, time and again, in the minds of its readers and of those who happen to glance at its title, that the notions of "authority" and "gift" go together, than it would already provide a valuable service for Christian unity. There can never be reconciliation between divided Christian communities about the topic of authority unless these communities see authority as something positive.

But aside from the utilitarian benefit of facilitating greater unity, a positive approach to authority which sees it as a gift of God is needed most of all because such an approach is true. In fact, God wills the Church to be guided by His own gracious authority, which is active in the saving missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Matthew's gospel closes with those inspiring and consoling words of Jesus:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age (Mt 28,18-20 [RSV]).

This authority is shared in a unique way with those who, in succession to the apostles, are ordained to the ministry of bishop and who are charged to serve the Church's unity in faith and charity. In carrying out this ministry, according to the needs of time and circumstance, they have the duty to make decisions about issues relative to the doctrine and life of the Church. These are convictions which, at the time of the division between the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, were not a matter of dispute between the two communities. ARCIC II wants to affirm them once again, and to do so within the context of an ecclesiological reflection upon the nature and exercise of authority in the Church in general. This context then makes possible a serene and careful attempt to achieve a common understanding of that which *was* a point of contention at the time of the break between the two communities: the primatial ministry of the bishop of Rome serving universal unity.²

Another characteristic of the present text is its "catholicity", in the full and rich sense of the term according to which both Anglicans and Roman Catholics have both considered themselves to be "catholic". This quality is especially apparent in the document's adamant refusal to get caught up in false disjunctives or to oppose traits of Christian life which must in fact be held together in complementarity. Thus *The Gift of Authority* rejects opposing freedom to obedience. Jesus who imparts the truth which makes one free (Jn 8,31) is the same one whose embrace of the Father's will may be rightly called "life-giving obedience" (cf. *Gift*, 10). Or, again, there can be no question of choosing between the faith of the individual or the faith of the Church (cf. *Gift*, 11-13). They go together. Similarly, in order to discern God's will, the Church is not faced with the option of consulting either Scripture or Tradition, but both. Various similar dichotomies are shown precisely to be *false* dichotomies by the present text. No adequate ecclesiology can be satisfied with a list of either/or's such as: either the Word of God or the authority of the Church, either the ordained ministry or the laity, either the local church or the universal church, either synodality or primacy. Disagreement about authority often derives from the mistake of opposing two realities or two values or two subjects which simply should not be

opposed. The genius of *The Gift of Authority* is continually to point this out.

The result of this theological catholicity is a text which is very rich from an ecclesiological point of view. I would not presume to estimate its effectiveness in reflecting the Anglican doctrinal heritage, but Catholics will find in this document many echoes of the themes with which they have become familiar from the Second Vatican Council and from the writings of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II. Indeed, in what are perhaps some of the most remarkable paragraphs to appear in ecumenical dialogue to date, there is an effort to reaffirm some of the essential doctrines of Vatican I's *Pastor aeternus*, on papal primacy and infallibility (*Gift*, 45-48).

Part I: Building Upon Earlier Agreements.

The text has four parts, the first of which is retrospective. It looks to the past and seeks to summarize the convergences which had already been achieved in the earlier ARCIC texts on authority (the "Venice Statement" of 1976 and the "Elucidation" and the "Windsor Statement" of 1981). Most helpful to the dialogue commission in delineating the precise themes to be examined in this third document on authority were the official responses to the earlier texts provided by the Anglican Communion in 1988 and by the Roman Catholic Church in 1991. These official responses helped the commission to formulate its precise goal as that of seeking further agreement on the following issues:

the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and the exercise of teaching authority; collegiality, conciliarity, and the role of laity in decision making; and the Petrine ministry of universal primacy in relation to Scripture and Tradition (*Gift*, 3).

The fact that *The Gift of Authority* is seeking to make progress on precisely the issues which were judged as needing further work by the official responses is important for situating its role in assessing the degree of agreement between Anglicans and Catholics about authority. This agreement will be broader and deeper than what is expressed in the present text alone, precisely because the latter, to some degree, limits itself to problems not sufficiently resolved by the earlier agreements. Topics such as the ministry of *episcopate*, regional primacy, jurisdiction, *ius divinum* and the Petrine texts of the New Testament receive important attention in the earlier documents which should not be forgotten. Thus, one ought to take seriously the subtitle "Authority in the Church III".

Part II: Authority in the Church.

This and Part III represent what is precisely the new level of agreement achieved by *The Gift of Authority*. Part II discusses authority in reference to the local and universal Church (*Gift*, 13-14; 27-27; 30), to Scripture and Tradition (*Gift*, 14-23) and to apostolicity and catholicity (*Gift*, 16-17; 26-27). The whole people of God is the recipient of God's Word, handed on in Scripture and Tradition (*Gift*, 28). Within the whole people, special attention is given to the relation between the individual believer and the local Church (*Gift*, 11-13) and to the relation between those entrusted with the ministry of episcopate, on the one hand, and the whole people endowed with the gift of the *sensus fidei*, on the other (*Gift*, 24-30). The following paragraphs will attempt to draw out some of the important themes in Part II.

First of all, the positive estimation of authority, which functions as the *Leitmotif* of the text, is very clear from the happy choice of making a refrain of the Hebrew word "Amen", which connotes the biblical act and posture of faith.

In Jesus Christ, Son of God and born of a woman, the "Yes" of God to humanity and the "Amen" of humanity to God became a concrete human reality. This theme of God's "Yes" and humanity's "Amen" in Jesus Christ is the key to the exposition of authority in this statement. (*Gift*, 8).

Time and again the various topics treated, such as the individual believer's act of faith, the faith of the local church, the reception of Tradition and Scripture or the catholicity which unites local churches in time and space, are all presented in the positive framework of saying "Amen" to God in response to God's "Yes" to human beings. This golden thread continues through the remaining parts of the document, in such a way that the very last sentence of the text ingeniously gathers together all of the affirmations which went before, placing them precisely within the framework of seeking full communion: "Thus the 'Amen' which Anglicans and Roman Catholics say to the one Lord comes closer to being an 'Amen' said together by the one holy people witnessing to God's salvation and reconciling love in a broken world" (*Gift*, 63). In this way, the commission wisely elected to recall that the very commonplace and uncontroversial act of saying "Amen" is relevant to the topic of authority in the Church. The exercise of authority within the Church and the acceptance of that exercise needs to be understood as part of the Church's "Amen" to God.

This positive approach is strengthened by the fact that Part II opens with several paragraphs which are strongly biblical and Trinitarian. The biblical material appeals to Christian belief in the normativity of the Word of God. A positive attitude toward authority is sanctioned by the Scriptures. Jesus himself is the model for accepting the authority of the

Father and obeying it in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Trinitarian theme illustrates what was proposed as a sound methodological principle for use in ecumenical dialogue by Vatican II's decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, 11, which called attention to the order or "hierarchy" which exists among the truths of faith. When the topic of ecclesial authority is located within the context of the central truths of faith, of the Triune God's economy of bringing about the salvation of human beings, it appears in a much more positive light. For this reason, *The Gift of Authority* should be more convincing and more credible not only to Anglicans and Roman Catholics, but to the members of other communities as well.

The relation between Tradition and Scripture, magisterial interpretation and reception dominates Part II of *The Gift of Authority*. The text takes Tradition as its point of departure, explicitly referring to the famous Faith and Order Commission statement of Montreal 1963 (*Gift*, 14-18). In this section the reader has a chance to observe the remarkable synthetic quality of the text. The Holy Spirit guides the process of tradition (pneumatology) through the ministry of *Word* and *Sacrament* and in the *common life* of the people of God (the three dimensions of communion which correspond to the activity of Christ the *prophet*, *priest* and *shepherd/king*; cf. *Lumen gentium*, 13-14 and *Unitatis redintegratio*, 2; *Gift*, 14). Tradition is a "channel of the love of God", "integral to the economy of grace", an "act of communion", which "unites local churches" with one another and "with those which preceded them in the one apostolic faith". Thus the process of tradition is one of a "constant and perpetual reception" in various times and circumstances. It elicits the "Amen" which unites the whole Church in responding to God's "Yes" to humanity (*Gift*, 15-16). Yves Congar often pointed out the profoundly synthetic quality which characterized the writings of so many of the Fathers of the Church. It seems clear that this text also enjoys such synthetic power. Its authors rightly have chosen to employ a patristic way of thinking.

Scripture is situated within the context of Tradition. It occupies a "normative place" because it is "uniquely inspired"; thus it is "uniquely authoritative". The discussion of Scripture strikes one as quite attentive to hermeneutical issues. The way in which the composition of the New Testament books occurred within the context of addressing the issues which faced the local communities existing during the apostolic age seems very congenial to the historical-critical approach adopted by most biblical scholars (cf. *Gift*, 20-21). Yet even here one finds balance. Interpretation is not simply relegated to scholars, but rather is an ecclesial activity. "The meaning of the revealed Gospel of God is fully understood only within the Church" (*Gift*, 23). This paragraph of the text not only affirms the necessity of faith as a hermeneutical prerequisite without which an adequate interpretation of the bible is impossible, but also notes that "The faith of the community precedes the faith of the individual" (*Gift*, 23). It is most satisfying to see in this discussion of the authority of Scripture that the individual's interpretation is presented as guided by and contributing to that of the community. When *Gift*, 23, affirms "The Church cannot properly be described as an aggregate of individual believers, nor can its faith be considered the sum of the beliefs held by individuals", it is difficult for a Catholic not to be reminded of similar phrases used by Pope John Paul II in speaking of the relation of bishops to the college of bishops,³ or by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in reference to the unity of the local churches within the church universal.⁴ In addition, the hermeneutical content of *The Gift of Authority* resonates with the recent work done by the Faith and Order Commission on ecumenical hermeneutics. It would be quite interesting to explore how the results of these two commissions might be mutually illuminating.

At times, Christian divisions have been predicated on a supposed opposition between Scripture, which must be followed since it is the Word of God, and Tradition, which has been accused of contradicting the Scripture by introducing novelties. Or again, some have seen an opposition between obeying the Scriptures and obeying those exercising authority in the Church. The present text contains a number of jewels, one of which accurately responds to these supposed oppositions by showing, in a very satisfying way, the harmony between Scripture, Tradition, authority and obedience.

The formation of the canon of the Scriptures was an integral part of the process of tradition. The Church's recognition of these Scriptures as canonical, after a long period of critical discernment, was at the same time an act of *obedience* and of authority. It was an act of obedience in that the Church discerned and received God's life-giving "Yes" through the Scriptures, accepting them as the norm of faith. It was an act of *authority* in that the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, received and handed on these texts, declaring that they were inspired and that others were not to be included in the canon. (*Gift*, 22).

The two paragraphs included under the specific subtitle "Reception and Re-reception" contain proposals which will be very agreeable to Catholics, though I imagine that the same could be said for Anglicans as well. First of all, *The Gift of Authority* clearly affirms that it is the *whole* apostolic Tradition which is received by the Church. The official Roman Catholic response to ARCIC I's discussion of authority had explicitly pointed out as a weakness the suggestion that only central doctrines could be the subject of solemn teachings by those who exercise authority in the Church.⁵ This seemed to suggest that the Church could somehow stand over and above revelation, declaring what are the central and

normative doctrines, while leaving to the liberty of the individual believer those which are not deemed to be central. This theme has been amply discussed in the last thirty years, especially by those who have tried to explain the compatibility between Vatican II's teaching about the "hierarchy of truths" and the traditional conviction that the authority of God underlies the whole of revelation, a conviction expressed, to give but one instance, in Pius XI's *Mortalium animos* of 1928. Our present text gives unambiguous witness that Anglicans and Roman Catholics are convinced that the Church's "Amen" is given to the whole of God's revelation, not only to what may be identified as its most fundamental articles. At the same time, it nicely illustrates the hierarchy of truths, as noted above, when it organically relates its various affirmations to one another and to the foundational truths about the Trinity as the ultimate ground of the life of the Church and of the exercise of ecclesial authority.

In addition, reception is presented as an activity in which the Church's memory is refreshed and even healed. In my opinion, this is one of the most profound and promising themes attached to the theological notion of reception. It harmonizes nicely with Jesus' call to conversion, *metanoia* and a change of mind and of heart. In this sense, the notion of "re-reception" may even find an Old Testament foundation in the call by the prophets to remember the forgotten covenant and to reform one's life according to it. This is very congenial to a Catholic approach to ecumenism, which has constantly emphasized conversion as an absolutely necessary part of the path toward full communion. Pope John Paul II may have even coined a new expression in this regard, by speaking of the "dialogue of conversion".

The Catholic Church must enter into what might be called a "dialogue of conversion", which constitutes the spiritual foundation of ecumenical dialogue. In this dialogue, which takes place before God, each individual must recognize his own faults, confess his sins and place himself in the hands of the One who is our Intercessor before the Father, Jesus Christ. ... The "dialogue of conversion" with the Father on the part of each Community, with the full acceptance of all that it demands, is the basis of fraternal relations which will be something more than a mere cordial understanding or external sociability. The bonds of fraternal *koinonia* must be forged before God and in Christ Jesus. (*Ut unum sint*, 82).

Part II concludes with six paragraphs which relate authority to the catholicity of the Church. Several important points are made. First of all, the Church is understood as a whole, extending over both space and time (*Gift*, 26). One should see in this a clear opposition to an ecclesiology which would posit the local church as a community sufficient to itself. This same point is made, in an even more explicit way, in Part III's discussion of synodality:

The mutual interdependence of all the churches is integral to the reality of the Church as God wills it to be. No local church that participates in the living Tradition can regard itself as self-sufficient. (*Gift*, 37).

Even the Eucharist, the highpoint of the life of the local church, reveals the ineradicable dynamism which places the local community in communion with the catholic unity of the whole.

The local church is a eucharistic community. At the centre of its life is the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in which all believers hear and receive God's "Yes" in Christ to them. In the Great Thanksgiving, when the memorial of God's gift in the saving work of Christ crucified and risen is celebrated, the community is at one with all Christians of all the churches who, since the beginning and until the end, pronounce humanity's "Amen" to God - the "Amen" which the Apocalypse affirms is at the heart of the great liturgy of heaven (cf. Rev 5.14; 7.12). (*Gift*, 13).⁶

Secondly, the Church "as a whole" is presented as the only subject adequate to receive and pass on the living Tradition. Laity, theologians and ordained ministers all have a responsibility to receive and hand on the Word of God, each according to their specific capabilities (*Gift*, 28). Catholics will recognize immediately the affinity which this paragraph has with *Lumen gentium* 12, of Vatican II, which affirms that "the holy People of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office" and that "the whole body of the faithful ... have an anointing which comes from the holy one (cf. 1 Jn 2.20 and 27)". Within this context, *The Gift of Authority* describes the *sensus fidei* as "an active capacity for spiritual discernment, an intuition that is formed by worshipping and living in communion as a faithful member of the Church" (*Gift*, 29). The discussion of the *sensus fidei*, and its correlative notion of *sensus fidelium*, seems to be one of the principal ways in which ARCIC II takes up the task requested by the official Anglican response to ARCIC I, which asked that the dialogue further explore "the role of the laity in decision-making within the Church".⁷ The relationship between those who exercise episcopate, "the ministry of memory", on the one hand, and the whole people whose reception of God's Word in faith may be summed up in the expression *sensus fidelium*, on the other hand, is described by means of the analogy of a symphony. Because the Holy Spirit is at work within the Church, there is harmony between *episcopate* and *sensus fidelium*. The "ministry exercised by the bishop, and by ordained persons under the bishop's care" is attentive and "alert to the *sensus fidelium*, in which they share.... Thus the *sensus fidelium* of the people of God and the ministry of memory exist together in reciprocal relationship" (*Gift*, 30). These affirmations are true. At the same time, one wonders whether the text might not do well to consider also the very real possibility of tensions within the community concerning matters of faith and order. I will return to this question in a section about possible improvements which

might render even more impressive the agreement recorded in the present text.

Part III: The Exercise of Authority in the Church.

The use of the word “exercise” here should be noted. *The Gift of Authority* does comment on the *style* in which authority is to be exercised within the Church, especially by referring to “the mind and example” of Jesus and to his “different way”, characterized by self-giving service (cf. *Gift*, 5, 9, 35, 48, 49). The text does not hide the fact that authority can be abused and deformed by the sinfulness or weakness of those who exercise it (*Gift*, 5, 25, 48). That being said, Part III is not simply concerned with the virtues needed for exercising authority in the Church, but also with the purpose, subjects and characteristics of this exercise. There seem to be five specific themes in this section, each of which deserves a brief comment: unity for mission, synodality, truth, primacy and discipline.

From the simple point of view of the number of paragraphs in our text, the section devoted to mission and unity stands at the very center. One could argue that it is also the doctrinal heart of the agreement. Paragraphs 32 and 33 attempt to provide the *raison d'être* for authority in the Church. What is its purpose? Helpfully, the commission places its purpose within the context of the purpose of the Church as such. The Church exists as an instrument to continue Christ's mission to bring to realization the Kingdom of God. The very nature of the Kingdom is one of communion.⁸ The mission of the Church is to be an instrument of communion (cf. 1 Jn 1.1-3). Lack of unity damages this mission; Jesus prays that his followers be one, “so that the world may believe” (Jn 17.21). The present text nicely expresses these points:

When Christians do not agree about the Gospel itself, the preaching of it in power is impaired. When they are not one in faith they cannot be one in life, and so cannot demonstrate fully that they are faithful to the will of God, which is the reconciliation through Christ of all things to the Father (cf. Col 1.20). ... The challenge and responsibility for those with authority within the Church is so to exercise their ministry that they promote the unity of the whole Church in faith and life in a way that enriches rather than diminishes the legitimate diversity of local churches. (*Gift*, 33).

From the Catholic perspective, this is very helpful at the beginning of a section which will treat the themes of episcopacy, synodality and primacy. *Lumen gentium* 23 intimately associates the ministry of bishops and of the pope with the role of serving the Church's unity, and this precisely within the context of the mission of the Church to announce the Gospel in the whole world.⁹ One could say that the dominant themes of Catholic ecclesiology in the period after Vatican II all coalesce around the topics of communion (unity) and mission. Even the most recent general synods, concerning the laity, the ordained ministers and those vowed to the consecrated life, have all developed the understanding of these vocations in terms of the dual ecclesiology of communion and mission. Pope John Paul II was guided by these discussions in writing his three apostolic exhortations which were the fruit of those synods: *Christifideles laici*, *Pastores dabo vobis* and *Vita consecrata*. Now, in *The Gift of Authority* the members of ARCIC II have given us two valuable paragraphs relating authority in the Church precisely to her nature as communion and mission.

The paragraphs concerning synodality (*Gift*, 34-40) begin with a beautiful description of the whole Church, comprised of the communion of all the local churches, as a community walking together (playing on the Greek word *synodos*) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in fidelity to the living Word of God. Next follow the document's strongest paragraphs about bishops. They need a certain pastoral authority to exercise episcopate effectively within a local church. This means that they must be able to make and implement decisions for the sake of communion. The faithful “have a duty to receive and accept” these decisions. “The jurisdiction of bishops is one consequence of the call they have received to lead their churches ...; it is not an arbitrary power given to one person over the freedom of others”. There is a complementarity between bishop and community which is symbolized and expressed by the prayerful dialogue between president and people during celebration of the Eucharist. These affirmations, all from *Gift*, 36, succeed in harmonizing a clear and decisive episcopal authority with a sensitive respect for the faith of the individual believers who make up the community. This is the kind of authority which one naturally associates with Jesus himself, the shepherd and bishop of souls (cf. 1 Pt 2.25). The section continues by recalling some of the structures which facilitate synodality, pointing out that “the maintenance of communion requires that at every level there is a capacity to take decisions appropriate to that level. When those decisions raise serious questions for the wider communion of churches, synodality must find a wider expression” (*Gift*, 37). In order to actualize this synodality bishops need to meet together. Consulting the faithful will also be a necessary aspect of their episcopal oversight (*Gift*, 38). Paragraphs 39-40 offer a fascinating account of the different ways in which Anglicans and Roman Catholics express synodality, of particular interest because of the different emphases present in the descriptions. Paragraph 39 is confident about the extensive practice of synodality and consultation of the laity within the Anglican Communion; but it seems almost to have to “protest too much” that the bishops have a “distinct and crucial” responsibility, a “distinctive and unique ministry” of oversight. Paragraph 40, about the Roman Catholic Church, on the other hand, presumes a strong exercise of episcopal and primatial authority but seems almost to have to “protest too much” that “the tradition of synodality has not

ceased” and that the three post-Reformation councils celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church and, especially, many structural developments implemented since Vatican II have fostered a greater degree of synodality. The text adds: “Complementing this collegial synodality, a growth in synodality at the local level is promoting the active participation of lay persons in the life and mission of the local church” (*Gift*, 40). This gives the impression that Catholic lay participation occurs only at the level of the local church and thus may unduly minimize their participation at the national, regional or even universal level (at the general synods, for example). These two different emphases will appear again later in Part IV, when the commission lists some issues facing Anglicans and Roman Catholics respectively (*Gift*, 56-57).

The section on perseverance in the truth (*Gift*, 41-44) attempts to hold together various affirmations which could seem to be in tension with one another. It clearly states that Anglicans and Roman Catholics can affirm both the indefectibility and the infallibility of the Church. Just as Vatican I had taught that the pope, under certain conditions, is able to exercise “that infallibility with which Christ willed his Church to be endowed” (Denzinger-Hünemann, 3074), so too ARCIC II notes that the biblically supported confidence which Christians rightly have about proclaiming the truth of the Gospel rests on trust in Jesus’ promise that the Holy Spirit will not abandon the Church as a whole and will guide her into all truth. This confidence is what is meant by our common conviction about the “indefectibility” of the Church. The text tries to harmonize such confidence with the experience that doctrinal development, which eventually may lead to new formulations of faith, consists of a cautious and careful process in which such formulations are tested. The “testing” which is spoken of here should be understood along the lines of Newman’s *Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, which recounts how the Church arrived at new formulations, such as the use of the word *homoousios* to describe the relation of the Son to the Father. Within the context of indefectibility, *The Gift of Authority* unambiguously affirms that it is precisely the role of the college of bishops to “discern and give teaching which may be trusted because it expresses the truth of God surely”. In some circumstances the bishops urgently “need to test new formulations of faith” and may even, “assisted by the Holy Spirit ... come to a judgement which, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with apostolic Tradition, is preserved from error” (*Gift*, 42).

One of the most crucial issues in the present text appears precisely at this point, where ARCIC II attempts to harmonize the infallible teaching authority of the college of bishops with the reception of its teaching by the whole body of believers. In paragraph 43, *The Gift of Authority* addresses a concern present in both official responses to ARCIC I’s texts on authority. As already noted, the Anglican response called for further exploration of the role of the laity in decision-making within the Church. The present text seems to carry out this task, especially in its reflections about *sensus fidelium* and reception, both of which are at issue in *Gift*, 43. The official Roman Catholic response, on the other hand, cites several passages from ARCIC I, such as:

... Anglicans do not accept the guaranteed possession of such a gift of divine assistance in judgement necessarily attached to the office of the Bishop of Rome by virtue of which his formal decisions can be known to be wholly assured before their reception by the faithful.¹⁰

While this text is about teaching by the Bishop of Rome, the central question concerns “reception”, which is precisely the issue of paragraph 43, with which we are now concerned. The Roman Catholic response summarizes its concern about this question as follows:

A clear statement is made, moreover, in *Authority in the Church: Elucidation n. 3*, to the effect that reception of a defined truth by the People of God “does not create truth nor legitimize the decision”. But as has been just noted with regard to the primacy, it would seem that elsewhere the Final Report sees the “assent of the faithful” as required for the recognition that a doctrinal decision of the Pope or of an Ecumenical Council is immune from error (AII, 27 and 31). For the Catholic Church, the certain knowledge of any defined truth is not guaranteed by the reception of the faithful that such is in conformity with Scripture and Tradition, but by the authoritative definition itself on the part of the authentic teachers.¹¹

How are these issues addressed in the present text? First, the text states that the whole body of believers participates in distinctive ways in the exercise of teaching authority in the Church. It does not say that the whole body of believers is the holder of that teaching authority attached to the college of bishops, which the previous paragraph 42 had indicated as an authority which, under some circumstances, may come to a judgement which is immune from error. What is the nature of this participation? In it “the *sensus fidelium* is at work”, presumably as one of those sources consulted by the bishops prior to making any decision. Bishops not only consult the Word of God as expressed in Scripture and handed on in Tradition, but they also are attentive to the way in which this Word has been received by the people, who are guided by the gift of *sensus fidei* and whose common understanding of the Word may be called the *sensus fidelium*. *The Gift of Authority* wants to say that such participation by the whole body is not only antecedent to official teachings, but

also is consequent. The text continues:

Since it is the faithfulness of the whole people of God which is at stake, reception of teaching is integral to the process. Doctrinal definitions are received as authoritative in virtue of the divine truth they proclaim as well as because of the specific office of the person or persons who proclaim them within the *sensus fidei* of the whole people of God. (*Gift*, 43).

It would appear here that it is not reception that is the condition which “guarantees” an authoritative definition. Rather, should one speak of a “guarantee”, ARCIC II would say that such definitions are “authoritative” “in virtue of the divine truth they proclaim as well as because of the specific office of the person or persons who proclaim them”. The phrase “within the *sensus fidei* of the whole people of God” does not seem to make reception the condition for the possibility of a doctrinal definition, but rather seems to confirm the points made in paragraphs 41 and 42, and also earlier in *Pastor aeternus* of Vatican I, that any exercise of infallible teaching authority can ultimately only be grounded as an exercise of “that infallibility with which Christ willed to endow His Church”. Nevertheless, reception is “integral” to such definitions because the precise purpose of a definition is to express the normative faith of the Church, and therefore the faith shared by all. If the teaching were not received, it would fail to achieve this purpose.

Why does the body of believers accept a doctrinal definition? It is ... because they recognise that this teaching expresses the apostolic faith and operates within the authority and truth of Christ, the Head of the Church. The truth and authority of its Head is the source of infallible teaching in the Body of Christ. God’s “Yes” revealed in Christ is the standard by which such authoritative teaching is judged. Such teaching is to be welcomed by the people of God as a gift of the Holy Spirit to maintain the Church in the truth of Christ, our “Amen” to God. (*Gift*, 43).

From this text, it seems clear that it is not the acceptance by individuals which serves as the source of infallible teaching. Rather that source is Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church and who acts through the Church. *The Gift of Authority* here uses the two verbs “to be judged” and “to be welcomed” in reference to infallible teaching. Can a teaching be both judged and welcomed at the same time? Does this mean that an individual believer or that groups of believers or the body of believers as a whole, as it were, stand in judgement over solemn definitions by an Ecumenical Council or by a Bishop of Rome who intends to teach in the manner described by Vatican I?

This seems clearly not to be the intention of the text. It is not that the believer enjoys an authority higher than that of Christ, or than that which Christ Himself exercises through the episcopal college. I suspect that the conjunction of these two verbs, instead, intends to point out, in this context of receiving official teaching, the same doctrine which Pope John Paul has indicated, in the context of the relation between philosophy and theology, that is, that there can be no ultimate conflict between faith and reason.¹² The faith of believers engages the whole human person, whose intellectual embrace of doctrine will therefore necessarily engage the capacity for judgement. One cannot divorce the text’s two verbs “welcome” and “judge” in the reception of defined doctrine, as if one would be able to welcome a teaching as an authentic interpretation of God’s revealed word even though one found oneself utterly incapable of reasonably judging it to be able to be considered as such. In such a case, faith would be reduced to a blind fideism, correctly rejected both by *Fides et ratio* and Vatican I’s *Dei Filius* as unworthy of the dignity of the human person created in the image of God.

The section on truth closes with a repetition of the unique role and responsibility of the episcopal college, which “is bound in succession to the apostles”, to maintain the Church in the truth. In this context, *The Gift of Authority* reiterates Vatican II’s affirmations that individual bishops teach in solidarity with the whole episcopal college and that the teaching office must be faithful to Scripture and Tradition, because it “is not above the Word of God, but serves it” (*Gift*, 44; cf. Vatican II, *Dei verbum*, 10)

The section devoted to primacy (*Gift*, 45-48) begins by acknowledging that the synodality of the Church is served by not only conciliar and collegial but also by primatial authority. Both communities recognize primatial ministry, at various levels of ecclesial life. Paragraph 46 explicitly acknowledges its debt to what has to be one of the most important achievements of ARCIC I: the common recognition not only of the need for primatial ministry at the universal level but also of this ministry being exercised by the Bishop of Rome. If it is true that the origins of the division between these two communities lay “precisely in the problem of papal primacy”, as *The Malta Report* indicated, then ARCIC I must be given credit for already having made an historically important advance.

The official response of the Anglican Communion to ARCIC I’s treatment of primacy called for continued exploration of:

... the basis in Scripture and Tradition of the concept of a universal primacy, in conjunction with collegiality, as an instrument of unity, the character of such a primacy in practice, and to draw upon the experience of other Christian Churches in exercising primacy, collegiality and conciliarity.¹³

Regarding that final request, paragraph 4 of *The Gift of Authority* does mention briefly that both Anglicans and Roman Catholics are trying to be open to experience of other churches concerning the nature and exercise of authority. The text itself does not thereafter explicitly refer to other churches, although its description of the Church as “where the Word is preached and the sacraments are celebrated” (*Gift*, 17-18) seems to echo an ecclesiological theme dear to the Protestant Reformation, while the framing of the discussion of collegiality and conciliarity in terms of “synodality” (*Gift*, 34-40; 45) would probably be congenial to Orthodox thought. Regarding the basis in Scripture and Tradition, the present text recalls the more extensive biblical reflections in *Authority in the Church II*, 2-9 and does add a text and several examples from the patristic period. The mention of the Anglican liturgical celebrations of two bishops of Rome, Leo and Gregory, is a particularly pleasing addition here. The relation between primacy and collegiality is addressed by the way the topics are linked in Part III of *Gift*: synodality leads to the discussion of perseverance in the truth and then to the treatment of primacy. Finally, the “character” of the primacy, in terms of its purpose in serving unity, its origin in the pattern set by Jesus himself in the choice of one of the twelve, its collegial style and its vulnerability to the weaknesses of its holder all seem to be addressed in *Gift*, 46-48. Thus it seems that the text has addressed all of the issues mentioned in the Anglican official response.

What of the Roman Catholic reactions to ARCIC I’s treatment of primacy? The Catholic difficulties concerned what might be seen as the two general components of Vatican I’s teaching about the papacy: primacy and infallibility. Regarding the primacy, the official response challenged ARCIC I’s statement that “a church out of communion with the Roman See may lack nothing from the viewpoint of the Roman Catholic Church except that it does not belong to the visible manifestation of full Christian communion which is maintained in the Roman Catholic Church’ (AII 12)”. Instead, such a church “lacks more than just the visible manifestation of unity”.¹⁴ ARCIC II does seem to respond to this when it clearly affirms that “the mutual interdependence of all the churches is integral to the Church as God wills it to be” (*Gift*, 37) and that “the exigencies of church life call for a specific exercise of *episcopate* at the service of the whole Church” (*Gift*, 46). Of its very nature, the local church is not self-sufficient (*Gift*, 37). Thus more than just the visible manifestation of unity is at stake in the question of communion with that ministry which serves as a point of reference for the unity of the whole.

The Catholic response, furthermore, found ARCIC I as falling short of the Catholic belief that “the primacy of the Bishop of Rome belongs to the divine structure of the Church” and that “the primacy of the successors of Peter [is] something positively intended by God and deriving from the will and institution of Jesus Christ”.¹⁵ In response, ARCIC II repeats ARCIC I in stating that the “pattern of complementary primatial and conciliar aspects of *episcopate* serving the *koinonia* of the churches *needs* to be realised at the universal level” (emphasis mine). The “*exigencies* of church life call for a specific exercise of *episcopate* at the service of the whole Church” (emphasis mine). The reference to the New Testament singles out the choice of Peter by Jesus Christ himself, while the text from St. Augustine speaks of “Peter’s acknowledged preeminence” and relates the words spoken to Peter alone (“To you I am entrusting”) to the gifts bestowed on the Church as a whole (all texts taken from *Gift*, 46). Thus *The Gift of Authority* seems to be saying that primatial ministry is of the *esse* and not of the *bene esse* of the Church. It is required. In addition, both the biblical and the patristic evidence provided presuppose that the initiative in providing the Church with what she needed came from Jesus himself.

This is not to commit the text to a fundamentalistic interpretation of either the Scriptures or of the origins of the Church. The concept of *ius divinum* can and must be understood in a way which allows it to be in harmony with whatever may emerge as the established results of properly exercised historical research. The recent considerations by the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith about the primacy of the successor to Peter admit “doctrinal development” and “growing clarity” regarding this ministry. At the same time, the Congregation underlines the continuity in this development, and that the growing clarity concerned a conviction which the Church had from its origins that “just as there exists a succession to the apostles in the ministry of the bishops, so too the ministry of unity, entrusted to Peter, belongs to the perennial structure of the Church of Christ and that this succession is tied to the see of his martyrdom”.¹⁶ By affirming its necessity and by referring to biblical and patristic texts which speak of Jesus’ words spoken specifically to Peter, choosing him for a role which had reference to the Church as a whole, which called upon him to exercise powers entrusted to the whole, ARCIC II seems to affirm substantially what the Congregation also affirms regarding the foundation of the primacy in the will of Christ for the Church. Quite understandably, the Congregation’s discussion of primacy is much more extensive and its affirmations more explicit. Still, I suspect that ARCIC would be able to affirm a succinct statement such as “The Episcopacy and the Primacy, reciprocally connected and inseparable, are of divine institution”.¹⁷ From what is said in the text as a whole, this statement could be acceptable to both communities.

Just as, after presenting the synodal exercise of authority by the college of bishops in general (*Gift*, 34-40), *The Gift of Authority* proceeds to the more specific question of its teaching authority (*Gift*, 41-44), so too its discussion of a universal primacy (*Gift*, 46) leads to a paragraph about the primate’s teaching authority (*Gift*, 47). The text clearly

envisions the possibility of “solemn definitions pronounced from the chair of Peter”, this last phrase obviously inspired by the Latin phrase *ex cathedra* (from the chair). Paragraph 47, in a way similar to Vatican I’s *Pastor aeternus*, affirms that such an ability to teach derives from and is in some way included within the ministry of primacy: “The reception of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome entails the recognition of this specific ministry of the universal primate”.¹⁸ The primary intention of this paragraph seems to be to anticipate and avoid those “difficulties and misunderstandings” which have arisen concerning this particular ministry of discerning the truth.

Anyone familiar with Vatican I will be reminded of the famous *relatio* of Bishop Vincent Gasser, spokesperson for the Deputation *de fide* of the council, delivered on July 11, 1870, a speech cited in four footnotes of Vatican II’s main paragraph about teaching authority and infallibility (*Lumen gentium* 25)! Bishop Gasser attempted to respond to fears held by some Catholic bishops that the definition of papal infallibility would set the pope up as an authority who could impose a solemnly defined doctrine on the whole Church on the sole basis of his arbitrary decision. Gasser’s argument hinged on the interpretation of three adjectives: personal, separate and absolute. In what sense can papal infallibility be qualified by these adjectives? Regarding the third, Gasser openly admits (his expression) “in no sense is pontifical infallibility absolute, because absolute infallibility belongs to God alone...”.¹⁹ In what sense *personal*? “Indeed, infallibility is said to be personal in order thereby to exclude a distinction between the See and the one who holds the See. ... we defend the personal infallibility of the Roman Pontiff inasmuch as this prerogative belongs, by the promise of Christ, to each and every legitimate successor of Peter in his chair”.²⁰ Gasser goes on to clarify that the adjective “personal” needs to be precisely limited to the pope insofar as he is “a public person, that is, as head of the Church in his relation to the Church Universal”.²¹ The bishop explicitly denies that the pope is infallible when considered as a private person or as a private teacher.²² In what sense is the infallibility of the pope *separate*?

It is able to be called *separate* or rather distinct because it rests on a special promise of Christ and therefore on a special assistance of the Holy Spirit, which assistance is not the same as that which the whole body of the teaching Church enjoys when united with its head.²³

“Teaching Church” for Gasser must be understood from within the distinction prevalent at the time between the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia discens*. Thus it means the college of bishops. Because of this operative framework, he would have been unable to acknowledge a “participation” in the Church’s teaching authority on the part of the laity. This limitation need not be a problem for us today, when a much more adequately developed doctrine and theology of the laity has shown its unique sharing in the prophetic mission of Jesus. But Gasser’s text here is helpful for grasping the limited way in which the bishops of Vatican I understood the teaching of the Bishop of Rome to be “separate”. When compared with that of the college of bishops, the primate’s relation to the whole Church is “completely special”:

- .. to this special and distinct condition corresponds a special and distinct privilege. Therefore, in this sense there belongs to the Roman Pontiff a separate infallibility. But in saying this we do not separate the Pontiff from his ordained union with the Church. For the Pope is only infallible when, exercising his function as teacher of all Christians and therefore representing the whole Church, he judges and defines what must be believed or rejected by all. ... Indeed we do not separate the Pope, defining, from the cooperation and consent of the Church, at least in the sense that we do not exclude this cooperation and this consent of the Church.
- .. And thereby we do not exclude the cooperation of the Church because the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff does not come to him in the manner of inspiration or of revelation but through a divine assistance. Therefore the Pope, by reason of his office and the gravity of the matter, is held to use the means suitable for properly discerning and aptly enunciating the truth. These means are councils, or the advice of bishops, cardinals, theologians, etc. Indeed, the means are diverse according to the diversity of situations, and we should piously believe that, in the divine assistance promised to Peter and his successors by Christ, there is simultaneously contained a promise about the means which are necessary and suitable to make an infallible pontifical judgment.

Finally, we do not separate the Pope, even minimally, from the consent of the Church, as long as that consent is not laid down as a condition which is either antecedent or consequent.²⁴

This extensive quotation from Bishop Gasser shows him trying to explain the restricted sense in which papal infallibility, as defined by Vatican I, was “separate” from the Church and the many senses in which it not to be understood as separate. He was trying to convince Roman Catholic bishops who had expressed concern about this special teaching authority of the primate.

Gasser’s remarks seem especially helpful for correctly interpreting the intention of paragraph 47 of *The Gift of Authority*.

This paragraph appears to be addressing fundamentally the same concern. While the teaching authority of the universal primate in declaring the authentic faith of the whole Church is “a *particular exercise* [emphasis mine] of the calling and responsibility of the body of bishops to teach and affirm the faith” and, as such, it is unique, nevertheless it is exercised “within the college ... and not outside”, it expresses only the faith of the whole Church and of the local churches. It is faithful to Scripture and Tradition, “to the faith proclaimed from the beginning”.

ARCIC I had expressed various concerns among Anglicans about papal infallibility, especially with regard to the definitions of the Marian dogmas in 1854 and 1950, which, according to the official Roman Catholic response, “illustrate the need for much further study to be done in respect of the petrine ministry in the Church”.²⁵ These Anglican concerns are no longer voiced in ARCIC II’s *The Gift of Authority*. Instead there appears an attempt to underline the unity between the pope, when exercising that unique teaching authority of solemnly defining a doctrine, and the Church as a whole. This attempt has some remarkable affinities with the speech of Bishop Gasser, who successfully assuaged similar fears of Roman Catholic bishops at Vatican I.

Can the affirmations by ARCIC II relating such special teachings on the part of the primate to the faith of the whole Church be interpreted as making the approval of the whole the juridic condition which guarantees such teaching, as if, in the absence of universal antecedent unanimity or consequent reception, no definition can be said to occur? To interpret ARCIC II in this way would be to misconstrue the text, in my opinion. The main evidence of this is the document’s understanding of teaching and reception in paragraph 43. There definitions are said to gain their authority not from reception, but from divine truth, from the authority of Christ the Head who acts through “the specific office of the person or persons who proclaim them”. Bishop Gasser was arguing against the Gallican view that the primate’s actions were absolutely conditioned by their positive reception. He sought to win over those bishops who wanted to assure that sufficient consideration be given to the views of the Church as a whole, especially as expressed in the advice of bishops, whenever the pope proposed any teaching in a definitive way. He wrote:

It is in this strict and absolute necessity that the whole difference between us consists. The difference does not consist in the opportuneness or some relative necessity which must be completely left to the judgment of the Roman Pontiff as he determines according to circumstances.²⁶

Bishop Gasser succeeded in convincing those of his fellow bishops who were concerned about this issue that the Gallican insistence on reception as an absolute condition for definitive teaching would effectively eliminate such teaching. For this reason Vatican I added the sentence that papal definitions were irreformable “of themselves, and not because of the consent of the Church”. Only within this anti-Gallican context can that sentence be properly understood, as the words quoted from Gasser make abundantly clear. Gasser succeeded in assuaging the fears of some of his fellow bishops. ARCIC II also intends to avoid misunderstandings about the special teaching of the primate in relation to the whole. It seems to repeat themes present in Bishop Gasser’s very important intervention at Vatican I. Hopefully, it too will succeed in assuaging the fears of Christians who may sincerely struggle with the question of how the unique teaching authority of the primate may be understood as integrated into the faith of the community as a whole, not threatening it, as it was threatened by the false teachers so frequently mentioned in the New Testament (cf. Acts 20.29-31; Eph 4.14; various places in the pastoral letters and the Johannine letters), but indeed confirming it (cf. Lk 22.31).

The section on primacy concludes by agreeing with Pope John Paul’s affirmations concerning the human frailty of Christian ministers, including the one exercising the ministry of Peter. From there it moves to a final subdivision about discipline (*Gift*, 49). Perhaps this paragraph could provide a clearer description of what is meant by the word “discipline”, since it can have a variety of connotations. Is the text here attempting to further comment on what *Authority in the Church: Elucidation* 5 called “a bishop’s [or, here, a primate’s] authority in certain circumstances to require compliance”?²⁷ Such an interpretation seems correct in light of the rest of *Elucidation* 5, which speaks of the possible “need for disciplinary action”. In any event, the present text proposes a balanced recognition both of the individual’s duty to follow the direction given by the entire community in the persons of those exercising authority, as well as the duty of those in authority to respect the consciences of those whom they are called to serve. The latter point should not be misconstrued as blindness to the fact the conscience is formed within the community, a point explicitly acknowledged in *Gift*, 13.

Part IV: Synthesis and Look Toward the Future.

“We believe that if this statement about the nature of authority and the manner of its exercise is accepted and acted upon, this issue will no longer be a cause for continued breach of communion between our two churches” (*Gift*, 51). This is a very strong and hopeful claim about the level of agreement present in *The Gift of Authority* as well as a

recognition of the difference between theory and practice (as connoted in the phrase “and acted upon”). This difference is important for interpreting Part IV.

The recapitulation of new points of agreements, listed in *Gift*, 52, is not only very impressive but may even be too modest. While it includes most of the points which we have discussed so far, it did not mention paragraphs 32-33, which locate authority precisely within the context of an ecclesiology of communion and mission. It has been noted above why those paragraphs are especially helpful in light of recent emphases both in ecclesiology and in official Roman Catholic teaching.

The description of the developments within each community (*Gift*, 53-55) seems quite accurate. The Roman Catholic Church has undoubtedly given new attention and importance to the exercise of authority locally, synodally and with the inclusion of the laity in recent years. Anglicans recently have and intend to continue to pay closer attention to the exercise of authority at the universal level. Thus they do seem to be moving in directions which will bring them closer together concerning authority and its exercise.

The “Issues facing Anglicans/Roman Catholics” of *Gift*, 56-57, should not be seen as contradicting the statement of agreement registered in *Gift*, 51, but rather as expressive of the difference between theory and practice. As such, to point out such challenges after asserting the earlier agreement is fully in harmony with what Pope John Paul II has called that “dialogue of conversion” (*Ut unum sint*, 82), which was mentioned above.

These “Issues” (*Gift*, 56-57) along with the paragraphs which appear under the title “Renewed Collegiality” (*Gift*, 58-59) respond to a request increasingly expressed in the literature about the reception of ecumenical documents. More and more dialogue commissions are asked not only to produce texts but also to suggest concrete steps by which the greater degree of communion may find visible expression. Cooperation between Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops in meeting, praying, witnessing and even teaching together seems fully in harmony with Pope John Paul’s experience of collaborating in various ways with other Christian leaders, which he recounts in Chapter II of *Ut unum sint*, entitled “The Fruits of Dialogue”. The suggestion to consider the participation of Anglican bishops in *ad limina* visits seems a noble gesture, a concrete way of expressing the Anglican acknowledgment of a universal primacy recorded in paragraphs 45-48 of *The Gift of Authority*. At the same time, one can imagine that such a step would require a certain pastoral prudence. Here, as well as in the case of common teaching, one would have to consider carefully how such steps would be understood by the faithful and, insofar as possible, to guard against exploitation by a media which shows little reluctance to sensationalize stories in a ways which can be quite misleading.

The Gift of Authority closes with several paragraphs which characterize also the ministry of universal primacy as a “gift”. Catholics should welcome this gracious stance by their Anglican brothers and sisters. Several phrases in this section will probably lead some critics to pounce on the text with the objection that only a certain sort of primacy is being affirmed, a primacy which “upholds legitimate diversity” (*Gift*, 60) and which “protects theological enquiry” (*Gift*, 61), a primacy which can be recovered and re-received by Anglicans only “under certain clear conditions” (*Gift*, 62). In my judgment, it would a mistake to interpret such phrases as suggestive of some sort of crypto-Gallicanism. Catholic doctrine and theology can interpret these phrases in a way which is compatible with a correct understanding of papal primacy. Within the ecumenical landscape, it is fair to say that no other community has come so far along with Roman Catholics in common agreement about the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Indeed, one recalls the poignant words of Pope Paul VI that, for ecumenism, there is no greater “obstacle” than the papacy.²⁸ Here, perhaps for the first time in ecumenical dialogue, the Anglicans, together with their Roman Catholic dialogue partners, speak of it as a “gift”.

Concluding Remarks.

Throughout this commentary, I have tried to point out how ARCIC II attempted to address the concerns voiced by the two official responses to ARCIC I’s work on authority. On the whole, *The Gift of Authority* seems reasonably successful in addressing these concerns. At the same time, as is only to be expected, by focusing on them it may have missed the opportunity to more fully develop some themes less sharply enunciated by the official responses. In this regard, I would like to indicate simply two areas in which I believe greater precision would render even more adequate the understanding of authority present in this text and thereby also deepen the agreement between Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

One issue concerns what is referred to as the *sensus fidelium*. Could not the text be clearer as to the precise meaning of this expression? Is it distinct from *sensus fidei*, which is described as “an active capacity for spiritual discernment, an intuition that is formed by worshipping and living in communion as a faithful member of the Church” (*Gift*, 29)? Paragraph 29 states: “When this capacity is exercised in concert by the body of the faithful we may speak of the

exercise of the *sensus fidelium*". What does it mean to exercise the *sensus fidei* "in concert"? Later, *sensus fidelium* is described almost as an active force or principle: "within the working of the *sensus fidelium* there is a complementary relationship between the bishop and the rest of the community" (*Gift*, 36; see also *Gift*, 1, 43 and 56). Finally, another meaning seems to appear, as if the phrase referred not to a subjective capacity, exercised either singly or in concert but rather to the doctrinal content concerning matters of faith and morals which is actually believed by the faithful: "when bishops take counsel together they seek both to discern and to articulate the *sensus fidelium*" (*Gift*, 38). It seems to me that the text would be improved if it were to restrict the meaning of *sensus fidelium* to this final meaning. Perhaps Vatican II could be of help on this point. *Lumen gentium* 12, referred to in *Gift*, 43, does not actually use the expression *sensus fidelium*, but is satisfied simply to speak of "the supernatural *sensus fidei* of the whole people".

By this appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*), aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth, the People of God, guided by the sacred teaching authority (*magisterium*) and obeying it, receives not the mere word of men, but truly the word of God (cf. 1 Th 2.13), the faith once for all delivered to the saints (cf. Jude 3). The People unfailingly adheres to this faith, penetrates it more deeply with right judgment, and applies it more fully in daily life.

Here *sensus fidei* is clearly a subjective capacity which accompanies faith; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Should the whole people, guided by this gift of *sensus fidei*, concur in universal consensus about a matter of faith or morals, then they would not err on that particular point of belief (so *Lumen gentium*, 12). Might not the expression *sensus fidelium* refer precisely to the level of agreement about any particular matter of faith or morals? Only in the case of unanimity would one be assured that the whole body of the faithful is preserved from error. Falling short of such unanimity, the commonly held views of the whole people are not thereby reduced to insignificance. They still contribute to the interpretation of God's revealed Word. But this very statement uncovers the true role of the *sensus fidelium*. It is not that the Church needs to discern the *sensus fidelium* as an end in itself. Rather, the ultimate purpose of discernment is to receive the Word of God, to adhere to it and to apply it to life. The *sensus fidei* is a gift given to each believer to assist him or her to do this. The *sensus fidelium* is comparable to a "reading" taken as to what the faithful actually believe. Such clarifications would allow ARCIC II to indicate more clearly how the *sensus fidelium* contributes to authoritative teaching as well as to acknowledge more frankly the difficulties inherent in the task of discerning what the faithful believe and the degree of their unanimity. Especially in an age in which "public opinion" is so frequently consulted and appears to be so malleable, a more thorough reflection on this very important aspect of ecclesial life would be helpful.

A second suggestion is not unrelated to the first. It is this. Might it not be possible to identify more clearly the distinctive episcopal authority to teach as precisely a sharing by Christ of his own teaching authority? There is something of this theme in *The Gift of Authority*, to be sure. One can be particularly grateful for the Christological references in paragraphs 36 and 43 and for the pneumatology which is woven throughout the text (cf. *Gift*, 4, 18, 28, 30, 35, 36, 41, 42, 43, 47, 49). Such references to the missions of the Son and of the Holy Spirit support an optimistic assessment of ministerial authority in the Church. At the same time, one wonders whether this optimism might not allow for greater treatment of episcopal ordination as an epiclestic sacramental rite in which the newly ordained bishop is graced to share in a unique pastoral way the authority of Christ the Good Shepherd.

Moreover, the helpful emphasis on the laity, especially by means of the recourse to the theme of *sensus fidelium*, can nevertheless give the impression that those charged with the "ministry of memory" have access to the Word of God mainly through the commonly held convictions of the people. Of course, bishops do in fact learn the Word of God from lay people. Who could forget those words addressed in Paul's name to Timothy, which, while having a certain familial charm at the same time suggest the profound personal rootedness of ordained ministers within the whole community of believers?

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you. Hence I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands. (2 Tim 1.5-6).

That being so, might not the text still be even more satisfying if it could include a more developed reflection upon the relationship between the ordained ministry and the proclamation of the Word of God? This could fruitfully utilize those biblical passages in which Jesus shares his mission of proclamation with the twelve (such as Mt 10.1-42). Also it could recall the special episcopal responsibility to conserve and guard the faith, an idea which could be supported not only by the New Testament but also by abundant material from the writings and practice of the Fathers of the Church.

Anglicans and Roman Catholics, both being convinced that the episcopacy is part of God's will for the Church and never having been formally in conflict about this issue, might naturally feel less need to give a strong foundation for the episcopacy in their agreed statements. Indeed, one criticism of *Authority I* was precisely that it focused too much on the hierarchy and said too little about the laity.²⁹ Because *The Gift of Authority* attempts to carry out the mandate

specified in the official responses to ARCIC I, it is natural that the laity would be placed in special relief in the text. Perhaps some additional attention to the sacramental foundation and significance of episcopal ordination could make even better what is already a remarkable agreement.

Standing on the threshold of a new millennium, it seems remarkably providential, a sign of the influence of the Holy Spirit, that, in the space of several months, important agreed statements have appeared which have claimed significant consensus about two of the most seminal doctrinal issues dividing Christian communities. In addition to *The Gift of Authority*, studied in the present commentary, a Lutheran-Catholic *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was published in June of 1998.³⁰ While these documents differ as to the process which led to them as well as the specific doctrines considered, nevertheless the two issues and the two agreements are not unrelated. Both concern the healing and elevating of nature by Christ's redeeming grace. *The Declaration on Justification* focuses on how this occurs in the life of the redeemed individual. *The Gift of Authority* instead contemplates the working of grace within the whole community which is the Church, local and universal. One could prophesy with confidence that the impact of these agreements will go beyond relations between the Roman Catholic Church and only the Lutheran and Anglican communities. The Justification text could well assist Catholic dialogue with many other communities of the Reformation. The Authority text can do the same, but could also contribute to the common consideration about primacy which will continue to be of special concern in the healing of divisions between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

Pope John Paul has noted that what unites us is far greater than what divides us. He has hoped that, even if not yet completely one, the new millennium should find us much closer than before. This latest agreement offered by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission surely helps to make this dream come true. Their hope that "the 'Amen' which Anglicans and Roman Catholics say to the one Lord" will come closer "to being an 'Amen' said together by the one holy people witnessing to God's salvation and reconciling love in a broken world" is not unrealistic. Their work will help to bring about this common witness and this common "Amen" so fitting and so needed at the dawn of the new millennium.

[*Information Service* 100(1999/1) 30-42]

ENDNOTES

1. *The Gift of Authority*, paragraph 5. Hereafter all references to this document will appear within parentheses in the text as follows: (*Gift*, paragraph number).
2. The first ARCIC statement about authority (*Authority in the Church I*, 1976) noted: "It was precisely in the problem of papal primacy that our historical divisions found their unhappy origin". Text taken from H. Meyer and L. Vischer, ed., *Growth in Agreement*, Geneva/Mahwah 1984, 88.
3. *Apostolos suos*, 12. Italian text in *Il regno-documenti* 15, 1998, 487-492 at 490.
4. *Communio notio*, 9. English text in *Origins* 22, 1992, 108-112.
5. See "Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC-I", in Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Information Service*, N. 82, 1993/I, 49.
6. A similar idea is expressed in *Communio notio*, 11, which points out that the celebration of the Eucharist itself demonstrates that the local church is not self-sufficient but is, of its intrinsic nature, related to the whole.
7. See *The Truth Shall Make You Free*. The Lambeth Conference 1988, London 1988, 211.
8. One of the more explicit statements pointing out the "communion-nature" of the Kingdom is John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, 15.
9. In fact, *Lumen gentium* is here merely expanding upon the theme which was announced in the first sentence of Vatican I's *Pastor aeternus*. That text identifies Jesus as the *pastor aeternus* (eternal shepherd) and *episcopus* of our souls (1 Pt 2.25), who built up his Church in such a way that "in the house of God all the faithful might be united together by ties of a single faith and of living charity" (Denzinger-Hünemann, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, 3050).
10. See "Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC-I", in *Information Service*, N. 82, 1993/I, 49, quoting *Authority in the Church II*, n. 31.
11. *Ibid.*, 49.
12. Cf. John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, 34 and the whole of Chapter IV, entitled "The Relation between Faith and Reason", paragraphs 36-48. In this chapter, John Paul tries to show how great theologians of the past have applied reason to faith and laments the tendency, especially on the part of philosophers of recent centuries, to separate the two.
13. *The Truth Shall Make You Free*, 211.
14. Quotations from "Catholic Response", 49.
15. *Ibid.*, 50.
16. These points and the quotation (translation mine) are taken from "Il primato del successore di Pietro nel mistero della Chiesa. Considerazioni della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede", in *Il Primato del Successore di Pietro. Atti del Simposio Teologico. Roma, dicembre 1996*, Vatican City 1998, 493-503 at 493 and 495.
17. *Ibid.*, 497.
18. This follows the pattern present in Vatican I, where the ability of the Bishop of Rome to define doctrine flows as a consequence from his ministry of primacy. Cf. Denzinger-Hünemann, 3065.

19. I am using the translation provided by James T. O'Connor, whose *The Gift of Infallibility. The Official Relatio on Infallibility of Bishop Vincent Gasser at Vatican Council I*, Boston 1986, provides an introduction and translation of Gasser's intervention, as well as a theological synthesis on infallibility. The Bishop's speech lasted four hours and takes up some 26 columns of Mansi, *Collectio Conciliorum Recentiorum*, Vol. 52, Arnhem 1927, 1204-1230.
20. O'Connor, 41; Mansi, col. 1212.
21. O'Connor, 42; Mansi, col. 1213.
22. O'Connor, 41; Mansi, col. 1212.
23. O'Connor, 42; Mansi, col. 1213.
24. O'Connor, 43-44; Mansi, col. 1213-1214.
25. "Catholic Response", 49.
26. O'Connor, 48; Mansi, col. 1215).
27. See *Growth in Agreement*, 103.
28. "The Pope, as we all know, is undoubtedly the gravest obstacle in the path of ecumenism. What shall we say? Should we refer once more to titles which justify our mission? Should we once more attempt to present it in its exact terms such as it is really intended to be - the indispensable principle of truth, charity and unity? A pastoral mission of guidance, of service, of brotherhood which does not challenge the liberty and honor of anyone who has a legitimate position in the Church of God, but instead protects the rights of all and demands no other obedience than that which is demanded from the sons of a family?" From "Address of Pope Paul VI to the Secretariat Given at the Conclusion of the Annual General Meeting, April 28, 1967", in *Information Service*, N. 2, 1967, 4.
29. See *Elucidation 4*, in *Growth in Agreement*, 102.
30. English text, along with Press Statement by Cardinal Cassidy and Official Catholic Response in *Origins*, 1998, 120-132.