

APPENDIX A

THE GENERAL SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF IRELAND
COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY - ARCIC SUB-COMMITTEE

RESPONSE TO ACC QUESTIONS RE: *THE GIFT OF AUTHORITY*
JANUARY 2003

1. With regard to the relation between Scripture and Tradition and the exercise of teaching authority:

(a) To what extent does *The Gift of Authority* reflect the understanding and practice which the Anglican Communion has received?

We welcome the commission's affirmation of Scripture as "uniquely normative" (para. 19). However, we do not believe that the agreed statement draws out the full implications of this affirmation. We believe that Scripture is to be regarded as a separate category rather than "within Tradition", as stated (para. 19). While we recognise the dynamic interaction between Scripture and Tradition, Scripture is "God's Word written" (Article 20), and, as the commission's quotation from *Authority I* states, is "uniquely inspired". Anglicans speak of Scripture, Reason and Tradition as three strands of dispersed authority. If Scripture is "uniquely inspired" (however that is to be explicated), this clearly places it in a category of its own. The 1958 Lambeth Conference commented: "The Church is not 'over' the Holy Scriptures, but 'under' them, in the sense that the process of canonization was not one whereby the Church conferred authority on the books but one whereby the Church acknowledged them to possess authority. And why? The books were recognized as giving the witness of the Apostles to the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of the Lord and the interpretation by the Apostles of these events. To that apostolic authority the Church must ever bow." (*The Lambeth Conference 1958*, SPCK, part 2 page 5).

The use of the word "Tradition" at para. 14 fails to identify the normative role of Scripture as transmitting an original and authentic witness to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and as containing "all things necessary to salvation" (*Articles of Religion*, 6). The contrast is not so much between "Tradition" and "tradition" as between Scripture and tradition (small 't'). If Scripture is to be considered as apostolic tradition then the qualitative distinction between this and all later "traditions" must be fully acknowledged. It is not clear, in spite of what is said in para. 19, that the Commission has fully faced the implications of this important distinction. We feel that the Commission's distinctions between Tradition, tradition, traditions and apostolic Tradition are ultimately more confusing than helpful, running the risk, in the end, of actually blurring the very distinctions that the Commission seems to wish to clarify.

(b) What fresh insights into, or challenges to that understanding are suggested in *The Gift of Authority*?

The theme of God's "Yes" to us and our "Amen" to God is an attractive one with much potential for enriching our understanding of the covenant relationship between God and humankind. However, it is also a complex concept and it is by no means clear whether 2 Corinthians 1:19-22 can bear the enormous weight that is made to rest upon it in the agreed statement. We believe the Commission's exegesis of the text here is rather overdeveloped. We believe that great care is needed in moving from the believer's "Amen" to Christ to the believer's "Amen" to the faith of the church (paragraph 12). We detect a significant theological shift here. While there is truth in the commission's assertion, it cannot be taken to imply a "lock, stock and barrel" acceptance of every item of church teaching. That could amount to a complete submission to a magisterium, which we would regard as intellectually oppressive. We believe that a useful point is made at paragraph 13: "The believer is incorporated in an "Amen" of faith, older, deeper, broader, richer than the individual's "Amen" to the Gospel. So the relation between the faith of the individual and the faith of the Church is more complex than may sometimes appear."

2. With regard to collegiality, conciliarity and the role of the laity in decision making:

(a) To what extent does *The Gift of Authority* reflect the understanding and practice which the Anglican Communion has received?

In response to this question, we warmly welcome the commission's view, expressed at paragraph 5, rejecting "oppressive and destructive" patterns in the exercise of authority and affirming, with appropriate scriptural references, that it is "in conformity with the mind and example of Christ that the Church is called to exercise authority." The reference to authority here leads on to the designation, in paragraph 6, of authority as a "gift" to the church, but we feel that the ensuing discussion of authority is overly focused on people. This does not do justice to the Anglican view of authority as dispersed, among Scripture, reason, tradition and "people". In so far as authority, exercised in love, is a gift of God to the church, it is to enable that diversity which is reflected in God's many gifts to his people (Eph. 4:11-13).

When ARCIC states, "Decisions taken by the bishop... have an authority which the faithful have a duty to receive and accept" (paragraph 36), the commission runs the risk of over-stating the case. The faithful have a duty to respect episcopal decisions, but this becomes somewhat dangerous territory when the bishop is divorced from the synodical process, which strangely seems to be the case here, despite the introduction of the concept of synodality. Para. 36 appears to move away from synodical to solely episcopal government. One is left wondering precisely what the commission understands by synodality in practical terms, and precisely how one is to understand the commission's own statement here that there is a "complementary relationship between the bishop and

Standing Committee – Report 2004

the rest of the community”; it appears as though this complementarity is to be allowed to exist only up to a point.

What is said in paragraph 38 about the bishops' role being “magisterial” in the determination of what is to be taught reflects a particularly Roman Catholic perspective. We believe that the Holy Spirit is bestowed on the whole church to lead it into all truth, this being recognised in the synodical structure in most parts of the Anglican Communion in so far as matters of faith and order are determined by bishops, clergy and laity together, and not by bishops only. There is a significant difference, we believe, between saying that a House of Bishops is integral to such a process and saying that bishops are “to determine” what is to be taught and practised.

Paragraph 39 does not appear to recognise variations in practice within the Anglican Communion. Decisions of a diocesan synod in the Church of Ireland require the bishop's consent to stand (cf. paragraph 39); faith and order matters being decided, not by diocesan synods, but by the General Synod in which there is also a decisive episcopal role.

We understand that for Roman Catholics, infallibility means that at specific moments the church's teaching in matters of faith and morals can be proclaimed at the time of its definition as surely and absolutely free from error, therefore commanding certitude. Indeed, the Vatican's 1982 document, *Observations on the Final Report of ARCIC* (the first Commission), indicates that infallibility “refers immediately not to truth but to certitude” (B, III, 3). The indefectibility of the church - more generally the Anglican approach - means that the church, despite its very fallibility, is maintained in the truth - *ecclesia semper reformanda*. The commission tries to conflate infallibility and indefectibility by arguing that “infallible teaching is at the service of indefectibility” (paragraph 42). However, an infallible magisterium is not necessary for the church to be maintained in the truth, and where the idea of infallibility has been put into practice the result has not been helpful. Indefectibility works, not through an infallible magisterium but through the unfathomable providence of God. It is a matter of trust in God. Indefectibility, moreover, has a vital and dynamic eschatological dimension that the much more static, cut and dried infallibility lacks. Furthermore, in proposing not only an infallible magisterium but also papal infallibility, there is a conspicuous absence in *The Gift of Authority* of any reference to the Marian dogmas (1854 and 1950). In a pastoral letter following the publication of the 1950 Dogma of the Assumption, the Church of Ireland House of Bishops protested “against the defining, as part of the divinely-given Faith of Christ, of a doctrine which possesses the acceptance of only a section of Christendom, resting as it does on no scriptural authority or historical evidence, and not even on any support from the writings of the most ancient fathers.” While *The Gift of Authority* does not refer to papal infallibility (using those words), this is clearly implicit when, as at paragraph 47, the Commission speaks of the “specific” ministry of the Bishop of Rome concerning “the discernment of truth”.

The commission states at paragraph 43: “Since it is the faithfulness of the whole people of God that 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

Standing Committee – Report 2004

as because of the specific office of the person or persons who proclaim them within the *sensus fidei* of the whole people of God.” This paragraph may appear to endorse the need for the reception by the people of God of definitions of the faith for those definitions to be fully authoritative. If that is what is intended by the text, it accords with a very important principle for Anglicans, namely reception. However, is this in fact what the Commission is saying? The text as quoted reads: “Doctrinal definitions are received as authoritative...”, suggesting that reception is “integral to the process” because the faithful are obliged to receive teaching rather than because teaching is dependent on reception by the faithful, as part of the complementarity of the process, to be fully authoritative. In the Vatican's *Observations* document (quoted in our last paragraph), it was indicated that the latter view of reception “is not in accord with Catholic teaching” (B, III, 5).

When paragraph 43 speaks of God's “Yes” revealed in Christ as “the standard by which such authoritative teaching is judged”, the Commission can be understood to be using the word “judge” not in the sense of passing judgement but simply as a reference to the intellectual aspect of receiving teaching. Indeed, the paragraph's next sentence states: “Such teaching is to be welcomed by the people of God....”.

Paragraph 44 asserts that “the authenticity of the teaching of individual bishops is evident when this teaching is in solidarity with that of the whole episcopal college.” This does not appear to envisage the situation in which one bishop may maintain the truth in face of the otherwise unanimous neglect of truth by the rest of the bishops. There was a time when, as Jerome put it, “the whole world groaned and found itself Arian” and when Athanasius stood *contra mundum*. The commission's view here is simply too “neat”. This whole section of the report appears to be somewhat presumptuous for the sake of tidying up its argument.

2(b) What fresh insights into, or challenges to that understanding are suggested in <i>The Gift of Authority</i>?
--

We warmly endorse the statement at paragraph 35: “The way in which authority is exercised in the structures and corporate life of the Church must be conformed to the mind of Christ (cf. Phil. 2.5)”. The servant leadership exemplified in the life of Christ provides a role model which needs to be explored afresh by the Church in every age (cf. Luke 22:24-27, John 13:1-17).”

Comment as to the practical implications of this has already been made above (cf. the beginning of the response to 2[a]).

- 3. With regard to the Petrine ministry of universal primacy in relation to Scripture and Tradition:**
- (a) The Lambeth Conference of 1998 resolution III.8 (h) requested study “on whether effective communication, at all levels, does not require appropriate instruments, with due safeguards, not only for legislation, but also for oversight, as well as on the issue of a universal ministry in the service of Christian unity.” What fresh insights into or challenges to this area are suggested in *The Gift of Authority*?**

We agree with the commission that the “exigencies of church life call for a specific exercise of episcopate at the service of the whole Church.” (paragraph 46). In the Church of Ireland’s response to the *Final Report* of ARCIC-I, we already accepted that “in a reunited Church a form of universal primacy may be desirable” (*The Response of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland to the Final Report of ARCIC-I*, May 1986, Dublin, APCK 1987, p.22). For many Anglicans, the observation of the ministry exercised within the Anglican Communion by the Archbishop of Canterbury, as *primus inter pares*, leads to the conclusion that there may be a highly significant role for the global ministry of a universal primate. However, it is the terms of such a universal primacy that are important. We believe that the universal primacy in a reunited church (1) should not have any unique magisterial powers, (2) should be non-jurisdictional, and (3) should not necessarily be associated with Rome. The universal primate in such a church, we believe, should perform a primarily pastoral role, as distinct from a magisterial/jurisdictional one.

The commission states at paragraph 47: “Within his wider ministry, the Bishop of Rome offers a specific ministry concerning the discernment of truth, as an expression of universal primacy.... In solemnly formulating such teaching, the universal primate must discern and declare, with the assured assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit, in fidelity to Scripture and Tradition, the authentic faith of the whole Church, that is, the faith proclaimed from the beginning.” Although the word “infallibility” is not employed in this context, there can be no doubt that the dogma is clearly intended by the use of the phrase “with the assured assistance and guidance of the Holy Spirit”. In this connection, we would refer to our comments on infallibility and indefectibility at 2(a) above.

While it is good to note how the commission says that “loyal criticism and reforms are sometimes needed” (paragraph 48), the reform of specifically “infallible” teaching can be taken as excluded as this would, by definition, be irreformable. We find paragraph 49 reassuring in its initial part (especially regarding freedom of conscience), but proceeding to appear to restrict that very freedom of conscience by stating: “In freely accepting the way of salvation offered through baptism, the Christian disciple also freely takes on the discipline of being a member of the Body of Christ.” There is, certainly, discipline involved in belonging to the church, but we feel that the commission is hinting at something that could have the potential to be, in fact, quite oppressive. The recognition of the rights of conscience should have had a more central and determinative place in the thinking of the commission.

Standing Committee – Report 2004

Paragraph 53 refers to *The Virginia Report*. Despite some of the suggestions in The Virginia Report, Anglican history has largely been one of devolution of powers to provincial synods as new provinces have come into being. Consultation, through the Primates, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Lambeth Conference, maintains our “bonds of affection”. However, within Anglicanism (as within Orthodoxy), communion is best maintained on a voluntary basis. In the Church of Ireland’s response to *The Virginia Report*, it is commented: “...we think it worthy of note that, in 1870, the Church of Ireland produced the Preamble and Declaration which attempted to think the relationship between the Church of Ireland and the Church of England within the context of disestablishment. In that document the view develops of an autonomous church gladly and freely recognising the ecclesial significance of a historic relationship guaranteed and authorised in no other (certainly no juridical) way. The document also interestingly commits the Church of Ireland to act in such a way that communion will not be jeopardised, but rather maintained (Section 3).”

Certainly, there has been impairment of communion within Anglicanism over women’s ordination to the priesthood and episcopate, and even moral issues, but the definition of Anglican *koinonia* as being in communion with the See of Canterbury (as opposed to the Church of England) leaves the way open for the primus inter pares formally to cease communion with an individual or province. (We offer these comments also in relation to the agreed statement’s paragraph 56.)

We do not consider it appropriate that Anglican bishops should join in *ad limina* visits of Roman Catholic bishops to the Vatican (paragraph 59). The involvement of Anglican bishops in such visits could very easily appear to imply a recognition of some form of papal jurisdiction over Anglican churches. Indeed, this proposal of the commission (of Anglican bishops joining in *ad limina* visits) is clearly linked to the commission’s proposed recognition of papal primacy before there is communion (paragraph 60). We do not believe that there can be any meaningful primacy without communion. Further, we would ask if the “re-reception” process referred to at paragraph 62 would allow for rejection.

3(b) How can these insights or challenges be accepted into the life of the Anglican Communion?

This question is loaded as it is asking how we can accept the conclusions of the report into the Church.

We respond to *The Gift of Authority* whilst conscious of current discussion within Anglicanism of the manner in which authority in the Anglican Communion itself can be exercised. In view of difficulties which emerge from time to time as a result of the autonomy of individual Anglican Provinces it has been suggested that a more centralised and effective authority within the Communion is required. In spite of the Virginia Report, we note that such thinking has failed to win significant support among the Provinces of the Anglican Communion. Discussions at Lambeth 1998 and at the Anglican Consultative Council in 1999 revealed that Anglicanism has not been won over

Standing Committee – Report 2004

to the concept of more centralised authority. Ways in which mutual accountability can be developed are generally welcomed by Anglicans but, while recognising the respective roles of the Archbishop of Canterbury as *primus inter pares*, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council, further development beyond a moral and consultative form of authority is not seen as helpful.

There is the implication in *The Gift of Authority* that it is desirable that there should be an ultimate and final authoritative voice in the church, or at least that once the need for authority in the Church is established, there should be at some stage in the process an authority that is absolute. Our response here has been based on the conviction that such authority resides dynamically in the Triune God, and that the way in which God maintains the church in truth cannot be defined in any precise manner. This is an expression of the concept of dispersed rather than of a centralised authority.

We understand that a set of Elucidations to *The Gift of Authority* is planned in response to the comments from the two communions, but we feel it would be preferable to revise the text itself.

We would request the Anglican Communion Office to provide the Provinces with a draft Communion-wide response before publishing the final response of the Communion as a whole.