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## Report on the document "The Gift of Authority"

Anglican Studies Center  
The Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil

### Background

The document "The Gift of Authority" (GA) came into being in 1998, the fruit of work done by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission - ARCIC. It is a text that attempts to find points in common around ecclesiological questions. In the years following its publication, the document has been the subject of analysis by various theologians of those two Christian denominations. Subsequently, the Anglican Consultative Council requested that the Provinces of the Anglican Communion study the document and issue an official response.

The Anglican Studies Center (ASC) took on the responsibility for this study in our country. During 2002 we held three regional meetings, with bishops, clergy and lay persons participating. They met for two days, deep in study, critical analysis and debate on the document. The meetings were held in Santa Maria (with representatives of the three southern dioceses: Southern, Southwestern and Pelotas) in June 2002, in Recife (with representatives of the Dioceses of Brasília and Recife) in August 2002, and in São Paulo (with representatives of the Dioceses of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasília and of the Missionary District of Amazônia) in September 2002, with a total of 41 participants.

At each meeting representatives were chosen to write a final report on the studies. A meeting of this group was planned for February 2003. However, with the recent steep increase in airfares and other unexpected expenses, the meeting could not be held. Thus the Coordinator of the ASC was charged with the task of writing a preliminary text, with the help of Bishop Sumio Takatsu, and of distributing it to representatives of each meeting so that they could add their comments and suggestions. After receiving these suggestions, the final report was prepared by the committee named below and is now presented to the House of Bishops and the Executive Council of the Synod of the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil.

### Methodology

The following methodology was adopted for the three regional meetings:

At the outset all the participants named by their respective dioceses received copies of the document "The Gift of Authority", as well as studies of the document already in circulation on the Internet. The recommendation was that all the materials be read before the meeting.



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During the meetings, the time was divided into study periods, worship, and a sharing of experiences. At all the meetings, the Holy Eucharist was led by one of the participants, with the homily being the responsibility of Bishop Naudal Gomes (Santa Maria meeting), The Rev. Jorge Aquino (Recife meeting) and The Rev. Samuel de Souza (meeting in São Paulo).

The theological consultants at the meetings were The Rev. Jaci Maraschin, a member of ARCIC, and the Rt. Rev. Sumio Takatsu, member of the House of Bishops. The opening lecture, by The Rev. Maraschin, attempted to describe the scope of the work of ARCIC and the controversial points of discussion. The first study session, led by Bishop Sumio, revolved around the first chapter of the document, analyzing especially the concept of "authority". The Rev. Maraschin was responsible for leading the study of Chapter 2, and the final part (chapter 3), was led by Bishop Sumio. After each study period there were tightly focused discussions in smaller groups, followed by a plenary with all the participants. Conclusions were reported so that the reactions of the different groups could be compared, questions asked of the consultants and, where possible, a consensus position achieved to be included in the final report.

The questions studied by the groups followed a design sent by the office of the Anglican Communion in London and centered around the following items: a) the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and the exercise of authority in the Anglican Communion; b) collegiality and the role of the laity in making decisions; c) the Petrine ministry of universal primacy. Generally speaking, the question was: "To what extent does 'The Gift of Authority' reflect the understanding and practice which the Anglican Communion has received?"

The evaluation by the participants highlighted the positive point that the meetings provided much more than just an opportunity to study an international document. They were also important in deepening their understanding of ecclesiology and in reaffirming our Brazilian Anglican identity.

Each group handed the Coordinator of the ASC (The Rev. Carlos Calvani) its conclusions in writing. Having this material as a foundation and doing our best to be faithful to the conclusions of each group, we compiled the report that follows and now share it with all of the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil for information, analysis and reaction.

### **A) About ARCIC**

1. We noted at the outset our happiness in the fact that the existence of ARCIC is in itself a great sign of unity and we support continuing of this dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, noting especially that this dialogue should be strengthened at the provincial level, in dioceses and in parishes.

2. On the other hand, we were puzzled at the way the Anglican representatives to ARCIC are chosen (nomination by the Archbishop of Canterbury). We understand



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that the appointments are to be made by the Archbishop of Canterbury, but they should be made on the basis of recommendations from provincial synods and authorized by the Anglican Consultative Council. This would guarantee greater representation of the various currents of Anglicanism.

3. We also regretted the lack of representative lay persons and women among the Anglican members of ARCIC. This fact argues against one of the previous declarations of ARCIC, which appears in the preface to "The Gift of Authority" - "the recognition that, thanks to their baptism and their participation in the *sensus fidelium*, lay persons constitute an integral part of the decision-making power of the Church" - cf. *Authority in the Church: Elucidation*, 4.

3. We were also puzzled by the hegemony of theologians from the Anglo-Saxon world in ARCIC and we suggest that future Anglican members on the Commission be chosen from clergy and lay persons from every continent, observing a balance of gender, ethnicity and theological current.

#### **Scriptures, Tradition and the exercise of authority.**

5. We recognize first of all that authority in the church is a gift from God and, as such, should be at the service of the fellowship of human groups and the integrity of creation and be exercised in ecclesial relations, keeping in mind the eschatological horizon of the Kingdom of God. The understanding of authority as a gift comes from Christ himself who "came not to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10: 35 - 45) and, for this he left us an unequivocal example when he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13). The same Lord declared: "whosoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." (Mark 10:43-44). Beyond that, it is the authority to preach and to cure, to bless and exorcise the way Christ did. It is characterized as an exercise of power which should not stop with the person exercising it but rather in the well-being of the group and in the salvation of all people. The danger lies in that power ceasing to be *exousia* (deriving from God) and becoming despotic.

6. Beginning from this point, we feel that the document touches very superficially on this Biblical principle (§ 9), abandoning it in favor of an excessively juridical view centralized in the ministry of bishops, reinforcing the notion that authority has to do with administrative and decision-making kinds of power. Beginning with Chapter 2, in all discussion about authority, lay persons, deacons, and priests are categorized as those upon whom the authority of the church is exercised. This is reflected in the phrase: "Decisions taken by the bishop in fulfilling these functions have an authority which the faithful have the obligation to respect and accept." (§ 36)

7. As for the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and Authority, the consensus of the participants is that the document only partially reflects the Anglican view. The critical point is the understanding of the role of "*magisterium*" in the



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Roman Catholic Church and the tendency toward the centralizing of judicial authority in one person. We reaffirm our commitment to the reform principle of "free examination of Scripture", together with the need for constant encouragement of biblical research and exchange between scholars of Scripture, in order to avoid any single event or person claiming for him or herself the right to define the correct interpretation of biblical texts.

8. We highlight also the lack of objectivity in the document in its reference to the concept of "truth" (§ 41 to 44). An idealistic concept of the truth holds sway, which introduces and support the authority of the *magisterium* in the definition of doctrines. In this sense, we disagree with the affirmation that "the Church may teach Infallibly." (§ 42)

9. We understand that "infallibility" is a relatively recent concept in the history of Christian theology, and that it only became relevant beginning in the nineteenth century, by virtue of conservative reactions to rationalism, liberal theology and scientific theories arising in that time, especially the theory of evolution. It has to do with a concept agreed to at Vatican I to establish a Roman doctrine of "papal infallibility" and was later adopted by protestant fundamentalism to affirm the "infallibility of the Bible". We point out that during many centuries the Church renounced and not necessitated that concept, preferring to refer to the "authority of the Word", to the concept of the indefectibility of the Church and the assurance of the help of the Holy Spirit in crisis situations. Based on the promise of Christ that the gates of hell will not prevail over the Church, we believe that this, indeed, is "indefectible", but not infallible. If it were so, we would not need such a well-established penitential order. We recognize, starting from that point, the inadequacy of the concept of infallibility, while at the same time we affirm our faith in the authority of Scripture, in the help of the Holy Spirit to the faithful gathered in *koinonia* and we reject any suggestion of the infallibility of the *magisterium* of the Church or of episcopal ministry.

10. The analysis made in the document as to the exercise of authority in the Roman Church seems not to match historic reality. It becomes essential to discuss how far the decisions of Vatican Council II have really been implemented and observed in the Roman Catholic Church.

11. We highlight the need to deepen the concept of Tradition: the Anglican understanding of Tradition affirms that this is a dynamic principle. It is not something fixed in the past which should be followed without question. We believe that the church is still perfecting itself and maturing every day in the knowledge and love of Christ and the fullness of divine revelation. This implies that the Church should be open to questioning old interpretations that may have fossilized as "Tradition" and may impede us from hearing what the Holy Spirit says to us today. In this sense, we question the quite clear implication in GA that "Tradition" must include the Petrine primacy, as it is understood by the Roman Catholic Church.



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*Collegiality, conciliarity and laity*

12. The document offers various possibilities for reconsidering how authority has been exercised in the Anglican Communion. We recognize, for example, that the Anglican Communion is in general more participative on parish, diocesan and provincial levels. However, at all our meetings the question was raised about the way in which the Archbishop of Canterbury is chosen. Since the time of Henry VIII it is by nomination from a head of state, without the participation of Anglican leadership spread across the globe. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that in the nomination of the present Archbishop, Rowan Williams (104th in the line of succession from St. Augustine of Canterbury), the views of the 39 Primates of the Anglican Communion were heard. We understand that the present practice not only wounds, but also brings into question the concept of "dispersed authority" and we recognize that, in this instance, the Roman Catholic Church has something to share with us in reference to the process of electing the Pope.

13. Touching on Collegiality and Conciliarity, we understand that it is necessary to reconsider and emphasize the role of lay persons in the shared exercise of power. As this is one of the marks of our Anglican identity, we affirm that our churches need to deepen and review with some urgency the form this participation tends to take. Anglicans point out that this participation of the laity should be encouraged on diocesan and provincial levels, in preparations for the Lambeth Conference and in the ACC. We further emphasize the importance of theological training and sharing of documents at every level of the Church, in order to improve discussion about living out the gift of authority in the Anglican Communion, and especially in the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil.

14. We understand that we should seek, deepen, and broaden the participation of lay persons in the Anglican Communion, even if this Biblical, theological and pastoral conviction might distance us a bit from the Catholic Churches (Roman and Orthodox) as happened after the first women's ordinations. The general consensus of the participants was that this is the right path to follow, because we desire, in fact and by right, that the Anglican Church be an inclusive community in which the love and compassion of Jesus teach us to welcome all persons, especially the excluded.

15. In general, it was observed that the proposal of the document was inadequate on the subject of synodality and requires continuity and deepening study and dialogue (ecumenical and inter-religious) in order to arrive at a possible consensus and sharing of Ministries. We know that in the Christian tradition the bishop is a symbol of unity, but that unity is not expressed only through the episcopal ministry but also through parish council assemblies which include clergy and lay persons.

16. Both traditions involved in this dialogue have much to share. However, at the same time and in the same way, both have many challenges and expectations to meet, such as:



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- for the Anglican Communion a sociological revision of the concept and practice of synodality becomes necessary so that it can express and live out full communion and the "royal priesthood" exercised by all of the people of God (1 Peter 2:9-10)
  - for the Roman Catholic Church, a revision of the biblical-theological model of priestly ministry is necessary, thinking about women's ordination in the light of the Pauline understanding that condemns any and all discrimination, for all the baptized have "clothed themselves with Christ" (Galatians 3: 25 - 29) become "one body and one Spirit" (Ephesians 4: 4 - 6).
  - for the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil, the document inspire us to develop a larger participation of laity on the discussions and decisions about doctrinarie, liturgical and administrative questions. We understand that our practices of dispersal of authority would be stimulated and fortified through the study of the document.

### ***Universal Primacy and Petrine Ministry***

17. We were puzzled by the tone of the document, which refers to the Petrine primacy as something already resolved and consented to in the theological world. We thought the arguments of chapters 46 and 47, which attempt to justify the primacy of the bishop of Rome quite weak. We noted that even a good many Roman Catholic exegetes understand that at least the Church of Jerusalem was led by James and not by Peter. Some recognize that the community of the beloved disciple, later identified as the apostle John, maintained different traditions from the group in Jerusalem. In general terms, we understand that the identification of Petrine ministry with the concept of universal primacy, beginning with Matthew 16:16, is a theological mistake and we affirm that the Primitive Church maintained its unity in the confession of Peter ("You are the Christ of God") and not in the person of Peter.

18. We disagree with the final editing of paragraph 47, which says: "the primacy of the bishop of Rome...is a gift to be received by all the Churches." It is our understanding that there are not sufficient theological reasons to recognize the primacy of the bishop of Rome, although historical reasons might be cited. The exercise of a universal jurisdiction centralized in the bishop of Rome is incompatible with the Anglican concept of "dispersed authority".

19. On the other hand, some participants felt that it would be possible to accept the primacy of the bishop of Rome, as long as it were only an honorary primacy. The great majority of the participants understands that when considering proposals of unity we need to reconsider the concept of universal primacy and the question of Petrine ministry, looking toward an effective rotation in the exercise of these ministries. Some of the participants emphasized that a rotating system should be adopted among the great Christian traditions. In this way, for each time period primacy would be exercised by a different Christian tradition. For the time, we reaffirm our compromise in to maintain the communion with the ministry of Unity and Primacy of Archbishop of Canterbury and other structures of Anglican Communion



20. We understand that there are in the document two concepts that should be treated separately: the concept of Petrine ministry and that of the universal primate. The second does not necessarily arise from the first. In at least one of the plenary sessions, it was asserted that the Petrine ministry was invented by the Church of Rome in order to justify its absolutism and its hegemony over the other churches of medieval Europe.

21. We understand that, were it necessary to institute a universal primacy in Christianity, with a view toward greater unity in the Church, even then such a primacy should be honorary and collegial in nature, rather than jurisdictional or the unilateral declaration of dogmas of faith and should furthermore respect the traditions and local socio-religious-cultural context.

22. We agree unanimously that, more important than the Petrine ministry, is the apostolic ministry and that the recognition of a Petrine primacy on the part of the Anglican Church can only be understood as a gift of God to the degree that that primacy exercise not a pretense of Petrine power, but a genuine apostolic Petrine service.

***Other observations on the document***

23. The document implies between the lines that the "true" church is the Roman Catholic Church, in which resides the totality of grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit, and that the Anglican Church, like a rebel daughter, should return to Roman jurisdiction and authority.

24. We were puzzled by the text of paragraph 56 (*Questions confronting Anglicans*), especially the phrase "Anglicans have shown themselves willing to accept anomalies in order to maintain communion". We reject the unhappy choice of that rather blunt expression, in which the meaning of "anomaly" is never specified, nor the point of view. Are women's ordination and optional celibacy "anomalies" from the Roman point of view? This idea generated great arguments in the groups and plenaries for the temerity of the suggestion that accepting papal primacy meant turning away from the recognition of women's ministry and marriage options.

25. As to paragraph 57 (*Questions confronting Roman Catholics*) we understand that the teachings of Vatican Council II on laity and collegiality were never sufficiently implanted in the Roman Catholic Church. We note also that the Roman Catholic Church insists on disciplining with "obsequious silences" those theologians who demonstrate opinions at odds with the Curia's, and that the practice of interference by some factions in the Vatican in dioceses and seminaries, especially in Latin America, does not reflect adequate respect for the exercise and gift of authority through the "episcopate".



26. In paragraph 61: Historically, the practice of the Roman Catholic Church does not offer any guarantee that "a universal primacy will welcome and protect theological investigation and other forms of seeking the truth", as the text of the document declares. Our understanding is that, as long as the Roman Catholic Church maintains obsolete and medieval institutions like the "Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith", there will not be sufficient liberty for theological investigation.

27. On paragraph 62: We question the conclusion that "Anglicans are open to and desirous of the recovery and re-reception, under certain clear conditions, of the exercise of universal primacy by the Bishop of Rome." Such a declaration should not have been made by Anglican members of the Commission without broad consultation with Anglican clergy and lay bases.

28. We were surprised also by the fact that the document several times suggests that Anglicans should recognize the primacy of the Bishop of Rome as universal Primate, but at no time does it mention *Apostolicae curae*, the declaration signed by Leo XIII in 1896 which declares that ordinations done under Anglican rites "are totally invalid and entirely in vain". Although the authority of our ministry does not depend on Roman recognition, but rather on him who called us and commissioned us, we feel that it would be a great signal of the unity of the Church and a great stimulus to the ecumenical movement if the Roman Catholic Church, through its juridical power, were to admit the error of Pope Leo XIII and recognize publicly the validity of Anglican ministry.

29. In general, the majority of the participants agreed with the words of Hans Kung, Roman Catholic theologian, in the lucid article he wrote with respect to "The Gift of Authority" and which served as one of the resources for this study. He says, "My general impression is that the document attempts to divert the Anglican Communion from the Via Media toward the Via Romana (...) the attempt is to justify the Roman ideology of papal infallibility and of the episcopacy, which date back to the XIX century, and make them palatable for Anglicans." Kung adds: "In spite of their good intentions, the document does a disservice to ecumenism".

30. We concluded that, despite its virtues and disquieting questioning, the document does not totally reflect the diversity of Anglican ecclesiology nor of our healthy tradition of "dispersed authority" because of its having been written with roman presuppositions and directed not really toward the search for unity but rather toward capitulation of the Anglican Communion to the Roman Catholic Church, through an "Amen" given not to the authority of Jesus Christ, but to the pretensions of the Roman Curia.

31. Finally, we reiterate our support for continuing the bilateral dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and with other Christian confessions and we hope that the next group of Anglican theologians that comes to be part of ARCIC will be more attentive to the beauty of the diversity that exists in the Anglican Communion, so that





## Center for Anglican Studies



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their work may mirror vigorously and clearly our baptismal theology, our ecclesiology and the value of the laity in our church.

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Londrina, February 24, 2003 (St. Matthias the Apostle)

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