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ARCIC III: *The Gift of Authority*

Tim Bradshaw offers a detailed critique of this important document. He summarizes its main arguments, investigates its theological background, and suggests that its proposals would pose a serious threat to the identity of the Anglican church.

Introduction

The Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission has been producing reports since 1972. *The Final Report*¹, which appeared in 1981, collating sections on eucharist, ministry and authority, contains the most interesting and careful ARCIC attempts at fresh ways ahead for a creative ecumenical ecclesiology. The sections on eucharist and ministry were adjudged by General Synod to be consonant or convergent with Anglican understanding. The section on authority, while open to the notion of some kind of universal primacy, stated that '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.'² *The Final Report* also cast doubt on the term 'infallibility' as applied to any universal primate, or indeed to any human being: 'We agree that this is a term applicable unconditionally only to God.'³ On this point, it is relevant that the Anglican-Orthodox *Dublin Agreed Statement* affirms that the Anglican Communion shares the Orthodox, rather than the Roman Catholic, understanding of leadership or seniority, eschewing globally centralized jurisdiction and emphasizing the significance of the local church.⁴

The Gift of Authority,⁵ issued last year by ARCIC III, aims to follow up the material on authority in *The Final Report*, which had in effect agreed to disagree on the issues of universal primacy and infallibility. *The Gift of Authority* concludes by taking the bold step of recommending the universal primacy of the Pope, exercised in synodical or conciliar conjunction with the 'college of bishops', and of recognizing the infallibility of certain papal pronouncements as infallibly expressing the faith of the church. 'It is this faith which the Bishop of Rome in

1 *The Final Report*, Anglican Roman-Catholic International Commission, CTS/SPCK, London 1982.

2 *Final Report*, para 31.

3 *Final Report*, para 32.

4 *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: The Dublin Agreed Statement*, SPCK, London 1984, p 18 para 28.

5 *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III* ARCIC III, CTS/Anglican Book Centre/Church Publishing Inc, London, Toronto, New York 1999. References to *The Gift of Authority* will now be to its paragraphs, put in brackets.

certain circumstances has a duty to discern and make explicit' (47). The recommendation, moreover, has an immediacy and an urgency about it, since it plainly proposes 'that such a primacy could be offered and received even before our churches are in full communion'. Before trying to assess the document, it is important to listen carefully to its arguments.

The Gift of Authority – summary of its argument

'A scriptural image is the key to this statement', we read in the preface. This image is derived from 2 Corinthians 1.19-20; God's 'Yes' to humanity, and the responsive 'Amen' to God, both given in Jesus Christ, constitute this core principle. God's gift of authority is to be interpreted as being precisely at the service of this Yes and Amen. The Commission, moreover, wishes 'to clarify how the exercise and acceptance of authority in the Church is inseparable from the response of believers to the Gospel, how it is related to the dynamic interaction of Scripture and Tradition, and how it is expressed and experienced in the communion of the churches and the collegiality of their bishops' (6).

Authority in the church

In Jesus Christ the Yes of God's promises and the Amen of human response have become a concrete reality (2 Cor. 1:18-20). His obedience calls forth our Amen (10); in baptism we say Amen to God's work in Christ; our Amen is incorporated into that of Christ. The individual believer's response to the Gospel is a personal Amen, but a further dimension is always involved; the believer is also saying Amen to the faith of the Christian community (12). Here we begin to see a first glimpse of the ecclesiological premise stated at the outset: the inseparability of the believer's response to the Gospel and the question of authority in the church. The believer who is baptized must come to know the full implications of participation in the body of Christ, hence saying Amen to the Gospel has both individual and corporate dimensions. Few would balk at this claim.

This point is developed in terms of a completion of the individual's Amen as he or she learns from the church the content of divine revelation, in faithfulness to the Word of God. Here we note the linking of what has classically been distinguished in terms of *fiducia* and *assensus*: respectively, the heartfelt trust and commitment of personal faith, and the mental assent to doctrines and propositions. There is a distinction to be drawn between them, although of course not an absolute one; we need to know something cognitively about the one in whom we place our love and trust.

This linkage of individual faith with its expansion, or completion, as the believer receives the church's teaching, continues with a Christological statement: 'In that way the Amen said to what Christ is *for each believer* is incorporated within the Amen the Church says to what Christ is *for his Body*'(12). The individual Amen to the Gospel carries with it implicitly the Amen to the body of teaching of the church, as yet to be unfolded fully to the individual. This may be a painful process of questioning and struggle. The disciple is inducted into the complex reality of scripture, creeds, sacraments, and ministerial leadership, the believer is incorporated into an Amen of faith much deeper than the individual's Amen to Christ (13). The

local church community is a eucharistic community, in which all believers hear God's Yes in Christ and respond Amen with Christ to God.

Tradition and apostolicity are explained in terms of the living and dynamic process of church life, deeper than merely the handing on of propositions. The apostolic tradition unites the local churches in one faith as the Spirit enables them to say Amen to that tradition. The churches today are committed to receiving 'the one living apostolic Tradition' (17). 'Tradition makes the witness of the apostolic community present in the Church today through its corporate *memory*' (18). Within tradition the Scriptures play a unique and normative part (19). Old Testament Scriptures were re-received, as the New Testament shows. Formation of the canon was both an act of obedience as the church accepted them as normative; and an act of authority in that the church handed on these texts and excluded others (22). The meaning of the Gospel is understood only within the church, hence the word of God and the church of God are inseparable (23).

In its history the church receives the tradition in faithfulness and freedom: faithful and also free to seek to integrate it with new problems and issues of life in new ways. The church has the responsibility to hand on the whole apostolic tradition, 'even though there may be parts which it finds hard to integrate in its life and worship' (24). It trusts that such elements may again become more evidently important. Sin, however, does affect the memory of church, which can lose sight of aspects of the apostolic tradition. 'Churches suffer when some element of ecclesial communion has been forgotten, neglected or abused', and then fresh recourse to the tradition, new sifting in a new context is called for, in what is called 're-reception' (25). The whole people of God bears this living tradition; theologians offer new insights and suggestions; a creative process of mutual give and take with bishops, clergy and laity goes on in the body (28). The *sensus fidelium*, an intuitive Christian sense in the faithful, exists along with the ministry of *episcopate*, which superintends the living memory of the church. Those charged with *episcopate* are 'specifically connected to the ministry of memory, which constantly renews the Church in hope' (30). Anglicans and Roman Catholics need to re-appropriate, or re-receive, elements they may have rejected, forgotten or not understood. They need to move closer to an undivided sharing in Christ's one Amen to the glory of God.

The exercise of authority in the church

Jesus bestowed an essentially missionary authority on his disciples, to preach and heal, preaching being a characteristic of apostolic authority, not least for the ministry of episcopate. Authority is for mission and for unity; disunity hampers mission and Jesus prayed that his disciples may be one (32, 33). Hence the document stresses the importance of the eucharist and of the ministry of authority to promote unity while respecting legitimate diversity of local churches. This leads into the significance of synodality and the common way of local churches together, led by the Spirit to be faithful to the Amen of Christ and kept in the truth (35).

The bishop of the local church is endowed by the Spirit with pastoral authority to lead the people in a complementary relationship. The bishop, as eucharistic president, 'leads his people to make their Amen to the eucharistic prayer' (36).

Synodality needs to move to wider expression for regional, national and global levels, just as in *The Final Report* conciliarity embraced higher and higher levels through episcopal representation, conciliarity and primacy operating in complementarity. *The Gift of Authority*, however, adds a new concept, that of the 'college of bishops'. This college focuses the *sensus fidelium* and exercises a magisterial teaching role, determining what is to be taught as faithful to the apostolic tradition. Anglican synodical procedures are interpreted as 'eucharistic' in nature and leadership, while using parliamentary procedures, and 'In the Roman Catholic Church the tradition of synodality has not ceased' (40).

Indefectibility and infallibility are defined in paragraphs 41 and 42. The process of cautious testing out of new and debated expressions of faith, in confidence that the church will be maintained in the truth by the Spirit, 'is what is meant by the indefectibility of the church' (41). The college of bishops exercises the ministry of memory: 'They are to discern and give teaching which may be trusted because it expresses the truth of God surely' (42). In specific circumstances they may come to a judgement which is preserved from error: 'this is what is meant when it is affirmed that the Church may teach *infallibly*; such teaching is at the service of the Church's indefectibility'.

The role of 'the faithful' in the process is to receive the authoritative teaching. Doctrinal definitions are received as authoritative in virtue of the divine truth they proclaim as well as because of the specific office of the promulgators (43). God's Yes revealed in Christ is the standard by which such authoritative teaching is judged. The episcopal college has the power to exercise its ministry of memory and maintaining the Church in the truth because it is bound in succession to the apostles, the body authorized to preach the Gospel. Individual bishops need to be in solidarity with the college of bishops, a solidarity revealing their teaching authority. The teaching office serves the Word of God and must be faithful to Holy Scripture (44).

This leads to the question of primacy. *The Final Report* discussed the evolution of the primatial task and its identification with the bishop of Rome. That is assumed here, and taken further in terms of the discernment of truth. 'In the pattern found in the New Testament one of the twelve is chosen by Jesus Christ to strengthen the others' (46). Any solemn papal pronouncement must be within the context of the college of bishops; the bishop of Rome is to discern and make explicit the faith of the church, which is the faith of all the baptized. Such pronouncements have the equivalent guarantee to the solemn definition of ecumenical councils (47). ARCIC accepts this ministry as a necessary part of the primacy of the Pope. Conscience and loyal criticism are, however, to be respected.

Questions are finally posed for each side: for Rome, the need to implement seriously the conciliar and collegial imperatives (which are essentially there in Vatican II); for Anglicans, the need to move towards re-accepting or re-receiving what they have forgotten or rejected in another context. The final paragraph 62 affirms that Anglicans should be open to and desire a recovery and re-reception, under certain clear conditions, of the exercise of universal primacy by the present Bishop of Rome; and that Roman Catholics be open to and desire a re-reception

of the exercise of primacy by the Bishop of Rome and the offering of such a ministry to the whole church of God. ARCIC leaps over the need for change on the part of Rome, or any conditions being fulfilled, by recommending that Anglicans adopt the papal primacy now, prior to institutional integration (60): that is, an acceptance of the papal primacy as it is currently exercised. This recommendation could hardly be more radical for the future, or end, of Anglicanism.

Theological appraisal

Ecclesiological family

The model of the church adopted here seems close to that produced by Newman in his 1845 *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.⁶ that is, a view of the church as a Spirit-breathed organic body, moving through history and developing ways of expressing its teaching and practice as it progresses. Earlier in his *Lectures on the Prophetic Office*,⁷ Newman had proposed a dialectic between theological or prophetic ideas and the episcopal ruling office which adjudged whether a proposed development of doctrinal expression. We can see clear traces of this idea in the ARCIC III text: the magisterium of the college of bishops, the inspired hermeneutical organ of the church, discerns the true interpretation from among many suggested proposals. The place of the people of God is to say Amen to that final adjudication.

Faith and the faith

As we have seen, the document deals subtly with the faith of the individual in connection with the faith of the whole church, and this is the load-bearing synthesis of the whole argument, integrating the believer's response to Christ into assent to authoritative church teaching and combining these into a joint Amen. The believer's faith is inseparable from the faith of whole church, surely a statement which is theologically correct. But that statement surely demands a more careful definition of faith in this context. The document seems to speak of the believer's faith in the existential sense of personal trust and commitment to the living Christ in the Spirit. In speaking of the faith of the church, however, it seems to mean that which is *taught by the church* – propositional doctrine.

This interpretation is reinforced by the report's discussion of the *sensus fidelium*, the intuitive sense of God which the faithful have as a corporate body, set over against the teaching magisterium of the college of bishops and papacy, whose task it is to discern, sift and focus these intuitions. The living faith of the believer, the report asserts, needs to be expanded and completed by the teaching of the church. The question to be asked is whether, in its concern to develop a structure of ecclesial authority in which the Amen of the people parallels the Amen of saving faith to the grace of Christ, ARCIC is blurring a distinction which ought to be maintained between *fiducia* and *assensus*. Clearly the life of faith is helped and

6 *Essay on the Development of Doctrine: an Hypothesis to Account for a Difficulty*, Longmans Green & Co, London, New York and Bombay 1906.

7 Available now as *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, ed. H. D. Weidner, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1990.

developed by the episcopate and pastoral ministry and fellowship of the church. The document is arguing that saying Amen to Christ *necessarily brings with it* the duty to assent to the teaching of the church as expressed here and now by the episcopal college and papacy.

The report hinges on this argument: that faith needs the authoritative faith of the church structure to complete it, thus subordinating the Amen of the believer to the authority of the episcopate and papacy. But this argument works only by moving from one definition of faith to another, by collapsing *fiducia* into *assensus*, which then has to be assented to by an 'Amen'. The precise scope of the 'faith of the church' to which this intellectual assent is required is not stated, nor whether this is a 'blank cheque' for the future teachings of the episcopate and papacy. Are there any officially-given teachings which may be regarded as 'adiaphora', open to legitimate differences of opinion? Personal faith may indeed be described as an Amen, or better a Yes, to the claims of Christ on our life, to his costly love and call to respond in discipleship. And of course a heartfelt Yes to Christ entails some knowledge of the person to whom we yield ourselves, some understanding of the deity incarnated by this person, some cognitive content. So personal faith commitment does need the truth which the church has faithfully preached and witnessed to, but finds the portraiture of Christ and God narrated and worked out classically in Scripture. The church's task is to point us to the 'prophets and apostles' as the foundational teachers and guides for our life of faith. The key question we need to ask here, is 'to what propositions are we saying Amen, and why?'

Anglican laity do not have to assent to a body of faith propositions beyond their baptismal and confirmation vows: 'This is our faith, we believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit', expanded in terms of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed which is recited in the Holy Communion. *The Gift of Authority* on the contrary assumes precisely the system set out in the latest *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: 'The Church's Magisterium exercises the authority it holds from Christ to the fullest extent when it defines dogmas, that is, when it proposes truths contained in divine Revelation or having a necessary connection with them, in a form obliging the Christian people to an irrevocable adherence of faith.'⁸ 'Mindful of Christ's words to his apostles', the preceding paragraph tells us, 'the faithful receive with docility the teachings and directives that their pastors give them in different forms.' The content of 'the faith' amounts to some six hundred dense pages of the Catechism, quite a different notion from the trinitarian summary of the gospel recited at baptism and confirmation.

The living authority of the church

Newman, no doubt, would have resisted the critical distinction between *fiducia* and *assensus* and argued precisely for their synthesis. This he did in terms of his corporate model of the church as a developing entity which evolves organically as an acorn into an oak, or like a maturing person. This was Newman's 'hypothesis' to account for his Tractarian 'difficulty' that important practices and doctrines of

8 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Geoffrey Chapman, London 1994) para 88, p 26.

the medieval Roman church could be found neither in Scripture nor the first five centuries of the patristic era. To solve this problem, he appealed to the Spirit living in the church as she develops, and an important development is of course that of a criterion, the papacy, to determine a true from a false development. The individual is microcosmic of the macrocosm, the living church. To participate in this body is to share in the true faith in all aspects.

In order to grasp fully the drift of *The Gift of Authority*, we need to envisage the church as a visible, structured, corporate entity with a corporate mind here and now, which is not simply metaphorical. The church really is the body of Christ, with the structures appropriate to this Spirit filled organism. There can be no duality of an invisible spiritual church separate from the material, structural and juridical entity. ARCIC works with this model from the start in uniting personal faith with acceptance of ecclesiastical authority, both calling for the *same sort of Amen* from the believer. Likewise the presence of Christ for the body, including the authority structures of the body, includes the presence of Christ for the believer whose Amen must be to both modes of Christ's presence. Personal faith cannot be separable from ecclesial life and therefore from episcopal authority which produces authoritative teaching, traditionally known as dogma. As Newman put it, 'The principal (sic) of faith', which is an act of the intellect, 'is the correlative of dogma, being the absolute acceptance of the divine Word with an internal assent.'⁹

The German contemporary of Newman, Johann Adam Möhler,¹⁰ was a Roman Catholic thinker who produced very similar ecclesiological doctrine based on the developing understanding and practice of the church. Barth, perhaps surprisingly to our ears, dubs Möhler's doctrine the 'Schleiermacherizing of dogma', or better the 'catholicizing of Schleiermacher'.¹¹ Barth points out that just as Schleiermacher regarded doctrine as 'religious affections set forth in speech', a registration of experienced faith, so this model of the church suggests a corporate version of that approach. The church lives and moves and has her being, mulling over the inherited tradition, passing it on, and sometimes having to restate it creatively for new circumstances. At such moments she too will express her own religious affections in speech, and then the *sensus fidelium* will look to the appropriate organ of the body for this purpose, the bishops and their ultimate primate – the Pope.

Barth's exposition of Möhler uncovers a definite family resemblance with the work of ARCIC. According to Möhler, 'there corresponds to the unity of the spirit of the church the unity of its body, to the mystico-spiritual and doctrinal inner unity, *in which the individuality of the believer has its place*, (my italics) the outer unity, increasingly represented in the bishop as the unity of the congregation, in the unity of the episcopate and finally in the unity of the Roman cathedra'.¹² Of particular relevance is the way the formal and official episcopal dimension of the church

9 *Essay* p 325. This logically gives the dogmatic statements of the church equivalent status to Scripture, both given by the Spirit's inspired supervision.

10 Möhler's two famous works are *Unity in the Church* (1825) translated and edited by Peter

C. Erb, Catholic University of America Press, Washington DC 1996; and *Symbolism* (1832) translated by James Burton Robertson, Gibbings & Co, London 1906.

11 *Church Dogmatics* 1/2, pp 560ff.

12 *CD* 1/2, p 561.

incorporates the inner spiritual dimension, where the individual believer finds a subordinate place.

Authority and infallibility

ARCIC's treatment of the indefectibility and infallibility of the church also bears strong resemblances to this idealist developmental model: what is true will emerge with the test of time and become accepted generally. The church of God will, in the end, not fall into error, despite appearances and temporary mishaps. Infallibility belongs to the *ecclesia docens* in the service of the whole church, and will produce what is consonant with Scripture. ARCIC assumes, quite uncritically, that this has happened in the service of the church through history. It is of course vital, therefore, to identify which is the one true church, to join in and be shaped by its ministrations. The primacy has developed *de jure divino*, not merely as a matter of human wisdom which has produced a useful agency for church life. ARCIC, Möhler and Newman argue that the Papacy is a *necessary* development to provide the topstone of the magisterial structure, which otherwise would tend to fragment.

The Gift of Authority emphasizes that the Papacy should be accepted in the context of collegiality and not in isolation, as did Newman. It only declares what is true to the apostolic tradition, including Scripture; it is ministerial rather than creative. Yes, there have been abuses of this ministry in the past, but that does not nullify the need and usefulness of it in the service of the unity of the faith. ARCIC accepts infallibility in principle but is a little coy about infallibility in practice: 'those charged with the ministry of oversight may together come to a judgement which, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with apostolic tradition, is preserved from error' (42). If the solemn pronouncements of the primacy are so very evident from the tradition and Scripture, one wonders why this declarative ministry is in fact so necessary. But, more important is the status accorded to such a declaration: 'such a judgement is a renewed expression of God's one Yes in Jesus Christ' (42). The deliverances of the Spirit assisted episcopo-papal college equate with the divine authority, to which the church says its Amen and which it 'receives' as it receives revealed truth.

When one looks at the actual solemn pronouncements binding on the Roman Catholic Church made by this primacy, they amount to the doctrine of papal infallibility itself in 1870, and two Marian dogmas, the immaculate conception and the assumption – none of which can be said to flow at all easily from Scripture, in contradistinction to the claims of the report. Moreover, the decree of 1870, declaring papal infallibility under certain conditions, made it very clear that this infallibility was self-grounding, not arising from the consent of the church,¹³ rendering ARCIC's stress on collegial synodality as the context for infallible papal decrees rather artificial in terms of current realities.

13 'ex sese, non autem ex consensu Ecclesiae',
Pastor Aeternus, ch 4 in *Decrees of the
Ecumenical Councils* ed. N. Tanner
(Georgetown University Press, Washington
DC 1990) 2:816.

The document's oscillating ambivalence between the ideal and the real was debated between Colin Buchanan, Bishop of Woolwich and the Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir Ali, a signatory of the report.¹⁴ Buchanan's careful examination found that the descriptions of the current papal function are never stated in the conditional as if needing modification. Nazir Ali pointed to the synodical stress set out in the document which speaks of the *need* for the Vatican to implement conciliarity and collegiality, and to conform to Scripture. However, ARCIC finally commends the present Pope's ministry *as exercised today*, and indeed commends Anglicans to take advantage of this ministry *prior to* institutional unification or reform of the Papacy. Yet observers of the Vatican know that regional and national synods of bishops are decreasingly powerful or significant, with little or no status in terms of teaching authority, according to the recent Vatican decree *Apostolos Suos*.

The report therefore sends mixed signals about theory and reality. In terms of the real world, what could this actually mean? If the Anglican ARCIC team took the step they boldly recommend, those who are ordained and consecrated would be instantly laicized, the Papacy not recognizing Anglican orders.¹⁵ It would mean acceptance of the whole Roman Catholic Catechism, since that is the authoritative teaching of the Papacy with its college of bishops. The report is not even a Uniate proposal, leaving a local regional church with its historic liturgy and doctrine, under the distant aegis of the Papacy. This is why Buchanan used the analogy of converted 'hijack' victims enthusiastically joining their hijackers. In practical terms it appears to mean that Anglicanism is handing itself over to its dialogue partner, moving to the other side of the negotiating table, simply abandoning the distinctive positions found in its formularies.

Episcopal collegiality and memory

The novel doctrine of an Anglican college of bishops hardly accords with what the Anglican Communion claims to be. It does not claim to be, exclusively, the world wide church and hence does not claim that its bishops constitute the college of bishops for the church catholic around the globe. It claims to be *part of* the catholic and apostolic church, and so the most it can claim is that its bishops are part of the wider church's college of bishops. As far as I know, this question (whether Anglicanism can actually claim a coherent college of bishops in the sense set out in this ARCIC document) has not been addressed by Anglican ecumenical theologians. Can it claim to be part of a wider college, when other possible members of the college – that is, Orthodoxy and Rome – do not accept its

14 *Church of England Newspaper*, 2 July 1999, p 9; 23 July 1999 p 7; 30 July 1999 p 7; 13 August 1999, p 7 for respective contributions and responses from Buchanan and Nazir Ali respectively; there is also an article there by a liberal Roman Catholic, Paul Collins, expressing concerns. An Anglo-Catholic response was set out by the Bishop of Basingstoke, Geoffrey Rowell in 'A Pattern of Primacy', *New Directions*,

December 1999, p 16 f; *The Tablet* has carried Roman Catholic and other responses, eg 15th May 1999, p 647.

J. Robert Wright, 'The Gift of Authority: contents and questions', in *The Anglican* October 1999, p 3f, is an incisive American analysis.

15 A judgement ringingly, even rudely, reinforced recently by the Vatican in *Ad Tuendam*.

membership? At the very least such an ecclesiological concept needs much clarification. Likewise the claim that General Synod is 'eucharistic' in character, as a means of interpreting it in terms of the Yes/Amen structure, looks artificial and forced. General Synod members do not see themselves on the receiving end of episcopal judgements equating to the divine side of the Yes/Amen binary line. The eucharistic Amen of thanksgiving to the grace of God in Christ is confused with assent to an episcopal-papal bureaucracy producing doctrinal formulations for the laity to receive as authoritative.

The doctrine of the episcopal 'ministry of memory' needs further exploration and explanation. In what sense can the bishops constitute a corporate memory bank? They are in a line of tradition, within the evangelical succession of the whole people of God, but the notion of the collegial ministry memory claims much more. Clearly today's bishops were not witnesses of the mighty acts of God in Christ nor direct disciples of the apostles. Memory seems a strange category, therefore, to use of the episcopal-papal collegiate teaching ministry. The ministry of memory looks extremely like the ministry of the teaching office of the church as defined in the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* of Vatican II, itself heavily influenced by Newman. That speaks of tradition and scripture flowing from the one wellspring, closely connected and inspired by the Spirit. 'To the successors of the apostles, sacred tradition hands on in its full purity God's word, which was entrusted to the apostles... Thus led by the light of the Spirit of truth, these successors can in their preaching preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known... The task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the church, whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on....'¹⁶ This expresses ARCIC's concept of episcopal 'ministry of memory' with crystal clarity.

Concluding questions

The Gift of Authority concludes that the Church of England now needs to follow Newman's steps and reappropriate the Roman papal primacy, from which it was mistaken to part. The picture of the Anglican Communion is that of an episcopal body, lacking proper identity until it repairs the damage done by the Reformation. The report in effect resolves the Tractarian problem of an Anglicanism wedded to episcopacy and rejecting its Protestant heritage, but not accepted by Orthodoxy or Rome. ARCIC strongly and urgently recommends adopting the primacy of Rome in order to regularize the anomalous episcopal situation. This will integrate Anglicanism into the Roman structures of authority, doctrine and practice, if the report means what it says and is not a coded rhetorical exercise of some kind. The plain question is whether ARCIC's argumentation is convincing. If it is, then

¹⁶ *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* chapter II, pp 9f, in *The Documents of Vatican II* ed. Abbott and Gallagher, Geoffrey Chapman, London-Dublin 1966, pp 117f.

ARCIC and its readers should, as Buchanan says, follow their consciences and submit to the God-given primacy, admitting that the English Reformation was a profound mistake.

ARCIC paints a picture of an ever-developing doctrinal tradition. The Reformation cut away thickets of erroneous superstitious practice which choked out the gospel message, using the canonical Scriptures as its shears. Does this ARCIC doctrine allow for *excision* of error by the one true, indefectible church that it postulates, without undermining the claims it makes for the teaching magisterium? Can it allow that the church may have erred in the past, and needs correcting now? In other words, can the word of God engage with the church's cumulative tradition in any meaningfully critical way? Or will the authoritative teaching office of the church, the college of bishops and pope, necessarily produce self-authenticating doctrine in the name of the apostolic tradition? The Marian dogmas, conspicuous by their absence from *The Gift of Authority*, and the dogma of papal infallibility itself, are the only concrete instances we have of infallibly-given teachings, which for Roman Catholics are to be believed *de fide*, as part and parcel of personal faith in Christ, 'faith' and 'the faith' being inseparably linked, as for ARCIC. The Anglican conscience needs to ask itself if it can agree, however loving their ecumenical intentions, to the truth of these proposals.

Anglicanism now finds itself in difficulties over the question of authority. ECUSA's refusal to adhere in any sense to the resolutions of Lambeth 98 means that Anglican Provinces seem to do what feels good to them. *The Virginia Report* adopted at Lambeth calls for some teeth for the Anglican Communion to keep Provinces in line. It may be that, pragmatically, the Papacy seems a useful mechanism for doing this job. But, with its historical record of many disastrous interventions in national church affairs, is this a pragmatic risk worth taking, or several steps too far?

Anglicans are faced with an extremely sharp fork in the ecumenical path with this report. To take it would be to achieve the Tractarian reversal of the Reformation of the English church, and withdraw completely from the Protestant identity and formularies of almost five hundred years. A more promising option might be to seek 'visible unity', or better, 'reconciled diversity', with the Protestant denominations with whom we disagree so little. This course is argued by Buchanan in his contributions to the debate noted earlier in the article. ARCIC bids the Anglican church to take a tremendous gamble, in effect telling it to place itself under the control of the Papacy and trust that somehow things will work out as a result. At stake ecclesiologically is the choice between a more or less clerically dominated church. At stake theologically is the displacing of Scripture as the official basis of doctrine by the predominance of the current teaching magisterium of Rome, however this is nuanced.

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