

The members of the International Commission for the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue welcome The Gift of Authority as a significant contribution to ecumenical dialogue. They would be grateful for elucidation of the following points arising from their initial reading of this Agreed Statement, which they will study further.

1. The Gift of Authority sometimes emphasises the responsibility of the whole people of God for discerning, actualising and communicating the Word of God (eg.28). Elsewhere it attaches such responsibility to the body of bishops (e.g. 47), and implies that the role of the laity is the passive one of recognising God at work in the bishop's exercise of authority (e.g. 36). The latter seems to imply the distinction between the 'ecclesia docens' and the 'ecclesia docta'. Is it possible that the laity might conclude that a particular piece of teaching is mistaken?
2. The specific ministry of the Bishop of Rome in the discernment of truth needs clearer definition. The Gift of Authority at times emphasises the ministry of the Bishop of Rome concerning the discernment of truth, while at the same time stating that any solemn declaration of truth is made within the college of those who exercise episcopate (47). Does he discern the faith of the Church in a process of synodical consultation? Universal primacy requires universal synodality.
3. The Final Report of ARCIC I deliberately avoided using the term "infallibility". The present ARCIC seems to have gone back on that policy by using the term "infallible" of the Church's teaching – which seems to be identified with the college of bishops' teaching (42). What is the significance of this change? In what circumstances is such teaching infallible?
4. The Gift of Authority speaks of the universal primacy of the Bishop of Rome, but does not mention universal jurisdiction. For both Anglicans and Orthodox, the latter is unacceptable, as denying the fundamental nature of the Church as a communion of local Churches. Does the primacy envisaged by the present ARCIC include or exclude universal jurisdiction?
5. The Gift of Authority states that the Bishop of Rome's authoritative teaching has no stronger guarantee from the Spirit than have the solemn definitions of ecumenical councils (47). In the view of ARCIC, what kind of guarantee do they have? Would not any guarantee require reception by the whole Church?
6. The Gift of Authority speaks of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Orthodox ecclesiology, like early ecclesiology, ascribes primacy to a local church rather than to the person of its bishop alone. How does ARCIC see the relation between the 'college of bishops' and the essential connection of each bishop with his local church? Does it understand the 'college of bishops' to be above the local churches?