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The Gift of Authority: A United, Reformed and Renewed Church?

In our previous issue, Tim Bradshaw offered a critique of the recent ARCIC document, *The Gift of Authority*. Here, Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali responds in its defence, arguing that it has been misinterpreted by its critics.

I was very pleased to see Tim Bradshaw's detailed critique of *The Gift of Authority* in the last issue of *Anvil*.¹ His summing up of the document is nothing short of masterly. The 'theological appraisal' and the concluding questions are, however, of a different order and there is a tendency towards the polemical. Since I am the only member of the Commission to have been mentioned by name, and I consider his account of my position to be less than adequate, I have decided to make a response to his article.

It should be clear at the outset that ARCIC has pursued its work on authority in the Church only because it has been expressly mandated to do so by the competent authorities in both communions. Resolution 8 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference, for example, asked ARCIC 'to continue to explore 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'. The need for further study in these areas was also expressed in the official Roman Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC.²

Bradshaw is one of several commentators who have asked about the relationship between the ideal and the practical in the *Gift of Authority* (GOA).³ Are Anglicans being asked to accept the Roman Catholic Church and its structures of authority as they are, 'warts and all'? The answer to this is that GOA works with a renewed vision of the Church in which primacy, collegiality and synodality are held together. Synodality is about structures for the discernment of the *sensus fidelium* among the faithful. It is about the insights of scholarship and of debate contributing to the development of such a consensus. Collegiality has to do with those who have a special role in teaching, articulating together, from time to time, the faith of the Church as a whole. This can take place in particular parts of the world or at a universal level. Consulting the faithful, as well as experts, is a necessary aspect

1 Tim Bradshaw, 'ARCIC III: The Gift of Authority', *Anvil* 17.3 (2000), pp 201-11.

2 *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988*, London, ACC, pp 210f. and

Response of the Holy See to the Final Report, CTS, London 1991, pp 11f.

3 Bradshaw, 'ARCIC III', p 209.

of such a task.⁴ Bradshaw does not like the term 'ministry of memory' applied to bishops but surely the teaching office implies rehearsing sacred history for the whole church both in Word and in Sacrament? This is what we find the Apostles doing in their proclamation of the Gospel and the building up of the Church. The Ordinal says explicitly that a bishop shares with fellow bishops 'a special responsibility to maintain and further the unity of the Church, to uphold its discipline, and to guard its faith'. The Prayer of Ordination also refers to the bishop as 'guardian' of the Church's faith and sacraments. The House of Bishops paper on Eucharistic Presidency, similarly, makes the point that the formal recounting of the mighty acts of God, in the context of corporate worship, needs to be restricted to those who are the acknowledged leaders in the Christian community. Saying the words of the institution at the Lord's Supper is an instance of exercising such a ministry. It has little to do with the 'episcopal – papal bureaucracy' so feared by Bradshaw.⁵ The exercise of primacy, whether regional or universal is *within* such a college of teachers. It is for the sake of discerning and declaring the faith which the Church has had from the beginning and *only* this faith. It must be, moreover, in strict fidelity to Scripture and Apostolic Tradition as it derives from Scripture. In today's world, there are numerous occasions when what is believed by all, everywhere and at all times has to be authoritatively declared.

In his summary of GOA, Bradshaw nods briefly at a most important aspect of GOA: *its view of the normativeness of Scripture*. In my article, to which he refers, I had pointed out that the agreement makes the Bible the ultimate test for determining the authenticity of any aspect of the Church's tradition. It is fidelity to the Holy Scriptures which enables both teachers to teach with authority and the faithful to receive this teaching from them. Anglicans should welcome this agreement because, for the first time since the Reformation, Roman Catholics have acknowledged explicitly the normative role of Scripture in the life of the Church. The document recognizes the place of teachers in the Church but places them firmly under the Word of God and requires them to teach strictly in accordance with this Word. The teaching of GOA on the Scriptures goes well beyond even the notable advances of the Final Report.⁶

There is what I have called a 'delicate ecology' between normative revelation, authentic teachers and reception by the faithful. The teachers must teach in accordance with divine revelation and having taken into account both scholarship and the *sensus fidelium*. The faithful both contribute to this articulation of the faith and receive it when it is faithful to Scripture.⁷

Bradshaw and others have criticized Anglican members of the Commission for allowing that a primacy of the Bishop of Rome might be possible under certain, specified, circumstances. But is this really such an innovation? Paul Avis has pointed out that the Anglican Reformers and later divines have often been willing to contemplate a reformed papacy. James I, in his first speech to Parliament, went

4 *The Gift of Authority*, Toronto, London, New York, Anglican Book Centre/CTS/CPI 1999, pp 22ff.

5 Bradshaw, 'ARCIC III', p 210; ASB Ordinal, CUP, 1980, pp 388 and 394; *Eucharistic Presidency*, CHP, London 1997, pp 42f.

6 *The Final Report*, SPCK/CTS, London 1982, Authority I, para 19 and Authority II, para 29 cf GOA, paras 19, 42 and 47.

7 GOA, para 43.

so far as to acknowledge the Roman Church to be 'our mother' although defiled with some infirmities and corruptions! Even Bishop Colin Buchanan, whose authority Bradshaw invokes, is willing to consider a reformed primacy 'on its merits'. Both the response of the Church of England to the *Final Report* and that of the House of Bishops to *Ut Unum Sint*, the letter from John Paul II about his own ministry, admit the principle of primacy and go on to speak of 'a personal ministry at world level in the service of unity'.⁸

Such statements have become possible because of a fresh awareness of the place of Peter in the NT, where both his frailty and his leadership of the Twelve are recognized (Matt. 16:16-22, Luke 22:31-32, John 21:15-19, Acts 1:14, 3:12, 5:7-11, 1 Cor. 15:5, Gal. 1:18 etc). There is also a new and ecumenical awareness that Rome came to be looked on as the Church founded on the martyrdom of SS Peter and Paul. In the early years it was known for its orthodoxy and for this reason its authority was accepted (this is shown, for example, in the way Leo I's letter was received at Chalcedon and the way in which it helped to maintain a balance in the Church's doctrine regarding the divine and human natures of our Lord). The special role of the Bishop of Rome emerged from such a context. Like bishops in general and the catholic creeds, this development was a response to specific circumstances but, like them, its roots can also be seen in the NT, particularly in the recognition of the need for universal authority and leadership (cf Acts 15).⁹

All of this is not to deny that many exaggerated and untrue claims have been made for the papacy, nor that many of the holders of that office have been corrupt and unworthy.¹⁰ Pope John Paul II has himself admitted the 'frailty' and 'weakness' of the Roman Pontiff and acknowledged the mistakes and 'infidelity' of the past.¹¹ GOA is aware of this history and does not endorse all of the claims made on behalf of the papacy (see also *Elucidation to Authority I* in the *Final Report* para 8). It does, however, agree that, in certain circumstances, the universal primate may declare the faith of the whole Church regarding a particular matter. Such a declaration must be in fidelity to Scripture and in communion with the whole Church throughout the ages and across the world. It will need to be received by whole People of God as consonant with Scripture and Apostolic Tradition. If this is 'infallibility' then all those who teach from the Bible teach infallibly in so far as their teaching is faithful to the Bible. The Anglican position that nothing may be taught as necessary for salvation unless it is taken from Holy Scripture, is specifically safe-guarded at this point. In his article, Bradshaw criticizes GOA's hope that a reformed primacy could begin to be acknowledged by Anglicans even before fuller communion is achieved between the churches. He does not, however, take into account the many provisos attached to this in GOA. Nor does he seem to realize the extent to which the Bishop

8 Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1989 pp 244. *Towards a Church of England Response to BEM and ARCIC*, CIO, London 1985, paras 236ff and *May They All Be One: A Response of the House of Bishops*, CHP, London 1997, paras 44ff.

9 See further Paul Empie and Austin Murphy (eds), *Papal Primacy and the Universal Church: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue*, Augsburg, Minneapolis 1974.

10 For a sympathetic account of the mixed history of the papacy see Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*, University Press, Yale 1997.

11 *Ut Unum Sint*, Vatican, 1995, paras 4 and 11.

of Rome already exercises a *defacto* primacy among Christians of gathering and leadership. Archbishop Runcie used to say that only the Pope could have gathered people of such different kinds at Assisi to pray for World peace. Also the Pope's initiative on the cancellation of debt for the Jubilee of the Millennium has made a huge impact on all the churches and, indeed, on world leaders and institutions. Whether we like it or not, the Pope is often regarded as 'the leader of Christians'.

GOA is looking for the beginnings of a reformed exercise of primacy which is collegial and synodal, not monarchical and dogmatic (see paras 60f).

Bradshaw seems to have a rather minimalist understanding of the faith Anglicans are required to believe. His distinction between *fiducia* (faith as trust or faith in relationship) and *assensus* (belief in doctrines) is valid, indeed essential. This same distinction was made by the schoolmen when they distinguished between the *fides qua* and *quae creditur*. He is wrong, however, in trying to drive a wedge between clergy and laity as far as assent to the Church's doctrine, liturgy and credal formulas is concerned. The Catholic Creeds, the Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Lambeth Quadrilateral are important for all, ordained and lay. So are teachings of the Lambeth Conference, catechisms and other forms of instruction. Naturally, the clergy have a special responsibility as teachers but Anglicanism should not tolerate any notion of 'double-truth': a diluted version of the faith for lay people and a more rigorous version for clergy.

At the same time, Bradshaw is concerned that fuller communion with Rome will jeopardize Anglican identity. This has, indeed, also been a concern for Anglican members of the Commission. Most of them see reconciliation in terms that would preserve Anglican traditions regarding worship, scholarship and discipline. They take heart from the statement made by Pope Paul VI that 'there will be no seeking to lessen the legitimate prestige and worthy patrimony of piety and usage, proper to the Anglican Church when the Roman Catholic Church – this humble servant of the servants of God – is able to embrace our every beloved sister in the one authentic communion of the family of Christ.'¹²

Finally, Bradshaw asks why the Anglican members of ARCIC do not submit immediately to Rome, as a consequence of their work! The reason is precisely that the new vision of the Church set out in GOA has not been accepted by the Vatican. Indeed, there are signs of regression from ecumenical commitment. The declaration '*Dominus Iesus*' from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does not say anything specific either about the Church of England or the Anglican Communion.¹³ It says, however, in general of the churches related to the Reformation that they are not 'churches in the proper sense' (*sensu proprio ecclesiae non sunt* – para 17). It allows that 'elements of the true church' (*elementa ecclesiae*) can exist in such bodies but it seems to recoil even from so recent a papal pronouncement as *Ut Unum Sint* (that they may all be one). It refers to the papal encyclical where it seems consonant with the teaching of the CDF but ignores John Paul II's explicit statement that 'to the extent that these elements (of truth and holiness) are found in other Christian communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them' (para 11). The

12 At the Canonisation of the 40 Martyrs of England and Wales, October 1970.

13 Declaration '*Dominus Iesus*', Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 2000.

encyclical also refers to the Churches of the Reformation as 'churches' (paras 64–65). Is the Holy Father using the term in its 'proper' or 'improper' sense?

The declaration offers no commentary on the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Ecumenism* which states that in the Anglican Communion elements of catholic faith and church order continue to exist (*fidem et structuram ecclesiasticam*). Interestingly enough, there is a reference to the 'special place' of the Anglican Communion and the Decree on Ecumenism in the communiqué of the recent gathering of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops at Mississauga, Toronto.¹⁴ Nor does the document offer any comment on Paul VI's reference to the Anglican Church as an 'ever-beloved sister'. The most that can be said is that the declaration is one side of an argument going on between the different dicasteries in the Vatican itself. Naturally, Anglicans hope that wiser and more ecumenical counsel will prevail.

The exercise of papal authority without sufficient grounding in the Scriptures, the lack of synodality and, indeed, as Bradshaw notes, its *discouragement*, unnecessary interference in the affairs of local churches, cults of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of the Saints, indulgences, the enforcement of priestly celibacy in the Latin Rite, and the lack of convincing theological reasons for denying ordination to women all show that Roman primacy is still not yet reformed and not yet scriptural enough for Anglicans to be able to accept it. There are, however, concerns about the present state of Anglicanism as well. Is there too much autonomy at local and provincial levels and are Anglican 'instruments of communion' robust enough to provide a slide into incoherence and even institutionalized schism?

Instead of endorsing the *present* structures of either church, GOA looks forward to a united Church which has been reformed in the light of the Scriptures and where those with responsibility for teaching do so in faithfulness to these Scriptures. It recognizes the need for teachers of the Faith (1 Thess. 5:12, 1 Tim. 5:17, Heb. 13:17), but it knows also that scholars and theologians are important in deepening our understanding of God's purposes. As we have seen, the whole Church is involved in both the formulation of the teaching and its reception as an explanation of the Gospel it has believed (1 Cor. 15:11, Gal. 1:9).

In such a renewed Church, the universal primate will have specific (and restricted) tasks of gathering the Church in various ways, of hearing appeals in previously agreed areas and of teaching in communion with the whole Church. Such a vision should not frighten anybody. It is, rather, reassurance that the Lord of the Church keeps us faithful to himself and renews us in charity and unity. Anglicans are well used to the exercise of such a primacy at the provincial level and, increasingly, at Anglican Communion level. Anglican ecclesiology leads inexorably to the recognition of *some* kind of universal primacy, provided that it is faithful to the scriptures and strictly defined in scope.

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14 See further *Decree on Ecumenism* Ch 3 para 13 in Austin Flannery OP *Vatican Council II: the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents*, New York, Costello, 1988, pp 463ff.

Christopher Hill, *The Decree on Ecumenism: An Anglican View*, Centro Pro Unione, Rome 1989.