SAATC Response to *The Gift of Authority*

23 February 2004

1. Introduction

1.1. The South African Anglican Theological Commission (SAATC) appointed its sub-group on Anglican-Roman Catholic relations to examine the ARCIC II document *The Gift of Authority* (1999) for its Anglican and ecumenical import. The task group comprised the following members: Canon Louis Bank (chairperson), Revd Dr James Harris, Mr Clint Le Bruyns, and Prof Augustine Schutte (RCC observer).

1.2. The group gathered on several occasions over a period of a year to discuss the document, with responses ranging from cautious optimism to general aloofness. The following response intends to offer an Anglican appraisal of the ARCIC document.

2. Appreciation

2.1. We commend the international commission for treating the question of authority, which lies at the very heart of church divisions and *ipso facto*, requires renewed attention in the ongoing search for visible unity between Anglicans and Roman Catholics (*Preface*). Authority has been addressed in earlier ARCIC dialogues as a formidable ecumenical obstacle (§1). Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey, and Pope John Paul II rightly stated in 1996: "Without agreement in this area we shall not reach the full, visible unity to which we are both committed" (*Preface*). We are therefore grateful to the commission for their role in facilitating a significant measure of theological convergence on the question of authority (§1).

2.2. We commend the international commission for situating the question of authority in the Church within the framework of mission and service. Notions of authority as oppressive and controlling are confronted and replaced with a new and more promising perspective of witness and love (§5). The document talks about authority as a gift of God that demands to be exercised with integrity and shared in love to contribute towards reconciliation and peace. (§6). It therefore opens the dialogue for continuing reflection by Anglicans and Roman Catholics on aspects in ministry that, while not uncontroversial, are framed anew against the Church's witness in the world.

2.3. We appreciate the opportunity to reflect critically on those areas requiring further exploration between both Churches on the path towards potential consensus, which the document identifies (§3) as follows: (1) the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and the exercise of teaching authority; (2) collegiality, conciliarity, and the role of laity in decision making; and, (3) the Petrine ministry of universal primacy in relation to Scripture and Tradition. The Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) urged the Anglican Communion's provinces to carefully and critically study these matters, "particularly with a view to considering any outstanding issues of ecclesiology and authority."

2.4. One of the central clarifications of nature of authority in the Church is expressed in §6 of the document. As a "further statement" on authority it seeks to clarify "how the gift of authority is inseparable from the response of the believer to the Gospel, how it is related to the dynamic of Scripture and Tradition, and how it is expressed and experienced in the communion of the Churches and the collegiality of their bishops." From an Anglican perspective primacy is set within synodality and not imposed upon it. Anglicans will only be able to accept the authenticity and validity of a Petrine primacy reformed in accordance with the clarification of the gift of authority proposed in the document.

3. Scripture, Tradition, and the Exercise of Teaching Authority

3.1. We agree with the biblical foundation the document provides for understanding the nature of authority. The document rightly asserts: "The root of all true authority is … the activity of the triune God, who authors life in all its fullness" (§7). This authority possessed by Christ "is that of the 'faithful witness'" (§8) as he lives out his authority in obedience to the Father at the service of humankind (§§9–10). In this regard, the document reminds us that authentic authority in ministry is not self-established or self-contained, but stems from the divine Godhead, is characterised as a life-giving and life-enhancing gift, and is directed towards faithful witness in Church and society.

3.2. While we agree that a believer's response to Christ involves and necessitates a further dimension of response to the Christian community (§§12–13), we are concerned that the document implies that the church's teaching is always assumed to be a faithful reflection of Christ's teaching, when it remarks: "The believer's 'Amen' to Christ becomes yet more complete as that person receives all that the Church, in faithfulness to the Word of God, affirms to be the authentic content of divine revelation" (§12). It is acknowledged that growing into acceptance of the faith of the Church may be "an experience of questioning and struggle' for the individual believer. We would emphasize that it is also so for the Church. As reformed Catholics, Anglicans have never accepted a form of magisterium that claims to provide final answers. Consequently there is greater facility and freedom to continue to re-form the life of the Church in response to the experience of questioning and struggle with the formulations of faith in its search for the fullness of truth. In the Anglican understanding primacy must be able to accommodate diversity and accept plurality in the search for truth.

3.3. We agree with the document's emphasis on Tradition as the process by which the revealed Word "is received and communicated through the life of the whole Christian community" (§14). This Tradition is none other than the Gospel of Christ who as "the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us is at the centre of what was transmitted from the beginning and what will be transmitted until the end" (§14). Moreover, "Tradition is a channel of the love of God" that makes it "both a treasure to be received by the people of God and a gift to be shared with all humanity" (§15).

3.4. We wrestle with Tradition in the context of Christian communion, however, where different interpretations of the Tradition portray a different reality. The document notes: "The process of tradition entails the constant and perpetual reception and communication of the revealed Word of God in many varied circumstances and continually changing times" (§16). It is on this very assertion that church division is forged, as this process is understood differently in various circumstances and times. Again, the problem of women's ordination is a noteworthy case in point. We therefore find the document somewhat idealistic at these points where, for example, it states: "Tradition expresses the apostolicity of the Church. What the apostles received and proclaimed is now found in the Tradition of the Church where the Word of God is preached and the sacraments of Christ celebrated in the power of the Holy Spirit" (§17). Real experience attests to an awkward scenario: both Churches claiming to be faithful to the apostolic Tradition, yet divided.

3.5. We agree with the document's emphasis on the lived-out Tradition. As it states, "The purpose of Tradition is fulfilled when, through the Spirit, the Word is received and lived out in faith and hope" (§18). In this regard, it challenges Anglicans to witness through its "proclamation, sacraments and life in communion" as simultaneously "the content of Tradition and its result" (§18).

3.6. We agree with the document's uneasiness with individualism in understanding God's revelation, but are concerned that an equally problematic communalism replaces it (§23). The role of prophetic individuals played a seminal role in recovering scriptural truth at different points in church history, most notably in the Reformation era. The document might be over-anxious on this point.

3.7. We agree with the document's emphasis on the reception of Tradition as "a gracious gift of God" but have reservations with the remark that "reception is at one and the same time an act of faithfulness and of freedom" (§24). In its pure form, the latter is true; in reality, it is problematic. Anglicans may be called upon to receive aspects of the Tradition as interpreted by Roman Catholics with which they cannot agree; in that sense it is unfair to regard reception as necessarily an act of faithfulness and freedom. We would agree, though, that "there may be a rediscovery of elements that were neglected" because of inadequate or misleading expressions of the Tradition in the past (§25).

3.8. We agree that "encounter with the living Tradition produces a variety of expressions of the Gospel" (§27). "Where diverse expressions are faithful to the Word revealed in Jesus Christ and transmitted by the apostolic community, the churches in which they are found are truly in communion" (§27). Anglicans appreciate legitimate diversity in church doctrine and praxis, and seek to practise mutual tolerance in the diverse communion. Anglicans struggle with the issue of centralised authority in Roman Catholicism, which seemingly invalidates the integrity of diversity. The document rightly refers to a variety of expressions of the Gospel, which we hope will result in mutual respect, tolerance, and recognition on such issues as the papal office. Its presence in Roman Catholicism and its absence in Anglicanism should not lead either Church to question the credibility of the other Church's faithfulness to the

Tradition. “The challenge and responsibility for those with authority within the Church is so to exercise their ministry that they promote the unity of the whole Church in faith and life in a way that enriches rather than diminishes the legitimate diversity of local churches” (§33).

4. Collegiality, Conciliarity, and the Role of the Laity in Decision Making

4.1. We agree with the document’s affirmation that the “people of God as a whole is the bearer of the living Tradition” (§28). It notes that “the discernment, actualisation and communication of the Word of God is the responsibility of the whole people of God. The Holy Spirit works through all members of the community, using the gifts he gives to each for the good of all” (§28). Moreover, “In each community there is an exchange, a mutual give-and-take, in which bishops, clergy and lay people receive from as well as give to others within the whole body” (§28). Anglicans find much agreement on the role of the laity in the affairs of the Church in living out Christ’s authority, but are not always convinced that this ideal is readily discerned in Roman Catholicism. On the contrary, we perceive a very restrictive or superficial involvement of the laity in their church matters. We hold dear the *sensus fidei* in the life of the Church (§29), and urge that “Those who exercise *episcope* in the Body of Christ must not be separated from the ‘symphony’ of the whole people of God in which they have a part to play” (§30), which often concerns us vis-à-vis the manner in which the primatial ministry in Roman Catholicism is exercised. The document rightly bases this on the missiological orientation of the Church: “They need to be alert to the *sensus fidelium*, in which they share, if they are to be made aware when something is needed for the well-being and mission of the community, or when some element of the Tradition needs to be received in a fresh way” (§30).

4.2. We agree with the document’s notion of synodality to indicate “the manner in which believers and churches are held together in communion” as they walk together in Christ (§34). The bishops no doubt play a pivotal role in leading the churches in response to Christ, where the faithful can “recognise God at work in the bishop’s exercise of authority, and also to respond to it as believers” (§36). Moreover, we agree that bishops are concerned for synodality in its various “expressions that have included a wide variety of organs, instruments and institutions, notably synods or councils, local, provincial, worldwide, ecumenical” (§37). However, we stress what the document states thereafter: “The maintenance of communion requires that at every level there is a capacity to take decisions appropriate to that level” (§37). We believe that this rightly underlines the resourcefulness of the laity in their different dimensions of ministry to participate in decisions, and that *ipso facto* there should not be unnecessary or unwarranted interference from the ‘higher’ levels of authority. In this regard, while we are not indifferent to weaknesses within the Anglican Communion, we are extremely troubled that bishops and the pope are often seen to overlook the value of subsidiarity and communality in their way of being together in Christ. We also affirm the value of collegiality that must be present within any relationship of ministry within the Church (§38).

4.3. We agree with the central place of the Eucharist in the Church as "the fundamental expression of the walking together (synodality) of the people of God" in the local church (§36).

5. The Petrine Ministry of Universal Primacy

5.1. We agree with the document's emphasis of the Church's "confidence in the promise of Christ that it will persevere and be maintained in the truth," which refers to the Church's indefectibility (§41). Anglicans are committed to the preservation of the Gospel's integrity and recognise the role all their members play in fulfilling this responsibility. We are cautious about this confidence in reality. While the Bishop of Rome does play a seminal role in maintaining the church in truth, we do not agree with his claims of infallibility, even though we stress the claim of indefectibility. The document states: "In some situations, there will be an urgent need to test new formulations of faith. In specific circumstances, those with this ministry of oversight (*episcope*), assisted by the Holy Spirit, may together come to a judgement which, being faithful to Scripture and consistent with apostolic Tradition, is preserved from error" (§42). While to some extent we might entertain the validity of this dogma, we are nevertheless perplexed at how, for example, the Marian doctrines emerged from this dogma in a way that troubles not a few Anglicans in its relation to Scripture. We value the role Scripture, tradition, reason and experience plays in our understanding of the mind of God, and we value opportunities of engaging the truth. With regard to the attribution of infallibility under certain circumstances to the Petrine primacy we re-affirm the statement in ARCIC I *The Authority of the Church* §32:

> *Roman Catholic tradition has used the term infallibility to describe guaranteed freedom from fundamental error in judgement. We agree that this is a term applicable unconditionally only to God, and to use it of a human being, even in a highly restricted circumstances, can produce many misunderstandings.*
> *That is why in stating our belief in the preservation of the Church from error we have avoided using the term. We also recognize that the ascription to the Bishop of Rome of infallibility under certain circumstances has tended to lend exaggerated importance to all his statements.*

5.2. We agree that, as far as the exercise of ministry by the episcopal college is concerned, the authenticity of their teaching as "individual bishops is evident when this teaching is in solidarity with that of the whole episcopal college" (§44), which highlights the prerequisite of collegiality in primatial ministry.

5.3. We agree that forms of primacy exist in both Churches (§45). While the Anglican Communion does not possess a papal office, it certainly reflects a primatial ministry through the Archbishop of Canterbury (§45). We affirm the document's call: "The exigencies of church life call for a specific exercise of *episcope* at the service of the whole Church" (§46). The document refers to the historical reality in which "the Bishop of Rome has exercised such a ministry either for the benefit of the whole Church … or for the benefit of a local

church," which should be welcomed as a gift and celebrated liturgically by both Churches (§46). Anglicans have historically wrestled with the papacy (§47), questioning its legitimacy and propitious nature as a structure of the church, but are here challenged to see the link between the papal office and its manifestation as a ministry that benefits the mission and communion of the Church. We are not convinced that this connection has ordinarily been discernible in the past exercise of popes, yet are cognisant of the valuable contributions recent popes have offered on this front. Moreover, while we do not celebrate the Petrine ministry formally in our liturgical settings, we are challenged by the document to consider the merits of including this practice in our formal worship, *inter alia* in Eucharistic prayers for Christian leaders. We do already conduct prayers for the pope in the Maundy Thursday liturgy. We recognise that Anglicans require further appreciation and exploration vis-à-vis how this gift of the Petrine ministry through the Bishop of Rome might be received (§47).

5.4. We agree with the document's concession that ministers "are marked by fragility"; "This authority is exercised by fragile Christians for the sake of other fragile Christians," which no doubt "can distort the human structuring of authority" (§48). We are aware of how this applies to the ministry of the pope and recognise Pope John Paul II's acknowledgement and confession in his 1995 encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint* (UUS 4). In this regard, the document rightly highlights the valid role of "loyal criticisms and reforms" (§48), which was particularly noted in the encyclical letter. Anglicans therefore fulfill an important role in assisting the Roman Catholic Church on the path of renewal and reform. We recognise the involvement we should take in seeking the welfare and improvement of the papal office in order that it serve the Church and society more effectively. We are, however, mindful that the document does not squarely treat this matter of papal reform, which we regard as a shortcoming. It is one thing to urge Anglicans to participate in the reform process, but quite another to be convinced that our feedback will be taken seriously. We continue to wonder to what extent, if at all, the papacy is willing to change. Anglicans, it must be stated, might potentially accept the Petrine ministry, though not in its present form. We feel that our next discussion of the Petrine ministry with Roman Catholics should treat the extent to which the Vatican is addressing our concerns. A renewed primacy depends on the following: that Anglicans be open to and desire a recovery and re-reception under certain clear conditions of the exercise of universal primacy by the Bishop of Rome (§62). In other words, Anglicans are not asked to give Rome a signed blank cheque, but are expected to be partners in the reformation of the Petrine ministry as it presently exists to what it ought to be for effective primacy at the universal level.

5.5. We agree with the issues facing Anglicans as identified by the document as reflecting well the scope of our needs and challenges (§56). As we explore "the development of structures of authority" among our provinces, we are still wrestling with the tension between maintaining diversity of opinion in matters of the Church and allowing decisions that bind the whole Communion (§56). The prevailing crisis in Anglican identity and ministry, especially concerning ordination and homosexuality, aptly reflects this unresolved tension. In the light of these challenges, we express hope that in mutual learning and

solidarity there is room for a new but credible way of walking together in Christ in our real, albeit imperfect, communion.

5.6. We agree that a renewed Petrine ministry could serve Anglicans in future as a gift of God (§§60*ff*), which the document envisages as follows: Upholds the legitimate diversity of traditions, strengthening and safeguarding them in fidelity to the Gospel (cf. §33); Encourages the churches in their mission (cf. §32); Exercises leadership in the world and in both communions, addressing them in a prophetic way; Promotes the common good in ways that are not constrained by sectional interests; Offers a continuing and distinctive teaching ministry, particularly in addressing difficult theological and moral issues; Welcomes and protects theological enquiry and other forms of the search for truth, so that their results may enrich and strengthen both human wisdom and the Church's faith; and might gather the churches in various ways for consultation and discussion.

5.7. We suggest that Anglican reception of the Petrine ministry of universal primacy could be guided in the following ways:

a. Strengthening the instruments of synodality within each province of the Anglican Communion:
   - Synods of Bishops
   - Provincial and General Synods
   - Primates' Meeting
   - Anglican Consultative Council
   - Lambeth Conference
   - Archbishop of Canterbury

b. Active participation of laity in the life and mission of the local church

c. Association of Anglican bishops with Roman Catholic bishops in their *ad limina* visits to Rome

d. Bishops of both communions meeting regularly at regional and local levels; participation in the international meetings of the other

e. Common witness in matters of faith and morals, or on issues affecting the common good

f. "Paired bishops" (sharing experiences of *episcope*, mailing lists, etc)

g. Teaching documents serving Anglicans

h. Continued study on proposals for Petrine reform

i. Developing new ecclesial models for exercising authority that would actualise one's shared convictions more accurately (cf. safeguards, procedures, etc)

j. Openness to other Petrine functions within the Anglican Communion

k. Liturgical inclusion

l. The openness of Roman Catholics to the resourcefulness of the Anglican model of authority and primacy

m. Detailing what constitutes a non-acceptable papacy for Anglicans

n. Roman Catholic acknowledgement and acceptance of the validity of Anglican orders and sacraments.

6. Conclusion

6.1. The SAATC offers this response with ongoing concern for various obstacles in the path of our ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic Church, but with appreciation for the work carried out by ARCIC as well as a continuing commitment to dealing with old problems in fresh and creative ways towards visible unity and joint witness.

Response to *The Gift of Authority*
23 February 2004
SAATC (ARCIC) sub-group

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY BY THE PROVINCES

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?

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

c) What consequences does the understanding in The Gift of Authority have for deepening Anglican-Roman Catholic relations in the future?

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

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

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

c) What consequences does the understanding in The Gift of Authority have for deepening Anglican-Roman Catholic relations in the future?

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 communion, 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?

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

c) What consequences does the understanding in The Gift of Authority have for deepening Anglican-Roman Catholic relations in the future?

Responses to the study to be sent to
The Director of Ecumenical Affairs and Studies
Anglican Communion Office, 157 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8UT UK
by 31 October 2003.