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BACKGROUND TO THE GIFT OF AUTHORITY

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After more than thirty years of conversations, official relations between the Anglican Communion and the Church of Rome are now almost at an all-time low. This is not because ARCIC (the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission) has not made considerable concessions to Roman Catholicism, whilst it has, but because of new developments, offensive to Rome, in some Anglican churches while the talks have been in progress – first the ordination and consecration of women priests and bishops, and now the consecration of an actively homosexual bishop in the USA and the solemnizing of homosexual unions in Canada. As a result, the Anglican co-chairman of ARCIC (Frank Griswold, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the USA) has had to resign, and plans for meetings have been suspended. Anglicans are very much on the defensive, and must not be tempted to make improper concessions as conciliatory gestures.

Background: the work of ARCIC and Rome's Reaction.

The Gift of Authority, was published in 1999. It was produced by ARCIC II, the commission set up in 1982 to continue the work of an earlier commission, ARCIC I, which was set up in 1970. ARCIC I produced a statement on the Eucharist, a statement on the Ministry, and two statements on Authority, which were all bound up in its *Final Report* of 1982. The statements on the Eucharist and the Ministry were unanimous, but the statements on Authority were not, because of the reservations of the Anglican members about the infallibility of the Pope and about the sinlessness and bodily assumption into heaven of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to which Roman Catholics are committed, following the authoritative promulgation of these dogmas in 1870, 1854 and 1950 respectively. The new third Authority statement, however, moves in a different direction from its predecessors, though it covers only the infallibility of the Pope and not the Marian dogmas, which are reserved for future treatment.

The first of ARCIC II's agreed statements was on justification, and appeared in 1987 under the title *Salvation and the Church*. Following the lead given by the adventurous Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng, it treated justification in a manner much more favourable to Reformation (and Pauline) teaching than Rome has traditionally done. The next year, however, the statement was condemned by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at Rome in a reply called *Observations*, which called for the statement to be revised and brought into conformity with the teaching of the (Counter-Reformation) Council of Trent. This was only a few months after a friendly reception had been given to ARCIC's work by the 1998 Lambeth Conference. In 1991 the Congregation followed this up with a reply to the *Final Report* of ARCIC I, entitled *Response of the Holy See*, calling for the report to be revised and brought into complete conformity with the teaching of Trent and Vatican I, and for Anglican reservations about Roman teaching to be dropped. (Vatican I must not be confused with Vatican II, but is the council which in 1870 promulgated the dogma of papal infallibility. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is the old Holy Office of Inquisition, and is the most important of the advisory committees surrounding the Pope: it is chaired by Cardinal Ratzinger, and responsible also for the intransigent statement of Roman claims *Dominus Iesus*, issued in the year 2000).

The Anglican Change of Policy.

Faced, now, with the realisation that Rome was interested in nothing except surrender, the Anglican members of ARCIC seem to have made an astonishing decision, which was to give Rome what it was demanding. In 1993 they published a report called *Clarifications*, which has not come before the Synod, but which responds to the Congregation's criticisms of the ARCIC I's statements on the Eucharist and Ministry by claiming that Anglicans agree with the Roman doctrines of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass. *The Gift of Authority* reflects the same revolution of policy, and not only withdraws the Anglican objections to papal infallibility, but proposes that, even in their separated state, Anglicans should accept the authority of the Pope (sections 60-63).

The reception of *The Gift of Authority* by informed Anglicans has naturally been pretty critical. Colin Buchanan's booklet *Is Papal Authority a Gift to Us?* (Grove Books) and Martin Davie's article 'Yes and No' in the FOAG symposium *Unpacking the Gift* (Church House Publishing) are particularly penetrating critiques.