

THE CHALLENGE OF GOSPEL AUTHORITY

*An Agreed Statement of the Australian
Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue*

2004



The Challenge of Gospel Authority
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Preface

At a time when the Anglican and Roman Catholic communions are being challenged in their relationship, it is good to highlight what we have in common. Today, perhaps more than at any other previous time, we realise the great extent of our shared Christian heritage. This realisation is a product of the effort to work through the issues that might once have been seen as separating us, rather than bringing us closer to each other.

This document endeavours to highlight some shared insights into authority, which may well lead both our communities to a greater mutual understanding and appreciation. The document is a joint undertaking by members of the two Churches.

In a humble way, this document focuses the thirty years of international dialogue that has been conducted through the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC). This document seeks to make more available to members of both Churches the insights of that Commission's statement on 'The Gift of Authority'. The authors of this document, the members of the Australian Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue (AUSTARC), believe that a truly

Christian exercise of authority will not only bring our communities closer together, but will bear witness to a model that would also be helpful to our contemporary Australian society.

So often, our communities, due to their human frailty, do not adequately let the divine mystery they embody, shine through. Nowhere is the Gospel humility more likely to be undermined by human pride than in the exercise of authority. And yet there is no other situation where Gospel humility can be so profoundly proclaimed as in the exercise of leadership. Jesus himself bears witness to this. This alone should be sufficient to stimulate us to reflect on and improve in our communities our exercise of authority.

This paper explores how our two Churches experience authority. It does this by reflecting on the sources of authority and the ways those sources might shape the exercise of authority. In so doing, it reveals differing approaches in the two communions, but also uncovers areas of common ground.

We hope that those who read this paper will be led to greater understanding, and a more profound exercise of the Christian attitude to authority that Anglicans and Roman Catholics share.

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Co-chairs of AUSTARC

April 2004

Introduction

Today's Australia presents a challenging environment for a discussion of authority. Although Australians value authentic leadership, and the exercise of authority that accompanies it, they tend to have little sympathy for authoritarian attitudes. The fabled Australian commitment to the 'fair go' challenges all of us not only to make space for the expression of a wide variety of opinions, but also to be wary of efforts to restrict rights and freedoms.

Australians accept authority if it is clear that its purpose is to promote the common good. Still, there can be long and intense debates about how far such authority should reach and the powers it should have. Even recent concerns about terrorism, which have shaken our traditions of openness and trust, have yet to alter fundamentally our conviction that authority must always be accountable and transparent.

While Australian Christians bring to the Church the national reservations about authority, they bring also an expectation that the exercise of authority in the Church will express the spirit of the Gospel. Authority in the Church, therefore, is subject to a demanding standard.

The exercise of authority in the Church, however, can fall tragically short of that standard. Thus, the misuse of power and the violation of trust evident in sexual abuse have caused distress and anger in the Church, but so too has the manner in which some authorities in the Church have responded to that misconduct. Where that response lacks compassion, openness, and acceptance of accountability, it damages the trust that members of the Church have in their ordained leaders.

It is, however, not only the exercise of authority in particular circumstances that causes authority within the Church to be problematic. Different theologies of authority can come between the members of any one Church, while also making it more difficult to achieve the reconciliation of the separated Churches.

Thus, within both the Anglican and Roman Catholic communions members remain either unclear or at odds with one another about key aspects of authority: How might the exercise of authority express the spirit of Jesus? Is Scripture the supreme authority in the Church? What authority do we give to creeds and other forms of the Church's teaching? Are bishops and priests the only members of the Church who exercise authority? How might authority and freedom exist together in the Church?

In addition, a cluster of authority-related concerns has long contributed to unease in the particular

relationship between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Indeed, the folk wisdom of each communion carries powerful caricatures about the dynamics of authority in the other communion.

Thus, Anglicans can have the impression that authority in the Roman Catholic Church is irredeemably centralist and monolithic. Roman Catholics, on the other hand, can believe that the Anglican Church either lacks a clear authority or has rendered its organs of authority totally ineffective by dispersing and decentralising them. Inevitably, such perceptions give rise to anxiety at the prospect of a closer relationship between the two communions.

There is, then, a need in the two communions for both a clearer understanding of authority and a more transparent practice of it. Those developments might promote greater unity within each Church and facilitate a closer relationship between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. While the task is substantial, there is also reason to be hopeful. To appreciate the grounds for hope, we need only to recall the progress already made.

For much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, sectarian controversies scarred Australian society and the witness of the Churches. Until recent times, therefore, Anglicans and Roman Catholics have not worked together to clarify and articulate a common theology,

either of the Church in general or of authority in particular. Although each Church has a long tradition of its own concerning authority, the tensions between the two communities ensured that the members of one Church had limited exposure to, or appreciation of, the wisdom that flowed from the other.

The fact that this paper is a joint undertaking by members of the two Churches indicates that the circumstances described above have changed. Today, Anglicans and Roman Catholics recognise each other as Christians called to a common discipleship. They have also developed a more collaborative spirit in social action, and, most importantly, a deeper appreciation of the need to pray with, and for, each other. In addition, more than thirty years of international dialogue – the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) – has not only prompted closer relations between the two Churches here in Australia, despite difficulties old and new, it has also encouraged progress towards full communion.

Reconciliation between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, which is an imperative of their common faith in the Holy Spirit, is especially important today when the two Churches face common challenges. These challenges arise both within the wider society, where the influence of Christian faith has declined significantly in recent decades,

and in the Church itself. The fact that the worshipping community in many parishes in Australia, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, is now older and smaller in number than it was a generation ago, is a powerful indicator of the challenges facing the Churches. While Christians lament the present situation of the Church, the Church's marginality can have positive implications if it leads Christians to a deeper authenticity in their own response to the Gospel.

The fact that many of their fellow citizens perceive Christian faith as beyond its 'use-by date' motivates Australian Anglicans and Roman Catholics to reject the illusory comforts of their divided and diminished state. In an age when cynicism about religion is prevalent, divisions between Christians do not help to convince people that God is the ultimate source of life and hope. In response to this realisation, the Churches have engaged in greater efforts at reconciliation within and between themselves. It is likely that the Gospel will have a more positive impact if the Churches not only proclaim it in a common voice, but also act together in offering a vision for contemporary Australia.

The authors of this paper, the members of the Australian Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue (AUSTARC), believe that our two Churches might offer such a vision by prophetically modelling a constructive practice of authority. The exercise of

wise, courageous, and compassionate authority in a more united Church, whose members embody fidelity to the Gospel, could be a gift to a divided and contentious society. Such action would also realise the Church's mission: to be a symbol of God's liberating love present in human history.

This document will explore possibilities for a liberating theology of authority and for its positive exercise in the Church today. Those possibilities, which build on a shared understanding of the sources, nature, and purpose of authority in the Church, offer our two communions an opportunity to respond to the challenges presented by their situation in Australian society today. As an 'Agreed Statement', this document, which draws on the work of ARCIC, particularly *The Gift of Authority* (1999), is more than a survey of the different ways in which the two communions perceive and practise authority. In fact, it aims to develop a common understanding of ecclesial authority in the Australian context.

If our document can convey something of the Gospel's approach to authority, it might help to promote a deeper willingness to heal divisions within and between the Churches. It might also lead the members of both Churches to move together beyond internal concerns back into the service of the Gospel in contemporary Australian society.

1

Gospel Authority

The word 'authority', like the word 'author', comes from the Latin *auctoritas*. This Latin word suggests causing or enabling something to grow. Within a community, then, authentic authority fosters the growth of individuals and of the community as a whole.

For the Christian, authority in the full sense belongs to God. It is God who is the source of all fruitfulness and growth (1 Cor 3:6-7). It is God who fosters life. In both creation and salvation, everything springs from the Source of All, through Jesus Christ in the life-giving Holy Spirit. The Christian view of authority has its foundation in the life-giving and life-fostering 'authoring' of the triune God.

Two important New Testament words are related to the concept of authority: *dynamis* and *exousia*.

The word *dynamis* is widely used in the New Testament; it is usually translated as 'power'. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter tells us that 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power'. He describes how Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, 'went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him' (Acts 10:38). The message

of salvation in the New Testament is a message of divine saving power: God has raised Jesus from the dead. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit, God brings new life and liberation to the world.

The word *exousia* is used of Jesus and is usually translated as 'authority'. The Gospels present Jesus as a person of amazing authority (*exousia*). At the beginning of Mark, we read: 'They were astounded at his teaching, because he taught them as one having authority' (Mk 1:22). This astounding authority is evident not only in Jesus' words but also in his deeds. His authority finds expression in acts of compassionate love that bring healing and hope to suffering people (Mk 1:27).

The authority of Jesus is radically different from the dominating authority of tyrants and bullies. It is not the lordly authority so often displayed by the rich and the powerful. Those who exercise dominating authority achieve their purposes through manipulation, coercion, and violence. They crush their opposition, ensuring the promotion of their own causes and the achievement of their own goals. Jesus flatly opposes this kind of authority:

You know that among the Gentiles, those whom they recognise as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but

whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all (Mk 10:42-44).

Jesus forbids the use of dominating power in his community; the overpowering of others is ruled out by his explicit command. Every exercise of authority in the community of disciples is subject to this standard.

Jesus, then, does not reject all authority. On the contrary, he embodies a unique form of authority and encourages it in others. His is an alternative form of authority: a Gospel authority modelled on the position of the slave. Jesus deliberately aligns himself with the powerless of his society, with slaves and children (Mk 9:33-37; Jn 13:3-16). The Gospels seem to be saying that it is only by going to the extreme of modelling oneself on the position of a slave or a child that one who is in authority will be able resist the dangerous seduction of coercive power.

The choice to stand with the lowliest is about respecting all people. The community of disciples is to be a new family, in which authority is exercised in a context of relationships of equality and mutual respect (Mk 1:34-35; 10:29-30; Mt 23:8-12). Something of this approach of Jesus is reflected in Paul's word to those who have been baptised into Christ: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, there is no longer male and

female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28).

In First Corinthians, Paul reflects on the profound truth that God's action to save was accomplished not through human achievement or success, but through the cross. God's powerful work of healing and new creation occurs in and through the apparent failure of Jesus' mission and the absolute vulnerability and shame of his death: 'We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God' (1 Cor 1:23-24).

In Philippians we are told that what is needed in the Christian community is 'the mind of Christ', who did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but 'emptied himself', taking the form of a slave 'becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross' and it is this self-emptying that leads to Jesus' exaltation and the achievement of the divine purposes (Phil 2:5-11). The cross defines the Christian use of authority. Authentic Christian authority cannot coerce, but can only speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). It will always be a self-emptying and vulnerable authority. Gospel authority is a relational authority that seeks to build up the other. It cannot enforce its way by violence, but can only persuade, invite, and witness to the truth.

Jesus not only embodies a relational form of authority and power, he also embodies true obedience. The word obedience comes from the Latin *ob-audire*, which means 'to listen' or 'to hear'. Obedience to God means listening to what God asks of us in the midst of life and seeking to respond faithfully. It involves the attempt to discern God's will in openness to the Spirit. Jesus lives his life in radical openness to the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1, 14). His obedience is not that of servility, but the obedience of true freedom. His 'food' is to do the will of the one who sent him (Jn 4:34; 6:38). In a similar way, the obedience of the true disciple is not that of subservience, but involves the desire to 'hear the Word of God and keep it' (Lk 8:21).

The same Spirit that anoints Jesus with power establishes the Church and provides gifts to each member for the good of all - 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' (1 Cor 12:7). The gifts and ministries of the Church exist for the 'building up' of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 14:12; Eph 4:11-16). The Spirit dwells in each member and constitutes each in the communion of the one Christ. Authentic authority and leadership in the Church, therefore, make room for the charisms of each member to flourish for the good of all.

In John's Gospel, Jesus speaks of our participation in the divine mutual indwelling: 'I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I in you' (Jn 14:20).

Jesus calls his disciples 'friends' (Jn 15:15) and those who are caught up in the mutual indwelling of the divine life are called to a radical love for one another that will be a powerful witness of the Gospel to the world (Jn 17:23).

In the fourth century, the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) would define the full and equal divinity of the Son and the Spirit with the Father. The mutual indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, and our participation in this by the grace of the Holy Spirit, would come to be described as *perichoresis*, a being-with-one-another in a profound unity-in-love. It is the radically equal and mutual relations of the Holy Trinity that provide the foundation for a Christian vision of the communion of the Church and of the exercise of authority within this communion.

2

From Jesus to the Church

Commentators describe the present era of Western culture as 'post-Christian'. Nonetheless, the figure of Jesus Christ remains attractive for many people. Even those who might reject any explicit religious interest can find appealing the richness of Jesus' humanity. In parables like the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son, in Jesus' proclamation of forgiveness, and in his life of self-sacrifice, people continue to find challenge and inspiration.

The Church, on the other hand, does not always hold the same appeal. Indeed, there is a strong climate of cynicism about the worth of the Church. Much of that cynicism arises from the destructive struggles over authority and doctrine that absorbed Christians after the Reformation.

More fundamentally, however, people can have reservations about the Church because they are unsure how to connect it to Jesus: If Jesus represents the model of what it means to live well, why would anyone, even religious people, want anything beyond Jesus? Why, particularly, would they want the Church with what seems to be its arcane rituals, impenetrable doctrines, and oppressive instruments of authority?

A preliminary task, then, to any discussion of authority in the Church is to address the question: Why the Church? An adequate answer to that question depends on understanding the implications of faith in Jesus as the Christ.

Christian faith acknowledges Jesus as more than a uniquely estimable human being: Jesus is the self-revelation of God in human history. In his humanity, Jesus makes present in our history the love at the heart of God's own life as Trinity. In Jesus, then, we see more than the human potential to be generous: we see divine love in a human form.

The Gospels highlight that Jesus' relationship to the God he named 'Father' was the source of his identity. Indeed, the Gospels portray the baptism of Jesus as an anointing by the Holy Spirit with the love of the Father: 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased' (Mt 3:16; cf Mk 1: 9-11; Lk 4:1,18). Jesus knows himself as the one whom the Father loves and he lives to return that love (Jn 4:34).

In response to that love, Jesus dedicated himself to the proclamation and exemplification of God's reign. Through the lens of the 'kingdom' or 'reign' of God, then, we gain a sense of what God offers to the whole of creation in Jesus. More than anything else, the kingdom expresses the abundance of God's own life, the love that flows between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and self-sacrifice of Jesus, the kingdom of God enters into human history. Jesus' proclamation and enactment of the kingdom brings transformation, healing, and hope to all those open to receive it. Through Jesus, we learn also that the love at the heart of God's reign is stronger than death.

Although Christian faith has no illusions about the reality of death, it rejects death as the endpoint of human existence. Through the death of Jesus, which expresses the fullness of his loving trust in the Father, the darkness of death is transformed. In the resurrection, which is the Father's return of the love that Jesus offers, death gives way to life. Nothing is more powerful than God's desire to give life.

The resurrection establishes Jesus as Lord and Christ (Rom 1:2). He is the one through whom the whole of creation can enjoy the fullness of God's own life, the fullness of the kingdom. As the ancient Christian tradition expresses it, Jesus, in his life, death, and resurrection is the means of our reconciliation with God, one another, and all creation (Col 1:15-20).

Even if we will know the fullness of God's reconciliation in Jesus only in heaven, that reconciliation is a present reality. Accordingly, it must be possible, here and now, for us to encounter, and respond to, the risen Christ. In addition, such an encounter must take place

amidst the everyday realities of life, within our sphere as embodied, historical, and social beings. Here we see a primary implication of the Incarnation: God in Jesus comes to us as we are. That truth also illuminates the connection between Jesus and the Church, a connection to which the Holy Spirit is central.

The Spirit reveals Jesus as the Christ. It is the Spirit who anoints the disciples of Jesus at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13), thereby initiating them into the new life of the risen Christ. In so doing, the Spirit forms them as the Church, the body of Christ, the communion of those who not only recognise Jesus as 'Immanuel' ('God-with-us'), but who also seek to live as his disciples and offer the world the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit, then, brings the Church into being as the communion of those who are to witness to Jesus as the Christ. The Spirit is at the heart of every element through which the Church proclaims Christ and responds to Christ: the Scriptures; the sacraments; the communion of believers; and the structures of authority and doctrine that serve the Church's unity in faith.

The presence of the Spirit establishes the historical and social reality of the Church as a symbol of Christ, a means of encounter with Christ. Just as the humanity of Jesus is central to our experience of God, so the humanity of the Church is inseparable from the presence of

the Holy Spirit in the contemporary world. There is, then, a parallel between the Incarnation and the Spirit's formation of the Church. In both, God offers us what we could not accomplish for ourselves.

Through the Holy Spirit, Christian faith understands the Church in the light of Christ. The Church is the communion of those who accept Jesus Christ as the revelation of God in history and as the source of our reconciliation with God. Members of the Church are to be symbols, living witnesses, of God's love for the whole of humanity, indeed the whole of creation. The Church, then, expresses the historical and social reality of our reconciliation with God. It expresses also the fact that God comes to meet us as we are, rather than in some invisible or merely interior and private way.

Although the Spirit of the risen Jesus animates the Church, Christians cannot take the Spirit for granted, but must always be willing to embrace that Spirit, to allow the Spirit to work through them. Without that openness to the Spirit, itself a response to the working of the Spirit, Christians can act in ways that obscure God's presence. Hardness of heart, envy, and the expressions of bitterness that create division can grieve and stifle the Spirit (Eph 4:30-32; 1Th 5:19), ensuring that the Church witnesses to the death of God, rather than to the living Christ.

The members of the Church, therefore, never outgrow the need for that conversion that brings about personal and communal transformation. While the failure of Christians to be just or compassionate is always damaging, their willingness to acknowledge those failures, seek forgiveness, and aspire to a more generous way of living can be a powerful witness to the Spirit of God alive in the Church.

The answer, then, to 'Why the Church?' centres on Jesus Christ. The Church exists through the Spirit of the risen Jesus in order that there might be in human history a living witness to the God of Jesus Christ. To be part of the Church is to accept not just the reconciliation achieved in Jesus Christ, but also the invitation to be both the sign and instrument by which that reconciling love becomes tangible for others. The link to Jesus Christ is also the basis for all authentic authority in the Church.

Membership of the Church is never less than both a gift and a project in which all believers can participate. All authority in the Church, whether exercised by the individual believer or ordained ministers, is to serve this purpose.

3

The Authority of the Spirit: The Bible, the Creeds, and the Sacraments

All authority in the Church depends ultimately for its legitimacy on faithfulness to the Holy Spirit. It is in the Spirit, who completes the revelation of God's trinitarian love, that we encounter Jesus Christ, who has reconciled us with God and brought us together as the people of God, the Church. Since the Holy Spirit is thus central to our lives as Christians, we need to clarify both how we experience the Spirit and how we might respond to the Spirit.

The Christian tradition has always named as 'grace' the movement of the Holy Spirit in each person. Today, there is a renewed appreciation that the grace of the Holy Spirit is neither an object nor something quantifiable. It is, rather, an invitation, one interwoven with our whole human experience, to a deeper communion with the God of Jesus Christ, the rest of humanity, and the whole of creation. The new creation in Jesus Christ begins here.

Those who form the Church do so in response to the Spirit. Through our communion in the Church, the Spirit draws us more deeply into the trinitarian life of God and unites us with one

another in our common mission as disciples. Christians, therefore, live authentically when they seek to be open to the Spirit in all that they do. Through the Spirit, the members of the Church can become symbols for the world at large of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. That hope, which we manifest in forgiveness, compassion, and our commitment to justice, is the product of the Spirit at work in us.

The unity of the Church and the holy lives of its members are also crucial forms of witness to the hope that the Church has in Christ. The Spirit, who works particularly through the Scriptures as the Word of God, the authoritative teaching of the Church, and the sacramental life shared by Christians, guides the Church to both unity and holiness.

The Bible is the gift of God to the whole Church and is to be interpreted within the living tradition of the Church. What makes the Bible authoritative for the Church is its capacity to mediate God to us, individually and communally, in the present. The Church professes that the Holy Spirit's inspiration is central not only to the text, but also to the reading of it within the community of faith. The Bible, therefore, is both the primary witness to God's self-revelation and a privileged vehicle for our present encounter with God.

When we approach Scripture in faith, the Spirit in our hearts, the same Spirit who guided the

writing of the text, not only enables us to understand the text as an expression of God's self-revelation, but also calls us to a deeper trust in the God of Jesus Christ and to a more authentic discipleship. Thus, the Bible remains a source of encouragement and challenge for Christians. For this reason, the faith of the Church affirms Scripture as 'the Word of God', as the expression of God's authority in the Church.

The Bible is, in every age, the norm of the Church's faith. This is so as the Bible is our primary means of access to the apostolic faith, which itself builds on Israel's faith in the God of the covenant made with Moses. The 'apostolic dimension' of faith expresses the Church's permanent dependence on those who shared the life of Jesus, those whose witness enables us to identify and understand the Holy Spirit shared by every believer and generation of believers. The Bible, then, is not simply an ancient text, but the witness to the Spirit-inspired faith that is both ancient and ever new. Anglicans and Roman Catholics share the conviction that the Bible is essential to Christian faith.

Faithfulness to the Bible's apostolic witness, however, requires that we do far more than cite chapter and verse of the scriptural text to support our ideas or justify our actions. Faithfulness requires that we open our hearts to the Spirit who speaks to the Christian community through the words of Scripture. We must also be prepared to

follow where that Spirit leads. In short, the authority of Scripture is inextricably linked with our openness to conversion.

Since the unity of the Church is a sign of the Spirit, Christians need ways to discern not only a common faith, but also a faith that has its foundation in Jesus Christ. In addition, that faith must seek authentic contemporary expressions of Christian discipleship. These needs provide the context to understand both the creeds and, more broadly, the structures of authoritative teaching that make a claim on all believers.

The Church lives always from the faith that comes from the apostles, the first witnesses to what God has done in Jesus Christ. While all believers share in that faith through the Spirit of their baptism, the Church has, at different times in its history, articulated its faith in creeds and doctrinal statements in order to preserve the unity of the communion and to resolve disputes.

The ancient creeds, then, continue to guide the Church's faith. Like the Bible, the creeds are subject to ongoing interpretation and appropriation in new situations. Authentic discernment of their meaning, no less than the application of it in the present, requires a longing to receive the Spirit in the present. All believers have a role in discerning how to express, in a new context, faithfulness to the witness of the New Testament and the creeds.

In both the Anglican and Roman Catholic communions, bishops have a particular responsibility to serve the Church through their oversight of the Church's unity in faith. In the Anglican tradition, this responsibility is exercised through synodal structures, where bishops, clergy, and laity together participate in theological decision-making in order to respond to the Spirit. In the Roman Catholic tradition, there is a special role for the college of bishops, which, with the Pope as its head, presides over the unity of the Church.

While the two communions differ in the particular ways in which their instruments of teaching and leadership operate, they share a common desire to respond to the Spirit by preserving and developing a communal faith that is genuinely apostolic. The authors of this document believe that the practices of each communion have something to teach the other.

The call to conversion and authentic discipleship that is central to the Bible and the creeds finds its echo in the sacraments. The sacraments too provide a means of encounter with God through the Holy Spirit. Through words and actions, the sacraments assure us that there is a God who loves us, they invite us to renew our trust in that God, and they send us to live our discipleship in the world.

Just as Scripture is not a magical word that we invoke to control God, so too the sacraments are

not magical actions that enable us to manipulate God. They do, however, convey the healing, reconciling, and life-giving presence of God's Holy Spirit. The sacraments make use of the familiar and ordinary – bread, wine, water, oil, and words – as vehicles for the extraordinary – the Spirit of God. They reflect the fundamental truth of the Incarnation: that God's presence in our world is intimately related to our daily realities. Through these everyday elements, God comes to meet us, to assure us that we are loved, and to encourage and empower us to spread God's blessings to others.

Anglicans and Roman Catholics each have a rich liturgical tradition. Rejoicing in our common baptism, both communions prize the sacramental life, above all the celebration of the Eucharist, as authoritative for their relationship with God.

As symbols of the Spirit, the Bible, the teaching of the Church, and the sacraments communicate the presence of God through the human and the historical. They all disclose their fullest meaning within the communion of faith, in which they share an authoritative place because they call us to conversion and invite us to a deeper realisation of discipleship.

4

The Authority of Disciples

We have seen that 'gospel authority' shines with God's love and justice. It is most clearly seen in the self-giving of Jesus Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection. It is expressed in the Church through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Such authority serves to promote in the world the Church's witness to the reconciling love of God in Christ.

The Church is a community of disciples. Within this community, Christians share in the authority of Jesus. Within the Christian community, each person is a disciple of the risen Jesus, and is empowered by the Spirit to live in real and permanent communion with the Lord. In baptism, the believer participates in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and receives grace to 'live as a disciple of Christ, fight the good fight, finish the race, keep the faith' (Anglican baptismal liturgy, 1995). Our discipleship of Jesus becomes our response to the gracious fidelity of God.

Following baptism, disciples continue their life in Christ in common prayer and worship, in the eucharistic communion of the Church. Together we follow the one Lord as pilgrims and companions.

All disciples are called to holiness, called to respond to the Spirit of God in their own spiritual journey, to live the Gospel in daily life, and to build up the Church. As disciples called to live the Gospel in everyday circumstances, our lives, individually and together, must reflect the vision and the values of the Gospel in the concrete historical reality of each moment.

To be a believer in the God of Jesus Christ is also to be a doer. It is to live, to act, and to respond in our world, according to the pattern of Jesus Christ. All disciples are also called to build up the communion of the Church. The life of disciples is marked by charisms: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good' (1 Cor 12:7). As gifts of the Holy Spirit, charisms are for the building up of the Church, so that the Church as a whole may bear faithful witness to our God. Some members are called to designated ministries of care and service, and special ministries of liturgy and music. Some are called to participate in decision-making in councils and synods of the Church. All are called to serve God in daily life.

So the authority of disciples is authority to serve: to serve the communion of the Church and the community of the world. It is authority to proclaim the Gospel that has given life to the disciple and can give life to others, who are also called to become followers of Jesus Christ. It is

authority to do justice, and to celebrate the mercy and abundant life that are signs of the reign of God. This God-given authority belongs to every Christian disciple. It exists in communion with, and complements, the God-given authority of ordained leadership within the Church.

In every community where Scripture is read and the sacraments are celebrated, there are disciples whose lives do faithfully show the authority that comes from exercising the Holy Spirit's gifts in the communion of the Church. What might this authority of disciples look like?

Margaret does not hold any official positions in the parish and she rarely speaks up in meetings, yet her presence in a gathering brings a spirit of discerning prayerfulness to any matter that comes up for discussion. She has a long history in the parish, and some key moments in that history were also times of great personal suffering. Many knew her twenty years ago at the time when her teenage son was tragically killed. Others knew her and her husband in more recent years, when he was dying of cancer in his early 60s. Those who have joined the community since then may not know just how Margaret came by her present depth of spiritual experience, but, nonetheless, they recognise it.

Margaret's theological education is confined to basic parish exposure to preaching and liturgy and the occasional study group, but she makes

deep sense of it all through a prayer life that is both unselfconscious and passionate. She will say that she wrestles with God. She will testify to the reality of death and resurrection, not just as an article of faith, but as a present reality. A rebuke or a blessing from Margaret is given with gentleness, and is almost impossible to resist or deny. People who need God's help often go to Margaret. Her companionship is a bridge for them into the presence of God.

Margaret is an authentic embodiment of discipleship. Her charism we might identify as companionship, and her discernment we might see as coming from her experience. Margaret's authority we can certainly see as ecclesial, grounded in and pointing to the communal life of the Church.

The Authority of the Ordained

Both the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches have a threefold ordained ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons. While the two communions emphasise different aspects of those ministries, and while the Roman Catholic Church has yet to accept the validity of Anglican orders, it is true of both Churches that ordination brings with it the exercise of significant authority.

That authority puzzles many people, both in the Church and beyond it. Since the Church is a communion whose every member is to live the Gospel, since all believers share equally in the life of the Spirit, the authority of ordained ministers can appear to be elitist, even divisive.

Compounding the puzzlement at the unique authority of the ordained is the fact that ordained ministers are not necessarily the most talented, holy, or competent members of the Church. It is imperative, therefore, to clarify not only what accounts for their authority, but also the nature of that authority. In order to do so, the proper starting-point is what the Church believes about the ordained ministry.

The faith of the Church regards the ordained ministry as a product of the Holy Spirit's initiative.

As such, the ordained ministry shares in the symbolic function of the Church itself and its witness to Jesus Christ. Just as the Church is an effective sign of God's presence in Christ, so ordained ministers represent both the communion of the Church and the faith that has its foundation in the apostolic tradition. The ordained ministry, therefore, is a reminder that God's presence to us is not merely interior and private but finds an expression in human beings and their history.

In being official and public symbols of the Church's communion, ordained ministers are symbols of the Spirit who gives life to the Church. Seen from this perspective, ordained ministry is a gift to the Church, a reminder to us that none of us can provide for ourselves all that we need in our relationship with God.

Ordained ministers are called to represent Jesus Christ. While it is certainly true that their link to Christ gives ordained ministers authority, it is the authority to serve the communion and mission of the whole Church. The authority of ordained ministers, then, is that of the Gospel they serve, not their own authority.

Ordained ministers are to support all believers on their pilgrimage to the fullness of God's Kingdom. They do so by proclaiming the Word of God, presiding over the community's worship, ensuring the pastoral care of those members who are in

need, and by offering encouragement, direction, and challenge to all the baptised, who are the primary bearers of the Gospel in the world.

As ministers of Christ and the Church, ordained ministers are not free to impose their own agenda on the life of the Church. They are to proclaim the Word of God, preside at sacramental celebrations of the reconciliation between God and humanity that Jesus Christ accomplished, and invite people to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. In short, ordained ministers are to lead people to God, not to themselves.

This means that ordination is less a validation of their strengths, but of their need for the Spirit. Ordination confirms the fact that only the power of the Spirit can enable ministers to fulfil their role in the Church. It is true, therefore, that the authority of ordained ministers is not dependent on their personality or even their abilities.

On the other hand, their dependence on the Spirit does not imply that ordained ministers are merely ciphers or that they have a licence for mediocrity. Just as all baptised people can witness authentically to the Gospel only if they remain open to the Spirit, so ordained ministers are to grow in the life of the Spirit.

Ordained ministers will more deeply express the wisdom, compassion, and justice of Jesus Christ if they embrace the call to wholeness and holiness

that is inseparable from the Gospel they proclaim. The most authentic ordained ministers, therefore, will be those who listen to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Since ordained ministry is a gift of the Spirit, members of the Church cannot claim as their right or due the authority that comes with ordination. Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics recognise that it is the Church, in the person of the bishop, who ordains to ministry. That action takes place only after a significant period in which the Church seeks to discern the movement of the Spirit in those who offer themselves as candidates for ordained ministry.

The unique role of ordained ministers embodies the particular way they are to live the call to discipleship that is at the heart of Christian life. Ordained ministers, therefore, are never less than disciples of Jesus Christ; they are always part of a communion of disciples, all of whom draw life from the Spirit. This means that it is not possible to understand ordained ministry in isolation from the discipleship of all baptised believers, the bedrock of the Church's mission. Authentic ordained ministry, then, is best expressed within the communion of faith. The decisions and deeds of those ministers who act in isolation from other believers, or who aspire to be dictators with unrestricted power, misrepresent that ministry.

Indeed, the efficacy of ordained ministers will be most evident in communities where all members

are seeking to live their baptismal commitment. Thus, the ministry of deacons thrives when a spirit of loving service characterises the communities they serve. Similarly, the priestly ministries of proclamation and presiding flourish where the members of a community of faith are open to the Word and desire to respond to the Gospel in their everyday lives. In the same way, the essential episcopal ministry of nurturing the Church's unity in faith can be effective only when that unity is a priority for every Christian.

In our present moment of history, the authority of ordained ministers is more susceptible than the authority of other disciples to observation, description, and delimitation. In part, that fact is a reaction against the failure of ordained ministers to witness to Christ in their exercise of authority and in their treatment of other people.

Inevitably, such failures breed cynicism about the claims of ordained ministry in particular, but also about the claims of the Church at large. The recognition of the damage done by such failures, however, can stimulate a renewed spirit of conversion amongst ordained ministers, no less than amongst all members of the Church. That conversion can renew ordained ministry as a symbol, for the Church and the world, of God's gift of reconciliation in Jesus Christ.

Moving Forward Together: An Authority that Listens and Discerns

Australians are often suspicious of those in authority. While this can be healthy, in so far as it involves an egalitarian ethos and a rejection of self-serving, pretentious and authoritarian attitudes, it can also end up in unhealthy cynicism.

We believe that Australia needs good leaders in all fields: in politics and industry, as well as in education, science, and the arts. The promotion of that leadership concerns us all. While maintaining a critical stance before all abuses of authority, we need to move beyond our cynicism and the 'tall poppy' syndrome in order to be willing to foster, support and applaud those who offer creative leadership.

In the life of the Church too we need to recover a positive notion of leadership and authority. The positive view of authority that this document endorses is that of an authority that listens, that is open to the Spirit. Of course, such a positive notion of authority will need to include a critical awareness of the ever-present danger of the abuse of authority. It will need to be alert to the ways in which power is misused in the life of the Church.

It will involve being prepared to challenge the misuse of authority. On the other hand, it will also see authority as a precious gift of God to the Church. It will value this gift of God because it enables us to hold fast to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to live with each other in genuine ecclesial communion.

To follow Jesus means giving authority to him and to his Gospel in our lives. It also means giving authority to the Church as the Body of Christ. We are convinced that, in Australia at this time, there is need to rediscover a positive and life-giving notion of authority in the Church - both in the authority practised by the entire baptised People of God and in the authority practised by the ordained. We believe too that we are called to make our contribution to the work of ecumenism in Australia as we search for common ground between our two Churches on authority.

One of the three central ideas of this common statement concerns *the authority that comes from baptism*. As part of the communion of the Church, each Christian is called by Baptism to witness to Christ in the world and to participate in the life of the Church. This call and authorisation comes from Christ himself. Each Christian is called to be part of the living tradition of Christian faith. Through their incorporation into Christ, everyone who seeks to live as faithful members of the Church shares in the living sense of the Christian

faith, the *sensus fidei*, in communion with the whole Church.

Each baptised person receives gifts from the Holy Spirit for the good of the whole Church. These gifts or charisms of the Spirit include talents that enable Christians to witness to Christ and to promote justice, peace, and compassion in the wider Australian society. They include also specific gifts given to contribute to the life of the Church, charisms that can blossom into a variety of ministries. Authority in the Church involves calling forth these gifts, fostering them, and celebrating them. The mission of the Church, then, depends on the participation of the whole community.

Accordingly, synodal structures are important because they have the capacity to enable the whole Church to listen to the Holy Spirit at work in individual Christians as well as in the gathered communion. We are conscious that the synodal structures of the Anglican Church may need reform and those of the Roman Catholic Church may need development in order that our Churches might be better able to listen to the Spirit.

A second major theme of our agreed statement concerns *the authority of the ordained*. Both of our Churches are episcopal. Both give a unique authority to the ordained to safeguard the Gospel and to embody and promote the communion of the Church. Both believe that while the charisms

of the Spirit are given to the whole Church as the Spirit sees fit, those called to ordained ministry have an important role in discerning the Spirit and in ordering the use of charisms for the good of the whole communion.

Promoting a positive view of the authority of the ordained in the Roman Catholic Church is made more complex by the perception of its excessive centralism and top-down authority. Promoting a positive view of the authority of the ordained in the Anglican Communion is made more complex by the perception of divisions between bishops over important issues. In addition, the authority of the ordained in both our Churches suffers because of the scandal of sexual abuse and the response to it by those in authority in the Churches.

We believe that reform of our churches in response to the damage done by these issues might involve three positive steps: first, a strong and public commitment to a Gospel view of authority that rejects all 'lording it over' others and takes the position of a servant; second, a commitment to patient and long-term renewal of the Church, which involves building attitudes and structures of participation, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church; third, a long-term commitment to building up attitudes and structures of unity, particularly in the Anglican Communion.

A third theme of our work together concerns *the relationship between our two Churches on the issue*

of authority. Perhaps the most important thing that can be done to bring our Churches closer together on the issue of authority is to work at various levels on the two issues mentioned above – structures of participation and structures of communion. *The Gift of Authority* notes that the Lambeth Conference of 1998 resolved to strengthen instruments of communion amongst Anglicans. It notes too that the Roman Catholic Church, especially since the Second Vatican Council, has been gradually developing more synodal structures. Synodality, in this sense, refers not only to councils and synods at various levels of the life of the Church, but also to all the pastoral practices that build up communion and collegiality.

The Gift of Authority advocates fuller implementation of both these developments. It challenges both Churches to reconsider the issue of universal primacy in the light of Pope John Paul II's invitation to dialogue about this office. *The Gift of Authority* also calls Anglicans and Roman Catholics to build up our existing communion and make it more visible. We believe that these issues need much further discussion in the Australian context. Since that discussion will involve controversial areas, it needs to proceed in a spirit of ecumenical commitment and Christian charity. We believe that our Churches in Australia can contribute to thinking and acting on these issues as we move forward together.

We conclude by affirming our belief that at the heart of a renewed approach to authority in the life of the Church is the issue of listening and discernment. We think that Australians will respect authority in the Church when it is clearly perceived to be listening to the Spirit. Such an authority will be one that ponders the Word of God in the light of the Spirit. It will listen to indigenous people of this land and learn from them. It will be an authority that stands with the poorest among us. It will be an authority that witnesses to reconciliation and to peace.

Within the life of the Church, it will be an authority that listens to what the Spirit has to say in both assertive and quiet voices. It will be a courageous and compassionate authority. It will be an authority that remembers and gives witness to Jesus who washed his disciples' feet and then said: 'So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you' (Jn 13:14-15).