

17.12.80
9.30 pm.

7. A comparison of the preceding paragraphs 5 and 6 shows that there is significant common ground shared by Anglicans and Roman Catholics although the term 'infallibility' is an unsolved difficulty. It is not in dispute that the Church can make a decisive judgement in matters of faith (provided it be consonant with Scripture) and so exclude error. This judgement is normally given through synodal decision, but in special circumstances the primate acting in communion with his fellow bishops may articulate the decision even outside a synod. Although ~~the~~ reception by the people of God does not confer authority on a definition, the assent of the faithful is the final sign that the Church's authoritative decisions in matters of faith have been truly preserved from error by the Holy Spirit.

8. Anglicans and Roman Catholics agree that the faithfulness of God protects the Church from irrevocable commitment to error in essential matters of faith. In order to formulate its teaching in defence of the proclamation of the Gospel the Church had recourse to ecumenical councils and primatial sees. Only when a genuine balance is struck between conciliar and primatial authority can the Church fully discharge its teaching office. Misunderstandings have arisen from the impression that preservation from fundamental error belongs exclusively to a particular office rather than to the whole Church. Other misunderstandings have derived from the false assumption that such authoritative institutions must have the effect of stifling the freedom of the Spirit to inspire other agencies and individuals. It is clear, moreover, that the effective fulfilment of their responsibilities by these organs is impaired by divisions among Christians.

(9) (In regard to the two Marian definitions, to say that ~~by grace she~~ ^{by grace} Mary was prepared to play a crucial role in the incarnation and life of Jesus Christ and that her glory in heaven is proportionate to the honour God gave her on earth, is a confession of faith with an obvious kinship to the defined faith of Roman Catholic believers. Christian understanding of Mary is in no way divorced from the doctrines of Christ and the Church; and the question between us is that of the appropriateness and need for the Church to make statements of essential doctrine in Marian rather than directly Christological terms.)