What follows is the text of an address given by the Archbishop of Canterbury to a symposium at the Gregorian University in Rome, hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, first president of the Council, 19 November 2009

This text includes in brackets passages that because of the constraints of time it was not possible to deliver in the symposium session itself.

Since the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, the Roman Catholic Church has been involved in a number of dialogues with other churches – including with the Anglican Communion – which have produced a very considerable number of agreed statements. This legacy has been brought together in a recent publication by the Vatican department to promote Christian Unity, whose first President during and after Vatican II, Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, is justly and happily celebrated in today's centenary conference.

Let me give an outline of what I want to say in the half an hour or so available. The strong convergence in these agreements about *what* the Church of God really is, is very striking. The various agreed statements of the churches stress that the Church is a community, in which human beings are made sons and daughters of God, and reconciled both with God and one another. The Church celebrates this through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion in which God acts upon us to transform us 'in communion'. More detailed questions about ordained ministry and other issues have been framed in this context.

Therefore the major question that remains is whether in the light of that depth of agreement the issues that still divide us have the same weight – issues about authority in the Church, about primacy (especially the unique position of the pope), and the relations between the local churches and the universal church in making decisions (about matters like the ordination of women, for instance). Are they *theological* questions in the same sense as the bigger issues on which there is already clear agreement? And if they are, how exactly is it that they make a difference to our basic understanding of salvation and communion? But if they are not, why do they still stand in the way of fuller visible unity? Can there, for example, be a model of unity as a communion of churches which have different attitudes to how the papal primacy is expressed?

The central question is whether and how we can properly tell the difference between 'second order' and 'first order' issues. When so very much agreement has been firmly established in first-order matters about the identity and mission of the Church, is it really justifiable to treat other issues as equally vital for its health and integrity?

1.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the journals written during the Second Vatican Council by figures like Willebrands and Congar is the record of a struggle for what I shall call a genuinely theological doctrine of the Church. Part of what Vatican II turned away from is a way of talking about the Church as primarily an institution existing because of divine decree, governed by prescription from the Lord, faithfully administering the sacraments ordained by him for the salvation of souls – 'an external, visible society, whose members, under a hierarchical authority headed by the pope, constitute with him one visible body, tending to the same spiritual and supernatural end, i.e., sanctification of souls and their eternal happiness' (Pietro Palazzini, s.v. 'Church (Society)' in the *Dictionary of Moral Theology*, ed. F. Roberti and P. Palazzini, originally published in 1957). But what is missing from this account is any real explication of how the nature and character and even polity of the Church are grounded in and shaped by

the nature of God and of God's incarnation in history. A *theological* understanding of the Church would be one that makes this connection.

[De Lubac's outstanding work in the first half of the twentieth century had laid the foundations – or, better, had excavated foundations long obscured; and the much-maligned Pope Pius XII had helped to bring some of these insights into the mainstream of Catholic thinking. But Vatican II pressed further, absorbing silently but effectively some of the critiques of ecumenical observers at the Council: Congar's journal for the 1 October 1963, gives a good example of what was finding its way unobtrusively into the Council's work by way of the observers (Yves Congar, *Mon journal du Concile*, vol.1, pp.415-418), summarising contributions from various ecumenical interlocutors around the themes of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the Church as sacrament of God's presence in the midst of humanity, the prophetic vocation of the people of God an so forth. And the general ethos and idiom of ecumenical dialogues since the Council illustrate the longer-term results of this 're-theologising' of the Church (it is no accident that the late Jean Tillard, OP, very much a disciple of Congar, played a major role in all these encounters).] A striking feature of the current *Harvesting the Fruits* document from the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity under the name of our greatly loved and respected friend Walter Kasper, is the integral connection between what is said about the nature of God and what is said about the Church, its mission and its ministry. All these dialogues, it appears, have been deeply influenced by the new style in ecclesiology rooted in Vatican II and the work of Willebrands and his colleagues – and it is worth mentioning the way in which this new style is paralleled in other ecumenical dialogues, notably the Anglican-Orthodox document on *The Church of the Triune God*.

In broad outline, the picture is something like this. God is eternally a life of threefold communion; and if human persons are to be reconciled to God and restored to the capacity for which they were made, they must be included in that life of communion. The incarnation of God the Son recreates in human persons the possibility of filial relation with the Father, standing in the place of Christ and praying his prayer; and only the Holy Spirit, which animates and directs the entire human identity of the Incarnate Word, can create that filial reality in us. To be restored to life with God is to be incorporated into Jesus Christ by the Spirit; but because the gift of the Spirit is what takes away mutual fear and hostility and the shutting-up of human selves against each other, it is inseparably and necessarily a gift of mutual human communion also. The sacramental life and the communal disciplines of the Church exist to serve and witness to this dual fact of communion, with the Father and with all believers. To take only one of the countless formulations referred to in the *Harvesting* document, in this case from the 1993 Lutheran-Catholic statement on *Church and Justification* (#6), 'According to the witness of the New Testament, our salvation, the justification of sinners and the existence of the church are indissolubly linked with the triune God and are founded in him alone.' [What is more, there is a clear recognition that the Church's *mission* is to be conceived in the same way, as the mission 'of the Son and the Spirit', communicating to all places and all ages the divine invitation to communion (see the 2007 IARCCUM document, *Growing Together in Mission and Unity*, #27).]

So there is a clear line of connection between fundamental doctrinal commitments (the doctrines of the creed concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation) and issues around the shape and mission of the Church. The former lead into the latter; the latter only make sense against the background of the former. But what are the implications of this for our continuing ecumenical engagement? In what follows, I shall suggest some possible lines of further enquiry. But I also want to put a bit of a challenge to some trends across the board in current thinking, trends that might encourage us to adjust our expectations downwards in ecumenical dialogue, given the apparent lack of progress towards institutional or organisational unity. I do so in the hope that if we can recognise the remarkable degree to which what we could call Willebrands' legacy in ecclesiology has triumphed in the life of the dialogues, this may yet stir us to new insights and possibilities.

2.

If the *Harvesting* document is to be taken seriously, the issues between Christians in the historic churches are *not* about the essential shape of our language concerning God and God's action in Christ. [Whatever shaky theologies may be advanced by individuals in this or that particular pulpit, divinity school or seminary (Catholic *and* otherwise, be it said), the self-definitions of the churches remain solidly anchored in the Nicene faith, understood precisely as the faith that makes sense of the experienced reality of communion in Christ.] The common centre is a twofold vision: filial relation with God the Father as the realisation of the human vocation; and, as an immediate corollary of this, communion with other believers, offered to the whole world as promise and hope, a model for human life together in accord with the creator's loving purpose. As the ecumenical statements in varying words agree, the ongoing debate is not about these fundamentals, but about where the fullest realisation of communion is to be found.

Even in discussion over sacramental forms and doctrines, a powerful convergence is evident that takes us well beyond any tired polarities. [We cannot any longer assume that there is a fundamental disagreement between Catholics who think of the sacraments objectively and Protestants who think of them only in functional or 'memorialist' ways.] The links from trinitarian doctrine straight through to the meaning of the Lord's Supper are strongly affirmed on all sides. The whole discussion of sacramental life is centred upon how the believer is established in filial communion through the act of the triune God; there is little to suggest that outside the Roman fold there is any ambiguity over this priority of the divine act, or any separation between the act of God in salvation and a purely or predominantly human activity of recalling or expressing that act through human practices.

And this is where the difficult questions begin to gather. If the picture just sketched is true, what exactly are the points that still divide us? *Harvesting* returns several times to a few key matters: I want to pick out three for further reflection. There is an issue over *authority*: in several places, continuing disagreement is noted over the nature or indeed the very possibility of the magisterium. Is there a mechanism in the Church that has the clear right to determine for all where the limits of Christian identity might be found? Then there is an issue, naturally connected with the first, about the nature of *primacy*. Is the integrity of the Church ultimately dependent on a single identifiable ministry of unity to which all local ministries are accountable? And this relates immediately to a third set of questions about the way in which we think of the universal Church itself. Is it an entity from which local churches derive their life, or is it the perfect mutuality of relationship between local churches – or indeed as the mysterious presence of the whole *in* each specific community? I want to propose that we now need urgent clarification of whether these continuing points of tension or difference imply in any way that the substantive theological convergence is less solid than it appears, so that we must still hold back from fuller levels of recognition of ministries or fuller sacramental fellowship.

3.

As to authority: the summary on pp.137-8 of *Harvesting* puts it very well in describing convergence around the belief that 'the ministry and the ministries in the Church are not an end in themselves'; the Church is called to obedience, and thus to the discerning conservation of the authentic gospel in its teaching and preaching. But is that obedience, discernment and conservation in some sense the task of the entire body of the baptised or essentially that of a group designated as having binding power?

A properly *theological* answer to this would challenge the premise of the question as expressed in those terms. It should rather come from a clear sense that responsibility, the 'authority to become children of God' (Jn 1.12) given to all those who belong in the communion of the baptised, is something allocated and distributed in the Church by the leading of the Spirit. If we are not just going to reaffirm the language of rule and hierarchy established by decree, with fixed divisions between teachers and taught, rulers and ruled, then we must approach the question as one that has to do with the way in which the gifts of the Spirit are properly distributed. In the light of the ecumenical ecclesiology we have been outlining, what is the status of differences over how responsibilities are allocated in the Church? How practically deep and non-negotiable are the divisions if what is at stake is not the basic reality of filial holiness? If the

issues are *less* basic than the agreement over the Church's central character, then the future ought to be one in which there is a search for practical convergence in administrative responsibility and visible structures of governance, while allowing a significant mutual recognition of sacramental authenticity in the meantime – perhaps including some sacramental fellowship, as hinted at in #8 of *Unitatis Redintegratio*).

[I suspect that what makes this unattractive from the Roman Catholic side is the wariness of lapsing back into another kind of non-theological ecclesiology, allowing decision-making in the Church to become no more than a 'democratic' process in which the search for corporate discernment became no more than campaigning for majority votes. Those of us with synodical styles of governance influenced by parliamentary procedure may well understand the anxiety. Yet, understandable as this anxiety is, it would be a mistake to say that anything other than a clear commitment to a centralised magisterium would be bound to be a secularised democratism. It is never a good idea to take the worst risks and distortions of a system as normative. It would be as pessimistic as the reaction of a reformed Christian convinced that any ordained magisterium would be bound to be an unaccountable tyranny. If we really do agree about what the Church is for, then we ought to be able to see in one another the desire to be obedient – *and* to recognise that inevitably any particular embodiment of that desire will need to be scrutinised theologically and is likely to be historically variable, vulnerable and in some way inadequate.]

The question becomes whether we can find ways of creating structures in which ordained authority and conciliar collaboration are properly accountable to each other and to the whole Body. It is about how we look – at the very least – for joint means of decision-making between churches differently ordered in their systems of authority, as several ecumenical texts propose (not least the IARCCUM documents); and at most for a means of making possible exchange of ministries and sacramental provision (with all that this might entail in terms of requirements for simple canonical recognition and incorporation).

4.

As to primacy: convergence is probably less clear here, but there is a quite widespread recognition that, just as local ministry serves coherence and mutual openness within a congregation, so there is a powerful theological case for a ministry of universal focusing and gathering cast in the same terms. To put it like this is, once again, to see it in relation to the Church's purpose overall: this is a ministry existing for the sake of filial and communal holiness held in a universal pattern of mutual service – a point worth taking very seriously in the context of a globalised culture.

The disagreement comes over whether existing forms of primacy are – on the one hand – despite all their historic ups and downs, fundamentally unavoidable embodiments of the agreed principle or – on the other – so allied to juridical privilege and the patterns of rule and control I have referred to earlier that they simply fail to do what they say they are there for. This is to put the difference quite sharply, I know, in a way that ignores the fluidity of recent debate and the remarkable initiative represented by *Ut Unum Sint* and what has flowed from it. But once again, the ecumenical issue for those outside the Roman Catholic fold is whether the necessity of the existing form of primatial ministry is so *theologically* crucial a matter that the Church's integrity, its faithfulness to its essential purpose, is wholly compromised by a diversity of understanding about primacy. Is there a level of mutual recognition which allows a shared theological understanding of primacy alongside a diversity of canonical or juridical arrangements? The slightly sensitive discussion of the nature of papal jurisdiction outside the historic Western Patriarchate might be a door-opener here. But it is surprising to find support in another quarter, in the shape of a bald statement (quoted in *Harvesting*) from the Lutheran-Catholic Report of 1972 'that the question of altar fellowship and of mutual recognition of ministerial offices should not be unconditionally dependent on a consensus on the question of primacy' (#66).

To present the question in these terms is in fact to look back to Cardinal Willebrands' celebrated sermon in Cambridge in 1970 which spoke (using the language of Dom Emmanuel Lanne) of a diversity of *types*

of communion, each one defined not so much juridically or institutionally as in terms of lasting loyalty, shared theological method and devotional ethos. The underlying idea seems to be that a restored universal communion would be genuinely a 'community of communities' and a 'communion of communions' – not necessarily a single juridically united body – and therefore one which did indeed assume that, while there was a recognition of a primatial ministry, this was not absolutely bound to a view of primacy as a centralized juridical office.

It is of course impossible to open up these issues without some brief reference to issues of very immediate interest in the lives of the Anglican and Roman Catholic communions. The current proposals for a Covenant between Anglican provinces represent an effort to create not a centralised decision-making executive but a 'community of communities' that can manage to sustain a mutually nourishing and mutually critical life, with all consenting to certain protocols of decision-making together. As *Harvesting* notes, Anglicans have been challenged to flesh out their rhetoric about communion through the crises and controversies of recent years, and this is simply part of a variegated response that will, no doubt, continue for a good while yet to be refined and formulated.

The recent announcement of an Apostolic Constitution making provision for former Anglicans shows some marks of the recognition that diversity of ethos does not in itself compromise the unity of the Catholic Church, even within the bounds of the historic Western patriarchate. But it should be obvious that it does not seek to do what we have been sketching: it does not build in any formal recognition of existing ministries or units of oversight or methods of independent decision-making, but remains at the level of spiritual and liturgical culture, as we might say. As such, it is an imaginative *pastoral* response to the needs of some; but it does not break any fresh *ecclesiological* ground. It remains to be seen whether the flexibility suggested in the Constitution might ever lead to something less like a 'chaplaincy' and more like a church gathered around a bishop.

5.

As to the broad issue of local and universal Christian identity, much that has emerged in discussion involving Roman Catholics, Anglican and Orthodox has had the effect of challenging simplistic opposition between the two poles, as if the choice were between a conglomerate of local and almost randomly diverse communities vaguely federated together, and a monolithic global corporation. The re-theologising of ecclesiology, especially in dialogue with the Christian East, has meant that we are now better able to see the local community gathered around the bishop or his representative for eucharistic worship not as a portion of some greater whole but as itself the whole, the *qualitative* presence, as we might put it, of the Catholic reality of filial holiness and Trinitarian mutuality here and now. In one sense, it needs no supplement or validation from a wider institutional reality; in another sense, of course, it is itself only as related with other communities doing the same thing in all times and places. To quote from the Roman Catholic-Reformed dialogue, 'It is only by participating in the local community that we share in the life of the universal Church, but the local community without universality…runs the risk of becoming a ghetto or of being arbitrarily dominated by individuals' (*The Presence of Christ in Church and World*, #62). Or, in the words of the ARCIC statement on *The Gift of Authority*, 'No local church that participates in the living Tradition can regard itself as self-sufficient' (#37).

So the question here becomes one about what criteria help us establish that the *same* Catholic life is going on in diverse communities. The facts of corporate reading of Scripture, obedience to the Lord's commands to baptise and make eucharist, shared understanding of the shape and the disciplines of what we have called filial holiness – can these be utilised as they stand or do we need a further test – visible communion, say, with a universal primate? And if that further step is necessary, can it be shown to be theological in exactly the same sense as the rest of the discourse? If not, once again, is it a ground for maintaining the level of non-recognition currently in practice? [To revert to a rather old-fashioned idiom, while we might recognise universal structural isomorphism or a universal canonical system as

something belonging to the *bene esse*, the good order or well-being of the Church, is it so much a part of the *esse* as to preclude shared practice?]

An answer to this would have to look at some of the complex and neuralgic issues that arise around local decision-making. To take the most obvious instance in the relations between the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches at present, the local decision to ordain women as priests – and as bishops in some contexts – is presented by Roman Catholic theologians as one that in effect makes the Anglican Communion simply less recognisably a body 'doing the same Catholic thing'.

Harvesting records the substance of the early consensus in ARCIC on the nature of ordained ministry and also the acknowledgement that there had as yet been no consideration of *who* could be ordained (the 1973 *Ministry and Ordination* text, #17). Since then, this latter issue has been defined by the highest authority in the Roman Catholic Church as one in which the Church does not have the liberty or the competence to license change as regards the historic prohibition against women in holy orders. This is now presented as a clear obstacle to any further recognition of Anglican orders.

I don't want here to rehearse the arguments for and against the ordination of women, only to ask how recent determinations on the Roman Catholic side fit with the general pattern of theological convergence outlined. The claim of certain Anglican provinces is that the ordination of women explicitly looks to an agreed historic theology of ordained ministry as set out in the ARCIC report and other sources. Beyond that, many Anglicans have been wary of accepting a determination of who can be ordained that might appear to compromise the some of the agreed principles about how ordination relates to the whole body of the baptised. This, by the way, would hold for at least some who believe that a decision within a divided Church about a matter affecting the universal ministry should not be taken by a single province or group of provinces. But for many Anglicans, *not* ordaining women has a possible unwelcome implication about the difference between baptised men and baptised women, which in their view threatens to undermine the coherence of the ecclesiology in question.

And the challenge to recent Roman Catholic thinking on this would have to be: in what way does the prohibition against ordaining women so 'enhance the life of communion', reinforcing the essential character of filial and communal holiness as set out in Scripture and tradition and ecumenical agreement, that its breach would compromise the purposes of the Church as so defined? And do the arguments advanced about the "essence" of male and female vocations and capacities stand on the same level as a theology derived more directly from scripture and the common theological heritage such as we find in these ecumenical texts?

Let us take this a stage further. All ordained ministers are ordained into the shared richness of the apostolic ministerial order – or perhaps we could say ministerial 'communion' yet again. None ministers as a solitary individual. Thus if the ministerial collective is understood strictly in terms of the ecclesiology we have been considering, as serving the goal of filial and communal holiness as the character of restored humanity, how much is that undermined if individuals within the ministerial communion are of different genders? Even if there remains uncertainty in the minds of some about the rightness of ordaining women, is there a way of recognising that somehow the *corporate* exercise of a Catholic and evangelical ministry remains intact even when there is dispute about the standing of female individuals? In terms of the relation of local to universal, what we are saying here is that a degree of recognizability of 'the same Catholic thing' has survived: Anglican provinces ordaining women to some or all of the three orders have not become so obviously diverse in their understanding of filial holiness and sacramental transformation that they cannot act together, serve one another and allow some real collaboration.

It is this sort of thinking that has allowed Anglicans until recently to maintain a degree of undoubtedly impaired communion among themselves, despite the sharpness of the division over this matter. It is part of the rationale of supplementary episcopal oversight as practised in the English provinces, and it may yet be of help in securing the place of those who will not be able to accept the episcopal ministry of women.

There can be no doubt, though, that the situation of damaged communion will become more acute with the inability of bishops within the same college to recognise one another's ministry in the full sense. Yet, in what is still formally acknowledged to be a time of discernment and reception, is it nonsense to think that holding on to a limited but real common life and mutual acknowledgement of integrity might be worth working for within the Anglican family? And if it can be managed within the Anglican family, is this a possible model for the wider ecumenical scene? At least, by means of some of the carefully crafted institutional ways of continuing to work together, there remains an embodied trust in the possibility of discovering a shared ministry of the gospel; and who knows what more, ultimately, in terms of restored communion?

6.

Once again, I am asking how far continuing disunion and non-recognition are justified, theologically justified in the context of the overall ecclesial vision, when there are signs that some degree of diversity in practice need not, after all, prescribe an indefinite separation. I do not pretend to be offering a new paradigm of ecumenical encounter, far from it. But the very quality of the theological convergence recorded, and very expertly and lucidly recorded, in *Harvesting* prompts the sort of question I have been raising. At what point do we have to recognise that surviving institutional and even canonical separations or incompatibilities are overtaken by the authoritative direction of genuinely theological consensus, so that they can survive only by appealing to the ghost of ecclesiological positivism? The three issues I have commented on may all seem, to the eyes of a non-Roman Catholic, to belong in a somewhat different frame of reference from the governing themes of the ecumenical ecclesiology expressed in the texts under review. If the non-Roman Catholic is wrong about this, we need to have spelled out exactly why; we need to understand either that there are issues about the filial/communal calling clearly at stake in surviving disagreements; or to be shown that another theological 'register' is the right thing to use in certain areas, a different register which will qualify in some ways the language that has so far shaped ecumenical convergence.

Cardinal Willebrands would, I suspect, have been uncomfortable with the latter option and would have wanted (if he had agreed that these issues were critical, unresolved, and in need of resolution) to keep our attention fixed on the former, so that our language and thinking about the Church remained theological in a sense recognised by all involved in the discussion. To say this is not to foreclose consideration of these and other outstanding areas of diversity, let alone to say that they are 'political' matters and that there is no point in approaching them theologically, or that they are 'second-order' questions. But it is important to be clear about just how much convergence there is, as witnessed in the survey offered in *Harvesting*.

All I have been attempting to say here is that the ecumenical glass is genuinely half-full – and then to ask about the character of the unfinished business between us. For many of us who are not Roman Catholics, the question we want to put, in a grateful and fraternal spirit, is whether this unfinished business is as fundamentally church-dividing as our Roman Catholic friends generally assume and maintain. And if it isn't, can we all allow ourselves to be challenged to address the outstanding issues with the same methodological assumptions and the same overall spiritual and sacramental vision that has brought us thus far?