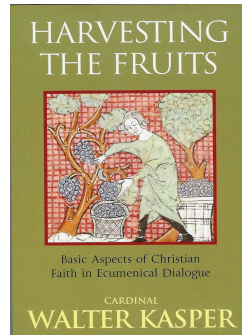


TALK TO THE COMMITTEE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY AND DIOCESAN ECUMENICAL  
REPRESENTATIVES  
SATURDAY 15 JANUARY 2011

## HARVESTING THE FRUITS



Publisher: Continuum, ISBN 978-1-4411-6272-4.

### Synopsis of Talk

1. Origins
2. Method of composition
3. The text of 'Harvesting the Fruits'

- Chapter 1     **Fundamentals of our Common Faith: Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity**
- Chapter 2     **Salvation, Justification, Sanctification**
- Chapter 3     **The Church**
- Common Perspectives on the Nature and Mission of the Church
  - Source of Authority in the Church
    - Jesus Christ
    - Apostolicity
    - Scripture and Tradition
  - Ministry in the Church
    - Ministry of the People of God
    - Ordained Ministry
    - Episcopé
    - Ministry at local and universal level
    - Universal Primacy/Petrine Ministry
    - Teaching Authority
- Chapter 4     **Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist**
- A common perspective on sacraments?
  - Baptism
  - Eucharist
    - Centrality to the life of the Church
    - Memorial and Sacrifice
    - Real Presence

Epiclesis  
The ordained Minister  
Further issues

#### 4. Some Preliminary Conclusions

#### 5. Beyond 'Harvesting the Fruits'

- The goal of ecumenism
- Reception
- Theological hermeneutics
- Mission
- Common Ecumenical Declaration

## HARVESTING THE FRUITS

### 1. Origins

'Harvesting the Fruits' is the title given by Cardinal Walter Kasper to his synthesis of forty years of ecumenical dialogue with the four major western Christian traditions stemming from the Reformation. In its favour, it is a *synthesis* which abbreviates and summarizes extensive discussions and lengthy documents. It thereby saves a lot of time. Counting against it is the fact that it is a document about documents, and, as Hilaire Belloc said, 'Of all fatiguing, futile, empty tasks, the worst ... is writing about writing.'

But from the first, Cardinal Kasper did not want this book to be another dreary title left on a library shelf. He wants it to provoke, to stimulate discussion. The project came to his mind when, approaching the end of his term as President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Cardinal sensed an air of despondency in the dealings of what we call the Western Section of the Council. Whereas relations with the Orthodox seemed to be progressing well, and there was high optimism of some break-through in our Eastern discussions, the same could not be said of the dialogues with western Churches. There, developments within our partners – most notably the ordination of women, issues regarding homosexual clergy, the blessing of gay partnerships, lay presidency at the Eucharist – seemed to have undermined any realistic hopes of rapprochement, and had induced a depressing atmosphere of gloom. The Catholic Church itself – as the Cardinal publicly recognized - had not helped ease the mood with some of its recent pronouncements: *Dominus Iesus* of 2000, with its denial of the title 'Church' to our Protestant and Anglican partners, particularly rankled. Our partners were telling us that they sensed that the Catholic Church was turning its back on the ecumenical progress that had been made, at least with the traditions stemming from the Reformation, and there was talk in the air of an 'ecumenical winter.'

It was within this context, and indeed to challenge this context, that *Harvesting the Fruits* was composed. It sets out – as its very title suggests – to be a positive statement of Ecumenical dialogue, setting before a new generation of theologians and ordinary Christians the results that have been achieved since Vatican II. In an age when we have become used to a certain level of ecumenical commitment at a local and national level, it is easy to forget just how remarkable an achievement that is. Many of us can remember at time when we did not go into non-Catholic churches, when we felt nervous if having to attend a non-Catholic service. When I was a student, I had enormous scruples about singing in the choir of the Anglican chapel of my college. When I was younger still,

I felt sad that, while I loved my grandmother dearly, she would not as an Anglican be able to go to heaven. To have moved beyond such attitudes, particularly in the historically charged setting of England, is nothing short of astonishing. Accordingly, the opening paragraphs of HTF record with gratitude to the Lord that ‘many prejudices and misunderstandings of the past have been overcome, [and] bridges of new mutual understanding and cooperation have been built.’<sup>1</sup>

But there is another purpose in the creation of this book. In gathering together the results of forty years of dialogue, gaps will be evident, areas that have not been treated, or treated insufficiently, and problems will perhaps be seen more vividly. Cardinal Kasper and his Pontifical Council were never rosy-eyed about ecumenism, and saw in many of the issues facing dialogue relations in recent years perhaps a ‘growing up’ of ecumenism, a maturing from the somewhat simplistic fervor of previous decades. Thus HTF also states right at the start; ‘The original enthusiasm has given way to a new sobriety; questions about the ecumenical methods and the achievements of the past decades, and doubts about the futures are being expressed.’<sup>2</sup>

The real purpose that Cardinal Kasper had in mind for his book was, then, neither a starry-eyed zeal nor a catalogue of woes; rather, he sought to put ecumenism back into the church’s agenda. He sets out his stall early on in the book: ‘We hope (he writes) to initiate and facilitate the reception of dialogue results in the Catholic Church and with four partners from whom we are still divided, and to foster further dialogue regarding questions that are still open.’<sup>3</sup> In other words, the Cardinal is posing the question: We have achieved a great deal in our ecumenical dialogue. Why does it not feel like it? And how do we take this forward?

In short, this is not another book to leave on a shelf to gather dust. This is an attempt to encourage reception of, and discussion about, ecumenical agreements - and, more than that, to encourage an ecumenical way of living our lives in the Church. As the Holy Father stressed in his visit to Great Britain, there is work for the Church to do – that is, for all Christians to do – together. Let us start to see ourselves and our Catholic community in a wider context. We need to put some urgency back into the ecumenical project, and despite - or perhaps because of - difficult developments, let us work together at all levels with a renewed spirit on the path to unity.

## 2. Method of composition

The idea of HTF was simple in intention, but difficult in execution. Put simply, the results of the international dialogues with the four major Western traditions would be placed, thematically, side by side, to form a sort of concordance. The first question that arises is, why these four: Lutheran, Anglicans, Reformed and Methodist? Why not Baptist, Old Catholic or Pentecostals? That is an easy enough question to answer: the four bilateral dialogues chosen are those that began soon after Vatican II, and that represent the major, and best documented, dialogues of the Pontifical Council. A more major objection might be that the Orthodox Churches are not represented. This was a decision based on practicalities. To make this a manageable project, we thought we would limit ourselves to the western Churches where, even if theology is more diverse, there is a basic culture and outlook in common. To have included the Orthodox dialogues, where different subjects have been tackled in diverse ways, would vastly have complicated the project, whereas these four bilateral dialogues could be set side by side and compared; there was a common platform that would make the project viable, and of more practical use.

That said, there were considerable difficulties when it came to comparing the results of the four bilateral dialogues. Firstly, while many topics have been treated by all four dialogues, there are

---

<sup>1</sup> HTF 1

<sup>2</sup> HTF 1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

many others that have not, that only appear in one or two of the dialogues. For instance, the Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue has, albeit tentatively, discussed moral issues; but as these do not appear in the other dialogues, they could not be included in the book. Mary is another example of a fascinating topic treated in one dialogue but not in others, and so had to be left out of consideration. As a corollary of this, *Harvesting the Fruits* is not a general theological survey, and not every aspect of theology will be there; only those topics that have been treated by all four bilateral dialogues.

A further difficulty lay in the different treatment of various topics; what is central in one bilateral may be incidental in another. As we studied the historic texts produced by the four dialogues, and set statements or conclusions side by side with similar statements from other dialogues, it was clear that there was some unevenness in the handling of various topics. Not surprisingly, the dialogue with the Lutherans focussed heavily on Justification in a way that was not reflected in other bilaterals; the topic is there, but not so central in the other bilaterals. The dialogue meetings with the Anglicans (ARCIC) has looked extensively at the question of authority; this is there in other dialogues, but by no means to the same extent. Further, among our partners, there is a variety in the status of their beliefs. For Lutheranism and Calvinism there are foundational documents – *catechisms*, if you like, but nothing of the sort for Anglicanism and still less for Methodism. Lutheran doctrine on the Eucharist, for example, can quote extensively from Luther's writings; Methodist source material on the same topic is not much more than the texts of Wesley's hymns.

Therefore, HTF comes with a health warning; it is not a comprehensive treatment of theological themes, nor even of every theme discussed by the bilaterals. It records only those areas which were common to all four bilateral dialogues, at a level and in a way where they can be usefully compared. Moreover, this project has a distinctly Roman Catholic point of view; observations and conclusions come from the Catholic side, naturally, as the instigators of this project. A Lutheran or Reformed approach might well have come up with different conclusions.

### 3. 'Harvesting the Fruits'

HTF begins with a section on 'Fundamental aspects of our Christian faith'. Here, as might be expected, there is not a great deal of disagreement, but HTF is following the agreed methodology of the bilateral dialogues themselves – to begin by establishing what is agreed before moving to more contentious areas. Hence, there is broad and predictable agreement on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Creeds and the Holy Trinity. No surprises there, and a good basis on which we can affirm our relationships. However, while it affirms 'fundamental consensus' on these basic building blocks of our faith, Chapter one also notes some differences of approach in the way that Scripture relates to the Church – a topic that will be pursued in greater depth later – and the status of the Creeds. HTF also observes several differences between the official confessional position of some traditions, and what happens in practice. It states 'Even when a Church affirms the Creeds in principle and holds them as their basis, sometimes individual elements of it (eg the Virgin Birth) are criticised.'<sup>4</sup> No great insights are offered here, but rather a simple warning that if these common foundational beliefs are called into question, 'all the rest is without substance and foundation.'<sup>5</sup>

Chapter two considers the topics of *Salvation, Justification and Sanctification* which were, as you will be aware, the sparks that ignited the Reformation. Just as they were central to the break-up of the Western Church, so these questions have dominated ecumenical dialogue with the Lutheran and Reformed Churches. Here there is some historical imbalance across the dialogues. HTF itself

---

<sup>4</sup> HTF 13

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

acknowledges that '[f]or Anglicans Justification did not become a central issue, whereas Methodists were more concerned with personal sanctification.'<sup>6</sup>

Naturally, in recording the ecumenical achievement here, HTF focuses on what is perhaps the single most successful ecumenical event of the post-Conciliar period, the signing between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999, with which the World Methodist Council formally associated itself in 2006. This remarkable agreement, formally accepted by the Catholic Church, revisits the central controversy of the Reformation, showing that what was in dispute was not the basic concept of Justification, but rather the terminology used about it – each side wanted to hear certain words that the other did not feel they could supply. Now, however, as HTF sums it up, 'Lutherans, Methodists and Catholics are one in a shared confession of faith concerning God's justifying work, which occurs because of Christ and through the Holy Spirit.'<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in line with the best practice of receptive ecumenism, HTF notes that different forms of expression and terminology, rather than dividing, can 'in fact co-exist and even enhance each other.'<sup>8</sup>

HTF then sets forth the treatment of this topic in the Reformed and Anglican dialogues, noting a wide area of consensus. The priority of the saving grace of God, the role of the Church, and the relationship of sanctification to good works, have all been the subject of agreements in the four bilateral dialogues. As regards sanctification, Methodism in particular has a strong tradition of emphasising personal holiness, the restoration of man and women to the image of God. Wesley considered this to be 'at the heart of Methodist teaching,' and not surprisingly this tradition was especially prominent in the Methodist statement of association with the *Joint Declaration*.

In conclusion, then, HTF wants to remind us that on this key issue which divided the Church five hundred years ago, there is now not mere consensus, but formal agreement. It is an astonishing accomplishment, a 'milestone in ecumenical relations' as HTF calls it, and one that perhaps, in our English setting, we have not fully absorbed. But – asks HTF – what does this achievement actually mean? Does it mean that the Reformation is finished, that the key issues dividing us are resolved and that (as many Lutherans at first assumed) there is now no longer any reason not to share the Eucharist together?

The problem is, that while the *Joint Declaration* signalled agreement on the central topic of Justification, it left many subsidiary questions unanswered. What HTF hints at is that formulae were acceptable to both sides exactly because they were formulae; phrases that avoided specifying what the words really meant. This is always a danger in ecumenism – and indeed any sort of accord – that a form of words acceptable to all parties is found, allowing them to understand it in their own way. HTF tries to balance the remarkable achievement of the agreement with the acknowledgement that there are further, deeper, questions to ask. Some of these questions are to do with Justification itself - such as its biblical foundations, or what it means to say a person can be *simul Justus et Peccator*; justified and yet a sinner. Others are related issues such as indulgences (which were, of course, the trigger of the whole Reformation dispute). At an even more basic level, HTF says we need to discuss the status of this doctrine. For Lutherans, Justification is the central doctrine which 'serves to orient all the teaching and practice' of the Church. For Catholics, Justification is one of several criteria, and they would wish to place it into a larger context.

In general, HTF highlights two key elements that were unknown to the world of Luther's time, but which are crucial to a modern understanding of the Doctrine of Justification - and which will

---

<sup>6</sup> HTF 15

<sup>7</sup> HTF 17

<sup>8</sup> HTF 18

become a recurring theme for HTF: hermeneutics and anthropology. Hermeneutics, or the way we interpret our theology, employs these days new techniques of biblical scholarship, new understandings of the Church (as, for example, the Vatican II premise of the ‘hierarchy of truths’), and new evaluations of foundational documents – all of which need further work. Anthropology nowadays takes us into areas that the Reformers could never have dreamed of: personal ethics, sexuality, bioethics – and even political and social ethics. Having a bearing on how we live our lives, these issues relate to what it means to speak of Justification and sanctification.

The third chapter, the longest and the most complex in HTF, looks at how the Church has been treated in the four bilateral dialogues. It begins with a summary of the aims of the Reformers which was, precisely, to *Reform*, not to found new churches. Here HTF treads carefully, as Catholics are giving an account of our partners’ motives. At the writing stage asked the opinions of ecumenical friends on what we had written – the director of the Anglican Centre at Rome helped me through four drafts of a single sentence about the origins of Anglicanism.

True to its method, HTF then seeks to establish ‘Common perspectives on the nature and mission of the Church,’ noting that while none of the dialogues has engaged in a systematic description of the Church, there are conclusions occurring throughout the four bilaterals that can be drawn together.

Firstly, the Church is founded in the Trinity; in itself not much to argue with there! HTF furnishes plentiful examples to show agreement across the four dialogues on the Church ‘as the People of God called by the Father’, as the ‘Body of Christ’ that receives its ‘meaning and purpose in Jesus Christ’, and as the ‘Temple of the Holy Spirit.’ It is clear the dialogues have done much to dispel the Reformers’ suspicions that ‘Catholic ecclesial self-understanding obscured the sovereignty of God’s action’ in the work of salvation. Indeed, according to HTF, the dialogues themselves have helped advance a Catholic understanding of the role of the Church in salvation – an example of the ‘exchange of gifts’ that, we remember, is not all one-way.

Turning next to the Mission of the Church, the dialogues ‘demonstrate a basic agreement’ on the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God, with a common recognition that the Church does not merely signpost the Kingdom, but in some way makes it present. Following from this, they speak of the Church as an ‘effective instrument’, or even a ‘sacrament’ of salvation. This is especially interesting in the context of the Reformed Churches, where there was historically an emphasis on the Church as the ‘*creatura verbi*’ – formed by the Word – rather than a sacrament of Grace. Thanks to our dialogues, these concepts can now be seen as complementary, rather than exclusive, ‘expressing the same instrumental reality under different aspects.’<sup>9</sup> Lutherans were less happy about the language of the Church as a sacrament, concerned that it blurred the distinction between Christ and the Church, but their dialogue did affirm that the Church is the ‘instrument and sign of salvation, and in this sense, the sacrament of salvation.’<sup>10</sup> This acceptance of sacramental language in relation to the Church is seen by HTF as ‘an important ecumenical breakthrough.’<sup>11</sup>

Following from this, HTF shows how the notion of the Church as Communion has gradually emerged in all four dialogues as the key concept for describing the Church, thus reflecting the vision of Vatican II itself. Here, most work has been done by ARCIC, the Anglican – Roman Catholic dialogue, reflecting the sensitivity in relations between the two traditions which are held to be ‘in a real though as yet imperfect communion’ with each other. In its documents on *Communion* and *Authority*, ARCIC has explored the notion of communion. There is agreement on how communion within the Church relates to communion with Christ and with the apostolic faith, and

---

<sup>9</sup> HTF 35 p69

<sup>10</sup> HTF 35 p70

<sup>11</sup> HTF 35 p71

here Anglicans acknowledge that the ARCIC dialogue has enriched the Anglican understanding of Communion. All the sadder then that, as HTF itself recognises, ‘recent developments are causing Anglicans to give renewed attention to their structures of communion’, and have undermined the common understanding of communion that had been apparently achieved.

But the notion of the Church as Communion has been prominent in the other dialogues too - perhaps surprisingly so. For Methodists, while this term describes well the relationship of the Church to Christ, it is all the more welcome as it allows a recognition of unity within diversity: communion means that ‘while in the one Church there is basic agreement in faith, doctrine, and structure essential for mission, there is room for various ‘ecclesial traditions’, each characterised by a particular style of theology, worship, spirituality and discipline.’<sup>12</sup> HTF considers that this aspect of the notion of communion will help reception and consensus, that will allow previously contradictory positions to be held in a complementary framework.

Moving on to the important area of Authority, HTF begins, as ever, by affirming what the five traditions hold in common; that the primary authority for all Christians is Jesus Christ himself. There is also agreement, although more nuanced, on the normative value of the witness of the Apostles - while there is consensus on the apostolic succession in faith, there is a difference in emphasis on the need for a ministerial succession of bishops. The Reformed see the need for an ‘apostolic continuity of doctrine’ in the Church, but are not certain whether that has to be expressed through a visible succession of bishops. Methodists, while not opposed to the historical succession of ministry, ‘do not consider [it] to be necessary for the Church or for ministry.’ HTF is realistic about the problems caused by recent developments within our partner Churches, and concludes that more work is needed on the Sacramental understanding of the Church, and – in particular - its ramifications for ministry and succession within the Church.

Reflecting Cardinal Kasper’s own concerns, HTF devotes a weighty section of Chapter 3 to the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, which it terms ‘one of the classic controversial themes’ to emerge at the Reformation. Here, as you might expect, the work of Vatican II in showing the interrelation, rather than the contrast, between Scripture and Tradition has proved groundbreaking. But our partners have also deepened their own understanding of this relationship as well, placing their view of the primacy of Scripture in a broader context. The Reformed dialogue states ‘Historical researches have shown not only how the New Testament writings themselves are already the outcome of and witness to traditions, but also how the canonisation of the New Testament was part of the development of tradition.’<sup>13</sup> HTF concludes that ‘much of the historic conflict between *sola scriptura* on the one hand, and Scripture and Tradition, on the other, has been overcome.’<sup>14</sup>

The largest section of Chapter 3 looks at Ministry in the Church. Again, there is broad agreement on the ministry of the faithful, which is, as ARCIC says ‘not a matter of disagreement between us.’ On the matter of ordained ministry, however, much work is yet to be done. HTF records at length the work of ARCIC on ministry, which (we must remember) has been officially received by the Catholic Church. The threefold ministry of the Church is affirmed as essential and sacramental in character. This close agreement was reached despite the potentially disastrous (for the dialogue) developments of the ordination of women, or of practising homosexuals, by considering the theology of ordination distinct from the subject of ordination. In other words, Anglicans and Catholics talked about ordination in the abstract, not about *who* can be ordained. ARCIC was convinced that ‘the principles upon which our doctrinal agreement rests are not affected by such

---

<sup>12</sup> HTF 40 p77

<sup>13</sup> HTF 48 p96

<sup>14</sup> HTF 75 p150

ordinations.’ HTF soberly acknowledges that later Catholic commentary has not accepted this distinction, declaring that ‘the question of the subject of ordination is linked with the nature of the sacrament of Holy Orders.’ The ordination of women, or of practising homosexuals, raises questions of ecclesiology and authority, and effectively prevents ‘further constructive discussion’ of this subject.

With the other partners, there was less common ground to start with, and accordingly hopes were not so high. Lutherans, Reformed and Methodists do not speak of ordination as a sacrament, but do celebrate it through a laying on of hands and an invocation (epiclesis) of the Holy Spirit. There is thus a recognition across the dialogues that ministers are ‘called forth’, ordained for a special service wherein they stand in the apostolic tradition, and have the assistance of the Holy Spirit in building up the body of Christ.

While the other dialogues differ on the need for a threefold ministry, there is an increasing willingness to discuss the nature and importance of episcopacy. Obviously, not all our partners have episcopacy as we would recognise it, but they all affirm the need for ‘episkope’ or ‘oversight’ in the original sense of the word. Episcopacy is a ministry of unity that needs to be exercised in a communal fashion. What is not agreed is whether episcopacy must refer only to one person, or whether there can be a ‘corporate bishop’, a shared episcopacy, among the faithful.

HTF leads on to a discussion of the relationship between the universal and the local in the Church. In various ways, all the dialogues affirm that the universal church is present in the local, so that each local expression of the Church must be understood in terms of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. It is the exact relationship between these two realities, the local and the universal, that is more problematic. For Anglicans and Catholics, this relationship is expressed through the college of bishops; Lutherans, Reformed and Methodists agree on the need for some form of visible structure to bind the Church together, but ‘have different perceptions about the nature and theological weight of those structures.’ They are happier talking at the level of a conciliar relationship. For them, the relationship between the local and universal cannot be limited to the hierarchical, but includes the whole people of God. The Reformed hold up the World Council of Churches as a model, where the ‘one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local Churches which are themselves truly united.’<sup>15</sup>

Out of this arises the key question of the Petrine primacy. Here, above all, HTF astonishes with the revelation of openness to some form of universal primacy among our partners. There is a growing recognition of the need for some form of universal primacy, and an acceptance that, if that is the case, the most appropriate location for it is the See of Peter. The difficulty (and it is a major difficulty of course) is how that primacy is to be exercised. Thus ARCIC, which of the four dialogues has most extensively covered this issue, acknowledges the ‘need for a universal primate to exercise his ministry in collegial association with other bishops.’ However, it notes that there ‘continue to be questions as to whether the Petrine ministry as exercised by the Bishop of Rome exists within the Church by divine right.’<sup>16</sup> This reflects closely the Lutheran position, which says that ‘the office of the papacy as a visible sign of the unity of the Church’ is ‘not excluded’, but question whether that office is ‘necessary for the church’, or only a ‘possible function.’ Methodists accept that ‘a universal primacy might well serve as focus of and ministry for the unity of the whole Church’ and go so far as to say they ‘may be prepared to receive a Petrine ministry exercised collegially within the college of bishops as a final decision-making authority in the Church’. However, they also feel that, as exercised as present, the Papal office exceeds its scriptural remit. The most hesitancy is found in the Reformed dialogue, where there is a recognition of the normative role of the ministry of Peter as found in the scriptures, but an unwillingness to go beyond

---

<sup>15</sup> HTF 65 p127

<sup>16</sup> HTF 66 p134

that to the current Papal office. HTF does not want to minimise the achievement here – at the very least, old polemics have been overcome, and the Petrine ministry can now be discussed in a civilised manner. There is significant theological rapprochement, but ‘the path to consensus still seems to be long and difficult.’

Finally, in this third chapter, HTF looks at how the issue of teaching authority in the Church has been examined by the four bilateral dialogues. There is agreement on the need for faithfulness to the truth revealed in Jesus Christ, but significant difference in understanding the role of the Church’s teaching authority in ensuring that faithfulness. As usual, Catholics are closest to Anglicans, who recognise the need to ensure the ‘indefectibility’ of the Church, but who blanch at the doctrine of ‘Papal infallibility’, preferring to subject such issues as might be defined in this way to the test of receptivity. Lutherans recognise the need to ensure that the Gospel of Christ is preserved in its fullness, but want to give the Holy Spirit a greater role in finding ‘new formulations of its faith which correspond better to the challenges of new historical situations.’ They make much use of the term ‘differentiated consensus’, which allows for a plurality of interpretations within the teaching ministry of the Church. For the Reformed, of course, authority lies with the Scriptures, and they are unwilling to bind the Church to any one form of authoritative teaching – which for them usurps the function and the power of God. In this they are close to the Methodists who declare that ‘there is no disagreement that the Church has the authority to teach’, but would locate the normative sources of doctrine in a wide range of subjects: Godly individuals, like John Wesley; providential events, like the Reformation; gatherings, like the early Councils and Methodist Conferences. Where all our partners agree is in finding difficulty with the terminology of ‘infallibility’, especially when applied to a man, however exalted. They consider this a usurpation of a title belonging to God alone, and an attempt to bind his Spirit. The dialogues show greater happiness with the notion of ‘indefectibility’ applied to the whole Church.

The sheer length of this chapter shows how ecclesiology has become a central, or *the* central, topic in ecumenism in the West. So much else depends on how we view the Church. HTF doesn’t want us to forget how far we have come in this; ‘On many questions a far-reaching common understanding of the nature of the Church has been achieved, and the dialogue partners are clearly no longer where they were in the sixteenth century and the following periods of polemics and controversies.’<sup>17</sup> The difficulties arise particularly when we consider ‘the concrete form of the ministry, and the sacramental nature in the Catholic sense of ministerial ordination.’ HTF sees the need for more clarity on the difference between ordained ministry and other offices in the Church, and acknowledges that the ordination of women is now a critical issue within all of the western dialogues.

At root, HTF sees the questions ‘What is the Church?’ and ‘Where is the Church?’ as crucial, and the fact that the dialogues contain different answers to these fundamental issues shows that ‘a full breakthrough in ecclesiological questions is yet to come.’<sup>18</sup> What needs to be teased out is the Catholic understanding of the sacramental nature of the Church, how her visible and concrete manifestation relates to her invisible and spiritual reality. Despite the advances in the use of sacramental terminology, our dialogue partners have yet to work through what that means in concrete situations.

Chapter 4 of HTF looks at the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Why only these two? Because these are the only two that have been treated in all the dialogues. Nevertheless, HTF records discussion in all the bilaterals on the nature of sacraments in general, and a high degree of agreement, describing them as ‘visible signs through which the grace of God is given by the Holy

---

<sup>17</sup> HTF 73 p149

<sup>18</sup> HTF 78 p153

Spirit in the Church' (ARCIC), or 'vehicles of the unique grace of Christ mediated ultimately by Christ alone' (Reformed and Methodist). There is a reference in all the dialogues to the importance of a liturgical setting for the celebration of the sacraments.

Turning to Baptism, HTF makes the point that, as Baptism was not a central Reformation controversy, it has not been dealt with extensively in the dialogues. In the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, there is agreement on the action of the Holy Spirit in Baptism, uniting one with Christ, justifying, and renewing. Here, there is significant consensus, demonstrated by recognition of each other's baptism.

As you might expect, there has been far more attention paid in the dialogues to the Eucharist, and in one of the bilaterals, ARCIC, a 'substantial agreement' - official acknowledgement by the Catholic Church - making this a very hot topic indeed. There is consensus with Anglicans on the Real Presence, on the Eucharist as memorial and sacrifice. For both of us the Eucharist is at the heart of the Church. There is, of course, trouble over the term 'transubstantiation', but HTF notes that term *affirms* the real presence rather than offering an *explanation* of how that presence comes about. There is a recognition that ecumenical dialogue, particularly with the East, has helped to bring about a rediscovery of the role of the Holy Spirit, the epiclesis, in the Eucharist, and this has been true in the other dialogues as well. So much is agreed. There are still differences with Anglicans, however, on the relation of the Eucharist to ecclesial communion (the question of receiving communion in other Churches), and some devotional practices.

In the other dialogues, these topics have also been discussed, if not as extensively as with the Anglicans. There is broad agreement on the centrality of the Eucharist to the life of the Church; the Reformed recognise the Church as a 'eucharistic community.' All the bilaterals are happy to state that the 'memorial' of the Eucharist is more than a mere remembering. For the Reformed, 'Christ himself is present ... It therefore becomes a living sacrifice of thanksgiving, through which God is publicly praised.' Methodists likewise affirm the Eucharist as 'the celebration of Christ's full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, offered once and for all.' There is close agreement on the Real Presence, and a rejection by all the bilaterals of any notion that the Eucharist is only 'commemorative or figurative' - although there are different emphases and ways of explaining it.

HTF notes much work to be done, however, over the use and meaning of the term 'transubstantiation'. While Methodists proclaim that the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, 'they do not consider this change to be of such a nature that the bread and wine cease to be bread and wine.' There is also unease among our partners at the way that the Church is associated with the one perfect sacrifice of Christ in the Eucharist. It seems that there is still a Protestant suspicion that the Catholic Church wants to control, or usurp, the saving act of Jesus Christ. As HTF puts it, 'further clarifications are needed on the sacrificial nature of the Mass, on the nature of the change wrought in the bread and wine, and on the real presence of our Lord in the Eucharist.'<sup>19</sup> There is also Catholic unease at some developments within our partners: at the use of non-ordained ministers in parts of the Methodist and even Anglican churches, at Eucharistic agreements with churches that do not share our theology, and at the method of disposal of the Eucharistic species.

#### 4. Conclusions

In its conclusions, HTF wants first of all to present a rich harvest, where many classic disputes have been overcome, and on many others formerly contentious issues convergence, if not consensus. It notes the assistance given to the ecumenical process by an emphasis on the liturgy, and how the

---

<sup>19</sup> HTF 98 p192

more relaxed ecumenical atmosphere has allowed an appreciation of each other's traditions, in a real 'exchange of gifts.' At the same time HTF raises questions for further discussion, not as obstacles, but as an invitation to closer ecumenical collaboration.

In the first place, Cardinal Kasper calls for a new 'Symbolic Theology' - by which he means an agreement of the Symbols, or the Creeds, of each Church. In short, we must know what we all mean when we make our basic affirmations.

Cardinal Kasper also notes problems with hermeneutics – the way we explain our theology – particularly in relation to the Scriptures. To what extent does Tradition have a bearing when we are discussing the meaning of Scripture, and who decides ultimately what the answer is? What sort of exegetics should be employed, and who decides on their correct interpretation?

The next area mentioned by the Cardinal is anthropology. He feels that there is a basic agreement, but only a basic agreement. The real questions of how men and women co-operate in their salvation, and how we can be saved but still sin, are still to be agreed. But as you will be aware, the elephant in the room is ethics and morality, and it is patently clear that there has been a divergence here. HTF notes, in addition, a divergence on social, political and environmental ethics. Further work here is vital if Christians are to cooperate in realising a common mission in the contemporary world.

The nature of the Church, particularly its sacramental nature, need further discussion. HTF contrasts the Catholic view, which sees an essential role for visible and concrete structures, with the more strictly Protestant view of the Church as event, 'happening' wherever the word is preached and sacraments duly celebrated. This issue has an essential bearing on what full church communion means, and indeed what the very goal of the ecumenical movement should be. For Cardinal Kasper, there is only one goal of ecumenical dialogue, set out right at the start of HTF, 'full visible communion in faith, sacramental life, apostolic ministry and mission.'<sup>20</sup> He is concerned that some of our partners may be more at ease with a simple recognition of each others' ministries, or worse, a mere co-existence.

It may seem that the tenor of HTF is somewhat negative, despite its avowed aim and its title. But Cardinal Kasper is clear; we do ecumenism no service if we ignore problems rather than naming them clearly. The first step towards solving issues is to set them forth honestly. It might be argued that one of the reasons that ecumenism is in the state it is, is that in the past issues that divide us were not always clearly identified. Accordingly, HTF is presented in the hope that it may 'initiate a process of reception of what we have achieved, and may promote further dialogues on remaining questions.'<sup>21</sup>

## 5. Beyond 'Harvesting the Fruits'

Cardinal Kasper's book has attracted much attention, perhaps because it seems to suggest a way forward at a time when most ecumenists are shrugging their shoulders. A symposium, comprising theologians from each of the four traditions represented in HTF, was held at the beginning of 2010, and the Plenary of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity devoted much of its time to discussing the conclusions of the book. Points that have arisen from these and other discussions are:

### a) the Goal of Ecumenism

Full communion, the goal of ecumenical endeavours, is not in the first place a 'horizontal consensus', but a more faithful participation in Christ – if you like a 'vertical' component. This

---

<sup>20</sup> HTF 3 p6

<sup>21</sup> HTF 112 p206

underlines the fact that the unity of the Church is at heart a matter of the Spirit; while theological discourse has an essential part to play, it is not the whole of the matter.

There is also the question of 'whose unity' it will be. Our partners are clear that they do not see full communion as uniformity, and seek an element of recognition of different forms of structures in the Church. That brings forth the question of what elements are negotiable, or non-negotiable. The notion of the 'exchange of gifts' can be of great service here, allowing different Churches to explain why a certain element is for them essential, and whether or not behind it might lie a common vision. Thus, if Christians of one tradition believe an element to be non-negotiable, they can be asked to explain to others why that is so, and to discuss the ways they understand and use this element. They will be able to exchange gifts and learn from the critique of others without the danger of a feeling that their heritage is being explained away.

Another useful concept – this time borrowed from Anglicanism – is that of 'adiaphora', the notion of 'first order' and 'second order' truths. Anglicanism has long sought to insist consensus only on 'first order' issues, while allowing diversity on 'second order' issues. While this does enable a large measure of diversity within unity, it also brings the dangers that 'second order' issues might be seen as less true or unimportant. What is optional for one tradition can be seen as essential by another. More acceptable, perhaps, is our own notion of the 'hierarchy of truths' in determining the status of elements in our Churches.

#### b) Reception

Cardinal Kasper declared himself astonished at the level of theological agreement between the Churches. There is no theological issue on which there is not some agreement; nothing that we completely disagree about. The task then is to communicate this good news to the faithful, and to rekindle their interest in, and sense of urgency for, ecumenism.

While at a theological level there is a recognition of significant success, more needs to be done at other levels – that of *leadership*, and that of the *ordinary worshipper*. At a leadership level, HTF sees much that can be done by the authoritative and formal recognition of accords, and by adequate ecumenical training for those engaged in leadership. At a popular level, the dialogues can learn from local initiatives and shared best practice, and can be enriched by prayer and activity undertaken by Christians together. HTF recognises the role of liturgy here, as well as the importance of social activity that Christians can undertake together. This has an interesting echo in the message of Pope Benedict to the Christians of Great Britain, and in his recent book 'Light of the World.' We need to work together to bring the Christian message into the discourse of society, and to counter secularism.

#### c) Theological hermeneutics

Following the call of HTF to sort out our hermeneutics, it has been commented that we need not so much to do theology in the same way, but to understand better why we each do things the way we do. *Harvesting the Fruits* gives prominence to this issue particularly in the search for a common understanding of the inter-relation between Scripture and Tradition. Significant progress has been made here, and caricatures of the past set aside, but this complex and dynamic relationship needs to be clarified further.

Here the practice of 'receptive ecumenism' is particularly helpful. Different dialogue partners need to be prepared to 'receive' from one another different ways of doing theology, to appreciate the value of these differences, and to engage in constructive dialogue about these theological methods.

#### d) A focus on Mission

Comments on HTF have emphasised a focus of Mission, that helps to avoid an excessive navel-gazing by the Churches (although questions of Faith and Order will always be important), and reminds us that ecumenical dialogue cannot be an end in itself.

Common Mission requires some essential resources – one basic need is a common translation of the Scriptures. We need to be sure we are using the same words when speaking of God, and that these words are meaningful for contemporary Christians.

#### e) A Common Ecumenical Declaration

This perhaps is the most concrete suggestion to come from HTF, receiving enthusiastic endorsement from theologians including the Archbishop of Canterbury. What is envisaged is a brief, accessible text that sets forth simply and clearly what we have achieved and what we hold in common. Originally, the term ‘ecumenical catechism’ was used, but this is liable to misunderstanding. Better to speak of a ‘Common Declaration’ that sets out clearly what we hold in common. It should be positive in tone, emphasising that there are no purely negative issues between partner churches. More work is needed to decide what areas this ‘Common Declaration’ might cover, and how it might be used effectively.

An obvious starting point – and one providing a new theological framework – is recognition of a common baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Accordingly, we might draft a common explanation of the Apostles’ Creed, which could be accessible for ordinary people. Another possibility is an ecumenical commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, or the Sermon on the Mount. An interesting suggestion came from the Archbishop of Canterbury in a speech in Rome last November; he asked for some form of statement on the Eucharist, bearing in mind that ‘there are many varieties of Christian practice spreading across the world at present in which Eucharistic practice is not obviously central, and Eucharistic theology is very thin.’<sup>22</sup>

#### 6. Conclusion

This is a brief canter through a dense book, and an inadequate look at some of the many and complex issues it raises. I would conclude by emphasising, as Cardinal Kasper does, the positive gains in ecumenism and hopes for the future. Hope which encompasses a realism about where we are and the difficult issues we face. But a hope, above all, founded in the belief that ecumenism is not first and foremost the work of human hands, but the will of God. Our task is not to construct something new, that does not already exist, but rather to participate more fully in the life of the Triune God, and realise more completely God’s image in the Church. Then we will reveal the unity that is the essential attribute of the Body of Christ.

---

<sup>22</sup> Rowan Williams, address at Conference marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the PCPCU, 17 November 2010