



Dear Archbishop Williams, dear Father Abbot Gregory, Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As my illustrious predecessor, Cardinal Désiré Mercier, used to say: “In order to unite with each other, we must know one another, and in order to know one another, we must go and meet one another”. I very much regret not being able to ‘meet you’ today, the day on which the Malines Conversations’ Group celebrates its 10th anniversary, marking the event with the publication of a book: “Malines: Continuing the Conversations”. However, I am grateful for having the possibility to address you this fraternal message of appreciation and support.

In the first place, I wish to express my gratitude to Archbishop Williams for his important contribution on the occasion of the centenary commemoration of the Malines Conversations in 2021. As you all know, the centenary has not been celebrated as was planned, due to the Pandemic. However, Archbishop Rowan Williams has written a beautiful “little book” on the Malines Conversations, which both resources our memory and strongly encourages **both** of our Churches to engage again on the path of restoring unity in the Body of Christ.

Secondly, I wish to warmheartedly thank the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey for hosting this festive event. I know how fervently daily prayer in this beautiful historic Abbey Church is addressed to God for the world, for the Church and for all people. When we pray to God as baptized Christians, the same Holy Spirit cries from within our hearts: “Abba, Father!” Prayer, therefore, is one of the strongest ways through which we express our commitment to overcoming our divisions and to receiving Unity in Christ as God’s most holy gift to humankind.

Thirdly, I would also like to thank the members of the Malines Conversations Group for keeping alive the memory of the Malines Conversations of a hundred years ago and for having taken inspiration from those historic conversations for theological explorations corresponding to the challenges of our time. I warmly congratulate you with the 10th anniversary of the Group and with the publication of this book. And I wish to strongly encourage all of you to continue your studies and your conversations, exploring new ways – with the word Cardinal Danneels proposed to describe your methodological reflection in Canterbury in 2014 – to ‘undertunnel’ what cannot be addressed in a straight forward way.

As Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, I am delighted that the Metropolitan See of the Catholic Church in Belgium is known internationally for its historic endeavors and engagement for the restoration of Christian Unity, and, in a very special way, between Anglicans and Roman-Catholics. In Mechelen we are very proud of the Malines Conversations as they are, to quote Cardinal De Kesel, “a gift to the universal Church: a spirit of openness towards other Christians”, very much like Pope Francis’ dream of synodality. And even more, they were held in an atmosphere of friendship that unites people, and that connects Christians over the boundaries of denominations. It makes them brothers and sisters in our Christian faith, *Fratelli tutti*, which happens also to be my bishop’s motto.

I hope that in 2026, a second chance will be given to us to celebrate the centenary with the solemnity it demands and deserves. May Christ, whose birth as a humble little child we will celebrate in just 10 days from now, renew in us his Holy Spirit, so that we may all engage with new forces – young, fresh and prophetic – on the path of Unity in his Body.

+Luc Terlinden, Archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels,

Mechelen, 15 December 2023