

Concluding Common Joint Statement

of the Commission for the Dialogue between the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht

Editorial Note: The sub-commission (Rev. Sam T. Koshy, Rev. Dr. Adrian Suter) has worked on this statement and considers this version to be the final one. Other than the correction of errors and the adaptation of the reference style in the footnotes in case of a printed publication, no more changes shall be made.

Introduction: A journey towards a relationship of communion between the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht

The ecumenical journey between the two churches began with the meeting of Archbishop Dr. Joris Vercammen, President of the International Bishops' Conference of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, and Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, then Suffragan Metropolitan (now of blessed memory), of the Mar Thoma Church in the context of the World Council of Churches, in 2005. Later, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa continued the contact with the Union of Utrecht. On the invitation of the Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Church, a delegation from the Union of Utrecht, which included the Archbishop of Utrecht, the bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Austria, Dr. John Okoro, the Rev. Prof. Günter Esser and the Rev. Ioan Jebelean, visited the Mar Thoma Church in 2006 and 2008. A delegation of the Mar Thoma Church made a reciprocal visit to the Old Catholic Church. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa attended the synod of the Old Catholic Church of Austria in 2012. These – and other – encounters between members of the Mar Thoma and Old Catholic Churches led to the joint initiative of the Metropolitan and the Episcopal Synod of the Mar Thoma Church and the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht, to discern the possibilities for and to embark upon a dialogue between the churches. Against the background of this developing relationship, the journey continued with four meetings of the commission at Santhigiri Ashram, Aluva, India (2011), in St. Pölten, Austria (2013), Munnar, India (2014) and Bern, Switzerland (2018) to study in detail the various doctrines of the two churches. This resulted in the following agreed statement proposing ways for a relationship of communion.

Ecclesial and academic exchange have helped to deepen the emerging relationship. His Grace Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan participated in the International Bishops' Conference and the International Old Catholic Congress in Vienna, Austria, in 2018. The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geevarghese Mar Theodosius Episcopa, Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos Episcopa and Rt. Rev. Joseph Mar Barnabas Episcopa were invited to attend the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht at various times from 2009 onwards. The Old Catholic Church of Switzerland enabled Rev. Dr. Joseph Daniel and Rev. Sam T. Koshy, both priests of

the Mar Thoma Church, to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of Bern. The Rev. Prof. Dr. Angela Berlis, currently dean of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Bern, visited the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary (Kottayam) in 2011, 2014 and 2018, as a guest lecturer. The Rev. Dr. Adrian Suter and the Rev. Prof. Dr. Peter-Ben Smit taught courses at the Mar Thoma Theological Seminary twice. Prof. K.G. Pothen, former principal of the seminary was invited as a visiting professor at the University of Bern in 2018. The dialogue between the two churches was furthered through the response of each church to the interim reports produced at the first three meetings,¹ in particular through a symposium on the dialogue organized at the University of Bern on 5-6 May 2017.² All involved in these exchanges and the dialogue are appreciative of the generous hospitality of the two churches during the various meetings. Personal friendships and spiritual fellowship proved to be as important for the advancement of the dialogue as the theological exchange.

In the course of the dialogue, the delegation of the Mar Thoma Church consisted of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus Suffragan Metropolitan (co-chair; 2011-2016), the Rt. Rev. Dr. Geeverghese Mar Theodosius (co-chair since 2017), the Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, the Very Rev. Prof. Dr. K.G. Pothen, the Rev. Dr. M.C. Thomas, the Rev. Sam T. Koshy, and the Rev. Shiby Varghese. The delegation of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht was made up of the Rt. Rev. Dr. John Okoro (co-chair), the Rt. Rev. Dr. Harald Rein (observer), the Rev. Dr. Adrian Suter, and the Very Rev. Prof. Dr. Peter-Ben Smit. With the death in 2016 of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Suffragan Metropolitan, the commission wishes to express its gratitude for his theological wisdom and spiritual insight and hopes that its work may be seen as a worthy part of his legacy.

The joint commission expresses its profound joy over this journey together and would like to express its hope that this relationship continues to grow as part of the life of each church and developed into a communion relationship.

Historical Introduction to the two churches

The following offers a brief outline of the history and defining characteristics of each church. The full name of each church is: Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht; for the sake of convenience, they will typically be referred to in this document as the Mar Thoma Church and the Old Catholic Church.

The Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches

The Union of Utrecht presently comprises seven churches in Europe,³ each of which is organized on an episcopal and synodical basis within the boundaries of a particular country. They share a central organ for common witness and mission in the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference (IBC) but each national church is autonomous. The Old Catholic Churches of the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Czech Republic, Croatia and Poland currently make up the Union of Utrecht. Three distinct group of churches can be identified

within the Union: the Old Catholics in the Netherlands, those in the mainly German-speaking parts of Europe and those with a Slav origin.

The Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands (Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland) regards itself as being in historical continuity with the Church of Utrecht founded in the 7th century by St. Willibrord and organized as a church province with the metropolitan see of Utrecht in 1559. From the late 16th century onwards, weakened by the Calvinist reformation and the Dutch war of independence against the Spanish king, the church had to find a new (and hidden) mode of life in the Calvinist republic. In this difficult and unclear situation, a conflict arose between Rome and Utrecht as to whether the Church of Utrecht, headed by an apostolic vicar, constituted a missionary church subject to the Congregation de Propaganda Fide in Rome or should be regarded as the continuation of the ancient see, preserving its ancient rights to govern itself. The majority of Catholics in the Dutch Republic accepted direct governance from Rome, whereas a minority held on to the ancient rights. The latter were called “the Church of Utrecht”. It elected an Archbishop of Utrecht, had him validly consecrated and appealed to a general council to defend its rights. Until that time when the council might meet, Utrecht refrained from anything which would widen the division between itself and Rome.

The emergence of the Old Catholic Churches in Germany (Katholisches Bistum der Alt-Katholiken in Deutschland), Switzerland (Christkatholische Kirche der Schweiz) and the former Habsburg Monarchy (now the Old Catholic Church of Austria) goes back to the refusal of a group of Catholics, with a politically liberal outlook, to accept the new understanding of the church as expressed in the decree “Pastor aeternus” of the First Vatican Council in 1870, i.e. on the universal jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome and his infallibility as supreme teacher in matters of faith and morals. Their refusal to accept the new dogmas led to their excommunication. Thus they sought to continue the faith and order of the Early Church – hence the name Old Catholic. This resulted in the creation of diocesan synods and the consecration of bishops elected by the synod. From the very beginning of these emerging church structures the emphasis was on reform and a commitment to the recovery of church unity on the basis of the faith and life of the ancient undivided church.

The emergence of Old Catholic Churches in the Czech Republic, Poland and Croatia was not the result of the controversies surrounding the First Vatican Council but rather the result of a desire to live with a distinct ethnic and national identity within the Catholic Church, which the Roman authorities were not willing to concede.

Together these Old Catholic Churches form the Union of Utrecht, which as a communion of churches can also be referred to as one church.⁴ The Union of Utrecht was established on 24 September 1889 when the three Dutch bishops and the bishops of the Old Catholic Churches in Germany and Switzerland declared “that the churches headed and represented by them are in full ecclesial communion with each other”. Subsequently, other Old Catholic churches have become part of the Union. The bishops of the member churches together form an

international synod of bishops, the International Bishops' Conference, of which the Archbishop of Utrecht is ex officio the president; his role is understood as "primus inter pares" (first among equals).

While sharing a common vision, most of the churches' life, mission and work is organised on a national level. Each national church has its own distinct understanding and way of living out its ministry, its liturgical and diaconal work. Each church has its own liturgy in the national language, they organize their life, decision-making and religious education independently. There are various aid agencies for the churches' diaconal work, women's associations, institutions for youth work, communications and such like, where the role of the laity is of central importance. Exchange of experiences is maintained through international networking meetings like the International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference, the International Old Catholic Lay Forum and every four years the International Old Catholic Congress.

The Mar Thoma Church

According to tradition, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church was founded by St. Thomas, who landed in Malankara (Kerala, India) in 52 CE. His work brought several local families to faith in Jesus Christ and he established seven churches in Malankara. Thus, the church in Malankara came into existence, which was a community united in faith, having connections with the Persian church and using the Syriac liturgy. The church had cordial and friendly relations with the local religious communities and cultures.

After the arrival of the Portuguese in India in the 15th century, however, the Roman Catholic Church established its supremacy over the Malankara church through the Synod of Diamper in 1599, where the existing documents on liturgy and faith in the Malankara church were burnt. The Malankara church expressed its pain and protest through the Bent Cross Oath (Koonen Kurisu Sathyam), where representatives from various churches of Malankara tied a rope around the cross in front of the church in Mattancherry, Cochin, in 1653 and made the oath that the Malankara church will continue as an independent and autonomous church.

Following this event, the church requested the Patriarch in Antioch to consecrate an Episcopa for Malankara, who consecrated Deacon Thomas from Malankara church with the name Thomas Mar Athanasius in 1663, who is known as Mar Thoma I. The Malankara church continued to be independent and hold to its faith and practices. After the Bent Cross Oath, the Roman Catholic Church functioned alongside with those people who joined its fold. However, from its beginning the Roman Church introduced faith and practices in the Malankara church which were alien to its original tradition.

Missionaries from the Anglican church arrived in the 19th century and translated the Bible into the local language by which the members of the church had the opportunity to read and understand the scriptures. The missionaries were teachers at the Seminary in Kottayam, along

with Abraham Malpan and Kaithayil Geevarghese Malpan of the Malankara church, where the ordinands were trained.

Understanding of faith in the local language through the translation of the scriptures enabled the teachers at the seminary to emphasize the Biblical and liturgical foundations of ecclesiastical life. Abraham Malpan celebrated the Eucharist in the local language for the first time. He also banished such practices from church which were abusive of faith and liturgy, such as an excessive veneration of saints that had superseded the apostolic faith in the Triune God. In this manner, the reformation of the Church of Malankara began in 1836. It was an affirmation of the faith of the church prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in the 15th century. This continuing community of faith took the name of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

The Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan is currently the head of the church and is the 21st Mar Thoma. At present, the church has eleven Bishops, thirteen Dioceses, 1235 parishes and congregations spread across the globe. There are 1100 clergy who serve around 1.6 million members of the church worldwide.

Missionary presence through monasteries (Ashrams), evangelism through mission centers and witnessing through the diaspora presence constitute the historical trajectories of the community. From 1940 onwards, the migration of Mar Thoma families began within and beyond India, resulting in the growth of a diaspora, which became a key to the historical growth of the community. Migrations to Malaysia, beginning in the 1940s and subsequently to the African and Middle Eastern Countries, to Australia, New Zealand and later to Europe and North America have paved the way for the global presence of the church.

The Mar Thoma Church understands itself as part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. It is rooted in Biblical faith and is Christ-centred in its life. Its worship is Oriental, and its governance is episcopal and democratic. The church fosters its mission through organizations such as the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association, Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam, the Mar Thoma Suvisesha Sevika Sangham, the Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists Association, the Mar Thoma Yuvajana Sakhyam, the Mar Thoma Students Conference and its Department of Sacred Music and Communications. The church also has support programmes amongst those living in poverty, for women, children, people with addiction, people living with mental illness and people living with HIV/AIDS as well as others. Initiatives for justice and peace through mission and evangelism have resulted in the empowering of and solidarity with the oppressed, mainly due to Casteism in India. This was a socio-historical expression of redemption in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The reason for the dialogue

The motivation behind the current dialogue can be traced to three specific developments. Firstly, the Mar Thoma Church and the Old Catholic Church found themselves – in the context

of the broader ecumenical movement as embodied by the World Council of Churches – as two distinct and ancient traditions, dedicated to confessing the faith of the Early Church and committed to ecumenism whilst not being-part of a larger confessional family. Secondly, both churches share an ecumenical commitment and are in communion with the Churches of the Anglican Communion. Thirdly, through personal meetings and theological exchange, an awareness developed that the two churches might have so much in common that a dialogue exploring the establishment of communion would be feasible. The ecumenical context is noted here, the common faith and the shared communion with the Anglican Churches will now be addressed in more detail.

Common Faith

As will be further elaborated in this common statement, the faith of the Early Church, based on Holy Scripture and confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, forms the common basis of faith of the two churches:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Beyond being very ancient, the Nicene creed expresses the common faith agreed upon by the undivided Church. No other confessional document can be considered equal to this creed from the first two ecumenical Councils. Therefore, although the Old Catholic Church is rooted in the Western tradition, it does not confess the “filioque”, which is a later addition to the original text.

Communion with the Anglican Churches

Both the Old Catholic Churches (since 1931) and the Mar Thoma Church (since 1936) are in communion with the churches of the Anglican Communion.⁵ While this does not automatically lead to communion between the Mar Thoma Church and the Old Catholic Churches, it is nevertheless significant for their relationship. On the one hand, it challenges the ecumenical self-understanding of the two churches: they must enter in a dialogue in order to clarify their relationship. On the other hand, the fact that both are in communion with the Churches of the Anglican Communion allows them to enter into the dialogue with mutual trust. Therefore, the commission concentrated upon certain areas of discussion, either because these seemed potentially controversial, or because the commission hoped that a discussion would be particularly enriching.⁶

7

The agenda of the dialogue and the contents of this statement

The agenda consisted of topics arising from the coming together of the Syrian and reformed tradition of the Mar Thoma Church on the one hand and the western Catholic tradition of the Old Catholic Church on the other. Furthermore, the different cultural contexts of the Mar Thoma and Old Catholic Church were given consideration. The dialogue commission identified the topics as follows: Scripture and tradition; councils, the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople and their reception in the church; christology; ecclesiology; the communion of Saints and the faithful departed; sacraments and sacramental theology, including the ministry; symbols, images and icons; mission and inculturation; faith, life and practice. Work leading up to this statement has been published in the shape of the Santhigiri, Hippolytus and Munnar Statements. The current document provides a synthesis of the work presented at the earlier stages of our common ecumenical journey, as published in the aforementioned statements.

The order and inner logic of the topics discussed can be understood as follows. Firstly, that the sources of the faith are considered, starting with Scripture and tradition, especially the

conciliar tradition and its reception with special attention given to Christology. Secondly, the church, its life and mission are considered, with particular attention to the church's liturgical life and questions of inculturation. Each section of the document contains two concise outlines of the Mar Thoma and Old Catholic perspectives on a given topic, followed by a joint statement on the same.

SECTION 1: SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

The Mar Thoma Church has made a long journey of 2000 years and the church has had relationships with various interpretative traditions, primarily with the East Syriac liturgical tradition from the early centuries, and later with the Antiochene liturgical tradition beginning in the 17th century. In the history of the church, the Bible has always been read and interpreted during celebrations of the Eucharist. In the 19th century the church then came into contact with the Anglican missionaries. The Reformation which began in the 19th century was an effort to cleanse the church in its faith and practice on the basis of the Scriptures.

The constitution of the Mar Thoma Church states that it accepts "the Holy Bible consisting of the sixty-six books" as they are "comprised in the Old and New Testaments ... as the basis of all matters of doctrine and faith."⁷ The constitution also affirms the importance of feasts and fasts which is clearly derived from the East and West Syriac liturgical traditions. Since the beginning of the reformation of the Mar Thoma Church in 1836, primarily the Christ-centered feasts and fasts have been celebrated. In its ordination service the Mar Thoma Church entrusts the apostolic faith and tradition to those ordained to the ministry of the church. Thus, the importance of the interpretative traditions and the apostolic faith is affirmed by the church. The position of the Mar Thoma Church is expressed eloquently in the following intercession taken from the Liturgy of Holy Qurbana:

"O Lord, we remember the heritage with which you have entrusted us, the labors of St. Thomas, Apostle of India, and of all the fathers, who passed on to us intact your word and doctrines and through whose care and nurture we now stand before you. Grant us grace that we may steadily adhere to the truth of this Gospel and faithfully pass on our trust to our children."⁸

The Scriptures are taken to be authoritative for determining, correcting, and forming right faith and doctrine.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

The Old Catholic Church takes its name from its orientation towards the witness of the "Early Church" and has sought to renew its faith and order through a continuous process of returning to the ancient sources. In this process, the return to the Scriptures and the Fathers

of the Church has been of preeminent importance. In particular, this long process has led the Old Catholic Church to reform its life and doctrine in multiple ways. In doing so, the Old Catholic Church, stemming from the Latin tradition, has taken recourse to sources from the Eastern and Oriental traditions as well, seeking to do justice to the full witness of the Early Church.

Already at an early stage, this led to both the recognition of the authority of the original text of the Scriptures and an emphasis on their availability in the vernacular. Also, the relationship between Scripture and tradition was reconsidered on the basis of the witness of the Early Church, leading to an understanding of the Holy Scriptures “as the primary rule of Faith” and the acknowledgement that “Scripture is understood within the tradition, but the tradition preserves its purity and the criterion of its truth through Scripture and from the content of Scripture.”⁹ For the Old Catholic Church, the tradition of the Church is an ongoing process of the reception and re-reception of the faith, enculturating it for every generation anew; within the church, the ordained ministry has a preeminent responsibility in this respect.

Agreement on Scripture and Tradition

Both churches agree to the following and consider it to constitute agreement in the faith on this point:

- 1) Both churches recognize the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the heart of the tradition on which the Church’s witness is based and by which it is measured. Both churches identify with the statement that the Holy Scriptures are “the basis of all matters of doctrine and faith”¹⁰ and the statement that the Holy Scriptures are the “primary rule of faith” of the Church by which all matters of faith and order are measured.¹¹
- 2) Both churches understand the Scriptures as a whole to be the authentic witness to God’s self-revelation through the divine Word, incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ.¹² In the Scriptures, God speaks to humankind in human language. – The Scriptures are God’s Word in human words.
- 3) Both churches read Scripture in the context of the Spirit-led life of the church and hence of its tradition. In the life of the church the Scriptures are interpreted for each generation anew and insights from earlier generations, especially from the Fathers of the Church and the conciliar tradition, are indispensable for the understanding of the Scriptures. It is an essential part of the mission of the church to receive the faith, witnessed to by Scripture and tradition, anew in new contexts and enculturate it afresh.¹³ Both churches understand the process of reception to be Spirit-led and open-ended. Differences in the interpretation of Scripture and tradition can result from different processes of inculturation in diverse contexts and do not need to be mutually exclusive but can be complementary and enriching.

- 4) Both churches adhere to different canons of the Old Testament: The Mar Thoma Syrian Church adheres to the canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Old Catholic Church adheres to the canon of the Septuagint. They both recognize, however, that both of these canons have venerable histories and origins. Also, both churches concur that the so-called “deuterocanonical” books (or “anagignoskomena”) are “not of the same canonicity as the books contained in the Hebrew Canon.”¹⁴

SECTION 2: COUNCILS, THE CREED OF NICEA-CONSTANTINOPLE AND THEIR RECEPTION IN THE CHURCH

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

The Mar Thoma Church stands in the rich double tradition of Semitic/Hebrew and Greek Christian thought and is rooted in the life and ministry of St. Thomas, the Apostle. It understands the faith as a way of life (“Margam”) that was committed to them by St. Thomas and finds its expression in a life of discipleship and worship; liturgy is faith celebrated. This is the perspective from which the Mar Thoma Church approaches the ecumenical councils. It accepts the first three ecumenical councils and remembers them in its Eucharistic liturgy as affirmative of the faith of the Syriac tradition. At the same time, it had no part in the controversies leading to later ecumenical councils or in these councils themselves, which it recognizes, but has not formally accepted. This position does not imply rejection or disapproval of these later (four) ecumenical councils, but, on the contrary respect and regard. The focus of the Mar Thoma Church is on the first three councils and the creed of Nicea-Constantinople. The latter is recited in the liturgical celebration of its sacraments.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

The Old Catholic Churches takes their name from their orientation towards the witness of the “Early Church”, including the faith of the seven ecumenical councils. They acknowledge that the later councils sought to further develop the faith that had been confessed by the earlier ones. In the Old Catholic tradition, the conciliar tradition and the conciliarity of the Church are of major importance. Therefore, the Old Catholic Churches have a strong focus on the continuous reception of the faith of the Early Church, as expressed in the conciliar tradition and through the episcopal-synodal life of the church and in its liturgy (e.g., the recitation of the Nicene-Constantinople creed in the Eucharist).

Agreement on Councils, the Creed and their Reception

Both churches agree on the following concerning the ecumenical councils and their reception and consider it to constitute agreement in the faith on this point:

- 1) Both churches uphold the faith of the Early Church. For the Mar Thoma Church, this faith is expressed in the first three ecumenical councils, which it recognizes and accepts as part of its tradition. The discussion was greatly helped by the recognition that the Mar Thoma Church was not involved in the Council of Chalcedon, nor took sides in the surrounding and ensuing debates. For the Old Catholic Church the faith is expressed in the seven ecumenical councils.
- 2) A long-standing tendency in Old Catholic and Mar Thoma theology to focus on the reception of the essence, rather than the letter of conciliar decisions, and a reluctance to repeat theological controversies of the past in contemporary theology, provided a basis for rapprochement. In receiving past theological insights and ecclesial teaching, the focus should be on the intention and soteriological concern underlying them rather than on the letter of what has been transmitted. Accordingly, both churches take a dynamic view of reception and a hermeneutical approach to the past. This approach also received broad recognition in recent ecumenical dialogue. Therefore the two churches agree that the difference in the number of councils is secondary to the faith that they express and recognize that this difference does not have to affect the relationship between both churches.¹⁵
- 3) Accordingly, both churches recognize that each has received, through their respective traditions and histories, the same faith of the Early Church, as confessed in the creed of Nicaea and Constantinople.

SECTION 3: CHRISTOLOGY

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

Several churches in the Syriac tradition did not involve themselves with the Christological controversies of the early centuries. The non-Chalcedonian churches in Oriental Christianity did not receive Chalcedon and were content with the understanding that they have one Lord Jesus Christ who is both fully divine and fully human. The Mar Thoma Church affirms the divinity and humanity of one Lord Jesus Christ, which is the mystery of the one incarnate Christ. Incarnation, which is itself a mystery, reveals the mystery of the triune God. Revelation of God is both unfolding and concealing the nature of the triune God at the same time. The purpose of incarnation is the redemption of humanity and the entire creation, by receiving and appropriating the way of redemption revealed in the incarnate Jesus Christ.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

The Old Catholic Church received the faith of the Early Church through the Latin tradition of the West.¹⁶ It is part of its tradition to confess its faith in Christ following the definitions of the conciliar tradition, including the Council of Chalcedon. At the same time, in the theological tradition of the Old Catholic Church, a strong emphasis has been developed to focus on the soteriological essence of doctrinal definitions, rather than on their letter and its acceptance.

This also applies to Christological definitions. Accordingly, the Council of Chalcedon is seen as providing signposts for reflection on the mystery of the divinity and humanity of the one Lord Jesus Christ, rather than defining one particular Christology with one normative terminology. In doing so, Old Catholic theologians share in the broad ecumenical re-reception of this council.

Agreement on Christology

- 1) Both churches confess the faith of the Early Church in the words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (without the “filioque”), while jointly recognizing the first three ecumenical councils (Nicea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus). Thus, with the Church of all the ages, we confess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ,

the only begotten son of God, begotten of the Father before all world, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man.

Together with the Mar Thoma Church, the Old Catholic Churches rejoice in confessing the mystery of Christ being fully divine and fully human. Yet, “a difference between the two churches consists in the fact that the Old Catholic Churches understand this mystery following the tradition and language of the Council of Chalcedon, whereas the Mar Thoma Church does not”.

- 2) Our dialogue benefitted from the work of earlier theological consultation on the topic of Christology between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches, in which much agreement has been reached already and in which a re-reception of the Council of Chalcedon is taking place. Among the various Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches a considerable consensus on Christology is emerging in the context of different bilateral and multilateral dialogues, e.g. in the dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and the Armenian Apostolic, the Syrian Orthodox and the Coptic Orthodox Church,¹⁷ respectively, the Anglican Communion and the Oriental Orthodox Churches,¹⁸ and the dialogue between Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches.¹⁹ For the Mar Thoma Church, it is its dialogues with the Churches of the Anglican Communion in particular, which are of great importance. In this context, the Church of England acknowledged that the Mar Thoma Church’s “statement of understanding of the Nicene Creed had removed all suspicion of lingering Nestorianism” and that for the Church of England to take further action towards the Mar Thoma Church “would have no implications for relations either with Chalcedonian or non-Chalcedonian Orthodox.”²⁰
- 3) While these dialogues differ in detail, they share a common approach and lead to very similar results. Their common approach is to focus on the theological concerns

involved.²¹ With regard to the hypostatic union, these dialogues typically concluded that both Church families consider this to be a real and complete union, not a duality. Chalcedonian Churches, confessing a divine and a human nature in Christ, do not want to split Jesus Christ in two; nor do non-Chalcedonian Churches want to deny His full divinity and humanity.²² Thus, the churches involved can view their contemporary Christological confession as being in continuity with their common pre-Chalcedonian faith.

- 4) Thus, the Mar Thoma Church and the Old Catholic Churches have both received the faith of the Early Church, confessing the mystery of the one Lord Jesus Christ as being both fully divine and fully human. The Lord Jesus Christ is one, just as the work of redemption is one. At the same time, his divinity does not diminish his humanity, nor does his humanity exist at the expense of his divinity. Therefore, both churches reject one-sided Christologies that emphasize one of these two aspects of Christ to the detriment of the other, both in history and in ongoing contemporary theological reflection.
- 5) Theological reflection on Mary has its place within the context of faith in Christ and the mystery of the incarnation of the divine Word.²³ Accordingly, both churches stand united in rejecting all tendencies to give Mary an independent soteriological status.²⁴

Jointly, our churches believe in “Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, the Word of Life, God Incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”²⁵ Following the Council of Ephesus, both churches rejoice in the remembrance of Mary, the Mother of our Lord, “who was born of the Virgin Mary for the life and salvation of all mankind.”²⁶ Both churches remember Mary as the chosen one and the icon of faith, whose “yes” to God and identification with her Son’s suffering are exemplary for the life of every Christian.²⁷ Mary’s bearing of the Son of God is a mystery of faith. We consider her as the crown of the Saints. Mary carried the second Adam. It is highest wisdom to receive in faith that the Son of God was in the womb of Mary and at the same time with the God the Father. Mary stood at Cana to invoke the Son. Mary stood at the Cross to invite the World to the Son. Mary was among the disciples sharing the deepest moments of Christ’s life, his passion and his resurrection. Bearing witness to his resurrection, she inspired all to the risen Lord. Mary is the pioneer of the apostles. Therefore, we uphold Mary as blessed Virgin and, together with Elizabeth, call her the Mother of our Lord (Luke 1:42-43) and try to emulate her in bringing forth Christ as a gift to the world.²⁸

SECTION 4: ECCLESIOLOGY

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

The church as a faith community is called into being and constituted by the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The church is called to grow in communion after the model of the Holy Trinity, which embodies communion *par excellence* and in whom it has its origin and is anointed to call the whole of creation to the same communion. The church as a sacramental

community affirms salvation and redemption from sinfulness and alienation from God through Christ by its worship, mission and practice. The ministry of preaching the Word of God and the celebration of the sacraments is exercised to this end.

The church, with its origins in the Triune God, as a family of families, stands in continuity with earlier generations as a cloud of witnesses, embodied in human relations in the present, and stretching to the future, anticipating it as an iconic representation of the eschaton. Therefore, the church is in continuity with the heavenly community, which is lived out in the present reality and looking forward to the recapitulation of everything in Christ. In doing so, the church considers *leiturgia*, *martyria*, and *diakonia* as pivotal dimensions of its mission and witness.

Episcopacy and democracy are specially linked in the governance of the church.²⁹ The Metropolitan is the Supreme head of the church. The episcopal synod is the highest body on all matters related to faith and practices. The Prathinidhi Mandalam (general assembly) is the highest democratic body of the church,³⁰ it has a membership consisting of bishops, clergy and elected lay members representing different parishes all over the world. The Prathinidhi Mandalam generally meets once a year; special meetings are convened in order to elect bishops (Episcopas). The Sabha Council is its executive body, constituted by the elected members from the Prathinidhi Mandalam, highlighting concerns and implementing the decisions of the Prathinidhi Mandalam. The clergy meet once a year. The Mar Thoma Church is one global church, with the same liturgy, mission, practices and constitution worldwide. As a global church, the Mar Thoma Church works in such a way that it engages with the contextual realities of all countries and continents. In each context, episcopacy and democracy cohere in the church's governance in such a manner that its core faith and practices are maintained.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

For the Old Catholic Church, the biblical notions of the church as the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, are of particular importance. It considers the communion of the church as the image of the communion of the triune God, which is the origin of the church.³¹ The four characteristics attributed to the church in the creed – one, holy, catholic and apostolic – are correlated divine gifts and as such are also to be translated into the concrete life of the members of the church in *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*.³² In the Old Catholic understanding, it is above all the local church where worship, witness and service come to life, and thus each local church is a full realization of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The local church of all the baptized, lay and clergy, gathered around its bishop, is “wholly church, but not the whole church”:³³ It seeks communion with other local churches, who are themselves also realizations of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. Church leadership in the Old Catholic Churches is organised in a participatory way: the bishop has the first, but not the sole responsibility for church leadership. He shall consult and decide

with the synod, which in Old Catholic church structures is a body of both clergy and elected lay people, meeting regularly to deliberate on important issues of the church and taking common decisions. These synods make their decisions by vote but strive to seek consensus and unanimity, thus avoiding divisions in the church. A primordial task of the synod is the election of the bishop.

Agreement on Ecclesiology

Both churches share the same vision of the church as the following clearly illustrates:

- 1) Both the Mar Thoma Syrian and the Old Catholic traditions see the Church as a communion of salvation, bound together with God through the trinitarian mystery of salvation, and called to embody the sending of the Son by means of its life as the body of Christ. Therefore, it is a communion characterized by a life of *leitourgia*, *martyria*, and *diakonia* and stands in apostolic succession, of which the threefold apostolic ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons is a central expression.³⁴ It exercises the ministry of Word and Sacrament, with its priestly, prophetic, and governing dimensions.
- 2) Both churches have structures of church governance that are characterized by episcopal leadership and structures that assure the participation of laity and clergy alike in processes of discernment and decision making.³⁵
- 3) Both churches affirm their belief in the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” and consider themselves as realisations of the same.³⁶ For this reason, both churches see themselves as participating in the fullness of salvation and are oriented towards communion with other churches. Both churches can also recognize that they share a history of being autonomous churches in apostolic tradition.
- 4) Both churches also underline the ecclesiological significance of the Eucharistic assembly, while simultaneously stressing the necessity of communion on various levels of the life of the church. As a result, both churches can identify with the tradition and language of Eucharistic ecclesiology.

15

SECTION 5: THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS AND THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

The Mar Thoma Church recognizes the apostles, preachers, the evangelists, martyrs, the confessors, and all the saints. They are remembered for their faith and their exemplary life of devotion to God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The church acknowledges their influence on the faith community and prays that the present generation will emulate their life and example. The liturgy affirms the church as a mystical body, a unity of the church in the present and all the faithful departed. The church also affirms that God will raise and gather all the faithful departed on the last day to inherit the heavenly kingdom.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

The Old Catholic Church views the church as the “communion of saints”, consisting of those that have been called into fellowship with God through baptism, and are being sanctified by God.³⁷ The Old Catholic Church gratefully remembers those saints in whose life and death the power of God’s love has become manifest in a particularly intense and clear way. Whenever such saints are remembered, however, the church does not praise them, but God, whose transforming love for humankind and of all creation, has reached its fulfilment in them.

Agreement on the Remembrance of the Departed and the Saints

- 1) Both churches agree on the identity of the communion of all the faithful as “saints.” Both churches understand the “communion of saints” as consisting of the church on earth, the faithful departed and the eschatological church (“church militant, church expectant, church triumphant”). Beyond this, outstanding faithful are recognized and treasured in both churches and “the mother of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary”, “the holy prophets, the apostles, the preachers, the evangelists and the martyrs, the confessors and all the saints”³⁸ are commemorated in the liturgy. Yet, it is recognised that the Old Catholic practice of the remembrance of the departed and the saints is “theologically qualified”. It is noted that these differences in practice do not question the fundamentals of the faith.

Both churches remember the faithful in the liturgy. This is an expression of the communion of all the faithful in Christ which cannot be destroyed by death. Such liturgical practice consists of remembering the faithful departed before God and asking God to remember them mercifully. When God, according to his free judgment, remembers the departed mercifully, he grants them life eternal. This is the core of the remembrance of the departed, whose salvation does not depend on any prayer by the church, but only on the unmerited grace that is received through Christ’s unique work of salvation. Bearing this in mind, both churches recognize their faith in an intercession from the joint Mar Thoma Syrian – Church of South India – Church of North India³⁹ liturgy that mentions both remembrance and recognizes dependence on God’s grace:

“Lord, we thankfully remember the faithful departed, and pray that you raise and gather all the faithful and grant that we may be counted worthy of entering your presence and be gathered into your heavenly kingdom.”⁴⁰

- 1) In the celebration of the liturgy, both churches share the experience and conviction that the church on earth is united with the worship of the heavenly communion of saints, as part of the mystical body of Christ. Both churches rejoice in being part of the “great cloud of witnesses” and give God thanks for the lives and works of His saints, while praying to be given the grace to emulate their life and example, in the hope of being united with all the saints in God’s kingdom when Christ comes in glory. For this

reason, the saints (apostles, evangelists, martyrs, etc.) are commemorated in the liturgy and the life of the church. Therefore, in the Old Catholic Church, statues and paintings of saints exist, in order to make this remembrance visible. This is not the case in the Mar Thoma Church, but the theological intention – remembrance and giving God thanks for his saints – is the same. Both churches reject any worship of saints or holy objects in themselves. We worship not the creature but the creator alone.

- 2) Based on the strong sense that the church on earth is united with the church triumphant, Old Catholics also know of one further kind of prayer that involves saints: requests made to saints to intercede for the church militant.⁴¹ While this practice is not shared by the Mar Thoma Church, the underlying notion of the unity of all members of the mystical body of Christ is part of its tradition as well. Both churches also confess that salvation is always God's free and gracious act mediated through Christ alone. Saints are not seen as additional mediators, nor are they considered as offering more efficacious prayers than the church militant, nor are they worshiped in any way. In line with this, both churches reject any practices or doctrines that would suggest this.

SECTION 6: SACRAMENTS AND SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY

The life of both churches is characterized by the celebration of seven sacraments (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation/Chrismation, Confession, Marriage, Ordination, and the Anointing of the Sick) as the means of initiation into the church and as the means of sanctification by God's grace. At the same time, the proclamation of the Word of God is an indispensable part of every liturgical celebration. Given their foundational importance, baptism (with christmation/confirmation) and eucharist are discussed separately. Given its ecumenical significance ordination will also be considered separately⁴² Confession, marriage and the anointing of the sick are jointly seen as sacraments intended for the ongoing sanctification of the Christian life.

Baptism

Both churches regard baptism as a means of grace, effecting a person's initiation into the communion of the church and its faith, as well as into a life of discipleship.⁴³ In both churches, children born into families that are members of the church are commonly baptized as infants, while unbaptized adults joining the church are baptized following their conversion. Both churches celebrate the baptism of an anointed candidate with sanctified water in the Name of the Triune God and complete it by Chrismation. The minister of baptism is the bishop or a priest; in the Old Catholic tradition, in special pastoral cases and with a specific commission by the bishop or the responsible priest, baptism is also administered by deacons.

Eucharist

Broad consensus was noted with regards to the shape and content of the Eucharist. Both churches understand the Eucharist as the remembrance of God's salvific acts, making these present to the assembled congregation in the sharing of bread and wine as the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharistic celebration unites heaven and earth, past and present, and joins the Church with the entirety of creation in its worship of God. Both churches agree on the affirmation of the unique presence of Christ, as a mystery, in the celebration and the elements, but do not express this faith using models such as transubstantiation, consubstantiation, or receptionism. The Eucharist is presided over by the bishop or, in his place, a priest.⁴⁴

Ministry

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

The Mar Thoma Church affirms that the Church, as the body of Christ, as the body of baptised members, shares in the priestly ministry of Jesus Christ (priesthood of all believers), representing creation before God in worship and representing God before creation through its mission. In exercising this ministry, the church is being led, guided and shepherded by the ordained ministry. The one ordained ministry is exercised through three offices namely: Episcopa (Bishop), Kassesha (Priest) and Semmash (Deacon). Following the apostolic tradition through St. Thomas and in accordance with the Syriac tradition, Episcopos are elected, through a democratic process, from the celibate clergy of the church. Episcopos are consecrated in apostolic succession, in a lineage reaching back to St. Thomas himself. Being a steward in the church, the minister has the responsibility to shepherd the faithful until all things will be united in Christ. Ministers ardently participate in the mission of the Kingdom of God, through the preaching of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments and equipping the laity to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ. Ministers witness to the Risen Lord by the pastoral and missionary presence in church and in society. The chief celebrant of all the Sacraments is the Holy Trinity.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

In the Old Catholic tradition, the apostolic ministry flows from the office of the bishops, who together with priests and deacons form the three-fold ministry, which exists within the communion of the church and in relation to the joint calling and responsibility of all the baptized.⁴⁵ Bishops have a double belonging: as *episkopoi* of local churches and as members of supra-local episcopal synods. Old Catholics embrace the concept of the threefold episcopate: within the local church a bishop exercises the episcopate personally, collegially with the presbytery (and the deacons), and communally with all the baptized who are not ordained (for instance in a synod). Each person exercises the responsibilities pertinent to the order to which s/he has been called. All are part of a network of mutual and joint responsibilities for the mission of the church.⁴⁶ As a key expression of the apostolicity of the church, the ministry

is in apostolic succession, indicative of the ongoing mission of the church throughout the ages, transmitted by means of the episcopal ordination of all clergy, in particular of bishops. In most Old Catholic Churches, the threefold ministry is open to men and women, both married and unmarried.

Agreement on Ministry

- (1) Both churches uphold the threefold apostolic ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, ordained by the bishop. This ministry is in apostolic succession, thereby expressing the continuity of the apostolic faith of the church with its origins in the sending of the Son of God.⁴⁷
- (2) The ordained ministry exists within and at the service of the church, with particular responsibility of presiding over its life, initiatives that enhance its life and mission in worship, witness and service, and by reminding it of its apostolic origins and tradition.⁴⁸
- (3) In both churches, bishops are elected by the whole church in a democratic process, thus underlining the responsibility of the people of God for its own leadership.
- (4) The ministry of the bishop is exercised personally, collegially with priests and deacons and communally with the entire church; it also entails a particular calling to enhance the fellowship of churches among each other.
- (5) In the question of the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry, the two churches take a different approach. The Mar Thoma Church does not disagree with such ordinations theologically. Nevertheless, for reasons of tradition and culture, has not ordained women to the apostolic ministry. Most Old Catholic Churches do ordain women to the apostolic ministry.⁴⁹ Both churches recognise this as an expression of unity in diversity.

SECTION 7: SYMBOLS, IMAGES, AND ICONS IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

Standing in the tradition of the oriental churches and drawing on the biblical heritage with its rich symbolism, symbols are very significant for the Mar Thoma Church. Through symbols, eternal realities become present in time and space to human beings, who also exist in time and space. The central symbol is Jesus Christ, from whom all other symbols derive and to whom all other symbols point. Both the liturgy and church architecture are replete with symbols. Due to the reformation of the Mar Thoma Church in the nineteenth century and a concern that icons could be seen as idolatrous, there is a reluctance to use them in worship. This position similarly applies to the veneration of images and saints at large.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

In the faith and worship of the Old Catholic Church, symbols play an important role. They are considered as material signs that point beyond themselves to the spiritual. Fundamentally, all ecclesial symbols refer to God, who alone is worthy of adoration and worship. The ground for the use of visible symbols to refer to the invisible God and thus aid the believers on their spiritual journey is found in the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ, who himself is the perfect image of the invisible God. Thus, symbols are an essential part of divine-human communication. Icons, statues, and other imagery or decoration that occur in Old Catholic Churches, is part of this church's cultural heritage and, whenever used in worship, are used as a means of furthering the devotion to God in Christ. Abuses of images as idols are carefully avoided; in modern Old Catholic church buildings a clear reluctance to overuse images can be discerned.

Agreement on Symbols, Signs, Images and Icons in the life of the Church

- 1) Both churches agree that symbols, understood as signs with a deeper meaning, making accessible a reality that goes beyond themselves, are of significance for the life of the church and divine-human communication. The eternal communicates itself to the temporal by means of signs belonging to the realm of the temporal. In this sense, the central and foundational symbol within the Christian tradition is God in Jesus Christ himself. All other signs and symbols ultimately are derived from him and point towards him.⁵⁰
- 2) Both churches are wary of the abuse of images that can become idols; in the Mar Thoma Syrian tradition this has led to a situation in which the use in worship and veneration of icons is not practised. In Old Catholic liturgy, the use of images and icons is limited and Christ-centered. Such use of images and icons is respected by the Mar Thoma Church.

20

SECTION 8: MISSION AND INCULTURATION

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

The Mission of the church is the mission of God for creation. God created the world thus it belongs to God and is destined for God. However, creation is distorted and alienated from its creator, breaking communion with God and one another. God's mission to unite everything in Christ, restoring communion with God and fullness of life in Christ. Incarnation is God's manner of mission to complete God's purpose.

The church is called to proclaim and practise the redeeming love of Jesus Christ, enabling the world to fully participate in the life-giving communion in God. Throughout history, the church has taken a critical stance with a prophetic voice in situations of injustice and has lived in solidarity with the poor and the suffering. The church participates in mission in the hope in

the risen Christ, who makes all things new and in whom all things in creation are brought to fulfilment.

The Mar Thoma Church lives out this mission as a church that stands in the Syriac tradition and that of its reformation. Inculturation of this mission is part of its historical existence. It considers the inculturation of the Gospel as a crucial issue in the church's missionary activity that has its basis in the incarnation of Christ, who took on our human nature and was formed in a human culture to carry out the work of salvation. The missionary inculturation of the Gospel through the work of the church stands in analogy to the incarnation. The interpretation of the tradition leads to a dialogue between Gospel and culture. In this dialogue, the Mar Thoma Church is neither hostile to culture nor fully identifies with it but rather attempts to be hospitable to elements of the culture in which the church exists. Many examples of the integration of spiritual, liturgical, and social aspects of this interaction between Gospel and culture exist. Some of them concern the integration of Indian culture into the life of the church, e.g., the use of the vernacular in the liturgy, others show a critical interaction between Gospel and culture, such as the commitment of the church to the struggle of the "untouchables" (Dalits) for social justice in challenging the caste system.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

The mission of the church is to bear witness of the good news of God's salvation of humankind to all people, to serve the world and in particular the marginalised, thus making the message of God's love for the whole of humanity more tangible, and to call men and women into the discipleship of Christ. It is not the church's own choice but rather the task given to the church by God himself (*missio Dei*). Due to misconceptions of the notion of mission in the colonial age, which led to contempt and violence in some contexts, Western European churches often prefer to speak of the proclamation of the Gospel, of witness and of service in the world, thus avoiding the term "mission". They do, however, adhere to the *missio Dei* of the church as described.

The Old Catholic Church sees inculturation of the Gospel in new cultures as part of the missionary endeavor of the church and in analogy to the incarnation of the Divine Word in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. In this way, the church lives up to its participation in and its calling to be an instrument and embodiment of the *missio Dei*, by means of which it exists as a fire exists by burning. In the Old Catholic tradition, this missionary understanding of inculturation is traditionally expressed through an emphasis on the use of the vernacular in the worship and the life of the church. Also, the Old Catholic Church consciously attempts to seek the dialogue with the culture in which the church exists, as expressed in art, modern thought and scholarship. In addition, it challenges itself to engage in outreach to other cultural groups, beyond the predominantly Western Old Catholic Church, and to the increasingly secular society, through participation in the public debate, for instance in the media. At the same time, the Old Catholic Church also engages in a critical dialogue with

contemporary culture. Such a dialogue takes place, not least, through the equipping of the faithful (e.g. through adult education) to assist them in their own discernment for their life in Christ in contemporary culture.

Agreement on Mission and Inculturation

- 1) Both churches agree on an understanding of mission in terms of *missio Dei*,⁵¹ of which they are instruments through their Spirit-led participation in it. Inculturation of the Gospel is the incarnational shape of such mission. In its contents, the church's mission is that of the gospel of liberation and reconciliation as it was embodied and preached by Jesus, calling human beings to turn to God and live a life of solidarity with the marginalized, in imitation of the one who came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.
- 2) Both churches consider inculturation as a fundamental aspect of their historical and their missionary existence, which continues the mission that Jesus gave to his apostles and understand it in analogy to the Incarnation.⁵²
- 3) Both churches understand the relationship between Gospel and culture as a dialogical one, in which the church can be both hospitable and critical towards the culture in which it exists.⁵³
- 4) Both churches recognize that the missionary transmission of the Gospel from one culture to another is a complex process of "translation" from one socially established structure of meaning to another, in which neither cultural system is normative.⁵⁴
- 5) Both churches recognize that the ongoing inculturation of the Gospel in a multitude of cultures, as a result of the church's mission, leads to an ever greater discovery of the richness of the Gospel and therefore to a greater diversity in Christian life. This diversity is to be understood as the result of the inculturation of the one Gospel of Jesus Christ and, therefore, as a diversity that has its basis in the fundamental unity of the one incarnate Lord.⁵⁵

22

SECTION 9: FAITH, LIFE and PRACTICE

The perspective of the Mar Thoma Church

For the Mar Thoma Church, the field of faith, life, practice and ethics has its origins and roots in the Trinity and the Triune God's salvific work of recapitulation of creation and renewal of life through the incarnation of the Son of God. The church progresses as a pilgrim through history in a life of *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*. In the *kerygma* the church transmits and interprets the tradition and the liturgy, in *koinonia* the church seeks to be a healing, reconciling, and mentoring network in which the Trinitarian relationships are emulated, *diakonia* is the mission of the church in which it embodies God's love in the world and celebrates the "liturgy after the liturgy." In the sacraments, the created world is lifted up to the heavenly realm and through them God in Christ invites the faithful to the journey of a

sanctified life. The liturgical year fulfils a similar function, providing space for reflection and focus on the faith and on issues of ethical and moral importance. In the missionary work of the church, an extension of God's love, care, and justice in the world, the three dimensions of *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia* are also present. In the context of all of this, ethical questions are considered in relation to the Trinitarian love of God. For any social relation, the Trinity provides a life affirming paradigm. In ethical debates, the Bible is interpreted in the Eastern tradition of interpretation; in the discussion of all ethical questions, the Mar Thoma Church operates very carefully, taking into consideration doctrine, biblical interpretation, cultural criticism, and the importance of the enhancement of human relations, as called for by humanity's redemption in Jesus Christ. Cultural differences with other churches may lead to differences in reflection and method to culturally specific questions. Nevertheless, taking into account the distinctiveness of different cultural contexts can help to see such differences as part of the harmony of the ecumenical journey towards unity.

The perspective of the Old Catholic Church

The Old Catholic Church understands salvation as the restoration of communion with the Triune God, who is in Godself communion.⁵⁶ In the life of the church, the faithful are incorporated into this communion; this takes place paradigmatically in the church's liturgy, which, therefore, offers a model for life in Christ. In the interpretation and reception of the faith, Old Catholics use a careful hermeneutical approach that seeks to do justice to the witness of Scripture and tradition, contemporary culture, and the dignity of the human person. Furthermore, the Old Catholic Church upholds a strong sense of personal responsibility of the faithful for their own discernment of their life in Christ, especially in relation to ethical discernment. This has its roots in the church's historical background, in particular in relation to schools of thought that emphasize personal freedom and responsibility. By exercising their personal freedom and responsibility in the church, the faithful bring to fruition the gifts of the Spirit that they have received. In this participatory process of discernment, clergy and laity alike seek to discover what the meaning of the faith and an appropriate life in Christ means for today.⁵⁷

Agreement on Faith, Life and Practice

- 1) Both churches agree that life in the church is life in communion (*koinonia*) after the paradigm of the Trinity; this life is characterized by witness (*kerygma* or *martyria*), worship (*leitourgia*), and service (*diakonia*). This life in communion is salvific because it participates in the renewal of all things in Christ until all is restored to communion with God.⁵⁸
- 2) In both churches, church practice, most notably: *diakonia*, is understood as the "liturgy after the liturgy." In the liturgy, which transmits the faith of the church and relates the created world to God, the faithful are strengthened for their part in the

church's pilgrimage of faith in the world. The missionary work of the church is an essential part of this continuation of the liturgy in everyday life.⁵⁹

- 3) Both churches use a careful hermeneutical approach when it comes to discernment in ethical matters: the precise study of doctrine and the thorough interpretation of the Bible are combined with constructive cultural criticism and attention to the life enhancing aspects of ethical decisions.
- 4) Both churches recognize that the inculturation of the Gospel in diverse contexts may lead to differences in church practice and ethical decision making. They are convinced, however, that these differences are best understood as resulting from cultural differences and as part of the common ecumenical journey towards unity.⁶⁰

Conclusion: A Relationship of Communion between the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht

The dialogue commission is thankful for the opportunity to jointly explore each other's perspectives and arrive at a consensus on all the topics discussed in the course of the dialogue process. It acknowledges that differences in the life and practice of the two churches are expressions of the same apostolic faith. The dialogue commission expresses deep joy over this journey together and proposes that this relationship grow further into living in a Communion relationship.

In the opinion of the dialogue commission, the two churches should come to a formal agreement on a communion relationship.⁶¹

(1) Identifying Communion Relationship

In this agreement, the two churches shall acknowledge:

- a) that both churches realize the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Jesus Christ;
- b) that the distinctiveness of traditions in the two churches is part of the continuation of the apostolic tradition through the centuries and manifests a basic unity in diversity;
- c) that both churches have a rich liturgical and sacramental life and an unbroken episcopal structure;
- d) both churches share a deep commitment to the visible unity of the church. Therefore, both are committed to the ecumenical movement, and share an open and at the same time critical attitude to changing values in society;
- e) that there is a solid foundation on spiritual, as well as institutional, levels which enables a deepening of the relationship between the two churches in the future. Their common faith and practice provide opportunities to support each other and to foster mutual learning.

Based on these acknowledgements, the two churches shall commit themselves to accepting each other's members and clergy and to growing in communion relationship:

(2) Growing in Communion Relationship

- f) The two churches commit themselves to welcome one another's members to receive sacramental and other pastoral ministrations, to encourage their members to participate in the Eucharistic celebrations of each other, as if they were members of their own church, thereby growing into a closer relationship.
- g) The two churches commit themselves to pray for and with one another. Opportunities must be explored for the common celebration of the Eucharist by both churches. The two churches shall invite one another's bishops to participate and officiate in different sacramental celebrations. Both recognize each other's ordained clergy as exercising the same apostolic ministry and welcome them accordingly.
- h) In order to share a common life in mission and service, the two churches choose one or more areas in which to co-operate in missionary and diaconal work. In this way, the churches can foster a partnership in mission by sharing their resources and facilities in a spirit of hospitality. Furthermore, they encourage cooperation between Mar Thoma and Old Catholic parishes wherever possible.
- i) The two churches encourage and facilitate learning and exchange of ideas and information in theological and pastoral matters, e.g. through the exchange of lecturers and students of their respective theological faculties and through the invitation of representatives from each other's churches to major events.
- j) A permanent working committee shall be established, in order to carry on and deepen the relationship and to study new areas of mutual concern.

The commission is grateful to the Episcopal Synod of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht for entrusting this task to it. The commission respectfully submits this final report to them for their deliberation and reception in the churches, according to the procedures of each church, praying that its work may be of service for the establishment of a relationship of communion between them.⁶²

This statement was authored by the dialogue commission, meeting from 16-19 October 2018 in Bern and consisting of the following members, who add their names to the statement:⁶³

Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church

- The Rt. Rev. Dr. Geeverghese Mar Theodosius (co-chair)
- The Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos
- The Very Rev. Prof. Dr. K.G. Pothen
- The Rev. Sam T. Koshy

Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht

- The Rt. Rev. Dr. John Okoro (co-chair)
- The Rt. Rev. Dr. Harald Rein (observer)
- The Rev. Dr. Adrian Suter
- The Very Rev. Prof. Dr. Peter-Ben Smit.

¹ Published as: ‘Santhigiri Statement,’ *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* [hereafter: IKZ] 102 (2012), 315-320; ‘Hippolytus Statement’, IKZ 103 (2013), 324-331; ‘Munnar Statement’, IKZ 105 (2015), 159-166.

² Some of the papers presented are published in issue 1 of IKZ 109 (2019).

³ For this and the following, see: *Utrecht and Uppsala on the Way to Communion. Report from the official dialogue between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Church of Sweden* (2013), in: Angela Berlis (ed.), *Utrecht and Uppsala on the Way to Communion. Report from the official dialogue between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Church of Sweden* (2013) with a revised translation “Utrecht und Uppsala auf dem Weg zu kirchlicher Gemeinschaft” (2018), (Beiheft zu IKZ 108; Bern: Stämpfli, 2018), 69-135, par. 3.

⁴ Since the Union of Utrecht is a communion of churches, the term “Old Catholic Churches” is often used in plural. However, a communion of churches can also be seen as a representation of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, cf. *Kirche und Kirchengemeinschaft. Erster und Zweiter Bericht der Internationalen Römisch-Katholisch – Altkatholischen Dialogkommission 2009 und 2016* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2017), par 17. English translation of the first part: *The Church and Ecclesial Communion. Report of the International Roman Catholic-Old Catholic Dialogue Commission* (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/vetero-cattolici/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20090512_report-church-ecclesial-communion_en.html, accessed 2019-05-07). Thus, the singular “Old Catholic Church” is also possible and will be used in the course of this document whenever it refers to the communion of Old Catholic Churches as a whole.

⁵ 1931: ‘Bonn Agreement’ between the Old Catholic Church and the Church of England; 1936: Agreement of intercommunion between the Mar Thoma Church and the Anglican Church of India. Both agreements were subsequently extended to other Anglican churches.

⁶ Cf. *Utrecht and Uppsala*. An all-encompassing systematic approach, however, which deals with all aspects of the faith, was not deemed necessary (as in the Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue, cf. Urs von Arx [ed.], *Koinonia auf altkirchlicher Basis* [Beiheft zu IKZ; Bern: Stämpfli, 1989]).

⁷ *Constitution of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*. Preamble, par. 3 (Thiruvalla, India: Mar Thoma Publications, 1998).

⁸ *The Holy Qurbana Liturgy of Mar Thoma Syrian Church* (Thiruvalla, India: Mar Thoma Publications, 5th edn, 2000), 43.

⁹ Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission for the Holy and Great Synod, 16th to 28th July, Chambésy 1973, p.110, Cf. Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue, I/1, 5, in: von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*.

¹⁰ *Constitution of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, par. 3.

¹¹ Thesis 9a of the 1874 Bonn Reunion Conference, cf. Heinrich Reusch, *Bericht über die 1874 und 1875 zu Bonn gehaltenen Unions-Conferenzen. Neudruck der Ausgabe in zwei Bänden von 1874 und 1875* (Bonn: Alt-Katholischer Bistumsverlag 2002), 33 and 50.

¹² Cf. Commission on Faith and Order, *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels* (Geneva: WCC, 1998), 1-3; 15-16; 32, see: Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue, I/1, in: von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*; and *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, par. 10.

¹³ Cf. Faith and Order, *Treasure*, 32-33.

¹⁴ Thesis 1 of the 1874 Bonn Reunion Conference, in: Reusch (ed.), *Bericht*, 15. Cf. Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue, I.2, in: von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*.

¹⁵ Cf. *Utrecht and Uppsala* 6.1.1., and ‘Authority and Primacy in the Church. Statement Agreed by the Anglican – Old Catholic Theological Conference, Chichester, August 6-10, 1985,’ 8, in: IKZ 80 (1990), 5-15. See also: Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue III/6, in: von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*.

¹⁶ Cf. *Statute of the Old Catholic Bishops United in the Union of Utrecht* [hereafter: IBC, *Statute*], A.1-2, in: von Arx, Urs/Weyermann, Maja (eds.) (2001): *Statut der Internationalen Altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz (IBK). Offizielle Ausgabe in fünf Sprachen*. (Bern: Stämpfli, 2001 [Beiheft zu IKZ 91]). See also *Utrecht and Uppsala*, 6.1.1.

¹⁷ Cf. ‘Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and of the Pope of Alexandria Shenouda III’ (1973), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 65 (1973), 299-301; ‘Common Declaration. John Paul II and Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas,’ (1994), in: Jeffrey Gros/Harding Meyer/William G. Rusch (eds.), *Growth in Agreement II* (Geneva: WCC, 2000), 691-693; ‘Statement of the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church,’ *o.c.*, 696-697; ‘Common Declaration. Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I,’ *o.c.*, 707-708.

¹⁸ Cf. esp. Anglican – Oriental Orthodox Commission, ‘Agreed Statement on Christology’ (2002), in: Jeffrey Gros/Thomas F. Best/Lorelei F. Fuchs (eds), *Growth in Agreement III* (Geneva: WCC, 2007), 35-38; and idem, ‘Christology. Agreed Statement by the Anglican-Oriental Orthodox International Commission’ (2014), <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/103502/anglican-oriental-orthodox-agreed-statement-on-christology-cairo-2014.pdf> (accessed 2019-05-07).

¹⁹ Cf. Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, ‘Communiqué’ (1989), in: Gros/Best/Fuchs (eds), *Growth III*, 191-193; idem, ‘Second Agreed Statement and Recommendations to the Churches,’ *o.c.*, 194-199.

²⁰ See: Faith and Order Advisory Group of the Board for Mission and Unity of the Church of England, *The Church of England and the Mar Thoma Church* (s.l.: 1974), 2.

²¹ Cf. for this emphasis also *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, preface: ‘the dogmatic decrees of the Ecumenical Councils recognised in both the East and the West.’

²² Cf. esp. Anglican – Oriental Orthodox Commission, ‘Statement’ (2002) 36; idem, ‘Statement’ (2014), par. 8-9; Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, ‘Statement,’ 1-7.

²³ Cf. Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue II/3, in: von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*, where Mariology is discussed in the context of Christology programmatically. See also the declaration of International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference 2008, in: IKZ 99 (2009) 1-3, esp. 2-3.

²⁴ Cf. the International Old Catholic Bishops’ Conference’s reaction to the dogma of the Assumption of Mary (1950), in: IKZ 41 (1951) 2-3, with reference to Acts 4,12: ‘There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’ See also Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (London: Continuum, 2006), par. 2: ‘We agree that there can be but one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, and reject any interpretation of the role of Mary which obscures this affirmation.’

²⁵ *The Holy Qurbana Liturgy of Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, 21.

²⁶ St. Mary is remembered in prayer as the Mother of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, who is worthy to be called ☩ blessed of all generations of the earth. *The Holy Qurbana Liturgy of Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, 33.

²⁷ Cf. International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference 2008; see also the Roman Catholic – Old Catholic Dialogue: *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, par. 55: ‘The mother of the Lord is to be seen within the context of salvation history, as fundamentally testified by the ancient church. It is also important to distinguish between dogma and dogmatization: In the doctrine of the faith a wide-ranging consensus can exist even if the fact of dogmatization is evaluated differently. In addition, the anthropological significance of Mary is to be considered;

Mary can reveal particularly to contemporary individuals how they are graced by God and what they may hope for.’

²⁸ The previous doxological statements on Mary are taken from the Liturgy of Ordination of the Mar Thoma Church, Sections of *Amalugia Prayer and Personal Confessional Prayer to the Ordinate*. Similarly, the International Old Catholic Theologians Conference of 2008 draws attention to doxological materials as informative of (Christocentric) Mariology. Cf. also *Church and Ecclesial Communion* par. 51.

²⁹ *Constitution of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, pars. 10-20, inform about the inseparable and mutually enriching relation between episcopacy and democracy.

³⁰ Thus, the *Prathinidhi Mandalam*, containing 65% lay members and 35% clergy and a minimum of 20% of its members are to be women, as a representative body, is most akin to an Old Catholic national synod, whereas the Mar Thoma tradition reserves the word ‘synod’ for its synodal gathering of bishops, analogous to the Old Catholic International Bishops’ Conference or a national gathering of bishops (Old Catholic Churches of the Netherlands and Poland).

³¹ Cf. *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, par. 7.

³² Cf. *Utrecht and Uppsala*, 5.1 and 5.2.1; IBC, *Statute* A.3.3.; Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: WCC, 2013), 21.

³³ Cf. ‘The Church: Local and Universal. A Study Document Commissioned by the Joint Working Group [of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches],’ in: Gros/Meyer/Rusch (eds.), *Growth III*, 36; IBC, *Statute* 3.1; 3.3.

³⁴ Cf. for this and the following: *Utrecht and Uppsala*, 5; *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, pars. 5-9; Faith and Order, *Church*, pars. 11-27; IBC, *Statute*, A.3.4.

³⁵ Cf. *Constitution of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, pars. 10-20 and 187-236; IBC, *Statute*, A.4-4.1.

³⁶ Cf. *The Constitution of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, par. 1; IBC, *Statute*, A.3.1-3.2., *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, par. 16; ‘The Church: Local and Universal’, 13-14.

³⁷ Cf. Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue, III.2/2; VI/1.2, in: von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*.

³⁸ Cf. *The Holy Qurbana Liturgy of Mar Thoma Syrian Church*, 33. *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, 51.

³⁹ CSI and CNI are both members of the Anglican Communion.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Common Liturgy of the Eucharist for the Church of North India, the Church of South India and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar*, prepared by the Commission on Worship and Mission of the Communion of Churches in India, <http://csimichigan.org/PDF/COMMON%20LITURGY%20OF%20CNI%20AND%20MARTHOMA.pdf> (accessed 2019-05-07).

⁴¹ Cf. Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue, VI.1.2, in: von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*.

⁴² Cf. Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982), see also idem, *The Church*.

⁴³ The first prayer of the Holy Baptism Service of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church: *Liturgy for Holy Baptism* (Thiruvalla, India: Mar Thoma Publications, 2013), 3-27:4. Cf. *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, 12.

⁴⁴ Cf. Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Liturgy of the Holy Communion. Liturgy for the Vesting (*Thooyaba*), 1-5 (*Thooyaba* is the Syriac term for the preparatory liturgy preceding the main liturgy of the Holy Communion); *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, 12; Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, V/4, in: Von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, 12; *Utrecht and Uppsala*, 5.4.1; Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, V/7, in: von Arx (ed.), *Koinonia*.

⁴⁶ I.e., as intended by the terms ‘personal episcopo’, ‘collegial episcopo’ and ‘communal episcopo’, as introduced by Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 26, cf. also idem, *The Church*, 52.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, pars. 24 and 36.

⁴⁸ Cf. IBC, *Statute*, A.4.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, 65-73.

⁵⁰ Cf. Anglican – Orthodox Dialogue, *Dublin Statement*, 79-87.

⁵¹ Cf. Faith and Order, *The Church*, 1-7. The International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference met with bishops of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church and the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites at an extraordinary meeting, from 14 to 18 September 2014 in Utrecht, in order to formulate a response to the questions posed to the churches by the Faith and Order document "The Church: Towards a Common Vision", cf. IKZ 95 (2015), 72-76, esp. 73.

⁵² Cf. IBC, *Statute*, A.3.4; *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, par. 20.

⁵³ Cf. Faith and Order, *The Church*, pars. 1, 17-20.

⁵⁴ Cf. Faith and Order, *The Church*, par. 7.

⁵⁵ Cf. Faith and Order, *The Church*, 28-30.

⁵⁶ Cf. IBC, *Statute*, A.3.

⁵⁷ Cf. IBC, *Statute*, A.4, see also: *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, par. 23.

⁵⁸ Cf. Faith and Order, *The Church*, 67; *Utrecht and Uppsala*, 5.1.1.; *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, pars. 13-15.

⁵⁹ Cf. Faith and Order, *The Church*, 67; *Utrecht and Uppsala*, 5.1.1.; *Church and Ecclesial Communion*, pars. 13-15.

⁶⁰ See: Faith and Order, *The Church*, 6, 12, 28-30.

⁶¹ See for this also the recommendations made in *Utrecht and Uppsala*.

⁶² The road that leads to such an agreement includes the following processes in the Mar Thoma and Old Catholic Churches, respectively: The Mar Thoma Church has discussed the processes of the Dialogue at the level of the Episcopal Synod, and at the Theological Commission and the Ecumenical Relations Commission of the Church. The church wants to take these processes further to its intended fruition. As a next stage the church intends to take the discussion to clergy meetings and the annual gathering of the clergy of the entire church. Then it will be taken to the Sabha Council and the Prathinidhi Mandalam, the annual general body of the church, and finally for approval by the Episcopal Synod. In the Union of Utrecht, the International Bishops' Conference has already discussed the three earlier statements of the dialogue commission and given its approval in principle. In order to establish a communion relationship, all national Old Catholic Churches as well as a number of international Old Catholic institutions must be given the opportunity to comment on the proposals. Some of these have already reacted positively to the previous statements of the dialogue commission. The final decision on entering communion relationship, following the reception process of the national Churches, will be in the responsibility of the International Bishops' Conference.

⁶³ On its meeting in Bern on October 19th 2018, the commission entrusted the editorial finalization to a sub-commission, consisting of Rev. Sam T. Koshy and Rev. Dr. Adrian Suter. They were supported by The Very Rev. Prof. Dr. Peter-Ben Smit (references) and Rev. Lars Simpson (linguistic advisor).