

Ecumenical Dialogue as Intercultural Encounter

The Dialogue between the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht as an Example of Intercultural Theological Dialogue

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of a recent ecumenical dialogue, the one between the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht (2011-2014) and analyses the dialogue through the lens of intercultural theology, arguing that the fields of ecumenical dialogue and intercultural theology can be brought into conversation with each other fruitfully, even if this is not currently being done in appertaining scholarship.

Keywords

ecumenical dialogue – intercultural theology – Old Catholic Church – Mar Thoma Syrian Church

Introduction

The dialogue between the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht (UU) that was, after an exploratory exchange of visits of clergy and bishops, begun in November 2011 and concluded in February 2014 is one of the youngest — and shortest — bilateral dialogues with the aim of establishing full communion between of recent years, and certainly the youngest conducted by both of these churches.¹ So far, no scholarly work

¹ For an overview of the ecumenical engagement of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, see: Joseph Daniel, *Ecumenism in Praxis. A Historical critique of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian*

has been published on this dialogue.² The current essay provides an outline of the dialogue, its contents and results, and pays particular attention to the intercultural dynamics that helped it to proceed relatively speedily. Thus, the paper asks the double question of the history and of the development of this dialogue and answers both. In doing so, it will become clear how the dynamic of intercultural encounter and theology was a significant catalyst for this dialogue and can serve as a paradigm for the conceptualization of other such dialogues. In this way, this paper contributes to the understanding and dynamics of formal theological dialogues between churches, which are, often, discussed without much reference to the dynamics of intercultural theology and, as it is always implied by this kind of theology: hermeneutics. In order to achieve these aims, first, an outline of the dialogue and its contents will be given, including an overview of the three documents that were produced by it, second, this ecumenical dialogue will be placed in the context of and interpreted from the perspective of intercultural theology, after which, in the third and last section, conclusions and perspectives will be offered on the interrelationship and interaction of ecumenical theology and intercultural theology in the dialogue process. In doing so, this contribution interrelates intercultural

Church, Bern *et al.*: Peter Lang: 2014 (forthcoming at the time of writing), here quoted after the manuscript of Daniel's 2014 doctoral dissertation, defended at the University of Bern on 27 February: *The Historic Praxis of Ecumenism in the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church*. For an overview of Old Catholic ecumenism up to 2011: Peter-Ben Smit, *Ecclesiologicals* (since the publication of this work, the dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht was also completed and the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites was readmitted to the Union of Utrecht through the membership of the International Bishops' Conference, see: International Bishops' Conference, 'Communiqué of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference (IBC) on the occasion of its 2014 meeting in Wislikofen, Switzerland', website of the *Utrechter Union der Altkatholische Kirchen*, <http://www.utrechter-union.org/?b=403>, accessed 25 May 2014. For the agreement between the IBC and the Mariavites, see: International Bishops Conference, 'Communique about the readmission of the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites to the Union of Utrecht', website of the *Utrechter Union der Altkatholische Kirchen*, <http://www.utrechter-union.org/fman/271.pdf>, accessed 25 May 2014; for the preceding 'Statement of the Mariavite bishops to the IBC,' see the website of the *Utrechter Union der Altkatholische Kirchen*, <http://www.utrechter-union.org/fman/275.pdf>, accessed 25 May, 2014; for the report of the dialogue with the Church of Sweden, 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, website of the *Utrechter Union der Altkatholische Kirchen*, <http://www.utrechter-union.org/fman/258.pdf>, accessed 25 May 2014.

- 2 In his dissertation, Joseph Daniel only makes passing reference to this dialogue, which had not been completed at the time of its submission. See: Daniel, *Ecumenism*.

theology to ecumenical theology in a way that is not often done, i.e. by focusing on the interface and interrelationship between intercultural theology and an emphatically theological dialogue aimed at full communion,³ rather than on the interface between intercultural theology and missiology, interfaith dialogue, or more general intercultural communication within or beyond the limits of the Christian community (even if precisely a strongly intercultural approach to Christian theology will always question such boundaries). It will be argued, in the end, that the dynamics of this theological dialogue can very well be described using the perspective of intercultural theology and that a typically intercultural dynamic is very much part of the way in which this dialogue has proceeded. On this basis, a plea can be made for a further and more emphatic integration of intercultural insights into theological dialogue and, conversely, of the utilization of insights and experiences with theological dialogue to further enrich the field of intercultural theology.

The Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic Dialogue: Context and Outline

The Context of the Dialogue in Old Catholic and Mar Thoma Ecumenism

In order to give an overview of the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic theological dialogue, it is helpful to briefly give an impression of the place of the dialogue in the engagement with the ecumenical movement of both churches.

Mar Thoma Ecumenism and the Relationship with the Old Catholic Churches

Before turning to the ecumenical commitment and tradition of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, some attention should be given to the tradition of this church in the broader sense of the word. Its name already indicates two traditions of which it is part, i.e. the Syrian Christian tradition and the tradition

3 On this emphasis within intercultural theology, see below. This observation also implies a potential criticism of the Mar Thoma Syrian — Old Catholic dialogue, given that it was not all that clearly placed in the horizon of the church as the continuation of God's mission. Nonetheless, it stood in the context of the fulfilment of the ecumenical mission of both churches. — Still, this lack of connection in the dialogue documents as such can be seen as exemplary for the discourse on intercultural theology with its (often) missiological agenda on the one hand (and resulting lack of attention for church unity on the basis of theological agreement) and the discourse on theological agreement in the context of theological dialogues that often do not focus much on mission as such (even if it is often mentioned as the context of such dialogue).

of the Mar Thoma Christians in India (notably in Malabar). Furthermore, the heritage of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church was reshaped in the 19th century through a reformation under the leadership of Abraham Malpan (with its climax in 1836), which received much Western (Anglican evangelical) theological insight, particularly as mediated by the Church Mission Society (CMS).⁴ All of this is relevant for the purposes of the present article, as will become apparent also on the basis of the outline of the Old Catholic tradition below, given that it indicates that the ecumenical dialogue at stake is one that can be considered intercultural in two senses of the word: moving between two different ecclesial traditions and two different cultural settings.

As far as the ecumenical commitment of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church is concerned, the line of the thought presented recently by Daniel may be followed, who describes the ecumenical involvement of this church at great length in his doctoral dissertation, and also places the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Church in this context.⁵ Daniel first gives an impression of the religious and ecumenical identity of the church:

The [Mar Thoma Syrian] Church is an indigenous autonomous and independent church and its historical disposition and existence can be traced back to the first century beginning from the St. Thomas tradition. The coming of Christianity and the speculated founding of the church by the Apostle Thomas in India's socio-religious and cultural setting enabled it to take on an indigenous Indian church tradition, independent of the influence of the western church traditions. But it was dependent on the church tradition of the East. In this process, the church was able to bring members from three diversified religious and ethnic communities — the *Dravidian*, the *Brahmin* and the People of the land — under the umbrella of the church. This necessitated the church to take a stance in dialogical relationship with their brethren, who belonged to other religious communities. Historically, the church continued this policy of dialogical interaction and engagements with other religions in India and other

4 Thus, it takes up its own position in the family of Mar Thoma churches in India, on which, see: C.P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas, *Indian Churches of St. Thomas*, New Delhi: ISPCK, 2nd edition 2005, especially 66-68, on CMS, see, e.g., Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movements in Christian History*, New York: Orbis Books 1996, 240-258.

5 While this paper will attempt to also present a view about the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, it is obviously written by a scholar at home in the Old Catholic tradition and unable to read Malayalam; potential imbalances (and inadvertent mistakes or misunderstandings) can be attributed to this circumstance.

churches across the world. Broadly speaking, these may be regarded as constituting the MT Church's cognitive base, which provides the context to the church within which ecumenical engagements and its relation with other religious communities emerged.⁶

Daniel goes on to note that it is necessary for one's analysis of the ecumenical self-positioning of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church

to be aware of the praxis of a notable conciliar fellowship model of ecumenism that can be seen very early in the [Mar Thoma Syrian] Church. Even when the church remained as an independent indigenous church, it remained open to other churches in receiving episcopal supervision, and in engaging in full-communion, episcopal concelebration, occasional inter-communion and inter-communion relations with the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, Church of India, Burma and Ceylon, and Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon.⁷

In fact, as Daniel also notes, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church has been in communion with the Churches of the Anglican Communion at large.⁸ He further notes a resulting principle of Mar Thoma Syrian ecumenism: 'Keeping the unity of the churches, while remaining as autonomous churches with sovereign administrative freedom has been the central stance of the MT Church on these ecumenical engagements.'⁹ This principle has both encouraged the participation of the Mar Thoma Syrian in the ecumenical movements (including such expressions of this movement as the International Missionary Council, Life and Work Movement, Faith and Order Movement and the World Council of Churches, as well as the Christian Conference of Asia, National Council of Churches in India and the Kerala Council of Churches) and shaped this participation.¹⁰

When commenting on recent developments in the field of the establishment of communion relationships with other churches, Daniel notes the following:

The [Mar Thoma Syrian] Church was unsuccessful in ecumenical engagements in formulating inter-communion relations with other churches

6 Daniel, *Ecumenism*, 237.

7 Daniel, *Ecumenism*, 242.

8 See Daniel, *Ecumenism*, 125-133.

9 Daniel, *Ecumenism*, 243.

10 Daniel, *Ecumenism*, 242-243, *et passim*.

within the St. Thomas family of churches in Kerala. There were some ecumenical dialogues with the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church (Jacobite Church), the Syro-Malabar Rite of the Roman Catholic Church and the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East without achieving the desired results. Therefore an urgent need of the [Mar Thoma Syrian] Church is to make necessary steps to reach out to other churches within the St. Thomas family of churches in Kerala and its diaspora communities throughout the world to establish Eucharistic hospitality. This is indeed a major challenge too. The [Mar Thoma Syrian] Church's fresh ecumenical discussions with the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht is a positive sign that testifies its continued enthusiasm for ecumenical praxis.¹¹

As can be seen from this overview, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church has been very committed to ecumenical relationships, cooperation, and dialogue. Notably, this has taken place both with churches from an Indian context, in the context of broader, global, and multilateral expressions of the ecumenical movement, and in relation with churches from the global north. The beginning relationship with the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht fits well into the broader dynamic of the Mar Thoma Syrian ecumenical relations; it is a relationship with a church from the global north and initial contacts with it were forged in the context of the World Council of Churches.

Old Catholic Ecumenism and the Relationship with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church

The Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht are, as a communion of churches, the result of three distinct developments in the history of the Western Catholic tradition.¹² The first concerned a conflict between the church in the northern low countries (ecclesiastical province centered at Utrecht) and the Vatican authorities in the 17th and 18th centuries concerning the history and development of the Catholic Church in the Low Countries after the Protestant reformation and the provision of this church with a bishop (with the background of a theological and pastoral struggle concerning Louvain Augustinianism). In 1723 / 24 this resulted in a formal schism when Cornelius Steenoven was elected as (arch)bishop of Utrecht. Following the First Vatican

11 Daniel, *Ecumenism*, 246.

12 See for this and the following, e.g., Urs von Arn, 'The Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht' in: Paul Avis (ed.), *The Christian Church: An Introduction to the Major Traditions*, London: SPCK 2002, 157-185.

Council (1870), Catholics protesting against its decisions under the banner of 'Old Catholicism' ('old' refers to 'ancient') found themselves excommunicated and, intent on the continuation of the Catholic faith and practice, constituted national Catholic churches in Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. These churches found themselves looking for ecclesial partners in which they could discover the same ancient Catholicity that they themselves sought to embody and found such a partner in the Church of Utrecht with which formal ecclesial communion was established in 1889, an event which would result in the emergence of what is now known as the International Bishops' Conference (IBC) of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. A third group of churches, Slavic in origin and nationalist in outlook, joined this communion of churches in the following years. This communion of churches together aimed at developing a coherent approach to ecumenism with an every widening range of partners throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Thus, within Old Catholic ecumenism, the relationship with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church is part of a long history of ecumenical relationships and even of an ecumenical 'program' that was started in the late 19th century.¹³ This program aimed at establishing ecumenical relationships with other churches in which the Old Catholics could also recognize the Catholicity of the early church as they themselves sought to live it. In the course of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, this has led to a series of ecumenical dialogues, notably with Anglican and Orthodox partners, independent Catholic Churches in Spain, Portugal and the Philippines, and in later years also with the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Sweden, and now the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. It also led to a characteristic participation in the international and multilateral expressions of the ecumenical movement, i.e. with an emphasis on matters of faith and order and with much attention for ecumenism in the sense of ecclesial reunification and renewal on the basis of the faith and order of the early church.¹⁴ This program was expressed afresh in 2011 in a position paper on ecumenism produced by the International Bishops' Conference, as well as in its

13 See: Urs von Arx, 'Der kirchliche und ökumenische Auftrag der altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union: Wie weiter in der Zukunft?,' *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 98 (2008), 5-49.

14 See for an extensive overview: Peter-Ben Smit, *Old Catholic and Philippine Independent Ecclesiologies in History. The Catholic Church in Every Place*, Leiden: Brill 2011, as well as the extensive documentation provided by Harald Rein, *Kirchengemeinschaft*, volumes 1-2, Bern et al.: Peter Lang 1993-1994.

statute.¹⁵ In this position paper, the program is expressed first (first two quotations) and then subsequently related to the relationship with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and other churches (final quotation):

4. The presetting of the Old or primitive Church constitutes the focus for the ecclesiological identity and theological agenda of the Old Catholic Church. In doing so the continuity with the apostolic beginning of the Church is aimed at. The role model of the Ancient Church is important on three levels: on the level of the local Church (which is understood here as a church which structure is Episcopal and synodical at the same time), the next level understood as the community of local churches within the Union of Utrecht and the external layer, comprising the relationships to other denominations with the goal of a universal community of churches.

7. The IBC statute (charter) presupposes that the Union of Utrecht is a community of local churches where in which each church views herself as realization of the One Church of the creed in a special place and time. Looked upon by other churches to be a small global Christian community, the UU has the special task to spread and live out the catholicity of the Ancient or primitive Church. Thus the UU wants to foster the unity of the churches and aims at the healing of the universal community of local churches.

15 See for this emphasis on ecumenism based on the recognition of one's own identity in the other also the preamble of the Statute of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference, par. 3.2. (see for its publication in five languages: Urs von Arx and Maja Weyermann (eds.), *Statut der internationalen altkatholischen Bischofskonferenz. Offizielle Ausgabe in fünf Sprachen* Beiheft *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 91 [Bern: Stämpfli, 2001]), as well as the following contributions that reflect on principles of Old Catholic ecumenism and ecclesial communion: Sarah Aebersold, 'The Church Local and Universal,' in: Urs von Arx, Paul Avis and Mattijs Ploeger (eds.), *Towards Further Convergence: Anglican and Old Catholic Ecclesologies*, Beiheft of the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 96 (2006), 85-101; Urs von Arx, 'Unity and Communion. Mystical and Visible,' in: Van Arx, Avis and Ploeger (eds.), 140-173; idem, 'Der kirchliche und ökumenische Auftrag der altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union: Wie weiter in der Zukunft?,' *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 98 (2008), 5-49; Günter Esser, 'Episcopacy — Conciliarity — Collegiality — Primacy: The Theology and the Task of Episcopacy from an Old Catholic Perspective,' in: Von Arx, Avis and Ploeger (eds.), 72-84, Mattijs Ploeger, 'Catholicity, Apostolicity, the Trinity and the Eucharist in Old Catholic Ecclesiology,' in: Von Arx, Avis and Ploeger, 7-27.

22. In the framework of the above mentioned relationship of the Union of Utrecht to other churches, the IBC considers it to be her special project to join together with bishops of smaller churches into a reflection process exploring the meaning and practical implications of a commonly lived out “Catholicism informed by the Ancient Church”. A successful meeting took place already in 2010 with a smaller number of bishops from the Philippine Independent Church, the Mar Thoma Church, the Mariavites, and bishops from the Union of Utrecht. It was resolved then to pursue this road. The goal of those meetings is clearly to encourage bishops in their own commitment for the catholicity of their own church and beyond (cf. above No. 4.7).¹⁶

Thus, the dialogue with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church fits into an Old Catholic ecumenical paradigm. At the same time, the dialogue has also a unique flavour to it that, with the partial exception of the dialogue with the Orthodox Churches (1975-1987; partial because of the strong involvement of theologians from Western countries and the importance of the Orthodox diaspora),¹⁷ is new to Old Catholic ecumenism. This is to say: it is a dialogue with a church that exists primarily in and identifies itself fully with a different — and strange — culture. This does not apply to earlier dialogues with, for example, Anglican Churches (the Bonn agreement was largely simply adopted by one Anglican province after the other), the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Sweden, the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church and Portuguese Lusitanian Catholic Apostolic Evangelical Church, nor to the dialogue with the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (IFI), in which differences of culture did not play a role, due to the fact that *in ecumenicis* and *in theologicis* the IFI functioned as a satellite of the Anglican presence in the Philippines when full communion with the Old Catholic Church was established.¹⁸

16 See: International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference, 'The Ecumenical Mission of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht: A Present-Day Position-Fixing'; website of the *Utrechter Union der Atkatholische Kirchen*, http://www.utrechter-union.org/page/280/the_ecumenical_mission, accessed 26 May 2014. — See for the project mentioned in the final paragraph also: Joris Vercammen, 'Bauen an der „neuen Katholizität“. Der ökumenische Auftrag der Utrechter Union', *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 98 (2008), 73-96.

17 The dialogue established full agreement in the faith, which, so far, has not led to the formal establishment of communion between the churches, see, e.g., the critical overview by Urs von Arn, 'Evaluation of the Orthodox — Old Catholic Dialogue', *Reseptio* 1/2009, 76-98.

18 See on this subject the documentation in: Wim H. de Boer and Peter-Ben Smit, *In necessariis unitas. Hintergründe zu den ökumenischen Beziehungen zwischen der Iglesia Filipina*

Overview of the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic Dialogue

Introduction

The formal phase of the dialogue between the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht began after initial, informal contacts between Old Catholic and Mar Thoma representatives in the context of the World Council of Churches and its central committee, as well as through a series of exploratory visits of bishops, theologians and clergy. Subsequently, the Archbishop of Utrecht, acting as president of the International Bishops' Conference, proposed a further theological dialogue to Metropolitan of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, The Most Rev Dr. Joseph Mar Thoma. This proposal was accepted and a joint theological commission proposed by the Metropolitan on a meeting of the Episcopal Synod of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of 5 May 2011. The International Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht discussed topics for the upcoming theological dialogue at its meeting of 7-11 November 2011 in Santhigiri Alwaye, Kerala (India). The dialogue commission met three times, with, as its participants the following: The Rt. Rev. Dr. Zacharias Mar Theophilos Suffragan Metropolitan and the The Rt. Rev. Dr. Isaac Mar Philoxenos, The Very Rev. Dr. K.G. Pothen, The Rev. Dr. M.C. Thomas (first meeting), The Rev. Sam Koshy (first and third meetings), and The Rev. Shiby Varghese (third meeting) of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church; the Old Catholic delegation consisted of The Rt. Rev. Dr. John Okoro (Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Austria), The Rt. Rev. Dr. Harald Rein (Bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland, observer at the third meeting), the Rev. Dr. Adrian Suter (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland), and the Rev. Dr. Peter-Ben Smit (Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands). Each meeting of the commission resulted in the drafting of a joint statement in which the progress of the dialogue was recorded: the Santhigiri Statement (2011), the Hippolytus Statement (2012) and the concluding Munnar Statement (2014). The dialogue clearly was informed by the broader 'ecumenical tradition' and the involvement of both churches and its theologians in the ecumenical movement; nonetheless, it seemed best, for communicative reasons, not to engage in a process of cross-referencing the statements of the dialogue with those of other dialogues or bilateral consultations.

Independiente, den Kirchen der Anglikanischen Gemeinschaft und den Altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union, Frankfurt et al.: Peter Lang 2012.

Initial Agreement and Dialogue Agenda

At the first meeting of the dialogue commission, explorations were undertaken as to what could be considered as common ground and what should be seen as topics requiring further discussion. Thus, the meeting had a preparatory character.

Areas that proved to be uncontroversial because, having studied the various confessional and other representative documents of the two ecclesial traditions involved, there was no reason to think that the two traditions did not agree with each other in substance, were the following.¹⁹

First (1.1), the fundamental nature and structures of the church is addressed and it is understood as a 'communion of salvation, bound together with God through the trinitarian mystery of salvation' that is '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' that 'exercises the ministry of Word and Sacrament, with its priestly, prophetic, and governing dimensions.' Furthermore, it was observed that 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.' Thus, it could be stated that 'both churches see themselves as participating in the fullness of salvation' and that they are on that basis 'oriented towards communion with other churches.' Notably, it could also be noted that both churches 'share a history of being autonomous churches in apostolic tradition.' Beyond that, and of significance for the language that would be used in the course of the dialogue, it was also agreed that '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.' In line with this, the Santhigiri Statement noted that 'Both churches affirm their belief in the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" and consider themselves as realisations of the same.' With this, much ground was already covered.

Second, the question of the 'sacraments and sacramental theology' was addressed by the Santhigiri Statement (1.2); here, it could immediately be noted

19 For this and the following see the Santhigiri Statement as it was published in the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 102 (2012), 315-320. See also the website of the *Utrechter Union der Altkatholische Kirchen*: <http://www.utrechter-union.org/fiman/261.pdf>, accessed 11 June 2014.

that 'The life of both Churches is characterized by the celebration of seven sacraments (Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation / Chrismation, Confession, Marriage, Ordination, and Anointing of the Sick) as means of initiation into the Church and as means of sanctification by God's grace.' At the same time, it was underlined that 'the proclamation of the Word of God is an indispensable part of every liturgical celebration.' In this context, also the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry, as it is common in most Old Catholic Churches,²⁰ concluding that, even if the two churches differ in practice, this is not an church-dividing issue.²¹ Particular attention was also given to the respective understandings of Baptism and the Eucharist and agreement was noted (1.2.1, 1.2.2.).

Next, the notion of the 'communion of saints' was addressed (1.3). Both churches, as could be noted, 'agree on the communion of all the faithful as 'saints.' Furthermore, they also 'understand the "communion of saints" as consisting of the church on earth, the faithful departed, and the eschatological church.' In addition, the dialogue observed, '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' . . . are commemorated in the liturgy.' In this context, however, also a first important difference was noted, given that it was noted that 'due to the abuses related to the veneration of and prayer to saints, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church has rejected such veneration and prayer at the time of its reformation and they are no longer in use now. By contrast, the Old Catholic Church retained the use of prayer to and veneration of saints in a theologically qualified way.' Nonetheless, already at this first meeting, it could also be stated that 'both churches reject the abuse of the veneration of and prayer to saints' and that the commission did not consider this issue 'as touching the fundamentals of the faith.' In addition, the commission added a note at this point that 'with regard to the prayer for

20 See on the road towards this, including an official consultation with senior Orthodox theologians that came to the apt conclusion that there are no theological objections to the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry, e.g., Urs von Arx, 'Die Debatte über die Frauenordination in den Altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union,' in: Denise Buser and Adrian Loretan (eds.), *Gleichstellung der Geschlechter und die Kirchen. Ein Beitrag zur menschenrechtlichen und ökumenischen Diskussion*, Freiburg: Universitätsverlag 1999, 165-211.

21 Currently, a discussion of this topic is ongoing in the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, on which, see, e.g. Abraham Philip, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Tiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithy 2012, 127.

the departed and the role of images and icons in the church, the differences between both churches seem to be similar.²²

A final area that was addressed was that of Christology (1.4). Here, both similarities and differences could be noted:

Both churches confess the faith of the early Church with the words of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (without the “filioque”), while jointly recognizing the first three ecumenical councils (Nicaea 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. With the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, the Old Catholic Church rejoices in confessing the mystery of Christ being “fully divine and fully human.” A difference between the two churches consists in the fact that the Old Catholic Church understands this mystery following the tradition and language of the Council of Chalcedon, whereas the Mar Thoma Syrian Church does not; this question needs to be further discussed between the two churches.

On this basis, and on the basis of the surrounding discussion, also an agenda for the remainder of the dialogue could be formulated, which turned out to contain the following items and constitutes the second section of the Santhigiri Statement (‘Areas for further Discussion’):

- a. Since the Mar Thoma Syrian Church is non-Chalcedonian, while the Old Catholic Church is Chalcedonian, Christology cannot be dealt with by just referring to a common tradition. We therefore need a discussion about our understanding of Christology.
- b. There has been only limited discussion on the question how the two churches see the ordained ministry. Further information on this issue, that is crucial for many ecumenical dialogues, is needed.²³

22 The Mar Thoma Syrian Church’s reluctance vis-a-vis the use of images is grounded both in the heritage of its 19th century reformation and in an awareness of the potential for misunderstanding that the veneration of images holds in an Indian context.

23 Theology of ministry proved to be uncontroversial during further study by members of the dialogue and, therefore, was not discussed again. See, e.g., Philip, *Baptism*, 120-142, and Smit, *Ecclesiologies*, 391-418.

- c. Since the two churches differ in their attitude towards same-sex relationships, we need a deeper reflection on how to deal with diversity with regard to ethical issues.²⁴
- d. The importance of Scripture and its relation to Tradition and the Church also seems to be in need of further joint exploration.
- e. Also the fact that the Mar Thoma Syrian Church considers the first three ecumenical councils as authoritative, while the Old Catholic Church considers seven ecumenical councils as authoritative, needs further exploration.
- f. Similarly, the differences between the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Church regarding: a) images and icons, b) the saints, and c) the faithful departed, are in need of further discussion.

In addition, the commission reflected on the appropriate method (section 4 of the Santhigiri Statement), noting not only that a thorough preparation of the meetings in question would be vital, but also that 'Personal meetings of a joint commission are indispensable in order to enhance mutual trust and clarify open questions.' Also, the agenda was kept open in the sense that any potentially church-dividing issues that were only noted later on in the process of study, reflection, and discussion, could still be placed on the agenda of the dialogue.

Continuation and Conclusion of the Dialogue: St. Pölten and Munnar

The commission met for its second meeting on 1-6 October 2012 in St. Pölten in Austria. It also produced a statement, the Hippolytus Statement, which notes that 'In the context of shared prayer and the celebration of the Eucharist, three topics were addressed and discussed: Scripture and tradition, Christology (and in that context Mariology), and the question of the remembrance of the departed and the saints.'²⁵

Concerning scripture and tradition, the statement outlines on the one hand the respective traditions concerning the scriptures and the appertaining

24 Even though differences on this topic were frankly acknowledged and discussed, no need was felt to discuss this particular issue in any detail; sufficient trust emerged to allow both parties to be convinced that the other was representing a church that was seeking to inculturate and live the gospel in its own context in an authentic way.

25 For the Hippolytus Statement, named after the patron saint of St. Pölten, see the website of the *Utrechter Union der Altkatholische Kirchen*: <http://www.utrechter-union.org/fman/260.pdf>, accessed 11 June 2014. The text has since been published in: *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 103 (2013), 324-331.

canons of the two churches, noting that both traditions are venerable and old, while the difference between the 'Hebrew' and 'Greek' canons of the Old Testament is a relative one, given that both churches can largely agree on the states of the deuterocanonical books. More importantly, however, a fundamental theological consensus could be formulated concerning the place of the scriptures in the life of the church and as it lives and transmits the faith, i.e.: tradition. The two key formulations from the Hippolytus Statement are the following:

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" (Constitution of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, 1) 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 (Thesis 9 of the 1874 Bonn Reunion Conference).

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 inculturate it afresh. 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.

With this, in fact, much more ground was covered than just an agreement on 'scripture and tradition', given that also part of a hermeneutical framework was presented here that included the inculturation of the faith in new contexts.

With regard to Christology, and in that context also Mariology, a topic that, given the close proximity of both of these two issues to the worship of the church, a similar route was travelled as with regard to Scripture and tradition. The following agreement was formulated eventually, having outlined the traditions of the two churches with regard to it:

- 1) As was already recognized in the Santhigiri Statement, both churches confess ‘the faith of the early Church with 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.

With the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, the Old Catholic Church rejoices in confessing the mystery of Christ being “fully divine and fully human”. The same statement also retained that ‘a difference between the two churches consists in the fact that the Old Catholic Church understands this mystery following the tradition and language of the Council of Chalcedon, whereas the Mar Thoma Syrian Church does not.’ Therefore, it was placed on the agenda of this consultation.

- 2) The consultation could benefit 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. In particular, the dialogues between the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and Churches of the Anglican Communion are of relevance. In this context, the Church of England acknowledged that the Mar Thoma Syrian 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 Syrian Church ‘would have no implications for relations either with Chalcedonian or non-Chalcedonian Orthodox.’²⁶
- 3) The discussion was also greatly helped by the recognition that the Mar Thoma Syrian Church was not involved in the Council of Chalcedon, nor took sides in the surrounding and ensuing debates.
- 4) Furthermore, a long-standing tendency in Old Catholic and Mar Thoma Syrian theology to focus on the reception of the essence, rather than

²⁶ See the 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.

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.

- 5) Thus, both churches can together receive the faith of the Ancient 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 exists his humanity 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.
- 6) In the context of the faith in Christ and the mystery of the incarnation of the divine Word, also theological reflection on Mary has its place, given that we believe in 'Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, the Word of Life, God Incarnate of the Blessed Virgin Mary.' (Liturgy of Holy Qurbana) 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.' (Liturgy of Holy Qurbana). Both churches remember Mary as the chosen one, whose 'yes' to God and whose identification with her Son's suffering are exemplary for the life of every Christian. Also, both churches stand united in rejecting all tendencies to give Mary an independent soteriological status.

Particular attention was given to the title 'Mother of the Lord' which is used by both the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches, while both also accept the council of Chalcedon (*theotokos* title); in appeared that a (more) literal translation of *theotokos* was prone to misunderstandings in an Indian context ('mother goddess') and might obscure the Christological focus of the title itself. With this, the focus can shift to the third and last topic of the second meeting of the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic dialogue: The remembrance of the departed and the saints. Again, after providing outlines of the respective traditions involved, a common mind could be formulated:

- 1) In the Santhigiri statement, substantial agreement with regard to the communion of the saints was already formulated:

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” (Liturgy of Holy Qurbana, p. 33) are commemorated in the liturgy.

The same statement also noted that both churches have different practices with regard to the faithful departed and the saints. It further described the Old Catholic practice of the remembrance of the departed and the saints as being ‘theologically qualified’ and noted that the difference does not touch the fundamentals of the faith.

- 2) The following theological qualification of Old Catholic practice of remembering the faithful departed in the liturgy was discussed and deemed in accordance with the Scriptures. When the faithful departed are remembered in the liturgy, this is an expression of the communion of all the faithful in Christ that cannot be destroyed by death. By remembering the faithful departed before God and asking God to remember them, the Biblical notion of ‘remembrance’ is taken up. Such remembrance goes beyond merely ‘thinking of’, but involves the renewed presence of those remembered (example: the Eucharistic anamnesis). 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.
- 3) Keeping this in mind, both churches can recognize their faith in an intercession from the joint liturgy of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, the Church of South India (CSI) and the Church of North India (CNI) which 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.

- 4) 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. In the Old Catholic Church, this remembrance is done through the various senses that have been given to human beings, from which e.g. the use of images results. This practice is not shared by the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, but the theological intention — remembrance and giving God thanks for his saints — is the same. Both churches vehemently reject any worship of saints or holy objects. We worship not the creature, but the creator alone.
- 5) Based on the strong sense that the church on earth is united with the church triumphant, the Old Catholics also know of one further kind of prayer that involves saints: requests made to saints to pray for the church militant. While this practice is not shared by the Mar Thoma Syrian 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.

Having thus surveyed the Hippolytus statement and given in quotation its most significant elements, now attention can be given to the dialogue's final meeting, which took place in the Mar Thoma Retreat Centre in Munnar, Kerala, India, from 17-19 February 2014 and resulted in the Munnar Statement.²⁷ Prior to the meeting, the delegates also attended the yearly Maramon convention, a missionary conference of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

The first topic that this meeting of the dialogue commission addressed was that of councils and their reception in the church. After listening to papers on the subject and discussing these, they agreed upon sketches of the respective traditions of the two churches, mutual agreement with regard to this topic, taking into account the divergences between the churches when it comes to

²⁷ For the Munnar Statement, see website of the *Utrechter Union der Altkatholische Kirchen*: <http://www.utrechter-union.org/fman/259.pdf>, accessed 11 June 2014. The text has since been published in: *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 105 (2015), 159-166.

the number of councils mentioned in their liturgical books and confessional documents:

1. Both churches receive the faith of the early church. For the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, this faith is expressed in the first three ecumenical councils, which it accepts. For the Old Catholic Church, this faith is expressed in the seven ecumenical councils.
2. Both churches recognize that they receive, through their respective traditions and histories, the same faith of the early church.
3. Therefore, the two churches agree that the difference in the number of councils that they recognize does not affect the relationship between both churches.

Thus, the two churches agree on principles of tradition and, having tested the waters in an exploration of Christology, they trust that the number of councils does not affect the substance of the faith, they can recognize each their own faith in that of the other.

That this trust was indeed justified also becomes apparent from the consideration of another potentially controversial topic: the role of symbols, images, and icons in the life of the church. With regard to this topic, the same course of action was followed as for the others, i.e. presenting outlines of the two traditions before formulating an agreement. The agreement runs as follows:

1. Both churches agree that symbols, understood as signs with a deeper meaning, making accessible a reality that goes beyond themselves, are of high importance 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.
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 common and not encouraged. In Old Catholic liturgy, the use of images and icons is limited and Christ-centred. Such use of images and icons is respected by the Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

Next, the Munnar meeting of this dialogue considered the topic of ‘inculturation’. Here, after the usual outlines of the two approaches or perspectives, much was made explicit what had been implicit all along in the conversations:

1. Both churches consider inculturation as a fundamental aspect of their historical and their missionary activity, which continues the mission that Jesus gave to his apostles, and understand it in analogy to the incarnation.
2. 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.
3. Both churches recognize that the 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.
4. Both churches recognize that the ongoing inculturation of the gospel in a multitude of cultures leads to an ever greater discovery of the richness of the gospel on the one hand and to diversity on the other. 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.

Finally, the topic of 'faith, life, practice, and ethics' was addressed, potentially controversial, given different attitudes towards a number of issues. Nonetheless, a consensus could be formulated as follows:

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.
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 invited to and 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.
3. Both churches use a very 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 harmony of the ecumenical journey towards unity.

With this, the development and the content of the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic theological dialogue has been surveyed. After the last meeting, the members of the commission considered that they had completed their task of probing whether there is agreement in faith and order between the two churches, coming to a positive conclusion, and submitted its results to the authorities of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. On this basis, the dynamics of the dialogue can be considered from the perspective of intercultural theology. In this way, this paper moves beyond the dialogue and its presentation as such, given that the notion of 'intercultural theology' was not discussed during it, nor was an extensive reflection produced on the dynamics of the dialogue. Only the notion on inculturation was used and it was considered to be necessary for the proclamation of the gospel and giving rise to inevitable cultural diversity, which ought to be treasured as it brings the richness of the gospel to light.²⁸

Intercultural Dynamics of the Dialogue

Intercultural Theology: Sketch of a Paradigm

In order to be able to place the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic dialogue in the context of 'intercultural theology' (both in relation to the two different ecclesial 'cultures' that meet each other in this dialogue and in relation to the two broader cultures, Western European and Indian, involved), to analyse it from the perspective of this paradigm, and to see whether this dialogue has anything to contribute to the development of the paradigm, first a sketch should be provided of the paradigm itself. This will be done by drawing on the work of some of its key representatives, notably Volker Küster and Robert Schreiter, with reference to more recent explorations in the doctoral dissertation of Gruber. Their insights will serve as a lens for the analysis of the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic dialogue.

Intercultural theology is often presented as a result of the interaction of the fields of missiology, comparative religion, and ecumenical theology and to a certain extent as its successor, even if the paradigm or perspective that it

28 See the immediately preceding quotation from the Munnar Statement; a possible criticism of the dialogue is that it can be seen as thinking in terms of the (supracultural) 'essence' and the (culturally determined) 'form' of the Gospel.

constitutes, as the ‘the theological reflection upon the process of interculturalisation,’²⁹ is broader than that alone.³⁰ Küster, a leading intercultural theologian, writes, for example, the following about its emergence ‘Important impulses originate in the disciplines of the history of religions or religious studies, missiology and ecumenics.’³¹ When Küster considers the heuristic function and potential of intercultural theology, he notes that it can be understood as hermeneutics, comparativistics, and dialogics. The hermeneutical aspects of intercultural theology have to do with the following: ‘In intercultural hermeneutics one does not primarily seek one’s own agenda in the foreign, but respects the other in his difference. One must be able to recognize oneself in the partner’s portrayal.’³² Intercultural theology, however, also moves beyond this and seeks to compare, albeit it with respect for differences, but also with an eye for ‘transcultural constants.’ Finally, intercultural theology contains an

29 A succinct and apt definition offered by Frans J.S. Wijsen, ‘Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church,’ *Exchange* 30/3 (2001), [218-228] 221. Thus, rather than a new discipline, intercultural provides a new perspective or method. Its effects can be thorough going, as, e.g., the contribution of Martha Frederiks and Werner Ustorf, ‘Mission and Missionary Historiography in Intercultural Perspective: Ten Preliminary Statements,’ *Exchange* 31/3 (2002), 210-218, illustrates: when reading and analyzing the history of Christian missions (or, in fact, of Christianity as such) as the result of a continuous process of interculturalisation, one achieves a significant different picture than when one would approach it through the lense of one (normative) form of Christianity, for example, that can be seen as being inculturated in or accommodated to different cultures with more or less success. This example from the study of the history of Christian missions illustrates how the intercultural perspective can be valuable both in a heuristic and in an ecumenical sense. Indeed, it can well be argued, as S. Wesley Ariarajah, ‘Intercultural Hermeneutics — A Promise for the Future?’, *Exchange* 34/1 (2005), 89-101, rightly argues that intercultural theology and interculturality as the mode in which theology is being done is nothing new, in fact, it can be seen as being as old as Christianity itself and as having been practiced whenever Christianity came into contact with other cultures. It remains striking, however, that theological dialogues are not frequently, if at all, conceptualized in terms of an intercultural encounter or understood from the perspective of the theologizing in the mode of interculturality.

30 See for a palette of topics and fields of study related to intercultural theology, e.g., the contributions collected in: Claude Ozankom and Chibueze Udeani (eds.), *Theology in Intercultural Design / Theologie Im Zeichen der Interkulturalität*, Amsterdam: Rodopi 2010.

31 See for this and the following: Volker Küster, ‘Intercultural Theology’, *Religion Past and Present*, Brill Online, 2014, accessed 7 June 2014. See also, e.g., the reflections of Martien Brinkman, ‘Intercultural Theology as the Integration of Ecumenism and Missiology’, in: J.D. Gort, H. Jansen and W. Stoker (eds.), *Crossroad Discourses between Christianity and Culture*, Amsterdam: Rodopi 2010, 579-598.

32 Küster, ‘Intercultural Theology’.

element of dialogue, such '[i]ntercultural dialogue is understood as the joint search for the truth, which can only be experienced contextually.'³³ The way in which this dialogue takes place is always contextual: 'The rules for dialogue for interdenominational, intercultural and interreligious encounters must always be newly negotiated in the process.'³⁴ This latter aspect can be taken as something that is fundamental to Christian theology that takes the notion (and reality) of 'interculturality' as, for example, used by Bhabha, and understood to denote a space of absence and difference,³⁵ seriously and seeks to move beyond conceptualizations of the relationship between faith and culture in terms of 'accommodation' (older missiological paradigms),³⁶ inculturation (contextual theological paradigms),³⁷ in order to understand, with reference to the notion of 'interculturality', processes of interpretation and translation of Christian identities as something belonging fundamentally to Christian theology, which is, as such, is characterized by the revelation of the universal in the particular. The church, therefore, becomes a 'universal hermeneutical community.'³⁸

All of this has a close affinity with the work of Robert Schreiter, who, developing a model of theology for a globalized world ('new catholicity'), has also proposed a model of intercultural hermeneutics, or more specifically: intercultural communication, which has four characteristics: first, the observation that meaning is produced by the social judgment of those involved in an intercultural communication event; the judgment involved concerns the interaction of all parties in the creation of meaning; second, the observation that any such meaning or truth is embedded in the stories or narratives of (living) communities; third, intercultural hermeneutics aims at finding a balance between differences and sameness, in Schreiter's own words: 'Balancing difference and sameness has ethical as well as epistemological significance. Denial of difference can lead to the colonization of a culture and its imagination. Denial of similarities promotes an anomic situation where no dialogue appears possible

33 Küster, 'Intercultural Theology'.

34 Küster, 'Intercultural Theology'.

35 Judith Gruber, *Theologie nach dem Cultural Turn. Interkulturalität als theologische Ressource*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2013, 227.

36 Gruber, 17-33.

37 Gruber, 34-53.

38 Gruber, 81. See on the notion of translation in relation to theology and culture also and especially: Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message. The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Orbis NY: Maryknoll 1989. See also the considerations of Klaus Hock, 'Translated Messages? The Construction of Religious Identities as Translatory Process', *Mission Studies* 23 (2006), 261-278.

and only power will prevail';³⁹ fourth and finally, Schreiter's model of intercultural hermeneutics, i.e. communication, underlines the role that the agency of all plays: "There can be no passive or inert players in the intercultural communication event, no subjects robbed of their subjectivity."⁴⁰ In relation to this, Schreiter also notes that the notion of culture itself is changing; one concept of culture, which is not all that strongly influenced by globalization understands cultures as

patterned systems in which the various elements are coordinated in such a fashion as to create a unified whole. The patterned nature provides a sense of recurrence and sameness that gives to those who participate in the culture a certain identity (the etymological root of which is "same"). The familiarity of the patterns offers a sense of security and of being "at home".⁴¹

A second notion of culture that is more globalized in nature, or at least takes the dynamics of a globalized world more into account; using insights from postcolonial theory and its understanding of culture as the result of (relational) negotiation and construction along the axes of sameness and difference, comparability and incommensurability, cohesion and dispersion, collaboration and resistance.⁴² When Schreiter brings these (and other) insights in relation to the reconstruction of a Catholic theology for a globalized age, he proposes the concept of a new catholicity, which is

marked by a wholeness of inclusion and fullness of faith in a pattern of intercultural exchange and communication. To the extent that this catholicity can be realized, it may provide a paradigm for what a universal theology might look like today, able to encompass both sameness and difference, rooted in an orthopraxis, providing *teloi* for a globalized society.⁴³

Having thus outlined what intercultural theology is, notably by drawing on two important theorists, without, however, harmonizing them in detail — in line

39 Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*, Maryknoll NY: Orbis 1997, 43.

40 Schreiter, 43.

41 Schreiter, 48-49.

42 Schreiter, 54.

43 Schreiter, 132-133.

with Küster's observation that, as of yet, there is no one standard understanding of intercultural theology⁴⁴ — with its aspects of hermeneutics, comparativistics, and dialogue, it can also be noted that, while lip service is paid to 'interdenominational dialogue', such dialogue, i.e. theological dialogue focusing on matters of faith and order with an eye to the establishment of ecclesial communion across denominational and cultural barriers, is hardly a subject of discussion among those concerned with intercultural theology; rather, emphasis is placed on a more general dialogue between inculturated theologies,⁴⁵ more general topics from the encyclopaedia of theology,⁴⁶ or the fundamental dialogical nature of Christian theology.⁴⁷ Conversely, dialogues of the 'faith and order' kind, be they multilateral or bilateral, hardly pay attention to the dynamics of intercultural dialogue and / or theology.⁴⁸ It is precisely at this

44 See Küster, 'Intercultural Theology.'

45 See, e.g. Küster, 'Intercultural Theology', as well as his *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011, in which hardly any attention is given to theological dialogues and the primary focus seems to be on intercultural theologies as a further development of 'contextual' theologies. Also the extensive introduction of Henning Wrogemann, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Hermeneutik: Grundfragen, aktuelle Beispiele*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2012, does not pay much attention, if any at all to the field of theological dialogues; this also applies to, for example, Mark J. Cartledge and David Cheetham (eds.), *Intercultural Theology: Approaches and Themes*, London: SCM 2011, and Klaus Hock, *Einführung in die interkulturelle Theologie*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2011, see also his 'Interkulturelle Theologie — programmatische Assoziationen', *Interkulturelle Theologie. Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 37 (2011), 53-69. — This lack of interest in the 'faith and order' side of things is doubtlessly explained genealogically, i.e. by a look at the roots of intercultural theology, which have little to do with dialogues of the 'faith and order' type, on this, see, e.g., Werner Ustorf, 'The Cultural Origins of 'Intercultural Theology'', *Mission Studies* 25/2 (2008), 229-251; the divergence between the various fields is also illustrated by the *Festschrift* in honor of one of the founding fathers of intercultural theology, Walter J. Hollenweger, see: J.A.B. Jongeneel (ed.), *Pentecost, Mission and Ecumenism: Essays on Intercultural Theology. Festschrift in Honour of Professor Walter J. Hollenweger*, Frankfurt et al.: Lang 1992.

46 E.g., christology, see for explorations in this direction, e.g., the recent work of Martien Brinkman, *The Non-Western Jesus. Jesus as bodhisattva, avatara, guru, prophet, ancestor or healer?*, London: Equinox 2009, and *Jesus incognito*, Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum 2011, as well as the earlier work by Volker Küster, *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ. Intercultural Christology*, London: SCM 2001.

47 See, e.g., Gruber, 209-226, on the subject of the canon in relation to the nature of Christian theology.

48 See, e.g., the following recent statements: Commission for Faith and Order, *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, Geneva: WCC 2005, of which section 61 is of relevance, which notes that 'There is a rich diversity of Christian life and witness born out of the diversity of cultural and historical context.' Furthermore, the document notes that 'The communion

interface, however, that this contribution is located. Why this is the case, will be outlined briefly below.

Many, if not most theological dialogues between churches take place either between churches that are part of the same or of a similar cultural context, or, in the case of dialogues between confessional families, the commissions will

of the Church demands the constant interplay of cultural expressions of the Gospel if the riches of the Gospel are to be appreciated for the whole people of God.' It also underlines that no culture or cultural expression of Christianity is absolutized. Relevant is also section 69, in which it is noted that 'The Church is called upon to proclaim the same faith in each generation, in each and every place. Each church in its place is challenged in the power of the Holy Spirit to make that faith relevant and alive in its particular cultural, social, political and religious context.' See also: Commission for Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Geneva: WCC 2013, section 6 of which notes that 'One challenge for the Church has been how to proclaim the Gospel of Christ in a way that awakens a response in the different contexts, languages and cultures of the people who hear that proclamation . . . [The resulting] diversity within the unity of the one Christian community was understood by some early writers as an expression of the beauty which Scripture attributes to the bride of Christ.' Furthermore, section 28 states that 'Cultural and historical factors contribute to the rich diversity within the Church. The Gospel needs to be proclaimed in languages, symbols and images that are relevant to particular times and contexts so as to be lived authentically in each time and place. Legitimate diversity is compromised whenever Christians consider their own cultural expressions of the Gospel as the only authentic ones, to be imposed upon Christians of other cultures.' Thus, even though processes are described that could be analysed and further clarified from the perspective of interculturality or intercultural theology, this does not take place. Even the word 'intercultural' is absent from these documents. This is a somewhat surprising development, taking into account that the notion was very much on the forefront of a 1995 WCC consultation (see: 'On Intercultural Hermeneutics. Report of a WCC Consultation. Jerusalem 5-12 December 1995', *International Review of Mission* 85 (1996), 241-252, while it also still figured in Commission on Faith and Order, *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, Geneva: WCC 1999, section 44 (albeit in an interpretation that comes close to a notion of 'contextual theology'). A similar picture emerges when looking at recent bilateral dialogue that produced major reports, e.g. the Roman Catholic-Old Catholic dialogue in its report *The Church and Ecclesial Communion* (2009; see website *The Holy See*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/vetero-cattolici/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20090512_report-church-ecclesial-communion_en.html, accessed 7 June, 2014), which notes in its section 20 about the ministry that 'It is part of their mission to give expression to and preserve the unity of the church and its maintenance in the one truth in a constant process of world-wide mission and inculturation of the gospel' (see also section 23). In relation to the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry in the Old Catholic Churches, the document then notes: 'In view of the cultural transformation which has among other things brought about a situation in which women now in every respect assume the same leadership responsibilities as men, they believe that they owe it to the gospel and the transmission of the faith to take the corresponding

be mixed, such as to provide sufficient overlap between representatives from different cultural contexts; discussions within world Christian communities, such as the Anglican Communion and others are, strictly speaking, not ecumenical dialogues and have their own dynamic. This also applies to discussions revolving around matters of *Life and Work*. The dialogue between the Mar Thoma Syrian Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht differs from many of such dialogues in that it was a dialogue that took place between members of a commission that did not share each other's culture; at most, the senior Mar Thoma delegates had had significant exposure to Western

step — just as the church in earlier times again and again believed it could recognize the *kairos* for a responsible inculturation of the message of Christ to which it above all wishes to be faithful' (section 70). Again, inculturation plays a role, expressions are used that could be interpreted in the sense of theology in the mode of interculturality, but the concept itself is absent. This also applies to the many bilateral dialogues of the Anglican communion (on which see: Peter-Ben Smit, *Tradition in Dialogue. The Concept of Tradition in International Anglican Bilateral Dialogues*, AMSTAR 3, Amsterdam: VU University 2012), see, e.g., International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, *The Church of the Triune God*, London: Anglican Communion Office 2006, 29-32, which discusses the (missiological) notion of inculturation and the need for mutual accountability when inculturating the gospel, but not the notion of interculturality. — In fact, inculturation is, in all of these dialogues, seen as a necessity, the resulting diversity both as a treasure and as a threat to the unity of the churches and continuity of the faith, absolutizing one culture is rejected, while incidentally (e.g., the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic — Old Catholic dialogue) processes are described that could be understood as expressions of theology in the mode of interculturality, but the notion and perspective are both absent from these texts.

Probably even more strikingly, though, also recent missiological documents from the WCC do not use the notion of interculturality. For example, in the 2012 document *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, prepared by the WCC's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (see the website of the *World Council of Churches*, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>, accessed 11 June 2014), it is noted in its section 100 that 'A plurality of cultures is a gift of the Spirit to deepen our understanding of our faith and one another. As such, intercultural communities of faith, where diverse cultural communities worship together, is one way in which cultures can engage one another authentically and where culture can enrich gospel.' Some guidelines for this authentic engagement are outlined subsequently, but none of these betrays an in-depth engagement with the insights of intercultural theology, even if the remark about engaging each other and thus enriching the gospel might be seen as pointing into a compatible direction. To be sure, the same applies to another major missiological statement of recent vintage: Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelium Gaudii* (2013).

culture because of their ministries and education. What took place in terms of dynamics, however, can be described as follows, when reading it informed by the theorization of Küster and Schreiter and taking into account the notion of interculturality as an important aspect of the development of theology.

Faith and Order goes Intercultural? The Dynamics of the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic Dialogue from the Perspective of Intercultural Theology

As was just indicated, here, it will be attempted to bring together the dynamics, method, and content of the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic dialogue and an intercultural approach to, and perspective on, (ecumenical) theology. In doing so, the hermeneutics of Küster and Schreiter, enriched by insights from Gruber and others, which provide a representative, even if not a full, picture of what theology from the perspective of interculturality and its appertaining forms of hermeneutics and communication amount to, will be used as a lens for reading the dialogue from the perspective of intercultural theology; having attempted this, it will also be asked whether viewing ecumenical dialogues of the 'Faith and Order' type from the perspective of intercultural theology offers any new input for the latter paradigm itself. At the same time, it may be noted that, by interpreting the dialogue from an intercultural perspective, this paper adds to the consideration of 'inculturation' and especially theology in the mode of 'interculturation' in Mar Thoma Syrian and Old Catholic tradition, given that there the notion of 'inculturation' is used frequently, but the notion of 'interculturation', in the sense described above, is only beginning to be employed.⁴⁹ Having stated this, it is now possible to attempt the intercultural interpretation of the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic dialogue.

First, it proved to be of high importance in the dialogue to engage in a careful process of listening, asking questions, revising one's pre-understandings, and searching carefully for the importance of particular words and concepts in the discourse and tradition of oneself and the other. At some point in the dialogue, originally somewhat jokingly, the image of a 'Mar Thoma-Old Catholic / Old Catholic-Mar Thoma' dictionary began to be used, as an illustration of the necessity of this process. An example of misunderstanding and

49 See for representative positions, e.g., Alex Thoma, *A History of the First Cross-cultural Mission of the Mar Thoma Church, 1910-2000*, Delhi: IPSCK 2007, and Joris Vercammen, 'Bauen an der "neuen Katholizität". Der ökumenische Auftrag der Utrechter Union', *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 98 (2008), 73-96 (See for an important input into the Old Catholic discourse also: Anton Houtepen, 'Oikumene oder der Weg zu einer neuen Katholizität', *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* 96 (2006), 9-42).

their resolution was, at a micro-level a long discussion about the word 'synod', which, in the Mar Thoma Syrian tradition refers to a meeting of bishops (in Old Catholic terminology: a conference of bishops, such as the IBC), and in Old Catholic terminology would refer to a body notably including laity, priests, and deacons as well (in Mar Thoma terminology, the *Prathinithi Mandalam* or 'Legislative Assembly'); in the end, the formulation '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'⁵⁰ was used. On a macro-level, a similar process took place in relation to, for example, Christology and the commemoration of the faithful departed. The hermeneutical process that took place here, seems to be that what Küster describes with the notion of 'hermeneutics', i.e. the search for an understanding of the other in which difference is not negated, but in which the other can recognize him- or herself.⁵¹ At the same time, it is clear, to speak with Schreier, that the embeddedness of meaning (of a word like 'synod') or truth (e.g., of certain Christological notions) is embedded in the narratives of living communities, while it was a precondition for achieving mutual understanding, not yet to speak of agreement, that both parties were actively engaged in the, sometimes heated, discussions, which is fully in line with Schreier's emphasis on the need for the agency of all in the process of intercultural hermeneutics, i.e. communication.

This process of understanding each other in a way that was also recognizable for the one that was understood was greatly aided by the face-to-face meetings of the commission (a requirement it noted at its first meeting, stating that 'Personal meetings of a joint commission are indispensable in order to enhance mutual trust and clarify open questions.'⁵²) This, of course, aided a nuanced discussion, but, just as importantly, it allowed the participants to share in each other's lives, at least to a certain extent, which, just as the participation in each other's liturgies and prayers allowed the participants in the discussions to discover the context and meaning of words and concepts that the other used, i.e. the meaning of words and concepts became clear through the discovery of their rootedness in a lived tradition and the (at least partial) participation in this tradition. Besides an important element of 'sameness' that could be discovered in this way, the *convivencia* that was experienced in this way also led

50 *Santhigiri Statement*, 1.1.

51 Küster, 'Intercultural Theology'.

52 *Santhigiri Statement*, 3.

to trust,⁵³ which again enhanced the process of intercultural understanding.⁵⁴ All of this also greatly aided the process of comparison, which will be turned to next, and during which mutual trust was essential when it came to sketching, or rather: rewriting, the position of the other in a way that was both recognizable for the other and understandable for oneself, as well as vice versa.⁵⁵

Second, the dialogue contained a strong element of comparison, which was facilitated by an understanding of the tradition and position of the other. In fact, the comparison took place, to a large extent, through a process of describing and discussing the positions of both churches on any given subject prior to attempting to formulate a joint position in language that did both justice to one of the two churches' position on a topic in its own eyes and did not lead to misunderstandings — and could, therefore, serve as the basis for a real comparison — in the eyes of the other church (see, e.g., the example of the notion of 'synod' above). This way of operating also left substantial space for the articulation of the differences in the two traditions and, especially, for the different journeys through history that the two churches had behind them. Again, the recognition that any meaning or truth is embedded in a community's narrative, the active participation of all in the conversation, the recognition and formulation of differences, with keeping an open eye for similarities and sameness, all important aspects of both Schreier's intercultural hermeneutics as such and of Küster's notion of both hermeneutics and comparativistics were of high importance for this process, even if they were not named as such at the time.

Third and finally, all the hermeneutics and comparativistics involved in the dialogue stood in the service of a 'joint search for the truth'.⁵⁶ In actual practice, this consisted of (and is reflected as such in the statements of the dialogue) the formulation of a common position on a variety of subjects. This required both a language and conceptuality that both agreed on and understood in a sufficiently similar way and an understanding of both traditions, based on a process of comparing them to each other in an atmosphere of trust, that all could identify with and understand in (at least largely) the same way. The formulation

53 See, e.g., Rudolf von Sinner, 'Trust and Convivência. Contributions to a Hermeneutics of Trust in Communal Interaction', *The Ecumenical Review* 57 (2005), 322-341.

54 See on all of this the pointed and apt contribution of Jim Harries, 'Intercultural Dialogue — An Overrated Means of Acquiring Understanding Examined in the Context of Christian Mission to Africa', *Exchange* 37/2 (2008), 174-189.

55 As the main drafter of the joint statements (or, less glamorously: the *de facto* secretary of the dialogue), the physical and mental experience of 'rewriting' his own faith was a particularly rewarding one for the author.

56 Küster, 'Intercultural Theology'.

of the 'truth', both about the two traditions involved and from a rootedness within these traditions (see Schreiter's emphasis on the embeddedness of meaning in living traditions), involved the 'social judgment' (Schreiter) of all involved (see Schreiter's emphasis on agency), the acknowledgment of differences as well as that of sameness. What it amounted to in the end was a sketch that formulated a consensus about the convergence (and divergence) of the two traditions in such a way that the two particular traditions were both able to recognize themselves in it and to recognize in the joint formulation that the other shared ('essentially') the same faith, thus, by reformulating and rewriting their own tradition in a joint statement, transcending the boundaries (in terms of conceptuality, etc.) of their own particular tradition in a process of the joint traditioning of the faith together with the other, and, in that sense, discovering both the catholicity, in the sense of the plenitude, of the faith of the other and that oneself in a new way.

In particular the third and last point can give rise to further reflection. What is described there, is nothing else but the rediscovery of the Christian faith for, in this case, both parties involved, in a way that allows them to remain rooted in their own traditions with all their differences and at the same time rediscover the meaning and value of this very particular tradition by restating it together with another party, or, rather, in the encounter with another tradition, another product of the ever-on-going process of the development of Christian identities and theologies in the mode of interculturalization. The continuation of this process of rewriting and re-performing one's tradition and identity, but with a difference,⁵⁷ or of the translation of one's own tradition and identity into a 'language' that can be understood both by oneself and the other without any (too serious) misunderstandings is both triggered and facilitated by the encounter with the other. In this way, to borrow a term from De Wit,⁵⁸ the other provides an 'epiphanic space', in which the other, because of his / her

57 See for this, from the perspective of ecumenism beyond the cultural turn: Claudia Jahnel, 'Vernacular Ecumenism and Transcultural Unity. Rethinking Ecumenical Theology after the Cultural Turn', *Ecumenical Review* 60 (2009), 404-425. Jahnel goes a long way in reframing ecumenical theology in an intercultural way, but still does not tie this directly to the experience of bilateral dialogues; for the notion of re-performing with a difference, see also: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, London: Routledge 1990, and queer studies in general, the implied eschatological character of interpretation / rewriting and performance is also articulated by Hans de Wit (inaugural lecture), see: J.H. de Wit, *My God; She Said, 'Ships Make Me so Crazy': Reflections on Empirical Hermeneutics, Interculturality, and Holy Scripture*, Amsterdam: VU University 2008, 27-30.

58 See, e.g., De Wit, *God*, 65, 87; the term seems to suffer from some underdefinition in De Wit's work; its current use seeks to employ it in line with the overarching interests of De Wit's project of reading the Bible 'through the eyes of another'.

otherness offers the opportunity, by means of the encounter with the other, to rediscover oneself in the process of rearticulating and rewriting oneself, or one's own tradition in relation to the other, which means addressing questions asked because of the otherness of the other and, in order to address these questions, a rethinking and resourcing of one's own tradition, which, paradoxically, can lead to a new revelation of oneself to oneself (in the sense of: one's identity to oneself) because of the encounter with the other who opens up the revelatory space for this. Thus, the encounter with the other is an important, if not the most important catalyst for the on-going process of interculturalization which is the mode in which Christian identity — just like any other identity — exists. It agrees well, to be sure, with a dynamic view of tradition, as it has been developed and become current in the tradition of *Faith and Order* within the ecumenical movement, as the following excursus will demonstrate.

Excursus: Viewing the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic Dialogue Through the Lens of Montreal 1963

By way of excursus, the entire process of the dialogue and its outcome as they are discussed here can also be described following the logic and lines of thought of the well-known and well-established formulations of the 1963 Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order of Montreal, which can, by that route, also be related to an intercultural perspective on theology. With an eye to transcending discussions concerning the relationship between scripture and tradition and providing a paradigm for the consideration of the interrelationship of various kinds of traditions, thus offering a matrix for the conceptualization of the relationship between one's own particular tradition and 'Tradition', Christ's presence in the life of the church, and the appreciation of the process of traditioning. In the conference's report, the main statements on this matter of the 1963 Montreal conference run as follows:

By the Tradition is meant the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church, Christ Himself present in the life of the Church. By tradition is meant the traditionary process. The term traditions is used . . . to indicate both the diversity of forms of expression and also what we call confessional traditions, for instance the Lutheran tradition or the Reformed tradition . . . the word appears in a further sense, when we speak of cultural traditions. (Section 2, par. 39.)

Our starting point is that we as Christians are all living in a tradition which goes back to our Lord and has its roots in the Old Testament and are all indebted to that tradition inasmuch as we have received the

revealed truth, the Gospel, through its being transmitted from one generation to another. Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Section 2, par. 45.)

The traditions in Christian history are distinct from, and yet connected with, the Tradition. They are the. This evaluation of the traditions poses serious problems. . . . How can we distinguish between traditions embodying the true Tradition and merely human traditions? (Section 2, par. 47 and 48.)⁵⁹

When considering the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic dialogue through the lens of the matrix offered by the Montreal conference, a number of observations can be made.

First, the starting point of the members of the dialogue commission was, inevitably, the own particular tradition, albeit with an eye to recognizing its essence in the tradition of the other, understanding (at least) the own tradition as one of multiple valid 'expressions and manifestations in diverse historical terms of the one truth and reality which is Christ.' The question was whether it would be possible to recognize the essence of the own faith tradition in that of the other and to formulate this in terms of a shared faith as well.

Second, the goal of the dialogue, or at least the hoped for result, was the discovery of the presence of gospel in an identical way, i.e. in a way in which both churches could recognize the essence of their own faith, which is none other than the gospel (as defined by Montreal 1963, Christ's presence in the life of the Church, or 'Tradition') or its own Catholicity.⁶⁰ This gospel cannot be made or created, but only discovered. The road towards such a (potential) discovery, is connected to Montreal's second understanding of tradition.

Third, the process of intercultural encounter and the ensuing rewriting of the faith, including its rediscovery as such and its discovery in the tradition of the dialogue partner, leading to its joint formulation, can well be understood as a part of the process of traditioning, which is the second kind of tradition

59 Text in Günther Gassmann (ed.), *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993*, Geneva: WCC Publications 1993, 10-18. See also Smit, *Tradition*, 43-55.

60 Understood in the qualitative sense of the word, i.e. as the participation 'in the whole reality of salvation and truth that comprises God and humans, heaven and earth' (Preamble to the Statute of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference, 3,2 (See: Von Arx and Weyermann; on this understanding of Catholicity, see Urs von Arx, 'Was macht die Kirche katholisch? Perspektiven einer christkatholischen Antwort,' in: Wolfgang W. Müller (ed.), *Katholizität — Eine ökumenische Chance*, Zürich: TVZ 2006, 147-186).

that the Montreal conference distinguished, acknowledging that 'we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*) testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit.' The intercultural process of the joint formulation and hence rewriting of the faith as it took place during the dialogue is, in fact, a manifestation of the transmission of the faith in a new way.

Thus, what was described above along the lines of the paradigm of intercultural theology can, in fact, also well be understood and described along the lines of the paradigm of the 1963 Montreal conference. This observation is useful, given that it indicates continuity between the two paradigms and sheds additional light on the dynamics of the dialogue considered in this contribution. Furthermore, what Montreal describes in terms of the process of traditioning in which the 'universal' (Tradition) is present in the 'particular' (traditions) in ever new ways through a continuing process of negotiating, rewriting, reconstructing this presence in the intercultural space, characterized by the encounter with the 'other', can well be understood as the dynamics of intercultural encounter and dialogue. Traditioning, in fact, can be understood as another word for negotiating interculturality, or, rather: for doing theology in the mode of interculturality.

Conclusions

The above considerations and reflection on the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic dialogue lead to perspectives on ecumenical dialogue and understanding that offer vistas that go well beyond this particular dialogue. They include the following.

First, it has become clear that, despite the fact that intercultural theology has, so far, paid scant attention to the dynamics of theological dialogues of the type studied here, while such dialogues themselves hardly operate with the notion of interculturality, such dialogues and their dynamics can very well be interpreted from an intercultural perspective and appear as instances of doing theology interculturally. Even a 'traditional' paradigm for conceptualizing such dialogue, i.e. that of Montreal 1963, appeared to be capable of being reinterpreted along intercultural lines. The various aspects and characteristics of (good) intercultural hermeneutics and dialogue as described by intercultural theologians such as Schreiter and Küster were very much present in the dialogue analysed here, in which also the importance of *convivencia*, was very apparent, as well as the dynamic of, in the epiphanic space provided by the encounter with the other, rewriting and rediscovering the own tradition, while remaining rooted in it, by means of the understanding the other, comparing

the other and oneself, and attempting to express the joint faith in terms that are at the same time rooted in both highly contextually determined traditions and therefore understandable and accessible to both and that, because they pertain to *both* traditions, enable the transcending of the limitations (historical, theological, and cultural particularities) of these traditions as such. This, indeed, leads to rediscovering of the quality (fullness, Catholicity) of one's own tradition in that of the other and *vice versa*, which, with Schreiter, can be conceptualized as a new Catholicity, or with the statute of the Old Catholic International Bishops' Conference as Catholicity as such.⁶¹

Second, given that this is the case, the current contribution also leads to the conclusion that there exists a considerable challenge, both for mainstream models of intercultural theology and for theological dialogues as studied here. Given that theological dialogues can be fruitfully understood as expressions of intercultural theology, the field of intercultural theology could consider why it is that these dialogues are so seldom seen as expression of theology in the mode of interculturality and so little used as a source of intercultural theology. Can reflection on these dialogues contribute anything to an understanding of the dynamics of intercultural theology? *Vice versa*, those involved in theological dialogues or any process of consensus-seeking theology of the 'Faith and Order'-tradition, could consider whether a fuller integration of the notion of interculturality might not be beneficial, both for the understanding of the dynamics of the traditioning of the Christian faith as such and for the understanding of such dialogues themselves.

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61 See: Preamble to the Statute of the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference, 3.2 (See: Von Arx and Weyermann, *ad loc.*).