

Old Catholic Theology

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Old Catholic Theology

An Introduction

By

Peter-Ben Smit



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Old Catholic Theology: An Introduction

Peter-Ben Smit

University of Berne, Switzerland

University of Utrecht and Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

University of Pretoria, South Africa

p.b.a.smit@vu.nl

Abstract

Old Catholic theology is the theology that is characteristic of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht. *Old Catholic Theology: An Introduction*, authored by Peter-Ben Smit, an acknowledged expert in the field, outlines the main characteristics of and influences on Old Catholic theology, as well as the extant ecumenical relationships of the Old Catholic Churches. In doing so, it covers what may be called 'mainstream' Old Catholic theology, while paying attention to extant diversity within the Old Catholic tradition. Particular attention is given to the hermeneutical approach to theology, ecclesiology, sacramental theology and ecumenical theology. Old Catholic theology has come to be characterized by a sacramental understanding of the church. This is the result of ecumenical dialogue and the basis upon which the Old Catholic Churches engage in ecumenical rapprochement. Hermeneutics of Scripture and tradition plays an important role as well, given that Old Catholic Churches have developed their own form of a hermeneutics of communion.

Keywords

Old Catholicism – ecclesiology – ecumenical theology – liturgy – catholic theology – sacraments – Union of Utrecht – ordination of women – tradition – hermeneutics

Introduction

This volume aims to introduce Old Catholic theology in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Its contexts, both institutionally and historically, are presented in part 1; its main paradigms, main themes and methods are surveyed in part 2.

In what follows, most attention is given to key topics and a relatively generalized view of Old Catholic theology, not individual persons or individual Old Catholic Churches, even though the names of a few influential Old Catholic theologians will feature prominently. I will refer to and elaborate on my own previous work, in part because it is often documentary in nature. As space is limited here, the discursive and layered character of the Old Catholic theological tradition cannot be discussed fully. In general this introduction aims at being representative: the overarching (and dominant) characteristics of Old Catholic theology – its history and contexts – are sketched somewhat idealtypically. This provides an overall impression for anyone who wants this and a starting point for further research for those who want to do more than just orient themselves. In general, it will appear that Old Catholic theology is characterized by a hermeneutically reflected appropriation of the faith of the early Church for new contexts. This appropriation is done with an ecclesiological focus, in the context of which the church features as a means and instrument of salvation. The words of the Swiss Old Catholic theologian Ernst Gaugler express this aptly – Old Catholic theology consists of ‘das Ringen um das Wesen der Kirche selbst’ (Gaugler 1946: 16 – ‘a struggle for the very essence of the Church’).

Thus, one particularity of Old Catholic theology is that it is heavily invested in ecclesiology. This is the case for a number of reasons: self-legitimization, commitment to ecumenism and in relation to a theology of communion. As Old Catholic theology has invested much time and energy in ecumenical relations, the section on ecumenical dialogues and ecumenical theology will be relatively lengthy. Another peculiarity of much, especially early, Old Catholic theology – its strong emphasis on historical studies – is not reflected in this introduction, given that the series’ request was an introduction to Old Catholic *theology* rather than history.

Most of this introduction was written during a sabbatical granted to me by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands and the Old Catholic Seminary (Utrecht University). Research was made possible thanks to the hospitality of Westcott House Cambridge, supported by a generous grant of the Society of St. Willibrord, and the hospitality of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Pretoria with which I am affiliated as a research associate, and my host Prof. Dr. Kobus Kok. I am also grateful to the participants in the annual meeting of the *Internationaler Arbeitskreis Altkatholizismusforschung* 2017 and in the *Internationale Altkatholische Theologenkonferenz* of the same year for responding to outlines and drafts of this text. A number of people, including the members of the *Werkgezelschap Oud-Katholieke Theologie* (Utrecht), of whom I mention by name Dr. Mattijs

Ploeger and Dr. Dick Schoon, as well as Ms. Ruth Nientiedt, MA, and Ms. Miriam Schneider, MA, were so kind as to read a penultimate version and to offer detailed comments, which also applies to the series' reviewers. I hope that I have done justice to all of these comments. Attention has been given to a gender-sensitive use of language, but stylistic considerations have given reason to lapse occasionally. To Mr. Edward Jacobson (Vuurtoeren Editing) thanks are due for correcting the manuscript linguistically as well as to the series' editor and Brill Publishers for making this publication possible.

Amsterdam/Utrecht/Bern, on the Feast of St. Matthew, 2019

1 Contexts of Old Catholic Theology

The main aim of this section is to survey the settings of Old Catholic theology. In the first section its institutional contexts are described: The Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, their academic institutions, networks and publication outlets. The second section deals with the historical context(s) of Old Catholic theology, its development within the Old Catholic movement during the 19th century and onwards. Before proceeding, however, the socio-cultural context of Old Catholicism deserves some attention first. In introductions to predominantly Western theology such attention is of significance, given that the Western context is frequently not seen as a context, although it is a context nonetheless. No more than a few issues can be addressed here, however, prefaced by brief note on the name 'Old Catholic.'

The term 'Old Catholic' is derived from the Old Catholic movement, which developed during the second half of the 19th century in opposition to the centralization of authority in the Roman Catholic Church that culminated in the dogmatization of papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction at the First Vatican Council in 1870. As an expression, 'Old Catholic' became popular following the 'anti-modern' dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854). The national churches that emerged from this movement in Germany, Switzerland and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire allied themselves with the so-called 'Church of Utrecht' (*Cleresie*; see below, 1.1.1) to form the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches in 1889 (Schoon 2015). These churches were mainly motivated by a wish to retain and/or return to the faith and order of the early church for the benefit of a credible witness and church unity. Old Catholic Churches have therefore never understood themselves as 'alternatives' to the Catholic Church; rather, they view themselves as 'representations of the Catholic Church,' a formulation that is always used in such a way that it

leaves plenty of room to acknowledge the catholicity in other churches (e.g., Rinkel 1959; accordingly, no Old Catholic church has a ‘founding date’ – only canonical structures have these). As I hope to make clear in this survey, the Old Catholic desire is to be the Catholic Church, not just a movement within it or an alternative to it. This also means that many theological positions are not uniquely Old Catholic, but simply *also* Old Catholic.

With the word ‘Western’ one important characteristic of Old Catholic theology is indicated already. Most Old Catholic churches are (geographically and culturally) located in Western Europe, and hence they – and even those outside of Western Europe’s traditional boundaries (i.e., in Poland, the Czech Republic, Croatia) – are in many ways co-heirs of the Western catholic tradition (in terms of liturgy, church structure, theological emphases, etc.). With that, they have also inherited the engagement of this tradition with major cultural, social and political developments. Such developments include the Enlightenment of the 18th century, modernity and secularization, the industrial revolution of the 19th century, political movements such as nationalism, fascism, socialism and national socialism, the two World Wars and ensuing Cold War, subsequent developments such as European unification, the sexual revolution, the rise of neo-liberal policies, processes of decolonization and the influx of migrants and the current postmodern intellectual climate, to name only a few. It also means that most Old Catholic churches exist in settings, in which a clear distinction is made between church and state.

Within this broad context, Old Catholic theology is generally pursued in an academic fashion – i.e., at institutions that are part of or closely affiliated with universities – which leads to a kind of theological studies and ministerial training in which the independent pursuit of scholarship and ecclesial orientation are balanced. As churches, the Old Catholic Churches seem to frequently, yet not exclusively, attract people with a higher than average education from the lower to upper middle classes (cf., e.g., Krebs and Kranz 2014 on the Old Catholic Church of Germany). This does, by no means, mean that no rural or industrial communities exist or have existed (cf. Historische Kring 1988 for a sketch of the industrial town from which I come myself), but it does mean that such settings are not typical for the places and the intellectual and social climate within which Old Catholic theology is typically developed. People with a (non-European) migration background are largely absent from Old Catholic Churches and, except when acting as ecumenical discussion partners, therefore also from the Old Catholic theological discourse – this may well be regarded as a serious challenge for Old Catholic ecclesial life. In terms of gender, the Old Catholic churches are diverse, with a significant rise in female and (openly and partnered) gay leadership, both lay and ordained, in recent decades. Missionary activity or diaconal outreach has not been a hallmark of Old

Catholic Churches either at home or abroad, local initiatives notwithstanding, and this is reflected in Old Catholic theology. The same applies for an active involvement in politics or education, again with the exception of individual cases or short periods of history. Finally, it should be stressed that Old Catholic Churches have mostly existed as minority churches, even if locally Old Catholics could be a majority presence. This relatively weak social and political situation has doubtlessly also shaped the Old Catholic experience and its theology – certainly in tandem with its programmatically irenic outlook in its ecumenical endeavors.

1.1 *Old Catholic Theology: Churches and Institutional Contexts*

Old Catholic theology is practiced within the context of Old Catholic Churches. In this chapter a description is given of these Churches and their co-operation within the Union of Utrecht. After that, several (further) institutional contexts of Old Catholic theology are outlined. Finally, attention is given to sources of Old Catholic theology in terms of its more formal and representative expressions.

1.1.1 The Union of Utrecht and Its Churches

The Old Catholic Churches are, both empirically and theologically, the places where Old Catholic theology is developed. The life of the church – in worship, witness and service – is primary theology; its reflection upon in theological studies is secondary and relates dialectically to the first. Therefore, a sketch of the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches is in order here. Influential historical trajectories and theological tradition are discussed subsequently (for other outlines, see: Von Arx 2001; Visser 2003; Smit 2011a; Flügel 2014; Eßer 2016). Currently, six churches are members of the Union of Utrecht, while bishops of the Union of Utrecht also oversee (at least) ‘dependent churches and parishes’ at the request of these churches and parishes. These six churches are the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands (*Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland*), the Catholic Diocese of Old Catholics in Germany (*Katholisches Bistum der Alt-Katholiken in Deutschland*; often referred to, as will be done here as well, as the ‘Old Catholic Church of Germany’), the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland (*Christkatholische Kirche der Schweiz*; not to be confused with the *Christ-Katholische Kirche* in Germany), the Old Catholic Church of Austria (*Alt-Katholische Kirche Österreichs*), the Old Catholic Church of Poland (*Kościół Polskokatolicki w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*), and the Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic (*Starokatolická církev v České republice*); additional communities exist in Croatia (*Hrvatska starokatolička crkva*), France and Belgium (*Mission Vieille-Catholique France et Belgique*). Other churches used to be part of the Union of Utrecht – notably the Polish National Catholic Church in

North America (cf. Platt 1977; Jozefski 2008) and the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites (cf. still Peterkiewicz 1975) – but are no longer; this includes the followers of Arnold H. Mathew (consecrated by Old Catholic bishops in 1908; cf. Schuler 1997). Other churches and groups using the name ‘Old Catholic’ are not part of the Union of Utrecht either (compare Anson 1965).

Internationally, the Union of Utrecht is the communion of Old Catholic Churches. Their fellowship (*koinonia*) finds expression in the “International Bishops’ Conference” (IBC), which has the function of an episcopal synod (cf. Hallebeek 1994; Von Arx 1994) and reflects the communion among the churches involved through their bishops. In 2000 the IBC adopted a statute with a preamble, expressing the common self-understanding of the churches involved (cf. IBC 2001a). As ‘founding date’ of the Union of Utrecht, usually 24 September 1889 is given, because then the bishops of the Old Catholic Churches of Germany and Switzerland met with the Dutch episcopate in order to discern a common way into the future. On this occasion they also issued the so-called “Declaration of Utrecht”, in which they laid out their theological principles and stressed their common bond (cf. Stalder 1989; IBC 2001a, see: Van der Velde 2014; Schoon 2015). The 1889 declaration contains several joint convictions and intentions that can be read as a roadmap for Old Catholic theology in the 20th and 21st centuries. Four elements stand out in particular: (1) resistance to the developments in the Western Catholic church that culminated in the dogmatic decisions of the First Vatican Council; (2) adherence to the faith and order of the early Church as a theological basis; (3) commitment to church unity on the basis of the faith and order of the early church; (4) revitalization of the life of the church on that same basis.

As an episcopal conference, the IBC does not have direct jurisdiction over the churches of the Union of Utrecht. Rather, the bishops exercise their regular episcopal ministry together, each of them making sure that he (or she) does so in agreement with the statutes of his (or her) local church. In line with this, the IBC has also been tasked with initiating and furthering processes of theological discernment within the Union of Utrecht, concerning both ethical and theological developments within member churches and overarching developments, such as new ecumenical partnerships (cf. article 4 of the ‘Order’ of the IBC). In exercising this latter function, the IBC contributes to the discernment and expression of a common Old Catholic voice.

1.1.2 Institutions, Publications and Networks

In terms of academic institutions, Old Catholic theology is currently taught at five locations. These are the Institute for Old Catholic Theology at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Bern (Switzerland; 1874, cf. Von Arx 2002b;

it was founded in 1874 as the Faculty of Catholic Theology); the *Seminar* for Old Catholic Theology at the University of Bonn (Germany; 1873/1902) and the seminary *Johanneum* also at the University of Bonn (1887, cf. Berlis 2002); the Cabinet of Old Catholic Theology at the Hussite Theological Faculty of the Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic; 2004); the Christian Theological Academy (Warsaw, Poland; 1954); and the Old Catholic Seminary affiliated with the Faculty of Humanities of Utrecht University (Utrecht, The Netherlands, 1725/1969, cf.: Jacobs and Smit 1994; Berlis and Hallebeek 2002). Numerous journals and book series are also associated with these institutions, including the *Schriftenreihe Geschichte und Theologie des Alt-Katholizismus* and the annual *Alt-Katholische und Ökumenische Theologie* (both Bonn), *Rocznik Teologiczny* (Warsaw), the *Publicatieserie Stichting Oud-Katholiek Seminarie* (Utrecht) and, most importantly, the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift* (from 1893–1911: *Revue Internationale de Théologie*) published in Bern. A series of supplements is also attached to this journal, as well as the series IKZ BIOS (*IKZ Bern Interreligious and Oecumenical Studies*).

Without going into too much detail, three networks that have been of significance for (academic) Old Catholic theology should be mentioned here (Smit 2011a: 38–40). First, the series of (International) Old Catholics' Congresses – meeting from 1871 onwards – have contributed to the formulation of an Old Catholic theological program and its execution (cf. Berlis 1998). Second, the International Old Catholic Theologians' Conferences have been meeting since 1950 (for the history up to 1971, see Küry 1977). Incorporating a series of Anglican-Old Catholic theologians' conferences since 1993, they have become a key 'think tank' for Old Catholic theology. Its proceedings are usually documented in the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*. Finally, a more recent network is the *Internationaler Arbeitskreis Altkatholizismusforschung* (IAAF, 1998–) that brings together Old Catholic theologians and (church) historians and those working on topics related to the Old Catholic Churches and their tradition. The IAAF meets annually and has published, since 1998, an annual bibliography, which is the most comprehensive bibliographical resource for contemporary Old Catholic theology. In addition, there are several (incidental or permanent) international theological commissions, working at the request of the IBC either on ecumenical relations or other topics such as the liturgy. Together with formal statements by Old Catholic Churches (and their bishops) as well as the IBC and its commissions, the output of the first two of these networks are important sources of Old Catholic theology. As theology is not necessarily the same as academic theology, networks such as the *Internationale Altkatholische Diakonie*, the *Internationale Altkatholisches Laienforum*, the *Internationale Altkatholische Jugend*, and the (Anglican-Old

Catholic) Willibrord Society should also be mentioned here as international networks of some significance.

1.1.3 Earlier Surveys, Introductions and Handbooks

Old Catholic theology and the history of its development have been surveyed in several other publications (frequently in German, the *lingua franca* of Old Catholic theology). In order to outline the history of this research, they will be charted here, focusing first on theological handbooks, next on historical overviews and finally on several more essayistic presentations of Old Catholic theology. Catechisms (e.g. Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland 1963; Christkatholische Kirche 1972) and incidental contributions to theological encyclopedias (e.g. Küppers 1957, 1978; Oeyen 1998; Parmentier 2002) have not been included. Key individual theologians and their work have been reviewed by Ploeger 2008; Smit 2011a contains an overview (and bibliography) specifically of Old Catholic ecclesiology; research in Old Catholic theology past, present and future is surveyed in Berlis 2003. Collections of key documents can still be found in Küry 1982, as well as in the documentation of the Roman Catholic-Old Catholic dialogue (IRAD 2017) and in Eßer 2015.

When it comes to handbooks of systematic theology, two mid-20th-century works are of importance: one by the Swiss Urs Küry (Küry 1966; reissued in 1978 and 1982 with new appendices by Christian Oeyen; Polish translation: Küry and Wysoczański 1996) and one by the Dutch Andreas Rinkel (Rinkel 1956). The 1962 Polish handbook by Maksymilian Rode was likely only of influence in the Polish Catholic tradition (Rode 1962). Together with the general English introduction to Old Catholicism by Moss (Moss 1977 [1948]), Rinkel's and Küry's works continue to be actively used, even though they are also somewhat dated. The Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue (1975–1987; Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989) can be mentioned here as well, given that its joint statements constitute a kind of miniature dogmatics that uses the language and conceptuality of the early church (cf. Aldenhoven 1989: 33–34). Another theological synthesis can be found in a work by the Swiss Kurt Stalder, whose systematic-theological blueprint was published posthumously (Stalder 2000, cf. Krebs 2011a, 2013). Building on the work of influential Old Catholic theologians and ecumenical voices, Ploeger highlights the *communio* paradigm that came to be characteristic of Old Catholic theology in the latter part of the 20th century (Ploeger 2008: 457–541) and provides his own systematic outline. These are the main and most reliable book-length presentations of Old Catholic systematic theology.

Additionally, presentations of Old Catholic faith and order appeared in several essays in handbooks, journals or as part of surveys. The following may be

mentioned from the past six decades or so. To begin with, Küppers published a few surveys sketching the beginning of the development of an Old Catholic *communio* theology (Küppers 1964, 1968, 1977); similarly, Visser has published two such surveys in Dutch and one in English (Visser 1979, 2000, 2003). The latter contribution has a counterpart in Von Arx 2002a. A survey of Old Catholic theology is also included in the comprehensive introductions of Schoon 2010 and Eßer 2016, as well as in Suter, Berlis and Zellmeyer 2020; Vercammen has offered his own attempt to reformulate Old Catholic identity (Vercammen 2011), much like earlier such attempts (cf., e.g., Van der Minde 1994). Suter added a further survey of Old Catholic systematic theology in 2016 and Ploeger in 2018 (Suter 2016; Ploeger 2018a). A representative approach to the sacraments is available in the introduction by Vobbe 2005. These presentations of Old Catholic theology are all illustrative of what emerged as “mainstream” Old Catholic theology in the course of the 20th century.

Another place where Old Catholic theology has been presented in a synthesized fashion is the series of ecumenical dialogues in which the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht have participated (cf. below 2.2.6 on the ecumenical dialogues). In some ways these documents are the most representative, as they are the work of multiple authors, which also applies to the succinct summary of Old Catholic theological identity in the preamble to the statute of the IBC (IBC 2001a). In particular, the statements and reports published by the dialogues with the Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Sweden are of interest in this respect.

As far as the history of the Old Catholic Churches are concerned, the most significant works – focusing on the churches that are currently full members of the Union of Utrecht – are the following. For the German Old Catholic Church, the surveys can be found in Berlis 1998 (19th century) and Ring 2008 (20th century up until and including the Second World War). The early outline of Von Schulte (1887/1965) remains of interest as well. Sketches of the later history can be found in Eßer 2015 and Flügel 2014, as well as in Moss 1977. For the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland, relevant resources can be found in Conzemius 1969, as well as in several contributions by Von Arx (e.g., 1992, 1995, 1996), Berlis (e.g., 2011, 2013) and the handbook Suter, Berlis and Zellmeyer 2020.

Concerning the history of the Old Catholic Church of Austria (and the Habsburg Empire), much information can be found in Halama 2004 (but see Von Arx 2007b). Aspects of history of the Czech Old Catholic Church can be found in Vinš 2008 and Kováč, Vinš and Wagner 2014. The history of the Polish Catholic Church has been surveyed by Wysoczanski (2001, 2003, 2005). For the history of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, see the work of Parker 2008, Smit and Jacobs 1994, Schoon 2004, 2019; Smit 1987 and Smit 2016b

provide surveys of the (longer) history of this church since the cessation of its communion with the See of Rome. Finally, it can be added that general overviews are provided by Smit 2011a, Flügel 2014, and Eßer 2016, whereas Rein 1993, 1994 and Smit 2011a do the same for Old Catholic ecumenism.

1.2 *Old Catholic Theology: Historical Contexts*

In what follows, most attention will be given to the theological tradition as it developed in the Swiss, German and Dutch Old Catholic Churches during their co-operation in the Union of Utrecht. For a variety of other historical reasons, other Old Catholic Churches have contributed much less to the sustained development of Old Catholic theology, even if some noticeable theologians and theological leaders have existed in these churches. Sometimes institutional reasons played a role (e.g., a lack of theological institutes, such as in Austria and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic), sometimes other historical circumstances (e.g., a dire existence under communist rule – the Old Catholic Churches in Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and now the Czech Republic – or coping with the aftereffects of migration, such as in the Polish National Catholic Church).

And although more emphasis is placed on the theological traditions of the respective churches following Rome's split from them, that does not suggest that their histories only began when "they split from Rome" (hence the inverse formulation). There is a deeply ingrained historiographical tendency to attribute "starting dates" to all churches and denominations in the West following their "separation from Rome". Historically, this is misleading: at the very least, every separation involves two parties going their separate ways, and generally both parties – emerging from a separation as two distinct churches – consider themselves to be a faithful continuation of the Catholic Church. In line with this, in Old Catholic theology the history of the Old Catholic Churches is seen as a continuation of the history of the Catholic Church as such – their history does not involve the 'founding' of new churches (either historically or theologically), even if new canonical structures emerged in history.

This is a challenge for theologians and historians alike: is it possible to talk about the catholicity of a church without denying the (claims to) catholicity of another? Is it possible for church historians to consider the histories of both Roman and Old Catholicisms as part of the one history of (Western) Catholicism? Having offered these introductory remarks and posed these questions, the two main theological traditions that are involved can be surveyed, those of the Church of Utrecht and of the Old Catholic Movement.

1.2.1 The Theological Tradition of the Church of Utrecht

The theological tradition of the Church of Utrecht (i.e., the church province of Utrecht as it was established in 1559) that became part of the “Old Catholic” theological discourse in the second half of the 19th century had a history of its own, distinct from that of the Old Catholic Churches originating in the *Altkatholische Bewegung*. A few key aspects of this tradition need to be mentioned, given their pertinence for understanding the theological tradition of this church.

Since the late 16th century, the ‘Church of Utrecht’ existed underground, owing to the fact that practicing the catholic faith had been outlawed in the Northern Low Countries (roughly the Northern part of the current Netherlands). One of the consequences of the ban was a conflict concerning the status of this church: did it cease to exist, thereby transforming the Northern Low Countries into a missionary territory, or not? The first view was favored by the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* and many regular clergy, the second was the view taken by Dutch secular, i.e. diocesan, clergy and the vicars apostolic who had been appointed to serve as Archbishop of Utrecht. Together with other theological differences, discussed below, this eventually led to the suspension and deposition (1702/04) of vicar apostolic Petrus Codde and the election and consecration (1723/24) of Cornelis Steenoven as Archbishop of Utrecht. Tensions between local and the supra-local levels of authority in the church were a key theme throughout all of these discussions and conflicts.

Besides the ecclesiological and canonical questions just mentioned, also theological differences played an important role in these debates; they are often referred to as the “Jansenist” controversy. A heresiological phantom (cf. Arnould 1686), “Jansenism” was invented as a strawman to discredit ecclesial opponents in this conflict (cf. also Ceysens 1977; Cottret 2016).¹ This controversy can be summed up in following four key characteristics (cf. Schoon 2004: 23–24), some of which continued to be relevant well beyond 17th and 18th centuries.

(1) First, the conflict concerned the question of divine grace and human free will, as it had been discussed, yet also left undecided by the *Congregationes de auxiliis* (1598–1607). Louvain theologian Cornelius Jansenius’ book on

1 Although a phantom, “Jansenism” continues to be a very real presence in a plethora of handbooks of systematic and historical theology, misleading generations of scholars and students (cf. Cottret 2016).

Augustine, his *'Augustinus'*,² sparked fresh controversy from 1640 onwards, especially as it was dragged into pre-existing party conflicts. The *Augustinus* and its sympathizers were eventually cast as "Jansenists" and marginalized. Apart from matters of content, also matters of method played a role, given that Jansenius' work was an exercise in "modern", humanist positive theology. Among the sympathizers were many secular clergy in the Northern Low Countries, as well as the abbey(s) of Port Royal (des Champs and de Paris) and its friends (including Blaise Pascal) and the Arnauld family of religious, theologians and statesmen.

(2) The *spirituality* of many of the people involved (keyword: *École française de spiritualité*) points to a second aspect of the controversy. In keeping with their spiritual ideals – a relationship with God based on love alone and not on fear; a deep sense of awe before God, in particular due to God's incarnation; their awareness of the dependence on divine grace – the people living in the tradition of this "French" spirituality, clergy and lay persons alike, pursued an intense, inward-looking piety focused on the study of the Bible (and the Church Fathers) with a strong Christocentric, incarnational and Eucharistic focus (cf. the *Oratoire* of Pierre de Bérulle). In the course of the conflict, differences between those who were and were not able to identify with this kind of spirituality played a notable role. This often had to do with tensions with forms of devotions that were said to be too much concerned with external matters and too lax when it came to spiritual and moral discipline.

Institutionally, those at odds with this school of theology, this spirituality, or both were able to effect their denunciation through the bulls *In eminenti* (1642), *Cum occasione* (1653), which condemned five specific propositions supposedly drawn from Jansenius' *Augustinus*, *Ad beati Petri sedem* (1656) and *Regiminis apostolici* (1665), the latter becoming known as the *Formulary of Alexander VII*, as it was to be signed by all clergy. In doing so, a cleric stated that one not only rejected and condemned the five propositions taken from Jansenius' *Augustinus*, but that one also did this 'in the sense understood by that same author' (Hünemann 2017, n. 2020).

Another stage in the controversy was the 1713 apostolic constitution *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, which was directed against a devotional work of the Oratorian Pasquier Quesnel, condemning no less than 101 propositions drawn from it. It was also to be accepted formally by members of the clergy. These measures largely served to reinforce the conflict; following the schism of 1723/34, it was only in 1966 that acceptance of these documents was lifted as a

2 Full title: *Augustinus, sive doctrina Sti. Augustini de humanae naturae sanitate, aegritudine, medicina adversus pelagianos et massilienses* (Leuven: J. Zeger, 1640).

condition for dialogue between Old Catholics and Roman Catholics (Kok and Tans 1966; cf. Schoon 2014).

(3) The condemnation of Jansenius' work on the basis of five propositions that most theologians couldn't find in it (historians still can't, cf. Ceyskens 1980) gave rise to a further and third aspect of the controversy, one focused on ecclesiology and canon law and concerned with questions of authority: was it indeed a papal prerogative not only to condemn a particular view as heretical but also to determine that it could be found in the sense intended by the author in a particular publication? Many would argue against such notions, which led to another difference in outlook.

(4) A fourth aspect concerned the relationship between state and church. Those targeted by the papal condemnations were frequently protected by national institutions such as the French parliaments, which led to a rekindling of ecclesiological positions such as regalism or Gallicanism and stressed the relative independence of the national or local church, protected by the state against ecclesial abuses of power (Schoon 2004: 24; Hallebeek 2011a: 74–77).

Thus, these developments, including the conflicts and papal condemnations, brought together a group of people for a variety of theological, spiritual, ecclesiological and political reasons. They were all inspired by Louvain Augustinianism and/or the "école Française", while also opposing the use, if not abuse, of ecclesial power to misrepresent and condemn theologians and their positions in order to influence a theological debate.

As suggested above, all of these four aspects of the controversy played a role in the way in which tensions came to a head in the Northern Low Countries. Many of the secular clergy and certainly the apostolic vicars – who had been the Archbishop of Utrecht in all but name since the protestant Reformation in the Netherlands (in Utrecht: 1580)³ – had been educated in milieus influenced by Louvain Augustinianism, the *Oratoire* of Pierre de Bérulle and/or the circle around Port-Royal (cf. Parker 2008). The situation following the Reformation raised questions of ecclesiology: did a Catholic Church still exist, albeit underground, or had it been destroyed, leaving only a missionary territory to be governed under direct supervision from Rome? Did the Church of Utrecht and its clergy have to accept the various papal condemnations, thereby essentially condemning their own sources of theology and spirituality? Following the suspension and deposition of the then vicar apostolic Petrus Codde because of his refusal to sign the *Formulary of Alexander VII* (1702/04), no successor

3 To be sure, this was for exclusively political reasons (the appointment of an Archbishop of Utrecht by what was seen as a foreign power would not have had a beneficial effect for the person and the church involved).

acceptable to both Rome and the Church of Utrecht could be found. The latter, acting through the Metropolitan Chapter of Utrecht, elected Cornelis Steenoven (1661–1725) in 1723, with consecration in 1724 by bishop Dominique Marie Varlet (of Babylon).⁴ All of this was expressive of an adherence both to the theological and spiritual traditions indicated above and to the ecclesiological positions that came to be associated with it. A schism was the result, which, at least until the mid-19th century, was seen as temporary by many, given frequent attempts at reconciliation (cf. e.g., Schoon 2004, cf. also idem 2019). Hopes for reunion and recognition were, however, largely destroyed in the second half of the 19th century, when in 1853 an alternative Roman episcopal hierarchy was introduced in the Netherlands, followed in 1854 by the promulgation of the dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary (*Ineffabilis Deus*) and in 1870 by the dogmatic definition of papal universal jurisdiction and infallibility *ex cathedra* (*Pastor aeternus*; cf. Schoon 2003, 2004). As a result, the Church of Utrecht underwent a process of reorientation. It abandoned a certain cautiousness regarding renewal and innovation, out of fear of doing anything that might widen the gap with Rome. Simultaneously, it self-positioned itself as a national catholic church that actively looked for ways to engage modernity constructively and was willing to revise its discipline, theology and liturgy on the basis of new insight (Schoon 2004, cf. also 2006). It would be on this basis – as a national church with a biblically and patristically ‘re-sourced’ faith and order – that the Church of Utrecht would enter into the Union of Utrecht and become the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands.

1.2.2 The Theological Tradition of the “Old Catholic Movement”

The 19th-century Old Catholic movement – in particular as it transformed into the Old Catholic Churches of Germany, Switzerland, the Habsburg Empire (today, Austria and the Czech Republic) – was a multi-layered phenomenon (one that also existed beyond Germanophone Europe, cf. Berlis 2013). It drew its inspiration from historical studies (with the early church as an ideal); a related openness to modern (historical) scholarship; (philosophically oriented) theological approaches that sought to constructively interrelate modern science and philosophy with theology and spirituality; and emancipatory liberal and nationalistic politics and thought.⁵ The resistance of those opposed to the

4 As a result, Old Catholic orders have always been recognized as valid by other Western catholic churches, including the Church of Rome.

5 Naturally, not everyone involved held all ideas in the same manner. Some regional diversity can also be observed: e.g., the Swiss Old Catholic movement was rooted more strongly in the world of liberal politics than its German counterpart, which was more firmly based in the world of the university.

dogmatic definitions of the First Vatican Council, for which the Old Catholic movement became known in particular, was equally multifaceted. This council, its dogmas and the resistance against it were the climax of a longer struggle between those seeking to “ultramontinize” the church while resisting modernism and those travelling in the opposite direction. Therefore, the “Old Catholic movement” is much more than just an expression of uneasiness with Vatican I, but in fact a conglomerate of alternative catholic responses to modernity and modern society that were marginalized and forced out of the Roman Church by the ultramontanist victory and found ecclesial expression in the Old Catholic Churches (cf. Berlis 1998).

In order to sketch the theological tradition of the ‘Old Catholic Movement’, its sources need to be addressed. To begin with, the broader political and social influences of nationalism and liberalism need to be mentioned. The concept of nationalism is of importance because it further emphasized the national character of the church and theological “inculturation” in terms of a constructive dialogue with “national culture”. By nature, nationalism was resistant to foreign domination and influence, including the influence of the religio-political power that the Pope represented; papal infallibility and especially universal jurisdiction were, of course, seen as an expression of illegitimate foreign interference in national matters (cf. von Arx 1996). The second concept, liberalism, is important because it was an expression of resistance against authoritarian structures of all kinds, including ecclesial ones, promoting the participation of the laity (mostly: *laymen*) in the affairs of the church (influenced by the emergence of parliamentary democracy; see Hallebeek 201b). For the introduction of (national) synods with lay participation, similar representation in “executive councils” (*Synodalvertretung*; *Synodalrat*), and the governance of parishes through parish assemblies (*Gemeindeversammlung*) and their vestries (*Kirchgemeinderat*), such liberalism was of key importance. These developments can, to a certain extent, be seen as continuing earlier movements that favoured a stronger influence of broader society (in particular, the state) over the church, such as “Josephinism”. In a similar vein, 19th-century (political) liberalism supported a view of religion as relegated to the interior and the private. It allowed personal, but not institutional, political involvement on a religious basis, but only as long as this did not interfere with the general national security and peace. Therefore, the Old Catholic movement opposed Roman (Catholic) political lobbying and interference (cf. e.g., Eßer 2016: 10–20); the dogmatic definitions of Vatican I were seen as an expression of precisely this.

The freedom propagated by liberalism also found expression in one of its key institutions: the university. The Catholics who opposed Vatican I were often characterized by their involvement in the world of science and

certainly by an openness vis-à-vis the insights that it produced (cf. the nickname “Professorenkirche” of the German Old Catholic Church). The opposite was the case in other parts of Catholicism in the same era, which began to be dominated by an anti-modernist attitude (cf. Neuner 2009). Modern, critical historical scholarship was a central area of interest for the Old Catholics, embodied most distinctly by Ignaz von Döllinger (1799–1890), the doyen of catholic church historians in the 19th century (cf. Howard 2017; Bach, Berlis and Thüringer 2015).

Such scholarship was inherently inquisitive and therefore anti-authoritarian, as became apparent both in discussions concerning the (historical) support adduced for the dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary (1854) as well as for the papal dogmas (1870) and in the manner in which a return to the sources of the faith and order of the early church took place. Even if for historical reasons only, such reforms were deemed necessary in theology, ecclesiology, canon law and spirituality. This was expressed in the works of other scholars as well, such as Johann Friedrich (1836–1917, church history), Joseph Hubert Reinkens (1821–1896, church history, ecclesiology) and Johann Friedrich von Schulte (1827–1914, canon law). In a similar manner, those finding themselves in the Old Catholic movement typically identified with a philosophical openness and positive (yet critical) engagement with enlightened philosophy. This is particularly evident in scholars following in the footsteps of theologians such as Georg Hermes (1775–1831) and philosophers such as Anton Günther (1783–1863), who were attempting to arrive at a philosophically viable way of overcoming the (apparent) conflict between faith and modern reason without recourse to the Neo-Scholasticism that would eventually triumph in 19th-century Catholicism at large. The combination of these ingredients and their interaction led to both protest and renewal, accompanied by a spirituality that was patristically sourced, Christocentric and focused on the Eucharist; such a spirituality also emphasized personal faith and stressed experience, receptivity and a style of theologizing that was critical and open to modern scholarship with a clear awareness of being a church in a particular cultural context, all while underlining the involvement of all members in the affairs of the church (i.e., synodality). At the same time, this spirituality and its underlying theology were self-consciously catholic and clearly recognizable as such.

In the context of the First Vatican Council and its aftermath – which meant the (*ipso facto*) excommunication of many ‘Old Catholics’ – the movement developed into churches: what are now Old Catholic Churches of Germany (1873), Switzerland (1876), Austria (1879) and the Czech Republic (1879; in its current form, 1993). For this reason, it makes little sense to speak of Old

Catholicism as a “movement within the church” after the establishment of the Old Catholic Churches: this is exactly what the Old Catholic protagonists in the 19th century did not want to be; they wanted to be the Church rather than merely a loose network of interconnected people with similar convictions. The ‘Old Catholic’ program supporting such *ecclesiogenesis* was articulated at a series of events, such as the *Koblenzer Laienadresse* (1869), the Königswinter and Nürnberg declarations (1870), the *Münchener Pfingsterklärung* (1871), and the Old Catholic Congresses from 1871 onwards. Their foundational ideal was the restoration of an episcopal-synodal model of (national) church governance based on the early church, thereby crafting a “third way” between ultramontanist Catholicism and nationalist Protestantism (cf. Berlis 1998; Ring 2008). The bishops for these various catholic churches were consecrated in the apostolic succession as it was received from the “Church of Utrecht”: on 11 August 1873, Hermanus Heykamp (1804–1874), the bishop of Deventer, consecrated Reinkens as the first bishop of the *Katholisches Bistum der Altkatholiken in Deutschland*, who in turn consecrated Eduard Herzog (1841–1924) as bishop of the *Christkatholische Kirche der Schweiz* on 18 September 1876. All other Old Catholic consecrations have their basis in these. At the time of its self-organization, this movement, having ceased to consider the western catholic tradition in its ultramontanizing form as the norm for catholic identity, began to look for union with other like-minded churches, finding such churches particularly in the Church of Utrecht, the Anglican tradition (especially in the Anglo-Catholic movement) and the Orthodox Churches, with some interest in Lutheran churches as well. Already the Munich Congress of (Old) Catholics (1871) noted that such reunion ought to be sought based on the faith and order of the early church. The Bonn Reunion Conferences (1874 and 1875) were a particularly eloquent expression of this search, given that here, even before the ecumenical movement had taken off as such, the basis was laid for the subsequent Old Catholic ecumenical program (cf. e.g. Rein 1993, 1994; Von Arx 2008; Smit 2011a). The basis for such ecumenism was to be the faith and order of the “undivided church” of the first millennium: not in the sense that this church was undivided empirically speaking, but rather in the sense that it predated confessionalism and the institutionalization of ecclesial divisions. A vision of communion and union was seen to be still extant, despite all sorts of (temporary) suspensions of communion. This development led to the establishment of communion among several churches, beginning with that between the Church of Utrecht and the Old Catholic Churches of Switzerland and Germany in 1889 (only later called ‘Union of Utrecht’, cf., e.g., Smit 2011a: 75–98; Schoon 2015). Also, the 1931 Bonn Agreement with the Church of England is an outcome of

this development; this agreement was received by all churches of the Anglican Communion subsequently. The latter will be discussed below, in the context of the treatment of Old Catholic ecumenism.

2 Developments of Old Catholic Theology in the 20th Century: Paradigms, Themes and Methods

In the course of the 20th century, the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht attempted to further develop their catholic theology in a scholarly sound, ecumenically responsible, contextually aware and patristically sourced manner, all while coming to terms with the traumatic events of the 19th century. The latter developments found their dogmatic and ecclesiological expression in 1853 (the institution of a new Roman-Catholic hierarchy in the Netherlands), 1854 (the dogmatization of the immaculate conception of Mary) and 1870 (the dogmatization of papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction). One might even say that the emphasis on protest against Roman dogmatic developments – although certainly an important part of (popular) Old Catholic self-understanding (see Von Arx 2006: 147), a first and key element of the 1889 Declaration of Utrecht – receded somewhat into the background. This shift happened in favour of three more positive elements found in the same declaration: (1) adherence to the faith and order of the early Church as the basis for the faith and order of the contemporary church; (2) commitment to church unity based on the on the same ancient faith and order; (3) revitalization of the life of the church on that same basis (cf. also the observations of Küry 1972). This shift was also facilitated by dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and the Old Catholic Churches at various levels, good experiences with (local) ecumenical cooperation and collaboration in theological research and training, especially after Vatican II. All of this has done much to mitigate a primarily antagonistic positioning of the churches vis-à-vis of each other (cf. below, 4.5., on the relationship with the Roman Catholic Church).

Such revitalization and renewal is often the most visible in a number of adjustments of church order, such as the introduction of synods (1874 in Germany, 1875 in Switzerland, 1879 in Austria, and 1919 in the Netherlands, cf. Hallebeek 2011b), the abolition of compulsory clerical celibacy (Berlis 2015, 2008), the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry (cf. 2.1.1), the treatment of divorced people (cf. for the Netherlands: Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland 1992; for Germany: Haag 2016: 81–100) and most recently a more embracing attitude, also theologically, towards LHBTQ+ members, most explicitly and emphatically towards people in same-sex relationships (cf., on the Dutch

situation, e.g. Berlis and Van der Velde 2016; Vercammen and Schoon 2016a, 2016b; on the German situation: Haag 2016: 84–88). Although most of these expressions of revitalization and renewal may seem like surface phenomena, they all are the result of a particular style of theologizing, in which the appeal to the early church – the Old Catholic way of referring to the reception of the tradition of the faith – plays a key role. In the second part of this introduction, this style of theologizing will be explored. First, however, a general outline of this style will be offered, together with a sketch of what the appeal to the early church means in Old Catholic theology, which is exemplified by means of an excursus on the ordination of women. Subsequently, several influences and inspirations for Old Catholic theology are discussed, which is followed by a brief summary of core aspects of what may be considered ‘mainstream’ Old Catholic theology.

2.1 *An Old Catholic Style of Theologizing Rather than an Old Catholic Theology*

Recently both Suter and Ploeger, two representatives of the current generation of Old Catholic systematic theologians, have noted that, in an absolute sense, there is no such thing as Old Catholic theology in terms of a confessional theology with its own set of creedal documents (Suter 2016; Ploeger 2018a; they continue a longer tradition of doing so, cf. Küry 1982; see also the exchange of views between Von Arx 2003c, Visser 2005 and Smit 2006 on the topic of the existence of Old Catholic theology). This also means that Old Catholic theology regards itself not so much as *a* theology among *other* theologies, but as a way of doing theology in an Old Catholic manner, bearing witness to and taking into account the long tradition of Christian theology of all times and places. Even if the 1889 Declaration of Utrecht functions in some ways as a foundational statement of Old Catholic theological principles, it is not commonly viewed as a confession of faith. Its *de facto* replacement with the current theological preamble to the statute of the IBC as a key expression of Old Catholic theological identity also indicates that it is increasingly becoming an historical document.⁶ This is in keeping with the origins of the document, as it was a tool to outline the shared theological principles that formed the basis for the communion among the Old Catholic Churches of Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands (and *de facto* also of Austria/the Habsburg Empire) and offered a point of departure for a theological approach that would overcome confessionalism by taking its starting point in the early church. Thus, no fixed

⁶ In keeping with this, the creedal letter offered to the Ecumenical Patriarch in 1969 was not simply a copy of the Declaration of Utrecht, cf. IBC 1971.

set of confessional documents or binding interpretations of ‘the’ faith of the early church were developed – the closest thing is the 2000 preamble to the IBC’s statute. What has been developed (and of which this preamble is an expression), however, is a particular style of theologizing. This style, which incorporates a number of fundamental-theological points of departure, can be characterized as follows.

To begin with, the heritage of the early church – in terms of its faith and order and the extent to which it can be accessed and studied with all the relevant scholarly tools – is a constant point of reference. The underlying assumption is that the faith and order of the first centuries contain several core decisions that can inform the continuation of that theological tradition (cf. representatively Suter 2016: 259–260). This particularly applies to the Christological dogmas of the early Church, as well as the doctrine of the Trinity (as expressed in the creedal decisions of the seven ecumenical councils and the witness of church mothers and fathers, cf. Küry 1982), the Scriptures as foundational witness to God’s revelation, and the liturgical tradition of the Church as an embodiment of its faith (*‘legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi’*) and order (episcopal-synodal ordering of the church), the paradigm of communion of human beings with God, with each other and with the whole of creation.

It is considered necessary to access and reformulate this dogmatic starting point time and again in a hermeneutical manner and with an eye to contemporary culture (cf. e.g., Visser 1979, 1996, 2000, 2005; Ploeger 2012; Suter 2016, cf. also Vercammen 2011 and esp. Krebs 2015). Especially in more recent decades – and in line with broader academic developments – an awareness of contextuality has increased (cf., e.g., Smit 2015a). Hermeneutics is, in Old Catholic theology, understood as the critical and scholarly study of earlier expressions of theology in order to understand what they may have meant in their own time, a way to understand their inspiration to reflect on challenges in one’s own context (cf., e.g., Ploeger 2012, see also Rinkel 1956: I, 8). But while faith is considered contextual, it is not considered to be contextual to such an extent that transcontextual communication becomes an impossibility. In keeping with this, the Old Catholic understanding of tradition is a dynamic one, one that sees tradition as a living process of transmission in which ultimately Christ himself, in his reconciling presence, is communicated (cf. Smit 2007, 2015a, 2017a; Rohmann 2019; cf. the insights of the 1963 World Conference on Faith and Order). The most tangible result of authentic tradition is, therefore, not conceptual truth but a community, the church, in which such reconciliation can be experienced (cf. Stalder 1984: 241; Ploeger 2008: 201–202). Doctrines are, therefore, frequently interpreted with reference to their soteriological and

(with that) their spiritual significance, rather than as abstract “statements of truth”. The Church is always more than just an institution; it is the living embodiment of this tradition and in that sense Christ’s sacramental presence in the world. This decidedly ‘high’ ecclesiology also allows Old Catholic theologians to be openly critical of their own church, given that its sanctity does, in the end, not depend on them or their efforts, but rather is a gracious gift of God in Christ through the Spirit.

In line with the communal character of reconciliation, theological discernment in Old Catholic theology (and ideally, in praxis) is always a communal undertaking. At the level of the local church, this is expressed through the interplay between episcopacy, collegiality and synodality: put differently, the personal, collegial and communal dimensions of the ministry of *episkope*, which is charged with initiating those processes that lead towards an authentic continuation of the life of the Church (cf., e.g., Von Arx 2006; Smit 2015c, see in general also Suter 2016; note the influence of the 1982 Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Report). In practice, this means that decisions are taken in consultation with conferences or synods of clergy or clergy and laity, or even by these bodies, depending on the canonical organization of a particular Old Catholic Church (cf. Hallebeek 2011ab). In this context, Old Catholic theologians usually emphasize that even if some of their structures were inspired by 19th-century parliamentary models, synodality goes beyond “democracy”: it is based on the ideal of consensus and the discernment of truth as a eucharistic community rather than majority rule and the discernment of the will of the people as the measure of policy making, even if synodal processes use democratic tools such as voting (cf. Suter 2016: 265–267; Von Arx 1996, *passim*). And yet, such internal processes of decision making are not regarded as sufficient; consultation within the community of churches is also deemed necessary, both within the Union of Utrecht (cf. the institutions mentioned above) and beyond. This is because the ecumenical dimension of the church is considered to be part and parcel of responsible theologizing, with an eye to *ressourcement* and renewal that helps to rediscover the unity of the church at the same time. Thus, mutual accountability is of importance (for an example, cf. below 3.3.1, on the ordination of women), a concern that is also recognized in the broader ecumenical movement (cf. 2013, section 15). Given the contextuality of all theology, the Old Catholic emphasis on openness vis-à-vis contemporary culture, and the importance of the participation of all members of the church in processes of discernment (not just academic theologians and/or members of the clergy), this style of theologizing also seeks to connect with (post)modern reality (recent examples include: Stalder 2000; Vercaemmen 2011; Krebs 2015; Visser 2017).

In general, this creates an atmosphere in which there is space for creativity and experiment as well as a willingness to submit one's own ideas to a broader forum and to accept its reception or non-reception.

At this point, it is also useful to note that very many (if not virtually all) Old Catholic theologians, whether lay or ordained, combine academic and ecclesial roles. Very many theologians are also ordained and have had professional pastoral experience. This leads to a relatively strong interaction between the actual life of the church and the professional theologians' reflection on it. The title of a Festschrift for one of the most prominent Old Catholic theologians of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Urs von Arx, *Sentire cum ecclesia*, may be regarded as a general expression of Old Catholic theological style. Also, the diversity within the Old Catholic churches has never led to the development of pronounced 'movements' or 'wings' within the individual churches or internationally. Of course, affinities of thought and spirituality exist among Old Catholics, but hardly in an institutionalized or politicized manner. Similarly, protracted conflicts between academic theology and the broader church (and church leadership) are absent from Old Catholicism and the (theological and spiritual) climate in the churches is generally hospitable to academic theological contributions.

In order to elaborate further on Old Catholic theological style and method, the topic of the appeal to the early church will now be discussed in more detail, owing to the fact that it is key to the Old Catholic theological program. It is followed by the example of the appeal to the *pristina norma patrum* in the discussion leading up to the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry.

2.1.1 The Appeal to the Early Church

The appeal to the faith and order of the early church is both as programmatic for 'Old Catholicism' as it is potentially problematic. Difficulties arise, given that it may be regarded as being indebted to an (all too) romantic view of the early church, an epistemology that questionably privileges the 'original' and is subject to epistemological positivism, a historically untenable view of the unity of the early church, an entity without clear boundaries and therefore without clear content (for paradigmatic criticism, in this case by Old Catholic authors, cf. Stalder 1974; Ring 1994). Yet, one of the advantages of appealing to the early church in terms of its faith and order is precisely that it refers back to a lived reality and an organic whole rather than confining itself to a set of theological principles or a particular set of books such as the Bible (cf. with this emphasis: Von Arx 2003b: 4); it therefore offers a comprehensive point of theological departure. When considering this with an eye to "tradition" as the ongoing transmission of the faith, such historical uncertainties are even

necessary, given that they offer opportunities for the ongoing discovery of new, forgotten or misrepresented aspects of the Church's tradition (cf. Smit 2015a). Somewhat counterintuitively, then, it is precisely the apparently problematic aspects of an appeal to the early church that in fact make the faith and order of the early church much more accessible. The connection with the life of the world today is furthered by this hermeneutical approach to theological tradition. Although the remarks below will attempt to systematize the appeal to the early Church with a focus on the emergence of a joint Old Catholic tradition post-1870, it is worth stressing here that such an appeal is characteristic of both traditions of "Old Catholicism": the "Augustinianist" tradition also aimed at a return to the patristic sources (cf. Ploeger 2008: 167–170).

Frequently, the Old Catholic appeal to the early church is summed up by Vincentius of Lerinum's famous dictum (or 'rule'): "id teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est" (Vincentius of Lerinum, *Commonitorium* II.3).⁷ This has been adopted by the Old Catholic Churches as a quasi-official theological motto (cf. IBC 1889, par. 1 and the cover of the *Internationale Kirchliche Zeitschrift*). As all motto's, the question is, of course, what it means. The best interpretation is presented by the history of Old Catholic theology itself, where the appeal to the early Church – and with that to the Vincentian rule – can be seen to have four key functions.⁸ The appeal functions in relation to (1) the protest against a specific shape of the Church (i.e., as it was the result of the ultramontanization of the church during the long 19th century); (2) the formulation of an Old Catholic "creed"; (3) the development of a basis for ecumenical relations; (4) the starting point for ecclesial renewal. Not coincidentally, these are also the four main components of the Declaration of Utrecht of 1889. But although the four are mutually interrelated and depend on each other, it is helpful to distinguish them.

(1) In the context of resisting the ultramontanization of the church, the appeal to the early church during the 19th century (and, in the case of the Dutch Church, also earlier) clearly provided the rationale for the "Old" Catholic

7 "That we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all"; the dictum is an abbreviated form of the following text: "In ipsa item catholica ecclesia magnopere curandum est, ut id teneamus, quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est. Hoc est etenim vere proprieque catholicum; quod ipsa vis nominis ratioque declarat, quae omnia fere universaliter comprehendit." – For an edition, see, e.g., Parmentier 1989. For interpretations emphasizing the "material" and "formal" aspects of the Vincentian rule, cf. Oeyen 1996 and Visser 1996, 2012.

8 The following is indebted to discussions with Dr. Adrian Suter, Schönenwerd/Bern on the subject of his *Habilitationsprojekt* "Berufung auf die Alte Kirche als Kriterium für Theologie heute".

protest: the theological and canonical renewal that was taking place was seen to contradict the faith and order of the early church, and it certainly had not been believed everywhere, always and by all. The aforementioned ‘rule’ of Vincentius of Lerin functioned as a way to exclude especially *Pastor Aeternus* from the possible spectrum of catholic teaching and to relegate what was expressed in *Ineffabilis Deus* (1854) to the realm of theological opinion and speculation, rather than to that of dogma. When applying the terminology of material and formal principles of theology, the ultramontanizing dogmatic definitions was seen to go against the material principle, i.e., the dogmatic tradition of the early church (cf., e.g., the emphasis of Oeyen 1996). Yet, this was by no means the only aspect of the protest. In addition, it was also argued that the changes went against an episcopal-synodal and conciliar way of existing as a community of reconciliation and engaging in discernment of the truth (with this emphasis, e.g., Visser 1980, 1996, 2012, cf. also Krebs 201b), as the Dutch bishops had already protested against the dogmatization of the immaculate conception of the Blessed Virgin by pope Pius IX without a General Council in 1854 (cf. Schoon 2004: 245–253). In other words, it was argued that the new developments were not “just” at odds with the ancient faith and order as it had existed in the early church, but in fact contradicted the manner of discerning the truth of the early church as well, making the situation even more serious and the protest all the more urgent. Thus, more than just the “validity” of a particular innovation was at stake; so was the extent to which the church could indeed be the (social) space in which salvation could be experienced, i.e., by existing in such a way that the life of the ecclesial communion could indeed be a conduit for facilitating an encounter with God in Christ through the Spirit, which is at the heart of what it means to be a catholic church (cf. Stalder 1984, 2000; on this qualitative view of catholicity, see Von Arx 2006). In all of these ways, this protest based on the faith and order of the early Church remains current in contemporary Old Catholic theology, given that its formal view of the legitimacy of these doctrinal developments has not changed (cf. e.g., Von Arx 2003a, see also Suter 2013).

(2) The second function of the appeal to the early church was to furnish the Old Catholic Churches with a viable point of doctrinal orientation. In fact, the protest against the ultramontanization of the church is a corollary of a way of developing the catholic tradition on the basis of the (scholarly accessed) faith and order of the early church, not *vice versa*. Yet, the First Vatican Council made the development of such patristically supported catholic theology in all the more urgent. The appeal to the early church – especially in a cultural climate that was inclined to favour the origins as something as the most authentic (romanticism) – provided a theologically, academically, ecclesially

and socially viable point of orientation for the Old Catholic Churches. It has remained so ever since, with emphasis on the content of the faith and order of the early church and on the (communal) hermeneutics of the early church (cf. Visser 1996). It also meant that the Old Catholics could in good faith remain Catholics and were not forced to adopt the “logical” alternative to Roman Catholicism (that is, Protestantism). In the course of the 20th century, ongoing reflection on the appeal to the early church and its constructive significance led to the following theological consensus of the 1995 International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference:

Die Internationale Altkatholische Theologenkonferenz ist zu der Feststellung gekommen, dass die Berufung auf die Alte Kirche sich nicht allein auf Glaubensinhalte bezieht, sondern auch auf die Art und Weise, wie man in Fragen des kirchlichen Lebens zu einer Übereinstimmung kommt. Dieser Prozess zur Bewahrung kirchlicher Gemeinschaft war gekennzeichnet von synodalen und konziliaren Beratungen. Er war in der Alten Kirche eingebettet in Einheit und Vielfalt. Diese beiden Prinzipien der “Synodalität” und der “Einheit in der Vielfalt” stützen und ergänzen sich gegenseitig. (IOThC 1996, 15)

The significance of this appeal becomes especially clear when focusing on ecclesial reunification and renewal.

(3) The third function of the appeal to the early church was an ecumenical one (cf. for an outline, Von Arx 2008; more extensively, Rein 1993, 1994). This function is a direct consequence of the orientation towards the early church and the realization that, in the light of the ultramontanization of the church as the outcome of a longer tendency in Western Catholicism, as Döllinger and others stressed, the Western (Roman) Catholic tradition could no longer be regarded as the only authentic continuation of the Christian tradition. Rather, the faith and order of the early church began to be seen as the norm for authentic catholicity. When establishing this, church unity – in the sense of recognizing each other’s catholicity – must also have the faith and order of the early church as its basis. On this basis, it was hoped that confessionalism in the West and even longer-standing schisms, such as the one between Eastern and Western Christianities, could be overcome. With regard to ecumenical rapprochement, a similar interplay between the content of the faith and order of the early church and its (re)discovery in the modern world can be seen in the case of the Old Catholic protest and the development of its approach to theology: Old Catholic ecumenism is about both form and content, it is concerned both with how faith is discerned and with what it has as its content. In

other words, ecclesial communion can only be established when churches can *together* – i.e., in a conciliar manner – discern the faith and order of the early church in such a way that its presence in the lives of the churches involved can be determined and reciprocally received. As will be discussed below, the Old Catholic approach to ecumenism *avant la lettre* – as embodied notably through Döllinger and the 1875–1875 Bonn Reunion Conferences – would provide a good match with the later Faith and Order Movement as it developed out of the 1910 World Missionary Conference. In the early years of the *Altkatholische Bewegung*, this approach to ecumenism led to a principled focus on the Church of Utrecht, the Orthodox Churches and the Anglican Churches as churches that were likely to have continued the faith and order of the early church in a manner similar to the *Old Catholics*. Following the formalization of relations with the Church of Utrecht (especially through the consecration of Reinkens by Heykamp in 1873 and the establishment of the Union of Utrecht in 1889), a trilateral ecumenical project was pursued with the Orthodox and Anglican Churches.

(4) The fourth and final function of the appeal to the faith and order of the early church has to do with the theological and organizational renewal (and with that, spiritual renewal) of the Old Catholic Churches. Here, form and content are again interdependent: the tradition of the early church can only be received and confessed through a way of justly discerning the truth of the early church (emphasized by e.g. Von Arx 2006; Suter 2016; Ploeger 2018a). In line with this, a strengthening of synodal structures was one of the first, if not the first, step taken to renew the life of the church on the basis of the faith and order of the early church. (In the churches emerging out of the *Altkatholische Bewegung* this took the form of modern synods in the 19th century (i.e. ‘parliaments’ with lay and clergy representation); in the Dutch church, synodal awareness existed even without a “modern” synod thanks to its ecclesiological tradition, cf. above). Ways of dealing with new challenges to the life of the church, both within the communion of a local church and within the communion of communions of churches that makes up the Union of Utrecht, have usually been discerned by means of such synodal structures, ideally leading either to a common vision or at least to the insight that different practices need not lead to divisions. Such transformations cover several aspects of ecclesial life – such as the liturgy (e.g., the introduction of the vernacular and the revision of liturgical rites in general – cf. Von Arx 2018) and church order (e.g., the abolition of compulsory clerical celibacy and the ordination of both women and men to the apostolic ministry) – but they also include matters at the interface of ethics and theological anthropology (e.g., the church’s attitude toward divorce and same-sex relationships, cf. below 2.2.4.4). Tensions

and differences are, as it is often (and sometimes somewhat gleefully) noted, inherent to this process, but in reality they further and deepen the conversation. This is the nature of synodality and conciliarity as theological and therefore spiritual processes: communion and dialogue are predicated on difference (as befits a church *in analogia Trinitatis*, cf. Ploeger 2008: 459–469). In fact, such dialogue precisely facilitates the process to which Old Catholic theologians such as Rinkel referred: he argued that the faith of the early church needs to be “rethought” for today in order to remain faithful to it (Rinkel 1956: 1, 8). Stalder similarly stressed that salvation should also be experienced in the church today – in particular in its common life and interpretation of the faith (cf. Stalder 1984, 2000) – in order to be able to live a life of faith essentially identical to that of the early church. A merely conservative attitude would, of course, prevent precisely this kind of faithfulness to the early church, as it necessarily leads to anachronisms (cf. Smit 2015a).

Not everything has been said with these historical and hermeneutical considerations, however. When asking what the faith and order of the early church consists of, the answers offered by Old Catholic theologians are both confident and relatively modest. Formally, the early church is commonly delineated as coinciding with the timespan covered by the seven ecumenical councils, of which the dogmatic content is considered to be of primary importance (cf. the reference to “the catholic faith as expressed in the Church in the east and west by the seven Ecumenical Councils” – IBC 2001a, par. 2, see representatively: Ploeger 2018a; Suter 2016). Furthermore, the episcopal-synodal ordering of the church with its Eucharistic focus is confidently stressed (cf. Von Arx 2006). In a similar manner the dogmas of the ecumenical councils are affirmed, it being always noted that these are also subject to interpretation in the pneumatological “*communio* event” of the church (cf. Aldenhoven 1989, cf. Suter 2016; for an emphasis on the soteriological content rather than on the letter of dogmas, see also Ploeger 2012; on the hierarchy of truths, see Suter 2011).⁹ In line with this, the creed of the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) is recited during the Eucharist on all Sundays and other feast days. The Christian canon is similarly affirmed (i.e., the canon of the Septuagint), all the while though underlining that a hermeneutical approach is of course needed (e.g., Smit 2015a). Also, the apostolic ministry is emphasized as an instrument

9 Aldenhoven draws heavily on the work of John Zizioulas, in particular to Zizioulas 1974 and 1997 (references are given to the English translations for the sake of convenience, although Aldenhoven quotes Zizioulas in, possibly his own, German translation). Note that the non-Anglophone versions of Zizioulas’ early work usually predate the English translations by decades.

for enabling the unity and mission of the church, both synchronically and diachronically. Also the liturgical life of the early church, with its Eucharistic life as its core, is considered to be part of the faith and order of the early church. Beyond these various items, a general appeal is made to the insights and practices of the early church as a first point of orientation for contemporary ecclesial life, but, as noted above, this is not done without an appeal to the Spirit: only in the Spirit and in the communion brought together by the Spirit – i.e., the church, by way of a permanent Pentecost (cf. Aldenhoven 1989, with reference to Zizioulas) – can the ancient faith be received in such a way that Christ, as a salvific reality (“Christ event”), becomes present to the church again in a way essentially identical to the way in which Christ was present to the earliest *ekklesia*. Life in communion in the church today is thus also life in communion with the church of the past, and – given its basis in the Christ event made present pneumatologically – it is also the same communion with God (cf., e.g. Ploeger 2008, cf. Zizioulas 1997, 2001).

The relative modesty of some Old Catholic theologians when it comes to answering questions about the precise content of the faith of the early church has to do with the other aspect of this faith and order: its role as a hermeneutical principle. The ecclesiological structure of the early church – i.e., its episcopal-synodal ordering and the fact that it was a communion of communions with a very limited hierarchy among the local churches (*qua* Eucharistic assemblies around a bishop that gather at a supra-local level under the presidency of a ‘primate’) – serves as a means of interpretation in communion (cf. Visser 1980, 1996, 2005, 2012). Such a structure also determines the way in which insight into the tradition can be discerned: i.e., only through a communal process of dialogue and reception (cf. Aldenhoven 1989, see also Von Arx 2006, Smit 2015a, Suter 2016, Ploeger 2018a). Such discernment in communion can, if the question at stake demands it, involve a global communion of communions of churches (that are themselves communions). In this case, a form of papal primacy can be required to preside over such a communion of communions (cf. IRAD 2009, 2017). To be sure – and in line with the pneumatological emphasis above – this is more than just a ‘democratic’ form of governing the church: it aims at a way of discerning the truth that does justice to the insights and *charismata* of all the baptized and all the churches in their respective contexts, ideally based on consensus. This hermeneutical approach to ecclesiology also leads to a certain reticence when it comes to laying down the law too quickly concerning the form and content of the faith of the early church in detail. This reticence is reinforced by theological and historical insight into what tradition is and how it functions (as an evolving organism); attention to the necessity of the ongoing ‘translation’ of the faith in new contexts and the possibilities inherent to that process in which new or forgotten aspects of the faith are

discovered or rediscovered, as well as a certain *eschatologischer Vorbehalt* ('eschatological reservation') when it comes to definite formulations of what the faith amounts to (cf. Smit 2015a [literature]).

In order to further unpack all of this, it is helpful to turn to an example: to understand how this appeal to the faith and order of the early church works in practice (and to simultaneously address a topic that concerned Old Catholic theologians from the late 1960s until the turn of the millennium), the case of the Old Catholic Churches' progression towards the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry will be considered in more detail.

2.1.1.1 *Excursus: The Ordination of Women and the Appeal to the Early Church*

At first glance, the most prominent discussion in Old Catholic theology in the latter part of the 20th century concerned the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry. When examined further, however, it becomes clear that other questions were at stake as well. These included the theology of the ordained ministry, the role of issues raised in society (i.e., the demand for women's rights) in theology, the best way of continuing the faith of the early church (the question of tradition), questions of theological anthropology, the theological significance of gender, the relationship of the churches of the Union of Utrecht to each other and the ecumenical dimensions of the ordination of women (see, in general, Smit 2011a: 389–419 and surveys in Von Arx 2000 and Berlis 2008; compare also Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland 1999; Vobbe 2005: 423–478). In what follows, the discussion and its eventual outcome will be presented from the point of view of what this meant for the Old Catholic understanding of the appeal to the early church.

From the late 1960s onwards, Old Catholic churches and their theologians saw themselves as needing to engage in renewed study of and reflection on a number of interrelated questions: the significance and appeal to the early church (and, in that context, the interrelationship between Scripture and tradition), the theology of the (ordained) ministry as such, and the admission of women to this ministry. This was caused both by ecumenical relationships such as those with the (post-Vatican II) Roman Catholic Church (e.g., *Dei Verbum* on tradition, *Lumen Gentium* on the church), the preparations of the dialogue with the Orthodox Churches (and, relatedly, the reception of *koinonia* theology), involvement in the broader ecumenical movement (in particular, Faith and Order, cf. the outcome of the 1963 Faith and Order Conference of Montreal), and the broader social developments associated with the year 1968. Accordingly, both a repristination of the Old Catholic appeal to the early church and of the theology of the ordained ministry was called for in a new theological and social setting.

The ensuing discussion (see Smit 2011a:391–400, cf. Von Arx 2000; Berlis 2008) led to a consensus at the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s that an unqualified and therefore uncritical appeal to the undivided church of the first millennium could no longer suffice (cf. IOTHC 1981: 68n8). Instead, a different view was needed, also as a basis for rethinking the theology of ministry. This new view of the appeal to the early church was expressed well by the 1981 International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference:

Die Kirche muss ... ein fortwährender Prozess der Wahrheits- und Entscheidungsfindung und des gemeinsamen Handelns sein, an dem alle beteiligt sind. Diese Beteiligung aller zu ermöglichen ist die Aufgabe des Amtes in Apostolischer Sukzession. Die Altkatholischen Kirchen der Utrechter Union glauben, dass sie damit die Tradition (Leben und Aufgabe) der ungeteilten Kirche des 1. Jahrtausends in einer den heutigen Problemen angemessenen Weise weiterführen. (IOTHC 1981: 67–68, similarly: IAOTHC 1980 and subsequently IOTHC 1985)

The appeal to the early church is therefore an appeal in terms of both form and content, something that be further developed in the course of the next years – this is apparent from a statement by the 1995 International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference, the conclusion of which was already cited above (IOTHC 1996, 15, cf. Nickel 1996). Keeping with the general development of Old Catholic theology, this conference aimed at recovering one particular aspect of the recourse to the early church: namely, the synodal and conciliar style of processes of discernment, deemed necessary for a legitimate appeal to the faith and order of the early church as a whole.

Accordingly, the discussion about the ordained ministry in general – which constituted the broader context of the entire discussion (cf. for this and the following: Smit 2011a:391–419) – and the ordination of women in particular took the form of a conversation in communion, both within the member churches of the Union of Utrecht – among them through 'instruments of communion' such as the IBC, the International Old Catholic Theologians' Conference, and International Old Catholics' Congresses – and with ecumenical partners such as churches in communion (notably the churches of the Anglican Communion), the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church (cf. in general Von Arx 2000, Berlis 2008). The Roman Catholic position left, at this point, relatively little room for discussion, given the publication of *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* in 1994 (preceded by *Inter insigniores* in 1976).¹⁰ No

¹⁰ Though it should be noted that the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry was, although controversial, not an unsurmountable obstacle for the initiation, by the Vatican

additional discussion was pursued, therefore. With Anglican partners, the theology of the ordained ministry was discussed generally, as it was with Orthodox partners, leading to joint statements on a shared and renewed view of the ordained ministry, though no definitive position on the ordination of women to it (cf. for an overview of Old Catholic ecumenism in this period Smit: 2011: 359–391 and as above); Anglicans were moving in the direction of the ordination of women, however, and the relationship of communion was not threatened by its introduction on either side of the relationship – as had happened, for example, when in 1976 the Episcopal Church in the USA officially ordained women to the priesthood. When it came to conversations with the Orthodox Churches, not generally known for their supportive stance regarding the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry: a dialogue with these churches was considered a way of testing the viability of the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry as an ecumenically recognizable faithful reception of the faith and order of the early church.

An Orthodox – Old Catholic consultation took place in 1996, consisting of two meetings held with the blessing of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop of Utrecht. The results of this consultation – which, despite their publication in English and German, have remained somewhat hidden – came as a surprise to all involved (and all observing): the joint consultation unanimously concluded that there were no theological objections against the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry. Both the results of the consultation as such and its line of argument as they appear in the “Common Considerations” of the consultation (Von Arx and Kallis 2002) are of interest here, as they show how an appeal to the early church actually functions and how a faithful reception of the faith and order of the early church fits into an ongoing search for ecclesial communion. This approach comes close to what would later be outlined in the Anglican-Orthodox Cyprus Agreed Statement [AOD 2006]).

The “Common Considerations” are prefaced by “preliminary remarks” by the editors, Old Catholic theologian Urs von Arx and Orthodox theologian Anastasios Kallis. They outline how the participants in the consultation agreed that in the earliest history of the church

At first, tendencies not to treat men and women differently based on gender, as both are viewed as parts of Christ’s body, allowed for multiple ecclesial ministries, even for what we would nowadays call leadership positions. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 501–502)

authorities, of what would prove to be a serious Roman Catholic-Old Catholic dialogue, envisioning the rediscovery of ecclesial communion, see IRAD 2009, 2017 and Visser 2010; the question was not on the forefront of this dialogue either.

This changed as the church was increasingly influenced by gender norms current in (Greco-Roman imperial) society, leading to the exclusion of women from such (priestly) roles. As this happened relatively early in the church's history, the effect was that

This state of affairs, initially caused by socio-cultural conditions, has become surrounded with the aura of holy tradition in the course of the church's pilgrimage to its destination in the doxa of God." (ibidem)

The document continues to outline, however, how another, newer social development has given reason to begin reassessing this earlier cultural development:

This was to be confronted with the (admittedly socio-culturally conditioned) movement that evolved in modern Europe and North America advocating equality for women, and with the realization that various traditional cultures are characterized by the phenomena of patriarchy and androcentrism. This raised the question as to whether there are inevitable and dogmatic reasons for excluding women from being priests. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 502)

The reason for reconsidering the witness of the early church is, therefore, social and contextual. As will become clear, the argument itself is not determined by arguments derived from, for instance, a discourse on social justice, but rather from one concerned with early Christian soteriology and the theological anthropology inherent to it. Prior to making this argument, a matter of method is first clarified:

The answer to this question cannot simply be taken out of the history of the church, as long as that history is identified as the "holy tradition." In other words, it does not make sense to take statements of church fathers, made in specific historical and cultural contexts, and apply them to the questions that have emerged from the spiritual needs of people today in our own cultural context. Rather, a hermeneutical consciousness is required. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 502)

Next, a few reasons are given as to why it is not possible to ordain women to the apostolic ministry:

Among the objections to the ordination of Christian women raised by churches in the East and the West alike, there are some that claim to be

independent of time or specific sociological context. The male gender of priests is derived, according to these arguments supposedly not conditioned by culture, from an indispensable connection between the function of the priest to represent Christ (or his “Christ-iconicity”) and his male sex and gender. These reasons are ultimately untenable. The same applies to the arguments with Christ-Adam and Eve-Mary typologies when they are used to explain a gender-specific difference that would make the ordination of women impossible. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 502–503)

The traditional character of these argument is acknowledged, yet also relativized with reference to another, more authoritative strand of the same tradition:

Although the patterns of both arguments reflect formal-patristic thought, they do not correspond to the tradition, since they ignore the universal salvific significance, inclusive of both men and women, of the incarnation of God’s Logos. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 505)

Thus, as will also happen in the “Common Considerations” themselves, particular aspects of tradition that can be seen as primarily socio-cultural in nature are relative here with reference to the theological core of the tradition of the early church: i.e., soteriology and its implied anthropology.

Von Arx and Kallis then acknowledge the complexities of the discussion surrounding gender difference and equality, noting that

The tradition of the early church, whose founders articulated their faith in different socio-cultural environments from ours, can provide us with neither general basic guidelines nor explicit guidance for each and every case. However, they provide something of a foundation ... when they speak of the incarnation of God’s Logos – in which Jesus Christ took the common nature of men and women – and of the restoration of the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:27) that men and women alike find in him. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 503)

Once again, “culture” is stressed as something that dictates whether women are admitted to the apostolic ministry or not (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 503; “certain cultural factors”). They also note, adumbrating the findings of the consultation as a whole, that no “compelling dogmatic or theological reason” was found “for not ordaining women to the priesthood.” (ibidem). As this is the case:

This means that the ordination of women could not fundamentally call into question or destroy the communion and unity of the church or the moves toward restoring broken communion and unity. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 503)

In the subsequent “Common Considerations” some of these arguments return, though it is worthwhile outlining them in sequence so as to do justice to the statement’s coherence. Having placed the conversations in the context of an ongoing dialogue and discernment of the Gospel (and with that of the unity of the Church), a common view of tradition is first outlined that builds on the insights of the official Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue (1975–1987):

In faithfulness to the treasure of tradition, we discern tradition as a process, directed by the Spirit of God, of the dynamic contextualization of the faith for the life and the witness of the church in its ever-changing contemporary situation. This provokes questions concerning the appropriate way of dealing with the tradition (the hermeneutical problem). (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 505)

Next, an ecclesiological observation is made. The consultation observes “that today churches justly emphasize the dignity of the laity and especially of women, and that they appreciate the fact that these people occupy an appropriate place in the mission of the church.” (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 505; subsequently reference is made to 1 Cor. 12)

The consultation then reports that it has researched the tradition of the early church based on the aforementioned understanding of tradition. Particular attention was given to

the historical data which was brought forward as a rationale for the “male character” of the priesthood: the maleness of the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ’s choosing of men in the circle of the twelve, the exclusive appointment of men to the priestly office of the church, as well as the corresponding argumentation with regard to typologies (e.g., Adam-Christ, Eve-Mary) and with ideas of the priest being the image or representation of Christ. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 505)

Through a consideration of these various traditions and the arguments based on them, the following is concluded:

We have reached the common conclusion that there are no compelling dogmatic-theological reasons for not ordaining women to the priesthood.

The soteriological dimension of the church is decisive for us: the salvation of humankind and the entire creation in Jesus Christ in whom the new creation is being accomplished. We were especially guided by the conviction that was central to the ancient church: only that which has been assumed and united with God has been saved. It is human nature, common to men and women, that has been assumed by our Lord. (Von Arx and Kallis 2002: 505)

In what follows in the remainder of the document, allowance is made for the role of socio-cultural (“non-theological”) factors in the actual decision-making of churches, but these do not affect the validity of this theological view.

By presenting these “common considerations”, both the basis upon which Old Catholic Churches proceeded with the ordination of women from 1998 onwards and the way in which the appeal to the early church functions in Old Catholicism have been laid out.¹¹ The consultation process within the Old Catholic Churches, both within the various churches and among them, was (much) broader than this; its discussion here served to illustrate the Old Catholic appeal to the early church (cf. for the local and supra-local consultations the surveys by Von Arx 2000 and Berlis 2008). This appeal is more than just an historical appeal as such. It is also characterized by a multi-layered discernment in communion. This discernment takes place through the episcopal-synodal structures of each of the local churches that are part of the Union of Utrecht, among these churches in conciliar communion, and among communions of churches in (ecumenical) exchanges with churches in communion and with churches with which communion is sought. This method of discerning in communion responds to questions raised by the contemporary context of the churches and makes use of the tools of academic theological scholarship. In this way the churches are able to critically reassess, as part of the process of tradition that shapes the life of these churches, whether their position on a topic such as the ordination of women is still the most appropriate reflections of the faith and order of the early Church and enables a faithful witness to Christ, who is at the heart of the living tradition of the church (cf. the formulations of the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal 1963).

11 The communal process of discernment was disrupted in two ways, it should be noted: in 1996, the Old Catholic Church of Germany proceeded with the ordination of women unilaterally and in 2003 the Polish National Catholic Church left the Union of Utrecht definitively due to its inability to retain communion with churches ordaining women to the apostolic ministry.

2.1.2 Influences and Inspirations

As indicated above (cf. 1.2.1 and 1.2.2), the Church of Utrecht and the Old Catholic movement were themselves expressions of particular approaches to theology in the Western Catholic tradition, which together became the initial Old Catholic theological tradition. The further development of this tradition was influenced by theological paradigms and approaches in the course of the 20th (and early 21st) century, which will be surveyed briefly here. It has been decided to acknowledge these various influences up front, before proceeding to outline what may be called the “mainstream” paradigm in more details (2.2). This approach does justice to both the discursive character of Old Catholic theology as well as its most characteristic shape. The focus will be on the appropriation of various theological paradigms and approaches within Old Catholic theology. As Old Catholic theology is positioned squarely in both the broader ecumenical movement and centres of academic theology, it goes without saying that interaction with different confessional traditions and methodological approaches also continues. Acknowledgement of historical paradigms – e.g., in biblical studies and in systematic theology – is kept to a minimum here. Although Old Catholics stood out because of a historical approach early on – particularly in the 19th century, when the catholic historical school in the *Altkatholische Bewegung* revolving around Döllinger and others played a key role – such approaches have since become established to such an extent throughout theology that they do not merit separate discussion in a study largely focusing on the 20th century (although it should be noted that many Old Catholic theologians continue to work with a historical focus). The influences surveyed here span movements, confessional traditions and disciplinary emphases.

The ecumenical movement has been a major conversation partner for Old Catholic theology in the 20th and 21st centuries (cf. for a partial survey: Smit 2011a; theologically, see also Ploeger 2008). In line with their theological self-understanding, the Old Catholic Churches committed themselves from the start to the ecumenical movement, particularly through the Faith and Order movement. In line with this, the Old Catholic Churches became founding members of the WCC in 1948. ‘Faith and Order’ especially confirmed the Old Catholic search for unity based on the faith of the early church. Accordingly, this tradition within the ecumenical movement became a valuable discussion partner for Old Catholic theologians (notably, in the field of ecclesiology). The Faith and Order movement also provided a context within which Old Catholic Churches and theologians situated themselves as Catholics and catholic churches, thus preventing ecclesial isolation (especially prior to the Second Vatican Council). Engagement with the output of the Faith and Order

commission, especially the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) and *The Church – Towards a Common Vision* (2013), will be discussed below.

The liturgical movement has also exercised considerable influence on Old Catholic theology. Ecumenically and patristically oriented – and at its core a theological, not merely an aesthetic, movement (cf. Ploeger 2007) intent on furthering a sacramental understanding of the church – it fitted Old Catholic concerns well. In particular, those theologians affiliated with the Old Catholic movement were, at a very early stage, engaged in liturgical renewal, such as the introduction of the vernacular, experiments with the westward celebration of the Eucharist, and enhancing participatory forms of celebration (cf. paradigmatically the work of Adolf Thürlings, see: Berlis 2019a). In the course of the 20th century, however, Old Catholic theologians from across the spectrum of Old Catholic traditions actively received insights from the liturgical movement (survey: Von Arx 2018). This pertained both to liturgical theology and ecclesiology and to liturgical spirituality and the manner of revising and celebrating liturgies, which has led to a patristically sourced (cf. e.g., Aldenhoven 197 IOTHC 972), ecumenically recognizable (cf., e.g. Kraft 2002, 2015) and strongly sacramental liturgical tradition and a highly participatory way of celebrating it (*actuosa participatio*; cf. for a theological synthesis Ploeger 2008).

Orthodox theology is another key influence, particularly the so-called “neopatristic movement” (cf. Toroczai 2015, survey also in Louth 2015). The theologians involved all sought to move beyond Orthodox “handbook theology” and to come to a new articulation of the patristic tradition in the context of modernity. Affinities between this and Old Catholic theology result from concordant efforts to retrieve the faith of the early church for the modern age and an ecclesiological vision in which the local, rather than the universal, church is central. In particular, insights concerning the retrieval of patristic tradition of a liturgical *koinonia* theology (and ecclesiology), in which the church has key soteriological and spiritual significance, have become important for Old Catholics (cf. Von Arx 2015b). Orthodox theology continues to be a dialogue partner for issues ranging from ecclesiology in general (cf., e.g., Aldenhoven 1974) to the theology of ministry (Von Arx and Kallis 2002) and questions concerning the church in the modern world (cf. on ecology, cf. Hasselaar and Smit 2015, Smit and Hasselaar 2017).

Anglican theology, as it grew out of a theological and ecumenical partnership from the early days of the Old Catholic movement, has been of significance as well. Affinities existed and continue to exist with the Anglo-Catholic tradition especially, both in terms of spirituality and theology. More recently, affiliated theological movements such as Radical Orthodoxy have been received constructively (cf. Ploeger 2008). In the mid-20th century, questions

of common theological concern were discussed (especially ecclesiology and the theology of the ordained ministry; cf. Rein 1994, see Smit 2011a). The Old Catholic discussion on ordination of women was significantly furthered by this. More recently, attention has been shifted to joint existence in Europe and the theological challenges this brings with it: that includes the question of ‘overlapping jurisdictions’ but also (and perhaps especially) questions of joint existence in a secularizing Europe (cf. e.g., the 2011 report of the AOCICC) and the place of theology in the public sphere.

Roman Catholic theology has become a more constructive partner of Old Catholic theology, especially since the Second Vatican Council. Earlier antagonism had to be left behind (cf. the reflections on this and of this in IRAD 2009, 2017) and new convergences in method and ethos could be explored. This partially involved affirmation (e.g., a commitment to a historical approach [*Nouvelle Théologie!*]), an ecumenical attitude, (positive) attention to contemporary culture, and the appreciation of the *charismata* of all (i.e., synodality; cf. in general: Visser 2010). But some challenges also arose from this ‘new’ Roman Catholic theology, such as those pertaining to the relationship between church and world, the theology of the ordained ministry, and a greater emphasis on human experience. Among these various developments, liberation theology has been particularly pronounced and is of significance for Old Catholic theology as well. Connections were forged first through the broader Roman Catholic and ecumenical discourse (cf. the International Old Catholic Congresses of 1986 and 1990; for a search for a liberation theology for Europe, see: Segbers 2002, 2007, 2015). Second, Old Catholic theology encountered and was challenged by liberation theology through the communion with the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* and its societal involvement (IFI, communion: 1965, cf. Revollido 2006, 2007, 2008). Such exchange culminated in a three-year research project on ‘Catholicity and Globalization’ (2006–2008, cf. Dutton 2010, cf. also IKZ 2017 [107]).

Protestant theologies have also been of significance, even if their influence is hard to track beyond informal contacts, the broader ecumenical movement and the influence of individual personalities. To the extent that historical-critical methods started out within the sphere of protestant theology, it can be argued that Old Catholics were eager to adopt them, a move in line with the influence of the catholic historical school as represented by Döllinger and others in the *Altkatholische Bewegung*. The other major protestant influence on Old Catholic theology that can be singled out is Karl Barth, particularly through the Bernese Faculty of (Old) Catholic Theology in the 1930s and 1940s (cf., e.g., Krebs 2011a: 16). In continuation of this influence, particularly through the work of Stalder, elements of Barth’s work entered mainstream Old Catholic

theology, notably where it concerned the relational character of revelation (cf. Krebs 2011a, 2013a; see Stalder 1962, 1984, 2000).

Social-Scientific approaches have begun to have a larger impact on Old Catholic theology in recent decades (in line with their rise elsewhere in theology), often inspired by an emphasis on the *sensus fidelium* or ‘theology from below’. Studies by Old Catholic theologians in this field only emerged around the turn of the millennium and afterwards: e.g., on Old Catholic identity in the Netherlands (Vercammen 1997), catholic wedding rituals (Robinson 2008) and the faith of German Old Catholics (Krebs and Kranz 2014). Research in management studies in relation to the (practical) theology of ministerial leadership can also be mentioned here (Rein 2012, 2014). Psychological (and psychoanalytical) insights are used in Old Catholic pastoral theory and practice; a notable integration of exegetical and pastoral-theological approaches can be found in Kirscht 2014 (see earlier also, e.g., Amiet 2000).

Feminist and Queer approaches should also be mentioned, as related and distinct as they are – in Old Catholic theology they are often viewed in relation to questions of gender equality (rather than fundamental theology). Such research has both a historical component (cf. e.g., Berlis 1998, 2000) and a contemporary component, as in the context of the discussion about women’s ordination (cf. above 2.1.1.1). Concerns about theological anthropology persist, however, when it comes to the “LHBTQI+ community”. While LHBTQI+ people have played and continue to play a full role in most Old Catholic churches as baptized members of the body of Christ – with some serving in holy orders while being “out” for decades already – the theological question is not whether or not there is a place for “queer” people in the church (cf. IOTC 2002), but rather what one’s theological understanding of these identities is, particularly in relation to sacramental theology (cf. 2.2.4). Like other theological traditions, Old Catholic theology is only beginning to come to terms with these realities in the context of the 21st century. Attempts to receive ‘queer’ approaches into Old Catholic theologizing as such are also just beginning, especially in terms of thinking about fluid identities, otherness and difference (cf. Smit 2010; Derks 2013, Ploeger 2018b).

2.2 *Old Catholic “Mainstream” Theology: Communio Theology*

As just surveyed, a variety of paradigms, movements and voices were and continue to be influential in Old Catholic Theology. In outlining these influences and offering the example of the discernment leading up to the ordination of women, it has become clear that in the latter half of the 20th century one theological paradigm – that of *communio* or *koinonia* theology – became characteristic or even dominant. This is usually with an ecclesiological focus, given

the particular history of the Old Catholic Churches and the way in which they have been challenged by other churches and their historical contexts (cf. for a historical outline: Smit 2011a; classical expressions: Aldenhoven 1980b; IBC 2001a). Within this paradigm, the core issues of the Christian traditions such as the doctrine of God, Christology, pneumatology and soteriology have their place. The dominance of this paradigm is congruous with the 19th-century Old Catholic program: i.e., as a theological paradigm it is an expression of the recovery of the faith and order of the early church in both form and content in a manner that furthers the unity of the church and leads to ecclesial renewal. In the course of both receiving and further developing this paradigm, Old Catholic theologians have operated both in constant ecumenical exchange and in dialogue with historians of the early church, which is another sign of continuity with 19th-century developments.

This emphasis on the Eucharist as the most intense performance of 'being church' leads to an emphasis on the local church as the central element of ecclesiology. This accords with another and earlier emphasis in Old Catholic tradition (particularly in canon law), in which the central position of the local church and its bishop – particularly the *communio* of the local church *qua* diocese (*qua* Eucharistic gathering around a bishop) – was also underlined. This can be found both in the traditions of the Church of Utrecht (stressing the local church/diocese vis-à-vis the “universal” church governed by the See of Rome) and in the emphasis on the national church/diocese by the churches emerging out of the *Altkatholische Bewegung* (cf. Smit 2011a: 50–98) as well as in compatible developments in, for example, the Polish National Catholic Church (North America) and the Polish Catholic Church (Poland), with their emphasis on the local *qua* cultural and ethnic.

Some of the influences mentioned above were of particular importance for the development of this *communio* theology in an Old Catholic context. The first was the theological impulse provided by orthodox *émigré* theologians following the First World War and the Russian Revolution, particularly those who sought to gain a new access to the faith of the early church (“neo-patristic synthesis”) and those engaged in a project of liturgical theology. The second was what has become to be known as the “nouvelle théologie” in Roman Catholic tradition, in which compatible and comparable insights were developed. Third, partially overlapping with the others, is the liturgical movement as it emerged from the late 19th century onwards. Fourth, in the ecumenical Faith and Order movement, with which Old Catholic theologians interacted strongly, many of these insights came together (cf., theologically, e.g., Ploeger 2008).

The reception of theological and especially ecclesiological insights from these various sources facilitated a shift in most, if not all Old Catholic Churches

from an emphasis on an ecclesiology of the 'national church' after the Second World War (cf. on the development of the ecclesiology of the 'national church' prior and during the way: Ring 2008). Simultaneously, the *communio* paradigm offered an encompassing and ecumenically viable theological vision that could also strengthen the cohesion and clarify the self-understanding of the Old Catholic Churches. The latter is evidenced in the ecclesiological preamble to the statute of the IBC of 2000 (cf. IBC 2001a), which is a concentrated statement of a Eucharistic *communio* theology with a focus on ecclesiology. Von Arx (e.g., 2002a) has rightly termed this theological approach "mainstream" Old Catholic theology, although it has become this only from the 1920s onwards (cf. Von Arx 2002a, 160, noting that this theology was "manifesting a marked closeness to Anglican and Orthodox ecclesiology"; see also: Ploeger 2008; Smit 2011a).

As just indicated, the most representative statement of this ecclesiological paradigm can be found in the ecclesiological preamble to the statute of the IBC, although it has also been expressed in the statements of ecumenical dialogues, particularly those that were received formally by Old Catholic churches and their (joint) institutions, such as those from the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, Anglican-Old Catholic theological conferences, the Roman Catholic-Old Catholic dialogue and the Church of Sweden-Old Catholic dialogue. The Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic dialogue is also based on this paradigm, which constitutes the background to the Old Catholic reaction to both the 1982 Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry-report and *The Church -Towards a Common Vision* (2013; cf. Aldenhoven and Von Arx 1988; IBC 2015, on the dialogue, see Smit 2015d). Here, however, the IBC statute and its preamble will be a starting point for an outline focusing on those aspects that are indicative of a theological blueprint. The document is aimed at expressing the shared Old Catholic ecclesiological self-understanding. Accordingly, its core statement is:

It [sc. the shared Old Catholic ecclesiology] presupposes that each fellowship and communion of people, which by the reconciliation in Jesus Christ and by the outpouring and the continuous work of the Holy Spirit is constituted as a unity in a given place around a bishop with the eucharist as its center, is a complete church that carries out its tasks autonomously in that given place. Each local church living the common faith and having its indispensable synodal structures, uniting the ordained ministry and the laity, which bring to bear her communion and unity, is a representation of the "one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church", as confessed by the ecumenical creed of Nicaea-Constantinople (381). (IBC 2001a, par. 3.1)

In addition to this paragraph, the following is also of importance:

Each local church is the Body of Christ in which the members, baptized and confirmed in the name of the Holy Trinity and united in the Eucharist, are called, authorized, and sanctified by the various gifts of the Holy Spirit to live a multifaceted common life in *martyria*, *leitourgia*, and *diakonia*. In communion with the other local churches they are the people of that God who has elected Israel to be a sign of salvation and has opened up the blessing promised to Abraham to all peoples in the power of the Gospel. Being the manifestation of the renewal of creation that has its origin in Jesus Christ, it is on the way to its fulfillment which all its members have to go in repentance and hope. (IBC 2001a, par. 3.3)¹²

With this, some key ecclesiological notions have been introduced already: the church is understood as a communion (Greek: *koinonia*; Latin: *communio*), whose life is characterized by the complementary dimensions of worship, witness and service (*leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*, cf. Janßen 2010, Von Arx 2006).¹³ Other aspects of this preamble outline the Old Catholic understanding of *notae ecclesiae* and will be discussed further below, when focusing on the church as such. At this point, it is of importance to stress a number of characteristics of this theological approach, to which the church is very central. The reason that the church is so central is because it is the (earthly) embodiment of what may be described as 'salvation-through-communion': God's gracious and redeeming presence exists on earth in the shape of the church, initiation into which is the sublunary shape of salvation:

The church as a reality in which we 'believe' is the realm of life and salvation, created by the Father in his sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit, where human beings who are justified by and reconciled to God, and brought together as his people, are called to share in God's saving and life-giving acts and to lead the entire creation to its eternal consummation. (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, par. 5)

¹² Although not a major theme in Old Catholic theology as such, supersessionist models of ecclesiology seem to have gone out of use particularly following the Second World War, as is also reflected in this formulation.

¹³ *Diakonia* is here used in the "old" meaning of the term, given that the triad as developed in the 1930s, cf. Janßen 2010; for a more contemporary interpretation of *diakonia*, cf. esp. Collins 1990.

This soteriology of communion also means that it encompasses all aspects of the human person, body, soul, spirit and mind, each of which are of significance (in line with the Christological dogma, cf. below). Personal initiation into the mystery of the Church, which is the mystery of God, can, accordingly, emphasise one of these aspects over another – more social than intellectual, for example, or more physical than noetic – even if all matter. In line with this emphasis on communion and initiation, life in the communion of the church is also mystagogical in nature: it can be understood as an ongoing initiation in the salvific work of God, which is, ultimately, the renewal of the entirety of creation. The renewal of creation is the view of eschatology that coheres naturally with a *koinonia* approach to theology, given that a renewed creation is a creation that in communion with God and therefore in reconciled harmony with itself and its constituting parts. While this view is central to the biblical witness, it is also central to one of the very few more extensive Old Catholic statements on eschatology, as it is part of the documents produced by the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, VI/1.1; compare also the appertaining discussions in Rinkel 1956 and Küry 1982, see also Neuhoff 2016). Such a renewed creation is proleptically present in the church and therefore in each of the baptized and will achieve its consummation at the second coming and the judgment that accompanies this.

Given this understanding of the church, the church is always much more than ‘just the church’, even if its institutional shape is also a topic to which much attention is given in Old Catholic theology. In fact, the *communio* paradigm often seems as if it is all about the church, but in reality that is just the visible shape of a soteriology of communion based on a doctrine of God that emphasizes God’s ‘being in communion’ (cf. Zizioulas 1997, an important influence in recent Old Catholic theology, see, e.g., in Ploeger 2008, Aldenhoven 1989) with an appropriate understanding of Christ and the Spirit as well. In this understanding, the church is, of course also sacramental in nature (e.g., Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, 5.3.1). This means that the life of the church is also a sign of salvation and that failure to live up to this is never just embarrassing institutionally, but also deeply troubling spiritually. Whatever takes place in worship, witness and service (*leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*, cf. IBC 2001a: 3.3, cf. also Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, 5.2.1), it is all part of the life of a redeemed community and should also be a sign of salvation. Nothing is unsacramental in the church, even if the sacramentality of certain, usually liturgical acts are more obviously recognizable than other, usually administrative or organizational acts (cf., e.g., Ploeger 2017, see also Smit 2015a). The participatory – i.e., synodal and conciliar – approach to decision making in the Old Catholic Churches, together with an understanding of ecclesial ministry that has personal *and*

collegial and communal dimensions, is also a direct consequence of this theological approach. In that sense, the Old Catholic Churches also seek to live up to their ‘citizenship in heaven’ (Phil 3.20) organizationally (cf., e.g., Suter 2016: 265–257).

Finally, it should be noted that this approach to theology does full justice to the theological program of the ‘Old Catholic fathers and mothers’ as it was outlined in the late 19th century:

- It is patristically based, but also seeks to reformulate patristic insights about God, redemption and humankind in a scholarly and hermeneutically accountable manner.
- It is an approach that both is capable of further ecumenical rapprochement and has been developed in dialogue with other churches and their theologians. It also is fully catholic in nature without having to rely on a ‘papal system’.
- It may contribute to a believable witness of the church, given that it is spiritually intelligible: God, redemption, church and humanity constitute a coherent whole, and the divine life, the ecclesial life and the personal, spiritual life become intertwined. Furthermore, given the emphasis on relationality, it is in tune with the *experiencescape* of (post)modern people.

2.2.1 Theology and Liturgy

Old Catholic theology, as it has developed over the past decades, has been mostly focused on liturgical matters. To some extent, this was a practical issue: in the course of the 20th century, new liturgical books were needed, and these had to be produced with due care. The history of Old Catholic liturgy would be worth a monograph of its own (cf. for a survey Von Arx 2018). Here, however, the focus should be on the theological aspects of Old Catholic liturgy and liturgical renewal. The motivation behind the substantial investments that the Old Catholic Churches are wont to make in the field of liturgical studies and development is a deeply theological one, an awareness that it is in liturgical celebrations – centrally in the Eucharistic liturgy – that the church is most fully itself, as a *communio* of God and creation and of creatures among each other. As Ploeger puts it, “The Eucharist is the gathering of those who have *koinonia* with one another through their corporate *koinonia* with Jesus Christ, and through him with God.” (Ploeger 2008: 467) In this sense, the Old Catholic theological tradition incorporates key theological insights of the liturgical movement, which comprised both Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant protagonists and usually considered the early church as a point of reference (ritually and, especially, theologically, cf. Ploeger 2007). The adage ‘lex orandi, lex credenda’ – which indicates that liturgy shapes the faith first

and foremost ('*legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi*') – sums up the resulting interrelationship between liturgy and theology well, and it is as important for Old Catholic theology as it is for other traditions (cf. paradigmatically Ploeger 2008 as well as Suter 2016: 258, and Aldenhoven 1980a, Von Arx 2007a, Kraft 2002). Fundamentally, liturgy both ritually constitutes and shapes salvific *communio* with the Triune God, who is *koinonia*, into which human beings are drawn sacramentally through baptism (*cum* confirmation, cf. below 2.2.4.1) and Eucharist. The full shape of such a celebration is, in Old Catholic understanding, a church community with its dimensions of witness and service, centred in worship, *qua* sacramental communion with God and therefore with one another (cf. IBC 2001a: 3.3, see also Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue 1989: v/4). Contrary to some opinion (and practice), theologically, a liturgical spirituality is, when truly sacramentally understood – i.e., as grounded in *koinonia* with God who is *koinonia* and yearns for *koinonia* –, always outward looking and in that sense “missionary”, as it is seeking for communion (cf. Berlis 2014; Smit 2015a; Ploeger 2017). Given that the Old Catholic liturgical tradition is, theologically speaking, all about *koinonia*, the frequent theologizing from the vantage point of the liturgical celebration in Old Catholic theology with an emphasis on *koinonia* need not surprise. The celebration *is* what the theology is all *about*, and therefore the former logically constitutes the paradigm for the latter. Liturgy as sacramental *koinonia* is the paradigm for all theology that seeks to theologize with an understanding of salvation as being drawn into *koinonia* at its core. In this way, the celebration of the liturgy and theological reflection relate to each other as “first” and “second” theology (cf. in general Ploeger 2008).

On the basis of the above general outline of an Old Catholic approach to theology and this reflection on the relation between liturgy and theology, it is now possible to turn to the doctrine of God, the understanding of revelation and the understanding of the church in Old Catholic theology.

2.2.2 The Triune God

As indicated already, the *communio* paradigm typical of Old Catholic theology is a *theological* approach that leads to a certain ecclesiological vision, rather than *vice versa* (unless one understands the ecclesial experience as the experience of salvation, out of which a theology is born by means of reflection on this experience, then the sequence would be ecclesiology-theology). Yet, when comparing it to the amount of energy Old Catholic theologians have spent on the development of a fully catholic, patristically sourced and ecumenically viable ecclesiology that could provide the basis for ecclesial renewal, the doctrine of God and with that Christology and pneumatology seems to have received

relatively little attention. This has to do not only with historical factors, but also with a theological program that exercised a strong reticence when it came developing distinct theological emphasis and preferred to look for expressions of the faith that could be shared with other churches and that relied on the (expressions of) faith of the early church. This programmatic entails that there should be no such thing as a ‘confessional’ Old Catholic theology, but that Old Catholic theology aims to be the theology of the early church (cf. above, 2.1). Theological research is, therefore, mainly focused on areas of ecumenical challenge, in which disagreements may be overcome by a joint rediscovery of the faith and order of the early church (cf. above, 2.1.1).

That is not to say, however, that there is no discernible Old Catholic approach to these topics. In fact, when considering representative accounts of these topics – usually treating them in relation to one another and typically on the basis of an understanding of God as Trinity – it would seem that most representative Old Catholic theologians have, in line with a general tendency in 20th-century theology, moved away from philosophically oriented models that originate with discussions of religion and God “in general” and progress towards a discussion of God as Trinity, to models with a stronger emphasis on either salvation-history or (otherwise historically mediated) divine revelation, particularly in the experience of Israel and the life, death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Küry 1982; Ploeger 2012, 2018, compare also already Rinkel 1956; in the work of Visser and Stalder human experience and revelatory experience are closely interrelated, yet with strong emphasis on revelation, cf. Visser 2017, Stalder 2000; see also Krebs 2013a, 2015, for considerations about the term “God” and its referent in a “secular age”). In line with the Old Catholic theological ethos, this approach is seen to be patristically based (cf., e.g., the outline of the Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue in Ploeger 2008: 443–454). This leads to an emphatically trinitarian doctrine of God, which in classical terms is expressed in the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue:

We believe and confess One God in three hypostases, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father, who “loved” the Son “before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:24), revealed himself through him in the Holy Spirit in order that this love might be in his disciples (Jn. 17:26) through the communion of the Holy Spirit who has been “sent into our hearts” (Gal. 4:6). This revelation is an ineffable and inexplicable mystery, a mystery of love, “for God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8). (Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue 1989: 1/3)

This dialogue continues, quoting John of Damascus, to draw attention to the “being-as-communion” of God:

“The three holy hypostases are distinct exclusively in these hypostatic properties, not in nature, but by the distinctive feature of each hypostasis, and thus separated they remain inseparable” since they “do not denote the nature but the mutual relationship and mode of being” (John of Damascus, f.o. 8;10- PG 94.824, 837). (Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue 1989: 1/3)

As will become apparent below, this emphasis on “being as communion” is closely related to soteriology and ecclesiology, which is just as relational in nature as the doctrine of God is (cf., e.g. Visser 2000; Stalder 2000; Smit 2015; Ploeger 2018a). In its more minimal form, the relationships between the persons can be expressed as follows: the Father is different from the Son in that the Father begets the Son, *vice versa* the Son differs from the Father by being begotten; the Father differs from the Spirit in that the Father breaths the Spirit and the Spirit from the Father in that he is breathed and from the Son that he is breathed, not begotten, whereas they participate in each other by way of *perichoresis*, i.e. dance-like mutual interpenetration.

Much inspiration for this view of the Trinity is drawn from the (Greek) church fathers (and their contemporary interpreters), yet they are not the only source of inspiration for a relational approach. 20th-century theologians also play a role; Stalder, for example, developed his branch of *communio* theology in conversation with and based on the dialectical theology of Karl Barth. In fact, Barth’s dialectical approach is received in a manner that relates such dialectics to free communication, authentic subjectivity and (redeemed) existence in communion (cf. Stalder 2000).

The relational understanding of revelation and redemption and God as Trinity, and accordingly as *koinonia* in which the persons are only distinguished from each other by the way in which they relate to each other, is also based on the experience of the people of God with this God. That is to say, it is based on God’s self-revelation to which Scripture and tradition witness, while it simultaneously serves as a way of reflecting on and making sense of these experiences.

There is much reticence in Old Catholic theology to go beyond this theologically and dogmatically; at the same time – and quite compatibly with the patristic heritage influences such as Barth – such blueprints of the doctrine of God have much in common with apophatic approaches to theology, as was also expressed in the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue when considering revelation in Christ: “In Jesus Christ, the Triune God, whose essence is inaccessible and incomprehensible to us, revealed himself in his salvific energies and, indeed, in his whole plenitude” (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, 1/1).

These experiences with God do have a certain shape, which is seen to be an expression of Godself, i.e., the shape of the gift of oneself to the other. This can be understood as grace: the intention to establish a relationship and to achieve reconciliation. In Old Catholic theology, the incarnation, crucifixion and exaltation of the Son of God are not primarily seen as a divine exercise in problem fixing, but as an expression of God's persistent underlying desire for communion as such, both with humankind and with creation as a whole.

The church *qua* reconciled community is the direct result of who God is and what God wants. Ideally, reconciliation can also be experienced in this manner in the community of the church (cf., e.g., Stalder 1984, 2000; Von Arx 2003a, Ploeger 2008, Smit 2015a). The church as a theandric organism is always called to live up to its divine character in its human form. Soteriology can thus be read as being deduced from theology (in the sense of the doctrine of God), but the reverse is also possible: theology is the result of reflection on an experience of salvation-through-communion, for instance in a liturgical celebration (as outlined above in relation to primary and secondary theology, cf. 1.1).

Quite in line with all of this and with the ecumenical and patristic orientation characteristic of Old Catholic theology, the Christology that belongs to this discourse was expressed normatively at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) and subsequently clarified and refined at the fifth and sixth ecumenical councils (553, resp. 680–681 CE): the salvific communion between God and creation finds its most focused expression in the hypostatic union of the two natures in Christ, even if the content of the dogmatic definition of Chalcedon is regarded as more important than its precise form (cf. below, 2.2.6.3.6, on the dialogue with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church; see also Suter 2016). This view of Christology is, therefore, primarily focused on its revelatory and soteriological content. Such an approach to the doctrine of God and of Christology is a good example of Old Catholic patristic repristination with an eye to ecumenical rapprochement and ecclesial renewal: on this basis the experience of the church can be understood as an experience of salvation-in-communion, closely tied up with the God in which Old Catholics believe. As it is also a non-confessional approach to the doctrine of God, it unites rather than divides. Pastorally and spiritually, the Chalcedonian dogma also provides the basis for a sacramental understanding of the church, a sacramental spirituality and a positive appreciation of all aspects of the human person, body, spirit, soul and mind.

In line with an ecumenically minded approach to the early church and especially as part of the preparations for the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, the Old Catholic Churches have come to use the more original version of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed (i.e., without the *filioque*, which was removed in new editions of liturgical books in the course of the 20th-century).

Reasons for this included fidelity to the faith of the early church; a desire for ecumenical rapprochement; resistance to the filioque's illegitimate (Western/papal) insertion; and identification with theological objections to the filioque as disturbing the relations within the *koinonia* that God is, particularly by introducing too much hierarchy and subordinating the Spirit to the Son, with potentially dire spiritual and ecclesiological consequences (cf. Stalder 1981; Aldenhoven 1981, 1999). The ground for this had already been prepared at the 1874 Bonn Reunion Conference (cf. Reusch 1874/2002).

The relational understanding of the Triune God common to Old Catholic theology has as its corollary a very theological understanding of relationships, notably those relationships that make up the *koinonia* of the church. As the Body of Christ, the church is literally spiritual, infused with the Spirit. This is also what the institutional church is at its core, as the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue put it:

The Holy Spirit is as it were the soul of the Church, the life-giving, sanctifying and unifying power of its body. The Holy Spirit and the Church are inseparable: "for where the Church is, there the Spirit of God is also, and where the Spirit of God is, there the Church is and all grace." (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Haer.* 3.24.1) (Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, IV/2)

On this basis and in line with New Testament insights (cf. e.g., 1 Cor. 12:28), Old Catholic theology does not oppose charism to institution, or the Spirit to the ordained (i.e., ordered) ministry. Again, in their doctrine of the Holy Spirit, Old Catholic theologians have sought to find a way to access anew the faith of the early Church with an ecumenically oriented mindset and with an eye to ecclesial renewal. With the general rediscovery of the importance of the Spirit in the 20th century, the Spirit has received a more pronounced place in Old Catholic theology. Old Catholic theologians have, accordingly, also played a role in (ecumenically minded and sacramentally oriented) strands of the charismatic movement (cf., e.g., Parmentier 1997, see also Aldenhoven 1982). Dogmatically, this has not led to radically new developments in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but it has indeed led to more attention to the work of the Spirit in the Church, which is, on the one hand, visible in Old Catholic ecclesiology and, on the other hand, in Old Catholic spirituality. Ecclesologically, the awareness that the Spirit has been given to all who are initiated has been influential in shaping the Old Catholic understanding of what synodality and a communal discernment of the Gospel is really all about theologically and spiritually speaking. In a similar manner, the awareness that the Spirit might move beyond the visible boundaries of the church has also become more

pronounced (cf., e.g., Parmentier 1997, see also Vercaemmen 2011), which is of significance for the appreciation of developments taking place outside of the church in their relevance for the church and for theology. In relation to spirituality, the actual working of the Spirit in and through the sacraments has received a stronger emphasis. This is both apparent in the stressing of the epiclesis in ‘consecratory’ prayers – e.g., at ordinations – but also and especially in the Eucharist (see for a summary Von Arx 2007a) – and in the renewed appreciation of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick (cf. Parmentier 1997). Also, the range of hymns to or about the Holy Spirit that is in use in Old Catholic liturgical life has increased significantly and thus strengthened an awareness of living in the Spirit.

2.2.2.1 *Christology*

As may be expected, given the previous paragraph, Old Catholic Christology is strongly informed by the conciliar tradition, notably in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon and their further delineation in subsequent councils (also concerning Mary, the Mother of God, cf. 2.2.2.1.1). The statement of the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue on this matter reads like a very succinct summary of this tradition (1989, II/1–2), discussing the two natures in line with the “Chalcedonian definition”, whereby the hypostatic union and the *communicatio idiomatum* receive substantial attention, which also applies to the existence of two wills in Christ, as well as topics such as the *theosis* of the human nature of Christ. Such reaffirmations of traditional early Christian thought can also be found in dogmatic handbooks, such as Küry 1982 and Rinkel 1956 (see also Gilg 1936).

In line with a general tendency in Old Catholic theology to underline the soteriological and revelatory significance of Christology, the relevant statement of the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue – which is taken as a point of departure here – also stresses these connections. In fact, Christology can only be understood and appreciated when it is placed in the context of soteriology, given that the early Christian Christological discussion was, at its core, a discussion about soteriology. This is most obviously concerning Christ’s “two natures”: if he is not fully divine, then worship of *kyrios Christos* is unjustifiable, and God did not reveal Godself truly in Christ, preventing full access to and communion with God. If Christ was not fully human, he cannot have identified himself fully with humankind in order to lift it up out of its fallen state and restore it to communion with God. This line of thought is also evidenced by Old Catholic ecumenical dialogues, in which soteriology is discussed following Christology. For instance, in the Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue, soteriology is

described as God's (self-)gift by means of sending of the divine "Son and Logos" (cf. John 3.16) in order to restore the communion between humankind and God that had been lost (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, IV/1). This gift is understood as comprising Christ's becoming human in total obedience to the Father (cf. Phil. 2.8). Emphasis is placed on the Son of God's completion

of the work of salvation by his incarnation and his entire earthly life, his baptism, his word [sic] and his deeds his suffering, his death on the cross, his descending to the realm of the dead, his resurrection and ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit. (Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, IV/1).

The incarnation is understood as the starting point of the fulfilment of "the great mystery of salvation"; the basis for this idea is found in the communion of the two natures in the one person of Christ: the "hypostatic union of the human and divine nature came about forming the foundation and starting point for the salvation of the whole human race" (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, IV/1). Restoration of divine/human communion thus takes place in Christ at the "level" of the two natures: Christology is soteriology. This restoration of communion is also understood to imply the restoration of humankind to its original beauty in the image and likeness of God. Yet, with this only part of Christ's salvific work is described. His (earthly) proclamation and his embodiment of holiness and obedience to God are also mentioned as a means of enlightenment. Christ's obedience and his surrendering of himself to the Father are also key for the understanding of Christ's sacrifice on the cross (as it is also received in Old Catholic Eucharistic theology, cf. below 2.2.4.2). The latter is understood as the extension and climax of the former and has at its core the free offering of Christ's life out of love for humankind (in that sense, Christ's death on the cross is a sacrifice, because it involves an offering up to God and has a redemptive effect, even though it may not be a sacrifice technically speaking). Such self-giving continues, if temporal language is permissible, or rather is a persistent reality: it follows on Christ's descent to hell and rising to glory, given the constant presence of this "sacrifice" and Christ's intercession with the Father, while the Spirit continues the work of salvation by being poured out on Earth. The place where the latter happens is the "Church founded by him (sc. Christ)", in which Christ "continues the redemption of the world through the work of the Holy Spirit ... by giving ... himself to those for whom he continuously intercedes before God" (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, IV/1). In all of this, the resurrection functions as the guarantee of redemption: through

it, God puts both a divine “stamp of approval”, as it were, on Christ’s obedience, faithfulness and self-giving and simultaneously vindicates him and, in doing so, all those for whom Christ gave himself. Although it has not been explored frequently, such salvation, as it is described here, is in the end intended for all of creation: the somewhat anthropocentric expression that Christ had a *fully human* nature, in fact, means that in him communion between God and *creation* came to pass (cf. also Smit and Hasselaar 2018). From this statement, the integral unity of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and of soteriology and ecclesiology is also evident, given that they are all part of the same overarching salvific dynamic. In more recent contributions to the interrelationship between these topics – authored in the “key” of contemporary exegesis, such as Ploeger 2006b and Smit 2013a–this is also apparent, while similar insights can also be found already in the exegetical work of Stalder, for example (Stalder 1962).

When asking about Old Catholic accents or characteristics when it comes to the expression or understanding of these doctrine, these cannot be found in additions to or alterations of the substance of the conciliar tradition concerning Christ, but in emphasizing, on the one hand, the interrelationship between Christology and soteriology (as was note already) and, on the other hand, by a hermeneutical approach to dogma’s, which leads openness for something other than conciliar language to express the reality to which they point, as has been attempted in the dialogue with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church (this was recently emphasized by Suter; cf. Suter 2016: 260, Mar Thoma-Old Catholic Dialogue 2012, 2019: 10–11).

2.2.2.1.1 Mariology

In catholic theology, which Old Catholic theology is, Mariology is never a topic in its own right. It is, as is apparent from the witness of the early church, always a corollary of Christology, soteriology or ecclesiology; here, it is treated in relation to Christology (as it is in the Old Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue 1989, 11/2; on Old Catholic Mariology in general, see IOTHc 2009; Eßer 2009; Berlis 2009; Van der Velde 2009 [cf. Ploeger 2005]; Crüwell 2009; Von Arx 2009; Vinš 2009; Bajorek 2009). In the history of Old Catholic Mariology of the past 125 years, a development is discernible that concerns both theology and devotional practice: generally speaking, Old Catholics have moved from a very reluctant attitude with regard to (furthering) Marian devotion or emphasizing her place in theology – the conciliar teaching concerning Mary was upheld, feasts associated with her were being celebrated, and she retained her classical place in regular liturgical celebrations, such as the Eucharist and the office – to what may be called a stronger emphasis on a (Christologically focused) Mariology and corresponding devotion.

The Mariological reluctance just mentioned constituted (and often constitutes) a marker of Old Catholic identity, given that (over)emphasis on Mary, both devotionally and theologically, was seen to be characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church, whose new dogmas of Mary's immaculate conception (1854) and her assumption "body and soul" into heaven (1950) have been formally rejected by the Old Catholic Churches (cf. IBC 1889 and Rinkel 1950; IBC 1951 – see Berlis 2017). For this reason, Mariology is also an important topic in the Roman Catholic-Old Catholic dialogue (cf. below, 2.2.6.3.4). When searching for what may be said positively about Old Catholic Mariology, the first agreed statement of this dialogue has expressed the Old Catholic position as follows:

Old Catholic liturgical orders and other more recent texts touching on the Virgin Mary Mother of God reveal that she has a firm place in the doxology of the church with regard to the mystery of God becoming man. As blessed by God in being chosen to give the Redeemer to the world, and in affirming and opening herself to the divine plan of salvation, she is considered the first of the saints for whose intercession for the faithful on their journey to God the church pleads. To the extent that her entire path into the eschatological glory of God is transparent for the communion of the baptised, she is also seen as a type of the church and a model for the believers in Christ who have been granted the spirit of God. In liturgy and the practice of piety there is clearly an endeavour to preserve carefully the link to God and to Christ, as well as the poetic and doxological character of the praise of Mary. (IRAD 2009, par. 51)

This statement is also indicative of the "Christologically focused Mariology" just mentioned, along the lines of which Old Catholic theologians and churches – in which devotional practices have increased in the course of the past few decades – have developed a constructive approach to Mariology (cf. IOTHC 2009). Mary is honoured theologically, notably with the epithet *theotokos* "Mother of God", due to her role in the incarnation and as the first of those redeemed by Christ. As the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue (1989, II/2.3) puts it:

[T]he Church venerates in a very special way the Virgin Mother of God, though "not as divine but as Mother of God according to the flesh" (John of Damascus, *Imag.* 2.5 – PG 94.1357). If, because of the redemption in Christ and its blessings, the Church glorifies God above all and offers him the worship of true adoration due to the divine nature alone, at the same time it venerates the Mother of God as chosen vessel of the work

of salvation, as she who accepted the word of God in faith, humility and obedience, as gateway through which God entered the world.

In line with this, the Old Catholic Church knows few (if any) “Marian” feasts as such, but rather feasts of Christ with a particular commemoration of the *theotokos* (partial exceptions are the commemoration of Mary’s *dormitio* and her nativity on 15 August and 8 September, respectively). This means that feasts such as the Annunciation or Candlemas are first and foremost celebrated as feasts concerning Christ, the first in relation to the incarnation, the second in relation to his presentation in the Temple (cf. Van der Velde 2009; Von Arx 2009). Prayers to Mary, to the extent that they exist, always constitute requests for intercession, recognizing that “there is one mediator between God and men – the man Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 2.5, as quoted in Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue (1989, 11/2.4).

As indicated above, due to the dogmas of 1844 and 1950, Mariology has become a subject of particular interest in the Roman Catholic-Old Catholic dialogue; the questions that were addressed there and the proposals made for their solution are best discussed in the context of that dialogue (i.e. below, par. 2.2.6.3.4).

2.2.2.2 *Pneumatology*

Old Catholic reflection on pneumatology seems to have been primarily carried out in the process of interacting with the movement of charismatic renewal in the 20th century; it has been a prominent topic of the work of Martien Parmentier especially, particularly regarding the various (overlooked or undervalued) gifts of the Spirit, such as those usually associated with healing in its physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions (cf. Parmentier 1997, see: Aldenhoven 1982). Parmentier was keen to relate contemporary charismatic revival to its patristic roots (cf., e.g., Parmentier 1993; 1999). This approach to the Holy Spirit has indeed led to (some) charismatic revival in Old Catholicism, especially when it comes to the reappraisal of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick in relation to healing (cf. below 2.2.4.4) and (to a more limited extent) to the rediscovery of gifts such as speaking in tongues. Possibly, a renewed appreciation of more meditative approaches to the sources of the faith such as *lectio divina* is also expressive of a renewed appreciation of the work of the Spirit in the Church.

Yet, to focus on the charismatic alone would be to miss key aspects of the role of the Holy Spirit elsewhere in Old Catholic theology. To begin with, the contours of Old Catholic pneumatology are recognizably patristic, as it is expressed in the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, for example (1989, VI/2).

The Spirit is understood and worshiped as the third person of the Trinity, formally characterized by his¹⁴ procession from the Father (cf. Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, 1/3). The significance of the Spirit concerns the entire work of creation and salvation, and with that it also permeates Christology and ecclesiology: “There is no christology [and hence ecclesiology] without pneumatology, because there is no Christ without the Spirit” (Ploeger 2006b: 45). Originating in the salvific will of the Father, the Spirit dwelt in Christ and continues to dwell in the Body of Christ, the Church, drawing all who accede its “pull” into this body, appropriating the work of Christ for them by making them members of Christ’s body and sanctifying them:

The life of Christians in the body of Christ is Spirit-given participation in Christ’s journey from death to resurrection, grounded in baptism and celebrated again and again in the Lord’s Supper with a view to its consummation in the glory of the father. (IRAD 2009, 6)

Such salvation takes place in a manner that can be described in terms of a cooperation between the Spirit and the person: God does not violate a human being’s free will, but rather “awakens, protects the free will which he himself once granted” so that a person may accept “the grace offered” and participated “freely by faith and his good works”, while “[t]he Holy Spirit effects the vocation, the illumination, the conversion, the justification, the rebirth in Baptism and the sanctification in the Church” (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, IV/2; cf. also on Stalder’s reflections on freedom: Krebs 2013a).

The relationship between the Spirit and the church can be expressed with an analogy: The Spirit is to the Body of Christ as the soul is to a human body (Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue 1989, VI/2, cf. IRAD 2009, 8). This makes for a very “charismatic” ecclesiology:

For where the Church is, there the Spirit of God is also, and where the Spirit of God is, there the Church is and all grace. (Irenaeus of Lyons, *Haer.* 3.24.1 – quoted in Orthodox – Old Catholic dialogue 1989, VI/2)

Accordingly, the entire life of the Church – its proclamation, its liturgical celebration (including the sacraments), its pastoral ministry, not to mention its organization, especially the ordained ministry and synodal structures, in fact all members of the Body of Christ – ought to be seen as charismatic or “spiritual”

14 Following the grammatical gender of ‘spirit’ in English, with the awareness that the Semitic equivalent is grammatically gendered female and its Greek counterpart neuter.

(cf. e.g., Parmentier 1998). This is, in fact, the basis of all synodality, given that synodality only makes sense if *all* have received the Spirit and are full members of the Body of Christ through that Spirit. In the work of Stalder such notions have been developed even further, as has the related notion of the salvific work of God in the entirety of reality: when experiencing reality as it truly is – i.e., as redeemed – this is a “Spirit-led” experience to the extent that a person experiences him- or herself (as an individual) and the world that he or she encounters as being a space that has been redeemed into an existence of free relationality in communion. By experiencing and viewing reality, including oneself, one enters into true reality: i.e., the reality of *koinonia* of creation with the Trinity through Christ and in the Spirit (cf. Stalder 2000, cf. Aldenhoven 1980; see also Ploeger 2008: 200–207, Krebs 2011; on the communal epistemology of the early church, cf. also Smit 2011b). Thus, although not commonly a topic very much at the forefront of Old Catholic theology, pneumatology is a key component of the Old Catholic understanding of God, of salvation, of the church and of one’s perception of reality.

2.2.2.3 *Revelation, Scripture and Tradition*

The above perception of God, current in Old Catholic theology, implies a certain view of the revelation. In its briefest form, it understands revelation as God’s self-revelation out of love and desire for communion. In other words, God, who is communion, reveals Godself as communion and salvation as being drawn into communion. Accordingly, witnesses to such experiences of communion are also received in communion as witnesses to God, God’s love and God’s intentions for creation. It can also be expressed the other way around: as God is communion and God’s revelation takes the shape of drawing people into communion with Godself, each other and the entirety of creation, revelation must always be revelation of Godself, given that God exists in communion. Such self-revelation that takes place out of love and desire for the other (cf. above, 2.2.2) can be understood as what grace amounts to most fundamentally: the *literally* ecstatic gift of oneself (in this case, Godself) to the other (in this case, a human being, as part of creation) in order to establish communion. Such a gift can liberate the other out of the bondage of those forces that prevent one from living in communion – forces that are best described as “sin” or “evil” – allowing one to enter into communion in freedom. This is a way of (re)appropriating the early church’s insights into the doctrine of grace in relation to human freedom, beyond the confessional divisions of later centuries (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, IV/2; see Ploeger 2008: 461–463 [“soteriology of communion”]).

When turning to the sources of revelation, the following development can be observed: in the course of the 20th century, the Old Catholic approach to the doctrine of revelation moves away somewhat from having a starting point in both general revelation and particular revelation to having its starting point in the latter only, a development in line with broader developments in 20th-century theology. In this view, revelation is understood as consisting of Israel's liberating experiences with God, culminating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth (cf., representatively, Ploeger 2018a; Schoon 2010), to which the Scriptures provide an authoritative witness; as such, they are received and transmitted in the tradition of the church (see Smit 2007; Rohmann 2019). Thus, the witnesses to the faith are grounded in historical experiences and reflection upon such experiences. Scripture in Old Catholic theology is, therefore, related organically to tradition and constitutes its core and most authoritative (though hardly its only) part; the Scriptures are also received in the living tradition of the church. In the end, this 'living tradition' is nothing but the presence of Christ himself. Both the scriptural and non-scriptural parts of tradition thus function, in their reception, as witnesses to God and have a mediating function (cf. Smit 2017a; all of this is quite in line with insights developed in the Faith and Order discourse, cf. Smit 2012a, 2015a). This synergy between Scripture and tradition in the service of witnessing to God and mediating God's presence is probably best seen in the liturgy and the proclamation that is an inherent part of it. To be sure, this also implies a multisensory and therefore inclusive reception of tradition that surpasses the merely noetic, however important the intellect is; liturgical reception *par excellence* enables a holistic manner of participating in the reception of tradition (cf. the consonant interplay between academic, pastoral and personal reflection in Young 2013). In the Old Catholic response to the Faith and Order Lima Report on 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' (the BEM Report), this position is also articulated by stating that whereas the sacrament is always to be understood from the point of view of the word, the sacrament itself allows the most intense experience of the incarnation of the word (Aldenhoven and Von Arx 1988; cf. Smit 2011a: 361, 2017a, see esp. also Ploeger 2008: 491–493). Word and sacrament are more than each other's counterparts; they reciprocally imply and presuppose each other. The word is always the word incarnate, be that as second person of the Trinity, as written witness to God or as contextual sermon, and the sacrament is always interpreted by the word.

Therefore, the Scriptures have their most natural place in the worshipping life of the church as a reconciled communion between God and humankind on the one and humans amongst each themselves and with the whole of

creation on the other hand. This interrelationship between Scripture, tradition and the life of the Church – with an eye to receiving tradition in such a manner that a recognizable witness to God in Christ becomes possible – demands a conscious hermeneutical effort. A mere replication of “tradition,” as if that were even possible, is not sufficient; the witness of the past cannot be the witness of today, even if it can inspire such a witness, just like establishing the “historical facts” can never be the only goal of the study of the Scriptures and the traditions of the church. In line with this, in Old Catholic theology – and in Old Catholic preaching – a broad range of hermeneutical approaches is used – virtually all current in contemporary exegetical practice (cf. Barton 1998; Lieu and Rogerson 2008) – but always with an eye to the function of the Scriptures as a canonical text: i.e., read in communion and with contemporary significance. The resulting situation is summed up neatly by the Church of Sweden-Old Catholic Dialogue:

Instead of speaking of scripture and tradition (thus including the above-mentioned dogmatic decisions) as two separated entities or sources of revelation, Old Catholic theology tends to see them as two expressions of the one apostolic tradition, which is interpreted in and by the church. It is confident of being enlightened by the Holy Spirit when using hermeneutically reflected methods. (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, 6.1.1).

How such various approaches can cohere, contribute to comprehensiveness and lead to credible theological insight informed by both context and tradition is evidenced by the already mentioned 1996 Orthodox-Old Catholic consultation on the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry (cf. also the fundamental-theological considerations of Krebs 2015). The input into this consultation consisted of, *inter alia*, exegetical, patristic, systematic-theological, feminist and psycho-analytical contributions, and the outcome was a patristically sourced, ecumenically sensitive, academically sound and ecclesially relevant witness to “what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Cf. Kallis and Von Arx 2002; on hermeneutics in Old Catholic theology see Ploeger 2012). As a consequence, Old Catholic theology is, when seen from the outside, notoriously difficult to pinpoint on the “liberal-conservative” spectrum, which likely says more about that spectrum than about Old Catholic theology (cf. Ploeger 2012). When surveying the development of Old Catholic theology since it became a distinguishable tradition, it is clear that it has always retained as its theological starting point the faith and order of the church, rather than, for example, human experience, even if the experience of the church has always been influential (as is always the case) when it comes to accessing this “old

catholic" faith. With this, variously expressed "realistic" notions of God and revelation have been a fixture of mainstream theologizing (e.g., Rinkel 1956; Küry 1982; Ploeger 2012) – a positioning of God in the realm of the human psyche or imagination alone, for example, or other "non-realist" positions have not become typical of Old Catholic theology.

Yet, with this only part of the Old Catholic approach to revelation (or, Scripture and tradition) is covered. As will be outlined in more detail below, the discernment of tradition and its reception in the Old Catholic tradition is always a concern of the entire church and can only take place through the whole church and through the interplay of all of its members (i.e., in synodal fashion and in communion with the bishop). Hermeneutical techniques and scholarly theological studies also have their place in this process of discernment by the church as a whole. In the end, it is all about God's self-revelation as "being-as-communion" received in and through communion.

2.2.3 Ecclesiology

As was shown above, theology and ecclesiology are very closely connected in the Old Catholic theological discourse; their linking pin is soteriology. The church, *qua* eucharistic *communio*, is the salvific expression of God's self-revelation as communion and yearning for communion out of love. In fact, the church is the theandric result of this divine desire and, accordingly, exists as communion and as a sacrament of God's presence in the world. In the same way Christ, the head of the Church, existed in that way on Earth, and he continues to do so through his Body, the Church, which can be called "a sign of salvation" and "the manifestation of the renewal of creation that has its origin in Jesus Christ" (IBC 2001a, 3.3; for an outline of the key lines of thought, see Ploeger 2015). The church as a whole is an embodied expression of the *missio Dei*, and its entire existence is missionary in that sense. This existence is the life of the church *qua* reconciled communion and is characterized by its fundamental dynamics of worship, witness and service (cf. IBC 2001a, 3.3), structured episcopally-synodally and conciliarly (IBC 2001a, 3.2; 4). This *communio* consist of people called and gathered by God into the people of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit, and they are sent out into the world as a fellowship and as members of this fellowship; accordingly, the mission is never confined to an individual, even if it is always personal. Given its trinitarian foundation and salvific significance, some of the most fundamental aspects of Old Catholic ecclesiology have been discussed already in relation to the Trinity as such and soteriology. Given the importance of ecclesiology *sensu stricto* in Old Catholic theology – particularly due to the history of its emergence and its ecumenical commitment, inherent as it is to this history – here some of its

aspects will be considered in more detail. This will take place by (a) discussing the ‘marks of the church’ (2.2.3.1–4) and (b) discussing the church and the sacraments (2.2.4). Prior to these two discussions, the topic of ecclesiology also permits a note on the place of canon law in Old Catholic theology and the Old Catholic Churches. The reason for doing so is that unlike in other (and larger) churches in the catholic tradition, the role and codification of canon law has, intentionally, remained more modest and focused on ecclesiological questions (cf., programmatically, Hallebeek 2011a). This also means that there is not an extensive system of rules and regulations pertaining to the sacraments, even if canonical rules are in place that give the theological and ecclesiological view of the sacraments a specific form. Their form is primarily liturgical, however (and, of course, liturgy is a source of canon law as well). A separate discussion of canon law will, therefore, not be offered here.

2.2.3.1 *The Marks of the Church*

As they are frequently an important index in ecumenical discussion for a tradition’s ecclesiology, the four marks of the church as they occur in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed will also be discussed here. They have been the subject of reflection in Old Catholic theology as well, leading to a specific kind of positioning, as will be clear from the following.

2.2.3.1.1 The Church is One

Given the programmatically ecumenical approach to theology and ecclesiology within Old Catholicism, the question of the church’s unity has been the subject of considerable reflection (cf. the overview of representative voices in Ploeger 2008: 161–234 and Von Arx 2008; compare IOTHC 2008). It has led to a theologically and ecclesially demanding position that fits well into broader currents of ecumenical theology, such as it is developed in the context of Faith and Order: i.e., true unity implies full mutual recognition and eucharistic communion (cf. notably Faith and Order 1982; 2013, see Ploeger 2008: 389–456). As may be expected, given the above, the Old Catholic understanding of ecclesial unity considers the local church *qua* eucharistic assembly around a bishop as the core element of a vision of ecclesial unity in terms of a ‘communion of communions’. Only in this way can there be a ‘universal church’, a term that is otherwise not used in Old Catholic theology (cf. IRAD 2009, par. 19, cf. Von Arx 2003a). In its statement on ecumenism, the IBC has outlined this position in a manner that is representative for Old Catholic theology at large:

Summarizing it can be said that the one global or universal Church of God is constituted as a community of local churches which are bound by the self-revelation of God in the sending of Jesus Christ and the Holy

Spirit. This community realizes the components of *martyria*, *leitourgia* and *diakonia*. By these components the mission of the community of all the baptized finds its expression. The local Church is the prominent place where all who hold the personal, collegial and communal episkope are responsible for carrying out those components in various forms. The local Church is the representation and realization of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church that is quoted in the creed of Nicaea-Constantinople, describing her as an entity of faith in a pneumatological context. (IBC 2011, par. 6)

In the dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Old Catholic Churches – in which this topic was of particular importance given the differences in ecclesiology on this point – such an understanding of the unity of the church was unpacked as follows:

(16) Each local church is a representation of the one holy catholic and apostolic church of which the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith speaks. It is catholic because on the one hand it participates sacramentally in the whole reality of salvation and truth that comprises God and mankind, heaven and earth, and finds therein its unity, and because, on the other hand, it is linked in unity and communion with other local churches in which it recognizes and acknowledges its own nature, grounded in God's loving care (cf. IBC/Statute, Preamble 3.1–2; WCC-RC/Church 13–14). The local churches which are bound to one another in this way recognize and acknowledge in the other, beyond all individual local and cultural particularities, the same reality of the mystery of the church. The distinguishing marks of this identity are the common apostolic faith, the common fundamental forms of sacramental-liturgical life and the common fundamental principles of church order with the three-fold office. (cf. AC-O/Unity [21–24] 2–5; O-RC/Mystery III 3b)

(17) The unity and communion of the local churches in their diverse supra-local dimensions, extending as far as the universal dimension, is also in each instance a representation of the *Una Sancta*, in fact a communion of local churches, be it a *communio ecclesiarum* or *communio communionum ecclesiarum*. At the same time each local church in this communion of local churches possesses full catholicity in the same way. Therefore the individual local churches also bear responsibility for the supra-local and universal communion. For the local church is wholly church but not the whole church. (WCC-RC/Church 36)

(...)

(19) The local church is in regard to its essential nature and its sacramentality not a deficient part of the universal church, nor is the universal church the sum of the local churches, but rather both are a representation of the one holy catholic and apostolic church which will find its consummation in the future incorporation of all creation into heavenly doxa, when God is all in all. The local and universal dimension of the church are complementary, they mutually define [bedingen] one another and are indispensable for the vitality and dynamism of the church (LUDK 14; 54).” (Church and Ecclesial Communion, par. 16–17, 19; par. 18 indicates the role of bishops) (IRAD 2009, par. 16–17, 19)

With this, the Old Catholic understanding of the Church’s unity has been outlined in a representative manner.

2.2.3.1.2 The Church is Holy

The question of the holiness of the church is probably the least developed of the four marks of the church in Old Catholic theology. A twofold explanation may be offered for this. On the one hand, this aspect of the church is usually not a major topic in ecumenical dialogues in which the Old Catholic Church is involved. On the other hand, ‘holiness’ or ‘sanctity’ as building blocks for a theological ethics have not been a topic of key interest in Old Catholic theology as such, at least not in the 20th and 21st centuries, even if the notion of sanctifying grace has always been retained. As a result, ‘holiness’ receives much less attention in formal statements of churches or affiliated bodies (congresses, conferences, etc.) and the work of individual theologians. A brief and representative statement can, however, be found in the documents produced by the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue:

The Church is holy since Christ its Head is holy and gave himself for it “that he might sanctify it that the Church might be presented before him in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that it might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25–27). Christ made the Church the “household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 3:6); he gave it fellowship and share in his holiness and grace and in his divine life; he “who sanctified the people through his own blood” (Heb. 13:12). Christians are therefore also called saints (Acts 9:13). The fact that members of the Church sin does not nullify the holiness of the Church. The Fathers were agreed in condemning those who because of immoderate and ascetic tendencies took

the view that the Church is a community made up exclusively of completely sanctified members. (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, III/1)

This representative statement of Old Catholic theology takes a clear position. The sanctity of the church is derived from Christ, which thus sanctifies its members, who are to live up to this fundamental holiness of the church as the body of Christ. Sinfulness of members of the church is acknowledged as a fact, and any position that would view the church as a community of “completely sanctified members” alone is avoided. Somewhat counterintuitively, therefore, precisely because the Old Catholic tradition has a “high” ecclesiology – and because the church’s sanctity does not depend on that of its members – criticism of the empirical church and its shortcomings can be aired relatively freely.

In this context, the place of ‘the saints’ in Old Catholic theology and spirituality can also be outlined (cf. e.g., representatively Suter 2016: 265; see also the Mar Thoma-Old Catholic Dialogue 2012, 2019: 15–17, and earlier Berlis 2005). As indicated, the communion of the saints is the communion of the sanctified, of whom particular members – in whose lives and death God’s holiness has been particularly visible and whose communion with God beyond death is believed by the church – are commemorated with distinct respect. As the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue puts it,

The honour which the Church accords the Saints rests on the belief that they are already in God’s presence and, in a certain sense, are already enjoying the divine glory, the full enjoyment of which at the general resurrection at the Last Day they still await. (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, VI/1.1)

As an extension of this view, requests for prayer directed to the saints, with whom a living communion is experienced, can also be made: “Prayers to the Mother of God and the Saints to intercede for us with God in whose presence they live and are continuously heard by him rest on the same assumptions” (*ibidem*). In actual liturgical praxis, the commemoration of the saints occurs regularly, often in the context of the celebration of the Eucharistic communion that encompasses heaven and earth. Theological reflection has usually centred on the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, as pre-eminent among the saints, especially as this was a subject of theological controversy due to the doctrinal innovations of the Marian dogmas 1854 and 1950 in the Roman Communion. Alternatively, the doctrine of the saints could also have been discussed in the context of soteriology, given that ecclesiology is, in the end, an extension of that doctrine. The focal point of the commemoration

and veneration of the members of the 'ecclesia triumphans' by the 'ecclesia militans' ultimately has its roots in the incorporation of all members of the church into the same Body of Christ: i.e., the communion of the saints. In the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue the saints are discussed in the context of eschatology, particularly in the context of the church's eschatological hope, which also enables a further insight into the nature of the communion of the saints: i.e., church and eschaton are (proleptically) coterminous:

Eschatological hope is no empty experience, since the end time has already commenced in the midst of the life of the Church, which represents the continued unfolding reality of the Kingdom of God in historical time. The resurrection of Christ already ushers in his return in glory, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit inaugurates the last times ... the Christian lives in the period of time between Pentecost and the Second Coming of the Lord as on the "eight day of creation." We in the Church receive through the sacraments and the other divine means of grace the pledge of the Spirit, in the hopeful anticipation of the joyous experience of the whole which is yet to come. (Orthodox – Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, VI/1.1)

In sum, therefore, the Old Catholic theological tradition perceives the sanctity of the church primarily in terms of being sanctified by God's salvific, justifying grace. Such grace also involves a commandment, behaviour that accords with being sanctified (grace is "Gabe und Aufgabe" or "charisma and challenge"). Accordingly, both the sequence of the reception of grace – which has priority – and a subsequent life of sanctification – as it is particularly discernible in the lives of saints – as well as the appertaining coherence of justification and sanctification are of importance.

2.2.3.1.3 The Church is Catholic

The question that Old Catholics probably have to answer to most frequently is how they differ from the 'catholic church' – the appropriate and appropriately confusing answer is, of course, "in nothing": the Old Catholic Church is a catholic church, a statement that does, to be sure, leave open the question of the catholicity of other churches, including the Roman Catholic Church. Formally, the Old Catholic Churches have not been able to establish the full catholicity of this church, due to their official rejection of parts of its dogmatic teaching. Again, the ecclesiological preamble to the Statute of the IBC offers a pronounced statement of what a representative Old Catholic position involves (par. 3.2):

Each of them (sc. local churches) is “catholic” because on the one hand, it participates in the whole reality of salvation and truth that comprises God and humans, heaven and earth and finds therein its unity, and because on the other hand, it is linked in unity and communion with other local churches, in which it recognizes its own essence. Thus the catholicity of each local church becomes manifest in the unity and communion with other local churches perceived in faith as being identical in their foundation in the redemptive work of the Triune God. The unity and communion of local churches in their supra-diocesan link – i.e., usually in national churches, ecclesiastical provinces, patriarchates – is a representation of the “one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church” as well – however, not as a kind of super-diocese of supra-regional or even universal dimensions, but as a communion of episcopally and synodally organized local churches. It is in this perspective that the relationship between autonomy of the local church (as to the self-government in the broadest sense) and supra-local obligation of each local church (as to the communion of local churches) should be viewed. (IBC 2001a, par. 3.2)

Thus, a qualitative understanding of catholicity is primary in Old Catholic theology, as it was in the earliest Christian tradition concerning catholicity. The quantitative dimension of catholicity is a consequence of the qualitative dimension of the same, not *vice versa* (cf. Von Arx 2006). In line with this, catholicity is also not made dependent on communion with any particular see (cf. also IRAD 2009, par. 16). This emphasis on qualitative catholicity has theological and spiritual advantages, given that it makes clear that a church’s catholicity depends on (salvific) communion with Christ, rather than on strength in numbers or geographical expansion. Also, such an emphasis underlines the sacramental character of the church, which, given this quality, is always much more than just an institution: it is a community embodying communion with Christ and thus constituting a tangible and visible sign of God’s presence in Christ in the world. Like each of the four “marks of the church”, the church’s catholicity also involves a challenge, a challenge to reflect in its life the reality in which it participates, *koinonia* with God (cf., e.g. Smit 2015a). Life in communion ought to reflect the deep quality of this communion. In Old Catholic theology this has been explored variously with explicit reference to the notion of “catholicity”. It has been explored at a macro-level, for example, in relation to the quality of the communion of churches in a neo-liberally globalized world (Dutton 2010) and at a micro-level when it comes to a way of life characterized by open-mindedness, commitment and participation (cf. IBC 2014) – or, more

liturgically phrased, in a “doxological” way of living, characterized by a “eucharistic ethics” (cf. Ploeger 2008: 534–539 and esp. Segbers 2009).

However, while an emphasis on qualitative catholicity may have a sectarian side-effect, it should be underlined that, given the innate orientation towards communion of churches that are themselves communions, such catholic (local) churches that stress a qualitative understanding of catholicity are, when all is well, always oriented towards communion with other churches in which they can recognize their own essence: in this case, catholicity, which is always also expressed in a mutual recognition of each other’s faith (cf. IBC 2001a, parr. 3.1, 3.2., 4). This finds expression in communions of (local) churches (i.e., dioceses *qua* eucharistic assemblies in one place and around a bishop), particularly in and through the joint celebration of the Eucharist by the appropriate bishops as well as the joint ordination of new bishops and the joint discernment of the Gospel inherent to such celebrations. The episcopal conferences of the Polish Catholic Church and the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands as well as the IBC are instances of such supra-local communions, or communions of communions. In fact, their functioning as viable and credible expressions of the church *qua* *communio* is a test case for the Old Catholic theological witness, resistant as it is to hierarchical ways of organizing the church in order to maintain (or even enforce) communion. By way of alternative, it emphasizes the role of the voluntary self-obligation of churches and their members to maintain communion. Yet, whether this way of living in communion can actually function is always a very real question. Also when ecumenical relationships, especially relationships of communion, need to be given a structure, only voluntary forms of communion, based on the innate desire and the appertaining self-obligation of catholic church to live in and maintain a life of communion can be appreciated positively from an Old Catholic point of view.

2.2.3.1.4 The Church is Apostolic

Old Catholic theology is keen to emphasize a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the apostolicity of the church, based on the witness of the early church and moving beyond later one-sided developments such as locating the church’s apostolicity in its confession or faith, its succession of bishops or its communion with one particular see alone (cf. Utrecht and Uppsala 2013: 47). In a similar manner, it has been emphasized time and again that in order for the church to be (theologically) identical with the church of the apostles, which is the point of the notion of apostolicity, requires an identity incorporating on unity, holiness and catholicity just as much as apostolicity (cf. e.g., Rinkel 1956, III:196, 227, reiterated by Ploeger 2006a: 14); this is also the sense of a statement of the International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference of 1999:

“The Apostolicity of the Church is visible in the continuity of the Church’s whole life” (IOThC 1999: 6). In the midst of this all, however, the apostolic continuity in the ordained ministry is singled out as a particularly important aspect of this continuity. The Old Catholic view of the church’s apostolicity is succinctly expressed in par. 3.4 of the preamble to the Statute of the IBC:

In continuity with its soteriological-trinitarian foundation, the catholicity of the Church is expressed by those elements and processes which are signified by the comprehensive term “apostolic succession”. This means that whatever the Church is doing in word and sacrament, doctrine and ministry, has and must have its origin, in space and time, in the mission of Jesus Christ and the apostles, operated by the Spirit. This includes pre-eminently the passing on of the ordained ministry by prayer and the laying-on of hands. The apostolic succession of the Church requires the full communion of the catholic churches that are headed by the bishops in unison with the college of presbyters and exhibit a synodal structure. It finds its particularly clear expression in the ordination of a locally elected bishop by the other bishops. (IBC 2001a, 3.4)

As one might expect, apostolicity has been a topic of discussion in all ecumenical dialogues of the Old Catholic Churches with other communions and/or churches and, accordingly, also a topic of reflection throughout the Old Catholic theological tradition (cf. representatively Frei 1964; Küry 1982; Rinkel 1956, III: 240–241 Oeyen 1972; Stalder 1972–1973, Ploeger 2006a). Its most succinct and recent expression can be found in the dialogue with the Church of Sweden, where it required more extensive discussion (par. 5.4 of Utrecht and Uppsala 2013: 47–48). Here, the basic understanding of apostolicity is expressed as follows: “The fundamental idea is that apostolic tradition is an expression of the apostolicity of the church. It has two main aspects: that the church is sent into the world and that it is built on the faith of the apostles.’ Next, the document notes that succession in the faith, succession in the apostolic (i.e., episcopal) ministry, and succession in the life of the church as a whole were held together in the early church, only to fall apart later on. With regard to the succession in the (apostolic) ministry, the document notes that even one more distinction was introduced in the course of history: between succession in the ministry as such and succession on particular sees. The contemporary ecumenical consensus, however, is that all of these aspects belong together. The apostolic succession in the episcopal ministry is then singled out as a focus for further consideration of apostolicity. It is discussed from the vantage point of the key notion of communion: i.e., *koinonia*:

The basis of the doctrine of the episcopal ministry in apostolic succession is the understanding of the church as a communion grounded in the triune God. The office of a bishop is embedded in the *koinonia* of the whole people of God, related to baptism, eucharist and ordained ministry of deacons and priests and to lay ministries of various kinds. The ministry of bishops is a sign and instrument for keeping the church faithful to the Holy Scriptures and tradition, to the unity of the church through all ages ministering to the people of God the mystery of the church. (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, 5.4)

Thus, the function of the notion of apostolic succession – in all of its forms, including the one concerning the succession in the episcopal ministry – is the maintenance of communion. The church as communion is key, as the document states later regarding the interrelationship between the church and the bishop: “What a church teaches about the apostolic succession of bishops is thus what it teaches about the whole people of God” (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, 5.4). With this, apostolic succession is, as it were, a function of tradition as an ongoing process of handing on; in this context, it stands at the service of maintaining continuity and communion. In this context, “bishops are signs and instruments” of the community and by ordaining bishops in apostolic succession, “the apostolic tradition becomes manifest and effective” (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, 5.4). This applies to continuity with the apostolic church and with the communion that Christ initiated in a diachronic sense (but also in a synchronic sense):

The ordination of a bishop through prayer and the laying-on of hands is an act of church communion. The bishop to be ordained is chosen to lead a local church. This is, however, an expression of the presence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in communion with other local churches, made visible through this symbol of faith. This is expressed through the fact that bishops of other local churches conduct the ordination, and what is more, this is in the context of the eucharist, in which the communion of churches is constituted and represented in the most significant way. (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, 5.4)

While thus signifying historical continuity, the consecration of bishops by other bishops in apostolic succession is a particularly focused expression of the continuation of this tradition as embodied life in communion with the earliest church (cf. Söding 2004). It therefore belongs to the church in its fullness (in older terminology, it is part of the church’s *plene esse*; it is not just part of its

bene esse and not to be equated with the church's *esse* either, even if the notion of *plene esse* implies that apostolic succession belongs to the church's being). This also relates to the contents of the episcopal ministry, acting as an effective sign of communion with the church past and present and thus as a sign of communion with God. In fact, the minister in apostolic succession both gathers the community and constitutes its "vis-à-vis" in analogy to Christ, serving as a representative of the apostolic tradition, coordinating the various charisms in the church and coordinating their discernment (cf. Ploeger 2006a: 512–514). To this it may be added that, somewhat contrary to more noetic conceptions of continuity alone, the embodied nature of apostolic succession through episcopal ordinations also does justice to the embodied, incarnational nature of the Christian faith, which, as such, always takes the shape of an embodied communion, rather than just of an idea, an opinion or a doctrine.

Obviously, the question of the apostolic ministry is always a significant ecumenical issue. Often, even in professional ecumenical circles, it happens that ecclesial traditions that do not adhere to or value a ministry in the apostolic succession struggle to understand and value the catholic position and tradition and the fact that the two kinds of ministries are not the same (all while assuming the reasonable character of their own, post-reformation perspective and automatically expecting catholic theologians to declare the apostolic succession to be an *adiaphoron*, rather than considering that they return to broader Christian tradition in these matters). Old Catholic theology has attempted to avoid both the Scylla of denying the reality of the ministry of other churches and the Charybdis of leaving the Christian tradition in this respect. Therefore, a middle course is taken: the reality of forms of ministry in churches that cannot be recognized as standing in the apostolic succession in the same way as this is the case the Old Catholic Churches is recognized *as the ministry of such a church* in which the Spirit is at work, but not as identical with the catholic ministry as it exists in the Old Catholic Churches. Dialogue can lead to the discovery that the two ministries are theologically identical, but this is not assumed *a priori* in order to do justice to otherness within the broader context of a desire for communion.

2.2.4 The Church and the Sacraments

Besides the thoroughgoing sacramental approach to the church, the individual sacraments have also, to a greater or lesser extent, been the subject of theological reflection in Old Catholic theology. This is visible in the liturgical books of these churches (survey: Von Arx 2018), as well as in a series of pastoral letters by Joachim Vobbe that have widely received (cf. Vobbe 2009; Vobbe was bishop of the Old Catholic Church of Germany 1995–2005). Theological study of the

sacraments takes place within and among the Old Catholic Churches – there is, for example, a significant agreement on the character of the Eucharist (IOThC 1980) – with regular ecumenical input. The manner in which such insights are received by the individual Old Catholic Churches, of course, differs (cf. on the Eucharist, e.g., the IOThC 2013 and Holeyton 2013; Rohmann 2013; Van der Velde 2013; Schlenzig 2013; Von Arx 2013b; Ickelsheimer 2013; Bajorek 2013).

When it comes to the Old Catholic understanding of the sacraments, the first thing that can be observed is that sacraments are regarded – as they are in broader, ecumenically oriented and patristically sourced discourses (cf. Faith and Order 2013a, par. 25–27) – as having to do with initiation into the mystery of Christ (as it exists in the *koinonia* of the Church) and primarily sustaining that initiation, rather than being relatively disjunct ‘means of grace.’ In line with this, formulations such as the following are possible: “The church is primarily a mystery of God. As such it has a fundamental sacramental character. It is an instrument of God’s love and mercy for the world. This love and mercy culminate in Christ, who may justly be termed the original sacrament” (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, par. 5; this is reminiscent of distinctions such as Rahner’s between Christ as *Ursakrament* and the Church as *Grundsakrament*, cf. Rahner 1984:411–430, Van Eijk 1984). With regard to this, it must be emphasized that the church also realizes its own existence sacramentally, notably through the celebration of the rites called ‘sacraments’ and especially through the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist (it is also possible, however, to argue that everything the church does is, in a certain way, sacramental; cf. Suter 2017). Such a perspective clarifies the relationship between the church *qua* communion and the rites commonly called sacraments and the relationship between the church and the world, thus avoiding “ecclesiocentrism”. The church exists as a sign of salvation for the world and is in that sense a sacrament of the kingdom, which as *basileia tou theou* also has cosmic dimensions, as well as a liberative and prophetic character:

[T]he church in its universal and local expressions should be seen as a sign and instrument for the kingdom of God and a sacrament for the world. The church is sent into the world, not primarily as an institution, but as the fundamental expression of God’s love in Christ. The church is a sacrament of healing, reconciliation and renewal of all creation. She is a mystery and a prophetic sign, a communion sustained by the Holy Spirit, participating in God’s mission for the salvation of the world. (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, par. 5.3)

Seen in this context, “the” sacraments now appear as those rites in which the church, *qua* Body of Christ, realizes itself in the Spirit. By performing and

mediating this reality, sacraments are, therefore, instrumental in shaping the salvific reality, the Body of Christ, that the church is as communion with God. They are hence always both Christologically and pneumatologically constituted, given that all elements of the “economy of salvation” always have these two dimensions, originating in the salvific will of the Father (cf. above, 2.2.2, see also Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/1.1–2). Accordingly, the Church of Sweden-Old Catholic Dialogue can offer the following definition of a sacrament:

A sacrament is a material element transformed by the word of God into a means of salvation. In baptism, water is this material element, in the eucharist bread and wine. The institutional organization of the church is not in itself sufficient to make it the church, which is the body of Christ. It becomes a sacrament for the world only by sharing in communion (*koinonia*) with the Father through the Holy Spirit. The church as *koinonia* is the fundamental sacrament for the life of the world, transcending the limits of the secular and bringing the world to peace with God. (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, par. 5.3, compare Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue, v/1.8)

Thus, all sacraments of the church originate theologically (and as a consequence also historically, cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/1.3) in the economy of salvation, particularly in the ministry of Christ as it was received by the apostolic church. For this reason, the shape of the sacraments is never ad hoc: content and form cohere and such coherence needs to be maintained. In fact, given the close relationship between salvation and the sacraments, it can be said that “It is the Triune God who performs the Holy Sacraments as well as the whole work of salvation” (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue, v/1.11). The passage goes on to quote John Chrysostom: “The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit administer all things, the priest lends his tongue and makes his hand available” (*Hom.* 87.4 in *Johannem*).

Given this foundation, the sacraments are considered reliable “means of grace”. The “grace” involved is, in particular, that of incorporation into the church as the Body of Christ, which, together with a person’s “development to life in Christ all the manifestations of his or her personal and corporate existence” is salvation, effected by the Holy Spirit (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue, v/1.5). The sacraments are both physical and spiritual, and thus both do justice to the psycho-somatic existence of human beings and underline the importance of both the physical and the spiritual when it comes to salvation (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue, v/1.7). As is the case with salvation in general, the sacraments are entirely God’s work, though human beings do

need to be willing to accept them in order for them to achieve their aim (cf. *idem*, v/1.9). As is the case generally in the broad Christian tradition, just as the communion of the church is presided over by the *episkopos*, the celebration of the sacraments is presided over by the bishop or by a priest to whom s/he delegates such presidency. Delegation to deacons is an irregularity and contrary to the proper character of the diaconate. Such presidency is required to ensure that the celebration of the sacrament takes place in the (public) liturgy of the church, not in a private gathering disconnected from the church. This is because the ordained ministry has this public and connecting aspect, which ensures the apostolic character of the celebration and preserves the interrelationship between liturgical and pastoral presidency (“leadership”), all while involving the sacramental representation of Christ as ‘head of the body’ by the ordained minister in the community (cf. e.g., Ploeger 2008: 499).

In line with this ecclesial focus, sacraments are – even when celebrated “privately” (e.g., confession, holy unction) – always communal: the entire church is represented by the bishop or her/his delegate presiding over the celebration. Accordingly, they are considered acts of the Church as a whole and therefore should be celebrated in communion rather than ‘administered’ individually. Old Catholic liturgical revisions have, in this and other respects, received key insights of the liturgical movement (cf. Von Arx 2018 on rites and their revisions, Ploeger 2008 systematic-theologically).

When it comes to the ritual form of the celebration of the sacraments, this emphasis on their communal celebration is clearly visible in 20th-century revisions of the pertaining rites. The celebration of baptism is nowadays celebrated as part of a Sunday or feast day Eucharist, rather than as a separate ceremony; the celebration of the Eucharist correspondingly witnessed an increase in reception of the sacrament and a clearer role of the congregation as the actual celebrant. The anointing of the sick is used less frequently *in articulo mortis* only and is more frequently celebrated as part of ongoing pastoral care for the sick and sometimes as part of an overarching liturgical celebration such as the Eucharist. Incidentally, the blessing of marriages is also celebrated as part of the worship of the entire congregation. Confirmation has always been a relatively public and communal celebration, and although more communal rites of penitence – sometimes including ‘sacramental absolution’ – do exist, the sacrament of reconciliation (i.e., confession) has remained a relatively private matter.

As “sacrament of the Kingdom”, the church is also an eschatological reality, participating proleptically in the life of the redeemed world already. This finds expression in the celebration of the sacraments of the church as well, but also in other ecclesial practices: e.g., the practice of charity is also the practice of

the kingdom in the world and the proclamation of the good news also makes the *eschaton* present in time. In these cases, as elsewhere, the experience of the *koinonia* of creation with God becomes a reality in and through Christ, simultaneously, it still awaits its full consummation and is therefore proleptic and anticipatory, but no less real. As the dimensions of the kingdom are cosmic, so is the celebration of the sacraments. The celebration of the Eucharist, for example, “The Eucharistic celebration unites heaven and earth, past and present, and joins the Church with the entirety of creation in its worship of God.” (Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic Dialogue 2019: 18). In this sense, the church also exists for the world – i.e., as a sign of redemption and hope – and never just for itself.

In what follows, the sacraments will be discussed in accordance with their internal coherence in Old Catholic theology. When doing so, it should be noted that the classical Western catholic emphasis on a set of seven sacraments has been relativized in Old Catholic theology since at least the 1874 Bonn Reunion Conference (cf., thesis 8a, see further, e.g., Rinkel 1916; Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, v/1.4; Suter 2016: 262). Accordingly, Christian initiation – i.e., baptism with confirmation and first Eucharist – is discussed first (with separate attention to the Eucharist), followed by a discussion of the ordained ministry at the service of the communion into which people are initiated. The next section deals with the other sacraments, those concerned with healing of body and soul, repentance and the sanctification of life in communion (i.e., marriage). Finally, attention is given to some “sacramentals”. This structure is similar to the one found in the influential Faith and Order report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order 1982), as evidenced by the following statement in the Church of Sweden-Old Catholic dialogue:

The Old Catholic Churches are not bound by any rigid, scholastic systematization of all aspects of sacramental theology. Baptism and eucharist are regarded as the two main sacraments for every believer, and episcopal ordination is seen as essential for the structure of the church. Beside the seven acts recognized as sacraments, there are other symbolic acts named sacramentalia. (Utrecht and Uppsala, par. 5.3.1).

As a final introductory remark, it should be mentioned that in Old Catholic theology the sacraments are typically discussed from a theological or liturgical, rather than a canonical, perspective. This has its roots in both the theological understanding of the sacraments and a principled reluctance to govern the administration of the sacraments from the perspective of canon law rather than from the perspective of their ecclesiological and spiritual properties (even if

these properties of course result in a particular “discipline” of the sacraments that also has canonical aspects; cf. Hallebeek 2011a: 130–140 on the Dutch situation, which seems to be representative).

2.2.4.1 *Initiation*

Together, baptism and confirmation constitute, together with someone’s first participation in the eucharist initiation into the Body of Christ (cf., e.g., IRAD 2009, par. 12; compare Von Arx 2010a, 2016). Accordingly, in Old Catholic theology, baptism is discussed theologically with a focus on initiation:

Through baptism an individual becomes a member of the church of Christ, in that he or she is through participation in the mystery of the divine work of salvation freed from the dominance of sin and reborn as a new creature in Christ (OC-O/Baptism). (IRAD 2009, par. 12)

In line with the communion into which a person who is baptized is initiated, baptism takes place in the name of the Triune God and with a threefold immersion into or pouring over with water. Both adults and infants are baptized, with the rite used for the latter being the norm. In the case of the latter, emphasis is placed on receptivity and being brought up in the faith; in the case of the former, the active embrace of the faith is stressed. In both cases, *being* initiated and thus redeemed is the principal point, thus relativizing the significance for personal affirmation of the faith, however integral a part it is of a life in Christ. Episcopal or episcopally delegated confirmation – consisting of the laying on of hands, chrismation and the invocation of the Holy Spirit – is the conclusion of the baptismal rite, through which “the gifts of the Holy Spirit” are granted to the faithful “to strengthen them in what they have obtained in baptism” (IRAD 2009, par. 12). Spiritually and theologically, a baptized person is a full Christian, as is evidenced by the faithful’s ongoing participation in the life of the body of Christ, particularly in the Eucharist. Accordingly, a person’s first participation in the Eucharist is at the same time the last stage of initiation into the Body of Christ, as one receives what one has become in the Eucharist, i.e., the Body of Christ. Other sacraments do not make a person “more Christian”, but rather further shape the grace received at baptism (cf., e.g., Aldenhoven 1994, in relation to holy orders). As a baptized Christian, a person is a full co-celebrant of all aspects of the life of the church, in worship, witness and service (cf., e.g., Ploeger 2008: 478–479).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the custom of most Old Catholic Churches was to baptize infants – frequently privately, outside of a public liturgy – followed by first communion during the early teenage years and confirmation in the late teens. Of course, this made the order and coherence of

the rites of initiation of the early Church hard to recognize, given that they were chronologically separated by linking them to certain phases of a person's biography and partially inversed (i.e., the sequence of confirmation and first eucharist). In the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, this has changed in a number of respects (cf. Von Arx 2010a, 2016). In its most far-reaching form, this can be observed in the current rite for initiation in the Swiss Old Catholic Church. In this rite, celebrated as part of the public liturgy of a congregation, baptism and confirmation (and in the case of adults, first eucharist) have been reunited. Accordingly, confirmation – now administered by whoever presides over the service, whether that be a bishop or a delegated priest – has been restored to its place as an integral part of the baptismal rite, and the logic of being initiated into a eucharistic communion can be experienced in the actual celebration of and participation in the eucharistic communion. A discussion about the admission of baptized infants to the eucharist prior to the celebration of a 'solemn first communion' or the like is not currently taking place, although the praxis would be theologically consistent (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, v/2.3).

Given the close interrelationship between baptism, confirmation and eucharist in Old Catholic theology, the mutual recognition of baptism among churches that are not (yet) able to regularly share in the same eucharistic fellowship constitutes a theological anomaly, as has been pointed out variously (cf. Von Arx 2010a; Ploeger 2011: 26–28, 2016: 77–79; this does not apply to incidental participation on the basis of *oikonomia*). In a *communio* theology, the Eucharist can never be regarded as "one among many" sacraments, the sharing of which may be a tool for furthering ecclesial communion: the Eucharist *is* ecclesial communion. If such communion cannot be established, it makes no sense to celebrate the Eucharist together: at least, not the Eucharist as it is understood in catholic theology (cf., e.g., Aldenhoven 1987, see also Smit 2011a: 362–365). What seems to be a Eucharistic problem is in fact a baptismal one: mutual recognition of each other's identity as Christians forming a part of the same *communio*. The mutual recognition of baptism (including confirmation/chrisamation) is the entry point into that *communio* and would seem to imply mutual ecclesial recognition and hence the celebration of the Eucharist, but it usually does not. Old Catholic theology stresses that this is a serious inconsistency and warns against ecumenical endeavours that seem to be content with baptismal recognition "only" (cf. representatively Von Arx 2010a; Ploeger 2011, 2016). If the church is to be a lived reality of *communio*, then rapprochement should go further than just the formal recognition of baptism. It might even be wise to exercise some restraint when it comes to festive declarations of mutual recognition of baptism, if only because the question may be raised whether churches that emphasize baptism as constituting Christian initiation as such

and those that emphasize a more comprehensive understanding of Christian initiation actually have the same understanding of baptism. In practice, Old Catholic Churches are usually co-signatories to such declarations and decide to live with the anomalies that this current praxis leads to, while advocating ecumenical rapprochement that goes further and has as its goal a visible *communio* of all who have been initiated into the one Body of Christ in which all can fully recognize each other as such.

2.2.4.2 *Eucharist*

The eucharist has received much attention in Old Catholic theology, both as a key liturgical rite of central theological significance and an ecclesiological paradigm (cf. for the former the 1889 Declaration of Utrecht: “[The] Holy Eucharist has always been the true focal point of worship in the Catholic Church”). Because of this role of the eucharist, it is more than just one ritual among many:

Listing the eucharist as one sacrament among others, does not, however, fully correspond with the eucharistic ecclesiology of the local church which has become the hallmark of contemporary Old Catholicism. The eucharist is the central manifestation of the pilgrim church on its way to the kingdom and the ordinary context for other sacramental acts. (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013: 46)

Instead, a brief outline of the Old Catholic understanding of the Eucharist can be found in the dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church:

The sacrament of the holy eucharist is the focal point of the whole life of the church. In this sacrament Christ is really and essentially present and communicates with the faithful in the constantly renewed real representation of his sacrifice on the cross, offered once and for all. Both churches consider the eucharist as thanksgiving and doxology to the Father, as the commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ and as the presence of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit (OC-O/Eucharist; CCC 1358). (IRAD 2009, par. 12)

The sacrifice that the Eucharist re-presents (i.e., makes present, *not* repeats) is significant because it constitutes the climax of the “whole work of the divine economy in Christ that has its climax in his sacrifice on the cross and in his resurrection” (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, v/4.4). As outlined above, Christ’s sacrifice is his self-giving out of love for humankind and all of

creation in obedience and faithfulness to the Father (cf. above, 2.2.1; see also the formulation in 1889 Declaration of Utrecht: “perpetual commemoration of that sacrifice and a real representation, being enacted on earth ..., of the one offering which Christ according to Heb. 9:11–12 continuously makes in heaven for the salvation of redeemed humanity, by appearing now for us in the presence of God”). The sacramental meal commemorates and thus makes sacramentally present Christ’s death (and resurrection) in accordance with Christ’s commandment at the Last Supper (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, v/4.2). In doing so, the notion of commemoration that is used is that of *anamnesis* (Greek: ἀνάμνησις; Hebrew: זכר), which refers to commemorating something in such a manner that it is made present to those commemorating it. In this way, the Eucharist enables an ongoing participation in Christ’s *pascha* through death into new life, begun at baptism. By receiving the body and blood of Christ sacramentally – broken bread and poured out wine having become Christ’s body and blood that were broken and poured out, only to be raised in glory and vindicated by God – the faithful share in Christ’s living body. Christ’s vindication thus becomes the salvation of all who participate in him. Or, formulated the other way around, by participating sacramentally in the body of Christ *qua* church through baptism (*cum* confirmation) and especially the eucharist, one participates in all that the Lord is about: i.e., salvation through communion with God. Such participation or communion (both: *koinonia*) is key to the Old Catholic understanding of the Eucharist and the soteriology that it embodies. Somewhat lyrically, the Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue (1987, v/4.9) describes such participation in Christ in the Eucharist and its effects as follows:

In the Eucharist the faithful are united with their Lord and with one another by the communion in his Body and Blood and together form one body. “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). “Because we partake in the one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood and members amongst each other and are thus united with Christ in one body” (John of Damascus, f.o. 86 – PG 94.1153). In union with Christ, the believer is filled with grace and with all spiritual gifts and blessings that union with Christ involves. He makes progress in spiritual life, grows in perfection and thus has the hope of resurrection to eternal life and the full participation in the glorious and blessed Kingdom of Christ.

The final reference also suggests the cosmic scope of the Eucharistic celebration, which coincides (proleptically) with the scope of the kingdom of God.

This notion is abundantly present in Old Catholic liturgical texts and has recently been somewhat elaborated on (cf. Ploeger 2008: 463–465, see Dutton 2010; Hasselaar and Smit 2015; Smit and Hasselaar 2018). Furthermore, becoming part of the (sacramental) Body of Christ also implies becoming part of the dynamic of the *Missio Dei*: God’s “mission of communion” and the church, consisting of those gathered into the body of Christ, is always called to reach out in love and gather those not yet in communion with God in Christ. Even the Church’s sheer existence is a sign of God’s inviting presence (cf. also Smit 2015a).

When considering emphases in Old Catholic eucharistic theology *sensu stricto*, then the question of the central structure and with that the spiritual “logic” of the Eucharistic celebration and its appropriate ritual performance comes to the fore immediately. This is also closely related to Old Catholic accents in understanding the notion of the eucharistic sacrifice, much debated in (post)modern theology (cf. e.g. Krebs 2013b). The work of Herwig Aldenhoven is of particular significance in this respect (cf. Aldenhoven 1971–1972, 1980; see also Von Arx 2007a, cf. Smit 2012b), especially as it has been received in Old Catholic eucharistic theology (cf. e.g., the statement of the International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference of 1979, IOTHC 1980 and the appertaining documentation in *IKZ* 70 [1980]). At its core, this approach to the Eucharist – based on an analysis of the extant patristic sources with an eye to their (literary) structure, “flow” and theological, ritual and spiritual logic – consists of a structure of commemorating praise of God’s salvific deeds, culminating in the *anamnesis* of Jesus and the “words of institution”, the bringing of the gifts of bread and wine to God on the basis of Jesus’ injunction to do so, the epicletic prayer for the Holy Spirit in order to sanctify the gifts and their recipients, and a doxology. This eucharistic prayer is the middle part of a ritual triad, consisting of the offertory, the eucharistic prayer and the communion itself. As the body of Christ, the bread is distributed in broken form.

All of this implies a certain understanding of the eucharistic “sacrifice”, in that it is seen as analogous to Christ’s self-offering in faithfulness and obedience to God for the life of the world. The Latin *offerre* and the Greek *anapherein*, as they are used in the early Christian prayers, indicate that the “sacrifice” here is Christ’s self-offering to God; in that sense, it is identical with Christ’s voluntary *pascha*, his journey through death to new life, which is also at the core of Israel’s Exodus traditions and which he embodied personally. The latter is also the reason why the last supper, although itself not a Passover meal historically, came to be identified as such theologically in early Christianity.

In the Eucharist, the eucharistic gifts of bread and wine function as *pars pro toto* of the entirety of creation and also represent those who do the offering:

i.e., the church and its members are offered up to God and request that the Spirit be sent in order for the gifts to become the Body and Blood of Christ and as such means of the transformation of the recipients into the Body of Christ, *qua* church, thus prefiguring of the completion of the new creation. The 'words of institution' are, accordingly, understood emphatically as part of the anamnesis preceding the offering of the gifts and the epiclesis. As a result, the sequence of the ritual – i.e., anamnestic thanksgiving, offering, epiclesis over the gifts and the church, and the reception of the gifts – stands out clearly and can be entered into by the celebrating congregation. This also shifts the focus of the service from the 'production of the real presence' through the consecratory words spoken by a priest to a more organic and coherent ritual in which the communal dimension of the Eucharist and its role in reconstituting and expressing the Body of Christ (the *church* is the celebrant, and as the 'Church makes the Eucharist,' 'the Eucharist makes the Church') are more apparent. Yet as was indicated earlier, at a deeper level Christ himself is the one performing the sacraments, including the Eucharist. Accordingly, and especially viewing the Eucharistic sacrifice as a representation of Christ's sacrifice, it can be said that Christ himself is acting both as priest and as victim in the Eucharist (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, v/4.4–5).

Naturally, all of this implies particular kinds of Eucharistic prayers – most Old Catholic Churches have also developed these; there is at least one prayer common to all – as well as a specific performance of the eucharistic prayer that emphasizes more aspects than just 'consecration through the words of institution'; offering and epiclesis are accentuated in particular (cf. Von Arx 2007a). As the latter is a particularly Western development to begin with, this patristically supported view of the eucharist also offers a basis for theological rapprochement with the churches of the Eastern traditions. Such rapprochement has been formulated, for example, with the Orthodox Churches, and it shows to what extent patristic theology can be received within the framework of the Old Catholic Churches. Notions of sacrifice, for instance, are retained, linking them strongly to the sacrifice of Christ himself and to the 'offering' of the gifts in the Eucharist:

The sacrament of Holy Eucharist is the focal point of the entire life of the Church. In this sacrament Christ is present in reality and essence: He offers himself in a bloodless way and shares himself with the faithful in an ever new and real representation of his bloody sacrifice on the cross offered once and for all. So the Eucharist is at the same time sacrament and real sacrifice. In this sacrament the faithful receive the Body and Blood of Christ and by it are united with him and through him with one another

and take part in the power of his work of salvation that has its climax in his sacrifice on the cross and in his resurrection. (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, v/4.1)

The conviction that the Eucharist has its origins in the life of Jesus and that Jesus is truly present through and in the sacrament are also inherent to this (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, v/4.2–3). In this context, Old Catholic theology has a certain openness for different explanatory models that seek to express this presence as a reality (a term such as *realis praesentia* is frequently used; cf. also the 1889 Declaration of Utrecht: “... believing that we receive the Body and the Blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ Himself under the species of bread and wine”). The International Roman Catholic-Old Catholic Dialogue states in this respect that “the misgivings occasionally expressed on the part of the Old Catholics in regard to the word ‘transubstantiation’ do not represent a rejection of the statement intended thereby on the part of the Tridentinum in conjunction with the entire tradition of the ancient Church, namely ‘conversio’ or ‘metabole’” (IRAD 2009, par. 12). In discussions of the “real presence”, this presence is typically both associated with the *anamnesis* of the great deeds of God, culminating in the *anamnesis* of the *pascha* of Christ, which includes the so-called “words of institution” and the epicletic prayer for the Holy Spirit (cf. Von Arx 2007a, 2013).

In keeping with both the emphasis on the Eucharist as communion of all the faithful and on the real presence, communion is also reserved in order to be distributed among those who cannot be physically present at the celebration of the Eucharist: “In all Old Catholic parishes the sacrament is reserved in the tabernacle for the communion of the sick” (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013: 46). Given the Old Catholic faith in the true presence of the Lord in the sacrament, the reserved sacrament is also venerated. Therefore, also a practice of benediction with the sacrament exists in some places. Such practices are maintained in relation to the celebration and reception of the Eucharist itself as a means of deepening one’s appreciation of it.

The revision of the eucharistic rites in the course of the 20th and 21st centuries within Old Catholicism was of course a complex process. It cannot be surveyed fully here (cf. Von Arx 2018; Von Arx 2013a). However, aspects of the development of the eucharistic rite, often corresponding to broader developments inspired by the interconfessional liturgical movement, include a more prominent place for the liturgy of the word, which is celebrated using a three-year lectionary; the introduction of ‘prayers of the people’, a fuller form of the peace – usually positioned before the offertory – and frequently the offertory itself (including an offertory procession) have also been given a more extensive

shape. Often, preparatory rites were revised with an eye to making them the start of the service of the entire congregation. The calendar of the liturgical year was similarly adapted, giving pride of place to the celebration of the Sunday (rather than saints' days) and other feasts of Christ; the commemoration of saints was reduced and is usually focused on saints that are of importance to a local church, early Christian saints – including the *theotokos!* – and those that are of ecumenical significance.

Finally, and as was indicated above already, a tradition of incidental eucharistic hospitality exists in all Old Catholic churches. This practice is based on the insight that the boundaries of the visible – i.e., institutional and sacramental – church can be more porous than one imagines and that the work of the Spirit may transcend them. An appeal to the principle of *oikonomia* is made in order to substantiate this, while it is simultaneously expected that those receiving the sacrament are baptized and recognize Christ's presence in it. Also, and by way of an exception to this approach, a few formalized agreements of intercommunion exist as well (cf. below, 2.2.6.2). In both of these ways, Old Catholic Churches seek to respond to “anomalous” situations, such as individuals from one church recognizing their faith in that of the Old Catholic Church but not being able to live in a situation of full communion with this church ecclesially. Theologically and spiritually, only the celebration of the eucharist in the context of full communion makes sense, given that ecclesial communion is eucharistic communion. In Old Catholic theology, the notion of intercommunion as a stepping stone towards communion is hardly with the Old Catholic emphasis on the equivalence of eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion, as outlined above. What applies to agreements of mutual recognition of baptism also applies *a fortiori* to agreements of “intercommunion”, which, from a catholic perspective, are a contradiction in themselves. Either there is ecclesial – and therefore sacramental (and eucharistic) communion – or not, but both recognizing and not recognizing a church as theologically identical is not possible: to do so, one would have to reduce the Eucharist to “one of the many things” that a church does and about which a deal can be made. The reality constitutes even more of an ecumenical challenge: the establishment of agreements of intercommunion actually legitimizes situations in which divisions and non-recognition among churches exist. Due to such agreements, these are, however, frequently no longer experienced as problematic, which means that agreements of intercommunion paradoxically promote the acceptance of the divisions in the Body of Christ. Yet, at the same time, the Eucharist is celebrated together, as if one *does* recognize each other fully and lives in communion – this paradox can be summed up well with reference to the *bon mot* that if churches like each other a little, they recognize

each other's sacraments, if they like each other a lot, there will also recognize each other's orders, and if churches are truly infatuated with each other they enter in a communal life and also share their money with each other. From an Old Catholic mainstream perspective, this is untenable, undesirable and essentially counterproductive to ecumenical rapprochement. The application of *oikonomia* is more than sufficient to address anomalous situations.

2.2.4.3 *Ordained Ministry and Synodality*

"Synodality" is often emphasized as a characteristic of Old Catholic identity. Yet, synodality always coexists with the ministry of *episkope* in the Old Catholic tradition. The two are closely interrelated and mutually determine each other. There can be no real synodality without the ministry of *episkope* and *vice versa*: the ordained ministry implies and requires a communal context, while a community requires and implies structures of ministry in turn. Therefore, the ordained ministry and synodality are discussed in connection with each other here. Having underlined the foundational character of the *communio* of the church already, both ordained ministry and synodality are approached as structures enabling the life of the church, first ministry and subsequently synodality.

2.2.4.3.1 The Ordained Ministry

In Old Catholic theology, the ordained ministry in apostolic succession – particularly the episcopate (*qua* personally exercised *episkope*) – is regarded as a key structuring element of the life of the church *qua* local eucharistic gathering. However, it is this only when embedded in the church *qua* communion and therefore it exists always in relation both to the other orders of ministry – i.e., the presbyterate and the diaconate – and to the entire *communio* of a local church, particularly to its synodal structures, and in relation to other catholic churches with which communion is sought or upheld (cf. IBC 2001a, par. 3.1: "Each local church living the common faith and having its indispensable synodal structures, uniting the ordained ministry and the laity, which bring to bear her communion and unity", cf. also *idem*, par. 3.4, 4). The ordination to the ministry is a sacrament, particularly because it turns the minister into a certain kind of representation and instrument of Christ.

Receiving what became the key ministerial structure of the early church and in keeping with a broad ecumenical consensus in these matters, Old Catholic theology understands the apostolic ministry as one ministry with three orders (cf. Smit 2011a: 391–419; Ploeger 2008: 161–234). *Episkope* – which has come to designate the core of the ordained ministry ecumenically – is central to this ministry, embodied in its fullest extent by the bishop, albeit always

in a manner that has a personal dimension, a collegial dimension (in relation to the presbytery and the diaconate) and a communal dimension (community of the [local] church; cf. e.g., Commission on Faith and Order 1982, par. M.22, 2013, par. 52–53). Somewhat distinct among those traditions and theologians who see *episkope* as key to unlocking the meaning of the ordained ministry, Old Catholic theology is wary of an etymologizing interpretation in terms of “oversight” (cf. Von Arx 2009, cf. Smit 2015a). Apart from due caution to avoid the mistake of the “etymological fallacy”, another important reason for such wariness is that the functioning of a ministry in its paradigmatic context (i.e., the liturgy) and not its etymology is determinative of its content (cf. Ploeger 2008: 495–515). This has led to an emphasis on the exercise of *episkope* in terms of presidency, understood as a ministry of gathering people into communion in such a manner that all the members of this communion, the Body of Christ, can exercise their own gifts. Logically, this also prevents a primarily “sacerdotal” understanding of the priestly ministry.

Thus, the *koinonia* of the church is performed in a life of worship, witness and service (*leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*), for which the one exercising *episkope* takes the necessary initiatives and is thus instrumental in creating the (social) space for this to take place. The task of gathering people and “ordering” (“co-ordi-nating”) them into a community is determined qualitatively by the content of the apostolic tradition, which the *episkopos* is called to embody. This has at least two aspects: (1) a bishop (and any other ordained minister) should exercise her or his ministry in keeping with the apostolic tradition, both in terms of teaching and in terms of the exercise of authority (e.g., not just personally, but always collegially and communally as well), while embodying Christlike qualities; (2) the bishop should also remind the (local) church of the “apostolic tradition” and thus serve as an “vis-à-vis”, pointing to Christ and reminding a communion of the tradition in which it stands, even if this tradition is always to be discerned in communion (cf. the oeuvre of Visser; see also Smit 2015a; on apostolicity in general, cf. above 3.3.4.2.1.4; IBC 2001a, 4 also underlines keeping the church in the apostolic faith). While all the baptized celebrate the liturgy (and other aspects of the life of the church) *in persona Christi* – i.e., being incorporated into Christ and thus representing Christ – the (ordained) presider and gatherer of the people can be said to have her or his own kind of role in agreement with her or his *ordo* in the ordered Body of Christ, which can be called acting *in persona Christi capitis* by sacramentally fulfilling the role of Christ, who is ultimately the presider over the church’s life (cf. for this and the following: Ploeger 2008: 498–502). At the same time, this role also incorporates acting *in persona ecclesiae* when it comes to representing the Church vis-à-vis God in prayer (although one could argue that this is also part of the role of

Christ, as emphasized by Von Arx 2007a; see also Aldenhoven 2002, cf. Smit 2012b). Both of these aspects apply to the full scope of the ordained ministry: i.e., when it pertains to “extensions of the liturgy” in *diakonia* and *martyria* and the synodal structures of the church. Such a “representative” view of the ordained ministry has a sacramental quality: the ordained person becomes a *Realsymbol* – i.e., a symbol that embodies and participates in the reality to which it refers – of what the ordained ministry refers to, both by virtue of her or his ordination and through the role that a person fulfils (cf. for an ecumenical exploration, Smit 2015c). For ministers, this can be both a support and a burden, while it amplifies the impact of the exercise of the ordained ministry.

The episcopal ministry is also *par excellence* the ministry that serves as a lynchpin between local churches, given that a catholic local church is always oriented towards communion with another (local) church in a communion of communions (cf. above, 3.3.4.2.1.1). The ecclesiological preamble to the statute of the IBC expresses this well and what is said there can be extended to other “levels” of the church.

Regarding the Union of Utrecht all this means that it is primarily the task and service of the bishops to maintain the catholicity of the church in the unity of the tradition of faith, to respond to arising new problems and to take decisions concerning the relationships to other churches. For they are at the intersection of primarily belonging, as individuals, to their local or national church on the one hand, and of taking, as a college, primary responsibility for the fellowship and communion of the local and national churches on the other hand. The conciliar unity and committed communion of autonomous catholic churches – be they individual dioceses or national unions of dioceses – is expressed in the bishops’ synodal assemblies, i.e. the IBC meetings. (IBC 2001a, par. 4)

The theological understanding of the priesthood – the most frequent kind of ordained ministry in Old Catholic Churches – in Old Catholicism is focused on a priest’s membership of the *presbyterium* (cf. for this and the following, Ploeger 2008: 504–509). It focuses, that is, on a priest’s membership of the college of *presbyteroi* around the bishop, in communion and consultation with which the bishop exercises her or his ministry collegially, and to whom various aspects of the exercise of the ministry of *episkope* can be delegated, either for a diocese as a whole (e.g., by preaching at diocesan celebrations, by assisting in coordinating the clergy, etc.), or for part of it, such as parish ministry. Such delegation consists of “co-presidency” with the bishop over part of the (geographically or culturally extended) diocese in many matters of *leitourgia*,

martyria and *diakonia*. All of these kinds of delegation are expressions of the collegial exercise of the episcopal ministry, which has the *presbyter* (i.e., priest) function in a manner analogously to the *episkopos* (i.e., bishop), albeit it with constant reference to the bishop (and Christ), given that the bishop is personally the head of the *presbyterium*.

The ministerial order of the diaconate is somewhat in search of its identity in Old Catholic theology and practice (cf. Von Arx 2005). Since the 1970s, attempts from different theological starting points – including a wish for a diaconate accessible to women – have been made in many Old Catholic Churches to restore a vocational (“permanent”) diaconate (cf. Berlis 2019b). While the “old” paradigm concerning the diaconate as a “caritative” ministry aiming at care for the needy within and outside of the communion of the church – as it is reflected in the ordination rites common to all churches of the Union of Utrecht – is still influential, in theological reflection the newer paradigm, as inspired by the work of Collins (cf. Collins 1990), is also beginning to make its influence felt. In this paradigm, the diaconate is understood as the ministry of the “go between”, acting on behalf of someone else in a whole range of capacities and areas of activity. This situation is made even more complex by the continued use of the diaconate as a preparation for the ordination to the priesthood, which draws the diaconate in yet another direction, an understanding as a “trainee” ministry and a deacon as someone who is “not yet a priest.” The existing absorption of traditionally diaconal functions by priests and laypersons, both in the liturgy and in “the liturgy after the liturgy”, is also perpetuated due to the sociological fact that most parishes are served by a priest alone – someone who “can do everything” – and the corresponding economic fact that resources for stipendiary deacons are lacking, although non-stipendiary deacons fulfil an important ministry. A major hindrance to the development of a diaconate with its own profile is the treatment of deacons as “mini-priests”, “allowing” them to perform all kinds of roles that are not diaconal at all, such as presiding over sacramental liturgies (e.g., the anointing of the sick, the blessing of marriage). In spite of all of this, the shape of the theological discussion seems to be going into the direction of deacons as “assisting clergy” to bishops or those to whom *episkope* has been delegated (e.g., parish priests), engaging in a ministry of assistance and acting as “go between” (especially between church and world). A full theology and praxis of the diaconate still needs to be developed, in other words. Von Arx formulated this challenge as follows:

Es gilt also, den Unterschied von presbyteral-episkopalen und diakonal-episkopalen Funktionen wahrzunehmen. Das aber impliziert, dass jede altkatholische Besinnung über den Diakonat die Sendung der Kirche

als Ganzes im Auge behalten [...] sollte. Zu diesem Ganzen gehört der Zusammenhang von leitourgia und diakonia innerhalb der Gemeinde und an den Schnittstellen von Gemeinde und "Welt": Diakone und Diakoninnen bauen gewissermassen Brücken vom zentralen eucharistischen Geschehen zu den unscharfen Rändern der Gemeinde und darüber hinaus in die (teilweise postchristliche) Gesellschaft und bringen dorthin die der Kirche anvertraute Zuwendung der Liebe Gottes, wie sie umgekehrt die Nöte von Menschen mit ihrem Hunger nach Leben in die eucharistische Versammlung tragen, woraus gezielte Projekte entstehen können. (Von Arx 2005: 213)

Finally, it is worth restating that compulsory celibacy for any of the orders of the ordained ministry is not part of Old Catholic church order, whereas the possibility for marriage following ordination is part of it, just like the admission of both women and men to all orders.

2.2.4.3.2 Synodality, Conciliarity and Reception

Any ecclesiology that underlines the *communio* or *koinonia* character of God, salvation and the church to such an extent as Old Catholic theology must emphasize synodality. Synodality is, despite influences from 19th-century political liberalism (cf. Hallebeek 2011b), far from being just a "modern" and "democratic" way of governing the church (cf. Suter 2016: 265–267; Von Arx 1996, *passim*). In fact, democracy and synodality are quite at odds with each other as governing principles: whereas the former legitimizes decisions based on the power of the majority of the people, the latter sees decisions as fully legitimate only if they are carried out by the entire communion. Democracy is grounded in competition and struggle, synodality in reconciliation and communion (cf. for backgrounds to this claim: Milbank 2006). Accordingly, synods should be wary of employing democratic means of decision making such as voting too liberally. Because synodal discernment of the tradition is inextricably bound up with notions of conciliarity and reception, these two concepts are discussed here as well. Prior to doing that, one disclaimer is needed: what will be described here belongs to the world of theological ideals. It does not pretend to conceal the fact that in certain cases quite unsynodal struggles for power exist in a church, while at times sound democratic processes can indeed be a healthy mirror for the church. Usually the term synodality (in combination with *episkope*) is used for discernment in communion at a local (or national) level, while the term conciliarity (in combination with primacy) is typically used for such discernment at a supra-local (or supra-national) level.

When it comes to synodality the logic behind it is quite clear: all members of the Body of Christ are equally incorporated into it and are equally gifted by the Spirit (for a survey of the synodal structures in the Old Catholic Churches, see Hallebeek 2011b). If one takes one's cue from the paradigm of the liturgy, it is clear that as everyone's active participation is essential (*actuosa participatio*), everyone's active participation in the discernment of the truth and corresponding decision-making in the life of the church is just as essential (cf. Ploeger 2008: 503–504). The task of those exercising the ministry of *episkope* is to initiate processes of discernment in such a way (i.e., a synodal way) that enables all those participating in the life of the Body of Christ to participate in the process of discernment for a common way forward (cf. Smit 2015a). As Visser has emphasized throughout his work, the patristic doctrines of God, of salvation, of the church and of the sacraments together provide a hermeneutical model with a communal focus and are geared towards operating on the consensus required to maintain communion. Decisions concerning changes in the expression of the faith or the order of the church – whether that concerns the evaluation of ecumenical relationships and agreements; developments such as abolition of compulsory clerical celibacy and the admission of women and men alike to the ordained ministry; or questions regarding the development of the sacrament of marriage – are all to be discerned in the interplay between *episkope* and synodality, in which the bishop and the synod can act as each other's "vis-à-vis" (cf. Ploeger 2006: 502–504). This is a matter that is as canonical as it is theological and spiritual. With this synodal process within a local church only part of the process of discernment is described, however.

Certainly when matters of concern to other churches are at stake, conciliar consultation within the communion and with ecumenical partners, especially those in communion, is necessary. This can take place through a number of different channels, ranging from the meetings of the IBC, extended meetings of the IBC with ecumenical partners, theological conferences or broader congresses with participation of all faithful. The ideal is to achieve a situation in which decisions are "received" – i.e., accepted by all – whereby the process of reception can also have a preparatory function: consultation and conversation take place in such a way that the decision the bishop(s) make is one that is expressive of the view received by all. The IBC statute formulates it as follows:

The reception by the church is a manifestation that the decisions of the bishops, prepared and taken in a comprehensive conciliar process, have been initiated by the Spirit of God and correspond to the will of God for the mission of his Church. Reception therefore includes the participation

and joint responsibility of the baptized (clergy and laity) in this process both within each local or national church (synods or other responsible organs) and within the Union of Utrecht as a whole. But being a process led by the Spirit of God, it cannot comprehensively, let alone conclusively, be put into juridical terms or mechanical finalization. (IBC 2001a, par. 4.1, cf. also Smit 2011a: 430–438)

This process of discernment in communion and the reception of tradition and its new articulations in communion naturally require a shape— as *koinonia* always does — and the Old Catholic churches have been searching for such a shape in the course of the 20th and 21st centuries — attempting to come to terms with changing circumstances — which resulted in the current IBC statute. According to this statute, those exercising *episkope* (usually bishops) are both required to initiate such discernment and to safeguard the structures necessary for this (cf. IBC 2001a, par. 4). As the visible shape of reconciliation is communion, local churches and their bishops are always oriented towards communion with other local churches in which they can recognize their own theological identity. Such relationships can be structured more formally as well. The model that Old Catholic theology follows in this respect is that of a structured “communion of communions”, continuing the early church’s system of church provinces with their episcopal conferences and synods, presided over by a senior bishop, on the level of a patriarchate by a patriarch, and on the level of the church of the entire *oikoumene* by the bishop of Rome: primacy has its logical place on various levels of communion. Conciliarity is, therefore, a phenomenon analogous to concentric circles of ever-widening communion. As evidenced by the structure of the Old Catholic realization of such a communion in the Union of Utrecht, such presidency involves the necessary rights to convene meetings, for example, but it does not involve any rights that would lead to an infringement upon the integrity of one of the local churches constituting such a communion. All decisions of the (episcopal) synod of such a communion also need to be approved by the constituting churches, in order to ensure that the common decisions are indeed the decisions of bishops and their churches, not just of the bishops alone (cf. IBC 2001a, 4, 4.1). Conversely, when it comes to holding each other accountable, decisions and developments by and in local churches are also to be received by other churches by way of a(n episcopal) synod and related bodies of consultation. This should ensure that churches do not “walk alone” without considering their existence in communion with other churches. In this entire process, bishops play a key role by being the *pontifices* between their local churches and the communions of which these churches are a part. In this manner, the Old Catholic Churches

also seek to continue the conciliar tradition of the early Church, appeals to which were made earlier on in history already, such as when the Church of Utrecht protested against its treatment by Rome.

2.2.4.4 *Other Sacraments and Sacramentals*

Having so far discussed baptism (*cum* confirmation), eucharist and ordained ministry, three broadly recognized sacraments – confession, the anointing of the sick and matrimony – still need to be discussed. This also includes “sacramentals”, of which the use of images and icons will be singled out in particular, and some attention will be given to burial rites.

When it comes to confession – or, rather, the sacrament of reconciliation, as it is termed in current liturgical books – Old Catholic theology has a relatively modest theology and practice, at least as far as the 20th and 21st centuries are concerned (cf. on the Dutch tradition above, 1.2.1; see also the *Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue* 1989, v/5, IRAD 2009, 12, compare: Vobbe 2005: 173–245). In a number of churches both rites for a communal celebration and a private celebration of this sacrament exist. The former are typically used in preparation for major feast days, the latter in individual pastoral care. In accordance with the emergence of the sacrament, it is only used in grave situations (post-baptismal) or in situations felt to be of deep existential significance by someone seeking pastoral assistance. Biblically, the sacrament is founded on Jesus’ promises to his disciples concerning the forgiveness of sins (cf. Matt. 16.19; 18.18; Jn 20.23). Repentance and confession are required on the part of the one receiving the sacrament, while the minister (bishop or priest) administers the sacrament in the name of God, whose forgiveness acts through the pronouncement of the same, using either an indicative or deprecativ formula, by the minister. A penance may be imposed; when it is, it is typically spiritual or social in nature. As in most Western catholic churches, the use of the sacrament of reconciliation is the exception rather than the rule. However, various elements concerning repentance and the confession of sins in other liturgies, particularly the liturgy of Eucharist, are typically valued as an important way of confessing and repenting from lesser sins. In that sense, a lively practice of confession and repentance exists.

When it comes to the anointing of the sick – a sacrament that developed into (one of) the “last rite(s)” in the course of the history of Western Christianity and is celebrated with reference to James 5 – it can be noted that in the course of the last few decades it has begun to be used more frequently in all kinds of situations of illness. This is both in keeping with ecumenical theological agreements concerning this sacrament (cf. *Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue* 1989, v/6.5: “The sacrament of Unction is to be received by all baptized, not

only those suffering from terminal conditions”; compare IRAD 2009, 12; a biblical basis is found in Jas. 5:14–15) and with the rediscovery of the sacrament in pastoral practice (compare Vobbe 2005:367–506; for charismatic influence, see Parmentier 1997). The (salvific) healing that this sacrament signifies and communicates has, in both theology and pastoral practice, begun to be understood more holistically, i.e., in terms of wholeness (cf. Parmentier 1997, see also Vobbe 2005: 367–407). This also facilitates an integration of physical, mental and spiritual aspects of healing, including the forgiveness of sins. The sacrament is both celebrated at the sickbed (more or less in private) and in the contexts of other, usually eucharistic, liturgies. The minister of this sacrament is normally a priest or bishop.

The sacrament of (the blessing of) marriage is, although historically relatively novel and theologically relatively marginal, enormously significant both socially and pastorally. This not only has to do with the biographical significance of marriage, but also with the issue of its dissolution (divorce) and the increasing attention being given to same-sex relationships and their sanctification. In Old Catholic theology, the core of the sacrament is seen to be in the blessing of the couple – which has “contracted” its marriage freely before a magistrate – by a priest or bishop (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/8.3). The “traditional” Western catholic focus on the exchange of the mutual consent – to which someone representing the church (usually a priest) is a witness – has also played a role, primarily in the Old Catholic Churches emerging out of the *Altkatholische Bewegung*, but it is not the actual position of the Old Catholic Churches (cf. Haag 2016; Eßer 2016:59–60). In the history of the *Cleresie*, the solemnization of marriages that had been contracted before the protestant magistrate had already become customary due to the exigencies of catholic life in the Dutch Republic (cf. Schoon 2004: 648–654 – this came with papal permission, cf. the brief *Matrimonia quae* of Benedict XIV [1741]). In Old Catholic theologizing, most emphasis has come to be placed on marriage as a communion, a reflection of the covenant of God with God’s people or the communion of Christ with the Church (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/8.1; compare Haag 2016; Eßer 2016: 58–61, cf. Vobbe 2005: 305–363). Given the character of such covenant or communion, “marriage is the mystery of love par excellence”, which “fulfills its purpose as a fellowship of love of spouses” (cf. also the conclusions of Haag 2016 and Vobbe 2005: 346–348). This “love and unity between spouses” can therefore be viewed as the “principal purpose of marriage” (cf. Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/8.2). Thus, marriage is aptly described as a “union and fellowship of persons” (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/8.4), which, in order to do justice to a theological understanding of both personhood and communion, should be placed in the context of the

eucharistic communion of the church (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/8.3). Scriptural warrant for such unions between persons – in Scripture, woman and man – is found in the creation narrative (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/8.1). As a consequence of this view of marriage, earlier emphasis on marriage as a means of channelling human (sexual) desire into an appropriate place has moved into the background. Quite in line with this, notions such as “fertility” have – in keeping with the witness of the early church (where this found expression in discussions concerning the fertility of the chaste) and given the experience of the social and spiritual fertility of couples without children – become to be interpreted in a broad sense, as is evidenced by a representative formulation from the liturgy of the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland: “Segne ihr ganzes Haus und stärke sie in der Verantwortung für alle, die du ihnen anvertraust” (Christkatholische Kirche 2005: 273.2).

When it comes to the question of divorce, Old Catholic theology advocates a combination of a principled emphasis on the indissolubility of marriage and the possibility, “on the basis of pastoral considerations”, to take “into account other reasons for the dissolution of marriage besides the physical death of a spouse.” Accordingly, “in specific cases divorced persons may be married and admitted to the sacraments”, a tradition the Old Catholic Churches share with the Orthodox (IRAD 2009, 12; cf. representatively Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland 1992 and see Eßer 2016:60–61). In doing so, the Old Catholic tradition does justice to the witness of Scripture and tradition that contains both aspects as well: “in its pastoral care the Church is guided by divine commandments and the divine disposition to forgive as it deals with marriages which have failed due to human shortcomings” (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue v/8.4).

A newer challenge for Old Catholic Churches both pastorally and (therefore) theologically is the question of the blessing of same-sex relationships and the relation of such blessings to the blessing of (heterosexual) marriages. In most Old Catholic Churches, the presence of same-sex couples as members of the church is considered a matter of fact (cf. also IOTHC 2002). However, the sacramental-theological question just mentioned and the question of theological anthropology implied by it is still in need of an answer that represents a consensus of the Old Catholic Churches as a whole. A number of Old Catholic Churches – those in Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the Netherlands – currently use (trial) rites for the blessing of same-sex relationships, and their sacramentality is increasingly underlined (cf. Vercaemmen and Schoon 2016ab) while its precise relationship to the sacrament of marriage continues to be clarified (cf. Vercaemmen and Schoon 2016ab; Rein 2017). Of course, this situation is both informed and complicated by the fact that in some countries

(the Netherlands, Germany) the state has introduced marriage for same-sex couples as well. In other words, the discussion has moved from the question of “acceptance” or “non-discrimination” to the question of the precise relationship between various kinds of love relationships and, with that, also to a renewed reflection on what constitutes the core of “traditional” marriage. This all awaits further intra-Old Catholic discussion and consultation with churches in communion and with which communion is sought. When considering the course of the development of the theological understanding of marriage in the 20th and 21st centuries, however, the increasingly strong emphasis on marriage as a communion of love between two persons – as it is also reflected in ecumenical dialogue – would seem to point towards an understanding of marriage in which the interpersonal character of a relationship is primary vis-à-vis the gender of the persons involved (cf. Ploeger 2018b).

Finally, so-called “sacramentals” should be considered. Like all churches, the Old Catholic Churches celebrate a range of rites that, following the scholastic subdivision between sacraments and sacramentals (as noted above, a distinction strongly relativized in Old Catholic theology), are not numbered among the sacraments, but can be classed as “sacramentals”. Two of them will be considered briefly here: burial rites and the veneration of images.

As the example of burial rites (both the *Requiem* mass and other rites) indicates, some of the sacramentals are rites of high emotional and pastoral significance. Theologically, burial rites in Old Catholicism are focused on the earthly completion of a life in Christ and express the hope that God will remain faithful to those who entrusted their lives to him. Emphasis is placed on baptism in this respect (note, e.g., the use of the apostolic creed *qua* baptismal creed in the Dutch Old Catholic liturgy; compare Wirix 1984). At the same time, the notion of judgment is upheld, while the doctrine of the saints indicates that those in whom the spirit of God has effectuated particular holiness enjoy a beatific existence already (cf. above 2.2.3.1.2). The preparation for death – which has received some specific pastoral attention, also in relation to hospice ministry (cf. Leiter 2002, Okoro 2009) – has, with some variation according to pastoral need, an increasing focus on the *viaticum*, rather than on the anointing of the sick. Usually conducted as part of the Eucharist (but increasingly by means of “para-liturgical” rites such as the lighting of candles in a remembrance chapel), the faithful departed are commemorated “in the faith, and with the hope, that God will remember those fallen asleep in mercy”, which “gives expression to the loving fellowship between the living and those who have already passed on, together with the hope of one’s own resurrection” (Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue 1989, VI/1.2). In the dialogue with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, such remembrance was articulated as follows:

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. (Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic Dialogue 2019: 16).

While burial rites do not typically evoke much theological controversy, at least not in the ecumenical dialogues in which Old Catholics are involved, the veneration of images can be a contested topic due to various iconodule and iconoclastic heritage, notably those of the 8th and the 16th centuries. Formally, the Old Catholic view is given with the teaching of the seventh ecumenical council (Nicaea II, 787 CE), with its distinction between worship due to God alone and the reverence that ought to be given to "types" – i.e., visual and tangible representations of the divine – intended to further the relationship with the "prototypes" in those beholding them. Its reception can be exemplified with a reference to the Mar Thoma Syrian-Old Catholic Dialogue, in which the communicative and representative function of images was noted: "symbols, understood as signs with a deeper meaning, making accessible a reality that goes beyond themselves, are of significance for the life of the church and divine-human communication" (Mar Thoma-Old Catholic Dialogue 2019: 20). In this sense, Christ is recognized as the foundational sign of God's presence in the world, and an incarnational understanding of images is indicated, while it is also stressed that the risk of idolatry should always be recognized and averted.

2.2.5 Ethics, Public Theology, Missiology and Diakonia in Old Catholic Theology

As a distinct topic, some attention should also be given to Old Catholic approaches to ethics and with that to public theology, missiology and diakonia. These topics have not been at the forefront of Old Catholic theological reflection as much as missiology, though a notable discourse and position has been developed nevertheless.

2.2.5.1 *Ethics and Public Theology*

The Old Catholic ethical tradition of the last 50 years or so is one that, if surveyed only superficially, would give the impression of a lack of attention to ethical matters if not an actual surrendering to individualism in ethical matters. In this respect, contemporary Old Catholicism would present a striking contrast to its "Jansenist" roots, at least in the Netherlands. However, this would be a mistake for at least two reasons: (a) there is an ongoing tradition

of ethical reflection in Old Catholicism in the 20th and 21st centuries; (b) not a rift, but rather a transformation has taken place in Old Catholic theological tradition, encompassing both continuities and discontinuities. Both will be outlined briefly, beginning with the latter (cf. for this and the following also Segbers 2020).

The turn of the 20th century – during which the Union of Utrecht of Old Catholic Churches was both established and consolidated – was characterized by an increased emphasis on personal responsibility of people, both in society, often under the banner of the (political) liberalism of that period, and in (some) churches. Old Catholic churches engaging this cultural development saw, accordingly, a decrease in emphasis on formal ethical teaching by the church as a whole and an increased emphasis on personal decision making based on one's own responsibility and conscience (cf. paradigmatically, Küry 1982: 119–121). Theologically, the development of this attitude can, on the one hand (and within Dutch Old Catholicism), be seen as a transformation of the traditional emphasis on interiority and the importance of one's personal responsibility for living a sanctified life into an emphasis on the importance of one's own conscience in matters of faith and morals. On the other hand, it can be seen as an expression of spiritual and ecclesiological approaches that stress the full participation of all in the life of the church (as it was characteristic of the *Altkatholische Bewegung*) and that underline the equal (baptismal) dignity of all and the giftedness of each believer with *charismata*. Also, the Old Catholic resistance to creating too much of a juridical system around the reception of the sacraments and entrusting decisions about their celebration to those exercising pastoral care – with respect for individuality, contextuality and theological principles such as the notion of *oikonomia* – means that less detailed guidelines are required than would be the case otherwise. When it comes to communal decision making – and this applies equally to ethical matters – the synodal process is the institutional consequence of this approach (cf. Von Arx 1996; Hallebeek 2011b). An emphasis on an ecclesiology of the local church in recent decades and prior to that a kind of ecclesial nationalism has also served to favour ethical decision making on a local (though in practice, national) level. The result of this combination of an emphasis on freedom and a process of communal discernment rather than on the issuing of statements by church authorities (bishops, synods, episcopal synods, etc.) is a reticence when it comes to issuing such statements. It seems to be the result of a particular ecclesiology and possibly the price of acknowledging real diversity within the church (cf. Ring 2015), both past and present. For instance, in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century, the space given to personal ethical and political convictions of the faithful in the public sphere was translated into

the ‘non-political’ attitude of some Old Catholic churches: refraining from active political involvement or positioning by the church and its representatives along the lines of party politics, thus aiming at creating an inclusive space in which people of all political convictions could be at home. The rise of National Socialism would show the limits of this concept.

The flipside of the approach to ethics outlined in the previous paragraph is that processes of joint ethical discernment become all the more important, at least if the Old Catholic churches want to take their own ecclesiology and spirituality seriously. In some ways, this is indeed the case, as can be seen when surveying topics and themes of recent meetings of the International Old Catholics’ Congresses – which had a tradition (until 2014) of issuing joint statements – and of the International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference. Without being able to be exhaustive, some more recent examples include issues of ecology at the 2014 Old Catholics Congress (cf. Chryssavgis 2015) or the exploration of “alterity” by the International Old Catholic Theologians’ Conference of 2017 (documentation: IKZ 2018:2). Earlier, in 2001 and 2002, a theologians’ conference and a congress expressed themselves on the question of same-sex relationships (affirmatively and inclusively, cf. IOTHC 2002) and the issues of ecology and looming war in Iraq (IOCC 2002). The International Old Catholics’ Congresses have, in general, been dedicated to topics of broader social interest since 1990, such as women’s rights, ecology and care for the marginalized in society, while the 1986 meeting of the congress already passed a resolution on the political situation in the Philippines. Closer to the various local churches, similar statements have been made on the same or similar issues, such as the Dutch Old Catholic Synod of 2016, which passed a motion calling for a “green church”, and the German Old Catholic Synod of 2015 taking a stance against the export of weaponry; various stances on same-sex relationships were already discussed above (2.2.4.4). Earlier and more occasionally, guidelines were issued concerning divorced persons, for example, and the possibility of a second marriage (paradigmatically, Oud-Katholieke Kerk van Nederland 1992). It seems that the closer a statement is to the life of an actual church, the higher the chance that it is expressive of its discernment and will be received as such. The reverse is also true when considering a further example of ethical reflection in the shape of an international and ecumenical study project on catholicity and globalization (2006–2008). The key question of the consultation was about the theological concept and *nota ecclesiae* of ‘catholicity’ and its embodiment by churches striving for a particular quality of life in communion and whether its exploration by a trilateral consultation – consisting of two churches from the “global north” (Old Catholic Churches and the Episcopal Church, USA) and one from the global south (Iglesia Filipina

Independiente) – could lead to new insight. The consultation’s answer to this question – while a common understanding of “globalization” was not reached, despite agreement about the term catholicity – was an outline of a eucharistic vision for a world globalized in an alternative manner (cf. Dutton 2010). The work of the commission was strongly influenced by that of one of the few Old Catholic theologians working primarily in the field of ethics, Franz Segbers (cf. e.g., Segbers 2002, 2007, 2015). Its results, as well as those of its follow-up conference of 2016 (cf. IKZ 2017:3–4), still need to be received more broadly in Old Catholic theology, even if the approach can be presented as paradigmatic (cf. Smit 2014a).

The project just mentioned also points to another reason why Old Catholic ethical discernment is sometimes somewhat invisible: frequently, it takes place in ecumenical cooperation, with statements being issued in the name of such a body. Currently, this applies to the discussions in the World Council of Churches (Faith and Order) about “moral discernment in the churches” (cf. Faith and Order 2013b), for example, and to similar processes of discernment in the Conference of European Churches and within various national councils of churches, as they address questions that face churches currently, ranging from issues resulting from ethnic and religious tensions (such as those associated with shifting demographics in Europe), beginning and end of life issues, to questions of economic inequality, ecology and marriage and partnership. As Old Catholic theology frequently intentionally seeks *not* to take its own stance but rather to contribute to a general Christian stance, this will be noted here, but not explored further. A relatively recent example of this would also be a Swiss interreligious declaration on refugees, in the development of which the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland participated (Swiss Council of Religions 2018).

Finally, it may be remarked, concerning ethics, that in recent years a number of initiatives have appeared that seek to create a space for debate on theological and ethical topics with broader societal conversation partners, taking the shape of either a series of public lectures (for instance, those centred at cathedral churches in Bern: “Berner Spurensuche” [www.bernerspurensuche.ch], “Denken in de Driehoek”, or the series of ‘Quasimodo Lectures’ [2007–2017, cf. e.g., Smit and Derks 2018], both Utrecht), which seek to initiate a process of reflection and discernment, or in the shape of “round table discussions” centred on topics such as the ecological crisis. Instances of this include two such events co-hosted by the Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands in 2014 and 2016, in the first case on the occasion of the visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch to the Old Catholic Church (cf. Hasselaar and Smit 2015; Smit and Hasselaar 2017;

Hasselaar 2016). These may be tentative steps towards the development of an Old Catholic public theology.

2.2.5.2 *Missiology*

“Missiology”, as it exists as a theological discipline, is in Old Catholic theology an aspect of other disciplines. Yet, in the interest of highlighting it as a topic, it should be discussed here in order to avoid the impression that no such thing exists. When considering mission, a starting point is the notion of *missio Dei*: i.e., the church is a (sacramental) instrument in God’s own mission to the world, having its deepest origins in the salvific will of the Father, which leads to the sending of the Son in the Spirit (cf. for this and the following Smit 2015a; compare Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, par. 6). Such *missio Dei* is at the same time *missio ecclesiae*, given that God acts through the church and the church’s mission is God’s mission. The Anglican-Old Catholic statement *Belonging Together in Europe* agrees with Faith and Order’s *The Nature and Mission of the Church* in this respect: “The Church is the community of people called by God who, through the Holy Spirit, are united with Jesus Christ and sent as disciples to bear witness to God’s reconciliation, healing and transformation of creation” (Faith and Order 2005, par. 111; AOCICC 2011, par. 36). This also leads to all aspects of the life of the church being considered missionary. When discussing the dimensions of *leitourgia*, *martyria* and *diakonia*, the report Utrecht and Uppsala on the Road to Communion (Utrecht and Uppsala 2013, par. 6) states that

These three concepts are used in the contemporary ecumenical context to refer to the fundamental aspects and expressions of the church. *Leitourgia* includes all the various forms of worshipping God in praise, thanksgiving and intercession for his creation. *Martyria* includes the various acts of the proclamation of the gospel, catechesis, the accounting for the Christian hope and faith in all its dimensions, statements on social and political issues as far as they are necessary consequences of the gospel. In *diakonia* the church fulfils its mission of healing and caring for men and women and the whole of creation on the way to the fulfilment of God’s plan. These aspects of the church’s mission cannot be neatly differentiated, since they often overlap and have their inner, spiritual centre in the eucharistic service.

Such a view is also present in Anglican-Old Catholic conversations (cf. AOCICC 2011, par. 33). The church is a missionary presence in this way, but the form that

this takes is a matter that cannot be addressed here, as it would move beyond the confines of an outline of theological principles.

2.2.5.3 *Diakonia*

Here, also the Old Catholic theological view of *diakonia* in the sense of aid and outreach should be considered briefly, closely related as it is to the fields of both ethics and missiology. This aspect of Old Catholic theology cannot be said to have a pronounced theological profile. Rather, unlike the diaconate *qua* order of ministry (cf. Von Arx 2005), the field of *diakonia* in terms of outreach and aid seems to have been largely left to develop as a practice based on relatively general notions of the necessity to do good, to serve one's neighbour and to connect with others as an expression of being-in-communion (even if it is frequently overlooked as an aspect of ecumenical relations, cf. Smit 2014b). Seen from the latter perspective, diaconal work in terms of aid and outreach is an expression of being in communion or a consequence of desiring to be in communion with others – a desire that is, fundamentally, God's. The church acts as an embodiment of the *missio Dei* and as a sign and instrument of salvation and therefore serving the world (cf. Ploeger 2017; see also Smit 2015a). From the point of view of the eucharistic paradigm current in Old Catholic theology, diaconal service can be understood as the extension of the liturgy into the world, as suggested by the dismissal at the end of the liturgy. The other movement also exists: in the liturgy the world is brought before God (intercessions; the offering of the gifts of the earth and products of human hands). Thus, worship and service mutually imply each other (cf. e.g., Smit 2011c, see also Ploeger 2008, 2017), which accords well with the interrelatedness of the three key dynamics of ecclesial existence: *leitourgia*, *diakonia* and *martyria*.

In terms of developing a theological perspective on the world in which the church exists and exercises *diakonia*, notably Segbers has made a range of contributions (cf. Segbers 2002, 2007, 2015) individually, while the aforementioned project on catholicity and globalization (Dutton 2010, cf. 1KZ 2018:3–4) proceeded to try to understand the globalized condition of the world. On the basis of such theological insights, a variety of diaconal initiatives exists, which cannot be surveyed here. What should be noted, however, is that most Old Catholic Churches have diaconal commissions that, on a modest scale, seek to give shape to the theological vision of the diaconate both in a European context and globally (cf. Vercammen 2004).

2.2.6 Church Unity

As indicated above, church unity and involvement in the ecumenical movement has been a core concern of the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of

Utrecht since its inception. In fact, the establishment of this communion of churches itself was a result of ecumenical rapprochement (cf. Smit 2011a), rather than the founding of yet another ‘world Christian communion’ based on a common theological ancestor or confessional tradition (cf. Schoon 2015). From the start, the Old Catholic Churches have looked for ecumenical partners on the basis of the conviction that being a catholic church means being in communion with other catholic churches in which their own theological identity can be recognized. This was, for instance, established by the (Old) Catholic Congresses following the First Vatican Council and in particular on the Bonn Reunion Conferences of 1874 and 1875 (Von Arx 2008, Rein 1993, 1994; see also Smit 2011a: 78–85, 183–199). Shortly afterwards, a programmatic approach was developed that looked for ecumenical rapprochement on the basis of the faith and order of the early church (cf. Von Arx 2008; see also Küry 1982). In this, key elements included the reception of the faith and order of the seven ecumenical councils (notably the canon of Holy Scripture) and the Christological and trinitarian doctrines, an episcopal-synodal ecclesiology and a sacramental life in continuity with that of the early church. In the early decades following the First Vatican Council, this approach led to a principled tri- or quadrilateral dialogue with those partners in with the churches continuing the catholic tradition following the council could recognize the same catholic faith and order: The Church of Utrecht, Anglican Churches and Orthodox Churches (cf. Von Arx 2008; Smit 2011a, 2012). Communion with the first was formalized in 1889, with the second in 1931; with the third it was established theologically in 1987, but it has not become a canonical reality yet. Further dialogue partners were added to these three in the course of time, as an awareness grew of other churches that shared the same catholic tradition.

In time, these starting points were fleshed out more concretely through the dialogues in which the Old Catholic Churches engaged and through their involvement in the multilateral ecumenical movement at international, national and local levels. In 2011, the IBC issued a document in which it laid out its ecumenical principles. The document’s dogmatic point of departure is a combination of a reference to the early church, Old Catholic appropriation of it and the heritage of the ecumenical movement:

The faith of the Ancient Church is the directive groundwork to search and create unity and community with other churches. In the Declaration of Utrecht (1889) it is said that this faith is verbalized by “the ecumenical creeds and by the commonly acknowledged dogmatic decisions of the ecumenical synods of the undivided Church in the first millennium” (No. 1). The Lima-Text (1982) on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry – a

consensus document of the Faith-and-Order-Commission of the World Council of Churches – serves as orientation mark for the UU in so far as the common heritage of the churches is described. In this it helps fulfilling the task of searching and discovering unity and community with other churches. (IBC 2011, section 11)

The ecclesiological vision of the Old Catholic Churches – as it was laid out above already and as it is summed up in the IBC statute and its preamble – formulates the Old Catholic ecumenical vocation, particularly as their bishops are described as having the duty to look for ecclesial unity (cf. section 13 of the document) and the churches are called to reconsider continually whether divisions between churches are still justified (section 9). In line with this, practices such as agreements of Eucharistic hospitality are ruled out. Also, terms such as ‘intercommunion’ or ‘full communion’ are not commonly used in Old Catholic theology: communion is either there or not. The occasional administration of sacraments to members of churches not in communion is considered on a case by case basis and is an exception, not the rule (section 12; cf. also Aldenhoven 1987; compare Ploeger 2017; the notion of *oikonomia* plays a role here). This ecumenical self-positioning of the Old Catholic Churches has led to a series of dialogues in addition to active participation in the multilateral ecumenical movement, particularly in the Faith and Order movement (and the later WCC commission on Faith and Order). This has also led to a principled ecumenical focus when it comes to the development of Old Catholic theology, especially ecclesiology; it is developed in such a way as to be able to give an account of Old Catholicism in ecumenical dialogue, while such dialogues also fuel the development of Old Catholic theology. In the next paragraphs, these individual dialogues will be considered briefly, with particular attention given to the theological issues addressed. As will become clear there as well, the Old Catholic *koinonia* approach is visible in and fruitful for all of these dialogues, and it provides coherence among the dialogues (cf. Von Arx 2015b).

A final prefatory remark concerns interreligious dialogue. This topic has usually been explored in concert with ecumenical partners (e.g., through councils of churches and their working groups, both nationally and internationally); the absence of Old Catholic missions abroad probably also played a role. This principled ecumenical stance has also led to a situation in which there is no distinct Old Catholic approach to the matter. Yet, exceptions to this rule exist, among which the most notable is that the Old Catholic institute in Bern has recently devoted part of its resources to interreligious studies in ecumenical perspective (cf. Berlis and Pratt 2015; Pratt 2015; Pratt, Berlis and Krebs 2016; Pratt and Berlis 2017). Thus, a research is emerging together with increased ecclesial attention to the topic (cf. Schneider 2017).

2.2.6.1 *The Broader International Ecumenical Movement*

Charting the Old Catholic involvement in the ecumenical movement in its entirety would go well beyond the scope of this survey (cf. Rein 1993, 1994; Smit 2011a, 2012a). As already discussed, an ecumenical impulse has been characteristic of the Union of Utrecht, itself an ecumenical enterprise, since the latter decades of the 19th century. This starting point has led to a strong involvement in multilateral and bilateral ecumenism. Such interactions have been of high significance for the development of the Old Catholic theological tradition. With regard to the broader ecumenical movement, the 'Faith and Order' tradition in particular played a role of importance. Other aspects of the ecumenical movement were, even in its heyday, of much less importance theologically, notwithstanding the involvement of Old Catholic delegates. This follows from the Old Catholic focus on ecclesial reunion on a doctrinal and ecclesiological basis, rather than on the basis of common cooperation in social or missionary outreach: two aspects of ecclesial existence in which the Old Catholic churches have not tended to invest much energy, especially in comparison with the energy invested in ecumenical dialogue (cf. Smit 2011a, see also Smit 2016b). In order to articulate succinctly the Old Catholic stance in the Faith and Order part of the ecumenical movement, the official reactions of the IBC to two key reports – the "Lima Report" on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) and its successor from 2013, *The Church – Towards a Common Vision* – will be discussed here (for engagement with earlier statements/ecumenical surveys, see Smit 2011a). In both cases, the reactions were prepared by the Old Catholic episcopate in collaboration with theologians and are, therefore, representative of the Old Catholic theological position. Early involvement in the ecumenical movement has been surveyed by Smit (2011a).

The Old Catholic response to the Lima Report, which originated in the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland, consists mainly of two parts: a general comment (1) and comments on the document's three sections (2–4). The first is very brief and states that "We approve the texts as a whole and declare our conviction that they do not contain anything that would contradict the faith of the church through the ages" (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland 1988: 8). The question as it was posed to the churches – i.e., whether they recognize the faith of the church through the ages in the report – is welcomed and turned into a challenge for those churches that came into existence during the second millennium: how do they understand the historical continuity of the faith? (*ibidem*) The response also indicates that this recognition of the document means that it provides a basis for rapprochement with other churches that recognize their faith in the "Lima Report" in a similar manner, thereby offering the promise of the (re)discovery of unity (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland 1988: 9). With that, the statement enters into a discussion of what the Lima Report has

to say on baptism, eucharist and ordained ministry. In the section on baptism, most emphasis is placed on (a) baptism as initiation into a concrete community of faith and (b) the initiatory unity of baptism–confirmation–eucharist (cf. also Von Arx 2010a). The “indiscriminate administration of baptism” and the “connection of baptism and worship of the church” are both noted as challenges.¹⁵ The comments on the eucharist are more diverse in nature. Emphasis is placed on the following: (a) the unity of the celebration and the interrelationship between word and sacrament; (b) the role and agency of both God and the community of the faithful in the liturgy; (c) terminological clarity, in particular concerning “memorial” (God’s command and human action) and its character of an act, “expiatory sacrifice” (not part of the faith of the early church, it cannot be called “Catholic” in an unqualified sense) and the “real presence” between spiritualistic and materialistic misunderstandings of the notion; (d) the relationship between eucharistic communions (and the distinction between local church and denomination; the latter presupposes the division of the church, the former does not); (e) ethical obligations following from the eucharist (noting that only injustices committed by Christians go against a Eucharistic ethos and that only those who can are obliged to engage in social action and commitment); and (f) the presiding of an ordained person (which is of significance because it characterizes the eucharist as an assembly of God’s people, not a private assembly) (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland 1988: 10–12). In terms of challenges, the document notes that the Old Catholic treatment of the reserved sacrament is questioned by the Lima Report’s injunction that it be primarily reserved for later distribution rather than for other purposes. In the final section on the ordained ministry, probably the most condensed section of the reaction appears, which outlines a detailed agreement with the balanced description of the ordained ministry in the Lima Report (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland 1988: 13–14), which emphasis is also placed on the necessity of having ordained ministers preside over the eucharist. In this section, the Old Catholic comments all have to do with the church as a communion and the place of the ordained ministry therein – with one exception: when the Lima Report speaks of gifts of “guiding and following”, the Old Catholic reaction also wants to include the gift of “refusing the wrong guidance” (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland 1988: 14). Next follows an outline of the Old Catholic understanding of what a “local church” is theologically

15 With historical hindsight, it can be noted that both have indeed since changed, both in the Old Catholic Church of Switzerland, where this statement originated, and in most other Old Catholic churches: baptisms are prepared carefully and take place in the context of the Eucharist as a rule.

speaking: a Eucharistic communion presided over by a bishop, assisted by his priests. The collegial dimension of the ministry of the bishop is therefore of importance; in this context, the Old Catholic reaction asks the question whether the Lima Report operates on the basis of an ecclesiology of the universal or the local church, noting that the latter would fit better with the document's main line of thought (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland 1988: 16). It is also noted that ministers should equip the members of the church for "Christian life and ministry" to avoid "a clerical misunderstanding of the ordained ministry" (ibidem). Dialogue and communication between the various members of the ministry and the church is also stressed a number of times (Old Catholic Church of Switzerland 1988: 17). In sum, the reaction is a good expression of what was noted above: Old Catholic compatibility with the theology as developed in the context of the Faith and Order movement and commission, even if critical comments are offered from the vantage point of a self-consciously catholic position that is deeply committed to a *communio* paradigm in theology and ecclesiology.

The second major document of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches to which the Old Catholic Churches responded was the 2013 text *The Church – Towards a Common Vision* (IBC 2015). The response was prepared in consultation with representatives of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, the Iglesia Filipina Independiente, the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church and the Old Catholic Church of the Mariavites, churches with which the Old Catholic Churches are in communion or in dialogue in order to establish such communion. They all also represent episcopal-synodically organized churches oriented towards the early church without being members of an overarching confessional family and are all members of the World Council of Churches. By preparing the statement in this manner, the IBC also gave expression to the Old Catholic approach of discerning the faith in communion: i.e., in an ecumenical manner. The resulting document expresses that it recognizes the *communio/koinonia* ecclesiology that is the core of its ecclesiology, with the local church appearing as 'a eucharistic *communio* round a bishop, encompassing all the faithful in a given place, discerning the life of faith in communion, characterized by a life of *diakonia*, *leitourgia* and *martyria*, through an interplay of episcopacy and synodality' (IBC 2015: 73). In a similar way, the statement agrees with an understanding of the 'universal' church as a communion of communions inherent to this kind of ecclesiology. The understanding of *episkope* as the core of the apostolic ministry with its personal, collegial and communal dimensions is similarly appreciated, as is the document's emphasis on contextuality and the church's role in God's mission in the church as 'sign and sacrament of God's kingdom' (IBC 2015: 73). The document is also seen as

a possible tool for bringing churches with a similar identity in contact with each other, while it also considers the emphasis on the *missio Dei* a challenge for Old Catholic theology, specifically a challenge ‘to develop a broader sense and understanding of mission (proclaiming the gospel in a multicultural and multi-religious society) and of the church as a moral/ethical communion’ (IBC 2015: 73). If other churches can recognize themselves to the same extent in *The Church*, then this might mean that communion with them could also be established, as it is a sign of shared theological identity (IBC 2015: 74).

In sum, while some challenges – particularly with regard to missiology and ethics – are accepted from the last of the two Faith and order documents, identification with the tradition of Faith and Order seems to have grown even further since the 1982 Lima Report.

2.2.6.2 *National Dialogues and Agreements*

Ecumenical dialogues involving Old Catholic Churches occur on a diocesan and/or national level as well as on regional and congregational levels. Not all of these can be surveyed here, but it should be noted that when it comes to councils of churches on these various levels, Old Catholic Churches and their representatives are commonly active members. Sometimes these contacts are aimed towards common witness, common outreach, common worship, and always common understanding. Among the dialogues that have led to an (explicit) systematic theological kind of output, the Polish National Catholic (Polish National Catholic-Roman Catholic Dialogue 2006; Brzana/Rysz 1990; Nemkovic/Timlin 2003) and Polish Catholic (Kijas 2004), Swiss and German national dialogues with the Roman Catholic Church ought to be mentioned (as reviewed in IRAD 2009, 2017; on the Swiss dialogue, see Koch 2003); a form of intercommunion between the Polish National and Roman Catholic Churches has been in place since 1993. A Dutch trilateral dialogue among Protestant and Catholic Churches (Reformation-Catholic Dialogue Commission 2008) and a bilateral dialogue between Roman and Old Catholic Churches (Katholieke Vereniging voor Oecumene 2004) are also worth mentioning. These dialogues all focus on (a) a common way of dealing with conflicts, past and present and (b) a common way of understanding the church and communion among churches. The German Roman-Old Catholic dialogue also produced guidelines for the transfer of clergy that has subsequently been received throughout the Union of Utrecht (as reviewed in IRAD 2009, 2017).

By far the most prominent and consequential of these dialogues, however, is the dialogue between the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Old Catholic Church of Germany, which led to an agreement of mutual invitation

to participation in the Eucharist in 1985. This was subsequently much debated and was placed in a broader theological context in 2010, even if serious questions remain concerning its consistency and compatibility with a fully-fledged *communio* approach to theology (see Von Arx 2011; Ploeger 2011, cf. also: IOThC 1987). In particular, tensions between a “baptismal” ecclesiology and a “eucharistic” ecclesiology are of significance as is the question of the character of the Christian message as proclamation in relation to the same in terms of integration into a living organism (Ploeger 2011).

2.2.6.3 *International Dialogues of the Union of Utrecht*

Informed by local (i.e., national) developments, the international bilateral dialogues that are surveyed here are arguably the kind of ecumenical endeavour that the Old Catholic Churches have invested in the most heavily. This is quite in keeping with the ecumenical program of Old Catholicism, while the intense exchange with the partners involved has also been both very formative and challenging for Old Catholic theology, given that such conversations also involve being held accountable for one’s position and necessitate an ongoing self-critical reflection of it. Here, first the communion with the Anglican Churches and the ecumenical relationships resulting from it are discussed, followed by the ecumenical relations with the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, the Church of Sweden and the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, finishing with a brief word on the current conversations with the Armenian Church.

2.2.6.3.1 Anglican Churches

On the basis of the 1931 Bonn Agreement, the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht are in communion with the churches of the Anglican Communion (on history and reception, see Rein 1993; Schuler 1997; Neuhoff 2010; Smit 2011a, 2012). This is the outcome of a complicated process of dialogue that began during the aftermath of the First Vatican Council (survey: Eßer 2016, 97–106, details: Rein 1993). The Bonn agreement, famous for its brevity and for being a very early agreement of communion in the ecumenical movement, has since been the basis for ongoing contacts and exchange between the churches of the two communions, in particular with the Anglican Churches in the United Kingdom and the Episcopal Church in the USA. It merits quotation in full (Meyer and Vischer 1984: 37):

1. Each Communion recognizes the catholicity and independence of the other and maintains its own.
2. Each Communion agrees to admit members of the other Communion to participate in the Sacraments.

3. Intercommunion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental devotion or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all essentials of the Christian Faith.

Since the establishment of the Bonn Agreement and especially following the Second World War, an ongoing theological exchange has been in place between the two church communions involved. Such exchange has been furthered by a number of means, first and foremost the participation in each other's episcopal consecrations. Further exchange has involved a series of joint theological conferences (formally from 1957–1998, cf. Rein 1993; see also Smit 2011a) – since 1998, the Anglican-Old Catholic International Coordinating Council (AOCICC) in combination with a joint theological conference every five years (cf. e.g., Von Arx, Avis and Ploeger 2006; Berlis and Avis 2012)¹⁶ – participation in major events in each other's church life; the presence of Anglican observers at IBC meetings; the presence of Old Catholic observers at the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Consultative Council; incidental joint meetings of the Anglican (Episcopal, Church of England, Lusitanian and Spanish Reformed Episcopal) bishops in Europe; as well as the mutual appointment of bishops as auxiliary bishops in European jurisdictions. When it comes to the themes and challenges that such exchange has involved, the following stand out.

First, the conversations leading up to the Bonn Agreement were much concerned with questions of mutual understanding, with Anglicanism presenting itself as a catholic tradition and in a manner recognizable by the Old Catholic Churches. This pertained in particular to a joint view of apostolicity (ordained ministry, apostolic succession), the sacraments and the interrelationship between Scripture and tradition (cf. Rein 1993; Neuhoﬀ 2010; Smit 2011a: 222–224).

Second, a number of topics have played a role in joint theological conferences and the AOCICC. The first of these has to do with deepening the joint understanding of the church and its faith and order: in other words, unpacking and exploring further what the Bonn Agreement had stated, e.g., concerning the Eucharist (1957), the doctrine of the church (1960), the early church (1961), the notions of “intercommunion” and “full communion” and the consequences of full ecclesial communion (1973), the intention and contents of the Bonn Agreement (1974). The second is concerned with ecumenism. Conferences sought to explore jointly their relations with the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Methodist Churches, with questions about authority in the church and the question of (non-)transivity of ecumenical relations (1966, 1972, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1987 [focus on Episcopal-Polish National Catholic relations in North

16 Papers of a 2015 joint conference were not published as proceedings.

America], 1990). A third topic is the theology of ordination, both as an ecclesiological and an ecumenical question, specifically in relation to the ordination of women (1977, 1987; cf. for a survey Rein 1993:361–388; dates refer to the years in which meetings took place). This tradition was continued by the three theological conferences since the establishment of the AOCICC, with a first conference focusing on ecclesiology in the light of *communio* ecclesiology (2005), a second focused on ecclesiology and mission (2012) and a third concentrated on the authority of churches in a pluralist Europe (Von Arx, Avis and Ploeger 2006; Berlis and Avis 2012; Berlis 2016). These topics also indicate a shift in focus, from exploring ecclesiological and ecumenical questions in order to deepen a relationship to pursuing them in the interest of a joint missionary presence in Europe. From 1993–1998 annual seminars exploring similar topics for young theologians also took place (cf. Schuler 1999). In 2017 AOCICC organized a youth pilgrimage to the shrine of St Willibrord in Echternach (Luxemburg), with participants from all over Europe; in 2019, Dutch Old Catholic youth made a pilgrimage to Canterbury.

Third, when considering the work of the AOCICC, it appears that it concerned itself with a similar set of issues: deepening the existing communion, coordinating ecumenical relations and exchanging information about them, and seeking a joint vision and shape for a common missionary presence in Europe, thereby doing justice both to the distinct character of the Anglican and Old Catholic Churches involved while also seeking to overcome the anomaly of overlapping jurisdictions that seem to deny the communion that exists between the churches. In 2011, the commission published its key document to date, “Belonging together in Europe: A joint statement on aspects of ecclesiology and mission” (AOCICC 2011; AOCICC 2017). The document outlines the shape of the relationship as one of two churches that are part of the Western catholic tradition and now share a common context and common challenges, along with sharing a joint ecclesiological vision that is focused on a eucharistic ecclesiology of the local church, structured by the ministry of *episkope*, and always oriented towards communion with other churches; emphasis is placed on the church’s apostolic, sacramental and eschatological character (par. 16–17). Mission is integral to this ecclesiological vision: “ecclesiology is intrinsic to missiology, and vice versa – *missio Dei, missio ecclesiae*” (par. 32). The document’s ecclesiological and missiological vision is worth quoting at length here:

This holistic understanding of mission and ecclesiology [sc. as just quoted] can be illustrated from the threefold formula *martyria, leitourgia* and *diakonia*. This goes back to the ideal-typical description of the Christian community in Jerusalem in Acts 2.42–47. *Martyria* expresses the Church’s

witness, in and for the world, to God's salvation through his Son Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit. The Church fulfils this calling in preaching the Gospel and in proclaiming the need for believers to follow Jesus by living out his message of reconciliation and redemption. *Leitourgia* refers to the coming together of the faithful as a congregation to give praise and glory to God through hearing the Holy Scriptures, through praying to God, and through celebrating the Eucharist. *Diakonia* is the service of the Church to the needy, following Christ's calling to be servant of all. This threefold formula must include all that is conventionally understood as mission: the proclamation of the Gospel occurs not only in specific acts of witness (*martyria*), but also in the worshipping life of the congregation as praise is offered back to God (*leiturgia*), and in the service the Church offers to the world (*diakonia*) in fulfillment of its calling to exemplify the love of Christ. (par. 33)

Fourth, beyond this, Anglican spirituality of a particularly Anglo-Catholic variety – as well as individual Anglican theologians such as Michael Ramsey and Rowan Williams, or Catherine Pickstock and Sarah Coakley – has had and continues to have an impact on Old Catholic theologizing as well (cf., Ploeger 2008; see also publications such as Williams 2013).

Fifth and finally, on the local level, good contacts have been maintained in places where both Anglican chaplaincies and Old Catholic parishes exist. The most poignant expressions are the shared use of churches (e.g., in Haarlem, Groningen and Arnhem in the Netherlands); the exchange of clergy, sometimes on a permanent basis (e.g., an Anglican priest serving the Old Catholic parish in Enkhuizen, NL, or one priest serving both Anglicans and Old Catholics in Lausanne, CH); and the incorporation of the Prague Anglican chaplaincy into the Old Catholic diocese with a form of joint episcopal oversight. Incidental joint outreach initiatives, such as Schiphol Airport ministry, also exist, while on an international level, diaconal and missionary cooperation has been ongoing with Anglican churches worldwide, a matter that has been little documented so far. Such efforts at collaboration have been much supported through international networks, especially the one created through the so-called Willibrord Societies in various countries since 1908.

2.2.6.3.2 The Iglesia Española Reformada Episcopal, the Igreja Lusitana Católica Apostólica Evangélica and the Iglesia Filipina Independiente
As a result of the relationship with the Churches of the Anglican Communion, the Old Catholic Churches also entered into communion with a trio of affiliated churches in 1965: the *Igreja Lusitana Católica Apostólica Evangélica*

in Portugal (1880), the *Iglesia Española Reformada Episcopal* and the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* or IFI (on the first two churches, see Igreja Lusitana Católica Apostólica Evangélica 2017; on the latter, see Smit 2011a and De Boer and Smit 2012). The ‘Bonn Agreement’ (Anglican-Old Catholic) was reused in this context.

The relationship with the two Iberian churches has been of relatively little consequence to the Old Catholic Churches, especially after they were fully integrated into the Anglican Communion in 1980. From the early 80s onwards, however, the impact of the relationship with the IFI has been growing, given that the ecclesiological and theological significance of having a poor and socially very active partner in the ‘global south’ began to be more appreciated (Smit 2011a, cf. Segbers 1988). In terms of theological impact and challenges, the IFI has been and continues to be of importance for considering issues on the level of political and public theology, such as understanding, analysing and coming to terms with a globalized world characterized by structural injustice and an unfair distribution of resources (cf. Berlis and Smit 2015). A study project on the subject produced its politically accentuated version of a joined ‘eucharistic vision’ in 2008 (Dutton 2010) and was followed in 2016 by a conference in cooperation with the World Council of Churches (cf. IKZ 107 [2017]). In the meantime, the Old Catholic Churches have paid significant attention to the remembrance of IFI bishop Alberto Ramento, who was murdered in 2006, likely due to his efforts on behalf of the marginalized (cf. Smit and Segbers 2011).

The relationship has been shaped by a structural exchange of theologians for lecturing and research duties, incidental visits of (youth) members of both churches, joint development and outreach projects, and the participation of representatives in each other’s major celebrations. With the IFI, the Archbishop of Utrecht has also served as “third party” in the peace talks between the Philippine government and the National Democratic Front from 2001 onwards.

2.2.6.3.3 Orthodoxy

The dialogue between the Orthodox Churches and the Old Catholic Churches dates back to the earliest phases of catholic reorientation following the First Vatican Council (for this and the following, see Von Arx 1989a). Now that Rome was seen to represent a deviation from the catholic tradition, Orthodox and Anglican Churches could begin to be seen as more authentic representations of that tradition *qua* faith and order of the early church. This also applied to the Church of Utrecht. Even prior to the establishment of communion between the latter and the post-Vatican I Old Catholic Churches, a tri- or even quadrilateral ecumenical dialogue emerged, as indicated above already, gaining its first

expression at the 1871 Munich Conference of (Old) Catholics (cf. Von Arx 2008; an extensive history can be found in Rein 1993, 1994). A constant matter of attention at the Old Catholics' Congresses of the late 19th century, this search for union was forcefully expressed at the two Bonn Reunion Conferences of 1874 and 1875 (cf. Reusch 1874–1875/2002; Oeyen 1971; Rein 1994). Here, a common basis was found to work towards unity among Orthodox, Anglicans and Old Catholics, including an agreed understanding of, for example, Scripture, tradition and the manner in which the *filioque* ought to be understood and treated given its illegitimate insertion into the creed.

Until the establishment of the Union of Utrecht in 1889, the period 1871–1888 can be considered as a first and foundational period. Subsequently, a more formal dialogue took place – by correspondence – between theological commissions founded in St. Petersburg and Rotterdam, instituted by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and the IBC. The commissions exchanged memoranda with questions and answers about the theological identity of both churches, leading to a statement by the St. Petersburg commission (1912), with the approval of the Holy Synod, that all orthodox questions had been answered satisfactorily (cf. Küry 1968). This dialogue lasted until 1917, when the political changes in Russia made further dialogue impossible.

Following a shift in initiative from Russia to Constantinople, a subsequent, third phase of the dialogue lasted from 1920–1960 and had at its core a meeting in 1931 in Bonn, three months after the Anglican-Old Catholic meeting in the same city that had led to the Bonn agreement. The meeting itself was promising, as no dogmatic obstacles could be identified. However, the Orthodox reception turned out to be disappointing: the Anglican-Old Catholic communion was suddenly and unexpectedly seen as an obstacle to Orthodox-Old Catholic communion (cf. Von Arx 1989a).

From 1960 onwards, the dialogue received new impetus and a fourth phase commenced, lasting from 1961–1975. Preparatory diplomacy led to a statement of the pan-orthodox conference that underlined the commitment and self-obligation of the orthodox churches to dialogue with the Old Catholics. As a result, preparations for a further dialogue began, consisting, among other things, of a more formal commitment of the Old Catholic Churches to eliminate the *filioque* from the creed and the delivery of a formal statement of the faith (“homologia”) to the Ecumenical Patriarch on 21 June 1970.

The envisioned “dialogue of truth” began in 1975 and lasted until 1987; it constitutes the fifth phase of Orthodox-Old Catholic ecumenical relations. During it, the joined commission, consisting of members appointed by all (autocephalous) Orthodox (14) and Old Catholic Churches (8), worked its way through the entirety of the Christian faith, producing something of a shared and agreed

survey of dogmatic theology, phrased in the language of the early church and the church fathers on whose thinking the dialogue had agreed to base itself (published as *Orthodox-Old Catholic Dialogue* 1989).¹⁷ Upon its completion, the commission concluded that, according to its view, agreement in the faith existed, which could be the basis for ecclesial communion.

Following on this fifth phase of the, now completed, dialogue, a sixth phase can be discerned in which the achieved theological results are received ecclesially. This reception has been slower than was hoped for, which has to do both with developments in the Orthodox Churches – who had to come to terms with a new political and ecclesial reality following the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Iron Curtain around 1990 – and with developments in Old Catholic Churches such as the ordination of women. As far as the latter is concerned (and as was discussed above), care had been taken by the Old Catholic Churches to consult at length about this theologically, as part of the reception process of the dialogue; both Orthodox and Old Catholic theologians saw no theological objections to proceeding with these ordinations in a joint theological consultation in 1996 (cf. above, 2.1.1.1). Since 2004, a joined working party has been tasked by the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Archbishop of Utrecht, as president of the IBC, with furthering theological conversations and encounter between the members of Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches. A significant expression of the continuing close ties was the official visit of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew I, to the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands in 2014 (see Hasselaar and Smit 2015) and the participation of the Archbishop of Utrecht as an observer in the Pan-Orthodox Council of 2016.

Despite the sometimes frustrating delay of the canonical reception of the results of this dialogue in the form of the establishment of communion among the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches, this dialogue has had a profound and beneficial influence on Old Catholic theology, enabling it to further develop its *koinonia* theology.

17 In English translation, the topics discussed by the dialogue were: (1) The doctrine of God: divine revelation and its transmission, the canon of holy scripture, the Holy Trinity; (2) Christology: the incarnation of the Word of God, the hypostatic union, the mother of God; (3) Ecclesiology: the nature and marks of the church, the unity of the church and the local churches, the boundaries of the church, the authority of the church and in the church, the indefectibility of the church, the synods (councils) of the church, the necessity of apostolic succession, the head of the church; (4) Soteriology: the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, the operation of the Holy Spirit in the church and the appropriation of salvation; (5) Sacramental doctrine: the sacraments of the church, baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, the anointing of the sick, ordination, marriage; (6) Eschatology: the church and the end of time, life after death, the resurrection of the dead and the renewal of the earth; (7) Ecclesial communion: conditions and consequences.

2.2.6.3.4 Roman Catholic Church

For Old Catholics, the relationship with the Roman Catholic Church and its theology is in some ways the most challenging and in some other ways no challenge at all, given that this church is both the traditional “adversary” of Old Catholicism and a very close “family member”. Rapprochement between the two churches began in earnest around and during the Second Vatican Council and led to a number of dialogues on a national level. From 2003 onwards it also led to a dialogue on an international level (cf. Visser 2010, there also on a 1968 attempt to coordinate relations between the churches internationally).

The aim of the dialogue is the rediscovery of ecclesial communion. Given the significant dogmatic differences (Marian dogmas, papal dogmas of Vatican I) and differences in ecclesial practice (ordination of women to the apostolic ministry, clerical celibacy) – as the differences would be classified from and Old Catholic perspective – this goal may seem somewhat surprising. However, the recognition that both churches are heirs to the tradition of the catholic church of the West, the fact that both have undergone a compatible, ecumenically oriented process of repriminisation (due to, *inter alia*, the *nouvelle théologie*, the liturgical movement and the ecumenical movement; the Second Vatican Council, cf. Smit 2013b, Hensmann-Eßler 2017), and the observation that both can formulate their theology and ecclesiology in a mutually recognizable form of a *communio* theology, has laid a firm basis for discussing the divisive issues in the light of an overarching and fundamental theological consensus (the method of ‘differentiated consensus’, cf. IRAD 2009, par. 6.1). A first report was published in 2009 (IRAD 2009), in which precisely this was outlined (idem, par. 2–5). The various contested issues could be listed convincingly as “Remaining open questions” (idem, par. 6).

These “open questions” also express the real theological challenges for both churches. For Old Catholic theology, this involves the papal and Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950 in particular, whereas the question of being in communion with a church that has a different perspective concerning gender roles and a range of (other) ethical and theological questions is also a serious issue.

The ecclesiological questions concerning papal primacy – and with that, the place of the local church – are discussed in such a way that the theological difference is acknowledged (idem, par. 13–15, 27–33) and summed up as follows:

They involve on the one hand the relationship between the rightful autonomy of a local church or a communion of local churches in the exercise of their mission ... and in the election of their bishops, and on the

other hand the primacy of the pope, which in this regard according to Roman Catholic understanding encompasses "the full, supreme and universal authority over the Church" (LG 22). (idem, par. 44)

Subsequently, an interpretation of the papal dogmas of 1870 is proposed that could be acceptable to Old Catholics as well (cf. Von Arx 2010b), under the following condition: "If by 'Petrine office' one means a ministry, exercised in a universal perspective by the pope, in service of the unity, mission and synodality of the local churches led and represented by their bishops" (idem, par. 47). This formulation positions the papal, "universal" primacy within and at the service of the global communion of local churches, a point that is repeated and refined in IRAD 2016 (parr. 1–23). In a similar manner, the latter document also positions the exercise of the ministry of the bishop of Rome in terms of "verbindliches Lehren und Unfehlbarkeit" ("binding teaching and infallibility") and the reception of such teaching in the communion of communions of churches and thus seeks to understand ("receive") it in such a manner that it can be appreciated positively by both church communions (IRAD 2016, parr. 24–40). In doing so, the dialogue seeks to respond to John Paul II's call in *Ut unum sint* (1995) to look for ecumenically viable ways to understand the ministry of the bishop of Rome.

Concerning the Marian dogmas, a similar path is followed, and, focusing on the intended content of the dogmas, formulations concerning its content are offered from an Old Catholic perspective. The dogma of 1950 is seen as indicating

die feste Hoffnung und Glaubensgewissheit ..., dass das Ziel des Weges Marias identisch ist mit dem Ziel der vom Heiligen Geist in die Gemeinschaft mit Jesus Christus geführten Gläubigen aller Zeiten, d.h., der Kirche Gottes: die Vollendung in der eschatologischen Herrlichkeit Gottes, wie sie von der Hl. Schrift bezeugt wird ... (IRAD 2016, 54)

Mary's resulting state of being is referred to as "im Geheimnis der eschatologischen Vollendung verborgen" (IRAD 2016, par. 54). On the (implied) assumption that this does justice to the dogma of 1950, it is proposed that this position, which also agrees with the view of the Orthodox-Old Catholic dialogue, would not have to fall under the anathema of 1950 that rejected heretical teaching; with that the contents of this dogma would also become acceptable to Old Catholics (IRAD 2016, par. 55). The core content of the dogma of 1854 is, from an Old Catholic perspective, stated as the intention

die Jungfrau und Gottesmutter Maria als die von Gottes Gnade ganz Geheiligte und dadurch zum Ja gegenüber der Verkündigung des Engels befähigte künftige Mutter des Erlösers Jesus Christus als Erste der heiligen und Panagia (Allheilige) zu ehren. (IRAD 2016, 56)

The doctrine of a special Marian privilege is, at the same time, said to be without sufficient foundation to constitute a dogma to be believed by all. It is also noted that the dogma of 1854 represents the tradition of but one theological school and cannot therefore not be imposed on the entire *Una Sancta*, especially given the specific historical circumstances of the dogmatic definition itself. If this can be seen as an adequate representation of the dogma of 1854, then Old Catholics might no longer fall under the anathema of that year and also begin to reconsider their own rejection of the dogmatic definitions of 1870. This is the case, according to these sections of IRAD 2016, even if there are a number of remaining questions, such as the question of the one-sided and procedurally problematic proclamation of these dogmas in the Roman communion (but with an eye to the entirety of Christianity), questions of reception and dogma, and questions about the place of these dogmas in the hierarchy of truths (on which see from an Old Catholic perspective, Suter 2011).

Two further issues discussed at length in IRAD 2016 are the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry in most Old Catholic Churches and questions of sacramental communion and ecclesial communion (parr. 65–80 and 81–94 respectively). In both cases only clarifications are given that restate what has been said already earlier in this introduction on these subjects and the theological principles behind them. Throughout both documents, it is repeatedly stressed that for Old Catholics this dialogue also comes with a challenge that is both psychological and has to do with self-positioning: what does it mean for Old Catholic theology when the Roman Catholic Church can no longer fulfil the role of foe or the negative ‘other’ against which its own identity is presented in a favourable light? Both the dogmatic questions and those pertaining to the domain of identity politics and the emotional will, doubtless, be addressed in the reception of the latest edition of the IRAD document.

2.2.6.3.5 Church of Sweden

In this genealogy of ecumenical relationships, the recently completed dialogue between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Church of Sweden should also be mentioned. In a way, it completes an ecumenical quadrant, given that this church has been in communion with the IFI (since 1999) and the Anglican Churches in the UK and Ireland (Porvoo Agreement 1992, cf. for a critical Old Catholic evaluation Parmentier 1999, 2000), while these

two other churches are also both in communion with each other and with the Churches of the Union of Utrecht.

The dialogue lasted from 2005–2013 and culminated in the report *Utrecht and Uppsala on the Way to Communion* and the subsequent agreement signed in November 2016 in Uppsala (cf. Berlis 2018a), which was later celebrated in Utrecht in January 2018. The basis for the communion established is a clear expression of the Old Catholic approach to ecumenism as it is laid out above. The two churches engage in a joint search for a common formulation of the faith and order of their churches in which both can recognize the faith and order of the early church while remaining faithful to their own ecclesial traditions. The starting point is again a *communio* theology and ecclesiology (cf. par. 4.6 and 5). Concerning this ecclesiology, the two churches are in agreement, which also applies to the (episcopal) ministry in apostolic succession (par. 5.4, see above in the discussion on apostolicity) and a compatible way of receiving the faith of the early church (par. 6.1, although it is also recommended for further consideration). The dialogue now awaits its reception in lived communion among the churches – an early example of this is common attention to the life and work of the Swedish mystic and politician Hammarskjöld (cf. Smit 2017b).

This dialogue can be distinguished from national dialogues involving protestant (Reformed and Lutheran) churches, which, in the case of the German Old Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church of Germany, led to an agreement of intercommunion. In the case of the ‘Utrecht and Uppsala’ dialogue, the Church of Sweden neither presented itself nor was treated or approached as a ‘Lutheran’ church, but rather was seen as another national church whose catholicity might be and now has been recognized by the Old Catholic Churches as well. Comparisons between the two dialogues are therefore largely mistaken.

2.2.6.3.6 Mar Thoma Syrian Church

The youngest formal Old Catholic ecumenical dialogue is the one with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church, one of the eight distinct churches of the Thomas Christians in Malabar, India (see Daniel 2014). The dialogue emerged out of contacts among independent episcopal-synodically structured churches with an orientation towards the early church that are not part of one of a denominational family of churches. Initial encounters, exploratory visits and meetings as well as the fact that this Mar Thoma Church is in communion with the Churches of the Anglican Communion gave rise to the idea that a dialogue between the two churches might be fruitful (cf. Daniel 2014; Smit 2015d). A series of three meetings of a dialogue commission confirmed this impression, and their joint statements (the Santhigiri Statement [2011], the Hippolytus Statement [2012] and the Munnar Statement [2014]) and the ‘Concluding

Common Statement' [2019] are currently awaiting reception by the churches involved (Mar Thoma-Old Catholic Dialogue 2012, 2013, 2015, 2019).

The basis for the agreement in faith and order was a mutually recognizable identification with the faith and order, particularly as it is expressed in terms of a *communio* theology and the heritage of the Lima Report, which proved to be an important instrument for expressing the common faith. This was confirmed by the large degree of recognition that the churches found together in *The Church – Towards a Common Vision* (cf. above, 2.2.6.1).

The largest challenge in this particular dialogue was how to find a common way of expressing the faith in Christ of the early Church, given that the Mar Thoma Syrian Church is non-Chalcedonian (albeit not *anti*-Chalcedonian [!]). Building on the newer scholarly and ecumenical insight into the Christological debates of the fifth century, the dialogue could say that

Thus, the Mar Thoma Church and the Old Catholic Churches have both received the faith of the Early Church, confessing the mystery of the one Lord Jesus Christ as being both fully divine and fully human. The Lord Jesus Christ is one, just as the work of redemption is one. At the same time, his divinity does not diminish his humanity, nor does his humanity exist at the expense of his divinity. Therefore, both churches reject one-sided Christologies that emphasize one of these two aspects of Christ to the detriment of the other, both in history and in ongoing contemporary theological reflection. (Mar Thoma-Old Catholic Dialogue, 2019: 13)

Such acknowledgment that both churches receive the faith of the early church, albeit without using the same language and references to councils to express it, is present in a similar manner in the recent Old Catholic dialogue with the Church of Sweden, as well as in the older Bonn Agreement. Other apparent differences – such as those pertaining to the role of Scripture and tradition, commemoration of the faithful departed, the use of images and icons, etc. – could be resolved through the exchange of outlines of the faith of both churches in such a manner that confessional prejudices and assumptions vis-à-vis the identity of the other could be overcome. Their restatement here would add little to the above discussion of Old Catholic theology. An issue such as the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry also proved to be a matter of acceptable difference in the broader context of a “unity in diversity”, rather than an obstacle for recognizing one's own theological identity in that of the other. Challenges of different practices in the field of ethics may remain but have been submitted to the ongoing reception both of the theological results of dialogue and of the churches of one another.

2.2.6.3.7 The Armenian Apostolic Church

In 2017, the IBC decided to initiate conversations with the Armenian Apostolic Church (Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia), with which informal contacts have been in place since the late 19th century. A first round of talks took place in February 2018, focusing on contemporary challenges to the church, such as the ordination of women to the apostolic ministry in both churches (Armenian Church: to the diaconate; Old Catholic Churches: all three orders) and the role of women in society, changing patterns of relationships (e.g., same-sex relationships), and enhancing knowledge of each other's traditions and histories (e.g., Armenian Genocide of 1915 and its aftermath).

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