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*adheres to orthodox faith*

# THABLITHA

Faith and Tradition Series

THABLITHA  
Faith and Tradition Series  
(English)

August 15, 2015

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## Preface

*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit ✠*

**O**ur faith and tradition are the two major factors that define our identity in Christian living. Faith stands for what we believe as a church and tradition denotes how we live according to our faith.

As a church, the faith of Believers Eastern Church is deeply rooted in the Holy Bible, which is the foundation of our life and spirituality. Our tradition is the practices of what the apostles, the composers of the New Testament showed and later was perfected by the vision of the early church fathers.

My hope is that the 'Faith and Tradition' series will bring renewal and life to our Christian life and our church, to know Jesus, who gave His life and loved us, more intimately.

✠The blessings of the Triune God be with  
you all forever.

✠Dr. K. P. Yohannan  
Metropolitan

Synod Secretariat  
August 15, 2015



## Introduction

*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit ✠*

The use of the Thablitha for the Holy Communion has a long and rich tradition in the church. Although we live in the 21st century, we are part of the church that began 2000 years ago. The symbols and the godly traditions of our holy faith help us to retain the identity that is based in the One holy church.

The Thablitha speaks of the celebration of the Eucharist, which is symbolic of the Cross of Christ and His eternal sacrifice for our redemption.

May the blessings of the Holy Trinity be with you always. Amen. ✠



# THABLITHA

## What is the Thablitha?

The celebration of Holy Communion has been the most sacred sacrament in Christian worship since the birth of Christianity. As the church grew rapidly in the early centuries, the church fathers sought a way to ensure that the Holy Communion was accessible to all believers, and yet celebrated with the reverence it deserves. What we know from our church's records through the ages tells us that, the Thablitha became an essential tool to unite the church in upholding the sanctity of the Eucharist – the Holy Communion.

The Thablitha is a rectangular wooden tablet, measuring 15" X 8" X 1/2". It is placed on the altar to hold the Paten or Pilasa (plate for Bread) and Chalice or Kasa (cup for Wine) for the Holy Communion. In the early centuries of the

church, especially where no church building or altar existed, Holy Communion was celebrated by keeping the holy elements on a Thablitha, which was set on a table or platform. By its very nature, the Thablitha is a “portable altar” used for the celebration of the Holy Communion. The Thablitha is placed on a specially made Virikoot.

### **The Virikoot**

The Virikoot is a multi-colored (often three colors – red, white/yellow and green) cloth, stitched for the sacred purpose of the church. This special cloth is spread on the altar during Holy Communion.

The red of the Virikoot reminds us of Jesus’ sacrifice that brought our redemption; the white signifies its work of sanctification; the yellow signifies the glory of God and the green states that this sacrifice was not only for us, but for the entire world. The symbols of Kasa and Pilasa are embroidered on it; the symbol of grapes speaks of the wine which represents the blood of Christ, and the grains speak of the bread which represents the body of Christ.

## **How is the Thablitha used during Holy Communion?**

The Thablitha is kept in a specially made pouch at the center of the Virikoot, with the Kasa and Pilasa (holding the Wine and Bread) placed on the Thablitha, during the Holy Communion. The Virikoot is spread on the altar. If the congregation is worshipping in a place with no consecrated altar, a table with a white cloth spread on it can be used instead. In that case, the Virikoot is spread over the table, and the Thablitha, with the Kasa and Pilasa, is placed on it with reverence.

## **The Biblical Background**

Sacrifice (offering) is a central theme of both the Old and New Testaments. During Old Testament times, animals were sacrificed as part of individual and collective worship. These sacrifices were commonly offered on altars.

The Book of Hebrews reveals how Jesus Christ, the High Priest of the New Testament covenant, offered His own body as sacrifice on the wooden cross at Calvary. Therefore, a wooden Thablitha, on which the Holy Body

and the Blood (kept in Pilasa and Kasa) are placed, is used for the Eucharist. This keeps the sacrifice of Christ on the wooden cross at Calvary at the forefront of our minds and hearts. The act of sprinkling the blood of the Passover Lamb on the wooden doorposts by Israelites foreshadows the redemptive sacrifice of Christ Himself.

## **The Spiritual Meaning**

Theologically and historically, the Thablitha embodies Jesus Christ's sacrifice. The celebration of Holy Communion enables us to become partakers of the eternal sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The forgiveness of and deliverance from sin, the promise of eternal life, and all forms of divine endowments are declared and provided for in the participation and experience of the Holy Communion. The Pilasa (Paten) indicates the body, and the Kasa (Chalice) the blood, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As Christ gave His body and blood for our sins on a wooden Cross, the Paten and Chalice are placed on the wooden Thablitha. Biblical traditions point to the fact that this was the

practice of the church from its conception, in obedience to the command of the Lord, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Jesus gave up Himself on the cross of Calvary as the perfect sacrifice for the redemption of humankind from their sins. Placing the Bread and Wine on this wooden tablet reminds believers of the body and the blood of Jesus Christ.

The spiritual unity of all parishes and the faithful, all over the world, is connected and unified as 'one' through the symbols we use in our worship. The Thablitha is one of the most important and visible of these symbols, reminding us that as we worship the Lord, we come together from various walks of life in society. It becomes a tangible expression and experience of our unity as members of the one holy church.

## **The Consecration of Thablitha**

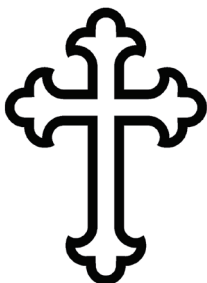
Believers Eastern Church's first Thablithas were consecrated by our supreme authority and spiritual father, The Most Rev. Dr. K. P. Yohannan, Metropolitan. Each Thablitha has to be sanctified by anointing it with Holy Muron on one side (the side that faces up and is visible when being used), using the sign of the Cross three times, in the name of the Holy Trinity -- the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Both sides of the Thablitha have the Cross and the names of the Holy Trinity inscribed on them. In addition to these, the signature of the Metropolitan is also inscribed on the Thablitha at the time of its consecration. The Thablitha must be consecrated before being used for Holy Communion; and the Kasa and Pilasa must always be placed on the consecrated side of the Thablitha.

The diagrams on page number 17 and 18 explain the writings and symbols on the Thablitha. It has the signature of the Metropolitan on one side and the imprints of the designated priest or church where it is to be used. English writings are also translated into the Syriac language, which is derived from the Aramaic language that was spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ during His public life and ministry.



## The Two Sides of the Thablitha

(Consecrated Side – the Top)



**GLORY BE TO ✘ THE FATHER ✘ THE SON ✘ THE HOLY SPIRIT**

*The Holy Spirit consecrate this tableetha  
through the hands of*

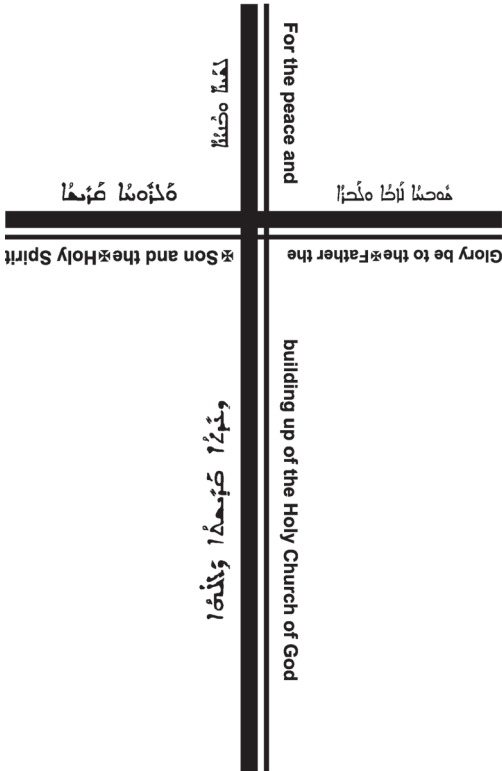
**The Most Rev. Dr. K.P. Yohannan  
Metropolitan of Believers Eastern Church**

*For .....*

*on ..... in the year of our Lord*



(The Bottom)



In the year of our Lord ..... for .....

..... this Tableetha has been  
consecrated by the Holy Spirit.

The Most Rev. Dr. K.P. Yohannan, Metropolitan

## **Thablitha and the Holy Church**

The Thablitha is consecrated by our spiritual father, the Metropolitan, as an embodiment of the unity of all our parishes as part of the Believers Eastern Church. It expresses the relationship within the church between the bishops, priests and believers. Thus, it proclaims the perpetual divine fellowship and unity between and amongst them.

Our church, which is spread across different parts of the world, experiences oneness through the bishops and priests appointed by the Metropolitan, although they are diverse in languages, cultures and peoples. The Holy Communion is a tangible event that proclaims this spiritual unity in the midst of all diversities. The consecration of the Thablitha by our spiritual father with the divine authority thus enriches that spiritual unity, partnership and fellowship of the members of our church as we celebrate the Holy Communion.

Thablitha also functions as a visible symbol during Holy Communion that proclaims the unity between the churches and believers from different walks of life. It symbolizes the unity of believers of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

## **Practical Instructions**

1. The Thablitha is a sacred component in the celebration of the Holy Communion. Therefore, the Thablitha should not be used for any other purposes.
2. As the Thablitha is consecrated by prayer and by anointing Holy Muron, it must be kept with much sanctity and great care. When not in use, it should be wrapped in the Virikoot and stored safely as instructed.
3. All local parishes should have a Thablitha.
4. If there is no consecrated church building, the Thablitha should be kept within the Virikoot in a safe place in the house of the priest or deacon. The priest or deacon should take personal responsibility for its safe keeping, especially while traveling with it.
5. During a worship service that does not celebrate the Holy Communion, the Thablitha should be kept at its proper place on the altar of the church within the Virikoot.
6. For those congregations without an altar or a consecrated church building, a table, spread with white tablecloth, can be used instead. The Virikoot is spread on the table, and the Thablitha is placed on the Virikoot, in the centre.

7. When carrying the Thablitha to other locations for the Holy Communion, the Thablitha, Virikoot, Kablana and Sosappa should always be kept in the official bag provided by the Believers Eastern Church for this purpose. The Virikoot should be folded properly and kept neatly within the bag.
8. The use of the Thablitha enables priests to officiate the Holy Communion services in keeping with the faith and traditions passed on from time immemorial.
9. When not in use, the Thablitha, Virikoot and other sanctified holy elements must not be mixed with other clothes or materials. Therefore, ONLY use the Thablitha bag for the safe-keeping of the Thablitha, Virikoot, Kablana and Sosappa. Do not put personal clothes, pens, papers or other materials in the bag. This is holy unto the Lord. The bag is ONLY for carrying those things that are Holy unto the Lord. Let us fear God by honouring what is holy.
10. The Thablitha must be placed only within a Virikoot issued by the Believers Eastern Church.
11. The Virikoot must always be kept clean.

## GLOSSARY

- Thablitha - (Syriac) Consecrated portable Altar made of wood, used for during the Holy Communion.
- Kasa - (Syriac) Chalice for the wine.
- Pilasa - (Syriac) Paten for the bread.
- Virikoot - (Malayalam) Length of cloth upon which the Thablitha is placed.
- Muron - (Greek) Consecrated Holy Chrism for dedication and consecration services.
- Thronos - (Greek) Altar.
- Kablana - (Syriac) Two pieces of holy decorated cloth which covers the Chalice and Paten.
- Sosappa - (Syriac) A piece of holy white cloth which covers Chalice and Paten together. It resembles the cloth which covered the body of Christ. It usually has a symbol of the cross or a dove or both in the middle.



