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TOWARD A DEFINITION OF EPISCOPAL MINISTRY : LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION WORK ON EPISKOPÉ, 1983–2007

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Abstract

This article examines how the episcopal ministry and related concepts such as 'episkopé', 'installation' and 'consecration' are understood and used in Lutheran World Federation (LWF) statements on the Episcopal Ministry from 1983 to 2007. Over this time, some Lutheran churches entered full communion with both episcopal and non-episcopal churches. Some ecumenic partners were also invited to participate as active observers in the LWF process of drafting statements. Through the ecumenical work done and the comprehensive identity study undertaken by the LWF, the understanding of episcopal ministry in LWF documents has developed from a 'Leuenberg-style' general Protestantism to a 'Porvoo-style' understanding of episcopacy.

Keywords

Episcopacy, Ministry, Bishops, Episkopé, Unity, Lutheranism, Ecumenism, Apostolic succession

1 Identity in crisis: The Lutheran World Federation's theology of episcopal ministry

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was established in Lund in 1947. After 43 years of serious self-examination, it was decided that the LWF should be considered as more than merely a loose federation. Its new status as a

communion of churches was accepted in Curitiba in 1990.¹ However, it soon became apparent that the role of the LWF as a church communion needed still further clarification.² As a result, especially the topics of episcopal ministry and historic episcopate came to the fore, as some Lutheran churches had entered into full communion with both episcopal and non-episcopal churches in the late twentieth century. The compatibility of these different bilateral initiatives required further explication.³ Therefore, the LWF began conducting systematic work on the topics of the historic episcopate and apostolic

¹The Constitution of the LWF, as adopted in the LWF 8th Assembly in Curitiba, p. III, reads as follows: 'The Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches which confess the triune God, agree in the proclamation of the Word of God and are united in pulpit and altar fellowship'; Jens Holger Schjørring, 'From Federation to Communion: Five Decades of LWF History', *From Federation to Communion*, ed. J. Holger Schjørring, P. Kumari and N. A. Hjelm (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 42–81. In 1993, the LWF council commissioned the Department of Theology and Studies to study the ecclesiology of *communio/koinonia*. This work culminated in the statement *Toward a Lutheran Understanding of Communion* (1996). The process of drafting this statement is documented in Heinrich Holze (ed.), *The Church as Communion* (Geneva: LWF Documentation No 41, 1997).

²For instance, even ten years after the Curitiba event, Pope John Paul II addressed the LWF in his homily as an ecumenical organization, not as a Lutheran communion: John Paul II, *Ecumenical Commemoration of the Witnesses to the Faith in the Twentieth Century: Homily of His Holiness Pope John Paul II on the Third Sunday of Easter, 7 May 2000*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2000/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20000507_test-fede.html; LWF Archives X.8.6.1, Email from Sven Oppegaard to Eugene Brand Friday 12th May 2000. The LWF Secretary for the Office of Ecumenical Affairs, Sven Oppegaard, explained the purpose of the identity study to former LWF Secretary Eugene Brand as follows: 'Vatican needs to think more about how it addresses other churches. Here is from Pope's homily: "I warmly greet the representatives of the Ecumenical patriarchate and of the other Orthodox Sister Churches, as well as those of the ancient Churches of the East. I likewise thank the representatives of the Anglican Communion, of the worldwide Cristian Communities of the West and of the Ecumenical Organizations for their fraternal presence."' 'Cassidy has little understanding of our character as communion. And Kasper does not understand how we can relate simultaneously with the Reformed and the Anglicans (e.g. ELCA and Norway).' 'Somehow, we have to explain our ecumenical rationale to them in a more substantive way than we have hitherto. This is the purpose of the Identity Study.' 'The reason I am taken up with this, of course, is that our credibility as a global ecumenical partner is at stake in the various directions.'

³LWF Archives X.8.6.1, Exhibit 6.1. Throughout the following years, Oppegaard would describe the coherence of the topics of the historic episcopate as decisive for the LWF as an ecumenical partner and a communion. For instance, at regional meetings and in Malta, he would assert that 'the existence of a coherence that can be described in this area is decisive for the common life and the ecumenical role played by the Lutheran communion.' The direction of the identity work was also clear from the beginning—e.g., in *ibid*: 'I am not ready to involve us in one-sided Leuenberg politics. We have made it very clear to Hüffmeier and others that pan-Protestantism is not our line.'

succession. The questions as to whether the bilateral agreements made with episcopal and non-episcopal churches could be made compatible and acceptable to LWF member churches and how Lutherans in fact understood the episcopacy were soon raised and examined on all continents.⁴

This topic was not, however, new. The LWF had studied the episcopacy already during the 1980s. The LWF meeting in Dar es Salaam (1977) resulted in a mandate for the LWF Studies Department to study the Lutheran understanding of ministry, including within the episcopal office.⁵ Consequently, three booklets on ministry were issued in 1983.⁶ Furthermore, the Executive Committee of the LWF also decided to elaborate on their understanding of episcopacy (1988). This work was published and sent to the member churches 'for study and for reference in ecumenical conversations' together with the 1983 booklets in the LWF Studies series (1993).⁷ Altogether, the studies published in this effort are as follows: The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry (M83), The Lutheran Understanding of Episcopal Office (EO83) and Women in the Ministries of the Church (W83) and MINISTRY–Women–Bishops (MWB92).⁸ These booklets were used as

⁴LWF Archives X. 8.6.1 Regional Meetings. North America, Dec 2nd–4th, 2001; Nordic countries, February 25th–28th 2002; Australia, April 13th–15th 2002; South America, May 6th–9th 2002; Central Europe, June 23rd–26th 2002; Africa, August 19th–21st 2002.

⁵LWF Archives, In Christ a New Community: The Proceedings of the Sixth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania. June 13–25, 1977 (LWF: Geneva 1977) p.113; The Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office, a Statement by consultation on Episcopé, Geneva, November 29–December 2, 1982. LWF Studies (LWF: Geneva, 1983) p. 3.

The Lutheran Understanding of Ministry, The Lutheran Understanding of the Episcopal Office and Women in the Ministries of the Church (LWF Studies: Reports and Texts from the Department of Studies, LWF: Geneva, 1983).

⁷LWF Archives Minutes, The Lutheran World Federation, Meeting of the Council 20–30 June 1993, Kristiansand, Norway, p. 43.

⁸The former three documents are the products of the mandate by the LWF Studies Department given during the 1977 Dar es Salaam Assembly. Due to this mandate, three different consultations were organized, one on the topic of ministry of all baptized believers (1980), one on that of episcopal office (1982) and one on that of the ordination of women (1983). EO83 and W83 are based on the consultations that were held in Geneva in 1982 and 1983. M83 is written by the LWF staff and is based on these before mentioned consultation reports. W83 barely addresses the topic of the episcopal ministry and therefore is only tangentially considered in this particular article. The participants in the consultation behind EO83 are Rt. Bishop Andreas Aarholt (Norway) gave presentation on 'the understanding of episcopacy in the Lutheran tradition', Rt. Bishop Helge Brattgård (Sweden), Rt. Bishop Manas Buthelezi (South Africa), Rt. Bishop Kleopas Dumeni (Namibia), Oberkirchenrat Folkert Ihmels (Germany), Rt. Rev. S.T. Jacobson (Canada), Rt. Bishop Sabastian Kolowa (Tanzania), Rt. Bishop Paavo Kortekangas (Finland), Rt. Bishop Andar Lumbantobing (Indonesia), Professor Per Lønning (Norway), Oberkirchenrat Käte Mahn (Germany) Rt. Bishop Jacob Nag (India), Rt. Rev. Meinrad Piske (Brazil), Rt. Rev. David Preus

research and background material for identity studies on episcopacy carried out in the present century. Consequently, two further statements were issued: The Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church (Malta02)⁹ in 2002 and Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church (Lund07) in 2007. This article analyses how the episcopal ministry and related concepts

(North America), Professor Karoly Pröhle (Hungary) gave presentation on 'Towards a common understanding of episcopacy', Rev. Gerhard Reitz (Papua New Guinea) Rt. Bishop Karlheinz Stoll (Germany), Rt. Bishop Wilson Touhsaent (North America); ecumenical observers: Metropolitan Emilianos (Ecumenical Patriarchate), Bishop Emeritus Eric Kemp (Church of England), Rt. Rev. Paul Werner Scheele (Roman Catholic Church), Frère Max Thurian (Reformed/WCC/F&O) and the LWF staff: Dr. Eugene Brand, Ms. Phyllis Comte, Dr. Gunther Gassmann, Rev. Karl Gervin, Dr. Yoshiro Ishada, Dr. Anza Lema, Ms. Dorothea Millwood. M83 is written by the LWF staff: Dr. Eugene Brand, Dr. Gunther Gassmann and Rev. Karl Gervin. The consultation on MWB92 is written by mainly North American and European pastors and doctors of theology, including only one African pastor—the participants were Rt. Bishop Dr. Andreas Aarflot (Norway), Rev. Dr. Phyllis Anderson (USA), Rev. Dr. Sven-Erik Brodd (Sweden), Prof. Dr. Karlfried Froehlich (USA), Rev. Dr. Niels Hasselmann (Germany), Rev. Donna Herzfeldt Kamphrath (Canada), Bishop Georg Kretschmar (Latvia), Rev. Rose Materu (Tanzania), Dr. Dr. Harald Schultze (Germany) and Rev. Pirjo Työrinoja (Finland).

⁹Malta02, pp. 3, 25; the Malta02 statement is the outcome of a consultation by Lutheran members of international bilateral dialogues involving the LWF. The participants of Malta consultation are Prof. Dr. Anna Marie Aagard (Denmark), Prof. Dr. André Birmele (France), Rev. Fui-Yung Chong (Malaysia), Prof. Dr. Theo Dieter (Germany), Prof. Dr. Luis Henrique Dreher (Brasil), Ret. Bishop Guy Edmiston (North America), Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Greive (Germany), Bishop Dr. Béla Harmati (Hungary), Rev. Dr. Hartmut Hövelmann (Germany), Archbishop Dr. Georg Kretschmar (Latvia), Prof. Dr. Kristen Kvam (North America), Superintendent Dieter Lorenz (Germany), Prof. Dr. Eeva Martikainen (Finland), Prof. Dr. Mickey Mattox (North America), Prof. Dr. Ricardo Pietrantonio (Argentina), Prof. Dr. Hermann Pitters (Romania), Rev. Dr. Roman Pracki (Poland), Prof. Dr. Michael Root (North America), Prof. Dr. Risto Saarinen (Finland), Rev. Klaus Schwarz (Germany), Prof. Dr. Turid Karlsen Seim (Norway), Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Silcock (Australia), Prof. Dr. Yoshikazu Tokuzen (Japan), Rev. Dr. Pirjo Työrinoja (Finland), Prof. Dr. Gunther Wenz (Germany). The statement promises to summarize what had already been affirmed by Lutherans in international ecumenical dialogues as well as in the former statements EO83, M83, W83 and MWB92. As background material, members of Malta consultation had the MWB92 booklet, consisting of EO83, M83 and W83 as well as reports from regional meetings and certain presentations. LWF Archives X.8.4.1 Preparation Malta, The regional meetings as well as the Malta consultation were planned and organized by the steering group of the Lutheran Identity Study. The members of this steering group were Dr. Wolfgang Greive, Prof. Dr. Mickey Mattox, and Rev. Sven Oppegard (chair). Malta02 was shared with all LWF member churches for study and response and was also distributed to the participants of 10th general assembly of the LWF; *ibid*, Responses from LWF member churches; Follow Up Malta, Preparation to Final Statement, the final document Lund07 was prepared by Prof. Dr. Joachim Track, Prof. Dr. Theodor Dieter, Rev. Dr. Randall Lee and Rev. Sven Oppegard.

such as 'episkopé', 'installation' and 'consecration' are understood and used in all these statements, from 1983 to 2007. Furthermore, this study investigates how the guiding theologies of the episcopal office in these statements have developed.¹⁰

Because the main purpose of the identity study was to clarify the Lutheran understanding of episcopal ministry and to strengthen the identity of the LWF as a communion of churches and as an ecumenical partner, it has to be noted that Lund07 played somewhat of a steering role. The Lund07 statement is therefore not only a descriptive document presenting the contemporary situation in Lutheran understanding of episcopacy but also a prescriptive one in which the LWF aims to clarify its own identity. Lund07 does not present a unified opinion of the Lutheran churches but attempts rather to harmonise different theologies of episcopacy into one theology, acceptable to all member churches. Lutheran churches vary both in the practices used to oversee the church and what theological arguments are used to justify such practices.¹¹ Therefore, creating a shared theology of episcopacy is a challenge.

¹⁰Each subsequent statement is based both on former ones and on the ecumenical dialogues that Lutherans have participated in. Nevertheless, each is characterized by its own tone. E.g., Lund07 contains extensive quotes from Malta02 but also has some interesting changes and additions. It is important to acknowledge that these documents differ from one another also by the degree of their normativity and by the extent to which member churches have been able to exert an influence in them. However, in this article, the documents are observed equally, since all former documents have played some role in building up to the latest document, Lund07. Apostolicity and the apostolic succession have been key issues when discussing episcopacy, especially in bilateral dialogues with the Anglican churches. *Successio apostolica* in LWF statements is a large question and deserves to be researched in length, so it is only briefly addressed here. Two recent doctoral dissertations on the topic of apostolic succession in bilateral dialogues concerning Lutherans also address briefly Lund07: Toan Tri Nguyen, *The Apostolicity of the Church and Apostolic Succession. The Impacts of This Relationship in the Post-Conciliar Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue* (Helsinki: Pontificia Universitas Sanctae Crucis Facultas Theologiae, 2016) pp. 1–848, about Lund07 at pp. 221, 293, 319, 399, 422, 525, 596, 671, 695; Erik Eckerdal, *Apostolic Succession in the Porvoo Common Statement Unity through a Deeper Sense of Apostolicity* (Uppsala: Uppsala University Thesis, 2017) pp.15–512, about Lund07 at pp.177, 194, 340, 342, 443.

¹¹The development of ministerial offices in Lutheranism is a large and complex question which has been addressed in detail in several books and articles. See: I. Asheim and V.R. Gold ed., *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church? Studies in the Development and Definition of the Office of Church Leadership* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 60–70, 72–101, 127–133; Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luthers Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), pp. 248–251; Maria Erling and Kirsi Stjerna, ed., *The Role of the Bishop: Changing Models for a Global Church*. (Minneapolis, MN: Kirk House Publishers, 2002), pp. 86–87, 97–98; Eric W. Gritsch, *The History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), pp. 23, 25, 37, 65–67, 212; Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011) pp. 291–297; *Together in Mission and Ministry [TMM], Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe* (London: Church House Publishing 1993), pp. 60–123.

One needs to acknowledge that the LWF member churches are autonomous and, at the same time, that the LWF as a communion of churches is not a 'Head Church' per se. Therefore, declarations made by the LWF are not binding. The reception of such declarations is important and even somewhat unpredictable. Nevertheless, member churches had the possibility to participate both at the beginning and at the end of the process that resulted in Lund07 through the feedback process undertaken by the LWF and the Strasbourg Ecumenical Institute.¹² It should also be noted that certain ecumenical partners were invited to participate as 'active observers' in the process of composing the documents Malta02 and Lund07 and thus exerted significant influence.¹³

2 Terminological Considerations: Episkopé

The Greek word episkopé (ἐπισκοπή) means 'oversight'. This section looks at how the word episkopé is used in LWF statements (1983–2007) and how the concept of oversight (episkopé) is understood in these documents. One particular question of interest is whether episkopé should be understood as a task performed uniquely by bishops, or whether it should be viewed from a wider perspective.

The word episkopé (also spelled episcopé) is found three times in M83, four times in EO83, two times in MWB92, five times in Malta02 and twenty times in Lund07. Most commonly (25 times out of 34 times), episkopé designates a

¹²LWF Archives X.8.4.1 Responses. The identity study process took place rapidly and was criticized as a 'not inclusive' and 'hurried' process. Some of the member churches requested more time for their responses on Malta02; LWF Archives Minutes Jerusalem-Bethlehem (31st August- 6th September 2005): The responses were received from member churches in North America, Australia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Romania, Sweden, Germany and Latin America but no responses from Africa. In addition, the LWF received a critical response to Malta02 from the Word Alone Network.

¹³LWF Archives X.8.6.1, Presentations and relevant documents from consultation in Geneva 24th–25th August 2000; E-mails between Sven Oppegaard and David Hamid on Wednesday 5th and Thursday 6th July 2000; LWF Consultation of Lutheran Dialogue Participants, Malta, 16th–21st November 2002. Anglican and Reformed observers were invited already to the first preparatory meeting (2000). Although these observers did not give any presentations, the active role of these observers was discussed and confirmed in the emails exchanged between Sven Oppegaard and David Hamid, as well as in the memorandum on exploratory consultation issued in Geneva, August 24th and 25th 2000, written by Sven Oppegaard. Furthermore, at the Malta consultation of 18 Nov 2002, the panel 'Perspectives from Current Bilateral Dialogues' included Andre Birmelé on behalf of the Lutheran-Reformed, Anna-Marie Aagaard on behalf of the Lutheran-Orthodox, Gunther Wenz on behalf of Lutheran-Roman Catholic and Mickey Mattox on behalf of Lutheran-Anglican dialogue.

type of ministry— ‘the ministry of episkopé’. Eight times, the word episkopé refers more generally to the oversight of the church, such as an ‘area’ of oversight including, for instance, the tasks of parish councils. Once, episkopé refers to the concept of visitation.¹⁴ In two documents, EO83 and Malta02, the word episkopé occurs only in the narrow meaning of the ministry of episkopé. This might seem surprising, because it has been typical for Lutheran theology to view episkopé from a wider perspective. However, such conclusions should not be drawn too hastily. The idea that different committees, institutions and persons share the tasks of oversight with a bishop is found in one way or another in all the LWF statements. Such oversight is said to be shared more or less by parish councils, ordained ministry and episcopal ministry.¹⁵

The emphasis placed on the role of parish councils and other synodical structures, however, do differ between the statements. Some of the statements, such as M83 and EO83, place greater value on oversight in general and the role of all Christians, whereas other documents, such as MWB92 and Malta02, underline the specific importance of the episcopal ministers regarding the oversight of the church. For instance, according to EO83 and M83, the episcopal functions as such are important, but the actors performing the functions may differ. Variation in practice, at least to a ‘certain’ degree, is acceptable so long as all episcopal functions have been carried out.¹⁶

MWB92 and Malta02 further emphasize the special role which bishops play in the oversight of the church. However, they also acknowledge that the wider community is called on to participate in oversight as well as to judge the way in which the episcopal ministry is carried out. The same view as such is expressed in Lund07.¹⁷ Oversight is even given as the first and foremost task of a bishop in MWB92, Malta02 and Lund07. Episkopé understood this way, as regional oversight, is considered fundamentally important to the church.¹⁸ Malta02 also states that ‘oversight is never merely an administrative or institutional matter but is always personal.’¹⁹ According to Lund07, Malta02 here is referring to ‘the ministry of episkopé’, not to oversight in general.²⁰

In M83, the role of the ordained in episkopé is also emphasized. M83 discusses the leadership provided by the ordained ministry, linking ordination together with episkopé:²¹ ‘Because ordination is a calling into pastoral

¹⁴EO83 pp. 1, 4–5, 14; M83 pp. 22, 28–29; MWB93 pp. 44, 63 footnote 28; Malta02 pp. 4, 20–23; Lund07 pp. 2, 4, 7, 26–27, 39, 43, 45, 47–48, 57–58, 60–61, 65.

¹⁵EO83 pp. 19, 22; M83 p. 22, 31; MWB92 p. 49; Malta02 p. 33; Lund07 pp. 4, 50.

¹⁶EO83 p. 22; M83 p. 22.

¹⁷MWB93 p. 49; cf. Malta02 p. 33; Lund07 p. 50.

¹⁸Malta02 p. 23; Lund07 p. 43.

¹⁹Malta02 p. 2; cf. PCS pp. 32 k, 44–46, 58 v.

²⁰Lund07 p. 47.

²¹EO83 p. 19: ‘Many [duties of episcopal ministry] are exercised also by pastors in the context of local congregations’; M83 p. 22; also p. 18 ‘The community needs the leadership provided by the ordained ministry’.

leadership (episcopé) through word and sacrament in the church of Jesus Christ, those ordained share responsibility for the whole church (oikumene).²² This pastoral leadership (episkopé) is practiced through word and sacraments, the key elements of the Lutheran understanding of ordained ministry. This paragraph could be understood as saying that the ordained ministers use preaching and the administering of the sacraments as tools for nurturing and providing leadership to their flock. Interestingly, oikumene as a responsibility of pastors, is also linked here with episkopé. This is in agreement with documents that emphasize that 'the ordained ministry is also a sign of unity of the church.'²³ In later documents, the episcopal minister is seen as the sign of unity. This development reflects the influence of ecumenical work. For instance, in the Porvoo Common Statement (PCS), unity is linked with episcopacy.²⁴ Interestingly, in M83, episkopé is assigned to all ordained ministers through ordination— that is, ordination 'calls' the ordained to the task of episkopé. This idea is not, however, found in the other documents.

Although LWF documents betray tensions and inconsistencies, the definition of episkopé in Lund07 paragraph 4 is clear and detailed, giving good examples of the Lutheran understanding of episkopé:

The terms episcopacy and episkopé build on the Greek verb episkopein, which means 'to look upon, discern and exercise oversight'. In Lutheran churches, episkopé (oversight) in the broad sense is exercised by ordained persons, synods and specially designated collegial institutions. These latter instruments generally include both ordained and non-ordained members. As part of this episkopé, Lutheran churches assign specific tasks of oversight to a regional ministry by bishops and similar officials with other titles (church presidents, ephorus, synodal pastor, etc.), who exercise personally, collegially and communally, a supra-congregational form of ordained ministry for the sake of spiritual discernment and leadership.²⁵

According to Lund07, the oversight or episkopé is shared between various lay and ordained roles. At the same time, episcopal ministry is understood as having a distinct role in the church and is viewed as an important instrument

²²M83 p. 49.

²³M83 pp. 24, 49

²⁴Cf. 'The Porvoo Common Statement', *Together in Mission and Ministry*, The Porvoo Common Statement with Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe (London: Church House Publishing 1993), PCS 32j: 'The threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon may serve today as an expression of the unity we seek and also as a means for achieving it'; 43: 'Bishops preach the word, preside at the sacraments and administer discipline in such a way as to be representative pastoral ministers of oversight, continuity and unity in the Church.'; LWF Archives X.8.6.1, Responses: The unity as a special task of the episcopal ministry is emphasized also in the responses of the member churches. However, it is also reminded that unity is the task of all baptized.

²⁵Lund07 p. 4.

of episkopé. This definition combines the different understandings of LWF documents and can be viewed as a Lutheran middle position.

2.1 Terminological Considerations: Bishop, Episcopal Ministry, Evangelically Reshaped Episcopacy

Both in theory and in praxis, episcopacy has been and continues to be conducted and understood in different ways in Lutheran churches. Behind this development lie historical lines of reasoning and differing interpretations of the Book of Concord (BC) as well as of Luther's writings. This heterogeneity is most clearly present in the terminology used by different Lutheran churches. Some of the Lutheran churches have deliberately avoided the title bishop, resorting to other titles like president or superintendent. The title superintendent, however, is a direct translation of the word *episcopos* and therefore shares the same root with the word bishop,²⁶ a title that has been difficult for some Lutherans to accept, since it has been understood as denoting hierarchical or monarchical structures.²⁷ While LWF documents have been aware of such connotations underlying these different terms,²⁸ they have nevertheless opted either to more neutral terminology or the title bishop. LWF documents further differ in the importance they lay on the uniformity of terminology.

The 1983 documents EO83, M83 and W83 use the terms episcopal office and episcopal ministry to denote the ministers whose tasks include oversight. Both terms are understood as including episcopal ministers of different titles, such as superintendent and church president.²⁹ The title bishop occurs in the 1983 documents only when no other term is possible—for instance, when discussing medieval history or drawing direct quotes from BEM.³⁰ The word episcopacy, on the other hand, is not found in these 1983 documents.

Interestingly, MWB92 does not follow this more neutral terminology, preferring rather to use the title bishop and even introducing a new concept of 'evangelically reshaped episcopacy' (also 'evangelically reformed' and 'renewed episcopacy').³¹ This 'reshaped' episcopacy is an interesting concept that seems to have been an attempt to underline that, in fact, episcopacy in

²⁶Bernhard Lohse, 'The Development of the Offices of Leadership in the German Lutheran Churches,' in *Episcopacy in the Lutheran Church?*, p.57.

²⁷LWF Archives X.8.6.1, Responses: Denmark, Latin America.

²⁸EO83 p. 7; M83 pp.30–31; Malta02 pp. 27, 32; MWB92 p. 36.

²⁹EO83 pp. 1–22; M83 pp. 3, 26–32, 56–57; W83 p. 64.

³⁰M83 pp. 56–57; EO83 pp. 10–11, 20, 22.

³¹MWB92 pp. 35, 39, 42.

contemporary Lutheranism has evolved away from the medieval institution of bishops.³² No other document, however, repeats this concept.

Both MWB92 and Malta02 reveal that the diversity of Lutheran terminology as well as of episcopal structures had in fact become more uniform in the Lutheran churches during the twentieth century.³³ This might be one of the reasons behind the liberal use of the title bishop in these two documents. Among the 28 paragraphs of the MWB92, the term episcopacy occurs 25 times and the term bishop more than 30 times.³⁴ The same tendency is found in Malta02, wherein the term bishops occurs 33 times over the span of its eight-and-a-half pages. Malta02 further emphasizes that there had been no theological reasoning behind the abandonment of the title bishop at the time of the Reformation.³⁵ Neither this piece of information nor such liberal use of the title bishop is to be found in Lund07.

In Malta02, the terms episcopal ministry, episcopal office and episcopacy are sometimes used as synonyms for the office of a bishop,³⁶ whereas 'the ministry of oversight' and 'the episcopal ministries' seem always to designate all ministers of oversight, whatever their title.³⁷ MWB92 and Malta02 further suggests that all Lutheran ministers performing tasks of oversight, such as superintendents, should be recognized and titled as bishops:

Further, persons who carry out this ministry of oversight should be understood as carrying out the episcopal office. The integrity of their ministry should be respected and it should receive appropriate recognition. Ecumenical and popular understanding would be facilitated if such persons in episcopal ministries were uniformly called 'bishop'.³⁸

Uniform titles are seen in MWB92 as a beneficial tool of unity.³⁹ Moreover, in Malta02, not only the title bishop but also something in the structure should in fact be, if not uniform, at least common. That is, communion must include the common exercise of oversight:

³²MWB92 pp. 41–42, 44.

³³MWB92 pp. 35–36; Malta02 p. 32.

³⁴MWB92 pp. 34–62.

³⁵Malta02 p. 27; cf. Lund07; LWF Archives X.8.6.1 Responses: The formulation in Lund07 follows the suggestions given by the LWF member churches.

³⁶Malta02 p. 31: 'The episcopal ministry must be exercised in cooperation with other ministries of the church leadership in the area under bishops' care'.

³⁷Malta02 pp.18–33.

³⁸Malta02 p. 32; cf. MWB92 p. 48.

³⁹MWB92 pp. 35, 40, 48.

The communion we seek must include the sharing of the one baptism, the celebrating of the one Eucharist and the service of a common ministry (including the exercise of a ministry of oversight, episcopé).⁴⁰

This plea for uniformity, presented in the citations above, is interesting in the realm of Lutheran ecumenism. The concept of reconciled diversity has been largely used in the bilateral and multilateral dialogues that the LWF has participated in. Hence, it is surprising that, also within the LWF communion, uniformity of terminology gained an importance of this kind.

This plea for a uniform title or uniform structures is not, however, present in the 1983 documents or in Lund07.⁴¹ Thus, where Lund07 has quoted Malta02, it has avoided the title bishop, replacing it with the term episcopal ministry. This term is explained in Lund07 as including all Lutheran ministers of episkopé, no matter their title.⁴² The term 'bishop', on the other hand, is used expressly in paragraphs explaining historical developments and in one direct quote—likewise in the 1983 documents.⁴³

While uniformity in terminology is understood as a tool of unity in MWB92 and Malta02, the earlier documents EO83 and M83 consider diversity in ecumenical structures as being beneficial to the ecumenical movement, quite the contrary to MWB92 and Malta02.⁴⁴ Moreover, it is noteworthy that, according to Malta02, the communion must include the common exercise of episcopal ministry. This understanding had not always been common in Lutheranism. Furthermore, this gives an impression that, in 1992 and 2002, uniform structures and titles were valorized, whereas, in 2007, the LWF documents returned to the tolerance of multiple structures and titles. Behind

⁴⁰Malta02 p. 22.

⁴¹LWF Archives X.8.4.1, Responses, Denmark. The Church of Denmark was not satisfied with the terminology of Malta02 and the way title bishop is used in Malta02. It also found Malta02 in many ways 'hierarchic' and suggested that the text was very close to PCS. They also noticed that there was a difference in concepts used in German and English edition. The German version's 'Bischöfe und Bischöfinnen haben die Aufgabe' is in the English version 'Bishops are called to'. Translation to 'das aufgabe' is 'a task'. To the Church of Denmark 'Aufgabe' would have been acceptable concept for the document but 'a call' not.

⁴²Malta02 pp. 29, 30, 39; cf. Lund07 pp. 45, 46, 59 cf. Malta02 p. 33; Lund07 p. 50. LWF Archives X.8.6.1, Sven Oppegards email to the steering group on 24h August 2006: 'I am proposing here to speak of the "Ministry of Episcopé". The reason for this is that I believe it will have a more integrating, less exclusive, function within the Lutheran family. It still maintains some of the qualities of the expression "Episcopal Ministry" but will hopefully make it possible also for churches (and leaders of churches) who do not have bishops, to see themselves included in what the statement says'.

⁴³Lund07 pp. 23–26, 44–45; 50.

⁴⁴EO83 pp. 7, 21–22; M83 p. 32: '[T]he ecumenical discussion may be able to benefit from the Lutheran experience where diversity in the structure and exercise of the office of episcopal ministry have not imperiled Lutheran unity'.

the development of MWB92 and Malta02 seems to have been the ecumenical steps taken, for instance, in PCS as well as enthusiasm over the development of more uniform practice among the Lutheran family. However, the LWF has recognized that this narrow terminology excluded some of the member churches from statement and therefore changed the terminology to that seen in Lund07.

3 Terminological considerations: Ordination, consecration, installation

As discussed above, Lutherans have not used a uniform title to designate their episcopal ministers. Not only the title of the episcopal minister but also the name designating the rite of inauguration for the episcopal minister has roused spirited discussion among Lutherans, a debate visible also in the LWF documents. Not surprisingly, EO83 and M83 remain loyal to their tolerance for heterogeneity. This is clear, as these documents prefer to use the neutral term 'induction'. This term can be understood as including all terms used in Lutheran churches, such as installation, consecration and ordination.⁴⁵ MWB92 employs a similar tact, equally employing all three concepts: consecration, installation and ordination.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, differences can be found in Malta02 and Lund07. In Malta02, this rite of inauguration is primarily termed 'consecration', while 'installation' is given in parentheses.⁴⁷ Interestingly, Lund07 does the opposite, using 'installation' as the primary term and enclosing 'consecration' in parentheses.⁴⁸ This change reflects the Lutheran dialogue, as 'consecration' is not acceptable as the primary term for the rite of inauguration of the episcopal minister for all member churches.⁴⁹ Therefore, 'installation' was taken out of the parentheses and 'consecration' has put between them. The term 'consecration' is commonly linked with the historic episcopate and the appreciation of apostolic succession and can even mean that the ministry of bishop is its own ordo. 'Installation', on the other hand, underlines that the ministry of bishop remains strictly in the same ordo as the ministry of pastor. 'Installation' can be repeated unlike the ordination or consecration of a bishop in some churches. Installation is the term commonly used in churches with superintendents and church presidents, and these tasks are usually not

⁴⁵EO83 p. 8; M83 p. 31.

⁴⁶MWB92 p. 53.

⁴⁷Malta02 p. 37: 'Episcopal consecration (or installation)'; pp. 40, 42: 'succession of consecrations'.

⁴⁸Lund07 pp. 57–59.

⁴⁹LWF Archives X.8.4.1, Responses, Netherlands: 'The Commission (of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands) also questions the practice of consecrating bishops.'

permanent, whereas a consecrated bishop is usually still considered to be a bishop emerita/emeritus after retirement.

In none of the LWF documents is the induction primarily called 'ordination', though MWB92 gives this term as an option. Lutheran churches have traditionally avoided the understanding that the office of a bishop could be seen as its own 'ordo', because it has been understood to contradict the emphasis on equality and the understanding that ordained ministry is in fact one. However, in some Lutheran churches, such as the Nordic churches, the same word 'vigsel' is used to designate both the ordination of a pastor and the consecration of a bishop. Likewise, Lutherans in the Porvoo communion accepted the term ordination, used in at least paragraph 58 of PCS.⁵⁰

The change in these documents from 'induction' in the 1983 statements to the use of 'consecration/installation/ordination' in 1992, 'consecration (installation)' in 2002, and '(installation) consecration' in 2007 is revealing: there is no consensus among the Lutheran family on the permanent or temporal character of this rite of inauguration. However, at the same time, it is crucial to recognize that how these rites are described does not actually radically differ among these documents. The rite always comprises a prayer to the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands by at least three participants and a recognition of the gifts for this ministry. The only point of contention is the permanence of this induction.

4 No hierarchies?

Lutherans underline that there is no hierarchy in status between clergy and laity. In addition, Lutherans do not traditionally hold to the so-called threefold ministry but teach that pastors and bishops share in the same ordained ministry. Every baptized individual is equal before God and is called by God to his or her individual ministry.⁵¹ This basic idea of equality comes from Luther, who insisted that all Christians are equal before God.⁵² Luther even states in his Babylonian captivity of the Church that all baptized Christians are

⁵⁰PCS 58 b vi: 'to invite one another's bishops normally to participate in the laying on of hands at the ordination of bishops as a sign of the unity and continuity of the Church'. In PCS 47–49, 56, the term consecration is also used.

⁵¹Bishop, Priest and Deacon in the Church of Sweden. A letter from the bishops concerning the ministry of the Church (Uppsala: The Bishops' Conference, 1990), some Lutheran churches have readopted the threefold ministry; Hellmut Lieber *Amt und Ordination bei Luther und Melanchton* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 1962) pp.35–47; Bernhard Lohse 'Bischof nach dem Evangelium: Zur Frage des Bischofsamtes im deutschen Luthertum', *Bischofsamt- Amt Der Einheit. Ein Beitrag zum Ökumenischen Gespräch.* (ed. Wilm Sanders, Munich: Pfeiffer 1983) pp. 32-34; Timothy J. Wengert, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops. Public Ministry for the Reformation and Today* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008) p. 59.

⁵²Martin Luther, *Waimarer Ausgabe (WA) 6*, pp. 407–409.

sacerdotes, 'priests'.⁵³ Luther scholars of the twenty-first century are, however, certain that Luther did not mean that anyone could act as a pastor or a bishop without a calling to this office. According to the Augsburg Confession, the ordained ministry of the word and sacraments is divinely instituted (*iure divino*) and essential.⁵⁴ This background does, however, bifurcate the Lutheran theology of ministry. Is there, then, a hierarchy among the ministries or not?

According to M83, all ministries of the baptized belong to the one ministry of Christ. The baptized people of God are sent to carry out Christ's ministry through various tasks in everyday life. The statement emphasizes both the wholeness of this one ministry and the individuality and personality of these ministries. All baptized individuals participate in this 'one ministry as a community', but no Christian can delegate his or her ministry to anyone else, because no one else stands precisely in the same place as another.⁵⁵ Similarly, the ordained ministry itself is also understood as 'one ministry', to which the episcopal ministry also belongs—EO83 states that 'the episcopal ministry must be sought within the more comprehensive concept of ordained ministry.'⁵⁶ The episcopal ministry is not its own entity; rather, it is one instance within the ordained ministry and is an essential part of the ministry of Christ.⁵⁷ Ministerial tasks may be different among the ordained ministry, but different duties 'do not create gradations of status in the one ministry instituted by Christ'.⁵⁸

Later documents follow this understanding, at least to a certain point. The episcopal ministry is understood as a distinct form of pastoral office, though not separate from it. Bishops are pastors of the word and sacrament belonging to one ordained ministry—i.e., *ministerium ecclesiasticum*.⁵⁹ Equality is, however, not as heavily stressed in Malta02 and MWB92, though they explicitly recognize the role of all baptized believers: 'Mutual accountability binds together episcopal and other ministries with all baptized believers. It is through the *communio* of charisms, the total interplay of ministries within which episcopal ministry plays a leading role, that the church trusts that will

⁵³Luther, WA, 6 p. 564: 'Qui si cogereantur admittere, nos omnes esse aequaliter sacerdotes, quotquot baptisati sumus, sicut revera sumus, illisque solum ministerium, nostro tamen consensus commissum, scirent simul, nullum eis esse super nos ius imperii, nisi quantum nos sponte nostra admitteremus.' Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. T.H. Trapp. (originally in German: *Martin Luther's Theology: Eine Vergegenwärtigung*) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 275; Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, pp. 287–289.

⁵⁴Confessio Augustana, para. 5.

⁵⁵M83 pp. 8–17, 21.

⁵⁶EO83 p.2.

⁵⁷EO83 pp. 6, 19; M83 pp. 12, 17, 21, 33, 44.

⁵⁸EO83 p. 19. cf. M83 p. 52: 'Ordination is not an act of separation from other members of the church, nor does it impart a special personal quality or a higher status (to the ordained minister).'

⁵⁹EO83 pp. 2, 6; MWB92 p. 46, Malta02 p. 29; Lund07 p. 45.

be led into the truth.⁶⁰ Here, the word ministries refers, in the first sentence, to the ordained ministries. In the second sentence, the word refers to charisms and therefore should be understood as the gifts of the Holy Spirit, likewise in M83. These charisms are the ministries of all the baptized in M83.⁶¹ According to MWB92 and Malta02, among these ministries or charisms, the episcopal ministry 'plays a leading role'.⁶² Episcopal ministers lead all ordained and all Christians. Interestingly, the most recent document, Lund07, has made small albeit significant changes to this paragraph: 'Mutual accountability binds together ordained ministers and other baptized believers. Episcopal ministry is exercised within the communion of charisms and within the total interplay of ministries in the church.'⁶³ Thus, in Lund07, 'episcopal and other ministries' have been replaced with 'ordained ministers', and the 'leading role' of the episcopacy has been omitted. Lund07 emphasizes that the episcopal ministry is exercised within the total interplay of ministries, whereas in MWB92 and Malta02 episcopacy is said to play the leading role within this interplay of ministries.⁶⁴ Lund07 also states quite clearly that 'God's grace and salvation make all Christians equal before God and prevent their separation into distinct estates or classes.' Based on Revelation 1 and 1 Peter, all Christians share the priesthood in Christ.⁶⁵ Both passages underline the equality of all Christians. This equality is a reality for modern Lutherans, even though the episcopal ministers do in fact lead others. The ordained ministry in the church is understood as one entity, led by the episcopal ministry, which itself belongs to the entity it leads: 'There is one office of ministry common to the entire church, and the episcopal office is concerned with keeping this one ministry rightly oriented toward the one gospel.'⁶⁶

This kind of 'on the one hand, on the other hand' theology is, however, not new to Christianity. Christ is understood to be at the same time truly God and truly human, and, according to Lutheran theology, every Christian is at the same time a sinner and justified. Why not, then, should bishops be, at the same time, the equal of others as well as their leaders? Furthermore, some kind of a

⁶⁰MWB92 p. 49; Malta02 p. 34; cf. Lund07 p. 51.

⁶¹M83 pp. 12–17; cf. BEM pp. 5–7. The statement in M83 interprets BEM as talking about ministries in section M5, though, in fact, BEM discusses the gifts of the Holy Spirit and never once employs the concept of ministry or ministries. The word ministry is explained in BEM M7b: 'The word ministry in its broadest sense denotes the service to which the whole people of God are called, whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the universal Church. Ministry or ministries can also denote the particular institutional forms which this service may take.'

⁶²MWB92 p. 49; Malta02 p. 34.

⁶³Lund07 p. 51.

⁶⁴LWF Archives X.8.4.1, Responses; Australia, Denmark; Minutes Jerusalem, Exhibit 18.4: the responses received from the member churches are behind this change.

⁶⁵Lund07 p.19

⁶⁶MWB92 p. 51; cf. p. 54. 'In addition, the role of the bishop in ordination both realizes and symbolizes the ongoing relation between bishop and clergy in a synod or diocese.'

hierarchy of service is acceptable to Lutherans, where the bishop is understood as the servant of servants, or pastor *pastorum*. The steps taken back and forth in these LWF documents on this issue nevertheless betray the sensitivity of this question among the Lutheran churches. The equality of all the baptized is something indispensable to Lutherans.

5 Divine origin or human institution... and then what?

Traditionally for Lutherans, an adequate definition of the Church and its unity can be found from Augsburg confession (CA), paragraph seven.⁶⁷

The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. And it is enough for the true unity of the church to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions, rites, or ceremonies instituted by human beings be alike everywhere.

This paragraph, however, has created some tension in the Lutheran theology of the episcopal ministry. As the paragraph does not directly address the topic of episcopacy, it leaves some questions unanswered. First, is there a need for theological agreement on ministry, if the agreement on the word and sacraments is adequate for the unity of the church? More precisely, is the episcopal ministry needed at all for the church to be a church? And, if the episcopal ministry is needed, is it instituted by humans, (*iure humano*), or by God, (*iure divino*)? Once again we find that the LWF documents do not provide only one answer to these questions. Furthermore, an interesting development can be found on the *iure divino*–*iure humano* sliding scale.

As for the Book of Concord and the question of the divine origin of the ministry, CA article 5 states that the ordained ministry is established *iure divino*, whereas The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Apology) states that ‘the order of the church and the various ranks of the church ... are established “by human authority”’.⁶⁸ This statement has been interpreted in Lutheranism in such a way that *ministerium* as such is seen as *iure divino*, but the particular structures of ministry in the church are seen as *iure humano*. For instance, the order of the threefold office has been understood as *iure humano*. Furthermore, what is instituted by humans (*iure humano*), may vary. This consideration has also led to a certain Lutheran minimalism, as it were. Some Lutherans have insisted that all matters established *iure humano* are less

⁶⁷Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen. *Hope and Community: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017) p.301.

⁶⁸Apology 14:1; BC 222.

relevant or even irrelevant for the church compared to those established *iure divino*.

All LWF statements under investigation here take for granted that there is some kind of episcopal structure in the church. M83 and EO83 follow most closely the aforementioned line of thinking: the ordained ministry is understood as divinely instituted, whereas the structures, such as the threefold order of bishop, priest and deacon is understood to be a human invention and thus not essential for the church: 'Lutherans do not regard uniform structure to be necessary for the church and its unity (cf. CA7)'⁶⁹. What is *iure humano* is not regarded as entirely irrelevant, but nevertheless may vary from church to church.⁷⁰

MWB92 states that the ordained ministry is *iure divino* but begins its reasoning by elaborating the concept of *adiaphora*:⁷¹

Lutherans have insisted that the identity of the church is constituted by word and sacraments and the divinely instituted ministry which serve these. An episcopal ministry of oversight in a succession of consecrations cannot be considered essential to the church's identity in the same sense, nor as essential to the identity of the office of ministry. No particular structure of church leadership is an infallible sign of the Spirit's guidance.⁷²

It is important to recognize that this paragraph and the section to which it refers, are discussing the historic episcopate, not episcopal ministry as such.⁷³ Furthermore, according to MWB92, this succession is not inessential, though it does not compete in importance with the word and sacraments. According to MWB92, a simplified distinction between *adiaphoral* and essential has been problematic in the Lutheran theology of the church. The statement emphasizes that between these two may also lie something which is important for the church and should be regarded as a normative practice and indispensable except in 'extreme emergency situations'.⁷⁴ It is clear from the context that, in this regard, MWB92 means the historic episcopate. However, MWB92 refers to the events of the Reformation in the last part of section 59, suggesting that, if the church faces a situation which 'forces a clear choice between adherence to a certain episcopal structure or succession on the one hand and fidelity to the gospel on the other, then the gospel must be chosen'.⁷⁵

⁶⁹EO83 p. 7.

⁷⁰EO83 pp. 7, 19, 21–24; M83 pp. 19; 25–37, 44, 46. Also: LWF Archives X.8.4.1, Responses; Denmark.

⁷¹MWB92 pp. 10, 62–63.

⁷²MWB92 pp. 59–60 cf. Malta02 pp. 37, 42; MWB92 p. 39 mentions that the Reformers viewed episcopacy as a normal polity of the church.

⁷³EO83 p. 10; MWB92 p. 59.

⁷⁴MWB92 pp. 62–63.

⁷⁵MWB92 p. 59; cf. Malta p. 42.

MWB92 considers that the ordained ministry is *iure divino* and episcopal ministry in apostolic succession is highly important and should be a normative practice in the church, even though it is understood to be a human invention, *iure humano*.

Interestingly, Malta02 has left this latter part of section 59 out, even though it has quoted the first part of that section. Hence, it looks as though Malta02 has either gone even further than MWB92 in its emphasis on the importance of the episcopal structure or does not consider possible that the church could ever face the kind of situation in which the church has to choose between the gospel and episcopal succession. It should be noted, however, that Malta02 was composed by Lutheran participants from different bilateral ecumenical dialogues. Therefore, this emphasis may relate to the fact that the creators of this document were ecumenically oriented.

The episcopal ministry and its structures are considered important also in Lund07.⁷⁶ Lund07 suggests that the Reformers would have retained the ministerial practice of the medieval church, if that had been possible.⁷⁷ Furthermore, it states that the bishops should be obeyed by 'divine right':

The reformers recognized the value of an episcopal ministry whose task is to ordain and supervise, and made a strong effort to retain the traditional episcopal polity.... The reformers clearly recognized and affirmed the need for the ministry of episkopé (superintendents). The Augsburg Confession calls for obedience to bishops by divine right, *de iure divino*.⁷⁸

Lund07 uses here expressions such as 'strong effort' and 'need for', even stating that bishops should be obeyed according to divine right, *iure divino*. Such obedience should be maintained so long as they teach according to the gospel. This understanding of Reformation thinking follows the findings of many contemporary Luther scholars, who have underlined that in the sixteenth century episcopacy was not rejected as such; it was only the misuse of the practice that was rejected by the Reformers. These scholars have pointed out that the Lutheran Confessions were not against either the episcopal office or the historic episcopate. The Augsburg Confession did not present a new doctrine on episcopacy; rather, it accepted the ancient tradition of bishops, so long as the bishops were following the gospel. In the Lutheran Confessions, the church structures are understood as valuable and worth retaining.⁷⁹ As a

⁷⁶MWB92 p. 39: the episcopate is 'an important element'; Malta02 p. 48: 'the integrity of their ministry should be respected and it should receive appropriate recognition'; p. 49: 'bishops are called to a special role of oversight', a 'leading role'; Lund07 pp. 25–26, 43.

⁷⁷Lund07 pp. 22–23.

⁷⁸Lund07 pp. 25–26; cf. CA28.

⁷⁹Apology 14:1; BC 222: 'It is our greatest desire to retain the order of the church and the various ranks of the church—even though they are established "by human authority".' Eugene L Brandt, 'The Episcopal Office in the Nordic Lutheran Churches seen from the Worldwide Lutheran Perspective.'

matter of fact, these paragraphs in Lund07 clearly illuminate the growing importance of the episcopal ministry in twenty-first-century Lutheranism. The episcopal ministry is prized as an important and even fundamental practice, which should be obeyed *iure divino*, so long as it is 'exercised in light of the gospel' and through the word and sacraments.

6 Aspects of the episcopal ministry

As presented above, the episcopal ministry belongs, according to all LWF documents, to the entity of ordained ministry. That is, the episcopal ministers are ordained ministers.⁸⁰ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that most of the defining aspects of the episcopal ministry in these statements are the same fundamental tasks given to all the ordained according to Lutheran theology. The LWF documents do, however, give some definitions and assign special tasks to episcopal ministers, but again there are both similarities and differences among the documents.

At the first glance, the 1983 statements seem extremely cautious in assigning any distinct features to this form of ministry, a characteristic that is discernible in the following paragraph:

From this fundamental task [of word and sacraments] derives the special authority which they [ministers in episcopal offices] share with other bishops and co-workers called to corresponding tasks. Their authority 'is a power or command of God to preach the Gospel, to remit or retain sins, and to administer the sacraments' (CA 28).⁸¹

This excerpt states that the episcopal ministry has a fundamental task but that this fundamental task is the same task which every ordained person has according to Lutheran teaching: 'the service of word and sacraments'.⁸² In this

Biskopsämbetet I de nordiska folkkyrkorna ur ett ekumeniskt perspektiv. (Uppsala: Nordisk Ekumenisk Skriftserie 23, 1994), pp. 5–20; Gunther Gassmann, 'The Historic Episcopate in Anglican-Lutheran Dialogues,' in *The Role of the Bishop*, pp. 22–23; Eric W. Gritsch, *The Ministry in the Church in the Perspective of Lutheran Confession, with a Particular Focus on the Ministry of Bishops in Succession*. (Lutheran Identity Study 22th June 2001, the LWF archives: Geneva); p.10; *The History of Lutheranism*, pp. 24, 62–63, 74, 83, 84, 105, 110, 246, 257; Lohse, 'The Development of the Offices of Leadership,' pp. 62–70; *Martin Luther's Theology*, p. 296; Harding Meyer: *Apostolic Continuity, Ministry and Apostolic Succession from a Reformation Perspective*. (Louvain: Louvain Studies 21 vol. 2 pp.169-182:1996), pp. 174–176; Wengert, *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops*, pp. 55–61.

⁸⁰EO83 p. 14; MWB92 p. 46; Malta02 p. 29; Lund07 p. 45.

⁸¹EO83 p. 15.

⁸²EO83 pp. 15–16; cf. M83 p. 15; Malta02 p. 29; Lund07 p. 5; BEM; CA28. Similarly, Luther: 'That Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and Call,

excerpt, the only aspect especially defining the episcopal ministers is the power of the keys, found in Augsburg's Confession paragraph 28. Strangely, the power of the keys does not seem to be given a larger role as a definition for a bishop in the LWF statements, though it is the one and only power CA28 gives solely to a bishop by divine law, *iure divino*. The meaning of 'the power of the keys' is not, however, explicated or explained in the LWF documents, though, according to CA28, the power of the keys may only be administered through the word and sacraments and thus does not provide much additional information.

Nevertheless, as presented before, these documents do talk about certain procedures one must follow when entering this form of ministry. All episcopal ministers are called on and inducted, that is installed or consecrated. This means that, after being called, the ordained minister must attend a certain rite, as she or he is entering the episcopal ministry. This rite includes a prayer to the Holy Spirit and a recognition of the gifts for this ministry.⁸³ If the calling and induction are the first two aspects defining the episcopal ministry, the third aspect is more geographical. This aspect is found in all the LWF statements examined here: the episcopal ministry as a 'regional ministry'.⁸⁴ Regional here means that the episcopal ministers supervise a larger area than the local pastors do. However, the boundaries of 'regional' are not more precisely elaborated. How large an area is 'larger'? County deans are also in charge of some 'supra-congregational' tasks of oversight in Lutheran tradition—are these persons also episcopal ministers?

One revealing paragraph, however, is finally found in Malta02 and Lund07. According to these documents, the episcopal ministers share a distinct *propria* not shared with pastors at the local level. These *propria* includes (1) visitations and guiding the life in the congregations at their region, (2) the ordination of pastors; and (3) supervising the teaching and practices of the pastors.⁸⁵

Appoint and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture, 1523', Luther's Works, Volume 39, Church and Ministry I. (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1970) pp. 311–312; WA11 p. 412. In the early church, the development proceeded from a bishop as the overseer of a local church and as a celebrant of the word and sacraments towards a bishop in charge of a larger area. This is compatible with LWF statements, understanding the episcopal tasks as centered around the tasks of all the ordained: the service of the word and sacraments.

⁸³EO83 p. 8; MWB92 p. 53; Malta02 p. 39; Lund07 p. 59. LWF Archives X.8.4.1, Responses, Denmark. The church of Denmark did not agree with the formulation in Malta02: 'The bishop does not receive a new call to ministry in addition the call he or she already has as an ordained priest.'

⁸⁴EO83 p. 46: 'a communion of local communities calls a pastor to serve them collectively through an episcopal ministry'; MWB92 pp. 43, 50; Malta02 p. 19: 'the supra-congregational ministry of oversight'; pp. 20, 22, 30, 38; Lund07 pp. 4, 45–47, 58. Also found in bilateral dialogues: MC81, The Ministry in the Church. International Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue (1981) p. 44; AC06, The Apostolicity of the Church. Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. (Minneapolis MA: Lutheran University Press, 2006), p. 190.

⁸⁵Malta02 p. 30, Lund07 pp. 46, 52.

Lund07 adds also episcopal ministers' role as the 'voice of the church in the public sphere' and widens the scope of their supervision from that of the ordained ministers to that of all teaching and spiritual practices of the church.⁸⁶ It is worth noting that, since Malta02, ordination is distinctively the task of an episcopal minister. In EO83, the LWF states that 'persons in episcopal ministries are called to exercise leadership by ordaining pastors or by authorizing others to ordain.'⁸⁷ This option made presbyteral ordinations possible. The question of whether or not, in some cases, non-episcopal ordinations could be possible is still left somewhat open in MWB92, because the report mentions in footnote 18 that a fuller description of activities characteristic of the episcopal ministry can be found in EO83. However, this footnote is left out of Malta02 and Lund07, where the ordinations are understood to be a part of the distinct *propria* that episcopal ministers possess.⁸⁸ This decision follows the ecumenical line which some of the LWF member churches have followed in the PCS and in the Called to Common Mission (CCM)⁸⁹ and clarifies the regional boundaries of the episcopal ministry. For instance, the superintendents in Austria are installed and do ordain pastors of their own region. Therefore, it is clear that they serve as episcopal ministers in the church.

One interesting development in the statements is that certain definitions have been viewed in M83 or in BEM as definitions of all the ordained but later gained a larger role in defining the episcopal ministry. For instance, in most of these documents the episcopal ministers are understood as servants of the unity and continuity of the church. M83 and BEM state that not only bishops but all ordained ministers are commissioned to serve the unity and continuity of the church. This point is also found in Lund07, though Lund07 simultaneously sees unity as a special responsibility of the episcopal minister.⁹⁰ In most of these documents, the episcopal ministry is also defined as personal, collegial, and communal. However, in M83 and BEM, these are features of the entire ordained ministry. Interestingly enough, this group of definitions has gained a larger role over the years, especially concerning definitions of the episcopal ministry both in LWF documents and in

⁸⁶Lund07 p. 46.

⁸⁷EO83 p. 17. Also, M83 leaves room for presbyteral ordinations: p. 47: 'ordination is administered ... especially by those who occupy an office of pastoral leadership and spiritual supervision (episcopé).' For instance in the Church of Denmark presbyteral ordinations still are common.

⁸⁸MWB92 p. 47; Malta02 p. 30; Lund07 p. 46; cf. EO83 pp. 16–17; LWF Archives X.8.6.1, Responses, Australia.

⁸⁹PCS 58b (v); An Agreement of Full Communion: Called to Common Mission (A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement, 1999) p. 20.

⁹⁰EO83 pp. 14, 17–18; MWB pp. 34, 40, 47, 50, 54–55; Malta02 pp. 19, 20, 30, 37–38; Lund07 pp. 27, 54; cf. BEM p. 29; Lund07 p. 55 and M83 pp. 24 'the ordained ministry is also a sign of the unity of the church', 56. Lund07 and M83 emphasize more than other documents that all ordained ministers are commissioned to serve the unity and continuity of the church.

Lutheran–Anglican dialogues.⁹¹ Another interesting development is that, over time, the episcopal ministry has been understood in an increasingly less bureaucratic way. That is, the episcopal ministry is not only a bureaucratic office; more and more, its spiritual character is recognized. Episcopal ministers should regularly lead services, preside at the Eucharist and preach.⁹² This development is in line with what we know of the role of the bishop in the early church.

7 Conclusions

I have analysed the LWF's statements on episcopal ministry from 1983 to 2007. The aim of this study was to find out how the episcopal ministry and related concepts such as episkopé, installation and consecration are understood and used in these statements and how their theologies of episcopal office have developed. The understanding of episcopal ministry in these LWF documents has developed from a 'Leuenberg style' general Protestantism to a position that is closer to a 'Porvoo style' understanding of episcopacy. The tendency has, however, not developed uniformly throughout the twenty-first century. The influence of ecumenical partner churches as well as the input from the LWF member churches, is visible in the development of the documents and in the amendments made to Lund07.

The episcopal ministry develops in these statements from the multiform practical office in the 1983 statements into a more uniform, more distinct spiritual office in the 2007 statement. This development is apparent in four different but related theological topics. First, the episcopal ministry's role regarding episkopé changes during this time. All statements propose that oversight of the church is a responsibility shared by several individuals within the church, though the specific term episkopé is not used in all statements in this broad sense. Because this idea is present, episkopé is understood as an umbrella term for oversight, encompassing all agents that perform the task of supervision and oversight within the church. In the later statements Malta02 and Lund07, episkopé is understood more or mostly as a task of a particular episcopal minister—i.e., a bishop.

Secondly, the equality of all offices of the church is very much emphasized in the 1983 documents. In the later documents (MWB92, Malta02 and Lund07) equality is still present, but, at the same time, the distinct and

⁹¹MWB92 pp. 46, 49, 51–52, 55; Malta pp. 28, 31, 33; Lund pp. 47–49. Aspects of all the ordained in BEM p. 26, and M83 p. 53; aspects of the episcopal ministry in PCS pp. 44–45, 58 a (v) and CCM p. 6.

⁹²MWB92 p. 46; Malta02 pp. 28–29; Lund07 p. 47, 63: 'Episcopal ministers are expected to show firm rootedness in the liturgical life of the church by regularly leading services of the word and sacraments themselves, and by providing support for processes of renewal of the church's life of worship'.

fundamental role of the episcopal ministry to supervise the entity to which it belongs is also recognized. While unity was linked with all the ordained in the 1983 statements and in BEM, the episcopal ministry is seen especially as a servant of the unity of the church in later documents. At the same time, the spiritual nature of the episcopal ministry is highlighted.

Thirdly, the rite of inauguration of an episcopal minister is primarily called 'consecration' in the Malta02 document. The term 'consecration' is commonly linked with the historic episcopate and the high appreciation of apostolic succession and can lead to the interpretation that the ministry of the bishop constitutes its own *ordo*. This affirmation has, however, been withdrawn in Lund07, which uses 'installation' as the primary term to denote this rite of inauguration. Another similar development takes place in this document with the term 'bishop'. The 1993 and 2003 documents suggest that the title 'bishop' should be accepted in all Lutheran churches. This plea for uniformity is not reflected in EO83, M83, W83 or Lund07. In 1983, diversity was understood as an indication of richness, which could promote the ecumenical movement.

'Installation' is a term denoting a certain act that can be repeated. The 'ordination of a bishop' might not be an optimal term for Lutherans, since this concept allows for an interpretation of episcopacy as constituting its own *ordo*, a view which has been challenging for some Lutheran churches to accept. The term 'consecration' does not lead to such problem and also captures the Lutheran understanding of episcopal ministry as an important and most useful sign of the apostolicity of the church, though not essential in the same sense as the ordained ministry, which is understood to be divinely instituted and constitutive. The development in these statements shows that it is also possible for Lutherans to conceive of the episcopal ministry at the same time as a distinct office among the ordained ministry and not separate from it. Based on my analysis of these statements, the episcopal ministry could be considered in Lutheranism as its own *ordo*, so long as this understanding does not violate the Lutheran emphasis on one ministry and the equality of all Christians. One question for further research would be whether the Lutherans understanding of the concepts of ordination and *ordo* differ from the Anglican tradition.

Fourthly, the twenty-first-century statements of Malta02 and Lund07 present certain duties, such as the ordinations, as belonging to the *propria* of a bishop. Presbyteral ordinations were still an option in EO83. Since the ordinations are understood as the task of the bishop in both twenty-first-century LWF documents, the episcopal ministry is understood as a different form of ministry in a more profound way than, for example, the office of a vicar.

The idea of not having hierarchies of status but still having distinct tasks among the one office of Christ is very much present in LWF statements. This creates a paradox, where the offices are more or less arranged into a hierarchy both in a temporal (only an ordained minister can be installed as an episcopal minister; thus, one office necessarily precedes the other) and in a structural

sense (one supervises the other), while the underlining theology emphasizes the oneness of ministry and the equality of all Christians. While this paradox contributes to tensions within and between the statements, it is nevertheless characteristically Lutheran. The struggle with such paradoxes can be seen in the development of different concepts besides in the role given to the episcopal ministry.

Earlier statements, EO83 and M83, underlines the role and primacy of all baptized believers. M83 is based on consultations on ministry of all the baptized, the ministry of women and the episcopal ministry. This can be one reason for placing greater emphasis on the role of all the baptized than do the twenty-first-century documents or MWB92 which addresses mostly the topic of episcopal office. However, in EO83, the role of all the baptized is also central, though its aim is specifically to discuss the episcopal office. Later documents places greater emphasis on the episcopal ministry and its specific role. Hence, both the role of all baptised believers and the oneness of the ordained ministry is taken more profoundly into account in Lund07.

Because Lund07 is affirmed by the LWF council as an appropriate expression of the Lutheran understanding of the ministry of oversight, the LWF advances the view of episcopal ministry as (1) personal, (2) collegial, (3) communal (4) a regional ministry, which belongs to (5) one ministerium, (6) is called, (7) includes the gifts of the Holy spirit, (8) is installed or consecrated, (9) serves and symbolizes unity, (10) presides over ordinations, (11) supervises the life and teaching of the church and (12) should be obeyed by divine right (*iure divino*) so long as it is exercised in loyalty to the gospel.

Lund07 does not underline the special role of a bishop as the 1993 and 2002 statements do, nor is it close to the emphases of EO83, W83 and M83. Nevertheless, episcopal ministry, with its own distinct *propria*, calling and installation, almost belongs to its own order in Lund07. While Lutheran churches have developed a more uniform structure of episkopé, the practices of Lutheran churches nevertheless vary. The Lund07 document may, however, turn out to be a valuable tool for bilateral dialogues and the Lutheran quest for unity.