Apostolicity – Sacramentality – Visibility
Building blocks for a consensus on the fundamental truths of ecclesiology

Study by a working group convened by the German National Committee
of the Lutheran World Federation and the Johann Adam Möhler Institute for Ecumenism

1. Introduction

The signing of the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" (JDDJ) between the Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 1999 was instrumental in creating the atmosphere of mutual trust that made it possible to hold joint commemorations of the Reformation in Lund and Malmö in 2016. The momentum generated by these events provided encouragement for further ecumenical steps. In various regions – namely in the USA[1] and in Finland[2] – studies were produced that attempt to articulate a "differentiated consensus" with regard to the church, ministry and the Eucharist. Irrespective of the question of whether these approaches are convincing in every respect, both the method of "differentiated consensus" and the focus on the connection between ecclesiology, theology of ministry and the doctrine of the Eucharist have met with broad approval. Complementary to this, a joint study document at world level has also pursued the approach of identifying the ecclesiological implications of the mutual recognition of baptism.[3]

The study presented here documents the results of an expert discourse by a working group convened by the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the Johann Adam Möhler Institute for Ecumenism in Paderborn. It intends to offer a German contribution to the ecclesiological issues that are currently being discussed at world level and in national dialogues. The guiding question is whether and in that case how ecclesiological consequences can be drawn from the "differentiated consensus" that the JDDJ has established in the doctrine of justification. Can the consensus reached in a central theological doctrine, and the method by which this consensus was reached, offer an impetus for fundamental consensus in ecclesiology? This question had already been addressed in "From Conflict to Communion". The signature under JDDJ implies that the Roman Catholic Church recognises the continuity of the Lutheran

1 Declaration on the Way. Church, Ministry, and Eucharist. Report of the Committee on Ecumenical and Inter religious Affairs of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Minneapolis 2015.

2 Communion in Growth. Declaration on Church, Eucharist and Ministry. Report of the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Commission for Finland (2017), Leipzig / Paderborn 2019.

3 Baptism and Growth in Communion. Report of the Lutheran-Catholic Commission on Unity, 2022, available at: https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/baptism_and_growth_in_communion_en_0.pdf.

Church in sound doctrine and thus indirectly the existence of a true ordained ministry.[4] However, this interpretation is not undisputed in the Catholic Church, particularly in its pointed application to the theology of ministry. If the Catholic Church establishes a basic consensus in the doctrine of justification, thus implicitly affirming doctrinal continuity in the understanding of the doctrine of justification, yet is unable to confirm its agreement in the understanding of ministry, it is confronted with the challenge of clarifying its own view of the ecclesiological implications of the JDDJ. Conversely, Lutheran churches have never basically denied the validity of Catholic holy orders, but they have subordinated the authority of the clergy to the condition of correct proclamation of the gospel; they can now pose the question as to the implications of the differentiated consensus of the JDDJ on the central doctrine of justification in ecumenical dialogue when it comes to the theology of ministry.

One important motive in the search for more far-reaching consensus is certainly the fact that many Lutheran and Catholic Christians yearn to be able to participate in the other denomination's services of Holy Communion or Eucharist in mutual hospitality or even to gather together at the Lord's Table. In the 2016 Lund Declaration, both churches affirmed that they had heard this urgent call and understood it as an incentive not to let up in their endeavours to reach further understanding. However, there is agreement that the question of Eucharistic communion cannot be dealt with in isolation from the understanding of the ordained ministry, which in turn can only be dealt with in the wider context of ecclesiological reflection.[5]

Without losing sight of this context, the present study is primarily intended as a contribution to such ecclesiological reflection. On the way to a deepened consensus on the fundamental truths of ecclesiology, it seeks common ground in the understanding of central ecclesiological basic definitions, namely apostolicity, sacramentality and visibility (or "visible unity"), on the basis of the JDDJ.

The joint basis of *apostolicity* is already particularly broad and strongly developed. In particular, the study "Communio Sanctorum" specifies common convictions regarding the nature of the church based on the apostolic mission.[6]

The term *sacramentality* applied to the church is foreign to the Lutheran tradition. However, if it is used in a broad sense to mean that God makes himself salvifically present in the being, mission and practices of the church, then it is from a Lutheran perspective not unfounded to speak of a "sacramentality of the church". However, it would then be necessary to clarify the

4 From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, Leipzig / Paderborn 2013

5 The question of reciprocal hospitality in the Eucharist and Holy Communion was reflected upon in detail by the Ecumenical Study Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians (ÖAK) in its Statement "Together at the Lord's table", thereby triggering a discussion process that is still ongoing. Cf. Together at the Lord's table. A statement of the Ecumenical Study Group of Protestant and Catholic Theologians, Freiburg i.Br. / Göttingen 2020.

6 C f. Bilateral working group of the German National Bishops' Conference and the Church Leadership of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, Communio Sanctorum. The Church as the Communion of Saints, Paderborn / Frankfurt a. M. 2000.

consequences for the understanding of the church and of certain ecclesiastical practices and delegated tasks (ministries).

This leads to the dimension of *visibility*. This is also generally regarded as a Catholic proprium, given that the Catholic Church has emphasised the institutionality of the church in general and the givenness of certain ecclesiastical ministries in particular as essential to the being of the church, making their recognition a condition of full ecclesial communion. Nonetheless, the Wittenberg Reformation also never doubted that visibility belongs to the *essence* of the Church; the emphasis on the spiritual ("hidden") character of the church led to this aspect being often underexposed theologically. The ecumenical dialogues have strengthened awareness for the fact that the Christ-given unity of the church also requires visible forms of expression, including the institutional forms. This is also and especially valid for cohesion beyond the regional level. From a Lutheran perspective, the visibility of the church itself and the inner relationship of the church(es) must not be narrowly defined in terms of the theology of ministry, although the ordained ministry naturally fulfils an important function in this respect.

Based on these considerations, the present study deals with the following topics, using a consistently dialogue-based approach:

Chapter 2 begins by addressing in depth the initial question of what the *signing of the JDDJ* signifies for the self-understanding of each denomination and its interpretation of the other denomination's ecclesiastical identity, and what consequences follow for church fellowship. From a Lutheran perspective, the focus here is on the content-related dimension, showing how far the doctrine of justification can also be identified as a criterion for setting standards and as a critical touchstone with regard to other areas of normative self-description of both churches. From a Catholic perspective, the implications of signing the JDDJ for the form of ecclesial self-definition of the Catholic Church itself have to be investigated, along with the consequences for the dynamics of internal Catholic reform.

The next two chapters are methodological in nature. First of all, chapter 3 specifically reflects on the *model of "differentiated consensus"*, which is the guiding principle for the following considerations, in that it does not iron out existing differences, but rather questions whether they must still be understood as church-dividing in the light of an overall consensus. This is flanked in chapter 4 by explanations on the graded relevance of the *witnessing authorities* ("*loci*") of church doctrinal formation, which can help to assess the significance of individual doctrinal differences between the confessions, thus, for example, differentiating between fundamental and less fundamental (and therefore possibly not church-dividing) differences.

On the basis of these hermeneutical and methodological preliminary considerations, the three ecclesiological guiding concepts that were selected are then discussed.

Chapter 5 considers how the already far-reaching understanding of *apostolicity* as the basic character of the church can contribute to a common understanding of the church's mission for and in the world. Recognisably, even from a Catholic perspective, apostolicity is not simply present and tied to certain forms of institutional continuity, but must be constantly reclaimed as

a dynamic process. On the other hand, when the Lutheran reformers developed their criticism and their criteria regarding apostolicity, seeing fidelity to the original conception as more important than institutional continuity, they nevertheless did not fundamentally question the visible continuity of the apostolic church in its visible form. It remained controversial, whether the continuity of the episkopé in the form of monepiscopacy was constitutive for the apostolicity of the Church. In the context of this dialogue constellation, this study outlines the contours of a "differentiated consensus". Since diachronic fidelity to the origins of the church is itself a topic in connection with apostolicity, this section discusses the New Testament sources and historical developments in great detail.

Chapter 6 examines whether and how the reference of Catholic theology to the *sacramentality* of the church can be interpreted in such a way that it can also be accepted as a relevant category for defining the nature of the church from a Lutheran perspective. In the sense of a differentiated consensus, it is the intention to show that both traditions ascribe a special role to the church in witnessing to God's salvific self-revelation.

Chapter 7 shows how the past bilateral dialogues have already adopted constructive ideas offered by the respective denominational doctrinal traditions on the essential *visibility* of the church. Here far-reaching convergences in this regard can be identified, namely in the understanding of the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. The remaining differences concerning the ecclesial significance of the ordained ministry and ministerial order are clearly identified. At the same time, it is suggested that a spiritual reflection on the personal vocation to the ordained ministry might well reveal common ground beyond the current theological controversies.

The *outlook* at the end (chapter 8) emphasises once again the inner connection between justification and the church; it encourages both denominations to take further steps towards an ecclesiological understanding, based on the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" and seen in the light of a possible differentiated consensus, as described in this study, with regard to the apostolicity, sacramentality and visibility of the church.

2. The signing of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in its ecclesiological significance

The signing of the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification" (JDDJ) has great ecclesiological significance for the churches involved.[7] The Joint Declaration does not specify *which* ecclesiological consequences are to be drawn from the differentiated consensus reached on the doctrine of justification. However, the signing took place in a church service. This service was celebrated ecumenically in Augsburg on Reformation Day, 31 October 1999. The service was led by Bishop Christian Krause, at that time President of the Lutheran World Federation, and Cardinal Edward Cassidy, who was President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Taking the relationship between doctrine and liturgy in our churches seriously means that the signing of the JDDJ in a service of worship has great performative significance. The signing is an ecclesial act. Seen in this way, the consensus reached must be re-examined in terms of its ecclesiological significance.

2.1 Ecclesiological dimensions of the JDDJ

With the JDDJ, a decisive point of theological conflict for the division of the churches in the 16th century has been transmuted into a new common understanding. This also changes the ecclesiological self-understanding of the two churches. For the JDDJ makes it clear that views and convictions that are important for the other church can be understood from one's own perspective as legitimate explications of the common faith and can deepen the perception of one's own faith.

The JDDJ states as a task that the consensus reached "must come to influence the life and teachings of our churches. Here it must prove itself.". The churches “share the conviction that the message of justification directs us in a special way towards the heart of the New Testament witness to God’s saving action in Christ". By orientating the church's preaching towards the heart of the New Testament testimony to God's saving action, the doctrine of justification forms "an indispensable criterion" (JDDJ 18) in the understanding of the church's witness to the saving action of the triune God.

For both the Catholic and the Evangelical-Lutheran Churches, the doctrine of justification “is more than just one part of Christian doctrine. It stands in an essential relation to all truths of faith, which are to be seen as internally related to each other.” (JDDJ 18). In the "Official

7 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church.
Available at http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/1999-dichiarazione-congiunta-sulla-dottrina-della-giustificazion/en.html

Common Statement" and the Annex, both churches agree on "the criteriological significance of the doctrine of justification" and specify this to the effect that it “is measure or touchstone for the Christian faith. No teaching may contradict this criterion." (JDDJ, Annex to the Common Official Statement). The churches are therefore called upon to fulfil this hermeneutic and to bring the significance of the doctrine of justification to bear in the teaching and life of the church.

Because the consensus on the doctrine of justification affects all dimensions of Christian faith and because the Protestant churches and the Catholic Church have committed themselves to the JDDJ with their signatures, the JDDJ claims far-reaching ecclesial authority for the doctrine and life of the churches.

The consensus on the doctrine of justification has implications for the understanding of the ministry of both churches. The proclamation of the gospel is one of the central features of apostolic ministry, as the apostle Paul states, particularly in his letter to the Romans (Rom 10:13-15). The ordained ministry of the Protestant churches, conferred through the laying on of hands and prayer, is a ministry of the pure proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament (Confessio Augustana, CA 7). If, therefore, from a Catholic perspective, the Protestant proclamation of the gospel fulfils the criteria of the doctrine of justification laid down in the JDDJ, then the office or ministry responsible for such proclamation cannot be viewed in isolation from this recognition. For if this office or ministry were fundamentally deficient, this would affect the gospel proclamation so strongly that one could no longer speak of a differentiated consensus in the doctrine of justification.

If this ministry is therefore fundamentally to be recognised by the Catholic side as apostolic ministry to the gospel, the reverse also applies, namely that the episcopal, sacerdotal and diaconal ministries in the Catholic Church, including the papal office, serve the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and are to be recognised in this function by the Lutheran side as ministry to the gospel. In contrast to past polemics, this has largely been the case on the Lutheran side for a long time. The JDDJ reinforces the argumentation for this recognition.

These reciprocal affirmations of the church's ministry, consequential to the signing of the JDDJ, also imply major work in theology. The JDDJ obliges Catholic ecclesiology to express the primacy of witnessing to the gospel at all levels of ecclesial action. Protestant ecclesiology, on the other hand, is called upon to emphasise the importance of the ordained ministry for the mission of the church. Both sides are to give equal recognition to the fact that the whole people of God is committed to apostolic witness and proclamation of the gospel.

2.2 The signing of the JDDJ as an ecclesial fulfilment

More than twenty years after the signing of the JDDJ, steps have been taken towards a differentiated form of church fellowship between the Evangelical Lutheran churches and the

Roman Catholic Church at various levels,[8] but a breakthrough towards a union of the churches is still pending. Apart from a few exceptions, fellowship at Holy Communion or the Eucharist has not been mutually declared. It is therefore all the more important that the signatures of the partner churches and their consensus in ecumenical theory and practice prove to be fruitful and resilient.

The signing of the JDDJ is a performative act of the churches. The recognition of a fundamental consensus in doctrine was celebrated at a joint service of worship. The liturgical context and the liturgical presence of representatives of both churches indicate that the signing is highly relevant in ecclesiological terms. This act means that the churches are not only committed to the doctrine of justification, but also express their consensus in an ecumenical liturgy.

If one takes this liturgical context seriously, then the question arises as to whether the act of signing the JDDJ does not constitute a *de facto* recognition of the Evangelical Lutheran partner *as a church* by the Roman Catholic Church. The declaration "Dominus Iesus" of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith[9] did not yet address this question. Therefore, the interpretation of what the Second Vatican Council says about the differentiation towards churches and ecclesial communities that emerged from the Reformation can be continued even after the document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In the light of the JDDJ, the role that the papal office can play in the future for the development of relations between the Lutheran churches and the Catholic Church must also be re-examined.

The reflection on the basic theological consensus on justification can go beyond the question of mutual recognition of ministries and deal with practical forms of the relationship between *Christian brothers and sisters*. The joint worship celebration "From Conflict to Communion" on Reformation Day 2016 in Lund, which was led by Pope Francis and the President of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Munib Younan, with the participation of other representatives of both churches, is of particular importance.[10] For here – despite all the continuing differences – mutual esteem for the ministry was literally illustrated by the common liturgical vestments; this calls all the more for a corresponding theological reflection.

The signing of the JDDJ puts the method of differentiated consensus into effect ecclesiologically, since the joint understanding of the doctrine of justification allows the churches room for different interpretations of this doctrine which do not signify division. This performative dimension of the signing must be emphasised in the further reception of the JDDJ from an ecclesial perspective. The considerations presented below therefore also serve this purpose.

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8 Cf. especially From Conflict to Communion (see note 4).

9 Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration "Dominus Iesus" on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church. Rome 2000 Available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html

10 From Conflict to Communion. Ecumenical service for the joint commemoration of the Reformation 2017, commissioned by the Liturgical Working Group of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity, Leipzig / Paderborn 2016.

3. Differentiated consensus
How viable is this methodology with regard to further steps towards unity?

The significance of the JDDJ is not merely that a consensus was reached on a fundamental controversial issue and that this consensus was signed at a solemn ceremony by representatives of both churches. Rather, the JDDJ is characterised not only by the theological insights it formulates and the performative implications associated with its signing, as described above (in Chapter 2), but also by the underlying consensus model, the so-called "differentiated consensus".

In the preamble to the JDDJ, the "differentiated consensus" is characterised, without being named as such, as *a)* a "consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification" reached in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, which *b)* includes various ("differentiating") confessional developments of this consensus that continue to exist, so that *c)* "the doctrinal condemnations … do not apply." (JDDJ 40-44).

The JDDJ initially corresponds to this consensus model in its rough structure. After the basic biblical considerations (section 1, JDDJ 8-12) and a brief historical excursion (section 2, JDDJ 13), the common understanding is formulated (section 3, JDDJ 14-18), followed by the explication of the common understanding (section 4, JDDJ 19-39) and the consequential summary regarding the doctrinal condemnations (section 5, JDDJ 40-44). For its part, the development of the basic consensus follows the "differentiated consensus", in that the understandings reached and the differences that remain are named in detail but are no longer regarded as church-dividing as such.

If the JDDJ stands paradigmatically for this model of consensus because of its consistent application of the "differentiated consensus", and if other ecumenical consensus texts also have to be measured according to this, then it is by no means the case that the "differentiated consensus" can be limited to a particular dialogue and a particular topic, as the characterisation in the preamble of the JDDJ might suggest, nor does it necessarily presuppose doctrinal condemnations.

The Lutheran theologian Harding Meyer, who can be regarded as one of the most important pioneers of the "differentiated consensus", has accordingly not linked it solely to the JDDJ, but on the contrary has pointed out that a form of "differentiated consensus" has emerged in most ecumenical dialogues, even though "this particular kind of ecumenical consensus-building practised by them has hardly ever been reflected upon, described or even mentioned" in the dialogues themselves. He sees the 1960s as a turning point in the history of the ecumenical movement, when the opening of the Roman Catholic Church in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the beginning of broad bilateral ecumenical dialogues led to the abandonment of the model of an "organic union" and a shift towards an understanding of "unity in reconciled diversity". From then on, confessional diversity was no longer seen as a

contradiction to ecumenical understanding, but as an integral part of it. Thus, the "idea and formula" of "differentiated consensus" had emerged and gradually crystallised in the course of consensus attempts in bilateral interconfessional dialogue. The result was "repeatedly [...] a consensus with a special structure, which the dialogues were unable to describe simply as 'consensus', referring instead to 'far-reaching', 'fundamental', 'substantial' or 'useful' consensus", a consensus that takes into account the unity of churches with continuing differences in their confessions.[11]

The "differentiated consensus" can therefore also be applied to topics other than the doctrine of justification. It is not necessary to find a common language; on the contrary, characteristically confessional expressions remain justifiable, even if they should always be critically questioned with regard to their perception of the partners and the need to bring them up to date. Ecumenical dialogue has adopted the thesis that the various traditions differ in their perspectives, which need not be mutually exclusive, but can rather be inclusive. Accordingly, the particular formulations in language and emphases in theology that emanate from the various traditions can be understood as mutually illuminating, complementary and limiting forms or figures of thought in the light of a basic conviction of unity in faith which has recently been acquired.

In cases where no explicit doctrinal condemnations exist, one must first identify those points of difference that are perceived as church-dividing. In the course of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, the topics of "apostolicity", "sacramentality" and "visibility" have become apparent from an ecclesiological perspective. They should be examined more closely with regard to the possibility of a "differentiated consensus". The task is to analyse and reappraise the points of difference on the basis of the consensus on the doctrine of justification as formulated in the JDDJ.

11 Harding Meyer, Die Prägung einer Formel. Ursprung und Intention, in: Harald Wagner et al. (eds.), Einheit - aber wie? Zur Tragfähigkeit der ökumenischen Formel vom "differenzierten Konsens" (QD 184), Freiburg i.Br. 2000, 36-58; cf. also Jennifer Wasmuth, Formel, Methode, Ziel!? Der "differenzierte Konsens" in kritischer Betrachtung, in: Cath(M) 75 (2021) 214-223.

4. Explication from fundamental theology
Witnessing authorities (*loci theologici*)

In order to bring out the *ecclesial significance* of the JDDJ, it can be helpful to use the methodology of the *loci theologici*, both formally, i.e. regarding the manner of theological insights, and in terms of content. This method was employed and made fruitful for ecumenism by the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue in Germany in the document "Communio Sanctorum" (CS)[12] which presented various authorities that witness to the gospel. There it states:

"To receive the truth of God, to witness to it, and to share it belong essentially to the church's reason for existing. In this our churches agree. They also agree that the reception, recognition, and witness of the truth is the task of the church as a whole, and that in this, various recognition- and witnessing-authorities must work together:

- Holy Scripture
- The handing on of the faith (*tradition*)
- The witness of the whole people of God (the faithful's *sensus fidei*)
- The church's teaching office (*magisterium*)
- Theology. (CS 45)

In the process of finding and testifying to the truth of the gospel, guided by the Holy Spirit, these witnessing authorities differ in their weighting and their tasks, but they always interact with each other and are in this sense dependent on one another.
If one adds to these witnessing authorities the so-called "signs of the times", which are to be perceived and interpreted in the light of the gospel (cf. Gaudium et spes, GS 4 and 11; Presbyterorum ordinis, PO 9; Apostolicam actuositatem, AA 14; Unitatis redintegratio, UR 4), then this interplay of witnessing authorities can be perceived as a historical process, which therefore also leads the churches to new insights over and over again. If we therefore assume that the gospel or the Word of God is testified in a historically effective way in the lively interaction of these instances, then we can assume that these different witnessing authorities are present and active in each of our two churches, even if their precise understanding, their classification and their theological perception can be and indeed are quite different.
If this methodology is applied to the JDDJ, then the doctrine of justification can also be located within this framework. On the one hand, it is then for both sides "an indispensable criterion which constantly serves to orient all the teaching and practice of our churches to Christ." (JDDJ 18). At the same time, however, this criterion allows for a differentiated evaluation *by*

12 Communio Sanctorum (see note 6), nos. 40-73.

consensus, for: "When Catholics see themselves as bound by several criteria, they do not deny the special function of the message of justification." (JDDJ 18). This gives expression both to the central importance of the doctrine of justification and to its contextualisation, insofar as it is integrated into the structure of the other authorities witnessing to the gospel, setting the significant standards for them all in this structure.

In the teaching and life of the Catholic Church, this significance of the doctrine of justification, orientated towards the centre of the Trinitarian faith, and its criteriological significance as a "measure and touchstone" for the context of Catholic doctrine as a whole and in the context of the doctrine of the "hierarchy of truths" should now be brought to the fore. In this way, the connection between the doctrine of justification and several criteria which Catholics see as their duty, as mentioned in JDDJ 18, would come to bear in its fundamental significance, directing the church's practices towards the gospel as its centre.

This results in a methodological and ecclesiological gain for the question of ecclesial consensus. This is because the *methodological* approach of the witnessing authorities simultaneously releases a correspondingly differentiated ecclesiology that gives room for processes of negotiation in the church. They can be linked to questions about further consequences:

The Catholic Church has to face the question whether it is not a performative contradiction if it fails to recognise the (certainly differentiated!) ministry and ecclesiality of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, whilst at the same time assuming that the aforementioned witnessing authorities also exist in the Evangelical Lutheran Church. For the recognition of the JDDJ implies that a ministry in the church is a witnessing authority of this kind, even if the concrete form of the ministry (and thus also of the church as a whole) cannot be logically derived from the JDDJ. Conversely, the question which has to be faced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church is how far such mutual recognition within the JDDJ influences the perception of Catholic ecclesiology and the possibilities of its Protestant reception, for example with regard to the meaning of the "sacramentality" of the church.

5. Apostolicity of the Church

The fact that the church is apostolic is part of the joint credo. The term "apostolicity" covers the mission of the church, founded in the revelation of Jesus Christ as God's salvation for mankind and imbued with life by the power of the Holy Spirit. The great commission given to the church to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as the message of salvation for all people is addressed to all church members.

The exact understanding of apostolicity differs between the Evangelical Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches. In shaping their mission to proclaim the gospel, the churches have developed different forms which, according to their respective self-understanding, are based on the message of salvation of Jesus Christ and in this sense are instituted by the Lord of the church. These differences are also evident in the churches' outward appearance. In ecumenical relations, it is essential that these differences do not tear the churches apart, but rather bind them together. The precondition is that the differences have a stable foundation uniting all believers and their churches in their discipleship. In this case, it is possible to recognise the differences mutually as legitimate manifestations of the commonalities. In the study on "The Apostolicity of the Church" (2006)[13], there is a differentiated argumentation on the way in which this may be achieved. In an ecumenical study on "The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification" (2012)[14], approaches have been deepened and developed which reinforce the testimony of justification in the Bible as it is found in the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification". Further considerations in this direction are contained in "From Conflict to Communion".

On this basis, it is necessary to examine whether one can also speak of a differentiated consensus in the understanding of apostolicity, allowing the development of further studies on the mission of the church as undertaken in the power of the Holy Spirit.

5.1 The New Testament basis

Before employing individual biblical texts as a basis for ecclesiological reflections on a differentiated consensus in the understanding of the church, there must be a thorough clarification of the hermeneutical presuppositions. When it comes to the apostolicity of the church, this clarification particularly covers the relationship between the revelation of Christ,

13 The Apostolicity of the Church. Study document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. Minneapolis 2006. Available at https://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2019/documents/lwf_apostolicity_of_the_church_complete_book_english.pdf

14 The Biblical Foundations of the Doctrine of Justification. An Ecumenical Follow-up to the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Commissioned by the Lutheran World Federation, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Methodist Council and presented by a task force of biblical scholars and systematic theologians. New York 2012.

as testified in the New Testament, and the apostolic witness of the church, as it began in the New Testament. The Christ event is the subject of the apostolic witness and precedes the New Testament writings. It reveals God's salvation, and as a revelation it predetermines the faith and testimony of the church. In the last days, it became present in Jesus' mission to Israel and in the founding of a community of Jesus' followers in Israel. Jesus' disciples were commanded to pass on the message of God's healing presence among humankind that had been given to them (Mt 10:5-7). The gospel is founded upon the Easter confession of his salvific death and his resurrection from the dead, and the apostles were commissioned to proclaim this message of salvation for all nations in faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:3-11). The unity of the apostolic witness to Christ is based on this gospel, for whose proclamation the apostles were commissioned and empowered by Jesus Christ (Gal 2:7-10).

Because the Christ event has from the very beginning been received and passed on by people, fundamentally by the apostolic witnesses, it can only ever be understood in the diversity of its human testimonies, which unfolded kerygmatically, doctrinally, in the formation of fellowships and in practical life. It is incumbent upon the church as a whole, with all its members in their mutual relationship, to develop the message of Christ at all times by people for people, based on the Christ event described in Holy Scripture. The Church is confident that it is guided by the Holy Spirit down through history, so that it will stay true to the original apostolic witness as preserved in Holy Scripture, or be brought to revert to it.

The manifold expressions of the apostolic testimony and preaching form the basis of the New Testament canon. According to the New Testament, the apostles, the first recipients of Christ's revelation and fundamental witnesses to him, acted jointly and were in agreement on the core of their message. They proclaimed the message of Jesus' actions, his salvific death on the cross and his resurrection by God. The beginnings of the Easter proclamation of Christ as the origin of the church on earth are reflected in the fellowship of the apostles. The historical diversity of the testimonies to the one Christ event is thus fundamentally embedded in and entrusted to the church in its scriptural canon .

In the testimony of the New Testament, there is strong unity combined with great diversity. In the New Testament canon, which was developed in a comprehensive and historically complex process lasting up until the second half of the 4th century, various texts of different authors, which were recognised as apostolic, were compiled and placed into an orderly structure. This is the form in which the New Testament, together with the Old Testament, is given to the church as a standard and criterion.

The unity of the New Testament testimony is based on the unity of the gospel. The New Testament only recognises the word "gospel" in the singular. The unity of the gospel manifests God's eschatological will of salvation, made accessible to people in the person, work, life and destiny of Jesus of Nazareth in Israel. The Easter church has confessed him since his resurrection from the dead as the foundation, author and finisher of its faith and of its hope for ultimate salvation for all peoples. The eschatological will of God for salvation is clear and was

revealed in Jesus Christ once and for all (Rom 6:10; Heb 7:27; 9:12; 10:10). Just as there is only one Father, one Son and one Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-6), so there is only one gospel, one baptism, one Eucharist and one faith (Eph 4:4-6). This unity is genuinely manifested in a diversity of human voices, gifts and forms (1 Cor 12:4-6). Thus, the canon contains one gospel "according to" Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The gospel can be expressed by the proclamation of the kingdom of God (Mk 1:15) as well as by the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:3-5); it remains the one gospel of God that can be accepted in faith, because Jesus, who proclaimed that the kingdom of God is at hand, is identical with the exalted *kyrios* whom God raised from the dead.

For the sake of the proclamation of the gospel, people are required who are sent and authorised by Jesus Christ himself to work in his name. These people are already called "apostles" in the Gospels in connection with their being sent out by Jesus Christ long before Easter (Mt 10:2; Mk 3:14; 6:30; Lk 6:13; 9:10; 17:5; 22:14; Jn 13:16). They are messengers, envoys representing Jesus himself and proclaiming him as God's Saviour (Lk 10:16). After Easter as well, mission is inextricably linked to the calling and sending of apostles by the risen Jesus Christ (Mt 28:16-20; Lk 24:10; Acts 1:2, 26; 2:37 et pass.; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Gal 1:17 et pass.). In this way, the church's message of Christ attains global dimensions (Mt 28:16-20; Acts 1:8 et pass.). At the same time, it maintains the connection with the people of Israel and with Jerusalem, from where the gospel emanates, and with the apostles who continue to work there (Acts 8:1; 11:1-18), even when it comes to disputes about the truth of the gospel (Gal 2:1-10; Acts 15). The message continues to come from Jesus Christ, represented by people whom he has appointed to this ministry (2 Cor 5:20f.).

The diversity of the New Testament witness is demonstrated by the fact that many people with different talents and biographies were called to the apostolic ministry from the very beginning. Peter and Paul are representative examples of this broad spectrum. Only recently has it been rediscovered that Junia, a woman, is also reckoned among the apostles by name (Rom 16:7). The diversity also encompasses the fact that different concepts of the apostolate are to be found in the New Testament. Characteristically, there is Luke on the one hand, who in his Gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles only recognises the Twelve as apostles in the true sense: those who were chosen by Jesus himself (Lk 6:13-16) and were supplemented by Matthias before Pentecost to replace Judas (Acts 1:15-26), for only they can bear witness after Easter to what Jesus experienced, taught and suffered beforehand. It is on the other hand also characteristic that Paul indeed connects the apostolate to the Easter calling by the risen *kyrios*, recognising the fundamental importance of Cephas (Peter) and the Twelve, but ranks his own calling alongside them, even though he confesses that as a former persecutor he is not worthy to be called an apostle (1 Cor 15:5-11). In this sense, Paul also seems to be able to reckon James, the brother of Jesus, among the apostles (Gal 1:19), who says in the prescript of his epistle that he does not call himself an apostle, but "a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Jas 1:1; cf.

2:1), because, like Paul, he has obviously become his envoy through an encounter with the risen Christ.

The unity and diversity of the apostolate are not played off against each other in the New Testament writings, but are reconciliated to one another. Paul describes the "Apostles' Council" (cf. Acts 15:1-35) in such a way that the "pillars" of the church in Jerusalem – James, Cephas and John – held out the right hand of fellowship to him in consensus about the gospel, because they recognised the "grace" given to him and thus the legitimacy of his apostolate for the nations (Gal 2:1-10). Immediately afterwards, he reports on a serious conflict with Cephas in Antioch concerning the fellowship at table between Jewish and Gentile Christians (Gal 2:11-14), in which he had reminded Cephas (Peter) of their common conviction that a person is not justified by "works of the law", but by "faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2:15-16). In missionary practice, Paul can refer to the example of "the other apostles, the Lord's brothers and Cephas" in order to justify different methods and ways of life in the service of the one gospel (1 Cor 9:5). According to the Acts of the Apostles, Peter expressly supported the mission work in Antioch, as described and advocated by Barnabas and Paul, and referred to his own preaching experiences, reflecting on them theologically (Acts 15:7-11). According to the Second Epistle of Peter, the author, who is introduced as an "apostle of Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:1), praises the "wisdom" given by God to his "dear brother Paul", which must be protected from distortion by means of correct interpretation (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Paul saw his task as an apostle not only in the proclamation of the gospel and the founding of churches, but also in pastoral care for their growth (1 Cor 3:5-17; cf. 1 Peter 5:2). It is typical of early Christianity that all individual believers and the church as a whole are called and empowered to proclaim the gospel in word and deed. Paul influenced this mission in many ways, right down to the missionary force of the Christian liturgy (1 Cor 14:23-25), showing great sensitivity for the impact of Christian ethics on society (1 Thess 4:9-13). The First Epistle of Peter draws on the promise to Israel in Exodus (Ex 19:4-6) in order to justify the calling of the Christian community as the royal and priestly people of God "to declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The Corpus Paulinum contains testimonies explaining that in later times the church must be built on the foundation laid by the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20-21). The Epistle to the Ephesians mentions "evangelists, pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11), who are to do the work of ministry so that all members of the church reach maturity in order to profess their faith. The Pastoral Epistles emphasise the ministry of the bishop (episkopos) and the deacons (1 Tim 3:1-7, 8-13). However, the elders also have responsibilities (Tit 1:5-9; cf. 1 Tim 5:17-22 and 1 Peter 5:1), albeit their relationship to the bishops is not fully clarified. Here there is also reference to a succession from the apostles – in relation to the "teaching" given by the instruction (1 Tim 4:6). In this case, succession means continuation, a combination of continuity and innovation. However, this development, which is intended to respond to the current challenges of the time,

is coupled with the exclusion of women from the public sphere, including the church, and from leadership positions in the congregations (cf. 1 Tim 2:9-15).
In our churches, the Pastoral Epistles are respected, but read and interpreted differently. The Roman Catholic tradition quotes the Pastoral Epistles as it sees the calling of the bishops to the apostolic succession in the service of faith and sound teaching (1 Tim 4:6-11). It also recognises here the approach of the doctrine of the threefold ordo. The Evangelical Lutheran tradition refers to the same Pastoral Epistles when it states that therein the ministry of the bishops cannot be sharply distinguished from that of the elders, but shows decisive similarities with it (Titus 1:5-9). Reflection on these differences requires a more precise understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition.
Apart from the Corpus Paulinum and the Acts of the Apostles, there are other constellations in New Testament writings that are partly different and partly similar, developing in different ways. Matthew presupposes a chain of tradition consisting of believing disciples who have come to be teachers through learning; more and more generations come to learn from them, so that the teaching is passed on (Mt 28:16-20). The Epistles of John recognise an "elder" at the head of the church (2 John 1; 3 John 1). The Epistle of James sees a group of church elders at work (Jas 5:14). The Epistle to the Hebrews mentions “leaders” (Heb 13:24: cf. Rom 12:8). In the Revelation of John, the "twelve apostles" form the foundation of the church (Rev 21:14), while the prophets (Rev 22:6,9) speak the words that are to come true without being integrated into an ecclesiastical hierarchy.
As the New Testament writings were compiled into the canon of the church, an image of the apostles became definitive that was a combination of elements from the tradition of the Gospels as well as the Lucan and Pauline concept of the apostles. Thus, the twelve disciples of Jesus were reckoned to be apostles both individually and as a group, as were Paul and the Lord’s brothers James and Jude. The author of the Epistles and Gospel of John was identified with the Zebedee John and thus also counted as one of the twelve apostles. The authors of the Gospels of Mark and Luke, who were obviously not apostles, were also indirectly attributed with apostolicity as disciples of Peter (Mark) and Paul (Luke). Peter, Paul, Matthew, John and James stand for the fellowship of all apostles and the church as a whole, which is founded on the unity of God and the Christ event and finds expression in the proclamation of the message of Christ to Israel and the nations.

5.2 Interpretation and development in the tradition of the church

The apostolic ministry was unique and fundamental, although in Paul and Luke there are obviously both differences and similarities in the conception of apostleship. As witnesses of the resurrection who form together with the prophets the foundation of the church on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ (according to Eph 2:20f), the apostles could have no successors with a similarly fundamental role in the church. Nevertheless, essential tasks that were originally

(prototypically) performed by the apostles lived on in the spiritual ministries that developed and became increasingly institutionalised in the course of time.

Referring back to the apostles, the post-apostolic churches saw themselves as "apostolic"; likewise, incumbents of church ministries regarded themselves as "apostolic successors". The claim to apostolicity and apostolic succession depends upon the apostolic origin of the church (*apostolicitas originis*). The apostles were considered to be authentic witnesses of the gospel. The good news of God's salvation of sinful man in Jesus Christ, the core of the doctrine of the justification of the sinner, on which there is broad agreement between Lutheran and Catholic Christians, is the foundation of the church, its apostolic doctrine (*apostolicitas doctrinae*). Understood in this way, the consequence of consensus on the doctrine of justification is consensus on the apostolicity of the church as well as the apostolicity of the ministry that serves the message of justification.

Even in the late New Testament period, "following the apostles" in teaching, mission and life conduct was supposed to testify to faithfulness towards the original message on the one hand and to continuity in mission and unity on the other, even though each apostolic role model was unique. Paul's letters were collected, and the Jesus tradition was recorded in writing; pseudepigraphical attribution of authorship to the apostles was also used to claim authority when adjusting the proclamation of faith to new situations. It was seen to be necessary to prevent falsifications of the apostles' teaching. This purpose was to be served by the ministerial order, which was being formed and was understood to be in line with the work of the apostles (cf. 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 3:10). Faithfulness to the apostles' teaching is the central criterion for this order. The laying on of hands and prayer become a sign of the God-created connection to the apostles, which lies at the heart of the concept of apostolic succession (*apostolicitas successionis*).

The claim that presbyters and bishops are continuing the ministry of the apostles can already be found in the First Epistle of Clement (1 Clem 40-44) and the Didache (Did 15). Irenaeus of Lyons develops this idea further in his defence against Gnosticism. The identity with the faith of the apostles can be demonstrated by the continuity of the public proclamation of faith, which is guaranteed by the ministry of the bishops in traceable continuity back to the apostles (Adv. haeres. III,3,1 and III,3,3). It is primarily the church that stands in *successio* to the apostles (Adv. haeres. IV,26,5), but here the bishops now exercise the ministry formerly held by the apostles, namely to interpret the original doctrine of the Scriptures without falsification (Adv. haeres. IV,33,8). The apostolicity of faith is the foundation of a synchronic consensus of faith in all apostolic churches, based on a diachronic consensus of public proclamation going back to the apostolic origins (*regula fidei*, Adv. haeres. I,10,1). This applies to every apostolic church in the same way, so that for Irenaeus it is sufficient to point to Rome as pars pro toto (Adv. haeres. III,3,2). For Tertullian, too, apostolicity (in the sense of a "communion of blood in doctrine") is based on accordance with the apostles, regardless of whether a church can directly or indirectly refer to its foundation by an apostle (De praescriptione haereticorum 32). For

Tertullian, however, the apostolic unity of the churches is evident in peace, brotherhood and hospitality (De praescriptione haereticorum 20).

The doctrine of episcopal succession was widely received in antiquity (Tertullian, De praescriptione haereticorum 32; Cyprian, ep. 69,3; Optatus of Mileve, De schism. Donat. II,2). Diachronic continuity back to the apostles was essential in order to preserve the purity of the gospel of salvation handed down in the scriptural canon. Equally important was the synchronic consensus of the episcopal churches, joined together in a *communio* of unity and peace, since the same apostolic faith and the same Holy Scriptures were present everywhere and they all celebrated the same Eucharist (cf. Augustine, b. Faust. 33,9; 38,2; c. ep. Man. 4,5; util. cred. 27,35; Cresc. 2,11,13).

There were other forms of ministry that were not based on apostolic succession. In the Ignatian letters, the hierarchy of the earthly church mirrors the heavenly reality, so that the bishop represents God/the king and the presbyters the apostles, who should be united in harmony with the *episkopos*. The Syriac didascalia also follows this trans-historical pattern of forms and imitations, thus inculcating obedience to the bishop. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita also develops the idea of the earthly representation of the *hierarchia caelestis*.

The organisation and relationship of the ministries of *episkopos* and *presbyteros* to each other was extremely fluid. From the second century onwards, the monarchical episcopate prevailed, which saw the bishop as the only *sacerdos* who presided over the Eucharist and preached, while the presbyters were his counsellors and assistants. Subsequently, however, they were also "sacerdotalised" and acted as preachers and presiders over the Eucharist, especially in rural parishes. A significant movement among the Fathers (Jerome, Ambrosiaster and others) denied that only the bishops belonged to the apostolic ministry in the strict sense, advocating an original unity and equality of episcopate and presbyterate, based on the Pastoral Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles. According to this tradition of interpretation, the superiority of the bishops developed later owing to contingent historical circumstances.

From the 4th century onwards, the Roman bishop began increasingly to claim responsibility for the universal church on the basis of requests from individual bishops. The Roman See, as the *cathedra Petri*, was the sole *sedes apostolica*. However, this claim could not be enforced, especially in the East; in the West in the early Middle Ages, anxious concern about ritual correctness led to the adoption of Roman liturgy and Roman canon law, and missionaries influenced by Rome were active in many places. As canon law was further developed, it came to an unhistorical projection of Roman claims reaching back into the early centuries of church history. This led to a Romanisation of the concept of the church in the early and high Middle Ages, including a new interpretation of the power of the keys: that it represented ecclesiastical jurisdiction which had been conferred solely on St Peter and his successors and in which the bishops could only receive a share. In the 11th and 12th centuries, the papal reformers largely succeeded in asserting this claim in the Latin Church. Divine *iustitia* demanded obedience to the *sedes apostolica* of the Bishop of Rome, whose episcopal see had been founded by Christ

himself and who alone must be called universal bishop (Dictatus papae, nos. 1 and 2). Only those who agreed with the Roman Church could be Catholic (ibid., no. 26).

Parallel to this shift in the meaning of apostolicity as a *successio regiminis*, understood as church government by the Roman See as the *cathedra Petri*, medieval theology following Jerome and Ambrosiaster saw in the presbyterate the fullness of the *ordo* and thus of the sacrament of Holy Orders. Thus the priesthood was the pinnacle of the apostolic ministry, which was interpreted as entirely sacerdotal, centred on the celebration of Holy Mass (authority of consecration): episcopal ordination went no further, other than endowing greater jurisdictional authority, which was, however, regarded as predominantly derived from the pope and not originating *ipso facto* from episcopal ordination itself. As a rule, ordinations continued to be conferred by the bishop – ordinations by presbyters with papal authority remained the rare exception – and the liturgical prayers at ordination also indicated that the bishop was the true *sacerdos.* Nevertheless, apostolicity was now interpreted primarily as conformity with the Roman See. The priesthood (presbyterate) was in any case the basis of the spiritual ministry.

In addition, the *successio vitae*, the exemplary life of the apostles, became very important for the Christian life. *Vita apostolica* was initially the model for the canonical movement in particular, which wanted to live in celibacy and community, doing pastoral work. The ideal of itinerant preaching in poverty, following the example of Christ and his apostles, attracted many men and women in the High Middle Ages, even outside the traditional religious communities. It is an expression of an intensification, individualisation, ethicisation and intellectualisation of faith, which was supposed to be more than mere participation in the correct ritual performance of the priest. This also gave rise to new forms of pastoral care and new religious communities; however, a significant number of the communities striving for an apostolical life were also forced out of the church and persecuted by it, which sought to prohibit lay preachers in particular. The Franciscan theologian William of Ockham (ca. 1288-1347), who accused the Pope of heresy because he opposed the *vita apostolica* of the Franciscans as Christ's way of life, believed that the apostolicity of the church was founded on Holy Scripture and the apostolic faith instilled in baptism.

The experience which characterised the Reformation, namely that the bishops and especially the Roman magisterium combatted as heretical the understanding of the gospel which the Reformers had discovered to be true and in accordance with Scripture, led them to the realisation that a formal *apostolicitas successionis* could not guarantee fidelity to the apostolic origins (*apostolicitas originis*) as such. They therefore focussed on an understanding of apostolicity that was oriented towards Holy Scripture and defined in terms of content, which the whole church is called upon to evaluate and preserve. The doctrine of the "universal priesthood" ascribes to all who are baptised and believe the "priestly" ability imparted by Christ to intercede for people before God and to stand up for the gospel before people. It also establishes the right and duty of all the baptised and believers to examine the preaching and teaching of the church in the light of the gospel and to judge it accordingly. However, the public

proclamation of faith and administration of the sacraments carried out in the name of the church requires a specific ministry appointed by Christ. Even before 1517, Martin Luther was convinced of the unity of the one apostolic ministry, appointed by Christ to proclaim the word and administer the sacraments. He was thus in accordance with the thesis of the factual identity of episcopate and presbyterate within the *ordo*, which had been developed by Jerome in particular and was advocated throughout the Middle Ages. He disconnected this one ecclesiastical office from sacerdotal notions of priesthood. According to Luther, Christ's unique sacrifice, which requires no addition or repetition (Hebrews), renders the category of priesthood in the sense of a sacerdotal sacrificial service inappropriate for a ministerial office in the church and its understanding.

According to the Wittenberg Reformers, the conferral of this apostolic ministry requires a "regular calling", which visibly expresses the church's authorisation for this ministry (cf. CA 14 in connection with CA 5). The specific form of such an act of calling was not initially specified. From 1535, centralised ordination was introduced in Wittenberg, even though the ordination of people ordained elsewhere was recognised. The token was the laying on of hands, by means of which an ordained person (1 Tim 3:17) entered into a presbyteral succession of office (cf. the Smalcald Articles, Third article, X). Beyond the individual parish, the need for a regional episcopate was recognised, especially for the supervision of teaching (cf. CA 28). This was usually carried out by superintendents and the consistory, and for secular matters in most territories by the sovereign. In the Scandinavian countries, the episcopal constitution was retained.

The ministry had to serve the gospel of Christ. According to the Lutheran understanding, the *apostolicitas doctrinae* is alone decisive (cf. Martin Luther, Weimar edition 39/2, 11,2), which in turn is bound to the Holy Scriptures. The apostolicity of the church consists in the apostolicity of its doctrine. An incorporating succession in the pastoral ministry based on ordination (*apostolicitas successionis*) can be a sign of this, but represents no guarantee.

Catholic controversial theology of the 16th century had three main points of criticism of this concept: a) from the standpoint of the papal office as guarantor of the apostolicity of the church constitution; b) from the standpoint of a doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass, which saw the offering of the sacrifice of Christ and the church as the central task of the ministry; c) from the standpoint of a principle of tradition, countering the allegation of decay and obfuscation and the claim that to a great extent the church had stood in opposition to the gospel for centuries. Tellingly, there was hardly any accusation that the *apostolicitas successionis* was lacking due to the abandonment of the episcopal succession. This is the consequence or downside of the fact that the apostolicity of the ministry was solely dependent on the bond with the pope and the concept of presbyteral succession was also an option of the Roman Catholic school.

From the late 16th century onwards, confessional theologies sought to establish their own position over against their opponents even more clearly. The Catholic side developed the doctrine of the *notae ecclesiae*, by which the true church could be quickly and reliably

recognised. The Lutherans had a central and adequate definition for this, as laid down in the Confessio Augustana: it is essential for the church that the gospel be preached purely and that the sacraments be administered according to the gospel (CA 7). One of the essential characteristics of the church for the Catholics, alongside the three other characteristics of the creed, was apostolicity, which in turn could be recognised most quickly and reliably in the Roman Church. Johann Gerhard (1582-1637), on the other hand, argued against Robert Bellarmine (1542-1621), trying to prove that even in Rome there was no unbroken succession of office going back to the princes of the apostles, but above all, even if there had been, this could not have prevented a deviation from the apostolicity of the doctrine. The external *successio locorum et personarum* could at most be a changeable accident of the solely decisive *apostolicitas doctrinae*, whereas, according to Bellarmine, precisely the pope was needed as an *iudex controversiarum* who could decide authoritatively, in cases of uncertainty that could otherwise never be resolved, what was exactly the apostolic teaching of Holy Scripture. Thus only the papal office could securely preserve the apostolic faith.

However, it is only in more recent times that the argument became more intense, claiming that failing or invalid consecration of a bishop undermines the validity of the ministry and its sacraments. This came up in connection with the debates about the validity of Anglican ordinations, since from the 17th, and especially in the 19th, century there was controversial discussion on the validity of Matthew Parker's (1504-1575) episcopal consecration of 1559, which was the basis of the succession of subsequent Anglican bishops. Here, the notion that a historical-diachronic chain of office reaching back to the times of the apostles was made into the guiding principle for each individual bishop. In contrast to the patristic concepts of apostolic succession, this signified empirical and restrictive precision. The question of episcopal succession became particularly important in those more episcopalistic models which saw the bishops as successors of the apostles and members of the college of apostles and did not derive their office entirely from the papal office.

In many places, the upheavals in Europe after the Enlightenment signalled the end of episcopalistic movements and ushered in the triumph of ultramontanism. Nevertheless, the question of the independence of episcopal jurisdiction vis-à-vis the pope remained controversial. The doctrine of the sacramentality of episcopal ordination prevailed largely. In 1896, in the Apostolic Constitution "Apostolicae curae", Pope Leo XIII declared Anglican ordinations null and void, but the explanations for this rejection were and remained controversial.

While the encyclical "Mystici corporis" of 1943 stated that episcopal jurisdiction was solely derived from the papal office, the Roman Catholic Church subsequently reinterpreted the episcopal office in a more favourable way. In 1947, the encyclical "Sacramentum ordinis" not only defined the laying on of hands as the sacramental sign of the liturgy of ordination (instead of the *traditio instrumentorum*), but also defined the higher ordained office as consisting of three parts, namely episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate. This was linked to the doctrine of

the sacramentality of episcopal ordination as distinct from priestly ordination. This was then further developed by the Second Vatican Council, according to which episcopal ordination confers the fullness of the sacrament of Holy Orders (Lumen Gentium, LG 21), specifically the power to teach, sanctify and lead (LG 25-27). An old doctrine was adopted, seeing the bishops at the head of the threefold ministry (LG 28), succeeding to the place of the apostles (LG 20). They become part of the college of bishops with the pope as its head, which has succeeded the college of apostles (LG 19 and 22). They represent their particular church within the universal church, and the universal church in their particular church (LG 23). As part of the college of bishops with the pope as its head, the bishops thus become the guarantors of the church's apostolicity. If a church is not in full communion with this *communio* of bishops, then they have a *defectus* (lack) in the sacrament of the *ordo* (UR 22,1), since it does not establish fullness of unity. The declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith "Dominus Iesus" of 6 August 2000 that ecclesial communities "which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery are not Churches in the proper sense" (DI 17) is a restrictive exacerbation that cannot be deduced from the Council. Although the Council also speaks of churches and ecclesial communities, it deliberately avoided saying exactly which of the churches fall under the respective terms. The fact that this openness of the Council is now being interpreted as a demarcation has therefore also been criticised by Catholics.

Although Lutherans can only see the criterion of the church's apostolicity in the apostolicity of its doctrine, fundamental debates about ecclesial offices have taken place, especially in the 19th century. This was also in connection with a "neo-Lutheran" self-assurance. On the one hand, such debates centred on the question of whether the offices should be derived from the common priesthood of the baptised or from Christ's command, but also whether the sovereign's summepiscopate interfered too strongly with the freedom of the episkopé of the church. This resulted in constitutional debates in which the idea of a historical episcopal succession hardly played a role, since this was in any case highly doubtful for the early period of the church, but they led to the implementation of superintendents (deans) and general superintendents (regional bishops). In addition, synods were increasingly established as organs of church leadership, which included non-ordained people as participating members. In this development, the concept of the common priesthood of all baptised and believers played a decisive theological role. As early as the 18th century, there were calls and reforms aimed at making church leadership less dependent on the state, and after 1918 structures were created on this foundation. The previous institutions of an episkopé above parish level were retained, but the leadership authority of the regional superintendents and regional bishops was strengthened. When the German Christians adapted the "Führer" principle, wanting to expand unilaterally the directive authority of the leadership offices, the "Barmen Theological Declaration" of 1934 emphasised that Jesus Christ acted through all offices of the church, which serve solely to proclaim the gospel and "for the

exercise of the ministry entrusted to and enjoined upon the whole congregation" (Thesis III and IV).

Through the ecumenical dialogues and the dialogues within international Lutheranism, the question of the apostolicity of the ministry and its significance for the apostolicity of the proclamation and teaching of the church became more relevant again in the 20th century . In further elaboration of the Leuenberg Agreement, the Neuendettelsau Theses on consensus about the question of "Ministry and Ordination" (1982/1986) emphasise that the ministry of episkopé should serve the unity of the church, and not be an office over the church. Thus, within the framework of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), the office conferred by ordination with the laying on of hands and prayer is regarded as a prerequisite for the ordered public proclamation of the gospel and administration of the sacraments and, as a ministry instituted by Christ, is a constitutive part of the church's being; in the same way, the necessity of the episcopal ministry, which can be exercised in different forms in the CPCE churches, is also emphasised. Such diversity in the organisation of the church's offices cannot be seen as a difference that divides the church. In the dialogues with the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches, it is emphasised that the one ministry is an integral element of the church in all parts, i.e. at various levels, and serves in a special way to witness to the gospel that is at nobody's disposal, but comes from outside and cannot be claimed unilaterally. An episkopé at a supra-congregational level is fundamental, as "Das geistliche Amt in der Kirche / The Ministry in the Church"[15] and the "Lima Document"[16] state (MIC 57; Lima-Ministry 23). Apostolicity is primarily agreement with the teaching of the apostles (MIC 60f., Lima-Ministry 35). The apostolic succession of bishops could be a sign of maintaining this continuity in doctrine, but it is no guarantee (Lima-Ministry [for the position of the Lutheran side] 66; Lima-Ministry 36 and 38). On the Lutheran side, however, the episkopé is not only associated with the office of bishop, but also with synods, in which the non-ordained also have an equal say in shaping the church's leadership on the basis of the general priesthood of believers. The "Porvoo Common Statement" (PCS)[17] emphasises on behalf of the Anglicans and the Scandinavian and Baltic Lutheran churches the apostolicity of the threefold church ministry (PCS 41), but also emphasises that this can promote *successio fidei,* but not guarantee it.

Against the background and with the experience of over 40 years of international ecumenical dialogue, in 2007 the Lutheran World Federation summarised in "Episcopal Ministry within the

15 The Ministry in the Church. Report of the Joint Roman Catholic/Evangelical Lutheran Commission, 1981. Available at http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/en6.html.

16 Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. Convergence Statements of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. Available at https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/FO1982_111_en.pdf.

17 The Porvoo Common Statement, 1992, British and Irish Anglican Churches and Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches. Available at https://porvoocommunion.org/porvoo_communion/statement/the-statement-in-english/

Apostolicity of the Church" (Lund)[18] the existing common ground between the Lutheran churches in the doctrine and practice of episcopacy as follows: "The Reformation was fundamentally concerned with the apostolicity of the church in faithfulness to the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ, upheld by the proclamation of the word and by the sacraments, received in faith. In relation to the ministry of episkopé the churches of the Lutheran Communion around the world maintain and develop forms and practices to serve their divine mission" (Lund 64). More precisely, apostolic succession is understood in the sense of the continuity of the proclamation of the same message as that of the apostles – a task which is incumbent on the whole church. Therefore, the apostolicity of the church should not be reduced to a particular form of continuity, such as an unbroken chain of laying on of hands. Because the office of episkopé "with its special responsibility to care for the unity and growth of the church" is "set in the context of the mission of the church as the whole people of God" (Lund 27), it is exercised in Lutheranism not only by bishops but "also carried out by cooperative, synodical forms of oversight, involving both lay and ordained persons, according to established rules and regulations" (Lund 4). The office of bishop is described as "a supra-congregational form of ordained ministry for the sake of spiritual discernment and leadership" (ibid.). The synods are not subordinate to the office of bishop as mere advisory bodies, but have an independent leadership and decision-making competence alongside it.

Since the JDDJ of 1999 in Augsburg states that there is consensus between the Evangelical Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches in the understanding of the gospel of Christ, then such a consensus also exists for the *apostolicitas doctrinae*, namely that remaining differences in the understanding of justification need no longer be regarded as church-dividing factors. In the Joint Official Statement on the JDDJ, the signatories undertake to continue to work on the open questions on the church, ministry and sacrament named in JDDJ 43, for the JDDJ must have an impact on the life of the churches. This particularly applies to the question of the apostolicity of the church. If fundamental agreement is established and expressed in the doctrine that salvation is given by grace alone in faith in the gospel of Christ, then it must be asked whether such a deep divergence between the two sides can exist regarding the apostolicity of the church and the ministry that one side could deny this apostolicity to the other without in fact undermining and revoking the JDDJ.

5.3 Theological orientations

The overview of the New Testament testimonies has shown that the apostolicity of the church is based on the fact that Jesus himself, the earthly and risen Christ, called, empowered and commissioned people to proclaim the gospel of God in his name, so that at all times and in all places people might come to believe for their justification and salvation. Later generations came

18 Episcopal Ministry within the Apostolicity of the Church. The Lund Statement 2007 (four-language edition), Geneva 2008.

fundamentally to encounter Jesus thanks to the biblical testimony, which in the New Testament goes back to the work of the apostles and is to be found in the Old Testament as a promise confirmed by Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). In form and concept, content and consequences, the apostolic testimonies in the New Testament are indeed manifold; they find their unity in Jesus Christ himself, his life and salvific work. The New Testament writings reveal how new ministries emerged in the young church on the basis of the apostolic ministry, first and foremost the office of the bishops, who are commissioned and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the fundamental ministry of the apostles, which goes back to Jesus Christ himself, and to proclaim the gospel of God in its liberating power.

In the course of the history of the church, the concept of the apostolicity of the church has undergone both constancy and various developments. It is supposed to express the connection with the church of the apostles, who by witnessing to the gospel of Christ laid the foundation of the church, which is Jesus Christ himself according to 1 Cor 3:10-17. The apostolicity of doctrine laid the basis for this and was to be served by the apostolicity of the succession in office. Despite all variations in the organisation of the apostolic ministry during the history of the church, it is indisputable that such an apostolic service is necessary for the public proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacrament, even though it takes various forms in our churches. This ecclesiastical ministry connects each individual congregation with the others and with the church as a whole, so that the structure of the episkopé is also part of the apostolicity of the church. This integration into the unity of the universal church is the deeper significance of apostolic succession, which is essentially succession in faith. The historical diversity of ministerial orders and theologies as well as the different practices of ordination teach us to distinguish between the specific forms and the basic foundation of *apostolicitas successionis* in the service of *apostolicitas doctrinae*. In this respect, it would seem possible to take the example of the JDDJ in order to establish a differentiated consensus on the question of the apostolicity of the church and its ministries.

The New Testament witness, which has been received and modified in the tradition of the church, contributes in three ways to an ecumenical-theological understanding of the apostolicity of the church.

1. The apostolicity of the church qualifies the continuity of the gospel and of faith through the ages, based on its defining origin in Jesus' mission of salvation. This continuity does not consist in rigid adherence to formulas of faith, but in the living development of the faith tradition, which always brings God's liberating word “up to date” (cf. Lk 4:18-21). The gospel and faith are not abstract elements. It is always people who proclaim and celebrate God's word – by no means only the apostles, but also the apostles in the sense that they promote the faith and witness of others and unite them in the one church of Jesus Christ.

2. By confessing the apostolic church, one is reminded that believers have to be called and empowered by Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel in his name in such a way that the church as a whole is built up. One form of calling and empowerment that emerged for the post-Easter faith community according to various New Testament texts was derived from Old Testament tradition (cf. Num 27:22f.; Deut 34:9), namely the laying on of hands by the apostles, the elders or the congregation, coupled with prayer (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim 1:6; cf. Heb 6:2). The New Testament does not recognise a fixed form, but it does state that no one may ordain themselves. Rather, the appointment to the ministry comes from God (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11), just as it is God who gives the grace to perform the ministry (1 Cor 12:4-7, 11; Eph 4:7-10; 1 Tim 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). The congregations are actively involved in the selection of suitable persons (cf. Acts 6:1-6), they perform the ordination (cf. 1 Tim 4:14) and make it clear that it is not they themselves who have created the ministry, but that they accept it as God-given.
3. Apostolic succession (*successio apostolica)* is necessary for the sake of succession in faith *(successio fidei)*, the post-Easter form of following Jesus Christ. This discipleship in faith manifests itself in the truth and freedom of the proclamation of the gospel, in adherence to the confession, in the celebration of the liturgy to the glory of God, in doctrine that is true to the gospel and, last but not least, in service to one's neighbour. Discipleship in faith requires the ministry of those who continue what was first done by the apostles: the proclamation of the gospel to build up the church and offer salvation to the world. Such ministry also serves to make visible what the apostles once did: erecting the church on the foundation that is Jesus Christ himself (1 Cor 3:5-17) and orientating it to Jesus Christ as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20-21). When it comes to the question of what concrete forms this service takes in the sense of apostolic succession, our answers are different, but not contradictory.

4. In the light of Scripture and tradition, it is necessary to consider and continue the search for an answer as to how a differentiated consensus on the theological meaning and understanding of apostolicity can address the still open questions of ecclesiology concentrated in the theology of ministry. According to the *Roman Catholic understanding*, the *successio apostolica* necessarily requires the service of the bishops, who jointly serve the hearing of the gospel, the lordship of Jesus Christ, the Head, and the unity of the church. In their ministry they are not above the company of believers, but are there to serve them. In their ministry of leadership, they are synodically integrated, without prejudice to their specific responsibility for the internal and external growth of the Body of Christ; this is why the Pope has currently invited the Catholic

Church to take a synodal path.[19] The entire People of God bears witness to the faith – with differing charisms, and different mandates. The episcopal office of leadership serves this sense of the faith (*sensus fidei fidelium*), also by giving it orientation. For "the entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn 2:20,27), cannot err in matters of belief." (LG 12).

According to the *Evangelical Lutheran understanding,* the fellowship of the baptised as the body of Christ consists in the common understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in mutual love and diakonia, as well as in the proclamation of the gospel for all people, to which all members of the church are called in the same way. Apostolic succession is fulfilled decisively in the lives of the faithful, who need the ministry of proclamation and administration of the sacrament for the sake of the public proclamation of the gospel (CA 7). This ministry is conferred by ordination with the laying on of hands and prayer. According to Evangelical Lutheran understanding, the office of episkopé helps the church to remain faithful to the truth of the gospel. It takes various forms. Depending on regional characteristics, the personal office of bishop participates in the leadership of the church, which is organised according to synodal principles.

Further studies are needed to clarify whether these differences have a church-dividing significance or allow for a differentiated consensus, as in the study "The Condemnations of the Reformation Era"[20].

19 Cf. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission. Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality available at: https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/document/common/vademecum/Vademecum-EN-A4.pdf.

20 The Condemnations of the Reformation Era. Do they still divide? Edited by Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990

6. Sacramentality of the church

As the ecumenical dialogue has shown, both the question of the common understanding of Holy Communion and the Eucharist and the question of the role and function of the ordained or consecrated ministry require an understanding of the nature and task of the church and thus, above all, a definition of the relationship between the "visible" and the "mystical/hidden" church. Here it is a particularly specific and yet – precisely for this reason – controversial question, how God reveals himself and what he has shown conclusively and unsurpassably clearly in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. For God reveals himself in the words and signs of human beings, and such audible words and visible signs can only be perceived and accepted as God's revelation, as his gospel, in the faith worked by his Spirit. Therefore, it is only from the perspective of faith that the church as a visible human community with its limitations – that is to say with its failures and guilt – can nevertheless be seen at the same time as the "sign and instrument" or the "means of salvation" (*medium salutis*) in which and through which the Gospel is passed on and testified.

6.1 Church as a sacramental "sign and instrument" of salvation: a Catholic impulse

It was primarily through recourse to the ecclesiology of the early church that Catholic theology in the 20th century came to apply the concept of the "sacrament" or the category of sacramentality to the church in order to characterise the relationship of the visible church to the whole fellowship of ("mystical", faithful dead) believers. Since the Second Vatican Council, which adopted this idea positively, it has become almost self-evident within Catholic systematic theology to speak of the sacramentality of the church. This could be positively received precisely because it makes it possible to express the essential distinction between Christ and his church without overlooking the bond that exists between them. For according to the words of the church constitution "Lumen gentium", the sacramentally understood church is indeed the "sign and instrument" (LG 1) of salvation; according to an old sacramental definition, the church mediates the salvation that it describes and bears witness to. However, it is not directly identical with this salvation itself, which, as in the individual sacraments, is bestowed solely by God in Christ and can only be recognised and accepted in faith. At the same time, however, it is particularly the intensive ecumenical discussion which has made it clear that this concept also has its limits and its dangers and therefore remains in need of explanation.

6.2 The church as the means of salvation through God's favour to the world: a Lutheran interpretation

In the Lutheran confessional tradition, this application of the concept of sacrament to the church as a whole is not common. Nonetheless it is also prepared to see God's presence in the world in terms of sacramentality, insofar as it assumes that God reveals himself authentically to people in a human way and through human words and signs. This applies elementarily to the Word of God (as given in Holy Scripture, differentiated as law and gospel, yet of one kind), which is understood pointedly as a "promise" that bears its fulfilment within itself. This basic figure is explicitly defined as a "sacrament" with regard to specifically designated "places", i.e. certain ecclesial practices, namely baptism and Holy Communion, at which believers can be certain of God's saving presence on the basis of the biblical promise. In the light of the biblical witness, it is then also possible from a Lutheran perspective to understand the church as a whole in this sense as an effective sign of divine salvation among the nations; this is factually congruent with the Catholic definition of the church as a "sign and instrument" (LG 1). The concept of "sacramentality" is then one (but of course not the only) specific way of expressing a relationship between human and divine working in the mediation of revelation. Both are combined, but not identified with one another, thus preserving precisely the primacy of divine action.

6.3 Relevance and limits of the talk of the "sacramentality of the church"

As mentioned, the category of the "sacramentality" of the church can only be viably used in an ecumenical sense if its limits are also recognised. For referring to the church as a sacrament involves a double analogy, first to Jesus Christ and then to the individual sacraments. According to the classical theological doctrine of the analogy (correspondence) between the divine being and that of the creature, this means that also with regard to the church the postulated "similarity" of earthly reality to the inherent divine presence is also linked to a ("much greater") dissimilarity. The church is therefore a "sacrament" in a different sense to Christ as the "original sacrament" on the one hand and to the individual sacraments on the other. The "sacramentality" of the church originates in the "sacramental" self-revelation of Christ and is permanently dependent on it; at the same time it must be distinguished from the "sacramentality" of the ecclesial practices expressly designated as "sacraments", in which Christ’s self-revelation is made tangible in a specific way. When speaking of Christ, the church or the individual sacraments, using the expression sacrament in each case, the dissimilarity should not be overlooked, despite all the similarities in the relationship between human and divine activity. In this sense, it must above all be made clear that the church may not be understood as such a "sacrament" in all its activities, and even less in its entire existence, but only in its constitutive actions, i.e. in the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments.

Two points are particularly relevant here. Firstly, it must be clearly defined which specific church practices possess a "sacramental" character in the sense mentioned, and which do not. Here the Lutheran Church has deliberately set stricter limitations than the Catholic Church in

order to avoid a "sacramental" idealisation of the church's structures, rites and ministries. In this context, it would be helpful to carry out a deeper joint reflection on the sinfulness of and in the church. This aspect has always been emphasised in Lutheranism in order to adhere to the church's abiding dependence on Christ's forgiving and renewing presence. At the same time, the Second Vatican Council also sees the fact that the Church is "always in need of being purified" and "always follows the way of penance and renewal" (LG 8) as the central difference to the "sacramentality" of the one and only bringer of salvation, Jesus Christ. Thus, Catholic theology can also speak of the sinfulness of the church by following up these thoughts. The shocking recognition of the extent of the churches' guilt in the sexual and spiritual abuse of countless people must therefore also lead to a deeper reflection as to how far the church remains threatened by such guilt. This has to be reflected in the way the church speaks about itself, and may no longer exclude from its self-understanding the honest perception of such guilt.

Secondly, to speak of the "sacramentality" of the church, thus focussing on its sacramental practices, should not relativise or obscure the importance of the proclamation of the gospel as the central task of the church. In this sense, the search for a common theology of the Word of God must be continued, for the Word can certainly be understood as "sacramental" insofar as it effectively reveals God's presence and his saving will for the world.

These points can certainly serve as common foundations despite the differing accentuations of Lutherans and Catholics, so that the understanding of the church as a "sacrament" developed in Catholic theology and the Catholic Church does not have to be church-dividing. What is decisive is the common conviction that God reveals his gospel salvifically through and in the church in various ways. This conviction must not necessarily be expressed by the term "sacramentality", but it certainly can be. Insofar as Evangelical Lutheran and Catholic theology can formulate a "consensus in basic truths" about the nature and task of the church as outlined, ecumenical understanding does not require any further agreement on a common use of the term "sacramentality" of the church. For such a consensus neither excludes different concerns and emphases of the ecumenical partner, nor does it exclude different linguistic and terminological developments, because "the "concerns" and interpretative stresses which are of primary importance in the doctrine of the one partner [are] nevertheless so clearly maintained in the doctrine of the other that they can neither be overlooked nor misunderstood" (Condemnations 40).

7. Visible unity of the church

The fact that the church is and must be visible is one of the self-evident insights of Christian faith. Visible practices are part of the nature of the church. But which visible practices are binding and therefore also irrevocable for the question of the unity of the church?

Almost 40 years ago, the report of the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue on "Facing Unity"[21] (FU) on the unity of the church formulated the following: "The unity of the church given in Christ and rooted in the Triune God is realized in our unity in the proclaimed word, the sacraments and the ministry instituted by God and conferred through ordination. It is lived both in the unity of the faith to which we jointly witness, and which together we confess and teach, and in the unity of hope and love which leads us to unite in fully committed fellowship. Unity needs a visible outward form which is able to encompass the element of inner differentiation and spiritual diversity as well as the element of historical change and development. This is the unity of a fellowship which covers all times and places and is summoned to witness and serve the world." (FU 3). For the unity of the Church, therefore, the agreement over the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments is fundamental. The ecclesial ministry must serve this purpose.

Catholics and Lutherans are struggling in ecumenical dialogue to determine exactly how this insight can be translated into visible form and unity. Significant theological approaches have been found. Many controversial theological condemnations have been resolved, while other issues have not yet been brought to a mutually convincing solution despite rapprochement. With regard to the joint commemoration of the Reformation, Lutherans and Catholics have therefore stated in the document "From Conflict to Communion" (FCTC) : "Catholics and Lutherans should again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal." (FCTC 241).[22] It is therefore necessary to continue to grapple with the outstanding questions on the path to visible unity and at the same time to remain aware of what has already been achieved ecclesiologically.

This includes the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. By signing the JDDJ, the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches have already overcome the doctrinal differences in the doctrine of justification that divided the churches and have laid

21 Facing Unity. Report of the Joint Roman Catholic/Evangelical Lutheran Commission (1984). Available at http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/en2.html

22 "Visible unity" is a commonly formulated ecumenical goal not only in Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, but also in multilateral international ecumenism. According to the basic formula of the churches associated in the WCC, this involves the commitment to "calling the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in the common life of Christ, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe." The Charta Oecumenica, to which the Christian churches of Europe have agreed, testifies: "We commit ourselves ... in the power of the Holy Spirit, to work towards the visible unity of the Church of Jesus Christ in the one faith, expressed in the mutual recognition of baptism and in eucharistic fellowship, as well as in common witness and service."

down the main features of a common understanding of the *gospel.* The first and fundamental goal of visible unity has thus been achieved. For agreement on the gospel is a prerequisite for unity in faith and thus also a prerequisite for agreement on the question of sacraments and ministry. Although unity in the understanding of the gospel or faith as such cannot be made visible, it was visibly witnessed to in the ceremonial signing of the JDDJ and visibly reinforced at the international and national joint commemorative services on the occasion of the Reformation commemoration. The JDDJ and further theological work formed the theological basis for the service in Lund commemorating the Reformation in 2016. The service celebrated the journey of both partners from conflict to communion. Abstract theological formulas that overcame the controversies of the Reformation era were thus filled with liturgical life. This and other services in conjunction with ecumenical worship practice made the communion in proclamation and faith visible.

The visible unity of the church does not remove the mystery of the invisible God, which is represented in the invisible church of Jesus Christ, nor can it be restricted to the classical topoi of controversial theology (e.g. sacrifice, transubstantiation, hierarchy), which of course cannot be ignored either, but must be dealt with decisively. The visible unity of the church is expressed primarily in worship celebration, in witness to the faith and in service to the poor and those in any way afflicted (GS 1). All dogmatic and ecumenical clarifications must serve to strengthen the liturgia, martyria and diakonia of the churches.

7.1 The understanding of the sacraments

Far-reaching agreements have been reached in the understanding of the *sacraments*, especially baptism and the Lord's Supper. Through the JDDJ, they are on the one hand given a new foundation, and on the other, they are strengthened and deepened.

There are no church-dividing differences in the understanding of *baptism*, but indeed fundamental and far-reaching similarities. In baptism with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of all sins and rebirth to a new life in Christ, the water symbolically anticipates the dying and resurrection together with Christ, and there is a visible act of incorporation into the one body of Christ. Baptism is mutually recognised. In the international Lutheran-Catholic dialogue "Baptism and Growth in Communion", this common persuasion is described in detail and has also been positively acknowledged by Roman Catholics, despite the reservations they have expressed about its ecclesiological consequences.

Fundamental agreements have been reached on the understanding of the *Lord's Supper*. There is a common conviction that the joint celebration of the Lord's Supper is of particular importance for the visible unity of the Church. In the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ gathers the fellowship of believers at his table and is through the promise of the words of institution himself present in his body and blood during the celebration of the meal under the elements of bread and wine. In the joint celebration, the

fellowship with Christ and in him the fellowship of believers with one another can be effectively experienced and symbolically visualised by the congregation at the service. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is the most meaningful and insurpassable representation and experience of fellowship and unity in the body of Christ under earthly conditions. For the pursuit of visible unity, it is therefore of great importance that the doctrinal differences with regard to the understanding of the Lord's Supper itself (i.e.: real presence, sacrificial character, lay chalice) should no longer be regarded as church-dividing (cf. "On the Eucharist"[23], FCTC 153-161). There is also agreement "that the celebration of the Eucharist involves the leadership of a minister appointed by the church" (Eucharist 65, quoted in FCTC 161). There is not yet agreement on the significance of the church for the Lord's Supper. According to the Catholic view, the Eucharist is essentially a celebration of the whole church (Sacrosanctum Concilium, SC 7). Eucharist communion presupposes church communion. In the discussion on the "Statement" of the Ecumenical Working Group entitled "Together at the Lord's Table", this aspect was once again strongly emphasised. However, the ecclesial dimension of the celebration of Holy Communion is also important to the Lutheran churches. It is important to link up ecclesiology with Eucharist and Communion theology in order to examine exactly how far the differences and similarities extend.

Fundamental agreements have also been reached with regard to the *ministry* of preaching the gospel. However, there are still serious tasks to be solved. There is a common conviction that (1) the proper calling in ordination with the laying on of hands and prayer of the church is the prerequisite for the ministry of public proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament, that (2) this ministry is a service to the unity of the body of Christ, i.e. his church, and that (3) Christ is represented in presiding at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Different answers are given to the question of how the common priesthood of all believers relates to the special ministerial priesthood, that is to say, how universal priesthood relates to the ordained ministry. There are also differences regarding the status and authority of the episcopal ministry and how the threefold *ordo,* which is essential for the Catholic Church, relates to the Lutheran understanding of the ordained ministry and especially to the episcopal office.

Since baptism and Communion or the Eucharist are explicitly described as sacraments in both the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Lutheran tradition, it is right that the ecumenical dialogue should focus primarily on these two liturgical practices, especially since they are regarded as the "major sacraments" in church tradition. Nevertheless, when considering the visible unity of the church, the question of the other symbolic acts understood as sacraments by the Roman Catholic Church cannot be ignored. However, the differences in the precise conceptual definition of what constitutes a sacrament must not allow us to overlook the fact that there are far-reaching similarities in the understanding of ordination in particular, but also of

23 The Eucharist. Report of the Joint Roman Catholic/Evangelical-Lutheran Commission (1978). Availabel at http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/en10.html

confession, both in the factual understanding and in the practice of worship, so that the explicit use of the term sacrament can be understood in a certain sense to be secondary. There are also no contradictions in the case of confirmation, the anointing of the sick, and marriage, but rather significant differences that do not rule out convergences in practice. The factual openness of the Lutheran concept of sacraments on the one hand (cf. Luther's statements on confession, for example) and the reference to each individual form of the sacraments on the Catholic side on the other hand therefore offer opportunities for understanding, which should be addressed further in dialogue. However, the question remains open as to how far the acts other than baptism and Eucharist which are known in the Roman Catholic Church as sacraments are essential to the nature of the church and therefore also necessary conditions for ecclesial unity.

7.2 The understanding of the pilgrim church

With regard to the *visibility of the church* and thus also the understanding of the visible unity of the church, there are important similarities, but also differences, which must be the subject of further discussion.

As a pilgrim church, the church is a *spiritual* fellowship that is *visibly* apparent as a fellowship in worship and a structured organisation. The dimensions of spirituality and visibility cannot be separated. The church on earth is a *pilgrim church*. It is a fellowship of believers who are reconciled with one another in Christ. This fellowship is particularly visible, tangible and effective in worship services. In this respect, the assembly of believers in a church service is a foreshadowing, precursor and foretaste of the kingdom of God, but for that reason still distinct from the kingdom of God.

According to a common conviction, the church is indeed *corpus permixtum*. It is not evident who truly belongs to the body of Christ. But the church is not a *civitas platonica*, not an invisible entity, as Philipp Melanchthon, for example, emphasises in his Apology of the Augsburg Confession (BSELK 407). For the church of Jesus Christ becomes visible in the assembly of worship, where the gospel is proclaimed and the sacraments administered. The constitution of the church in its order cannot be separated from this.

According to LG 8, the one mediator Christ "established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation". But "the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things; rather they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element." In CA 7, the church is described as the "assembly of all believers" or *congregatio sanctorum*. Certain visible practices are assigned to this fundamental designation, "namely the public proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. The visible practices belong to the essence of the church, are not merely inevitable makeshifts which are only required because the gospel

needs organisational structures in order to be communicated under the conditions of space and time."[24] However, for Lutheranism the faith of the "believers" is "in certain respects unclear. … More precisely, faith does indeed articulate itself in certain visible and audible actions, statements and confessions. But one cannot explicitly deduce from them with absolute certainty the genuine existence of the faith … The visible church is thus not simply identical with »the assembly of all believers and saints«: it has members who do not really believe, but pretend (and possibly are even convinced) that they do."[25] For this reason, the Lutheran tradition also speaks of the hiddenness of the church. The following distinction is also relevant for Lutherans. In the CPCE's doctrinal text "The Church of Jesus Christ", a distinction is made between the foundation, shape and commission of the church.[26] The foundation of the church consists in the action of the triune God through his Word and in the power of the Spirit. The commission of the church is to bear witness to the gospel and, as a community, to be a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God. The shape of the church, its way of life and organisation, must correspond to the foundation and commission of the church. This differentiation corresponds to the differentiation between the spiritual and visible dimensions in LG 8, as stated in the consultation report "Church and Church Communion"[27] between representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the CPCE.

7.3 The attributes of the church

The *attributes* of the church (unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity) not only describe the church in its invisible essence, but should also become visible in the life of the church in *leiturgia*, *martyria*, *diakonia* and *koinonia.* It is disputed whether and in what way the attributes become visible in the order or *hierarchical constitution* of the church and thus in the *ministerial office.*

According to Roman Catholic understanding, the attributes of the church become visible in its sacramental constitution, "since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG 1). In order to be fully and practically capable of action and to exist as a local and universal church, it needs the threefold ordained ministry as a structure. Without holy orders and the Eucharist, the church is no church. According to the Catholic view, churches that lack the (bishop's) office in historical apostolic succession "have not retained the proper reality of

24 Bernd Oberdorfer / Oliver Schuegraf (eds.), Visible Unity of the Church from a Lutheran Perspective. A study by the Ecumenical Study Committee, Leipzig 2017, 14.

25 Ibid. 19.

26 Cf. The Church of Jesus Christ. The Contribution of the Reformation towards Ecumenical Dialogue on Church Unity. Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich (eds.), Leuenberg Texts 1, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Leipzig 2012, 106-129.

27 See Church and Church Communion. Outcome of a series of consultations commissioned by the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Leipzig 2019.

the eucharistic mystery in its fullness"[28] and are therefore not churches in the full sense. However, the attributes are neither connected with the ministry nor in the ministry alone, but are always related to the church as church. According to LG 10, the constitution of the church results from its participation in the mission of Christ, namely in two forms that are distinct from each other, yet at the same time related to and mutually dependent on one another: namely the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood. This constitution of the church is fulfilled in *participatio* and *communio* to, with and in Christ. Neither form of participation exists without the church; both exist only in and with it. Neither of the two forms is identical with the church or could form and represent the church alone.

According to Evangelical Lutheran understanding, the attributes of the church are manifested in its proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament and in actions that are in accordance with the gospel. The constitution of the church must correspond to and serve the foundation and mission of the church. It is therefore not arbitrary. The church is constituted by the propagation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments; this commission is incumbent upon all believers in order to ensure that the church remains true to its apostolic origin. To ensure that the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments take place reliably, there is a public, ordained ministry that is assigned to observe and serve both these ends. The ministerial order serves to define the nature of the church as designated by its attributes. It has to take care that the exercise of the unifying means of salvation, both word and sacrament, is secured for the *communio sanctorum.* The proclamation of the gospel through the preaching ministry is also committed to the apostolic witness recorded in the New Testament and thus expresses the apostolic faith. The Lutheran churches agree that the ordained ministry also includes the ministry of episkopé, which is exercised in person by ministers of spiritual leadership (usually called bishop). Altogether, Lutheran churches traditionally speak of the one ministry, which is then to be differentiated according to the function and can be organised in different ways at different times and in different places. Unity and catholicity are also clearly evident in the fact that all churches that belong to the communion of the Lutheran World Federation stand in visible fellowship of altar, pulpit and confession, and this also includes fellowship in ministry.

The church's faithfulness in proclamation and life or action is not to be played off against its organisation in the form of ministerial structure. The order of the church in the form of its ministerial structure serves the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the church, but is unable to guarantee of itself the proper proclamation of the gospel in word and sacrament and

28 The full sentence reads: Communitates ecclesiales a nobis seiunctae, quamvis deficiat earum plena nobiscum unitas ex baptis mate profluens, et quamvis credamus illas, praesertim propter sacramenti Ordinis defectum, genuinam atque integram substantiam Mysterii eucharistici non servasse, tamen .... (UR 22). It is not a question of a complete absence of the sacramental ministry or the sacrament of Eucharist, but of the incompleteness of the original and complete substance/essence of the Eucharistic mysterium (which also includes holy orders). The incompleteness, not the complete absence, of the Eucharist or of holy orders is named and explained.

the corresponding testimony by one's life. Only Christ and the Holy Spirit can serve as guarantors for this.

8. Outlook
Ecclesiological consequences from the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification

The considerations presented in this study are based on the conviction that justification and the church belong together essentially. Soteriology and ecclesiology cannot be separated. The international Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue has already dealt intensively with this connection in the document "Church and Justification".[29] The "Report on Church and Church Communion" (CaCC) on the series of consultations commissioned by the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity also emphasises: "Church (including the sacraments and the ministerial office) serves the directness of the divine relationship of the individual and the Church's fellowship with each other. Church and justification therefore belong indissolubly together and by no means stand in rivalry to each other." (CaCC 42).

But if this is the case, then a "consensus on basic truths of the doctrine of justification", as formulated by the JDDJ, must also be explicitly considered in terms of its ecclesiological consequences .

The JDDJ opens up a common understanding of the message of justification. Its significance makes it possible to profile the testimony of the gospel in the people of God, since the various different instances of testimony open up its meaning. In this way, the determinative significance of the message of justification can be understood as a lively process of development in the people of God, such that justification becomes effective as an "indispensable criterion" (JDDJ 18) while the "interrelation and significance of all truths of faith" (JDDJ 18) come to the fore in the process of interpreting the gospel.

The present study, resulting from an intensive interdenominational discourse, has attempted to develop these consequences using certain selected questions as examples. Even the performative act of signing the JDDJ, which took place within the liturgical framework of a joint worship service, served to show how each denomination held the other in esteem as a church. In this discourse, it was considered what this can mean in concrete terms in the areas of apostolicity, sacramentality and the visibility of the church. Methodologically, the orientation towards the model of the "differentiated concept" proved its worth, leading to the search for elementary common persuasions, in the light of which remaining differences no longer have to be regarded as church-dividing. In dealing with these differences, recourse to the method of theological witnessing authorities has also proved helpful, as it allows fundamental doctrines to be distinguished from those that are less central, and thus facilitates the weighting of doctrinal differences.

29 Cf. Church and Justification. Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification. Report of the Third Phase of Lutheran/Roman Catholic International Dialogue (1993) Available at http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/1993-church-and-justification.html

The reflections in this study challenge both sides, both the Roman Catholic Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Churches, to rethink their own self-understanding in the light of the agreement that has been reached; by revealing the depth of common ground that already exists in the understanding of the church, these thoughts are intended to encourage further steps towards unity in reconciled diversity. In this sense, they encourage us to continue seriously at the level of ecclesiology what began in 1999 with the signing of the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification".

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