

*DO NOT
DUPLICATE!*

The Historic Episcopate
in
Recent Ecumenical Dialogue¹
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*MAY NOT
BE FINAL
DRAFT.*

Pre-Vatican II students at Luther Seminary, such as myself, spent little time discussing Apostolic Succession, Historic Episcopate, or Apostolicity. We were aware that in the 16th century Lutherans were not being ordained because Catholic bishops could not be found to ordain Christians of the Lutheran persuasion, this resulted in presbyteral ordinations. We also knew that the reformers attacked both the Pope and the Catholic Church for their theological assumption that Christian ministry was derived from the Pope and Bishops.

As a result of over fifteen years of involvement in ecumenical campus ministry, and educational ministries in an ecumenical setting (in which I taught theology students of five Christian traditions ranging from Baptists to Roman Catholics); ten years directly involved in ecumenical dialogue; and more-than-thirty years of studying ecumenical theology as well as teaching it, I am aware that numerous changes have taken place in the theology and the self-understanding within churches for whom these three concepts have been more central than they have ever been for Lutherans.

Following one workshop on the "Concordat of Agreement," a pastor and former academic came up to me and said the "historic apostolic succession" was "neither historic nor apostolic." From this brief "volley across the bow," I assume what was meant is that there is no historical evidence of continuity back to the apostles, nor is their evidence that all bishops in succession, in fact, have maintained the apostolic faith.

In a resolution that recently came before a Lutheran synod in Minnesota, there was reference in a "whereas clause" to the "issue of 'unbroken apostolic succession.'" These, and other references to the "historic episcopate as a sacramental necessity" and to the requirement

that the “ELCA adopt the ‘historic episcopate’ of the Episcopal Church USA”—are all inaccurate or misleading portrayals of the Lutheran-Episcopal dialogue and the agreements reached.

It must be noted that these claims are no longer made by Episcopalians (and in many instances by Catholics) with whom we Lutherans have been in dialogue. The above inaccurate and misleading statements are an indication that there is need to more fully understand what has happened in the past thirty five years in ecumenical dialogue concerning Apostolicity.

In preparing for this presentation I recall having read a 1940 lecture that Paul Tillich gave in response to Albert Einstein’s public attack on those in the 20th century who affirm belief in a “personal God.” After opening his lecture indicating how the church and contemporary theologians of the Church use language, Tillich addressed Einstein’s method. He suggested that Einstein and every critical scientist should approach theology with the same degree of fairness that they would demand of others who approach physics critically. To be fair, the critic has to refer to advanced forms of the discipline and not make some out-dated form of the discipline the object of his criticism. In effect, Tillich was asking Einstein whether there had been any advances in physics since the middle ages. If so, did he have a right to assume there had been none in theology.²

The parallel to our topic, in my judgment, is obvious. We have many people (including academic theologian) who have failed to follow the developments in ecumenical dialogues and therefore are uninformed about how the theological landscape has changed. In turn, this results in a failure to understand the ecumenical documents that now come before our two churches for discussion and consideration.

The Modern Ecumenical Movement

The modern ecumenical movement is a complex history of several movements joining forces: the International Missionary Council, the Life and Work Movement, the Faith and Order Movement, and the Sunday School Movement. Following the world missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910, the various movements began conversations with one another, eventually forming the World Council of Churches in 1948.

The 1920 Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople eventually led to a direct involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement. It agreed to become an Observer and has been involved in the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches making significant contributions to Faith and Order discussions and documents.

In general, the goal of the recent ecumenical movement has been to find ways to express the “one body of Christ” in more visible form. That is, it has been assumed by Faith and Order that bilateral or multilateral theological discussions would lead to greater visible unity of the church.

Vatican II (1963-65) gave new impetus to this search for unity. The various Lutheran initiatives for dialogue are a direct result of both Vatican II and the earlier ecumenical attempts to achieve greater visible unity.

Apostolic Succession

Prior to Vatican II (1963-65), **Apostolic Succession** would have been defined as: “The method whereby the ministry of the Christian Church is held to be derived from the apostles by a continuous succession. It has usually been associated with an assertion that succession has been maintained by a series of bishops.”³ The adjective, **Apostolic**, is a concept *not* found in the New Testament, but one that appears in the early church. It refers to writings or documents

that were composed, to persons (e.g. in succession); or institutions (e.g. that maintain succession) that were established or founded by the apostles. **Apostolicity** was claimed for **what already existed** (tradition, canon, office) as well as **what was new** (Apocrypha, church rituals).⁴

Concerning Apostolic Succession, one Catholic theologian says, “what we might call the official Vatican view” is found in the response of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to *The Final Report* of ARCIC:⁵ “The Catholic Church recognizes in the apostolic succession both *an unbroken line of episcopal ordination from Christ* through the apostles down through the centuries to the bishops of today and an *uninterrupted continuity in Christian doctrine from Christ* to those today who teach in union with the college of bishops and its head, the successor of Peter”⁶ [emph. mine].

Thus, if we spoke to Anglicans/Episcopalians or Roman Catholics up to the late 60s, Apostolic Succession would probably have been equated with “historic succession” or “historic episcopate.” The assumption would have been that an unbroken line of episcopal ordination went back to Christ—or, at least the Apostles—and it would serve as an assurance of apostolicity and catholicity.

Recent Anglican-Lutheran Conversations

The earliest Episcopal-Lutheran dialogues took place in 1935 between the Augustana Synod and the Episcopal Church. More recent dialogues began in 1969.

In 1963 the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Commission on World Mission, passed a resolution requesting that a study committee be established to prepare for worldwide Anglican-Lutheran conversations. It took four years before an invitation was extended to the Anglican Communion. The Lambeth Conference, the world-wide meeting of Anglican bishops,

accepted the offer at their meeting in 1968. They suggested that “the general mission of the church in the world” be discussed first and that “questions of doctrine and order” should follow.⁷ Thus, from 1970 to 1972, Lutheran and Anglican church leaders, heads of communions or their representatives, met in Oxford, England; Denmark; Florida; and Munich, Germany. Lutheran leaders included names most of you would know: Dr. Kent Knutson, ALC; Dr. Robert Marshall, LCA; Bishop Harms, Germany; Bishop Kibira, Tanzania; Prof. Regen Prenter, Denmark; Prof. M. Schmidt, Heidelberg; Archbishop em. Hultgren, Sweden; and LWF staff members Dr. P. Høyen, Norway, and Dr. Günther Gassman, Germany. On the Anglican side, Bishop Ronald Williams, Leicester, England; Bishop R. S. M. Emrich, Detroit; Prof. James Atkinson, England; Prof. Reginald Fuller, Virginia; and Prof. S. L. Greenslade, Oxford were among others.⁸

Their report back to the LWF and the Anglican Communion has 108 short paragraphs (26 small pages) including 13 paragraphs with recommendations and seven pages of reports by the Anglican chairperson to Anglicans and the Lutheran chairperson to Lutherans.

The participants in the International Conversations said in their report, in part:

- (11) We are aware that in every ecumenical conversation the delegates from both sides develop an increasingly friendly relationship; understanding develops, deep spiritual fellowship grows, and with it a strong desire to express the maximum agreement possible. Those they represent are not going through the same experiences, and there is always a danger that both sides, or at least one, will prove to be so far ahead of their constituency, that little good will come of the encounter.
- (12) This is particularly true in the matter of language. Phrases have come into currency and have worked their way into the life and thought of Lutheran and Anglican Churches. In some cases the words correspond to those used on the other

side and mean much the same thing. Sometimes the words sound similar, but mean something different. Sometimes the words are very strange and foreign in the ears of another tradition in the life of the church.”⁹

It seems to me this has been profoundly the case. Let me mention a few examples: Episcopalians/Anglicans refer to “ordinals,” or “canons.” They speak about a person being a “sign of unity.” Lutherans speak about the Augsburg Confession, the Apology, the Smalkald Articles, about “adiaphoron,” or use Latin phrases such as “*satis est*” and translate it as “it is enough.” Sometimes we confuse it by preferring to use the German, “*es ist genug*,” since parts of the Augsburg Confession were originally written in German, then in Latin. Or we use language such as “ministry is one,” or bishops serving “under the Gospel.” When both traditions use the phrase “Word and Sacrament,” we discover that Lutherans have their own particular understanding of Word, not commonly understood by others. For Lutherans, a pneumatological presupposition accompanies the understanding of proclaimed Word. These words and phrases are “coded language” that make understanding difficult and preparation of joint statements complex.

All this is to help you understand that the ecumenical proposal we have had before us since 1991 is very complex. It is complex in terms of language and its history.

It was particularly striking to me as I re-read the results of these Conversations in preparing for this presentation that, even within these conversations there was an awareness on the part of Anglicans, that they needed to reconsider their own understanding of Apostolic Succession. This is reflected particularly in the 1970 report of the Anglican chairman to the Anglican Communion in which, Ronald Leicester wrote, in part:

In the report, an attempt is made to widen the scope of the phrase, and hence the meaning of “apostolic succession.” Anglicans would not, if asked, have imagined the

only meaning of the phrase was succession of ministers by ordination or bishops in the “succession.” They would have wanted to include faith in the apostolic gospel (expressed in the creeds), acceptance of the Scriptures (which anchored the Patristic church to the apostolic church) and the acceptance of the gospel sacraments. But as a fact of history these other forms of continuity (discussed in the Lambeth Quadrilateral) have been taken as marks of “catholicity” rather than of “apostolicity.” The adjective “apostolicity” [in the past] *happens* to have been attached to the continuity of the *ministry*. It can only be widened in its application by a conscious effort to merge apostolicity into catholicity and *vice versa*.¹⁰

He goes on to analyze the relationships of the Anglican Church to the Scandinavian churches, pointing out that, although Norway, Denmark and Iceland do not have “the succession,” the Anglican Church entered into “hospitality rights” with these churches in 1954. Further on in his report, he indicates, “The extent of ‘the spread’ of the succession in Lutheran churches is very difficult to define. It is fairly easy to assert which churches possess it. It is not nearly so easy to assert which churches do not possess it.”¹¹ Further, he says, “The acceptance of the possibility of full intercommunion (a phrase which itself is capable of many gradations of meaning) with churches which have varying degrees of attachment to the apostolic succession in the traditional Catholic or Anglican understanding of those words, need not imply the slightest retreat on the Anglican side from a firm attachment to it [apostolic succession].” He continues, “They [Anglicans] need not, however, **make it the sole touchstone** of ecumenical fellowship with churches holding a different set of priorities”¹² [emph. mine].

What we have in Bishop Williams’ report is the beginning of the process to reevaluate and redefine Apostolicity, Apostolic Succession, and Historic Episcopate in relation to

Catholicity. This begins in LED I and the International Conversations and is reflected and further developed in LED II, III, in the “Concordat of Agreement,” and “Called to Common Mission.”¹³

How did this change in emphasis come about? As nearly as I can determine, the discussion that first articulated these changes took place as a part of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, round IV, that took place from 1969-70 and resulted in the report “Eucharist and Ministry.” We shall return to this later in an attempt to trace the roots of the change and the effect it has had in other ecumenical dialogues. The new emphasis has clearly had profound ramifications beyond the International Anglican-Lutheran conversations and LED I on the Lutheran-Roman Catholic, Anglican-Roman Catholic, Faith and Order documents of the World Council of Churches, and Anglican-Methodist dialogues.

LED I began in the United States (1969-72)¹⁴ a year before the International Lutheran-Anglican Conversations. Remember, the first invitation was extended 35 years ago, dialogue began 29 years ago.

Lutheran members of LED I reported asking, “Are we able mutually to affirm the presence of the gospel and apostolicity in our respective communions sufficiently to agree that the renewal of the church is more likely to come **in communion with one another** than **out of communion with one another**?” To which the Lutheran members of the dialogue said, “Yes.”¹⁵ They went on to say, “Most noteworthy, perhaps, is that we found ourselves able to affirm each other’s ministries and sacraments on the basis of a preliminary but by no means superficial examination . . . we do know each other sufficiently to know that the gospel is proclaimed, shared, and believed in the congregations of each Communion.”¹⁶

The Episcopalian members of the dialogue said, “. . . we propose that the apostolicity of the Lutheran ministry be acknowledged by the Episcopal Church.” They do so saying “. . .

.contemporary ecumenical theology including Roman Catholic theology, since Vatican II, is moving forward to a wider definition of apostolicity. Hitherto we **Anglicans have tended to define it too narrowly in terms of episcopal succession**. Apostolicity means primarily, fidelity to the apostolic Gospel, faithful use of the apostolic sacraments, and loyalty to apostolic traditions and life. This is already affirmed in our Offices of Instruction (*Book of Common Prayer*, page 291). **Episcopacy is to be seen as *one* element**—many of us would say an *essential* element—in the fullness of apostolicity, **but certainly not the sole determinative factor. It is rather a means of symbolizing and preserving these other facets of apostolicity**. It is in view of Lutheran fidelity to apostolic Gospel that we propose the recognition of the apostolicity of their ministry and the reality of Word and Sacrament as ministered by them”¹⁷ [emph. mine].

Among the agreements reached and therefore a part of the Recommendations in LED I was the statement: “*Agreement that our two communions have maintained the essential apostolicity of the church as set forth in Summary Statement IV*”¹⁸ [emph. mine]. [Summary Statement IV is a six-paragraph statement on Apostolicity.]

What had been accomplished in the International Anglican-Lutheran Conversations and LED I? In conversations with Lutheran members of LED I, I was told they thought they had made a real breakthrough regarding Apostolicity as a result of their dialogue. Whereas there had been a tendency prior to the International Conversations and American dialogues to equate apostolic succession with the historic succession of bishops, these dialogues separated apostolicity from apostolic succession. This, in turn, had a profound affect on understanding historic episcopate. Apostolicity was now seen as having several elements, facets, or factors and historic episcopate is **seen as one**, but **not the most important or most significant** of these elements.

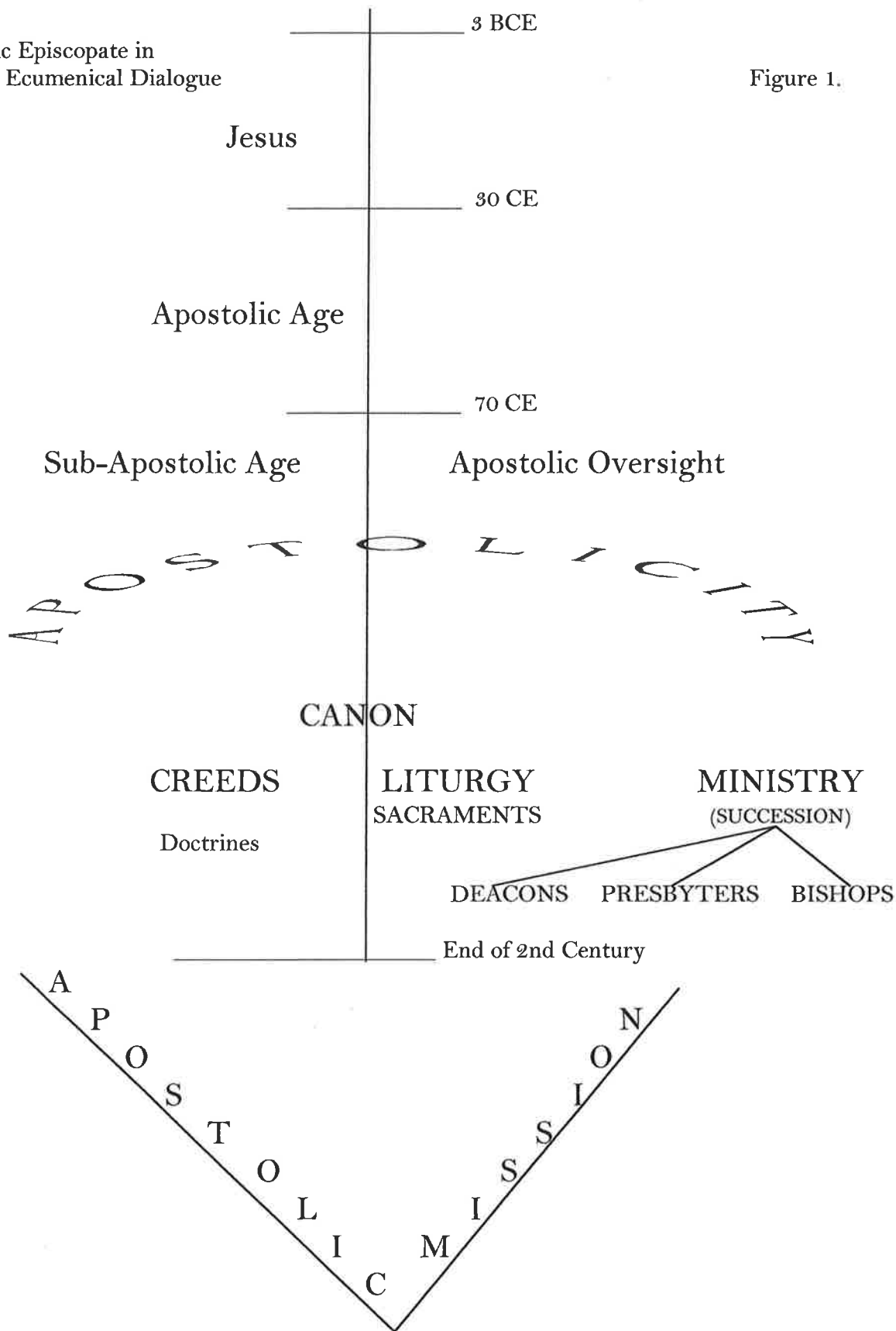
Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession in the Early Church

In a paper presented to the dialogue group by Episcopal New Testament scholar, Prof. Reginald Fuller, this issue is clarified. He identifies the four periods in the early church: the period of Jesus' life and ministry, the Apostolic Age, the Sub-Apostolic Age, and the period after the end of the second century. He refers to several elements of apostolicity: canon, creeds and doctrine, liturgy and sacraments, and ministry.

My doctoral advisor said one should never diagram theology because the visualization will always be misleading in some way. Yet, he occasionally diagrammed theology. It can be helpful if one does not take the diagram as a visualization of an absolute truth. Here is my diagram as an attempt to help understand what Fuller is suggesting.

Historic Episcopate in
Recent Ecumenical Dialogue

Figure 1.



The diagram is to illustrate that the early church understood God to be working through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus' mission and ministry was carried on [i.e. "succeeded"] by the Apostles in the Apostolic Age. When Jesus' Apostles were dying and his return did not take place as anticipated, the words, sayings, miracle stories, and parables of Jesus were gathered and shared. This is one form of "succession." Other forms of "succession" included patterning worship and sacraments on those from the synagogue and temple, in order to worship Christ. Creeds were formulated and doctrinal statements began to be formed—another form of succession. Whereas, the Canon of Scripture, Creeds, and doctrines, are primarily **verbal forms**, the liturgies were a "dramatic" form dependent upon visual, auditory, and bodily gestures to affirm who Jesus was, to gather the community in worship, and to prepare people of faith for mission and ministry.

It took ministers to carry on the "succession" of faith beyond Jesus' death and resurrection. Ministry was incarnated in the community of faith and individual leaders. The Apostles, temporally immediate followers of Jesus, ministered. They were succeeded by their disciples. "Apostolic oversight" was important for this ministry. At first, care was taken that those persons who had known Jesus were to be "successors" in the ministry. Those who succeeded them needed to be tested by persons trusted within the faith communities to assure they were passing on the faith in a dependable and trustworthy way. Hence, at least by the end of the second century, there were Presbyters or Elders, Deacons, and Bishops (*episcopoi*) "in succession." The threefold pattern of oversight had been established. Their messages were tested against the canonical scriptures, creeds and doctrine, liturgy and the sacraments.

Under the arched word "Apostolicity" you may add "Apostolic Succession." Although the terms are not identical in content, they both describe the importance of a process that went

on during the second century. It was an attempt by the early church to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus and to assure that it was in keeping with the mission and ministry of the Apostles. The “Apostolic Mission” arrow accents both the goal and the movement into the future. Each of the elements or factors under the umbrella are aimed at carrying Apostolic Mission into the future.

Apostolicity or Apostolic Succession is the complex relationship and interrelationship of *all the elements or factors* mentioned above. Other theologians have pointed out additional factors not mentioned by Fuller: *Koinonia and Catholicity*. They emphasize the unity and universality of faith created by proclamation of word and administration of the sacraments. These themes emphasize the “one God, one body, one faith, one hope, one calling” as that relates to the one Jesus Christ and as it is stated in Ephesians 4:1ff.

Fuller concludes his essay with this observation: “The real question is whether these sub-apostolic developments, incipient canon and creed, the careful preservation of the apostolic sacraments and liturgy, and the development of an ordained ministry in succession from the earlier charismatic one are legitimate developments or sub-apostolic corruptions. Did they really enable the sub-apostolic church to remain apostolic? About the canon, creeds, sacraments, and liturgy there can be little question, and it is certainly not an issue between Anglicans and Lutherans. The development of the ordained ministry, however, is more of a problem.”¹⁹ He then quotes Ernst Käsemann and questions his theological analysis of this issue. Fuller indicates why he considers the development of historic episcopate legitimate and where Käsemann’s analysis is not accurate.

Fuller begins by commenting on the Preface to the Ordinal in *The Book of Common Prayer* [BCP]. He notes the difference between conclusions drawn on historical grounds and

from those drawn on **systematic grounds**. On the basis of New Testament and patristic scholarship as well as the dialogues, quoting the BCP, Fuller says:

'From the apostles' time' does not mean that Christ himself or the apostles created the three-fold ministry. It was the outcome of a historical development which is still going on when the New Testament closes, and doesn't reach its term until the second century. The New Testament offers a number of lines which project beyond it and converge in the 2nd century. It is however still relevant to point out that the Preface bases the Anglican maintenance of episcopacy on historical grounds and not on systematic ones. Systematically the only defensible claim for episcopacy would seem to be that it is a means of preserving the primary elements of the church's apostolicity: the canon, the creed and the sacraments, and the liturgy and the Apostolic faith and life that go with these things. *It does not entitle us to exult episcopacy into the status of the sole sign of apostolicity*, so that the apostolicity of those churches without it is denied. *The historic episcopate is the historic way of signaling the present church's continuity with the church of the apostles*. But it is **no more than a sign**. The *substance* of apostolicity lies in the scriptures, the creed and the sacraments, with their liturgical celebration, as these are—through the preaching—unpackaged and rekindled into *viva vox evangelii*²⁰ [living voice of the gospel] [emph. mine].

Implied is: one of the difficulties for many Lutherans, is that they want to draw conclusions about structuring the church primarily or solely on **systematic grounds**. On the other hand, Episcopalians/Anglicans affirm historic episcopate on **historical grounds**. This is not to say that doctrine and doctrinal grounds are not important to Episcopalians. Note, however, the difference and why it is sometimes so difficult to carry on dialogue, why it is

difficult to understand the other party. One of the most important *ecumenical questions* has to be, is this difference to be understood as **complementary, or must it be church-dividing.**

Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue II²¹

The LED II report says, during the fourth session members were “Encouraged by this action [completing the draft of a common statement on Justification after reviewing the ‘Malta Statement’ from the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue], we decided to aim for a joint statement on Apostolicity . . . Session five. . .generated the greatest optimism about future meetings of the Dialogue. While there [at Nashota House], the finished LED Joint Statement on Justification was adopted . . .and subsequently released for publication. The main topic ‘Apostle/Apostolicity,’ however, also uncovered wide areas of agreement between the Lutheran and Anglican traditions on the basis of New Testament, Patristic and Reformation materials.”²²

Comparing the LED I report to LED II, one notes that the latter has agreed statements that are greater in length. LED I has less than three pages relating to Apostolicity²³ In LED II there is a two-page statement on methodology as it relates to Apostolicity²⁴ and a ten-page “Joint Statement on Apostolicity”²⁵ followed by an Appendix referring to this topic in Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue IV (The Malta Statement).

Let me cite a few of the key statements relating to Apostolicity from LED II:

- (1) The Apostolicity of the Church refers to the Church’s **continuity with Christ** and the apostles in movement through history. The Church is apostolic as “devoted . . .to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).
- (2) Apostolicity or apostolic succession is a dynamic, **diverse reality organically embracing a variety of elements and activities.** It includes continued faithfulness to the apostles’ teaching, which teaching found normative expression in Holy Scripture,

and under Scripture, in the ecumenical creeds. It involves participation in baptism, in the apostles' prayers and the breaking of bread which continues in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. **Abiding in apostolic fellowship** is given expression through sharing in the Church's common life of mutual edification and caring, served by an ecclesiastically called and recognized pastoral ministry of Word and sacrament. Finally, apostolic succession involves a **continuing involvement in the apostolic mission, in being sent into the world to share the Gospel of Christ by proclamation to all far and near and by neighborly service to those in need.**

- (3) It has been all too common for many to think of **apostolic succession primarily in terms of historic episcopate.** We must take care to avoid this narrowing of our view of the Church's apostolic succession to an exclusive concern with the historic episcopate. Such a reduction falsely **isolates the historic episcopate** and also obscures the fact that churches **may exhibit most aspects of apostolicity while being weak or deficient in some.** Recovery of appreciation for the wider dimensions of apostolicity has allowed us to see in each other a commonality which a narrow concentration on the historic episcopate would have obscured²⁶ [emph. mine].

As I indicated in referring to recommendations made by LED I, the dialogue partners said: "the two communions have maintained the essential apostolicity of the church.". LED II amplifies that conclusion:

Lutherans saw faithfulness to **the apostles' teachings in Scripture as the core of Apostolicity.** . . . For Lutheranism as a whole, the episcopate and apostolic succession did not function as the primary strand of apostolicity. The confessional writing, the Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism in Scandinavia and the entire Book of

the historic Episcopate not only joyfully for ourselves but for the wider and uniting church.²⁸

The Lutheran dialogue members of LED II referred to a 1958 “Declaration on Apostolic Succession” by the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Germany [*VELKD*] and noted:

“. . .the separation from the papalistic formulation of the succession” which occurred at the time of the Reformation for the sake of the Gospel, and declared that break to be “correct and necessary.” Nevertheless, the statement asserted that episcopal succession may be “appropriate” even if it is not “necessary” for the *esse* of the church.

Dialogue members from LED II go on to say:

Because of what episcopal succession has meant to the church [note: they do not say Episcopal Church] throughout much of its history, and because of its ecumenical significance today, we recommend that the Lutheran Churches in America begin an internal study of the historic episcopate to determine whether it is a viable form of ministry for our Churches. . . . We are convinced that our willingness to deal seriously with this issue would be regarded as a most positive sign by our Episcopalian brothers and sisters, could serve the cause of church unity, and might redound to our own blessing.²⁹

We Lutheran participants in this dialogue have especially grown to appreciate the gift which the historic episcopate bestows on the church. We are aware of the distrust with which many American Lutherans regard the episcopate, especially in its aristocratic model, including negative experiences within the Lutheran family.³⁰

This round of dialogue can be divided into two major sections. As reported in the Preface of *Implications of the Gospel*, a LED III document, following the declaration of the two churches to enter into a new relationship in 1982 in which “interim eucharistic sharing” was established, “The Episcopalians wanted greater agreement on the ordering of the church as the community of apostolic faith. The Lutherans sought greater clarity on the claim that there was sufficient agreement on the gospel to enter into eucharistic fellowship.”⁹¹ We should note, that for those who have claimed the Episcopalians had conditions for full communion and imply that Lutherans did not, Lutheran conditions should be noted: We wanted greater clarity concerning the Gospel. Episcopalians agreed and invested a great deal of time and money in dialogue.

This dialogue produced *Implication of the Gospel* (1983-88) and was followed by the round that produced “*Toward Full Communion*” and “*Concordat of Agreement*”⁹² —that is, the document proposing what commitments would be made, what our relationship with one another would be, and how the we were to “live into full communion” in the future.

Implications of the Gospel is approximately eighty pages. It does not refer directly to the newly agreed upon understanding of Apostolicity or Historic Episcopate and, therefore, will not occupy a lot of our time except for one observation. There have been some critics, including academic theologians, who claimed that our agreements with the Episcopalians either “said nothing about the gospel” or said “practically nothing about mission and ministry.” Note that the entire book is about the Gospel. Following are some of the section titles: The *Church of the Gospel*, The Church’s Liturgy Communicates the Identity and Mission of the Gospel, The Church’s Polity Is Life Together for Witness to the Gospel, The Church’s Doctrine Serves Its Proclamation of the Gospel, The *World* and the Gospel, The Gospel as Alternative Vision for the Future of the World. The entire section V. has the title: The *Mission* of the Gospel

with sub-sections: The Lord's Prayer as the Prayer of Mission, Mission and Ecumenism, Mission and Evangelization, Mission and Ethics.

Directly related to our topic, LED III summarizes the "five substantive agreements" reached in LED I regarding Apostolicity:

- Apostolicity belongs to the reality of the one Catholic church; it is manifested in various ways in all areas of the church's life,
- That the ordained ministers of the one church of Christ are apostolic ministers; [therefore through] mutual recognition of ministers, each church would receive gifts [as a result of full communion] from the other for greater service to the Lord and his Gospel,
- Re: [succession or] mediating the tradition of the gospel in Word and sacrament: The church has, within the providence of God, enacted its responsibility that this succession shall be a succession of the *Gospel*, by means of the canon of Scripture, the use of authority of creeds and confessions, sacramental-liturgical tradition, and the institution of an ordered ministry and succession, and
- within the one church, both the Anglican continuity of the episcopal order, and the Lutheran concentration on doctrine, have been means of preserving the apostolicity of the one church.⁵³

LED III recognizes LED II's achievement was to "make explicit the distinction between apostolic succession and the institution of the historic episcopate" [affirming what we have said above]: Apostolicity is "the church's continuity with Christ and the apostles in its movement through history." "Apostolic Succession is a 'dynamic, diverse reality' embracing faithfulness to apostolic teaching; participation in baptism, prayer, and the eucharist; 'sharing the Church's common life of mutual edification and caring, served by an ecclesiastically called and

recognized pastoral ministry of Word and sacrament' and 'continuing involvement in the apostolic mission.'" "Apostolic succession is not to be understood 'primarily in terms of historic episcopate.'"³⁴

Repeating a theme cited first in Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue IV, "Eucharist and Ministry," then found in LED II and III, with references to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, the Faith and Order document of the World Council of Churches, CCM states that "historic episcopate is a sign but not a guarantee" of apostolicity.³⁵ Or, as it is stated elsewhere in LED III, "The meaning of episcopal succession is that the bishop is to serve as a sign and means of unity between the church in the present and its continuity with the church of the past and the future"³⁶

All of these statements and those in the consensus regarding Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession find their way into the Concordat and its revision, "Called to Common Mission."

The Niagara Report³⁷ (1987)

Niagara Falls, New York, was the site of an Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on *Episcopé* in 1987. This document is not as readily available as the LED documents. You will find it in libraries, through the LWF and the Bookstore, at Church House in London. It is a concise summary of the various dialogue documents and includes important information from *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* as well as International and international regional discussions, some of which finds its way into the Concordat of Agreement. The report provides little totally new material, but let me cite a few important statements from the report that relate directly to Apostolicity.

...to speak of “apostolic succession” is to speak primarily of characteristics of the whole Church; and to recognize a Church as being “in apostolic succession” is to use not one criterion of discernment, but many (cf. BEM, M35).³⁸

Mission indeed comes to special expression in the Church’s apostolicity. For apostolicity means that the Church is sent by Jesus to *be* for the world, to participate in his mission and therefore in the mission of the One who sent Jesus, to participate in the mission of the Father and the Son through the dynamic of the Holy Spirit.³⁹

The apostolicity of the Church is the mission of self-offering (not self-preservation) for the life of the world.⁴⁰

The mere presence of a bishop as what is said to be a “focus of unity” will not *guarantee* the preservation of *koinonia* between local and universal; nor will the absence of such a bishop entail its destruction.⁴¹

“Apostolic succession in the episcopal offices does not consist primarily in an unbroken chain of **those ordaining to those ordained**, but in a succession in the presiding ministry of a church which stands in the continuity of apostolic faith and which is overseen by the bishop in order to keep it in the communion of the Catholic and Apostolic Church” (LRCJC, *The Ministry of the Church*, 62)⁴² [emph. mine].

Apostolicity in an Ecumenical Context

Jesuit Richard J. Schlenker, Professor of Systematic Theology, Sacred Heart School of Theology, and former Marquette University faculty member, wrote an article in 1994 entitled “A Roman Catholic Comment on the Lutheran-Episcopal Concordat.”⁴³ Bishop Walter Kasper, Regensburg, Germany, gave The Bicentennial Lecture at St. Mary’s Seminary and University, Baltimore, entitled “Apostolic Succession in Episcopacy in an Ecumenical Context.”⁴⁴

Both reminded me of the importance the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue IV, *Eucharist and Ministry*.⁴⁵ Schlenker pointed out that the fourteen Roman Catholic theologians participating in that dialogue concluded that Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession needed to be reevaluated. At the conclusion of the dialogue the Catholic participants addressed the validity of Lutheran ordination saying:

We have found serious defects in the arguments customarily used against the validity of the eucharistic Ministry of the Lutheran churches. In fact, we see no persuasive reason to deny the possibility of the Roman Catholic Church recognizing the validity of this Ministry.⁴⁶

It is particularly interesting to note the method used in this Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. There was a general discussion of topics considered to be divisive. The Roman Catholic participants would ask Lutheran participants to directly address a series of several questions. Lutherans would do the same for Roman Catholics. Each caucus met and returned with answers agreed upon by their own caucus.

When the issue of recognition of those permitted to preside at the eucharist arose, Lutherans asked pointedly about apostolic succession and the claim that Roman Catholicism had consistently made about "an unbroken chain" of succession back to Christ and the apostles. When Roman Catholic participants returned, relying on biblical scholars such as Raymond Brown and patristic scholars such as George Tavard, the report was that the Roman Catholic Church could no longer make the claim of an unbroken chain of succession back to Christ or the apostles. Following several meetings of the caucuses, the Roman Catholic participants arrived at the above formula. They insisted, however, that they could not do so without addressing the four major objections to recognition of Lutheran and Anglican orders which

had been used consistently within the Catholic tradition. They therefore address these in the paragraphs that followed.

Both Kasper and Schlenker indicate that there are, in fact, two competing themes within contemporary Catholic theology regarding this issue. Schlenker cites “what we might call the ‘official Vatican view’”⁴⁷ saying that *Lumen gentium* refers to “. . . various ministries which, as tradition witnesses, *were exercised in the Church from the earliest times . . . in a sequence running back to the beginning*, are the ones who pass on the apostolic seed” [emph. his]. He points out that ministries “exercised from the earliest times” avoids the “unbroken line” theme and “running back to the beginning” is “more ambiguous than ‘from Christ,’ since the first expression can be understood as designating merely the apostolic era.” He says, “The wording seems to have been a very deliberate choice by the Council, since it departs from Trent’s statements that the threefold hierarchy is a ‘divine ordinance.’”⁴⁸

He recognizes that elsewhere in Vatican II documents “there is strong insistence on the unbroken line.” He then refers to the 1982 Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Church saying the view of apostolic succession agreed upon is not a power passed on to a bishop in ordination; it is a property of the church in which a bishop is ordained. . . .” that “. . . comes through its apostolic faith and communion with other apostolic churches. . . .It seems that the ordination by the laying on of hands by other bishops does not confer the charism but recognizes it and expresses the new bishop’s insertion into the apostolic communion that all their churches enjoy.” He concludes that the Concordat follows this second view of apostolic succession.⁴⁹

Schlenker thinks this second view “is often more evident among Catholic theologians today” than the “notion of an unbroken line of ordinations going back to the Apostles themselves.”⁵⁰ He then spells out some of the complications the Vatican will have modifying

what might be called its “official view” and the implications for recognizing ordination of those in the Reformation traditions. He considers both to be possible.

Kasper’s Observations: New Perspectives for the Ecumenical Movement

Bishop Kasper, former Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Regensburg and a member of the International Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, made several important observations. He refers to Vatican II documents that use the term *defectus* when referring to ecclesiastical communities of the Reformation. He writes:

Of course, the Council only stated its position . . . implicitly or in passing. *Defectus* here does not mean that something is completely missing, but that something is lacking. The Council does not elaborate on what this “lack” consists of. From what has been said so far [in this address], it should be clear that the *defectus* can hardly be seen in isolation as a break in the link of apostolic succession in episcopacy. For, (as we have already seen) the Council does not view apostolic succession as an isolated issue, but rather as a whole, complex issue.⁵¹

In words that appear to affirm Schlinker, he says:

First: Apostolic succession *cannot simply be regarded* as the transmission of the original apostolic ministry *in a linear sense*. It is rather a question of co-opting and incorporating new members into the unique circle of apostles and involving them in the timeless mission at hand. Second: This incorporation is rooted in Jesus Christ’s own eschatological claim. . . . Thus “vertical” authorization from above is conferred on the “horizontal” transmission of ministry. Ministry and charisma are united from within. Third: *Apostolic succession* is not a self-contained principle, but instead *serves the proclamation of the Gospel* till the end of time and is thus *subject to the norm of the Gospel*.

As a symbol and an instrument of the Gospel, it does not guarantee the correct proclamation of the Gospel. Individuals in the ministry can become unfaithful to the apostolic tradition and thus betray it. If they do, then according to established theological tradition, they *eo ipso* forfeit their official authority⁵² [emph. mine].

He goes on to speak about the Word, succession, tradition, episcopal ordination and how Christ is “represented” in ordained ministry. He does so against the background of the Middle Ages and the Reformation:

In the Middle Ages, the Church largely lost sight of the christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological context of the principle of succession we have examining thus far; as a result, we can observe a lack of appreciation for how apostolic succession in ministry can be seen as a symbol and witness or for how it is interwoven with *traditio* and *communio*. . . .It was therefore hardly possible to make a plausible case for the theological significance of ministry as a sacramental *Representatio* inspired by the Holy Spirit. The *ordo* came to be seen as no more than an isolated sacramental consecration rite. Episcopal ministry was no longer regarded as sacramental, but was thought only to comprise more *potestas* and *dignitas* in the Church in comparison to priestly ministry. It therefore comes as no surprise that this one-sided concept of sacramental priesthood, with its narrow preoccupation with the externals of consecration, a form of priesthood which was often out of touch with the requirements of preaching the Word and serving the parish, became the focus of the Reformers’ protest.⁵³

Just as the Church as a whole is a sacramental symbol and an instrument of salvation, so succession in ministry is a symbol and an instrument for spreading the Gospel. The *successio episcoporum* stems from the *successio verbi* which it serves.⁵⁴

The ecumenical problem of succession in ministry brings us back to the central point which constitutes the unresolved fundamental problem for ecumenism to date: our understanding of the Church, of the sacramental nature of its basic structure and of its relevance for salvation.⁵⁵

With this final quote, we have gone beyond the specifics of the Lutheran-Episcopal dialogues and their conclusions. On the other hand, Kasper and Schlenker indicate that the conclusions of Lutherans and Episcopalians in dialogue are not isolated to those two communion.

Of course, it has to be clear that simply because ecumenical dialogue participants have come to a particular conclusion in no way means that their conclusions will be "received by the church." The conclusions reached by Lutheran-Roman Catholic IV obviously have not yet been received by the Catholic Church.

This observation makes it all the more significant if the ELCA should approve the CCM at its 1999 Churchwide Assembly. The vote by the Episcopal Church at its 1997 General Convention is an indication that they have received the results of the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue. The statements in CCM clearly indicate that the Episcopal Church has affirmed the broader understanding of apostolic succession outlined above. They have agreed that historic episcopate is but one form of apostolic succession, "a sign but not a guarantee" of apostolicity.

The agreement about Apostolicity and Apostolic Succession in Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue is much broader than that. It affirms the complex interrelationship of the canon of scripture, creeds and doctrines, liturgy and sacraments, *koinonia* and catholicity, the Apostolicity of the Church, and succession in ministry. The ELCA is now invited to affirm this understanding of Apostolicity, Succession, and ways the ELCA, with other churches, will be committed to join together in proclaiming and preserving the Apostolic Faith.

¹ This paper was originally presented at the Kairos Continuing Education Program entitled "The Historic Episcopate" held at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, MN, July 14-16, 1998. This article is a modified and expanded form of the original lecture. The author is a former member of the Lutheran-Episcopal Coordinating Committee, 1991-97.

² Cf. Paul Tillich, "The Idea of the Personal God." *Union Review* (New York), 2:1, 8-10. In response to Albert Einstein, "Science and Religion." *Science, Philosophy, and Religion* (New York), 9-11 September 1940. Both translated in Paul Tillich, *Gesammelte Werke*. Stuttgart, *Evangelische Verlagswerk*, 1971. Bd. XII, 300-304.

³ "Apostolic Succession" in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston (eds.) *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. 3rd Ed., 1997, 91ff.

⁴ *Apostolisch in Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.⁹ Tübingen, J.C.B.Mohr (Paul Siebeck). 1957, I, 515.

⁵ Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, 1981 report.

⁶ Richard J. Schlenker in "Journal of Ecumenical Studies," 31:1-2, Winter-Spring, 1994, 111ff. Quote, 117.

"Rome and Canterbury: The Vatican Response to ARCIC" is in "The Tablet" (December 7, 1991), 1523f.

⁷ "Report of the International Anglican-Lutheran Conversations" (1970-72) is printed as part III of *Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue, A Progress Report*. Cincinnati, Forward Movement Publications. 1972, 7. (Hereafter, LED I.)

The International Conversations had dialogue about the following topics: A) Sources of Authority: Scripture, Creeds, Confessional formularies, tradition, and theology; B) The Church; C) Word and Sacrament: Relation of Word and Sacrament, Baptism, The Lord's Supper, Of the number of sacraments; D) Apostolic Ministry: Apostolicity and apostolic succession, The ministry, Episcopacy; and E) Worship.

⁸ *op. cit.*, 175.

⁹ *op. cit.*, 143f.

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, 168f.

¹¹ *op. cit.*, 169f.

¹² *op. cit.*, 171.

¹³ Although American dialogue LED I began before the International Conversations, I begin with the Conversations because of the clarity with which Bishop Williams states the issue of apostolicity. See also p. 9 where an Episcopalian and a Lutheran write in the Introduction: "Apostolicity" as understood in these dialogues of Lutherans and Anglicans becomes a word of larger meaning than it currently possesses in either Lutheranism or Anglicanism."

¹⁴ LED I held six sessions, 1969-72. Topics of dialogue included: A) Holy Scriptures in relation to (a) The Symbols of the Lutheran Church and (b) The documents to which Anglicans characteristically appeal; B) Christian Worship; C) Baptism-Confirmation; and D) Apostolicity.

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, 31.

¹⁶ *op. cit.*, 32.

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, 41.

¹⁸ *op. cit.*, 23. "The Summary Statements Deriving from the First Four Dialogues" of LED I are found, 14-22.

¹⁹ *op. cit.*, 83f.

²⁰ *op. cit.*, 89f.

²¹ LED II, 9 sessions, 1976-80. Dialogue topics included: A) Justification; B) Gospel; C) Eucharistic Presence; D) Authority of Scriptures; and E) Apostolicity (a) A New Appreciation, (b) The Historical Development of Lutheran and Episcopalian Views and Expressions of Apostolic Succession, and (c) An Analysis of the Agreement in Apostolic Succession to be Found in the Lutheran and Episcopal Church: (1) Apostolic Mission, (2) Apostolic Scriptures, (3) Apostolic Creeds, (4) The Holy Sacraments, (5) The Ordained Ministry or Pastoral Office.

²² *Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue: Report and Recommendations*. Cincinnati, Forward Movement Publications. 1981, 9. (Hereafter, LED II.)

²³ *op. cit.*, 20-22.

²⁴ *op. cit.*, 15f.

²⁵ *op. cit.*, 32-43.

²⁶ *op. cit.*, 32.

²⁷ *op. cit.*, 34.

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- ²⁸ op. cit., 60f.
- ²⁹ op. cit., 63.
- ³⁰ op. cit., 62.
- ³¹ William A Norgren and William G. Rusch (eds). *Implications of the Gospel.* Minneapolis/Cincinnati, Augsburg/Forward Movement Publications, 1988, p. 9.
- ³² William A. Norgren and William G. Rusch (eds.). *"Towards Full Communion" and "Concordat of Agreement."* Minneapolis/Cincinnati, Augsburg/Forward Movement Publications. 1991.
- ³³ op. cit., 27ff.
- ³⁴ op. cit., 30.
- ³⁵ CCM 10.
- ³⁶ op. cit., 77.
- ³⁷ *The Niagara Report: Report of the Anglican-Lutheran Consultation on Episcopate 1987.* London, Church House Publishing, 1988. The Niagara Consultation was sponsored by the Anglican-Lutheran International Continuation Committee.
- ³⁸ op. cit., 14:20.
- ³⁹ op. cit., 14: 21.
- ⁴⁰ op. cit., 15:23.
- ⁴¹ op. cit., 31:51.
- ⁴² op. cit. 31:53. LRCJC refers to the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission.
- ⁴³ cf. fn. 5.
- ⁴⁴ Walter Kasper, "Apostolic Succession in Episcopacy in an Ecumenical Context." Baltimore, St. Mary's Seminary & University, 1991. The Bicentennial Lecture was published by the seminary as a part of its bicentennial celebration.
- ⁴⁵ *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue IV: Eucharist and Ministry.* Minneapolis, Augsburg. 1970.
- ⁴⁶ Schlenker, 114. *Eucharist and Ministry*, 32.
- ⁴⁷ op. cit., 116.
- ⁴⁸ op. cit., 117.
- ⁴⁹ op. cit., 117f.
- ⁵⁰ op. cit., 118.
- ⁵¹ op. cit., 11.
- ⁵² op. cit., 6f.
- ⁵³ op. cit., 9.
- ⁵⁴ op. cit., 7f.
- ⁵⁵ op. cit., 11.