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Jonathan Mumme

Lutheran ecclesiology is an outgrowth of a reform movement within the Western church and shares scriptural underpinnings with this broader tradition. The Lutheran reformers' convictions about the church and the basic contours of an ecclesiology found binding expression in the Lutheran confessions of the sixteenth century. Already in the sixteenth century, certain structural categories – often weighed in theologically productive pairings – began to shape and convey much of Lutheranism's ecclesiology. The church's visibility and hiddenness, faith and the means of grace, the nature and the marks of the church, and the relationship between congregation and ministry can all be diagnostically examined under the lens of internality and externality. Both the sixteenth-century confessions and subsequent works of Lutheran ecclesiology responded to the contexts in which they were forged, as the reformers and their historical heirs sought to think about and live as the church amid shifting social, philosophical, and political circumstances. Efforts over the last hundred years have therefore been shaped not just by the Confessions but also by theological developments from the Reformation to seventeenth-century orthodoxy, the Enlightenment, and the intellectual sea changes of the nineteenth century.

Lutherans address some general theological concerns that relate to ecclesiology in a common manner. At the same time, Lutheran forms of ecclesial life have both reflected and framed more distinctly Lutheran theologies of the church along somewhat different trajectories, with Lutherans living under bishops, in state churches, in free churches, or often in some democratized amalgamation thereof. Modern Lutheran ecclesiological efforts have taken shape as regional or national groups of Lutherans have sought association, federation, and communion with one another, and as they have attempted ecumenical rapprochement with other Christians. Now informed by a polyphonic ecclesiological discourse in an increasingly secular age, Lutheran ecclesiologies seek to present the church as a creature of the gospel while articulating the place, role, and responsibility of Christians in and for this community.

Keywords: Ecclesiology, Lutheranism, Lutheran Confessions, Martin Luther, Reformation, The Nordic countries, Germany, Authority, Bishops/Episcopacy, Ecumenism, Ecumenical theology, Communion

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1 Introduction

In 1521, students of theology at the university of Wittenberg got a new textbook: the *Theological Commonplaces* of Philipp Melanchthon. Like Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* and Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, the first edition of this work contained no section dedicated to the church. Although Christians had always spoken about the church, it took the reformations of the sixteenth century to make ecclesiology commonplace, a topic in its own right. By Melanchthon's later years, ecclesiology was coming into a contested standing of its own. Within the span of this Wittenberger's career, and in revision of that textbook, it had become necessary to say 'what the church of God is and where it is', for these disputed questions related to how God himself was to be known (Melanchthon 2011: 240). Disputes over the church's understanding of itself, which began in the late Middle Ages, boiled over in the sixteenth century. With the 1555 Religious Peace of Augsburg, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation took a fateful step, one that would have been unimaginable a century before: it allowed its estates to live under divergent confessions of the Christian faith. As a Lutheran form of Christian life solidified in some regions of the empire, and as the Lutheran Reformation shaped the Nordic and Baltic regions, Lutheran ecclesiology came to be an exercise in 'contextual dogmatics' (Anselm 2000), with particular sociopolitical situations not only raising new questions but also stipulating the parameters of theological discourse and ecclesial life. Emigration and mission work of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries spread Lutheran Christians and churches around the globe. The twentieth century saw the formation of international Lutheran organizations and ecclesiological production spurred by the ecumenical movement and keen to pursue greater unity with other Christians. Lutheran ecclesiology bears in mind a certain foundation in the sixteenth century and subsequent historical unfolding as it seeks to speak about the church in view of the gospel, present a form of ecclesial life commensurate with the gospel, and embrace fellowship under the gospel.

2 Late medieval ecclesiological thought

The Lutheran ecclesiology of the sixteenth century took shape as the Western church cracked and fragmented. Western ecclesial disintegration did not, however, begin in the sixteenth century: the investiture controversy, the sweeping claims of the high medieval papacy, the Western schism, and the countervailing curialist and conciliarist movements all contributed to an ecclesial crisis to which the first treatises on the church, written in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, bore witness (Tierney 1988; Tanner 2018). Without absolute uniformity, Western Christians shared a common faith and inhabited a common (albeit non-monolithic) church. Degrees of pious and local flexibility were possible, but these Christians' catholicity assumed that significant differences of theology had to be

examined and prosecuted to a conclusion, and that the church did and must live as one. What precisely the church was, how it would deal with its differences, and how it would and would not live together had not been codified. In the late Middle Ages, the church itself was becoming a topic of the church's theological interest, and the political and ecclesial stakes surrounding the matter were high.

Because of its subsequent implications, the Reformation is often considered as a period in its own right, but ecclesiologically the Lutheran Reformation is of a piece with the late Middle Ages, and it must be understood in view of two significant challenges that faced the late medieval church. First, canon law was in a state of crisis; its positive development had ceased around the twelfth century as the ultimate claims of the papacy were being established (Maurer 1976). In the wake of medieval debates surrounding the Mass, the church was spoken of as the mystical body of Christ as opposed to the true body, which was found in the Eucharist. A conceptual wedge was driven between the sacramental and governmental aspects of ecclesial life (Oakley 1979: 157–174). The concept of the church and ecclesial authority underwent an undue spiritualization while discussion of its governance was unduly secularized (Frank 1978). As canon law attempted to get its head around the spiritual and corporate elements of Christian social existence, the chief topic of interest became the operation of the church's jurisdictional authority in the external forum (*potestas iurisdictionis in foro externo*). Secondly, at this same time the prince-bishops (*Fürstbischöfe*) of the northern regions of the empire were chiefly concerned with management of their territories and holdings, and not with the overseeing of catechesis, preaching, and the sacramental administration of their dioceses – tasks most often left to subordinate clergy. These bishops oversaw estates of the empire, some in the highest echelons of its governmental workings. Any reform of their station or the duties of their office implied tinkering with the politics of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

The roots of Lutheran ecclesiology lie in this period of developing ecclesiologies, which drew from a common scriptural, patristic, and medieval tradition, and which faced an ecclesially-challenging situation with wide-ranging political implications. The Lutheran reformers' assertions about the church, particularly those received into the confessions of the Lutheran tradition, do not constitute an alternative to a previously-established standard of orthodoxy; instead, they claim to represent the ancient tradition of the church in a moment of crisis as Christianity moved from the late Middle Ages into the early modern era.

3 The ecclesiology of the reformers and the confessions

The foundation for ecclesiology in the Lutheran tradition is shared with the rest of mainstream Christianity: the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. These sacred

texts form the basis of ecclesial deliberation and theological formulation; explicitly or implicitly, they have been recognized as the ultimate norm for Christian doctrine, including by the 1577 Formula of Concord of the *Book of Concord* (*BC*: 486). The confessions to which Lutheran churches subscribe enjoy an authoritative status as exhibitions of the teachings of holy scripture. The confessional standards of Lutheran churches vary to some degree from place to place, but generally they accept the ancient creeds and several confessions of the sixteenth century that were eventually assembled in the 1580 *Book of Concord*. Without according their works any official status, Lutherans have tended to recognize Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon as figures standing at the headwaters of their tradition, as well as theologians and clergy who have been seminal in specific places, as for example Olaus and Laurentius Petri in Sweden.

3.1 General characteristics

When Martin Luther declared in his *Smalcald Articles* that any catechized seven-year-old child knew that the church was one of 'the little sheep who hear the voice of their shepherd' (*SA* III.xii: 1; Kolb and Wengert 2000: 324–325), he was using a biblical image: a shepherd or pastor along with his sheep or flock. As theologians at the ground level of the Lutheran Reformation spoke about the church as a subject of theological interest, they did so with reference to the holy scriptures, which they sought to make the basis of their ecclesiological ideas. As Christians dating back to the first century had done, they contemplated and drew upon images for the church provided by these most sacred texts of the Christian tradition (Minear 2004). With opponents loyal to the pope as the head of the church, Lutherans particularly debated those passages of the New Testament that served as evidence for a primacy of Peter and, by extension, as justification for the Roman curia's claim to universal supremacy (e.g. Matt 16:18–19; John 21:15–17). In treating the scriptures as the word of God in written form, the Lutherans were in full agreement with theologians loyal to the papacy. Disagreement about the place of the scriptures in the ecclesial systems that governed the church's teaching and life could crop up, as did questions about authoritative interpretation. But, for theologians of the sixteenth century, the books of the Bible were authoritative as writings of prophetic and apostolic origin, behind which stood the Holy Spirit. Lutherans shared these common convictions. Not all texts bore equal ecclesiological import, but Lutherans, like other readers, were operating well before the critical methodologies of a subsequent era, and so they took Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles – all books with serious ecclesiological weight – to be genuinely Pauline. They held the holy scriptures to be clear and placed their interpretation and exposition among the chief duties of university theologians, under curricular revisions shaped by Renaissance humanism. On an ecclesial level, the sixteenth-century confessions and church orders entrusted judgement of doctrine, on the basis of the scriptures, to bishops and superintendents (*CA* XXVIII: 21; *BC* 2000: 94–95).

As with most names from which -isms are later derived, Luther's theology can be distinguished from appropriations and representations of it in the subsequent tradition of Lutheranism. A papally-excommunicated son of the Western church, around 1520 he decried the captivity of that which was sacred to the church under the Roman curia, while affirming local oversight and governance of the church and calling on the nobility and civil authorities to act for its good. None of this was unprecedented. In fact, the ecclesial reform program of Electoral Saxony, led in part by Luther and Melanchthon, was an attempt to reinstate a churchly form of episcopacy. It entailed visitation, oversight of teaching, sacramental practice, and the care of souls, and ordination, carried out by super-ordered ministers: the parsons and superintendents (Elert 1967b; Kretschmar 1995). Though attempts at evangelical bishoprics were doomed to eventual failure by the politics of the empire in which prince-bishops and -archbishops ruled ecclesiastical estates (Wendebourg 1997), these German reformers were aiming at a spiritually and institutionally integrated pattern of ecclesial life, according to which the church would again be governed under the doctrinal and sacramental authority of ministers operating on the local and regional level. Instead, they got a further step in the bifurcating trajectory of the later Middle Ages: a church governed by an external authority distinct from sacramental-ministerial authority, a church organized under the heads of state (*das landesherrliche Kirchenregiment*), bishop-like princes. Consequentially, their German heirs had to, and did, come to terms with this set of affairs for three centuries.

The reform of the Nordic countries was also magisterial, but more so. Danish and Swedish kings, whose forebears under the crown had at times struggled with a church governed from Rome, strengthened their sovereign hold on their territories and further unified their kingdoms in the Lutheran-led reform of their churches. With the end of the Kalmar Union in 1523, the once-united kingdom was split into Denmark, Norway, and Iceland on the one hand and Sweden with Finland on the other. Johannes Bugenhagen, the parson of Wittenberg, played a major role in King Christian III's reforms of the Danish kingdom. In addition to crowning the king, he composed a church order and consecrated the first seven superintendents – later referred to as bishops – under whom the diocesan structure of the Danish church was preserved. King Gustav Vasa of Sweden wanted a state church dependent on its king. Not only did the crown absorb much ecclesial property, he curtailed the power of the bishops to a certain degree, forcing Bishop Peder Månsson of Västerås to consecrate bishops for open dioceses in Sweden and Finland – a move that would make the Church of Sweden an attractive ecumenical partner for the Church of England in the twentieth century, since the Church of Sweden maintained an apostolic succession understood to proceed by chain of episcopal consecrations.

3.2 Symbolical expression (the Lutheran Confessions)

The Lutheran reformers were sometimes called upon to offer official formulation of doctrine for and on behalf of the territories that had followed their teachings and adopted certain ecclesial reforms based on them. As such formulations were received into the ecclesiastical structures of regions that adopted Lutheran reforms of the church, they achieved a recognizable status as symbols or confessions of the church. The Augsburg Confession (*Confessio Augustana* [*CA*]) of 1530 enjoys ubiquitous standing in the Lutheran tradition. Before the initially-pejorative moniker 'Lutheran' stuck, the ecclesial heirs of the Wittenberg reformation spoke of themselves as 'churches of the Augsburg Confession' (*FC-SD*, Binding Summary: 2, 8; *BC* 2000: 526, 528). This document is best interpreted in its historical context, as well as in view of the imperial *Confutation* that responded to it and Melanchthon's *Apology* (*Ap*) that offered further explanation of it. Luther's *Small Catechism* (*SC*) usually stands alongside the Augsburg Confession as a received confession in Lutheran churches, as often do Luther's *Large Catechism* (*LC*), his *Smalcald Articles* (*SA*), and Melanchthon's *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* (*Tr*).

The Augsburg Confession presents the church as a perpetually-existing historical reality: 'the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly' (*CA* VII: 1; *BC* 2000: 43). Two consequential facets of this compact dogmatic definition must be noted. On the one hand, the church is described in a mysterious and credal manner, with 'assembly of saints' (*congregatio sanctorum*) paralleling 'communion of saints' (*communio sanctorum*) in the Apostles' Creed. The German version of the Augsburg Confession calls these saints 'believers', thereby referencing the justifying faith of its fourth article, which was fiercely contested by the *Confutation* of 1530 (*BC* 2000: 38–41; Kolb and Nestingen 2001: 108–109). Like God the Father Almighty, the resurrected Christ, and the eschatological resurrection of the body, the saints or believers are not simply visible now. On the other hand, they are by no means invisible, but are mysteriously or sacramentally congregated by ministerially-proffered external bodily means – the gospel and the sacraments – that the Holy Spirit uses to work this justifying faith (*CA* V; *BC* 2000: 40–41). Against charges to the contrary by the leading pro-papal theologian Johann Eck, the Augsburg Confession (*AC* XIV) affirmed that public preaching and teaching and the administration of the sacraments – the duties of the ecclesiastical ministry instituted by God – required ordination (*BC* 2000: 46–47), and Melanchthon's *Apology* affirmed the desire to see canonical ordination under the bishops continue (*Ap* XIV; *BC* 2000: 222–223). Thus, the Augsburg Confession's definition of the church simultaneously recognizes a mysterious and hidden internality of faith alongside the ministerially-mediated sacramental externality of the liturgical assembly. The theological ordering of these two factors – and the neglect of one for a hegemonic propagation of the other – has shaped various streams of ecclesiology in the Lutheran tradition.

Four further factors characterize the ecclesiology presented in the primary sixteenth-century confessions of the Lutheran tradition. First, those adhering to this movement understood themselves to be asserting the truth of Christian doctrine over against novel errors and thereby continuing in the patristic pattern of rejecting false teaching (*FC-SD* Preface and Binding Summary: 1–5; *BC* 2000: 524–570). As they engaged in a simultaneously theological and practical act of confession, they presented themselves as heirs of the Western Christian tradition and exemplars of its lineage, claiming that their churches did 'not dissent from the catholic church in any article of faith', and that nothing in their confession or ecclesial practice 'depart[ed] from the Scriptures or the catholic church or from the Roman church', insofar as could be ascertained from its writers (*CA* Abuses Corrected: 1, and Conclusion of Part One: 1; *BC* 2000: 59, 61).

Their attempt to address ecclesiology and ecclesial practice in a traditional manner was tied to a second factor: the confessors approached the church not solely or even chiefly in a conceptual manner, but as a perpetually-existing historical reality manifested and experienced in churches, i.e. in local and regional manifestations of the church – in ecclesial realities like bishoprics, parishes, and/or the church in a region, territory, or city. The civil authorities who presented the Augsburg Confession to Charles V offered a confession of what 'the churches among [them]' taught (*CA* I: 1; *BC* 2000: 37); the *Small Catechism* begins by upbraiding the bishops for neglecting their office before appealing to the parsons and preachers to properly discharge theirs (*SC* Preface: 1–6; *BC* 2000: 347–348); the *Smalcald Articles* compare churches in the territories of the Smalcald League to bishoprics and parishes elsewhere (*SA* Preface: 10; *BC* 2000: 299). Ecclesiology began on the ground, with the factual and experienced realities of the church in the churches.

Thirdly, the church for and in view of which the confessions operate is an institutional reality. Not only is it built on the ministry (*Tr* 25; *BC* 2000: 334), it is governed by the clergy, to whom belongs the peculiar ecclesial authority (*potestas ecclesiastica*) of order (*potestas ordinis*), i.e. to preach the word and administer the sacraments, and of jurisdiction (*potestas iurisdictionis*), i.e. to judge doctrine and exercise the lesser ban – including on a regional or diocesan level (*CA* and *Ap* XXVIII; *BC* 2000: 90–103, 289–294; Mumme 2015a). It is not necessary for the unity of church that rites and ceremonies be the same everywhere. At the same time, the bishops – who are to 'keep diligently together in unity of teaching, faith, sacraments, prayers, and works of love, etc.' (*SA* II.iv: 9 *BC* 2000: 308) – are accorded authority to regulate the churches' practices and liturgical life, so long as extra-biblical stipulations are not declared necessary for the salvation of those under their care (*CA* XV, XXVI; *BC* 2000: 48–49, 74–81).

Fourthly, returning the two facets observable in *CA* VII, the ecclesiology of the confessions honours the believer as an individual who can say, 'the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts', and at the same time integrates that believer

into what the Holy Spirit does for 'the whole Christian church on earth' (*SC* Creed: 6; *BC* 2000: 355). Any believer and all believers receive and experience the full, self-giving communion of the Triune God (*LC* Creed: 67–69; *BC* 2000: 440), not in some dreamlike and ideal ecclesial reality that does not exist in the world (*Ap* VII: 20; *BC* 2000: 177) but in a historical, mysteriously tangible, and institutional reality that is encountered locally.

The foundations of Lutheran ecclesiology, as expounded in the sixteenth century, lie primarily with the exposition of the holy scriptures and come into recognized expression in the confessions of the sixteenth century. The scriptural basis means that Lutheran ecclesiology operates on the most common foundation of Christian theology. The Lutheran confessions do not claim to be the limit or extension of ecclesiology, but they now exist as a standard that may not be bypassed or contradicted by presentations of the church that claim to be Lutheran. The impetuses taken from scripture and insights from the reformers received in the churches' confessional standards – as well as how the two intermingle – shape much of how ecclesiology unfolds in the Lutheran tradition.

3.3 Productive theological pairings

As Lutheran churches and theologians have considered the church as a topic of theology in their dogmatic and constructive systems and in view of their shifting sociopolitical contexts, their work has often developed structural categories already observable in the sixteenth century. Some of the most important of these categories operate in pairs – pairs, that is, of theological concerns and ecclesial factors that are drawn to each other, live in tension with one another, or both. These pairings can be considered in their own right and also in view of an underlying dynamic of internality and externality that informs them all.

Whatever other topics they may raise, most Lutheran presentations of ecclesiology will address something like the following four questions: how is the church invisible, visible, or both, and what terminology is suited to properly describe it in this regard? If the church is the assembly of believers, how does their collectively-held faith relate to the means of grace? What marks the church such that it may be recognized? How does the congregation or assembly relate to the ministry?

Before turning to the subsequent historical unfolding of Lutheran ecclesiology, in which these categories continued to play important roles, the following sections address these theologically productive pairings in the sixteenth century.

3.3.1 Invisible and visible

Ecclesiology must weigh the church as a mysterious fellowship that relates to Christ as both bride and body, attending at the same time to the church as a local assembly and regional reality. This is due to the productive ambiguity of the term *ekklēsia* (assembly) in the New Testament itself. In the sixteenth century it was Ulrich Zwingli who first put

forward visibility and invisibility as categories for this task. Further shaping what would become the Reformed tradition, John Calvin asserted that, in the proper sense, the church was the invisible fellowship of the elect in Christ. In the later revised editions of his *Commonplaces*, Melanchthon takes up this pairing somewhat begrudgingly, as pressed on him by opponents. An invisible church would be a figment of the imagination, he contends; there are no elect outside the visible assembly of the called (Melanchthon 2011: 239). Not only is the church visible, it is local and temporal, described as those who confess true doctrine and passively receive what God actively delivers through the ministry (Melanchthon 1982: section 29). Yet this liturgically-described assembly, which invokes the name of Christ and rightly calls on God, is hidden – not least under persecution and the cross – until the eschatological manifestation of the kingdom of God at the second coming of Christ (Melanchthon 2011: section 30; cf. Prenter 1967: 530). Though Luther could, for example, state that, '[t]he church is hidden, the saints are unknown' (1525; *LW* 33: 89), his ecclesiology also did not operate under the influential structural principle of visibility and invisibility. Like medieval thinkers before him, he understood the church as one of three estates instituted by God, a hierarchy endowed with divine authority and having a divinely instituted ministry or order that governed it. As a continual reality, the church moved through history (1541; *LW* 41: 207). Among the unsettled and competing ecclesiological options of the waning Middle Ages (Jedin 1968), Luther sought to present the church as a pneumatological reality from a position of a qualified conciliarism.

3.3.2 Faith and the means of grace

According to Luther, the church was a creature of the word – the word of the gospel (1519; WA 2: 430, 6–7; 1520; *LW* 36: 107). Against all spiritualism and any bare internality of faith, Luther maintained that the faith of the communion of saints hangs on the gospel externally and orally preached, and on tangible elements, such as water taken into God's ordinance (*LC* Baptism: 28–30; *BC* 2000: 460). The preached word and the administered sacraments of baptism, the Lord's supper, and absolution are realities that offer themselves to perception by the senses, while simultaneously being media through which the Holy Spirit operates to create and sustain saving faith. Following this conviction, it became common among Lutherans to speak of them as organs or instruments of salvation, or as means of grace. Specifying the gospel as 'the divine proclamation in which men […] are presented with the most gracious promise of God', Melanchthon explained the sacraments as 'signs and pledges of divine grace, the application and appropriation of grace' (2011: section 9, 19). Distinct from ceremonies of a sacrificial nature, these are 'decreed so that God may give us something' (1982: section 23) Their relationship to faith, salvation by faith, and to the church as the assembly of believers has been presented with various accents in the Lutheran tradition. The basic conviction that the church is created by the word of God (Schwöbel 1989) – that it is a creature of the gospel – has become a set piece of Lutheran ecclesiology received from Luther.

3.3.3 Church and marks of the church

As the Western church was dividing at the time of the Lutheran reformation, a pressing question arose as to how the church could be identified. The structural category of the church and its marks is closely related to the category of faith and the means of grace, but it operates somewhat more broadly. Inasmuch as the reformers and the Lutheran confessions affirmed and continued to use the ancient creeds, Lutherans liturgically repeat and have always said that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic (Mumme 2020: 157–158). The reformers understood the church's unity as concord in saving faith, underwritten by scripturally-normed and episcopally-overseen teaching, by orthodox sacramental practice, and by proper if not ubiquitously uniform liturgical celebration. They presented catholicity chiefly as a matter of historical and theological continuity; thus, the Augsburg Confession claimed that it departed from no article of the faith in doctrine or practice. In addition to constant appeal to the prophetic and apostolic scriptures as the highest authority in the church, the reformers understood and maintained an apostolic continuity in their ministerial orders (Mumme 2015b: 63–66, 123–166; Piepkorn 2006: 26). In a much-contested atmosphere leading up to what would become the Council of Trent, Luther took up the credal attribute of holiness and claimed that the church was 'a Christian holy people' (1539; *LW* 41: 143–167; Yeago 1997). The Holy Spirit made the church this particular people by hallowing it through the word, baptism, the Lord's supper, and the absolution of sins under the authority of the keys, all of which were entrusted to consecrated ministers. Luther could speak of such marks of the church as treasures established and left behind by Christ (Mumme 2015b: 224–233), which operate in the present as gifts passed down through the church as a historically-existing reality (1541; *LW* 41: 193–224). Similarly, Melanchthon asserted that the church was characterized by the uncorrupted profession of the doctrine of the gospel, by the use of the sacraments in accord with their divine institution, and by obedience to the ministers of the gospel (1955: 212, 286). Inasmuch as the church was seen a transtemporal guardian of the word operative in the ministry (Melanchthon 2011: 245) at a time when the content of that word was being debated, it also became common for Lutherans to recognize an orthodox and ministerially-overseen confessional standard as a mark of the church (Elert 1967a: 146).

3.3.4 Ministry (*Amt*) and congregation (*Gemeinde*)

In the day-to-day life of the church, there is always some kind of reciprocal relationship between ministry and congregation that is between ministers and the assembly of believers as such. The systematic-theological ordering of these ecclesial elements and the implications of that ordering for the life of a given church are thus a weighty matter of both doctrine and practice. Two of the Augsburg Confession's doctrinal articles directly treat the ministry, the first (*CA* V) in its central tasks of preaching the word and administering the sacraments, the second (*CA* XIV) in connection with the need for proper ordination of

ministers. That squares with Luther's understanding of the ministry as a particular office, established by Christ's sending of the apostles and passing in a historically-enduring fashion through ordination (1535, *LW* 26: 17; Mumme 2015b: 233–255). Like him, Melanchthon also understood ministers to be endowed with a real pneumatic authority through which they governed the church (1555: section 28; Mumme 2015a).

With this pairing, however, there arose a striking shift in interpretation as the confessional text is reread in a modern context. At the 1530 Diet of Augsburg, the emperor and the papally-loyal theologians behind the *Confutation* accepted *CA* V, understanding it to assign the ministry of word and sacraments to an authoritative office, much as Luther and Melanchthon did (cf. Pannenberg 1990: 297). Under later democratic sentiment, the article has often been reinterpreted in light of the idea of a 'priesthood of all believers'. Though Luther did, in certain writings between 1520 and 1523, speak of a general priesthood of all Christians (cf. Wendebourg 2005; Lieberg 1962), he by no means derived the ministry from it in his mature writings.

Nevertheless, fortified with a few citations from writings in this four-year period, many contemporary Lutherans draw a distinction between the fifth and fourteenth articles. *CA* V, they maintain, refers to ministry in general, as a functionally-defined task that is the responsibility and right of all believers, while *CA* XIV requires ordination for public preaching and administration of the sacraments. This reading of the Augsburg Confession – one that asserts a general form of ministry resting on a basic right of all Christians to preach and administer the sacraments – may be a constructive re-interpretation of the text, but it marks a significant departure from the original meaning of the relevant articles as they were understood both by the reformers and by their early opposing interlocutors.

3.4 Internality and externality as ecclesiological diagnostic

At the Leipzig Debate of 1519 and in his mature years, Luther prioritized the factual to the conceptual and the external to the internal as he set about the task of ecclesiology (Mumme 2019). His ecclesiological pattern generally aligns with Melanchthon's focus on the visible assembly of the called, which distinguished itself as the true church from the false church by way of its confession of Christian teaching, its sacraments, and its ministry (1555: section 28–29; see Melanchthon 1982).

When the Augsburg Confession asserted that human beings are justified as a gift through faith in Christ 'when they believe that they are received into grace and that their sins are forgiven' (IV:2; *BC* 2000: 41), it installed an irreducibly internal and self-referential element at the heart of what would become Lutheranism's most-recognized confessional standard. Especially given the prominence of the doctrine of justification in the Lutheran tradition, the ecclesial consequences have been prodigious. *CA* IV (*Of Justification*) is, however, fused to *CA* V, such that when their collective content is theologically ordered,

this internality of faith is preceded by the externality of the physically-communicated word and the sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit works justifying faith. Luther could not have been more explicit in the ordering of externality and internality – and by extension of the factual-historical and the conceptual (Mumme 2019: 267–277) – in the Holy Spirit's dealings with human beings. '[T]he external word […] goes before' (*SA* III.viii:3; *BC* 2000: 322). In part an inheritance of Augustine's anti-Donatist sacramentology, in part a conviction solidified over against radical reform movements of the 1520s, Luther's belief in the primacy of the external to the internal in God's saving dealings with human beings would be lost on or abandoned by many of his historical heirs within the Lutheran tradition – with consequential ecclesiological results.

4 Historical unfolding

Until the nineteenth century, the main theatres of Lutheran ecclesiology were Germanic lands of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation – which faded as an empire while its territories struggled toward nation-statehood – and the Nordic lands, whose kingdoms proved stable venues for the establishment of Lutheran churches in Lutheran states. Emigration, foreign missions, and the revolutions of the long nineteenth century raised new questions for the church, as did the international exchange and ecumenical spirit of the twentieth century, along with its growth in the Global South.

4.1 Orthodoxy and Enlightenment

Various national versions of a Lutheran monoculture took shape in the Nordic countries after the Reformation. The Danish state became a combination of its nation and its church, with the king at the head of both. The parish functioned as the basic unity of society, and the parish clergy were civil servants. King Karl XI's church law of 1686 specified that all citizens of the Kingdom of Sweden must confess the faith of the whole *Book of Concord*. Not until the eighteenth century were Calvinists, Roman Catholics, or Jews tolerated, and only in the nineteenth century was conversion to another denomination legally sanctioned.

These Nordic manifestations of confessionalization were mirrored by developments in Germany. There too ecclesiology unfolded as an operation of controversialist theology, but on the confessionally-chequered map of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, whose law now allowed the faith to be practiced under the Augsburg Confession (Heckel 2007). There, Lutheran territories often bordered those of Roman Catholics or with Calvinist sentiment. Given the confessional patchwork of the land now known as Germany, Lutheran ecclesiological efforts during the age of orthodoxy (c. 1555–1780) could be aimed in different but related directions. On the one hand, there were confessional and polemical operations in which theologians took aim at Roman Catholic and Calvinist opponents, either challenging their understandings of the church, the ministry, and the sacraments, or mounting defences against charges levelled by them. On the other hand,

there were efforts to heal the established but perhaps not yet utterly hardened divisions of Western Christendom.

In the turbulent period following Luther's death, the Centuriators of Magdeburg offered an ecclesial history that legitimated the existence of a Lutheran type of church living separate from Rome against Roman Catholic opponents. Matthias Flacius, Johannes Wigand, and Matthäus Judex belonged to the '*gnesio*' or 'genuine' Lutherans who resisted the Calvinist leanings of some of Melanchthon's devotees. In the *Magdeburg Centuries* (1559–1574) they evince a clear interest in the historical continuity of the church, especially as regards its doctrine, which functions as a sometimes clearer and fuller and sometimes dimmer and reduced presentation of the light of divine truth. Although they tended, in some sense, to think of church as defined by its confession of the faith, the Centuriators did not reduce the church or its historical continuity simply to a matter of doctrine; instead, they recognized a visible church effected in a structured form by the word, to which preachers of the word belonged as organs and instruments (Wagner 1973: 13–84).

The Roman front also played a significant role in works like Johann Gerhard's *Theological Commonplaces* (*Loci Theologici*). When it came to his loci on the church and the ministry, Gerhard had no interlocutor more important than Robert Bellarmine. For example, Bellarmine's *Disputations on the Controversies of the Christian Faith* (*Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei*) asserted that church was just as visible as the Kingdom of France or the Republic of Venice. Entering the controversialist fray, Gerhard debated not only the nature and identity of the church along the lines of visibility and invisibility but also ministerial issues, such as the distinction between bishops and presbyters as a matter of divine right (Gerhard 2010: 70–142; 2012: 48–63). Gerhard, like other theologians and churchmen of the period, found himself in a situation where the rulers of Lutheran territories had become the legally recognized heads of the churches in their domains. In this new situation marked by religious parity in the empire and attempts at confessional homogeneity in its territories, these rulers' lawyers turned medieval imperial law, canon law, and Roman law, as well as Byzantine, Gallican, and Spanish precedencies to make legal sense of the situation where princes were heads of churches (Heckel 1968). In this milieu, Gerhard overhauled the reformers' doctrine of the three estates in a theological attempt to limit the head of state's authority over the church (Honecker 1968).

At the same time, German Lutherans were also pressed to call attention to ecclesiological distinctions that separated them from Calvinists. This direction of controversialism proved somewhat more delicate though no less stormy, inasmuch as Calvinism as yet had no legal standing in the Holy Roman Empire and could exist only insofar as crypto-Calvinism infiltrated Lutheran lands and institutions. One such Lutheran–Calvinist controversy arose between the Hamburg parson Philipp Nicolai and Urban Pierius, an erstwhile court preacher in Dresden and professor at the University of Wittenberg who was eventually

jailed for his Calvinist teachings. The substance of their rupture was ministerial (Baur 1980: 119–126). Nicolai asserted that, based on God's promises, God was present in the ministry, indeed in the preacher's mouth. Pleading an anti-magical case, Pierius contended that God as sovereign subject did not thus bind himself to the finite, and that such a predication of the concrete presence of God was injurious in objectifying God. In a mode similar to Lutheran-Calvinist debates surrounding the Lord's supper, this disagreement orbited the questions of God's self-binding and his presence as mediated by a finite instrument such that his presence could be claimed in a specific place, i.e. through the ministerial service of a specific person. Pierius contended that only a spiritual power and divine activity could be claimed of the ministry, since a spiritual immediacy exists between God and Christians and since such concreteness as Nicolai claimed would threaten the sovereignty of God and the freedom of the Christian subject. According to Nicolai the ministry had a theophoric character; according to Pierius it did not and could not.

The solidifying of confessional lines that generally took place during the period of orthodoxy did not mean that some theologians were not openly working towards a reunification of Western Christianity. Georg Calixt of the University of Helmstedt used his chair of controversialist theology to pursue an irenic and conciliatory theological path (Fry 1979). Shaped by the Thirty Years War, he sought to identify a way towards ecclesial peace (Mayes 2004). Following Nicolaus Hunnius' distinction of fundamental and nonfundamental articles of the faith, Calixt suggested that different doctrines were of different import: some were antecedent and self-evident; others constitutive as teachings divinely revealed and necessary for salvation; still others were consequent, derived from the antecedent and constitutive doctrines. Constitutive doctrines he described as fundamental, and derivative as nonfundamental. With this distinction in place, he thought there could be a peaceful fellowship of faith between Calvinists, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics on the basis of a patristic consensus on fundamental articles of the faith as found distilled in the Apostles' Creed, the so-called *consensus quinquesaecularis* (the consensus of the first five centuries). The tradition of the first five centuries was the standard by which what was necessary for salvation could be distinguished from subsequent developments and nonfundamental derivations (Böttigheimer 2003).

Though he inspired Gottfried Wilhelm Liebniz in his later quest to provide theological grounds for ecclesial reunion on the basis of a substance metaphysics capable of reframing confessional differences surrounding the holy supper (Edel 2000), the Helmstedter found an indefatigable opponent in Abraham Calov of the University of Wittenberg. Not only did Calov reject the distinction of the relative importance of doctrines, he saw contention in the church fathers and did not recognize consensus as a marker of the truth. Further, it was clear to Calov that Calixt's system placed the doctrine of justification – by which Calov understood the church to stand or fall – in the category of nonfundamental doctrines developed after the first five centuries. This seemed a

blatant affront to the heart of the Lutheran Reformation. Calov and Calixt were the leading figures of the Syncretist Controversy, which began after Calixt participated in the Colloquy of Thorn in 1645. This eventually led Calov, who thought that true doctrine grows as an organic whole, to compose his *Consensus Repetitus Fidei Vere Lutheranae* (The Repeated Consensus of the True Lutheran Faith), in which he claimed that the Lutheran Church was the true church of Jesus Christ. Johannes Musäus, multi-term rector of the University of Jena (the University of Wittenberg's inter-Saxon rival), took something of a mediating position in the controversy. He shared Calov's conviction about the danger of sorting doctrines into the categories proposed by Calixt, and although he was quite sanguine about what degree of consensus could be reached on a patristic foundation, he did think that the consensus of the fathers – so far as it existed – could serve as a valuable starting point for dialogue. On the other hand, he opposed Calov's *Consensus Repetitus* as an undue expansion of ecclesial doctrine on the basis of theological opinion even as he opposed Calixt's notion that the Apostles' Creed functioned as a summation of all material necessary to the Christian faith. Instead of subtraction or addition, the Lutheran confessions of the sixteenth century marked out the parameters of the true Lutheran faith. Whereas Calixt seems to have found the catholic church in the first five centuries – especially represented by the church's ancient patriarchates – and Calov identified it with the Lutheran church, Musäus made a distinction between visible and invisible central to his presentation, loosing the internal and invisible essence of the church from its external form (Albrecht 2000). In this sense the church, properly speaking, was by definition one, and external union was possible only under agreement on all articles of the faith.

Cognizant of their place within a Lutheran type of church in a now-divided Western Christendom, Lutheran theologians went about their perennial task of expounding doctrine from sacred scripture. Disputations, such as those that took place at the University of Wittenberg, show that the topic of ecclesiology was somewhat experimental (Appold 2004). Though they could be expected to acknowledge the veracity of the Augsburg Confession and to deny papacy's claims to primacy by divine right, the theologians of the period of Lutheran orthodoxy allowed one another a good deal of latitude in the unfolding of this doctrine. Even as they presented Lutheran versions of the church as true, they generally did not claim that the salvation which was could not be found outside of the universal church was only to be found in certain (Lutheran) territorial churches. The theologians of the period of Lutheran orthodoxy presented the church as a body (the body of Christ), as a bride, and as the house of God (Gerhard 2010: sections 17, 18, and 21).

Although many still insisted on the church's visibility (cf. König 2006: section 1026), ecclesiologies of the period adopted visibility and invisibility as a structural principle for assessing and presenting the church. The true version of church could be diagnosed by its presentation of the most orthodox doctrine. Though theologians continued to speak about the word and the sacraments as organs or instruments of salvation (König 2006:

section 1019), Lutheran orthodoxy shifted emphasis from the preached word that effected faith to the scriptures as the foundation for right faith and pure doctrine. The holy scriptures became a sort of prolegomenon in the era of Lutheran orthodoxy, which witnessed the unfolding of the doctrine of scripture's inspiration and presented the Bible as the formal principle of theology. Building out a category taken from Melanchthon, the orthodox dogmaticians could speak of 'the church strictly speaking' (*ekklesia stricte dicta*) and 'the church loosely speaking' (*ekklesia late dicta*), tying the former to the invisible multitude of the elect and the latter to the visible assembly of the called (Kühn 1989: 265). They thereby accorded a certain priority to the invisible. Over against Luther's understanding of the three estates, a significant theological shift took place as the civil estate and the domestic-economic estate ceased to operate as hierarchies or estates next to the church and were instead placed inside of it. The magistrate was, therewith, accorded care for the Christian religion (*cura religionis*) in his territories, and the civil authority had the right to – and bore responsibility for – the outward ordering of the church (*ius circa sacra*), even if it eventually came to be somewhat distanced from the spiritual oversight of the church in matters of faith and worship (*ius in sacra*).

Pietism and Enlightenment rationalism were in part responses to Lutheran orthodoxy, and began to unseat it by the end of the seventeenth century. Lutheran orthodoxy's scrutiny of the rectitude of faith paved the way for Pietism's inward turn. Philipp Jacob Spener, herald of subsequent efforts towards a German Protestant union (Hirsch 1949: 127–138 [vol. 2]), called attention to the elements of faith and life that Lutherans shared with the Reformed, over against Roman Catholics. In Herrnhut, the Pietism of Nikolaus Ludwig, Reichsgraf von Zinzendorf melded with the ecclesiology of Moravian refugees as their 'congregation of brothers' (*Brüdergemeinde*) undertook influential and expansive mission work that operated beyond confessional differences.

The Pietists' emphasis on spiritual rebirth and sanctification led them to see the highest manifestation of the church in the congregation of awakened and renewed believers, so much so that a strain of chiliasm, which awaited an ideal state of affairs already within history, made its way into Lutheran circles. Pietism, which shared with the Enlightenment a preference for the invisible church, made ecclesiology 'pragmatic to the point of functionalism' (Tjørhom 2016: 334) and ranked visible manifestations of the church as secondary to the invisible nature of the true or 'little' church. Its proponents and adherents were more concerned with the appropriation of salvation than its administration; its obligation to a very detailed order of salvation both internalized and anthropologized a salvation that had as little need for external mediation as the Enlightenment had place for outward means of grace in religion.

Theologians shaped by the Enlightenment broke with older standards of Lutheran orthodoxy and moved religious discourse in a Neo-Protestant direction. Like the Pietists,

rationalist thinkers of the Enlightenment were also sceptical of orthodoxy's identification of salvation with doctrine. Johann Salomo Semler appropriated the categories of visibility and invisibility to call attention to the distinction between theology and religion, influencing Immanuel Kant in his assertion that only the weak needed the doctrines and ordinances of the church for religion. Kant saw the church as a vehicle for the religious faith of free individuals, which itself could pass away with its laws and dogmas. Both Spener and Semler lent the doctrine of the common priesthood of Christians (1 Pet 2:9) new weight. Consequentially, the reformers' fundamental conviction about the primacy of the external to the internal did not readily survive the Enlightenment's placement of religion with the abstract and intangible, nor Pietism's personalizing and strict subjectivizing of human beings' relationship to God.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Friedrich Julius Stahl aligned orthodoxy, Pietism, and Rationalism with three successive theories of church polity (1840: 5–46). Lutheran orthodoxy maintained a certain episcopalism, presenting the head of state as the standing emergency head of a region's church, which still enjoyed some institutional independence within the state. Pietism's internalization of ecclesiology was able to pair with a territorialist understanding of church, wherein the head of state's authority over the institutional church needed no justification via an episcopal byway. The Rationalists espoused a collegial system of polity, in which the sovereignty of the people itself was accorded sovereignty over the church. Though Stahl's construal is something of an oversimplification, it does note a general trajectory that would be subjected to intense debate in the nineteenth century.

4.2 The long nineteenth century

The long nineteenth century, stretching from the French Revolution to the First World War and including such events as the Napoleonic Wars, the revolutions of 1848, and the Franco-Prussian War, was a period of upheaval for Lutheran churches in Lutheran states. By the turn of the century, Romanticism and awakening movements had begun to move ecclesiological sentiments in new directions, with internality of experience sometimes fusing with a renewed appreciation for tradition.

The Danish Church, often the subject of Søren Kirekegaard's reproofs, was shaped in a congregational direction by its Pietist Inner Mission, albeit with fresh affinity for an older Lutheran orthodoxy as promulgated by Klaus Harms of neighbouring Schleswig-Holstein. N. F. S. Gruntvig and the Gruntvigians constituted a uniquely Danish reform movement, which discovered in the liturgy and in the Apostles' Creed substantial moments of continuity for the faith and life of the church. The Danish focus on mission was shared in Norway, albeit from a more individual direction, while Christianity in Sweden was still that of the Swedish Lutheran Church, characterized by centralized state control. After Sweden

lost the eastern portion of its territories to Russia in 1809, ecclesial life in the new Grand Duchy of Finland was shaped by both the Lutheran and the Russian Orthodox Churches. During this period, the Nordic countries took first steps in a more pluralistic direction, tolerating other denominations and religious groups and allowing conversion, albeit with the Lutheran confessions still as recognized standards of the official churches.

In Germany, F. D. E. Schleiermacher sought to keep individual piety tied to the institutional church. In his synthesis of Pietist and Enlightenment impulses, the church emerged as a creature of faith (Tjørhom 2016), the social form of religion that followed faith. Schleiermacher also offered theological support to Prussian efforts to unite German Protestants in a single church. Echoing Spener's sentiments, he asserted a consequential ecclesiological principle: '[Protestantism] makes the individual's relation to the Church dependent on his relation to Christ, while [Catholicism] […] makes the individual's relation to Christ dependent on his relation to the Church' (Schleiermacher 1989: section 24).

Adjacent to feeling and piety, the category of experience played a significant role in Schleiermacher's theological program. This particular facet of his theology was taken up in Erlangen, which came to be the centre of a Lutheran confessional revival in Germany, which – contrary to Schleiermacher – opposed the Prussian Union. The Lutheran confessional revival, fuelled in part by the revolutions of 1848 and 1849, was very much an ecclesiological revival. Confronted by 'a church that want[ed] to know nothing of Protestantism and a Protestantism that want[ed] to know nothing of the church' (Harleß 1838: 2), the Erlangers turned to the Lutheran confessions as documents with legal standing in their church, presenting them as tried and true testimonies to right, collective experience of the faith as it had unfolded in an organic fashion. One challenge posed by Schleiermacher's influential legacy was the integration of the means of grace into a revitalized understanding of the church. For three centuries since the Lutheran Reformation the word had been preached, people had been baptized, and the Lord's supper had been celebrated in Lutheran territories; but as Lutherans of the nineteenth century scrutinized ecclesiology, it was unclear whether the church was responsible for these phenomena, or whether they were responsible for the church. Even within Germany's neo-Lutheran revival opinions were mixed. In Erlangen, J. W. F. Höfling struggled to integrate the sacraments into his ecclesiological system, and Adolf von Harleß described them signs of the church's existence by which the church assembled itself. Theodor Kliefoth, superintendent of Schwerin and president of its high consistory, on the other hand, asserted that God generated, assembled, and maintained the church through the means of grace while also ordering the church (Kliefoth 1854; cf. Grundtvig 1976: 62). F. J. Stahl of Berlin and A. F. C. Vilmar of Hesse insisted that particular persons, i.e. ministers, were an indissoluble facet of this divine ordering.

Höfling, who set the main direction for Erlangen's ecclesiology, accepted Schleiermacher's Protestant principle and took the invisible church, whose existence was simply a given (Brunner 1962: 238, note 3), as his ecclesiological starting point. Operating under what he considered the 'proper Protestant perspective' of the church as an essentially inner and spiritual fellowship (Fagerberg 1952: 233), all matters of institution were presented as necessarily secondary. Careful to avoid anything with an air of Roman Catholicism, Höfling strictly separated ecclesial ministry from the governance of the church and categorized all external matters of the church's life under the necessarily secondary heading of the law, including liturgical matters of 'ceremonial law'. Significantly, he presented the ecclesial ministry as a derivation of the general priesthood of believers, which delegated certain functions to it.

Some who were associated with the confessional revival did not, however, follow Erlangen's dominant ministeriology, including Erlangen's own Franz Delitzsch. Along with Stahl and Vilmar, Wilhelm Löhe of Neuendettelsau presented more institutional visions of the church, in which external facets of ecclesial life were prized as part and parcel of its sacramentally-fed existence and historical-continuous character. Underscoring the word and sacraments as means of grace, they understood the ecclesial ministry, which Theodor Kliefoth described as 'the means-of-grace office' (1854: 132–231), to be founded in a particular institution of Christ and passed on by ordination. Stahl stressed the priority of the Christ's lordship in the church as an institution by way of the word, the sacraments, and the ministry – Christ's instruments – to Christ's lordship in souls – his abode. Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, theological sentiments about the church as an institution could move in wildly different directions even within Germany's confessional revival.

In the political upheavals that were reordering the states and governmental systems in which they lived – or in the lands of their emigration, where they lacked state ecclesial structures altogether – Lutherans of the nineteenth century sought new connections to one another in theological federations, such as the General Evangelical Lutheran Conference of Germany (1868) and the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of North America (1872).

In the latter decades of the century, and somewhat opposite the Neo-Lutheran confessional revival, the Neo-Protestantism of the Enlightenment unfolded in the direction of cultural Protestantism (*Kulturprotestantismus*), whose politically liberal spirit wished to retain certain Protestant cultural values while unfettering personal faith from dogma and making the church more pluralistic. Under the influence of Kant, the *pro me* (for me) element of the gospel had become the a priori assumption of a transcendental 'I' (Bayer 1993: 107–108). Immediacy, including an unmediated relationship to God, was assumed. Hegel took the abolition of externality as a basic principle of the Reformation. Ecclesiologically, this transcendental 'I' had an ecclesiological counterpart in the

transcendental ‘We’ of the general priesthood of all believers. Believers simply existed, and – as believers – their direct access to God was to be taken as the starting point of ecclesiology. This trajectory, which appropriated Schleiermacher’s alignment of internal sense and feeling with consciousness of God, had a marked impact on the Lutheran tradition. A primacy is clearly accorded to the internal in ecclesiological reasoning; nothing can rightly be predicated about the church that does not pass through the internality of faith. If the starting point of ecclesiological reasoning is an undifferentiated immediacy of relation to God in faith, and if the word of God is the gospel first in being subjectively appropriated as such, then the entire external edifice of the church and the ministry as an institution qua edifice and institution are simply necessary matters of the law. Binding the divine to the internal generates ecclesiological repercussions. External matters of the church’s institutional life were necessarily secondary.

Trutz Rendtorff (1970) has shown how a given appropriation of the doctrine of justification, with inherent elements of internality, has led to the indefiniteness and indecisiveness of structures in *Volkskirchen* (peoples’ churches; a *Volkskirche* is a church of and representing a given people) lest external, ‘human’ orders somehow be related to salvation). Georg Rietschel operated with these Neo-Protestant underpinnings in his liturgics: the liturgy, including the rite of ordination, pedagogically taught what was already the case. Similarly, Rudolph Sohm’s treatment of ecclesiastical law neatly quarantined all matters of church law and ecclesial organization from questions that could be considered properly theological. Cultural Protestantism operated with a kind of ontological dualism (Kinder 1964: 59–60). With the church as a given, a subjective reality essentially unmoored from external or historical causation, the proponents of cultural Protestantism could focus their attention on its effects, indicating how it leavened the whole culture and connected it to a Christian religious foundation. Toward the long century’s end, the heirs of the awakenings and the confessional revival protested that *evangelisch* (Protestant/evangelical) did not stand for ‘a generic, undifferentiated, Rome-free, dogma-free, universal Protestantism’ (Kinder 1955: 280). Nevertheless, at least in Germany, the passing of theological verdict on radically divergent streams of ecclesiology was overtaken by events leading to the establishment of the German Empire and eventually to the collapse of the *Landesherrlichen Kirchenregiment* in 1918.

4.3 Recent and contemporary

Lutheran ecclesiology since the First World War has been shaped by new stages in the relationship between church and state, by the formation of international Lutheran federations, by the ecumenical movement, and by the growth of Lutheranism among peoples of non-European origin.

In the twentieth century, the Lutheran monocultures of the Nordic lands became more permeable, in part due to a general secularizing tendency operative in these societies. Governmental control of state churches and former state churches loosened, but with the Lutheran churches enjoying a recognized majority status as peoples' churches (*Volkskirchen*). At the same time, the ecclesiology of Einar Billing helped to lay a foundation for the welfare states of Sweden and Denmark, a replacement for an earlier concept of *oeconomia* as a familial-economic hierarchy or estate established by God. In Germany, Lutheran ecclesiology had to confront the National Socialists' attempt to co-opt the unified German Evangelical Church for its purposes; the leading resistance was mounted by the Confessing Church, itself a pan-Protestant institution, whose Barmen Declaration (1934) would shape ecclesiological convictions downstream by declaring that '[t]he Christian Church is the congregation of brothers in which Jesus Christ acts presently as the Lord in Word and Sacrament through the Holy Spirit' (Barmen Declaration: 3; Rabinbach and Gilman 2013: section 188). The Lutheran ecclesiologies of emigrant communities and foreign missions developed in countries that allowed religious freedom without offering Lutheran churches favoured status.

In 1923 the Lutheran World Convention met for the first time. It was replaced in 1947 by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the largest Lutheran body in the world. The smaller International Lutheran Council (ILC) and the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) were founded in 1993.

Nathan Söderblom, archbishop of Uppsala, who was instrumental in bringing together the Lutheran World Convention, was also a Lutheran pioneer in the ecumenical movement. He suggested a model for ecumenical interaction based on Schleiermacher's apologetics, which flipped an older controversialist tendency by encouraging interlocutors to understand each other's traditions. Lutheran ecumenical dialogues, which have taken place on both national and international levels, have led to greater understanding with the Reformed, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, and Christians of other traditions, sometimes resulting in declarations of fellowship. As a result of such ecumenical engagement, contemporary Lutheran ecclesiology faces a question about what social shape the church's life may take, such that the particularities of a given confession be maintained as growth in communion with other churches is recognized (Schwöbel 2002).

By the latter half of the twentieth century, Lutheranism had come to a global self-awareness and its greatest numerical growth, as that of many churches, lay in the southern hemisphere. Taking direction from the *communio* ecclesiology that flowered under the ecumenical movement, the Lutheran World Federation now takes its theological measure as a global communion (Holze 1997). Initial attempts in the direction of contextual ecclesiology have mainly been overseen by Europeans, Americans, and immigrants to Western countries, but the twenty-first century awaits systematic contextual

reflections on ecclesiology from Lutherans of the Global South and of southeast Asia (Greive 2001; Grosshans 2009; Grosshans and Sinaga 2011).

In addition these historical developments, Lutherans of the last century continued to produce theologies of the church that sought to address questions about the church's nature and visibility, about the relationship of faith to the word and sacraments, and about the ministry.

In some contemporary efforts it has been common to put the preached word and the administered sacraments out in front of the faith by which the church is defined, while simultaneously describing preaching as the voice of the church and the sacraments as its actions (Skydsgaard 1963: 18, 39), raising the question: which comes first, faith or the means of grace? One approach to this puzzle is to treat all mediation of the gospel as a word-based type of communication, such that the gospel is proclaimed 'in the word and the sacrament' (Schwöbel 2002: 386). Such a description places the activity under which the gospel is being considered in the vocabular orbit of 1 Pet 2:9, the only instance of *exaggellō* (to proclaim or sound forth) in the New Testament, and the classic text for the general priesthood of believers. It also treats the word and sacrament(s) as activities of the church seen as a fellowship of collective witness. The event of the gospel's proclamation presumes the ecclesial fellowship that makes it possible, such that the church simultaneously acts as the instrument of the gospel and is created by the gospel, with human cooperation written as a law into both the origin and maintenance of the church (Herms 2010: xvi–xvii, 39). In a sense, this approach revisits the issue of visibility and invisibility from another angle: the clearly-visible collective fellowship gathered around the word and sacraments sees to its preaching and their administration, whose gospel goes before the more nearly invisible faith of individuals. The visible church is then presented as the means for the communication of the gospel, which – insofar as it fulfils its task of ministry – brings the invisible church into existence and sustains it (Härle 2015: 468, 471–472). Another approach, affirming the church as a creature of the gospel and recognizing the word of God as the holiest of all holy things (cf. *LC* Ten Commandments: 91; *BC* 2000: 399), honours the sacraments alongside the preached word as particular confrontations with the judgment and grace of God (Kinder 1961), which as ministerially-delivered realities are what they are apart from any collective or individual reception of faith, such that the gospel externally delivered opposite the law creates both faith and the church (Kinder 1957: 137). Thus, while acknowledging that the church is not immediately available to visual sense perception (*unsichtlich*), the category of invisibility (*Unsichtbarkeit*) can simply be abandoned. Nevertheless, based on certain indicators of its hidden and revealed presence, which themselves are available to sense perception, the church is recognizable (Kinder 1958: 173–74).

Even as modern developments in the theological presentation of the word and sacraments warrant attention, so too a shift in Lutherans' sentiments about ecclesiological reasoning out from the sacred scriptures must be noted. A major shift in Lutheran theology had been transpiring since the Enlightenment's historical-critical scrutiny of biblical texts led to the undermining of the previously-untouchable foundation of Lutheran orthodoxy's theological program. By the turn of the nineteenth century, this shift was clearly being felt in the rank and file of the church. By the middle of the twentieth century, critical engagement with scripture resulted in least two important ecclesiological changes. First, many theologians had begun working de facto with a more authoritative canon within the canon of the New Testament – more specifically, a real Pauline canon distinct from the 'deutero-' or 'pseudo-Pauline' epistles (Prenter 1967: 524). This led to the theological prioritization of a more charismatic picture of the church, underwritten by Romans and 1 Corinthians, over the more structured ecclesial pictures presented by Colossians, Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles. Accordingly, their more institutional facets are judged to be later accretions to the real apostolic model. Second, the Gospels themselves are often not read as the reformers would have read them, namely as direct and clear presentations of the words and actions of Jesus, but at least in part as competing visions of the communities in and out of which they arose (Schnelle 2009). Ecclesiologically, these methodological shifts tend to place communities witnessing to Christ out in front of authoritative texts as such, and they assign matters of institution and structure a necessarily secondary – i.e. non-apostolic and non-divine – status.

It is almost impossible to find a Lutheran theologian who does not wave the flag of his or her tradition's esteem of holy scripture in some high fashion, but, taken across its five-century history as a whole, Lutherans' ecclesiological engagement with the holy scriptures operates in divergent directions. Some have taken the church and the apostolic ministry to be direct institutions of Christ, attested by the Gospels, and the structures and offices of the broader Pauline corpus to be of apostolic origin and thus of dominical weight. Others have sought to be guided by the witnessing communities behind the Gospels and Acts, themselves outgrowths of the Jerusalem community's encounter with Christ, and by a pre-institutional and charismatic vision of the church taken from the narrower Pauline canon. Between these loosely-described poles a spectrum of opinion also exists.

There is perhaps no greater matter of inner-Lutheran ecclesiological dissent than Lutherans' differing understandings of ministry – or the ministry – and how this relates to the Christian congregation. As Wolfhart Pannenberg observed, inner-Lutheran disagreement surrounding this structural category can impinge on Lutherans' ability to engage in ecumenical dialogue (1990: 287–288). Though all espouse a divine institution of the ecclesial ministry, some understand the particular or special ministry of those who bear it as their specific or professional office to be derived from and a necessarily ordered

form of the general ministry of all believers' priesthood. Accordingly, ministry is the job of the whole church; it is actuation of the life of this fellowship of faith, a duty all Christians share as soon as they share in the life of the congregation. Any who minister in a special way do so as those called to it by, in the name of, and on behalf of all (Herms 2010: xxvi, 54). Along this trajectory, ordination is often understood as a liturgical recognition of such a calling and/or as a ritualized conferral of rights and duties from the congregation, but not itself as an essential blessing or capacitation to the ministry of preaching and administering the sacraments (Härle 2015: 477); episcopacy is most often viewed as a function, for which competency is attained through education. Professional ministers do what all Christians do; the difference between them and other Christians is one of theological competency and degree of public engagement, but not one of essence. This ministeriological trajectory takes *CA* V to be speaking of ministry in general, and not the ministry of particular people; preaching and administration of the sacraments are understood as functions not tethered to persons.

However, it has also been noted that there is no preached word and no administrated sacraments without the persons who preach and administer (Brunner 1962: 245, note 11). Therefore, along a rather different trajectory, the ministry is not general but particular and tied to persons. In this vein, most credit the ministry to Christ's call and commissioning of the apostles. This apostolic office, from the beginning wed to particular persons, is then most often understood to pass from those who already bear it to others in ordination, an act entailing at least prayer and the laying on of hands and understood as a real benediction (Giertz 2010: 157–169; Heubach 1956). The notion of succession is overt. However, given the Lutheran appropriation of an earlier medieval position, which held that the clergy presiding over parishes and those who oversee dioceses belong by divine right to the same order (*Tr* 60–65; *BC* 2000: 340; Ott 1969: 19–25, 40–48, 78–87; Wendebourg 2000: 197–205), this succession must be distinguished from a subsequent understanding of 'apostolic succession' (Kretschmar 1995; Piepkorn 1970). Along this trajectory the difference between ministers and congregation can, with qualification, be described as essential, a difference pertaining not to their salvation or individual sanctity but to their office in the church. On a historical level, the aforementioned trajectories mirror to a considerable degree positions in a debate that eventually split Germany's nineteenth-century Lutheran revival, whose participants variously accused one another of Romanist and Reformed importations into Lutheran ecclesiology (Fagerberg 1952: 101–120, 271–312; Mumme Forthcoming).

Lutherans agree that the ministry operates within and not apart from the congregation. A question exists as to whether the ministry and ministers also stand opposite (*gegenüber*) the assembly of believers as something other than a necessary instance of social order and a pool of theologically-educated persons modelling and directing the work that all Christians are to do: are they representatives of Christ to the church, and thereby capable

of confronting sinners with divine judgment and of proclaiming the gospel as a message whose merciful veracity simply stands – apart from the internal sentiments of a given soul or souls – and therefore can be preached to those in need of but not themselves capable of salvation? This case can be adjudicated by asking what kind of religion supports or fails the presence of the gospel as the gospel (Baur 1980: 106–107).

As Lutheran ecclesiological efforts of the last hundred years have taken up theological pairings that date at least as far back as the Reformation, these remain productive, and in the contemporary flowering, as at the historical root the diagnostic of internality and externality merits application. If it is true that the church is a communion, and that this communion is not constituted through itself but from outside itself (Schwöbel 2002: 409), then the claim that the church is a creature of the gospel in the same way that it is an instrument of the gospel, necessarily involved in a permanent process of cooperative self-realization (Herms 2010: xxviii, 45), may actually constitute a contradiction the most basic principles of the Lutheran reformers' soteriology, albeit on the collective level of the community. The church cannot claim that its salvation comes externally while at the same time claiming itself to be an or the instrument of salvation. The attentions more recently afforded to speech, language, ritual, history, liturgy, and tradition by theology, philosophy, and the social sciences – a fresh 'praise of externality' (Wannenwetsch 2009) – point in the direction of a reappraisal of this neglected but potent factor at the foundation of Lutheran ecclesiology.

4.4 Polities and particular ecclesial trajectories

Though Lutheranism now extends throughout the world, its oldest historical centres are Germany and the Nordic countries, along with the Baltics. These, along with the United States, have thus far yielded the most in the way of ecclesiology. Though one cannot cleanly mark out a German form of Lutheran ecclesiology that is entirely distinct from a Nordic form, certain emphases of a German trajectory can be discerned that distinguish it from a Nordic trajectory – especially that of Sweden and Finland. These trajectories relate to the structure of the church and ecclesial polities as they have operated in these lands. American Lutheran ecclesiology, which draws on Nordic and German tradition while responding to the American religious landscape, has been both productive and polarized.

The life, structure, governance, and polity of Lutheran churches has been shaped, on the one hand, by the spectrum of convictions playing through the aforementioned structural categories, and also by the shifting political landscape and theories of the last five centuries. For most of the twentieth century, it was common to claim that the church can thrive either as a state church or as a free church (Prenter 1967: 515). Some have claimed that, though there must be a polity, no particular polity may lay claim to be the proper structuring of the church's governance and ordered life together (Höfling 1851:

16–19). Other voices, such as those associated with the Princeton Proposal for Christian Unity, have contended that it is mistaken to see polity as theologically indifferent, and that facets of a given polity are indispensable for a doctrinally-integrated life of the church (Yeago 2000; 2004). The various positions relate to the fact that Lutherans have variously lived in ecclesial structures overseen by bishops tied to given states, or as free churches, and that contemporary Lutheran churches are often an amalgam of what were once more clearly distinguishable types.

4.4.1 Germany

A German trajectory of Lutheran ecclesiology seeks to elevate to an organizing structural principle Luther's insight that the church is a creature of the word. Often combining this dictum from the era of the Lutheran Reformation with more modern observations from the philosophy of language and/or with sociological conclusions about the nature and requirements of communication, a logic of the church is presented in which the church answers for communication of the gospel, which gives rise to faith. Everything from the understanding of the church's foundation to that of its task or mission and to its shape or structure is worked out from and mustered for the communication of the word of the gospel (Kühn 1980: 135; CPCE 2018: Introduction, 4). According to this presentation, the church is an event; the church happens on the basis of a word event and is itself such an event (Kühn 1980: 169). The church's foundation is the christological word event under which God has taken action to save humankind; it is the task of the church to witness to this word, and the church takes whatever form or structure maximally allows for orchestration of such witnessing (CPCE 2018: Intro, 4). As Ulrich Kühn presents the matter in the German Protestant *Handbuch systemtatischer Theologie* (Handbook of Systematic Theology), the church's foundation is and must be Jesus Christ.

Since no founding of the church can, however, be established in a historical relation to the historical Jesus, the theological heirs of the Lutheran Reformation must follow its biblical-humanist underpinnings by getting back to the earliest sources they can reach. Today this means using historical-critical methodology and the insights of current exegesis to arrive at conclusions about what lies behind the texts of the New Testament. According to this scholarship, Jesus instituted neither baptism nor the Eucharist, and he did not found what Christians now know as the church. This insurmountable distance between the church and the historical Jesus is theologically quarantined by the claim that Jesus remains the perpetually-present foundation of the church in contemporary proclamation; the relation of the church to Christ is perpetually established in the present. Not only is the church a creature of the gospel, it is responsible for the 'witness[ing] […] to' the gospel (CPCE 2018: Introduction, 4); this claim about the church's duty or task overlaps with concepts of 'mission' and 'sending'. Because of the coincidence of church and society in the West at their time, 'the Reformers' did not have the missionary task of the

church ‘in view at all’ (Kühn 1980: 151). Especially in the face of increasing challenges in secularist, pluralist, and post-Christian societies, the church must take its collective task of witness – which involves each and every Christian – seriously, such that the church as a fellowship of witness and service be encounterable as credible presence of Christ in the world, a messianic people of the coming kingdom. Not least because nothing in the church can be traced to the historical Jesus, and all structurings of the church are the result of subsequent historical development, the church has no form or structure that can claim the status of a divine institution. Contemporary questions about ministry and polity can then be answered in a pragmatic manner oriented to the communication of the word. Ecclesial tradition may be appropriated as information as the contemporary church structures its polity and collective responsibility for ministry along democratic lines. Public or ordained ministry gets worked out as a kind of social and practical matter, required for the orchestration of public worship and other instances of witness, which always remain the purview of the whole community and the joint responsibility of each individual Christian. In this way the church comes to be the sort of institution that it is – and, as sociologists also recognize, institution is needed for event: ‘First because the church as institution is present, can the church become as event’ (Kühn 1980: 169).

This German trajectory evinces the following theological challenges. First, its concept of ‘the word’ is nebulous. There is clearly a proper desire to stipulate this notion christologically, but as ‘the word’ passes into the present it comes to be a message of or about Jesus Christ cast along the (somewhat refreshed) lines of the doctrine of justification. What is unclear is how this ‘word’ is a word – how it is spoken and communicated – by any agent but the church itself. Second, then, is the challenge of *CA* V, which presents the faith- and church-creating word of the gospel as an ‘external’ and embodied word, a word that is antecedent to faith. There is, however, no word antecedent to faith when all word-eventing takes place by means of the believing community’s witness. There is no word outside the church by which the church is being created and sustained. Third, this German trajectory can attempt to present its logic of church as word-event along the lines of or analogous to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which faith comes by hearing (Rom 10:17). This becomes particularly ironic when assertions are without further ado made about church as the communal instantiation and instantiator of Christ’s work and presence today – assertions that, if read soteriologically, contradict the doctrine of justification: ‘The church shares in the messianic work of Jesus Christ’ (Kühn 1980: 153). As an ostensible creature of the word, the church is ‘the fellowship that springs from the living witness of the gospel’, as ‘people […] witness to the gospel and celebrate the sacraments’, such that ‘[b]y this means the Holy Spirit gathers and builds the church as the community of the faithful’ (CPCE 2018: 1.1 and 1.3).

Likewise, the gospel by which God saves is, on the level of the communication without which it is not the gospel, also presented as a responsibility to be fulfilled: ‘God’s justifying

action […] requires' independent and free human action, including 'witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ', right down to the co-structuring of the witnessing community (CPCE 2018: 1.4). God saves by communication; there is no communication of the saving gospel today but that which is carried out by the church; the church as collective agent necessarily contributes to salvation by witnessing, and each and every believer bears joint responsibility for witnessing; so, each and every believer and the church collective bears responsibility for a salvation that is also their own – therein lies a major challenge for a soteriology that claims salvation by grace alone without contribution of human activity. A final challenge lies in the ahistoricity of this trajectory, which by overtly staking everything on a present word-event and the continued ecclesial instantiation of that event neatly avoids giving a theological answer for the historical continuity of the church.

This ahistoricity of the present word-event pairs with a tendency to use 'Reformation' as an adjective (CPCE 2018: passim). Historical scholars of that period must not only specify what they mean by 'the Reformation' and often speak of 'reformations', but this trajectory's adjectival use of the term hegemonically also elides significant differences of that period and appears to elevate 'Reformation' to the level of understood sentiment under which theology can be done in relation to a 'word' that need not be pressed for a definition.

It is perhaps understandable that the history of the church's form and structure is avoided as a systematically relevant set of categories, when a given church's turbulent historical experience resists systematization. The Lutheran churches in German territories, with their superintendents and related ecclesial structures, lived in particular states and operated under the heads of those states. In Germany's case, medieval diocesan structures did not remain nearly so intact as in the Nordic countries, and the head of the state was the ruling authority of the given church. Over the course of time, different political theories – episcopalism, territorialism, collegialism – variously underwrote how German Lutherans understood the highest political authority of their lands as the governing authority over their churches. Before the war that ended the *landesherrliche Kirchenregiment*, most of these churches operated with a consistorial polity, with a council or consistory of church officials overseeing the church under the authority of the state. More recently there has been a gradual movement towards seeing these churches as peoples' churches, even where a particular church is still associated with a given state of Germany's federal republic.

4.4.2 Nordic countries

A somewhat different sentiment has imbued ecclesiology in the Nordic countries, at least in Sweden and Finland, where the Lutheran Church is understood and presented as the evangelical tradition of the one church. Eero Huovinen expresses this posture when he underscores the historical continuity of the Christian faith as a hallmark of its veracity in any place: 'The dogma of the Christian Church is seen as an integral part of the tradition beginning with the Apostles, running down like a powerful stream through

history' (Huovinen 2009: 277). Ecclesiology in this trajectory operates with a historical continuity that ties the church as it exists among Lutherans to its classical heritage and thereby lays historical claim to the church's catholicity. Thus, Bo Giertz claimed, 'there has never been more than one church in Sweden', while Nathan Söderblom asserted: 'The catholic church in Sweden, that's [us]' (Giertz 2010: 80, 83). Although event-level interaction with God is not denied, especially in view of the liturgy and worship (*Communion in Growth* 2017: 33), the church is also a more permanently localized entity. The given parish church, a reflection of the heavenly city and permanent eschatological symbol, stands as a local instance of a chain or web of localities spread throughout the land and to the ends of the world; to this locality Christ descends, such that this holy place allows access to heaven itself (Giertz 2010: 3–5, 93–95). That such a place exists owes to the existence of the church prior to any contemporary Christian and before the given local congregation (Giertz 2010: 15). As this trajectory considers the church's foundation, it points to the apostles' commissioning by Christ, which authored an apostolic form of authority that then passed to their chosen successors, with the offices of the church organically emerging from the transferable authority of the apostolate (Giertz 2010: 42–44, 84, 155).

A notion of apostolic-ministerial succession is part and parcel of the sense of historical continuity that marks out this particular trajectory of Lutheran ecclesiology, such that an apostolic-ministerial succession of the church's pastors is meaningful even when it does not involve an unbroken chain of episcopal consecrations dating to the period before the Reformation. The apostolic ministry precedes the church in such a way that it accounts for the church's coming to a given land, in which place the integrity and veracity of the church are then wedded to this ministry in its congregating primacy, as an instrument and representative of Jesus Christ that is not only located in but faces the congregation it gathers on his behalf (*Communion in Growth* 2017: 194, 202). A viable ecclesiology is inconceivable apart from a historical type of continuity that presents not only the scriptures, the rule of faith, and a fixed confession but also the ministerial office in a historically transmitted form; all of these belong to agreement in the gospel (Giertz 2010: 156; Huovinen 2009: 299; *Communion in Growth* 2017: 11).

Two challenges face such a trajectory. First, if ecclesial entities, as they live in places like Sweden or Finland, wish to claim continuity with the one catholic church, they must account for their history in a way that makes this continuity intelligible, from Christ to the present. This seems a challenge that the Swedish-Finnish trajectory has generally welcomed. Second, if Lutherans, even more than their Anglican counterparts, prize continuity of faith and doctrine as marks of the church's true apostolicity, especially as they live spiritually in liturgical expression (Huovinen 2009: 278), no new ministerial action may be taken that would be a departure from their church's identity as 'a branch of the catholic church' (Giertz 2010: 83). This includes matters of admission to the ministry, i.e.

the ordination of women and non-heterosexual persons, and the liturgical celebration of weddings in Sweden and Finland, i.e. same-sex marriage.

The tradition of episcopal polity, which most accurately reflects the reformers' thoughts about the constitution of the church (Bornkamm 1966: 212), has lived most strongly in Nordic Lutheranism. In Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland the older diocesan structures were for the most part maintained, with those overseeing them being referred to variously as bishops and superintendents. Sweden's bishops, though appointed by the monarch, along with their chapters and a fairly intact succession of pastors in the parishes, were able to resist Gustav Vasa's wishes for a greater sub-ordering of the church to his government, thus maintaining greater ecclesial independence over against the state. Bishops were elected by the clergy until 1965 (Giertz 2010: xix). Later, episcopal candidates came to be chosen by a type of election similar to that of civil officials, subject to subsequent selection by the government, a state of affairs that left them largely without canonical power and unable to correct national aberration (Brodd 1993: 69). The Nordic countries have also undergone shifts in the direction of folk churches. On an official level, the Church of Sweden ceased to be a state church in 2000, as did the church of Norway in 2012. The supreme ruling body of the Danish church, which considers itself a folk church supported by the state, is parliament and the monarch.

4.4.3 America

The historically pluriform religious landscape of America makes it more difficult to identify an American trajectory of Lutheran ecclesiology. A key difference to Nordic and German trajectories lies in the fact that American Lutherans, like all American Christians, have no national history as a state or folk church. This is not to say, however, that they do not face challenges and questions that are in part shared with their European counterparts. Even in circles where an appeal to confessional identity can regulate ecclesiological efforts (Marquart 1990), pressing ecclesiological questions of the relationship of individuals to the Christian community, of persons to institutions, and of the particular to the universal must be faced in a way can account for the growth and deepening of the church's confessional insight (Mumme, Serina and Birkholz 2019: xi–xvi, 136–143; Jenson 1997–1999: 237 [vol. 2]).

The work of the first generation of theologians contributing to *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue* in the United States was marked by churchliness and erudition. From 1965, the group was at the forefront of ecumenical theology. In the more recent generation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson stood as heirs of this ongoing tradition. Their work, along with the journal *Pro Ecclesia* and the efforts of the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology, pointed American Lutheranism in a traditional and broadly catholic direction. At the same time, Braaten's piercingly keen observations about the ecclesial reality of his day showed just how far American Lutherans

might be living from that sort of catholicity. In the Lutheran Church he observed, Braaten saw an underdeveloped ecclesiology fuelling a dogmatic deficit, such that ecclesial dogma could not be established (1998: 27–28, 135–137). Like Jenson, he read the Reformation as an ecclesial corrective and not as constitutive of a new kind of church, and called for an ecclesiology that proceeded along eschatological lines (Braaten 1998: 40–66). Jenson's *Systematic Theology* (whose eschatology will be discussed below) mounted an impressive ecclesiological project marked by lively exchange with the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), various ecumenical dialogues, and elements of Orthodox pneumatology. Presenting institution and charism as coordinate categories (Jenson 1997–1999: 182 [vol. 2]), Jenson's most intrepid suggestion is not only that the church *has* a polity, but that the church *is* a polity (1997–1999: 189–210 [vol. 2]), which entails a governing, sacramental authority. He presents the essence of the church as trinitarian, its perichoretic structure as a sacrament of trinitarian *koinonia*, and its essential office as a charism of the Spirit conferred in ordination to gather the church and serve it with an authority that entails pastoral magisterium. The *communio*-ecclesiology of the postconciliar period received a strong reception among catholic-minded evangelicals in America, who affirmed that the church as a *koinonia* of salvation entails continuity in the mission, ministry, and message given to the apostles by Jesus (*Church as Koinonia* 2005: 75). However, in the 'life and death struggle for the confessional center' that was taking place in all Protestant denominations (Braaten 1998: 9), the ELCA in 1993 rejected the suggestion of its Department for Ecumenical Affairs that the ministerial office also stood over against the church as a facet of that priority of the word of God that constitutes the church (*Church as Koinonia* 2005: 62, 224, 236).

Any American trajectory of Lutheran ecclesiology faces at least three challenges. The first of these was amply indicated by Braaten: namely, how a Lutheran version of church can live or even survive mainline Protestant dissolution in America with its catholicity intact. A second and related challenge comes in finding a path between confessional integrity and confessional insularity preserved in a type of anti-ecumenical parochialism. A third challenge for Lutheran ecclesiology in America comes in making recognizably valid and persuasive claims in a religious landscape that neither knows nor has known standards of orthodoxy, be they Protestant or otherwise. George Lindbeck addressed this question in a general manner in his *The Nature of Doctrine* (2009, originally published 1984) before taking his influential postliberal project in a specifically ecclesiological direction (2003). Cheryl Peterson's work attempts to further Lindbeck's narrative ecclesiology. Instead of tracing the story of Israel, she proposes a theology that 'starts with the Spirit', by orbiting the narrative of the book of Acts before flowing into the creed (Peterson 2013).

Whereas some Nordic churches have now technically become free – albeit nationally-privileged – churches, Lutheran churches in lands where there was no magisterial version of the Lutheran reformation have always been free churches. Such is the case in America.

Whether these churches' leading officials are referred to as bishops, presidents, or chairpersons, they have almost always organized in synodical structures that gradually worked their way into the lives of their older German and Nordic counterparts. Oftentimes their ethos and polity have been more congregational – a banding together from the ground up rather than a stipulation of ecclesial life from above by civil or ecclesial authorities.

4.4.4 Amalgamations

Although there has been some variety to the shape and structure of Lutheran churches, political developments since of the middle of the nineteenth century put them in a tighter orbit than may first appear to be the case. If not already present, synods made their way into nearly all existing Lutheran churches around the time that representative forms of government came to shape their states. The highest instance of contemporary ecclesial authority is usually an assembly of church-wide representatives that convenes on a regular basis. Without contextualization, no assumption can readily be made about what a title such as 'bishop' entails. In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, for example, where bishops are consecrated to lifetime service with self-stipulated retirement, the archbishop presides over the council of bishops that leads the church, the lay and clerical synod that governs the church, and the synodically-elected consistory that sees to ecclesial affairs in the three-year intervals between synods. Contrast the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, whose local bishops and presiding bishop are elected to six-year terms. Its conference of bishops serves a merely advisory role. Between its triennial church-wide assemblies, the ELCA is governed by a church council elected by that assembly, in which bishops have no voting role. The United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD) is governed by a general synod, which is constituted every six years, meets annually, and is directed by an elected presidium of clergy and laity. Its conference of bishops is led by an executive bishop, who is elected every three years. Both Germans and Americans have questioned what a traditional title like 'bishop' means if it is emptied of authority (Braaten 1998: 82–97; Wenz 2004). The Church of Sweden's bishops are consecrated and serve until a mandatory age of retirement and lead their cathedral chapters and diocesan boards; at the same time its general synod is its chief ruling body, with delegates elected every four years, along with representatives at the diocesan and parish levels. The national assembly of the Malagasy Lutheran Church convenes every four years and consists of representatives from its twenty-five regional synods, which each have their own elected presidents. The synod elects the church-wide officers, which include a president and a general secretary.

In a somewhat ironic contradiction of *CA* XXVIII, which was most keen to see ecclesial authority distinguished from a different type of authority operative in the state, the governing structure and institutional operations of Lutheran churches (*Kirchenregiment*)

have most often lived under the very kind of authority operative in the state. At first, that was the politically instantiated authority that ruled given states; gradually it has become a representative-democratic form of authority operating through elected assemblies and term-elected officials. This means that the shape and perhaps the very nature of ecclesial authority (*potestas ecclesiastica*/*Kirchengewalt*) is different than that envisioned by the Augsburg Confession. Those leading and governing the contemporary church represent constituents, whose desires they must follow – at least in many churches – if they are to remain leaders in their churches. It is difficult, for example, to conceive of an instance where a ministerially-operative authority of jurisdiction could rebuke and bind public or open sins in such a system. An exception to this paradoxical but historically observable counteraction is in ecclesial offices whose incumbents hold their positions for life and exercise a jurisdictional authority over communion fellowship in their regions of oversight.

4.5 Lutheran approaches to general ecclesiological concerns

Lutheran ecclesiology has unfolded over the course of five centuries, not in a vacuum, but alongside the ecclesiological questions of the fractured Western church and with increasing contact with the churches of the East. Some matters that are or that have clearly become essential to the task of ecclesiology are not necessarily marked by Lutheran distinctives; nonetheless they are, or have become, so germane to questions about the church that Lutheran ecclesiological efforts naturally address and integrate them. Three such matters are Israel, eschatology, and the state so far as it relates to the church. All three of these topics live in a nexus marked out by ecclesiological deliberations about the people of God and about the kingdom of God.

4.5.1 Israel and eschatology

Prior to the Shoah (Holocaust) and the Second World War, supersessionist delineations of the relationship between Israel and the church were more common. The scriptures were seen to refer to both an old Israel and a new Israel – an ‘Israel according to the flesh’ (1 Cor 10:18) as distinct from ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal 6:16). The church as ‘the true Israel’ was considered the proper continuation of the congregation of Israel in the Old Testament, with true Israelites becoming followers of Christ, as Israel’s destiny came to completion in the resurrection of Christ such that the blessing once given to Abraham would thereafter be extended to all nations (Giertz 2010: 8–15). The old covenant of Israel, presented as combining grace and works, could be viewed as system of self-justification, which – when clung to in this way – led to the rejection of Christ’s words as God’s Word and his vicarious satisfaction as the full and proper atonement for Israel. Except in coming to stand under the new covenant of grace, Jews would be monotheists who did not in fact have the true God and were thus subject to condemnation. Paul’s statement about ‘all Israel’ being

saved (Rom 11:26) was then read as referring to the spiritual Israel, i.e. those elected to salvation from the people of Israel (Pieper 1953: 527–534).

At least two events of the twentieth century contributed to a reconsideration of the relationship between Israel and the church: the Shoah and the Second Vatican Council's adoption of a people-of-God ecclesiology. With eschatology having outgrown its earlier status as a final locus in works of dogmatic theology and having become a sign under which the entire systematic presentations of the faith could be ordered, recent Lutheran efforts have recast the relationship of Israel and the church along an encompassing eschatological trajectory. Wolfhart Pannenberg has asserted that God's election aims at a human society whose definitive form is only to be found in the eschatological fellowship of the kingdom of God (1998: 463). God elects and operates in history toward this goal. Any community of the elect existing prior to the unveiling of this eschatological fellowship regards itself as provisional, a representation of the kingdom of God living in the last days, but certainly distinct from this kingdom. Both Israel and the church have been elected to bear witness to God's righteousness among the nations; as advance representations, both point beyond themselves to the kingdom of God. Pannenberg notes how Israel's prophets speak of a new covenant (Jer 31:31–34; cf. Isa 59:20–21). It is into this covenant that Christ initiates his disciples on the night of his betrayal (Luke 22:20), such that the church now participates in the new covenant of Israel which will be unveiled at Christ's second coming (1998: 473–474). There is, according to Pannenberg, only one people of God, and only on the basis of this new, eschatological covenant with Israel does the church also lay claim to the title 'the people of God' (1998: 465). Both Israel and the church are being brought forward into this covenant.

The title 'people of God', a standard mode of speaking about the church since the Reformation and adopted by Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, has had a chequered history. Over against *Lumen Gentium* 9 it must be noted that, biblically, there is no reference to a 'new' people of God. In fact, the New Testament seldom refers to the church as the people of God (1 Pet 2:9; Rom 9:23–26); this title is, most often, reserved for Israel. Fathers of the early church could speak of it as the people of God, but for some the title became part of a replacement thesis, under which the church took over Israel's former status in a manner that now looks to be at odds with Paul's argument in Romans 11. After Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, the church as 'people of God' was eclipsed by debates surrounding spiritual and secular authority, jurisdiction, and hierarchy, until the Reformation reinvigorated sensibility of this category by calling the church 'a Christian, holy people' (Luther 1966; *LW* 41: 148); its adoption by Roman Catholicism and centrality in modern ecumenical discussions constitutes 'one of the most important events in modern discussion of the church' (Pannenberg 1998: 470).

Nonetheless, the recognition that the title ‘people of God’ does not belong solely or even most directly to the church seems to have required some decades of reflection subsequent to the Shoah along with the re-examination of Jewish and Christian relations that it generated. The result has been an eschatological reassessment of categories. Looking at the church’s past and its present status, it cannot simply be said that the church is – to the exclusion of Israel – the people of God; looking at the present reality in view of the future, it also cannot be said that the church is the kingdom of God. Instead, the church is those who are now being brought into the people of God by communion with Jesus Christ and thus stand as a sign of the kingdom of God before the second and ultimate advent of its King.

Robert Jenson adopts an eschatological method similar to Pannenberg, under which he somewhat more expansively delineates the relationship between the church and Israel. The church, neither a realization of the new age nor an item of the old, is an event within the new age’s advent (Jenson 1997–1999: 171 [vol. 2]). Espousing an anticipatory as opposed to a realized eschatology, he notes that the church anticipates but is not itself the kingdom of God; the kingdom is happening and being established in the church but not such that this kingdom ceases to be an intrinsically future reality. Similarly, the church, along with Israel, anticipates the one people of God which cannot be gathered before the last day. Jenson asserts that Israel and the church have the same God and the same faith (1997–1999: 46–47 [vol. 1]), but are based on specific historical events by which the personal God has revealed himself to each, namely the exodus and the resurrection. Jenson defuses suppersessionist and replacement frameworks by indicating how God’s promissory covenants pull forward through history toward ultimate fulfilment. Israel’s calling by the personal God, enacted in the exodus, to be a blessing to the nations is of such a scope that its fulfilment lies beyond the present age in the new creation (1997–1999: 170 [vol. 2]). The Lord is still patiently (cf. 2 Pet 3:9) bringing that promise of blessing to fulfilment, and both the church and Judaism are detours on the way to the goal that is reached with the second coming of Christ, ‘the paired continuations of Israel’ (1997–1999: 284 [vol. 2]).

These re-examinations of the church along the lines of an encompassing eschatology offer some guidance for thinking about contemporary Jewish and Christian relations. The same God has been at work throughout history and is gathering a single people to welcome and enjoy the full and final unveiling of his kingdom. The Spirit constitutes ‘the common dynamism of Israel and the church, impelling Israel to become the church and liberating the church for the fulfilling of Israel’ (Jenson 1997–1999: 183 [vol. 2]). This means that Jews today are to be baptized into the one people of Jews and Gentiles, though not repenting of former life and beliefs in the same way that Gentiles do. For the church now sacramentally participates in Israel’s eschatological new covenant; under the form of

signs, the church enjoys the presence of the Messiah and has share in his kingdom, which defines the hope of the eschaton. In contradistinction to darker moments in Christian history, forced conversions are out of place (Pannenberg 1998: 475), and, in view of God's faithfulness to his calling, the continued existence of a separate synagogue cannot be read as contrary to the will of God (Jenson 1997–1999: 193–194 [vol. 2]). As Jews and Christians both lay claim to the title 'people of God', they are afforded opportunity to explain how they are such a people and to give an account of their hope for the coming reign of God.

4.5.2 The church and the state

The gospel that gave rise to the church, and which in every age serves as the source of the church's life and substantiates its hope for the future, is a message about the kingdom of God. It is inevitable that a thing constituted by the message of a gifted kingdom and oriented by the hope of its full realization must bump into and wrestle with kingdoms as they operate in this world. The church has always had to examine and come to justifiable terms with its relationship to what is now usually called 'the state'. As the sign of the coming kingdom of God, the church is both at odds with and a beacon to all other kingdoms.

The Lutheran tradition, along with the mainstream of the Christian tradition, recognizes that civil authority has been established by God and as such is to be honoured and obeyed (Rom 13:1–7). At the same time, Christians' and the church's fealty to any given state or set of civil authorities is not absolute (Mark 12:17; Acts 5:29; 1 Pet 2:17), for human authorities stand under God; though accountable to him, they may act against his will (Amos 7:10–17), sometimes in apocalyptically fearsome fashion (Rev 13:1–8). So far as the church and the given state go, there is always a possibility of obedient cooperation or of conflict, for the church's expectation of the coming kingdom of God demythologizes all temporal, earthly rule and accords it only a preliminary status (Lienemann 1989: 399).

Before the advent of Christianity, there was but a single order in which little if any distinction was drawn between religion and the state or body politic. The coming of the Christian church made a duality of orders possible, in which a religious society stood somehow independent of the state (Weber 1999: 502). This distinction led to various two-part models being proposed to explain this distinction in orders and authority, especially in the West: Augustine's two cities, Gelasius I's two powers, Peter Damian's two swords. Lutheranism's oft-vaunted doctrine of the two regiments or 'kingdoms' (Gritsch and Jenson 1976) entered the conceptual fray after the late medieval papacy collapsed in part under the weight of its own claims about the supremacy and originality of spiritual authority under the pope. Nonetheless, in the Reformation and at least through to the Peace of Westphalia (1648), there remained the notion of a *res publica christiana*, a Christendom in which spiritual and secular authority not only existed but were expected to operate

in concert with one another. The Lutheran Confessions accepted and supported that notion, recognizing civil government as a 'good wor[k]' of God (*CA* XVI:1; *BC* 2000: 49). Over against the Anabaptists sometimes associated with the Peasants War, the *Small Catechism* and the *Apology* affirm that even Christians under the gospel are to remain faithful and obedient subjects of their rulers (*BC* 2000: 232, 365). As early modern nation states were taking shape, their leaders were often keen to see the church integrated into the state; such movement began taking place in Germany in the sixteenth century. Successive theories such as episcopalism, territorialism, and collegialism offered changing theological justification for the state's authority being responsible at least for the external governance of the church. The Enlightenment began a shift towards a more secular structuring of states that moved in the direction of a dissolution of the once-Christian body politic; nonetheless, the former state churches in traditionally Lutheran lands retained a privileged status after official breaks were made.

Both the wars of religion and the Enlightenment's trend toward secularism contributed to a growing sentiment in the direction of religious freedom, but the value of what many would now consider a basic human right was a difficult lesson that took time to learn. Even the heirs of religiously-persecuted European dissidents were not necessarily interested in the freedom of religion in the colonies and states they established in America, with religious freedom first becoming enshrined in law there with the First Amendment to the US Constitution in 1791. Through the twentieth century and into the present, the difference between totalitarianism and democratically-constituted states that make fundamental provision for religious liberty often stand in stark relief in countries where Lutheran Christians and their fellow disciples live.

Though perhaps once fit for a Christian body politic, the former model of diarchy can look rather useless in contemporary secular societies (Lienemann 1989: 397–398), raising the question of whether the contemporary church must grasp where it stands in a given society's public domain and express its proper standing in that society's secular order, with the government being but one social institution to be considered (Huber 1999: 505). Not only has recent movement been away from models perhaps only fitted to legally-constituted Christian states, the twentieth century and its ecumenical movement have fostered a churchly awareness that clearly now extends beyond a given state, such that there exists a sense of global Christian fellowship. Even among Protestants, Christians' loyalty to the church as it lives everywhere may rank higher on scale of fealty than to a given state.

If Lutheranism has exhibited a weakness in its thinking about the relationship between church and state, perhaps it has come in an occasional inability to distinguish between divinely-constituted civil authority per se and the particular form of civil authority under which Lutheran Christians live in a given state. When for all practical purposes the lived

and known form of ecclesial life exists within and is legally constituted under a given state – without any real ecclesial connection beyond that state – then obedience may prove the easier option, since the alternative would require not only resistance but a reorganization and perhaps reconceptualization of the church itself. Obedience to divinely-constituted civil authority is itself proper, and the counsel to 'bear with the magistracy', even if 'they issue any tyrannical commands when nothing can be done about it short of disturbance or sedition', dates at least as far back as the first edition of Melanchthon's *Loci* (1521; 2014: 185). However, thinking about civil authority entered a new era with the notion of the social contract and election of governments by the people they are to govern. All models applied to the diarchy of the former Christian body politic assumed divinely anchored authority structures that operated from the top down, but the civil authority of democratically-constituted states operates from the populace up. What then happens when a civil authority chosen by and perhaps wildly (even messianically) popular among the people co-opts religion and ecclesial institutions, such that 'the Church ceases to be the Church' (Barmen Declaration: preface [1934]), under what becomes recognizable as an apocalyptic form of evil?

On the one hand, the twentieth century can be read as the abandonment of the last vestiges of a Christian body politic (Oelke 2001: 1043). On the other hand, the Lutheran and Reformed Declaration of Barmen (Bayer 1994: 336–341), the chief statement of ecclesial resistance mounted against National Socialism, can be read as a reaffirmation of a fundamental conviction of Christendom, namely that Christ's claim on the lives of his followers extends into 'all areas of our life' and thus also into the political arena, where obedience is rendered by those who belong solely to Christ (Barmen Declaration: 2–3). In a fallen world, the church bears the responsibility of bearing witness, a witness that includes reminding given societies that they do not constitute – and their civil authorities that their actions cannot bring about – a divine kingdom; instead, the authorities are accountable to God's commands and the standard of his righteousness in a divine appointment to provide for the rule of law and peace (Barmen Declaration: 3, 5). As Bo Giertz said: 'The Church is the conscience of the state' (2010: 85). In examples such as the Magdeburg Confession of 1550, Paul Gerhardt, Hermann Sasse, and the Confessing Church, the Lutheran tradition evinces examples of such conscience resisting the overreach of civil authority. The Barmen Declaration preserves the notion of two distinct divine 'commissions', which on the one hand restrains totalitarianism and on the other hand keeps the church from becoming an organ of the state (Barmen Declaration: 5).

It is a gift not least of the Reformation's Lutheran tradition that Christians from the World Council of Churches to the Roman Catholic Church now prize and affirm religious freedom. It can therefore be affirmed that human beings in a rightly-ordered form of state are to enjoy religious freedom prior to and apart from such a right being afforded by the

given state, that religious societies are to be free to organize and regulate their own affairs, and that churches are thus also free to publicly proclaim the content of their faith and convictions and carry out educational and diaconal work according to the same (Lienemann 1989: 403–404). A deepening of theo-political insight might be awaited from a re-examination and theological reinvigoration of Luther's and the Lutheran Confessions' doctrine of the three estates, a category almost entirely eclipsed in anglophone reception by the doctrine of the so-called 'two kingdoms' (Bayer 2008: 120–153; Mumme 2015b: 214–224, 348–352). Therein the political (*politia*) stands alongside, and thus is bounded by, not only the ecclesial (*ekklesia*) but also the familial and economic (*oeconomia*). This structure may prove important in the twenty-first century for resisting totalitarianism also on a human-anthropological and socioeconomic level.

5 Current state of play

The state of contemporary Lutheran ecclesiology has to do with how Lutherans relate to one another, with their ties to other Christians, and with new challenges and opportunities faced in view of, and out from, the tradition of their ecclesial heritage.

5.1 Federations, communions, and associations

The Lutheran World Federation is a global communion of churches in the Lutheran tradition, the largest Lutheran association in the world. It is comprised of 150 churches in nearly a hundred countries with approximately 77 million members. At its 1947 inception it was constituted as a free association of churches, such that the federation itself would have no power to legislate for or interfere in the autonomy of its member churches. What membership in the LWF meant at this point was a rather open question. The fact that the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod doubted the organization's federative character and opted to remain outside the LWF for its alleged lack of doctrinal consensus urged deeper reflection on the nature of LWF and on the ties of its member churches to one another. With the recognition that by granting and denying membership the LWF was tacitly operating with a doctrinal foundation, it seemed improper for shared doctrine not to be consummated with church fellowship (Brunner 1966). When the LWF considered the issue of apartheid and eventually suspended white Southern African churches over the matter, it was clear that an association exercising a kind of church discipline was something more than a federation, paving the way to its self-redefinition as a communion of churches that agree in their proclamation of the word and have pulpit and altar fellowship with one another (Root 1997). Its representatives were invited to the Second Vatican Council, and the LWF has been Lutheranism's leading ecumenical actor, carrying on bilateral dialogues with Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, the Reformed, Anglicans, and Mennonites. In recent decades, relations in the LWF have been strained by issues surrounding human sexuality, specifically by the blessing or ecclesial contracting of same-sex unions and

by the ordination of homosexual clergy, which threaten to rupture the communion. The Mekane Yesus Church of Ethiopia, the LWF's largest member church, broke fellowship with the ELCA and the Church of Sweden over these issues.

The International Lutheran Council is a worldwide association of confessional Lutheran church bodies and groups united by an unconditional commitment to the holy scriptures and to the Lutheran Confessions of the Book of Concord. More than fifty churches and 7 million baptized members are affiliated with it. It is structured with voting members, non-voting associate members, observers, and registered organizations. As it is not a communion, the churches associated with the ILC are independently responsible for fellowship with one another. A statement unanimously adopted by its 2009 conference affirmed lifelong monogamous heterosexual unions as the divinely-intended arena for the exercise of human sexuality and classified the practice of homosexuality as a sin violating the will of the Creator. The Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, affiliated with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), is composed of thirty-four church bodies with approximately 430,000 baptized members.

5.2 Ecumenism and post-ecumenism

Much Lutheran reflection on the church in the last century has been produced in the orbit of and shaped by ecumenical exchange with Roman Catholics, the Reformed, and Anglicans. Ecumenical contact has not been limited to these groups, but they are the most significant. Important regional dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics have taken place in Germany and the United States, in addition to the Lutheran–Roman Catholic dialogue carried out by the LWF. An early result of the international undertakings was the 1972 Malta Report, which presents the collective church as the priestly people of God, as both creature and minister of the word, while at the same time affirming that the ministry stands opposite as well as in the congregation (section 48, 50; Meyer et al. 1984–2017 [vol. 1]). *Church and Justification* (1994) takes up elements of the ecclesiology of communion made prominent in and around Vatican II and weighs the church in light of the Trinity (Meyer et al. 1984–2017 [vol. 2]). Recent efforts in Germany and at the international level have taken up the apostolicity of the church and the ministry (Lutheran–Roman Catholic Commission on Unity 2006; Wenz, Schneider and Sattler 2004–2008).

Lutherans and Roman Catholics recognize that ecclesiology and particularly various understandings of (the) ministry constitute the principal obstacles in their ecumenical efforts (Kasper 2009: section 110; Härle 1989: 279–280). Lutheran contact and consolidation with the Reformed antedates the ecumenical movement, especially in Germany, where Friedrich Wilhelm III's Union of 1817 sought to merge the Lutheran and Reformed churches under Prussian rule. In Germany, the Union of Protestant Churches (UEK) stands in full pulpit and altar fellowship with the VELKD under the umbrella of the

Protestant Church of Germany (EKD). The Prussian and German unions of Lutheran and Reformed churches paved the way for the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), formerly known as the Leuenberg Church Fellowship (Mannermaa 1981). Its founding document, the Leuenberg Agreement (1973), lacked an overt ecclesiology, but the topic was taken up by *The Church of Jesus Christ* (1995), which presents the church as a reality defined by the message of the gospel and declares ordered ministry to be necessary. Together the Church of England and the Church of Sweden were forerunners in what would become the ecumenical movement, affirming intercommunion already in the early 1920s, with the Church of Finland joining thereafter. The Porvoo Common Statement (1993), signed initially by the Anglican churches of Britain and Ireland and by the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran churches, resulted in the full communion of these churches by coming to official agreement about episcopacy and episcopal succession. As orthodoxy of doctrine was assumed, the statement has a very specific focus; it was accepted by the Church of Denmark in 2010, whereas the Latvian Church has remained an observer in the Porvoo Communion.

Risto Saarinen has indicated that Lutheran ecclesiology as shaped by its ecumenical endeavours faces the question of 'Rome or Geneva?', noting that German sentiment pulls more in the Reformed direction of Leuenberg whereas the 'higher-church' sympathies of the Nordic countries, some of whom do not belong to the CPCE, gravitate more towards the institutional ecclesiologies operative around Canterbury and Rome (Saarinen 2008: 182–183). At the same time, non-European Lutherans have called attention to the life-and-death struggle for a confessional centre in all Protestant denominations, including their own (Braaten 1998: 9). Echoing sentiments of Ephraim Radner, David Yeago (2004) has pointed to the thinning relevance and gradual disappearance of denominations, doubting their viability as subjects in the ecumenical process. In view of the first decades of the twenty-first century it seems likely that matters of human sexuality, usually filed by Lutherans under the ecclesiologically-unrelated heading of 'ethics', will give rise to a necessary re-examination of theological anthropology. Inasmuch as theological anthropology is antecedent to or bound up with all matters of human relation and community, the ecumenical shakeup may prove as dramatic as the current denominational turbulences. Tensions within the LWF, the formation of the Mission Province in Sweden and the Mission Diocese in Finland, as well as the separations of Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (2001) and the North American Lutheran Church (2010) from the ELCA, all point in this direction.

5.3 Directions toward the future

As Lutheran ecclesiology faces the challenge of articulating an understanding of the church that is capable of addressing and theologically shaping its social form (Schwöbel

2002), such that personal faith and ecclesial institution stand in harmony with one another (Anselm 1999: 1101), two factors seem of particular import.

First, though receiving less attention today than a generation ago, communion ecclesiology still holds promise if it is allowed to ferment a bit more. The possibilities for a trinitarian approach to communion ecclesiology might be refreshed by christological infusion, especially by observing the motion of the incarnation. Though the incarnation involved the divine Son taking a human nature, as it were, up and into himself, on the level of human history and experience the incarnation was definitively and redemptively the movement of God condescending toward human beings. As the communion of the church is related to the essential communion of the Holy Trinity, the God-towards-human motion of the incarnation – the motion of a Word external to human beings for their salvation (cf. *CA* V) – must be observed. Likewise, the doctrine of processions, which can be related to communication and certainly to communion, does not support ontological stratification of persons, but it does entail priority as well as elements of activity and passivity in the communion of the immanent Trinity. If communion ecclesiology is coordinated with the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of the church cannot begin in a homogeneity lacking source.

Second, inasmuch as the church is the church as a perpetually existing historical reality, it always has a social form. The current form must be examined against its divine foundations, such that formation and re-formation take place in view of them. As Lutherans take stock of the form of their churches in the twenty-first century, it is worth bearing in mind that the shape of the church suggested by the reformers and their confessions, itself claiming to be the reinvigoration of a more ancient pattern, remains a vision awaiting realization. In Lutheranism's first centuries, a real-pneumatic ecclesial authority capable of exercising a kerygmatic-doctrinal and sacramental jurisdiction, even over the highest personal instances of civil authority, was a political impossibility: what Lutheran bishop, superintendent, or parson could turn a king or prince away from the church's altar? Given the unfolding magisterial reformation in Lutheran lands, the possibility of an office of oversight not backed by the sword and operating with authority to visit, to oversee preaching and teaching and doctrine, to put open sin under the lesser ban, and to ordain first became a possibility with emigration and the gradual disassociation of states from their Lutheran churches. In more recent centuries, the political shift towards representative systems of democratic governance, fused with a pietistically-supplemented understanding of the priesthood of all believers, has meant that the ministerial leaders of Lutheran churches are still subject to a personal instance of authority that holds sway also over the civil realm – namely constituents capable of casting votes. To a greater or lesser degree, this fact is baked into presbyterial-synodical polities among Lutherans the world over. Faced not only with post-Christian cultures but also new forms of post-

pluralist totalitarianism, contemporary Lutherans must ask what form of the church will not surrender its holiness to secularism nor its catholicity to isolationism.

If the ancient episcopal federalism commended by the reformers and their confessions receives such attention (cf. *SA* III.viii: 9), elements of priority and progeny, activity and passivity, externality and movement will become discernible in this form of communion. Its bishops, however, cannot stand alone. Either their office owes to a divine institution and can claim apostolic foundation, or it does not and cannot. This question cannot be answered in either direction without appeal to holy scripture and without clarification of what in holy scripture counts as the Word of God and what in the New Testament qualifies as apostolic (see section 1.1). Especially if their office is understood to be apostolic and attested by the apostolic scriptures, the bishops themselves must obediently receive the canonically-witnessed teaching of the apostles. Likewise, 'a new symbolic theology' (Kasper 2009: section 107) will be required. No teaching authority of the church of Christ can claim to be its first voice of authority. All Christians, including those overseeing the church, are heirs and obedient to the faith as it has been truly confessed before them. The church cannot live without recognized, authoritative, and therefore binding doctrine that stands above the fluctuations of contemporary intuition and shifting collective preferences. It, including its overseers, is the obedient heir of the faith as that faith is truly expressed and handed down. Only as the church acknowledges what has been spoken rightly and truly – only as it can indicate authoritative confessions of the faith – is it in a position to speak the gospel authentically.

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