

The Office of Bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and in the Church of Sweden

Christer Pahlmblad

I.

The reformation period

The diet of Västerås 1527 and its consequences

The diet 1527 in the town of Västerås is often considered the starting point of the reformation in Sweden and is therefore sometimes called “the reformation parliament.”¹ This last statement is not quite correct, as the consequences of the diet hardly had any impact on the normal life of the church, especially not on the parish level. Nevertheless, it is true to say that the diet laid the foundation for the development during the following fifteen years.

The diet faced two main problems. The first was the debt to be paid to Lübeck for the financial support of Gustav Vasa’s war against the Danish king, Christian II, through which the Union of Kalmar after one and a half century of both peace and war finally was dissolved and Sweden again established as a kingdom of its own.

The second problem concerned the king’s supposed support of the Lutheran opinion. The king had appointed two prominent persons of the reformation movement in Sweden to central positions in Stockholm. Laurentius Andrae, the archdeacon of Strängnäs, became the king’s new chancellor, and Olavus Petri, deacon and secretary to the bishop of Strängnäs, became secretary of the city council in Stockholm.

Together with the king, Laurentius Andrae prepared the royal bill for the diet. The bill was to a certain degree informed by a Lutheran attitude to the relation between the royal authority and the church: it could be argued that the church is the people, and therefore the property of the church belongs to the people and can be appropriated by the crown. Most likely, the renaissance philosopher Marsilius of Padua and his theories also influenced Laurentius Andrae.

Olavus Petri, the city council and the clergy at the parish church in Stockholm, presumably in alliance with influential Swedish and German

¹ For the general picture of the Swedish reformation, see *Ole Peter Grell* (ed.), *The Scandinavian Reformation. From Evangelical Movement to Institutionalization of Reform*. Cambridge 1995, or *Åke Andrén*, *Sverige kyrkohistoria. I. Reformationstid*. Stockholm 1999.

burghers inspired by the continental reformation movements, had probably begun a moderate reform of the liturgy. Consequently, a rumour was spread throughout the country that the king himself was of the Lutheran conviction. This was a threat to the king's position.

At the diet, three of the four estates supported the idea that the debt to the Germans should be paid by means of a confiscation of the superfluous income and property of the church. The former archbishop Gustav Trolle had put his armed forces at the disposal of the Danish king. With an explicit reference to this, the fortified castles of the bishops were confiscated, and the bishops were forbidden to be accompanied by more armed men when travelling than could be considered necessary for their protection.

The king repudiated the accusation that he was supporting any false doctrine. After having heard the reformers, the estates concluded that their preaching was in accordance with the Word of God. In a famous formulation, the estates therefore decided that "the Word of God should be purely preached all over the kingdom." The two main problems had thereby been solved.²

After the diet the bishops, willingly or unwillingly, signed a document in which they accepted the decisions. They were deprived of the right to take part in the government and were from this moment on no longer called to the sessions of the king's council. The appointment of new bishops and prelates was eventually put in the hands of the king, who thereby could ensure that the church's leaders were politically loyal to the Sovereign.³

Practically all the episcopal sees were vacant. After the diet, the last of the bishops consecrated by the medieval church, Hans Brask of Linköping, left the country never to return. The king was, however, to be crowned 1528, and for this event he was in need of consecrated bishops. Three new bishops had been elected, Magnus Haraldsson of Skara, Magnus Sommar of Strängnäs and Martin Skytte of Åbo/Turku. Peder Magnusson, bishop of Västerås, consecrated in Rome by the pope, undertook the consecration of the three *electi* at the cathedral of Strängnäs on 5 January 1528. The elected bishops and the consecrator were more or less forced to carry this out. The new bishops were forbidden to seek papal confirmation, but it has sometimes been presumed that they intended to do so secretly. This is quite possible, as these bishops, including the consecrator, were all loyal to the medieval church and its faith and liturgy. They were by no means Lutherans

² Svenska riksdagsakter, I, pp. 65–96.

³ Regarding the oath to the king as a prerequisite for the consecration, see *Helge Nyman*, Ordinationslöfte och prästed i Sverige-Finland efter reformationen. Åbo 1963, pp. 77 ff; *Sven Kjällström* in: Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571 jämte studier kring tillkomst, innehåll och användning utgiven av S. Kjällström. Lund 1971, 1971, p. 222; *Lars Eckerdal*, "Genom bön och handpåläggning." Vignings- jämte installationshandlingar – liturgiska utvecklingslinjer (SOU 1985:48, bilaga 6), p. 381.

or in favour of any other heresies. Nevertheless, the oath that formed part of the medieval rite of consecration was given a flavour of Lutheranism through the intervention of the king's chancellor, Laurentius Andrae, and it was to be addressed to the king and not to the pope. By this oath, the new bishops pledged obedience to the king. From now on, bishops should be the loyal subordinates of the Sovereign.

The next step was taken in 1531, when Laurentius Petri, the younger brother of Olavus Petri and a dedicated Lutheran who had studied at the university of Wittenberg, was elected the new archbishop of Uppsala. The consecration, conducted also this time by Peder Magnusson, was in accordance with the medieval rite. From the standpoint of the Roman church, the consecration could thereby be considered valid, though schismatic. Thus, the apostolic succession was preserved in the Swedish church.

The consequences of the development between 1527 and 1531 were the following:

1. The king gained power over the state and the church. The bishops continued to exercise power over spiritual matters without the interference of the king, but for the next thirteen years, the king did not tolerate any reforms of the church's organisation or liturgy.

2. The confiscation of the church's income and property, the consecration of the new bishops without papal confirmation, and above all the election and consecration of a new archbishop while the former, who had left Sweden, was still alive, meant a breach with canonical law, and consequently a break with Rome and papal authority.

3. The province of Uppsala became through these events not a Lutheran church but an independent, national catholic church. No reforms whatsoever had been undertaken, but the reformers' teaching had been accepted as one way of interpreting the faith of the Church.

4. In this way, the whole organisation of the medieval church was transferred to this independent national church, with bishops, dioceses, cathedral chapters, deans, parishes and benefices, as well as provincial and diocesan synods. The medieval liturgy remained the official liturgy of the church well into the 1540s. Only from the middle of the 1530s were there in some parishes – not many – actual changes of the liturgy.

5. It was only slowly, by way of partial reforms, that the Swedish church was transformed into a church with a Lutheran character. To begin with, the king after the diet of Västerås for economical reasons reduced the number of priests in the cathedral chapters, but there were still enough personnel to keep up the daily office of the medieval breviary. There was a more decisive break with the medieval church order in the 1540s. The dioceses were then divided, and as heads of these new units were put what was called ordinaries. Some of these ordinaries were consecrated, but we do not

know if that was the general rule. They exercised, however, full episcopal authority, including the ordination of priests.⁴

As the king during the 1550s confiscated the property of the cathedral chapters, it became impossible to have more priests attached to the cathedrals than was necessary for pastoral care. During the reign of Johan III (1569–1592), the office of ordinary was abandoned, the seven medieval dioceses were restored, and the chapters were re-established to a minimum. Together with the bishops, the chapters could continue to exercise the function of supervising the dioceses. In this way, the medieval cathedral chapters were transformed into Lutheran *consistoria*, and they were to become one of the characteristics of the Swedish ecclesiastical organisation. During the following centuries, the bishops together with the members of their chapters exercised an undisputed authority regulated in the ecclesiastical law of 1686 over the parishes, the priests, and to a certain degree the individual members of the church.

The office of bishop according to the Church Order of 1571

The reforms during the 1550s were only partial, as mentioned. Statutes were issued on such matters as the liturgy.⁵ These statutes were probably the result of Laurentius Petri's efforts to create a Lutheran Church Order. A complete manuscript for such an order was at hand in 1561,⁶ but the king did not accept it. Marginally revised, it was instituted ten years later, in 1571, during the reign of Johan III. The Swedish Church Order of 1571 (hereafter CO 1571)⁷ was modelled on some German Orders,⁸ but the influence of medieval Swedish ecclesiastical law and liturgical traditions was dominant as a correcting factor, whenever Swedish practices differed from the German. At the Assembly of Uppsala 1593, which constitutes the definite transition of the Swedish church to a Lutheran confession, the Confessio Augustana was accepted as the basic confession of the Swedish church.

⁴ *Sven Kjällström*, Kräkla och mitra. En undersökning om biskopsvigningar i Sverige under reformationstidevarvet (BTP 19). Lund 1965, pp. 24–45. (With a German summary.) *Eckerdal*, "Genom bön och handpåläggning." (above n. 3), p. 379ff.

⁵ *Sven Kjällström*, Svenska förarbeten till kyrkoordningen av år 1571 (SSSKH 2). Stockholm 1940.

⁶ *Emil Färnström* (ed.), Laurentius Petri handskrivna kyrkoordning av år 1561 (SSSKH 34), Stockholm 1956.

⁷ Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571 jämte studier kring tillkomst, innehåll och användning utgiven av S. Kjällström. Lund 1971.

⁸ Mainly on the Church Orders of Württemberg and Mecklenburg. *Emil Färnström*, Om källorna till 1571 års kyrkoordning särskilt med hänsyn till tyska kyrkoordningar, Stockholm 1935. For the influence of medieval canon law and traditions, see, e.g. *Sven Kjällström*, Kyrkolagsproblemet i Sverige 1571–1682 (SSSKH 11), Stockholm 1944, pp. 20–27, and *Åke Andréén*, "Timelig kyrkonäpst." Kyrkoordningen 1571 och den uppenbara skriften." In: Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571 (above n. 7), pp. 302–314.

At the same time, CO 1571 was once again approved, thus marking the individual character of the church. It regulated the church's life until 1686, when it was replaced by an ecclesiastical law. As a confessional document, though, it is still normative for the teaching of the Church of Sweden.⁹

In CO 1571, Laurentius Petri clarifies his position regarding the office of bishop in a statement to which the attention of scholars has often been drawn. Here he brings to an end a discussion on the origin of the episcopal ministry. According to Laurentius Petri, every parish originally had "its own bishop or parish priest." Owing to disagreements between the leaders of the congregations, one of the bishops was entrusted with the supervision of the others. The name "bishop" was reserved for him, whereas the others were called "presbyter, priest etc." And he concludes:

Since this arrangement [or practice, "denna ordningen"] was quite useful and without doubt had proceeded from God the Holy Spirit (who gives all good gifts), it was generally approved of and accepted throughout all Christendom and has thus remained and must remain for as long as the world lasts.¹⁰

Swedish scholars of an older school have understood this statement along the lines of the common Lutheran interpretation: there is but one ministry, the office of preaching or the priestly office, and the office of bishop is a convenient way to organize the necessary supervision of the church's life. A bishop, though, does not have a ministry other than that of a priest, and, accordingly, any priest can undertake his duties. The bishop's office is *iure humano*.¹¹

More recent investigations have pointed out that CO 1571 does not presuppose an original priestly office, identical with "the office of preaching," from which the episcopal office developed as an office in its own right. Lars Eckerdal maintains the view that, according to CO 1571, bishop and priest in the beginning was the same office, but in order to prevent conflicts and promote unity, a differentiation was made. Thus, within the one ministry of the church, i.e. "God's 'office of preaching,'" some were ordained priests,

⁹ When defining the confession of the Church of Sweden, the Church Order of 1999 refers to the Assembly of Uppsala 1593 and "other documents approved of by the Church of Sweden." CO 1571 belongs to these approved documents as part of the decisions of 1593. See *Kyrkoordning med angränsande lagstiftning för Svenska kyrkan*. Stockholm 1999, Chap. 1, § 1.

¹⁰ Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571 (above n. 7), pp. 161–162. "Därför såsom denna ordningen var ganska nyttig och utan tvivel av Gud den helga Ande (som alla goda gåvor giver) utgången, så vart hon ock allmänt utöver hela kristenheten gillat och anammat, och haver alltså sedan blivit, och än ytterligare så länge världen står, bliva måste."

¹¹ E.g. *Sven Kjellerström*, "Sätt till att ordinera en vald biskop" 1561–1942 (BTP 33), Lund 1974, pp. 24 f. (With a German summary.)

some bishops. The office of preaching, therefore, is modelled in two different and separate offices.¹²

Sven-Erik Brodd has developed Eckerdal's interpretation. Contrary to the older school, Brodd suggests that, according to CO 1571, the priestly office as separate from the episcopal was derived from the full ministry of the church by way of a reduction. The episcopal tasks were reserved to one of the ministers, "while the other ministers were deprived of certain tasks."¹³

According to both Eckerdal and Brodd, "the office of preaching," the one ministry of the church, as understood by CO 1571, is the global entity, while priest and bishop constitute a differentiation within this ministry.

So far, the analysis of Eckerdal and Brodd seems coherent. Two problems arise, though:

When interpreting the citation above, Eckerdal and Brodd understand the words "denna ordningen," "this arrangement/practice," as referring to the episcopal office. Together with the phrase "without doubt had proceeded from God the Holy Spirit," the episcopal office can be understood as "an almost divine institution," as Eckerdal puts it, or an office *sui generis* and *iure divino*, as Brodd seems to suggest.¹⁴

Objections can be made to this analysis. Firstly, while the ministry of the church, "the office of preaching," is a divine institution, given to the Church by Christ himself, CO 1571 for the later differentiation of this ministry presupposes a process through which this practice was spread and eventually accepted by the Church as a whole. It was, according to CO 1571, mediated by the development of the Church's life and in the actual situation appreciated as the appropriate means to establish peaceful order and unity in the Church. As such, CO 1571 considers it a gift of the Holy Spirit. This is, however, not to say that there is a divine and binding command.

Secondly, the words "denna ordningen," "this arrangement/practice," do not refer to "the office of bishop," as proposed by Eckerdal and Brodd, but to the necessary differentiation of the tasks of the Church's one ministry for the sake of unity. CO 1571 is better understood when this differentiation is comprehended in terms of jurisdiction rather than a qualitative difference between the priestly and the episcopal offices. It is a practice instituted by the Church itself. This differentiation Laurentius Petri considers "quite useful" and therefore it "must remain for as long as the world last."

¹² Eckerdal, "Genom bön och handpåläggning" (above n. 3), pp. 379 ff, 384 ff.

¹³ Sven-Erik Brodd, "Biskopsämbetet i kyrkoordningen 1571." *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 1989, pp. 94, 98. (With an English summary.)

¹⁴ Eckerdal, "Genom bön och handpåläggning" (above n. 3), p. 387. Brodd (above n. 13), pp. 92, 106 n. 14.

In his book *Om kyrkostadgar och ceremonier* (On church statutes and ceremonies), Laurentius Petri argues that a church regiment and a church order are needed to provide the congregations with priests who can preach, teach and distribute the sacraments.¹⁵ Even the radical opponents of the reformation movement cannot do without any kind of church order. Instead, they use “new ones, i.e. those they themselves have invented out of eagerness for what is new.” You have to have “some human statutes,” and undoubtedly, he concludes, some of these should be exactly as those “in use under the regiment of the pope or elsewhere in Christendom.”¹⁶ Laurentius Petri has a high esteem of the inherited ecclesiastical organisation and its functionality, but it is not the only model for a church order. On the contrary, CO 1571 repeatedly refers to the practices of other Lutheran churches, notes the differences and leaves it there. These are not matters of principal importance. It would be remarkable if Laurentius Petri used New Testament church order as a binding paradigm for the church order of the contemporary church, as only the institutions of Christ are compulsory in an absolute sense. Like any priest, the bishop shall preach the Word of God. The special tasks of the bishop, as depicted by CO 1571, are entirely those related to the surveillance of the church’s life, i.e. to the upholding of the Church Order; and the office itself, as CO 1571 understands it, belongs to this merely human but necessary order.

What, then, is the ministry of the Church, “the office of preaching,” according to CO 1571? It is “not a work of man, but God’s and our Saviour Jesus Christ’s own institution, who also sustains it and powerfully acts through it.” By means of this ministry, he “lives amongst us, hears and helps us, and makes us the heirs of eternal bliss.” The “congregation”/Church can therefore not do without it.¹⁷ This ministry of the Word and the Sacraments is related to the “congregation” and its needs, and rests solely on the institution of Christ.

The bishop, rendered in Latin *superattendens* by CO 1571, shall “super-vise those under his jurisdiction,” attending to the teaching and pastoral care of the priests and the knowledge and moral conduct of the people. Further, he shall inspect the schools and the infirmaries etc. All this he shall execute by way of visitations, yearly, parish by parish. He is the *ordinarius* or *ordinator* of the diocese, translated into Swedish with words that mean “one who organizes,” “an administrator,” “a provider.”¹⁸ He is

¹⁵ *Laurentius Petri*, *Om Kyrkio Stadgar och Ceremonier* Scriffuin Aff Erchebis-cop Lars j Upsala / Anno 1566. Och nu ... på prent giffuin aff A[braham] A[ndreæ] A[ngermannus], Wittenberg 1587, ff. 9r–10v.

¹⁶ *Laurentius Petri* (above n. 15), f. 137r.

¹⁷ *Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571* (above n. 7), pp. 139–140.

¹⁸ “skickare eller skickningsman”, *Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571* (above n. 7), pp. 164–165.

also, according to CO 1571, invested with judicial power: he is the judge of priestly misconduct and of matrimonial cases within his diocese. Grave sinners are submitted to episcopal judgement, and penance shall be directed by the bishop's *paenitentiaris* at the Cathedral.¹⁹

In his capacity as supervisor, he also examines the ability and the knowledge of the candidates to priesthood, and therefore he is the one who ordains new priests. This is the only task of a "sacramental" character that is reserved for the bishop. CO 1571 nowhere discusses the possibility that someone other than a bishop can ordain, but on the other hand: the practices of other churches, such as the German Lutheran ones, are not questioned or criticised.

The continuity with the medieval church's organisation was stronger in Sweden than in any other Lutheran country. The episcopal office could continue to function much in the same way as it did in the medieval church. The Church Order of 1571 provides the framework for this; it explains the meaning of the church's structure and organisation and defends it against critics. In this way, it constitutes the first formally accepted text outlining the character and confessional status of the Swedish church.

II.

The post-reformation period up to 1809

In Germany, the princes were compelled by the situation in the sixteenth century to act as *Notbischöffen*. This was not the case in the Nordic countries, even if the reformation could not have been undertaken without the political support of the kings. Instead, new bishops were elected to the episcopal sees and consecrated.

In the Swedish church, no clear concept of the office of bishop emerges during the centuries after the reformation period. However, we can note the following:

1. During the seventeenth century, the office of superintendent was introduced in the church of the Swedish kingdom.²⁰ The dioceses were once

¹⁹ The judicial power of the church, see Åke Andrén, "Den andliga domsrätten i Sverige under reformationstiden," in: Ingmar Brohed (ed.), *Reformationens konsolidering i de nordiska länderna 1540–1610*. Oslo 1990, pp. 436–458. *Sven Lindegård*, *Ämbetsbrott av präst. En kyrkorättslig studie från medeltid till nutid* (BTP 61). Lund 1999 (with an English summary).

²⁰ Mariestad already 1581, later moved to Karlstad, Kalmar 1603, Göteborg 1620, Visby 1645, Härnösand 1647; beside these also in the conquered countries, in Riga, Narva, Ösel, Greifswald and Wismar. *Bengt Stolt*, *Svenska biskopsvigningar. Från reformationen till våra dagar*, Stockholm 1972, p. 39. (With an English summary.) *Sven-Erik Brodd*, "Superintendenturen som ersättning för och komplement till biskops-

again divided, and the superintendents were, just as for a short period the ordinaries in the sixteenth century, the heads of these new units. However, the medieval episcopal sees were not abandoned. That way the Swedish church had two supervising offices. The bishops were consecrated as before. The superintendents were not, but they exercised the same authority as a bishop; thanks to a royal mandate of 1631, this included the ordaining of priests. If, however, a superintendent was elected to a bishopric, he was also consecrated.²¹ As a contrast, it may be noted that a consecrated bishop later elected bishop of another bishopric was not re-consecrated. (To complete the picture: in the history of the Swedish church, priests who for one reason or another have for a time ceased to exercise their ministry have never been re-ordained, but have rather been re-installed in their ministry through corroborating their ordination vows or oath before the *consistorium*.)

2. Up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, there is a tension between the royal appointment of a bishop and the consecration of a bishop. The royal mandate was the condition for the consecration. The dominating line of thought seems to have been that the royal mandate actually meant the full transferral of the episcopal ministry, although as a general rule elected bishops did not undertake any ordinations before the consecration. However, during the eighteenth century some of the appointed bishops were of the opinion that they, based on the royal mandate, could fully exercise the office of bishop, and they therefore repudiated the consecration. Non-episcopal ordinations became a more or less normal thing, executed by a superintendent, an elected and appointed bishop or, in case of a vacancy of the see, a cathedral dean. The king gave the necessary permission for the dean to ordain, and this permission applied only to the one instance.²² Here again we can see the tension between the royal mandate and the consecration as a religious act investing the bishop with ecclesiastical authority.

This demonstrates that one side of the office of bishop was understood as identical with that of a priest, i.e. preaching the Word and celebrating the sacraments, and that the performance of ordinations was not seen as a task separate from these duties. Rather, the necessity of the royal mandate points in the direction that the power to ordain was a matter of polity. The "ability" to ordain was given by means of ordination to the priesthood. Not every ordained person, however, was allowed to exercise this "ability," only those appointed by the king, who thereby maintained power and control over the ecclesiastical organisation and its personnel.

ämbetet i svenska kyrkan 1539–1631," in: Ingmar Brohed (ed.), *Reformationens konsolidering i de nordiska länderna 1540–1610*. Oslo 1990, pp. 198–239.

²¹ *Stolt* (above n. 20), pp. 39–41.

²² *Kjöllerström*, "Sätt till att ordinera" (above n. 11), pp. 93–106.

3. The royal mandate is in other words the crucial thing. The kings did not interfere with the spiritual matters, i.e. the ministry of the Word and the sacraments. The office of the priest was conveyed by the purely religious act of prayer and laying on of hands. As the episcopal authority seems to have been transferred without consecration, it is also reasonable to conclude that a bishop and a superintendent were regarded as the same thing, but with different names due to tradition.

The bishops and the superintendents exercised the supervising authority as a consequence of the royal mandate. Both these offices can therefore be seen as an extension of the Sovereign's obligations as the *praecipuum membrum ecclesiae* to watch over the religion of the kingdom. In fact, there was also in Sweden and Finland a frequent use of the term *summus episcopus* to denote this position of the king. The king is the supreme supervisor or bishop, and the bishops and superintendents are by his appointment and mandate acting on his behalf. This supervising function must be seen as the main task of a bishop and the real content of the office he has undertaken.

4. Gradually, the *superintendentiae* were transformed into dioceses. The superintendents became bishops. If, however, the new bishop was the superintendent of the former *superintendentia*, he was not consecrated. This transformation of the *superintendentiae* was ended by 1778.²³ The possibility of non-episcopal ordinations was eventually discarded at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Swedish church was through these events once again given a consistent episcopal organisation and, accordingly, since the end of the eighteenth century all new bishops have been consecrated before exercising the full episcopal ministry. Through the centuries, in spite of the different opinions about the office of bishop, and regardless of the different ways of modelling the *episcopé* function, the historical episcopal succession was never broken in the Church of Sweden, at least not in a material sense.

III.

The Finnish and Swedish Churches after 1809

Through the Swedish–Russian war at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Sweden lost the eastern part of the kingdom and Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy under the Russian Orthodox emperor. At the ending of the war of 1809, a Finnish parliament, the *Lantdag*, was sum-

²³ Göteborg 1665, Karlstad, Härnösand and Visby 1772, and eventually Kalmar 1778. *Stolt* (above n. 20), p. 40.

moned, and the emperor guaranteed that the Swedish constitution as well as the Swedish ecclesiastical law of 1686 would remain in force.²⁴ These events gave birth to two separate churches, with a common history, organisation and liturgy. Thus, the starting point for the somewhat different development of the two modern Lutheran churches of Finland and Sweden was the same. The “pure” episcopal organisation that had emerged around the turn of the century became a common characteristic of the two churches. In the broader Lutheran context, it constitutes a peculiar church order, a combination of a transformed medieval inheritance and a Lutheran interpretation of the meaning of this inheritance. The organisation itself is closer to the episcopal structure of the Anglican Communion. It is a well-known fact that after the Lambeth Conference of 1888 it has formed the basis for closer relations between the churches of the Anglican tradition and the Lutheran churches of Finland and Sweden. The agreement in 1922 between the Lambeth Conference and the Swedish Bishops’ Conference can thus be seen as the starting point for the development resulting in the Poorvo Statement of 1992. However, if the episcopal structure of the Anglican and the two Lutheran churches superficially looked the same, the theological interpretation differed.

1. In Finland, a commission published a report in 1863 proposing a revised ecclesiastical law to replace the Swedish one of 1686.²⁵ The report also included an extensive commentary. With only minor changes, the emperor instituted the law in 1868.²⁶

In the commentary, the commission states, with reference to the Lutheran confession, that priest and bishop are not two different orders. Ordinations conducted by priests are therefore valid. The commission also points to the fact that priests have ordained priests in the post-reformation history of the Swedish church.²⁷

The ecclesiastical law of 1686 did not expressly stipulate that a person to be elected bishop must be an ordained priest. The commission calls this “an abnormal circumstance.”²⁸ According to the commission, the ordination to the priesthood conveys the Church’s ministry in its full sense, and “thereby follows a correct understanding of the office of bishop.” This is

²⁴ For the background, cf. *Eino Murtorinne*, *Finlands kyrkohistoria*. III. Autonomins tidevarv 1809–1899. Skellefteå 2000, pp. 11–17.

²⁵ *Förslag till kyrkolag för den Evangelisk-Lutherska kyrkan i Storfurstendömet Finland jämte Motiver och Reservationer ... Helsingfors 1863.*

²⁶ *Kyrkolag för den ewangelisk-lutherska kyrkan i Finland, af Finlands Ständer wid landtdagen år 1867 antagen och av Hans Kejslerliga Majestät den 9 December (27 November) 1868 i näder stadfäst. Helsingfors 1870.*

²⁷ *Förslag till kyrkolag* (above n. 25), p. 165.

²⁸ *Förslag till kyrkolag* (above n. 25), pp. 200–202.

supported by a reference to the historical explanation of CO 1571, that originally priest and bishop were thought of as having one and the same ministry. Consequently, the commission concludes, no tasks that normally belong to the office of a bishop have to be left undone because the see is vacant or the bishop for other reasons cannot fulfil his duties. In such cases the dean or another priestly member of the chapter can ordain. As this “true understanding of the episcopal office founded in Protestantism ... has not been evident in our statutes hitherto in force,” the ecclesiastical law ought to include also this possibility of priestly ordinations.²⁹

This view of the episcopal ministry was given a distinct illustration in 1884, when all the three bishops of the Finnish church died. As no consecrated bishops were at hand, the senate appointed one of the ordained professors of theology to perform the consecration of the new archbishop, who in turn consecrated the other two *electi*.³⁰

Today’s Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland retains the same understanding of the episcopal ministry. The revised ecclesiastical law and the new Church Order of 1993 originally permitted the consecration of bishops and the ordination of priests to be undertaken e.g. by a dean. Due to the Poorvo Statement, however, the Church Order was revised in 2001. Consecrations and ordinations then became the exclusive obligation of the bishops. This does not denote a change of the Finnish church’s theological concept of episcopacy – it was simply necessary for the implementation of the agreement.³¹

2. Faced with the Lambeth Conference’s invitation to closer relations with the Anglican Communion, the Church of Sweden had to clarify its understanding of the office of bishop. From an Anglican point of view, the episcopal ministry of the Swedish Church was in accordance with the requirements spelled out in the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888: the tasks of a bishop were conceived of in the same categories by the two churches, and the episcopal succession was unbroken in the Church of Sweden. The Swedish Bishops’ Conference appreciated the Anglican esteem, but explained in a reply that, although these circumstances admittedly were at hand, they did

²⁹ Förslag till kyrkolag (above n. 25), p. 212.

³⁰ *Murtorinne*, III (above n. 24), p. 228. The episcopal succession was thereby broken. It was re-established through Swedish bishops from the 1930s and on, and this was seen as one of the prerequisites for the intercommunion agreement 1936 between the Churches of the Anglican Communion and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. *Eino Murtorinne*, *Finlands kyrkohistoria*. IV. Från förtrycksperioden till våra dagar 1900–1990. Helsingfors 2000, p. 141. *Stolt* (above n. 20), pp. 83–84, 139.

³¹ Kyrkolag, Chap. 18, § 2; Kyrkoordning, Chap. 5, § 1, Chap. 18, § 2, in: *Gunnar Grönblom* (ed.), *Kyrkans lagstiftning med kommentarer*. Second edition. Borgå 1993. Cf. the commentaries on these paragraphs.

not have the same significance for the Swedish church as for the churches of the Anglican Communion. “[I]n the question of intercommunion,” the bishops affirmed, “our Church has not attached decisive weight either to the doctrine of the Ministry in general or to what is usually called the Apostolic Succession of Bishops and the questions thereby implied.” No particular organisation of the Church and of its ministry is instituted *iure divino*; the value of such an organisation is only to be judged “by its fitness and ability to become a pure vessel for the supernatural content.” Instead, the mutual understanding of the content of the “message of salvation, founded on the divine revelation” forms the basis for an intercommunion agreement, according to the Swedish bishops.³² The Anglican and the Lutheran bishops thus agreed on the historical facts, but differed in their interpretation; nevertheless, with different starting points, they found a valid ground for establishing the intercommunion agreement.

It is, however, somewhat surprising that this formal agreement on behalf of the Church of Sweden was made in an informal way. The Swedish synod had at the time no capacity to deal with questions of this kind, and the Swedish Bishops’ Conference actually did not have an official position as representative of the Swedish church; the Conference was an informal floor for the bishops’ internal discussions. Yet the agreement was made by means of a letter signed by the Archbishop of Uppsala, Nathan Söderblom, together with two of the other bishops. The bishops of the Swedish church acted as the teaching ministry of the church, giving their theological interpretation of the Swedish ministry, and on this basis together with another church’s Bishops’ Conference opened up for a “formally” agreed intercommunion. This role of the Swedish bishops was strengthened during the twentieth century, as the Swedish Bishops’ Conference issued letters on theological, ethical and social questions. It should be noted, though, that according to Swedish tradition the clergy as a whole, including the bishops, has been considered to constitute the teaching ministry of the Church, as will be shown below.

Nathan Söderblom regarded the historical episcopacy of the Swedish church as an instrument for ecumenical reconciliation. It had proved useful in the context of the Anglican–Lutheran relations. As consecrators or co-consecrators, Swedish bishops transferred the Swedish episcopal ministry to the Lutheran churches of the Baltic countries, as well as to the young churches that the Mission of the Swedish church gave birth to in India and Africa. The Poorvo Statement is a prominent expression of the ecumenical importance Söderblom attributed to the historic episcopacy.

³² Nathan Söderblom, Dokument till frågan om nattvardsgemenskap med Englands kyrka. Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift 1923, p. 374–381. The documents are given in English.

Although objections can be made to Eckerdal's and Brodd's analysis of CO 1571, their interpretation constitutes something of a turning point in the understanding of the ministry of the Swedish church. Their analysis has been a decisive factor in the ecumenical dialogue between the Church of Sweden and other churches, such as the Roman Catholic church in Sweden. It has also had a great impact on the new ordination liturgies of the Swedish church. The Bishops' Conference issued in 1990 a letter, *Biskop, präst och diakon i Svenska kyrkan* (Bishop, Priest and Deacon in the Church of Sweden).³³ Here Eckerdal's and Brodd's interpretation structures the theological exploration of the ministry of the church as modelled in three different offices with different tasks within the one ministry. Lastly, the constitution of the Church of Sweden, the Church Order of 1999,³⁴ is informed by the same understanding of the threefold ministry. This re-interpretation of the Lutheran concept of the church's ministry – even if the historical ground is not altogether solid – has thus become part of the identity that the Church of Sweden has chosen to assume.

IV.

The bishops as part of the teaching ministry of the Church

The teaching ministry as one of the estates of Parliament

In the history of the Finnish and Swedish churches, bishops and priests together constitute the teaching ministry, the priests with responsibility for the parish level, the bishops as the supervisors of their own bishoprics. During the reformation period, the bishops and the inherited provincial synod carried out the teaching authority on the national level. From the second half of the sixteenth century and on, the bishops together with priests elected by the clergy of each diocese formed one of the estates of the parliament. With regard to their special tasks within the teaching ministry, the bishops were automatically members of the parliament. Together with the representatives of the priests, they acted as one body in the parliament, with a common responsibility for doctrinal questions. On this level, there was no distinction between priests and bishops.

Not only was the parliament a political assembly, but in fact the national representation of the Swedish church. This, though, should not be seen as the state's supremacy over the church. The parliament of the Christian state was subordinate to the Word of God, and as the representation of the state

³³ *Biskop, präst och diakon i Svenska kyrkan*. Ett biskopsbrev om kyrkans ämbete. Stockholm 1990.

³⁴ *Kyrkoordning ... 1999* (above n. 9).

as well as of the church, the parliament was responsible for the higher value that the Christian faith constituted. That is to say, ultimately all decisions regarding the church, including the practical consequences of the church's teaching, was a responsibility shared by the teaching ministry and the lay members of the parliament. As the teaching ministry of the Church, the priestly estate prepared matters with confessional implications before decisions. However, each estate had one vote, and with three votes to one the other estates could override the priestly estate's opinion on any question concerning the church or the ecclesiastical laws.

During the eighteenth century, the priestly estate also acted as an informal but accepted ecclesiastical government, the *clerus comitalis*. In this capacity, the estate issued letters to the clergy on questions of importance for the church's life.³⁵

This understanding and position of the teaching ministry of the church was of decisive importance for the institution of the General Synods of Finland and Sweden in the mid-nineteenth century.

The institution of the General Synods of the Finnish and Swedish Churches in the 1860s

The General Synods of Finland and Sweden were instituted in the 1860s. The Finns experienced a necessity to defend the independence of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, as Finland by now had become an autonomous part of the Russian empire, with a Sovereign of the Orthodox confession. An ecclesiastical committee, which presented a report in 1863, prepared the institution of the Finnish synod. The report proposed a thorough revision of the Swedish ecclesiastical law of 1686, then still in force. The proposed law also contained a chapter regulating a General Synod. With only a few changes, the new law was ratified by the emperor in 1868.³⁶

The institution of the Swedish synod in 1863 was an effect of the replacement of the four estates by a parliament with two houses, based on elections that were more representative, even if not fully democratic. As the old parliament also acted as the representation of the church, the church would lose all its influence over ecclesiastical questions if nothing was done. Consequently, the government proposed the institution of a General Synod.³⁷

The Finnish as well as the Swedish synods were composed of two bodies, the representatives of the teaching ministry and the lay representatives of

³⁵ *Carl-Edvard Norman*, *Cleri comitalis circular 1723–1772* (SSSKH 29). Stockholm 1952. (With an English summary.)

³⁶ *Kyrkolag ... 1868* (above n. 26), Chap. 25, §§ 450–461.

³⁷ *Riksdagen 1862–1863*. Bihang. Proposition nr 33. – SFS 1863:61, förordning ang. allm. kyrkomöte.

the parishes. The bishops were automatically members of the synod, while the clergy of each diocese elected the priests. Electors appointed by the parishioners of each parish designated the lay members. The former parliament was the obvious model for this combination of priestly liability to the church's confession, founded on the ordination vows, and lay members representing the parishes. However, the priestly members (including the bishops) gained a stronger position vis-à-vis the lay representatives than in the parliament. In the Finnish synod, the lay people outnumbered the clergy with just a few persons, whereas the number of priests and lay people was the same in the Swedish synod. As in the parliament, bishops and priests were equals at the synods and shared the same responsibility.

Before the synods resolved doctrinal matters, these were to be prepared by the teaching ministry. In Finland, questions of this kind could be referred to the clergy at the diocesan synods.³⁸ In Sweden, the priestly body of the synod was to give an advisory statement on such matters.³⁹ Decisions regarding the liturgical books, the Hymnal, the Catechism etc. (in Finland regarding any major change of the established order) required a majority of three quarters in the Finnish synod, two thirds in the Swedish, as these books were particularly susceptible of doctrinal changes.

The Finnish synod acquired an independent position in relation to the state, as the new ecclesiastical law invested the synod with legislative power. The Swedish synod on the other hand was not given a legislative power of its own. The final decisions had to be made by the parliament and/or the government. The synod could only make suggestions to the government or by way of a veto block a decision by the government or the parliament. The synod became part of the political system. It could be considered a standing committee of the parliament that the parliament had to consult before instituting new ecclesiastical laws.

“The double line of responsibility” and the General Synods at the end of the twentieth century

The organisation of the Finnish and the Swedish churches is often described as “a double line of responsibility,” i.e. as a co-operation of the teaching ministry and the representatives of the parishes.⁴⁰ According to this idea, the teaching ministry has an independent responsibility for the

³⁸ Kyrkolag ... 1868 (above n. 26), Chap. 24, § 437:3; Chap. 25, § 455.

³⁹ SFS 1863:61, § 10. Cf. Lars Eckerdal, “Från kyrkomötets prästerliga beredning till beredningsutskottet. Ett led i kyrkomötets demokratisering?” *Kyrkohistorisk årsskrift* 1971, pp. 184–204 (with a summary in English).

⁴⁰ Per-Olov Åhrén, “Den dubbla ansvarslinjen som kyrkorättsligt problem.” In: J.-O. Aggedal, C.-G. Andrén & A.J. Everstsson (eds.), *Kyrka – universitet – skola. Teologi och pedagogik i funktion*. FS till Sven-Åke Selander (Religio 52). Lund 2000, pp. 57–72.

doctrine of the church, based on commitment to the confession as expressed in the solemn vows at ordination, while the concept of the priesthood of all believers provides the rationale for the participation of the lay people in the governing structures of the church. In Swedish historical accounts, it is often claimed that this “double line” is rooted in the medieval ecclesiastical laws of Sweden and has since then functioned as a structuring factor on all levels of the church’s life.

How democratic ideals should be combined with this “double line of responsibility” of the ordained ministry and lay representatives was one of the crucial questions for the reforms undertaken by the two churches in the late twentieth century.

1. A commission appointed by the Finnish General Synod published a report in 1979, suggesting a revision of the ecclesiastical law of 1868.⁴¹ The report suggested that the law be divided into an ecclesiastical law, providing the framework for the institutions of the church, and a church order, regulating the ecclesiastical organisation in greater detail. The report itself deals with the principles, and does not offer an actual text for either the law or the church order. It provides, in other words, the theoretical starting points for the revision.

Contrary to the situation in Sweden, as will be seen, it was the church itself, not the state, that initiated these changes in church polity. It demonstrates the liberty the Finnish church enjoys despite the fact that it is an established church, or at least a church with close relations to the state.

According to the report, the church expresses its nature and tasks in its constitution. Every revision must therefore once more clarify the values that must be regarded as constitutive for the church’s identity as a fellowship of believers. In response to this challenge, the committee explores the meaning of the fifth and the seventh articles of the *Confessio Augustana* (“On the office of preaching” and “On the Church” respectively). The Church is present or represented when the gospel is preached and the sacraments are distributed. This, the report says, presupposes the presence of both those who preach and distribute, the ordained ministry, and those who receive the Word and the sacraments, the people. The constitution of the church must give concrete form to this co-operation of ordained ministry and the priesthood of all believers, as none of them alone can make the Church present or represent it. According to the report, this ought to be realized at every level of the church’s organisation. The General Synod must therefore consist of a balanced representation of both ministry and lay people.⁴²

⁴¹ Kyrkoordiningskommitténs betänkande, Helsingfors 1979.

⁴² Kyrkoordiningskommitténs betänkande, Helsingfors 1979, pp. 12–16.

This, it can be argued, collides with the opinions of modern society. The citizens of the modern state expect democratic principles to be applied to most areas of society. As the report sees it, the seventh and fifth articles of the *Confessio Augustana* take precedence over the political democratic ideal and provide the church with certain fundamental values that cannot be ignored.⁴³ Ecclesiology and a renewed theological interpretation of the Lutheran confession provide the basic principles for the constitution of the church and its organisation at every level. Therefore, democratic ideals cannot be fully applied to the representative structure of the church.

As a result and in accordance with the ecclesiastical law and the Church Order, both instituted in 1993, the General Synod of the Finnish church is composed of two bodies, one representing the teaching ministry and one the lay people of the parishes. Each of the two bodies should therefore elect their own representatives. In a consistent manner, the idea of “a double line of responsibility” informs representative structures on all levels of the church’s organisation. Each parish council appoints delegates who constitute the electorate for the lay representatives of the diocese to the synod. The clergy of each diocese elects the priestly members of the synod, while the bishops are automatically members due to their special tasks. The lay representatives at the synod constitute the majority.⁴⁴

Before decisions of the synod, questions regarding the liturgical books of the church, doctrinal matters, the ecclesiastical law or the Church Order shall be referred to the Bishops’ Conference for an advisory statement, and thereafter settled by the synod by a majority of three quarters.⁴⁵ In this way, the teaching ministry maintains a strong position at the synod, despite the fact that it is the minor body of the synod, and the special position of the bishops within this ministry is underlined.

2. The General Synod of the Church of Sweden rejected in 1979 a governmental bill that could have formed the basis for a separation of state and church. With the consent of the four largest parties of the parliament, the government therefore proposed two laws in 1982, the one providing the framework for the status and character of the Swedish church as an established church, the other regulating in detail what was called “a reformed General Synod.”⁴⁶ The last of these presupposed a total reorganisation of the synod in order to meet the democratic requirements of other institutions

⁴³ Kyrkoordningskommitténs betänkande, Helsingfors 1979, pp. 27–28.

⁴⁴ *Grönblom* (above n. 31), Kyrkolag, Chap. 20, §§ 1–6.

⁴⁵ *Grönblom* (above n. 31), Kyrkolag, Chap 20, § 10, Chap 21, §§ 1–2. Kyrkoordning, Chap 20, § 4.

⁴⁶ Allmänna kyrkomötets protokoll 1982. Bihang. Saml. 1. Regeringens skrivelse nr 7, pp. 2–11.

of the state. A commission appointed by the General Synod published at the same time a report with conclusions and suggestions pointing in the same direction.⁴⁷

The bill and the report unanimously applied purely democratic ideals to the General Synod. The existing two bodies of the synod appointed by two separate electorates were referred to as a “division of categories.” Along with the automatic membership of the bishops this was regarded as undemocratic, since one group of professionals, the clergy together with the bishops, was given a privileged position, being guaranteed forty percent of the seats of the synod.⁴⁸ This could not be accepted in any state institution.⁴⁹

It was therefore suggested by both the bill and the report that an electorate of each diocese, composed of delegates appointed by the parishes, should elect all members of the synod, priests and lay representatives alike. The automatic membership of the bishops was to be discarded; consequently, bishops had to be nominated and elected like all other members if they were to enjoy full membership of the synod. Current democratic ideals were thus fully enforced without any thorough penetration of the ecclesiological and theological aspects of the problem, and “the double line of responsibility,” the distinction between the teaching ministry and the lay representatives of the parishes, was abandoned.

The two laws were accepted with only a few minor changes by the majority of the synod and were instituted by the parliament in 1982.⁵⁰ As the synod at the same time lost its direct participation in instituting ecclesiastical laws, the status of the Church of Sweden changed radically. It became what it had never been before: an established church over which the democratically elected parliament, with no obligations whatsoever to the confession of the church, could, if it wanted, exercise full power.

Mediated by an ecclesiastical law of 1992,⁵¹ the democratic principles were transferred to the independent Church of Sweden and the Church Order of 1999. Today, in accordance with the Church Order, all members of the synod are elected directly by the individual members of the church.⁵² This is clearly modelled on the political democratic system. The elections to the synod are general. The synod is a parallel to the parliament, constituting

⁴⁷ Allmänna kyrkomötets protokoll 1982. Bihang. Saml. 2. 1979 års kyrkomötes utredningsnämnds betänkande nr 1.

⁴⁸ When instituted in 1863, the synod comprised 30 priestly and 30 lay members. In 1982, according to a law instituted 1970 (SFS 1970:753), the priestly members were 39 and the lay members 53.

⁴⁹ Regeringens skrivelse nr 7 (above n. 46), 40–42. Utredningsnämndens betänkande nr 1 (above n. 47), pp. 105–107.

⁵⁰ SFS 1982:942, 1982: 943.

⁵¹ SFS 1992:300. – Edited with an introduction in: *Kyrkolagen* (1992:300). Stockholm 1992.

⁵² *Kyrkoordning ... 1999* (above n. 9), Chap. 11, § 1.

the representative assembly of the individual members of the church. The parishes have thereby ceased to be the basis for the ecclesiastical representative organisation.

A minor change suggested by the synod and accepted by the parliament already in 1982 made it possible for the synod to institute a standing commission for confessional matters. This too has been transferred to the Church Order of 1999. The fourteen bishops of Church of Sweden are all members of this commission, while eight other persons, not necessarily members of the synod, are appointed by the synod. This committee works independently of the synod, also between its sessions. When in session and before a decision on matters with confessional implications, including the revision of the liturgical books, the synod has to consult the commission. If the synod takes another standpoint than the commission, the matter must be referred a second time to the commission. Even against the recommendations of the commission the synod can thereafter determine the question with a majority of two thirds.⁵³

According to the Church Order of 1999, the bishops may no longer be members of the synod. They have to attend the sessions and can make suggestions and participate in the debates – or, as it was nicely put by a report in 1982: The attendance of the bishops at the synod gives the synod the opportunity to receive “the necessary information before deciding on confessional matters.”⁵⁴ This last statement is significant, as it reveals how the office of the bishops was understood by the politicians and most of the politically elected lay members of the synod: the bishops were regarded specialists. Their task was to prepare matters before the representatives of the people made the decision, but as specialists they could not be members of the synod and were not allowed to vote. The automatic and full membership of the synod that the bishops enjoyed before the reform was not considered compatible with an assembly based on the people’s free nomination and election.

Priests can be elected members of the synod, but as they are nominated by political parties and elected together with and at the same time as all other representatives, their presence and participation at the synod cannot be seen as a representation of the teaching ministry of the church. They represent those nominating and electing them, and at least in theory the result of an election could very well be that no priests at all became members of the synod.

Hence, the ultimate responsibility for the interpretation of the confession lies with a synod without members elected specifically to represent the teaching ministry.

⁵³ Kyrkoordning ... 1999 (above n. 9), Chap. 11, § 16–18.

⁵⁴ Kyrkomöteskommittén, as cited in Allmänna kyrkomötets protokoll 1982. Bihang. Saml. 8:1, Första utskottets betänkande. p. 33.

In the standing commission for doctrinal questions, the bishops are the sole representatives of the teaching ministry of the church, as the other members do not necessarily have to be ordained. This is in fact a novelty in the tradition of the Swedish church. The teaching ministry in the previous history of the Swedish church was considered identical with the clergy as a whole, including the bishops. Up to 1982, bishops and priests were equals on the national level with a common responsibility for the confession. Thus, in 1982, "the double line of responsibility" was abandoned in favour of a democratic political idea, fully applied to the representative assembly of the church, and the democratic structure was eventually in 1999 transferred to the Church Order of the independent Church of Sweden.

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In an interesting way, this development of the Church of Sweden during the last decades of the twentieth century sheds light on the refusal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland to accept democratic ideals as the sole model for church polity. The Finnish church claims that the confession provides the church with fundamental values that take precedence over any idea not rooted in the confession itself. The Finnish church therefore combines two ideas as the basis for its representative structure: the idea of a teaching ministry, necessary for the church, and the democratic idea of the participation of all members of the church in all matters of importance for the church's life.

The difference in attitude between the Finnish and the Swedish churches is most likely due to the different histories of the two churches from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. In the 1860s, the Finnish church gained a considerable independence when the ecclesiastical laws were separated from the civil law and at the same time a General Synod with legislative power was instituted. The church thereafter had its own legal system and an authority that was independent of the political system. The reforms in Sweden at the same time were partial: the ecclesiastical laws remained mixed with the civil law and untouched, and the General Synod had no legislative power of its own. The synod could only use its veto against proposals from the government or the parliament. In fact, the synod that existed until 1982 can be seen as an enlarged standing committee of the parliament, which the parliament had to consult in matters regarding ecclesiastical laws. The Swedish synod became the prisoner of the political system. During the last decades, the political parties have dominated the elections of lay people on every level of the Swedish church, from the parishes up to the synod. In the elections to the synod, no distinction is made between priests and lay people. They are nominated together by the parties and elected at the same time by the individual members of the Church.

The Finnish church retains a traditional Lutheran understanding of the office of bishop, thus considering the priestly office to be identical with the one ministry of the Church. According to this view, the task of a bishop could very well be fulfilled by any ordained person, as the Church Order of 1993 originally stated. As a necessary concession to the requirements of the Poorvo Statement, ordinations of priests and consecrations of bishops are now reserved for the bishops. In the ecclesiastical organisation, the bishops have a prominent position and the episcopal character of the church is thus manifest.

On the theoretical level, the Church of Sweden seems to hold the episcopal office in high esteem. Even if the fundamental Lutheran understanding has not been abandoned, the Swedish church has tried to reinterpret the office to conform to the idea of a threefold ministry. In the last decades, though, the formal position of the bishops has changed radically. The office has been pushed to the background of the church's organisation, and the episcopal structure has thus become indistinct. Nonetheless, the preambles of the Church Order of 1999 highlight the episcopal structure as something characteristic for the Swedish church.⁵⁵

This contradiction has repeatedly been pointed out. In the document of the dialogue between the Church of Sweden and the Roman Catholic Church in Sweden it is said that "theologically this system is dubious, to say the least, when the bishops may not even formally share the responsibility for doctrine." It should be possible to establish forms for decisions on doctrinal questions that "do not constitute a threat to 'ordinary democratic practice.'"⁵⁶ In an advisory statement in 1999, some of the members of the synod's standing commission for doctrinal matters concluded: "It is not enough that the Church of Sweden regards itself as an episcopal church. In relation to other churches and to itself, it must in a discernible manner appear as such."⁵⁷

Thus, in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland we find a traditional Lutheran understanding of episcopacy but a firm episcopal structure, in Sweden a high theological esteem of the episcopal office but a weak position of the bishops in the ecclesiastical organisation. The situation is something of a paradox.

⁵⁵ E.g. *Kyrkoordning ... 1999* (above n. 9), p. 41.

⁵⁶ *Biskopsämbetet. Rapport från den officiella samtalsgruppen mellan Svenska kyrkan och Stockholms katolska stift*. Stockholm 1988, p. 91.

⁵⁷ *Kyrkomötet 1999*. Bihang 16:3, pp. 10–11.

Sonderdruck aus:

Zeitschrift für evangelisches Kirchenrecht

Herausgegeben von

Axel Frhr. v. Campenhausen · Joachim E. Christoph
Michael Germann · Karl-Hermann Kästner · Christoph Link
Hans Martin Müller · Arno Schilberg

V. Internationales Symposium der VELKD
in Reval/Estland 2004



50. Band 3. Heft

September 2005

Dieser Sonderdruck ist im Buchhandel nicht erhältlich.