

0. FOREWORD

As I started in the public ministry as a young pastor, several members of my congregation told me about a certain Pastor Schmidt, with whom there had been some troubles in the past. He left the congregation in Schönfeld and took several members with him into the Lutheran State church, what nearly led the congregation into total destruction. The controversy on church and ministry and the departure of Pastor Voigt probably were the reasons, why those members remembered problems that lay far away in the past.

In the following time I tried to gain more information on those events and the departure of Pastor Schmidt. But I couldn't get much far. I could find only some information in the archive of the congregation and it wasn't really very much what the older members still had in their memories on those past events. Because of that I felt the need to make a research on the events that led to the departure of Pastor Voigt, so that future generations will have the opportunity to gain thorough information on it. It was finally made possible for me by the way of a directed research, which I had the opportunity to make in connection with my studies in Summer Quarter at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (Mequon, USA). With this paper I do not intend to open up old wounds that already have been healed over the years or to practice revenge on my opponents of the past. My purpose is a scholarly research on the events of the past, which I hope to be able to do with the necessary emotional distance that seems to be possible after a couple of years. I want to give thorough information to future generations, who want to find out more about the controversy on church and ministry. Footnotes in the paper will give the reader hints for further information.

First of all I want to thank Prof. John Brenner from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, who supervised this directed research. In addition I also want to thank Dr. Gottfried Herrmann for his prove reading of the German manuscript and his additional advice. Thanks also to P. Andreas Drechsler for his prove reading of the English translation. May this paper lead all, who study it, to a clarification in the reported issues. To this purpose I ask for the help and blessing of the lord of the church.

Schönfeld, March 10th 2010
Holger Weiß

1. THE CONTROVERSY ON CHURCH AND MINISTRY

Questions about the doctrine of the church and its public ministry did not only lead to controversies within confessional Lutheranism in the recent years. Already in the second half of the 19th century different Lutheran theologians in Europe as in the USA struggled with the proper understanding of the church and the public ministry. Just remember for example the Altenburg disputation (1841) or the controversy between Walther and Grabau.

So it was an old topic with some new issues that the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche (ELFK) had to deal with at the end of the 20th century and that led this small confessional synod into a serious tension test. Other controversies had proceeded. Already in the seventies and eighties the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche had to stand a serious testing of their confessional stand. Some sister synods like the Missouri synod in America (LC-MS) or the “Alt-lutherische Kirche” and the “Selbstständige Lutherische Kirche” (SELK) opened the doors for a historic-critical approach to the bible and for ecumenical cooperation with heterodox churches. Opposing those new forms of liberalism the ELFK professed the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. After lasting doctrinal negotiations church fellowship had to be suspended with those synods that held to the adopted way of liberalism.

But while some old relations broke because of this development, other relations to synods that were in complete doctrinal agreement with the ELFK could be intensified. These efforts led to the founding of the Confessional evangelical Lutheran Conference (CELC) at Oberwesel in 1993. This fellowship turned out for the ELFK as a great blessing, since the unity could not only officially be established but also could be experienced in many personal contacts. But it was also because of this fellowship with sister synods of the CELC (especially the WELS in the USA), the ELFK had to deal with questions on the doctrines of church and ministry in an intensified way and that led the ELFK after the controversies of the seventies and eighties in another serious tension test.

1.1. THE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

The controversial issues, the ELFK had to deal with at the end of the 20th century, are gathered around two subject areas: the proper understanding of the “church” and the proper understanding of the “office”, God has instituted within the church. Some pastors of the ELFK held the view, that the doctrinal position of the Wisconsin Synod (WELS) would stand in opposition to the previous doctrinal position of the ELFK, that –as those pastors thought– was orientated on old Missouri and especially on C.F.W. Walther. In contrast to this the other pastors recognized, that the position of the WELS was based on scripture and had always been taught within the ELFK.

So the first question was dealing with the proper understanding of the church in the light of Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. According to the doctrinal position of the WELS every group of Christians, which gather around the means of grace, has to be called “church”. However it is necessary to differentiate between *primary* and *secondary* groups according to their relation to the means of grace and according to the question, if they are always necessary or just because of some special needs. The normal form of a *primary* group is the local congregation, which is necessary at all times according to the will of God and will be extensively administered with the word and the sacraments by the called pastors. But in addition to those *primary* groups there will be *secondary* groups as different gatherings of Christians within a congregation (e.g. teenage or adult bible study groups), synods, the synod council, synod committees and so on. Those secondary groups must not be set absolute or autonomous, but have to be submitted and anchored in the primary groups. But according to their nature those secondary groups are “church” like the primary groups. In contrast to this

the opposing position (which declared to represent the position of Walther, old Missouri and the previous position of the ELFK) declared that only the local congregation with the “Pfarramt” could be described with the attribute “church” because of its constant and extensive use of the word and the sacraments.

In a similar way the problems in regard to the doctrine of the “office” dealt with the question, how narrow the term “public ministry” had to be taken in the light of Scripture. Those pastors, who viewed the position of the WELS as contradiction to old Missouri and the previous position of the ELFK, held the view that only the “Pfarramt” at a local parish could be understood as the “public ministry”. This special form was especially instituted by god and should work as the extensive “Hirtenamt” or “Weideamt” with all the means of grace. The statement of the apostle Paul to his coworker Titus was understood to be the words of institution for the “Predigtamt oder Pfarramt”: *“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.”* (Tit 1:5). They declared, as a matter of human opinion it would be possible to create “helping offices” out of this office that had been instituted by God. Those “helping offices” were understood as offices that should minister to the “Pfarramt”. And it was differentiated between “helping offices with the word” (e.g. elders of a local parish) and “helping offices without the word” (e.g. financial officers, ushers). But the public ministry could only be understood as the “Pfarramt”. As an office instituted by God it was superior over all the other offices in the church that could only be understood as “helping offices”. In contrast to this the other pastors declared in agreement with the doctrinal position of the WELS, that the general priesthood of all Christians was the basis of all ministries and offices in the church according to the New Testament. The whole of all these activities is summarized as “gospel ministry”, because all of these ministries serve the will of God to save lost sinners through the means of grace. But it is not by chance or by human invention that this gospel ministry is also performed by the public ministry of the church. God has instituted a public ministry that shall serve the church with the gospel in word and sacrament in the name of the community. But this public ministry that is instituted by god includes not only the “Pfarramt” but also all of the other offices of the church that work with the means of grace. The reason for this wider understanding of the public ministry is that there can be found no special word of institution for the “Pfarramt” in the New Testament. It is necessary to gain the complete picture of the office that is instituted by god from several passages and observations. And the picture, the New Testament is drawing of the godly instituted office, fits not only to the “Pfarramt” but also to the other offices of the church, who serve with the means of grace as they are appointed by the church. There is a public ministry instituted by God according to the New Testament writings, but this public ministry can appear in different forms (e.g. the parish pastor, the professor at the theological seminary, the synod president, school teachers at a parish school). According to its nature the “Pfarramt” has to be placed on the same level with the other forms of the public ministry, because all of them serve with the gospel. Nevertheless the “Pfarramt” has to be seen as something special. As the local parish is necessary at all times, where the basic supply with word and sacrament will occur, so this supply shall be provided through the godly instituted public ministry. Because of that there always will be and has to be the public ministry in the local parish to provide the basic supply with word and sacrament to the members of the congregation. It is not possible to get rid of the pastoral ministry. If in addition other forms of the public ministry are necessary and useful has to be meditated in church and local parish and settled under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit under the study of scripture. Because of that the parish ministry of the pastor is the most important but not the only form of the public ministry that is instituted by God.

So there are two questions in the center of the controversy: 1) How do we have to understand the term “church” in the light of scripture? Is it only the local congregation or likewise other gatherings of Christians around the means of grace like a synod or study

groups within a local congregation? 2) What do we have to understand the godly instituted public ministry? Does it only include the “Pfarramt” or also other forms of the public ministry like the theological Professor or a Staff minister (*Katechet*)? Those questions were the center of the controversies that led to many continuing questions and led the ELFK at the end of the 20th century in serious tension test.

1.2. THE CONTROVERSY ON CHURCH AND MINISTRY

In the early nineties of the 20th century doctrinal negotiations were held between the Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the WELS and members of the doctrine committee of the Evangelisch-Lutherische Freikirche about the doctrines of church and ministry. The development of these negotiations in the years 1991 to 1994 and their positive outcome was summarized in a report about the doctrines of church and ministry resolved by both sides. It testified that both synods would not reproach each other to hold to a doctrine that is in contradiction with Holy Scripture. As chairman of the doctrine committee P. Martin Hoffmann reported to the 81st synod convention of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche in Steeden, that agreement could be reached with the WELS in the previous doctrinal negotiations. The pastoral conference had been informed by a written report of the doctrine committee and already before that about the preliminary stages. In the next future the outcome of the negotiations should be discussed and checked. It was announced that a more detailed report should follow on the next synod convention after the conclusion of those discussions.¹

But soon it was getting clear that more clarification was needed within the ELFK. In the discussion of the previous mentioned report in the pastoral conference opposition arose against the position of the WELS. Some pastors viewed the position of the WELS as contradiction to the position of the ELFK that was oriented – as they thought – at old Missouri and especially on Walther. As Pastor Hoffmann resigned from the office as chairman of the doctrine committee for health reasons, Pastor Meinhold was appointed temporary as new chairman. He informed in detail on the next synod convention in Schönfeld about the issues that had broken up. In the meantime the doctrine committee had started to work off on the basis of Scripture and the Lutheran confessions the objections and contradictions that had come up against the outcome of the doctrinal negotiations between WELS and ELFK.² The Synod appointed Dr. Gottfried Herrmann as chairman of the doctrine committee. New members were also appointed to the committee after the Synod: Beside P. Martin Hoffmann, who continued to work within the committee, the pastors Blechschmidt and Voigt, who had raised objections against the doctrinal position of the WELS, were called as new members into the doctrine committee in the hope of clarifying the issues that had broken up.

In the period following the committee gave priority to questions dealing with the understanding of the public ministry. Encouraging progress could be made. The committee was working on questions about the interpretation of the New Testament Passages dealing with the office (Tit 1:5; Acts 20:28; 1Co 12:28; Eph 4:11), the role of woman in reference to the public ministry, statements of the Lutheran confessions about the public ministry and the demarcation of possible forms of the public ministry. The papers were presented to the pastoral conference. At the next Synod Convention in Chemnitz Dr. Herrmann could report that a clarification in some important details had taken place. Agreement had been reached, that the public ministry can take on different forms on the Basis of the New Testament. Yet it was still controversial, how far-reaching the public ministry had to be understood and how the

¹ *Tausendjähriges Reich – Biblische Prüfung einer alten Schwärmerei*. Report of the 81st Synod convention of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche Steeden 1996 (Zwickau: Concordia-Verlag, 1996), p. 55.

² *Der Antichrist & Hausgottesdienst*. Report of the 82nd Synod convention of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche Schönfeld 1998 (Zwickau: Concordia-Verlag, 1998), p. 64-66.

role of the pastoral ministry among the other forms of the public ministry had to be described. Further negotiations seemed to be necessary. Therefore the congregations of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche were asked for patience before a final outcome could be presented.³

But those encouraging progress was turned upside down in the period following. In April 2000 Pastor M. Blechschmidt started new webpages under the headline “Doctrina”. Beside publishing one-sided material to support his position he started to reproach the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and his fellow pastors of the ELFK. Some of the reproaches were rationalism, disregard of the Lutheran confessions or distortion of the teachings of the fathers. Synod president Wilde and Dr. Herrmann were urged to dissociate from the reproaches in a circular mail on August 9th 2000. With that the course of events escalated and the controversy on church and ministry entered a new stage. Because Pastor Blechschmidt continued to incriminate in an even more dramatic way, Wilde and Herrmann were urged to publish a “correction” two weeks later on August 21st 2000. The next pastoral conference in Schönfeld from September 26th till September 28th 2000 showed that the majority of the Pastors didn’t agree with the actions of Pastor Blechschmidt neither according to their form nor according to their content. He was forcefully requested to return to an objective manner of working and to remove the doctrina webpages from the Internet. He rejected both and left the pastoral conference early without joining worship and receiving the Lord’s Supper.⁴

On the first Advent Sunday 2000 the Immanuel-Gemeinde Steeden requested by letter the calling of an extraordinary Synod Convention to clarify the issues that had broken up in the doctrines of the church and the public ministry.⁵ In their circular the congregation reproached the introduction of a new doctrine into the ELFK and the spreading of a rationalistic approach to the bible. Namely they reproached President Wilde, Dr. Herrmann and the Professor of Dogmatics at the Leipzig Seminary (Pastor M. Hoffmann). Afterwards the rest of the pastors addressed the congregations of the ELFK in a circular that had also been signed by members of the Synod Council and the judicial committee. It summarized their doctrinal position on church and ministry and faced the problems of the doctrinal position that was supported by the congregation in Steeden. The circular closes with the following statement:

“This doctrine and practice isn’t new for our Synod. Our fathers have acted in a similar manner within the last 80 years by not suspending church fellowship with the WELS in spite of some questions according to the doctrine of church and ministry. Let us ask the Lord of the church to guide our hearts. May he lead us back to unity, to the unity in the truth of his word. May he have mercy on our Synod and its congregations!”

In January 2001 Pastor Blechschmidt resigned from his membership in the doctrine committee and from his collaborative work in the “Lutherische Gemeindebriefe” and the meditation book published by the ELFK. The Synod Council of the ELFK suggested a conversation between the Steeden congregation and delegates of the ELFK. But the suggestion was rejected by Pastor Blechschmidt. Although the request of the Steeden congregation was answered and an extraordinary Synod Convention was announced for

³ *Der Trost der Rechtfertigung*. Report of the 83rd Synod Convention of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche Chemnitz 2000 (Zwickau: Concordia-Verlag, 2000), p. 56f.

⁴ *Außerordentliche Synode 2001: Berichte und Protokolle*. Hg. im Auftrag der Synode der Ev.-Luth. Freikirche (Zwickau: Concordia-Buchhandlung), p. 8.

⁵ Circular from the Immanuel-Gemeinde Steeden to all congregations of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche dated December 3rd 2000.

September 2001, the Steeden congregation decided to enter a protesting stage on February 11th 2001. The congregation declares in its letter of protest:

“The suggestion to announce an extraordinary Synod for the end of September 2001 does not meet the requirements of the Steeden Immanuel congregation. We consider the doctrinal position of the WELS and its approach to questions of interpreting the Scriptures to be wrong and destructive. Holy Scripture compares every false teaching to spreading cancer (2Tim 2:17) and to yeast working through the whole batch of dough (Gal 5:9). It should be put to an end in the near future.”⁶

So it is after all not surprising that the Steeden congregation left the Synod of the ELFK already on April 22nd 2001 without awaiting the extraordinary Synod that had been announced according to their request and its results. It was nevertheless held in Zwickau from September 21st to September 23rd 2001 and showed compared to other synods a conspicuous novelty. For the first time two doctrinal essays were presented that deviated from each other to introduce both positions to the delegates of the Synod Convention. The first essay was prepared and presented by Pastor Thomas Voigt and Pastor Stephan Müller. It carried the title “About the outcome of the official doctrine negotiations with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod about the doctrines of church and ministry” (*Zum Ergebnis der offiziellen Gespräche mit der Ev.-Luth. Wisconsinssynode über die Lehre von Kirche und Amt*). A printed copy was handed out to the delegates and the official Reports contained summarizing theses of the essay. The second doctrinal essay was presented by Dr. Herrmann and carried the simple headline “Our doctrinal position on church and ministry” (*Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*). In addition bible study groups were held on the subject to help the delegates clarifying the issues. A petition of the pastoral conference contained theses about the doctrines of church and ministry that were supported by Scripture and references to the Lutheran confessions. The doctrinal essay presented by Dr. Herrmann and the theses of the pastoral conference were resolved by the extraordinary synod as the official doctrinal position of the ELFK.⁷

Because of the results of the extraordinary Synod Pastor Thomas Voigt left the Synod of the ELFK in November 2001. So Dr. Herrmann had to report to the 84th Synod Convention of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche in Hartenstein, that Pastor Uwe Klärner had been appointed temporary to the doctrine committee after the resignation of Pastor Voigt and Pastor Blechschmidt. He informed the delegates that the committee had made a big effort to clarify the issues. Many papers on questions and details had been presented and discussed. Most of the papers had also been presented to and discussed by the pastoral conference. Information had also been given to the elders of the congregations. He especially draw the attention of the delegates to the papers on the differences in the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the office, that had been prepared and resolved by the pastoral conference under the title “status controversiae” in 2000 and 2001.⁸

President Wilde mentioned in detail the extraordinary Synod and its results in the President’s report. Because of the resolutions of the extraordinary Synod Pastor Thomas Voigt had resigned from the pastoral ministry in Schönfeld. The congregation called Vikar Holger Weiß who had been ordained and installed into office on March 3rd 2002. Pastor

⁶ Protest letter published by the Immanuel congregation in Steeden on February 11th 2001 about the decision of the voter’s assembly on the same day. (All translations by the researcher)

⁷ *Ergebnisse der Außerordentlichen Synode 2001*. Hg. im Auftrag der Synode der Ev.-Luth. Freikirche (Zwickau: Concordia).

⁸ *Wachsen in allen Stücken*. Report of the 84th Synod Convention of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche Hartenstein 2002 (Zwickau: Concordia, 2002), p. 60.

Stephan Müller had not yet left the Synod of the ELFK. But he had opposed in writing the resolutions of the extraordinary Synod. After extensive preparations a conversation had taken place between Pastor Müller and the doctrine committee but it had not led to a convergence of viewpoints. In February 2002 Pastor Müller was offered the chance to present his matters to the pastoral conference. But he was not able to gain the agreement of the other pastors. He declared to continue presenting his doctrinal position to his congregation and had suspended himself from the Lord's Supper in his Synod. He asked for a procedure of suspension if necessary. President Wilde requested Pastor Müller to associate with the doctrinal position of his Synod or to conclude the started Selfexclusion instead of further weighing upon his conscience by causing trouble in the congregations. Because both objections failed to appear and Pastor Müller continued to accuse his Synod of false doctrine after the Synod Convention 2002 the Synod Council of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche answered his request of Suspension from the pastoral ministry. Some members of his congregation followed Pastor Müller and left the congregation in Jüterbog and the Synod of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche. The members who wanted to stay had asked the Synod Council for help because they had become unsettled by the accusation of false doctrine Pastor Müller insisted to raise against his Synod. In February 2003 Vikar Karsten Drechsler was called into the pastoral ministry. He was ordained and installed into office on February 23rd 2003 in Sernow and served from that on the Immanuel congregation Jüterbog.⁹

The resolutions of the extraordinary Synod also caused serious trouble in the Leipzig congregation. The former president of the Leipzig Seminary, retired Pastor Dr. Gottfried Wachler, also raised the accusation of false doctrine against his Synod. Although he had been retired for a couple of years he had always contributed to the controversy by several papers. Neither by a working group that was started in Leipzig nor by the way of letters between Dr. Wachler and the pastoral conference could the accusation be resolved. Dr. Wachler insisted accusing his Synod of false doctrine. After a final conversation between President R. Borszik Dr. Herrmann and Dr. Wachler had taken place, Wachler left the congregation at Leipzig and the Synod of the ELFK. Some members of the Leipzig congregation had already left the ELFK before him because of the accusation of false teaching.¹⁰

1.3. CONCLUSION

The controversy on church and ministry lasted from its beginning to its last effects for more than a decade. It required a lot of strength and opened many wounds. One congregation left the Synod of the ELFK, in three congregations the controversy caused heavy strife und the loss of several members. Three pastors left the ELFK to form independent Lutheran congregations. This is a moving example how Satan struggles to win those who are faithful to Scripture and how crafty he acts to seduce faithful Christians to depart from the sound doctrine of Scripture. One has to agree with the final statement Dr. Herrmann made in his report to the Synod Convention in Hartenstein looking back on the controversy:

“The events of the past years should have made us modest and humble. If our little Synod has been prevented before total destruction it is alone by the undeserved grace of our faithful God. He leads us into temptations, so that we become “good theologians” as Luther once said (Walch² 14,436). But he also

⁹ *Schmeckt und seht wie freundlich der Herr ist*. Report of the 85th Synod Convention of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche Zwickau-Planitz 2004 (Zwickau: Concordia, 2004), p. 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40. Later Dr. Wachler returned to the ELFK some months before his death. He was buried by Pastor M. Hoffmann in Leipzig. Many of the other pastors of the ELFK were present.

leads us continuing into prayer. May the lord have mercy on us and be gracious to us!”¹¹

After this introductory survey on the controversy on church and ministry that could only cover some corners and fundamental issues, now the contribution of Pastor Thomas Voigt shall be examined in more detail. Therefore it seems appropriate to gain first of all some information about his personal development.

2. THE PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THOMAS VOIGT

Thomas Voigt was born on June 13th 1964 in Zwickau. From childhood he belonged together with his Mother Lucie Voigt (born as Lucie Kolodjezak; she died in Zwickau 2008) and his brothers Matthias and Andreas to St. Petri, the congregation of the ELFK in Zwickau. Around the time of the political changes in the former GDR, Thomas Voigt once called political attention to himself: At a mass rally he spoke before 10 000 citizens of Zwickau for the political party SPD.¹² As a result of that, President Wilde as his bishop left the decision to Thomas Voigt between a political career or the pastoral ministry. Voigt made a decision for the pastoral ministry and continued his training that had already started some years before.

He received his theological training at the Lutheran theological Seminary of the ELFK (*Lutherisches Theologisches Seminar*) in Leipzig from 1982 to 1988. On July 1st 1988 he passed his first finals. He wrote his thesis in the New Testament area on the subject of the non idealistic interpretation of Scripture and questions of modern hermeneutic (*Die nichtidealistische Schriftauslegung*). After his finals he served as a vicar first under the guidance of Dr. Wachler in Leipzig from 1988 to 1989. Afterwards he changed his area of activity and served as a vicar in Zwickau-Planitz under the guidance of President Wilde till 1990. On July 16th 1990 he passed his second finals at the Lutheran theological Seminary in Leipzig. Again he wrote his thesis in the New Testament area about the mission strategies of the apostle Paul (*Die Missionsmethoden des Apostel Paulus*).

After passing his second finals Thomas Voigt received a call to the Emmausgemeinde Schönfeld whose longtime pastor Gotthilf Döhler was planning to retire in 1990.¹³ Pastor Döhler preached his farewell sermon on October 21st 1990. One week later Thomas Voigt was ordained and installed into his office on October 28th 1990. Ten pastors of the ELFK were present. Pre-eminent events in the time of his pastoral ministry in Schönfeld were the 82nd Synod Convention of the ELFK that was held from June 5th to 7th 1998 in Schönfeld and the 75th anniversary of the Schönfeld congregation that was celebrated on June 27th 1999.¹⁴ Furthermore the extensive rebuilding of the church building, that had been dedicated 1977, was resolved and planned in the time of Voigts pastoral ministry in Schönfeld. Unfortunately these plans could only be put into practice and be completed after his leaving while already a new pastor was serving the Schönfeld congregation.

On June 18th 1994 Thomas Voigt was married to Susanne Leckelt, who had been a member of the Schönfeld Congregation since childhood. God blessed the marriage with four children. Three of them were born in the time of Voigts pastoral ministry in Schönfeld: Annegret (1995), Richard (1997) and Albrecht (2000). The fourth child, Rüdiger, was born

¹¹ *Wachsen in allen Stücken*, p. 62.

¹² Article of the „Freie Presse“ dated November 14th 1989. The „SPD“ (= Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) is one of the main political parties in Germany.

¹³ Gotthilf Döhler served the Emmausgemeinde as pastor from 1958 to 1990. After his retirement he continued as chairman of the doctrine committee of the ELFK, but moved after retirement from the pastoral ministry from Schönfeld to Altengesees in Thüringen. In Altengesees he died on March 29th 1993. Cf. *Verzeichnis der Gemeinden und Pastoren – Ev.-Luth. Freikirche von 1876 bi 1996* (Zwickau: Concordia, 1996), p. 72f.

¹⁴ Cf. *Festschrift zum 75jährigen Gemeindejubiläum der Emmausgemeinde Schönfeld – Annaberg*. Ed. T. Voigt, S. Sprenger, K. Drechsler, A. Drechsler (Zwickau: Concordia), p. 12f.

after Voigt had left the ELFK (2002). On the Synod level Thomas Voigt besides his later collaboration in the doctrine committee served as chairman of the radio work, which was done under his leadership for a long time.

According to the controversy on church and ministry it soon became clear that Thomas Voigt couldn't hope to receive much support by his own congregation. This becomes clearly visible in a petition Voigt filed at the voter's assembly on February 11th 2001. It should be resolved that the building plans of the congregation should be interrupted for a period of one year because of tensions in the ELFK about the doctrines of church and ministry, which had also come to light between the elders and the pastor of the Schönfeld congregation. In the voter's assembly on February 11th 2001 Pastor Voigt informed the congregation about the situation in the Synod and about the difference between Pastor and elders of the congregation. A discussion of the subject was announced. It should take place after the studies of papers on the issues.¹⁵

At the next voter's assembly on June 10th 2001 the invitation to the extraordinary Synod in Zwickau from September 21st to 23rd 2001 was announced. Thomas Voigt gave some explanations on the issues and handed out a paper to the members about the "differences in the doctrine of the office". The members were asked to study the paper at home. Pastor Voigt reported that the Steeden congregation had left the ELFK, and announced another voter's assembly before the extraordinary Synod. The elder Karl-Ernst Drechsler was appointed as Delegate of the Schönfeld congregation for the extraordinary Synod.¹⁶

The announced voter's assembly was held on August 19th 2001 after Sunday worship. The assembly was informed that there were going to be two petitions at the extraordinary synod on the issues of church and ministry. Apparent a discussion arose about the theses of the pastoral conference and the petition of Pastor Voigt and Pastor Müller, but the minutes provide no further information about the discussion. No agreement could be reached over the petition of the opposing Pastors and the theses of the pastoral conference. The discussion was closed by the congregation unanimous.¹⁷

After the issues had been extensively discussed and resolved by the extraordinary Synod in Zwickau from September 21st to 23rd 2001, the delegate Karl-Ernst Drechsler reported at the next voter's assembly on October 14th 2001 in Schönfeld about the negotiations and resolutions of the Synod Convention. Pastor Voigt declared that now also a decision had to be made in the Schönfeld congregation. After a violent discussion Pastor as Voters declared the need for a quick clarification. Some of the brothers requested once more the Pastor to repent. As those attempts failed, a decision was made. By standing up from their seats 27 brothers voted for the resolutions of the extraordinary Synod, two brothers voted against it and two brothers renounced the right to vote. After the decision Thomas Voigt resigned from the pastoral ministry of the Schönfeld congregation and the ELFK.¹⁸

After leaving the Schönfeld congregation and the Synod of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche Thomas Voigt moved with his family to Annaberg-Buchholz. After a short time of unemployment he opened a bookstore with a second-hand bookshop to earn a living. Since then he only served as a part-time pastor. Once a month he travels to Bahren near Leipzig to conduct worship in the house of the Hecht family, former members of the Leipzig congregation of the ELFK. On the other weekends he conducts worship in his house in Annaberg-Buchholz, but those worship services are probably only attended by the members of his family.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Minutes of the voter's assembly on February 11th 2001*, p. 2 (Point 3).

¹⁶ *Minutes of the voter's assembly on June 10th 2001*, p. 2 (Point 5).

¹⁷ *Minutes of the voter's assembly on August 19th 2001*, p. 2 (Point 3).

¹⁸ *Minutes of the voter's assembly on October 10th 2001*, p. 2.

¹⁹ Cf.: <http://www.lutherisch.info/Gottesdienste/gottesdienste.html>

3. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THOMAS VOIGT TO THE CONTROVERSY ON CHURCH AND MINISTRY

While Pastor Martin Blechschmidt prepared a lot of shorter papers to detailed questions²⁰, we don't have many papers prepared by Thomas Voigt. In the beginning Thomas Voigt expressed his position by handing out papers prepared by the former president of the seminary Dr. Gottfried Wachler. He also expressed his viewpoint in discussions of the pastoral conference and through his collaboration in the doctrinal committee. The result of this collaboration was the "Status controversiae", a summarized comparison of the two positions. Thomas Voigt was one of the decisive authors of the documents. The most detailed written elaboration is the doctrinal essay that was prepared by Thomas Voigt and Stephan Müller and presented by both Pastors to the extraordinary Synod. The major part of the essay was prepared by Thomas Voigt. Therefore it is suitable to demonstrate and evaluate the position of Thomas Voigt in the doctrines of the church and its ministry.

3.1. THE CONVENTION ESSAY FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY SYNOD 2001

3.1.0. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Normally it is not a custom in the Synod Conventions of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche to have several convention essays that contradict each other. Usually there is one essay. The Convention will examine and resolve its content to be in agreement with the official doctrinal position of the ELFK. With the extraordinary Synod a different way of action was chosen. As an answer to their request Pastor Müller and Pastor Voigt received the opportunity to present their doctrinal position to the delegates. By the way of two essays both positions were presented to the Convention to examine the issues once more in detail and bring them to a final clarification.

The essay of Pastor Voigt and Müller carries the headline "About the outcome of the official doctrinal negotiations with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod about the doctrines of church and ministry" (*Zum Ergebnis der offiziellen Gespräche mit der Ev.-Luth. Wisconsin synode über die Lehre von Kirche und Amt*). Its title draws the attention back to the trigger of the controversy: the doctrinal negotiations with the WELS that had taken place in the beginning of the nineties and that had led to agreement in both doctrines between the synods – according to the delegates of the ELFK who attended those negotiations. Pastor Voigt and Pastor Müller were not willing to accept this outcome without hesitation. The essay should explain and justify, why this was the case.

The essay is divided in three parts. The first part deals with the foundations of the doctrines of church and ministry. The second chapter is about "the one church, the parish and other gatherings in the church". The third and last part deals with the doctrine of the ministry and carries the headline "The godly instituted pastoral ministry and other offices in church and parish". Each part is divided in several subdivisions. In its form the essay is similar to the dogmatic lectures in our Seminary. It follows the method doctrinal essays were prepared in

²⁰ For example: „Is that was an apostle wrote in a specific historic situation of lasting significance for the church at all times“ (*Gilt das, was ein Apostel in einer speziellen historischen Situation schreibt, der Kirche aller Zeiten*; Bibelstunde vom 12.9.1997), "Comparison of quotations about Tit 1:5ff which show the difference of interpretation" (*Gegenüberstellung von Zitaten zu Tit 1,5ff, an denen der Unterschied der Auslegung deutlich wird*) or "Notes on the doctrine of the church and on the doctrine of the holy preaching office or Pfarramt" (*Stichpunkte über die Lehre von der Kirche und Stichpunkte über die Lehre vom Heiligen Predigtamt oder Pfarramt*; Dezember 2000).

earlier times: Each doctrinal statement is summarized in a short these that will then extensively be explained and justified. But most of the time the important points come to light in the extensive explanations of the theses, so that the theses for themselves are not enough to get a proper understanding of what the presenter wants to say. The first two chapters on the foundations and the doctrine of the church were prepared and presented by Thomas Voigt. Stephan Müller is the author of the third part. But as we deal with a common essay that was prepared and presented by both Pastors, it is obvious, that Thomas Voigt stands in for the content of the third part as for the content of the first two chapters. Therefore the third part of the essay will also be presented and evaluated in this paper.

3.1.1. THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE DOCTRINES OF CHURCH AND MINISTRY

3.1.1.1. THE REPROACH OF MISSING FAITHFULNESS TO SCRIPTURE

At first glance nothing strange will be found in the first thesis of the essay. It points to the central Scripture passage on the inspiration of Scripture (2Tim 3:16) and concludes, that the statements of Scripture about “Church and parish, the administration of the means of grace and other offices of the church” are decisive, because Scripture is the guiding principle and norm in all matters of faith and doctrine.²¹ Concluding it is stated, that no ceremonial law is established, if evangelical orders are derived from the respective passages.

But the following explanations make plain, what the presenter is talking about. The objective of Voigt is to prove the influence of Höfling, a former theologian of Erlangen, on the WELS theology by pointing to alleged parallels between the WELS and the philosophical draft. By doing this he in the end reproaches the sister synod of missing faithfulness to scripture: WELS would stand in for a doctrine in the matters of church and ministry that would not have derived from Scripture but from philosophical methods.

Voigt tries to justify this assumption with an extensive historical excursus. First of all he describes the influence of the historical philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling on the controversies on church and ministry in the 19th century. Schelling declared, every branch of science should build for itself an organism and every theory should have to fit in the whole in an organic manner.²² Several theologians adopted this method, although by doing that they reached different results.

As a first example Voigt mentions the lawyer F.J. Stahl, who worked in addition with philosophy and theology. According to his conviction the church was an institution God uses to bring salvation to human beings. Beside the church there was the institution of the state, which has to watch over law and order according to the will of god. Both institutions had a different purpose but would be similar in structure. Therefore the church as institution of salvation needed polished rules. The leading office is of special importance. It has to reign the church as the government reigns the state. Theologians like Kliefoth, Münchmeyer, Vilmar and others followed Stahl, but each of them developed some specifics.²³

But also opposition arose against the “salvation institution” declared by Stahl. Many felt, the church would be pressed in a legal corset. The Missouri theologian C.F.W. Walther rightly criticized Stahl on the basis of Scripture. But many others criticized on the basis of the philosophy of Schelling by keeping the idea that the church was an organism. In this case the church was described as an “evangelical organism”.²⁴ At this point Voigt draws the attention

²¹ *Synodalreferat zum Ergebnis der offiziellen Gespräche mit der Ev.-Luth. Wisconsin-Synode (WELS) über die Lehre von Kirche und Amt.* Prepared and presented by Pfr. Th. Voigt, Schönfeld (Part 1 and 2) and Pfr. St. Müller, Jüterbog (Part 3), p. 1 (Thesis 1.1.).

²² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

to the Erlangen theological Professor Wilhelm Höfling, who should have had an immense influence on the theology of the WELS. Höfling declared that the church as an evangelical organism would have no lasting orders for all times. By erecting such orders a new ceremonial law would be established. Instead of that everything could and should be freely organized.²⁵

Voigt admits that the WELS surely would not teach exactly the same doctrine as Wilhelm Höfling. But Höfling should have had an immense influence on the theology of the WELS. At this point Voigt refers to the former Wauwatosa theologians Philipp Koehler, August Pieper and John Schaller with whom today's viewpoint of the WELS would be closely connected. He quotes from an article written by August Pieper that has been published again in the WELS-Ministry-Compendium. The quote closes with the following statement:

“Was überdies die Apostel durch den Heiligen Geist oder nach dem guten christlichen Menschenverstand anordneten oder örtlich oder zeitlich oder für die bestehenden Umstände einrichteten, aus dem darf nicht ein allgemeingültiges Gesetz gemacht werden, es sei denn, dass es in der Tat auf dem Wesen der Kirche selbst oder auf dem Gebot der Liebe beruht.”²⁶

Voigt understands this last statement as a parallel to Höfling. It would be declared, that anyone who traces binding rules from Scripture for the church at all times would establish a new ceremonial law. From the start it would be negated, that guidelines for the structure of the congregation and the establishment of the concrete pastoral ministry are given in the New Testament, because such guidelines would signify a new ceremonial law. But such an assumption would not be based on Scripture but on Höfling's philosophical idea of the church as an “evangelical organism”.²⁷

According to his philosophical viewpoint Höfling would have negated a godly institution of the public ministry because otherwise a new ceremonial law would be created. Just from an inner necessity the ministry would be established by the church. If Höfling nevertheless in regard to the ministry occasionally would be talking about a godly institution, merely an abstract “office of the gospel” would be meant. Altogether Höfling would draw from the philosophical thesis that all the inner things (nature) would have to find their expression in the outer things (forms, offices). Although the WELS would teach a godly institution of the public ministry, the sister synod would not equate the public ministry with the pastoral ministry (*Pfarramt*). At this point again one would come across the distinction between a godly instituted nature (*Wesen*) and the form that should be practically organized (*praktisch auszugestaltende Form*). Voigt concludes his explanations of the first thesis with the question, if this distinction could not be viewed as another parallel to Höfling.

The accusation of Thomas Voigt against the WELS is not a new reproach. Since many decades the WELS again and again has been reproached (mainly from members of the Missouri Synod) to teach under the influence of Höfling a doctrine on church and ministry that would not be in accordance with Scripture. But the fact that a reproach is found again and again for a long time does not mean that it is justified. An impartial examination of the doctrinal position of the WELS draws a completely different picture. In their theses on church and ministry, resolved by the WELS Synod Convention 1969, the WELS regarding those old reproaches clearly encloses itself from Höfling. In the theses on the doctrine of the ministry it says:

²⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 4. Voigt quotes and translates from the WELS Ministry Compendium, p. 32f.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 4f.

“Thus these public ministers are appointed by God. Ac 20:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Co 12:28. It would be wrong to trace the origin of this public ministry to mere expediency (Hoefling).”²⁸

In addition Joel L. Pless recently made plain the attitude of the WELS towards Höfling in a series published in the theological journal of the WELS (Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly). The series, that is published over four editions of the periodical, shows a much more thorough and balanced portrayal of Höfling’s position than the one that can be drawn from the assumptions of Thomas Voigt about Höfling and the WELS. He starts with a portrayal of the life and work of Höfling and then goes on in the second part to describe Höfling’s doctrinal position on the church. It can be summarized in four key questions: 1) The invisible church is the inner communion of faith. 2) The visible church is the gathering institution for the faith. 3) The confession (namely the Lutheran confessions) is the distinguishing mark of the true visible church. 4) Mission is the means of dissemination of the church.²⁹ Pless makes plain, what Höfling really means by defining the church as an “evangelical organism”:

“Thus Christ is the common Lord over all believers, and therefore all believers are united with Christ and they themselves experience a unity with each other. Believers have fellowship with Christ, their faith is sealed through Word and Sacrament, and this is also their bond with one another. It is in this sense that Hoefling understood the Christian church, defining it as the ‘product of the crafted, common faith by the Holy Spirit in Christians’ and as ‘the organism of the common activity of this faith.’”³⁰

Pless also mentions the reservations that have to be made against Höfling as he shows a dependency on Schleiermacher in his ecclesiological definitions (especially in his understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit and the means of grace).³¹

The third part of the series deals with Höfling’s doctrine of the ministry. Again Pless makes rightly plain, that Höfling shows in opposition to many romanising positions of high church Lutherans in his days at many points a refreshing faithfulness to Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. But Pless also clearly carves out the Weakness of Höfling’s doctrinal position:

“Loathing a return to Roman Catholicism and a Romanist view of the ministry, Hoefling conceptualized his theology in a very Lutheran way – according to the broad outlines of the formal and material principles of the Reformation – the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of justification. Most of the time, Hoefling landed on his feet, but with the doctrine of the ministry, his insistence that there were no ceremonial or legal regulations in the New Testament led him to deny that Jesus Christ specifically instituted the public ministry. Hoefling believed that Jesus Christ founded the church and the means of grace, but he saw the church as being the originator of the public ministry, largely as a matter of necessity and expediency. (...) So in summary, Hoefling’s concern to avoid New Testament ceremonial and legalistic regulations and his desire

²⁸ *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS. Prepared by the Commission on Inter-Church Relations of the WELS 1997* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House), p. 50 (II. D 5).

²⁹ Joel L. Pless. *Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling: The Man and His Ecclesiology. Part 2: His Doctrine of the Church*. In: “Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly”. Vol. 106 (2/2009), p. 85.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

not to turn the public ministry into a third means of grace is to be commended, but his concerns ultimately drove him into a proverbial theological ditch by denying a New Testament divine institution of the public ministry.”³²

In the fourth and last part of the series Pless deals with the alleged connection between Höfling and the three Wauwatosa theologians August Pieper, John Schaller and Philipp Koehler, that has again and again been asserted. First of all he mentions the sources of these assertions. Afterwards he looks for empirical proofs for the asserted connection and finally reaches the conclusion:

“This researcher has concluded that there is empirical evidence to conclude that at least two of the three Wauwatosa men seem to have read and studied Hoefling. This took place in the early days of the twentieth century as they sought to articulate the revelation of Scripture on the doctrines of church and ministry. The only point this actually proves is that the Wauwatosa Triumvirate of Koehler, Pieper, and Schaller found it important to be well-read about the theologians and controversies of their day – an eloquent demonstration that they belonged in a seminary classroom. What cannot be analytically measured is Hoefling’s possible influence on any of the Wauwatosa men. (...) Koehler, Pieper and Schaller conducted their studies in church and ministry the way they confessed doing it and the way history has recorded them doing it, the answer to that question is that Erlangen had a negligible effect. The Wauwatosa Theology was distinctly an exegetical movement – a return to performing the theological task by momentarily laying aside systematic theology and going back to the source of Christian theology – the Scriptures themselves. If the Wauwatosa seminary faculty derived even some of their ideas about ecclesiology from Hoefling’s largely systematic work, they would indeed be something less than the men they claimed to be.”³³

Having all of this in mind, one clearly sees that the reproach of Thomas Voigt towards WELS and ELFK of missing faithfulness to Scripture is completely unjustified. The following portrayal and evaluation of his essay will rather make plain, that his doctrinal position in fact is much less scriptural than the doctrinal position of the WELS and the ELFK.

3.1.1.2. THE REPROACH OF “SCHWÄRMEREI”

At first sight also the second thesis in the essay of Voigt seems plausible. He declares that the statements of Scripture must not be distorted or overlooked. Nothing should be added to the teaching of the Scriptures. He concludes that whatever is organized by a church or congregation in regard to their own affairs must not be put on the same level with the instructions of the Holy Scriptures.

Again one has to read the explanation to grasp what Voigt is really talking about in this second thesis. He reproaches the WELS to go beyond the teaching of scripture and become guilty of the so called “Schwärmerei”. Voigt points to the necessity of distinguishing between the enlightenment by the Holy Spirit and human based regulations of the church. The Holy Spirit certainly would guide the actions of Christians, who ask for his enlightenment. But the actions and decisions of Christians needed to be understood as human based

³² Joel L. Pless. *Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling: The Man and His Ecclesiology Part 3: His Doctrine of the Ministry*. In: “Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly”. Vol. 106 (3/2009), p. 169f.

³³ Joel L. Pless. *Johann Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling: The Man and His Ecclesiology Part 4: His Doctrine of the Ministry and WELS*. In: “Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly”. Vol. 106 (4/2009), p. 257

regulations of the church that are not inspired by the Holy Spirit as the biblical instructions. They could be wrong and had to be put on a completely different level than the instructions of Scripture.³⁴

At this point Voigt again draws the attention to one of the Wauwatosa theologians that he considers to be the founder of the “new doctrines on church and ministry” promoted by the WELS. Voigt is talking of Philipp Koehler, whom he also considers to be influenced by Höfling. He quotes from Koehler’s church history book. In this longer quotation Koehler makes plain, that the “Pfarramt” has to be seen as a special form (*Spezies*) of the public ministry developed in the German Middle Ages and that the local congregation has to be understood as a special form (*Spezies*) of the general term “church”. In both cases the term “institution” would not signify that God had priced both forms in opposition to other forms in the life of the church by a special prescription. The term “institution” would rather signify a godly creation of forms (Pastoral ministry, Synod, Local congregation and so on) by the work of the Holy Spirit within Christianity, as the Christians establish those things in regard to the outer circumstances in Christian freedom.³⁵

In contrast to that Voigt declares, the bible bound Lutheran Church always understood the term “institution” as an instruction of the lord revealed through Scripture. The WELS would place ecclesiological Regulations on the same level with Scripture, so that the word of man and the word of God would stand side by side. The assertion of the direct work of the Holy Spirit and the statement, this actions would be a godly creation of forms, would in fact be nothing else then “Schwärmerei”. Regulations of godly right would not be distinguished from regulations of human right in the WELS position. The missing of this distinction had already been the reason for many evils and controversies in the early church and would signify a disastrous setting of courses.³⁶

But in fact WELS and ELFK are only taking a firm hold on the truth, that there is no special form of the □□□□□□□□□□ and the public ministry instituted in Scripture. Because of this the forms of the public ministry can be organized by Christians in the manner of Christian freedom. They do this by the support of the Holy Spirit through the gift of the common faith, because whatever Christians do will be done in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him (cf. Col 3:17). But this in fact has nothing to do with “Schwärmerei”. It rather signifies a careful dealing with things that Scripture places in the area of Christian freedom and that can and shall be organized by the Believers in a fitting and orderly way (1 Co 14:40).

3.1.1.3. THE REPROACH OF MISSING FAITHFULNESS TO THE CONFESSIONS

The third and last thesis of the first part is not primarily aiming at the WELS but at the Pastors of the ELFK. The thesis shortly states, that the Lutheran confessions are not inspired by the Holy Spirit. In regard to doctrine Holy Scripture had to be understood as *norma normans*. Nevertheless also the confessions had to be regarded as norm in regard to doctrine, because (quia) they are the right interpretation of Scripture (*norma normata*). It would be a cancellation of the confessions, when the Lutheran Confessions would only be described as a signpost leading us into Scripture and instructing us to an independent study of Scripture.³⁷

The following explanation reveals the reason for the concluding third thesis: Papers and discussions in the previous time had shown an attitude of clear distance to the Lutheran confessions. Warnings had been brought up about dangers coming from an intimate

³⁴ *Synodalreferat*, p. 6.

³⁵ *Synodalreferat*, p. 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7f.

³⁷ *Synodalreferat*, p. 8.

relationship to the confessions. All of that would have flown into the statement that the Lutheran Confessions should only be understood as a signpost leading to an independent study of Scripture.³⁸

In contrast to this Voigt declares that the Lutheran Church had never placed the confessions on the same level as the Scriptures. The confessions are not inspired by the Holy Spirit. Because of that every doctrine of the church has (possibly) to be verified by Scripture. Nevertheless the Lutheran confessions would be for every Lutheran of great value. The statements of the confessions had also to be understood as a norm for doctrinal statements, because they are scooped from Scripture. But this fact would be obscured, if the confessions would only be understood as a signpost leading to independent study of Scripture. The confessions rather had to be viewed as a flag by which the orthodox church could be recognized and around which it gathers. Voigt recalls a statement of the constitution of the ELFK which declares, that all controversies on faith and doctrine need to be evaluated and settled by the Lutheran confessions, and points to the ordination vow of the Pastors. He closes his explanations on the third thesis with two quotes from John Sullivan about the timeless truth of the confessions and the necessity for a continuing study of the Lutheran confessions.³⁹

How completely unjustified this last reproach of Voigt against his fellow Pastors of the ELFK is can clearly be drawn from the fact, that all theses on church and ministry, that were resolved from the extraordinary Synod as official doctrinal statements of the ELFK, are not only proven with Passages from Scripture but in addition with many references to the Lutheran confessions.⁴⁰ Neither the lasting validity of the Lutheran confessions nor their significance as *norma normata* in all questions of faith and doctrine has ever been questioned. In contrast to this Dr. Herrmann declares in the introduction of his essay clarifying:

“Our Lutheran confessions can be a great help in this effort. But they must not be placed before the Holy Scripture. We accept thankfully what our Lutheran Confessions teach about the clear doctrine of Scripture. They are for us much more than only a “signpost” leading to the bible, they are a summary of Christian doctrine gained from Scripture. But they don’t answer every question we are struggling with today. Some of the issues about church and ministry that are discussed in our times were no issues at all when the confessions were written in the 16th century. The bible is the final standard. On this standard also the confessions have to be measured (they are a norm which is normed by the bible).”⁴¹

3.1.2. THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

In the second part of the essay Thomas Voigt elaborates on his doctrine of the church, which he summarizes under the headline “The one church, the parish and other gatherings in the church” (*Die eine Kirche, die Kirchengemeinde und andere kirchliche Zusammenschlüsse*). He develops in four theses his conviction, that only the local congregation with its pastoral ministry should be defined with the attribute “church”. In contrast to this the WELS and the majority of the Pastors of the ELFK teach that secondary groups as a Synod or gatherings of Christians within a local congregation have also to be understood as “church” according to their nature.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 8f.

⁴⁰ *Thesen zur Lehre von Kirche und Amt (Synodalthesen 2001)*. In: „Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Lehre von Kirche und Amt“. Published by the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche (Zwickau: Concordia-Buchhandlung, 2002) p. 199-201.

⁴¹ G. Herrmann. *Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*. In: „Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Lehre von Kirche und Amt“, p. 203.

would offer no clue, that the New Testament would use the term $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha$ beyond the level of a local congregation.

But one is not able to agree with Voigt's conclusions after a careful exegesis of the mentioned passages. First of all his translation of $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha$ is not convincing in regard to the grammar. The preposition *kata*; is basically used in the New Testament in a local ("over") or temporal ("while, at") sense. Figuratively the preposition is used in the sense "corresponding", "in accordance with". Frequently it is used in a distributive sense like for example in regard to $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha$ in Acts 2:46 ($\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha$ = from house to house). Then the preposition is also used in the sense "in the regard to", where as a possible translation also "towards ... to" is mentioned.⁴³ In any case, Bauer translates the phrase in his Dictionary simple as "die Hausgemeinde jmds." (= the house church of somebody).⁴⁴ And about these house congregations Wetzel remarks:

"The question about the relation of house congregation and local congregation is in such a way answered in the New Testament, that the local congregation is comprised of different house congregations. Because of that gatherings of Christians today in different houses that developed of the bible study groups in Pietism are a modern form of the house congregation within a local congregation."⁴⁵

And a careful exegesis of the Passages mentioned by Voigt will lead one to agree with Wetzel's conclusions. At last the house church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla mentioned in Rom 16:5 does certainly not describe the whole Christian congregation in Rome. It is found within a long list of greetings that contains members of the Roman congregation who are obviously no members of the house church mentioned in Rom 16:5. Murray concludes rightly:

"The fact that the church in the house of Aquila and Prisca is particularly mentioned in this list of greetings shows that it did not comprise the whole church at Rome. Hence there would be other *churches* and it would be proper to speak of the churches in Rome."⁴⁶

Stöckhardt concludes similarly:

"In larger cities the gatherings of Christians for worship were held in different places, because they were too many for one house. As in Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla offered their house also in Rome for such a gathering of a part of the local congregation."⁴⁷

⁴³ E.G. Hoffmann, H. von Siebenthal. *Griechische Grammatik zum Neuen Testament* (Riehen: Immanuel, 1990), § 184 k.

⁴⁴ W. Bauer. *Griechisches-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testament und der frühchristlichen Literatur*. Edited by K. and B. Aland (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1988), Sp. 1136.

⁴⁵ K. Wetzel. *Hausgemeinde*. In: „Das große Bibellexikon“. Vol. 2 (Wuppertal, Gießen: Brockhaus and Brunnen, 1990), p. 534. („Die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Hausgemeinde und Ortsgemeinde wird im NT dahingehend beantwortet, dass die Ortsgemeinde sich aus verschiedenen Hausgemeinden zusammensetzt. Von daher stellen die aus den im Pietismus entstandenen Bibelkreisen hervorgegangenen Hauskreise eine zeitgemäße Form der Hausgemeinden innerhalb der Ortsgemeinde dar.“)

⁴⁶ J. Murray. *The epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 229.

⁴⁷ G. Stöckhardt. *Commentar über den Brief Pauli an die Römer* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1907), p. 638. („In größeren Städten wurden die gottesdienstlichen Versammlungen der Christen, weil ein Haus sie nicht fasste, in verschiedenen Localen gehalten. Wie in Ephesus, so hatten Aquila und Priscilla auch in Rom ihr Haus zu einer solchen Versammlung eines Theils der Ortsgemeinde dargeboten.“)

Rom 16:5 in fact is a very good proof reference for the fact, that the New Testament does not only use the term *ekklesia* beside the invisible church for a visible local congregation as Voigt asserts. Rather also gatherings of Christians are named *synagoga*, that are not comprised of all Christians of a local congregation but only of a part of them. Because of that reason it is in line with Scripture, when we understand gatherings of Christians within a local congregation as teenage or adult bible study groups as *synagoga*. As believers also gather in such cases around the word of god, they are church in regard to their nature even as it is not in the form of the whole local congregation.

But there is another false estimation in the background of Voigt's explanations as it becomes visible in his conclusions about the congregations in Jerusalem and Corinth. He stresses that the Jerusalem congregation gathered regularly around the means of grace. And he concludes from the admonition in 1 Co 11:20, that the celebration of the Lord's Supper missed frequently in the Corinthian congregation ("*When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat*"). Therefore the congregation was admonished by the apostle Paul to remedy the defect. Voigt obviously concludes that a gathering of Christians can only be called *ekklesia* if word and sacrament are present. But a careful study of 1 Co 11:20 in its context reveals that the problem in Corinth was not that the congregation had an insufficient celebration of the Lord's Supper. There were a number of severe irregularities because of whom it was questionable that they after all still received the Lord's Supper, when they gathered for communion. See comments on the Passage:

“But now he moves on to give content to the ‘divisions’ about which he had been informed. They well may be ‘together in the same place’, but ‘it is not the Lord's Supper you eat’.”⁴⁸

Dr. Herrmann rightly states in his essay “Our doctrinal position on church and ministry”:

“This Sentence [= Augsburg. Confession VII, who marks “word and sacrament” as marks of the church; HW] must not be misinterpreted as if the presence of the church could only be believed, where at the same time both – word and sacrament is in use. Holy Scriptures states nowhere that word and sacrament do always have to be connected. Otherwise every simple preaching worship service would be inferior, in any case the gathered Christians in such a case would not be ‘church’.”⁴⁹

3.1.2.2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY AND THE EXERCISE OF THE OFFICE OF THE KEYS

In the second thesis Voigt speaks about the rights of the local congregations. First of all every parish has the right and the responsibility to establish the public ministry. Further every congregation regardless of its size has the right to exercise the office of the keys in its

⁴⁸ G. Fee. *The first epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1987), p. 539.

⁴⁹ G. Herrmann. *Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*“, p. 205. („Diesen Satz [= die Aussage des Bekenntnisses, dass ‚Wort und Sakrament‘ die Kennzeichen der Kirche sind (CA VII); HW] darf man allerdings nicht so missverstehen, als ob das Vorhandensein der Kirche nur dort geglaubt werden dürfe, wo gleichzeitig beides – Wort **und** Sakrament gebraucht wird. Die Heilige Schrift sagt nirgends, dass Wort und Sakrament stets gekoppelt vorkommen müssen. Sonst wäre jeder einfache Predigtgottesdienst minderwertig, jedenfalls wären die dabei Versammelten nicht ‚Kirche‘.“)

special sense. Voigt verifies the thesis by pointing to Mat 18:17 and in the confessions to Tract. 24; SA C 7,1.⁵⁰

In his explanation of the thesis Voigt first speaks about the establishment of the public ministry. But he is mainly interested in the responsibility of the local congregation to establish the public ministry; that it also has the right, to do that, is assumed after it has been mentioned in the summarizing thesis. Voigt points to the example of the early congregation in Jerusalem, where the public ministry was fulfilled by the apostles (Acts 2; Acts 6:4). After the founding of new congregations the apostles appointed by Christ saw to it that in every congregation elders were appointed. This statement would proof that God wanted every congregation to have at least one preacher and shepherd of souls (*Prediger und Seelenhirten*). According to Acts 20:28 the Holy Spirit appoints to the office of an overseer over the congregation (*Gemeindebischofsamt*); therefore this could only be a godly instruction. Following the statement of Tit 1:5 this order should be established everywhere, where it hasn't been done yet.⁵¹

To establish the preaching ministry (*Predigtamt*) in every congregation would be a binding godly Order for the church until the end of time. There certainly might be emergency cases, when a flock had to stay without a shepherd; but by this emergency case would not abolish the godly instruction in general. This biblical instruction even left his mark on our language usage: we call a congregation without a Pastor a “vacant” parish (from the Latin *vacare* = empty, unoccupied). The office would belong to the congregation: the place for the preacher would be in principle available, but in a vacant parish it is momentarily unoccupied. It would be a contradiction to the biblical order, if □□□□□□□□□□ (*Ekklesien*) would remain in principle (*von vorneherein*) without a shepherd. Certainly the church could establish groups or committees which naturally would not appoint a Pastor; but as such groups or committees were not named “Ekklesia” in Scripture we shouldn't do it either.⁵²

But it contrast to this it needs to be stated, that it is indeed in line with Scripture to call such groups or committees “Ekklesia”, because these groups also gather around the means of grace. They usually will not celebrate the Lord's Supper, but a youth bible study group also gathers around the word of god and the children have bible history and catechism classes, even if this ministry is not fulfilled by a Pastor but by an appointed Staff minister (*Katechet*). It surely is right, when Voigt is speaking about the responsibility to establish the public ministry. This responsibility is taught by Scripture, as the public ministry is instituted in the New Testament and in that sense commanded by God's word. Therefore there is in fact something missing, if God's word will not be preached and taught in congregation, church and the different study groups of a parish. But this public ministry can take on different forms according to the New Testament. When Voigt is saying that the place for a Pastor in the congregation naturally would be available and therefore in a vacant congregation only momentarily unoccupied, he is getting close to high church positions, in which the office is part of the nature of the church and a congregation without a Pastor is no real church.

The second half of the explanation on the second thesis deals with what Voigt calls the special exercise of the office of the keys (*besondere Ausübung des Schlüsselamtes*). At this point also a special care would be necessary in the use of the term “Ekklesia”. First he explains how the expression “special exercise of the office of the keys” has to be understood. Voigt differentiates between an exercise of the office of the keys in general and in special. In general the office of the keys would be exercised by the personal witness, when through the private proclamation of law and gospel the kingdom of the heavens would be closed or opened. In this manner the office of the keys should be exercised by every Christian. In a special manner the office of the keys would be exercised by the expressed remark, that

⁵⁰ *Synodalreferat*, p. 12 (Thesis 2.2.).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵² *Ibid.* p. 13.

somebody is not willing to repent and therefore an unbeliever. Such a verdict should not be given over-hasty, therefore Christ has set limits by the steps of admonition (Mat 18:15ff). If a sinner will not listen to the admonition by a “small group”⁵³, the congregation shall give a testimony to show the necessity of repentance. But who ignores the admonition of the congregation that is based on Scripture, is clearly a pagan and tax collector and remains excluded from congregation and the kingdom of heavens as long as he is not willing to repent.⁵⁴

But Voigt misses this necessary differentiation between the exercise of the office of the keys in general and in the described special manner in the doctrinal statements of the WELS from the year 1970. The antithesis to the doctrine of the church would only stress, that the office of the key isn’t given exclusively to the local congregation. If by this antithesis should be taught, that secondary groups like primary groups could exercise the office of the keys within a congregation or between congregations, the doctrine of Scripture would be expanded or distorted.⁵⁵

Then Voigt finally draws the attention to the heart of the problem, namely to the question, which gathering of Christians should be named “congregation” or “Ekklesia” according to the order of God. In the steps of admonition Jesus talks about a group of Christians that gather to admonish another member of the church (Mat 18:16). But Jesus does not name this group “Ekklesia” or “congregation”, because this group does not yet act on the congregational level. Even Mat 18:20 would not state that every gathering in the name of Jesus should be called “Ekklesia”, “congregation”. Jesus would be even with one single believer, especially when he is praying (Mat 28:20). But because of this fact a single believer would not yet be a congregation. Similarly the bible would not call every gathering of Christians a “congregation”. Therefore we should not go beyond Scripture but hold to the salutary words of Jesus.⁵⁶

In contrast to this Dr. Herrmann rightly states about the correct understanding of Mat 18:20:

“But we must not ignore the context of this Verse. In the previous verses Jesus is talking about the office of the keys and the so called church discipline. If the personal brotherly admonition and the admonition together with single witnesses leads to no results, the case matter shall be presented to the EKKLESIA (V. 17). It has been wrongly concluded, only the gathered local congregation would be deliberately called Ekklesia but not the two or three witnesses of the second step of admonition. But this is not the case, as the reason for this language usage is found in a quotation of the old testament, that is used in V. 16 (Deut 19:15). Especially to avoid the misunderstanding that only larger or in the form of a local congregation organized gatherings of Christian deserve this name, Jesus adds his statement of V. 20: ‘*For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*’ But what does ‘come together in the name of Jesus’ mean apart from gathering on behalf of Jesus for the purpose of personal edification and the purpose of spreading his kingdom? The building of the kingdom of God will never happen without his word.”⁵⁷

⁵³ Voigt is talking about the two or three witnesses that the admonishing brother shall take along if the sinner is not willing to repent (Mat 18:16).

⁵⁴ *Synodalreferat*, p. 13f.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14f.

⁵⁷ G. Herrmann. *Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*, p. 207.

“It has been stated, a synod could only act as ‘EKKLESIA’, because it has received certain rights from the local congregations. But only the local congregations are actually ‘EKKLESIA’, the Synods would only be ‘church’ in a derived sense. Obviously this idea has been developed from our institution, in which the Synod is only granted modest rights (she may only act in an advising sense). But the question is: Where is it stated in the New Testament, that this is the only possible way? There were times in the Lutheran church, where the church council had much more rights (it could intervene in cases of church discipline). Such order is not completely impossible. But we don’t consider it to be useful, because it declares congregations and Pastors incapable.

It has also been stated, that Synod should claim for them less godly right because they are not everywhere and at every time necessary. Right in this opinion is the fact, that the establishment of Synods is nowhere commanded by God. They can be established, where congregations want to merge to fulfill certain tasks. But where a true Synod is in existence, it gathers in the name of Jesus around the word of God (in some cases at Synod Conventions more is done for the spreading of the Kingdom of God than in some local congregations). But where Christians gather around the means of grace, the EKKLESIA is present in the full sense of the word, not only partly. Because of that reason a Synod also has the right to appoint.”⁶²

3.1.2.4. OTHER GATHERINGS OF CHRISTIANS

In the last thesis of the chapter on the church Thomas Voigt talks about other gatherings or groups of Christians who gather in the name of Jesus or form certain teams (*Arbeitskreise*). As an example Voigt mentions a team for a Christian school (*Arbeitskreis für eine christliche Schule*). Voigt declares, such gatherings for teams, who could receive certain authorities from the congregations, would certainly be helpful for the kingdom of God. But they should not be called “church” or “congregation”, as the New Testament does not describe or command such gatherings in the name of Jesus nor name such gatherings “church”.

In his explanation Voigt declares, that all that has been previously said in the essay about the pre-eminent position of the local congregations, should not lead to the misunderstanding, as if all efforts of Christians in special work (e.g. church music, Christian educational institute) would be strange or uneclesiastical. Certainly such activities would be

⁶² G. Herrmann. *Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*, p. 208f. („Man hat behauptet, die Synode dürfe nur als EKKLESIA handeln, weil ihr von den Ortsgemeinden bestimmte Rechte abgetreten (delegiert) worden seien. Nur die Ortsgemeinden seien eigentlich EKKLESIA, die Synoden seien dagegen nur im abgeleiteten Sinn ‚Kirche‘. Bei dieser Vorstellung hat offenbar unsere Synodalversammlung Pate gestanden. Denn nach ihr ist es so, dass der Synode nur bescheidene Rechte (eine beratende Funktion) zukommen. Die Frage ist aber: Wo steht im Neuen Testament, dass es nur so sein darf? Es gab Zeiten in der lutherischen Kirche, in denen das Kirchenregiment (Kirchenleitung) viel weitgehendere Rechte für sich in Anspruch genommen hat (bis in einzelne Kirchenzuchtsfälle eingreifen konnte). Eine solche Ordnung ist nicht grundsätzlich ausgeschlossen. Aber wir halten sie nicht für gut, weil sie die Gemeinden und Pastoren entmündigt.

Man hat eingewendet, dass Synoden schon deshalb weniger göttliches Recht für sich beanspruchen dürfen, weil sie nicht überall und zu jeder Zeit **notwendig** seien. Daran ist richtig, dass die Einrichtung von Synoden in der Tat nirgends von Gott befohlen ist. Sie können eingerichtet werden, wo Gemeinden sich zu bestimmten Aufgaben verbinden wollen. Aber, wo eine rechte Synode besteht, da versammelt sie sich im Namen Jesu und um Gottes Wort. (Ja, es wird bei Synoden so manches Mal mehr für die Ausbreitung des Reiches Gottes getan als in manchen Ortsgemeinden.) Wo sich aber Christen um die Gnadenmittel sammeln, da ist die EKKLESIA vorhanden, und zwar im Vollsinn des Wortes, nicht nur teilweise. Deshalb darf eine Synode auch Berufungen aussprechen.“)

high of praise and God pleasing. Many things could be much better achieved by special committees, teams or working groups (*Fachgremien, Ausschüsse oder Initiativgruppen*) than by local congregations as such. But such activities of Christians are not described in the New Testament or commanded by God. This would be the difference to parishes, as they have been founded by the apostles and received certain tasks by Christ (Mat 18:17). This biblical difference must not become blurred, leveled or made unclear.

In contrast to this Dr. Herrmann rightly states:

“What is valid in regard to Synods, can not be kept from other gatherings of Christians in the name of Jesus. If a supporting group of a Christian school wants to appoint a Pastor as shepherd for a Christian School, it is not obliged to ask the congregations of its members for permission. Because a group of Christians gather in the name of Jesus around the word of God, the group is allowed to act as EKKLESIA, as long as it is not in contradiction to other gatherings of Christians (e.g. the local congregations).”⁶³

3.1.3. THE DOCTRINE OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY

The third and last part of the synodical essay deals finally with the doctrine of the public ministry. It has already been said, that this third part was not prepared by Thomas Voigt but by Pastor Stephan Müller who served the Jüterbog congregation. For the sake of completeness and because the essay was presented by both Pastors to the Synod, it shall in this paper also be portrayed and evaluated.

Müller declares in the preliminary words of the third chapter, one important building stone in the doctrinal position of the WELS and the majority of the ELFK Pastors would be the differentiation between nature (*Wesen*) and form (*Form*). The essentials were instituted by God in Scripture; but the Forms could and should be organized by the Believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. According to the theses of the Pastoral conference the public ministry had been godly instituted (Theses B 1 and B 7). But this ministry could take on different forms, how ever they were necessary in the life of the church. Holy Scripture teaches, that the public ministry has not been limited by God to one special form. Müller points out, that the theses of the Pastoral Conference follow the doctrinal statements of the WELS. The Pastors of the ELFK also expressed themselves to be in agreement with the antithesis of the doctrinal statements in their Theses and in the circular to all the congregations of the ELFK.

In contrast to that Müller declares, that the public ministry indeed could take on different forms (e.g. the form of a preacher, evangelist, staff minister [*Katechet*] or professor). But this would not mean that none of these forms has specifically been instituted.

3.1.3.1. THE GODLY INSTITUTION OF THE “PFARRAMT”

In the first thesis on the office Müller declares, the New Testament writings would reveal the will of God, that congregations should have “shepherds” or “teachers” (he points to Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5ff; 1 Tim 3:1-7). They would also be called “overseers” or “elders” and should serve whole congregations (Acts 20:28; 1 Pe 5:2). They should be acknowledged by

⁶³ G. Herrmann. *Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*, p. 209. („Was aber von Synoden gilt, kann man auch anderen Versammlungen von Christen im Namen Jesu nicht vorenthalten. Wenn ein Schul-Trägerkreis einen Pastor als Seelsorger für eine christliche Schule berufen will, muss er nicht erst die Gemeinden, aus denen seine Mitglieder kommen, um ihre Erlaubnis fragen. Sondern weil hier eine Gruppe von Christen im Namen Jesu um Gottes Wort zusammenkommt, darf sie als EKKLESIA handeln – solange es nicht im Gegensatz zu anderen Versammlungen von Christen geschieht (z.B. Gemeinden).“)

the congregations as “Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Co 5:20), as Stewarts “entrusted with the secret things of God” (1 Co 4:1) and as “teachers” who watch over the souls (Hebr 13:17).⁶⁴

In the explanation Müller finally wants to prove, that the “Pfarramt” according to its nature (Wesen) and to the major part of its form (*zum größeren Teil der Form nach*) is specifically instituted by God. Therefore he declares first, the ministry of the “elders” or “overseers” had to be understood from the New Testament as godly order. The Jerusalem congregation had the apostles as their own shepherds. In other congregations elders were appointed by the apostles (Acts 14:23). The task of this elders is described in Acts 20:28. Even more would be revealed in Tit 1:5 about those elders, who were compared from Acts 20:28 with Tit 1:7 also called “overseers”. Paul stresses in Tit 1:5, Titus should do, what is still missing, and install elders. By doing that the apostle would confirm the elders and their concrete ministry as order of God that is binding for all times: a parish would miss something, if it would not at least have one shepherd. The task of the elders is to feed the flock (1 Tim 5:17). Finally every congregation in the New Testament had at least one elder or overseer, even if they first for a certain time heard the word of God through prophets or travelling preachers. As proof passages Müller points to Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:1.⁶⁵

Müller lays much weight on 1 Pe 5:1f, where Peter is calling himself a “fellow elder”. He concludes from that term, the elders or overseers should in obedience to the will of God fulfill the same ministry as the apostles, even if they had not to go into the entire world but were in difference to the apostles appointed to a specific congregation. Because of that the “elders” and “overseers” would as the apostles be “Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Co 5:20), Stewarts “entrusted with the secret things of God” (1 Co 4:1) and “teachers” who watch over the souls (Hebr 13:17). Therefore only in an extreme emergency case and not as a “form” beside other “forms” it would be God pleasing, if women would be called into the pastoral ministry of the New Testament (*neutestamentliches Weideamt*). The congregational office of an overseer should according to 1 Tim 2:11f only be entrusted to men.⁶⁶

From what has been said Müller concludes, the shepherding of whole congregations by appointed persons (*Beauftragte*) is described in the New Testament, revealed as the will of God and in so far specific instituted. Only more far-reaching regulations as e.g. the division of the ministry among several elders or a district call (*Bezirksberufung*) the congregations are allowed by God to arrange by themselves. And as the term “Pfarramt” would only be another term for the New Testament office of a shepherding elder (*Weide-Ältester*), the “Pfarramt” indeed was (according to its nature and to the major part of its form) specifically instituted by God. Every doctrinal position, who neglects this fact, would be no biblical position.⁶⁷

In contrast to this it first needs to be stated, that the public ministry indeed has not been established in the church simply because of a utilitarian thinking. The public ministry is instituted in the New Testament. But this ministry as the general priesthood of all Believers finally goes back to the great mission commandment (Mat 28:19f). Therefore Dr. Herrmann rightly states:

“The public ministry indeed is no adiaphoron. It is impossible to say, God left it to us, if we might establish the public ministry or not. Even if there is no direct word of institution (only the indirect word of the great mission commandment to the apostles), the mentioned passages (Acts 20:28; 1 Co

⁶⁴ *Synodalreferat*, p. 19f (Thesis 3.1.).

⁶⁵ *Synodalreferat*, p. 20f.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 21f.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 22.

12:28; Eph 4:11; Tit 1:5 and others) clearly show its institution wanted from God by the apostles.”⁶⁸

But on the other hand especially such passages as 1 Co 12:28; Eph 4:11 or Acts 13:11 make plain that the public ministry that is instituted in the New Testament can take on different forms. Therefore it is wrong to understand a special form of the public ministry like the “Pfarramt” to be specifically instituted by God. At this point Dr. Herrmann rightly asks in his essay:

“If there have been different offices (forms) of the preaching of the word in the first Christian congregations, why should we limit this ministry today in principle to one form (those of the Pastor)? Doesn’t that lead us to an improper limitation of Christian freedom?”⁶⁹

3.1.3.2. THE EQUITATION OF “ELDER” OR “OVERSEER” WITH THE “PFARRAMT”

What Müller already has shortly stated at the end of his explanation to the first thesis, namely that the “Pfarramt” has to be equated with the biblical “elder” or “overseer” and is specifically instituted by God, is now explained in more detail in the second thesis. He declares, the Lutheran church would name this specifically instituted ministry of God “public preaching ministry or pastoral ministry” (*öffentliches Predigtamt oder Pfarramt*). It would speak of “Pastors”, “Pfarrer”, “Preacher” or “Shepherds” (*Seelsorger*) instead of “elders” or “overseers”. It would confess with the book of concord the equitation of the “Pfarramt” with the New Testament office of the “Word-elder” (*Wort-Ältester*) or “overseer” and the institution of this office by God.⁷⁰

In the explanation Müller tries to justify the asserted equitation of the offices of the “elder” or “overseer” with the “Pfarramt”. He refers to the Lutheran confessions and asserts, the confessions would teach this equitation between the Pastor of a congregation and the New Testament office of the “Word-elder” (*Wort-Ältester*) or “shepherding Elder” (*Weideältester*). Müller points to the chapter of the housetable in the Small Catechism “for Overseers, Pastors and Preachers” (*Für Bischöfe, Pfarrer und Prediger*) and to a passage of the Tractatus (BSLK 490, 65).

Further the foundation of the pastoral ministry would according to the confessions be the word of Scripture and not the formation by the Believers. He points to the Augsburg Confession Chapter 28 (BSLK 121, 5f; 123,20) and to Apology 13,11 (BSLK 293). The Confessions would explain rather shortly, how the New Testament gives congregations the task to fill the office of the Pastor within their midst. The reason for this was that the scriptural teaching of this fact still was general knowledge at the time of the Reformation. But the differentiation between nature and form and the talking about “forming through the gift of the common faith” could be found nowhere in the book of concord.

It is indeed right, that the Small Catechism includes a chapter about “Overseers, Pastors and Preachers” in his housetables that quote from the Scripture passages 1 Tim 4:3-

⁶⁸ G. Herrmann. *Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*, p. 213. („Tatsache ist jedenfalls, dass das öffentliche Predigtamt kein ‚Mittelding‘ ist. Denn man kann nicht sagen, dass Gott es offen gelassen habe, ob wir das Predigtamt einrichten oder nicht. Auch wenn es kein **direktes** Stiftungswort dafür gibt (sondern nur das indirekte des Missionsbefehls an die Apostel), ist seine gottgewollte Einsetzung durch die Apostel aus den genannten Stellen (Apg 20,28; 1. Kor 12,28; Eph 4,11; Tit 1,5 usw.) unzweifelhaft zu entnehmen.“)

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 212. („Wenn es aber in den ersten christlichen Gemeinden verschiedene Ämter (Formen) der Wortverkündigung gegeben hat, warum sollten wir diesen Dienst heute grundsätzlich auf **eine** Form (die des Pastors) einschränken? Führt das nicht dazu, dass wir die christliche Freiheit dadurch unzulässig beschneiden?“)

⁷⁰ *Synodalreferat*, p. 25 (Thesis 3.2.).

4,6 and Tit 1:7.9. Our German edition even adds a footnote to the term “Overseer” and explains the term as “Pastor”.⁷¹ It is not necessary to raise objections against it, because all, that is been said in this chapter, certainly applies to our Pastors, as the pastoral ministry is one form of the public ministry instituted in the New Testament. But to conclude from this fact that the Small Catechism would equate the Pfarramt with the New Testament ministry of an overseer and teach that only the office of an elder or overseer is especially instituted by God, would read something into the Small Catechism that simply isn’t there and to ignore all Passages from Scripture who show that the public ministry already took on different forms in New Testament times.

According the other mentioned passages it is sufficient to refer to the thorough study of Augsburg Confession 28, Apology 13 and Tractus 60ff by P. Martin Hoffmann.⁷² Hoffmann proves on the historical background, that the Augsburg Confession states in Chapter 28 about an overseer beyond the congregational level (*übergemeindlicher Bischof*), that he is serving in a form of the public ministry, in so far as he is fulfilling his ministry in the described manner (to preach the gospel, to evaluate doctrine and so on), even if he is not appointed to a local congregation. Therefore the full-time office of an overseer is another form of the public ministry beside the pastoral ministry in the congregation. Hoffmann states:

“Although the Confessions do not deal in the broadness of its statements with our current issue, does it indeed in the matter of the church leading office of an overseer beyond the congregational level make plain, that the doctrine of the WELS is in the line, the confessions start to draw. So the confessions agree with the differentiation of the WELS: the public ministry is instituted by God. But the form in obedience to God’s word and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit can by organized in human estimation.”⁷³

According to his study Apology 28:12f expresses that overseers beyond the congregational level serve with their spiritual tasks in the public ministry. But the catholic overseers usually do not fulfill their task as it is given to them by Christ. Finally he discovers by a careful study of Tractatus 60ff that according to the statements of the Tractatus Pastors are serving in the same godly instituted ministry as those overseers beyond the congregational level. So M. Hoffmann finally concludes:

“The Confessions in major parts don’t deal with our current issues. Only the matter of the church leading office of an overseer beyond the congregational level is a specific case of our current issue. At this point the answers of the Confessions agree with the doctrinal statements of the WELS about the public ministry.”⁷⁴

Therefore it is completely wrong to assert that the confessions would equate the “Pfarramt” with the biblical office of the elder or overseer and to conclude that a confessional Lutheran has to confess a godly institution of the Pfarramt – as Müller does in his essay.

⁷¹ *Was wir glauben: Luthers Kleiner Katechismus erklärt von Henry Schwan*. Published in the name of the Pastoral conference of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche (Berlin: EVA, 1987), p. 41.

⁷² M. Hoffmann. *Was lehrt das lutherische Bekenntnis vom öffentlichen Predigtamt?* In: „Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Lehre von Kirche und Amt“, p. 133ff.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 138. („Obwohl das Bekenntnis in der Breite seiner Aussagen durchaus nicht unsere heutige Fragestellung behandelt, wird doch in Sachen übergemeindliches, kirchenleitendes Bischofsamt deutlich, dass die Lehre der WELS ganz in der Richtung liegt, die das Bekenntnis hier zu ziehen anfängt. Damit aber stimmt das Bekenntnis mit der Unterscheidung der WELS überein: Das Predigtamt ist von Gott gestiftet. Die Form aber nach Gottes Wort und Anleitung des Heiligen Geistes nach menschlichem Ermessen zu finden.“)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 139. („Das Bekenntnis behandelt die heutigen Fragen zum großen Teil gar nicht. Nur die Frage des übergemeindlichen, kirchenleitenden Bischofsamtes stellt einen Spezialfall unserer heutigen Problemstellung dar. Dort aber steht die Lösung des Bekenntnisses ganz im Einklang mit den Lehraussagen der WELS zum öffentlichen Predigtamt.“)

3.1.3.3. OTHER FORMS OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY AS ORDERS OF HUMAN RIGHT (*Ordnungen menschlichen Rechts*)

The third thesis about the ministry deals with special tasks like mission work, ministry with children or youth or the training of preachers, which would all be a part of the ministry of a Preacher. It would be possible, to send a Pastor for ministries in the mission field, at a Christian school or at a theological seminary, so that those Pastors had to work beyond the congregational level. This would then be good Christian order (*gute christliche Ordnung*).⁷⁵

In his explanation Müller again points to the apostles, which obviously made some divisions in their shepherding ministry as Pastors in Jerusalem. Such divisions surely would be possible under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through the gift of the common faith. But they were simply “Christian order” or “Orders of human right” (*Ordnungen menschlichen Rechtes*) and must not be put on the same level with the instructions of Scripture.⁷⁶

So Missionaries, Professors and Staff ministers (*Katecheten*) would serve in these forms of the pastoral ministry for the kingdom of God. The form of the ministry would be only good Christian order (*gute christliche Ordnung*), as they are not described and commanded in the Word of God as the pastoral ministry of the shepherding elders (*Weideälteste*) and overseers in the congregations. The schoolteacher would only be mentioned in the confessions very few times as “Schulmeister”. The confessions would not mention the teacher in regard to the public ministry and would differentiate between teachers, who give catechetical instructions, and teachers in non spiritual subjects.⁷⁷ In contrast to this Gottfried Herrmann rightly states in his essay:

“It has been said, that apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers etc were only different terms for one and the same office. This would be the office of the Pastor of a congregation. There might still be such special offices today as Missionaries (those early evangelists?) or Professors (those early teachers?). But one who wanted to serve in such a special ministry should first be entrusted with the extensive administration of all means of grace by being appointed to the pastoral ministry, even if he doesn’t need to exercise all of them in his ministry.

Also in this point the origin of the idea seems to be our institution. It states, that only ordained Pastors can be appointed as Professors at our Seminary. This is a useful order in our small circumstances, because the Professors are able to help in the congregations and to stand in for the local Pastor. But the question remains: Where is this taught in Scripture? Where is it commanded, that we are only allowed to speak of the public ministry, when somebody is entrusted with all functions? Where is it commanded to us to act in this manner?

Most of all such a conviction contradicts the numerated list in 1 Co 12:28. It is senseless to numerate apostles, prophets and teachers, if in all cases the same office is meant. That would be as if we would say: ‘We have 1. Pfarrer, 2. Pastors, 3. Shepherds’ – although we mean the same office with all three terms.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Synodalreferat*, p. 25 (Thesis 3.3.).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 25-27.

⁷⁸ G. Herrmann. *Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*, p. 212. („Man hat eingewendet, dass es sich bei den Aposteln, Propheten, Evangelisten, Hirten, Lehrern usw. nur um unterschiedliche Bezeichnungen für ein und dasselbe Amt handle. Dieses eine Amt aber sei das des Gemeindepastors. Es könne heute zwar auch solche

3.1.3.4. THE “PFARRAMT” AND OTHER OFFICES IN THE CHURCH OR PARISH

The last thesis of the essay finally deals with “other offices” as the school teacher or choir conductor. Churches or congregations may establish such offices beside the office of the Pastor. But these offices should not be put on the same level with the pastoral ministry as God has ordered nothing regarding such offices in his word and would not reveal such offices as his will for all times. In so far the ministers appointed to the pastoral office should carry the last responsibility for everything in the congregation according to Rev 2+3. Other offices or ministries as the mentioned examples would be fulfilled in the area of the general priesthood.⁷⁹

In the explanation Müller states, that there are “some hints” in the New Testament, that there were other offices in existence beside the Office of the shepherding elder (*Weide-Ältester*). He points to Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8ff; 1 Co 12:5; Rom 16:1 and 1 Tim 5:17. As examples from modern times he mentions the elder of the congregation, financial officers, musical directors or welfare ministries. Such offices would surely serve the kingdom of God. But they would be fulfilled within the area of the general priesthood of all believers described in 1 Pe 2:9. In contrast to this the specific ministry of the Pastor would be regulated in Rev 2-3 and was revealed as the will of God for all times. Especially those passages would show that the ministers appointed to the preaching office should carry the last responsibility for everything in the congregation.

At this point the grading becomes evident that is essential for the doctrinal position of Müller and Voigt. The office of the Pastor as the only office instituted by God is standing above everything else. Other offices are “helping offices”. They are fulfilled in the area of the general priesthood of all believers and must therefore not be put on the same level as the Pastor, who is responsible for everything in the congregation. In contrast to this Gottfried Herrmann rightly says:

“But the term “helping office” (*Hilfsamt*) is not biblical either. And you have to be very careful. It is possible to speak of “helping offices” in regard to the other offices in that sense that the supervision over all ministries in the congregation usually will be entrusted to the Pastor. But in principle such a terminology contradicts the New Testament teaching about the public ministry. Who wants to disqualify something as “helping office” that traces back to the will of God? And in the New Testament different forms of the public ministry are mentioned (overseers, shepherds, evangelists, teachers, elders, prophets). What gives us the right to chose from these the overseers and shepherds

speziellen Ämter geben – wie etwa Missionare (die damaligen Evangelisten?) oder Theologieprofessoren (die damaligen Lehrer?). Aber jedem, der ein solches Amt übernehme, müsse erst einmal das Pastorenamt mit der umfassenden Verwaltung **aller** Gnadenmittel übertragen werden – auch wenn er (...) diese dann in seinem Dienst gar nicht auszuüben brauche.

Auch hier scheint unsere eigene kirchliche Verfassung bei dem Gedanken Pate gestanden zu haben. Denn bei uns ist es so geregelt, dass nur ordinierte Pastoren Dozenten am Seminar werden dürfen. In unseren kleinen Verhältnissen kann man das als sinnvolle Ordnung ansehen, weil auf diese Weise Dozenten in den Gemeinden aushelfen und Vertretungsdienste übernehmen dürfen. Aber es bleibt die Frage: Wo steht das in der Heiligen Schrift? Wo wird festgelegt, dass nur da von ‚öffentlichem Predigtamt‘ geredet werden darf, wo **alle** Funktionen übertragen werden? Und wo wird uns geboten, so zu handeln?

Außerdem widerspricht dieser Ansicht die nummerierte Aufzählung in 1Kor 12,28. Es macht keinen Sinn, Apostel, Propheten und Lehrer zu nummerieren, wenn mit allen drei Ämtern das Gleiche gemeint ist. Das wäre ungefähr so, als wenn wir sagen würden: ‚Wir haben 1. Pfarrer, 2. Pastoren, 3. Gemeindeseelsorger...‘ – obwohl wir mit diesen drei Begriffen das gleiche Amt bezeichnen.“

⁷⁹ *Synodalreferat*, p. 27 (Thesis 3.4.).

(Pastors) and to declare them for godly instituted offices, while we declare other offices to be “helping offices”?

Because one thing is clear: All the offices have what is essential for the public ministry. They work with the word as the means of grace and do this in the name of the community (public). A teacher at a parish school or a staff minister (*Katechet*) doesn't fulfill his ministry only in the area of the general priesthood (as parents do, who instruct their children). He is appointed to his ministry by the church or congregation.”⁸⁰

3.2. THE “STATUS CONTROVERSIAE”

The essay prepared by Pastor Voigt and Pastor Müller remained the most detailed written Portrayal of their doctrinal position. Already before the essay Thomas Voigt contributed to the preparation of papers on the differences that should compare the two positions in a easy to understand manner. Those papers have been revised several times over the years. For the sake of shortness this paper will concentrate on the final editions that were resolved by the pastoral conference in the years 2000 and 2001.⁸¹ As the essentials of the doctrinal positions have already been described and evaluated in regard to the doctrinal essay, the following pages will concentrate on the Position of Voigt.

3.2.1. THE DIFFERENCES IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY

The statement about the differences in the doctrine of the office was the first paper that was resolved by the pastoral conference after several editions in the year 2000. Both positions are presented in a tabular comparison. The position of Thomas Voigt is published as “Position 1”.

First of all the introduction explains, that the term “public ministry” and the persons in regard is taken in a more narrow sense than in position 2. In this position it would be used in its traditional sense: Public ministry and the pastoral office would be taken as interchangeable terms, insofar as beside the congregational Shepherd also offices as the Missionary are included. Voigt differentiates between the holders of the office of the public ministry that could exercise all functions and tasks of the office, and other coworkers in the church, who fulfill a “helping ministry” by fulfilling special tasks or ministries.⁸²

This general statement is then explained by ten theses that are in each case explained and justified in more detail. The first thesis describes the task of the public ministry: It has to serve with the means of grace in obedience to the command of Christ and by the authority of the community. The explanation points to the great mission command (Mat 28:19f), because

⁸⁰ G. Hermann. *Unsere Lehre von Kirche und Amt*, p. 213f. („Aber der Begriff ‚Hilfsamt‘ ist auch nicht biblisch. Und es ist Vorsicht geboten. Von Hilfsämter kann man bei anderen Diensten zwar in dem Sinne reden, dass in einer Gemeinde gewöhnlich dem Pastor die Aufsicht über alle Dienste in der Gemeinde aufgetragen wird. Grundsätzlich aber sperrt sich diese Bezeichnung gegen die neutestamentlichen Aussagen vom Predigtamt. Wer will sich anmaßen, etwas als ‚Hilfsamt‘ zu disqualifizieren, was selbst auf göttlichen Willen zurückgeht? Und es werden im Neuen Testament ja verschiedene Formen des öffentlichen Verkündigungsdienstes genannt (Bischöfe, Hirten, Evangelisten, Lehrer, Älteste, Propheten). Woher nehmen wir das Recht, aus diesen einfach die Bischöfe und die Hirten (Pastoren) auszuwählen und für göttlich gestiftete Ämter zu erklären, während wir die übrigen zu Hilfsämtern machen?

Denn soviel steht fest: Das, was den öffentlichen Verkündigungsdienst ausmacht, haben auch die anderen Ämter. Sie arbeiten mit dem Gnadenmittel ‚Wort Gottes‘ und sie tun dies im Auftrag der Gemeinschaft (öffentlich). Ein Lehrer an einer Gemeindeschule oder der Katechet einer Gemeinde verrichtet seinen Dienst nicht nur aufgrund des allgemeinen Priestertums (wie etwa Eltern, die ihre Kinder lehren). Er wird zu seinem Dienst von der Gemeinde oder Kirche berufen.“)

⁸¹ Both papers are published in: „Ausgewählte Beiträge zu Kirche und Amt“, p. 181ff.

⁸² *Die Differenzen in der Amtslehre*. In: „Ausgewählte Beiträge zu Kirche und Amt“, p. 181.

of whom God's word shall not only be proclaimed in general but also by certain persons appointed to this ministry. Because of the promise that the Holy Spirit will lead the disciples in all truth (Joh 14:26; 15,25f; 16,13), one could recognize in the actions of the disciples and in their commission (Acts 14,23; Tit 1:5) the command of Christ. So the godly sending would also refer to the preachers appointed indirect through the congregations (Acts 20:28; 1 Co 4,1; 1 Pe 5,2).⁸³

According to the second thesis the appointment to the public ministry would signify that the appointed person should serve with all means of grace. There would be no limitation. The explanation points to the great mission command, according to which the public ministers should make use of word and sacrament. Paul also baptized, although he was sent to preach the gospel, because this task was part of the public ministry (1 Co 1:14-17). He describes the ministers of the word as "Stewards entrusted with the secret things of God", and a Steward would be entrusted with all matters of the house. The shepherd could only fulfill his task of shepherding (Acts 20:28; 1 Pe 5:2), if he was able to make use of the shepherding tools word and sacrament. In contrast to this *Position 2* states, that especially 1 Co 1:14-17 makes plain, that a minister in the public ministry can serve in the right manner without having to exercise all functions of the public ministry at all times: Paul usually did not baptize (cf. 1 Co 3:5-8). There is no command in the Scripture that all ministers in the public ministry must be entrusted in principle with all the means of grace and must always be appointed to all groups in the congregation.⁸⁴

Thesis three states that the public minister always has an extensive task. All functions are always entrusted to him, even if the entrusted area of duty will concentrate only on some of them. The explanation points again to the office of the apostles, from whom the office of the later appointed would derive. Between the office of the apostle and the public ministry would be no essential difference (although the apostles were sent in the entire world and placed under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit). Some passages would identify the apostles with other preachers (Acts 1:20; 1 Pe 5:1). Therefore the public ministry must also be extensive, as the office of the apostles was an extensive ministry. In contrast *Position 2* states that the apostles indeed were the first ones that were appointed by Christ into the public ministry, and that the public ministry and the apostle ministry match indeed in essentials. Nevertheless the Apostles and preachers in our times are not identical. Who is called into the public ministry may have a limited task. It is possible that he is only appointed to one function (e.g. instruction of children).⁸⁵

The fourth thesis declares that somebody who is appointed to a strongly limited ministry (e.g. leader of a youth bible study group) is not appointed to the public ministry but is fulfilling a "helping ministry". The explanation refers back to theses 3, in whose explanation it had been said, that there were no prove passages in the New Testament for somebody, who serves in the public ministry and has only a limited task. The public ministry has to be understood from scripture as an always extensive ministry. In contrast *position 2* declares that somebody who is entrusted with a limited ministry is also serving in the public ministry but not as a Pastor.

The 5th thesis declares, the appointment to the public ministry would always be an appointment into the *Genus*; this would include, the appointed person is in principle a congregational shepherd, a missionary, a theological professor etc. A limitation to one species would be possible for practical reasons. But after the situation has changed, the person in regard can exercise other or all functions of the public ministry. The explanation points again to the example of the apostles. They installed the Seven with the congregation (Acts 6:1ff). Paul, Peter, James and John came across that Paul should serve among the heathen while the

⁸³ Ibid., p. 182.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 182f.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 183-185.

other three apostles would serve among the Jews. But after the situation changed Peter again served among the heathen (1 Pe 1:1). Again 1 Co 1:14-17 is mentioned. In contrast *Position 2* states that the appointment to the public ministry is always an appointment to a special defined *Spezies* (e.g. Pastor, Missionary, Professor, Staff minister, Leader of a youth bible study group etc). The New Testament speaks of specific offices and we are not told, why one of the Seven, Philippus, is later called “evangelist” (cf. Acts 6:5 and 21:8). There is no proving passage in the New Testament that the appointment always has to be an extensive appointment into the *Genus* of the preaching office. And there is no proving passage that after an appointment to a *Spezies* always the ministry in all *Spezies* can be fulfilled.⁸⁶

Thesis 6 states that a change from one *Spezies* to another is always possible, because each preacher would also have the same extensive responsibility. The statement is then proven with 1 Co 3:58 and 1 Pe 5:1. In contrast *Position 2* declares that a change from one *Spezies* to another is only possible to some extent. For example a Staff minister (*Katechet*) cannot simply change into the office of a Pastor.⁸⁷

Voigt declares in Thesis 7 that only men can be appointed into the public ministry and he proves the thesis with 1 Co 14:34; 1 Tim 2:12. Certainly women are allowed to take part in discussions in bible study groups. But they were not allowed to teach, as they could not be appointed to the teaching office. In contrast *position 2* declares that women indeed can be called into some *Spezies* of the public ministry, in so far as the group in regard will contain only women or children. But as “mixed groups” could only be served by men in the public ministry, only men can be called into the pastoral office. This statement is justified with 1 Tim 2:12 and 1 Cor 14:34, where women are prohibited to teach in regard to the order of creation and the relation of man and woman. Therefore women are not excluded from all forms of the public ministry, as by the leadership of study groups that only contain women or children the commanded submission under the man is not distorted.

Thesis 8 declares, the public ministry would usually have to be exercised in the full-time ministry and could only be in emergency cases or because of other justified exceptions be limited to a part-time ministry. The explanation points to 1 Co 9:1-14 and sees in the fact, that the public ministry should normally be exercised in the full-time ministry, another proof for the fact, that limited ministries (e.g. Sunday school) should not be equated with the public ministry. In contrast *Position 2* states, that the public ministry can be exercised in full-time ministry as in part-time ministry, because full-time ministry is not required in all circumstances by the New Testament. The ministry of Paul is a good example for part-time ministry (cf. 1 Co 9:15; 2 Co 11:7-9; Acts 18:3).

Voigt then expresses in the 9th thesis that an appointment to the public ministry would always be a call without temporal limitations, as men is not allowed to set barriers or limits to God’s calling and that there could be no example found in the New Testament, where somebody received a call temporary limited to some weeks or years. Many passages admonish the called preachers to faithfulness in the office (1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 4:2; 1 Cor 9:16). The congregation could refuse the due obedience to the Preacher much more easily, if he only received a temporary limited call; it only would have to wait for the day, until his time has run out. In contrast *Position 2* states, that Scripture does not forbid a temporary limited calling. In regard to the pastoral office nevertheless only an unlimited calling is appropriate.⁸⁸

The 10th and last thesis finally declares, that the Pastoral office is godly instituted. Therefore the establishment of the Pastoral office is commanded to the church and the church is bound to this command until the end of time. This would show the great significance of the Pastoral office in differentiation to other offices (e.g. Professor, Synod President). The church

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 185f.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 186f.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 188f.

is allowed to establish other offices or helping offices (e.g. leader of a youth bible study group, Staff minister), but such an establishment has not been commanded by God. The explanation declares, that different terms for the Pastoral office of the New Testament as “Shepherds and teachers”, “elders”, “overseers” could be found in Scripture. The terms “elders” or “overseers” would be used interchangeable (Acts 20:17.28; Tit 1:5.7) and they had clearly the same task (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:2.5; 1 Pe 5:2; Tit 1:9). According to these Scripture passages the elders and overseers should also be called “Shepherds” and “Teachers”, therefore the “Shepherds” and “Teachers” in Eph 4:11 would in fact also mean “Elders” and “Overseers”. All of this terms would refer to the same office, that had been established in the congregations by the Apostles (Acts 14:23). The missing of this office would be a untenable situation (Tit 1:5). This specific office is the will of God who installs into this office (Acts 20:28). Therefore the New Testament pastoral office is instituted by God. Other offices, which are established by the church out of practical considerations and in good Christian opinion, are not commanded in God’s word. To call those offices godly instituted would signify the work of the Holy Spirit apart from Scripture. In Contrast *Position 2* states, that the extensive Pastoral office as a special form in distinction to other forms of the public ministry is not specifically instituted by God. Nevertheless the form of the public ministry, that has to be established, is not a matter of arbitrariness among the Believers. In obedience to the will of God word and sacrament have to be administered public and Counseling shall be exercised at all times. Therefore a form as the Pastoral office is at all times indispensable.⁸⁹

3.2.2. THE DIFFERENCES IN THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

The second paper on the differences in the doctrine of the church was resolved one year later by the pastoral conference (2001).⁹⁰ The outward form is similar to the previous paper on the differences in the doctrine of the public ministry. Again both positions are presented in a tabular comparison; Thomas Voigt presents his doctrinal position as “position 1” in six theses with following explanations. The doctrinal position of the majority of the ELFK pastors can be found under “position 2”. Two preliminary remarks state that the heart of the issue lies in the question, which gatherings of Christians could be called “Ekklesia” and the question about the tasks and responsibilities of those gatherings. In addition it is mentioned, that in position 2 the terms primary gatherings or groups (= local congregations) and secondary gatherings or groups (= Synods, Mission societies, School societies, bible study groups within the congregations) are used.

Voigt declares in his first thesis that only such mergers or gatherings should be called Ekklesia, in which word and sacraments are in use. Like in his essay he points in the explanation to Acts 2:41f; 1 Cor 11:20 and in addition to the great mission commandment (Mat 28:20). No mergers of Christians were called “Ekklesia” in Scripture that would go without the sacraments. In Contrast *Position 2* states that also such gatherings could be called Ekklesia, in whom only the word but not the sacraments are in use. The explanation makes plain, that the gospel is the only effective means of grace in word and sacrament. This power is also effective, where only the word is preached (Is 55:10f; Jer 23:29; Lu 8:8; Joh 17:20; Ro 1:16 etc). The presence of the church is nowhere bound to the simultaneous presence of word and sacrament. The asserted connection between word and sacrament cannot be justified by Scripture.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 189-191.

⁹⁰ *Die Differenzen in der Lehre von der Kirche (status controversiae)*. In: „Ausgewählte Beiträge von Kirche und Amt“, p. 193-198.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 193.

Afterwards thesis two states, one essential mark of the Ekklesia would be a frequent and continually recurring use of the means of grace. The explanation declares, that the congregation in Jerusalem made continually use of the means of grace (Act 2:42), while a description of an occasional gathering as “Ekklesia” could not be proven in Scripture. It would be of significance, that even the apostolic Council is not called “Ekklesia”, although the congregation of Jerusalem is mentioned among the actors (Acts 15:4.22). It is necessary to hear the word continually, that it can have its effect (Col 3:16; 2 Pe 1:19; Joh 8:47; Heb 10:25). In contrast *Position 2* declares that a gathering or group can also be called Ekklesia, when it gathers seldom and can therefore make only rare use of the means of grace. In such a case the basic supply with the means of grace must be granted otherwise in primary groups. The explanation adds, that Christians surely shall gather frequently around the means of Christ. But the New Testament prescribes nowhere, how frequent and in what form Christians have to gather. The Christians in Jerusalem gathered daily (Acts 2:46), while the Troas congregation gathered on Sundays (Acts 20:7), what is described in Augsburg Confession 28, 57-60 as an example of Christian freedom. In the Diaspora or in mission situations it is often not possible for congregations to gather frequent, but they are nevertheless “church”. This is in a similar way true for Christian gatherings as a Synod Convention or a youth rally.⁹²

Voigt adds in Thesis three, that a gathering of Christians as teams, societies etc could not be called Ekklesia, simply because the persons present are members of congregations. In the explanation he points to the fact, that within the outward visible congregation hypocrites might be found (Mat 7:21; 22:14; 2 Tim 2:19; 1 Cor 4:5). On the other hand this membership must not be made to a mark of the church and no scriptural prove could be found that a gathering of Christians should be named Ekklesia because of the described reason. In contrast to that *Position 2* declares, that a secondary group should be also named “Ekklesia”, because this group gathers for the purpose of the common ministry in the Kingdom of God (which can never be build without the means of grace). In addition the people gathering in the secondary group are at the same time members of a primary group. The addition points to such Scripture references that use the term “Ekklesia” for other gatherings as the primary group of a local congregation (Acts 9:31; Rom 16:5) and to the promise of Jesus in Mat 18:20. Therefore the term “church” cannot be limited to gatherings, in which Christians primarily gather around word and sacrament for the purpose of their own edification. Also groups, who gather for the gospel ministry on others, are expelled as “Ekklesia” by the marks of the church. Christians will gather for the purpose of their own basic edification in congregations (primary groups), while secondary groups concentrate on special tasks and ministries. The explanation closes with the final statement, that all gatherings of Christians (primary and secondary groups) are church in the full sense of the word und not only in a derived sense, because the local congregations have transferred certain tasks to those groups.⁹³

Voigt adds in the 4th thesis that every Ekklesia would have the same rights and responsibilities. The explanation declares that the one holy church (*una sancta*) is present in every congregation (Ekklesia). Therefore it is not possible according to godly right to place certain *Ekklesiai* above others, because such a submission is not taught in the New Testament. A congregation could transfer certain rights to a larger merger or let certain duties be fulfilled by this larger merger. Therefore this larger merger also had the right to call, because the congregations would stand behind the calling. All of those regulations would be orders of human right (*menschlichen Rechtes*). No Ekklesia could be forced by another or by the larger merger to do something nor could it be abridged in its rights. In contrast *Position 2* states that the Ekklesia and all of her members have been entrusted by Christ with spiritual goods und with all rights and responsibilities. The exercise of those can be different, but everything has to be done in a fitting and orderly way. The explanation is justified by Ro 5:1; Eph 2:18-20; 1

⁹² Ibid., p. 194.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 194f.

Cor 12:4 and 1 Cor 12:12ff. God does not prescribe how the single gifts and ministries should be organized in church or congregation. In the beginning there were different circumstances (cf. Jerusalem Acts 2+6 with Corinth 1 Cor 11-14). What is not prescribed in the New Testament can be regulated among the Christians in a Spirit of love, but everything has to be done in a fitting and orderly way (1 Cor 14:33.40; 16:14).⁹⁴

In the 5th thesis Voigt speaks about the right and the responsibility of the Ekklesia to establish the public ministry. Would this not be possible for a congregation because of financial or other reasons, it still would be a congregation, but a congregation in distress. In the explanation Voigt points to the practice of the apostles (Acts 14:23). Paul is talking about a defect that should be eliminated, if the public ministry has not yet been established (Tit 1:5). The Shepherds of the congregations are installed by God (Acts 20:28). Therefore a congregation is responsible according to godly right to call one or several Shepherds. In contrast *Position 2* states, that a gathering of Christians has the right and responsibility to establish the public ministry. But if certain tasks are fulfilled by forms of the public ministry in a primary group, there might not be the necessity to fulfill the same tasks in the secondary group. The explanation points to the fact, the Jesus has instituted the gospel ministry (Mat 28:18-20; Mar 16:15; Joh 20:21-23), which can also be called office of the keys. This office shall be exercised in privacy by every Christian and in public by called ministers. Therefore gatherings of Christians shall establish the public ministry among themselves (Tit 1:5ff; Acts 20:28). But the New Testament mentions different forms of the public ministry (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). Some offices were not only exercised in local congregations but were responsible for several congregations or the whole church (Apostles, Evangelists). The assignment of the ministry has to be done in a fitting and orderly way. It is decisive, that the public ministry is established in the Ekklesia in any form.⁹⁵

In his last thesis Voigt declares, anyone would go beyond Scripture, who applies the term “Ekklesia” to other gatherings like committees or groups, because in the New Testament the term would be limited to the invisible church and the local congregations. In the explanation Voigt mentions his conclusions to Mat 18:15-17 similar to the conclusions in the essay. There were other gatherings of Christians mentioned in Scripture, but in no instance they are called “Ekklesia”. Even the Apostolic Council would not be named as such. *Position 2* states that the differentiation between invisible and visible church must not be misunderstood, as if it was talking about different kinds of churches (outer organization and Spiritual Corporation). It is always the one Christian church. Visible gatherings are named church, as we can believe because of the marks of the church, that the true church is present. And where we can believe that, the church is present – regardless of the number of the gathered believers (Mat 18:20). The explanation declares that the New Testament does always refer the term Ekklesia to the people of God. This is a crowd that is hidden to the eyes of mankind but that gathers in this life in visible gatherings. Both aspects are stressed in the Ekklesia-Statements in a different measure: while Mat 16:18 hardly speaks about the aspect of the visible gathering, it becomes more important in Mat 18:15-20 and is stressed in Acts 5:11. But in all cases the name “Ekklesia” is only used, because Christ with his reign is really present and can be believed by us. The explanation closes by pointing to the doctrinal statements (of the WELS) who stress the same facts (DS, I.D 4.c).⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 195f.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 196f.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 197f.

3.3. LATER PUBLICATIONS

After leaving the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche Thomas Voigt tried to publish works on the subject of church and ministry over the Internet.⁹⁷ But only some of the material is prepared by himself. He publishes an online version of “*Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt*” by C.F.W. Walther and the decisive chapters of the dogmatic lectures of Wilhelm Oesch on church and ministry. Prepared by Voigt are the “*Reflexionen zu einem Artikel von Edward C. Fredrich*“. In this “reflections” he comments on the development of the doctrines of church and ministry in the WELS. Finally he presents a “Catechism” with questions on the doctrine of church and ministry. This catechism is based on a work of the Concordia Lutheran Conference, which has been translated and extensively edited. It carries the headline “*Katechismus zur Lehre von Kirche und Amt mit Bezug auf die falsche Lehre der WELS und den ihr darin folgenden Kirchengemeinschaften*“. As a book Thomas Voigt published a commemorative publication for Dr. Wachler on the occasion of his 80th birthday, which contains several papers on different subjects prepared by Stephan Müller, Wilhelm Oesch, Helmut Fiebiger and others. It was published under the title *Dem Wort gehorsam: Festschrift für Gottfried Wachler*.⁹⁸

4. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The controversy on the doctrines of church and ministry lasted from its beginnings over a whole decade and led the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche in a serious tension test. Thomas Voigt, the Pastor of the congregation in Schönfeld, played a key role in this controversy. Important contributions by him to the controversy were the doctrinal essay that was prepared by him and by Pastor Müller and his participation in the preparation of the papers on the differences in the doctrines of the church and the public ministry.

The heart of the issue was on the one hand, what should be described in the biblical sense as Ekklesia. Should only the local congregations beside the invisible church be called “Ekklesia” or are other gatherings of Christians like larger mergers as a Synod or bible study groups within a congregation also “church” according to their nature? In a similar way the controversy concerning the doctrine of the ministry dealt with the question, what had to be understood from Scripture as public ministry. Is the pastoral office as specific form of the public ministry instituted in Scripture and therefore commanded by God, so that other offices in parish and church have to be understood as “helping offices” which are subordinated under the pastoral office? Or can the public ministry that is instituted in Scripture take on different forms, who are placed on the same level and can be organized by the Believers in Christian freedom?

Thomas Voigt considered it necessary to limit the understanding of “Ekklesia” to the local congregation and the understanding of the public ministry to the “Pfarramt”. In distinction to other gatherings of Christians and other offices in the church he made a clear grading. But such a doctrinal position does not agree with the teaching of Holy Scripture. Scripture Passages like Acts 9:31 and Rom 16:5 clearly show, that on the basis of Scripture not only the visible local congregations but also other groups of Christians have to be understood as “Ekklesia”. In addition Scripture Passages like 1 Co 12:28; Eph 4:11 or Acts 13:11 clearly show that the public ministry instituted by God can appear in different forms and should therefore not be equated with the “Pfarramt”. Offices like the Professor in the

⁹⁷ Cf. <http://www.lutherisch.info>

⁹⁸ *Dem Wort gehorsam: Zum 80. Geburtstag von Dr. theol. H.c. Gottfried Wachler*. Published by a circle of his friends (Ehrenfriedersdorf: Buchhandlung Thomas Voigt, 2004).

seminary, the Staff minister or the leader of a youth bible study group are also forms of the public ministry, although they are no Pastors.

Therefore the Position of Thomas Voigt and the other opposing Pastors cannot be seen as a scriptural position. The accusation of false doctrine which they raised against the WELS and the majority of their former fellow Pastors of the Ev.-Luth. Freikirche, is completely unjustified, because the doctrinal position of WELS and ELFK is based on Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Thomas Voigt and the other opposing pastors make an improper limitation that has to be rejected from Scripture and the Lutheran confessions. This finally makes plain who was the driving force behind the turmoil about the doctrines of church and ministry: Satan, who wants to make the believers uncertain by distortion of the truth of God's word in order to move them away from the sound doctrine of Scripture.

5. LITERATURE

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