

What Was the Involvement of Zion Evangelical Lutheran
Church in the Protes'tant Controversy?

Church History – CH3031
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12-21-05

Introduction

An evolution usually occurs in the process of writing; opinions shift, new connections are made, and very often new questions not previously considered must be asked. This paper was no different. One of the most exciting and frustrating things about sifting through the dusty stacks of history is that there seems to be always more to find. There are facts which can be nailed down, pictures of the past which can be formed; but always the picture becomes more and more complex. It is the personal opinion of the author that any real student of history must acknowledge that there is always more to learn, more to see, more to read; there is no irreducible point to reach. This reality became abundantly clear in the writing of this paper; the more I learned, the more questions I had about who knew who, who knew what when, and what was so and so thinking?

The picture in this paper which I am going to paint is by no means exhaustive or comprehensive. Too many people have passed and their recollections with them for such a complete picture to be made possible.¹ But there is one invaluable source of information which has survived almost eighty years; the congregational minutes. Credit for this discovery must be duly given to my father who has served Zion as pastor for going on seventeen years now and who strongly suspected the historical significance of these old books when he stumbled across them one day buried in a closet. These two books are now currently to be found in the Seminary Archive where they will be given the due care they deserve.

There is a wealth of historical information, some of it not found anywhere else in the tomes which have been compiled on the Protestant Controversy. Most of unique information is admittedly specific to the congregational situation swirling around Zion at the time. However,

¹ As far as I am aware, the oldest and only person still alive from the Elroy congregation who would have been old enough to remember the events didn't even join the congregation until after Pastor Lutzke had been removed by the congregation.

since much of this correspondence and all of the minutes have never been disseminated before; the decision has been made to reproduce the correspondence and pertinent² portions of the minutes in their entirety to ease the both the author and reader's ability to reference these documents in the body of the paper.

One other initial comment needs to be made about the logbooks. Up until the January 23rd Annual Meeting of 1927, all the minutes were taken exclusively in German. After this they were taken in both English and German until the Annual Meeting on January 14th, 1934 where it was decided "that hereafter the minutes of the congregational meetings be written only in the English language."³ The author's German skills are not impressive to begin with and were stretched in the small amount of translation I did do for this paper; almost all of the minute's German script remains unreadable to me. It is the hope of the author that someone will at a future date translate the remainder of the minutes, especially those 1924 and later, so that any facts⁴ which remain hidden behind the wall of language are brought to light.

Some brief historical comments need also to be made before diving into the main question of this paper: *What Was the Involvement of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Protestant Controversy?* A complete overview or review of the events leading up to the Controversy is really not needed as there are many excellent papers⁵ out there which give most

² As interesting as much of it can be to read from a historical perspective, obviously not everything in the minutes is relevant to the topic of this paper.

³ Citations from the congregational minutes from this point forward will be cited as *Elroy Minutes* followed by the date of entry into the log.

⁴ For instance there is a reference to Beaver Dam and Prof Ruediger in the German minutes, paragraphs 3 and 4, dated October 3rd 1926; the meeting immediately before the minutes began to be also transcribed in English.

⁵ Meyer, Jeske, Prange, and others have all written thoroughly on the historical details of the controversy and occasionally their papers will be cited for the details they contain.

of the required contextual details. However, a brief thumbnail sketch of the congregation and its pastor up to the time the Controversy broke out probably would be beneficial.

German Lutherans settling in Elroy initially began meeting in their homes and were ministered to by a neighboring pastor from Wonewoc, Pastor August Schlei.⁶ On November 2nd, 1885, the congregation was officially organized as Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church. By next May the membership had doubled; the cornerstone for a building was laid a little over a year later on June 20th, and on October 6th, 1886, the new building “was dedicated to the service of the Triune God.”⁷ The congregation called their first resident pastor in March of 1888; and since 1893 “has always had resident pastors.”⁸ The congregation enjoyed steady growth up until the time the Controversy broke out, and for a time even after. However, during the early 1930’s there was a marked drop off in membership and attendance.⁹

One interesting point about the congregation’s founding constitution is also worth mentioning. The Anniversary Booklet reads as follows:

The founders of Zion were concerned about purity of doctrine. The constitution they adopted provided that only a member of an orthodox Lutheran Synod, that is, either the Wisconsin Synod or one in fellowship of faith with it, might serve as pastor of Zion. Even then they added this proviso: “Providing the Wisconsin Synod does not alter the confessional paragraph of its constitution, *but retains the faith it confesses at present.*”¹⁰ [*emphasis mine*]

Given the imbroglio of the ‘20s and ‘30s, Protestants might be quick to say these words were eerily prophetic.

⁶ The historical background for the congregation is taken from an unpublished booklet produced for Zion’s Diamond Anniversary in 1960; all future citations from this booklet will be cited as *Diamond Anniversary*.

⁷ *Diamond Anniversary*, pg. 3

⁸ *Ibid*, pg. 4. This situation changed when Zion united into a dual parish with St. Paul Hillsboro in the early 1970s; the pastor has now for decades resided in Hillsboro.

⁹ This was not entirely due to the Protestant Controversy. The financial struggles in the area due to the Great Depression were probably at least a contributing factor to the shrinking rolls as people moved from the area.

¹⁰ *Diamond Anniversary*, pg. 3-4

Not much is known about Paul Lutzke biographically before his arrival at Elroy, but what is known gives some very tantalizing clues; especially concerning the struggle he and his congregation were to be swept up in. Zion (Elroy) and St Luke (Glendale) appear to be his second parish. He was not installed into these two congregations until 1921; three years after his graduation from the Wauwatosa Seminary. The interesting thing is not that he graduated from Wauwatosa, or that he was a young pastor when things erupted; the interesting thing is who he went to school with. He was a classmate of Karl Koehler; the gifted firebrand who was so instrumental early on in stoking fires with his words. While I have no letters or document evidence as to how close they actually were, the coincidence is (if indeed that is all it is) remarkable.¹¹ Add to this the fact that he and Karl were one year behind W. Beitz in school, and you have an agonizingly translucent window through which you can see just enough to wonder.

Storm Clouds Gather Over Zion

The first English record of the minutes shows much that is normally found in an active congregation: the election of officers, the appointment of a janitor and organist and a strong proposal for and agreement on the need to do evangelism in their home area (along with the all important allocation of funds to that end). But these matters do not speak to the main question of this paper: *What Was the Involvement of Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Protestant Controversy?* The first mention in the English portion of the minutes of business with an official Synodical representative is found in the tenth point of that year's Annual meeting. An ominous allusion to the coming storm of the Protestant Controversy is found in this bullet point:

A letter from Rev. J. Brenner, Treas. Of the Seminary Bldg & Debt Funding Committee, to the congregation was read, urging us to finish our collection for the new seminary building. After serious consideration the following committee was appointed, Messers.

¹¹ This will come up again later in the paper, but another clue that possibly alludes to a closer friendship between the two men is the fact that Lutzke would eventually receive a call to serve a Protestant congregation in Neillsville; the town Karl and his father would settle in after their respective expulsions.

Gust. Leist, Aug. F. Preuss, & Dr. W. M. Hayden, which together with the church council is to draft a reply to this effect: that we will not raise anymore moneys for the new seminary building until the internal affairs at the seminary be corrected in accordance with the Spirit of Christ.¹²

Two names to note here in this list of committee members – men who will figure prominently in future events – are August Preuss and Dr. W. M. Hayden. Both men appear from the minutes to be strong personalities and August Preuss appears to have been an active member since at least 1894 when he and his brother offered to do all the masonry work for the new parsonage free of charge.¹³

A special meeting was then called by the pastor immediately after Sunday services on the 20th of February, 1927 to discuss a series of communications to and from Syondical officials since the Annual Meeting in January. First the minutes are quoted then the letters in chronological order.

The letter of the congregation to Rev. J. Brenner, as authorized by the congregation in its annual meeting was read with the letter received from Rev. J. Brenner, replying that he had forwarded our letter to the officials of our district¹⁴ that they might deal with us regarding our (stand?) toward the seminary matter. Then was read the letter from Rev. O. Kuhlow¹⁵ 2nd¹⁶ vice pres. Asking us to set a date where officials of Synod might meet with us to discuss these matters. After serious consideration the pastor was instructed to answer to this effect:

¹² Cf. pages 138-139 of the church minutes and also the enclosed letter from John Brenner to the congregation.

¹³ *Diamond Anniversary*, pg. 6

¹⁴ Here is a good place to point out the observations made by Pastor Prange concerning Thurow and the dynamic at work on the District level: "It goes without saying that the ill-fated actions and reactions of Thurow played a major role in these crisis years of 1926-1927, making one wonder why he was serving as district president in the first place...Mark Jeske concludes that Thurow was always dependent on others. 'He leaned on his wife, who had money from a LaCrosse broom factory, he leaned on Brandt and Hensel in Wisconsin Rapids, and later in Waterloo he leaned on [Vice-presidents] Nommenson and Kuhlow. He was emotional rather than intellectual, and he was vulnerable to people who knew how to play on his sympathies...He simply did not seem to have the theological acumen and administrative gifts to handle the job...But Thurow was not alone in this ineptitude among the officials.'" Prange, Peter. *Pastor E. Arnold Sitz and the Prote 'stants: Witnessing to the Wauwautosa Gospel*.

¹⁵ It might seem odd to some that the district vice-president responded instead of the District President Thurow. However, one other reason why Kuhlow may have been assigned to this particular case (or even volunteered) is that for six years (November 24th 1907-1913) he had been pastor of Zion's mother congregation, St. Paul in Wonewoc, before accepting a call to Northwestern in Watertown.

¹⁶ The Congregation's Secretary appears to be in error here since Kuhlow was at the time 1st Vice-President.

We do not deem it necessary for the officials to meet with us until the Synod has officially and openly settled the affairs of the Seminary. Furthermore, then, they are to answer this question for us: When did Christ ever make a believer of a man and use him as Prof. Ruediger was used?¹⁷

On the face of it, Brenner handled it as he was supposed to in forwarding the communication to the District level. He was not in a position to deal with this conflict, he had no authority to deal with this conflict, and he was probably quite right to say that he did not have the time to devote to the issue that the issue deserved.

One important point to be noted from the congregation's letter to Brenner is this quote: "We feel that we as a Synod are drifting away from good old Christianity." At this early point the congregation (at least those speaking for it) appear to have a very developed and impressively informed estimation of the matters going on at the Seminary; as the correspondence below shows. They also appear to have a very developed opinion of what the problem is at the root. Remember Beitz's paper was delivered at Schofield the previous September and we do know from an account¹⁸ quoted by Prange that Lutzke was in attendance. So it would make sense that one can already detect in the attitude of the congregation the views expressed in Beitz's paper. These next points are admittedly speculation, but the questions just beg to be asked: How did a young pastor in such an out of the way congregation in rural western Wisconsin get and apparently remain so informed about the dealings at the Seminary? Why did he head all the way up to Schofield to hear a conference paper when he was not even a member of that conference? The answers could very well stem back to the schoolmate connection of Lutzke to Karl Koehler and possibly even Beitz himself. And if one allows for this, then is it

¹⁷ *Elroy Minutes*. Feb. 20th 1927

¹⁸ Ave-Lallemant, Robert. "Shall We as A Body Sever Relations With Wisconsin?" Here is the relevant part of the citation: "Even before Hensel, Beitz, Motzkus, Abelmann, and *Lutzke* were at the conference Reverend [Herman] Brandt [of Neillsville, Wisconsin] had said he did not know whether he could with a good conscience still pray and go to the Lord's Supper with the Protestants who had protested the Fort Atkinson case." [*emphasis mine*]

possible that Lutzke had already been keeping up on everything since his classmate had been embroiled in the Watertown affair? Again this is all speculation, but it would really explain some of these thorny details.

Elroy, Wisconsin,
February 5, 1927.

Rev. John Brenner,
Treas. of the Seminary Building. Com.,
814 Vliet Street,
Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Dear Rev. Brenner,

Your letter of last November sent to the congregation, inquiring about the collection of moneys for the new seminary building, was read to the congregation and discussed in its annual meeting.

In reply we wish to state that we have begun this collection and at the time it was begun with zeal. You have received \$40.00, we still have \$107.00 which are enclosed.

However, since the beginning of this work our zeal has been quenched in a measure. It is not that we are poor¹⁹, not that we are building or have built, not that we are concerned about our financial burdens; these are not worrying us. Yet our zeal has been dampened by the status of internal affairs at the Seminary. As they stand at present we feel that before we seek to put up a big external front, as grand buildings, we should adjust our internal affairs, set our house in order. We feel that we as a Synod are drifting away from good old Christianity. All we need to do our work thoroughly and efficiently is that as a synodical body we, all of us, ought to get back to the real Christianity of the Cross of Jesus Christ, to guide us in adjusting the internal affairs of the Seminary. Let us get at these with the real Spirit of Christ and all of us will do our bit.

Praying for true service in Christ's Kingdom.

In the name of Zion's Ev. Lutheran Church,

Respectfully,

Its committee,

Signed by Aug. Breudwuebe
 Ernest Pieper
 Fred Lauge
 W. M. Hayden
 Gust. Leist
 Aug. F. Preuss.

¹⁹ The minutes bear this out, the congregation ended 1926 with a positive balance of \$38.78.

Elroy, Wisconsin,
February 7, 1927.

Rev. John Brenner,
814 Vliet St.,
Milwaukee, Wis.

Dear Brother Brenner,

Enclosed you will find a letter from Zion's Lutheran Church with a draft for \$147.00 of which \$107.00 is the sum of all remaining moneys contributed by them toward the seminary building. The balance of \$40.00 is from St. Luke's, Twp Glendale.

The enclosed explains the position of Zion's congregation at this time. It is our testimony as concerns the present status of affairs. We are hoping for an early adjustment which will truly prove that the Spirit of the Gospel is a living thing in every phase of our Church life.²⁰

As concerns St. Luke's, there are still about \$35.00 forthcoming, which I will be able to send shortly.

With fraternal greetings,
Paul Lutzke

Milwaukee, Wis., February 14th, 1927

Zion's Ev. Lutheran Church,
Pastor Paul Lutzke,
Elroy, Wis.

Dear Brethren:

The letter your church council addressed to me in explanation of your present attitude toward the collection for the new seminary and the debts of our synod demands attention that I have neither the call for the time to give.

I have, therefore, taken the liberty of forwarding your communication to the officers of your District, who will be glad to render your brother service in this matter.

In the hope that we will soon have you again working with us in the cause of our Lord, I am,

Fraternally yours,
John Brenner

If the communications had remained this cordial and open; it is quite possible that the Protestant storm which thundered over little Zion may have at least been lessened. But as we

²⁰ The Bietz paper it appears has made an impact on the thoughts expressed by the Pastor Lutzke; he was at the first reading of the paper in Schofield.

will see in the correspondence below, the well meaning, but slow reaction by the District in respect to Zion and its pastor, and Elroy's advanced early hostility towards District quickly turned things into a full-blown verbal thunderstorm.

At first tenor and content of these opening letters from Kuhlow are quite collegial. Like any number of pastors he is really simply attempting to get a feel for the situation; what the issues are, and how he should approach the matter. His immediate request for face time "when the officers... may meet with you and your congregation" from a pastoral perspective was right on; better to talk to the person or people in person than through letters or over the phone.

Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and other States.
West-Wisconsin District.

Jefferson, Wis., 2/16/27.

Rev. P. Lutzke,
Elroy, Wis.

Dear Bro. Lutzke,

Your communication and that of your Church Council of the 7th and 5th inst. Resp. to Rev. Brenner have been sent to us. In these communications are the following statements: "We feel that we as a Synod are drifting away from good old Christianity"; "We ought to get back to the real Christianity of the Cross"; "We are hoping for an early adjustment which will truly prove that the Spirit of the Gospel is a living thing in every phase of our Church life"; "The enclosed explains the position of Zion's congregation as this time."

I assure you that we wholeheartedly concur with you in your expressed hope for an early adjustment, and therefore ask you to set a date when officers of your district may meet with you and your congregation to take up this matter. If that can be arranged, a week day or evening would suit us best; but if need be we will be on hand for any Sunday except the first and last of the month.

Fraternally yours,
O. Kuhlow

It is in the response to Kuhlow that we see the first real ominous rumblings which were to herald the storm to come. Hindsight is admittedly so much more clear than the present, but

reading the letter from the congregation one cannot help but get the impression that their minds had already been made up, that they would have only agreed to treat with the District officials after Synod as a body had “mended ways” i.e. repented of their perceived sins. And one cannot inoculate the pastor from culpability in this matter. As was briefly mentioned above, there appear to be some strong personalities in the congregation, but every indication is that the pastor was no wilting flower either; his own correspondence in this matter has an abrasive edge to it which seems to indicate a hardening of opinion early on.

Here one cannot help but feel a bit for Kuhlow; his biggest error in this matter early on may simply have been giving the pastor and congregation he was dealing with the benefit of the doubt. Every indication is that he approached these early communications in good faith, wanting to resolve the issue, wanting to soothe the conscience of this congregation. Right away from the beginning it would appear that Zion, led by Lutzke²¹, was out to wring a confession from Kuhlow and the rest of the District officials. Some may think this to be too harsh an indictment against the pastor and congregation, to this I answer that their own words paint them in an antagonistic light. The tone of their letters to District are not inquiring, confused, or simply questioning; they are rather quite accusatory.

Elroy, Wisconsin,
February 24, 1927.

Rev. O. Kuhlow.
1100 West St.,
Jefferson, Wis.

Dear Bro. Kuhlow,

Your communication of the 16th received. Last Sunday it was read to and discussed by the congregation.

²¹ Like many of the other men who broke from Synod, Lutzke seems to have been a young idealist, one who honestly wanted to fix things, but whose ardor for the better clouded his judgment.

You asked us to set a date when officials of our district may meet with us to take up the matter of our letter to Rev. Brenner. They did not set a date at this time, believing that a meeting is unnecessary until after Synod has officially and openly investigated the case of Prof. Ruediger. Furthermore, when we get together then we would like to have this question answered: When did Christ ever make a believer of a man and then use him as Prof. Ruediger was used?

By instruction of Zion's. Ev. Luth. Church,
Paul Lutzke

At the next quarterly meeting held on April 3rd 1927, vice-president Kuhlow's responses to the February letters were read. Enclosed with these letters was the official Synodical circular of Professor Ruediger's confession, the faculty's absolution, and the Seminary Board's decision to terminate his professorship accompanied by an English translation of the German documents.

Interestingly, along with them was what appear to be minutes from the forthcoming December 13-14 meeting of the protesting pastors in Marshfield and a German copy of the Elroy Declaration. One cannot be absolutely sure why they were all bundled together; but there are at least a couple possibilities. It could be that pastor Lutzke took the letters and confession with him to the meeting in Marshfield and then everything got filed away together in the logbook; or it could simply be that for no apparent reason these documents simply got filed away together when they were stored. The Declaration and minutes from the Marshfield meeting will be dealt with later as we get to that point in the chronology. The Confession, Absolution, and Judgment will not be presented here in the body of the paper as they are well known to those who have studied the issue; they are, however, to be found for whoever wants to see them where they were placed in the logbook. The two letters from Kuhlow will here be reproduced for reference after the pertinent portions of the minutes are quoted; minutes which continue the accusatory tenor and tone seen in the opening letters.

A letter from Rev. O. Kuhlow, 2nd Vice President of our synodical district addressed to Dr. W. M. Hayden was read to the congregation together with a copy of Professor

Ruediger's confession which this letter contained. In this letter this official expressed his surprise at our last letter to Synod and begged that we consider Prof. Ruediger's confession. These were discussed at length. Dr. Hayden then read a letter which he personally would send to Rev. Kuhlow. The congregation, convinced of the truth of Dr. Hayden's answer, resolved to adopt his writing as his answer to Synod & instructed Dr. Hayden to send that letter in the name of the congregation.²²

Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and other States.
West-Wisconsin District.

Jefferson, Wis., 3/14/27
The Church Council of Zion's Ev. Luth. Church,
Elroy, Wisconsin. (Attention: W. M. Hayden)

Dear Brethren,

I have received a letter from your pastor stating that my letter of the 16th ult. to him for the congregation was read to and discussed by the congregation Feb. 20th. In this letter he informed me of your decision not to meet with officers of the district until after Synod has officially and openly investigated the case of Prof. Ruediger. Though I was hardly prepared for such a decision on your part, especially in view of the serious charges which your letter to Rev. Brenner conveyed, yet I assure you that the officers will be glad to meet with you at that time, (sooner if you desire) to take this matter up and settle it on the basis of the Word of God.

In the meantime I would ask you to hold back your judgment and to read and study carefully the enclosed confession of Prof. Ruediger.

Yours for the honor of Christ,
O. Kuhlow I. Vice President

Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and other States.
West-Wisconsin District.

Jefferson, Wis., 3/14/27
Elroy, Wisconsin.

Dear Bro. Lutzke,

I have noted contents of your letter of the 24th ult. I assure you that I hardly was prepared for such a reply, esp. when I think of your expressed hope of an early adjustment of a matter which gave you and your congregation such concern. Nevertheless, I assure you that we shall be glad to meet with you and cong. after Synod has met or sooner if you should so desire, to there discuss the questions contained in the letter to Rev. Brenner.

²² *Elroy Minutes*, April 3rd 1927. Regrettably, I could not unearth this letter anywhere in the logbook, nor any reference to its specific contents.

Brotherly yours,
O. Kuhlow

Was Kuhlow unwittingly throwing gasoline onto a smoldering fire? I think that is entirely possible. Credit this one to a lack of judgment, which probably, however, at the time may have seemed like quite a good idea on his part. Under most normal circumstances, sending out a statement which appeared in the name of and with the authority of the Seminary carried (and would still today) a great deal of weight. Under most normal circumstances, such a letter would have the effect of quieting things down. But students of the Controversy all know quite well that these were not normal circumstances. Among some within Synod the “officials” and “professors” were regarded with suspicion. Lutzke seems to have aligned himself with those skeptics and found allies in his congregation, or at least those quite happy to follow him.

And the Thunder Rolls

Nothing new appears in the minutes until the July 3rd semi-annual meeting when the council reaffirms its invitation to pastor Motzkus to preach at Zion for their mission festival. Motzkus had been just recently installed as pastor at Globe on April 10th by Oswald Hensel from Marshfield in defiance of the District President. This decision²³ by Zion was the first very public act of protestation made against the Synod’s pronouncements. “The church council reported that even though Pastor W. Motzkus, who a year ago was invited by our pastor to preach at our next mission festival, was suspended by the Synod, the invitation should stand. The congregation did not deem it necessary to act on this.”²⁴

The next peal of thunder comes on November 6th during a special congregational meeting; with an interesting twist that the pastor was chairman. Now in and of itself this might

²³ This was also a decision which was at least approved of by Lutzke, but more likely pushed by him.

²⁴ *Elroy Minutes*, July 3rd 1927

not seem too out of the ordinary, in my own vicar situation the pastor regularly ran the meetings as I am sure countless other pastors have done down through the generations. But this fact is explicitly mentioned in the minutes, implying that this was something out of the ordinary; something happening possibly at the instigation of the pastor.

The pastor as chairman opened the meeting. A special meeting of the Western Wisconsin District of the Wis. Synod having been announced to Nov. 15-18, for the purpose of discussing the different cases of controversy in Synod and all congregations were requested to send delegates. Mr. Ed. Druzy was drawn as our delegate. The pastor pleaded that others who could possibly could, to go.²⁵

Soon after, Nov. 27th at 2:30 p.m., the congregation gathered to discuss the action of the District in convention in Watertown. It is probably because of this meeting that all future communications and attempts at reconciliation originating from the District level proved fruitless. In the congregation's and pastor's eyes men like Thurow, Kuhlow, and Nommenson must have now been not simply suspect but part of the enemy camp. They had publicly aligned themselves with Pieper²⁶ and the rest of the Faculty, which tainted them and destroyed any remaining appearance of objectivity which they might have had at their disposal.

In this meeting a special report on the Watertown-Synod meeting was given, first by Dr. W. M. Hayden, Mr. W. M. Oehlers, and Mr. Ed. Druzy who was our delegate at the meeting. The pastor then also gave a lengthy report. All reports [?].²⁷ The report given in brief is this: That Synod under special guidance of its three officials, Pastors G. Thurow, Wm. Nommenson, and O. Kuhlow and Prof. Aug. Pieper condemned the Beitz paper: The Just Shall Live By Faith as containing much slander and false doctrine, without proving this in any instance; and [²⁸unrighteous?] by wronged all protesting pastors who agreed with Beitz paper; by (Synod) condemning these pastors, laymen, and teachers. Our pastor being one of the condemned pastors, the congregation resolved to write to these officials, Pastors G. Thurow, Wm. Nommenson, O. Kuhlow to come to

²⁵ *Elroy Minutes*, November 6th 1927

²⁶ Here it must be remembered that when it came to the events of the Watertown gathering, there was plenty of blame to go around. Pieper and others behaved especially badly; treating Beitz and others at best roughly, at worst downright shamefully. Cf. Prange's paper for a good blow by blow reporting of the meeting.

²⁷ I am unclear as to what this word in the minutes is.

²⁸ I am also unsure what this word is exactly; and it consequently makes the thought of the next few words unclear.

Elroy as soon as possible to prove 1. that our pastor's protest in the Ft. Atkinson case should be unfounded; 2. that he teaches false doctrine; 3. to answer the congregations question concerning Prof. Ruediger's case."²⁹

Emotions were now simmering at a rather high temperature on both sides. The Protestants were upset at how they were being treated (with some justification), and men on the Synodical side were growing impatient with the perceived impertinence of these young bucks and laymen. This next letter is written by Lutzke to the Committee of Twelve appointed by the District to deal with the protesting pastors. In it he expresses his unwillingness to comply with the request citing lack of time and perceived need. While one can sympathize with his anger at being asked to be hung again, patience and long-suffering seem to be something he at this point also lacks.

Elroy, Wis., November 29, 1927.
The Committee of Twelve,
Prof. H. W. Schmeling, Chairman,
810 Richards Ave.,

Dear Professor and All:

On November 25th I received a letter and a card from Rev. Hoenecke, requesting that I submit my matter to you before November 30th. That request is very vague, considering his next statement: "When your special case is up, you will receive due notice, so that you may be able to present your case personally."

I am not sending any material for two reasons: 1) the lack of time at present to write up this material; 2) if I should so decide to appear personally when the committee calls, I deem this written matter unnecessary.

Above all I cannot understand why the committee wants to deal with me. The committee as a part of the body has voted two resolutions condemning me; 1) with its resolution condemning the paper: The Just Shall Live By Faith; 2) with its resolution declaring me separate from the body. Pray, tell, how can any person submit his case to a body which has already condemned him and still hopes for justice and fairness? First you hang a man and then sit down and ask for the reason why. That smack of brutality in the highest degree.

Last but not least, my case is now resting with the congregation. In the congregational meeting in which the members who attended the synodical meeting,

²⁹ *Elroy Minutes*, November 27th 1927 From this point on, any friendly facade disintegrates. Zion and Pastor Lutzke begin to take a much more active role in the Controversy.

reported, the congregation decided to ask the three officials to come here, to prove their charges against me. A notice to this effect is being sent with this mail.

In closing I ask you this: Where in the action of the body can you find the smallest spark of the spirit of Matt. 18, namely, **humility, trust and forgiveness?** Did Christ ever condemn as Synod did? Consider with fear and trembling that you as a part of this body must give account of your condemnatory resolutions just as I will be held accountable to Christ for my stand.

Begging for a greater measure of faith and truth,

Yours,
Paul Lutzke

This next short letter again requests a meeting with the District officials, this time to answer the charges Lutzke saw as leveled against him through the resolution of the District Convention. It is interesting to note that since the first overtures for a meeting, about a year has passed and there not been a single face to face meeting. Let me say again, communication – clear and honest communication – might have done much to bring things back down to a simmer or better; instead, emotions, words, and people got carried away to the point where no one wanted to listen to anyone anymore (unless of course the other side admitted complete responsibility for their “sins”). Let this be a lesson to us today as we deal with our brothers in ministry no matter what the issue is: worship, change, etc. We must each and every one of us stand on the truth; but it is also critical that each and every one of us gives his brother the benefit of the doubt, hears him out, and treats him like the blood bought soul that he is.

Elroy, Wisconsin,
November 30th, 1927

To all Three Officials: Thurow, Nommenson, and Kuhlow,

After the report given to the congregation by the members who attended the special meeting of Synod, the congregation resolved to invite you together with the two other officials of the District to come here for the purpose of proving your* charges as given in the “praesidial Bericht” to the District concerning my case, the charge of false teaching as given in the resolution of Synod which declared me separated from the body, and finally to answer the questions of the congregation put to you in its communications of last winter.

The congregation would like you to come, as soon as you possibly can, preferring an evening during the week.

In the name of and on behalf of Zion's Ev. Lutheran Church,
Paul Lutzke

*This refers to Ft. Atkinson protest (against suspension of the two teachers the Misses Eliz. Reuter and Gerda Koch at Ft. Atkinson) which officials wanted retracted.³⁰

Another special meeting was called on Dec. 11th, 1927 by the pastor; this time to announce the organizational meeting of the Protestants at Marshfield.

The pastor conducted the meeting, in which he read an invitation to a conference of protesting pastors to be held in Marshfield Dec. 13-14. The congregation voted to send a delegate, and Mr. Harry Lewerenz was chosen and Dr. W. M. Hayden as alternate. Note: Neither of the chosen men being able to go, it devolved upon the church board to choose a man in their stead, and Mr. Aug. F. Preuss was chosen.³¹

At the Heart of the Storm

Here we now come to the high water mark of Elroy's direct involvement in the Controversy. It seems clear that not only was Pastor Lutzke at the meeting of protestors at Marshfield, but that he played a rather involved role as secretary for the conference. The minutes of that meeting are found in the logbook along with the "Elroy Declaration." It appears that the minutes of the meeting and the Declaration were taken home by Lutzke and then were typed up and sent out from there; which seems to be the only reason why the declaration which was formulated and accepted in *Marshfield* was ultimately called the *Elroy* Declaration. The Declaration was written and sent in German but will be seen here in translation. It is followed by the minutes of the meeting at Marshfield, since, (unless there is another copy squirreled away in an issue of Faith-Life or somewhere else) as far as I know, this is the only copy of these minutes extant.

³⁰ This was a handwritten note written at the bottom of the typed letter.

³¹ *Elroy Minutes*, December 11th 1927

Elroy, Wisconsin, the 16th Dec. 1927.

To the General Synod of Wisconsin, in particular to the Western Wisconsin District, to the hands of the Committee of Twelve:

Brothers:

We present the following to you as an answer to your recently received invitation to a discussion, during the week or Christmas, of the existing differences:

We, the undersigned, ourselves energetically refuse from this time on, to deal with any committee of the General or District Synod or to appear before such a committee for the purpose of communicating further information;

1. since we from now on will be fully occupied with our work at home, which has been greatly neglected because of the regrettable confusions, and we in light of the past must view all further dealings as fruitless and a waste of time;
2. since the Committee of Twelve has in hand a hard copy of all needed information for the settling of the cases, or rather would have been able to have if the Synod had acted on the recommendations submitted in the memorial;³²

³² The following is the Memorial which was submitted to the convention. It is found in the *Bericht der Dokumente und Korrespondenzen der beiden Extra Synodal-Versammlungen des West-Wisconsin-Districts*; published by Northwestern Publishing House: *We, the undersigned, should like to ask the question why has Synod been called into session? The reason for the call is given in their announcement: Because the committee suggested by general Synod did not and could not function. What was the purpose of that committee? To hear grievances of both sides and, if possible, to suggest means and ways of ironing out the differences that exist in our District.*

Since the committee of general Synod does not and cannot function and this meeting has been called to take the place of that committee, should not all grievances of both sides be put before this meeting body as a whole? We hold they should.

Who in the first place are the accusers and the accused? Historically all troubles of the District today go back to the protests of the Protestants of the Beaver Dam Synod meeting. These protests are at the bottom of all consequent actions, in the Fort Atkinson case the Protestants placed accusations against the officials and against the District, insofar as it ratified the finding of the committee which had been appointed by the accused parties to review the action officials in the Fort Atkinson case, without having had and demanded the full opportunity to hear all the evidence bearing on the case. The Protestants then are in the first place the accusers and the officials and the District are the accused.

What then, historically and logically, ought to be the first matter to be taken up by the District? We hold that historically and logically the first matter to be taken up by Synod are these basic accusations of the Protestants against the officials and the District.

If we are really desirous of justice and peace, is it then just, right and expedient to proceed according to the proposed program as published by the officials? We hold that we're in effect evading the real issues, wasting the time of Synod, misleading, contrary to the attainment of justice and peace, and thus only creating still greater confusion.

In view of the historical development of the issues at stake we would with all love and sincerity submit this question to Synod: Were it not advisable to get an outside, disinterested chairman for all these meetings? We hold that it is practically an impossibility to find a chairman in our circles who is not in some way biased, all claims to the contrary notwithstanding.

If Rev. Beitz "paper" is to be judged by this body, were it not only faithful and just to hear this paper read on the floor of Synod by Rev. Beitz himself? We hold that any jury, in order to arrive at an intelligent and just verdict must hear the accused in person. It may be argued that Synod would then become a party to the spreading of false doctrine, that the officials must guard the pastors and laymen against the imbibing of poisonous teachings.

3. since the Synod has in Watertown, as also in Beaver Dam, committed unheard of godlessness or still has silently tolerated it;
4. that we ourselves in contrast to you freely support the Beitz Paper, and intend to persist in doing so.

We then will only be found ready to engage ourselves when the decisions reached in Beaver Dam and Watertown, which were rushed and forced, are reversed, all cases from the beginning are once more reopened, and the Synod henceforth show an entirely different disposition which justifies the hope of more profitable dealings.

You will find the names of the people who sign it written down on a separate enclosed sheet.

Elroy, Wisconsin.
Dec. 23rd 1927.

Dear Brethren,

On Dec. 13-14 a number of protesting brethren met in Marshfield to discuss our present status in relation to the Wis. Synod. What responsibilities this placed upon us and the serious consequences to which this meeting might lead was impressed upon us as O. Hensel read for the opening service the words of Ps. 116 which tells us clearly that His disciples are "set in a large place." With a few remarks he reminded us of the responsibility and the seriousness of our meeting, saying that we are "standing before the Lord." But there was courage and joy because of the tenor of the Ps: "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear; what can man do unto me?...O give thanks unto the Lord for He is good; for His mercy endureth forever." There was joy throughout the great amount of work done, and in what spirit we labored may be seen from this remark by a Mo. brother who attended every session and said: "I came here to receive light, and also came to seek that fervent love for the Kingdom of God and love for the brethren. And I found a love, a

We hold that is not the only business of the officials and professors. The right and duty to judge whether this paper is heresy or not belongs to the laymen as well. To deny this is nothing short of popery.

It has been reported by the secretary of our District that Prof. Pieper is to read the paper on suspension. We hold that Professor Pieper is incompetent at the present time to hold forth on this topic, since he himself is involved in the suspensions and under indictment. A goodly number of laymen through us request the officials to make a clear-cut statement of the why and wherefore of suspensions, removals and resignations to date and that said statements be published in our official papers.

To sum up our stand once more: In order that we may accomplish something we wish that Synod would invert its program to get at the real issues and not waste its time in talking abstract principles.

We, the undersigned, subscribe to and submit this document upon the request and behalf of a goodly number of pastors and laymen.

Robt. E. Ave-Lallemant

J. H. Abelmann

Fred W. Krohn

W. H. Oehlers

WM. H. Parisius

unity of Spirit, harmony of mind that astonished me. This movement is from God and has all the earmarks of such.”

That all who could not attend this conference but are concerned, might in a measure know what transpired, the important things are summed up briefly.

Ave-Lallemant’s report on the Watertown meeting was read and discussed a full day. That meeting was seriously considered in detail to establish the facts. All discussions were taken in writing as much as possible that this report may be revised, added to and changed as necessary, to make it thorough and complete. All the brethren, professors, pastors, teachers, laymen are kindly urged to send a written statement (to Ave-Lallemant) of their testimony given before Synod as to why they voted “No” when a vote was called on the resolution condemning Beitz’s paper. Care should be taken that it be in the same words, if possible, as used on the floor of Synod; if that cannot be done, just a summary of your testimony will be embodied in the report³³ Ave-Lallemant is completing. So kindly send your written statement as soon as possible. All desiring a copy of this detailed report for use in their annual congregational meetings may apply to him. This report will again be discussed at our January conference and then prepared for separate publication.

The Lord has plainly shown that our life is to be a life of testifying and work and has Himself shown the way, placing various fields of mission work into our hands. Alma (Erwin Abelman), Rice Lake (W. F. Beitz), Klondyke (Ph. C. Schroeder); their subsidies withdrawn by Synod or to be withdrawn, need our assistance. That is great responsibility to which was added another: Mr. Fred Zeisler of LaCrosse* people, standing without the folds of the old body, pleading that we send a man to LaCrosse to start a mission on the south side where a large field is open and waiting for the Bread of Life.

Feeling the urgency of this need W.F. Beitz was called to LaCrosse as resident missionary. The importance of this work being done at once was so imperative that W. K. Bodamer was requested to supply these people with regular services. Look to all their needs until Beitz has moved to LaCrosse if he can accept the call. Bodamer consented to do so.

It was necessary then to have a treasurer for our group that all our offerings may be wisely handled, and Mr. Herman Arendt of Marshfield (R.F.D.) was chosen. All working for our cause, desirous to help us in our mission word and the spreading of the truth, for great sacrifices are now needed, are kindly asked to send their offerings to him. The treasurer requested assistance in handling this fund, and O. Hensel and G. Krasin were chosen to serve in an advisory capacity, thus practically creating a mission board.

Every one also felt the need of our periodical, not to serve in a polemic way, but constructive as all our work must be, if it is to be of any service and blessing to our people. The Bread of Life is all that we need, that is all we are to dispense, the Gospel of Christ. That means work. Have you any sermons or other material that contains a message, such as relating of pastoral experiences, by which many souls may be helped, the editors will gladly welcome this material. W. F. Beitz, Robt. Ave-Lallemant, Gerhard Gieschen, were chosen as editors. We are searching for a characteristic name for this publication (at

³³ I’m not entirely sure, but I think that the forthcoming report here alluded to is either Ave-Lallemant’s paper “Shall We as A Body Sever Relations With Wisconsin?” or his “Report on Session of Western Wisconsin District.”

the meeting were given as examples: Ev. Luth. Truth: The Lutheran Searchlight). If you have any suggestions to make kindly write them to Beitz.

Pastor Wm. Parisius³⁴ was expected to give us a German translation of the Beitz paper but could not be present because of illness. The conference urged the secretary to write him a letter of cheer, kindly urging him to continue with this translation as health permits. He has written that he is a little better, and we hope that he will continue to improve that he may be with us at our next meeting.

Our next conference is to be held Jan. 17-18. The brethren at Marshfield again invited us to be there which was heartily accepted. But it is possible that we might meet at Wilton instead; if this change will serve our movement. The program for the next meeting is: another discussion of Ave-Lallemant's report on the Watertown meeting; Parisius' German translation of Beitz's paper; O. Hensel's paper on the Faculty-Gutachten; Beitz is expected to give his own Gutachten of his paper, *The Just Shall Live By Faith*; and other matters that might arise as our movement continues to be blessed by our Lord.

At the Marshfield conference Ave-Lallemant also gave a complete and concise history of our movement from its very inception, covering all cases. Every one felt it contained a message and would be welcomed by all searching the truth. It was, therefore, decided to have this history duplicated (later possibly printed).

The greater part of the last evening's meeting we considered the writing of a letter to Synod,³⁵ expressing our stand. Every one felt that it was of no avail to deal with anymore committees, or attend any more meetings until Synod mends ways, reopens all cases. A letter was finally drafted, clearly stating our stand, and accepted, to be signed by all who wished. Three copies are in circulation for the signatures of all protestants who attended the Beaver Dam and Watertown meetings, or either, if their conscience permits them to sign. One copy will be sent to the District Synod, one to the Joint Synod, one to be kept for our own records.³⁶ It is expected that these copies will reach the proper persons by Dec. 28th. For those who have no copy or [have]³⁷ not read one, one is enclosed that they may be fully informed.

May we not neglect to take our cause to the Lord in prayer. He has placed great responsibilities upon us, and the future looms with demands of great sacrifices in time, labor, and money. As we are convinced of the truth of our cause, may the Lord make us willing to meet these demands with cheerfulness and a consecrated heart. In our day, as in Christ's, that means many trials, hardships, crosses, denials, misgivings, and persecution. But the Christ-child born into this world received myrrh as an offering,

³⁴ Interestingly enough this man also served Zion in Elroy from 1893-1900.

³⁵ This is most likely the Declaration which Lutzke would then send out from Elroy.

³⁶ The author contends that none of these three copies meant for circulation is the one found in the logbook, because there was no attached list of signatories to be found anywhere. Possibilities which seem most plausible are that this is either: the original typed draft of which then copies were made and then sent out; or that there were four copies typed up, three of them were sent out as per resolution of the conference, and Lutzke kept one for record purposes. The first option could be further strengthened by the fact that the copy of the meetings minutes (which appear to also have been meant for circulation) found in the logbook are mimeographed, so it would appear that the pastor or congregation had the ability to make copies without having to type up a new draft every time.

³⁷ This word is not in the original.

indicative of the bitterness He would and did endure in life. All who go to Bethlehem to worship and seek to follow Him must share with Him the myrrh. To us though it has been mellowed and sweetened by the peace He has purchased for us. May this cheer us these festal days.

Sincerely,

Paul Lutzke

In the name of the conference of protestants.

*attended the meeting on behalf of a number of LaCrosse

This letter accompanying the submission of the Elroy Declaration to Synod was sent out by Pastor Lutzke soon after his return from the Marshfield meeting.

Elroy, Wis., December 27th, 1927
Professor H. W. Schmeling,
For the Committee of Twelve,
810 Richards Ave.,
Watertown, Wis.

Dear Professor Schmeling:

Enclosed you will find a copy of resolutions³⁸ explaining the position of a number of protesting brethren whom you expected to appear before your body tomorrow. It was planned to have the original copies with the signatures in your hands by tomorrow, but since the copies with signatures have not reached me – probably because of the heavy Christmas mail – I am sending you a copy of the paper with the list of the signatures that have been thus far affixed. As soon as all signatures have arrived, they will be sent to the proper persons.

Respectfully,

Paul Lutzke,

In Behalf of the Protesting Brethren.

Those who have already signed are:

Pastors: J. Ablemann; Phil. C. Schroeder; O. Hensel; P. Lutzke; W. Motzkus; W. F. Beitz; E. Ablemann; W. K. Bodamer; Robt. E. Ave-Lallemant; Paul Hensel; Gerh. Gieschen; O. Kehrberg; WM. H. Parisius
Laymen: Herm. Kuethe; Aug. F. Preuss;³⁹ Frank Borgwardt; G. E. Grap; E. G. Schoenherr; Ferd. Grap

³⁸ This is the Elroy Declaration.

³⁹ He is the Marshfield Delegate from Elroy. Also a listing of signed names from a German copy of the Declaration found in the *Bericht der Dokumente und Korrespondenzen der beiden Extra Synodal-Versammlungen des West-Wisconsin-Districts* has the name of W. H. Oehlers.

The next and last entry in this logbook is the Annual Meeting of January 15th 1928. Now considering there were still almost 100 blank pages to be found after this entry it would initially appear odd this is the last entry; except that there is a motion passed and accepted to make this logbook a historical book of the congregation.⁴⁰ In other words, there seems to have been a consciousness of history being made here and they wanted to keep a record of who said what and when. This decision was very fortuitous indeed for us sitting here almost 80 years later. These minutes from the Annual Meeting for this year deal almost entirely with issues tied to the Controversy: what to do with mission monies considering their current relationship with Synod; reports from various people about the Marshfield meeting; changing the constitution for the purpose of separating from Synod; and the letter sent by District President Thurow.

In one respect at least this letter from Thurow exemplifies Prange's and Jeske's take on the man. After over a full year has passed, after the blowup in Watertown, after his Vice-President has been trying to mediate the situation on his own for a year; Thurow finally decides to get actively involved with this congregation and its pastor. It was too little too late; not to mention the wording of the letter in places would only serve to infuriate Elroy more with its condescending tone.

The pastor then reported on the mission moneys collected during the past year, \$194.83 up to Oct. 1st, together with the Christmas offering \$230.26 (Oct. and Nov. are not included, because they have not yet been opened); mission festival expenses \$22.50. Because of the strained relationship between the Synod and congregation this money was not sent in. The church council drew from this fund \$80.00 and placed it in the church treasury with this understanding that the congregation return this money to the mission fund if it [is]⁴¹ so desired. There remained in the bank \$127.76 which is to be used for

⁴⁰ Cf. pg 21 of the second logbook beginning nine lines from the bottom: "This was also done, as suggested, that the old book of minutes, containing the old Constitution and the correspondence between the Synod and the congregation, be preserved as a historical document of the congregation."

⁴¹ Word not in the original.

mission purposes in the conference of the suspended pastors... The pastor then read Rev. G. Thurow's letter in answer to our invitations that the officers come to Elroy to answer a few questions, cf. minutes of meeting Nov. 27th 1927. In brief the answer was that the officials would not come, but recommended that we invite the chairman of the Synod's committees which are to consider the various matters. This matter was discussed at length. The congregation was not inclined to accept this advice. The following motion was then passed: we stand by our pastor until further developments in the congregation and inform Synod of this fact. "Until further developments in the congregation" is explained by and refers to the [results?⁴²] of this following motion which was accepted: On the first Sunday of February at 2:00 p.m. a special meeting of the congregation is to be held for the purpose of changing paragraphs 13, 23, 24 of the constitution, or any other paragraph we might want to change, cf. the paragraphs of the constitution.

Mr. Aug. F. Pruess, our delegate to a conference of suspended pastors held at Marshfield, reported on this meeting, that these pastors had organized in a conference. The pastor then read a report showing what work was done at this conference; he also read the resolution to Synod signed by 13 pastors and 7 laymen declaring that they would no longer deal with Synod until Synod would show a brotherly, Christian Spirit and disavow all resolutions passed at Beaver Dam and Watertown and reconsider all cases. The pastor announced the meeting of the conference at Wilton Jan. 17 & 18 and urged that as many as possible attend.⁴³

Joint Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Wisconsin and Other States
West-Wisconsin District

Waterloo, Wis., Dec. 20, 1927

To Pastor Lutzke and The Church Council of Our Sister Congregation at Elroy, Wis.

Dear Brethren in Christ,

We have taken time to ponder your letter. We now ask you seriously to consider the advice of your brethren. It is this: For the time being incidents beyond our control have eliminated your officers as such persons who ought to discuss with you the important questions you are referring to. We were quite ready to come to Elroy in the early spring, but the doors to our dear Elroy Sister Congregation were closed to us that that time, and remained closed to us, as much as we deplored it, until the present time. Now the case of Pastor Lutzke, as it pertains to the Fort Atkinson case and to Pastor Beitz's paper, rests in the hands of Synod's Committee of Five and the Committee of Twelve. Will you not write to the chairmen of these committees and invite them to take up these matters with you? If those committees desire to have us present or to hear us we shall be glad to

⁴² I'm not sure that this is the word in the manuscript, but it is the only one I can think of which comes close to what is on the page and the context of the sentence.

⁴³ *Elroy Minutes*, January 15th, 1928

accede to their wishes. If you ponder present situations, you will perhaps agree that that would be the right course to follow.

Wishing you all a Blessed Christmas and A Very Happy New Year,
I remain,
Your humble servant,
G. M. Thurow.

Thurow's letter is now followed by a blistering letter sent back to Thurow by Zion's Board
(Church Council).

Elroy, Wisconsin,
February 3, 1928.

Pres. G. M. Thurow,
Pres. Of the West Wisconsin District,
Waterloo, Wisconsin.

Dear Rev. Thurow,

Your letter of December 20, 1927 received. This letter was read to the congregation and discussed in its annual meeting.

It is beyond our reasoning how you can say "the doors to your dear Elroy Sister congregation were closed to us at that time (spring) and remained closed to us as much as we deplored it until the present time."⁴⁴ In answer to this we refer you to our letter of February 24, 1927 to Rev. Kuhlow: "They (the congregation) did not set a date at this time, believing that a meeting is unnecessary until after Synod has officially and openly investigated the case of Prof. Ruediger." When has Synod done that? So your statement does not correspond with the facts. In November we asked you again to come and prove your charges against our pastor. You refused, not we. We do not want the chairmen of the committees, but you officials who have accused our pastor.

Now our answer is this resolution passed by the congregation at its annual meeting: "We stand by our pastor until further developments in the congregation and inform Synod of this fact."

Yours for true Christianity,
The Board of Zion's Lutheran Church,
Aug. Brendemuehl
Fred Lange
W. H. Oehlers

⁴⁴ This is partially true. The congregation had "closed" its doors for a time after February 24th when they had communicated to Kuhlow that they did not see a need to have a meeting. However, in a letter dated November 30th the congregation had re-instated its invitation to meet.

The special constitutional meeting was held as scheduled on Feb. 5th, 1928 for the purpose of amending the church constitution to allow for withdrawal from Synod along with their now suspended pastor.

This meeting was especially called for the purpose of changing Articles 13, 23, 24 or any other Article of the old Constitution which the congregation might desire changed... the question was also asked, how the new Constitution read regarding our relations with the Wisconsin Synod. Article XIII of the old Constitution was again read, also Article VIII⁴⁵ of the new Constitution with the explanation that the acceptance of the new Constitution meant a withdrawal from the Wisconsin Synod... This motion followed: That the new Constitution be accepted as read. This called for a rising vote, and every voting member present voted for acceptance of the new Constitution.⁴⁶

Soon after this meeting, Zion's Board sent this letter to the Committee of Twelve, Synod President Bergemann, and District President Thurow informing them of their withdrawal from fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod.

Elroy, Wis., February 13th, 1928.
Committee of Twelve,
Pastor G. E. Bergemann,
Pastor G. M. Thurow (respectively).

Brethren:

In view of these facts: 1) that the District officials have absolutely misrepresented to synod and other persons the case of our congregation and pastor as concerns the issues at stake in synod today (cf. our communication to Pastor Thurow of February 3, 1928); 2) that synod officials and the District itself has by its unchristian and condemnatory resolutions treated our pastor as "a heathen and publican," declaring him a false teacher and preacher because of his adherence to the message: The Just Shall Live By Faith.

We the undersigned for Zion's Lutheran Church, Elroy, Wisconsin, wish to inform Synod of this truth that our pastor during the time we have heard and known him, better than six years, has always preached the Gospel in truth and purity and exemplified his preaching by Christian living, therefore express our resentment of these sins of Synod by withdrawing from Synod which the congregation did February 5, 1928, by adopting a new constitution which omits the paragraph which formerly bound us to the Wisconsin Synod.

May the Lord by His grace enlighten your hearts.

⁴⁵ At the beginning of the paper a citation was made from the Diamond Anniversary Booklet concerning the original constitution. This citation alludes to an article pertaining who the congregation calls and is affiliated with. It was probably this article (VIII) which was cited in the Diamond Anniversary Booklet.

⁴⁶ *Elroy Minutes*, February 5th 1928

Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Elroy, Wisconsin, by its Board:
Aug. Brendenmuehl
Fred Lange
W. H. Oehlers

Chronologically there are a few letters which need to be inserted here to help color in the picture some more. These next letters were not found in the logbooks of the congregation but in *Bericht der Dokumente und Korrespondenzen der beiden Extra Synodal-Versammlungen des West-Wisconsin-Districts*. Found in the *Bericht* are two almost identical letters to each of Pastor Lutzke's congregations, St. Luke's Glendale and Zion in Elroy. The Elroy letter here is transcribed along with the brief response St Luke sent back to the Committee of Twelve which was not much more than "message received, goodbye." Elroy resolved not to respond to it at all in their March 11th meeting.

These letters appear to be a last ditch effort on the part of the Committee of Twelve to initiate a dialogue with the two congregations under Lutzke's care. It also appears to be fairly clear that this is not how they were taken. If Zion's response is any indication, the members read this letter as nothing more than an attack on them and their pastor by some high and mighty know-it-alls who they were in no mood to listen to.

There are a couple lines in this letter that deserve brief comment: "But you no doubt as fair minded people will be willing to give us a hearing, so that you are able to judge for yourselves, whether the synod together will all of its theological professors stand on the pure doctrine of Scripture, or whether it is Rev. Beitz." The spirit in which these and the following thoughts are meant could be taken correctly, but given the situation, appealing simply to numbers or the authority of professors really was not a wise thing to be doing. The members and Pastor Lutzke were not in any mood at this point to be essentially told "your elders and teachers know

better” without giving any kind of explanation or Scriptural support. Granted such theological wrangling is difficult at best if not impossible to carry out via correspondence, but to make such a blanket statement cannot realistically hope to result in anything else other than more anger.

Randolph, Wis., March 5th 1928.

To the Secretary of Zion’s Ev. Luth. Church of Elroy, Wis., to be presented to the Congregation.

Dear Congregation:

In answer to your letter to synod, in which you have severed from synod, I would like to call your attention to the fact, that you as a congregation have not as yet hear the synod’s side in its controversy with Rev. Beitz. Of course in matters of conscience and correct doctrine no material consideration ought to have weight. Now Rev. Beitz has severed connections from our District, especially by adhering to his paper: “The Just Shall Live By Faith.” In this paper Rev. Beitz commits two grievous errors. The first is, that he slanders the majority of the Christians in our synod; and the second is, that he plainly teaches false doctrine. Now to this paper of Rev. Beitz your pastor, P. Lutzke, is adhering and has severed from our Synod. And you as a congregation have stood by him. But you no doubt as fair minded people will be willing to give us a hearing, so that you are able to judge for yourselves, whether the synod together will all of its theological professors stand on the pure doctrine of Scripture, or whether it is Rev. Beitz. You surely would not be willing to follow the word of a mere man rather than the word of God, and surely would not be willing to condemn Synod without hearing it. For that would be popery in the highest degree. And the personal liking you may have had towards your pastor surely cannot induce you to follow his errors. For our Lord says: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” I would therefore earnestly beg of you to give our District a chance to talk to you (congregation) for the salvation of your own souls. May I hope for an answer to this letter, as soon as possible?

May God grant that you do in this what is pleasing to Him.

With hearty greetings and in hopes of a mutual God-pleasing settlement of this matter, I remain,

Yours,

H. Geiger,

Secretary pro tem. Of the Committee of Twelve.

Rev. H. Geiger,
Secretary of the Committee of Twelve,
Randolph, Wis.

Dear Sirs:

Your letter of March 5th was received. It was read in a special meeting of the congregation March 11th. The congregation did not take any action nor will any action be taken.

Respectfully yours,
Bert Wolfgram,
Secretary of St. Luke's Ev. Luth. Congregation of Township of Glendale.

This next letter marks the last communication from any Wisconsin Synod authority figure to the congregation or Pastor Lutzke. The inferred nature of the letter (if the congregation's view of it was accurate) and the congregation's reaction to it sealed the break; Zion was no longer a member of the Synod, nor would it have any more dealings with it. This also marks the last correspondence of any type preserved in the congregational records; from here to Lutzke's expulsion from the congregation in 1936, all we have for information is what there is to be gleaned from the minutes.

Special meeting of March 11, 1928. This meeting was called for the purpose of reading and discussing a letter which Past. Gehr. Pieper,⁴⁷ the visiting pastor of the Southwestern Conf. of the West Wis. District of the Wis. Synod had written to the congregation. This letter supposedly written by authority of the West Wis. District contained condemning judgments of the pastor and our whole congregation. After lengthy deliberation the congregation resolved to ignore and not to answer this letter.⁴⁸

Storm Damage and Aftermath

At this point, the things in the congregation appear to settle down as they settle into their new reality.⁴⁹ Most of the next series of entries from the minutes really do not need a large amount of explanation or commentary. They do however offer us a small window into the early years of the Protestant Conference from this one congregation's perspective. It is also at this point that Elroy's active involvement in the debate begins to taper off to the point that by the

⁴⁷ I would seem that this would have likely been the Circuit Pastor at the time. The letter he sent to the congregation was not to be found in the logbook. Whatever the tenor and contents of the letter actually were, the congregation reacted much the way it had to Geiger's letter.

⁴⁸ *Elroy Minutes*, March 11th 1928

⁴⁹ As is usually the case, the surface doesn't accurately picture what was going on internally in the congregation. If the "Stagemann Controversy" is any indication, there were at least a portion of the members who were clearly not pleased with their congregation's withdrawal from the Synod. More will be said of this later.

Annual Meeting in January of 1930, one almost gets the impression that Pastor Lutzke is having to work to keep the congregation interested in the issue.

The pastor then explained the necessity of the congregation being represented at our next conference July 23-24, because the conference is a matter that pertains to the congregation. I was urged that as many members as possible attend. A few expressed their joy that all congregation members at the conference meetings are considered delegates of their respective congregations.⁵⁰

This next entry warrants a closer look. On September 2nd, 1928 a joint meeting of the two congregations was held to take up a strange request of the pastor, to be released from his call to them so that he might go serve another congregation. Now in non-Lutheran circles such a request may not be all that unique, but every pastor who I have mentioned this to view this as highly irregular.⁵¹

Also there is the detail of where the call was to. I have not been able to nail down exactly when Karl Koehler moved from Watertown to Neillsville, but one can presume with some confidence that it was not too long after his dismissal. If that is true, then it is of some interest that he (and remembering the classmate connection) got the call; not to mention the fact that this would put Lutzke in the same area with likeminded men like Beitz, Hensel, Motzkus, and Koehler; at least some of whom he had already been working with.

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the question of whether or not we would grant our pastor a release to enable him to accept a call to another congregation. The meeting was opened by a short service conducted by the pastor, at the close of which service he gave a lengthy explanation of his call to the congregation at Neillsville, how a small group of Lutherans, which had come to the Protestant Conference for help, had been served by this Conference and now desired their own pastor. The pastor explained why he was willing to accept this, providing the congregation would give him a willing

⁵⁰ *Elroy Minutes*, July 1st 1928

⁵¹ This thought is extremely speculative, but assuming that there was an element of the congregation (and this does seem to be the case) which was not happy with leaving the Synod, such a request from the one who led them to break would first of all give them an opportunity to get rid of him (and the vote totals might reflect that), and second it could have galvanized their opinion of him and his allies as trouble makers (anecdotal evidence from conversations with my father seem to point to that being the case).

release; namely, the large opportunities that the Neillsville mission field afforded, and because he felt that these congregations (Elroy & Glendale), strengthened by past struggles in the Church, could continue in the same manner under the guidance of a new pastor. The congregations were to examine themselves regarding these matters. After these explanations Mr. Aug. Breudewuehle was asked to take the chair and keep a record of the proceedings, because the pastor left the meeting to permit all liberty in the discussion. In this record of the remaining proceedings is recorded that the motion was accepted to vote by ballot whether or not the pastor was to be released. The result was 12 ballots for release and 13 ballots against. The pastor was then called back to the meeting and informed of the results. It was declared that it was now left to him to decide in this matter for himself. He said that he would try to make known his decision at the close of next Sunday's service.⁵²

Then the pastor announced the next meeting of the Conference and asked that the congregation choose a delegate, warning against neglect of this matter as formerly with the Wis. Synod. The congregation expressed the wish that some would again go of their own accord.⁵³

The pastor then gave a lengthy report on the last meeting of the Conference, held at Marshfield, Jan. 22-23. Every member received a private report on the Conference finances. This report was explained and we hear how by the efforts and prayers of (all?) man the financial status was improved. The general report showed how an effort was made to call a meeting between the Wis. Synod and the Protestant Conference for the purpose of reconciliation, but this met with failure because of the refusal on the part of the Synod. The mission work to be done by Faith-Life and in the different mission fields was explained. In connection with this report the pastor also spoke on the life within the congregation and explained where and in what manner work might be done to elevate this life.⁵⁴

No new mention of anything at all having to do with the Protestant Conference is made for about a year until the February 9th continuation of the January 12th 1930 Annual Meeting. The brief entry and the way the council handled it perhaps shows either issue fatigue or that there simply wasn't much going on of note in the Conference.

When the pastor inquired whether the congregation wished to hear a report on the last meeting of the Conference, he was asked to give that report in the next service in the sermon or immediately after the service.⁵⁵

⁵² *Ibid*, September 2nd 1928

⁵³ *Ibid*, Oct. 7th 1928

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, January 27th 1929

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, February 9th 1930

Nothing at all is even alluded to concerning the controversy (however there is much to be read about concerning the financial struggles brought on by the Depression) until January 1932 when the Stagemann controversy finally came to a head. This issue, and the events following it, clearly are tied to the Protestant Controversy and appear to be rooted in discontent with the decision of the pastor and congregational majority to break with Synod.

Then came the following: Since there can be no conciliation, be it moved that Max Stagemann be given a release without discussion. Mr. Stagemann asked for this release through one of the members present. The motion was seconded. The pastor protested against this action in view of the contents of the motion. A lengthy discussion then followed. During the conversation other motions were made, namely, that a change be made; and that we go back to Synod, and in connection with the last motion, the maker of it said: "Stagemann told me, that he did not want a release,⁵⁶ but he wants what I want." Most members then declared they understood the suggested motion to mean that Mr. Stagemann's name be taken from the list of signers to the Constitution.⁵⁷ It was then asked that the motion be put, and the motion was then put and passed.⁵⁸

The next meetings show a noticeable drop in attendance (but then the July 9th, 1933 Quarterly Meeting did have 18 present) and the Annual Meeting of January 15th, 1933 shows the sizeable removal (for such a small congregation) of 7 members "because the individuals show by their conduct that they no longer wish to be members."⁵⁹ Things are then almost completely quiet outside of regular business until the Quarterly Meeting of May 17th, 1936 when what at first appears to be a minor note is recorded: "Motion to urge the women to attend the next meeting." Things begin to move very quickly at this point. A special meeting followed on June 6th, 1936 in

⁵⁶ He seems to be saying that he didn't want to leave the congregation persay, but wanted the congregation to return to the Synod.

⁵⁷ Here the articles which had been changed back in 1928 to allow for the congregation's pull out from Synod seem to be the sticking points.

⁵⁸ *Elroy Minutes*, January 1932

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, January 15th 1933. What this means exactly cannot be known, they might have just been cleaning out the books, or this could have been a group of people who had removed themselves (or were being removed) due to the congregation's fight with Synod.

which the previous note of the Quarterly meaning is explained and things really begin to get interesting: “the question to let the ladies vote, the ladies were not for it.”⁶⁰ Who instigated this? The subsequent entry seems to indicate that it was the pastor and some of his old allies. “Herman Triebs and Ed Klingbile were appointed to see the members of their confidence whether they want their minister or not.”⁶¹

At the October 4th, 1936 Quarterly Meeting Henry Sarnow who had been elected as an elder in January of '35 and George Sroenter who had been elected to Council in January of '36 both resigned for some unstated reason and there was a “motion to hear the report of Herman Triebs and Ed Klingbile;”⁶² which presumably referred to the member meetings mentioned from the previous minutes. And finally there is this cryptic final note: “report on the paper/pastor? that was sined/signed.”

This meeting was quickly followed up by another meeting the next month on the 29th with what was at that time an enormous percentage of the voting membership present – 19.

Motion was that the secretary appoint a chairman of this meeting, Herman Triebs was appointed. Secretary appointed the following board members: Robert Leverenz, President in place of George Sroenter; Wm. Hayden applied for release from the board. Gilbert Preuss was appointed in place of Hayden; Edward Duinzy in place of Henry Sarnow; the question of this meeting was: Shall the relation of Rev. Lutzke as pastor be terminated? Ballots as follows: 14 yes, 3 no, 1 blank.⁶³

Very quickly afterward a Missouri Synod pastor was called,⁶⁴ George Zunker, who applied for membership with the Wisconsin Synod and served them faithfully from 1937-1945. January 9th, 1938 the congregation voted to adopt a new constitution and to affiliate with but not

⁶⁰ *Elroy Minutes*, June 6th 1936

⁶¹ *Ibid*, July 1936

⁶² *Ibid*, October 4th 1936

⁶³ *Ibid*, November 29th 1936

⁶⁴ *Western Wisconsin District Proceedings*, 1938, pp 12-13

yet join the Wisconsin Synod. The 23rd of the same month Max Stagemann and his family rejoined the congregation. The congregation officially applied for re-admittance into the Synod in 1940.⁶⁵

With this, Zion's involvement with the Protestant Conference and Controversy officially ended. Within the context of the entire Protestant Controversy, Zion and its pastor did not really play much more than a minor role. But it was their story; and it was a very significant in the history of their congregation. My prayer is that I have accurately portrayed the events, and that we who read their story and other stories from this sad time take to heart these words of Paul as we deal with one another in our ministries: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Western Wisconsin District Proceedings, 1940, p 20

⁶⁶ Ephesians 4:32

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