

Speculations on the Influences of the Protestant Controversy
on Zion Lutheran Church, Elroy, Wisconsin

Church History
Harold Schultz
May 30, 1991

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Library
11831 W. Seminary Drive. 65W
Mequon, Wisconsin

Sixty to seventy years ago there took place a rift in the Synod which created hard feelings among many pastors in the Western Wisconsin District of the General Synod of Wisconsin. One of the pastors involved in the controversy which was called the Protestant controversy was Pastor Paul Lutzke. He was pastor of Zion Lutheran Church of Elroy, Wisconsin. It was from Elroy that the Elroy Declaration was published. In this declaration the members of the Protestant Conference declared that they would no longer consider themselves as under review by the Synod for their stand on the Beitz Paper. They would no longer discuss the matter of their stand on the Beitz paper until the Synod withdrew the resolutions concerning the incidents in Beaver Dam and Watertown, opened all cases up from the beginning of the incidents, and displayed entirely different attitudes.

The purpose of this writing is to determine as much as possible the effects of the Protestant Controversy upon the Elroy congregation. As resource material, the minutes of the annual and quarterly meetings of the church from 1928-1936 will be considered. Because of the time past since the controversy, many of those involved in it have since died. So it will be difficult to determine much information apart from what is recorded in the minutes.

The first striking observation in the minutes is that in the 1928 Annual meeting a new constitution was drawn up. This constitution was adopted by the congregation. Although I do not have the constitution which existed previous to the 1928 constitution, I do have the constitution which followed the 1928 constitution.

In the minutes of a special meeting called on Feb. 5, 1928, it was mentioned that acceptance of the constitution would result in "withdrawal from the Wisconsin Synod." A vote was taken and the 1928 constitution was accepted. In connection with this action, article VIII was read in the 1928 constitution. This article states as follows:

The ministry of this congregation may only be given to a pastor adhering in his confession of faith to all cononical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and as the divine guide of faith and life, likewise all the Symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. He must have the qualifications of a faithful servant of God as designated in I Tim. 3:1-6 and Titus 1:7-9.

We will not consider him merely as a servant of man who is hired by us for one or several years, but we will call him in accordance with the Word of God as a servant of Christ.

The minister obliges himself to serve the congregation faithfully and sincerely and not to deliberately leave the congregation, but his release must be manifested by the will of God.

We, however, reserve the right to depose him in a Christian way, if he has been found by the congregation stubbornly to adhere to false doctrine or if he is stubbornly leading an unChristian life, or has shown willful infidelity in his service.

This article would of course apply to a parochial school teacher.

In contrast to this article, the article VIII of the current constitution reads as follows:

The congregation has the exclusive right to call and elect pastors, teachers, and other officers. The

pastorate of this congregation shall be conferred only upon such ministers or ministerial candidates as unqualifiedly and publicly profess their acceptance of and adherence to Article II of this constitution; and such acceptance and adherence shall be required of them in the call or vocation extended by the congregation.

The teachers called to assist the pastor in the Christian training of our youth shall be such as are in accord with the confessional standard of the congregation (Article II) and are qualified for this field of work.

Note: In case of a vacancy in the position of the pastor or teacher the congregation shall notify the president of the local district of the Synod for the purpose that the latter may assist in temporarily filling the vacancy and in giving his good council in regard to the calling of a new pastor or teacher.

And article II of the present constitution reads:

The congregation accepts and confesses all the canonical books of the Old and the New Testament as the inspired Word of God, and all the symbolical books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, contained in the Book of Concord of 1580, as a correct presentation of true exposition of Christian doctrine, drawn from, and in full agreement with, the Holy Scriptures; hence, no doctrine shall be taught or tolerated in this congregation which is in any way at variance with the following symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, viz.: 1) The Three Ecumenical Creeds---the Apostolic, the Nicene, the Athanasian; 2) The Unaltered Augsburg Confession; 3) The apology of the same; 4) The Smalcald Articles; 5) Luther's Catechisms, the Large and the Small; 6) The Formula of Concord.

And we set forth that according to this norm of doctrine and faith all controversies which may arise in the this congregation shall be decided and adjusted

And in removal of a pastor or teacher from office includes the following in article XI:

Sufficient and urgent causes for removing a pastor or teacher are persistent adherence to false doctrine, scandalous life, willful neglect of duty, or established inability to perform the duties of his office. I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9.

With the articles from the two constitutions in mind, and assuming that the present constitution was similar in content to the constitution before the 1928 constitution,

what might speculate exactly what it was that would have caused, by acceptance of the 1928 constitution, a "withdrawal from the Wisconsin Synod."

In the proceedings of the 1928 meeting of the Western Wisconsin District a letter is addressed to the Committee of Twelve, Pastor Bergemann, and Pastor Thurow from the members of Zion Congregation in Elroy on Feb. 13th, 1928. In this letter the members of the congregation specifically state that they were "withdrawing from Synod which the congregation did Feb. 5, 1928, by adopting a new constitution which omits the paragraph which formerly bound us to the Wisconsin Synod."

The specific paragraph which they mention would most likely be the "Note..." listed at the end of article VIII of the current constitution.

What was the result of this action by the congregation as a result of what they saw as the "sins of the Synod", i.e. "that the 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?" At first the results might not appear as of much consequence. The congregation got along fine without the synod for business went along as usual as the minutes indicate. The regular matters of paying bills, and carrying on the business of the church seem go on as usual. But as time goes on certain

odd irregularities do appear. For instance there is the matter of a disagreement mentioned between Max Stagemann and the pastor which was mentioned already in the minutes of the July 14, 1929 meeting. A committee was appointed to examine the matter. On Oct. 6, 1929 the chairman, Aug. Brendenmuehl, reported that "as far as the congregation was concerned its committee had done all it could do." That is all that was said until Jan. 11, 1932 it was stated that Max Stagemann asked for a release from the congregation through one of the members. The pastor protested because of the contents of the motion. Then it is mentioned that a lengthy discussion followed and "motions were made 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, but he wants what I want.'" Most of the 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." From these comments it seems that dissension was continuing within the congregation related to the congregation's separation from the Synod.

Then in Oct. 4, 1936 the president and secretary of the congregation resigned. And on Nov. 2, 1936 a member of the board of elders asked to be released from the board. In the Nov. 2, 1936 meeting it was voted that the relations with Pastor Lutzke be "terminated." From 1937 to 1945 the congregation was served by Pastor Zunker, who applied for membership in the Wisconsin Synod from Missouri in 1937.

And in 1939 Zion asked to become a member of the Wisconsin Synod.

Though it could be possible that the Protestant Controversy did have a part in the pastor being terminated, it can not be definitely determined from the minutes of the meetings. And not enough can be known from those who were alive at that time since it was so long ago. But the pastor's influence seems to be strongly a factor in the separation of Zion from the Synod. In the letter which the congregation wrote to the Committee of Twelve mentioned above, they point to the pastor's faithful adherence to God's Word and his exemplary life as proof of his innocence in the Protestant Controversy. Such a faithful pastor certainly could easily be followed. But why was he then terminated so abruptly? Perhaps the congregation came to realize the adverse affects the controversy itself was having upon the members. But that is only speculation. The real truth of the pastor's termination may never be known. But by God's grace Zion continued to exist and be served by pastors who were faithful to God's Word.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Minutes of Zion Lutheran Church, Elroy, Wisconsin-1928-1936.

Proceedings of Western District of Wisconsin Synod-1928.

1910-1911
1912-1913
1914-1915
1916-1917
1918-1919
1920-1921
1922-1923
1924-1925
1926-1927
1928-1929
1930-1931
1932-1933
1934-1935
1936-1937