

# **The Protes'tant Controversy: Long-Lasting Reverberations of the Beitz Paper in the Dakota-Montana District**

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## **Introduction**

On June 2, 2012, Trevor Cox, an acoustic engineering professor at the University of Salford, England, recorded the sound of blanks fired from a pistol inside a network of underground fuel storage tanks near Invergordon, Scotland. Known as the Inchindown Tunnel, the tanks were excavated out of solid rock deep in the hillside between 1939 and 1941 to provide a bomb-proof supply of fuel oil for the Royal Navy ship anchorage nearby. Designed with a capacity of over 660,000 gallons, the tanks measure more than 600 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 44 feet high. The resulting echo from the gunshot, measured at 125 Hertz, a frequency typically made by a tuba, lasted an astounding 112 seconds, the longest ever recorded. The broadband reverberation time, which includes all frequencies simultaneously, was 75 seconds—a figure certified by Guinness last July as a world record for the longest echo in a man-made structure. This shattered the previous record of a fifteen-second echo of doors slamming in the Hamilton Mausoleum in Scotland set in 1970.<sup>1</sup>

At a meeting of the Wisconsin-Chippewa Valley Conference September 14-15, 1926, at Schofield, Wisconsin, William F. Beitz read a paper titled “God’s Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live by Faith.” Three weeks later, Beitz read it again at an area Wisconsin-Missouri mixed conference held at Rusk, Wisconsin. This writer knows nothing of the acoustics in the settings where Beitz first read his paper, but he is quite confident that any echo produced by Beitz’s own voice lasted nowhere near a record-setting length. The reverberations caused by his words, however, can be measured not in seconds but in decades, radiating from Wisconsin to the far reaches of South Dakota and Montana.

These long-lasting effects of the Beitz paper on pastors and congregations in the Dakota-Montana District will serve as the focus for this paper. No attempt will be made to recount every minute detail of the controversy. Only two years into the affair Beitz commented to Immanuel Frey, who had been tasked by the Minnesota District with presenting a history of the suspensions of the Western Wisconsin District, “Should I try to give you a detailed account of my case it would become of such proportions that I feel like John: ‘all the books of the world would not be able to contain it.’”<sup>2</sup> Since that time, much, much more has been written. This paper makes no claim of providing even a comprehensive overview; other more-capable writers have already tackled this endeavor.<sup>3</sup> It will not offer a careful critique of the warnings of woes or prescriptions for remedies offered by Beitz in his paper. Again, this has already been undertaken—both in condemnation and in defense—by members of the Seminary faculty. Instead, this paper will try to

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<sup>1</sup>Information for this paragraph taken from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/18/guinness-world-record-echo\\_n\\_4618542.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/18/guinness-world-record-echo_n_4618542.html) and <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/now-weve-heard-it-all-acoustic-scientists-shatter-the-world-record-for-longest-ever-echo-9062134.html>

<sup>2</sup>Immanuel Frey, “History of Suspensions in the West Wisconsin District,” with foreword and endnotes by Pastor Peter M. Prange, [www.jerusalem.lutheran.org](http://www.jerusalem.lutheran.org).

<sup>3</sup>See especially Mark A. Jeske, “A Half Century of *Faith-Life*,” a seminal study on the Protes'tant Controversy available for download from the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File. See also the various Protes'tant-related essays by Edward C. Fredrich on the WLS Online Essay File as well as the chapter on the controversy in *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*. A very engaging overview with special emphasis on the role the Wauwatosa faculty played in the controversy can be found in the pertinent chapters of *Jars of Clay: A History of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (1863-2013)* by John M. Brenner and Peter M. Prange. Prange has also written a number of other essays on the Protes'tants available for download from his congregation's web site: [www.jerusalem.lutheran.org](http://www.jerusalem.lutheran.org) (search for “papers”).

add a few threads to the rich tapestry of the history of the Protes'tant Controversy by bringing together in one place the accounts of three men—separated both in time and space—that demonstrate the long-lasting reverberations of the Beitz paper in the Dakota-Montana District.

This task is made more difficult by both the wealth and paucity of available information. Bound copies of *Faith-Life*, which since 1928 has chronicled the Protes'tant cause, fill several library shelves. The periodical includes extensive coverage (including copies of key documents and correspondence, personal reflections and commentaries, and even a full meeting transcript) of the “ordeals” of two of the protagonists, but only a passing mention is made of the third. Official minutes or original source documents recording the other side of the issue, however, are extant only for one of the congregations. Some of the most basic details have proved problematic to track down. With this in mind, the author makes no claim that his work provides the final word on this topic. Instead, he hopes this paper will provide a suitable starting point for further study.

### The Scene and Setting

The Protes'tant Controversy was certainly inflamed by the presentation of “the Message,” as the Beitz paper came to be known, but Edward Fredrich asserts that its roots can be traced back almost a decade earlier, to difficulties arising from the merger of the four federated synods into the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States:

As far as outward appearances are concerned, the merger was accomplished with a minimum of friction. This is especially true of the “other states” of the merger, Minnesota, Michigan and Nebraska. Here the built-in synodical leadership and bureaucracy simply transferred itself into a district counterpart. Not too much more than change of names and titles was required. In Wisconsin, however, it was a different story. Here the old synodical leadership moved up to serve the merged body. Three new districts were formed and there was a lack of experienced personnel to fill the many leadership posts.... It is understandable that there were some false starts, some clashing of gears, some outright breakdowns at the synodical level and especially at the district level in Wisconsin. It was easy to make a vague but hated *Beamtentum* the goat of all difficulties. The situation lent itself to an anti-establishment mood. Anyone perusing the old records of the Protes'tant Controversy is struck by this distaste for officialdom, this commitment to the belief that the worst of all worsts is *Beamtentum*. As has been said, the officialdom was weak in the days when the Controversy erupted within Wisconsin districts. But the point is not now to catalog failing and faults but rather to emphasize the anti-establishment character of the Protes'tant movement. This may well be the key to understanding the whole complex development.<sup>4</sup>

Such an anti-establishment bent was characteristic not only of would-be Protes'tants, but of the country in general in the 1920s. “A scofflaw attitude prevailed in that decade over against the old mores and morality, the old order and authority, the old and the new laws.... It was an era of rivalry on the national and world scene between the revolutionary and the reactionary.”<sup>5</sup> “The world was changing quickly and in an unprecedented way, and people’s worldviews were being seismically altered as a result.... It was easy to conclude that the end of time was drawing near and that God’s judgment would soon come quickly.”<sup>6</sup>

These apprehensions showed themselves in writings of the professors at the Wauwatosa Seminary. “When reading the *Theologische Quartalshrift* essays of those tumultuous years, especially those of John

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<sup>4</sup>Edward C. Fredrich, “The Protes'tant Controversy,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, 4.

<sup>5</sup>Fredrich, “Controversy,” 4.

<sup>6</sup>John M. Brenner and Peter M. Prange, *Jars of Clay: A History of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (1863-2013)*, (Mequon, WI: Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Press, 2013), 130.

Ph. Koehler and August Pieper, one cannot help but notice how often these men addressed the very real threat of incipient legalism and self-righteousness within the Synodical Conference and Wisconsin Synod, and the divine judgment that would result if those spiritual attitudes were not addressed.”<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Ruediger, who was called to teach at the seminary in 1921, reportedly told his students unequivocally, “We all lie under the judgment of hardening.”<sup>8</sup> Fredrich contends, “Among the underlying causes of the Protes’tant Controversy this issue of judgment and obduracy must rank as one of special significance.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Watertown Troubles<sup>10</sup>**

At Northwestern College in Watertown, Wisconsin, the distaste for officialdom and the issue of hardening came to a head with the discovery of rampant stealing by a number of students in March of 1924. An investigation by the tutors (three of whom later became Protes’tants), uncovered a total of 27 boys who recently had stolen something. Most of the thefts were petty, but there was a group of three whose joint thievery efforts had netted over \$80.00. The faculty handed down eight expulsions, eight suspensions to the end of the year, and eleven campus arrests.

The parents of a number of the boys complained to members of the college board about trials they deemed as unfair. Although the faculty pleaded with the board to support them for the sake of discipline at the school, the board was determined to exercise its rights. At the time the right of expulsion rested solely with the board. Although usually the board simply ratified any disciplinary action taken by the faculty, in this instance it intervened. It reopened and reviewed every case over the faculty’s strong objections. As a result all of the suspensions were overturned; five of the boys returned to complete the school year and another returned the following year. Absent objections by any of the parents, the expulsions were upheld.

Incensed by the board’s actions, NWC professors Karl Koehler (son of J. P. Koehler) and Herbert Parisius resigned from the faculty. They volunteered to continue teaching until the end of the year without salary, but the board refused their offer. Mark Jeske notes, “At this point it is surprising, not that two professors resigned, but that only two resigned.” He lays the lion’s share of the blame for the situation squarely on the shoulders of the board. He speculates, “What undoubtedly happened was that the Board made a quick statement immediately and then could not back down.” His assessment of the repercussions of the situation: “To embarrass and humble an entire faculty was most unwise. The Board forever laid itself open to Protes’tant charges of power politicking, lovelessness to the brethren, and making a *Machtfrage* out of a disciplinary case.” The only “serious error” he ascribes to the faculty was operating for so many years with a disciplinary policy that “sidestepped the letter of the statutes.”<sup>11</sup>

Jeske concedes, however, that personalities also played a large part in this dispute. Peter M. Prange writes, “You couldn’t have neutral feelings about Karl Koehler. A small group of pastors honored him as God’s special prophet to the Wisconsin Synod. Most did not appreciate his frankness, especially synodical leaders.... A friend on the Northwestern board [D. T. Abelman, who at first resigned in protest over the

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<sup>7</sup>Brenner and Prange, 131.

<sup>8</sup>Brenner and Prange, 133.

<sup>9</sup>Edward C. Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans: A History of the Single Synod, Federation, and Merger*, (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 156.

<sup>10</sup>Facts and details in this section taken from Mark A. Jeske, “A Half Century of Faith-Life: An Analysis of the Circumstances Surrounding the Formation of the Protes’tant Conference,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, pp. 7-10; and John P. Meyer, “The Historical Background Which Led to the Formation of the Protes’tant Conference,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, 1-2.

<sup>11</sup>Quotations in this paragraph taken from Jeske, 9.

handling of the situation but later withdrew his resignation] would later observe ‘I think if a Koehler would not have been involved in this, the controversy would not have been at all.’”<sup>12</sup>

Koehler was a central figure in the meetings called July 12, 1924, by Gerhard Ruediger to discuss the Watertown case and to hear the faculty’s side of the story. He publically accused synod president Gustav Bergemann of lying for alleging that the Northwestern faculty had forbidden the father of an accused boy to appear before them: “I know the source of that story. That is a lie. It’s either that, or the man who says so is so woefully incompetent to absorb information when he sits in at a hearing, that he ought not to be in office.”<sup>13</sup> In October Koehler added additional fuel to the fire when he asserted at a meeting of the Joint Synodical Committee “that the Watertown fiasco offered damning proof that ‘the Wisconsin Synod lies under the judgment of hardening (*Verstockung*).’”<sup>14</sup>

The reaction to his assertion was unambiguous. August Pieper wrote to his son, Gerhard:

A terrible dismay and serious opposition was the result of this speech, those terrible accusations of Karl. Once I cried out loud, because I was so horrified: “Ach Gott in Himmel.” Praeses Sauer, who was taking down the minutes, interrupted him, outraged: “You must have been in heaven and looked into the heart of the Almighty God to say such things.” Pastor Brenner declared that he lacked words to respond properly to such a judgment over against our Synod. He refused to continue to negotiate with Mr. Karl Koehler; there was no more common ground between him and us.<sup>15</sup>

In the same letter Pieper concluded, “The matter can only end—unless K[oe]hler] retracts—with his exclusion and with the exclusion of all who side with him.”<sup>16</sup>

### **The Fort Atkinson Case**

Twenty miles south of Watertown, in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, another situation was developing that would serve as a further catalyst for the developing controversy. Two young teachers, Gerda Koch and Elizabeth Reuter, expressed concerns about the spiritual condition of their congregation including the “sins” of short dresses, bobbed hair, less-than-Lutheran musical selections by the choir, and church suppers. Even Protestant historian Leigh Jordahl concedes, “Clearly the women by any traditional Lutheran standard exhibited an overt pietism.”<sup>17</sup> “What concerned these young ladies most was the fact that their pastor, an old gentleman by the name of A. F. Nicolaus, didn’t preach against these ‘sins.’”<sup>18</sup> The teachers’ rebuke of their pastor at first elicited only pleas for them to “relax their pietistic bent.”<sup>19</sup> In December 1924, however, Nicolaus lost patience after Koch accused him of being a false prophet. When the women refused to retract their slurs, the congregation suspended them until such time as they did.

A month later the women received and accepted calls to teach in Marshfield, Wisconsin. The Fort Atkinson congregation objected to this action and refused to grant them a peaceful release. In turn the

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<sup>12</sup>Peter M. Prange, “‘Prize the Brotherhood.’ A Review of the History of the Protestant Controversy: Its Causes, Its Effects and Its Lessons for Today in Carrying Out Church Discipline,” [www.jerusalem.lutheran.org](http://www.jerusalem.lutheran.org), 2-3.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted by Prange, 3.

<sup>14</sup>Prange, 3.

<sup>15</sup>Quoted by Prange, 3.

<sup>16</sup>Quoted by Prange, 3.

<sup>17</sup>Leigh Jordahl, “John Philipp Koehler, the Wauwatosa Theology and the Wisconsin Synod,” introduction to *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Publishing Co., 1981), xxvii.

<sup>18</sup>Prange, 5.

<sup>19</sup>Prange, 5.

teachers insisted that the Fort Atkinson vacancies not be filled because of the “spiritual deadness” of the congregation.<sup>20</sup> The issue intensified as the Marshfield pastor, Oswald Hensel, as well as Gerhard Ruediger began championing the women’s cause against “synodical tyranny.”<sup>21</sup> Committee after committee (Jeske notes at least ten in all) tried to resolve the situation but to no avail. No retraction was forthcoming. The Fort Atkinson congregation withdrew from synod membership. Finally on May 16, 1926, the Western Wisconsin District praesidium published this notice in *The Northwestern Lutheran*: “The undersigned hereby apprise the Synod of the fact that the Misses Elizabeth Reuter and Gerda Koch for the present cannot be considered eligible as teachers for our schools.”<sup>22</sup>

In June 1926 the Western Wisconsin District Convention at Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, at President Gotthold Thurow’s insistence, took up the praesidium’s action. “The floor committee assigned to the case resolved ‘to approve the action of its officials because these teachers were guilty of gross slander ... [and] because these teachers held such false views concerning the adiaphora, that for the present they were not capable of instructing children.’ The resolution passed easily.”<sup>23</sup> William Beitz and sixteen others protested this action on procedural grounds, arguing that the district had intervened before the Fort Atkinson congregation had completed its discipline according to Matthew 18. Peter Prange correctly notes, “Somehow the Protéstants [sic] seemed to overlook the fact that Oswald Hensel’s congregation had called the two teachers away from Fort Atkinson before that congregation could deal with them according to Matthew 18. A case of the kettle calling the pot ‘black.’”<sup>24</sup> This *Protestschreiben* gave rise to the moniker “the Protes’tants.” “Professor Pieper ... is supposed to have used it, somewhat disparagingly, in the first instance and those so dubbed regarded the epithet as accolade.”<sup>25</sup>

The protesters saw the teachers’ suspensions (Pres. Thurow had been careful to point out that the district’s action was not excommunication, simply confirmation that they could not be recommended at the present for teaching positions<sup>26</sup>) as only one part of a broader problem:

They feared their beloved synod was becoming more legalistic, slipping into formalism, traditionalism, orthodoxism. They observed a general smugness of ‘*reine Lehre*’ (correct doctrine). They noticed an ever-increasing reliance on methods, programs and rules for institutional success rather than a reliance on the gospel to bring about unfettered fruits of the Spirit. Their battle cry became: “Faith or forms?” The possibility of the synod’s *Verstockung* continued to unnerve them. As they encountered resistance to their message, they became more convinced that the Wisconsin Synod was indeed lying under the judgment of *Verstockung*. They couldn’t allow that to happen without witnessing to the truth, and they came to see any refusal to treat these “broader questions” as clear evidence of the very *Verstockung* they were struggling to avert.<sup>27</sup>

Their written protest offered, “We are ready at the proper time to deal with the basic principles, in order to make earnest attempt [sic] to attain true unity.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Jeske, 12.

<sup>21</sup>Jeske, 12.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted by Prange, 6.

<sup>23</sup>Prange, 6-7.

<sup>24</sup>Prange, 7.

<sup>25</sup>Fredrich, “Controversy,” 6.

<sup>26</sup>Prange, 6.

<sup>27</sup>Prange, 7.

<sup>28</sup>*Protestschreiben*, translation from Jeske, 38.

The invitation for further discussion with the protestors was summarily rejected. “Most had heard enough of these issues and wanted to move on to the ‘important business of the church,’ while Beitz and the Protéstants [sic] saw their concerns as the ‘important business of the church.’”<sup>29</sup> Pieper’s reported reply to their concerns was less-than-constructive: “*Rum oder ‘raus*” (“shape up or ship out”).<sup>30</sup> “The fight for the ‘soul of the synod’ was on, and Beitz asserted, ‘It is a battle to the finish because Pips is in it. And we cannot stand idly by and let the exponents of this blessed Gospel of Life be murdered. Surely if we do that we are *verstockt*.’”<sup>31</sup>

### Prelude to the Beitz Paper

Ruediger’s participation in the Watertown and Fort Atkinson situations (as well as dragging these issues into his seminary classroom) led the seminary board to ask for his resignation July 27, 1926. In September 1926, Ruediger signed a “confession of sins,” purportedly written for him by Pieper, which was published alongside a faculty absolution. At first he was asked not to teach for the rest of the school year. On January 31, 1927, the board rescinded his call, “claiming that the members of the synod no longer had confidence in his ability to teach at the seminary.”<sup>32</sup>

Prange records Beitz’s reaction to the board’s call for Ruediger’s resignation:

“He refused absolutely,” Beitz reported to a friend a month later. “What has come of his refusal I do not know at this time. I suppose the Board is divided and in a quandary.... Whoever is not willing to violate his conscience will be mighty careful to take the step of ousting. Yet I am sure that Pips will drive it to that issue.” Beitz again saw the whole state of affairs as evidence of *Verstockung*. “I am beginning to feel the truth of the words of Ruediger, Karl K[oehler] and others more each successive day: *Wir liegen im Gericht der Verstockung* [We lie under the judgment of hardening]. My! What awful words, but how they come home to one, and how that cuts.”<sup>33</sup>

Beitz saw legalism running rampant in his church body. In the same letter to Immanuel Frey referenced above he added, “We do not realize the awfulness of sin and so do not appreciate the Savior from sin.... The root of it all: *Keine wahre Busse* [no true repentance]. It’s all an intellectual process, this matter of Christianity.”<sup>34</sup> He placed the blame for this lack of repentance by the people on the preaching he heard coming from synodical pulpits. Earlier that August Beitz told E. Arnold Sitz, “I am working out a paper on that theme for our mixed conference in Oct. Perhaps that will serve to state more clearly what I believe true preaching is.”<sup>35</sup>

The first reading of that paper Beitz was “working out” came three weeks earlier than originally planned, at the Wisconsin-Chippewa Valley Conference meeting at Schofield, Wisconsin, September 14-15, 1926. Prange notes:

That the Beitz Paper was never going to be “received with thanks” as a conference paper is self-evident. A person would be hard-pressed to believe that Beitz himself expected a warm reception. It would be equally

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<sup>29</sup>Prange, 7.

<sup>30</sup>Prange, 7.

<sup>31</sup>Prange, 7.

<sup>32</sup>Brenner and Prange, 136.

<sup>33</sup>Prange, 8.

<sup>34</sup>Quoted in Brenner and Prange, 136.

<sup>35</sup>Quoted by Prange, 8.

difficult to fully appreciate the animus some pastors were apparently harboring for the Fort Atkinson protesters by the fall of 1926. Tensions were running high in the Western Wisconsin District.<sup>36</sup>

Already before the conference, Herman Brandt, pastor at Neillsville, Wisconsin, questioned whether he could in good conscience pray and commune with the Protestants. He consented to attend only on assurances that further action was pending. A majority vote of the conference was required before Beitz would even be allowed to read his paper.<sup>37</sup>

### **“The Message” and a Chorus of Responses**

The paper Beitz read at the Schofield conference as well as at the mixed Wisconsin-Missouri conference at Rusk, Wisconsin, October 5-6, 1926, for which he was originally assigned, was titled “God’s Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live by Faith.” In its opening paragraphs Beitz contends, “This letter is written not for the purpose that we may see what happened to the Galatian Christians, but that we may see what is happening to us.... The Galatians were in a bad way. God has it written that we may see that *we* are in the same bad way.”<sup>38</sup> The section headings for the most part give a good idea of the points Beitz was trying to make: “How Satan Gets Us Back Under the Law,” “The Miry Valley of Repentance,” “Repentance at the Foot of the Cross,” “The Ministry Is not an Assembling Plant,” “Using the Bible without the ‘Improvements,’” “Teaching, too, is Witnessship,” “All Teaching Glorifies the Savior,” “Christ Shows Us the Father,” and “Hagar and Sarah.” The concerns about the conditions within the synod Beitz had expressed earlier to friends were now made public. Fredrich summarizes his presentation this way:

Beitz used the great Reformation passage in Habakkuk and Galatians as a launching pad for an aggressive attack on the spiritual life in the Wisconsin Synod. The passage was to set the tone that would test harps “to see whether they be in tune with God’s.” The test, according to Beitz, showed a miserable failure in congregational life, in preaching, in Seminary training, in catechetical endeavors, in just about every aspect of “living by faith.”<sup>39</sup>

The reaction to “the Message” was predictable. Although a comparison of the Beitz paper and earlier essays written by Pieper uncover “obvious similarities in language and approach,”<sup>40</sup> Beitz was no Pieper, but rather “an unknown quantity who seemed to publically and purposefully goading synodical leaders, including the seminary faculty.”<sup>41</sup> A few pastors rallied around Beitz, “claiming the paper contained the right diagnosis and the sure cure for the synodical malaise.”<sup>42</sup> A large majority believed Beitz had gone too far. J. P. Koehler was among those who was critical of the inconsistencies and exaggerations contained in Beitz’s words, comparing them to the pietistic solutions of Jacob Spener.<sup>43</sup> In a letter to his former student written in October 1926 Koehler notes:

Lamenting and criticizing is the easiest thing to do; mostly everybody is going to pick up that habit, and it isn’t going to rouse the rest from their security. What is called for is getting down to joyful

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<sup>36</sup>Prange, 9.

<sup>37</sup>See comments of Robert Ave-Lallemant quoted by Prange, 9.

<sup>38</sup>William F. Beitz, “God’s Message to us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live By Faith,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, 1. Another commonly referenced copy is the reprint in the September-October 1978 issue of *Faith-Life*.

<sup>39</sup>Fredrich, “Controversy,” 6-7.

<sup>40</sup>Brenner and Prange, 136.

<sup>41</sup>Brenner and Prange, 136-137.

<sup>42</sup>Fredrich, *History*, 158.

<sup>43</sup>Prange, 10.

work with a purpose. To make that happen, a whole new attitude has to come about, and that is what we must strive for. How to begin? By pointing out the great, joyous prospect; by actually proclaiming the Gospel. This is the only way a sharp critique will gain the cutting edge. I know that I don't have to explain something so elementary to you. You yourself make the same point in the tract. But mentioning it isn't enough, the tract itself should have demonstrated this. Don't you see that [your] Gospel of faith, even if not exactly Law, nevertheless amounts to an ordinance?<sup>44</sup>

Although critical of his lack of precision, Koehler in that same letter sympathizes with Beitz's frustrations:

Don't think I don't know how a humor like this develops, because I have experienced it in myself. A man sees what is going wrong, and observes the wrong turns taken again and again, and how the mistakes saturate everything. One comes to realize what is the right position, and takes for granted that the communion of saints ought to know about it. But people who live by the book don't share this assumption. That is why they ascribe their own incorrect views to the opponent; and all this terminates in a futile feud.<sup>45</sup>

The situation quickly began spiraling out of control. The first meeting of protestors took place in November 1926 with the purpose of forming ranks behind the Beitz paper. A plan to print the paper in quantity was considered but no action taken.<sup>46</sup> Another get-together, accompanied by a worship service with Holy Communion, was held the following February.<sup>47</sup> In April 1927 the Beitz paper was read for a third time at a conference in Marshfield, Wisconsin. District President Thurow attended as did his two vice presidents. The furor that arose following the reading of the paper made it clear that the matter was not going to be resolved by floor discussion at any conference. At Marshfield the Western Wisconsin praesidium made the fateful decision to request of the seminary faculty a *Gutachten*, an official opinion, on the Beitz paper.<sup>48</sup>

Although seeking a *Gutachten* was a practice with a long history in the Missouri Synod, in Wisconsin the responsibility for maintaining doctrine and practice had been given in the 1917 merger explicitly to the districts. At its Beaver Dam convention the Western Wisconsin District had affirmed its support of this policy in its rejection of the *Protestschriften*. In spite of this Thurow made his request.

As the faculty met May 4, 1927, to discuss this request, the Wauwatosa faculty recognized the seriousness of their assignment. August Pieper later described the procedure they followed:

In order to be as correct and careful as possible, it was determined in this important matter affecting the peace and unity of the Synod that each of the four of us should make a written appraisal without prior consultation with the others, that then the four appraisals should be jointly evaluated and then brought together by one of us. The amalgamation should then be again reviewed and after that put into final form.<sup>49</sup>

On May 13, when the "amalgamation" was to take place, appraisals were submitted by William Henkel, John P. Meyer, and August Pieper. J. P. Koehler begged off, claiming he was too busy working on the architectural plans for the new seminary buildings. Meyer's was the sharpest. Pieper's was the mildest. At Koehler's insistence, Pieper's draft was chosen as the basis for the *Gutachten*. The seminary director's

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<sup>44</sup>Quoted by Prange, 10.

<sup>45</sup>Quoted by Prange, 10.

<sup>46</sup>Fredrich, "Controversy," 8.

<sup>47</sup>Fredrich, *History*, 158.

<sup>48</sup>Jeske, 20.

<sup>49</sup>Edward C. Fredrich, "The Parting of Professor J.P. Koehler and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary," Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, 3.



only comments involved a footnote on Beitz's frequent use of "we," which was changed by Meyer to Koehler's satisfaction, and the suggestion that what Beitz said about separating justification and sanctification could be correctly understood. "In the second matter, however, Koehler requested no changes in the Pieper text, assuming he could discuss and clarify the matter in a face-to-face discussion with Beitz."<sup>50</sup> The *Gutachten* was signed June 7, 1927, by the entire faculty with Koehler's signature at the top. The original was sent to Pres. Thurow.

The *Gutachten* identified five serious errors in Beitz's presentation:

1. That he twists a justification text into a preaching of sanctification, as a result of which he mixes and intermingles justification and sanctification, Law and Gospel throughout his essay and perverts the way unto life.
2. That, on the basis of his erroneous conception of the Epistle to the Galatians, he condemns the majority of hearers and teachers among us as people living in the dead works of the Law and that he describes the Lutheran church, the Synodical Conference, and especially our Synod as ripe for the Judgment of God, because of legalism.
3. That his teaching of repentance is fanatical and Antinomian, beclouding the way to peace and everlasting life for Christians and non-Christians.
4. That he fanatically condemns the teaching methods cultivated among us, particularly the Catechism instruction, dogmatics, and homiletics, as leading to spiritual death and recommends fanatical teaching methods of his own.

Finally, the author of this essay must be given corrective instruction not only his unsufferable heresies, but must also be admonished concerning his horrible judgment of hearts and the ghastly public slander of his brethren in office and the teachers."<sup>51</sup>

The aim and purpose of its writing was simple: "We do hope that this publication will be of assistance in making possible the essayist's return from his utterly insufferable heresies in the church, and that others will remain immune to them."<sup>52</sup>

What happened next is the subject of considerable debate. "To his dying day Koehler maintained that he signed the *Gutachten* stipulating that it not be published until he had an opportunity to discuss its contents with Beitz. He retained a copy of the *Gutachten* for this very purpose."<sup>53</sup> "His colleagues had no objections to such an effort on Koehler's part but they pointed out that dealings with Beitz were officially a matter for Western Wisconsin District officials."<sup>54</sup> But due to ignorance or misunderstanding or blatant disregard for Koehler's stipulations, the *Gutachten* was published by Pieper at Thurow's request June 11, 1927.

When Koehler learned of this, in the second half of June as he was on his way for his visit with Beitz, his son later reported he "nearly toppled out of his automobile, so stunned he was."<sup>55</sup> Koehler met with him anyway, but understandably, the meeting did not go well. In July Koehler held a week-long meeting with Beitz. After this meeting, Koehler was confirmed in his opinion that Beitz's paper could be understood correctly. Koehler set this down in writing, calling it his *Ertrag* ("fruit" of investigation), and

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<sup>50</sup>Fredrich, "Parting," 4.

<sup>51</sup>*Gutachten*, translated by Otto Gruendemann, *Faith-Life* Vol LI, No. 5, September/October, 1978, 24-25, par. 59-63

<sup>52</sup>*Gutachten*, 24, par. 58.

<sup>53</sup>Prange, 11.

<sup>54</sup>Fredrich, "Parting," 4.

<sup>55</sup>Quoted by Prange, 12.

gave copies to Beitz and his seminary colleagues. Koehler also officially withdrew his signature from the *Gutachten*. He even contacted Northwestern Publishing House about mailing postcards explaining his actions to all of the pastors and teachers in the synod, but at the urging of the seminary board, the postcards were never sent.

Koehler would present his *Ertrag* to the Joint Synodical Committee meeting October 18, 1927:

His assessment of the Beitz Paper was tough but even-handed. Throughout his presentation Koehler stated that Beitz owed his audience “a more precise and thorough presentation.” He charged Beitz with “a serious lack of proper exegesis,” and a “lack of necessary preciseness, which is produced by the proper kind of training in dogmatics.” ... Koehler criticized Beitz for using “sweeping generalizations ... [that] go too far,” and advised him that, when offering a public critique of others, an author should “be restrained and moderate, avoiding that which is inflammatory.” Koehler suggested that Beitz, “got himself all worked up ... and thus he was carried away into exaggerations which, upon more sober consideration, he must regret.” On the other hand, Koehler disagreed with his seminary colleagues that Beitz was guilty of false doctrine.... For Koehler it was enough that “the author ... confesses himself to the positive presentations of doctrine in the *Gutachten*,” stating that throughout Beitz’s paper “there is perhaps an indication in the relevant exegesis, but not necessarily proof of a false doctrinal position.”<sup>56</sup>

In the *Ertrag* Koehler was only putting into practice the principle he had articulated in “The Analogy of Faith,” published in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* in 1904. “This must be observed above all in controversy. Fairness demands that we seek to understand our opponent, not as his words *can* or even *must* be understood, but *as he wants them to be understood*” [emphasis original].<sup>57</sup> In response Pieper accused Koehler of denying “the great principle of the Reformation concerning the validity of the literal wording (*Wortlaut*).”<sup>58</sup> “In other words, Pieper argued that Beitz should be understood as the black-and-white words stood on the page and that Koehler was bending the rules of interpretation by attempting to put a meaning into Beitz’s words that simply was not there.”<sup>59</sup> The rest of the faculty as well as the seminary board sided with Pieper’s understanding. Pieper may also have questioned whether the “author’s intent” and “prevailing situation” demanded a softening of the condemnations of the *Gutachten*. Later he would write about the Beitz paper: “the whole thing is a well planned and biased writing, which was carefully considered by him with the advice of others of his partisans, a propagandizing and agitating piece of writing.”<sup>60</sup>

## Suspensions and Conventions

The events that were unfolding while the *Gutachten* was being prepared perhaps prove Pieper’s assessment as closer to the mark. In April 1927 Walter Motzkus, a signer of the *Protestschreiben*, accepted the call to Globe, Wisconsin. Jeske states that the congregation added his name to the list; Prange contends that Pres. Thurow had included it. In either case, the vacancy pastor, Herman Brandt, objected (see comments about him earlier), and Thurow directed that Motzkus not be installed. “In a

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<sup>56</sup>Brenner and Prange, 141-142.

<sup>57</sup>J. P. Koehler, “The Analogy of Faith,” in *The Wauwatosa Theology*, Vol. 1, edited by Curtis Jahn, (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 263.

<sup>58</sup>Quoted in Brenner and Prange, 142.

<sup>59</sup>Brenner and Prange, 142.

<sup>60</sup>Quoted in Charles F. Degner, “The Parting of the Ways,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, p. 13.

calculated move, Oswald Hensel [pastor of the Marshfield congregation] openly defied Thurow and installed Motzkus on April 10, 1927.”<sup>61</sup> Thurow suspended Hensel and Motzkus in early June; a few days later the Marshfield congregation followed their pastor and withdrew from the synod.

Another signer of the *Protestschreiben*, Hans Koch of Friesland, Wisconsin, was the next to go. Koch had created a difficult situation for himself with views of pedagogy and homiletics similar to Beitz’s. The church council held informational meetings where Thurow and Pieper laid out the synod’s position. The congregation repudiated their pastor’s position and induced him to write a “confession” similar to Ruediger’s. Koch later resigned, but then retracted both his confession and resignation. He was then suspended June 12, 1927.<sup>62</sup>

In the July 21, 1927, issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran*, the Western Wisconsin praesidium announced the next suspensions:

At a conference meeting held at Marshfield, Wis., April 20-21, this year [1927], Rev. W. F. Beitz was admonished because of his untenable erroneous doctrines, his enthusiasm and fanaticism, and judgment of hearts contained in his paper, “The Just Shall Live by Faith.” Rev. Beitz, however, adhered to his opinions set forth in this paper and declared, “I stand and fall with them.” When later the undersigned tried to confer with him on the basis of the *Gutachten* of our Theological Faculty, he laid down conditions that could not be met and declined to deal with them as officials. Another attempt to get together was frustrated by his non-appearance. The undersigned, therefore, declare herewith that with his judgment of hearts and public slander of his teachers and brethren, with his enthusiasm and false doctrine Rev. W.F. Beitz has separated from us. Here applies the Word of Scriptures, Titus 3,10: “A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject.” Rev. W[alter] Bodamer of Prairie du Chien, Wis., in an open congregational meeting, declared that he was in full accord with all contained in the paper of Rev. W.F. Beitz and steadfastly refused to deal with the officials of the District on the basis of the *Gutachten* of our Faculty. He has thus ceased to be our brother, Titus 3,10.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps at this point a brief excursus is in order in regards to what was intended by these suspensions. According to Jeske, “The majority of Synod pastors at that time held that suspension did not involve excommunication.”<sup>64</sup> This view seems somewhat surprising since beginning in 1911 Pieper wrote a series of articles for the *Theologische Quartalschrift* concerning synodical suspension and excommunication (*Bann*) arguing the opposite position. According to Prange, while Koehler

agreed with Pieper that synodical suspension and excommunication were one and the same thing, he was greatly disturbed with the seemingly high-handed way in which suspensions were often leveled by synodical and district officials who hadn’t taken the time to patiently hear all the issues. Along with the Protéstants [sic], he saw this as an especially prevalent problem in the Western Wisconsin District suspensions.... In Koehler’s opinion, these suspensions gave the appearance of “cleaning house” for the purpose of maintaining an artificial, worldly peace rather than the intended purpose of church discipline, namely, the winning back of a Christian brother for all eternity.<sup>65</sup>

But Jeske also adds:

On the other hand, the Protes’tants used the suspension question as a tactical ploy to force the District to take action when *they* in reality were the aggressors.... The suspensions did not drive

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<sup>61</sup>Jeske, 20.

<sup>62</sup>See Jeske, 20-21 for details of the “Friesland case,” as it is called.

<sup>63</sup>Quoted by Frey, 9.

<sup>64</sup>Jeske, 21.

<sup>65</sup>Frey, 3.

the Protes'tants out of the Synod; they merely recognized a chasm which already existed. To be true to their pronouncements of God's hardening of Wisconsin Synod hearts, the Protes'tants ought to have withdrawn gracefully, but to their discredit they vitiated the positive, constructive criticism they had to offer by the way in which they provoked synodical discipline.... By June of 1927 the Protes'tants embraced all of the essential elements which characterized them in later years. In case after case, the individual Protes'tants knew who the brethren were that were under discipline and knew the District (rightly or wrongly) forbade pulpit and altar fellowship on pain of suspension, and in case after case they deliberately flaunted their fellowship involvement with disciplined Protes'tants, daring Thurow to act. The shock which many them expressed upon being suspended rings hollow... what *really* did they expect?<sup>66</sup>

Perhaps this is getting a bit ahead of the story. August 17-23, 1927, the Joint Synod met for its biennial convention. Protests of the action taken by the Western Wisconsin District were submitted by the Marshfield and Prairie du Chien congregations as well as by Pastors Paul Hensel, Paul Kionka, and Henry Koch, Hensel in regards to the Marshfield situation and Kionka and Koch in regards to the Friesland case. The floor committee tasked with considering these protests referred the matter back to the district.

The district met November 15-18, 1927, for a special convention held at Watertown, Wisconsin. "It was the last general meeting attended by both parties; as it was, the Protes'tants came only reluctantly. The mood of the sessions was heated and irritable; discussions frequently degenerated into shouting matches, and calm rational deliberation gave way to angry charges and countercharges. Parliamentary repeatedly broke down."<sup>67</sup> At Pieper's suggestion Beitz was given the floor to read his paper prior to seminary professors Pieper, Meyer, and Henkel offering their appraisals. Over Pieper's objection Beitz was allowed one hour to offer an explanation and defense of what he wrote. A Protes'tant account of the meeting described the scene this way: "While Beitz was thus pleading with Synod, ominous quietness had fallen upon the whole body. It was a tense moment for all, as they had for once been confronted with the seriousness of the whole situation."<sup>68</sup> Pieper reportedly paced back and forth in the back of the church. If Protes'tant accounts are to be believed, he also "stooped to his natural theatrical stunts of posing in front of the speaker... and a murmur of disapproval, and calls to sit down induced him to withdraw."<sup>69</sup>

When Beitz had finished, the long-anticipated motion was made: "That we reject the condemning judgments and the false doctrine as set forth in the Beitz paper."<sup>70</sup> When synod president Bergemann, who had been asked by the district to chair the convention, called for the vote, eighteen were opposed with a number of abstentions. When Pieper was asked what he regarded as the necessary consequences for those voting "no," he "replied that it meant that these people had severed themselves from Synod."<sup>71</sup> The district followed a more moderate approach, requesting that those who voted against the resolution present their reasons in writing to the special committee appointed for the task. They did adopt, however, this resolution: "That we consider those teachers, professors and pastors, who subscribe to the paper of Pastor Beitz and persist therein as such who have severed themselves from us."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Jeske, 21.

<sup>67</sup>Jeske, 24.

<sup>68</sup>Quoted by Prange, 14.

<sup>69</sup>Quoted by Prange, 14.

<sup>70</sup>Frey, 11. But he notes, "Others say that the resolution also contained the following element: '*Dass wir uns zu den Ausfuehrungen der Professoren bekennen*' [That we subscribe ourselves to the explanation of the professors]."

<sup>71</sup>Prange, 15.

<sup>72</sup>Frey, 11.

Three weeks later the dissenters met at Marshfield. They adopted what is known as the “Elroy Declaration” (for the place it was mailed by the secretary), which rejected the recent district resolutions by declaring: “We shall be ready to deal only if the resolutions of Beaver Dam and Watertown are rescinded, all cases are reopened as new cases and the Synod thereby shows a new attitude which might give hope of profitable dealings.”<sup>73</sup> The Protes’tants met again January 18, 1928. One of the resolutions adopted called for the start of a periodical named *Faith-Life*. Its purpose, as currently articulated on its web site, “is to break down the influence of the misleaders of the church and free their followers from their thralldom, to break down within our Lutheran church, and wherever else it may flourish, the spirit of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency which breeds uncharitableness and unwarranted judgment of others, and thus leads to controversy.”<sup>74</sup> One of the signers of the “Elroy Declaration” described it this way: “We must publish our story to the world and let it judge what a pope-ridden, and therefore decadent, church can no longer judge.”<sup>75</sup>

In February the Western Wisconsin District held another special convention. None of the Protes’tants attended. All of the actions taken at the November meeting were ratified. The suspension toll stood at seventeen pastors, one teacher, and five congregations.<sup>76</sup> More were to follow. Prange notes, “By April 1928 *The Northwestern Lutheran* would publish the suspensions of more than twenty pastors who refused to go along with the Western Wisconsin District’s resolution about Beitz and his paper.”<sup>77</sup>

### Another Seminary Professor Removed

Already in 1927 Koehler was having second thoughts about his role in the controversy. “When Koehler later became aware that Beitz and the Protes’tants were claiming him as their champion, he offered a written statement confessing that he had contributed to the confusion of the controversy within synod by his words and actions.”<sup>78</sup> He refused to back down, however, in his insistence that the *Gutachten* erred in its condemnations of Beitz’s paper and needed to be revised. According to J. P. Meyer, on May 29, 1929, Koehler was requested to state his views in writing. “Koehler obliged, producing a document known as the *Beleuchtung* (Illumination). Fundamentally the *Beleuchtung* was identical to his earlier *Ertrag*, but this second document was published to all the pastors in the synod.”<sup>79</sup> In its conclusion Koehler writes:

With the *Gutachten* and its acceptance, the dispute in our synod, which has existed in its present form for five years, has developed a firm character, which should shake all of us up. What I am saying here matters to all who have shared in the dispute, to all who are within and without. It’s a mess.... It’s my opinion that we should omit all dispute and all celebration, that we in humility should silently do the positive work commended to each of us and trust the goodness of God, that it will bring all to recognition with more even temper and will again bring together the divided. If we would agree in these thoughts, then the first step to the cure would have already happened.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Fredrich, *History*, 161.

<sup>74</sup><http://protestantconference.org/policy-purpose/>

<sup>75</sup>Quoted by Jeske, 25.

<sup>76</sup>Jeske, 25.

<sup>77</sup>Prange, 15.

<sup>78</sup>Brenner and Prange, 143.

<sup>79</sup>Brenner and Prange, 143.

<sup>80</sup>J. P. Koehler, “Beitz’s Paper and the *Gutachten*,” translated by Earle D. Treptow, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, 9.

Koehler's wish would not materialize. His *Beleuchtung* is dated August 1, 1929. On August 9 Pieper and Meyer responded with their *Antwort* (Answer). "In it Pieper charged Koehler with a 'vacillation' which he attributed to his longtime colleague's 'historist point of view.' Pieper argued that Koehler's approach leads a person to be "uncertain, and can make no heart secure because it rides upon purely human abstraction."<sup>81</sup> Charles Degner, in his review of the official publications of the seminary faculty during the Protes'tant Controversy, is quite critical of what Pieper wrote:

Although the chief purpose of the *Antwort* was to defend the *Gutachten* against the accusations made by Koehler in the *Beleuchtung*, Pieper goes to great lengths in discrediting Koehler himself. Much of what he says against Koehler is not just drawn from his official writings, but from what Koehler had done or said in the year and a half after the *Gutachten* had been published. It is here that Pieper really blew it. He comes off as if he were carrying out a personal vendetta against Koehler instead of objectively refuting his stance against the position of the *Gutachten*. In the process, he does more to discredit himself than he does to discredit Koehler. He provided the Protes'tants with the occasion to accuse him of politicking and using his position as a Seminary professor to get Koehler's position as the head of the Seminary. It was beneath the dignity of a theologian like Pieper to resort to such tactics to defend himself.<sup>82</sup>

Koehler never saw a copy of the *Antwort* before the seminary board acted. In a letter dated August 13, 1929, they wrote:

Worthy Professor:

It is my grievous duty to communicate to you the following dismissal, arrived at by the Board on August 13, after they had read your document and the answer of Professors Pieper and Meyer. We are unreservedly in agreement on all points with the reply written ... in answer to Professor Koehler's "*Die Beitzsche Schrift und das Gutachten Beleuchtet*" and therefore declare that Professor Koehler cannot continue in office at our Seminary and expect God to bless his efforts.

On behalf of the Board  
W. Hoenecke, Secretary<sup>83</sup>

Two days later Koehler appealed to the synod convention convened in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It overturned the board's resolution, concluding it had acted too hastily. The convention appointed a committee, the *Gesamtkomitee*, to assist the seminary board in working out the difficulties. In September 1929 the *Gesamtkomitee* suspended Koehler from office for one year, suggesting it was "due to the nervous condition of Prof. Koehler,"<sup>84</sup> an insinuation that Koehler's son-in-law, E. Arnold Sitz, would vehemently deny, and which only served to deepen the rift.<sup>85</sup> On May 21, 1930, the board terminated Koehler's call. In August 1933 the synod convention received the report "that Prof. Koehler is still in church fellowship with those who have severed relations with us. This we must consider a severance of church fellowship with us."<sup>86</sup> So ended a sorry chapter of the synod's history.

According to the Protes'tants, so also ended the Wisconsin Synod's grand experiment known as "Wauwatosa Theology." With Koehler gone, Pieper's dogmatical approach now ruled the day, leaving the heirs of Koehler, the Protes'tants, to continue championing the cause. Leigh Jordahl writes,

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<sup>81</sup>Brenner and Prange, 144.

<sup>82</sup>Degner, 28-29.

<sup>83</sup>As quoted by Fredrich, "Parting," 5.

<sup>84</sup>Prange, 18.

<sup>85</sup>See Prange, 18, footnote 82.

<sup>86</sup>Fredrich, "Parting," 1.

The Wauwatosa Theology, as it has been called, developed under the leadership of Professor J. P. Koehler whose work was mainly in the direction of historical and exegetical emphasis over against the then dominant stress on dogmatic theology.... The Beitz Paper was a sharp and concrete expression of the self-criticism embodied in the Wauwatosa Theology.... The general reaction within the Synod was unfavorable to the Beitz Paper.... The officials of the Synod took the position that a paper must be judged by its bare words and not by its antecedents. The Protestants' desire to discuss the Beitz Paper only in terms of the larger issues was denied. In essence that was a repudiation of all the Wauwatosa Theology represented.... In the end the Wisconsin Synod repudiated the total thrust of the Wauwatosa Theology.... The Protestant Conference.... [by] means of its [quarterly] periodical, *Faith-Life*, ... [has] sought to preserve, cultivate, and develop the heritage of the Wauwatosa Theology.<sup>87</sup>

Fredrich begs to differ:

What [the Wauwatosa Theology] amounts to is employing the historical-grammatical approach to Scripture. This contrasts with a historical-critical approach, so much in vogue at this time, that sets itself as judge over Scripture. It contrasts also with a deficient dogmatical approach, divorced from the foundation of exegesis, that ignores Scripture. The goal in Bible interpretation remains what Eli told Samuel to say to God long ago, "Speak, for your servant is listening." That was the goal of those who espoused the Wauwatosa gospel and theology. It remains the goal today, despite relocation from Wauwatosa to Mequon.<sup>88</sup>

This author will allow the reader to choose which of these two to believe.

### Early Reverberations in White, South Dakota

Most accounts of the Protestant Controversy end with Koehler's removal (or with an overview of attempts at reconciliation, which will be covered later in this paper). This ending date, however, marks only the beginning of the reverberations of the Beitz paper in the Dakota-Montana District.

September 3, 1933, Friedrich G. "Fritz" Reuter was installed at St. Paul, Argo Township, and Zion, White, South Dakota. Reuter had graduated from the Lutheran Theological Seminary, Thiensville, Wisconsin, in 1931. He had been assigned in 1932 to the mission field of Gary, South Dakota, where he served a year before accepting the call to Argo and White.

Reuter's ministry soon ran into difficulties—at least from the standpoint of the district. In his district president's report to the 1936 Dakota-Montana District Convention, Edgar R. Gamm reported, "Rev. F. Reuter of White, So. Dak., on April 16, 1936, at Mobridge, So. Dak., at the pastoral conference declared his preaching and practice differed from us and our Wisconsin Synod. He maintains that the Lord's Supper must be given to a lodge member to strengthen the faith of such a member."<sup>89</sup>

In the 1930s the lodge issue still loomed large in the Wisconsin Synod. The 1935 synod convention dealt with an invitation of the United Lutheran Church in America to discuss "closer relations." The convention voted respectfully to decline the offer. One of the reasons cited in the floor committee's resolution was the ULCA's lodge practice.<sup>90</sup> But lodge membership was not just an issue for inter-church relations; it also was a struggle that played out within congregations and even families. Such was the case in White. Records of the exact details of the situation are not available, but it appears that Reuter had

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<sup>87</sup><http://protestantconference.org/about-the-protestant-conference/>

<sup>88</sup>Fredrich, *History*, 117-118.

<sup>89</sup>*Dakota-Montana District Proceedings*, 1936, 8.

<sup>90</sup>See Fredrich, *History*, 179-183.

difficulties accepting the “harsh” position of the Wisconsin. He simply could not bring himself to refuse the Lord’s Supper to members who were lodge members (yet alone remove them from membership).

At this point the careful reader might be wondering what any of this has to do with the Protes’tant Controversy. A look at the rest of Gamm’s report to the 1936 district convention should clear this up: “He also believes it to be his privilege to fellowship with those who are not one with us in doctrine, considering them his brethren. In subsequent correspondence he re-affirmed [sic] his position, thereby severing his affiliation with our district and synod. He will appear in person to appeal his case.”<sup>91</sup>

Notice the similarities in wording of Gamm’s report to the one received by the 1933 synod convention about Koehler’s severance of fellowship. Although Gamm does not mention “Protes’tants” by name, it probably isn’t to much of a leap to divine this as the intent of his wording.

Reuter certainly would have had contact with Protes’tants. Just across the border in Minnesota Henry Albrecht was forced to resign from the Omro Township congregation in August of 1935 because of his Protes’tant affiliations. By the following year Albrecht and his Taunton congregation were no longer part of the synod. Erwin Baumann as well as his congregation in Wabasso, Minnesota, also left for the Protes’tants in 1936.

Reuter had even closer ties to those central to the Protes’tant Controversy. Elizabeth Reuter, one of the two teachers at the center of the Fort Atkinson case, was Fritz’s sister. Oswald Hensel, one of the original Protes’tant agitators from Marshfield, became Fritz’s brother-in-law when he married Elizabeth. Although by 1936 Hensel had died, Fritz Reuter would have been no stranger to the Protes’tant cause.

As Gamm’s report noted, Reuter appealed his suspension to the 1936 district convention. The *Proceedings* records the following in regard to “The Rev. Reuter Case”:

A special committee, elected by the assembly, thoroughly studied the whole matter and presented the following recommendations, which the District, after due deliberations, adopted.

To the Dakota-Montana District of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States, assembled at Bowdle, South Dakota, June 16-19, 1936.

Dear Brethren:

Your committee, appointed to make recommendations in the matter of Rev. Fritz Reuter, has examined all documents and heard Rev. Reuter’s own representation of the case, now makes the following statement:

1. Since Rev. Fritz Reuter has declared, in writing and in word, that he does not agree with us in the matter of the practice with such as, at present, stand suspended by Synod, and
2. Since he maintains that our position of denying Holy Communion to all as are members of anti-Christian lodges is wrong, and
3. Because he, in spite of all instruction and admonition declares that he will act according to his conviction, we, therefore, recommend, with sincere regret:
  1. That we, the members of the Dakota-Montana District, look upon him as one who has severed his brotherly relation with us;
  2. That we, therefore, duly notify the congregations served by Rev. Reuter concerning this state of affairs; and finally,
  3. Declare that we find nothing amiss in the dealings of our officials in the case.

The report is signed by the chairman, Gustav Schlegel, the secretary, W. F. Sprengler, as well as committee members R. J. Palmer, J. B. Erhart, Carl Blumhardt, Albert Blek, and T. H. Kluchmann<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>*Proceedings*, 1936, 8.

<sup>92</sup>*Proceedings*, 1936, 11.



On July 19, 1936, *The Northwestern Lutheran* reported: “The undersigned gives notice that Rev. F. Reuter, White, South Dakota, has severed the bonds of fellowship with us. (Signed) E. R. Gamm, President, Dakota-Montana District.” By that time the congregations had already been notified “concerning this state of affairs.” The White congregation chose to follow its pastor. The Argo congregation chose to remain with the Wisconsin Synod. The exact dates of these meetings is unknown, but the July 2, 1936, issue of *The White Leader* lists F. Reuter as pastor of both congregations. There is no church listing for either congregation July 9. By July 16 Rev. H. Lau is listed as serving the Argo church.

The district president’s report in the 1938 *Dakota-Montana District Proceedings* offers this summary of the events that transpired:

Zion congregation at White, So. Dak., having been notified by a committee appointed by the District Synod at Bowdle, So. Dak., that their pastor, F. Reuter, had severed his affiliation with us, voted nevertheless to retain their pastor, thereby severing their relations with us and the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and other States. The few faithful to our doctrines are being served by the pastor of St. Paul’s church at Argo, So. Dak.<sup>93</sup>

The committee report on the report of the district president noted: “We regretfully observe the fact that the former Zion congregation of White, So. Dak., has severed connections with us. May the Lord grant them a penitent return into the folds of our Synod!”<sup>94</sup>

This author wonders how well the congregation understood that they had severed connections with the Wisconsin Synod. Certainly the members who left White for Argo and *visa versa* would have grasped the implications. Some of the membership changes involved splits within families;<sup>95</sup> no longer being able to commune with family members would have driven home the point in a very concrete way. But for the rest of the congregation, synodical affiliation perhaps seemed a vague concept at best. The church’s write-up in the city of White’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary history notes, “From 1897 to 1946 the congregation of Zion was affiliated with the Wisconsin Synod.”<sup>96</sup> Or perhaps the entire episode was so contentious that many simply chose not to remember.

The district’s desire for a return was granted—sort of—in 1946. In the spring of that year, Reuter resigned as pastor of Zion. Already in 1945 he had returned to school to become an accredited public school teacher. Reuter’s parting with the congregation seems to have been amicable. An article in the April 11, 1946, issue of *The White Leader* reported:

In farewell honor to Rev. F. G. Reuter and family, the congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran church of White gathered at the Presbyterian church basement Sunday night for an informal social time. At the close of the evening, lunch was served. A purse of money was presented as a gift from the group and the Ladies Aid gave the family a National pressure cooker. Rev. Reuter recently resigned as pastor after 13 years of devoted ministry. His future plans have not been made public.

At a church council meeting June 9, 1946, a motion carried unanimously for the congregation to join the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States. The following month, the church council reaffirmed this resolution.<sup>97</sup> September 29, 1946, Victor Lemke was installed. The Zion congregation had returned to the fold, at least to the care of a fellow member of the Synodical Conference.

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<sup>93</sup>*Dakota-Montana District Proceedings*, 1938, 9.

<sup>94</sup>*Proceedings*, 1938, 10.

<sup>95</sup>Interview with David Knefelkamp, current pastor at Zion, White, South Dakota, April 3, 2014.

<sup>96</sup>White History Book Committee, *White, S.D. 1884-1984*, (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1984), 177.

<sup>97</sup>See *Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church, White, South Dakota, 1897-1997*, 5.

Paul N. Schossow in “A Roster of Congregations Involved in the Protes’tant Controversy” writes about Zion: “In the mid 1940s the congregation joined the LCMS among protest from the Wisconsin Synod that they not be accepted.”<sup>98</sup> The protest must have been only at a synod or district level. Robert Steffenhagen from Argo is listed in *The White Leader* as one of the pastors participating in the installation.

Jeske includes Reuter in his roster of pastors involved in the Protes’tant Conference, but perhaps an asterisk needs to be included by his name.<sup>99</sup> Although his position on joining in fellowship with those suspended from the synod was listed by the floor committee as a reason that the district should “look upon him as one who as severed his brotherly relation with us,” Reuter never seems to have had much contact with the Protes’tant Conference. A search through the issues of *Faith-Life* from the years following his suspension until his resignation yielded only a single mention, more a complaint over the terminology used in *The Northwestern Lutheran* announcement of his suspension than a welcoming him into the fold.<sup>100</sup> Missing is the detailed rehashing of his mistreatment by district officials that is characteristic of many other Protes’tants. Although certainly sympathetic to the Protes’tant cause, neither Reuter nor the White congregation seem to have joined the conference. Perhaps his stand on communing lodge members precluded it.

### **Akaska, South Dakota, Thunderings<sup>101</sup>**

It may have been the topography, with the Missouri River cutting a deep channel through the landscape, but more likely it was the man, Marcus Albrecht, who caused the reverberations of the Beitz paper to thunder loudly at Akaska, South Dakota. The Protes’tant clarion call that Albrecht would first sound on the heights overlooking the Missouri would continue for more than sixty years, serving as editor of *Faith-Life* for forty-eight years and Conference chairman for thirty years.<sup>102</sup> But that is getting ahead of the story.

Albrecht’s formal introduction to the Protes’tants came his junior year in college in the person of Philemon Hensel. Phil’s father, Paul, served the Protes’tant congregation in Valders, Wisconsin. “Marcus and Phil learned to know and respect one another, but they did not immediately become ‘best friends.’” Marcus admired Phil, and ... no doubt ... the feeling was mutual.”<sup>103</sup> While at Northwestern the two traveled to Neillsville, Wisconsin, to visit the aging J. P. Koehler. (Influenced by his roommate, Albrecht had begun reading some of Koehler’s writings his sophomore year.) Their relationship continued at the seminary until Hensel was released October 11, 1946, after informing Prof. J. P. Meyer that he intended to accept an invitation to preach at his father’s church at Valders.

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<sup>98</sup>Paul N. Schossow, “A Roster of Congregations Involved in the Protes’tant Controversy,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, 14.

<sup>99</sup>A few clarifications might also be in order. The date of departure that Jeske lists is 1937; it should be 1936. He also notes that Reuter “Became head of a school for boys.” The congregation’s history includes a more accurate account that matches the information included in Reuter’s obituary: “He went into the education field, serving as a teacher at a boys’ training school in Red Wing, Minnesota.” Neither mention that Reuter remained in the White area for some time, teaching high school for a number of years in Astoria, South Dakota, before moving to Red Wing in 1956.

<sup>100</sup>See *Faith-Life*, Vol. IX, No. 12, December 1936, 10.

<sup>101</sup>Michael J. Albrecht, “One Born Out Of Due Time: Marcus Albrecht and The Protes’tant Conference,” Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Online Essay File, along with its appendices of articles from *Faith-Life*, is the source for much of the non-cited information in this section.

<sup>102</sup><http://protestantconference.org/previous-issues/trinity-issue/conference-report-june-2012/>

<sup>103</sup>Albrecht, 9.

Albrecht graduated from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Thiensville, Wisconsin, in 1948 and was assigned to Zion, Akaska, and St. James, Tolstoy, South Dakota. His father, Paul, was the Dakota-Montana District President, serving at Bowdle, South Dakota, some thirty miles away. The elder Albrecht had previously served at Tolstoy, so Marcus was not a total stranger to these congregations when he was assigned.

A synod-wide celebration for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Wisconsin Synod was scheduled for the summer of 1950. Albrecht made use of this celebration (or more accurately, the *lack* of celebration in his congregations) as an opportunity to present the case for the Protes'tant cause.

In an undated letter to his congregations, sent sometime before October 1, 1950, Albrecht spelled out his reasons for refusing to take part in the synod's anniversary celebration:

Some of you, at least those of you who get the church papers, may have wondered why our congregation did not celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wisconsin Synod. The reason is that it would have been a mockery, such a service would have been hollow and empty unless you had known what I am about to tell you.

At the time of such an anniversary it is proper and necessary to look back into the past, to see where we are, where we came from, how come we are where we are, and in what direction we are going. The Wisconsin Synod in its official pronouncements and publications did look *way* back but seems to have forgotten what happened about 25 years ago when it lost around forty pastors, professors and teachers—and a number of congregations. It seems to have forgotten the time when it was in an uproar for at least ten years. Because the Wisconsin Synod still won't face the facts of this so-called Protest ant [sic] Controversy, which broke into the open about 25 years ago, I could not preach to you about the celebration of its Centennial. Its one-hundredth anniversary cannot be celebrated in a God-pleasing way when Synod forgets all about its sins of the past, makes no or only passing mention of them, and makes no move to repent, to right the wrongs which it committed. And for me to be honest with you I can no longer be silent about these sins and make believe they do not exist, or make believe they make no difference, for the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. What happened 25 years ago does have its effect on us, whether we realize it or not.

After a page-and-a-half explanation of Beitz's paper and the resulting uproar he continues:

Synod's action is from the kingdom of darkness and is a lie. And the Synod still upholds that lie, which is crippling it. It refuses to see its sins in this matter and to repent of them. It stands by the "Gutachten" and the suspensions, although it doesn't seem to know exactly what it means by suspension and although it is far from agreed on the correctness and fairness of the "Gutachten." Still the Synod blackens faithful preachers of the Word by calling them false prophets, deprived these men of their congregations, violated divine calls, and caused these men great bodily hardship.

Albrecht then spells out the only course forward that he sees:

Only because of my youth and inexperience and because of my own unbelief have I not openly stood with the ousted men before. But from my own study and experience I am convinced that Synod's charges against these men are false, that they are not false teachers and slanderers, but, though sinful and erring, real men of God, real Bible students, real warriors, the like of which Synod has none. They are my teachers and from what they say and write I live. They are my spiritual fathers, and all I have or know when it comes to the Gospel I have from them. From the men in Synod I have learned little that is worthwhile. In the Wisconsin Synod I feel like a stranger. There is a constant undertone of disagreement. I owe my spiritual life to the ousted men, they showed me myself, and above all they showed me the Savior as I had never seen Him

before. How can I turn my back on these men! I can't and still be saved. I can't and still say that what they have taught me means anything to me.

They are my brothers in Christ, whom I dare not deny if the Gospel is to mean anything to me. And to declare this publicly I will preach for them and commune with them. I can't do otherwise. I can't make believe the things of the controversy did not happen and that these men did not live and write. For me to turn my back on them is an ugly and unnatural thing, is stabbing them in the back, is biting the hand that has fed me and still feeds me. If I deny them, I live the lie and damn myself. I deny the Savior. I can't like the priest and the Levite coolly walk by these wronged men who are not only my neighbors but my teachers and my brothers in Christ. Their suspensions from Synod are not of God and don't stand before the Savior. How can an how dare honor these suspensions?

As news of this letter spread, Herbert Lau, the district first vice president, visited Albrecht, expressing "shock and dismay that Marcus had raised the issue in his congregations."<sup>104</sup> At the meeting Albrecht agreed to writing an appendix to his letter to correct certain inaccuracies and clarify a few possible misunderstandings.<sup>105</sup> Concerns by area pastors about the propriety of exchanging pulpits with Albrecht resulted in another meeting, this time with both Lau and W. T. Meyer, the second vice president of the synod. (Because of his personal connections, District President Albrecht, did not participate in any official discussions, but as Michael Albrecht notes, the two "did have several long talks over the kitchen table."<sup>106</sup>) They convinced the younger Albrecht to refrain—at least temporarily—from practicing formal fellowship with the Protes'tants.

At the Western Conference Pastors' Conference the issue was debated at length, resulting in a resolution requesting that the brothers not exchange pulpits with Albrecht to avoid the possible confusion resulting from one man accepting and another man refusing (as had happened already). At a Study Club meeting in Mobridge, South Dakota, the issue of hardening of hearts was raised. Albrecht contended "that hardening takes place in general in all areas of life and that it happens in the church when we despise the Gospel. Others objected to this idea and said it was sinful judging of hearts to say that the church lies under God's judgment of hardening."<sup>107</sup> It was almost that Mobridge could be added to the list of Schofield, Rusk, Marshfield, and Watertown.

Except during his college and seminary days, Albrecht's primary point of contact with the Protes'tants had been through their writings in *Faith-Life*. But on October 31-November 1, 1950, he attended their conference in Neillsville, Wisconsin. In the conference report, Louis E. Mielke (Albrecht's father-in-law-to-be), recorded:

We were interested to hear what Pastor Marcus Albrecht who attended Conference, for the first time I believe, had to say about his recent experiences with the custodians of the gate in Jerusalem's north central wall. We heard a brief, unrehearsed story, told by a young pastor in open-hearted free spirit, which showed neither scheming design, nor even legitimately planned attack, but grew out of deepseated [sic] convictions and of a conscience bound by the Gospel.<sup>108</sup>

That same month, a joint meeting of the Akaska and Tolstoy congregations was held. Lau began by reading a prepared statement:

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<sup>104</sup>Albrecht, 13.

<sup>105</sup>Albrecht's "Centennial Letter plus Appendix" was published in a special supplement to *Faith-Life* in February 1951.

<sup>106</sup>Albrecht, 13.

<sup>107</sup>Albrecht, 14.

<sup>108</sup>*Faith-Life*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, February 1951, 5-6.

November 29, 1950

In a public statement, Rev Marcus Albrecht of Akaska, South Dakota has declared: “They\* are my brothers in Christ, whom I dare not deny, if the Gospel is to mean anything to me. And to declare this publicly I will preach for them and commune with them.”

Since Rev Marcus Albrecht insists that this is his position even now, and that he cannot change it, we, the presidium of the Dakota-Montana District, are compelled to announce that fraternal relations between him and us have been broken.

Signed  
Herbert Lau, 1st Vice-President  
W. T. Meier, 2nd Vice-President  
Dakota-Montana District

\*The members of the Protes’tant Conference, who are not in fellowship with the Wisconsin Synod.

Lau informed the meeting that Albrecht had asked for two weeks to consider whether to resign or to let the congregations vote to retain or remove him. When asked why it was necessary to choose, Lau explained that one could not practice fellowship both with the synod and with the Protes’tants. While trying to explain his objections to the Beitz paper, Lau made the mistake of saying he did not have it with him, so he could not quote it directly. Albrecht volunteered to fetch a copy for him, but needless to say Lau declined the offer. The first vice president then insisted that Albrecht not preach the next two Sundays while considering his actions. Lau made clear that his announcement at the beginning of the meeting had already ended his relationship with the district and synod. The only question remaining was whether the congregations would side with their pastor or with the synod.<sup>109</sup>

The follow-up meeting was held December 13, 1950. In the minutes R. C. Heier records: “There were lengthy discussions in regard to Rev. Albrecht’s idea of discord with the Wisconsin Synod and that he had severed relations with Synod on Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>. Motion made by Albert Kul\_\_ seconded by Wm C Sch\_\_ [handwriting not clear enough to make out the full last names] that we vote whether we keep Rev. Albrecht or not. Motion passed.” The result of the vote was 2 votes for Albrecht, 18 votes for Synod, 5 votes none sure, and 1 blank ballot. Heier explains the outcome of the voting: “Therefore the congregation voted to stay with the Wisconsin Synod.” Heier also notes, “Then Rev. Albrecht left the church building.”

In the December 31, 1950, issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran* this announcement appeared; “Rev Marcus Albrecht has declared himself in fellowship with the Protes’tant Conference. We are therefore compelled to announce that fraternal relations between him and us have been broken. Herbert Lau, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President, W. T. Meyer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President, Dakota-Montana District.”

Albrecht’s ministry at Akaska and Tolstoy was ended. But his work championing the cause of Beitz and the Protes’tants had just begun.

### **“Witness to the Dakota-Montana District” in Livingston, Montana**

A shortage of primary documents has been a difficulty in the previous cases, but this is not an issue in the case of Gerald Hinz of Livingston, Montana. On the advice of Paul Hensel, editor of *Faith-Life*, Hinz saved copies of every letter he sent and received. Hinz latter chronicles his ordeal, which he describes as

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<sup>109</sup>A transcript of the meeting, called the “Akaska Stenographic,” was published in a *Faith-Life* supplement April 1951.

“Gerald Hinz’s Witness to the Dakota-Montana District,” in two volumes of *Faith-Life*<sup>110</sup> under the title “All’s Quiet on the Western Front—Again!”

Central to the Hinz story are the olive branch overtures of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Efforts in the 1930s had failed. The 1933 synod convention urged the Western Wisconsin District to reconsider its suspensions, but the district at the time declined. In 1958, the Wisconsin Synod Union Committee authorized District President Sitz to approach Pastor Beitz in the interest of reconciliation. The approach was made, but the response from the Protes’tant side as voiced in *Faith-Life* was less than promising. The inaction on the Wisconsin side also did not send a positive message. In 1961 the synod again urged the Western Wisconsin District to overturn the Protes’tant suspensions, which the district did in June of 1962. Hinz’s suspension in the middle of these overtures, however, raised serious questions on the part of the Protes’tants as to the sincerity of the synod and district actions. But this again is getting ahead of the story.

Hinz was assigned to St. Paul’s, Livingston in 1959. Within a few months he was chastising them for the low level of sanctification they were demonstrating. In a letter dated March 4, 1960, he wrote: “I think it’s about time this congregation got over its apathetic attitude toward God’s Word and woke up. Perhaps it may sound inappropriate and uncalled for to many of you, but the fact remains that as a congregation this group’s appreciation for the Word of Life has been anything but commendable.” After citing attendance statistics that supported his contention Hinz continued:

Last spring you sent a call to our Seminary for someone to serve you with God’s Word. In answer to that call I was sent her to be your pastor, to serve you with the Word of Life. I have been trying to do that to the best of my ability. However, it’s pretty difficult for my service to you to be of any benefit when all you show me is empty pews. And I can assure you that I did not spend 11 years preparing for Christ’s ministry to preach to empty pews

So now I’m telling you: Show some interest or forget about having a church here. Surely you aren’t naive enough to think that any self respecting and sincere minister of the Word is going to put up with preaching to an empty church time after time? Surely you aren’t naive enough to expect this church to grow when its own members can’t get up enough interest in God’s Word to show up with any regularity. I have told you this before, and I’ll say it again. Your shoddy and disinterested attitude is what will keep this church from growing....

I expect all of you to be here for Sunday services *and* special services. If you cannot rouse yourselves enough to hear God’s Word, then prepare yourselves to be without it. If you will but study the tiniest amount of church history, you will see that God most accommodating when it comes to those who don’t what [sic] Him around. When that happens, He just takes the Gospel and goes someplace else.

Consequently, what are YOU going to do about this church? What will this CONGREGATION do? I am fed up with feeding empty pews with something as priceless as God’s Word.

What would prompt a pastor to speak so harshly to his congregation, threatening God’s judgment on their obviously hardened hearts? The condemnations echoed more than thirty years earlier in the Beitz paper continued to resound.

In a letter to District President W. A. Schumann dated September 3, 1961, Hinz confessed a fascination—dating back to his college years—to the accounts of the Protes’tants he read in *Faith-Life*. He notes, “To my surprise, I found them to be more than qualified to teach me many things about the proper appreciation of exegesis and application of Scripture. More and more I find myself reading their theological works with pleasure and profit.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Vol. XXXV, No. 2, February 1962 and Vol. XXXV, No 3, March, 1962.

<sup>111</sup>*Faith-Life*, February 1962, 5.

He also confesses:

Two years ago, when the synod decided to acknowledge that they had indeed suspended the Protes'tants, and that it was proper that we review these suspensions with this one thought: Can these suspensions stand before God? my heart was glad. By this time I was convinced that the Protes'tants had indeed been wrongfully removed from the public teaching and preaching fields of our synod, and that this was a dark blot that we would have to remove if we were to enjoy our Lord's blessings.<sup>112</sup>

He concludes:

I feel that I must be honest and inform you as district president that I am one in heart with the Protes'tants. For me to continue to give the impression that I am only mildly interested in this Controversy and have no convictions regarding it would be dishonest both to you as well as the rest of the pastors in this district, especially should our synod's efforts to resolve this Controversy again come to nothing and the suspensions remain in force. My convictions are that the suspensions of the Protes'tants are not of God and that I can not, [sic] with a clear conscience before God, actively or by my silence in any way uphold these suspensions.<sup>113</sup>

Schumann responded on September 7, 1961, expressing his surprise at Hinz's declaration. He questioned why the matter was of such great interest when there were so many other more beneficial areas of study. He also questioned how after only two years in the ministry Hinz was ready to "declare" anything, yet alone fellowship with the Protes'tants. The district president also advised Hinz accept the call to Kiel, Wisconsin, which he had received in the process of composing his letter to Schumann.<sup>114</sup>

Hinz was incensed by what he perceived as Schumann's condescension. He fired back a response dated September 11, 1961, in which Hinz accused: "You belittle my intelligence... You slander me in that you imply I do not spend time studying the Scripture... [You] declare me temperamentally unfit to man the outpost here in Livingston and you have the nerve to try and push me off on an unsuspecting congregation back in Wisconsin."<sup>115</sup> He concludes: "I am done with the kind of popery that sticks out all over your letter. If you think you can brow-beat me back into line with similar efforts, please save your time."<sup>116</sup>

The flurry of letters would only increase. Members of the mission board wrote to Hinz, also urging him to accept the call to Kiel, and Hinz fired back replies, accusing the mission board of collusion with the district president's efforts to get rid of him. Hinz took the matter to his congregation, offering his resignation to allow the congregation to "extricate themselves from the threatening storm."<sup>117</sup>

On September 20, 1961, mission board chairman E. O. Schulz, accompanied by district first vice-president Reginal Pope, arrived in Livingston. They met privately with Hinz in the afternoon and with the congregation in the evening. According to Hinz, Pope's presentation on the Protes'tant Controversy was so confusing that some of the members thought the Protes'tants were those who had been caught stealing at Northwestern. What followed was a recommendation from the mission board that the congregation grant their pastor a leave of absence to go back to the seminary to further study the issue. Hinz writes,

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<sup>112</sup>*Faith-Life*, February 1962, 6.

<sup>113</sup>*Faith-Life*, February 1962, 6.

<sup>114</sup>*Faith-Life*, February 1962, 7.

<sup>115</sup>*Faith-Life*, February 1962, 7.

<sup>116</sup>*Faith-Life*, February 1962, 7-8.

<sup>117</sup>*Faith-Life*, February 1962, 10.

“And so with joy in their hearts that the solution to the whole thing would be so simple, my congregation unanimously voted me an indefinite leave of absence at full pay.”<sup>118</sup>

Unfortunately, the whole thing would not be so simple. Already before leaving for Wisconsin, Hinz’s letter to the congregation provided an inkling of what was to come. He made clear that his position was not the result of a failure to study the other side of the issue. He used the comparison that as a Lutheran, he need not study every Catholic doctrine to know that what the Roman Catholic Church teaches is false.

When Hinz sat down in the in the seminary’s Tower Room October 24, 1961, with synod president Oscar Naumann, district president Schumann, E. Kowalke of Northwestern College, Leonard Koeniger of Manitowoc, and G. Hoenecke of the seminary. Hinz was asked what must have seemed to the others a straight-forward enough question: “Are you here with an open mind?”<sup>119</sup> Hinz replied he already had convictions on this matter and could not return with an open mind. Perhaps predictably the afternoon’s discussions did not produce any positive results.

At the close of the meeting Schumann informed Hinz that he should refrain from occupying the Livingston pulpit upon his return. On the way home he stopped in Billings, Montana, and learned that Schumann had directed Norbert Meyer to simply pass along to his congregation that their pastor had separated himself and they would soon start the process of calling a new one. Hinz objected, insisting that the congregation first needed to terminate his call before calling another man. Hinz notes that Meyer “could not really appreciate my objections. Had I not separated myself from the synod.?”<sup>120</sup>

In a letter dated October 31, 1961, the Dakota-Montana praesidium informed Hinz; “Having declared fellowship with the Protes’tant Conference and thereby indicated a severance of fellowship with the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, you are herewith notified of your suspension from that Synod by the praesidium of the Dakota-Montana District.”<sup>121</sup> Hinz’s notice of suspension appeared in the November 19, 1961, issue of *The Northwestern Lutheran*: “Pastor Gerald Hinz has been suspended from membership in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod for cause. The Praesidium of the Dakota-Montana District, Pres.: W. A. Schumann, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Pres.: R. Pope, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Pres.: H. Birner (signed) W. A. Schumann.”<sup>122</sup>

In his *Faith-Life* chronicle of his saga, Hinz makes much of the wording of the suspension notice: “Now isn’t that something! We have suspended Pastor Gerald Hinz, these men of faith kindly tell us. And would you like to know why we have suspended the bounder, all ye brethren and sisters in Christ? BECAUSE, that’s why. We have suspended him BECAUSE.”<sup>123</sup> The accusations of *Beamtentum* conveyed in Hinz’s twisting of words demonstrate the even decades later the Beitz paper continued to reverberate.

### Essayist’s Measure of the Reverberations

From the vantage point of as much as ninety years following some of the events and with a historical record that is in some instances woefully incomplete and overly biased, it is out of place to pronounce judgments on actions of the those involved in the Protes’tant Controversy. Certainly, district and synod officials many have at times betrayed a concern for expediency rather than charity, but the Protes’tants

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<sup>118</sup>*Faith-Life*, February 1962, 12.

<sup>119</sup>*Faith-Life*, March 1962, 5.

<sup>120</sup>*Faith-Life*, March 1962, 7.

<sup>121</sup>*Faith-Life*, March 1962, 7.

<sup>122</sup>*Faith-Life*, March 1962, 7.

<sup>123</sup>*Faith-Life*, March 1962, 7.



also must be charged with actions calculated to generate maximum effect. It is too simplistic to write the controversy off as a clash between strong-willed individuals, but it is also unrealistic not to recognize how personalities played a role.

Perhaps a few observations are in order. The terminology employed throughout much of the controversy is problematic. If the principals involved truly believed their suspensions equal to excommunication, the procedures they followed were certainly slipshod. The various work-arounds employed in an attempt to communicate something less than the *Bann*—“has separated from us,” “has thus ceased to be our brother,” “has severed his brotherly relation with us”—served only to cloud the issue further. Throughout the controversy district officials were taking steps to remove an individual from a fellowship he refused to acknowledge as being broken by his actions; they were not simply announcing a situation that was self-evident to all. It shouldn’t have taken until 1961 for the Dakota-Montana District praesidium to figure this out.

Especially troubling is the action demanded by the synod and taken by the Western Wisconsin District to rescind the earliest suspensions on technical grounds without regards to merit. If the original suspensions/excommunications, which for the most part were pronounced with an accompanying list of aberrations in doctrine or practice, are invalid, what does that do to the subsequent suspensions based solely on association with those already removed? The Hinz case clearly demonstrates that this issue had not been carefully worked through.

Finally this writer finds it difficult to imagine why the Protes’tants would want continued association with a synod whose spiritual condition in such bleak terms. As Jeske points out, once their witness was rejected, they should have simply withdrawn. The fact that they fought tooth and nail to remain a part of the Wisconsin Synod certainly raises the question whether their actions weren’t also an attempted power play.

The cycle Fredrich notes, of the Protes’tant Controversy surfacing every ten or fifteen years,<sup>124</sup> seems to have been broken. Or maybe it is just slowing down. The spirit of the times *seems* different, as does the overall spiritual condition of the synod, but perhaps they are not as different as people might like to imagine. Some of the other presenting causes certainly are still present. This author has witnessed dealings of district praesidia that might be perceived as being as heavy-handed as those of the Western Wisconsin District during the heat of the controversy, with an apparent emphasis on outward peace and order rather than brotherly love and true unity. A distaste for *Beamtentum* remains in the mouths of some (many?) Wisconsin Synod pastors to this day.

Perhaps what is missing is the determination to hold to one’s convictions no matter what the cost—long considered a badge of honor among Protes’tants. Perhaps also what is missing are those personal connections to aggrieved brothers that seem a part of so many Protes’tant stories. As the years roll along, the opportunity for such connections will probably only diminish as the number of Protes’tants decreases.

The reverberations of the Beitz paper have lasted a remarkably long time not only in the synod but also in the Dakota-Montana District. Only time will tell if the last echo hasn’t already died out.

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<sup>124</sup>Fredrich, “Controversy,” 2.

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