

Pastor E. Arnold Sitz and the Protéstants: Witnessing to the Wauwatosa Gospel

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Author's Preface

A church historian – any historian for that matter – cannot claim infallibility; he can only strive for accuracy. This is especially true when he goes beyond recording the simple facts of history and tries to explain the “why” and “how” of historical events and movements. These judgments quite often fall outside the realm of objective observation. Such historical judgments are usually tainted with a certain amount of subjectivism – something that this writer will readily admit is also characteristic of the very paper resting in your hands.

It is especially difficult to be objective when researching and writing about the Protéstant Controversy which coursed through the veins of the Wisconsin Synod in the 1920s and beyond. First of all, one is invariably forced to choose a side and wield a weapon. That temptation is even greater when the people involved in these tumultuous events include some who shared their flesh and blood with you. It is natural to put those participants in the best possible light, to make them the protagonists, the guys wearing the white hats.

One must also steer clear of judging motives. To make historical judgments – even to tender opinions – about motives of people long dead is both precarious and presumptuous. Ironically, a prominent accusation brought by both sides in the Protéstant Controversy was that of judging hearts. To judge hearts is always impossible, especially when seventy years separates us from the people and events of this controversy. The job of a church historian is simply to scrutinize the facts, to separate truth from myth and to make conclusions on the basis of this information alone.

Yet a true historian must also go beyond the simple facts to a certain extent. Professor John Philipp Koehler wrote that the historical point of view is not only “know[ing] the facts, but rather that one has first of all acquired an intellectual and practical knowledge of these things before attempting to state and expound them from the theoretical standpoint. Not to do that, is dogmatism, pure and simple.”¹ That is not always an easy task, especially when one can no longer sit down with the principals of the controversy and discuss these issues face to face. How many times I wished I had been born twenty or thirty years earlier that I might do this very thing!

There is one last difficulty that this particular “church historian” ran up against: the simple magnitude of words – many of them German – detailing and describing this controversy. So much was and has been written about these fascinating events, people and ideas that it is simply impossible to read and research every last thing. To read all the accounts of the Protéstant chronicles, *Faith-Life*, would alone require many months. Add to this all of the correspondence, reports and papers, and one quickly comes to the conclusion that to gain expertise in this subject is truly a lifelong pursuit. This alone makes me hesitant to write anything definitive at this time, but I take some comfort from the fact that a major participant in this controversy already in 1928 wrote to a friend who was investigating these matters, “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

¹ John Philipp Koehler, “Reminiscences [1930],” Concordia Historical Institute: Koehler Family Collection, 7.

the world would not be able to contain it.”² He goes on as if he were writing to me, “You have certainly undertaken some task. It is simply an impossibility to do the work assigned to you. You simply can’t delve into the details of all these affairs...” Indeed, I cannot, and I beg the reader’s pardon.

But let that admission also serve as an encouragement to you, the reader, to further investigate these things yourself. Do not look upon this work as the final word on the Prot stant Controversy or the Wauwatosa Gospel. It is by no means that. Instead it is the fruit of *my* investigation. It is as I see it at this time. Do not let this paper *hinder* you from looking into these matters yourself; instead let it serve as a *springboard* to further exploration. Only then will you – and we along with you – begin to comprehend and appreciate the full import of the Prot stant Controversy and especially the Wauwatosa Gospel.

Introduction

In the annals of church history, the Prot stant Controversy of the Wisconsin Synod does not loom large. It is but a footnote in the history of the Christian Church. Neither is the term “Wauwatosa Gospel” one that is known throughout Christendom or even Lutheranism for that matter. To claim that this controversy and the ideas behind it have had a crucial impact on the church at large would be a gross overstatement. To most outsiders this controversy would probably be summed up in two words: personality conflicts.

That, however, would be a gross understatement. While personalities played their part, the Prot stant Controversy was about motives, methods and especially ideas. To the participants and some observers this controversy was not just a matter of opinion or simple adiaphora; it was a matter of *Bekennntnis* (confession) and *Verstockung* (hardening of hearts), doctrine and pastoral practice. Like most controversies or conflicts both sides deserve to shoulder their part of the blame for the conflagration, but as in most controversies it’s much easier to point the finger at the other side.

This paper will not necessarily deal with the question of who was right and who was wrong; ultimately both sides deserve to shoulder a large portion of blame. Rather its purpose is to examine the *content* and *application* of what is known as the Wauwatosa Gospel in the *context* of the Prot stant Controversy. The Prot stants claim that the Wisconsin Synod repudiated this Wauwatosa Gospel following the ouster of Professor John Philipp Koehler from his Seminary post in 1930.³ This judgment has been disputed time and again by Wisconsin Synod historians.⁴ But to even suggest that the Wauwatosa Gospel is a “possession” of one church body or another is ill-advised and against the very nature of the Wauwatosa Gospel itself. The Wauwatosa Gospel cannot be possessed by a group; it is instead a matter of possession for each individual Christian in so far as we deal evangelically with our fellow human beings.

With that in mind then – that the Wauwatosa Gospel is an individual possession – the question I *do* wish to pose and answer is this: ***Has the Wauwatosa Gospel had a better witness***

² William Beitz, letter to Immanuel P. Frey, May 18, 1928.

³ Prot stant historian Leigh Jordahl, among others, makes this claim in his preface and introductory essay to John Philipp Koehler’s *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Publishing for the Prot stant Conference, 1981).

⁴ Among those who dispute Jordahl’s conviction are Professor Martin Westerhaus in his essay “The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997) and Pastor Mark Jeske in his Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Church History thesis “A Half Century of *Faith-Life*.”

from within the Wisconsin Synod by pastors and people such as Pastor E. Arnold Sitz, or was its witness better served and preserved from without the Synod by members of the Prot stant Conference? I plan to demonstrate that witnesses to the Wauwatosa Gospel such as Arnold Sitz preserved the spirit of the Wauwatosa Gospel better from within the Wisconsin Synod than the Prot stants ever could have hoped to from without. This does not mean to intimate that the Prot stants are entirely without the Wauwatosa Gospel; they certainly are not. Nor do I wish to suggest that the Wauwatosa Gospel does not have determined – if perhaps unconscious – opponents in Wisconsin Synod circles to this day. It’s only to suggest that the Prot stants would have served the Wauwatosa Gospel better by working quietly for its principles from within the Synod. In so far as *both sides* have engaged in loveless, unevangelical conduct, so far have they also been guilty of repudiating the Wauwatosa Gospel and everything it stands for.

The Prot stant Controversy hurt the Wisconsin Synod. It would have perhaps hurt even more had not the nation and the Synod soon afterward plunged into the Great Depression. Synod’s attention quickly shifted to other matters. But the discomfort of the controversy was certainly still felt. It most definitely was and continues to be a thorn in the flesh. As with any wound, though, it does no good to let it fester. Instead the wound must be diagnosed and treated.

But how does one heal the hurts of a controversy that began more than seventy years ago? First of all, we must confess and learn from our fathers’ mistakes, as well as our own. Secondly, we must pray the Holy Spirit to engender in us a spirit of love and forgiveness founded on the gospel of his love and forgiveness. Only then will we be able to learn from these tragic events. Only then will we *truly* be witnesses to the Wauwatosa Gospel.

Chapter One – The Wauwatosa Gospel: A Definition

The Wauwatosa Gospel is not easily defined. This much is certain: it’s an oversimplification to define the Wauwatosa Gospel exclusively as an emphasis on the historical-grammatical approach to Scripture. While it is true that an historical-grammatical approach to Scripture is perhaps the one place where the Wauwatosa Gospel’s *ad fontes* credo is most readily apparent, to simply boil it down to this one feature – as some in the Wisconsin Synod are perhaps apt to do⁵ – is inaccurate. A comprehensive definition of the Wauwatosa Gospel will be both complex and elusive.

⁵ Professor Martin Westerhaus, in his essay “The Wauwatosa Theology: The Men and Their Message,” asks the question: “Is the Wauwatosa theology alive and well in Mequon today?” His answer: “I would imagine that most Wisconsin Synod pastors would without much hesitation or reflection answer in the affirmative” (82). He goes on to give what I believe would be a typical Wisconsin Synod pastor’s response (“without much hesitation or reflection”) to the term “Wauwatosa theology”: “Today I would venture to guess that all members of our faculty and student body and all our synod pastors would agree that exegesis should be most important among the theological disciplines” (93). This is not to say that Westerhaus limits the definition of the Wauwatosa Theology to an historical-grammatical approach to Scripture (although that seems to also be his emphasis – cf. the conclusion to his essay on page 98: “it is to be hoped that coherent or systematic study of the Scriptures will lay the foundation for whatever efforts are undertaken”), but it’s my opinion that most pastors do. For an example of this inclination see Pastor Wayne Mueller’s dedicatory preface to each of the *Wauwatosa Theology* volumes: “For these stressful times, God raised up three men whose devotion to the Scriptures continues to define Wisconsin’s approach to change. These three men were Professors J.P. Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller – the Wauwatosa theologians. In the first 30 years of this century, these professors at the Wisconsin seminary in Wauwatosa refreshed the church with a direct appeal to the Bible. ... The selected writings of the Wauwatosa theologians in these volumes imbue us with an attitude that works directly from exegesis to guiding the church.” Pastor Mark Jeske in his Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Church History paper, “A Half Century of *Faith-Life*,” answers the Prot stant charge that Wisconsin has lost the Wauwatosa Gospel in this way: “this writer, as far as he can determine, received a steady diet

To begin with, the Wauwatosa Gospel invites an *originality of thought* perhaps unequaled in the church since the days of Luther, though always, of course, within the parameters of God's revealed truth. It calls its disciples to throw off the shackles of preconceived notions and to do original work regardless of whether one is working in Scripture or not. All of this is in sharp contrast to the idea of leaning, often mindlessly, upon the work of previous generations.

In his *Quartalschrift* article "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present," Professor John Philipp Koehler comments on the situation of the Lutheran Church in 1904. He writes:

A degree of mental inflexibility (*Geistesstarre*) has begun to assert itself, coupled with a hyperconservative attitude which is more concerned about rest than about conservation. This is always the case at the end of a period of mental development. The masses get into a rut which has been worn by what had long been customary. In our case it was dogmatics. This mental inflexibility is not healthy, for if it continues it will lead to death. Both in the mental activity of an individual and of a community, fresh, vibrant, productive activity is a sign of health.

The inertia of which I am speaking shows itself in a lack of readiness again and again to treat theological-scholarly matters or practical matters theoretically and fundamentally without preconceived notions. This is necessary if we are to watch and criticize ourselves. ... And if we do not again and again rethink in detail the most important theological matters and our way of presenting them, it can happen that all of this can become mere empty form without spirit or life. As we practice such self-criticism, we shall find that the divine truths which we draw out of Scripture indeed always remain the same, but that the manner in which we defend them, yes, even how we present them is not always totally correct. Here we can and must continue to learn.⁶

Self-criticism, as Koehler describes it here, is essential to the Wauwatosa Gospel. "The Wauwatosa Gospel at its best was always interested in applying the fruits of the historical-exegetical method also to the contemporary task of self-analysis, criticism and reorientation."⁷ Nowhere is this inclination more evident than in Koehler's signal essay, "*Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns*" (Legalism among us). Koehler identifies instances of legalism as they exhibit themselves both in his own life and in the life of the Lutheran church. Legalism "manifests itself in the Lutheran church chiefly and principally in bravado of orthodoxy."⁸ Its main objective is to conquer a person's mind with intellectual arguments where "the interests of *comprehension*

of studies determined and governed by Scripture alone in his three years in Mequon," (14-15). Again the emphasis seems to be on historical-grammatical work in Scripture, although elsewhere he does seem to describe the Wauwatosa approach more broadly (83-84).

⁶ John Philipp Koehler, "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 434-435.

⁷ Leigh Jordahl, "John Philipp Koehler, the Wauwatosa Theology and the Wisconsin Synod," Introduction to *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Printing for the Prot stant Conference, 1981), xxiii.

⁸ John Philipp Koehler, "Legalism among Us," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 229.

outweigh the interests of *faith* ... Considering of chief importance the intellectual *comprehension* instead of the inner *conquest of the heart*. ... Turning the words of Scripture, especially of the gospel, into a law for which one *demand*s rational assent.”⁹

[Legalism] infiltrates among us in the form of *bragging about orthodoxy*. By this term I understand such adhering to orthodoxy where the stress is shifted from *faith* to *correct faith*. ... Such adherence to orthodoxy is primarily of an intellectual kind and functions by demanding and with an admixture of consciousness of one’s own being in the right or having everything right. This bravado of orthodoxy feeds on the *factions spirit* which opposes the *ecumenical spirit*.¹⁰

Ecumenicity is yet another chief characteristic of the Wauwatosa Gospel. This principle of the Wauwatosa Gospel, Koehler says, is in direct contrast to the slothful, dogmatic ideas of unionism and isolationism. It is not a matter of the mind, but of the heart and is worked only by the Holy Spirit.

The ecumenical spirit accordingly does not consist in our having a *doctrine* of the invisible church. This is a great gift from God. But we make it into something external, if pondering stops here. Again, however, the ecumenical spirit also does not consist in the unprincipled *overlooking* of the inner differences, which certainly must divide, if one wants to remain truthful. Such indifference is also of an external, superficial kind.

By ecumenicity of evangelical preaching I understand that one always fosters the sensibility for the one true invisible church, the communion of those who truly believe in the Lord Jesus, as opposed to the partisanship of the various concrete church bodies in the world who claim for themselves that they are the true visible church. The ecumenical spirit is something internal which belongs to the individual person through the Holy Spirit.¹¹

There is ultimately one characteristic, though, that comes to the forefront when defining the Wauwatosa Gospel, namely, its *insistence on properly (i.e. evangelically) applying law and gospel*. Koehler so insisted that the evangelical pastor be “fair” when it comes to applying law and gospel (not wanting to fall into legalism) that some might confuse his logic with antinomianism, relativism or other doctrinal circumvention. Koehler’s hermeneutic principles for dealing with doctrinal controversy give us some insight into his unique and complex application of law and gospel: “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*.”¹² He argues that “one may reproach the opponent in doctrinal controversy for his incorrect words, instead of proceeding from the assumption that the other person probably means the right thing, but either

⁹ J.P. Koehler, “Legalism,” 241.

¹⁰ J.P. Koehler, “Legalism,” 239.

¹¹ J.P. Koehler, “Legalism,” 247.

¹² John Philipp Koehler, “The Analogy of Faith,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, I (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 263.

expresses himself incorrectly, or even merely expresses himself *differently* than I, so that with my limited understanding I just haven't understood him."¹³

And how should a Christian, pastor or otherwise, apply law and gospel? "The proper method is the following," Koehler writes:

At the apex stands the proposition of the forgiveness of sins. ... For me, faith in the forgiveness of sins is the main point. ... This faith is produced by the Holy Spirit through the Word about the forgiveness of sins. Faith is created by wooing, not by logical stringency. ... Unbelief cannot at all escape from the legalistic, intellectual mental sphere. To such a person I would preach sin and judgment. When that has unnerved him, then, or even already with a hint ahead of time, he would get to hear the word of forgiveness. And now, from this common vantage point of faith one may proceed to all areas of Scripture, and every point would be illuminated and made acceptable by the light of this evangelical truth and really in the whole context of the gospel. The gospel, because it is the gospel, is a reliable word and therefore worthy of all acceptance (1 Ti 1:15), a word one loves instinctively and which therefore offers him confidence. This is the proper approach.¹⁴

Such an approach also has implications for the believer's life of sanctification, which is not motivated by the law (or the "hurrah spirit" as Koehler called it) in any way, but instead by the inconspicuous gospel. "Sanctification is the direct opposite of the hurrah spirit. It is an operation accomplished in the quiet, gradual progress of repentance and faith."¹⁵

Ultimately then, when defining the Wauwatosa Gospel, one is drawn to conclude that *what the Wauwatosa Gospel really is and what it really espouses is the evangelical application of historical-grammatical methodology not only to Scripture but to all situations, especially as they relate to the tender care of the soul. To avoid legalism and to promote an evangelical, ecumenical spirit one must, on the one hand, exercise a certain amount of self-criticism with a daily life of repentance and faith. On the other hand, one must cast off preconceived notions and get at the "why" behind something that is said or done before making any conclusions or taking any action. Only after this original work is done can one then proceed in properly applying law and gospel.* This evangelical approach to souls is "exhausting and rewarding. Because it's applying law and gospel properly, it's also difficult."¹⁶ But if it isn't done, Koehler said, we simply and easily fall into lazy dogmatism and intellectualism, which lead to death.

All three Wauwatosa theologians, to a greater or lesser extent, shared and elucidated these tenets of the Wauwatosa Gospel, though Koehler perhaps best understood their profound significance and applied them most carefully and astutely to the life of the church and his own life. This does not mean however that the Wauwatosa Gospel was solely a Koehlerian possession, anymore than the gospel of Christ – of which the Wauwatosa Gospel is but a summary – belongs to one Christian more than to another. It simply means that Koehler was granted a rich insight into the gospel by the Holy Spirit that helped him enunciate and apply

¹³ J.P. Koehler, "Legalism," 243-244.

¹⁴ J.P. Koehler, "Legalism," 244.

¹⁵ John Philipp Koehler, "Sanctification Is Not Hurrah," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 399.

¹⁶ Paul Prange, e-mail to Peter Prange, February 25, 1998.

these principles. Koehler's encouragement to evangelical practice was no different than Peter's encouragement in his first letter: "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pe 3:15).

Koehler's principles were also identical to Luther's when it came to applying law and gospel. To Koehler as to Luther, the proper distinction of law and gospel was not a mathematical or intellectual formula for preaching and teaching. It was an everyday aptitude that has to be nurtured and is taught only by the Holy Spirit. It's Luther's *oratio, meditatio, tentatio*.¹⁷ C.F.W. Walther quotes Luther in his *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* on the difficulty of this task: "There is not a man on earth who knows how properly to divide the Law from the Gospel. When we hear about it in a sermon, we imagine that we know how to do it, but we are greatly mistaken. The Holy Spirit alone knows this art."¹⁸ At another time Luther preached on this distinction:

The whole power lies in rightly dividing the two. It is easy in preaching, or dividing the Words, but to use it and bring it into practice is a high art and hard to do. The papists and fanatics know nothing of it. I also see in me and others who know best how to speak how difficult this differentiating is. The skill is common. It is soon told how the law is another Word and doctrine than the gospel, but *practice* to divide it and the art of applying it is an effort and work.¹⁹

Obviously Luther knew nothing of Wauwatosa or Koehler or any Wauwatosa Gospel, yet in these five sentences he summarized its discipline most beautifully! This fact alone goes to show that the Wauwatosa Gospel wasn't anything new to Christendom, and the Wauwatosa faculty never claimed that it was. It was simply a restatement of the same, enduring gospel truths of Scripture concerning evangelical practice.

Sadly the Wauwatosa Gospel principles were not readily accepted and often not put into practice. Law and gospel were not always rightfully and evangelically divided, and it led to disintegration within the Wisconsin Synod and the Synodical Conference. Between the years 1912 and 1917 Koehler worked on a manuscript entitled "The Beginnings of Disintegration in Our Circles." It was never published until long after the Protestant Controversy had crystallized. In this article Koehler eerily tolls a yet unheard death knell for the Synodical Conference and the Wisconsin Synod, a death knell which is continually tolled in the visible church. The assassin? Intellectualism, namely, turning the gospel of Jesus Christ into so many doctrinal axioms to be learned and assented to by the mind which leads directly to legalism. Koehler writes:

The only business of a Gospel preacher is that he preach the Gospel. This statement has not been questioned once but repeatedly. ... I know very well how this interjection is meant when they say, "But the law must also be preached." The statement is correct as such but the temper is out of tune. How can anyone find it necessary in the face of Paul's declaration: "I determined not to know

¹⁷ Luther said that a theologian was made *oratio* (by prayer), *meditatio* (by meditation), *tentatio* (by experiencing Christian suffering).

¹⁸ C.F.W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 47.

¹⁹ Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Differentiation of Law and Gospel, Galatians 3:23-24, 1532," *Luther's Family Devotions* (Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 1996), 86.

anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified,” to add, “But the law also.” Do you not notice that such talk is prompted by purely intellectual interests rather than by faith? ... This intellectualism, especially when fortified by the will of man, is a tinderbox which ignites strife when man faces man in dispute, and spawns legalism, heresy hunting, judgment of hearts, unyielding obstinacy, and then, when other alien interests enter the picture, it terminates in unscrupulous actions and downright wickedness. Then the participants on both sides have interlocked their staghorns so inextricably, with the aid of all these permanently petrified evils, of party fragmentation, of diverging viewpoint, and want of mental and spiritual elasticity, so that a neutral observer is prompted to quote Peter: “Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders” (Acts 3:17). These conditions are nevertheless evil and must invite God’s judgment unless they are righted. Yea, I cannot help but say that this chapter of our church history is a carbon copy of the one which induced Peter to pronounce the verdict quoted above and moved the Lord to turn His back on those people. They were zealous for God but not according to knowledge.²⁰

Koehler finishes his appraisal with very appropriate and telling words: “Love is wanting.”

Sometimes we get so caught up in the minutiae of ministry and dogmatics ourselves that we forget how simple the message and ministry of the gospel is and that the gospel is a message of love:

If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us (1 Jo 4:15-19).

“We know and rely on the love God has for us. ... We love because he first loved us.” That is the gospel of justification and sanctification in a nutshell. Ultimately, that is also the Wauwatosia Gospel in a nutshell; it is knowing and relying on the love God has for us sinners and then naturally loving others because he first loved us. Such love has no fear. Koehler called this “faith-life.”

What’s hard even for the Christian to understand, though, is that the gospel is not merely a cold concept or doctrine, it’s a way of life. The Christian does not merely have intellectual knowledge (*οἶδα*) of forgiveness, he has the knowledge of experience (*γινώσκω*), knowledge of the heart. This experiential knowledge of God’s love and forgiveness naturally moves the believer to bear fruits of faith in his own life apart from the threats of the law. But we fail. We fail again and again to believe the gospel wholeheartedly (to rely on God’s love) and to bear appropriate fruits of faith (to love God and one another) because a sinful nature clings unmercifully to our person. And so we retreat to the law. As Koehler put it, “love is wanting.”

²⁰ John Philipp Koehler, “The Beginnings of Disintegration in Our Circles,” *Faith-Life* 44, no. 3 (March 1971): 10-11.

It goes without saying then that the sinful nature of human beings was a major player also in the provocation and proliferation of the Prot stant Controversy. Love was wanting. But, ironically, the Wauwatosa Gospel played its part in this controversy as well, as we shall see. In many respects the Wauwatosa Gospel mirrored its predecessors in the fact that it “did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Mt 10:34). Through a misunderstanding and misapplication of certain of its tenets, the Wauwatosa Gospel did just that.

Chapter Two – The Wauwatosa Gospel: Its Historical Setting

The Wauwatosa Gospel did not have its genesis in a vacuum. As with all historical ideas and movements, it had its own peculiar *Sitz im Leben*. Of course in dealing with the historical setting of the Wauwatosa Gospel two questions beg to be asked and answered: how much did the thought of the day (*Zeitgeist*) influence the Wauwatosa Gospel, and how much did the Wauwatosa Gospel influence the thought of the day, especially in the Wisconsin Synod and the Synodical Conference?

Ideally, one would hope and expect that the gospel would be the only influencing factor upon the Wauwatosa Gospel; but if the gospel of Christ and how it is proclaimed is not immune to corruption by sinful mankind – and it is not²¹ – neither should we expect that the Wauwatosa Gospel to be free from outside influences. These early twentieth-century Lutheran Christians were influenced by their world and tempted by the notions of self-importance and grandeur just as much as we are today, and it was into this world that the Wauwatosa Gospel made its entrance to struggle and to strive against the will of mankind, especially the men of the Synodical Conference and the Wisconsin Synod. The battle rages on to this day.

The Wauwatosa Gospel and Its Secular Setting

In the second decade of the twentieth century, both church and state caught the thrill of a lofty idealism and then almost immediately felt a chilling reaction from it. A new political situation, in effect, a world-wide revolution, called up new alignments, new political machinery, and larger combinations both national and international of political and cultural forces. Likewise a new spiritual atmosphere, highly charged with possibilities, spread over the earth and called the Christian church to unimagined opportunities demanding larger units of organization.²²

The Wauwatosa Gospel stepped into a world that was fraught with upheaval. The world was becoming smaller in the early 1900s, a thought that bred both optimism and fear. In America especially the changes were swift and sometimes unanticipated. In these early years of the twentieth century “the United States emerged as the most powerful and politically most important nation of the world.”²³ Ever so slowly the world began to see America for the world leader she was. Such a thought was both self-satisfying and scary for the people of the United States. Ever since the time of the Monroe Doctrine, Americans had for the most part been happy

²¹ Paul’s letters to his congregations (e.g. Galatia and Corinth) illustrate the many ways in which the gospel of Christ was perverted even at the time of the apostles. The many heterodox churches today further portray this sad reality.

²² Abdel Ross Wentz, *A Basic History of Lutheranism in America*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 251.

²³ Wentz, 251.

isolationists. “You stay out of our business, and we’ll stay out of yours” was America’s foreign policy motto, especially when it came to dealing with Europe. But the twentieth century brought a change to that thinking, and America was forced, sometimes quite unwillingly, to step into a leadership role.

In his *A History of Christianity*, Kenneth Scott Latourette summarizes the features of what he designates as “An Age of Storm” for the Christian church:

One of the most obvious features of the age was war. Within a little less than forty years two world wars devastated much of the earth’s surface and several lesser ones were waged. Never before had so much of mankind been engaged simultaneously in war, war which might be called internecine because it was really a civil war within the totality of the human race. Never before had mankind massed such large armies and produced weapons which worked wholesale destruction on so gigantic a scale. The first of the two world wars originated in Western Europe and there took its greatest toll in life and property.²⁴

Mark Jeske describes some of the immediate effects the First World War had upon the hearts and minds of the American people. “Historians describe a happy consensus in the war effort which swept the nation ... Propaganda and sloganeering were very effective. The euphoria dissolved, though, as the nation realized after the war that the world was still not safe for democracy, that this war had probably not ended all wars, and that the atrocious carnage had not really accomplished a great deal.”²⁵

The war also had its effects upon the Wauwatosia Gospel and its champions. Paging through the anthology of their *Quartalschrift* writings highlighting the Wauwatosia Gospel, one can find numerous references to the “conditions on earth brought about by the world war,”²⁶ “the present world conflict”²⁷ and to the fact that “*Reconstruction* is the catchword of our time. The World War has destroyed much.”²⁸ Without a doubt these men and their ideas were shaped in the context of this great world conflict. Especially prevalent on their minds was the spiritual “reconstruction” that had to take place after the war, fully knowing that only the gospel could effect a true reconstruction. Koehler, for instance, wrote of the “great opportunities for the gospel, but likewise great dangers” and how “it is most depressing when the dangers find their way into the opportunities of the gospel and spoil them.”²⁹

Another of the outstanding characteristics of the post-1914 world was revolution. Ancient monarchies were swept away. Outstanding in their collapse were those of China, Russia, Germany, and Italy. It was not simply that the ruling house toppled, discredited by lack of success in dealing with foreign foes, ... More important was the disappearance of the entire monarchical structure, centuries old, ... Usually a determined minority seized control and, asserting that it was acting

²⁴ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1953), 1351-1352.

²⁵ Mark Jeske, “A Half Century of *Faith-Life*,” (WLS Church History Thesis, 1978), 8.

²⁶ J.P. Koehler, “Sanctification,” 393.

²⁷ John Schaller, “The Kingdom of God,” *The Wauwatosia Theology*, III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 13.

²⁸ August Pieper, “The True Reconstruction of the Church,” *The Wauwatosia Theology*, III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 295.

²⁹ J.P. Koehler, “Sanctification,” 393.

on behalf of the masses, attempted to erect a new framework inspired and maintained by a body of ideas. . . . Under whatever name or ideology, these regimes appealed to the masses, masses restless under age-long oppression and official exploitation and corruption and roused to a great hope, a hope of a better day for themselves and their children³⁰

This revolutionary spirit found its way into the heart of the Protéstant battle and for many became intimately associated with the Wauwatosa Gospel itself. It is interesting to note that early on the Protéstants assumed the title “Bolsheviks” (a title first assumed by Lenin and his communist revolutionaries in Russia) and wore the tag as a badge of honor.³¹ It is clear that the early Protéstants saw themselves as revolutionaries and that the Wauwatosa Gospel, or at least strains of it, profoundly affected their movement. Unfortunately their revolutionary bent, although sometimes justified, naturally had an effect on how others within and outside the Synod viewed the Wauwatosa Gospel in general. Eventually, both it and its major proponent, Professor J.P. Koehler, came to be associated with revolution and the casting off of authority. This coupling was perhaps an unfair one, yet it was a coupling the Protéstants often effected by their actions. These actions put the Wauwatosa Gospel in the risky position of being repudiated wholesale by a Synod that directly associated the Protéstants’ revolutionary conduct and mode of presentation with their otherwise salutary message. For this the Protéstants are as much to blame as anyone.

One final historical factor that seemed to exert an influence upon the message and men of the Wauwatosa Gospel was the Second Industrial Revolution or the Mechanical Age.

One of the social reactions to the “Second Industrial Revolution” was a rising fear of a society dominated by machines; the short stories of Sherwood Anderson are eloquent testimony that Henry Ford’s innovations in assembly-line techniques were not universally perceived as blessings, while much of America gladly acquired the tastes and habits of an industrialized consumer society, there were some who saw in all the prefabrication, programming, and progress a cheapening of human values. There were articles in the early issues of *Faith-Life* which have this anti-machine flavor.³²

In a letter to a friend concerning his, by then, infamous paper, “The Just Shall Live by Faith,” Protéstant champion Pastor William Beitz comments on the evils of this mechanical age as they relate to the Christian. “First of all let me say something that applies to the understanding of my paper or any other paper in general. I see our intellectual, dogmatical, mathematical, dollars-and-cents, mechanical age with which we Christians are also contaminated will not let us get the spirit of what we wish to say, but tenaciously hangs to the dead letter.”³³

Kenneth Scott Lautourette concurs with Jeske that there was at the very least a “de-Christianization” of society at this time:

³⁰ Latourette, 1352.

³¹ Professor Elmer Kiessling in his *The History of the Western Wisconsin District* (Western Wisconsin District, 1971) writes concerning the Watertown Transcript Meeting (June 12, 1924), a meeting attended by many who would later become Protéstants: “One young pastor, apparently on his way to the meeting, referred to it with relish as a ‘meeting of the Bolsheviks’” (15).

³² Jeske, 9.

³³ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel P. Frey, May 31, 1928.

The de-Christianization was all the more serious because it was most marked in what some of the contemporaries called ‘modern mass society,’ the urban centres which continued to grow as a result of industrialization. Christianity remained strongest in the rural districts, the small towns, and some of the suburbs where some the older social patterns more nearly persisted. ... Christianity was finding it difficult to maintain footholds among the labourers ... [and] among the shifting masses of population. ... It was sobering to reflect that the industrialization which brought this challenge and these losses was in part ... a fruit of the science to which Christianity had contributed.³⁴

All of these secular historical factors played a part in setting the stage for the Prot st nt Controversy because it was into the context of these world events and this prevailing *Zeitgeist* that the Wauwatosa Gospel was given birth. A prominent question for the leaders of the church had to have been: “How can we be the best witnesses to the gospel in a world of such upheaval?” Different people had different answers to that question. Unfortunately, some of the answers given within the Wisconsin Synod fought against the very spirit of the Wauwatosa Gospel, namely, the quiet working of the gospel in the hearts of its hearers. Instead, a “hurrah spirit” was too often employed.

The Wauwatosa Gospel and Its Synodical Setting

While the broad historical context of the Wauwatosa Gospel is certainly important to note, it was its strict historical context, its synodical setting, that indeed proved to be the more pervasive influence on its witness. The Wauwatosa Gospel was articulated first and foremost for the hearts and minds of the Wisconsin Synod and the Synodical Conference. It spoke concretely to the issues of the day in those synodical bodies. In other words, it should not be surprising that the contemporary historical events of the Wisconsin Synod and the Synodical Conference exerted much influence upon the Wauwatosa Gospel and its mode of presentation. On the one hand, it was these events that provided the setting for that message to be applied most candidly. On the other hand, these same events inevitably colored the thinking of the men who witnessed to the Wauwatosa Gospel as much as, for instance, the American Revolutionary War colored the drafting of the Declaration of Independence. One must simply never take such ideas out of their historical context. Ideas are never conceived in a vacuum.

Perhaps the most prominent feature of the Wauwatosa Gospel’s immediate synodical setting was the 1917 amalgamation of four synods (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Michigan and Nebraska) into one. Professor Edward Fredrich writes, “In the interest of historical presentation it should be stressed that the 1917 shift to a merger of four synods was by [the time of the Prot st nt outbreak] only a few years old. That shift had of necessity created an abundance of new officialdom, new synodical machinery that could not but irk the rugged individuals that abounded then and abound now in the Wisconsin Synod.”³⁵

The merger itself did not seem to generate much conflict. Fredrich writes that the members of Synod realized “that the limited joint efforts in publication, worker-training, and

³⁴ Latourette, 1355.

³⁵ Edward Fredrich, *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1992), 155.

missions were proving so beneficial that they ought to be enlarged.”³⁶ It was instead the aftermath of the merger that was distasteful to many synodicals, especially to those residing in the Wisconsin districts, because it was in this aftermath that *Beamtentum* (officialdom) would quite notably rear its ugly head.

“That the protests [of the later Protéstants] were aimed at the establishment, the officialdom in the synodical structure ... is beyond dispute.”³⁷ That the witnesses to the Wauwatosa Gospel also, in general, cast a disparaging eye toward the oftentimes-legalistic practices of the official machinery both before and after the synodical amalgamation is also beyond dispute. Koehler and Pieper dashed off multiple articles for the *Quartalschrift* condemning legalistic practices in the Synod and calling the church body to spiritual renewal. Very often they had good reason for their disgust.

It is no secret that some of that new synodical machinery had a way of creaking and grinding and sometimes breaking down completely. This was not so much the case in the “other states” of the Wisconsin merger. In Michigan and Minnesota and even Nebraska there was experienced leadership that simply and easily could transform itself from a synodical to a district variety. In Wisconsin the old synodical leadership had for the most part moved up to serve the merged Wisconsin Synod. The three Wisconsin districts had no source of supply to look to for experienced leadership, and it was in these districts that the bitterest conflicts developed and were often mismanaged.³⁸

Another factor that loomed large in the Wauwatosa Gospel’s synodical setting was the church and ministry debate. This is perhaps the most striking example of how the Wauwatosa Gospel directly contributed to the tension during these years. The Wauwatosa faculty had revolutionized the church and ministry position in the Wisconsin Synod with *Quartalschrift* articles between 1911-1918.³⁹ Slowly but surely the Synod and her pastors were won over to the biblical position that while God certainly instituted the ministry of the gospel, he did not mandate one specific form of that ministry. Koehler’s dictum was “*Das Evangelium schafft seine eigenen Formen*” (“The gospel produces its own forms”). This went against the traditionally held view that the local congregation and the local parish pastor were the only divinely-mandated forms of gospel ministry.

In the discussion of these issues ... the Wauwatosa Seminary teachers, J.P. Koehler, August Pieper and after 1908 John Schaller, guided their church body in a clarification of its position on church and ministry. Koehler did the exegetical pioneering and Pieper did the bulk of the writing, speaking of the result later on in his classroom as *meine Amtslehre* [my teaching of the ministry], a term that Koehler does not gainsay.⁴⁰

³⁶ Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 130.

³⁷ Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 155.

³⁸ Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 155.

³⁹ See Peter M. Prange “The Wauwatosa Gospel and the Synodical Conference: A Generation of Pelting Rain,” *LOGIA* 11, no. 2 (Eastertide 2003).

⁴⁰ Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 110.

While the biblical principles could be established from Scripture, convincing the pastorate and Synodical Conference yokefellows was a more difficult task. “The three Wauwatosa teachers had not set themselves an easy task in this effort to change traditional thinking. It took many one-on-one discussions, many conference papers and debates, and many articles in the *Quartalschrift* before their position became a generally held position. Some never agreed. ... The strongest and longest opposition came from the Synodical Conference brethren in the Missouri Synod.”⁴¹

However, the most difficult aspect of Wisconsin’s church and ministry position, and the one that caused the most immediate problems, was the always sticky and still somewhat unresolved applications to church discipline. It was at this point, one could almost argue, that the Wauwatosa Gospel came into conflict with itself. On the one hand, the Wauwatosa Gospel threw the traditional thinking of church and ministry into disarray, which led to questions of practical application especially in the area of discipline. Now Synodical officials felt “justified” in exercising church discipline. Unfortunately, legalism was practiced in discipline cases far too often as a result, the very thing that, on the other hand, the Wauwatosa Gospel denounced. This question of the proper practice of discipline raged throughout the Prot stant affair, and even to this day the answers aren’t always easy and clear.⁴² In a 1929 *Quartalschrift* article entitled “Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry with Special Reference to the Synod and Its Discipline,” August Pieper summed up the Wisconsin position this way:

... our confessions not only recognize the representation of the entire church by synods and call their decisions the decisions of the church (*Tractatus 56, Triglot* p. 521), but our church in Europe has always placed congregational discipline in the hands of representatives of the entire church, of consistories, of ministeria, and of synods. That could result in tyranny, and it did; but in principle it was not contrary to God’s word, as long as it was done with the consent of the congregations and the discipline was administered in accordance with the word of God.⁴³

Of course, it was these final qualifiers that many people pointed to as being the nub of the problem in 1929. Some dealings appeared to be very tyrannical and were not administered in love. More and more this became a special problem at the time of the Synod merger:

Among many post-merger adjustments that had to be made, one that caused special difficulty was the assignment of discipline in doctrine and practice to the districts. The matter seems simple enough in theory, especially to those have learned to live with the arrangement in the course of a half century and more. Back in the 1920s the lesson was still being learned and sometimes forgotten.

⁴¹ Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 110.

⁴² In June 1928, Pastor Immanuel P. Frey presented a factual history of the Prot stant Controversy up to that date and discussed the difficulties that the Wisconsin Synod was still having in delineating the doctrine and practice of church discipline. This difficulty dated all the way back to the famous LCMS Cincinnati case (1899-1911). See Frey’s “History of Suspensions in the West Wisconsin District” with foreword and endnotes by Pastor Peter M. Prange, *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 20, no. 2 (October 2002): 25-41.

⁴³ August Pieper, “Concerning the Doctrine of the Church and Its Ministry with Special Reference to the Synod and Its Discipline,” *Wauwatosa Theology*, III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 137-138. NB: This article post-dated the initial Prot stant suspensions.

There could be indecision in decision-making and also disregard for decisions made.⁴⁴

But that these were questions at all speaks volumes about the immense influence the men at the Wauwatosa Seminary, despite their many frailties and faults, had upon the Wisconsin Synod and the Synodical Conference. Professors John Philipp Koehler, August Pieper and John Schaller are truly *the* giants in Wisconsin Synod theological history. Koehler is most often credited with pioneering the Wauwatosa Gospel, Pieper with popularizing it and Schaller with being the steady influence during the years of its greatest prosperity and dissemination. These men, the three great witnesses of the Wauwatosa Gospel, contributed mightily by God's grace to the theological foundation upon which the Wisconsin Synod in principle rests even today. It was the personalities of these men, however, that is of special interest to anyone studying the Wauwatosa Gospel. To study these men, especially Pieper and Koehler, is to gain a special insight into how the Wauwatosa Gospel was presented and defended in those early years.

From all reports it seems as if August Pieper was intensity personified. Prot stant historian Leigh Jordahl writes, "August Pieper was an original thinker with a charismatic personality. A study of his writings as well as interviews with a goodly number of his former students leave the distinct impression of an erratic genius. He was a dynamic teacher with a forceful and unusually alert mind."⁴⁵ "[One] of his students made this insightful observation: 'August Pieper was very proud of the fact that he was so humble.'"⁴⁶ Koehler, although he didn't always endorse the way Pieper said or did things, had high praise for him even after the two Seminary colleagues went their separate ways in 1930. Koehler writes in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, "August Pieper was probably the best gifted of five brothers who with their resolute mother followed another brother to America after their father died in Germany. ... He would have made good in any situation, by virtue of his abundant energy and stamina, a heritage from his mother..."⁴⁷ Besides his classroom work, he contributed over one hundred articles to the *Quartalschrift* over the course of his 41 years at the Seminary.

Pastor Mark Jeske, a great-grandson of August Pieper, characterizes his forefather in this way:

Pieper's approach was practical, and no student ever graduated without taking with him vivid recollections of "Pips" forceful lectures, incisive comments on anything and everything, penchant for hyperbole, and lack of reservation about using the first person pronoun. His assertiveness, though, was balanced by an equal bent for public self-deprecation. At the casket of his friend Gotthold Thurow he paused, pondered, and then turned about and exclaimed to the startled congregation, "*Der ist nichts! Ich bin auch nichts!*" ["He is no more! I also am

⁴⁴ Pieper, "Synod and Its Discipline," 155.

⁴⁵ Jordahl, xix.

⁴⁶ John Pless, "Prof. John Philipp Koehler's 1930 Reminiscences: A Synopsis, Analysis and Application," *WELS Historical Institute Journal* 15, no. 1 (April 1997): 23.

⁴⁷ John Philipp Koehler, *The History of the Wisconsin Synod* (Sauk Rapids, MN: Sentinel Publishing for the Prot stant Conference), 235. For Koehler to so favorably compare August Pieper to his brothers was high praise indeed in view of the fact that his brother Reinhold was the president of Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Illinois, for 23 years and his brother Franz, handpicked by C.F.W. Walther to succeed him at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, served both as the president of Concordia-St. Louis and the Missouri Synod, as well as authoring a first-rate dogmatics.

no more!"] He knew that his own pride had on occasion not particularly helped the [Protéstant] controversy: as an old man he confessed to this writer's grandmother, "*Früher konnte ich mich nicht geistig bücken; jetzt kann ich mich nicht leiblich bücken*" ["Earlier I could not bend myself intellectually; now I cannot bend myself bodily"].⁴⁸

John Philipp Koehler, on the other hand and in sharp contrast to Pieper, described himself as a "lone rider" who "lacked the technique for popular teaching."⁴⁹ As much as Pieper relished attention, so much did Koehler, in comparison, attempt to stay out of the public eye, writing that "he didn't want to be influenced and he didn't want to influence others excepting by impersonal open testimony."⁵⁰ Koehler was first and foremost an historian, a "reflective student, broad in his perspective and cautious in his interpretations."⁵¹ Ever the staunch opponent of legalistic dogmatism and intellectualism, Koehler, "in diametric opposition to Pieper, did not care to dwell on specifics, he much preferred to deal with the theoretical, the overview, the generalization. He loved to set forth broad principles without going into too many details; his judgments were understandable only after a good deal of preliminary work and reflection on the part of the student."⁵² However, Koehler's interests and talents extended beyond history. He was a first-rate New Testament exegete, as well as being something of an amateur artist and musician, always contending that "faith-life" extended also into the area of the arts.

Despite their obvious differences, Koehler and Pieper (along with Schaller) still stood "shoulder to shoulder"⁵³ when it came to the Wauwatosa Gospel. Together they set forth and championed their ideas on "formal theological approaches, and the historical-exegetical flavor of the *Quartalschrift* articles and seminary courses won the nickname 'The Wauwatosa Gospel.'"⁵⁴

But these men, especially Pieper and Koehler after Schaller's death in 1920, also contributed mightily to the negative developments that were spawned indirectly from a misapplication of the Wauwatosa Gospel and its principles.

Finally, we must say that the Wauwatosa faculty, if not the Wauwatosa theology, contributed to the Protéstant controversy and the origin of the Protéstant Conference. ... The loner inclined to be the aloof observer and critic [Koehler] had an influence as did the, at times, overly involved activist [Pieper] ... both at times were given to hyperbole, to exaggeration. Those who became Protéstants spoke and acted in the interest of correcting what they saw as abuses, of neglect of duty, but not entirely with good judgment. ... Criticism, fault finding, and polarization became an important part of Wauwatosa theology for the Protéstants.⁵⁵

It is not an original thought to suggest that some if not many of the Protéstant difficulties had their genesis already at the Wauwatosa Seminary, and that genesis was above all the

⁴⁸ Jeske, 13.

⁴⁹ J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 235.

⁵⁰ J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 235.

⁵¹ Jordahl, xx.

⁵² Jeske, 13.

⁵³ J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 234.

⁵⁴ Jeske, 14.

⁵⁵ Westerhaus, 97.

Koehler-Pieper antithesis. Although in earlier days, dating back as far as Northwestern College where they were classmates during the 1875-76 school year, Koehler and Pieper seemed to have a very amiable relationship (even in their first years together at Wauwatosa), by the 1920s the “relations between Koehler and Pieper had grown strained . . . [and] there had been open disagreements over church issues.”⁵⁶ The students were not oblivious to this situation by any means, and many cast their lots, rather publicly it seems, with either one or the other. “Both men had strong personalities and had developed loyal followings in the student body. For 28 years the Koehler-Pieper axis strongly influenced the Seminary, and events and people inevitably just aligned themselves between the two poles. While we would hesitate to use the term ‘factions’ or ‘partisans’, it is a fact that students were prone to take sides over the teaching methods of the two men.”⁵⁷

The Wauwatosa Gospel in principle would not stand for such partisanship. As was stated above, Koehler himself spoke of how he personally was uninterested in church politics, but apparently he allowed them to go on among his disciples, whether knowingly or unknowingly. In a similar situation with his disciples, Jesus reminded them of the very nature of the gospel, the theology of the cross: “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mk 9:35). The gospel unites fellow servants of Christ as they bear one another’s burdens, but our sinful nature casts the sword of envy and greed into the fray, leading to factions, as they had also in Corinth, for instance. Christ alone was the perfect servant in our place, putting aside the full use of his glory to take on the very form of a servant, as Paul reminds us in Philippians 2. This is the spirit the gospel imbues: one of service, not of faction. Koehler, especially as the president of the Seminary, would have done well to nip his students’ factious inclinations in the bud like Jesus, and in failing to do so is guilty of the consequences of his inaction. For his part, Pieper seems to have encouraged such partisanship publicly and is therefore equally culpable of its consequences, if not more so.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, both the action and inaction of these two men reflected badly on the Wauwatosa Gospel and ultimately led to confusion and offense in its witness among the synodicals.

All of which brings us finally to a personal setting of the Wauwatosa Gospel; a setting which serves as an interesting microcosm of what is to follow: the stormy relationship of Pastors E. Arnold Sitz and William Beitz, two particularly fascinating witnesses to the Wauwatosa Gospel, one a synodical, the other a Prot st tant.

The Wauwatosa Gospel and A Personal Setting: Sitz and Beitz

E. Arnold Sitz was born on August 27, 1893, in the northwoods Minnesota town of New York Mills. His parents named him Erdmann, but lacking appreciation for the name he rarely chose to disclose it, much less use it. In his professional life he was known as Arnold or E. Arnold. To his friends he was simply “Tois,” a nickname he acquired in a Greek class during his Northwestern College days presumably in the wake of producing a wrong answer in the midst of a sleepy fog.

Sitz came from a lay family, although there was a lineage of pastors on his mother’s side. His father, August, owned a hardware store in New York Mills. His mother, Anna, was a Pankow, of the Lebanon, Wisconsin Pankows, a pioneer family in the Wisconsin Synod. Her

⁵⁶ Westerhaus, 97.

⁵⁷ Jeske, 12.

⁵⁸ J.P. Koehler’s “Reminiscences” deal extensively with this feature of the Pieper-Koehler relationship.

father, Erdmann, and three brothers were pastors. Anna was actually the second daughter from the Pankow family that August had taken for a wife. His first wife, Sophia, died in 1889. Upon her death, younger sister Anna came to help with the five children and the family life. Romance ensued, and August and Anna were married on June 5, 1890. She bore Sitz three additional children, one of whom was Arnold. Young Arnold seemed to enjoy a loving home atmosphere, and as a child his foremost fascination was with trains, a special love affair he would have his whole life.

In a tender letter to a grandson who was about to start his preparatory education for the ministry Arnold Sitz recalled some of his experiences as a student, especially his homesickness at Northwestern and his love for the Wauwatosa Seminary:

When I attended parochial school for a year 12 miles away from home, I had a steady bout with [homesickness]. Across the Ottertail prairie eight miles away on high ground I could see a majestic elm, and I thought, "Why can't I be there?" For it stood near the house of the farmer who was my Father's closest friend.

When I traveled 500 miles to Watertown and Northwestern homesickness went with me. I got there in the first week of October [1908]. Given an examination I am put into Quinta, the second year prep. But I was very homesick and almost counted the hours till I could be on the train for home for Christmas. I had determined not to go back to NWC, then called Northwestern University. My Father and Mother wished me to go back and were so concerned that Father accompanied me on the train as far as St. Paul. But the ultimate decision was left to me. I recall that the thought that tipped the balance was, "If you don't return, you will some time regret it." Well, the tension slowly lessened; and in a year or two it rather faded out; but I always had a deep love for home.

One thing that struck me was the lack of a live and controlling Christian atmosphere at NWC. When I finished in 1914 I came out quite indifferent, not too far removed from heathenism. I more or less just drifted into the Seminary. But how glad I am that I got there! For that is where I learned under wonderful teachers, among whom was your Great Grandfather, Prof. John Philipp Koehler, what Christianity really is.⁵⁹

Sitz closed with one final thought: "... take care in your choice of close friends. Be real choosy under God's guidance." Perhaps with this final thought, Sitz hearkened back to the day he first met William Beitz, a young Northwestern classmate. Sitz reported their first encounter in his October 7, 1908, journal entry: "Become acquainted with Bill Beitz."⁶⁰ "Bill and I" would become a familiar phrase in the Sitz diary. The two became bosom buddies, associates, and ultimately fellow-witnesses to the Wauwatosa Gospel.

William Beitz was born in the township of Lomira, Wisconsin, on April 18, 1888. His family's home congregation was St. Paul, Brownsville, Wisconsin. He did not have a Lutheran elementary school education, but in the fall of 1908 he enrolled at Northwestern to pursue the

⁵⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Paul Prange, August 18, 1976.

⁶⁰ E. Arnold Sitz journal, October 7, 1908.

pastoral ministry.⁶¹ Beitz seems to have instantly become the consummate campus citizen. Undoubtedly he was “looked up to” by the rest of his classmates since he was five years older than most of them.

A class historian writes in the June 1914 issue of *The Black and Red*, Northwestern’s official periodical, “At the close of the third preparatory year the class, as customary, came together to elect its officers for the next year . . . W. Beitz was elected vice-president.”⁶² Beitz was editor of *The Black and Red* his senior year, along the way contributing many articles and poems to its pages. In addition, he served as the president of the NWC chorus and was a member of the college quartet. At the 1914 graduation Beitz gave the English commencement oration, entitled “Universal Peace and Its Impossibility.”⁶³ A *Black and Red* poet, writing a farewell ode to each member of the class of 1914, refers to the fact that Beitz was the captain of the Northwestern Military Company and apparently had a lady-friend when he writes of him, “Albeit staid in wildest warfare’s mazes, / Not immune he to Cupid’s darts – or Blazes’.” Of Tois the same poet writes, “A ‘Weary’ lad, composure never lost, / In Oratory famed – and cupid-tossed.”⁶⁴ Apparently Sitz loved to sleep and argue but wasn’t overly successful in the love department.

Sitz and Beitz had an interesting and lively friendship throughout their prep and college years. They engaged in long, theological debates, and sometimes their stubborn personalities got the best of them. Sitz gave this enlightening commentary on Beitz in 1913: “Bill has a tendency to look for the wrong motive even in his best friend and seldom puts the best construction on a man’s action.”⁶⁵

The two men parted ways for the first time in the fall of 1914. Sitz reluctantly reported on August 21, 1914: “Bill has about decided to go to the Chicago Seminary of the General Council to take up the study of theology in English. I’m in a leaky boat.”⁶⁶ Five days later Sitz stated, “We have been revolving the thought of going to the Chicago Seminary right along. It seems, however, as though Mother and Father are dead set against such a proceeding on my part. No doubt, if I wish to attend a seminary at all, I shall have to choose between St. Louis and Wauwatosa. The latter for me all the time; Better faculty; fewer students; more personal instruction.”⁶⁷

Sitz did continue on to the Wauwatosa Seminary in the fall of 1914 and drank deeply from the wells of the Wauwatosa Gospel under the tutelage of Koehler, Pieper and Schaller. His first day of classes would leave him with a favorable impression: “*Kirchengeschichte* [church history] with Prof. [Joh. Ph.] Koehler is a deep study; Hermeneutics with him also.”⁶⁸ Clearly Koehler made the deepest imprint on him from the start: “A number of us called on John P. Koehler this evening. There is hardly another man of his calibre living I am sure, who seems to intuit all that is worth knowing in *Kunst* [art] and *Wissenschaft* [science]. His conversation is very instructive. His dissertations in music were especially interesting to me.”⁶⁹ A month later

⁶¹ This biographical information on William Beitz was supplied in a letter to Pastor Mark Jeske from Beitz’s nephew, Ruben E. Beitz, of Mayville, Wisconsin. The letter was dated August 18, 1982.

⁶² *The Black and Red* (June 1914), 96.

⁶³ *The Black and Red*, 87-88.

⁶⁴ *The Black and Red*, 84.

⁶⁵ Sitz journal, June 16, 1913.

⁶⁶ Sitz journal, August 21, 1914.

⁶⁷ Sitz journal, August 26, 1914.

⁶⁸ Sitz journal, September 10, 1914.

⁶⁹ Sitz journal, October 29, 1915.

Sitz would write in his diary: “Prof. Koehler is sure a great thinker. This morning in the church history time he gave us enough thoughts to work over for life in order to come to the bottom of it.”⁷⁰ At another time he boldly opined:

I honestly believe him the greatest man of the times, not to say since Luther. Why? Because he is the only man of any outward importance who has [been] granted thought of the Gospel as he, and who has such a knowledge and insight into history as well as ... painting, music, literature. And he criticizes these things in the only true light, the light of the Gospel, the Gospel of which he has his understanding, not from church fathers nor dogmaticians, but from the Gospel itself, from Christ and Paul.⁷¹

As for Beitz, he would spend two years (1914-1916) at the United Lutheran Church seminary in Maywood, Illinois, only to transfer to Wauwatosa at the end of his second seminary year on May 1, 1916. He and Tois were finally reunited, and they spent the 1916-1917 school year as roommates at Wauwatosa.

When Seminary graduation came in 1917, Sitz and Beitz would understandably go their separate ways. Sitz was called to a young congregation (Martin Luther) in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, Beitz to Grace in Tucson, Arizona. There Beitz would replace Pastor Paul Hensel, who had started that congregation but had since taken a call to Liberty, Wisconsin. Ironically, Sitz had reported in his diary on June 1 that Koehler and Schaller “were looking for me ... to ask me to go to Tucson to take Rev. Hensel’s place there among the whites. Well, if that be the case, I am willing to go, yes, glad to go. ... If it bears out, that I am to go to Tucson, I shall have Prof. Koehler to thank for that. We know that Bill was practically slated for Tucson up to today.”⁷² The next day a disappointed Sitz reported, “This morning I got it semi-officially that I was positively not intended for Arizona. ... I am heartily sorry for it. I should have liked to have worked in that free western country. All signs point to Bill. I had the accompanying letter finished, when I was disillusioned.”⁷³ Additional feelings of loneliness and disappointment now slowly crept into Sitz’s psyche as that last year at Wauwatosa drew to a close:

It isn’t so easy to leave old Wauwatosa after all – after having been here these three years. The scenery hereabouts is rather beautiful and there are many picturesque little places. Besides one has become very much attached to the boys. Now they are all gone, ... it strikes home very forcibly, that we are parting for life. It is a sad feeling much akin to homesickness: We are beginning to learn that.⁷⁴

Neither Beitz nor Sitz would stay with their first congregations very long, especially Sitz, who in his first year suffered from the physical and mental strain of the ministry. His congregation was caught up in the hassle of buying a building, and Sitz was lonely. On August 27, 1917, he wrote: “I just tumbled this morning to the fact that today is my 24th birthday. I am

⁷⁰ Sitz journal, November 30, 1915.

⁷¹ Sitz journal, November 9, 1916.

⁷² Sitz journal, June 1, 1918.

⁷³ Sitz journal, June 2, 1918.

⁷⁴ Sitz journal, June 17, 1918.

not feeling quite right these last three days: band about my head again.”⁷⁵ When the stress finally brought him to the breaking point, Sitz decided that for the good of the gospel ministry in Oshkosh he should resign his call. Beitz repeatedly encouraged him to come to Tucson to recuperate, and Sitz eventually took him up on that offer, arriving in Tucson on December 14, 1918. The next day he attended services at Grace Church:

It being Sunday, church was the main concern of the day. I was much moved by the services and was glad of a long-neglected opportunity to partake of the Lord’s table. Bill [Beitz] wears no gown, but it does not disturb my devotions altho [sic] personally I should prefer the gown. Then I note the use of individual goblets in the communion service. . . . Another thing peculiar is the general invitation for all to partake; no special announcement is asked.⁷⁶

When Sitz regained his health in a couple months he set out on a whimsical adventure in the Wild West, an experience that would have a deep influence on shaping his already rugged individualism – a common trait, it seems, among the pastorate of those days. He found work as a brakeman with the Southern Pacific railroad out of Tucson and Yuma. He would later muse to a newspaper reporter, “I was No. 408 (seniority) when I went on the road as a brakeman. And when I left I was 218. Had I stayed, I would soon have been on some of the best passenger train crews.”⁷⁷

But Sitz didn’t stay with the railroad long, only six months. “Instead, when the weather warmed in 1919, the 26-year-old went on a tour of northern Arizona. He rode with friends over rough roads in a model-T Ford, visited Prescott, saw Grand Canyon and ended up as a cowpuncher on the Walter Williams Ranch in the White Mountains.”⁷⁸

The White Mountains are Apache country. Since 1893, just seven years after the tribe had been subdued, the Wisconsin Synod had been doing mission work among the Apaches. Sitz welcomed the opportunity to fraternize with the missionaries, several of whom were schoolmates and old friends. Naturally his name was brought to the attention of the Synod’s Mission Board. Before long he received a call to help found a church in the rough and tumble mining town of Globe, just off the Reservation.

Within less than a year he left the Globe congregation to the care of fellow missionary, H.C. Nitz, and followed a call to relieve temporarily the ailing E.E. Guenther at the mission church in White River. When Guenther recovered his health a few months later, the Mission Board asked Sitz to serve the Apaches in the Cibique area on the less mountainous, more arid lower reservation. . . . But once again his stay was short. In [November 1922] he received a call to assist Pastor William Beitz at Grace Church in Tucson. Beitz had spent the past winter battling a case of pneumonia and was still not at full strength. Besides, Grace had a parish school that wanted a schoolmaster.

⁷⁵ Sitz journal, August 27, 1917.

⁷⁶ Sitz journal, December 15, 1918.

⁷⁷ *The Tucson Citizen*, July 14, 1989.

⁷⁸ *Tucson Citizen*, July 14, 1989.

For some reason (he told me what it was, but I do not remember) Sitz carried the call around in his pocket for several months. When he finally accepted it in the fall, he was to have an association with his former classmate of only a little more than a year. On December 15, 1924, Beitz preached his farewell sermon and left for Rice Lake, Wisconsin.⁷⁹

One of Sitz's former vicars tells of the profound affect that these few years in northern Arizona had on the person and pastoral practice of Tois:

Compared with his near half century as pastor of Grace, the stints as Southern Pacific brakeman, cowhand, and Apache missionary covered a very short period of his life. Their affect on his pastoral work, on his self-image, and on the image he projected, however, was disproportionately large. Over and over again, with relish and with folksy skill, he told the stories of those romantic days. To anyone who spent any time with him at all in his later years and heard the fascinating tales, they seemed to cover decades, not months or a scant few years.⁸⁰

As for Beitz, he had a successful seven years in Tucson. "Pastor Beitz started a parochial school in 1920 and for two years carried on alone with notable success; in 1922, when the congregation also became self-supporting, nearly half of about twenty pupils hailed from non-Lutheran homes."⁸¹

Little, however, can be said about the few months that Beitz and Sitz spent together at Grace, Tucson. Apparently they had a good working relationship, but one can also sense from later correspondence that Beitz, and perhaps even Sitz, considered the former as "elder statesman" during that short stint together. In 1927 Beitz wrote to Sitz recalling their days together at Tucson and reproving him for not "living by faith" both then and currently:

I noticed your sermons and teaching overheard at times in the study at Tucson, that it had not become a heart and life matter with you. You remember I spoke very much at length to you about this heart, life matter of teaching at the beginning of the last school year I was down there. You realized the truth of what I said. You said as much as that, and I know you made an attempt to "live by faith" also in your teaching and everyday life. I noted repeatedly and told Trudie [Beitz's wife] so again and again, Tois is going to be a real teacher someday; with those gifts of intellect used as handmaids of faith he will revolutionize, in the Gospel sense, after a few years the teaching. How I rejoiced. How I felt that the people that had grown dear to me were in good hands when the call came. How I was relieved of some of the pangs of parting just for that very reason.⁸²

⁷⁹ Robert Christman, "A Place in the Sun: E. Arnold Sitz in Retrospect," *Faith-Life* 63, no. 1 (January/February 1990): 15. According to Fiftieth Anniversary history of Grace Church, Tucson: "Already in November 1922, the call had been tendered to Missionary Sitz to teach the school of Grace congregation. Conditions were such in the Apache Mission at the time, however, that made it seem wise to await the spring conference before coming to a decision. In May, the call was accepted, and in September 1923 Pastor Sitz took up his work" (9).

⁸⁰ Christman, 15.

⁸¹ J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 205.

⁸² William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, February 14, 1927.

In December 1924 Beitz did leave, guided by the Holy Spirit to accept his call to Rice Lake, Wisconsin, entrusting the small, yet thriving Tucson congregation to Sitz. By that time, however, a fire had already started to the north, and within a short time both Beitz and Sitz would be engulfed in the flames of what became known as the Prot stant Controversy. Beitz, among others, would fan the flame.

Chapter Three – The Fire is Kindled: Four Catalyst Cases and a Convention (1924-1926)

On the Friday night of March 28, 1924, an almost indiscernible spark touched down on the thirsty kindling that was the Wisconsin Synod. It was perhaps just a matter of time before such a spark would ignite a small blaze in the Synod, since even before that time tensions had begun to run high. But this seemingly insignificant spark steadily grew into a raging inferno, the proportions of which the Synod had never witnessed. It would have certainly been absurd back then to suggest that some sad but simple cases of stealing by twenty-seven Northwestern students would eventually result in a church-wide controversy that burns to this day. It would have been absurd, but it also would have been accurate.⁸³

The Watertown Case

Stealing had gone on before at the Northwestern College campus, as had disciplinary action by the faculty. That was not the burning issue in what came to be known as the Watertown Case. The real issue revolved around an obscure statute in the college constitution that vested the board of control, not the faculty, with the power of expulsion. This was the spark that kindled the fire.

The fire was lit on the evening of March 28, when the tutors (dormitory supervisors) at Northwestern conducted a search of the dormitory on the suspicion that stealing was rampant both in the dorm and at downtown stores. The inspection, which ended up going deep into the next morning, prompted a chain of confessions, snitching, and further investigation by the tutors. By the time the inquiries were complete the tutors had compiled a list of twenty-seven boys implicated in the mischief, some of which had been going on since the previous September. In one case, three boys had conspired to steal more than \$80 worth of merchandise from stores. Their loot included three cameras, five pocketknives, two watches, and a bottle of toilet water. Most other thefts were quite trivial: candy bars, pencils, cards, and gum. Some were simply charged with accepting stolen goods, perhaps without knowledge that they were even stolen. In the estimation of not a few it seems likely “that the tutors, three of whom later became Prot stants, were a bit more vigorous than necessary; while some of the suspects had been roused out of bed for early-morning questioning ... the tutors and Faculty emphatically denied

⁸³ While the Watertown Case is generally considered the igniter that lit the wick by both sides, William Beitz had a different outlook in a letter to Arnold Sitz, dated June 8, 1926 (NB: Just before the famous “*Protestschreiben*” conference at Beaver Dam, June 16-22, 1926): “I begin to see that the Oconomowoc affair with Hass was the ‘Lexington’ of this whole conflagration. All affairs at Watertown, Ft. Atk., Medford, Hurley are only further battles of the war.” The Oconomowoc affair involved the parting of Pastor W.P. Hass and his St. Paul congregation dating back to February 11, 1921. He would later form St. Matthew, Oconomowoc, with “a group of faithful and quiet Prot stants (termed such by [Hass] as early as 1922) who separated from St. Paul’s for conscience’ sake” (*Faith-Life* 5, no. 4 (April 1932 supplement). See the April 1932 issue of *Faith-Life* for Hass’ “Adieu to St. Matthew’s” and his historical outline. St. Paul, Oconomowoc would later join the Missouri Synod.

that third-degree methods had been used or that confessions had been browbeaten out of anyone.”⁸⁴

Providence played its part in stirring this pot as well. On Saturday, March 29, a severe ice storm cut off electricity and knocked out phone lines in Watertown, isolating the campus from parents who would have appreciated being informed of their sons’ conduct and suspensions prior to having them show up at the front door. Many of those same parents would later complain that they had not been a part of the suspension deliberations, and they appealed to the board.

On Monday, March 31, the faculty decided to dismiss classes and take up a number of the cases at once. Tutor Erich Falk, who had led the investigation, gave a full account of his findings. Apparently things were bungled from the start. “One of the boys, Kurt Lescow, had been permitted to go home on Saturday to make a confession to his parents. As he had not as yet returned, the faculty decided to telephone to Lescow’s father to come to Watertown with his son at once. It was found that it was impossible to reach Rev. Lescow, as the storm had destroyed all telephone connections.”⁸⁵

When Falk was asked for his appraisal of the situation and what he thought was advisable according to his experiences in the dormitory,

... he stated that he believed that every delinquent, those that had stolen as well as those that had received stolen goods, ought to be sent away. After a lengthy discussion the motion was made that the faculty act according to the following rule: Every student that is caught stealing is to be suspended, as has been the general practice up to this time, for the protection of the students; and that this rule is to work automatically. This motion was carried by a majority of 7 to 4.⁸⁶

Over the next two days the faculty heard the case of every boy. Almost all of them confessed to their misdeeds. In the end, though, each one was punished: eight were expelled indefinitely, eight were suspended until the end of the school year, and eleven were given “campus arrest.” It is noteworthy that in the case of each expulsion, the faculty secretary, Dr. J.H. Ott, insisted on including in the minutes the phrase “subject to the approval of the board,” appealing to the long-standing statute that the board alone had the power to expel. Throughout the entire proceedings Ott was the lone professor who objected to the disciplinary action the faculty took.

Trouble seemed to follow every faculty decision. They had directed Prof. E.E. Kowalke, Northwestern’s president, to inform the parents of each boy of its action as soon as possible. “But the notifications did not travel as fast as the expelled students, and most of the parents were taken by surprise when their sons arrived home with stories of how they had been awakened in the middle of the night ... [and] cross-examined ... for hours in some cases.”⁸⁷ Such treatment prompted several letters to Kowalke from concerned parents. Mr. Otto Kielsmeyer wrote on behalf of his son Karl, one of three boys who had stolen more than \$80 worth of merchandise:

The more I think of this the Watertown matter or rather the Northwestern College matter, the more I feel satisfied that if you want to uphold the respect of the

⁸⁴ Jeske, 17.

⁸⁵ Summary of the Northwestern College faculty minutes, March 31, 1924.

⁸⁶ NWC faculty minutes, March 31, 1924.

⁸⁷ Kiessling, 13.

College body, the synod, the congregation, the parents, and the now expelled children, men of the future, is to accept them back at their desk right after Easter [sic]. If you don't a tremendous reaction or storm may come over the college. ... These children (Koehler [Karl, an NWC professor; J.P.'s son] calls them men, he knows better) admitted their guilt, felt sorry, have repented, have received their punishment to the fullest extent. ... Was it, in your estimation, so small a matter that you did not think it worth while to ask for advice? ... We also know that you as a Faculty know you should have called a meeting of the parents and directors before you took the action you did. ... P.S. We parents placed the utmost confidence in the Northwestern College and in the Professors and Directors. We now hope you will place confidence in us.⁸⁸

In a letter to NWC board member, Pastor John Brenner, Kowalke pleaded for support from the board, which had already met in special session on April 3 and asked the faculty to reconsider the suspensions:

As regards the cases of "permanent suspension" the faculty was willing to do no more than to make the decision read "Suspension" in all those cases and decided at the same time to ask the board at its meeting after Easter to express its confidence in the ability of the faculty to handle these cases as it has handled similar cases before, for the welfare of the school. That certainly would not meet the wishes of some of the members of the board, but it would relieve the board of the necessity of trying each case on its separate merits and ratifying each separate decision. ... In no case was the faculty willing to consider readmission before the end of the year.⁸⁹

The matter remained unresolved for three weeks over the Easter break until the faculty and board met again on April 23. Several professors argued that the board was incapable of judging the actions of the faculty or the boys. The board disagreed. Referring to the statute in the constitution concerning the powers of suspension, Pastor Gustav Bergemann, president of the Synod and an ex-officio member of the board, reportedly said, "If that is not the statute, then it is high time that it be made the rule and that the law is laid down to this faculty."

During the course of the faculty-board discussions things became pretty caustic with plenty of finger pointing and faultfinding. One of the major participants and targets of this acrimony was Professor Karl Koehler. A pastor from his era wrote:

Koehler ... was a gifted, strong-willed man who had very definite views on education and a minimal tolerance for synodical officials. ... His friend, Dr. T.C.H. Abelmann, the only member of the college board who sided wholeheartedly with the faculty, made this revealing remark about him while speaking in his defense: 'I think if a Koehler would not have been involved in this, the controversy would not have been at all.'⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Otto Kielsmeyer, letter to President E.E. Kowalke, April 11, 1924.

⁸⁹ E.E. Kowalke, letter to John Brenner, April 10, 1924.

⁹⁰ Kiessling, 14-15.

Finally, after discussions led to an impasse, the board resolved to lift the suspensions of those who had been suspended to the end of the year. They also affirmed that the faculty had no right to suspend indefinitely or to expel. Therefore, the eight cases of indefinite suspension were to be taken up again separately and individually by the faculty.⁹¹ Even though this was the expected outcome of the board's deliberations, the faculty still fell into shock when the edict came down. Kowalke called an emergency faculty meeting to discuss the board's decision. Each member of the faculty was given an opportunity to address the matter. "All the professors, except Dr. Ott, stated that they were convinced that, under the conditions, it would be detrimental to the college if the faculty rescind its former action, as they were still of the opinion that the action of the faculty was justified."⁹² Professors Karl Koehler and Herbert Parisius were particularly adamant about this position, each stating that if the board's resolution stood, they would be forced to resign. The board invited them to meet again later that night, but no agreement was reached.

The faculty met separately the following morning, April 24, this time drafting a formal resolution that was presented to the board on the afternoon of April 28:

Resolved: That we petition the board to let the decision of the faculty regarding suspension stand; to make a statement to the synod, if the board sees fit to do so, to the effect that the board considers the faculty's decision too severe, condemns it, brought pressure to bear upon the faculty to reverse its decision without result, but refrains from forcing a reversal in order to avoid jeopardizing the general discipline of the school, to avoid disturbing the work of the school, and to avoid a possible disruption of the faculty.⁹³

Again, Dr. Ott represented the lone dissenting voice in this action.

The board's final decision came down that same day. "The eight boys suspended until the following year were free to return, subject to whatever punishments the faculty wished to impose, short of expulsion. Five of them did return. A sixth ... was back the next September."⁹⁴ In the case of those eight boys who had been expelled indefinitely, the board decided that they "would inform the parents ... that the suspension of their sons has been lifted by the Board; and that those thus suspended were at liberty to return."⁹⁵ No one from this group ever did return. Two applied for readmission the next fall, but both applications were rejected.

Unfortunately, the board's action brought other consequences as well, namely the resignations of Professors Koehler and Parisius which were addressed to the board and its chairman, Pastor Julius Klingmann, on April 29:

We herewith resign as teachers in your employ, our resignation to go into effect at once. Added to what we protested and pleaded in the course of the recent proceedings, there now weighs upon us the utterly ruthless and unchristian nature of the Board's procedure, persisted in, against our fervent hopes, to the very end.

⁹¹ "The Watertown Transcript," *Faith-Life* 13, nos. 7-9 (July-September 1940), paragraph 182.

⁹² NWC faculty minutes, April 23, 1924.

⁹³ NWC faculty minutes, April, 24, 1924.

⁹⁴ Kiessling, 13-14.

⁹⁵ NWC faculty minutes, April 28, 1924.

We so charge you before God and shall bring this and all other charges respecting your incompetence before the body which you profess to represent.⁹⁶

Both professors, not wanting to leave their colleagues in the lurch, offered their services to the faculty for the remainder of the year without cost. Their invitations were gratefully accepted. However, when the board heard of it “they not only terminated the services of the two men but intimated that the faculty had arrogated to itself some of their right to hire and fire. A committee of the board tried to deal with the two professors in the hope that they might rescind their resignations, but the cleavage had grown too wide.”⁹⁷

Although the initial wrangling was brought to an unhappy close by the end of April 1924, the Watertown Case did not soon fade into people’s memories. Synod members wanted to know detail, but news of the scandal was not easy to obtain. Things were kept very quiet, a great source of tension within the Synod. It seemed to many that the board was trying to cover-up its “officious, power politics.” One later Prot stant wrote about the pall that was still hanging over the Watertown Case some three years later:

Without doubt wrongs have been committed on either side likely on both sides, which should have been openly and fairmindedly discussed in the spirit of love. Instead a veil of secrecy has been drawn over this whole case, that one need not wonder that the fires of doubt and suspicion are still smoldering. Who knows today in Synod what wrongs existed and what was done to right them in the Spirit of Christ? Surely every single member of Synod should have been informed of all official actions, compromises or what not even without having to beg for such information.⁹⁸

Feelings of such discontent prompted a meeting of curious-minded men on Graduation Day, June 12, 1924. Professor Gerhard Ruediger of the Wauwatosa Seminary called this informational meeting specifically for the purpose of giving the faculty an opportunity to state its side of the case. Up to that time, it seemed to Ruediger, most had only heard the board’s side of the issue. For the sake of equity he thought it only fair that the faculty be allowed a forum as well.

The members of the NWC board considered the meeting, later known as the Watertown Transcript meeting because of the word-for-word transcript taken, to be out of order. They refused to show up with the lone exception of Dr. Abelmann. Certain members of the faculty disapproved as well, fearful that the meeting would only endorse rebellion. Their fears were realized. “One young pastor, apparently on his way to the meeting, referred to it with relish as a ‘meeting of the Bolsheviks,’ and such it turned out to be. The still extant transcript of the stenographic minutes of this meeting reveals that the leaders – mostly younger men – were not interested in pouring oil on the troubled waters but in denouncing the college board.”⁹⁹ Chief among these “bolsheviks” was Karl Koehler himself, the obvious center of attention.

⁹⁶ Karl Koehler and Herbert Parisius, letter to the Northwestern College Board, April 29, 1924.

⁹⁷ Kiessling, 14.

⁹⁸ Robert Ave-Lallemant, “Shall We as A Body Sever Relations With Wisconsin?” Unpublished essay delivered to the Prot stant Conference at Marshfield, Wisconsin, December 13-14, 1927.

⁹⁹ Kiessling, 15.

The younger Koehler promised to pull no punches that day. “We have been invited to tell the gentlemen interested our story [sic]. That is part of my testimony to nail the person who said a lie. ... It is valuable for you to know as historical information. It is an important matter of the history of the present case that such is my attitude and that I am not going to mince my words.”¹⁰⁰ The person whom Koehler particularly intended to “nail” was Bergemann. The synod president was known for his rough-and-tumble politics. This case had been no different. Bergemann was alleging that the faculty had forbidden the father of an accused boy – a pastor, no less – to appear before the faculty. Koehler retorted: “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.”¹⁰¹ Later he would identify his target: “Praeses Bergemann is the one who spread that story. It is a lie.”¹⁰² Koehler’s future brother-in-law, Pastor E. Arnold Sitz, was among those who heard his angry words.¹⁰³

At the end of the evening, Ruediger finally added his two cents worth, concluding the gathering with frenzied, almost paranoid words. Ruediger predicted impending judgment for the Synod.

Gentleman, we have come to a certain juncture in church history (which is a very valuable thing to know). I am teaching that stuff and I meet ever so many similar situations in the history of the church that I claim I can size up this situation. We have come to a point in the Wisconsin Synod where we have not very much life left. We have threshed out doctrines, we have made confessions, and we are just about at the end of our power. We have come to this point where one, if he wants to enter heaven, has to enter it by force. It is almost impossible at the present time to be saved. That is what I preach to my boys. ... Now those who are able to discern the signs of the times must come forth and must now form their own private judgment in the fear of God. ... The very fact that these men are not able to size up a situation, and from that situation work up a solution, shows those men are absolutely incompetent, incompetent to deal with an affair of life because they do not know what life is.¹⁰⁴

For all intents and purposes, the Watertown Transcript meeting accomplished nothing positive; it only drove the two sides further apart. Board member John Brenner, who had been somewhat sympathetic to the faculty’s plight early on, dismissed the meeting out of hand, feeling “very little inclination to offer any defense of my actions to those who were active in that gathering.”¹⁰⁵ By failing to put the best construction on the board’s motives and actions in the spirit of the Wauwatosa Gospel, this meeting instead “fanned the flames anew, broke faculty

¹⁰⁰ “The Watertown Transcript,” paragraph 85.

¹⁰¹ “The Watertown Transcript,” paragraph 55. In his *The Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, Fredrich writes: “A strong case for Bergemann can be made in the matter. If the issue involved reporting about parental access to the original faculty expulsion meeting, as the writer assumes, he deems it significant that at the follow-up Conference meeting Pastor Bergemann brought as his witness a pastor and parent involved. This is not to accuse Karl Koehler of misrepresentation of his own. He heard a report and may have reacted most honestly. Bergemann’s witness, however, dealt directly and privately with President Kowalke” (287).

¹⁰² “The Watertown Transcript,” paragraph 60.

¹⁰³ E. Arnold Sitz married Frieda Koehler on February 6, 1925.

¹⁰⁴ “The Watertown Transcript,” paragraphs 297-299.

¹⁰⁵ John Brenner, letter to Adolf Zeisler, June 25, 1924.

unity, and marked the first public emergence of a third party.... There had been private meetings before (notably in Ruediger's house), which explains how so many like-minded men could have assembled, but now there was some clear leadership. An us/them mentality developed...."¹⁰⁶ Leigh Jordahl adds, "Wisconsin Synod leaders have frequently maintained that this meeting marked the emergence to public view of 'a determined and united clique.'"¹⁰⁷

Not everyone at the meeting, however, would later become a Prot stant. In a 1928 paper delivered at a Minnesota pastoral conference, Pastor Immanuel Frey pointed out as "a matter of historical fact that a number of those who were loud and prominent in the Watertown case and Karl Koehler case have since withdrawn from the group of their former allies and their names are not found on the list of what may be termed the anti-official party."¹⁰⁸ Already by 1925 Sitz would be among those who withdrew their support. In a letter to Frey, William Beitz exhibited his obvious disgust. "You inquire about our mutual friend Tois. Well, let me whisper in your ear: He has joined the ranks of the benedicts. Joining at this late date may make it somewhat hard to get acclimated. Should think Tois would feel at home under all circumstances."¹⁰⁹

Unfortunately, this type of confrontational, sarcastic spirit continued to swell within the ranks of both parties. People began to dig in their heels. In an effort to resolve the malaise, the Joint Synodical Committee called for the Northwestern board and faculty to meet before them on October 28-30, 1924. In that meeting the faculty, while admitting that the board had the *letter* of the law in its corner, contended that the *spirit* of the law had been broken in the process. The faculty's chief argument remained the same: without the power to expel, their hands were tied when it came to discipline. The two sides remained at loggerheads over this issue until finally in 1927 the Synod convention resolved that the "President of the Institution ... shall be responsible for the discipline of the Institution in all its departments..."¹¹⁰ The matter of expulsions was forever resolved.

The Karl Koehler Case and Verstockung

It was another crucial development for which the Joint Synodical Committee meeting of October 1924 is best remembered. Here the Synod witnessed the advent of Karl Koehler's jarring words, "The Wisconsin Synod is lying under God's judgment of hardening (*Verstockung*)." It was a serious charge that the people and leaders of the Synod took seriously and resented.

Koehler was actually not the first to suggest the idea. In his 1929 *Antwort*, August Pieper recalls that at a September 1924 pastoral conference in McMillan, Wisconsin, "the sermon was delivered [by Pastor Gerhard Gieschen] which publicly reiterated the proposition stating that the Wisconsin Synod lay under the judgment of hardening of hearts, and added a new one to the effect that 'the officials rode roughshod over the consciences of individuals.'" When District President Gotthold Thurow called a special pastoral conference a week later to discuss these issues, "the local protesters and others who had traveled there defended that sermon and made the assertion on the hardening of the Wisconsin Synod during the discussion of Pastor [Herman]

¹⁰⁶ Jeske, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Jordahl, xxvi.

¹⁰⁸ Frey, "History of Suspensions," 29-30.

¹⁰⁹ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1925.

¹¹⁰ 1927 Wisconsin Synod *Proceedings*, Article XIV, Section 1.

Brandt's essay on the doctrine of hardening."¹¹¹ Brandt would become one the Protéstants staunchest rivals.

Now Karl Koehler had added fuel to the fire by uttering his infamous judgment. While he was quick to add himself under that judgment, the reaction to his assertion was unambiguous, as reported in a letter from August Pieper to his son, Gerhard, written the day after the meeting adjourned.

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. Pastor Walter Hoenecke said he felt compelled to publicly testify here against K.K's speech, which was very difficult for him. ... Years ago when he had been sick ... he was reading the latest issue of the QS [*Quartalschrift*] (in bed) and there he had come across those same terrible remarks and had thrown the paper under the bed in indignation. He now wanted to testify: yes, there was indeed a hardening in the Synod, but not against the Gospel, rather a hardening against the person who had thrown such things at us [a none-too-subtle reference to Koehler's father, Professor Joh. Ph. Koehler].¹¹²

Koehler would later assert that his statement had been made innocently enough and that people had read too much into it,¹¹³ but Pieper had already made up his mind in October 1924: "The matter can only end – unless K. retracts – with his exclusion and with the exclusion of all who side with him."¹¹⁴

Verstockung quickly became a Protéstant buzzword. Professor E.C. Fredrich maintained, "Among the underlying causes of the Protéstant Controversy this issue of judgment and obduracy must rank as one of special significance."¹¹⁵ As word of Koehler's statement spread, it seems that most within the synod misunderstood the concept of *Verstockung* as Koehler and the later Protéstants used it. Most synodicals simply equated it with damning unbelief, but this was not how Koehler intended his statement. That damning unbelief is the *ultimate* result of *Verstockung*, Koehler conceded. But, he claimed, *Verstockung* can and does happen even within the lives of Christians because the old Adam still lurks within each one. His father had written in a 1912-1913 *Quartalschrift* article:

Every man naturally has the nature of hardening [*Verstockung*] himself. The old Adam in Christians even maintains this nature. It consists in this, that the flesh strives against the law and gospel of God and especially, if that enters his consciousness, to intensify and harden himself in this. When in a Christian the

¹¹¹ August Pieper, "Antwort," *Faith-Life* 75, no. 2 (March/April 2002): 12.

¹¹² August Pieper, letter to Gerhard Pieper, October 31, 1924.

¹¹³ K. Koehler gives his side of the story in "Is This Really True? (1924-1929)" *Faith-Life* 21, nos. 6-7 (June/July 1948): 6-17.

¹¹⁴ August Pieper, letter to Gerhard Pieper, October 31, 1924.

¹¹⁵ Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 156.

flesh begins to get the better of the spirit, then hardening in the narrow sense sets in. Then Scripture warns against the judgment of hardening, that God is about to remove his grace and to give man over into his hardened mind, so that there would be no possibility of turning back.¹¹⁶

Young Pastor Beitz followed the various Watertown happenings with obvious excitement. He showed particular interest in the personal hardships of Karl Koehler, seeing them as an example of the synod's legalistic officiousness and a symptom not only of the synod's *Verstockung*, but ultimately his own if he did not raise his voice in protest.

Now do not get the idea that I am a worshipper of Karl K's person. Nay, but I am beginning to recognize talent that the good Lord has given to us in him. I feel if that talent is buried and I raise no voice of protest I am partaker of the evil deed. That is why I am interested. Karl to my mind towers head and shoulders above us all. He has his head in the clouds where there is always sunshine of God's righteousness. He professed a fine witnessship before the committee in Watertown [at a meeting on July 16, 1925], the like[s] of which I haven't heard from human lips before. It translates me back actually to the Diet of Worms. So unselfish, so self-denying, so crucifying the old Adam, and yet so gentlemanly. I fear if we let that talent go by the board we too are progressed along the road to *Verstockung* so far that we are beyond hope. It is awful to think of it.¹¹⁷

But in Beitz's estimation, the synod's *Verstockung* was nothing new. Like Karl Koehler, Beitz too had seen it coming for a long time. In 1925 Beitz wrote, "I fear this whole affair is going to precipitate a breach which has been ever widening for some dozen or more years. It is only the handle that is taken ahold of. It is by no means the whole story. The old way of never meeting an issue, of compromise, of *zuschmieren* [covering up] shall not take its course according to us protestants. That is the cancer our synod is allowing but surely running into *Verstockung* of."¹¹⁸

Such *Verstockung* could be averted only through plain, simple "witnessship," a recurring theme in Beitz's thought and writings. So Beitz witnessed. He questioned John Brenner, "Why reject, cast aside, let lie idle such [a] precious God-gifted and God-given stone as Karl Koehler?" Beitz protested, "If you board members as my servants, to carry out my God-given responsibility, act contrary to my Christian conscience I have a duty to protest, since mine is the responsibility before God for such actions unless I do."¹¹⁹ Soon that protest would be loud and clear, adding fuel to the fire.

The Fort Atkinson Case

Although they happened only twenty miles apart, the events at Watertown that rocked the Wisconsin Synod and especially the Western Wisconsin District probably had little immediate

¹¹⁶ John Philipp Koehler, "The Teaching of Scripture Regarding Hardening," *The Wauwatosa Theology*, II (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 220.

¹¹⁷ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel P. Frey, July 28, 1925.

¹¹⁸ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel P. Frey, July 28, 1925.

¹¹⁹ William Beitz, letter to John Brenner, March 26, 1926.

effect upon the trouble brewing in Fort Atkinson. Regardless of an immediate connection, the Fort Atkinson Case fueled the fire started in Watertown and “served to consolidate the so-called Protéstants”¹²⁰ who viewed the cases as being nearly identical in principle. Beitz wrote of the Fort Atkinson Case, “I suppose it will cause as big a stir in synod as the Board-faculty affair. It is only another pimple breaking out upon the dead orthodox skeleton-like dogmatics that we are cursed with. It is high-handed procedure over against two Christians that witness in word and deed.”¹²¹

Those two Christians were teachers Gerda Koch and Elizabeth Reuter of St. Paul School. Professor Elmer Kiessling reports that both Koch and Reuter “were talented, resolute young women who could write as fluently in German as in English and were not afraid to express their opinions in the august company of theologians or to expatiate on them in letters.”¹²² In a letter to Immanuel Frey, Beitz went into great detail to give his more-than-likely slanted characterization of these two teachers and their situation:

Miss Reuter had taught at Ft. Atk. for some years. She is more of an emotional nature, still the Christ had gained foothold in her sufficiently so that she felt rebuked at the empty orthodoxy of [Pastor] Nikalaus’ [sic] sermons and the general affairs of the congregation. ... She felt like a hypocrite. That conclusion came to her after some years of teaching at the Ft. She was unhappy. Unhappy as a Christian because she didn’t give the Lord a chance to be all to her, not enough of Christ; and unhappy with the world-spirited church life, because she realized it was wrong. In her plight the Lord so led affairs that a Miss Gerda Koch, daughter of the Reedsville Koch was called to the Ft. also. Miss Koch is a Deborah character. She was able to prove the spirits for herself and was living a life centered in her Lord. Not pietistic, not fanatical, but a spirited Christianity, whether eating or drinking or whatsoever doing, doing it to the glory of God. Miss Reuter you can well understand needed just such a witness to serve her. With such a gift at her disposal she soon rallied to see where her trouble was. They soon became fast friends. They were chums ... They studied the Bible together privately since they got nothing out of the sermons and church life to feed their souls. It was a dead orthodoxy, the preacher the lord, the rest the common herd ... Getting food directly from the Word they began to grow. ... They told the Bible stories so well that in allowing the children in that Spirit to make the application it often hit the besetting sins of our time. Take the matter of bobbed hair, woman’s dress, everyday work, churchlife [sic], missions, money, etc. life in detail. Well, they were fast becoming the preachers in the congregation. Life was beginning to grow from this leaven.¹²³

Some of the other “leaven” these women attacked was the fact that only a handful of young people attended the pastor’s devotions at the Walther League meetings, while a more robust group always seemed to make it for the social outings. They were disturbed by the music the church choir sang and by the fact that the choir had accepted an invitation to sing at St. Paul,

¹²⁰ Frey, “A History of Suspensions,” 30.

¹²¹ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, April 28, 1926.

¹²² Kiessling, 16.

¹²³ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1926.

Oconomowoc, which had only recently “expelled” its pastor and joined the Missouri Synod. They looked with disfavor upon the many bazaars and potlucks sponsored by the church. They complained when several members of the Ladies’ Aid entered Gerda Koch’s classroom and proceeded to snap her punishing stick in front of the children (both teachers believed in corporal punishment). Pastor A.F. Nicolaus’ simple advice to Miss Koch was to get a new one. Perhaps the thing that upset them most, however, was the fact that the pastor did nothing to preach against these “sins.” They began to absent themselves from choir rehearsals, Ladies’ Aid, Walther League, and ultimately worship. They encouraged their pupils to do the same.

The two teachers finally brought all their concerns to Pastor Nicolaus shortly before Christmas 1924. It is impossible to know whether they initially came to Nicolaus as distraught Christians or as pietistic do-gooders. Whatever their manner, they were not happy with his response. The pastor, a grandfatherly type, tried to explain that most of what they objected to were adiaphora – neutral things, neither forbidden nor commanded by God. He counseled them not to take these matters so seriously or to judge people’s actions too harshly. However, when Koch and Reuter persisted by carrying their complaints to the church council, Nicolaus reacted more sternly, perhaps to his discredit, leaving his actions open to misinterpretation, of which the following is just one example: “He knew, like England knew before the war, if I don’t intimidate and crush this stuff that is growing over my head, the time is coming when I shall not be able to do it. ... It was a plain case of popery. Fundamentally the same as the Watertown affair. Orthodox dogmatics versus evangelical spirit. *Lehre* [dogma] versus Life.”¹²⁴

Throughout the month of December 1924 the situation continued to deteriorate. “The girls not getting anything out of N’s sermons either studied the Bible together during services or listened in to Voliva.”¹²⁵ The straw that finally broke the camel’s back was Miss Koch’s whispering to Miss Reuter at a meeting with the council, “*Sehet euch vor den falschen Propheten*” (“Beware of false prophets”). She was referring to Pastor Nicolaus. “At his insistence she repeated it aloud. He then called them ‘*freche Gruenschnabel*’ (saucy greenhorns) for speaking about their elderly pastor in that way. But the girls, having committed themselves, refused to retract the epithet. The pastor and council were in no mood to let them continue teaching unless they did so.”¹²⁶

In the meantime the two teachers had written to the director of Dr. Martin Luther College, Edmund Bliedernicht, with their complaints. Finally, in an effort to ease tensions, Bliedernicht suggested to Pastor Oswald Hensel of Immanuel, Marshfield, that his congregation call the teachers to fill two vacancies at the school there. Hensel and the congregation readily obliged, and the two teachers accepted immediately without a proper release from the Fort Atkinson congregation, a fact that did not sit well at St. Paul. “Self-evidently Ft. Atk. congregation would not let such a name as false prophet rest upon their pastor. They demand the thing be investigated.”¹²⁷ The girls now found an advocate in Pastor Hensel.

At his suggestion Miss Koch and Miss Reuter appealed to the District president [Gotthold Thurow]. The pastor and council of St. Paul’s, they said, had forbidden them to teach and live according to the word of God and dismissed them because

¹²⁴ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1926.

¹²⁵ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1926. Kiessling explains: “Rev. Wilbur Glenn Voliva [was] a fundamentalist sectary who held forth over radio station WCBD at Zion, Illinois” (17).

¹²⁶ Kiessling, 17.

¹²⁷ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1926.

they refused to obey. They therefore protested the appointment of other teachers to fill their places at Fort Atkinson. ...When Pres. Thurow confronted St. Paul's with the charges, the congregation countered with an indictment of its own. The president now arranged for a meeting of all concerned parties at Watertown to settle the affair. But the teachers would retract nothing, and so there were further meetings – more than ten in all.¹²⁸

Among those to whom the girls refused to pay heed were Professor Joh. Ph. Koehler and Pastor Henry Koch, Miss Koch's father. In the course of these meetings the teachers also managed to secure another ally, Professor G. Ruediger, who always seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Beitz wrote, "O. Hensel and Ruediger have represented the girls at the trials of heresy. It is getting to be an inquisition. When the *bann* was pronounced at meeting, Ruediger and Hensel being present, said that that would mean them also. To this the officialdom halted, which act of theirs shows a very cowardly spirit. If the girls are wrong then all that agree with the girls fall under like condemnation."¹²⁹

Oddly enough, during the course of these discussions (the 1925-26 school year) the two women continued to teach – Miss Reuter at St. John, Wauwatosa, and Miss Koch at Christus, Milwaukee. This disgusted the congregation at Fort Atkinson so much that they felt compelled to withdraw from Synod. In an effort to appease the Fort Atkinson congregation the presidium decided to act by suspending the two teachers, but concerns were raised that a *public* announcement would only hinder efforts. "A number of protests to Thurow ... halted the publication for a time ... [but finally, on May 16, 1926] you noticed the notice in the NWLuth. not of excommunication but just 'not available for calling!'"¹³⁰ The official notice read: "Announcement is herewith made, that teachers Elizabeth Reuter and Gerda Koch are for the present not being recommended for positions in our Christian Day Schools."¹³¹

This "officious" action on the part of district officials "to keep the peace" enraged a number of people; some perhaps did not even have an intimate knowledge of the situation. They flooded the two synodical magazines with letters of complaint and seemed to single out one man in particular as the "devil" behind the public announcement, Professor August Pieper. Pastor Beitz was among his sharpest critics.

Protests against publication came into the editorial committees. They of [their] own accord withheld publication through officialdom, [which] Pieper behind the throne with his dirty work, had so decreed. It finally is Pips' work. The whole rest of the officials haven't the nerve and backbone to pull such stuff. But Annas is the real highpriest. What he says goes. He scents orthodoxy, officialdom, *pastorenschaft* is at stake, yea, he himself. He sees a fine opportunity to kick his archenemy of life: JP and his life principle: historical-exegetical instead of dogmatical.¹³²

¹²⁸ Kiessling, 19.

¹²⁹ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, April 28, 1926.

¹³⁰ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1926.

¹³¹ *The Northwestern Lutheran* 13, no. 10 (May 16, 1926): 159.

¹³² William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1926.

Professor Pieper, whether fairly or not, was dubbed early on as the archenemy of the Protéstants. A quick scan of Protéstant letters and articles makes this readily apparent. One has difficulty, however, tracing the exact genesis of this aversion, whether it was something bred already at the Wauwatosa Seminary or later. More than likely it was a combination of things, but already before 1926 it is was a major force driving the “bolsheviks.” They saw Pieper and his manner of handling things as *the* problem in the Wisconsin Synod. They did not appreciate him “sticking his nose” into every synodical situation. His involvement, both now and later, in these synodical affairs only cemented their opinion of him:

‘The villain is doing his stuff until he is exposed.’ There is so much to say I know not where to begin. ... Pieper is riding hard to wield himself into the synodical saddle as first man. ... Just you wait till he can see his way clear, so that he does not burn his fingers; just you wait till he sits pretty so that he’s sure he can get away with it; just you wait till he is czar and the whole bunch of us will fly. No one stands on his own feet, of the other party, they all lean on Pips.¹³³

Just as soon as Pieper and officialdom see their way clear without making too much of an uproar among synodical brethren in the pastorate and otherwise they are going to do it. Take my word for it. Pips will stoop to anything, we know that from former occasions.¹³⁴

In the minds of such men the time had finally come to take a public stand against Pieper and the other so-called “dogmatists” in Synod: “I guess we’ll all, protestants, will [sic] have a chance now to shoulder or disavow the Watertown [Transcript] meeting, etc. Perhaps at some date this summer. This is going to be great. It’s grand to live in our age.”¹³⁵ That “date this summer” would end up being the Western Wisconsin District convention to be held at St. Stephan, Beaver Dam on June 16-22, 1926.

The Beaver Dam Conference

In a letter dated April 28, 1926, Pastor William Beitz wrote his friend in Arizona, Pastor Arnold Sitz, “Synod at Beaver Dam, June 16-22, is going to be some time I guess. Better come up.” Sitz declined the invitation, but the “bolsheviks” arrived in Beaver Dam prepared for a fight. They had met on May 28 in Marshfield to plot their ambush. “All present at this meeting and all of the spirit with the meeting ought to shoulder responsibility or disavow,” Beitz urged Sitz in June. “That means all bolshevists. There were some two dozen present.”¹³⁶ These “third party” members appointed a committee of four pastors – Oswald Hensel, Walter Bodamer, Jr., Erwin Abelmann, and Beitz – “to present the grievances to synod concerning Officious officialdom, Beruf [office], etc.”¹³⁷ Not everyone, though, was as fired up about the meeting as was Beitz. “J.P. [Koehler] was there, but wants to save synod it seems, rather than souls. He says he is in

¹³³ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, April 28, 1926.

¹³⁴ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, April 28, 1926.

¹³⁵ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1926.

¹³⁶ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 8, 1926.

¹³⁷ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 8, 1926.

hearty accord with our position yet pours cold water on because he is so unacquainted with the facts. The meeting proved that again repeatedly.”¹³⁸

At the Beaver Dam conference President Thurow tried to throw some cold water on the situation as well. “This is no suspension in the sense of excommunication,” he explained in his report, “but only a confirmation of the fact that the officials for the present cannot recommend these teachers for teaching positions. The District will have to take a stand on this matter.”¹³⁹ Thurow’s comment distinguishing between suspension and excommunication was a major crux. The Wauwatosa professors had clearly stated since 1911 that suspension and excommunication were practically identical. The Protéstants no doubt saw Thurow as now attempting to have it both ways.

His clarification made little difference to the action taken. The floor committee dealing with the Fort Atkinson Case asked the district “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.”¹⁴⁰ In addition, they urged “those who had supported these teachers in their attitude to help them come to true repentance ... [and asked] the congregation at Ft. Atkinson to reconsider its resignation from Synod.”¹⁴¹ The motion passed easily.

Fifteen pastors and two laymen protested the district’s decision. They admitted that the girls had sinned, but objected to the vote on procedural grounds. The district officials, they said, had intervened in the case before the Fort Atkinson church had completed its discipline according to the dictates of Matthew 18. For Protéstant Oswald Hensel to stand on the floor of the convention and argue this point, however, was the pot calling the kettle black. Hensel and his congregation had called the two teachers to Marshfield in the middle of the conflict, a most unbrotherly action. If anyone had started the process of circumventing good order, it was Hensel himself.

But such details were not important to many of these earliest Protéstants. They were much more interested in what they saw as the deeper problem, of which the Fort Atkinson Case was only a symptom. “We consider that the case is only one part of several broader (*höhere*) questions. We are ready at the proper time to deal with the basic principles, in order to make an earnest attempt to attain true unity.”¹⁴² If taken at face value, the protesters’ concerns were quite valid. Discipline cases demand that the church deal evangelically, which means they won’t always work efficiently. One could argue that the Beaver Dam “*Protestler*,” as Pieper called them, were only interested in evangelical practice.

Unfortunately, there was already a history here, a history of these same Protéstants not always acting so evangelically themselves. Certainly both sides were culpable, but the Protéstants had called the Watertown Transcript meeting and slandered members of the Northwestern board without giving them an opportunity to defend themselves. They had written scathing letters to and about district and synod officials. Among their number was the pastor who by calling Miss Reuter and Koch had thrown a major wrench into the cogs of evangelical discipline by the Fort Atkinson congregation, presumably because he didn’t think they could handle it correctly themselves. The Protéstants expected the district to be charitable with their

¹³⁸ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 8, 1926. This is an amazing comment considering the fact that Koehler served as an arbiter in the case.

¹³⁹ 1926 Western Wisconsin District *Proceedings*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ 1926 Western Wisconsin District *Proceedings*, 14.

¹⁴¹ 1926 Western Wisconsin District *Proceedings*, 14.

¹⁴² “*Protestschreiben*.”

requests, but most of them hadn't been charitable themselves. Many Protéstants were just as unchristian and dogmatical before and during these initial phases of the controversy as Pieper and others would be later on. While neither side lived by the principles of Christian patience, love and understanding – the principles of the Wauwatosa Gospel – at the beginning of this turmoil it was the Protéstants who were especially blameworthy. The district officials had been patient. They tried to get these two teachers to see the error of their ways, but they refused. Miss Koch refused her own father! Something finally had to be done to make these women realize that this was not child's play. They had made a serious charge and were clearly in the wrong. The Protéstants admitted as much. It would have been “unevangelical” *not* to point that out with a stern warning. Suspension from teaching was the avenue the district finally chose to send this message.

It is important to note that J.P. Koehler did not align himself with either party at this time. While he didn't defend the girls' actions, Koehler was still quite concerned that the district officials deal evangelically with them and not be too hasty in official action against them. On April 17, 1926, Koehler addressed a letter to President Thurow deeply saddened by the turn of events. As one of the arbiters in the case he included himself among those who were responsible for their development.

Now the affair is so muddled that no utterances and discussions are of any avail, because all remain one-sided. ... The Holy Spirit does not operate that way. And suspension or excommunication at this stage is the worst thing possible. Anyone seeking to make such pronouncements must have clean hands. ... Therefore, Mr. President, only one thing remains: that all of us who have acted in the matter appear before ... both parties in this action and make a cleancut unmistakable confession, and advise them to let the matter rest as it is, and to commit it to God in heartfelt confession.¹⁴³

Unfortunately, that never happened, and the further steamrolling of the issue by some Protéstants was only met in kind by the district, its officials and especially by Professor Pieper, who had by this time become impatient with the whole situation. For example, Pieper was reported to have said in reference to the protesters, “*rum oder 'raus*” (“shape up or ship out”).¹⁴⁴ One Protéstant, Martin Zimmerman, describes Pieper's reaction to their *Protestschreiben* in this way:

When [the *Protestschreiben*] was later read on the floor of Synod, Prof. Pieper called it “*so'n Wisch*” [wishy-washy and worthless] and derided and ridiculed the whole thing and called upon the District to take a stand. Although I myself had not been satisfied with the rather indefinite character of our protest, yet it had been given in sincerity, and to say the least, it should have been received with sincerity and brotherly consideration. The very thing that I had seen lacking in the dealings with the two teachers, now also confronted us in the District's dealing with our protest. It is the cold, brutal spirit of lovelessness and inconsideration toward a fellow-Christian's sacred convictions, who dares to question some of the things which are said and done in the name of the church. Some of us ... tried to

¹⁴³ John Philipp Koehler, letter to Gotthold Thurow, April 17, 1926.

¹⁴⁴ Kiessling, 25.

explain that we did not intend to whitewash everything the girls had said and done, but that we could not O.K. the suspension ... But by means of Prof. Pieper's eloquence the District was inveighed to O.K. the actions of the officials without further delay and to disregard our protest.¹⁴⁵

Later at the same convention a motion was made – some claimed at Pieper's insistence – to declare that all districts presidents “by virtue of their election to office were empowered to treat conclusively with protesters. To the dissidents this was a typical instant of the un-Christian, ‘popelike’ power lodged in the hands of the officials. In a later meeting Pres. Thurow assured District members that the resolution was never meant to give a president absolute power.”¹⁴⁶

This resolution eventually resulted in a proposed meeting to be held on February 24, 1927, in Watertown involving the district presidents and those who protested the Beaver Dam action. The meeting was called on short notice, and only five Protéstants appeared. Bill Beitz was not one of them. In a letter to District President Thurow he gave his reasons.

First of all it is an abuse of brotherliness to set a date on short notice without consulting the brothers that thru [sic] personal expense and time are thereby greatly inconvenienced. ... You are only making the breach greater thereby instead of healing it, Brother Thurow. Again. Do you for a moment think we are going to appear like a bunch of kids in the Ft. Atkinson case before people that must of necessity have a very meager and mostly one-sided acquaintance with the case? Or are they because of the virtue of their office as praesides infallible in all judgments? Have we popery to that extent already? This is a case of the West District. That the district's delegates were inveighed into passing a resolution only shows the tyranny and black pope behind it all.¹⁴⁷

In many respects, Beaver Dam would be the Protéstants' Waterloo. Never again would they be so close, yet so far from lodging a protest that would be taken to heart by the Synod. In many respects, however, they had been the authors of their own defeat.

The Ruediger Case

Without a doubt the pace of the Protéstant Controversy quickened after the Beaver Dam convention of June 1926. Both sides smelled blood and hurried to mobilize their forces. Both parties also looked for someone to blame. The Protéstants chose Pieper as their villain early on. The opposition now tabbed Professor Gerhard Ruediger to play the role of scapegoat for them. This latter maneuver soon became known as the Ruediger Case.

From all accounts Gerhard Ruediger was an impish and odd man. He graduated from the Wauwatosa Seminary in 1914, and after serving only seven years in the parish at Hoskins, Michigan, he was called back to Wauwatosa to serve as a professor.

¹⁴⁵ Martin Zimmerman, “Declaration of Independence,” *Faith-Life* 3, nos. 5-6 (May-June 1930): 2. NB: In the opinion of the author, Martin Zimmerman seemed to be one of the more, if not the most, conscientious of the Protéstants. Unfortunately, his good and evangelical intentions were often lumped together with less than sincere intentions on the part of other Protéstants. Simply put, Zimmerman was one Protéstant who was dealt with unfairly and this seemed to embitter him.

¹⁴⁶ Kiessling, 19-20.

¹⁴⁷ William Beitz, letter to Gotthold Thurow, February 19, 1927.

His students remember him as an affable, if somewhat gauche, figure; equally prominent were his beaming countenance, corncob pipe, and socks that never seemed to match. He fancied himself as quite a theologian. . . . One wonders about his theology – he used to come to class and state unequivocally, “*Wir liegen alle unter dem Gericht der Verstockung.*” [“We all lie under the judgment of hardening.”] August Pieper would then come in next hour and assure the uneasy students, “*Meine Herrn, Sie sind nicht verstockt – Sie sind liebe Kinder Gottes.*” [“My dear gentlemen, you are not hardened – you are beloved children of God.”]¹⁴⁸

The Protéstants themselves did not seem to think much of Ruediger, although they certainly supported him against synodical action. He did not add much to Protéstant thinking except anxiety. He eventually would write very little for their periodical, *Faith-Life*. His fellow Protéstants sneered at his apparent inability to stand up under the weight of pressure and persecution. Beitz liked to refer to him as a “sensitive Jeremiah.”¹⁴⁹ Yet they fought for this “underdog” with great solidarity. When Ruediger first came under fire, they appointed a committee of four – Hensel, Bodamer, Abelmann, and Beitz – to deal with the Seminary Board in regard to his case. “We identify ourselves with the principles Ruediger contends for,” Beitz declared. “We told them we were making his case our own, since we were of the same spirit.”¹⁵⁰ In particular, Beitz called on all those who sympathized in any way with Ruediger and the Protéstants to “hold up his hands at least if you do not feel you ought to give a public testimony.”¹⁵¹

Ruediger’s name was from early on associated with this group of malcontents. His home had been the scene of the very first meetings concerning the Watertown Case. He had called the Watertown Transcript meeting. He had supported the two Fort Atkinson teachers in their charges against Pastor Nicolaus and his congregation. Perhaps his most reproachable deed, though, was to drag these issues into his Seminary classroom. Even Protéstant historian Leigh Jordahl admits, “Evidence indicated that Ruediger’s behavior had been less than circumspect.”¹⁵²

With public protests now being lodged against Synod, people began to investigate more thoroughly into the source of this discontent. Invariably, their search led them to Ruediger’s front door.

It was no secret that Ruediger made no friends in Wauwatosa with his support of the two teachers and his breezy statements about obduracy. Neither the Seminary Board nor his colleagues appreciated his involvement in the Controversy, especially since his comments aggravated rather than calmed the situation. It was widely rumored that the Board was displeased with him and hoping for his resignation.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Jeske, 33-34.

¹⁴⁹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 8, 1926.

¹⁵⁰ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, August 20, 1926.

¹⁵¹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, April 28, 1926.

¹⁵² Jordahl, xxvii.

¹⁵³ Jeske, 34-35.

On July 27, 1926, at a joint meeting of the Seminary board and faculty, Ruediger's conduct was discussed, and many leaned heavily on Ruediger to resign his professorship, especially Pieper it seems. "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."¹⁵⁴

It seems that Pieper did just that over the next couple months, though he certainly was not alone. "That fall [Ruediger] was induced to write a pitiful, abject 'confession' of his sins, sins of discussing the cases in his Seminary classrooms, making slanderous charges against Synod officials, and neglecting his academic duties. It has been suggested, probably with a good deal of truth, that the text was provided by August Pieper."¹⁵⁵ Ruediger's confession was dated September 18, 1926. On September 22, three of his colleagues at the Seminary – Pieper, John P. Meyer, and William Henkel – answered in a written absolution. Apparently Ruediger agreed not to teach during the 1926-27 school year, "though not ousted as far as I can ascertain," Beitz wrote on October 22. "I hear he feels a hundred years younger."¹⁵⁶

Regardless of Ruediger's relief, J.P. Koehler did not approve of the way Pieper and the others had coerced Ruediger into a written confession, and he refused to have anything to do with the faculty's absolution. If it was not perceptible before, this incident certainly sent signals that relations between the Seminary faculty members were resting on shaky ground at best. As time went on Koehler would disassociate himself from the Wauwatosa faculty and their dealings more and more.

Even with his confession and the faculty absolution, the Ruediger Case was not closed. On January 31, 1927, the young professor was ousted from his Seminary position. He was told that the Synod's confidence in him had been lost. Some synodical versions of what followed this ouster speak of how copies of Ruediger's confession and the faculty's absolution "leaked out" and how "in February of 1927 some unknown individual took it upon himself to distribute printed copies of both confession and absolution throughout the Synod."¹⁵⁷ But in a letter addressed to Arnold Sitz and dated June 13, 1927, Professor William Henkel implied that the Seminary faculty and board were behind this public disclosure. "We had to deal with a Christian brother who had given public offense. What to do in a case like that Paul tell us in 1 Timothy 5:20. We were not merely to 'win the brother' – though that, of course, was an object too – but also to induce him to make reprobation for a public offense."¹⁵⁸ Sitz, among others, objected to such treatment.

[The faculty] letter purports to be an announcement of forgiveness upon Prof. Ruediger's confession, but is in fact a whitewashing on one hand and a rubbing in of his sins on the other, after his confession. It asserts that there has been no persecution *in any way*, but is itself a species of spiritual persecution. Is there no understanding of 2 Corinthians 2:8ff? Where is there any hope for a loving adjustment of matters in the spirit of Him that loved us 1 John 4:7ff., if the whitewash brush is our shield and the accusing pen our weapon? To an impartial

¹⁵⁴ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, August 20, 1926.

¹⁵⁵ Jeske, 35.

¹⁵⁶ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, October 22, 1926.

¹⁵⁷ This is the account Jeske relates (35). It was not, however, original with him by any means.

¹⁵⁸ William Henkel, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 13, 1927. 1 Timothy 5:20 reads: "Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning."

observer it appears as though there is the effort to roll the responsibility for the present pass of affairs onto the shoulders of the other party, instead of honestly taking one's full share one's self; for there is not a man in Synod that is not in his several capacity responsible to a greater or less degree for the present unrest.¹⁵⁹

In reply, Professor Henkel took umbrage at Sitz's insinuation and countered with a less than evangelical argument.

When you accuse us of having persecuted Prof. Ruediger you cannot possibly mean that we have persecuted him in our hearts; you can only mean that we have persecuted him in word and deed. To say that or even to assume it is unbrotherly and uncharitable. If prevailing on a brother to make amends for a serious public offense is considered persecution in our synod, we are in a sad plight indeed.¹⁶⁰

Sitz, though, was not afraid to candidly express his disgust for the actions of both parties in this matter nor in others that followed. Most of all, he was grieved because he failed to see any evidence of the brotherly love that the Wauwatosa Gospel encourages and the gospel of Christ alone produces.

Where ... are the grounds for trust when incapacity and disingenuity [sic] are writ in large letters over the history of the Wis. Synod and now seem to be in their heyday? And when one, because one refuses to take up with either party, for that neither party has anywhere nigh a corner on righteousness, is cursed out by the one party for a pietist, by the other for an orthodoxist, whom is one to trust? And as to repentance and brotherly love, how are they to come about in general except each one for his person exercise them under God? ... Personally I look for no good in the future. It seems to be a mutual game of beam and mote. Pietist and orthodoxist are just hell-bent for rationalism, and apparently they will not be stopped; their own person stands between them and sober-mindedness. The one has a fever and the other is subnormal; and both conditions lead to death. None listens to another's criticism. If there be but one scintilla of truth to it, am I not thankfully to accept it? Proverbs 9:8. Instead of that, however, loud recriminations, often apparently designed to draw attention away from one's own sins; brutality such as to be a gaudium even to the devil; personalities.¹⁶¹

The fire had been kindled, and nothing would soon slow its raging course. Sides had been chosen, and lines had been drawn in the sand; and instead of exercising a bit of the sober-mindedness that Pastor Sitz – as a witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel – advocated, the men of this controversy found it easier to fire volleys at the other side. The biggest volleys had yet to be fired.

A Summary in View of the Wauwatosa Gospel

¹⁵⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to the Seminary Board, April 20, 1927.

¹⁶⁰ William Henkel, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 13, 1927.

¹⁶¹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Henkel, May 9, 1927.

Who was really responsible for the tumultuous events of 1924 to 1926? It's hard to make such historical judgments seventy years later, even when the facts of the case might seem pretty plain. It is especially difficult to indict individuals when one is judging their actions in spiritual dealings from a distance. Were the district officials too hasty in their dealings with the teachers? Were the Protéstants too hasty in judging the district officials' actions? Did either side really allow enough time to let the Holy Spirit do his work in the hearts of their "opponents"? Those were hard questions to answer in 1926. They are impossible to answer today.

There simply are no hard and fast rules when one is applying law and gospel. Jesus made this quite clear to his disciples in Matthew 18. Peter asked him, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Our Lord answered: "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." Jesus' answer is both stupendous and stupefying. Neither side lived up to Jesus' standard of supreme love. Both sides found it much easier to put the worst construction on just about everything the other side said or did. In most cases, nothing but arrogant pride ruled the day. Neither side dealt in love, and in the end it was those in the middle, men like J.P. Koehler and E. Arnold Sitz, who were squeezed.

Just about everyone made mistakes. The tutors at Northwestern were probably overzealous in their late-night investigations. The faculty was probably too harsh with some of the student offenders and could have acted more prudently with others. The board was probably overbearing and dictatorial. Karl Koehler and Parisius were probably premature with their decisions to resign. Ruediger, the teachers and pastor at Fort Atkinson, Hensel, Pieper, Beitz ... the list goes on and on of people who made mistakes, sinners; and each sinner must be dealt with individually and evangelically, without a pre-determined time frame. The law of love does not carry with it a stopwatch. That is a very central principle of the Wauwatosa Gospel. Unfortunately, that principle of evangelical practice was broken repeatedly between the years of 1924 and 1926 in the Wisconsin Synod. Far too many ultimatums were set, and the result was spiritual chaos. Already by 1926 the Wauwatosa Gospel had been repudiated to a large degree, ironically, by both sides. In the simple words of J.P. Koehler: "Love is wanting."¹⁶² But the fire had just begun.

Chapter Four - Martyrdom Prophesied, Martyrdom Fulfilled: The Beitz Paper (1926-1927)

The Greek word for "witness" is our English word "martyr" (*μάρτυς*). Over the course of history "martyr" has taken on different connotations. Sometimes it is used positively when, for instance, people willingly suffer and die for what they believe in. Many early Christians were martyred because they witnessed to the truth, a truth that the world did not want to hear. But martyrdom can also have a negative connotation. Luther used to talk about "the devil's martyr," referring to the fact that "there are many who without necessity impose a cross upon themselves."¹⁶³ Such people choose a "cross" to carry and only later cry foul when they are persecuted for it.

In *some* respects this is what the Protéstants did in the mid-1920s. In *some* respects this seems to have been the *modus operandi* of the Protéstant Conference ever since.¹⁶⁴ They have

¹⁶² J.P. Koehler, "Disintegration in Our Circles," 11.

¹⁶³ Quoted in Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, III (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950), 71.

¹⁶⁴ By italicizing the word "some" the author wishes to stress that this is a generalization. It certainly does not refer to every Protéstant in his opinion, nor to every action on the part of the Protéstants. This inference is drawn solely

rallied around controversial issues and held onto them vigorously “for conscience’s sake,” oftentimes unwilling to put the best construction on another person’s words and actions. In the process back-biting words have ensued and evangelical practice has broken down. Both Protéstants and synodicals have lacked brotherly love. Both sides have their “martyrs,” blinded to the fact that their witness may not have been given in gentleness and respect.

A true martyr will always witness to the truth in a *loving and respectful way* and then suffer the consequences of his witness *willingly*. Our Savior “did not open his mouth” (Is 53:7) when faced with opposition. “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Pe 2:23).

The Protéstants have not always betrayed this same attitude. They have been willing enough to suffer for their cause, it seems, but have been far less ready to speak the truth in love so that the Church in all things grows up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (Eph 4:15). This is not to say that a Christian’s witness will not at times be sharp and cutting. Peter’s Pentecost sermon is proof enough that a true Christian witness will at times “cut to the heart” (Ac 2:37). But the underlying motivation must be love for the “opponent” to lead them to the truth of the gospel. To witness to the truth in love is what the Wauwatosa Gospel represents. The Protéstants have been ready to witness, and very often they’ve witnessed to the truth. Less often has that witness been made with an evident, loving intent.

Prophecying Martyrdom: Resignation or Self-Infliction?

William Beitz was one Protéstant whose witness was confused with caustic-sounding words. Most people who knew Beitz personally insist that he was a warm and quiet gentleman.¹⁶⁵ He was thought to be a good, evangelical preacher by none other than August Pieper himself¹⁶⁶ and genuinely concerned about the spiritual welfare of his flock and synod. From every indication he seems to have been a model pastor upon graduation from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in 1917.¹⁶⁷

It has been suggested that the present-day conclusion that Beitz spoke too stridently might only be a product of the more politically-correct society we live in. It is argued that we do not write and say the things that were written and said in the rough and tumble Midwest of the 1920s. This is perhaps true. But in the end, love is love, and to call a man such as August Pieper

from the correspondence and articles with which the author had to work. He admits that this inference may be a false one and asks forgiveness for those cases in which this inference is incorrect.

¹⁶⁵ For example, in two letters to E. Arnold Sitz, dated December 1, 1958, and February 23, 1959, Immanuel P. Frey commented on the recent synodical developments toward reconciliation with the Protéstants. He feared that there were still some hotheaded men among them who would undercut Synod’s overture for peace. Beitz, however, was not among his concerns. He wrote: “If they were all as calm and collected as Beitz, it should not be too difficult to find a solution and a healing of the old wounds.” Later, Frey wrote: “If all were like Beitz, there would be hope.” These comments are particularly significant when one recalls that I.P. Frey knew Beitz from his days in Arizona and was on the original Peace Committee, which dealt with the Protéstants, established at the 1929 Synod convention. Already in 1938, Sitz had written to Frey: “There is something radically wrong when so cordial a preacher of the Gospel, a man who, unlike so many of us, went into the ministry with conviction and zeal, is cut off from the wider influence his remaining in the Synod would have accorded him” (September 13, 1938).

¹⁶⁶ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, December 7, 1925. Beitz writes: “I was together with [Pieper] at Menomonie about two months ago, and he gave me credit even there that I preached Christ.”

¹⁶⁷ J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 205. Koehler writes: “At Tucson, Pastor Beitz started a parochial school in 1920 and for two years carried on alone with notable success; in 1922, when the congregation also became self-supporting, nearly half of about twenty pupils hailed from non-Lutheran homes. The then mission board of Synod evidently appreciated this and volunteered to subsidize a teacher ...”

“Annas, the real highpriest,” for instance, does not serve the purpose of love especially when dealing Christian to Christian, no matter what the other’s faults may be. The Eighth Commandment still applies, even to our enemy.

Already by 1925, William Beitz was writing and speaking like a man who was looking for a fight and anticipating a fire. “These are days that try men souls, and in significance to synodical affairs I suppose it will be little less than a Diet of Worms. There sure are fundamentals at stake, and that will be uncovered that are going to shake the very temple that we have reared. Will Samson go down and die with the temple?”¹⁶⁸ By his own volition Beitz would start the fire that would later engulf him. He was the Samson who would ultimately bring the temple down on the Protéstants and himself.

The young Rice Lake pastor realized early on that the Synod had spiritual problems. He perhaps recognized this earlier than many, but he certainly was not alone. Professors J.P. Koehler and August Pieper had written numerous articles in the *Quartalschrift* pointing out the same spiritual deterioration. Unlike his former professors, Beitz seemed to emphasize the fact that such a situation could not go on without an eventual and painful breach. He concluded that the circumstances demanded a strong “witnessship,” and witnessing would eventually lead to division. “The time is coming when the breach which is already there will have to become evident unless it be that we become dumb dogs and hide the light entrusted to us under a bushel. If that be the case we are no good any longer but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men, be it men of the dogmatical synod or the unbelievers.”¹⁶⁹

Beitz insisted on a simple witnessing to Christ and castigated what he thought would be fruitless discussions with the “dogmatical” opponents using their “dogmatical” weapons. He made his position eminently clear in a 1925 letter to Arnold Sitz:

It’s a waste of time, energy and not to the glory of God. Twere better never said. I can see how it would be to our glory to take the very weapons the dogmatically inclined element are wielding, but I thank God that He has not allowed the devil to get us on to the field, their own ground. That would mean relinquish the sword of the Spirit and grasp for the wooden sword of human reason be it logic, dogmatics, etc. ... I tell you, Tois, it all can be summed up in this: We either preach Christ, or we preach about Christ. We cannot preach any more Christ than we have in us. To make up the deficiency we all so feel we are tempted to resort to the husks of logics [sic] and dogmatics. It condemns us as being on the road of spiritual bankruptcy...¹⁷⁰

Beitz’s position, however, was not in unison with a true witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel. The disciples of that approach would never demand up front that a discussion be held in a fashion most comfortable or time-efficient for them. They realize that evangelical dealings will often be “a waste of time and energy” in an earthly sense. But such dealings are *always* “to the glory of God” because they trust in God alone for the results. Instead of demanding a particular kind of forum then, it is their heartfelt belief that the gospel of love and forgiveness will conquer the heart and produce faith regardless of the forum. To demand that discussions be efficient throws a legalistic wrench into the entire matter. The Wauwatosa Gospel *necessitates* that we, in

¹⁶⁸ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1925.

¹⁶⁹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, December 7, 1925.

¹⁷⁰ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, December 7, 1925.

love, meet our opponent on *their* field, on *their* ground. It is only then that we can, over the course of time, lead them to the truth of the gospel through the Spirit of the gospel. As it was, Beitz and the other Protéstants often employed a “hurrah spirit” in an effort to bulldoze their opponents into seeing their point of view rather than using the quiet gospel of love to woo them to the side of truth.

Professor J.P. Koehler condemned such a “hurrah spirit” approach: “...if a person is of strong determination and is so inclined to impose his will on others, he can easily captivate the masses to follow him blindly and to help him carry out his aims with a rushing, hurrah-shouting attack.”¹⁷¹ He compared this type of spirit to the spirit of a soldier in battle: “There is decidedly nothing spiritually active here, nothing brought about by the Holy Spirit, not even any natural moralism, but something repulsive, even bestial, as many soldiers relate. Whatever goes on within those men at that moment ought to warn us not to employ that method in proclaiming the gospel of the death of our Savior.”¹⁷² That the Protéstants used such “hurrah spirit” tactics at times is evident. As a result of this bullying, one isn’t surprised at the persecution they experienced. They were the weaker, smaller party. In fact, one is almost forced to conclude that their pain was to some extent self-inflicted, especially early on.

When Beitz and the other Protéstants didn’t get the forum they desired to discuss their *höhere Fragen* (broader questions), they began to agitate more loudly and fiercely. This only led, in their minds, to greater persecution by the “dogmatical” party, attributing such persecution to their “spiritual” message. Eventually, they concluded, these events would leave them out of the Wisconsin Synod. “We cry peace, peace, and there is no peace. So if one of these days you find Bill Beitz preaching on the corner of Congress and Scott [a major intersection in Tucson where Pentecostals would preach] you know what happened. If there is anyway of doing it the other faction will not rest until they have removed the bolshevist element.”¹⁷³ Again, it could easily be argued that as the Protéstants escalated the ferocity of their witness, the synodical party answered with an equally ferocious tyranny. The Protéstants never learned.

Again, the arch-contestant in this battle was Professor August Pieper. The Protéstants believed themselves to be defenders of “Koehlerism.” “Draw your conclusions as to the psychology of it all,” Beitz wrote Pastor Immanuel Frey in 1926. “Koehlerism having received a serious setback in the popular mind, now Pips takes the genuine opportunity to plant this dung of Pieperism. Not being clear as to Gospel, he seems to be advocating a return to dogmatics. It seems to be the straw he is grabbing for to wield himself into power. Anything to kill Koehlerism.”¹⁷⁴ Beitz knew that fighting against Pieper and officialdom was risky business. “It may mean that before another year or two a good many others will be excommunicated also by force of power arrogated with popular opinion backing, ... I believe it is coming to that sooner or later. All joshing aside. Just as soon as Pieper and officialdom see their way clear without making too much of an uproar among synodical brethren in the pastorate and otherwise they are going to do it.”¹⁷⁵

As 1926 unfolded the battle lines between the Protéstants and “Pieperism” became more clearly defined. The Fort Atkinson Case was a special source of tension. Both sides were

¹⁷¹ J.P. Koehler, “Sanctification,” 393-394.

¹⁷² J.P. Koehler, “Sanctification,” 395.

¹⁷³ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, April 28, 1926.

¹⁷⁴ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, April 28, 1926.

¹⁷⁵ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, April 28, 1926.

throwing out threats, and in the minds of the participants separation between the two groups was drawing near. Beitz almost resigned himself to that outcome:

It may be some years, it may be shortly if the old bull, Pips, in the china closet begins to move, he'll carry most of the dishes with him for lack of information on the part of the dishes... I hope that never realizes ----- I mean, of course, the split, but the times are such that it only takes a few moves and that will be the inevitable result. Not that we wish. We'll witness as long as it turns to us for testimony. But when they put you out of the synagogues, it means to shake the dust off your feet and go into the next city.¹⁷⁶

In a letter to Sitz dated June 8, 1926, just before the Beaver Dam Conference, Beitz extended an invitation to Sitz that betrays his feelings on the imminence of the Protéstants' ouster, "Perhaps you can come up to read the bolsheviki funeral service next year."¹⁷⁷ After the Beaver Dam protest Beitz was even more certain: "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* [hardened]. See J.P. Karl K., Ruediger, Hensel murdered and fold our hands singing 'Glory be to God on high.'¹⁷⁸ He boiled the battle down in an August 11 letter to Sitz, making allusion to his famous paper that would soon rock the Synod.

If you believe that teaching doctrines is the main thing in the preaching of the Gospel we are to do, then I certainly do not understand my Bible at all, and then I do not understand the way Christ preached, nor Paul, nor Peter, nor Luther, nor any one of the preachers that I regard as Gospel preachers today in our circles. 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.¹⁷⁹

Regardless of his intent Beitz's "Message," as it was called by the Protéstants, would only serve to fuel the fire and fulfill the Protéstants' prophecies of their own martyrdom.

The Just Shall Live By Faith: "The Protéstant Bible"

The question has been asked more than once: What was the genesis of the Beitz Paper? Did Beitz really intend to create such a stir? In 1929 August Pieper would give the following opinion:

¹⁷⁶ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 19, 1926.

¹⁷⁷ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 8, 1926.

¹⁷⁸ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, August 20, 1926.

¹⁷⁹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, August 11, 1926. Note that Beitz intended to first present his paper on Galatians at the Missouri-Wisconsin "mixed conference" in Rusk, Wisconsin, on October 5-6, 1926, from which conference he had received this assignment. Beitz had also been assigned a paper on Christian Citizenship for the Wisconsin River-Chippewa Valley Conference, held in Schofield on September 14-15, 1926. When he didn't complete it, Beitz explained "that he had his Mixed Conference paper ... with him, which he was willing to submit here, since, after all, it was fundamental, too, to the problem of Christian citizenship." See Karl Koehler, "Please, Professor Pieper!" *Faith-Life* 75, no. 2 (March/April 2002): 22.

The whole thing is a well-considered, carefully meditated **tendential** [sic] **tract**, often premeditated by himself and a number of his adherents, a **propaganda and agitational** [sic] **tract** to promote the idea, publicly proclaimed in the year 1924 by the Watertown Professor Karl Koehler and shared and shored up by his faction to which also Beitz belongs, **that the Wisconsin Synod**, because of the spiritual and moral rot obtaining in her, as manifested in the Watertown board, is **under the judgment of the hardening of hearts**. This is so apparent on such strong evidence from the genesis of the *Beitz Paper* that one must blindfold one's eyes deliberately in order not to see it.¹⁸⁰

Not surprisingly, Karl Koehler tells an entirely different story. "To the best of our knowledge, not one of the earlier or later protestants knew anything whatsoever about the nature of Beitz's Paper." The first that anyone knew of its formulation was as a group of pastors traveled together to pastoral conference. Koehler reports that Beitz "casually mentioned that he didn't finish the paper assigned him and would submit another."¹⁸¹

What we can know for certain is that the Beitz Paper was not heartily received. In a paper entitled "Shall We as A Body Sever Relations With Wisconsin?" Pastor Robert Ave-Lallemant provides a distinctive and insightful look into the first reading of the Beitz Paper at a meeting of the Wisconsin River-Chippewa Valley Conference in Schofield, Wisconsin, on September 14-15, 1926.

Pastor Beitz had been asked by his conference and a mixed conference to work out a paper on a timely question and as a result had worked out his now so much discussed paper. ... I do not believe anyone knew of the character of this paper outside of the author before it was read at the conference. A number of third party men outside of the conference also attended this conference at Schofield, which may have given the impression that the reading of this paper was a "put up job," which it absolutely was not. I am merely mentioning these facts as something which may throw light upon the reception of the paper at its first reading. Add to that the peculiar conference atmosphere into which this paper fell and you will understand many other things in connection with this paper. Even before Hensel, Beitz, Motzkus, Abelmann and Lutzke were at the conference Reverend [Herman] Brandt [of Neillsville, Wisconsin] had said he did not know whether he could with a good conscience still pray and go to the Lord's Supper with the Protéstants who had protested in the Fort Atkinson case. Only as he was assured that further action with Protéstants was pending did he consent to remain and attended services. His remarks, however, had created the atmosphere of disharmony and aloofness. At that time Pastor Brandt had not talked to any of the Protéstants to admonish them, yet he came to conference to declare that brotherhood between him and Protéstants really no longer fully existed, that it had been severed by their Fort protest. One can easily imagine what the reading of the paper together with the presence of a number of outside Protéstants would call forth in the minds of some of these men who already then looked upon Beitz as an outcast. It was impossible for them to be favorably impressed. It was only a majority vote of

¹⁸⁰ August Pieper, "Antwort," 12. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸¹ Karl Koehler, "Please, Professor Pieper," 22.

conference that made them reluctantly consent to the reading of the paper. That paper coming from an enemy, an outcast, was no doubt already condemned as heresy, slander and what not, even before it was read. This has been the case repeatedly later. His message was well-meant but ill-received. A discussion of the paper did not take place at this conference meeting, only a few bitter condemnatory remarks were made by a few. It was voted to discuss the paper thoroughly at the next spring conference and that each member should be supplied with a duplicate copy for private study and consideration.¹⁸²

Despite the fervor that resulted Beitz would read his paper again at a Missouri-Wisconsin mixed conference in Rusk, Wisconsin, on October 5-6, 1926.

Since those initial readings much ink has been spilled analyzing Beitz's "Message." To spill much more analyzing his every word would not be particularly productive today. Certainly though, because of the historical import of this paper, some analysis is necessary.

Summarizing the paper is not an easy task. Beitz did not write in typical conference paper form. His train of thought is sometimes difficult to follow. His style is similar to that of the Old Testament prophets when they would preach to their listeners; his words are sharp and disconcerting. Because of these factors one shouldn't be surprised that this paper did not resonate with many of its hearers. "It is the manner of a prophet to speak sharply. The O.T. prophets spoke sharply at times (cf. Isaiah 56:10-12). Many passages in Luther are sharply spoken, in fact, over-spoken. Luther exaggerates, but Luther spoke primarily as a prophet and not as a systematic theologian or a careful social historian. The same thing may be said for Beitz."¹⁸³ Beitz pictured himself as a modern-day Jeremiah. His purpose was to awaken his church body from spiritual slumber caused by dogmatism; he feared that the Synod was in danger of *Verstockung*. "It was an earnest call to repentance, an earnest attempt to stem the inroads of formalism and externalism into Wisconsin Lutheranism. It was surely designed to strengthen spirituality and oppose the workings of the *opinio legis* in all of us."¹⁸⁴

However, Beitz cannot be excused simply by suggesting that he spoke as a prophet. His strong language and condemnations did not serve to mend any wounds or throw any oil on the troubled waters. Regardless of any salutary intent, Beitz failed to realize that his harping on sanctification would hurt the spiritual condition of the Synod as much as Beitz had hoped it would help. Even the Protéstants recognized this.

It being the first attempt to present our views and feelings in a tangible form, it bears the marks of primitiveness, boldness, crudeness and sharpness. Here is a woodsman coming into the timber to cut down the deadwood which is hindering the live wood in growth. He is fresh and full of strength and zeal. His ax is sharp and is cutting deeply into the trees to be felled, chips are flying everywhere. Under this mighty onslaught the trees are falling, but as they fall, here and there they are falling upon the live trees, hurting and harming them also, partly due to a lack of foresight in hewing down. ... I am mentioning these thoughts on Beitz's paper to point out shortcomings on our and Beitz's side. We should have considered more the possibility of hurting or bruising the babes in faith in our

¹⁸² Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

¹⁸³ Victor Prange, "A Review of the Beitz Paper," Unpublished essay, 5.

¹⁸⁴ Jeske, 40.

Synod. We should have considered more the generalness of babes in our synodical timber today eking out a bare living under the shadow of big giants. However, was not a great deal of this lack of consideration due to our own adult infantilism? ... Being children of the same mother-church we are very much alike. We make the same mistakes, have the same shortcomings, the same inability to handle and do things right. We too are too much adult babes where fullgrown men are needed to do the work of our special time.¹⁸⁵

Such an admission on the part of Ave-Lallemant is heart-warming and shows an alertness to the principles of Wauwatosa. Such an admission of accountability in a public forum would have gone a long way toward bringing a God-pleasing resolution to this controversy. Unfortunately, such public admissions did not seem to be readily forthcoming. As a result the trouble and misunderstanding only grew.

As far as the "Message" itself goes, two things proved to be the greatest disservice to a proper understanding: Beitz's initial lack of clarity and his subsequent refusal to change or even explain one jot or tittle. Beitz repeatedly answered his critics in a fashion similar to the way he answered Sitz in a letter on February 14, 1927: "Tois, you see only the surface, the externals, the letter. You do not enter into the spirit, the depth of the message."¹⁸⁶ In essence Beitz repeatedly said, "You just won't understand," an attitude which betrayed an absolute repudiation of everything the Wauwatosa Gospel stands for. Such an attitude does not allow for a building up by the gospel; it instead tears down relationships by means of a legalistic determination.

Simply put, Beitz's paper lacks theological clarity. There are two points of confusion that merit special mention. First there were his statements on repentance, of which the following is only a sampling:

Do we really mean to turn our backs upon sin? Upon ourselves? Do we come with a broken and contrite heart? To bring that home to us: Suppose you were bruised and smashed physically, and still living, wouldn't the pain be excruciating – more than you could bear? Well, let that serve in a small way as a shadow of the spiritual. If we are of a broken and contrite, smashed spirit we are in extreme excruciating pain, in sorrow and battle of soul; in agony; we are hopeless, shattered, despising self, in misery, perhaps entertain thoughts of suicide.¹⁸⁷

You will find repentance at the foot of the Cross. True, heartfelt repentance is not obtained from the individual commandments as most of us have learned to know them in our Catechism, or Catechetical course. ... If you want to see what your sin has done, the heinousness of it, the hell of it, look at Christ on the Cross. ... The real edge is put on the law by seeing the love, the grace, behind it: The Jehovah – the Jesus. ... Look to see how Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. Look at him preaching later in Acts. At Paul. At Philip. At John. At Christ Himself, -- and show me where you find law preached to bring about repentance as we are taught at our schools and seminaries.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

¹⁸⁶ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, February 14, 1927.

¹⁸⁷ William Beitz, "God's Message to Us in Galatians: The Just Shall Live By Faith," 10.

¹⁸⁸ Beitz, 11.

As a result of such statements Beitz opened himself to charges of antinomianism.¹⁸⁹ His use of the cross of Christ to preach repentance was an unconventional one for the people in his day, even though there certainly was precedent.¹⁹⁰ The problem with Beitz's approach was that he carelessly *overemphasized* this use of the cross. Throughout the course of his paper he used the cross as law repeatedly. The problem is that he never managed to preach the cross as gospel, its proper use. In fact, he never really got around to preaching the gospel much at all. He did not strike an overall gospel note, leaving his hearers instead with the threats and commands of the law.

Although it seems clear that Beitz was not an antinomian, it's easy to understand why he would be misunderstood and charged with that theological misstep. By always emphasizing the *opus alienum* of the cross instead of its proper use – consoling the terrified soul – he drove people to despair of the cross. Against such a practice the Epitome to the Formula of Concord issues an important caveat. “As long as all this – namely, the passion and death of Christ – proclaims God's wrath and terrifies people, it is not, strictly speaking, the preaching of the Gospel but the preaching of Moses and the law, and therefore it is an ‘alien work’ of Christ by which he comes to his proper office – namely, to preach grace, to comfort, to make alive. And this is the preaching of the Gospel, strictly speaking.”¹⁹¹

Closely connected to this charge of antinomianism was the accusation of enthusiasm and pietism. Beitz asserts the pietistic notion that there must be a certain level of sorrow over sin before one can really have “true, heartfelt repentance.” Again, Beitz was careless with his choice of words. To divide contrition and repentance into subjective levels or categories – as Beitz *seems* to do even if *in fact* it was not intended – is not only dangerous theologically-speaking, it is also irresponsible pastorally-speaking.

The second aspect of the Beitz Paper that caused an enormous uproar was his apparent judgment of hearts (*Herzensrichterei*). In the estimation of not a few people “Beitz overdid his law-preaching to the point of denying people's Christianity; he failed to see that a person could be weak in faith, tending to legalism, and erring and still be a Christian. He equates Wisconsin Synod Lutherans with the ‘generation of vipers’ whom John the Baptist inveighed against.”¹⁹² Again, the following is just a sampling:

Another thing that the devil palms off on us so that we do not LIVE BY FAITH is: using the means TO LIFE in an impersonal, mechanical way. We studied the Bible from the various angles of study at the seminary, but we often failed to realize that God was speaking to us thru our teachers and professors. That may have been the teacher's fault. We shall prove their spirits before we have done with this paper.¹⁹³

We deal with souls as so many Fords. Our work is then not a saving of souls, but just assembling plants for Ford parts. We gather members, we build

¹⁸⁹ Antinomianism is the heterodox teaching that the gospel, properly speaking, brings about contrition in the heart of a Christian, and that therefore it is no longer necessary to preach the law, properly speaking, to a Christian. John Agricola was the major proponent of antinomianism in Luther's day.

¹⁹⁰ One example in Lutheran circles would be the musical Passions of Johann Sebastian Bach.

¹⁹¹ FC Ep V, 10 (Tappert, 479).

¹⁹² Jeske, 43.

¹⁹³ Beitz, 12.

congregations, instead of saving souls. We measure a man's success in the ministry by the number of people he has been able to drum together, never proving the spirit of the means used, nor of those used to keep them together. This mechanical dealing with souls is especially true in the hyper-mechanical age we are living in where everything is coldly run by crank and lever.¹⁹⁴

How much is palmed off as "preaching the Gospel" – Christ – which is only ABOUT CHRIST. And no life is imparted because no Christ is imparted. ... How we public preachers of the Word are prone to drift into this! ... How many of us have not at sometime or other been asked at meeting to lead in prayer, or to say a few words, and we graciously excused ourselves: "We are not prepared." It shows us conclusively how little we LIVE BY FAITH, or it would be simple to let that faith express itself in words, to God or man.¹⁹⁵

One group that seemed to receive an extra-special salvo was Seminary professors. Despite his later claims to the contrary, one would suspect that Beitz at least had August Pieper in mind when he made reference to this profession:

Proved by that Spirit how little teaching really stands the test? How little teaching is true witnessship? How much more drudgery, lifelessness, formality, death, life-killing, self-glorifying! How few real teachers we have that are worthy of the name "teachers," even at our seminaries. How many teachers "so-called" are putting in time watching the clock, looking for a pay-check, are mere time-servers.¹⁹⁶

Did Beitz judge hearts in his paper? He always claimed that he included himself in the denunciations, pointing out that he used the first person plural pronoun "we" throughout the paper. That Beitz would have included himself in this harsh analysis would have been in line with the Wauwatosa Gospel's self-criticism. Some have questioned the sincerity of Beitz's plea of innocence, but Beitz's claim seems to be corroborated by a letter to Pastor Immanuel Frey dated August 20, 1926, less than a month before he delivered his famous paper. He writes in a very personal tone, fearful of his own *Verstockung*.

I am beginning to feel the truth of the words of Ruediger, Karl K. and others more each successive day: *Wir liegen im Gericht der Verstockung* [We lie in judgment of hardening]. ... My! What awful words, but how they come home to one, and how that cuts. ... We do not realize the awfulness of sin and so do not appreciate the Savior from sin. We do not see the absolutely hopeless vanity of our lives in thought, word, and deed, and so are unable to appreciate the One that has become vanity for us. The root of it all: *Keine wahre Busse* [no true repentance]. It's all an intellectual process, this matter of Christianity.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Beitz, 13.

¹⁹⁵ Beitz, 17.

¹⁹⁶ Beitz, 20.

¹⁹⁷ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, August 20, 1926.

Despite this concession, however, Beitz must still be held accountable for his carelessness and lack of clarity in this respect as well. He should have included himself personally in these condemnations beyond a shadow of a doubt. Any pastor realizes this as a rule of thumb when preaching specific law – he never wants to give even the *slightest* impression that he is excluding himself.

Beitz would attempt to clarify this issue, and for that he must be commended. He publicly stated more than once that he included himself in the condemnations, but those statements fell on deaf ears. Why? Perhaps too much water had gone under the bridge. The war was on, and no one was eager to listen to reason. The other possibility could have been the manner in which Beitz tried to clarify himself. He does not seem to have been adept at explaining things in a humble and respectful manner; at least, one gets that impression from his letters and articles. In addition, Sitz's private journal reflection about his college friend is illuminating. "Bill has a tendency to look for the wrong motive even in his best friend and seldom puts the best construction on a man's action."¹⁹⁸ Despite the sincerity of his clarifications, the manner in which he presented those clarifications perhaps led people to question them. The heat of the moment didn't help.

Despite the paper's obvious shortcomings, the Protéstants readily banded around the "Message." Pastor Paul Hensel wrote in 1928: "We hold Beitz's Paper, together with its imperfections as to form and contents, with all its misplaced commas, periods, dashes and what not, to be *perfect* and *unchangeable*. It is our book of confession. It is inspired. It is our Bible. We would not yield one comma, not a fly-speck to you. It is sacred."¹⁹⁹ Robert Ave-Lallemant wrote:

That paper has compiled many of the separate views and thoughts of individuals in our group. To a great extent it is a confession of our own sins and shortcomings, also pointing to many existing evils in our church which ought to lead all to an honest searching of hearts to see whether or not the Laodicean condition prevails in our church in general. Because so many of our individual views, thoughts and opinions are embodied and clearly stated in this paper a great many of third party men at once rallied around it. Here was at last something tangible and constructive. Here was something that presented fairly well our "big questions." This was not only felt by members of the third party, but also by the opposition and was therefore often referred to as the third party platform. That also explains why all later attacks have been centered upon this paper. The official crowd in a certain sense welcomed this paper, but also recognized and feared it as a dangerous constructive work from our side. ...

Allow me here to inject a few personal thoughts in regard to Beitz's paper. I fully subscribe to that paper; I fully agree with it. I am also convinced that brother Beitz was moved by the Spirit as he wrote that paper, fully as much and in like manner as we as Christians are moved by the Spirit in delivering a sermon. I also believe that his only motive in writing as he did write was the eager desire to help his brethren and sisters in Christ.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Sitz journal, June 16, 1913.

¹⁹⁹ Paul Hensel, "What about the Elroy Declaration," *Faith-Life* 2, no. 9 (September 1929): 5.

²⁰⁰ Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

Others, though, would not wax so enthusiastically. Most significantly Professor Joh. Ph. Koehler himself found fault with Beitz's defense of "Koehlerism" from the start. He wrote a letter to Beitz on October 26, 1926, just a month after Beitz had first delivered the paper. In it Koehler expressed his concern that Beitz's presentation had much in common with Jacob Spener's pietistic scoldings of the past. "It differs in this respect, that whereas Spener recommends external means, you emphasize the inwardness of faith. But this emphasis can just as easily turn external again. I am afraid that your tract would bring about external results in this way, that we would in spite of all relapse into Spener's mistakes."²⁰¹

Koehler went on to explain the Wauwatosa ideal:

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 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?²⁰²

Despite Beitz's lack of precision in writing his paper, Koehler could still easily sympathize with his frustration concerning the scene in the church militant.

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. It is really getting to be a nuisance for me to have to spell out in detail self-evident matters, and to repeat them over and over. But still, you have to do it. ... When all is said, that is our principal assignment, to publicize the glory of the Gospel in the face of every detraction.²⁰³

In a later analysis of the paper Koehler would offer a succinct critique, "What is lacking in Beitz's paper itself is the correct interrelation of facts, the right exegetical, historical, expositional method which he himself recommends, and hence the paper cannot pass muster as a doctrinal essay for public dissemination."²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ John Philipp Koehler, letter to William Beitz (October 26, 1926), *Faith-Life* 74, no. 3 (May/June 2001): 20.

²⁰² J.P. Koehler, letter to William Beitz, (October 26, 1926): 20-21.

²⁰³ J.P. Koehler, letter to William Beitz, (October 26, 1926): 21.

²⁰⁴ John Philipp Koehler, "The *Beleuchtung*," *Faith-Life* 75, no. 1 (January/February 2002): 13.

Koehler was not alone in his friendly criticisms. Another who was not impressed was Beitz's old Seminary chum and Tucson associate, Pastor E. Arnold Sitz.

A Call to Sober-Mindedness: The Sitz Plea

On November 8, 1926, Pastor William Beitz penned a letter to Sitz.

We have been differing so woefully of the late year that I felt the whole matter should be presented sometime from the fundamental as I see it. I have put a great deal of time and thought of late upon a paper which I read both at the Wis. conference and Missouri brethren mixed conference. Since you claim that I misunderstand you and your letters, and I cannot but conclude that you misunderstand me – for I cannot possibly see how we could get such opposite views within a period of little more than a year, I felt the medium of letters would only serve to widen the breach already too wide between us.

My paper is: God's Message to us in Galatians: The Just shall Live by Faith. It has popularly been called: Faith or Forms, though we are not flaunting that red cloth before our opponents. ... About twenty have identified themselves with the message to such an extent that the sum necessary to publish 10,000 copies has already been voluntarily contributed, in all \$243.00. This is not done in the spirit of revenge, antagonism, or selfglory. It is simply giving testimony as to our faith. ... It is the upshot of my life's work thus far; others say as much. I believe it ought to do much to help to understand one another better. It ought to make plain my stand, I should think, and then we can see whether we are still agreed or in opposite camps.²⁰⁵

A month later Beitz would send Sitz a copy of his paper with an attached cover letter:

To my mind this paper touches upon the big issue in our synodical squabble, and other synods for that matter also, yea the church at large. It is as I see it. Hence my own personal message. The bolsheviks identify themselves with the message. ... I hope this may be instrumental in clearing up the discord, real or imaginary, that seems to have sprung up between us in the last year.²⁰⁶

Although Sitz's initial reply to Beitz's "Message" is no longer extant, we can guess what that reaction was. Sitz's greatest difficulty with the paper was Beitz's apparent confusion of law and gospel. In a letter to Pastor Immanuel Frey dated February 15, 1927, Pastor E.E. Guenther, an Arizona pastoral colleague of Sitz, wrote: "I also received Bill's thesis, but have not yet had time to study it thoroughly. Tois claims there is some confusion of law and Gospel in it."²⁰⁷ Guenther went on to add his personal commentary to the situation:

²⁰⁵ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, November 8, 1926.

²⁰⁶ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, December 16, 1926.

²⁰⁷ E.E. Guenther, letter to Immanuel Frey, February 15, 1927.

I admire Bill, but I fear he is proving to be something of a bull in a china closet. ... The entire gang of would-be reformers claim to be disciples of J.P. and yet they ignore the one doctrine that the latter stressed to us at the Sem more than any other. “*Machen Sie ihre Sache zu Hause*” [“Practice what you preach”]. ... But as they are stepping now, even while championing self-evident Gospel principles, they are making themselves guilty of the same *Lieblosigkeit* [lovelessness] of which they are charging others.²⁰⁸

Undoubtedly, Sitz would have concurred with Guenther’s assessment.

Beitz did not take criticism from his friends lightly, as can be demonstrated by the harsh six-page reply he quickly dispatched to his former associate. One apparent difficulty for Beitz to overcome was the fact that Sitz had seemed to agree with his position in the not so distant past.

I am sorry to see by your letter of criticism that you have almost entirely missed the message I meant to convey by my paper. ... Tois, you are unstable. Do you recall how about four years ago, or is it only three, I contended for the very thing I am contending for in the paper? Do you recall it was you that urged me to send it in to the *Quartalschrift*? Do you recall that when I saw J.P. personally almost two years ago, and asked him about the message, he stated it was scriptural but inopportune for publication at this stressful time? Do you recall that you were going me one better in discussions we had of evenings and on our walks? Do you recall that you were breathing the free air of the Gospel and enjoyed it? Do you realize that it was just that very Gospel that God allowed me to proclaim to you that brought you back on your feet spiritually when the devil cast you into hell and disgust and despair? Do you realize that, summed up, you were swimming in the ocean of the mercy of God and His blessed free Gospel, making wonderful progress swimming on the sea of Faith? Now, I ask you, have you ever stopped to think, **WHAT HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THE CHANGE?** Let me tell you as I see it. You are of an impulsive, intellectual nature. You readily accepted the message, call it: The just shall live by faith. You felt content in it. ... Yet, since it was a head, not a heart, a life matter, it really did not become your own. ... You have turned back, to use the illustration I used before, to the shore of, let me tell you Tois, in plain words: dogmatics.²⁰⁹

In addition to his charge of dogmatism, Beitz also accused Sitz of being scared of persecution.

With only an intellectual grasp on the evangelical ocean, you seeing the waves of persecution and trial coming, got your eyes off of the One that walks and hold us on that Ocean, and instead of looking to Him, you turn about, back to the shore of dogmatical forms. That is the only way I can explain your change of heart. That is plain from the letters of the last 18 months. ... Then when it comes to the Watertown case, the Transcript, with the resultant Ruediger case flowing out of it, in which Tois is implicated from inception we find he pleads he does not know

²⁰⁸ E.E. Guenther, letter to Immanuel Frey, February 15, 1927.

²⁰⁹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, February 14, 1927.

enough about the case and allows Ruediger to be crucified right before his very eyes, hiding behind some flimsy trimming and pretext instead of meeting the issue squarely. ... Tois, are you afraid of persecution? Of bread and butter? Of losing prestige? Honor of men? Does it hurt the Sitz pride? Aren't you willing to turn your back on yourself and follow Jesus and take whatever cross He wisely lays on us to bear? Settle it before it is too late, and you find yourself mired in the mud between the Ocean of mercy and the shore of legalism.²¹⁰

In reply to Beitz's indictments Sitz tried to be gracious to his old friend, admitting in the true spirit of the Wauwatosa Gospel that he was not above reproach. "I sincerely thank you for the good [your letter] did me, in that under the Lord's guidance it once more showed me my sinfulness. Such is unwelcome to the flesh, but healthy for the Christian in the flesh."²¹¹ Still Sitz was dismayed by the treatment he had received and the accusations pitted against him.

I was scarcely prepared to receive so scurrilous a letter from one called a brother. Instead of going in upon the matter under discussion, you gave it over almost entirely to personal abuse on one hand and self-canonization on the other. We are not now discussing *Tois and Bill*, but the content of your paper. I pray thee, if your fountain of invective is not yet exhausted, pour the rest out on the devil; I am only human and by your own definition come under Mt. 6, 44 at least; I hope we still fall under 1 John 4, 7-21. ... In the light of Christ's love toward us we ought not allow our own old Adam to stand in the way of our love; his shadow is too black. And wherever I allowed him to speak along, forgive. Yet regardless even of that, in the points I criticized it was expected that a Christian brother would either show the contrary from the Word, or correct the statements. Tois's sins do not give Bill *carte blanche* to go and do likewise, i.e., to return with interest.²¹²

As far as Sitz's criticisms of the paper go, they seemed to have been confined to Beitz's apparent confusion of law and gospel. "In the main I cordially approve the rest of the paper; a reading in the spirit of love would have found that assertion on the first page of my letter."²¹³

Sitz desired to put away personal attacks and stick to the issues at hand. Only then would there be any hope of a resolution to the problems in Sitz's estimation. "I am willing to discuss when we learn to restrict ourselves to discussing; but I decline to be the object of abuse or a rubber stamp. Thus far you have scarcely deigned to enter in upon a single phrase of the argument. Certainly you do not fear to discuss your 'life's work', as you have so often told me it is? And certainly you are willing to correct it to conform with Scripture in every point?"²¹⁴

Sadly, Beitz never seemed ready to defend his paper with more writing. He was growing tired of his correspondence with Sitz and suggested that "no amount of letter writing will be able to heal the breach that has sprung up between us in the last year. I suppose nothing short of a good heart to heart talk will ever accomplish that, if ever it will be accomplished."²¹⁵ He invited

²¹⁰ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, February 14, 1927.

²¹¹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, February 21, 1927.

²¹² E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, February 21, 1927.

²¹³ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, February 21, 1927.

²¹⁴ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, February 21, 1927.

²¹⁵ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, May 2, 1927.

Sitz to take his next vacation in Wisconsin for this very reason. “If you believe the synod is on fire,” Beitz wrote, “nothing ought to stop you from coming.”²¹⁶

Sitz did not take kindly to Beitz binding his conscience. “You seem to make it a matter of conscience for me to come East this summer ‘if you believe that Synod is afire.’ Only I can decide that for my own person. My place in the line is here in Tucson. It is for me to try to quench as many brands as fly into this corner of the Church.”²¹⁷ He also realized that his going to Wisconsin would have only increased the chances of his losing the degree of objectivity he had procured over time by viewing the peppery Protestant events from the remote Arizona desert.

It would be useless for me to come East with my little canteen of water, seeing there are so many that are pouring barrels of gasoline into the conflagration. Water only spreads a gasoline fire. But sober-mindedness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit may serve to keep things from bursting into flames here, while coming East would only be risking having my passions inflamed by contact with the great burning.²¹⁸

One historical footnote to the Beitz-Sitz relationship during these tumultuous days merits some mention at this point because it concerns Beitz’s pastoral practice. It seems that Beitz was in communication with some of his old parishioners at Grace, Tucson. He was sending them sermons and letters pertaining to the events in Wisconsin, causing no little amount of unrest in Sitz’s congregation. Sitz demanded that Beitz “withhold his testimony” from the people at Grace Church. Beitz refused.

You ask me to withhold testimony from people that are asking me for testimony. Man, do you realize what you are asking? You again look at things in a dogmatical man-made way. From Whom is my commission? What is my field? How can I answer before God if I withhold testimony? I realize it puts you in a very ticklish position, and I am sorry for you. Yet asking me to withhold testimony is an awful thing, Tois. If I am convinced of my position as scriptural. I am sending no testimony to any one that has not or does not ask for it. I am sending sermons to no one that has not requested me to do so. I am a debtor to give them my testimony. If it conflicts with yours, it is too bad. It goes to show what an awful divider that Word of God is.²¹⁹

Sitz was understandably unhappy with the answer he received, although not entirely surprised.

Your refusal to entertain my request for discretion in writing to members of Grace was expected. I knew that you lay claim to a universal call. But within the Church that pertains only to an Apostle. As a Christian over against the world of unbelievers you have the call common to all the saints to witness to the Gospel; as

²¹⁶ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, May 2, 1927.

²¹⁷ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, May 21, 1927.

²¹⁸ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, May 21, 1927.

²¹⁹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, May 2, 1927.

a Christian among Christians you have the call of the Church to preach the Gospel in Rice Lake, to a Synod whenever you are called upon to print a sermon in our periodicals, to a Conference when you are asked for a paper, etc. Everyone in his own place in the line, as God has called him through the communion of saints. So you will agree that when Grace called me God thereby set me as their minister. For individual members of Grace to call you (as their writing you for opinions, and so on is a call) is to despise not only the pastor whom God thought well to place among them, but also to esteem lightly the working of the Holy Spirit in their fellow Christians, banded together with whom they issued their call. I do not hold them accountable. Neither did I object to your sending your sermons until you began to supplement them with letters of personal opinion that tend to confuse my people. You state, “You have employed vengeance to counteract some of my work.” (In every letter, Bill, we hear of “my work”, “my life-work”, etc.). Tell me, what am I as pastor to do when in direct opposition to what I find the Word of God teaching, not to mention the Confessions, it is said to me, “Well, Pastor Beitz doesn’t say so; in a letter (or sermon) from him he says” etc, etc? Once when that had been cast into my teeth time and again I did say, “In that case Beitz is not Lutheran.” Am I to say, “Well, then I take it back. Beitz certainly knows”? I am told to “Prove the spirits,” and again, “Prove all things; retain that which is good.” That holds good with you and me also. Because it is *your* work is far from a guarantee that it is therefore to be accepted without closest scrutiny.²²⁰

Beitz tried to justify this practice by accusing Sitz of teaching the doctrines of the Bible from an intellectual viewpoint by which, Beitz charged, “you drive people to despair.”²²¹ Sitz took great exception to this accusation, and in the course of answering it he astutely identified the nub of the entire Prot st nt dilemma.

It is largely this judging of others without sufficient grounds or upon mere hearsay, arrogating to yourselves the office of the Lord, that is isolating you men in Synod. I have written you before: your martyrdom is largely self-inflicted; if the cause goes on the rocks it is to no little extent the fault of its leadership. If the leadership had been sober-minded; had known what it means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice’; had practiced brotherly love (regardless of the failure of others to do so); had been masters of what they wished to teach; then more than half the Synod would have taken up with the cause. As it is the leadership has been a living example of incapacity, not to say disingenuity [sic]. A trusted friend, lately here on a visit, said, “It is too bad about the third party. The boys in it are all good fellows and some of the best material in Synod; but they are running wild. They claim to be followers of John P. and haven’t understood him. Everybody that doesn’t agree with them in every detail is condemned out of hand as being ‘dogmatic’.” And so it seems. When Gieschen gets out of the boat because he sees where it is drifting to, he is a “slow-going, lumbering, fearful old fellow”. When J.P. severs connection he is “too old”. When Dornfield quits, he is a “sick man”. When Ruediger confesses he is “weak”. When Tois goes he is, of course,

²²⁰ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, May 21, 1927.

²²¹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, May 2, 1927.

“dogmatic, and an intellectualist, a coward” etc. But has there been a single man in the third party that has honestly weighed the criticisms offered them? Have they not waved every well-meant warning aside and gone on their way denouncing those that cautioned?²²²

However, Sitz did not excuse those maintaining the “hard-line” in Synod from responsibility for the disharmony. He held both sides accountable in the escalating controversy, predicting that it would land the Wisconsin Synod in the desert of rationalism.

When our Synod lands in the wastes of rationalism a quarter of a century hence, let it be earnestly witnessed here and recorded that not only the orthodoxist party, but also the pietist movement is furnishing the steam to land it there. The former is hastening Synod into rationalism by its brutality and incapable reaction, a loveless and wooden attempt to save the outward semblance of “*reine Lehre*” [correct doctrine]; the latter is accelerating the same process by its unstable and wildly incapable attempt at reform. The first is suffering from a subnormal temperature fast falling to the death of rationalism; the latter has a fever that is fast rising in these shortened days of the end to the point where the life of faith will burn out in a flare of 107 ° – into the death of rationalism.²²³

Sitz then summed up his appraisal of the entire situation with a very “Wauwatosan” plea.

What we need is the sober-mindedness the whole Letter to Titus so earnestly enjoins. We need more self-control. We ought to have manhood enough in Christ not only to acknowledge in general that we are “sinners”, but to confess our “sins”. We ought to have courage enough to retract our mistakes, lest Truth suffer. It is indeed sad to see how, when in Synod there is an opportunity almost like none other to bring about a new life in the spirit of Luther, in conservative, Luther-an [sic] forms, the Karlstadts on one hand and the old scholastics on the other are giving it no chance to get on the stage.²²⁴

Unfortunately neither side heeded Sitz’s witness, and the Protestant Controversy continued to spiral into a war of words and actions.

For Every Action, A Reaction: The Gutachten

The time was fast approaching in the eyes of many synodicals to take formal action against the Protestants. Not only did the Protestants now have a manifesto in Beitz’s “Message,” they also began to organize themselves into a visible coalition and to meet independently. The first formal meeting of a large number of third party men took place at a church dedication in Wilton, Wisconsin, on November 14-17, 1926.²²⁵ These men met with a specific purpose in mind.

²²² E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, May 21, 1927.

²²³ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, May 21, 1927.

²²⁴ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, May 21, 1927.

²²⁵ Ave-Lallemant, “Sever Relations With Wisconsin?”

Here Beitz's paper was read and discussed. Several changes in wording and a few additions were made. Thus it was no longer Beitz's paper alone, it was supported and upheld as a worthy message by the whole group. By a great number of men present it was at that time urged to broadcast the paper throughout the whole Lutheran Church. This wish was not carried out because some considered it more in order and according to Christian Love to let Beitz's conference first pass judgment on [the] paper as they had agreed to do. Some also hoped to see great results in Synod and particularly with professors and officials through Ruediger's "Confession" which appeared at that time.²²⁶

This fellowship was furthered strengthened three months later when these same men met again at "the first called conference of Third Party men"²²⁷ in Marshfield, Wisconsin, on February 8-10, 1927.

At this conference regular Communion services were held, Pastor G. Gieschen preached the confessional and Ave-Lallemant the sermon for regular service. At this conference Beitz's paper was again read and discussed. As a result of this conference the men of [the] Third Party who attended were drawn more closely together by the oneness in spirit. It also became apparent that a rift already existed in Synod which it would be well nigh impossible to heal.²²⁸

This Protéstant gathering "*mit Gottesdienst und Abendmahl*" sent shock waves throughout the district and the Synod and "aroused the officials out of their slumbers. ... All at once they seemed to realize that not only Pastor [Oswald] Hensel needed attention as a dangerous Protéstant, but that there were still others endangering the souls of their congregation by slander and heresy."²²⁹ This maturing Protéstant fellowship persuaded the district presidium to call a meeting in Watertown for February 24, 1927, "where all Protéstants were to be placed before the worthy firing squad of Praesides of the whole Synod. ... The replies of the Protéstants to this invitation were so unfavorable and disappointing that two days before the meeting another summons was sent out, notifying us that officials were sure to be there."²³⁰ Only five Protéstants showed up.

Frustration continued to build on both sides as both parties became guilty of shutting down proper lines of communication. More and more they began to talk past one another. One Protéstant gave this obviously biased analysis of the course of the discussions.

Third party men seem to be using new and often daring expressions to make themselves clearly understood, whereas on the opposing side great care is exercised to stay within the enclosure of dogmatical orthodoxy. With them true Lutheranism must continually only move within the enclosure of old dogmatical terms and views, while with third party men true Lutheranism must and will

²²⁶ Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

²²⁷ Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

²²⁸ Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

²²⁹ Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

²³⁰ Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

express itself in terms and views that fit directly into life. For them all great questions have been answered over 400 years ago, for us there are today many unanswered questions which also will find their answer fully in Scripture, if we but search for them with an open mind and heart. To us there are continually new harvests of refreshing wine ripening upon Scripture, which new wine must be held in new bottles. For them there is only old wine in old bottles, but it is a great question whether they still have wine in the bottles or are merely drawing fumes of wine from the old leaky bottles. To speak in this fashion is indeed very unbecoming of Wisconsin, -- it is worthy only of the hobos and others without the walls of the Synodical conference.²³¹

True witnesses to the Wauwatosa Gospel could still be found at this dark hour. One such example was Prot stant Martin Zimmermann who wrote a letter to Pastor William Nommensen, the Second Vice-President of the district, to withdraw his Beaver Dam protest. Zimmermann still agreed in principle with the likes of William Beitz and Oswald Hensel, who believed that the district officials had failed to act evangelically when they published the suspensions of Teachers Koch and Reuter. Zimmerman writes, "Altho [sic] the girls sinned, sinned grievously, yet that does not justify anyone to make them the scapegoats [sic] of the whole affair."²³² However, he now withdrew his protest for two reasons:

First, Because I deem the withdrawal of my protest imperative for the salvation of Miss G. Koch and Miss E. Reuter, who are in grave danger of misunderstanding my protest and as a result in grave danger of using it as a means to soothe their conscience for their impenitence. Second, Because (after what has transpired since our District Meeting in Beaver Dam) I deem the withdrawal of my protest advisable in order to induce them, who were responsible for the publication of that notice, to view their act with an unprejudiced mind.²³³

Sadly such attempts at any reasonable discussion were soon overshadowed by a lack of brotherly love and evangelical practice in what became known as the Globe Affair.

In early 1927 the congregation in Globe, Wisconsin (rural Neillsville) was without a pastor. On January 16 they called Pastor Walter Motzkus of Cameron, one of the signers of the *Protestschreiben* at the 1926 Beaver Dam Conference. Motzkus accepted shortly thereafter. On January 23 Pastor Herman Brandt of Neillsville, who had expressed misgivings about receiving Communion with the Beaver Dam protesters and who had served the vacancy at Globe, now voiced concerns about installing Motzkus in a letter to Thurow, "I feel forced to inform you in advance that I can and would install Motzkus only after having your assurance that he has resolved his matter with the Synod. Motzkus himself is personally nice and dear to me, but he is one of the Prot stants."²³⁴ Soon Thurow, who had actually supplied Motzkus' name to the Globe congregation on January 12, withdrew his support from Motzkus' installation. Motzkus wondered aloud, "From June 1926 [Beaver Dam] to February 3, 1927, [Brandt] had not spoken

²³¹ Ave-Lallemant, "Sever Relations With Wisconsin?"

²³² Martin Zimmermann, letter to William Nommensen, March 7, 1927.

²³³ Martin Zimmermann, letter to William Nommensen, March 7, 1927.

²³⁴ Herman Brandt, letter to Gotthold Thurow, January 23, 1927. See Walter Motzkus, "The Globe Case Proper," *Faith-Life* 6, no. 12 (December 1933 Supplement).

or written to me in regard to the protest. Why just now after I had accepted the call?”²³⁵ He also marveled at how Thurow could recommend a man for calling that, in the district president’s own words, “supports sin and impiety.”²³⁶ When neither side budged in the matter, Oswald Hensel stepped into the fray again by installing Motzkus himself on April 10, 1927. Thurow and others were outraged.

Nine days later the Wisconsin River – Chippewa Valley Conference met, ironically, at Hensel’s church in Marshfield. The tension was unquestionably high in light of the recent events. Objectivity was perhaps at an all-time low. In this setting it would seem an almost impossible task to discuss the Beitz Paper impartially, yet it was the first item on the conference agenda.

Everyone who attended this meeting surely got some enlightenment on official actions, views and powers. A full report of this meeting ought to be put into the hands of every member of Synod. Outstanding features of this conference were first of all that officials insisted upon being present at this conference although they had been asked, for the sake of peace, to stay away. Secondly it appeared to have been agreed upon not to allow a full and free discussion of Beitz’s paper, but to line up conference with a condemnatory report of Pastor Brandt on the paper. ... Pastor Beitz pleaded with conference to give him a fair and full chance to present his paper as a whole and to discuss it in an unprejudiced manner. Conference finally granted Beitz the right to present his paper as he wished by a majority vote.²³⁷

Despite this vote, however, Beitz was not going to have an easy time of it. Many in the conference seemed to have already cast their vote by this time, judging that Beitz and his gang of Protéstants were simply a bunch of rabble-rousers. One person in particular who had it in for the Protéstants was Pastor Brandt. He had prepared a critique of the Beitz Paper that he wished to present to the conference, and he objected to the Beitz “Message” being read again.

Pastor Beitz now made an attempt to read his whole message but did not get far as continual interruptions were made. It was but a short time and the discussion was again turned over to the condemnatory remarks and Brandt thus was successful in placing his arguments before the conference. The officials also joined Brandt. Apparently they too had only come to condemn the paper and not to hear and discuss it. Today they like to speak of their cutting, slurring remarks as *christliche Ermahnung* [Christian admonition] of Beitz. May the Lord soon deliver us from all similar *Ermahnungen*.²³⁸

Quite understandably the discussion of the paper went nowhere. The conference demanded that Beitz retract his “slander and heresy.” Beitz refused to yield on even one point.

Finally Thurow announced that he would call upon the Seminary faculty to give a *Gutachten* (judgment or opinion) on the paper. Already on March 15, Thurow and District Vice-President Otto Kuhlow had met with Professors Pieper, Meyer and Henkel to discuss the young

²³⁵ Motzkus, “Globe Case Proper.”

²³⁶ Gotthold Thurow, letter to Walter Motzkus, February 3, 1927. See Motzkus, “Globe Case Proper.”

²³⁷ Ave-Lallemant, “Sever Relations With Wisconsin?”

²³⁸ Ave-Lallemant, “Sever Relations With Wisconsin?”

Protéstants.²³⁹ On April 1, those same faculty members met with Synod President Bergemann to discuss the Beitz Paper.²⁴⁰ It could well have been that the idea of a Seminary *Gutachten* had its genesis in such meetings. Requesting a Seminary opinion was not normal practice and “had never been favored by the Wauwatosa Theology,”²⁴¹ but Thurow needed help. In time, however, this decision would prove to be his greatest misstep of all. Bringing Pieper into the picture once again to deal with the Protéstants made this a high-stakes game.

It goes without saying that the ill-fated actions and reactions of Thurow played a major role in these crisis years of 1926-1927, making one wonder why he was serving as a district president in the first place. Thurow had served congregations in Bay City, Michigan, and Milwaukee and then accepted a call to Wisconsin Rapids where one of his closest friends was the pastor in neighboring Marshfield, none other than Oswald Hensel. In 1924 Thurow was elected to the presidency of the Western Wisconsin District with Hensel himself being one of his biggest supporters. Professor Elmer Kiessling recounts some of the irony: “When the District assembled at Immanuel church, Marshfield, in 1924, its members could not foresee that this would be the last peaceful meeting they would enjoy for nearly ten years. ... During this meeting Pastor Hensel, in a speech commemorating an anniversary of Pres. Thurow, hailed him as ‘our bishop,’ who was to be obeyed by his brethren.”²⁴² Mark Jeske concludes that Thurow was always dependent on others. “He leaned on his wife, who had money from a LaCrosse broom factory, he leaned on Brandt and Hensel in Wisconsin Rapids, and later in Waterloo he leaned on [Vice-Presidents] Nommensen and Kuhlrow. He was emotional rather than intellectual, and he was vulnerable to people who knew how to play on his sympathies.”²⁴³ All of which perhaps made him ill-equipped for the job of president, especially at a time of high crisis. He simply did not seem to have the theological acumen and administrative gifts to handle the job, and too often his lacking these gifts led to practical mistakes on his part. But Thurow was not alone in this ineptitude among the officials. Arnold Sitz once commented to Beitz about church officials, “Praesides are not noted among us for learning and piety; a [theological] victory over them is akin to a victory of the U.S. Navy over a Chinese junk fleet.”²⁴⁴

To make up for his lack of theological expertise Thurow approached the Seminary faculty with the idea of rendering their opinion on Beitz’s paper. On April 26, 1927, Thurow met with Professors Pieper, Meyer and Henkel, presumably to petition their support for a formal reply to the paper.²⁴⁵ Professor Koehler, as director of the Seminary, was reluctant to accept the assignment. He suggested that Beitz meet with the Wauwatosa faculty so that he could explain his paper to them and in this way come to an understanding. His faculty colleagues refused. Finally, Koehler was induced to comply with Thurow’s request hoping that it might do some good in clearing up the issues.

On May 4 the faculty devised a unique plan for putting together the *Gutachten*. Each professor was to write his opinion independently and then the faculty would meet to discuss their findings and combine their ideas for the official faculty *Gutachten*. When the time came for consolidation on May 13 only three drafts had been prepared. Koehler begged off on the grounds

²³⁹ John P. Meyer journal, March 15, 1927.

²⁴⁰ Meyer journal, April 1, 1927.

²⁴¹ Jordahl, xxvii.

²⁴² Kiessling, 9.

²⁴³ Jeske, 54.

²⁴⁴ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, May 21, 1927.

²⁴⁵ Meyer journal, April 26, 1927. The May faculty meeting dates (4 & 13) were also garnered from Meyer’s daily journal.

that he had been busy working on plans for the new Seminary building in Thiensville. When the faculty went through the other professors' drafts it was found that Meyer's version was the sharpest, Pieper's the mildest.²⁴⁶ Koehler said that he wished the Beitz Paper to be answered on the basis of Pieper's draft and the faculty agreed. Pieper then drew up the final draft with some suggested changes. When those changes were completed, each member of the faculty affixed his signature to the *Gutachten* on June 7, 1927, Koehler's signature at the top. The original was sent to President Thurow.

At this point, the story gets dicey and the facts become unclear. To his dying day Koehler maintained that he had signed the *Gutachten* with the condition that it not be published until he had an opportunity to discuss its contents with Beitz, retaining a copy of the *Gutachten* for this very purpose. In a 1932 letter Koehler gave his side of the story.

It was understood by the members of the faculty that I deal first with Pastor Beitz before the *Gutachten* could be published as such, because my colleagues were not willing to hear Beitz before they wrote their *Gutachten*. My name under that paper meant that it could not be published without my knowledge when I was sick abed. And before I had the opportunity to meet with Beitz. And then my colleagues denied that they knew anything about the publication, but they used the copies of the *Gutachten* before they were sent out by the Publishing House at a Milwaukee conference, also without my knowledge when I was laid up in bed.²⁴⁷

The rest of the faculty apparently either misunderstood or ignored Koehler's stipulations. Later on his colleagues would claim that they had no objections to his request, but that they had also pointed out to him that district officials were carrying on disciplinary dealings and that therefore they should be apprised of any approaches to Beitz.²⁴⁸ Naturally when Thurow returned a copy of the *Gutachten* to Pieper a couple days later with the instruction to publish it, Pieper readily complied.²⁴⁹ The *Gutachten* made its official appearance on June 11, 1927.

Koehler's son Kurt describes what happened next in a letter to his brother-in-law, Arnold Sitz:

When the thing happened [J.P.] was on the way to Marshfield with [Pastor Adolf] Zeisler. Incidentally Zeisler referred to the faculty *Gutachten* and that he ventured to disagree with certain statements made. When papa asked him where he got to see the *Gutachten*, he declared that he had received a copy through the Publishing House, whereupon papa nearly toppled out of the automobile, so stunned he was. He first wanted Zeisler to turn right back in order to straighten out the matter. But they continued.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to John Philipp Koehler, June 18, 1929. In his "Antwort" August Pieper writes: "Meyer's draft was short but sharp, Henkel's somewhat more extensive and very sharp, Pieper's the most extensive, but seemed to Prof. Koehler the most objective" (14).

²⁴⁷ John Philipp Koehler, letter to W.P. Haas (January 21, 1932), *Faith-Life* 73, no. 6 (November/December 2000): 28.

²⁴⁸ August Pieper, "Antwort," 15.

²⁴⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to John Philipp Koehler, June 18, 1929.

²⁵⁰ Kurt Koehler, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, December 29, 1927.

Koehler went on his way for a scheduled meeting with Beitz. Understandably it did not go well. Koehler was furious, and he would later withdraw his signature from the *Gutachten*. When Koehler “returned to Milwaukee, he wanted the Publ. House to print a statement for him and send it out to all pastors and teachers, explaining how his signature got under the faculty *Gutachten*. Luening [NPH manager from 1898-1945] calls in Pips, and the thing was blocked.”²⁵¹ Jordahl adds, “This card in its proof stage was brought to the attention of Koehler’s colleagues. He was taken to task, vacillated, and withdrew the notice. He did not, however, consent to put his signature back on the *Gutachten*.”²⁵² Koehler’s proposed statement had read like this:

The “Faculty *Gutachten*” was published without my knowledge and consent. I had a different conception from my colleagues as to what the “essayist” actually wished to say. Consequently I offered to discuss the contents of the *Gutachten* and the “Message” with the essayist and apprised the assembly of the General Committee of this fact. The publication of the *Gutachten* acutely disturbed these private deliberations, and in my opinion, as matters now stand, must mislead, agitate and eventually slander. Do your part in helping us arrive at an understanding, which must be our constant endeavor, so that our efforts be not frustrated.²⁵³

This incident perhaps more than any other was *the* axis upon which this whole controversy now turned. The difficulty in making an historical judgment is that there simply is a divergence in the accounts of the story. But one wonders whether it really could have been a simple misunderstanding on the part of Pieper, Meyer and Henkel when they published the *Gutachten* against Koehler’s wishes. If it was, wouldn’t a public apology on their part have been a fitting balm to the troubled peace discussions? None was ever forthcoming, however; instead *Koehler* was chastised for trying to explain the situation. All of which again makes one wonder whether these men were instead working with the same mechanical principle they had worked with in the Ruediger Case, namely, that a public offense demands a public reprimand. Just two days after the publication of the *Gutachten* on June 11, Professor Henkel would write to Arnold Sitz defending the fact that the “Ruediger Confession” had been made public.

We had to deal with a Christian brother who had given public offense. What to do in a case like that Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 5:20. We were not merely to ‘win the brother’ – though that, of course, was an object too – but also to induce him to make reprobation for a public offense. . . . If prevailing on a brother to make amends for a serious public offense is considered persecution in our synod, we are in a sad plight indeed.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ Kurt Koehler, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, December 29, 1927. Pieper gives a slightly different version of the events in his “Antwort,” stating: “During Prof. Pieper’s absence on vacation, Prof. Koehler had a notice printed, to be sent by mail, which already then would have caused a controversy in the synod to flare up wildly. Pastor W[alter] Hoenecke learned of it as proofreader for the Publishing House, and with [Seminary] Board President Pastor Knuth persuaded the Reverend Prof. Koehler to put the statement on hold” (15).

²⁵² Jordahl, xxviii.

²⁵³ *Faith-Life* 33, no. 4 (April 1960): 18.

²⁵⁴ William Henkel, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 13, 1927.

Certainly by this time there was a deep-seated feeling in Synod that Beitz's "Message" could not stand much longer without being officially and publicly answered. "Imagine [Thurow's] relief at having in his hands a formal, analytical rebuttal to the troublesome Galatians paper which embodied as it did all of his own misgivings and publicly vindicated his official position. Thurow could not have enjoyed the hot seat, and he must have been comforted that the Wauwatosa theologians stood with him to a man."²⁵⁵ It was expedient for Thurow to publish the *Gutachten*, especially as it contained Koehler's signature. Much better, in the spirit of the Wauwatosa Gospel, to deal with our "opponents" on the basis of Matthew 18 – in a spirit of love and understanding – always seeking the truth rather than personal vindication.

Unfortunately, personal vindication and even vindictiveness seemed to be the very nature of the *Gutachten*. A simple reading will send shivers up the spine of any Christian. Although it raised legitimate concerns about Beitz's phraseology,²⁵⁶ time and again "the *Gutachten* uses terms loaded with pejorative connotations,"²⁵⁷ opting for words like "ignoramus" instead of seeking more irenic language. Some might suggest that the *Gutachten* was an eye-for-an-eye answer to the Beitz Paper, one condemnation for another. The difference is that Beitz always claimed that he included himself in his paper's condemnations. The *Gutachten* authors would make no such claims. It was an unadulterated and very personal attack on Beitz and his supporters, and while the doctrinal content of the *Gutachten* may be rock-solid and worded with superior precision and clarity, the language is decidedly rough and unloving.

This harsh language and firm stance of the *Gutachten* against the Beitz paper seems to indicate that perhaps the secondary purpose of the *Gutachten* influenced the nature of the paper even more than the first purpose, that of "brotherly admonition." What is the other purpose? Pieper stated in the *Antwort*: "If the *Gutachten* hoped to save the author and defenders of the Beitz paper, and to warn the Synod of its seductions, then it had to call black, black, and white, white." This second purpose, then, was to warn the Synod and its members of what Pieper considered as "seductions" in the Beitz paper. If so, then, the responsibility of publishing the *Gutachten* cannot rest on Thurow's shoulders alone but must also rest with the faculty at the Seminary. ... The *Gutachten* gives the impression that the faculty is using the "big stick" policy in an attempt to keep the dissidents in the Synod in line. Add to this the embarrassing way in which it was used, and the results are predictable. ... [The Protéstants] saw in the *Gutachten* further evidence that "officialdom" and "popery" had infected the Synod, and that the "Wauwatosa Gospel" had departed from their midst.²⁵⁸

The formulation of the *Gutachten* and its subsequent publication is the single most significant event in the history of the Protéstant Controversy, even more significant than the "Message" that induced its advent. Its appearance marks *the* high-water mark of the Controversy. It turned a practical squabble into a confessional brawl. As a result, lovelessness increased at an alarming rate both in the pastorate and at the Seminary. From this point on the Wauwatosa faculty was irreparably divided.

²⁵⁵ Jeske, 56-57.

²⁵⁶ The *Gutachten*'s contentions were similar to those outlined above.

²⁵⁷ Jeske, 59.

²⁵⁸ Charles Degner, "The Parting of the Ways," (WLS Church History Thesis, 1979), 11-12.

Perhaps even more significant, however, is the fact that this incident seemed to spoil some of Koehler's objectivity in the matter. More and more he was drawn into an "us-them" mentality. Perhaps he had been wronged before, but the publication of the *Gutachten* was a very personal example of pastoral practice that lacked an evangelical spirit and patience, undoing everything Koehler had worked so long to build up at Wauwatosa. It hurt him deeply to be "double-crossed" by his colleagues, but it hurt even more that this incident would make it increasingly difficult for the Holy Spirit to work repentance and faith in the hearts of the combatants. Most significant of all is the fact that Koehler himself *became* a combatant in the controversy more and more, something he had avoided up to this time. This important fact would not be lost on the Wauwatosa witnesses or the Synod.

Sticky Terminology: Suspension and Excommunication

The appearance of the *Gutachten* was not the only significant event in June 1927. On June 12, two suspension notices appeared in the *Northwestern Lutheran*, those of Pastors Oswald Hensel and Walter Motzkus for their actions in the Globe Affair. A month later on July 21 another notice would appear authored by the District presidium.

At a conference meeting held at Marshfield, Wis., April 20-21, this year, 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."²⁵⁹

These suspensions raised two significant and interrelated questions. First, what exactly was the nature of synodical and district suspensions? And, secondly, was suspension the same as excommunication? These had been burning questions in the Synodical Conference since the days of the famous LCMS Cincinnati case (1899-1911).²⁶⁰ As a result of that case, the Wauwatosa faculty, and Professor August Pieper in particular, published a series of *Quartalschrift* articles beginning in 1911 concerning synodical suspension and excommunication. Here Pieper concluded that synodical suspension and excommunication were one and the same thing.²⁶¹ But in 1927 there was still considerable disagreement within the Synod concerning this issue.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ *The Northwestern Lutheran* 14, no. 15 (July 21, 1927): 236.

²⁶⁰ See Fredrich, *Wisconsin Synod Lutherans*, 107-111; J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 233-234.

²⁶¹ J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 236.

²⁶² Koehler (*History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 236) writes of the immediate objections that Pieper faced as a result of his writing a *Quartalschrift* article entitled "*Menschenherrschaft in der Kirche*" (Lording It Over Others in the Church) in 1911. It was in this article that Pieper first proposed that synodical suspension and excommunication from a local congregation were identical.

“The majority of pastors at that time held that suspension did not involve excommunication; some, however, used language that made it seem as if they were reading the Third Party out of the Christian Church.”²⁶³ A year later Pastor Immanuel Frey would comment on the situation.

It is evident at least in the [Western Wisconsin District suspensions] excommunication is involved when such statements are made in the suspension announcement as that the ties of brotherhood have been severed. We are told that these suspended persons are no longer our brothers. If they are no longer our brothers, then they are no longer our fellow-Christians, then they have denied the faith, they have forfeited the fruits of Christ’s atonement, the doors of heaven are closed to them and, unless they repent, will become the prey of eternal hell and perdition, that is, if the suspension was done justly, in accordance with the Word of God.²⁶⁴

While Koehler agreed with his Seminary colleague that synodical suspension and excommunication could be understood as 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, 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. He would later explain in his *History of the Wisconsin Synod*: “Excommunication, finally, rightly understood is not an enforcement of damnation, but should serve the sinner’s ultimate salvation by bringing him around.”²⁶⁵ Koehler’s concern was that the evangelical intention of synodical suspension – not to mention congregational excommunication – was often forgotten, as could be evidenced from the way that these suspensions were often handed down.

Defining words not found in Scripture can be extremely tricky and risky. In light of the Wauwatosa understanding that “Synod is church,” however, it’s understandable that synodical suspension and congregational excommunication would be understood as being identical by the Wauwatosa men, and to use such terminology can be rightly understood. Synod officials do hold the keys to the kingdom just the same as congregations and pastors. The key to evangelical church discipline on any level – congregational, district or synodical – is to work together as brothers and sisters in the faith and to deal patiently with erring Christians, as Koehler would explain:

As a matter of Christian course, the larger body will consider the smaller group that is involved by further ties with the erring brother. But that cannot mean that a righteous judgment pronounced by the larger body, say a synod, is not honored in heaven until the smaller body has had its say. And it is the effectiveness in heaven around which Matthew 18 revolves, not outward organization membership here on earth.

²⁶³ Jeske, 52.

²⁶⁴ Frey, “History of Suspensions,” 37.

²⁶⁵ J.P. Koehler, *History of the Wisconsin Synod*, 236.

Koehler points out that the problem is a logistical one, as much as it is a terminological one. Dealing evangelically on a congregational level is difficult enough. When the circle is enlarged to include districts and synods, church discipline cases will become time-consuming and often lead to confusion among those observing those dealings from the outside. Trusting district and synod officials to work evangelically in these cases can be difficult, but if the process is going to work correctly it's important.

More recently, the Wisconsin Synod seems to view suspension as a man-made, constitutional procedure to be used as a type of "cooling off" agent when ecclesiastical affairs get heated. In some cases it can express the termination of church fellowship without calling the suspended party an "unbeliever." Often a suspension has been issued for the sake of an offended third party who may not understand the ins and outs of a particular case. The purpose of such a "suspension" is not to terminate dialogue but to recognize that these discussions do not happen in a vacuum and that public offense may be given. Ideally, such a suspension of church fellowship would be mutually agreed upon by both parties, and discussions would continue outside those parameters until agreement could be reached.

However, suspensions can and have also be used as something to hide behind, as a way to circumvent evangelical practice, or simply as a quick and easy way out. At times Thurow seemed particularly culpable of the latter – more interested in getting a loan repaid, for instance, than winning over a brother, as a 1927 letter to Pastor Jules Bergholz concerning home missionary and Protéstant Phil Schroeder bears out.

No dilly-dallying anymore and being lead around by the nose by Hensel. Things are moving fast... Our friends in Marshfield are kicking that Phil. Schroeder is supported by synod and had Beitz as preacher for Mission festival. We promised them action. ... Your three praesides hereby are asking the M.B. [Mission Board: Pastors Bergholz, Siegler and Eggert] to settle the Schroeder case immediately before his next pay check. Please! Demand of him a written confession, undersigned, to his congregation and the M.B. that it was wrong for him to have Beitz as a preacher for his mission festival. ... (Phil. owes me \$35.00. If he has another check coming, would I have the right to claim it out of said check with Phil's permission?). Your officers have decided now to publish [the suspensions of Pastors] Abelmann, Ave-Lallemant, Lutzke. We had received a hint to wait with these publications for a time. Hass we shall spare for a short time because he is said to be a candidate for death; but we shall see him once more. Good-night!²⁶⁶

In all, five Protéstants were suspended in 1927; many others would soon follow. They were quickly finding out that for every one of their actions, there was indeed going to be an equally powerful and decisive reaction from Synod. The martyrdom they had prophesied was now being fulfilled. It produced a domino effect that would not soon wane. In fact, as synodical reaction gained momentum, it would only become more brutal.

For the Protéstants to claim that they were simply suspended without provocation is an historical inaccuracy. Without a doubt there were instances of district officials using less than evangelical procedure, but by the fall of 1927 the Protéstants were themselves asking the question: "Shall We as A Body Sever Relations With Wisconsin?" The Protéstant author of this conference paper made these remarks concerning that question:

²⁶⁶ Gotthold Thurow, letter to Jules Bergholz, October 13, 1927.

In conclusion, I firmly believe the time has come for the birth of a new child of the mother-church. That which is about to be born may soon appear before you in the form of one or more individuals of this group, it may possibly be the whole group. The form matters little and is finally unimportant. Let us remember that all birth under normal conditions is natural and unforced. The mature, living child is simply born when its time has come. May it be so with us. May the Lord bless that which He may call into existence.²⁶⁷

It seems that this mindset toward the future was prominent for many Protéstants, demonstrating that they were just as ready to *leave* the Synod as were many in the Synod *ready* for them to leave. Unfortunately, the Protéstants knew exactly which synodical “buttons” to push in order to bring this separation about, and in the end, they were just as responsible for the breach as anyone else. Simply put, both sides failed to deal in love.

Weighing the Issues “In the Light of the Word”: A Second Sitz Plea

Pastor E. Arnold Sitz addressed a letter to Pastor William Beitz on July 1, 1927, after having received a copy of the *Gutachten* by mail. His advice to Beitz was thoroughly “Wauwatosan” in that it pleaded with Beitz to understand the opponents’ point of view and to yield in love wherever they spoke the truth. Most of all, he wanted Beitz to “weigh their contentions in the light of the Word.”

You will, of course, know that I have received the faculty’s *Gutachten* on your paper on Galatians. I was not a little surprised at its appearance, expecting nothing of the sort. In part they have failed to comprehend your point. ... However, one must again take into account that they were bound to the words before them, not knowing you as intimately as some of us do, who therefore knew how to take and how to discount. Language, of course, is a common possession; and so he that speaks must in love exercise himself so to speak, that the other may understand. To understand is unnatural; the natural is to misunderstand, since sin has turned things topsy-turvy. So it is that each must take extraordinary care to use a common blessing as it is commonly used. Which does not excuse another from exercising his love in attempting to understand the other.

Again, I feel that they are sometimes unnecessarily severe in their censure. I believe that message would have been just as powerful a witness, if they had here and there omitted an adjective that adds a touch of harshness, but which also makes one’s admitting the truth of the statement made a bit more difficult.

Aside from such exceptions, however, you will know that I agree with the criticisms, taken by and large. My purpose in writing you is to plead with you to thoroughly weigh their contentions in the light of the Word; and if in *any detail* you find them right and in agreement with Scriptures, to admit it. To admit it will strengthen you; it will redound to the benefit of truth. To deny it will be only to

²⁶⁷ Ave-Lallemant, “Sever Relations With Wisconsin?”

weaken you and to injure the truth. It is not a matter between you and the faculty, but between you and the Lord and His truth. To refuse their witness and to reject it will mean that you will cut off from yourself a great field to witness in; to accept it will assure you of that field, though, of course, not in the sense that it was yours before this matter came up. You are now up against the supreme test of your life, if not of your faith; baldly stated, it is a test of whether W.F.B. or Jesus is to rule in your witnessship. To stand on your paper in its present form against the representations of the faculty from Scripture is to favor the first; to frankly admit your errors and your overstatements will mean that the Lord rules. The sad part is that whichever way you decide, the cause has already suffered greatly. But we must stay with the truth or the truth will not stay with us.

Who would have dreamt that three short years after your leaving from Tucson this thing should come to pass! And my ministry here in Tucson seems also to be drawing to its close. There is so much individualism rampant, so much insisting on personal interpretation of Scripture, so many different denominational leanings that the congregation can scarcely hang together at this rate. Well, let the Lord see to it, for He must!²⁶⁸

Tois' advice fell on deaf ears. By this time Beitz was beyond the point of comprehending his having spoken unclearly and unwisely in his "Message." He was utterly consumed with defending his every last word, and others were slowly but surely being drawn into the battle, including Sitz's father-in-law, J.P. Koehler. Beitz figured that his opponents were so darkened that they simply could not understand or agree with his "Message" and were instead compelled to rally against him and his spiritual message, casting him into the category of "heretic":

They look upon a conference paper not as a preachment but as a more or less intellectual essay by which one is able to judge as to the smartness, learning, and "*reine Lehre*" of the essayist. We drift into that so readily in our intellectual age today....

He signed his dispatch, "Yours to walk by faith, your 'heretic' friend, Beitz."²⁶⁹

A Matter of Confession: The Special Watertown Convention

On August 17-23, 1927, the nineteenth Biennial Convention of Joint Synod convened at St. Luke, Milwaukee. Some hoped that the Synod would step in to resolve the situation in the Western Wisconsin District, but those hopes were quickly dashed. Different people brought protests against the actions of the district officials, who had by this time suspended several pastors and forced some congregations out along the way. "Synod responded to all this: 'Joint Synod would be guilty of a breach of jurisdiction in considering the pending accusations.'"²⁷⁰ One decision that did come out of this meeting, however, was the proposed formation of a committee to hammer out the problems. It was to be headed by Pastor Immanuel Albrecht,

²⁶⁸ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, July 1, 1927.

²⁶⁹ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, August 4, 1927.

²⁷⁰ Claus Gieschen, "The Sins of Synod," *Faith-Life* 11, no. 1 (January 1938): 8.

president of the Minnesota District, and consist of Protéstants and Western Wisconsin District officials. Sadly, it never got off the ground. President Thurow suggested the reason in a letter to another district official. “[Oswald] Hensel’s tardiness was responsible for the delay in selecting a committee.”²⁷¹ When Hensel continued to drag his feet, it elicited the following announcement by the district presidium on October 30, 1927:

Since two months have already elapsed since the sessions of Joint Synod, and the prospect seems very remote that the “Committee” recommended by above Synod will materialize in the near future, the [District presidium] deem it expedient and necessary to call a special meeting of the West Wisconsin District. The West Wisconsin District, therefore will convene for synodical sessions in [St. Mark congregation] at Watertown, Wis., from November 15, 10 A.M. until noon of November 18, or until all pending matters have been transacted.²⁷²

The purpose of the meeting would be to discuss the theme, “Suspension and our attitude toward suspended persons,” and to define the district’s attitude toward the Beitz Paper and the Seminary faculty’s *Gutachten*. In addition all suspensions and appeals were to be considered.

Some Protéstants questioned the validity and the agenda of this special convention from the start, and they issued a memorial to convey their misgivings.

We ... should like to ask the question why has Synod been called into session? The reason for the call is given in the announcement: Because the committee suggested by general Synod did not and could not function. What was the purpose of that committee? To hear grievances of both sides and, if possible, to suggest means and ways of ironing out the differences that exist in our District. Since the committee of general Synod does not and cannot function and this meeting has been called to take the place of that committee, should not all grievances of both sides be put before this meeting body as a whole? We hold they should.

Who in the first place are the accusers and the accused? Historically all troubles of the District today go back to the protests of the Protéstants of the Beaver Dam Synod meeting. These protests are at the bottom of all consequent actions... The Protéstants then are in the first place the accusers and the officials and the District the accused. What then historically and logically ought to be the first matter to be taken up by the district? We hold that historically and logically the first matter to be taken up by the Synod are these basic accusations of the Protéstants against the officials and the district. If we are really desirous of justice and peace, is it then just, right and expedient to proceed according to the proposed program as published by the officials? We hold that we’re in effect evading the real issues wasting the time of Synod, misleading, contrary to the attainment of justice and peace, and thus only creating still greater confusion.²⁷³

²⁷¹ Gotthold Thurow, letter to Jules Bergholz, October 13, 1927.

²⁷² *The Northwestern Lutheran* (October 30, 1927): 347.

²⁷³ “A Memorial to Synod,” November 14, 1927. *Faith-Life* 1, no. 5 (June 4, 1928): 3

Other things about the meeting were bothersome to them as well. They asked, “Were it not advisable to get an outside, disinterested chairman for all these meetings? We hold that it is practically an impossibility to find a chairman in our circles who is not in some way biased, all claims to the contrary notwithstanding.”²⁷⁴ They also wanted assurances that Beitz would have the opportunity to read his paper before the convention if that body was going to serve as a fair and impartial jury. Perhaps most disconcerting, however, was the commissioned appearance of the arch-villain, Professor August Pieper: “It has been reported by the secretary of our district that Prof. Pieper is to read the paper on suspensions. We hold that Prof. Pieper is incompetent at the present time to hold forth on this topic, since he himself is involved in the suspensions and under indictment.”²⁷⁵

In a letter dated November 1, 1927, Protéstant Martin Zimmermann commented on how many synodicals were viewing the suspensions of the Protéstant men, suggesting to him that the special November convention was a waste of time.

Here’s the stand [the synodicals] took: Even if I regard these suspensions as an injustice and stand ready to prove that, yet I must acknowledge them and treat the persons suspended as such, until District O.K.’s or lifts these suspensions. Whether right or wrong, they stand, until District takes action, and all must bow beneath that. Well, now our District will meet Nov. 15th. Surely that ought to serve as a clearinghouse. The program as suggested in the announcement is surely a farce, but it will be our business to see to it that this meeting will not turn out to be a farce. Think of the idea of District taking a stand towards Bill’s paper, when none of the lay delegates and many of the pastors have never read Bill’s paper; say nothing about having studied it in the light of the word! I for my part shall insist upon it that Bill is given an opportunity to read his paper before they as much as even begin discussing it. He is constantly misquoted, and things are meddled something fearful.²⁷⁶

When November 15 finally arrived, Watertown was abuzz with anticipation. Curious students from Northwestern even made the trek down to St. Mark Church excited with the prospect of witnessing some fireworks. Thurow began the business part of the convention on that Tuesday afternoon by reading a long report reviewing the dealings of the officials with the Protéstants since the 1926 Beaver Dam Convention. “Instead of submitting these reports to synod for detailed consideration and discussion Pres. Thurow at once proposed that Synod extend to him the privilege of appointing a committee of six men which should then appoint a committee of twelve men to investigate all the cases and then report back its findings to the Synod.”²⁷⁷ His request led to a parliamentary game of cat and mouse between Thurow, Pieper and the Protéstants, with the immediate result being that a befuddled Thurow resigned his chairmanship of the meeting to Synod President Gustav Bergemann. “With apparent reluctance Pres. Bergemann accepted the call to preside and declared that he well realized the difficulties confronting him, but that he would try to be fair to both sides.”²⁷⁸ Then at Bergemann’s

²⁷⁴ “A Memorial to Synod,” November 14, 1927. *Faith-Life* 1, no. 5 (June 4, 1928): 3

²⁷⁵ “A Memorial to Synod,” November 14, 1927. *Faith-Life* 1, no. 5 (June 4, 1928): 3

²⁷⁶ Martin Zimmermann, letter to Immanuel Frey, November 1, 1927.

²⁷⁷ Robert E. Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District Meeting Held at Watertown, Wisconsin, Nov. 15-18, 1927,” *Faith-Life* 1, no. 5 (June 4, 1928): 4.

²⁷⁸ Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District,” (June 4, 1928): 5.

suggestion the assembly decided to grant Thurow's request of a twelve-man committee to investigate all the suspension cases, and the convention was adjourned until the next morning.

On Wednesday morning the Prot stant memorial was heard by the convention. Some men urged that a discussion take place on each one of the memorial's points, but Thurow and Pieper persuaded the assembly "to consider the vast amount of work to be done and that ... [it was] absolutely imperative for Synod to take a definite stand on the question of suspensions. ... To enable Synod to do that in the right manner it were important to have a certain measuring stick or basis to approach this question."²⁷⁹ That "certain measuring stick," Thurow maintained, was Pieper's paper on suspension.

Prof. Pieper at once fell in line with that proposal and assured Synod that the reading of his paper would not be likely to take up more than 25 min. These remarks led to a motion to drop discussion of the "Memorial" and to proceed with the reading of Prof. Pieper's paper on suspensions. Prof. Pieper gave a rather dramatic and drastic introduction to his paper, pointing out the great importance of having a correct basis for judging suspensions. The reading of his paper was practically a restatement of his views already brot [sic] forth in several articles of the *Quartalschrift* 17 years ago.²⁸⁰

When Pieper finished reading his paper, several pastors (non-Prot stants) raised questions concerning the validity of Pieper's assertions. The first question to be raised was this: "Is Synod to be considered church in the same sense as the established church of Christ, or it merely a man-made organization and not church?"²⁸¹ Apparently, some were still holding the view that the local congregation is the only divinely-mandated form of public ministry, an idea the Wauwatosa faculty had worked long and hard to extirpate from the Wisconsin Synod. Undoubtedly, Pieper reiterated the biblical principle that the gospel produces its own forms of ministry.

The other question [was]: Is suspension from Synod identical with "*Bann*" or excommunication from the Church, or is suspension merely a statement by synod that the suspended party has severed membership relations with Synod and not necessarily "*Bann*"? Prof. Pieper held the former view and his opponents the latter view. When these spirits began to clash on this question, so long kept dormant, it indeed looked as tho [sic] it might result in a fine fight to the finish. ... [Pieper] then tried to enlarge and explain his views on suspension. Particularly he stressed the point that even the Pres. of Synod could pronounce valid and binding suspensions. To impress this view upon Synod he finally ended with this remark: "Cursed is he who does not accept as valid a suspension pronounced by the President." That remark brot [sic] a fiery protest from Pastor Kionka who said: "First Prof. Pieper tells us: Only God cannot fail; then he says: Cursed is he who does not accept what a President has enacted." Pieper at first tried to deny that remark, but Synod sustained Pastor Kionka. Pres. Bergemann also admitted that he had made this remark but tried to put a milder construction upon this remark

²⁷⁹ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 4, 1928): 6.

²⁸⁰ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 4, 1928): 6.

²⁸¹ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 4, 1928): 6.

by declaring: Prof. Pieper did not mean to say that HE is cursed, but THAT is accursed, when someone doubts the validity and justice of the President's pronouncing of suspension. ... In spite [sic] of Kionka's protest Prof. Pieper did not retract his remark, nor did Synod insist upon it.²⁸²

When it became obvious that there was a difference of opinion on these issues, the discussion once again strayed from good parliamentary order. The Protéstants contended that if this basic question concerning the definition and ramifications of suspension could not be answered, how then could Synod consider any action toward those who had been suspended.

Was it not clearly Synod's duty under these peculiar circumstances to assure itself upon what basis it wished to stand in approaching judgment of the suspensions by calling for a vote for or against Pieper's views? What the underlying reasons were for this neglect we are not able to say, but surely there must have been some reasons for allowing this to come to pass. Thus much of the stressed "valuable time" was wasted, leading nowhere. Yet one thing, apparently of great importance to some, had been accomplished: The "Memorial" had been ignored and side-tracked.²⁸³

On Wednesday afternoon the convention began to take up the individual suspension cases, regardless of the fact that there had been no agreement upon the questions of principle in the morning session. It was suggested that Beitz's suspension be dealt with first, despite the fact that he hadn't been the first Protéstant suspended. Beitz, however, was not present, so the officials took up other cases first.

Pieper once again was very much in the thick of the discussion, telling one pastor that he could not read a prepared statement because it was too long. When the pastor tried to read his statement anyway, Pieper interrupted him again and again in protest until finally the pastor gave up.²⁸⁴

Late that afternoon the assembly decided to take up Beitz's case on Thursday. Pieper, Meyer and Henkel, all of whom had attended Wednesday, were asked to return so that they could comment. They assented, and on that following day, November 17, the big event finally arrived. Professor J.P. Meyer recorded in his daily journal that the day began with Beitz reading his paper "on [the] motion of Pieper."²⁸⁵ It was both a tense and exciting moment.

As Beitz stepped to the front the whole assembly moved to the front, showing the intense interest in the paper of which many had only heard, although they had already read its condemnation in the Faculty's *Gutachten*. Pastor Beitz began the reading of his paper with a few introductory remarks which were cut short by Prof. Pieper's remark that the paper should be read without personal comments. During the reading of the paper, which took a little over an hour, a strange quietness reigned and everybody listened attentively and critically.²⁸⁶

²⁸² Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 4, 1928): 6-7.

²⁸³ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 4, 1928): 7.

²⁸⁴ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 4, 1928): 8.

²⁸⁵ Meyer journal, November 17, 1927.

²⁸⁶ Robert E. Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District Meeting Held at Watertown, Wisconsin, Nov. 15-18, 1927," *Faith-Life* 1, no. 6 (June 18, 1928): 2.

Following the reading of the paper, Professor Meyer was the first to give an appraisal. He criticized the paper on two chief points: he claimed that the paper contained too much condemnation and taught that the knowledge of sin is brought about by the Gospel.

In the afternoon Professor Henkel had his say. He read a paper similar to the *Gutachten*, to which Pieper added explanatory comments at the end. The Protéstants clamored about such high-handed procedure.

If you consider this whole procedure in dealing with Beitz's paper and case, must not any fairminded [sic] man see the rank of unfairness of it thruout [sic]. Think of this continued bombardment of the minds of members of Synod with criticism upon criticism of the paper, first the *Gutachten*, then Meyer's attempted criticism, then Henkel with his paper, then again Pieper. Then take into consideration our age ... and its fear of standing independently, and you will know that Beitz's case was lost before he ever had a chance to say a word.²⁸⁷

Finally, though, some delegates requested that Beitz be given a fair chance to defend and explain the contents of his paper. Other wanted to enter upon a thorough discussion of the entire paper. "Against this Prof. Pieper warned, as it would surely lead to endless and deadlocking arguments and in four weeks we would still not agree. He thought that, since they had heard the criticism of the Faculty they ought to be ready to cast their verdict of condemnation also."²⁸⁸ As we have seen previously, Pieper apparently feared the further dissemination and discussion of Beitz's paper without first of all having a proper and forthright condemnation of its "false doctrine and slander."

Yet some troubled and fairminded [sic] souls expressed the wish to give Beitz more of a chance to explain himself. Pastor Allwardt suggested in answer to this plea: "I move we give him 15 minutes." This typical motion brought forth a storm of protest. Prof. Pieper reminded Synod that it was Synod's duty to come to a final decision upon the paper that evening: Synod owed it to the Faculty to support the *Gutachten*.²⁸⁹

At that moment one of Beitz's fellow-Protéstants, Pastor Walter Bodamer, stood to defend Beitz's right to explain or retract his paper. When Bodamer was recognized by the chair, Thurow stormed out of the meeting and hid in the vestry, protesting the fact that this suspended pastor had been given the opportunity to defend Beitz. A motion was carried to give Beitz one hour to address the convention.

Beitz began by explaining the history of the paper and how it had been written for a mixed conference. He went on to confess, "Had I known that it would go beyond the confines of the conference I should have been constrained by love to be more explicit."²⁹⁰ Beitz argued that his paper said nothing other than what Luther wrote in his Reformation hymn "*O Lord, Look*

²⁸⁷ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 18, 1928): 3.

²⁸⁸ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 18, 1928): 3.

²⁸⁹ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 18, 1928): 3.

²⁹⁰ Ave-Lallemant, "Report on Session of West Wisconsin District," (June 18, 1928): 4.

Down from Heaven” (CW 205),²⁹¹ warning the convention, “if you want to condemn me for these phrases in my paper, you are condemning Luther likewise.”²⁹² Finally, Beitz took out his Book of Concord and read the Epitome to Article Five of the Formula of Concord, subscribing without hesitation to its teaching on law and gospel.

“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.”²⁹³ Pastor Gerhard Struck, who was a student at Northwestern at the time, would remember how during Beitz’s address to the assembly, Pieper paced stubbornly in the back aisle of the church, presumably champing at the bit to respond.²⁹⁴

To overcome this spell of serious and quiet consideration of the body [Pieper] stooped to his natural theatrical stunts of posing in front of the speaker. This stunt did not well fit into the situation and a murmur of disapproval, and calls to sit down induced him to withdraw. Beitz continued his appeal to Synod to deal justly with him, to allow the Spirit to guide them to come to a decision in this matter, to remember that they must answer for their action before the throne of God. The tenseness of the moment increased and it is hard to say what different action would have been born out of this moment of meditation, if the body had been left undisturbed. As it was Pieper chose to tear down that veil of sacred quiet by his typical sneering and sarcastic remarks. He ridiculed remarks Beitz had used, particularly “searchlight” and “Spirit”. . . . Having gained his aim of destroying the seriousness of the moment, he at once went over to his illbegotten [sic] attack of forcing and stampeding Synod into action for which it was not ready. “The Synod must take a stand towards the paper now.”²⁹⁵

Into this tense moment the critical and long-anticipated motion was now flung: “That we declare to be in full harmony with the deliberation of the Faculty, and that we reject Beitz’s paper as containing unjust judgments and false doctrine.”²⁹⁶ Several pastors protested at what they thought was a premature calling of the question, but their protests were not received. “Bergemann finally put the question to a vote and urged that everybody ought to vote by a rising vote, as this were a matter of confession. Thurow at once urged to put the names of all who voted against this resolution on record.”²⁹⁷

When the motion was put to a vote, there were eighteen “no” votes, with others abstaining. One layman from Globe, a Mr. Schoenherr, was by this point so frustrated with the dealings that he felt compelled to address the assembly, “I have traveled over 200 miles to help along on my part to bring about peace and am now here 4 days; yet I have not had a chance to talk. This whole business reminds me of the time when Luther was called to Worms before

²⁹¹ Pastor Beitz, of course, quoted from the original German, “*Ach Gott, vom Himmel sieh darein.*”

²⁹² Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District,” (June 18, 1928): 4.

²⁹³ Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District,” (June 18, 1928): 4.

²⁹⁴ Interview with Professor John Brenner, January 22, 1998.

²⁹⁵ Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District,” (June 18, 1928): 4-5.

²⁹⁶ Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District,” (June 18, 1928): 5.

²⁹⁷ Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District,” (June 18, 1928): 5.

Kaiser and Pope. So it is with Beitz; he too is called before Kaiser and Pope, and Kaiser and Pope is Prof. Pieper. Good night.”²⁹⁸

It is certainly not difficult to understand the source of such tension and disgust. This Watertown convention had managed to make the Beitz Paper and *Gutachten* much more than they actually were. It had raised them both to the level of confessional status (*Bekennntnis*) in a very public way. That being said, it must not be forgotten that the Protéstants had made the Beitz Paper very much a matter of confession themselves, refusing to retract even the slightest bit of it. The district officials were certainly guilty of high-handed procedure in now elevating the *Gutachten* to such confessional status, but they were no more culpable than the Protéstants had been in respect to Beitz’s paper.

“Before the close of the meeting ... Prof. Pieper was asked to explain what he regarded as necessary consequence of the negative votes. He replied that it meant that these people had severed themselves from Synod.”²⁹⁹ The convention made a motion in accord with Pieper’s assertion, and it was passed. This Watertown gathering was to be the last convention ever jointly attended by Protéstants and synodicals. Professor Arnold Lehmann recalled:

My Dad, who was in the West Wis. District at the time of the Beitz controversy came home disgusted at the way the district's presidium was handling the matter. Unfortunately, I was too young to ask anything about it, but I remember the incident because that is the only time that I can recall that my Dad came home from a conference or synod meeting with oral remarks of disgust.³⁰⁰

The district had still left an avenue open for a Protéstant return. The Committee of Twelve was charged with the assignment of reviewing the Protéstant cases, each one to be submitted in writing for consideration. The committee set a December 28 meeting date and requested the Protéstants to meet with them to submit their documentary evidence. The Protéstants responded to the invitation with what has become known as the “Elroy Declaration”:

In answer to the most recently received invitations to a discussion of the standing differences during the Christmas week, be apprised of the following:

We, the undersigned, strongly refuse henceforth to have anything to do with any committee of the General Synod or the District, or to appear before such a committee for the purpose of providing further information

1. Since we have been totally caught up in our work at home which has been greatly neglected through the sad confusion, and in the light of the past we must regard any further dealings as useless and time-wasting;
2. Since the Committee of Twelve has in its hands in writing all necessary information for an evaluation of the cases, or at least might have been able to have them, had the Synod investigated the recommendations set forth in the material;

²⁹⁸ Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District,” (June 18, 1928): 5. Pastor Gerhard Struck, who was a student at Northwestern at the time, also recalled this incident.

²⁹⁹ Ave-Lallemant, “Report on Session of West Wisconsin District,” (June 18, 1928): 5.

³⁰⁰ Arnold Lehmann, email to Peter Prange, September 14, 2002.

3. Since the Synod, both in Watertown and in Beaver Dam, has committed, or at least permitted in silence, unheard-of godlessness;
4. Over against you we unreservedly take our stand on the Beitz Paper and intend to persist in doing so.

We will find ourselves ready to present ourselves only when the resolutions adopted at Beaver Dam and Watertown, which were over-hasty and forced, shall be retracted, all cases from the beginning opened up again, and the Synod herewith displays an entirely different attitude, on a day which shows promise of more profitable proceedings.³⁰¹

For all intents and purposes the Protéstant Controversy became a closed case at this point. Both sides were confident that they were defenders of the truth. Unfortunately, they were both so caught up with the misdeeds of the other side that they couldn't conceive of their own liability in the conflagration. As time went on those misdeeds were only perpetuated, and hearts were hardened to the reality of sin and lack of brotherly love in dealing with one another. The same holds true even today.

A Summary in View of the Wauwatosa Gospel

In his "Legalism among Us" Professor J.P. Koehler makes the following observations about Pietism:

Pietism consisted in emphasizing life entirely at the expense of doctrine. [It spawned] an insufferable legalistic domineering and spying set in, since one made his own conscience the criterion for the life of his neighbor. ... It need hardly be said that we aren't giving approval to any kind of unruly life. The Pietistic reproaches were in themselves often warranted. But what concerns us here is the spirit that produced them. That spirit lived not in the joy of the gospel, but existed in jealousy of anyone else's cheerfulness. This bravado of right living shifted the emphasis from "living" to "right." It wasn't life engendered by evangelical preaching, but the external form of life pressed into prescribed confines by ill-natured nagging. So it wasn't real life at all, but a simulation of it, even when it was honestly meant. Demanding and again and again demanding is thus the primary characteristic of this pietistic bravado of sanctification.³⁰²

To a certain extent, Koehler could have written exactly the same thing about the Protéstants in 1926-1928. The Protéstants were not necessarily emphasizing life "at the expense of doctrine," but they did seem to intimate that the *Wortlaut* (the precise wording) of what they were saying or writing was of secondary importance to the *spirit and life* they were attempting to convey through their words. William Beitz was particularly adamant about this point. He wanted people to stop approaching his "Message" intellectually and to start approaching it spiritually. "I

³⁰¹ Elroy Declaration, December 16, 1927.

³⁰² J.P. Koehler, "Legalism," 262.

am sorry the words of mine are so misunderstood. It should not be so. I find the Bible speaks in just that manner. We must get the spirit of the words, not the dead letter. If you people do to your Bibles as you have done to my paper I can well realize why we today seem to be separated.”³⁰³

To some extent we must concur with Beitz and recognize that the Word of God is meant for the heart as much as it is for the head. It is also our duty as Christians to put the best construction on Beitz’s paper. However, it was Beitz’s duty to witness in love and to understand that to some people his witness was unclear, even obtuse. In the spirit of love he should have clarified. He should have taken the attitude of St. Paul, who wrote to the Corinthians, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Co 14:18-19). Was Paul a “dogmatist”? Certainly not. But he stressed the importance of comprehension and edification. Earlier he had written, “If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church” (1 Co 14:11-12). Good advice.

Some Protéstants are also famous for making their “own conscience the criterion for the life of [their] neighbor.” Time and again the Protéstants have claimed that they were conscience-bound to protest. They’ve gone too far, however, when they’ve made it a matter of conscience for someone else. Often they’ve had important points to make, but too often their *manner* of “witnessing” has fallen into the domain of legalism. Again, these “reproaches were in themselves often warranted. But what concerns us here is the spirit that produced them.” Too often it is a spirit of legalism, the same spirit that Synod and district have often used against the Protéstants. Both questioned the Christianity of the other, suggesting that *they* had it right and “shift[ing] the emphasis from ‘living’ to ‘right.’ It wasn’t life engendered by evangelical preaching, but the external form of life pressed into prescribed confines by ill-natured nagging.”

Beitz and the Protéstants would perhaps counter by arguing that they were preaching in the manner of a prophet, preaching the law to people who needed to hear the law, who needed to be awakened out of their spiritual slumber. Yes, it is true, even Christians need to hear the law to keep them from spiritual complacency, but Professor Koehler gives this advice about such preaching:

One must ... also now and then preach the law to Christians to counteract their old Adam. Then demanding and threatening are in place; but then one must be *clear* [emphasis added] about this, ... that here one no longer wants to bring about a manifestation of new life, that is, acceptance of doctrine, but that one is here dealing with sin, which must be condemned. *Even this must be done in love, and in such a way so that the other person can also perceive it* [emphasis added].³⁰⁴

Again and again the Protéstants have overlooked this principle of the Wauwatosa Gospel. They have been too interested in results, of getting the Synod to do things their way (or the way they think God would have the church do something) that they become unconcerned about evangelical preaching and practice. Too often they’ve preached sanctification with a “hurrah spirit.” Too often they’ve simply forgotten to preach the gospel, the forgiveness of sins, the gospel of love – the only source of sanctified lives. The Protéstants have taken the Wauwatosa

³⁰³ *Faith-Life* 8, no. 6 (June 1935): 14.

³⁰⁴ J.P. Koehler, “Legalism,” 240.

Gospel's tenet of *self*-criticism and changed it into a tenet of criticizing *others*. Criticism, it seems, has become an end in itself. At that point the Protéstants have repudiated the Wauwatosa Gospel themselves and instead have become propagators of their own natural legalistic and pietistic tendencies.

But let us also once again remember that the Wisconsin Synod has been just as guilty of lacking brotherly love and concern; in some instances guiltier. The Synod has also repudiated the Wauwatosa Gospel and the evangelical practice it espouses every time it's dealt legalistically. Simply put, every time we deal legalistically with precious, blood-bought souls, we too repudiate of the Wauwatosa principles. Regrettably, it happens daily. Thanks be to God we have forgiveness through his Son!

Chapter Five – The Fire Is Stoked: The Koehler Ouster (1927-1930)

John Philipp Koehler's unwilling involvement in the Protéstant Controversy is perhaps the saddest feature of this whole sordid tale. Whether Koehler was a marked man from the beginning of the controversy, as the Protéstants later claimed,³⁰⁵ is difficult to definitively determine. At the very least, based on a reading of Koehler's "Reminiscences," it seems clear that his relationship with August Pieper was a stormy one during their final years together at the Wauwatosa Seminary. Koehler stated, "It has been said repeatedly that personal differences are at the bottom of the present controversies. This opinion refers mainly to the differences between Professors August Pieper and John Ph. Koehler. There is some truth in this, but it is not the whole truth."³⁰⁶ The "whole truth" is much more complex, and ultimately involves a discussion of Koehler's theological approach.

When Koehler first arrived at the Wauwatosa seminary in 1900, he began pointing out that American Lutheranism had not always followed in the footsteps of their evangelical forefathers. Too often a apathetic dogmatism had set in. Koehler insisted that, humanly speaking, the future of the American Lutheran church depended upon a return to the spirit of Luther and the historical disciplines of exegesis and history. In 1904 he published a signal essay entitled "The Importance of the Historical Disciplines for the American Lutheran Church of the Present," which outlined his proposal.

To a certain extent, men such as Dr. C.F.W. Walther and Dr. George Stoeckhardt – two of Koehler's seminary professors in St. Louis – had already sounded Koehler's clarion call within the Missouri Synod. For example, Walther's discourses on *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel* remain a classic treatment of that subject to this day, pointing the Lutheran pastor to an evangelical practice of rightly dividing law and gospel. Stoeckhardt's fondness for doing scriptural exegesis had a profound influence, especially within the Wisconsin Synod. Still, dogmatics reigned supreme as the queen of theological disciplines within American Lutheranism and the Synodical Conference; exegetical and historical studies lagged behind.

Walther was himself largely responsible for that state of affairs within Missouri. August Pieper asserted that "Walther was preeminently a dogmatician and administrator, with a strong inclination to externals and a decided love for external form, even for uniformity in the

³⁰⁵ An example of this sentiment is found in Philemon Hensel's "The third of Wauwatosa Seminary Professor August Pieper's picnic papers," *Faith-Life* 75, no. 2 (March/April 2002): 4-10. Hensel suggests that Koehler was the victim of Pieper's "30-year vengeful strategy to erase the name Koehler from his and the Synod's memory."

³⁰⁶ Koehler, "Reminiscences," 1.

church.”³⁰⁷ Yet, this was not meant as an indictment. Koehler called Walther’s dogmatic approach “an obvious development” due to the Pietism and Rationalism that Walther encountered during his early life in Lutheranism. His heroic defense against these heretical movements “quite naturally was accompanied by a return to the Bible-believing body of the 17th-century dogmatics.”³⁰⁸

Walther was above all a practical theologian with a tendency to approach matters somewhat mechanically. This was not as often a drawback for Walther himself, who made dogmatics very much a *habitus practicus*, as it was for those who were not as well grounded in evangelical practice as he. Where Walther usually understood the Scriptural principles involved, his followers often understood hard and fast rules. Typical practice slowly became the new principle, and the Scriptural principles were left behind. The tendency for these followers was to appraise certain situations or circumstances as though everything was now black and white according to some dogmatic formula. Koehler observed that this tendency eventually led to legalism: “The second and third generation rests upon the shoulders of their predecessors in this matter and does not treat it in the same original manner as they. They simply accept this or that idea as a finished product without having to go through the mental effort which the fathers put forth.”³⁰⁹ When this happens, Koehler suggested, mental inflexibility inevitably sets in and legalism is bound to rear its ugly head. Pieper added:

[Dogmatics] says so much and no more; it does not express the full content of Scripture. That is its essence. Scriptural truth is so living and refracting, so fresh and fluent, that one can turn it a thousand times, inspect it from a thousand sides, compare it with a thousand things, and apply it to a thousand situations, without its losing any content or power. It is like a nimble young giant, growing to every new situation, need, and danger. It is spirit and it is life, God’s life. God’s mind and life’s blood for the saving of lost sinners. It remains eternally young and eternally new and makes everything new and anew.³¹⁰

When it came to theological approaches, Stoeckhardt was in most ways Walther’s antithesis, as his “style and influence went in just the opposite direction.”³¹¹ Whereas Walther was the consummate church politician, Stoeckhardt had no love for church polity. When Walther got himself entangled in the election controversy of the late nineteenth century because of his dogmatic approach, it was principally Stoeckhardt who provided the exegetical wherewithal to extricate him from his conundrum. The Wisconsin Synod benefited greatly from Stoeckhardt’s exegetical discipline as three of his St. Louis students – Koehler, A. Pieper and Schaller – continued down the path he blazed when they later worked together at the Wauwatosa seminary. Within Missouri, however, exegesis failed to win the day.

One similarity between Walther and Stoeckhardt may have partly contributed to that outcome. While these two men certainly took decidedly different approaches to theology, neither of them seemed to be terribly original in their thinking. Both were quite scientific and tended to “think within the box.” Even in his exegetical work, Stoeckhardt seemed to be principally

³⁰⁷ August Pieper, “Stoeckhardt’s Significance in the Lutheran Church of America,” *The Wauwatosa Theology*, III (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1997), 421.

³⁰⁸ J.P. Koehler, *History*, 161.

³⁰⁹ J.P. Koehler, “Importance of the Historical Disciplines,” 440.

³¹⁰ Pieper, “Stoeckhardt’s Significance,” 423.

³¹¹ Pieper, “Stoeckhardt’s Significance,” 421.

applying an almost scientific approach to Scripture where the rules of grammar and syntax are the main concern.³¹² Both Walther and Stoeckhardt seemed interested in conquering the mind of their audience. That is not surprising when one considers how both had very similar historical antecedents, forced to defend their confessional Lutheranism. Walther used a dogmatic approach; Stoeckhardt an exegetical one.

Although Koehler recognized the benefits and blessings of good dogmatics and certainly promoted the necessity of understanding grammar and syntax, he insisted that a proper approach to theology could only be gained when exegesis and history were working side by side. Language and history must work hand-in-hand. These two disciplines keep the Christian constantly searching and re-searching the Scriptures, thinking critically about the church's doctrine and practice in the past and for the present. This approach was not intended to overthrow all pronouncements of the past or the foundation of Lutheran dogmatics. Just the opposite, Koehler argued. "As we practice such self-criticism, we shall find that the divine truths which we draw out of Scripture indeed always remain the same, but that the manner in which we defend them, yes, even how we present them is not always totally correct. Here we can and must continue to learn."³¹³

In Koehler's opinion, a chief antagonist to a truly historical-grammatical approach was the oft-referenced "analogy of faith," a hermeneutical approach with a long history of use in the Christian and Lutheran church. In his epic essay entitled "The Analogy of Faith," also written in 1904, Koehler explained that the majority who use this approach seem to suggest that "the doctrines of Scripture cannot contradict one another, but must be in harmony with one another," and when a contradiction arises "the expressions that contradict the clear doctrines of Scripture will have to be stripped of their usual, immediate meaning and be weakened or modified."³¹⁴ Instead, Koehler asserted that the proper approach does not allow the exegete to "deviate from the grammatical-historical sense that is immediately and clearly contained in these passages." When contradictions arise, "one may not modify these terms according to ... other doctrines. ... Then it is part of correct interpretation and presentation of doctrine to establish this difficulty and make it known."³¹⁵ Even famed dogmatician Franz Pieper, then the president of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, had difficulty understanding Koehler's approach and objected. "I fear that Koehler has ventured on a dangerous field with his article, and his presentation of the subject might do damage to the Lutheran doctrinal position."³¹⁶ The Wauwatosa Gospel was making a mark.

August Pieper's older brother wasn't the only one who had or would have trouble with Koehler's approach to Scripture and theology. Over the years people have struggled mightily at

³¹² For example, when one compares Stoeckhardt's commentary on Paul's letter to the Ephesians to that of J.P. Koehler's, the reader will instantly notice a marked difference. Stoeckhardt has copious quotations from other exegetes; Koehler has practically none. Stoeckhardt spends much more time on the fine points of grammar and syntax; Koehler deals much more with the interrelatedness of Paul's thought and the application of its saving truths to our lives as Christians. Stoeckhardt sounds like he's delivering a lecture aimed principally at the mind; Koehler sounds like he's delivering a sermon aimed principally at the heart. Incidentally, in his famous commentary on Isaiah 40-66, August Pieper followed much more along the scientific path of Stoeckhardt. This is certainly not meant to denigrate the importance of grammar and syntax; Koehler absolutely insisted that it is essential to good, Scriptural exegesis. But grammar and syntax can also become a wooden science apart from an historical appreciation of Scripture in which the history of God's plan of salvation in Christ is the main theme (John 5:39-40).

³¹³ J.P. Koehler, "Importance of the Historical Disciplines," 434-435.

³¹⁴ J.P. Koehler, "Analogy of Faith," 222.

³¹⁵ J.P. Koehler, "Analogy of Faith," 221.

³¹⁶ J.P. Koehler, "Reminiscences," 5. See also J.P. Koehler, *History*, 212.

times to understand the in-workings of Koehler's thought, and in time the younger Pieper would blame a large portion of the Prot stant Controversy on Koehler's "historicist point of view," claiming that it "leads on the one hand to irresolution, on the other to obstinacy."³¹⁷ This inability to be understood by others, perhaps more than anything else, stoked the fire that led to his ouster from the Seminary and the Synod.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Since Joh. Ph. Koehler was primarily an historian, his chief concern in analyzing past and current events was that he remain as objective as possible. To that end Koehler attempted to remain neutral in times of controversy, always encouraging open dialogue between warring parties. "He relished the role of aloof observer, analyzing events according to his historical-exegetical method without being personally involved. He preferred low-key, behind-the-scenes dealing."³¹⁸ Regarding his struggle for objectivity Koehler wrote of himself, "He was something of a lone rider, that is to say, he didn't want to be influenced and he didn't want to influence others excepting by impersonal open testimony."³¹⁹ Professor Edward Fredrich comments: "He was too good a historian not to be aware of the pitfall of oversubjectivity and exercised great restraint in avoiding [it]."³²⁰

Sadly, by 1927, objectivity in the Prot stant Controversy was a rare commodity, even for Koehler. In June he had been the victim of his own good intentions, caught between his Seminary colleagues and Prot stant William Beitz, after the faculty *Gutachten* was published without his knowledge or consent, an episode that was both heart-wrenching and ire-provoking for Koehler. Fredrich calls the circumstances of Koehler's involvement in this controversy a "high tragedy" comparing it to one of Shakespeare's plays "where the characters are simply thrown into a tragic situation and without much action or intention move on to the fateful end."³²¹ Fredrich goes on to explain.

There is something of this kind of tragedy to be seen in Koehler's departure from the Seminary. Feuding factions got into a conflict at Watertown while Koehler was 4000 miles away [in Germany, collecting information for his history of the Synod]. He could not remain aloof from the feuding. Efforts at peacemaking at Fort Atkinson fizzled. Resorting to a *Gutachten* approach only served to fan the flames. The tragedy simply moves on to its end.³²²

As Koehler found out, being in the middle of this controversy was never a comfortable position, a lesson shared by his son-in-law, E. Arnold Sitz. "When one, because one refuses to take up with either party, for that neither party has anywhere nigh a corner on righteousness, is cursed out by the one party for a pietist, by the other for an orthodoxist, whom is one to trust?"³²³

³¹⁷ August Pieper, "Antwort," *Faith-Life* 75, no. 2 (March/April 2002): 17.

³¹⁸ Jeske, 65.

³¹⁹ J.P. Koehler, *History*, 235.

³²⁰ Edward Fredrich, "The Parting of Professor J.P. Koehler and the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary," (WLS Essay File), 2.

³²¹ Fredrich, "Parting," 7.

³²² Fredrich, "Parting," 7.

³²³ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Henkel, May 9, 1927.

The Protéstants would have relished nothing more than to have Koehler among their number; the sooner, the better. It made perfect sense to them, as they considered themselves the defenders of “Koehlerism.” But Koehler, like Sitz, had his misgivings about the Protéstant approach. “At one point in the lengthy discussions, the date is late October 1927, Koehler was ready to ‘drop’ Beitz because of the latter’s unwillingness to offer any corrections or clarifications for his writings.”³²⁴ Leigh Jordahl adds:

Like many others, and to the end of his life, [Koehler] remained unenthusiastic about the “Beitz Paper”... When informed that Beitz would not withdraw his essay or modify it he went so far as to say that then he could not defend Beitz but must hold him half responsible for the strife. He, furthermore, believed that if the “Beitz Paper” were withdrawn the way might be paved for dealing with the essence of the controversy itself, which was not in Koehler’s judgment really the “Beitz Paper.”³²⁵

Beitz and the other Protéstants resented such wavering on Koehler’s part. Sitz’s brother, Alex, wrote to Tois in January of 1928, “As soon as they found that J.P. did not second them in all things he was pronounced incapable of seizing of the situation. ... Anyone daring to disagree with these men is anathema, he is denying Christ and is dead in forms.”³²⁶

Koehler had to deal with strong personalities on the other side as well, none stronger than August Pieper’s. There had been an increasing rift among the veteran Seminary professors for some time already before 1927. But the events of 1927-1930, especially the ill-advised publication of the *Gutachten*, made the gulf practically irreparable. Koehler commented at length on the disintegration of this relationship in his 1930 “Reminiscences,” recounting various instances where the two had come to verbal blows. “Koehler reveals that after he and August Pieper began teaching together at the Wauwatosa seminary [in 1902], relations between the two became cool, then strained, then acrimonious, and finally downright hostile. ... Both Pieper and Koehler were very gifted pastors and teachers, but there was quite a contrast in personalities between the two men, which has not always been readily understood.”³²⁷

To conclude, however, that this latter part of the Protéstant Controversy hinged *solely* on a personality conflict between Koehler and Pieper would be far from historically accurate. As Koehler himself would later surmise, the real issue after the summer of 1927 was the faculty *Gutachten*. On September 5, 1927, Professor J.P. Meyer first chronicled in his daily journal a long series of faculty meetings concerning that disputed document: “Unpleasant discussion on ‘*Gutachten*’ etc. Another meeting next Mon. [sic] Koehler asks to have man present who ‘understands’ him.”³²⁸ Meyer reported on six additional faculty meetings held in September and October of 1927, three of which included the Seminary Board. “Soon the divisive issue within the faculty boiled down to interpretation principles. Should a conference paper be judged on the basis of what its words actually say [*Wortlaut*] or should there be an allowance for the author’s

³²⁴ Fredrich, “Parting,” 5.

³²⁵ Jordahl, xxviii.

³²⁶ Alex Sitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, January 19, 1928.

³²⁷ Pless, 22.

³²⁸ Meyer journal, September 5, 1927. In his “*Antwort*,” (*Faith-Life* 75, no. 2 [March/April 2002]) Meyer reports that “Faculty sessions on Prof. Koehler’s *Ertrag*, which was mailed on August 11, were conducted on August 16, ... then on August 24 and 31, September 5, 12, and 19, 1927” (18). Pieper adds in his “*Antwort*” that the faculty had “naturally heated exchanges ... from August 16 to September 19, but led to no result” (15).

intent and the prevailing situation being addressed?”³²⁹ Koehler held the latter position, his colleagues the former. The issue was never amicably resolved. Koehler was literally between a rock and a hard place, and already by September 1927, he was expecting the worst: “I fear that here things are developing and heading for a break. That is something that can bring joy to no hearts. But it must come to clean out such soot that has accumulated in the course of a man’s lifetime.”³³⁰

Some have faulted Koehler for digging his own grave. “Koehler was a victim of his own lack of commitment – it proves the axiom that you cannot maintain a position in the middle of the road when there is heavy traffic.”³³¹ Others have suggested that “Professor Koehler seemed to have an affinity with people who had a hard time being understood ... [and] that Koehler, at his private meeting with Beitz, began to see in the young Rice Lake pastor a younger version of himself.”³³² But to fault Koehler for not wanting to be a party to the sins of either the Protéstants or the synodicals is unfair; to call it a lack of commitment on his part is historically irresponsible. For Koehler it would have been an absolute repudiation of the Wauwatosa Gospel and his own historical objectivity to choose a side when, as his son-in-law Arnold Sitz stated, neither side had a corner on righteousness. A simple reading of the facts also suggests that throughout the controversy Koehler demonstrated a willingness to put the best construction on the words and actions of everyone involved, not just those of Beitz and the Protéstants.

Simply put, Koehler blamed both sides for this controversy, and as a witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel he included himself in that indictment. Koehler *was* committed, committed to generating a genuine peace in which the disputed issues were actually resolved and hard feelings put aside. Koehler endeavored to live up to the encouragement of St. Paul, who implored the Ephesian congregation, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). In September 1928, Koehler wrote a young friend:

It is self-evident that we consider it of prime importance to uphold doctrinal purity. But Paul says too that we should do so through the bond of peace. Here both contending parties do not want to acknowledge this. And in a given practical case it is not always easy to do. And we aren’t the ones either who can do that. But in our times especially, it seems to me, matters are of such a nature that we must emphasize peace toward those who carry on the controversy.³³³

Koehler cringed at the idea of a false, outward peace or an “enforced” peace, instituted simply for the sake of “keeping the peace.” Such peace, Koehler said, was a product of “pragmatic dogmatism” which is more interested in mere external appearances than in true Christian unity of spirit.³³⁴ When neither side was willing to deal with the other in Christian love and understanding – when neither side was willing to work toward a truly peaceful resolution of the conflict – Koehler found himself between a rock and a hard place. In attempting to bring about such peace, Koehler would find himself being squeezed out.

³²⁹ Fredrich, “Parting,” 5.

³³⁰ John Philipp Koehler, letter to Kurt Zorn (September 21, 1927), *Faith-Life* 54, no. 5 (September/October 1981): 13.

³³¹ Jeske, 65.

³³² Pless, 25.

³³³ John Philipp Koehler, letter to Kurt Zorn (September 24, 1928), *Faith-Life* 54, no. 5 (September/October 1981): 17

³³⁴ J.P. Koehler, “Reminiscences,” 7.

The Koehler Construction: The Ertrag and the Beleuchtung

By the fall of 1927 Koehler felt compelled to put his thoughts about Beitz's "Message" down on paper. He had come to a different understanding of the essay than had the supporters of the *Gutachten* – especially his Seminary colleagues – after meeting twice with Beitz to discuss its contents. This is, of course, what Koehler had wanted to do before the *Gutachten* was ever published. The initial Koehler-Beitz conclave took place in June 1927, with one to follow in July of that same year. Concerning their July meeting Beitz reported:

J.P. was here for a week's visit ... and we took thru [sic] the paper and *Gutachten* thoroughly. He said on leaving he felt he ought to write a *Gutachten* now that he understands the paper. So that his signature to the former one will not be misunderstood. We came to the conclusion that most of those that oppose the message read it with their heads and not their hearts.³³⁵

The second *Gutachten* to which Beitz refers ultimately developed into Koehler's *Ertrag* (the "fruit" of his investigation). With the *Ertrag* Koehler put his chief principle of interpretation into practice, "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*."³³⁶

Koehler's *Ertrag* was far from complimentary. 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." This lack of precision was made all the more acute when the paper was disseminated widely and read. To hear a paper read and explained is much different than simply reading the hard, cold print because "in writing, the outward grammatical precision, or even the opposite of that, often has a different [damaging] effect. And especially under the pressures of the present, when general unrest prevails in men's hearts and minds, the manner in which the points were made could only come across as inflammatory to many a reader."³³⁷

Concerning Beitz's "sweeping generalizations, which lead one to think that faith is being more or less denied to the Synodical Conference," Koehler readily points out that "these generalizations do indeed go too far." Koehler conceded that "we might well initiate an earnest examination of all that we do, individually and when we come together in fellowship" and that "saying it openly [as Beitz did] ... is not to be ruled out." However, Koehler pointed out, whenever someone does spell these things out publicly he "must be restrained and moderate, avoiding that which is inflammatory." Koehler suggests that Beitz "got himself all worked up ... and thus he was carried away into exaggerations which, upon more sober consideration, he must regret."³³⁸

Koehler, however, disagreed with his Seminary colleagues that Beitz was guilty of false doctrine. This became the real rub in the Wauwatosa faculty room. For Koehler it was enough

³³⁵ William Beitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, August 4, 1927.

³³⁶ J.P. Koehler, "Analogy of Faith," 263.

³³⁷ John Phillip Koehler, "Ertrag of an interview with Pastor Beitz," *Faith-Life* 74, no. 6 (November/December 2001): 25-28.

³³⁸ J.P. Koehler, "Ertrag," 26-27.

that “the author ... confesses himself to the positive presentation of doctrine in the *Gutachten*,” stating that throughout Beitz’s paper “there is perhaps an indication of unclarity in the relevant exegesis, but not necessarily proof of a false doctrinal position.”³³⁹ Koehler concluded his remarks with a plea to both sides:

The writer should simply acknowledge this critique of his paper, if he is conscious of the fact, and if he emphasizes that in many respects he has not been understood correctly. Likewise right-minded readers need to have called to their attention, especially in our times, that much is said that is earnest and worth heeding, and that one dare not cast to the winds.³⁴⁰

Many have scoffed at Koehler’s “peculiar position on polemics”³⁴¹ and his stance toward Beitz’s “Message,” charging that his “antipathy to dogmatism here seems to have spoiled his appreciation of the importance of confessional writings” and suggesting that while “Koehler’s attitude would be helpful in dealing with the individual, it ignores the painful fact that erring and ambiguous statements, however well-intentioned, can corrode the faith of others if permitted to stand unchallenged.”³⁴² However, such criticisms of Koehler and his conception of the Beitz Paper overlook one important fact: when Koehler composed his *Ertrag*, Beitz’s paper was *not* standing unchallenged. In fact, the *Gutachten* had already appeared several months before, and a majority in the Synod stood staunchly on its side, despite its many harsh and personal denunciations. For all intents and purposes, by the time Koehler took up Beitz’s cause his client was already a condemned man, something his advocate believed was supremely unfair after hearing all the evidence.

Koehler simply wanted the Synod and the advocates of the *Gutachten* to give Beitz a fair hearing. To do this he needed to show that Beitz’s “Message” could be properly understood. The *Ertrag* was his first attempt to put the Beitz Paper in its proper context. On October 18-20, 1927, he presented this defense before the Joint Synodical Committee. Koehler’s associate, J.P. Meyer, reports that the general opinion of that committee was not to heed Koehler’s plea but instead to judge Beitz’s paper “by clear meaning of words (grammatical).”³⁴³ The *Wortlaut* won the day.

Sadly, Koehler’s endeavors were misunderstood by Beitz and his party to mean that their old professor was now one in spirit with them. As Koehler began to realize that his defense of Beitz was leading the Protéstants to harden in their stance, he back-pedaled sharply. On October 19, the minutes of the Synodical Committee meeting report that the Seminary Director offered a *mea culpa*. “I acknowledge that I have contributed my share to the confusion in the Synod, in that they hear that I no longer support the *Gutachten*, that most likely Beitz and his friends have been strengthened through me, but without my intention. I regret all of this.”³⁴⁴ Later Koehler would offer a written statement:

The refusal of Pastor Beitz to withdraw his Paper, when obviously in its wording it contributes to confusion among us, must cause me to recognize that my withdrawal too of my signature from the *Gutachten* of the faculty has also

³³⁹ J.P. Koehler, “*Ertrag*,” 27.

³⁴⁰ J.P. Koehler, “*Ertrag*,” 28.

³⁴¹ Pless, 25.

³⁴² Jeske, 57.

³⁴³ Meyer journal, October 18, 1927.

³⁴⁴ Quoted by Pieper, “*Antwort*,” 15.

contributed to the confusion and has placed obstacles in the way of the negotiation of the Western District with the opponents.”³⁴⁵

The secretary of the Synodical Committee reported: “The Reverend Prof. Koehler has altogether and entirely subscribed to the faculty *Gutachten*, to wit, that the Beitz Paper contains godless slander and false doctrine. The rest of the faculty members declared themselves altogether and entirely satisfied with this.”³⁴⁶ In November *The Northwestern Lutheran* alluded to Koehler’s concession. “In regard to the discussion on the paper written by Pastor Beitz ... we hereby report that the entire committee including all members of the faculty of our Theological Seminary *without exception* declared that the aforementioned paper contains slanderous libels and false doctrines.”³⁴⁷

With Koehler now seemingly back in the fold, District President Gotthold Thurow wielded *Wortlaut* as a club. In December 1927 he received a letter from Protéstant Martin Zimmermann in which the latter explained why he could not agree with the assessments of the faculty *Gutachten*. Zimmermann delineated the charges brought against Beitz – that he had taught falsely concerning repentance, had denied people’s Christianity, and had judged hearts – and pointed out how at the special Watertown convention Beitz had refuted each charge. Yet “Synod by its vote to accept the Seminary Faculty’s interpretation declared Beitz as a false teacher, a *Schwaermer* [enthusiast], *ein Herzensrichter* [a judge of hearts]...”³⁴⁸ Thurow underlined each of these three terms in the Zimmermann letter and wrote in the right-hand margin, “And that he is! His words prove it.” On the bottom margin, Thurow scribbled this note: “Beitz must be judged by his written words [*Wortlaut*] + not by his later explanation. If Beitz’s words, (written) are misunderstood, why does he not retract the words of his paper? Zimmermann is woefully wrong + certainly can learn a lot yet from his old professors at the Seminary.”³⁴⁹ Such was the attitude that Beitz’s advocates would now face more and more, although it was in some ways justified. If Beitz really wanted to be understood he would have agreed to rephrase parts of his paper. He categorically refused, a decision Koehler severely criticized.

Nevertheless, others threw their hat into the ring, taking their shot at defending Beitz. Perhaps the most intriguing and cleverest approach was Pastor Paul Hensel’s “The ‘*Gutachten*’ in the Light of the Wauwatosa Gospel.” In this essay published by the Protéstants Hensel compared Beitz’s paper to several articles and essays of Professor August Pieper from the 1910s and 1920s. Hensel pointed out some striking similarities between the language used by Beitz and his former professor as they attempted to rouse the Synod from their spiritual slumber. Both used strong and caustic language to make their point. Hensel wondered why Beitz would be condemned for things that Pieper himself had said.

Some aren’t so ready to concede Hensel’s argument. Although admitting that Hensel’s observations are appealing, Mark Jeske asserts that “his conclusions are unwarranted, for he fails to take several very important points into consideration.”³⁵⁰ Among those, Jeske writes, is the fact that “Pieper was known for his penchant for hyperbole ... Beitz was a near-unknown.”³⁵¹

³⁴⁵ Quoted by Pieper, “*Antwort*,” 16.

³⁴⁶ Quoted by Pieper, “*Antwort*,” 16.

³⁴⁷ *The Northwestern Lutheran* 14, no. 24 (November 27, 1927): 373. Emphasis in the original.

³⁴⁸ Martin Zimmermann, letter to Gotthold Thurow, December 28, 1927.

³⁴⁹ Gotthold Thurow, handwritten notes on Martin Zimmerman’s letter.

³⁵⁰ Jeske, 41.

³⁵¹ Jeske, 41.

Pieper had also been in the ministry forty years; Beitz less than ten. In addition, Pieper had broad Synod experience; Beitz did not. Finally, Jeske argues, “Pieper preached Law during a time of relative complacency ... Beitz, however, was not pouring oil on troubled waters, he was pouring gasoline on a fire that had been burning brightly all by itself.”³⁵²

Jeske’s arguments are well-founded, and one might even be added: it seems fairly certain that Beitz intended to stir things up and to force a reaction from synod officials. Beitz had prophesied martyrdom, and his paper had fulfilled it. His further refusal to restate even one iota of that paper only justified synodicals, as far as they were concerned, in their reaction to Beitz and the Protéstants.

For Koehler to have taken up Beitz’s defense against such a hostile crowd was nigh unto suicidal, but he seemed compelled in the interest of fairness. Attempting to put the brightest light of understanding on Beitz’s “Message” was thoroughly in line with his historical-grammatical approach and served as his witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel, even though he knew it was an unpopular witness. Since he also realized that his was a confusing position, both for Beitz and the Protéstants as well as for his fellow professors, he offered his resignation to the Seminary Board in the fall of 1927.

I express my regret ... that I have contributed in the manner indicated to the confusion in the Synod, which I have endeavored to remedy on both sides. If from this it should appear evident that an insuperable hiatus exists between my approach to the interpretation of a passage and that of my colleagues, then it is clear to me that I cannot continue to work at the Seminary, and submit my resignation to your disposal.³⁵³

The offer was not accepted, but neither was peace at the Seminary forthcoming, as Koehler recalled.

And so the storm passed. But the peace in the faculty has not yet matured to a heartfelt confidence. It is hard to say what will yet develop in the controversy. It’s still quite probable that I shall have to step aside if the work here at the Seminary is to prosper in peace. The controversy is a crisis in the life of our Synod which I have long anticipated, but had not expected that it would come so soon and would zero in on us here.³⁵⁴

One thing that only intensified the whole controversy from this point on was the publication of the Protéstant periodical *Faith-Life*, which began to roll off the presses in April 1928. From its inception *Faith-Life* has been a Protéstant witness against the abuses they suffered at the hands of Wisconsin Synod officialdom. It has become a Protéstant mainstay. “This periodical through half a century has proved to be the common denominator, the cynosure, the unifying factor of the Protéstant cause, and has enabled them to make a louder splash than

³⁵² Jeske, 41.

³⁵³ Quoted in Pieper, “Antwort,” 16.

³⁵⁴ John Philipp Koehler, letter to Kurt Zorn (December 30, 1927), *Faith-Life* 54, no. 5 (September/October 1981): 16.

one would think possible from their numbers.”³⁵⁵ Unfortunately, at times it has tended not to be a constructive witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel but a destructive scandal sheet.

The Controversy involved communicators, men whose speech could be vivid and compelling, but also cutting and inflammatory; it involved writers, notably the Hensels, who knew how to wield a pen. Unfortunately the *Faith-Life* tempers never cooled off, and articles would appear, aimed squarely at WELS, which were scathing, bitter, sarcastic and totally unworthy of a message directed from one Lutheran pastor to another.³⁵⁶

In many ways *Faith-Life* was an apropos addition to a troubled synodical scene. It has become the culmination of what turned out to be a long series of public documents that stirred the pot. In fact, one could argue that the entire Protéstant Controversy was a result of publication. Its history is scattered with ill-timed and ill-fated broadcastings of paper. First there was the publication of the Fort Atkinson teachers’ suspensions, which led to the first public protests at Beaver Dam. Following that there was the publication of Oswald Hensel’s Blue Books, pamphlets that castigated the district and its officials for the way they handled Hensel and his Marshfield congregation. Then there was the publication of the Beitz Paper. Soon afterward came the publication of Ruediger’s confession and the faculty absolution. Next there was the publication of the *Gutachten* without Koehler’s consent. Now came *Faith-Life*, only to be followed by Koehler’s *Beleuchtung* (elucidation), Pieper’s and Meyer’s answer, the *Antwort*, and Koehler’s last volley entitled *Witness, Analysis, and Reply*. Since 1930 *Faith-Life* has made letter after letter and conversation after conversation a matter of public record, adding to hardness on both sides.

Upon further analysis, however, such public dealing by the Protéstants was understandable. They had the rug pulled out from under them so often by different Synod officials that they became understandably gun-shy. Throughout the course of the controversy there were various instances of misquotation and misrepresentation. The way to avoid this was by making things a matter of public record. Unfortunately, this practice has tended to do more bad than good. Love was and has been wanting.

The fact that Christian love wasn’t always a motivating factor and that evangelical practice wasn’t always a norm disturbed Koehler greatly, even to the point of physical illness. Philemon Hensel recalls how Koehler “was in a state of emaciation ... [and] would abstain from taking any nourishment at all.”³⁵⁷ In his daily journal J.P. Meyer recorded that he “saw Koehler; must take four week’s treatment: then what?”³⁵⁸ The controversy had become everything that the Wauwatosa Gospel wasn’t. The events of 1927 and early 1928 only ushered in further disgust and disheartenment concerning the whole situation, so that in May 1928 Koehler rejoined the fight by claiming that his “recantation” of October 1927 had been misunderstood. Pieper reported that Koehler “sought to prove the whole meeting had misunderstood his so-called ‘penitential confession.’ He claimed that he had confessed nothing in this meeting other than what he had explained in signing the *Gutachten*.”³⁵⁹ When the Seminary board asked for a

³⁵⁵ Jeske, 63-64.

³⁵⁶ Jeske, 64.

³⁵⁷ Philemon Hensel, “A Brief History of the Protéstant Controversy,” *Faith-Life* 73, no. 5 (September/October 2000): 18.

³⁵⁸ Meyer journal, September 14, 1928.

³⁵⁹ Pieper, “*Antwort*,” 17.

clarification, Koehler refused to offer any until the “‘wrong’ minutes of his statements” had been corrected.³⁶⁰ Later that same year Meyer recounted a board meeting at which “Koehler refuses to restate [his] stand on [the] *Gutachten*” for fear that “his name might be used legalistically as [a] club.”³⁶¹

By the end of the year Koehler could see the handwriting on the wall. “I have really no good news for you from here,” he wrote in December 1928.

[Protéstant and Northwestern College Professor Elmer] Sauer³⁶² was deposed (*abgesetzt*), though not with that word. ... I expect the same in the near future. The dealings concerning this are already underway since the 8th of May. ... I am reluctant to relate the development of the proceedings to you. I would rather digest them in my own heart first so that my report to you would then be more objective. Only this much. The demand is that I stand shoulder to shoulder with my colleagues against the others, because the CHURCH has spoken (the doctrine of excommunication and suspension), and because the others are agitating (?) in “Faith and Life” [sic]. I myself want to stay out of the conflict, because I have no gift (*Organ*) to write for the public, and to speak before assemblies would only yield more obnoxious personal altercations with my colleagues, as has been the case all along. That is why I propose a (*Schiedskomitee*) judicial committee, appointed by both sides. That is where the matter stands now. The others will hardly go in on this.³⁶³

Koehler’s premonition was absolutely accurate. No committee was ever formed, and things only continued to deteriorate throughout 1929. By April, Koehler seemed to have become a bit more determined to push the envelope on his defense of Beitz.

The doctrinal issue needn’t disturb you because there is none. ... [Beitz] declared himself in full agreement with the doctrine presented in the *Gutachten*. There need be no quarrel on that score. Not even his exaggerated expressions in judging our Christians need to be falsely understood; not even his judgment about dogmatic stress. The matter will now soon come to a conclusion. They demanded that I stand shoulder to shoulder with my colleagues in the controversy. I refused and demanded instead that the *Gutachten* must be revised, which I had attacked right from the start and which was published without my consent. I have also declared that the West Wisconsin District initiated all the suspensions in an unheard of manner. The Synod can’t get around it and must satisfy my demand.³⁶⁴

In late May, Koehler again refused to state his position on the *Gutachten* and demanded a new discussion with Beitz present.³⁶⁵ When the matter was referred to the

³⁶⁰ Pieper, “Antwort,” 17.

³⁶¹ Meyer journal, November 22, 1928.

³⁶² Professor E.E. Sauer was suspended from teaching at Northwestern College on October 10, 1928, because he preached for suspended Pastor W.P. Hass at St. Matthew, Oconomowoc. He was later suspended from Synod, the notice appearing in the *Northwestern Lutheran* on February 17, 1929.

³⁶³ John Philipp Koehler, letter to Kurt Zorn (December 1928), *Faith-Life* 54, no. 5 (September/October 1981): 20.

³⁶⁴ John Philipp Koehler, letter to Kurt Zorn (April 6, 1929), *Faith-Life* 55, no. 1 (January/February 1982): 20.

³⁶⁵ Meyer journal, May 25, 1929.

Synodical Committee, it was decided that Koehler should “state his views on the Beitz paper and the *Gutachten* in writing.”³⁶⁶ The stage was now set for Koehler to compose his *Beleuchtung*.

As spring turned to summer even more ominous storm clouds began to form. For instance, two Seminary seniors, Marcus Koch and John John, were not graduated or assigned calls at the insistence of Professor Pieper. In 1928 Koch had leveled charges of “lie and slander” against Pieper after the latter repeatedly bashed the Protéstants in class and other student assemblies. Koch apologized for his charge, but was later forced to sign an “ultimatum” written by Pieper in the form of a confession.³⁶⁷ John was also numbered among those who dared to question Pieper’s public statements concerning the Protéstants. Both would eventually join the Protéstant ranks. Another incident that upset the Seminary family was the sudden death of Professor William Henkel on July 5, 1929.

The straw that finally broke the camel’s back, however, came on August 1, the publication date of Joh. Ph. Koehler’s *Beleuchtung*. Fundamentally the *Beleuchtung* was identical to his earlier *Ertrag*, but this second document was now printed and sent out to all the pastors in the Synod. As far as the content of the *Beleuchtung* goes, Koehler once again stated that he believed the Beitz Paper could be understood correctly, but that his presentation left much to be desired. “What is lacking in Beitz’s paper itself is the correct interrelation of facts, the right exegetical, historical, expositional method which he himself recommends, and hence the paper cannot pass muster as a doctrinal essay for public dissemination.”³⁶⁸

The *Gutachten* also came under fire. While Koehler conceded that “the doctrinal presentation in the *Gutachten* is incontestable and must grow deeper in us all,”³⁶⁹ he also suggested that its advocates had gone too far in passing summary judgment on Beitz and his paper without allowing the young pastor the opportunity to further explain his words to them.

If Beitz professed his agreement with the doctrinal position of the *Gutachten* [as he had to Koehler], and in doing so explained that he felt largely misunderstood, and in several instances had not intended to say what his literal wording seems to suggest, we would have to rest content with our own doubtful mistaken interpretations, instead of treating him as if he were an ignoramus, or as wanting in probity. In sum, the *Gutachten*, despite its otherwise correct concluding statement, offers no right directive on how to proceed.³⁷⁰

Most of all, Koehler felt that the *Gutachten* had not dealt with Beitz as a Christian brother in a spirit of meekness and love, putting the best construction on everything. “We cannot preserve the unity of the Spirit with the sharp logic of criticism but rather through the bond of peace; and this in turn will yield consistent logic, which gains far more than mere words, the logic of love.”³⁷¹ To that end, Koehler offered his own *modus operandi*.

³⁶⁶ Meyer journal, May 29, 1929.

³⁶⁷ Meyer journal, May 2, 1929 and following. See also Paul Hensel “Another Koch Affair,” *Faith-Life* 2, no. 17 (December 1, 1929): 4-6.

³⁶⁸ J.P. Koehler, “*Beleuchtung*,” 13.

³⁶⁹ J.P. Koehler, “*Beleuchtung*,” 18.

³⁷⁰ J.P. Koehler, “*Beleuchtung*,” 19.

³⁷¹ J.P. Koehler, “*Beleuchtung*,” 17.

How should we act in the conflict confronting us? On this topic, my opinion was, and remains: on the one hand, we may not exaggerate every derailment into false doctrine or godless conduct, and on the other, fall into the same errors we are censuring. Rather, Paul's admonition in Galatians 6:1 and Ephesians 4:3 must abide a guideline for both parties.³⁷²

He went on to explain how every point in Beitz's "Message" criticized by the *Gutachten* could be understood correctly and that, as a result, the *Gutachten* was no longer a valid critique of the paper.³⁷³ Charles Degner summarizes:

Koehler looked upon the Beitz paper as an innocent conference paper, while the authors of the *Gutachten* did not. Koehler saw it as an unclear presentation of the truth, the authors of the *Gutachten* as a writing which undermined the fundamental truths of Scripture. Koehler felt that the author's interpretation needed to be sought out, while the *Gutachten* maintained that the words of the paper should be the only basis of interpretation. Koehler emphasized that a spirit of love needed to be exercised in interpreting and dealing with the Beitz paper, while Pieper and Meyer ... felt that a spirit of truth was needed in proving the paper.³⁷⁴

Koehler summarized his view of the situation in this way:

With the *Gutachten* and its acceptance, the state of war in our Synod, which has prevailed these five years in its present pattern, has acquired a fixed character, which ought to shake us up, every one of us. And what I say here applies to all who have engaged in the controversy; all who stand within and without. It's a mess. ... The situation being what it is, all mutual trust must disappear, nor will it be recovered by lamenting and demanding, nor by subscribing to correct doctrine without inner acknowledgement of where and how each one has himself contributed to the disaster. ... I am of the opinion that we declare a moratorium on all recrimination and all celebration; that quietly, humbly, we perform the positive work committed to each one of us, and trust in the goodness of God, that in a tranquil frame of mind, it may bring us to our senses, and reconcile the divorced.³⁷⁵

But Koehler's plea once again fell on deaf ears. The mess that he described would only thicken with the publication of Pieper and Meyer's *Antwort* and Koehler's subsequent ouster. Both those actions would bring the fire to its hottest point yet.

The Synodical Destruction: The Antwort and the Dismissal of Koehler

³⁷² J.P. Koehler, "Beleuchtung," 12.

³⁷³ For a summary of Koehler's points, see Degner, 25-27.

³⁷⁴ Degner, 27.

³⁷⁵ J.P. Koehler, "Beleuchtung," 19.

J.P. Koehler published his *Beleuchtung* of the Beitz Paper on August 1, 1929. Eight days later Koehler's Seminary colleagues, August Pieper and John P. Meyer, replied with their *Antwort*. The *Antwort* was really two separate documents, the first written by Pieper, the second by Meyer. Pieper's remarks were decidedly more caustic. "Meyer's remarks really add very little to what Pieper had already said. His remarks illustrate, however, that although he did not express himself as sharply as Pieper did, he did share Pieper's feelings over against Koehler's dealings in the whole affair."³⁷⁶

Still, the *Antwort* was Pieper's baby, and he deserves most of the credit or discredit for what it says, as well as for the accusations it makes.

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. ... [Pieper] 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.³⁷⁷

Such personal attacks only supported Prot stant charges of lovelessness against Pieper and Synod. In a way it's almost amazing that Pieper never seemed to realize that his abrasive personality did much to exacerbate this whole controversy. He simply could not view things in a cool and objective manner. And yet, in love, we must also put August Pieper's words and actions in the best possible light. Certainly his behavior at times was uncalled for and abusive, but it was his love for the truth of Scripture that drove him to this at times. That does not excuse his actions, but it does help explain them somewhat. "For these men, the Prot stant controversy was more than just an insidious squabble between the 'Synod' and a handful of dissidents. For them, the truth of the Gospel was at stake, no less than it was as far as the Prot stants were concerned. ... Pieper's love for the truth of Scripture was a passionate love. And Pieper was not a man to subdue his passions in the heat of a battle."³⁷⁸

Simply stated, however, the *modus operandi* of both Pieper and a large contingent of the Prot stants, no matter how noble their intentions, was antithetical to the Wauwatosa Gospel. Koehler asserted that both sides fell into the trap of thinking that *they* had to defend the Word of God, when the truth really is that God's Word defends *us*. Scripture is a double-edged sword on *our* behalf. We are not *its* champion, it is *our* champion. That doesn't mean we should avoid standing up against error in doctrine and practice; no, we take the attitude of Paul in his letter to the Galatians: "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" (Galatians 1:9). The problem comes in, however, when we overemphasize our *logical* defense of the truths of Scripture and begin to view them as something that must conquer the mind instead of the heart. Simply put, the Holy Spirit does not work that way. He does not intellectually argue someone's mind into renouncing error and believing the gospel. "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). Instead the Spirit woos the heart with the gospel's winsome message of

³⁷⁶ Degner, 28.

³⁷⁷ Degner, 28-29.

³⁷⁸ Degner, 30.

free forgiveness from a loving God. One who proclaims that truth will certainly say, “Thus says the Lord,” and never depart from it; but, Koehler pleaded, he should then leave the rest to the quiet working of God’s powerful Spirit of truth. He alone changes hearts and minds to believe the gospel and to bear its fruits. That is what the Wauwatosa Gospel stands for, and that is what Koehler was trying to accomplish in his dealings with both sides. He was trying to get the combatants to put down their weapons of intellectual warfare and engage in a real and loving discussion concerning the truths of Scripture.

It was not to be, and Pieper’s passionate *Antwort* only added to the carnage. “In giving free rein to his passions, [Pieper’s] remarks about his colleague took on a bitter, almost vindictive nature.”³⁷⁹ Pieper blamed Koehler’s defense of the Beitz Paper on his peculiar “*geschichtliche Anschauung*” (historicist point of view). Pieper considered Koehler’s fundamental error to be his justification of Beitz’s “Message” and condemnation of the *Gutachten* on the basis of context rather than clear statements (*Wortlaut*). Even with Koehler taking this approach, however, Pieper suggested his colleague had misunderstood and misrepresented the historical context of Beitz’s paper.

With this suggestion, Pieper really put his finger on the nub of the issue. Even to that day the fundamental question had not been adequately answered for some, namely: At whom was Beitz’s paper *really* directed? Beitz declared that it was a message for him, his Synod, and for the whole Lutheran church. Pieper simply refused to take Beitz at his word. Instead he resolutely believed that the conference essay was “a well-considered, carefully premeditated **tendential tract**, often premeditated by himself and a number of his adherents, a **propaganda and agitational tract** to promote the idea ... **that the Wisconsin Synod ... is under the judgment of the hardening of hearts**. This is so apparent ... that one must blindfold one’s eyes deliberately not to see it.”³⁸⁰ According to Pieper’s reasoning, the harsh *Gutachten* was entirely appropriate, an eye for an eye.

Pieper then went on to outline Koehler’s “vacillations” toward the *Gutachten*. He argued that if Koehler had truly believed in June 1927 that the Beitz Paper was not all the *Gutachten* said it was, he would have never signed the *Gutachten* in the first place. The fact remains, he had, and Pieper was absolutely right. Despite his later protestations that his signature on the *Gutachten* “meant that it could not be published without my knowledge when I was sick abed [or] ... before I had the opportunity to meet with Beitz,”³⁸¹ Koehler’s fatal flaw was the affixing of his signature to the faculty *Gutachten*, an act that undeniably said to his colleagues and the world, “I approve of this document.” Even the Protéstants understood it that way, otherwise Beitz wouldn’t have reacted the way he did. Simply put, if Koehler didn’t approve of the *Gutachten*, he should have never signed it. If he wanted to make sure of its judgments in the light of the paper’s context, he should have spoken with Beitz *before* signing the *Gutachten*. He didn’t, and for this Koehler alone is to blame.

Koehler’s signing of the *Gutachten*, the publication of that *Gutachten*, and Koehler’s subsequent withdrawal of support was the axis upon which this controversy now turned. This turn of events robbed Koehler of some of his objectivity. As it was, he seemed to have an “historical blind-spot” when it came to the meaning of his signature on the *Gutachten*. Like it or not, his signature indicated endorsement of the *Gutachten*, and if it didn’t, he should have clearly stated otherwise in writing. This opened the door for Pieper to make accusations, and he did

³⁷⁹ Degner, 30.

³⁸⁰ Pieper, “*Antwort*,” 12. Emphasis in original.

³⁸¹ J.P. Koehler, letter to W.P. Haas (January 21, 1932), *Faith-Life* 73, no. 6 (November/December 2000): 28.

because in his opinion “this change in position by Koehler served to make the Protéstants more confident of a victory, since they could now claim a man of no less prestige than the president of the Seminary as their champion.”³⁸²

Pieper, however, went too far in his *Antwort* by insinuating “that Koehler had become something of a relativistic modern theologian.”³⁸³ He claimed, “It is true: board, the faculty, and many others who have dealt with Prof. Koehler in this affair, are unable to understand him in this vacillation ... We will have to trace it all back to his historicist point of view.”³⁸⁴ He argued that Koehler’s wavering resulted from the fact that “the historical point of view ... is uncertain, and can make no heart secure, because it rides upon purely human abstraction.”³⁸⁵ Pieper’s accusation against his longtime colleague proves that he was lacking in objectivity as well. “Professor Pieper could on occasion exaggerate. This is one of the occasions.”³⁸⁶

Unfortunately the story of the *Antwort* does not end there. Immediately before the 1929 Synod Convention, and before Koehler ever saw a copy of the *Antwort*, he received a letter on August 13 from the secretary of the Seminary Board:

It is a burdensome duty for me to inform you of the resolution which the Board passed on August 13, after it had read your paper and the *Antwort* of the Professors Pieper and Meyer.

“Without reservation, we take our stand in all its parts and points, to the *Antwort* writing of the Professors Pieper and Meyer as an answer to Prof. Koehler’s *Die Beitzsche Schrift und das Gutachten beleuchtet* (‘The Beitz Paper and the Gutachten Illumined’). And on the basis thereof we conclude that Prof. Koehler can no longer work at the Seminary with blessing.”³⁸⁷

On August 15, 1929, Koehler replied with a letter to the Synod convened at Saron, Milwaukee:

Yesterday morning the following letter was given to me by the Secretary of the Seminary Board without further explanation.

Of what nature the *Antwort* of the two professors might be, I have not the slightest idea. Therefore, the line of reasoning leaves me in the dark altogether as to why the resolution was passed at all, and above all why at this late hour instead of biding the decision of synod on the matter.

The situation is further aggravated by vague rumors seeping into synod, rumors which always accompany a procedure of this nature and serve but one purpose, to distort the facts, prejudice the minds, and make a gazing stock of the victim.

³⁸² Degner, 31.

³⁸³ Jordahl, xxix.

³⁸⁴ Pieper, “*Antwort*,” 17.

³⁸⁵ Pieper, “*Antwort*,” 17.

³⁸⁶ Fredrich, “Parting,” 8.

³⁸⁷ The Seminary Board of Control, letter to J.P. Koehler (August 13, 1929), *Faith-Life* 54, no. 5 (September/October 1981): 23.

Both of which oppress me, so that I cannot participate in the synodical discussions, which normally would be my privilege. At the same time I desire herewith to call synod's attention to a matter which every delegate had a right to know before it is consigned to committee.³⁸⁸

The 1929 Convention acted on Koehler's appeal and finally decided that the Seminary Board had acted too hastily. The convention appointed a committee of five men to assist the old and new Seminary Board to hash out the difficulties that had arisen. The committee found "beyond a doubt that the Seminary Board, in its judgment on Prof. Koehler's further activity at the seminary, was led by reasons other than those clearly stated in the document handed to the Synod."³⁸⁹ They demanded that the Board communicate with Koehler and clear up the misunderstanding during the upcoming school year. Koehler was given a leave of absence from his Seminary duties, presumably to help facilitate discussion. He used the time to organize the synodical archives and write his Synod history.

The negotiations, however, went nowhere. Meyer reported an August 1929 visit to Koehler's home, where the elder professor charged his opposition with "bull-dozing."³⁹⁰ "Professor Koehler himself insisted that there could be no useful dealings unless there would be a review of the acceptance of the *Antwort*, of the resolution that he could no longer teach and of the subscription to the *Gutachten*. It is obvious that there could be no meeting of the minds."³⁹¹

To the end Koehler attempted to get a handle on the objective truths of the situation, especially when it came to his relationship with Pieper. This search led him once again to the tenets of the Wauwatosa Gospel, one of which was self-criticism. He wrote to his young friend, Kurt Zorn:

As an old man and with my mannerisms (*meiner Art*), I must seem rather backward, so that it would not seem to be too easy for a young man to associate with me, although during the past few years my association has been limited almost exclusively to younger men, and I find a greater satisfaction with such association than I did previously with men of my own age. This idea, however, could be rooted in a big dose of egotism and self-interest, because I am not aware to what extent my young friends must put up with my weakness. And when the young show due respect for the old man, which his contemporaries do not, that butters up the Old Man, and so he too shows greater consideration for the young, something he wouldn't think of with those his own age. And that calls itself then Christian love and all manner of wisdom and virtue. Na, I find myself getting into the psychology of which Pieper accuses me in the *Antwort*.³⁹²

Koehler, though, could never quite put hard feelings aside. As the school year went on, Koehler's stance became harder and harder. Regrettably, more dogmatic, as well. Just before his final ouster he wrote to Zorn:

³⁸⁸ John Philipp Koehler, letter to the Wisconsin Synod Convention of 1929 (August 15, 1929), quoted by Jordahl, xxix.

³⁸⁹ 1929 Proceedings, quoted by Jeske, 68.

³⁹⁰ Meyer journal, August 23, 1929.

³⁹¹ Fredrich, "Parting," 6.

³⁹² John Philipp Koehler, letter to Kurt Zorn (November 21, 1929), *Faith-Life* 54, no. 5 (September/October 1981): 22.

I demand a recall of the *Gutachten* and the suspensions, or at least that I be granted a free testimony against it in the Synod, and then self-evidently also my association with the Protéstants. And this the ‘dogmaticians’ can’t get down. ... I will demand of them that they accept my thorough proof of the injustice of the *Gutachten*. If they desert me or let me sit, then my proof, confutation, will come in *Faith-Life*. Then the lord and masters will have to deal with me according to their recipe and put me out. Then at least the dreaded calm will be over; but then most likely the storm will break.³⁹³

Finally, on May 21, 1930, John Philipp Koehler was officially relieved of his duties at the Seminary, and his call was terminated. In September of that same year he moved to Neillsville, Wisconsin, where he lived out the remainder of his years. In 1933 the Synod Convention suspended Koehler from fellowship for his ties to the Protéstant Conference. He died in Neillsville on September 30, 1951, at the age of 92.

Chapter Six – Sifting Through the Rubble (1930-1958)

One person profoundly affected by John Philipp Koehler’s ouster from the Seminary and Synod was Pastor E. Arnold Sitz. Synod’s action against Koehler must have had Sitz questioning his future in the Wisconsin Synod since he held his former professor in such high esteem. As a seminarian, Sitz had the opportunity to hear Koehler give a speech at a State Teacher’s conference. Sitz’s adulation is hard to miss in his assessment of the Wauwatosa professor:

The speech was a masterpiece in thought and form. I honestly believe him the greatest man of the times, not to say since Luther: why? because he is the only man of any outward importance who has [been] granted thought of the Gospel as he, and who has such a knowledge and insight into history as well as being a born artist in all lines of *Kunst* [art]: painting, music, literature. And he criticizes these things in the only true light, the light of the Gospel, the Gospel of which he has his understanding, not from church fathers nor dogmaticians, but from the Gospel itself, from Christ and Paul.³⁹⁴

Sitz’s relationship with Koehler would only be cemented when the former married the latter’s daughter, Frieda, on February 6, 1925. At first Koehler seemed to be somewhat skeptical of Sitz as a prospective son-in-law. “When Sitz presented himself to Prof. J.P. Koehler, to ask for the hand of Koehler’s daughter, his teacher looked at him quizzically and observed, ‘*Ja, Sitz, Sie sind die Schalfmuetze*. Yes, Sitz, you are a sleepy-head.’ While granting the request, Koehler took a dim view of Sitz’s prospects. Sitz had often slept in class and seemed adrift.”³⁹⁵ But as time went on, Koehler began to appreciate his former student more and more. Though separated by 2000 miles, Koehler and Sitz were very much neighbors in their witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel. In addition to his close relationship with Koehler, one must also bear in mind that Sitz

³⁹³ John Philipp Koehler, letter to Kurt Zorn, (May 8, 1930), *Faith-Life* 54, no. 1 (January/February 1981): 23-24.

³⁹⁴ Sitz journal, November 9, 1916.

³⁹⁵ Philemon Hensel, “In memoriam E. Arnold Sitz,” *Faith Life* 63, no. 1 (January/February 1990): 36.

was very close to a good number of the Protéstants. Pressure from them to secede from Synod was enormous.

So how did Sitz remain in the Wisconsin Synod? There were probably two contributing factors. First, Sitz never intended to get himself suspended. He was not interested in self-afflicted martyrdom; he was interested in the truth. That doesn't mean, however, that his witness was not a strong one. It was. But Sitz witnessed in a way that kept most from misreading his intentions. His arguments were more objective than those who had been closer to the fire. As a witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel, Sitz had taken the time to investigate everything properly and only then did he draw his conclusions. By doing his homework, Sitz was able to stay above the fray and witness to the truth more impersonally. Obviously, his being in Arizona helped him remain more objective, but geography was not the sole factor. Others from Arizona had been swept up in the Protéstant tide and gotten themselves suspended from Synod.³⁹⁶

The second factor that helped Sitz remain in the Synod was that people were tired of the "bloodshed" by the time his pen started to rumble. There were others besides Sitz who began to see the many injustices in the Synod's dealings with the Protéstants and Koehler especially. Had Synod suspended everyone who had any Protéstant sympathies after 1929, the pastorate would have soon been gutted. By 1930 Synod officials were interested in having peace, even if a superficial one. Sitz too was interested in peace, but he wanted a God-pleasing peace based on repentance and forgiveness. The battle between Synod and Sitz was one of expediency versus truth. When expediency won out, true peace was never established.

The Peace Committee: Active Inaction

At the 20th Convention of Joint Synod in 1929 the Synod made several resolutions concerning further dealings with the Protéstants. The following were adopted:

That we: 1) acknowledge that this strife is a sign that we lack in spiritual perception and brotherly love, and therefore [it is] a call to repentance; 2) hold the Beitz-Paper, because of its unclarity and confusion and its extreme exaggerations, must be rejected as misleading, injurious, and damaging; but a paper that can only be withdrawn by its author; 3) consider the *Gutachten* and all subsequent papers as non-existent as soon as the Beitz-Paper is withdrawn; 4) express our confidence that the District has dealt according to the best knowledge and according to conscience and will respect the suspensions, unless the District can be proved wrong; 5) ask Synod to elect a Peace Committee; 6) expect all parties to avoid anything that can lead to offense or provocation and to work for peace; 7) avoid writing further papers on this matter. ...³⁹⁷

The Peace Committee (*Verständigungskomitee*) would consist of eight members. Among them were the president of the Nebraska District, Pastor J. Witt (chairman), and Pastor Immanuel Frey, a confidant of both Beitz and Sitz. Frey would write of his appointment: "Anyone who should imagine that I consider myself competent to serve on the committee is very much

³⁹⁶ Arizona Pastors Albert Meier, Alexander Hillmer and Arthur Arndt had all resigned in 1929 and were subsequently suspended.

³⁹⁷ Excerpts from District Minutes and Proceedings, Synodical Proceedings, and Other Materials Pertaining to the Protéstant Controversy compiled by Pastor Harold Wicke.

mistaken. The fact is that I feel so incompetent that I would gladly resign from it if I could do so without doing violence to my conscience. My only consolation is that God knows how to work through weaker vessels.”³⁹⁸ Presumably, other members of the Peace Committee felt the same way. In the last five years peace had been a very rare commodity. Now they were entrusted with the task of restoring it once again.

Some in Synod expressed guarded optimism. E.E. Guenther wrote to Sitz, “A committee of men who had thus far been little or not all *berührt* [touched] by the Protéstants was appointed to whom any of the Protéstants might appeal for a review of their case if they wished. They made a good selection of young fellows, e.g. Frey, and I would just wish that the entire P. [sic] group would turn to them.”³⁹⁹ The Protéstants, however, looked upon the committee with raised eyebrows. Pastor Martin Zimmermann expressed his concerns.

Altho [sic] Joint Synod upheld the suspensions, yet, by appointing a committee of eight men, it expressed its desire and willingness to hear any who felt that injustice had been done. Fair enough! Would Joint Synod, however, acknowledge a committed injustice, if confronted with the proof, or was this “open door” only another show of fairness to quiet the troubled consciences of many within its own ranks?⁴⁰⁰

Zimmermann was one Protéstant who was willing to deal with the Peace Committee. On November 20, 1929, he sent a letter to the committee requesting a review of his case.

In answer to Synod’s earnest prayer and hope that the breach may be healed, I herewith formally appeal to the Committee of Eight, appointed by the Synod for a aforesaid reason, to honestly and open-heartedly hear and investigate my conscientious grievances against the Wisconsin Synod. May the Spirit of Christ enlighten us to see the real cause of this breach and instill us with divine courage to uncover such cause truthfully and fearlessly so that His name may indeed be glorified, the truth be triumphant and troubled souls again be brought to peace.⁴⁰¹

The committee granted his request for a hearing, and on January 28, 1930, the young Burr Oak pastor appeared before the tribunal. It didn’t go well from the start. Zimmermann reported:

My father-in-law had come with me and also Pastor G.A. Zeisler, whom I had asked to be my witness. Having been branded by the Wisconsin Synod as a heretic, I felt the need of a witness, who might verify my own words and the words of the committee men, if occasion required it. ... Hereupon I was told that I showed distrust and that every member of the Committee was entirely impartial. After an hour’s argument I consented to deal with the committee without a witness, not because their demand was justified, but because I saw no other way

³⁹⁸ Immanuel Frey, letter to W.P. Hass, November 27, 1929.

³⁹⁹ E.E. Guenther, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, October 3, 1929.

⁴⁰⁰ Martin Zimmermann, “Declaration of Independence,” *Faith-Life* 3, nos. 5/6 supplement (March 1930): 10.

⁴⁰¹ Martin Zimmermann, letter to Peace Committee (November 20, 1929), *Faith-Life* 3, nos. 5/6 supplement (March 1930): 10.

open to be able to present my grievances to this 'General Peace Committee'. Thus from the very outset I was denied a right which any body of fair-minded men of the world would readily grant.⁴⁰²

This first obstacle of mutual suspicion was further augmented when Pastor A. Westendorf, a member of the committee, began the hearing by setting some ground rules and asking some pedantic questions. "He ... turned to me and said: 'Rev. Zimmermann, I therefore now ask you, do you believe in Christ and in the Holy Trinity?' I answered that such a question from him was an insult. He demanded of me that I have full confidence in the Committee, and yet he ventured to distrust me to such an extent as to question my sincerity in continuing the ministry without faith in Christ and in the Holy Trinity."⁴⁰³ Finally, after two hours of disagreement, Zimmermann was allowed to place his grievances before the committee in the form of a twenty-three page paper. The committee wanted to avoid getting into great detail, insisting that their job was to simply get clear on the fundamentals and whether they agreed on doctrine or not. Zimmermann recalled, "I told them that we agreed in doctrine and insisted that this was not a matter of doctrine, but a matter of applying and living the correct doctrine, as I had carried out in my paper. I asked the committee to give me its stand on the *Gutachten*, on the *Beleuchtung*, and Prof. Pieper's *Antwort*, on the *Wauwatosa Gospel*. I was given no answer."⁴⁰⁴

Just then Pastor J. Gauss, president of the Michigan District and a member of the committee, walked in. Zimmermann found him to be abrupt and condescending.

Turning to me, he asked: Where are you from? Are you suspended? What's your appeal? I told him to know, he must hear it, or read it. And when I handed it to him and he saw that it covered twenty-three pages, he laid it aside and said: Well, I know what's in it. I insisted he did not know and could not know. He answered: The Koehler case. No! The Sauer case. No! The Hass case. No! I insisted: So you don't know what's in it. He asked: Well, what's in it? He was told: You must read it! Then the secretary gave him a few points he had jotted down, and Pres. Gauss answered: Well, it's the same thing. It's time for adjournment; my supper is waiting for me; we can meet again after supper.⁴⁰⁵

Although Zimmermann was not excited about the prospect of dealing with such a man, he consented to return after supper. Gauss opened the evening session by addressing Zimmermann and the committee for an hour. He stated that at the 1929 convention, Joint Synod had declared that the Beitz Paper was unclear and that the *Gutachten* should not be raised to confessional status. Gauss insisted that "the resolution of the West Wisconsin District in regard to severing relations with Synod because of adherence to the Beitz paper therefore no longer existed for the Joint Synod and for the General Peace Committee."⁴⁰⁶ Gauss gave the example of a Michigan pastor who had told him that he could not accept the *Gutachten* and instead agreed with the Beitz Paper. "Hereupon Pres. Gauss told him that he was privileged to do so without being in danger of suspension, because neither of the two papers were confessional writings."⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰² Zimmermann, "Declaration of Independence," 10.

⁴⁰³ Zimmermann, "Declaration of Independence," 10.

⁴⁰⁴ Zimmermann, "Declaration of Independence," 10.

⁴⁰⁵ Zimmermann, "Declaration of Independence," 11.

⁴⁰⁶ Zimmermann, "Declaration of Independence," 11.

⁴⁰⁷ Zimmermann, "Declaration of Independence," 11.

When asked why the Protéstants were then under suspension, Gauss answered that they were not suspended because of their refusal to accept the *Gutachten* or their adherence to the Beitz paper, but for some other reason. When Zimmermann asked Gauss what other reason that might be, he confessed he did not know, but assumed that they had been suspended because of their protest in the Fort Atkinson case. “When I informed him that I had withdrawn my protest in the Fort case,” Zimmermann wrote, “he was at a loss to explain my suspension and insisted that we call Pres. Thurow, Nommensen, and Kuhlow for the next morning’s session, to explain my suspension and the suspension resolution of the West Wisconsin District.”⁴⁰⁸

Zimmermann responded to this suggestion by reading Gauss the district resolution concerning his suspension. “I insisted that the meaning of this resolution of the West Wisconsin District was fully and adequately explained by the publication of our suspensions, that in the minds of all men in Synod the fact was established that we were ousted as heretics because of our adherence to the Beitz paper.”⁴⁰⁹ Furthermore, Zimmermann referred the committee to Thurow’s *Praesidial-Bericht* (Presidential Report) of 1928 where Thurow “expressly stated that we were suspended because of our adherence to the Beitz paper and are to be regarded by Christians everywhere as ‘fornicators, idolaters, drunkards and extortioners, with whom no Christian should even eat.’”⁴¹⁰

At this Gauss insisted that the Western Wisconsin District officials be called in to explain the resolutions because of the obvious confusion as to what they really said. Another member of the committee, Dr. Wentz, “insisted that these documents and resolutions must be backed or retracted.”⁴¹¹ Zimmermann, however, refused to deal with his former overseers. “I had no desire and no time to enter upon such a farce; if these documents and resolutions, published by Synod itself, were not acceptable to the committee as a basis of dealing, then all further discussions were fruitless.”⁴¹²

One must be a little saddened and surprised at Zimmermann’s reaction. From reading his account, it seems as if the Peace Committee was ready to conclude that the district resolutions were unclear, if not unjust. They wanted to call in the officials to give an answer to Zimmermann’s charges. But Zimmermann didn’t read the situation that way. He insisted that the Peace Committee itself should rescind the resolutions. But the committee had no authority to do so; the only body with that authority was the Western Wisconsin District. But Zimmermann understood the committee’s hesitancy as an unwillingness to hear his appeal at all. He concluded that “‘The General Peace Committee’, led by Pres. Gauss, was determined to have peace at the expense of truth and common fairness, to say the least. ... Love toward the West Wisconsin District merely demands of them to uphold the suspension.”⁴¹³

The next day Zimmermann placed another impossible demand at the feet of the Peace Committee. He agreed to meet with the Western Wisconsin District officials and Professor Pieper on one condition: “that the Committee permit me to call in my witnesses and place us on the same basis with our opponents by lifting the suspensions.”⁴¹⁴ Zimmermann planned to call in a number of Protéstants to serve as his witnesses, including Beitz and Oswald Hensel. Again, the Peace Committee was in no position to lift suspensions levied by another body. Only the district

⁴⁰⁸ Zimmermann, “Declaration of Independence,” 11.

⁴⁰⁹ Zimmermann, “Declaration of Independence,” 11.

⁴¹⁰ Zimmermann, “Declaration of Independence,” 11.

⁴¹¹ Zimmermann, “Declaration of Independence,” 11.

⁴¹² Zimmermann, “Declaration of Independence,” 11.

⁴¹³ Zimmermann, “Declaration of Independence,” 11-12.

⁴¹⁴ Zimmermann, “Declaration of Independence,” 12.

could do that. With his demands Martin Zimmermann, who was usually a fine witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel, stumbled into the domain of legalism. He claimed that he was interested in the truth and in real peace. If that was the case, he should have gladly accepted the opportunity to once more witness to the truth in front of the district officials and August Pieper even if he thought the playing field was unfair. Instead he insisted on having things his way, and he repudiated the Wauwatosa Gospel.

Immanuel Frey's view of the meeting runs entirely contrary to Zimmermann's. In a letter to Pastor Henry Albrecht defending the Peace Committee, Frey wrote:

Zimmermann sums up the whole meeting in the words, "The General Peace Com. was determined to have peace at the expense of truth and common fairness, to say the least." ... Zimmermann's greatest mistake is that, contrary to Luther, he puts the worst construction on everything. He seems to have regarded everything with suspicion, and consequently could see nothing but knavery. He left out everything that did not fit into the theme quoted above.⁴¹⁵

Frey goes on to explain that the committee had decided to have an executive session, barring all outsiders from the hearing "to give Zim. a chance to present his matters without outsiders opposed to him butting in. One of their chief complaints has always been that because of interference they had never had fair play. I wanted him to have his say without any interruption or protest from others. ... The idea that he would bring a witness never entered my mind. Keep that in mind."⁴¹⁶ Frey goes on to say that he "personally favored letting [the witnesses] remain, because I saw Zim. was very touchy and very suspicious. I thought he might then have more confidence in us, but ... I do not blame the committee for upholding the decision. It may have been a mistake of the head but not of the heart. It was not the motives that were wrong, as he tries to make believe."⁴¹⁷

Barring Zimmermann's witnesses, though, was the fatal mistake in Frey's eyes because it "made [Zimmermann] see all subsequent things all wrong." Frey went on to disavow Westendorf's gaffe – "There is no doubt that Westendorf made a mistake, a blunder"⁴¹⁸ – and suggested that Zimmermann had misrepresented Gauss: "... not once did a single member of the Com. fly off the handle or say any unpleasant word to him, while he did so frequently."⁴¹⁹ And then he states the obvious: "Anyone must admit that the Com. did not have the power first to lift the suspensions, as he demanded."⁴²⁰ Finally, Frey concludes:

If any one feels that he can look into my heart and say that I was determined to have peace at the cost of truth and common fairness, if anyone thinks that I am that kind of fellow, that is his responsibility, for which he will have to answer to the Lord. I could also charge Zim. with unclean motives with just as much cause as he accuses our motives, but I don't pretend to be God who searches the hearts.

⁴¹⁵ Immanuel Frey, letter to Henry Albrecht, March 31, 1930.

⁴¹⁶ Immanuel Frey, letter to Henry Albrecht, March 31, 1930.

⁴¹⁷ Immanuel Frey, letter to Henry Albrecht, March 31, 1930.

⁴¹⁸ Immanuel Frey, letter to Henry Albrecht, March 31, 1930.

⁴¹⁹ Immanuel Frey, letter to Henry Albrecht, March 31, 1930.

⁴²⁰ Immanuel Frey, letter to Henry Albrecht, March 31, 1930.

... I confess that my conscience is far more at ease in this whole Prot stant affair than it has ever been before. I tried my best.⁴²¹

On May 22, 1930, Frey sent the same letter to his old friend Tois. Sitz would answer in no uncertain terms.

I thank you for the prompt answer. When I say that it confirms me in my conviction I have entertained of you that you mean well, and that I did not doubt this at any time, I hope I shall take away any suspicion you may have of my stand. On the other hand, I must also say that I find it a lame excuse, Friggie. Fellows like you and me, who have been away from the vortex of synodical affairs, only begin to grasp this situation after it is too late and the blunders have been made. I saw that at Synod last summer. The time has long been here when good intentions only permit the boat to drift toward the rocks; it takes energetic and fearless speaking up.

You do not seem to realize it, but your letter shows that you are no longer impartial. You do not grant Zim the benefit of many doubts; *in fine* [in the end], you do not put the best construction on everything that he said and did either. Nowhere does he say that the meeting was a “frame-up”; nor does he say the Committee was unscrupulous. But he does say that they were neither competent nor careful to consider the ordinary rules of procedure in the case. He was the appellant. It is the business of any court or jury to first consider the complaint. Instead of welcoming it and going in upon it, you went to work after the order of the dogmatist: debated the rules of procedure. Instead of permitting the course of events to prove the identity of doctrine that Zim asserted and you admit, you forced that into the foreground as the real issue. That appears clearly from both Zim’s and your report. *Da hilft kein* good intentions *wider* [sic] [Good intentions don’t do any good].

You attempt to roll the responsibility for Westie’s blunder upon Westie. *Das geht nicht* [That doesn’t fly]. The Committee collectively and individually are [sic] responsible for the blunder, unless they at once disavowed it. To remain silent is to acquiesce. Then also would have been the time, nay before that, to have said candidly that you did not think there was any difference of doctrine. That would have been the fair thing over against Zim and would have put him at ease. To have left that unsaid is to have contributed toward the misunderstanding and to have paved the way for Zim to resent, as I should have also done, the question of Westie. ...

You were holden, since he was the appellant, and the “under-dog”, to consider his appeal and that at once. It was gross incompetence not at once to go into the history of the cases and to consider the documents. Then refusal or neglect to discuss the *Gutachten*, *Beleuchtung*, and the *Antwort*. If one looks at this, one cannot but conclude – and that is not saying a thing about the motives of any

⁴²¹ Immanuel Frey, letter to Henry Albrecht, March 31, 1930.

committee member – the Committee was seeking to maintain peace at the expense of fairness. In all Synod there seems to be the spirit: set up a certain schedule, a certain scheme of procedure; and on this wooden dogmatism every effort toward an understanding flounders; instead of going into *medias res* [the middle of the thing], and truthfully saying: If this be true, why then, etc. ...

And that is one of the reasons why I am being converted from the most acrid critic of the Protéstant cause to one of its staunchest friends. As days go by I am convinced more and more that they have the only worthwhile ideas in our circles, and that the Wisconsin Synod dogmatism is a worse bane than that of Missouri ever was, simply because it is opposed to a better Gospel than the Missouri Synod ever had. ...

It is true that one must take the Protéstants' statements quite often with a grain of salt. But it seems necessary to take the pronouncements of the synodical party with a carload of "best constructions". And worse still, the Synodicals – as I saw it on the part of the West Wis. former and present officials – bring along a trainload of better construction and reconstruction and continually construct and revise their documents and yet let them stand in the original form to suit their own fancy and to meet every exigency ...

... the fact of the matter is that because of the dogmatic atmosphere truth and common fairness came short in your dealing with Zim. The general conception in Synod seems to be that the Committee just bungled and left the matter much worse than it found it. ...

Once more my friendly plea to you, Immanuel, is: resign from the Committee and declare candidly that you are sorry to have contributed to its failures and that you consider yourself no longer competent to sit on it further. As I said in my former letter: you are a man for the quiet of study, for quiet, painstaking work in the congregation; but it takes a quick man, one blessed with much *Menschenkenntnis* [knowledge of human nature] and perspicacity of the most acute kind, coupled with the facility of reducing to principles, one able to meet every turn of a situation at once and to open his mouth accordingly, and withal he must in our time and our circles not be given to any degree of *Vertrauensdusel* [simply trusting for the sake of trust] – *Vertrauen, ja; aber keinen Dusel dabei* [He should certainly trust, but wisely, not just for trust's sake] – and finally, he must be informed on every angle of the matter in hand. *Aber das gibt's nicht* [But that's rare]. So we need expect nothing other than that the fight will have to go on; and the end will be financial bankruptcy of Synod and a crumbling of the synodical structure. ...

I suppose you will by this time be heartily weary of the pop bottles and seat cushions I have been pegging at you from the bleachers; and in your ears it sounds like nothing but "Kill the umpire!" Not so. And I do trust that this will not be dynamite to our friendship. I wish I could talk to you about these matters. Bill

and I broke up over the deal. Several attempts to patch up our former *Verhältnis* [relationship] have proved abortive. I was very severe with Bill in the beginning. The *Gutachten* was soft in spots compared to my critique of Bill's paper. But I also misunderstood him. I still stand however to the belief that Bill should have corrected his paper, given more diligence to its concoction. But Bill's paper is Bill.

Well I shall let this suffice. I am not in a mood to write any gossip, especially since the news of J.P.'s ouster just comes to hand. And the end is not yet.⁴²²

Frey, though, would not resign from the Peace Committee, serving until the committee was disbanded in 1933. In the four years of its existence, the Peace Committee made a valiant effort but did not accomplish much. They heard several cases besides Zimmermann's, but in every instance they were not able to reconcile the synodicals with the Protéstants. Their work was bogged down with impossible demands, on the one hand, and impossible personalities, on the other.

Their first report to Joint Synod came at the 1931 convention. In that report the committee disclosed their findings in the Fort Atkinson Case, on the Beitz Paper, and the *Gutachten*. In the Fort Atkinson Case the committee stated that the congregation alone had the right to exercise church discipline against the offending teachers. They also stated that after "the case in the congregation was settled ... the dissatisfied could not be denied the right to protest against the end result ... [and that neither] the officers of the W.W.D. ... on the one hand, nor Pastor O. Hensel and other advisors of the teachers were justified to take the case out of the hands of the congregation until Matt. 18 had been carried out."⁴²³ The committee also asserted that "it would not have dared come to the suspension of the teachers in the manner [the officials] did."⁴²⁴ In conclusion, the following judgment about the entire Fort Atkinson affair.

The committee is of the sure opinion that the entire case on the part of all participants violated a clear Word of Scripture, after the case was taken out of the hands of the congregation and its pastor. And who would disagree that because of this the terrible confusion and all sorts of hard feelings in all phases of the case resulted. The case is not to this day settled with all clarity and above all doubt. As far as it is known, the ladies have not repented and inspite [sic] of their impenitence have not been positively excommunicated from the church.

As the Committee presents its decisions it does not in any way want to judge or condemn the brethren of the W.W.D. nor anyone in a loveless manner, much less accuse anyone of a willful sin. We are convinced that all participants dealt in good faith who had a duty to perform. The fact, however, that all acted in good faith and with the best of intentions, dare not keep us from correcting, as much as possible, a wrong committed in haste and ignorance. To do such a thing is a part of true repentance. It is also important for this reason to acknowledge error in

⁴²² E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, May 27, 1930.

⁴²³ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴²⁴ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

order to keep doctrine and practice in this matter clear among us and guard others from a similar mistake.⁴²⁵

In regard to the Beitz Paper the committee was of the opinion that the paper must be rejected “because of its unclarity and confusion in regard to its contained teachings and because of its extreme exaggerations in describing presumed and real wrongs in the church.”⁴²⁶ However, they also stated that this unclarity resulted not from doctrinal error but from the fact that Beitz presented Scriptural teachings “in such a manner of which we in the Lutheran Church are not accustomed and that because of this the practical application of its teachings ... cannot be allowed.”⁴²⁷ Since in their opinion there was no doctrinal error, the committee asserted that they did consider it “justified to revoke someone’s church fellowship and brotherhood because he does not see in Beitz’s paper any incorrect interpretations and applications.”⁴²⁸ However, the committee members also reprimanded Beitz for “his stubborn refusal to heed the plea to change the wording of his paper so that the Scriptural teachings are clear although such requests were made by various people.”⁴²⁹ For this reason the committee concluded that Beitz “must to a great extent bear the responsibility and the continuance of the evil consequences of the fight.”⁴³⁰

About the *Gutachten* the Peace Committee simply said that “its positive doctrines are Scriptural and its teachings instructive”⁴³¹ but that “we dare not operate with the *Gutachten* as a confessional writing in church discipline”⁴³² and that in its dissemination “greater care should have been exercised.”⁴³³

The discussion by Synod concerning the Peace Committee’s report was heated. Thurow felt that he was entitled to a copy of the report since his actions were brought into question. Others insisted that if Thurow received a copy of the report then the entire Synod should receive one as well. This argument lasted until someone reminded both parties that Synod had declared in 1929 that no more articles should be published on the controversy.

The question was then raised whether or not the committee had overstepped its bounds by judging the actions of the Western Wisconsin District officials. A Prot stant observer comments, “Two years previously Synod appoints a committee for ‘information, investigation, or settlement of individual cases’. Two years later they can afford to spend several precious hours wrangling because that committee made an attempt to inform, investigate, and settle.”⁴³⁴

Most of all, this battle was about the validity of the Western Wisconsin District’s suspension resolutions. “The Committee contended that these resolutions were a monstrosity in the Lutheran church. And now imagine: These men of the W.W.D., Pieper with them, who rode the *Wortlaut* so hard when it served their purpose, now attempted to prove that their resolutions are not to be understood as they stand.”⁴³⁵ That same Prot stant observer exclaimed, “Isn’t it too bad that they forgot to put quotation marks around their resolutions!”⁴³⁶

⁴²⁵ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴²⁶ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴²⁷ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴²⁸ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴²⁹ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴³⁰ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴³¹ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴³² Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴³³ Peace Committee Report, 1931 Synod Convention.

⁴³⁴ G.A. Ziesler, “Another Moratorium,” *Faith-Life* 4, no. 9 (September 1931): 14.

⁴³⁵ Ziesler, “Another Moratorium,” 14.

⁴³⁶ Ziesler, “Another Moratorium,” 14.

In the end only a portion of the Peace Committee's report was accepted by Synod. The members of the committee suggested resignation on their part, since it was their opinion "that the Synod was not as anxious to seek peace as [they] had presumed and that Synod itself had erred when two years previously it had sanctioned the dealing of the WWD. These two matters were stricken and tabled, respectively."⁴³⁷ The latter was never reopened. Instead the committee was ordered to present its findings to the Western Wisconsin District at its 1932 district convention. At that convention, held in LaCrosse, District President William Nommensen asserted, "We lament the fact and wish to bring it to the attention of the General Synod that the Peace Committee in its report to the General Synod has condemned actions of the District and its officials before discussing the matters with them. We hope this will be avoided in the future."⁴³⁸ The irony in this statement is, of course, the fact that the Protéstants had lamented the same thing several years before. The Western Wisconsin District was getting a taste of its own medicine.

Despite further discussions, the Peace Committee continued to be at loggerheads with the Western Wisconsin District. The 1932 district convention resolved:

Because of differences obtaining on principles and their application as pertaining to the Beitz paper, in as much as the "Peace Committee" has called some actions and resolutions of our District unlutheran [sic] and a monstrosity which cannot be tolerated within the Lutheran Church, the members of this District, however, being persuaded that the principles of said "Peace Committee" are untenable, this District petitions the President of Joint Synod, G.E. Bergemann, to appoint a committee to look into these differences and principles before the next General Synod and to send a statement of the findings of said committee to the District and finally have them read to the General Body.⁴³⁹

The entire matter was sadly put to rest at the 1933 Synod Convention. Getting nowhere with the Western Wisconsin District, the Peace Committee finally requested to be relieved of its duty. It was dismissed with thanks for its labors. In its final statement the committee struck the nub of the issue: "Your committee informs the Synod that both the Watertown resolutions [of 1927] and the disciplinary Ft. Atkinson cases can no longer be accepted and recognized by the committee on the basis of its own dealings in the matter."⁴⁴⁰ That same convention finally resolved "that it be the sentiment and understanding of this body that the WWD of its own free will and accord reconsider the Watertown Resolutions and the suspensions in the Fort Atkinson cases."⁴⁴¹ After four long years of struggling, the Synod was still no closer to peace. It was now left up to individual synodicals and Protéstants to secure a God-pleasing peace, a peace that could not be brought about by wrangling and arguing. God-pleasing peace could only be brought about by witnessing to the truth, by witnessing to the Wauwatosa Gospel.

⁴³⁷ Excerpts from District Minutes and Proceedings, Synodical Proceedings, and Other Materials Pertaining to the Protéstant Controversy compiled by Pastor Harold Wicke.

⁴³⁸ Excerpts from District Minutes and Proceedings, Synodical Proceedings, and Other Materials Pertaining to the Protéstant Controversy compiled by Pastor Harold Wicke.

⁴³⁹ Excerpts from District Minutes and Proceedings, Synodical Proceedings, and Other Materials Pertaining to the Protéstant Controversy compiled by Pastor Harold Wicke.

⁴⁴⁰ Excerpts from District Minutes and Proceedings, Synodical Proceedings, and Other Materials Pertaining to the Protéstant Controversy compiled by Pastor Harold Wicke.

⁴⁴¹ Excerpts from District Minutes and Proceedings, Synodical Proceedings, and Other Materials Pertaining to the Protéstant Controversy compiled by Pastor Harold Wicke.

The Sitz Witness: Walking the Tightrope

One man who gave his witness to both sides was E. Arnold Sitz. From the beginning Sitz had been walking the tightrope between the Protéstants and synodicals. Although at times he seemed to lean from side to side, for the most part he succeeded in keeping his balance. His position, however, was not popular, as his father-in-law had found out. But in the Protéstant Controversy Sitz's position was the only one that would or could ultimately procure true peace. He decided early on that it wouldn't do him or Synod any good if he got himself suspended. Rather he thought it crucial to remain in Synod so that his witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel might be more readily heard. His intuition served him well. Though Sitz retired in 1972 and died in 1989, his witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel is still sounding today through the mouths and pens of others. Had Sitz left the Synod with the Protéstants and taken his witness with him one can only imagine what the consequences to the Wisconsin Synod might have been.

Already by 1929 Sitz had made his position thoroughly clear. He did not appreciate the treatment that Beitz and the other Protéstants were receiving, but neither did he think the Protéstants completely blameless. He was of the opinion that the Protéstants' troubles had been self-inflicted to a great extent. For that reason alone Sitz could not stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them, something the Protéstants resented plenty.

In June of 1929, Pastor Paul Hensel, a leading Protéstant, wrote Sitz, asking him to preach for his church's mission festival in Manitowoc, Wisconsin. After returning from an Arizona pastoral conference at which the Protéstant issue was discussed Sitz gave his answer in a letter dated June 20, 1929:

There are several reasons, Paul, why I could not promise to do so ... 1. I cannot agree with Beitz's paper, not even in the translation you made, which, to my mind, is the sharpest criticism it has yet received. My main point of difference is the unclear approach on Bill's part to defining repentance. While your translation clears up many of the obscure portions by paraphrasing, it failed to clarify this part. To preach for you in the circumstances would be generally looked upon as an endorsement of Beitz's paper and your translation. 2. I do not wish to bar my way to witness within Synod. Judging by past experience, you know what would happen to Pastor [Francis] Uplegger and me, if we were to accept your invitation: our testimony within Synod would be silenced. We learned at this conference how great an opportunity this is. Prof. Meyer, Stern, and Buenger were here as a committee to set us right. We told them plainly that we did not identify suspension with excommunication ... We did not hesitate to name names, and yours, Karl's [Koehler], [E.E.] Sauer's and Beitz's were named as such, of whom we were certain that you had a living faith. And to this they had nothing to reply. 3. Finally, there is no absolute necessity involved in my preaching at your mission festival. If it were a matter of your congregation not hearing the Gospel, it would be a different matter; but they can find it at your mouth, and do find it there, better than I can give it. I think you see my position. I am not out to add to the bitterness you have already tasted. I believe that my best service to the truth for the present

is within Synod; and I seek to avoid anything that would hinder my witness there, provided I do not violate my conscience in so doing.⁴⁴²

Some Protéstants probably looked upon Sitz's reply as a way of squirming out of yet another tight situation, and although there is no documentary evidence, one would have to suspect that Sitz was once again accused of being afraid of persecution, an accusation Beitz leveled several years previous when Tois failed to meet the Protéstant challenge. Yet, this time it would be different. Sitz would not stand on the sidelines as he had four years previous. This time he was determined to get into the game and give his witness. He did not do this for the sake of glory or recognition. He did it for the sake of truth. He was determined to give his witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel.

One prominent recipient of Sitz's witness, as well as his wrath, was Pastor John Brenner of Milwaukee, who was by this time the chairman of the Seminary Board of Control. When the suspensions in the Western Wisconsin District first began, they were unsettling to Sitz. But in September 1929 his misgivings intensified when he received notice from the *Gesamtkomitee* (also known as the Committee of Five),⁴⁴³ chaired by Pastor John Brenner, that "due to the nervous condition of Prof. Koehler ... we are of the conviction that under the circumstances he should be suspended from office temporarily for one year, and we hereby suspend him from office for one year." Now Sitz joined the battle without delay by addressing a letter to Brenner.

A copy of your committee's resolutions concerning Prof. J.P. Koehler just comes to hand, signed by you and Wm. Sauer. The very first point concerning Prof. Koehler's "nervous condition" is an untruth. I repeat it advisedly: it is a bland lie; and you know it. And if Prof. Pieper in his opening address to the Seminary students stated that Prof. Koehler is not teaching this year at the Seminary because of his "sickness," Prof. Pieper lied and he knows it and the students as well. I lived with the Koehlers during the days immediately preceding Synod, also the first days of sessions themselves, those days so trying to Prof. Koehler. I state unequivocally that he was no victim of his nerves. Even when the old Seminary Board fastened on itself the odium of ousting a man who had done his duty by Synod faithfully now almost fifty years, even when they added the further odium of keeping this intelligence from Synod for two days until Prof. Koehler himself was forced to reveal it to that body who had every right in the first place to have been informed – I say, even then the Professor showed no particular sign of agitation, so that I was astonished that he seemed so little moved and marveled at his iron nerve. Indeed, in all the years I have known him I have never seen his nerves in better trim. This appears plainly from the calm, clear tone and exposition in all his communications to Synod and to the Board and Committee; and history will so conclude from the documents. "Nerves" and hysteria have

⁴⁴² E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Paul Hensel, June 20, 1929. NB: Pastors Stern and Buenger were officials in the Southeastern Wisconsin District of which the Arizona congregations were then members. Meyer, Stern and Buenger had come to Arizona to deal especially with Pastors Arndt, Hillmer and Meier, who on August 20, 1929, resigned from Synod due to their disagreement with the Protéstant suspensions. They, too, were suspended in 1930. For a summary of this conference, see E. Arnold Sitz's letter to J.P. Koehler, June 18, 1929.

⁴⁴³ The 1929 Synod Convention resolved to appoint a five-man *Gesamtkomitee* which would assist the former and current Seminary Boards resolve the Koehler affair. Brenner was appointed chairman.

appeared in other quarters; and the documents will again be sufficient to establish that in the eyes of posterity.⁴⁴⁴

When Sitz received no reply, he wrote Brenner again in January 1930. “I am sorry indeed to see our apparent inability to see and acknowledge our sins.”⁴⁴⁵ This time Sitz’s letter prompted a quick retort: “I frankly tell you that I will refuse to enter into a discussion of these matters with you. The reason for this attitude on my part you will find in your letter of Oct. 6, 1929. In that letter, to say nothing at all of its other contents and its general tone, you see fit to charge me with lying deliberately.” Brenner concluded, “Now, as far as I am concerned, a brotherly discussion of any other matter is impossible between you and me until you have retracted without qualification this charge, which impeaches my integrity, and which of its very nature cannot be proved, as God only is able to judge the heart of a man.”⁴⁴⁶

But Sitz was not about to back down. On January 21, he again addressed Brenner:

Whether or not you are willing to discuss [the issues] with me is altogether immaterial. ... When [the Lord] gets through with you relative to Prof. Koehler’s case none will be able to recognize the wreck of your “integrity”. ... I repeat that your statement concerning Prof. J. Ph. Koehler’s “nervous condition” is a lie. It was untrue when you wrote it, as you might well have known; and since Prof. Koehler himself, and doubtless others, as well as I myself, have told you that it is not true, it has become as deliberate as any lie can be, for you have made no move to correct it. And so this falsehood that is coursing throughout Synod about Prof. Koehler’s condition must be laid at your door. Far from correcting the evil, you aggravate it by demanding a retraction [from me] “without qualification” and complain of impeaching your integrity. ...

But in Prof. Koehler’s case the matter is made worse by a double circumstance: the lie is intensified because the “nervous condition” of Prof. Koehler is not the real issue and never will be; it is but a gesture covering the delay in meeting the real issue, and again you know it, Brother Brenner; and the guilt on your part is increased on the other hand, because Prof. Koehler was your own personal teacher and friend, and Scripture enjoins upon you to doubly honor him.

When it comes to retractions without qualification, Brother Brenner, there is one in immediate order at 814 Vliet Street [Brenner’s Milwaukee address] over against Prof. Koehler. The Lord give you courage to carry it out.⁴⁴⁷

Brenner made no reply, but his close friend and classmate, Professor Joh. P. Meyer, did address Sitz’s concerns. He counseled:

In times like ours, when everybody is more or less excited, I believe we should consider matters not only twice or three times but ten or twelve times before we

⁴⁴⁴ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to John Brenner, October 6, 1929.

⁴⁴⁵ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to John Brenner, January 1, 1930.

⁴⁴⁶ John Brenner, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, January 9, 1930.

⁴⁴⁷ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to John Brenner, January 21, 1930.

act and do irreparable damage. I warned the board not to act like fire eaters. My words seemed to make some impression, but John Brenner especially came back at me with your words regarding the special committee's action: "That (regarding Prof. Koehler's nervous condition) is a lie, and you know it." This I believe you should correct. It is a serious charge, which by its very nature makes discussion practically impossible, to accuse someone of a deliberate lie.⁴⁴⁸

Sitz responded to Meyer's plea with yet another letter to Brenner. This time Sitz was willing to yield some ground, but he still wanted action on Brenner's part to clear up the matter.

At the earnest solicitation of a friend I have once more scanned my correspondence with you ... I conclude that I asserted more than was warranted in my letter of Oct. 6th when I wrote, "I repeat it advisedly, it is a bland lie and you know it." At the time of your own participation in the erroneous statement about Prof. Koehler's "nervous condition" it was conceivably made in good faith on your part, although the statement itself was untrue. ... I retract that personal accusation in my letter ... cited above and beg your cordial pardon.

Since then, however, you have been informed time and again by competent persons that the statement concerning Prof. Koehler's "nervous condition" at the time of the Committee's asserting it was not true. To leave it uncorrected is deliberate. So my position of Jan. 21st stands.⁴⁴⁹

Instead of receiving a retraction, Sitz received an invitation to meet with the *Gesamtkomitee*. Sitz refused.

... there is no pleasant prospect in meeting with a group of brethren who had to be warned not to "act like fire-eaters" before they could bring themselves to send me a bid to meet with them. With such a spirit obtaining meeting together would be worse than useless. Yet, I am not averse to meeting with you at a more convenient season.

Meanwhile, Brethren, as you love God and His Church, be diligent to clear yourselves of the blemish you have brought upon yourselves in publishing the *Antwort*. Not one of you can swear to the truth of the paragraph on the genesis [of the problem]; it is a fabric of untruths. Brethren, for Christians there is only one avenue open: retraction. The insinuations in the *Antwort* concerning the character and teaching of Prof. J. Ph. Koehler are libelous. ... There is a command of God that none can avoid, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁸ John P. Meyer, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, May 6, 1930.

⁴⁴⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to John Brenner, May 12, 1930.

⁴⁵⁰ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to the Seminary Board, May 9, 1930.

Unfortunately, Sitz's bold words did not change many minds. There would be no resolution, prompting Sitz's brother-in-law, Karl Koehler, to write, "Everything is over now but the shouting," and to suggest that Sitz's writing campaign was "hardly worth the while now."⁴⁵¹

But Sitz persisted. Shortly after his series of communications with Brenner, the focus of his witness was sharpened as he unfolded his "peace plan" for Synod. In typically "Wauwatosan" fashion Sitz called for a mutual confession of sins by synodicals and Protéstants alike, "permitting the Holy Spirit to work out the details of reconciliation according to His time and in His way by the Gospel, increasing our love to cover ever more deeply the multitude of sins."⁴⁵² Sitz especially urged the Seminary Board to encourage reconciliation between Professors Koehler and Pieper.

[It saddens one to consider] the dereliction of the Seminary Board for years past, the dereliction of every member of Synod who knew of it, in not having done a thing toward bringing about a reconciliation between Prof. Pieper and Prof. Koehler. Their disagreement has been notorious in Synod – a district president told me at Synod that already eight years ago he had remarked publicly that unless the differences between these two men were adjusted, it would mean a rent in Synod – and yet no one has had the Christian charity to win these brethren to a reconciliation in accord with Matthew 18. And now one of them is being beaten up because of our neglect! ... These two men, who have done so much under God's grace to give us a clear conception of the Gospel, whose particular merit, along with Prof. Schaller, was to insist that we return into the immediate study of Scripture – to see them in disagreement these long years where there is no fundamental disagreement: Men, it is a pity and a shame! And every one of us is to blame for it!⁴⁵³

As for the rest of Synod, Sitz had this suggestion: call a general pastoral conference with all synodicals and Protéstants in attendance.

From the outset reconciliation must be the dominant note. It must be a Grand Disarmament Conference. And the basis for such, as well as the necessity, is there. For despite all talk, print, and smoke to the contrary, *there is no fundamental doctrinal difference between Synod and the Protéstant Party*. If there has been *Ungenauigkeit* [inaccuracy], it has been shown that that is not a monopoly of the Protéstant Party by any means. What should be the previously agreed object of the meeting? This: To load the Beitz paper, the *Gutachten*, the suspensions that followed out of them, the *Beleuchtung*, the *Antwort*, all recriminations, all rancor and bitterness, railing and malice, etc., etc. into one ship and scuttle it in the sea of pardon and conciliation. Impossible? Do you mean to say that there is not the good will among us to settle this mess? Do we mean to imply that the Lord's arm is shortened so that He cannot help, and that the Holy Spirit is dead, or gone from our midst? With God all things are possible. And the

⁴⁵¹ Karl Koehler, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 9, 1930.

⁴⁵² E. Arnold Sitz, letter to The *Gesamtkomitee*, June 11, 1930.

⁴⁵³ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to The *Gesamtkomitee*, June 11, 1930.

prayer of the righteous man availeth much. But there must be the cordial will to forgive and forget all. ...

Gentlemen and Brethren, we are at the parting of the ways. It is up to us to choose; it is now or never. Yet is it not too late [sic]. But woe unto us if we continue to play with the longsuffering of the Lord, as we had done in the immediate past! Remember, "They looked, and there was none to save; even unto the Lord, but He answered them not." The Lord grant us respite; may He not take His Holy Spirit from us! May He restore unto us peace and the joy in our salvation, that we as brethren may dwell in unity together. May the Israel of our Wisconsin Synod once more green and blossom! Amen.⁴⁵⁴

Sitz's witness was "Wauwatosan" to the core: cast off preconceived notions, be self-critical, promote a true ecumenical spirit, and most of all be evangelical. Sitz made this witness to both synodicals and Protéstants, yet neither side was willing to listen. In patience, though, Sitz continued to witness.

His next target would be the Western Wisconsin District. On June 23, 1930, he addressed by letter the convention delegates who were to meet in Baraboo, Wisconsin, on June 24-27. In this letter Sitz laid down six points as to why he could not honor the Protéstant suspensions in that district. The following is a summary of those six points:

When it comes to suspensions and excommunications all details must have been carried out in the spirit of the Gospel and handled in strict conformity with the Word of God, for they are the most solemn and awful Preachment [sic] of that Word of God. There dare be no degree of uncertainty, but they must be sure, as sure as the infallible Word of God. ... Moreover, all these things must be incontrovertibly established at the mouth of two or three witnesses. ...

Those therefore who suspend and excommunicate must be so sure of their case as to be willing to suffer judgement and hell-fire rather than retract jot or tittle of their suspensions or excommunications. ... They must be able to call God as witness upon their souls. ... And they must bear in mind always that swift retribution is theirs from the Lord if they do wrong to a fellow Christian.

The foregoing Scriptural position predicates that those suspending and excommunicating must be able on the basis of the Word of God and the indisputable facts of each case to demonstrate to any one in undeniable fashion that their way of handling the cases was unexceptionable from the viewpoint of love, Christian faith, right, and the Word of God. The burden of proof lies therefore with those doing the suspending and the excommunicating. ...

It is therefore false, goes into the face of the eighth commandment, is contrary to Scripture and common Christian love, unrighteous and ungodly to set up as a principle: All suspensions must be accepted and respected unless proof can be brought that they are invalid. Even the godless world, of which Scriptures assert

⁴⁵⁴ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to The *Gesamtkomitee*, June 11, 1930.

that it lieth in the evil one, holds a man to be innocent until he has been proved guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt. ...

I have read all the documents the West Wis. Dist. has issued on its suspension ... I have also read the demurrers of those suspended, a thing every man among us is bound to do, since they appeal to all in Synod on the grounds that they have been wronged, and Luke 10:37 applies always. I have found grave discrepancies. More ominous still, I find that such important documents as the *Dokumentenbericht*, *Gutachten* [and] *Antwort* are admittedly defective, and that the first-named has omitted important letters and reports. Beyond this I learned that the *Verständigungskomitee* [Peace Committee] rules that by the adoption of the report of the Special Committee Synod neither rejects the Beitz paper as heresy nor indorses the *Gutachten* as the stand of Synod. And yet the official notices of many of the West Wis. Dist. suspensions expressly state that they were made because the man in question adhered to the Beitz paper and refused to accept the critique of that paper offered in the *Gutachten*. All in all, the whole atmosphere hanging about the West Wis. suspensions and excommunications is charged with uncertainties, change of position, contradictions, and apparent unchristian and unfair tactics. I am therefore in the position where in accordance with God's Word I must say that I cannot acknowledge these suspensions until the West Wis. Dist. can prove in undeniable manner from the Word of God and the undeniable and indisputable facts in each case, supported by the two or three trustworthy witnesses God commands, that your suspensions and excommunications stand and must stand before the judgement seat of Christ; you must show that you are prepared to appear before Jesus Christ in the last judgement and say, "What we have bound You must bind on the basis of Your own Word; or else you must cast us into Hell" Rom. 14:23. Rom. 14:5b. Let each man be fully assured in his own mind.⁴⁵⁵

On July 3, 1930, Pastor Fritz Stern, the secretary of the district, wrote Sitz telling him that his "letter was read in open session of the District, discussed, then given to a committee of seven members for further careful consideration and recommendations, and finally brought back to synod again with the committee report."⁴⁵⁶ That report suggested that instead of dealing with the Sitz letter itself, the district should refer it to the Synod's Peace Committee since it had been established for this very purpose. It would be the first in a long series of evasive "hand-offs" applied to Sitz's six points. The reason is evident: the letter's logic was simple and its witness was truth. No one could argue with Sitz's points and so no one ever did. Everyone simply passed the letter on, and it was never acted upon. Neither has it been answered to this day.

Such evasions did not squelch the Sitz witness. In 1931, having received no answer to his six points, Sitz addressed the Joint Synodical Committee in a May 1 letter. He begins the letter with a defense of Beitz's paper, though not without reservations:

Beyond doubt greater care in the expression of his thoughts would have obviated such misunderstanding, so that I hold Beitz not entirely blameless. But I hold

⁴⁵⁵ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to the 1930 Western Wisconsin District Convention, June 23, 1930.

⁴⁵⁶ Fritz Stern, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, July 3, 1930.

those officials responsible in a far higher degree, who – *ohne ordentlichen Beruf* [without an orderly call] – projected themselves into what was still purely a conference matter, for the essay had not been finally discussed there. Beyond this, the *Gutachten* in its tone, content, and manner and time of distribution is in the gravest manner answerable for the present pass in Synod. It must be retracted as a *Gutachten* of the Beitz Paper.⁴⁵⁷

Sitz concludes the letter by detailing the reasons for his refusal to honor the suspensions of the Western Wisconsin District and by suggesting yet another way to heal the breach.

My refusal to accept the suspensions and excommunications of the West Wisconsin District and my reasons from Scripture for declining to do so are public property and need not be rehearsed here. They were sent to the West Wisconsin District and read in open sessions last summer and partially discussed. Coming to grips with my position was circumvented by adopting the resolutions of a committee advising that they did not belong before the District, but should be sent to the *Verständigungskomitee* [Peace Committee]. My points have since reposed in the files of the latter Committee. They were offered – point six omitted, since it concerned the West Wisconsin District directly – to the *Northwestern Lutheran* for print, but were not even acknowledged as received, much less printed. They were published in *Faith-Life* complete.

Synod cannot and dare not evade its responsibility of undertaking a thorough investigation of the whole mess. Both sides to the controversy, Protéstants as well as *Gutachten* party within Synod – for it is not true by any means that the *Gutachten* party is identical with Synod; wherefore those that do not agree with the *Gutachten* party may not be taxed with “attacking Synod”, as one hears and reads so often – should be permitted to appoint an equal number of men to an investigating body. If men cannot be found in our own Synod, there are thousands to choose from in the Missouri Synod.⁴⁵⁸

Sitz went on to explain that this committee should meet “until all testimony has been taken ... [and that] those who deserve censure and reprimand on the basis of the facts and the Word of God signify beforehand their willingness to receive it in the right spirit according to I Tim. 6:20.”⁴⁵⁹

Two weeks later Sitz addressed a letter to Synod President G.E. Bergemann:

Our refusal to face our sins and to repent of them is dragging Synod down into the abyss. Deficit and debt are a direct fruit of our lack of repentance. ... The depression, which we seem to be using as an alibi, is for us a chastisement flowing from our unthankfulness and hardness of heart. It is time we laid aside our evil works. The most disgraceful iniquity that now courses in our synodical veins is the silence observed over against notorious sins, such as the whole world

⁴⁵⁷ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Joint Synodical Committee, May 1, 1931.

⁴⁵⁸ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Joint Synodical Committee, May 1, 1931.

⁴⁵⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Joint Synodical Committee, May 1, 1931.

sees. ... If the Synod does not repudiate [the *Antwort*] and severely rebuke those responsible for it, let us expect anything but the Lord's continued blessing.⁴⁶⁰

The response to Sitz's letters was perhaps predictable: "At the request of the Synodical Committee, which met at Milwaukee last week, I am informing you that your letter, addressed to President G.E. Bergemann, was read at the meeting of the committee and by that committee was referred to the Committee of Eight, (The *Verständigungskomitee* [Peace Committee])."⁴⁶¹ Sitz's witness had been thwarted once again, yet his witness continued.

Over the next two years Sitz stayed in constant correspondence with the Peace Committee, reminding them of their responsibility to bring justice and real peace in this matter. This witness no doubt had some influence on that committee's eventual findings, namely, that the so-called *Gutachten* party was far from blameless in this whole affair, a conclusion that the Synod and especially the Western Wisconsin District resisted. Ultimately the rub led to the Peace Committee's desire to be relieved of its official duties since, the committee stated, "the Watertown resolutions [of 1927] and the disciplinary Ft. Atkinson cases can no longer be accepted and recognized by the committee."⁴⁶²

In time, the Sitz witness also landed on the doorstep of the Synod's Board of Trustees. His words, however, did not have as salutary an effect. Professor Elmer Kiessling refers to Sitz when he writes, "One excited pastor in January, 1932, petitioned the Synod to 'disavow all suspensions, repudiate the *Gutachten*, renounce the *Antwort*, and petition the United States court to appoint a receiver."⁴⁶³ Sitz concluded his letter with an animated appeal: "These things are steps that must eventually be taken, and the sooner they are taken, the better for Synod. We cannot go on in the manner we have and believe ourselves righteous; and it is insane to stagger on under the present load of debt and attempt to carry on besides."⁴⁶⁴

This time Sitz's petition was not looked upon lightly or simply handed-off to the Peace Committee. The Trustees answered forthrightly with a letter on March 31, 1932.

The members of [the Board of Trustees] ... are open to criticism. In fact, they invite and welcome constructive criticism. Had you offered such, you would have conferred a distinct favor. We can, however, not look upon your communication in that light. You are not only insinuating, you are preferring grave charges ... Your suggestions ... plainly indicate that, in your judgment, Synod can do but one thing: file in moral and financial bankruptcy – and the Board of Trustees is responsible for having come to this sorrowful pass. ... All of which is not constructive, but destructive. You have, as far as your communications are concerned, destroyed mutual confidence, you have taken away every inch of common ground, you have made cooperation impossible.⁴⁶⁵

Sitz himself described how the letter concluded.

⁴⁶⁰ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Gustav Bergemann, May 15, 1931.

⁴⁶¹ H.J. Diehl, Secretary of Joint Synodical Committee, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 1, 1931.

⁴⁶² Excerpts from District Minutes and Proceedings, Synodical Proceedings, and Other Materials Pertaining to the Protéstant Controversy compiled by Pastor Harold Wicke.

⁴⁶³ Kiessling, 27.

⁴⁶⁴ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to the Wisconsin Synod Board of Trustees, January 5, 1932.

⁴⁶⁵ The Wisconsin Synod Board of Trustees, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, March 31, 1932.

Then the ultimatum: “We are ready to assume that such were not your intentions. Are we justified in so doing? – Your affirmative answer will be taken at face value.” In other words, if you admit that you were wrong, cancel your contentions, and acknowledge our position: all will be well. Simple, isn’t it? No matter how well buttressed by the facts charges may be, my experience with boards, committees, and officials throughout the past five years has been uniformly to receive an indignant reply of the above tenor.⁴⁶⁶

The young Arizona pastor would not let the Trustees’ reply go unanswered. In particular, Tois was annoyed that the Board never addressed what he believed to be the genesis of the Synod’s problems, the unjustified suspensions of the Protéstants and J.P. Koehler.

I trust, Brethren, that it is not your contention that the wholesale suspensions, the *Gutachten* as a critique of the Beitz paper, the *Antwort*, the ousting of Professors Ruediger, Sauer, and J.P. Koehler; the Watertown Case; the suppression of documents and damaging evidence, the fear and silence in the face of wrongdoing, the sabotaging and threatenings, the lying and hypocrisies and venomous gossip, the unbrotherly manner of promulgating ... – that these are signs of the Synod’s moral solvency?⁴⁶⁷

Board member, Mr. William Mueller, attempted to ease Sitz’s concerns with a personal letter, stating that he believed it his “duty to tell you some facts, which ought to show some things in an entirely different light than you seem to see them.” Mueller expressed optimism about the Synod’s future, maintaining that “there never has been a time in my memory when our people have been so united and synod-minded as they are right now in spite of our well-known troubles.”⁴⁶⁸ But when Mueller again failed to address the matter of the suspensions, Sitz volleyed back.

Your optimism has a sand foundation. For you forget the past sins un-repented and uncorrected. You forget the ungodly suspensions, the summary dismissal, a kicking out into the street in fact, of professors with their families to starve or get bread and shelter as they may. Just in this connection Galatians 6:6-8 is not written for naught. We dare not forget the God of heaven, who will have righteousness among those that profess the Name of his Son.⁴⁶⁹

In the summer of 1933, Sitz’s witness would come to its high-water mark when he was selected as a delegate to the Synod Convention. He planned to use this convention as a forum for his witness. He wrote his good friend, E.E. Guenther, to share his strategy.

My request is twofold: that Synod may prove the six points at the hand of Scripture; that Synod may apply the principles therein contained to the suspension cases. I intend to do as you suggest: write out for myself what I wish to present to

⁴⁶⁶ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to the Peace Committee, March 6, 1933.

⁴⁶⁷ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to the Wisconsin Board of Trustees, April 12, 1932.

⁴⁶⁸ William Mueller, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, January 25, 1933.

⁴⁶⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Mueller, February 24, 1933.

Synod. *Aber die Hauptsache ist Gottes Beistand* [But the most important thing is the help of God]. *Der muss erbeten sein* [That must be prayed for]. Join me in asking for it. I do not expect to get far with my speaking. But it will be a witness. And if it be to the truth, *über kurz oder lang wird es sich durchsetzen bei denen, die aus der Wahrheit sind.* [sooner or later it will itself gain acceptance by those who are from the truth]. *Man predige nur Sünde und Gnade* without fear or favor; *das Übrige überlassen mann Gott* [One simply preaches sin and grace without fear or favor; the rest he leaves to God].⁴⁷⁰

The convention, held at St. Matthew, Milwaukee on August 2-9, might also be considered a high-water mark in the Protéstant Controversy. For one thing, after this particular convention the Protéstant Controversy became less and less of a pressing issue on the synodical conscience. But even more significant was the election of a new Synod president, John Brenner. One Protéstant reported, “They want a new deal, was sidewalk comment,”⁴⁷¹ an obvious allusion to the sweeping reforms that President Franklin D. Roosevelt was introducing on a national level at that time.

The previous Synod president, G.E. Bergemann, was said to be a crafty administrator who had a tendency to rub people the wrong way. By 1933 he had fallen out of disfavor because of the Protéstant issue and the Synod’s soaring debt. Brenner was seen by the constituency as the man who, with the Lord’s blessing, could perhaps raise the Synod up by its bootstraps and come to grips with both problems. The Protéstants did not think so highly of him. From the Watertown Case on, Brenner had been intimately associated with synodical *Beamtentum* [officialdom]. As far as the suspended pastors were concerned, Brenner had made one of the most significant statements in this entire imbroglio as a member of the Northwestern College Board. In dealing with the case of Northwestern professor E.E. Sauer, Brenner was reported to have said: “*Die Vorgeschichte geht uns nichts an* [The historical background does not concern us].”⁴⁷² Professor Edward Fredrich writes: “Long ago [the Protéstants] were incensed when there was unwillingness to enter into every aspect of every grievance over every past incident in the origins of the conflict. They refuted over and over again and still refute the declaration, ‘*Die Vorgeschichte geht uns nicht an.*’”⁴⁷³ Brenner now became a representative target of Protéstant disenchantment with Synod. Leigh Jordahl writes, “John Brenner ... had been aggressively anti-Protéstant, though he privately spoke highly of Koehler and affirmed with grudging appreciation the Wauwatosa Theology.”⁴⁷⁴

Arnold Sitz did not think so highly of Brenner either, as has been shown, but he also realized that Brenner had the gifts to be an effective president. In a 1934 letter Sitz gives his assessment:

Brenner has been blessed with a sober conception of the Gospel. Along with this he had common sense and good judgment. Many is the time he has forced Synod lone-handed by his sober good judgment to alter its course. But in the Watertown faculty Case and now in the Seminary Case he made grave mistakes. ... And now

⁴⁷⁰ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to E.E. Guenther, July 18, 1933.

⁴⁷¹ G.A. Zeisler, “Some Look for a New Deal, Some See the Old Deck,” *Faith-Life* 6, no. 8 (August 1933): 4.

⁴⁷² See *Faith-Life* 1, no. 17 (November 26, 1928): 6.

⁴⁷³ Edward Fredrich, “The Protéstant Controversy,” (Delivered at the Minnesota District Pastoral Conference, Rochester, Minnesota, May 1, 1984), 2.

⁴⁷⁴ Jordahl, vii.

one of his best virtues, as so often is the case in strong characters, namely his resoluteness, is become his worst vice. I fear he is not capable of retracting an error. So I look for nothing else, since God certainly loves him, than that Brenner has a hard road ahead of him. One heavy blow after the other will fall upon him until he is crushed so that he may be saved. So it is that at this juncture I cannot look to John Brenner as one who will be able to help Synod. He must be helped himself first.⁴⁷⁵

Whether he liked it or not, Brenner was now the man Sitz had to deal with as chairman of the 1933 Synod Convention.

And Sitz did give his witness. Following the release of the Peace Committee because of the impasse in their dealings with both the Protéstants and the Western Wisconsin District officials, John Brenner stood to address the convention. “[He] made a lengthy and impassioned speech in which he stated that some definite action on the part of Synod was imperative. He stated he was speaking extemporaneously and had no specific plan to offer, but something must be done.”⁴⁷⁶ In answer to Brenner’s plea, Pastor Sitz offered his plan: “E.A. Sitz rose and stated that the responsibility for the restoration of peace now rested squarely with the W.W.D. for Synod had instituted a committee, the P.C., to assist it in bringing about a settlement, but the W.W.D had placed obstacles in the way. Now they must resolve the matter, and do it alone.”⁴⁷⁷

In response to Sitz’s proposition a “resolution was offered ... and adopted placing the whole matter back into the hands of the W.W.D.”⁴⁷⁸ The Western Wisconsin District would hold a special session in Baraboo on October 17-18, 1933, but nothing was retracted or resolved. The district continued to insist that it had been totally justified in its action against the Protéstants, frustrating Sitz’s witness once again.

In the end these continuous rebuffs on the part of Synod and district officials took their toll on the Sitz witness. He grew tired of hammering the same points and getting nowhere. His frustration comes out in a 1935 letter to President Brenner.

I am frank to say that if Synod does nothing about this WWD suspension scandal in the space of this present year, I am going to bear my witness in no unmistakable terms. I am getting impatient with this drawing out of issues that, if they had been met and measured on the basis of truth and God’s Word and the facts in the cases, would long ago have drawn down upon the heads of those perpetrating these outrages the deserved public rebuke. Instead the truth has been crucified on the wood of procrastination and left dangling now almost a decade.⁴⁷⁹

Despite frustration, Sitz continued to sound a clarion call. For instance, Protéstant Martin Zimmermann reports that “Sitz preached at Burr Oak Mission Festival for a Protéstant pastor [Zimmermann himself] in order to testify to Synod that his protest against Synod’s outrage and misuse of the Word of God is not only talk.”⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁵ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to John Gauss, January 15, 1934.

⁴⁷⁶ Zeisler, “New Deal,” 16.

⁴⁷⁷ Zeisler, “New Deal,” 16.

⁴⁷⁸ Zeisler, “New Deal,” 16.

⁴⁷⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to John Brenner, March 3, 1935.

⁴⁸⁰ Martin Zimmermann, letter to E. Arnold Sitz (April 26, 1960), *Faith-Life* 34, no. 8 (August 1961): 9.

In 1936 Sitz traded a series of correspondence with the Western Wisconsin District and its president, William Nommensen, in which Sitz declared: “after ten years of careful investigation and review I am less convinced than ever that the suspensions conform to God’s Word and to fact. I once more state publicly that I cannot before God and the Church respect the suspensions and excommunications of the last ten years in the Wisconsin Synod.”⁴⁸¹ Nommensen replied with a veiled threat.

Your closing declaration, indeed, is a very serious matter. Such a stand, as you take it, simply declaring to us that, in spite of the fact that you have not been able to convince us of any grievous error in our dealings, (and we have reviewed and studied this case also very painstakingly), you will not respect the suspensions and excommunications of the last ten years in the Wisconsin Synod, is intolerable; it must lead to a parting of the ways. Such a situation between BRETHREN is impossible. Nor would your attitude ever be helpful in arriving at an understanding, if at the very outset you declare: Your suspensions, and hence also all your dealings in this matter mean nothing to me!⁴⁸²

Sitz replied:

Brother Nommensen, since 1930 at almost every session I informed your District that I refused to accept their suspensions and excommunications, and I have advanced both Scriptural and factual grounds. You have failed in every instance and in all these years to come to grips with my position. Not once in all these years have you replied directly to my questions or my statements. It has been, “Wir sind überzeugt, daß wir recht gehandelt haben [We are convinced that we have handled the situation correctly].” Or, “Your communication has not been able to alter our convictions.” Brother Nommensen, it must be clear to you as a Lutheran that others’ convictions and “überzeugt sein [to be convinced]” can never bind a man’s conscience, but it must be God’s Word and the open, incontrovertible facts of the case.

It has been apparent to me for years that there is a fundamental difference within the Synod on the question of suspension and excommunication. You and your District insist that all excommunications and suspensions must be acknowledged and respected until those suspending and excommunicating can be convinced that they are wrong. What frightful consequences that position harbors! It opens the door wide to oppression. If a man has been unrighteously excommunicated, the additional intolerable burden is cast upon him of proving to his accusers and judges that they have erred! This is the very cornerstone of papal power.⁴⁸³

The witness once again fell on deaf ears, though, and Sitz received only silence in reply. And then there was silence from Tois. In 1936 the agitating Sitz witness was almost inexplicably stilled. Had Sitz simply tired of the effort? Had he found other things to occupy his

⁴⁸¹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to the Western Wisconsin District, June 19, 1936.

⁴⁸² William Nommensen, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, July 30, 1936.

⁴⁸³ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Nommensen, August 8, 1936.

mind and time? One cannot say with any degree of certainty. Only this can be said: after 1936, references to the Prot stant Controversy are few and far between in Sitz’s correspondence, even though the issues were never far from his heart.

All of which brings us to an interesting question: Why did Sitz remain in the Wisconsin Synod through these tumultuous years? Why didn’t he feel conscience-bound to publicly denounce his synodical membership and join the Prot stants? Simply put, because it wouldn’t have solved anything. It wouldn’t have redounded to the benefit of truth. Sitz couldn’t see how his giving up on his Synod and joining the Prot stants would in any way further the spread of the gospel. Even after ten years of abject failure in witnessing to both sides, Sitz still believed that his “best service to the truth for the present [was] within Synod.”⁴⁸⁴ In 1936 Sitz wrote:

It is my earnest desire that peace on the basis of truth might be established. The great mistake that has been made from the beginning, it is certain, is that the flow of love was early stopped. Had love flowed as it should, the whole matter might have been amicably settled in the very inception. Synod has lost greatly in not having the Prot stants in its membership. Not only that many of them are outstanding in ability, but their witness within Synod would have been a good salt; and the restraint of fellowship within Synod would have been healthy for them also. The sad feature of the whole thing remains that neither doctrinal nor moral grounds were such as to make severance necessary.⁴⁸⁵

For Sitz, that sad reality would linger for many years.

The Intervening Years (1936-1958)

Over the next twenty years the Prot stant Conference of the Wisconsin Synod scraped and scratched for its very existence. Of course, as a group these men were not really interested in growth of numbers, and although there were those who defected to their side after 1936, their constituency remained decidedly modest.

That is not to say that the Prot stants were dormant during this period; indeed, that was not the case at all. Professor Elmer Kiessling writes:

Gradually the controversy subsided, though Prot stants tried to keep it alive right down to our own times by dishing up the whole mass, not to say mess, of charges and countercharges in the pages of their paper, *Faith-Life*. They were strangely tied to our Synod, however, even when they needled and denigrated its officers and personnel. ... They quarreled periodically among themselves and lost members, but also gained a few in later years, mainly young seminarians and pastors who were converted by reading *Faith-Life*.⁴⁸⁶

Faith-Life was the Prot stants most obvious and significant theological contribution during these years. “Prot stants consider *Faith-Life* their gift to Lutheranism. Most synodicals,

⁴⁸⁴ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Paul Hensel, June 20, 1929.

⁴⁸⁵ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Nommensen, June 19, 1936.

⁴⁸⁶ Kiessling, 27.

on the other hand, tend to dismiss it as a scandal sheet. Some good non-polemical articles have, however, appeared in it.”⁴⁸⁷

The stated purpose of *Faith-Life* is “to call men from a comfortable gospel, that acts as a soporific and permits unrighteousness to run riot in the church, to the Gospel that is in truth comforting to stricken sinners, and to seek with them an evermore increasing knowledge of our Lord, that we might win Christ and be found in Him...”⁴⁸⁸ The Protéstants saw and continue to see *Faith-Life* as their most significant public witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel. As a result they have a “policy of not mincing [their] words and speaking unvarnished terms [because such speaking] is in character with the Word of God.”⁴⁸⁹ They point to the Old Testament prophets as prime examples of such unvarnished speaking. Unfortunately, such a policy has not always been in accord with a true witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel.

The Wauwatosa Gospel emphasizes a criticism of self, not necessarily a criticism of others. When dealing with others, J.P. Koehler wrote, one should strive to understand their words in the best possible way – the very thing he attempted to do with Beitz’s paper, for instance. Criticism, especially if it is not totally accurate, will only encourage an opponent to harden his stance. A true witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel will instead go out of his way to give his witness in love “and in such a way so that the other person can also perceive it.”⁴⁹⁰ The Protéstants have failed in this respect, as any synodical review of *Faith-Life* can verify. One synodical, for example, once wrote, “*Faith-Life* thrives on scandal, reeks with lies and malicious slander.”⁴⁹¹ Whether that assessment is right or wrong doesn’t really matter. What matters is the *perception* *Faith-Life* gives, and if it is perceived as unloving then that witness must be tempered, explained or retracted for the sake of the gospel. Finally, one must wonder whether or not the Protéstants overlook those beautiful words of comfort spoken by the Old Testament prophets themselves, words often spoken even to stiff-necked people. Certainly, those prophets preached harsh words about God’s judgment for sin, but they never left the gospel of God’s forgiveness undeclared. They proclaimed it with beautiful and clear words: “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins” (Is 40:1-2). The Protéstants, unlike the Old Testament prophets, have too often left the message of God’s love and forgiveness in their preaching pouch, obscuring the very gospel they intend to proclaim.

Not everything in *Faith-Life* is polemical, however. Some of the noteworthy things published serially on its pages include J.P. Koehler’s *The History of the Wisconsin Synod*, as well as translations of his Galatians and Ephesians commentaries. A serial translation of Koehler’s *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (church history textbook) is a current *Faith-Life* project. The other invaluable thing that *Faith-Life* has done is to have preserved much of the history of the Protéstant Controversy. Certainly there is at times a heavy historical bias in the presentation of the facts, but the facts themselves are quite reliable and helpful.

In summary, it must be said that *Faith-Life*’s publication has done little to contribute to or hasten reconciliation between the Protéstants and the Synod. If anything it has only broadened the chasm and helped to calcify the synodical position.

⁴⁸⁷ Kiessling, 27.

⁴⁸⁸ This purpose is found on nearly every *Faith-Life* cover.

⁴⁸⁹ This policy is found on nearly every *Faith-Life* cover.

⁴⁹⁰ J.P. Koehler, “Legalism,” 240.

⁴⁹¹ Arthur Gentz, “Answer to the Appeal of Immanuel Lutheran Church ...,” *Faith-Life* 11, no. 8 (August 1938): 11.

There were still some individual efforts in reconciliation during these intervening years, however. The most significant attempt was between August Pieper and John Ph. Koehler in 1942. Three days before his eighty-fifth birthday and at the urging of a Seminary board member by the name of Freihube, Professor Pieper addressed a letter to his colleague of many years.

My Dear Old Friend Koehler!

In view of my and your approaching departure from life I should like one last time, on the basis of Matth. 5 and similar passages, to attempt – not in regard to our antithetic-ecclesiological position but in regard to our personal mutual relationship – to arrive at a Christian understanding so that we may die in peace. ... Thus I testify to you here in writing that I am heartily sorrow for every personal injury that I ever inflicted upon you, and beg your forgiveness, just as I heartily forgive you every personal thrust you ever directed at me. May the Lord, who purchased us both with his blood, grant us His Holy Spirit, so that we may depart in peace to Him when He summons us. Your old friend, Aug. Pieper⁴⁹²

Koehler answered Pieper's inquiry with a curious reply, implying that the need for a personal reconciliation was not as necessary as was the need for an "antithetic-ecclesiological" one. It seems that he wanted Pieper to make peace with the younger Protéstants, who would still be around long after the old professors had departed. What Koehler feared now, even as he had feared many years earlier, was that peace would be gained at the expense of truth. This was not an option as far as he was concerned. Reconciliation must be based on a truthful examination of history and a sincerity that is worked only by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. Koehler wrote to Pieper:

When I read of a reconciliation attempt, I was instantly ready for it because 12 years ago I had indicated the hoped for reconciliation which I prayed might be accorded to my heart by the grace of God, at the conclusion of my final refutation of your treatment of the chief point in Beitz[’s Paper] and a wrathful summary of your customary way of dealing. I never got around to the conventional reconciliation formula because I was afraid it might be talk and nothing more.

Now, after a week's interruption, when I had finished my urgent work and then found in your letter the "exception of ecclesiological antithesis." I asked myself: What is meant by this? During the entire interval since the controversy I have never until these last days believed that you regard me as a false teacher and accordingly, a dishonest person, as the readers of the *Antwort*, who are ignorant of the more particular circumstances, must deduce. Over the years the details of the controversy, time, place, persons, details of the transactions, have all escaped my memory ... [so] I hunted up the *Gutachten*, *Beleuchtung*, and *Antwort*. ...

The facts actually were new to me, and now judging objectively, I must state that [my] *Beleuchtung* is more factual than [your] *Antwort*. And my final word in

⁴⁹² August Pieper, letter to John Philipp Koehler (September 24, 1942), *Faith-Life* 45, no. 2 (March/April 1972): 16-17.

“Witness, Analysis and Reply” is even more illuminating, except that my anger becomes noticeable, through a bitter manner of expression which, however, does not turn on individual persons but on incorrect exegesis in the *Gutachten* and equally incorrect historical presentation of the wholly personal *Antwort*. I naturally will hardly have got by without some evidence of carnal anger at individual persons, but still, this would not be easy to prove from my writings. ...

For me, for practical purposes in this life, these matters carry no significance any more, except naturally that occasionally they still stir up my old Adam. But, Pieper, consider the others who will outlive us on earth. They are of course of a different mind since nearly all of them have more or less suffered damage to honor, property and life through the practice exacted upon them respectively by synodicals. They have proved themselves, naturally, not infallible. But already years back, in a conference at which I was not present, they on their own initiative exercised self-criticism. It is up to you to declare a proper word on your side which might bear fruit. ... God grant you the understanding, strength and grace to do this. This is my fervent wish. With friendly greetings, J.P. Koehler⁴⁹³

Koehler would later write to board member Freihube, “Only the Gospel has the power to create peace.”⁴⁹⁴ Sadly, however, it seems as if peace was never created, at least man-to-man, between Pieper and Koehler. The gospel cannot, of course, be blamed for this. Only Pieper and Koehler can. One would hope that these two great theological giants, these champions of the Wauwatosa Gospel, could have found a way to overcome their animosities, put aside their pride and forgive one another unconditionally. One can only hope that the Holy Spirit finally led both these men to take the counsel of St. John, who in his first epistle wrote: “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and gave his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love another” (1 Jn 4:10-11). Similarly St. Peter urges, “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins” (1 Pe 4:8). We, too, should pray for this spirit of love in our dealings with one another!

While J.P. Koehler remained apart from the Synod he so dearly loved, his son-in-law E. Arnold Sitz remained very much a part of the Synod. In fact, when the Arizona-California District organized on February 22, 1954 at Grace, Tucson, Sitz was elected as the district’s first president, serving in that capacity until 1966. Sitz’s rising to the rank of district president now put him in a better position to pursue an avenue for reconciliation with the Protéstants, something for which he had prayed so long. Ironically, however, his being a district official would actually work against him. The Protéstants now saw Sitz as an embodiment of the very thing they despised so much: officialdom. Martin Zimmermann wrote of Sitz’s election: “If this will not strike terror in a man’s soul, what will!”⁴⁹⁵ Undoubtedly, such sentiments would make reconciliation difficult.

The Synod, however, had other problems besides the Protéstant situation in the 1950s. Since the late 1930s there had been an uneasiness in relations with the Missouri Synod. Since

⁴⁹³ John Philipp Koehler, letter to August Pieper (October 10, 1942), *Faith-Life* 45, no. 2 (March/April 1972): 17-18.

⁴⁹⁴ John Philipp Koehler, letter to R.C. Freihube (Armistice Day, 1942), *Faith-Life* 45, no. 2 (March/April 1972): 20.

⁴⁹⁵ Martin Zimmermann, letter to E. Arnold Sitz (April 26, 1960), *Faith-Life* 34, no. 8 (August 1961): 9.

that time Missouri had been looking to establish fellowship ties outside the Synodical Conference, particularly with the more liberal American Lutheran Church. In some cases, fellowship was already being practiced. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s the Wisconsin Synod worked long and hard to witness against such unionism, but to no avail. Finally in 1961, the Wisconsin Synod terminated fellowship with Missouri.

Ironically, however, the long Missouri ordeal made the Wisconsin Synod sit down and think twice about their dealings with the Protestant Conference. Throughout their dealings with Missouri, the Synod was asking itself, “Are we dealing evangelically?” This question finally led them to reconsider their history and ask, “Did we really deal evangelically with the Protestants?” Apparently the answer was “no,” and the movement toward reconciliation was born. Arnold Sitz wrote: “The movement started right in the CUC (Church Union Committee) itself. It was more or less spontaneous. Its roots lay in the conviction that the present mess we are in with Missouri has as a tap-root the manner in which we handled the Protestant matter.”⁴⁹⁶

And so it was that there remained a few glowing embers among the charred rubble.

Chapter Seven – The Glowing Embers: Efforts at Reconciliation (1958-1965)

On November 5, 1958, Pastor E. Arnold Sitz addressed a letter to his old friend Immanuel Frey. He had news about the Synod’s dealings with their Missouri counterparts, which had come to a critical juncture.

But what will interest you particularly will be the intelligence that the Union Committee adopted a motion unanimously to approach the Protestants looking toward a reconciliation. On Prof. Meyer’s further suggestion I was asked to visit Bill [Beitz] to get the ball rolling. I was with him from 4:00 PM. Thursday afternoon till 2:15 the next morning. Had a very cordial visit. The Protestant Conference is taking the matter up this week at Neillsville.⁴⁹⁷

A Time For Peace: A Motion to Reconciliation

It was a significant day indeed when on October 21, 1958, the Wisconsin Synod’s Church Union Committee (CUC) unanimously resolved to approach the Protestant Conference regarding possible reconciliation. Professor John P. Meyer, the former colleague of Professors August Pieper and John Philipp Koehler, was the man who had introduced the motion authorizing Sitz to call on his old friend, Pastor William Beitz. Sitz was charged with the task of acquainting Beitz with the resolution and of asking him to bring it to the attention of the entire Protestant Conference. Sitz found Beitz to be gracious and open to the idea of reconciliation. Sitz would later write: “I found Bill not only surprised, but glad that an attempt was being made to undertake a reconciliation.”⁴⁹⁸

Faith-Life reported the action of the CUC in December 1958: “The following notice was handed to Pastor W.F. Beitz soon after October 21: Tuesday afternoon, October 21, 1958 Motion passed: that DP [District President] Sitz in the name of the Union Committee [all district

⁴⁹⁶ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to H.C. Nitz, February 23, 1959.

⁴⁹⁷ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, November 5, 1958.

⁴⁹⁸ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to H.C. Nitz, February 23, 1959.

presidents, president general, and Seminary faculty] make an approach to Pastor Beitz in the interest of reconciliation with the Prot stant Conference. A. Schuetze, Sec.”⁴⁹⁹

Pastor Frey, who had served on the Synod’s Peace Committee from 1929 to 1933, was one of the first synodicals to chime in concerning the reconciliation approach.

I was particularly interested to hear that initial steps have been taken to try to effect a reconciliation with the Prot stants. Now that the emotions have died down, at least on the synodical side, there should be some prospects of success. ... Since I am not a regular reader of *Faith-Life*, I do not know how many hotheads there may be left in the other camp. If they were all as calm and collected as Beitz, it should not be too difficult to find a solution and a healing of the old wounds. ... If the Synod had followed up on the report of our Peace Committee, the matter might have been settled twenty-five years ago. I hope that something will come out of this attempt.⁵⁰⁰

Mixed Reviews: The Prot stant Reply

The CUC resolution was discussed by the Prot stants at their meeting in Neillsville on November 6-7, 1958. Understandably, this resolution came as a surprise to the body. The Prot stant reporter exclaimed: “Suddenly to be confronted with these few lines, after years of official silence, was a surprise. By their vagueness and briefness they invited speculation and led to questions none of us could answer.” Still, “there was joy in our camp over this resolution. The hope of reconciliation with our enemies lies at the heart of faith, for the sake of God’s reconciling us, His enemies, unto Himself in Christ. ... So, my first reaction, said one speaker, was one of joy. True, after reflection I became wary, but I hope to retain my joy.” The Prot stants now saw as their task “to express our joys and hopes as well as our fears and perplexities as honestly as we can, and then to let the matter rest in the Lord’s hands for further development.”⁵⁰¹

When Sitz didn’t hear anything on this initial meeting he wrote to Beitz. “Will you be so kind as to send me a note ... with what intelligence you may feel free to give me? If nothing more than that the matter was placed before the Conference?”⁵⁰² Beitz replied with a long letter, relating to Sitz the initial response of the Prot stants to the idea of reconciliation.

As to whether we entertain reconciliation proposals there certainly need be no question. Our “Policy” and “Purpose” on the cover page of every issue of our periodical makes it plain that our hearts are and ever have been open to reconciliation. How could it be otherwise if we lay claim to being Christians, made so by the One Who has reconciled us to Himself, and still does so daily. Our name “The Prot stant Conference of the Wisconsin Synod” also indicates this.

That what I have just stated is true on our part is also confirmed by the note of joy evidenced when your resolution was read, as also in much of the discussion of it.

⁴⁹⁹ *Faith-Life* 31, no. 12 (December 1958): 16.

⁵⁰⁰ Immanuel Frey, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, December 1, 1958.

⁵⁰¹ Marcus Albrecht, “The Conference Report on the Reconciliation Offer,” *Faith-Life* 32, no. 1 (January 1959): 13.

⁵⁰² E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz (December 1, 1958), *Faith-Life* 32, no. 1 (January 1959): 14.

All our sustaining of a periodical at no mean cost to us thru all these thirty years was primarily for the purpose of reconciliation on a truly Christian basis.⁵⁰³

Victor Prange would later summarize: “It is plain then that the first reaction was not at all outright rejection, but rather joy mingled with questions and wonderings.”⁵⁰⁴

Not everything was rosy, however. One of the more caustic responses came in a letter from former Seminary Professor Gerhard Ruediger, who, even to this day, remained unconventional and belligerent in his approach to things. One target for Ruediger’s venom was his old, yet long-dead, nemesis, August Pieper.

The evil genius, renegade and “Ephialtes”, the man in whom the age-old opposition of the Gospel-contrary element in the synod became solidified, shortly before his demise approached his one-time yokefellow, Professor J. Ph. Koehler, with an abortive reconciliation proposal – Kurt has that on file – ; and for good reason this writer surmises that the present ‘olive twig’ is much of the same nature.⁵⁰⁵

Ruediger also reviled Doctor Elmer Kiessling, a Northwestern College professor, who at the 1957 Wisconsin Synod Convention had delivered an essay on the history of the Synod. The Protéstants saw it as a synodical estimation of the Wauwatosa Gospel.⁵⁰⁶ Ruediger maintained:

A body of men who can listen to the flamboyant gush, the ultimate in moral repulsiveness, spiked with innuendoes, non-sensical statements, total disregard for elementary principles of equity, selfrighteousness [sic] *sans pareil* [without peer] in spirit, etc. etc. that the essay of Kiessling is – a body who can listen to that and not get hot under the collar and fails to reduce such a hombre to size, horse-whip him, and have him wear striped pants for the days of his life: such a body of men can’t be taken serious when they talk, even intimate, to be of a consiliatory [sic] mind. “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain”, and the name of Professor Koehler either.⁵⁰⁷

Ruediger went on to lay down his specific demands for reconciliation:

There obtains a condition *sine qua non*. Lest you get this wrong: Not a condition posited by us: That’s the Lord’s sovereign demand. We were excommunicated – and let the foul-mouthed palaver about ‘they severed relationship with us’ finally [sic] be stopped – we were excommunicated by the godless, antichristian, bristling with innuendoes, antiscriptural and Machevillian [sic] in principle, slandering, and lying by God’s name document that boasts of being an Expert Opinion on the ‘Message’. It will never do to simply disavow this thing – take

⁵⁰³ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, December 5, 1958.

⁵⁰⁴ Victor Prange, “The Progress of the Reconciliation Efforts of the Wisconsin Synod with the Protéstant Conference, 1958-1962,” 2.

⁵⁰⁵ Gerhard Ruediger, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, January 5, 1959.

⁵⁰⁶ See Elmer Kiessling’s essay, “The Tie that Binds,” and Protéstant reply in *Faith-Life* 32, nos. 4-5 (April-May 1959).

⁵⁰⁷ Gerhard Ruediger, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, January 5, 1959.

your clue from the nuclear weapons boys. Cart it of [sic] to the demolition dump. Even so, the fallout has already contaminated or destroyed the genes of an entire generation of ‘pastors’ and the result will be cretins in the future.

The least thing you people can do is, for once sit down on your pants, that’s one thing pants are for, and study this ‘*Gutachten*’. Get to be ‘proof readers’ and stop being herecy [sic] hunters. Then, if after, let’s say a year of actual study, God’s Holy Spirit shall succeed to lead you into a realization that you people have become guilty of a crime that has cried to highest heaven all these years ... and then come clean. ... You will admit, that such a thing isn’t possible. The idea in [sic] utopian, fantastic. You would lose face; your entire built-up [sic] would crash about your guilty heads; you would have to confess to your congregations that you have all these years held them in errors’ maze. Your people would then, to be consistent, declare: We of course forgive you as far as that’s in our province. But you can no longer function as our pastors, teachers, and spiritual counselors. Which would mean that at this late date you would be cast out on the cold world justly, the way you did to every Protéstant without any compunction of a guilty conscience. Mind you, that’s the status quo of the proudly arrogant Wisconsin Synod as a body. And mind you that’s the *conditio sine qua non* as it obtains before God. And do not for a moment believe that there breathed a Protéstant believing that such a thing is going to happen.⁵⁰⁸

Ruediger closed with a prediction. “This controversy is not going to get settled this side of eternity. A situation we might well ponder with fear and trembling. As for our infinitesimally [sic] small group: We have absolutely no earthly future. And we are in danger at least as great as our fierce and smug enemies to lose our own miserable souls.”⁵⁰⁹

Despite this bitter reply to the synodical “olive twig,” Sitz continued to pursue peace with the Protéstants. In a letter to Beitz, Tois quoted their mutual friend, Pastor H.C. Nitz, concerning a possible *modus operandi* for reconciliation.

“I was told that at the New Ulm Synod in 1935 the West Wisconsin District was told – and the District promised – to review the Protéstant matter. I do not have the documentary proof, at hand. But, if that is the case, the West Wisconsin District should take the first step toward reconciliation. Perhaps the best procedure would be to have an *Ausschuss* [sic] [committee] of the C.U.C. and that the Protéstants meet in conference for a ‘brush clearing’ session. The matter lies heavy on my heart and conscience.”⁵¹⁰

Beitz responded:

Nitz latches on to the suggestion made to Conference by Karl Koehler in the early years of the controversy: To let bygones be bygones, and start from scratch. That was a very noble suggestion on Karl’s part, and had meaning and practibility [sic]

⁵⁰⁸ Gerhard Ruediger, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, January 5, 1959.

⁵⁰⁹ Gerhard Ruediger, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, January 5, 1959.

⁵¹⁰ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, February 24, 1959.

at the time when spoken. But after thirty years, and with them, a new generation that knows not the Josephs that were sent to us at that time, that suggestion has lost its force, and is hardly any longer applicable or feasible. It will get us nowhere, I fear, but only deeper into the mire between us.⁵¹¹

Beitz's suggestion, like Ruediger's, was to lift the suspensions:

Lifting the suspensions entails the repudiation of the scurrilous, not to say, devilish, *Gutachten* and its whole trailing brood hatched out thereby thruout [sic] synod and intersynodical circles. It entails the clearing of the fair name of the Koehlers whom synod has besmirched so woefully.

But that is putting the cart before the horse. The grievous sin of synod is that they have trampled the Gospel, which the good Lord has so graciously set on a candlestick for us all to rejoice in, under foot into the dirt of officialdom and dirty synod politics. Thereby they have repudiated the Gospel, and given grave offence, and made people in the church and in the world to blaspheme the fair Name of Christ. That is the real issue. That must be settled, or nothing is settled.⁵¹²

In closing, Beitz left Sitz with words of warning.

Since the committee has thus far had you as their spokesman, so to speak, allow me to quote here what one of the brethren stated to me when I acquainted him with the contents of your letter to me: "Your divine call Beitz is to head off Tois before he commits the folly of jelying a committee which is to deal with us. Thereby you will charitably spare him the humiliation which the flop will inevitably bring."⁵¹³

Other Protéstants reacted to the peace discussions through *Faith-Life*.⁵¹⁴ As was the case throughout, the biggest question raised was the method of procedure. The Protéstants made various suggestions. Almost to a person the suggestion was made: lift the suspensions. "Both [Martin] Zimmermann and Beitz speak of the harm which the suspensions have done in keeping people shut up because if anyone spoke up, he was suspended."⁵¹⁵ Sitz would answer on April 7, 1959. "Your suggestion about cashiering the suspensions coincides with the thinking of not a few Synodicals. Doubtless it will be taken up in the next meeting of the Union Committee."⁵¹⁶

The Protéstants also wanted the entire Synod to take a vested interest in these reconciliation efforts. They felt that true peace could only be realized if the members of Synod came to a real understanding of synodical actions against the Protéstants. Dealing with committees was something that did not excite the Protéstants. They wondered how a committee could really represent an entire Synod when it came to confession and absolution. However, here it is important to understand that the Protéstants were not looking for a confession of sins on the

⁵¹¹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, March 19, 1959.

⁵¹² William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, March 19, 1959.

⁵¹³ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, March 19, 1959.

⁵¹⁴ Most of these reactions can be found in the 1959 and 1960 issues of *Faith-Life*.

⁵¹⁵ Victor Prange, "Progress of the Reconciliation Efforts," 3.

⁵¹⁶ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, April 7, 1959.

part of the Synod. They were just looking for a personal, Christian-to-Christian undertaking where true repentance could be worked by the Holy Spirit and fellowship restored.

We don't look for an official statement from them saying: We have sinned. It isn't necessary either as far as we are concerned provided the personal attitude of the men involved is an outgrowth of faith and as such is imbued with a consciousness of sin freely and privately communicated to the Lord. When that is the case, the entire demeanor is stamped with genuineness and yearns for and welcomes fellowship with other sinners who have similarly laid themselves bare before the Lord and in like manner have been forgiven by Him. Such an attitude is sufficient and far more valuable than any official confession of sin passed in solemn conclave.⁵¹⁷

These public reactions to Synod's resolution were not popular among synodicals. Sitz wrote Beitz, "I deem it proper to let you know that the various reactions published in *Faith-Life* have had a decided dampening effect upon the Union Committee."⁵¹⁸ Sitz was particularly upset that his personal correspondence with Beitz had become a matter of public record on the pages of *Faith-Life*. "My correspondence with you must remain for the time being on the personal basis, of friend to friend, both of us under God looking for a resolution of the problem before us. Spontaneity is subjected to restraint as soon as the possibility is hinted that a letter may see print."⁵¹⁹

The Synod had an opportunity to respond officially at their convention at Saginaw, Michigan, on August 5-12, 1959. The report of the Union Committee to Synod commented only briefly on the efforts. "Pres. Sitz has been in correspondence with Pastor Beitz on this matter, and the Prot stant Conference has expressed itself as reported in *Faith-Life*. The Synod may want to express itself on this matter."⁵²⁰ The committee dealing with the President's report brought in a resolution which was adopted: "That we encourage the Union Committee of the Wisconsin Synod to seek a speedy and God-pleasing settlement of the whole issue."⁵²¹

One other item of interest from the 1959 Synod Convention was the reading of John Ph. Koehler's *Quartalschrift* article "*Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns*" [*Legalism among us*"]. This had long been the desire of men like Sitz and H.C. Nitz, who wrote in 1955, "I am more than ever convinced that we need to disseminate and study a good English translation of Koehler's '*Gesetzlich Wesen unter uns*.' I re-read it ... and found it embarrassing and edifying."⁵²² Nitz's proposal became a reality when the essay was stuck into the 1959 Synod agenda at the last moment. The Prot stants saw this as a very significant step on the part of synodicals to ground themselves on gospel principles, which alone could bring about true reconciliation.

It was with a sense of appreciation that I read that Synod at its last biennial convention in Saginaw ... contemplated Prof. J. Ph. Koehler's *Quartalschrift* article "*Gesetzlich Wesen Unter Uns*." Reaching to the roots of our sinful and rebellious life the article portrays our enslavement in the works of the flesh, and at

⁵¹⁷ Albrecht, "Reconciliation Offer," 13-14.

⁵¹⁸ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, July 21, 1959.

⁵¹⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, April 7, 1959.

⁵²⁰ 1959 *Proceedings* of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 170.

⁵²¹ 1959 *Proceedings* of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 24.

⁵²² H.C. Nitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, September 30, 1955.

the same time it lifts us up with a master stroke into the consciousness of our high calling in the Gospel as sons of God who must make their calling and election sure by standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. ...

You, the delegates, rejoiced in this presentation and your hearts burned within you as Prof. Koehler opened the Scriptures to you. It was indeed so: A voice from the past spoke to you again. That day in Saginaw the appeal of the Holy Spirit was urgent among you, as your reporter in the *Northwestern Lutheran* testifies. It was as though Prof. Koehler, this prophet of the Lord, stood in your midst again as he did of old, when Synod knew better days.

If we of the Protéstant Conference had been personally present with you in Saginaw for the hearing of this preachment alone, apart from the response which such preachment commands, our hearts in that hearing would have been knit with yours and vice versa. ... Upon reading that the delegates of Synod rejoiced in hearing this preachment I was involuntarily drawn into the bond of fellowship with the synodical delegates. And therein also we are given the directive for our hope of reconciliation. If you of Synod desire to draw close to us even as we seek to draw close to you, so that we may be united in Christian fellowship, this can be realized only by a study of the Word of God and by a restudy of the Wauwatosa theology, which is our peculiar heritage. ... In the mutual reclaiming of the past treasures which the Lord has given the Wisconsin Synod lies our hope for reconciliation.⁵²³

One thing that disappointed the Protéstants about the reading of this article, however, was the fact that Pastor Waldemar Gieschen, the man who read the essay, failed to mention that the essay had been translated by Protéstant Alex Hillmer. Another disappointment was that the Synod resolution to continue peace talks with the Protéstants was not reported in the *Northwestern Lutheran*. "These omissions make me wonder whether the peace proposal is considered in some quarters to be too insignificant to be reported to Synod and whether the policy of *totschweigen* [to hush up] should even at this juncture be observed toward the Protéstants."⁵²⁴

Despite these reservations, the move toward reconciliation continued in Synod. The Union Committee met in September 1959 to discuss further steps. Sitz wrote to Beitz with their conclusions. "The thought prevailed that a sub-committee might possibly be appointed to meet with the committee of the Protéstants Conference to clear away some of the obstacles that might stand in the way of a general meeting and discussion of the issues, trusting that the good Lord would bring about the end desired."⁵²⁵ The men appointed to this committee were Pastor Karl Krauss, Western Wisconsin District President Richard Mueller, and Sitz, who also would act as chairman. Immanuel Frey was later added. Sitz asked Beitz to take up the proposal with the Protéstant Conference and to "venture a guess as to the earliest time that might be convenient for a meeting of this Committee."⁵²⁶ Beitz replied that in his opinion "the whole matter had now

⁵²³ Martin Zimmermann, letter to Church Union Committee of the Wisconsin Synod, November 3, 1959.

⁵²⁴ E.E. Sauer, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, October 22, 1959.

⁵²⁵ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, September 21, 1959.

⁵²⁶ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, September 21, 1959.

grown beyond the sub-rosa stage dealings carried on between yourself and me personally as spokesmen for the groups at variance. Your Committee's proposal is made to the Conference and must be answered as such. ... we must now deal through Conference appointed channels."⁵²⁷

The Union Committee's new proposal was discussed by the Protéstants at their meeting of November 5-6, 1959, and it was reported in *Faith-Life* that "the answer by Conference took the form of letters addressed to the sub-committee chairman."⁵²⁸ In a letter to Sitz, William Beitz made it clear that "we are agreed that no one can act for the other." Then Beitz made his position clear in no uncertain terms.

We are thru [sic] with committees dealing with us. We have lost faith in committees. Such being the case I am therefore instructed by our Conference to inform you that we think it futile, and waste of time of money, to deal with your committee of three, as well as with the Union Committee, and are therefore appealing directly to Synod at large, not in hopes of great expectations, but for whatever conscience-troubled souls there may be in Synod, both as to people, but particularly as to conscientious pastors, who have been cowed and kept in the dark these many days as to what really has been going on. Talk about brain-washing. Instead of making them free souls to act freely, synod has made them slaves with a whip of fear over them to do their bidding. ... We will put our cards on the table. Whoever will do the same on your part there true fellowship can be restored. But whoever will not do so no amount of committee's and Synod's resolutions will be able to restore it.⁵²⁹

Sitz was understandably grieved by the Beitz response, a fact proven by the number of unsent, hand-written replies to his old friend Bill that he still deemed worthy to save. In one draft he wrote, "To tell truth [sic], I did not know what to reply to it." It appears that Sitz was afraid to say too much, so finally on December 11, 1959, Sitz replied with a very short note. "The receipt of your letter of Nov. 11th ought to have been acknowledged long ago. Thank you for sending it. I too could wish we might have discussed the matters contained in it face to face. It would seem that the hope for an approach to reconciliation is well-nigh extinguished."⁵³⁰

The Protéstants went ahead with their idea of publishing responses to Synod. In the March 1960 issue of *Faith-Life*, Conference reporter Marcus Albrecht wrote: "Without much discussion it was agreed to publish these replies rather than to confine them to the archives of the sub-committee. By publishing them we address the Church and thereby unite the elements that can be united. These matters belong before the Church, if they have any value at all. ... To be open and to speak openly is a fruit of the Gospel."⁵³¹

E.E. Sauer authored the first published response in December 1959. Sauer reported that he was saddened when he heard how a Synod official had told an acquaintance that "the Protéstants were unapproachable; it was also intimated that Synod would not undo anything that the 'fathers' had done."⁵³² In an accompanying letter he gave his reaction to Synod's lethargy in effecting reconciliation over the last thirty years. "We have been explaining our position for

⁵²⁷ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, October 1, 1959.

⁵²⁸ *Faith-Life* 32, no. 11 (November 1959): 3, 16.

⁵²⁹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, November 11, 1959.

⁵³⁰ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, December 11, 1959.

⁵³¹ Marcus Albrecht, "Conference Report, November 5-6, 1959," *Faith-Life* 33, no. 3 (March 1960): 16.

⁵³² E.E. Sauer, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, October 22, 1959.

some thirty years, but there has been practically no reaction. Synod has written almost nothing positive. It has raised accusations of false doctrine, but has not brought specific proofs. There were other accusations at times, but they did not meet the issues. *Totschweigen* [hushing up] and suspensions were Synod's strongest weapons."⁵³³

Beitz and Zimmermann responded in the January 1960 issue of *Faith-Life*; Paul Hensel's reply came in February.

We are willing to eat all manner of humble pie; to cast all harm done us into the sea; to be silent on all the blunders your officials have made; in nothing to please ourselves, but to please you for your good to sanctification, yes, shoulder the blame of others as our Lord did; in order to unburden your conscience, we are willing to be synod's scapegoat, and that before all people. But one thing we cannot do: cover up, countenance, condone, forgive and become party to hypocrisy committed in the Name of the Lord, to the lie deeply embedded in all your disciplinary actions throughout, from the first day to the last.⁵³⁴

What appeared most bothersome to Hensel was the general disinterest in Synod, especially among the pastorate, concerning the whole Prot stant matter. "We expected the synodicals to study us, look us over, in order to determine whether or not they could with a good conscience and with joy tear down the wall of separation and embrace us as their lost and new-found brethren. But nothing happened – nothing at all."⁵³⁵ Sitz reacted to all these letters with disappointment. He wrote to Beitz that "the sneering remarks *Faith-Life* published cast stumbling-blocks in the way of a nascent repentance."⁵³⁶ Sitz goes on to make reference to Beitz's famous paper.

Does it not appear that an attempt is being made to do what you, together with St. Paul in Galatians, condemned? By constant and unremitting preachment of law trying to hew out a course of reconciliation for Synod? Let us be reminded that the law worketh wrath. Prof. Sauer breathed the right gospel spirit in his letter in *Faith-Life*. You also struck the right note in your first reaction and in your first letter. Paul Hensel also made a valiant effort to strike that note. But in the past several months the law has been preached with a loud voice and is still being preached. That is the natural, the easy, and the ineffectual approach. Gospel is so far removed from the natural and is so difficult to proclaim that few succeed in any degree. ... There exists no "God-given right" to apply Law where the Gospel is called for together with action proceeding from the Gospel.⁵³⁷

The Church Union Committee met again in May 1960. Sitz reported on a January 1960 meeting that he had with Beitz and Zimmermann. "The meeting again was amicable. The proposal to discuss in committee meeting preliminarily was once more summarily refused. They expressed the opinion that the suspensions, since they were unrighteous, must be lifted first,

⁵³³ E.E. Sauer, letter to Prot stant Conference, October 22, 1959.

⁵³⁴ Paul Hensel, "The 'Wauwatosa Gospel' and the Present Generation," *Faith-Life* 33, no. 2 (February 1960): 13.

⁵³⁵ Paul Hensel, "Present Generation," 14.

⁵³⁶ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, April 1, 1960.

⁵³⁷ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, April 1, 1960.

before any other approach could be made. Then on a fraternal basis in social intercourse brotherly confidence could be restored.”⁵³⁸ Sitz went on to opine briefly concerning the Protéstant responses in *Faith-Life*.

In some cases the proposals have been evangelical, in others one must acknowledge an earnest effort to be fair, in which one will be ready to allow for an occasional over-severe judgment. But some replies descended to the level of sneering. The general observation must obtain, however, that they have contributed very little toward an understanding, to say nothing of a reconciliation. Indeed, in general they have proved hindrances to such.⁵³⁹

At that May meeting the CUC adopted three principles for dealing with the Protéstant matter. “First and fundamentally, as Christians, we must ask, ‘What is right before God?’ On this principle we must stand regardless of any other consideration. Secondly, we deem it proper that the suspensions of thirty years ago be reviewed. Finally, if they be found righteous, they must be upheld; or if they be found unrighteous, or even uncertain, they must be lifted.”⁵⁴⁰ These resolutions were sent to the nine districts for their consideration in the summer of 1960, and they all resolved to ask the CUC to continue its efforts looking toward reconciliation with the Protéstants.⁵⁴¹

At a CUC meeting in the late summer of 1960 Sitz “drew attention to the statement that [Beitz] and Martin [Zimmermann] had made to me that subcommittee members would be welcome at any of [the Protéstant] conferences.”⁵⁴² As a consequence he wrote Beitz, saying, “The Commission and its Advisory Committee resolved that the subcommittee members should accept an invitation from the Protéstant Conference coming to us in writing.”⁵⁴³

The Protéstant reaction to this committee resolution was anything but encouraging. “There was some puzzlement as to what this letter, seeking an invitation, meant.”⁵⁴⁴ Apparently either the Protéstants failed to realize that Beitz and Zimmermann had intimated this as an avenue for discussion, or Beitz and Zimmermann had been misunderstood by Sitz. Protéstant Marcus Albrecht stated, “The Conference was not clear as to what Sitz was suggesting, and this may have led to some *Wortklauberei* [word-splitting] on our part.”⁵⁴⁵ Then in an instance of such word-splitting Albrecht writes, “The letter does not state that with the knowledge and approval of the Commission on Doctrinal Matters and its Advisory Committee the subcommittee, through its chairman, is to *seek* [emphasis added] a written invitation. It seems only to say that the CDM and its AC resolved that the subcommittee should *accept* [emphasis added] a written invitation, if it gets one.”⁵⁴⁶ Later Albrecht wrote, “Zimmermann and Beitz did not extend an invitation to the subcommittee as such. In the course of their conversation with Sitz they merely repeated what had been said before, also in regard to the reconciliation offer, and what has always been

⁵³⁸ E. Arnold Sitz, hand-written report to Church Union Committee, May 1960.

⁵³⁹ E. Arnold Sitz, hand-written report to Church Union Committee, May 1960.

⁵⁴⁰ Resolutions adopted May 12, 1960, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin by the Synodical Council.

⁵⁴¹ Victor Prange, “Progress of the Reconciliation Efforts,” 10.

⁵⁴² E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, September 2, 1960.

⁵⁴³ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, September 2, 1960.

⁵⁴⁴ Victor Prange, “Progress of the Reconciliation Efforts,” 10.

⁵⁴⁵ Marcus Albrecht, “Conference Report, November 2-3, 1960,” *Faith-Life* 34, no. 4 (April 1961): 6.

⁵⁴⁶ Albrecht, “Conference Report, November 2-3, 1960,” 6.

self-evident in our circle, that anyone is welcome.”⁵⁴⁷ Despite this being the case, Albrecht still concluded that “we consider a meeting with them at this stage more than futile and less than honest, and we recommend to them something quite different from a meeting ...”⁵⁴⁸ Finally, Albrecht added a personal note. “By continuing to use the avenue of their friendship Sitz beclouds the fact that he and Beitz are now, and have been for many years, also opponents.”⁵⁴⁹

In a letter to Beitz, dated January 12, 1961, Sitz replied, “I have been not a little bewildered at the change that has come over the Protéstants since we first approached them for a reconciliation. The reception in the beginning warmed the heart. But since that first meeting the climate seems to have turned colder.”⁵⁵⁰ Beitz responded with sharp tones.

Tois, why prolong the writing of notes now done for two years, and we are still where we started from, if anything retrogressed, as you also infer in your letters. No matter what we say, you people simply have no ear for it. You either don’t read it, or don’t register it, or don’t entertain it, or, which God forbid, are rigidly hardened. ... The arrogance on your part to ask us, excommunicated and suspended Protéstants, to tender you a written and engraved (?) invitation to condescend to appear as a committee at our conference meeting. That is unmitigated gall, unbecoming of a Christian to a Christian. That is officialdom gone to seed. Where is your sense of decency and propriety? Any one with an iota of fair-mindedness left in his bones would feel the impropriety of that. Are we criminal? No wonder we don’t get anywhere.⁵⁵¹

Professor E.E. Sauer received copies of this most recent correspondence between Sitz and Beitz, and he sent Sitz his opinion of them. “After I had read them, the passage came to mind, ‘The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.’ What I had in mind was this: In many respects Russia and the United States have fewer points in common than the Wisconsin Synod ... and the Protéstants. But those countries continue to negotiate ... But we cannot even reach the talking stage.”⁵⁵² He suggested that something had to be done to “push us off dead center,” and his personal suggestion was that Professor John P. Meyer, as the sole surviving signer of the *Gutachten* and the “absolution” of Professor Ruediger, should remove his signature from both documents. “It would be in line with, and would strengthen, the suggestions now being put forth ... that the condemnation pronounced by the *Gutachten* was unwarranted. ... Rebuilding could begin at once on the basis of ‘forgive and forget.’”⁵⁵³

Sitz replied with hesitation.

I have seriously considered approaching Prof. Meyer with the content of your letter. One thing has given me pause, however. That is the fear from past experience that *Faith-Life* might sneer at the old man, who just passed his eighty-eighth birthday, which is something akin to the taunt that he had waited till the brink of the grave to do this. If that were to happen, you may be sure that there

⁵⁴⁷ Albrecht, “Conference Report, November 2-3, 1960,” 16.

⁵⁴⁸ Albrecht, “Conference Report, November 2-3, 1960,” 16.

⁵⁴⁹ Albrecht, “Conference Report, November 2-3, 1960,” 16.

⁵⁵⁰ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, January 12, 1961.

⁵⁵¹ William Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, January 19, 1961.

⁵⁵² E.E. Sauer, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, February 11, 1961.

⁵⁵³ E.E. Sauer, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, February 11, 1961.

would be such revulsion in the ranks of the Synod as would send any further effort to come to an understanding down the drain.⁵⁵⁴

Sitz went on to report that despite negative Protéstant reaction their “committee is nonetheless continuing its work.”⁵⁵⁵ This work was the first real historical research the subcommittee had put in on the issue, something Sauer found inexcusable and against the spirit of the Wauwatosa Gospel.

The work you describe as now going on, it seems to me, should have been the first step in the work of your committee. If your committee had done so at once, you might have put the results of your studies before the superior committee, received their approval, and then approached the Protéstants with definite ideas and suggestions. Evidently this was not done. As a result you could not place a definite plan before the Protéstants for their approval. It is highly surprising to see that only now your committee is taking up this fundamental work.⁵⁵⁶

As to his suggestion about a retraction of Meyer’s signature, Sauer responded:

With you I should deplore any slur, even the slightest, upon Professor Meyer if he should make statements according to the line I suggested. The word about ‘joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth’ is still in our Bibles. However, I am certain that such statements would not be made. I still believe that Professor Meyer would do himself and Synod a great service. ... A declaration by Professor Meyer could effect a real miracle.⁵⁵⁷

Despite Sauer’s assurances, a Meyer retraction never materialized.

The subcommittee’s research, on the other hand, was the topic of not a few letters between the committee members. Karl Krauss was to review the reports of the Western Wisconsin District. Immanuel Frey was to review the reports and activities of the Peace Committee of which he had been a member from 1929-1933. Richard Mueller was to check the minutes of the Western Wisconsin District. Sitz was to scan the early volumes of *Faith-Life*.

In a letter to Frey, Sitz questions “whether the Western Wisconsin District carried out the reconsideration of its resolutions after 1933. I do know that they never did act on their promise, given at the 1935 sessions at New Ulm, to approach the Protéstants once more.”⁵⁵⁸ In an earlier letter, Frey had given an update on his research, “After receiving your letter I started to look for the old material and after considerable search found it. It included, among other things, copies of the Peace Committee reports in 1931 and 1933. I had forgotten that it was such hot stuff.”⁵⁵⁹ On a lighter note Frey commented: “In the file I found several letters ... I notice that there are two from you, in which you advised me to resign from the Peace Committee after the Zimmermann fiasco. At that time at least you seemed to think that we were a bunch of scoundrels...”⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁴ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to E.E. Sauer, March 9, 1961.

⁵⁵⁵ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to E.E. Sauer, March 9, 1961.

⁵⁵⁶ E.E. Sauer, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, March 14, 1961.

⁵⁵⁷ E.E. Sauer, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, March 14, 1961.

⁵⁵⁸ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Immanuel Frey, April 7, 1961.

⁵⁵⁹ Immanuel Frey, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, March 12, 1961.

⁵⁶⁰ Immanuel Frey, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, March 12, 1961.

After deliberations the sub-committee reported to the Synodical Council on May 24, 1961, and their amended report was put before the Synod Convention in Milwaukee on August 8-17, 1961. It read:

Your committee, charged by the Synod with a review of the Prot stant matter of 30 years ago and encouraged by the several Districts to carry on, wishes to report the following:

- 1) We have reviewed the proceedings of the Western Wisconsin District of 1926 to 1934, the minutes of the WWD of the same years, the Proceedings of the Synod, particularly of 1933 and 1935, and statements of the Peace Committee to the Synod.
- 2) The evidence shows that the action taken on the 1927 resolutions of the WWD at Watertown was clouded over with uncertainties.
 - a) The scope of the resolutions was left in doubt, for it was said on the one hand that the suspensions were excommunications, on the other hand that they were not.
 - b) The vote taken on the Watertown resolutions was not unanimous.
 - c) As to the interpretation put on the resolutions, they have remained unclear and received various interpretations.

After considering all the angles available, your committee comes to the conclusion that the Synod should reaffirm the resolution adopted by the Synod in 1933, to wit: “Resolved, That it be the sentiment and understanding of this body that the WWD of its own free will and accord reconsider the Watertown Resolutions and the suspensions in the Fort Atkinson cases.” The adoption of this report does not mean a judgment on the WWD action of that time.⁵⁶¹

Pastor Victor Prange wrote the following year: “The reconciliation efforts have now brought it about that the matter lies before the Western Wisconsin District. A three man committee was appointed by the district presidium in the fall of 1961 to do some preliminary work which is to be put into the hands of the convention floor committee which will bring in a report to the convention of the district in June 1962.”⁵⁶² The men appointed to that sub-committee were Pastors Harold Wicke, Gerhard Fischer and Prange. Their efforts, as it turned out, would have to stand the testing of fire, as yet another Prot stant blaze broke out, this one in Livingston, Montana.

Sending Crossed Signals: The Hinz Case

In 1956-57 Victor Prange had served as E. Arnold Sitz’s vicar in Tucson. During that time, there had been some occasion to discuss the Prot stants since Sitz and Prange shared an interest in history. Now Prange, who married one of Sitz’s daughters in 1958 and was assigned to

⁵⁶¹ 1961 *Proceedings* of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 199-200.

⁵⁶² Victor Prange, “Progress of the Reconciliation Efforts,” 13-14.

the Western Wisconsin District, was serving on that district's sub-committee charged with reviewing the thirty-year-old Protéstant suspensions.

In the fall of 1957, Sitz got another vicar by the name of Gerald Hinz. Hinz, too, had a profound interest in the Protéstants and is said to have had great adulation for Arnold Sitz's wife because she was J.P. Koehler's daughter. After his year of service in Tucson, Hinz returned to the Seminary where he graduated in 1959. He was assigned to Livingston, Montana of the Dakota-Montana District.

By 1961 Hinz was having great misgivings about Synod's approach to the Protéstants. He felt that Synod should have been doing and saying more to patch up the relationship. On June 20, 1961, he addressed a letter to his former bishop concerning the Protéstant Committee's 1961 report to the Synod Convention.

Hinz first recalled the words of the committee's report to the districts in 1960. He called the words of that report "brave ... words which warmed my heart since they indicated that after thirty years of frustration, there was finally a committee working on this matter which recognized the deep moral implications of this controversy and was going to resolve it only with this consideration: 'What is right before God?'"⁵⁶³

The 1961 Synod report was a different matter to Hinz, however. He did not feel that the wording went far enough in describing the necessity of setting the matter straight. "Instead of treating this matter as something morally right or wrong which must be settled before God, your committee has confined itself merely to the technicalities of the suspensions. At no time does the Committee on The Protéstant Matter enter into the morality of this controversy at all."⁵⁶⁴ Hinz goes on to criticize the report for saying that the 1927 Watertown resolutions are "clouded over with uncertainties" on the one hand, but that the committee, on the other hand, "does not mean a judgment on the Western Wisconsin District action of that time." Hinz concluded that the committee "contradicts the very goal it has set for itself in the 'Report to the Nine Districts' of May, 1960 and shows itself incapable of handling its own assignment."⁵⁶⁵

Sitz answered his former understudy in calm fashion:

I can well understand your disappointment. I also am not too well pleased with the report as it was adopted by the Commission on Doctrinal Matters and the Synodical Council. Our original report was very sharp. It included condemnation of the *Gutachten* insofar as it purported to be a critique of the Beitz Paper. We also stated that there was a possibility that the vote of the Watertown Resolutions reflected a minority. These items were eliminated by the Plenary Committee and the Synodical Committee. Rather than withdraw the report altogether and so shelve the whole matter, we went along in order to bring the matter onto the floor of the Synod. ... Experience teaches that often one must be content in a large body with having brought an issue to its attention at all, let alone standing all the time on the rock-bottom foundation of the truth. Not all as are conversant with *Faith-Life* as you. Most often in life we must be content with having borne witness to the truth. Whether it is accepted on every hand is another matter. And that is all that is required of us: Witness.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶³ Gerald Hinz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 20, 1961.

⁵⁶⁴ Gerald Hinz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 20, 1961.

⁵⁶⁵ Gerald Hinz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 20, 1961.

⁵⁶⁶ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to Gerald Hinz, June 27, 1961.

Hinz was not satisfied. In September 1961 he mailed off a letter to Dakota-Montana District President Walter Schumann publicly declaring his sympathies with the Protéstants. “I feel that I must be honest and inform you as district president that I am one in heart with the Protéstants. 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.”⁵⁶⁷ He was careful to point out that this “does not mean that I intend to make ‘propaganda’ against the Wisconsin Synod or for the Protéstants in my congregation. I abhor such a use of the call as being totally unprincipled. But what this declaration does mean is that I will confess my agreement with the Protéstants whenever that becomes necessary as part of Christian honesty.”⁵⁶⁸

Unfortunately, Schumann’s response was less than salutary, as he replied in a rather condescending manner. “In the formative years which follow graduation from Seminary I am sure that I could think of many more fruitful and beneficial areas of study than the Protéstant Controversy. . . . I am surprised, furthermore, that after two years in the ministry you now stand ready to ‘declare’ fellowship with the Protéstants. I don’t believe you are ready to declare anything of the sort.”⁵⁶⁹ Schumann also urged Hinz to accept a call he was holding to Kiel, Wisconsin, at the time. “Until you gain a measure of experience and maturity I believe it would be to your advantage and that of the Church if you were in closer contact with older and more experienced men.”⁵⁷⁰

Hinz responded quickly. “You belittle my intelligence. You demean my choice of subjects to study without bothering in the least to recognize that this was and is a matter of conscience with me. . . . I utterly resent your bully-boy tactics and have no desire to be part of a system that harbors and encourages such tactics in the name of doing what is best for the Church at large.”⁵⁷¹ Hinz went on to tell Schumann that he had offered his resignation to the congregation in Livingston and that the congregation would meet the next day to act on it. “However, no matter what their decision is, I feel I should make this clear. 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.”⁵⁷²

Eventually Hinz would be suspended. He sent a postcard to Prange with the news on October 25, 1961. “We are out. Schumann put the thing to me in a way which would have compromised my convictions on this thing, and so I simply stood on my original statement to him. The result is that I am no longer expected to fill my pulpit...”⁵⁷³

The Hinz case bothered Prange very much. He dashed off a letter to his father-in-law to blow off “a little steam about various happenings within Synod.”

You may have noticed that I am one of three on committee to study suspensions. Now with this thing come up, it seems a waste of time to pursue the matter any further. . . . The one thing I fear above all others though is this: that theological matters and synodical matters will no longer be a matter for serious discussion.

⁵⁶⁷ Gerald Hinz, letter to Walter Schumann (September 3, 1961), *Faith-Life* 35, no. 2 (February 1962): 6.

⁵⁶⁸ Gerald Hinz, letter to Walter Schumann, September 3, 1961.

⁵⁶⁹ Walter Schumann, letter to Gerald Hinz (September 7, 1961), *Faith-Life* 35, no. 2 (February 1962): 7.

⁵⁷⁰ Walter Schumann, letter to Gerald Hinz, September 7, 1961.

⁵⁷¹ Gerald Hinz, letter to Walter Schumann (September 11, 1961), *Faith-Life* 35, no. 2 (February 1962): 7.

⁵⁷² Gerald Hinz, letter to Walter Schumann, September 11, 1961.

⁵⁷³ Gerald Hinz, letter to Victor Prange, October 25, 1961.

All we will be asked to do is to get on the Synodical Program bandwagon which will bring us to higher and higher successes as we shove theology further and further into the background. Such is the Spirit [sic] which seems to be taking hold – and it is not the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷⁴

Prange also wrote a letter to President Schumann protesting the Hinz suspension. “It seems very strange that such action should be taken so shortly after Synod resolved to ask the Western Wisconsin District to look into this matter of the suspensions. ... By your suspension you have in effect given the Synod’s answer to any question as to whether or not the suspensions of 30 years ago were indeed valid.”⁵⁷⁵ Schumann replied, and the entire tone of his letter was once again rather condescending. “In your communication I believe I detect the rather naïve assumption that should the suspensions against the Protéstants be lifted, all would again automatically become members of the Synodical family. Believe me, there are other equally weighty matters that must first be resolved. Investigate ... to your heart’s content, but do not lose sight of the fact that your ‘investigations’ will not be the only factor in determining fellowship...”⁵⁷⁶

At One Fell Swoop: The Lifted Suspensions

Despite this adverse climate, the Western Wisconsin District continued to investigate the Protéstant matter. In 1962 Prange wrote a conference paper entitled, “A Review of the Beitz Paper,” which struck a very conciliatory note. While criticizing Beitz for some unclarity, Prange pointed out that much of what the paper had to say really struck a cord in his heart. “Let us listen to the preacher. Reading and studying [Beitz’s] paper did me much spiritual good.”⁵⁷⁷ He commented that every pastor would have to admit that he is not always faithful to his calling, as Beitz himself admits, and that a pastor daily needs to come before the Lord in repentance, seeking forgiveness. One older pastor, who lived through the early years of the controversy, commented to Prange afterwards that if he had read his essay thirty years earlier he would have been in danger of being suspended himself.

Pastor Harold Wicke, in turn, presented a paper on the *Gutachten*. In that paper Wicke commented that this study was “all the more necessary because of the review we have already had on the Beitz=Message [sic].” In stark contrast to Prange, Wicke agreed with the *Gutachten*’s assessment of the Beitz Paper, especially in respect to its understanding of Beitz’s teaching on repentance. However, Wicke encouraged that there be still more investigation into the history of the matter.

The committee continued its work, gathering information and seeking help from those who had an intimate knowledge of the situation. Prange leaned especially on his father-in-law for assistance. In fact, Sitz met with the committee on different occasions.

A significant event took place early in 1962 when the district presidium chose the floor committee that would bring a report and resolution to the district. Prange wrote his former classmate, Pastor Richard Balge, on March 16, 1962. “Committee on Protéstants includes following pastors: [E.E.] Kowalke (chairman), H.C. Nitz, Waldemar Gieschen, and H. Oswald

⁵⁷⁴ Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, November 9, 1961.

⁵⁷⁵ Victor Prange, letter to Walter Schumann, November 9, 1961.

⁵⁷⁶ Walter Schumann, letter to Victor Prange, November 14, 1961.

⁵⁷⁷ Victor Prange, “A Review of the Beitz Paper,” 16.

(married to [Protéstant John] John [sister]). Three on committee are Protéstant sympathizers which leads me to think that the district powers want some real action. The floor committee could have been loaded in the other direction.”⁵⁷⁸

Despite this favorable turn of events, the study committee still recommended to the 1962 district convention floor committee “that a continuing study be made during the next two year though [Prange] suggested that we suggest a lifting of the suspensions. But this sounded like too much for the district to swallow at this time to Fischer and Wicke, though they personally said they could go along with it.”⁵⁷⁹

The floor committee had other ideas. Prange reported that they “did not call us in until they already had their minds pretty well made up to lift the suspensions. I heard from Nitz that Kowalke was at first quite hesitant about doing much of anything.”⁵⁸⁰ Apparently Kowalke was concerned how the district would respond to a lifting of the suspensions. “But Nitz and Gieschen and finally also Oswald kept talking until EEK [Kowalke] was himself convinced that lifting the suspensions was the only thing to do especially in view of the Synodical resolutions of [1961]. This then was the report which they placed before the district...”⁵⁸¹

When the report was made to the district many questions were asked. As chairman, Kowalke answered them all to the best of his ability. Would the Protéstants be restored to full membership? He answered that a lifting of the suspension would also lift all barriers to full membership but that fellowship would have to be established independently. Does this mean that former officials were convicted of wrongdoing? Does this resolution need to be adopted unanimously? Would the congregation at Fort Atkinson be asked to lift their suspensions against the two teachers who had called their pastor a false prophet? These last three questions Kowalke answered in the negative. When some were not satisfied that all the implications of lifting the suspensions had been worked out, Kowalke simply answered: “We want to do the Christian thing. Whether logical or not, it doesn’t matter. Forget about logic.”⁵⁸²

The district finally decided to send the report back to committee so that it could make a few revisions. The committee ended up dropping one phrase stating that the suspensions should be removed “because through the years since, the suspensions have not carried conviction to the suspended parties as being tenable.”⁵⁸³ Apparently there was some confusion as to what that phrase exactly meant. The amended report also specifically stated that the “resolution refers only to corporate actions of the Western Wisconsin District”⁵⁸⁴ and not to the Fort Atkinson congregation.

Prange reported: “From here on everything went very smoothly. There were hardly any questions raised. The vote on the first resolution passed with only a very few negative votes. The rest of the resolutions passed unanimously. Finally the entire report was adopted without a dissenting vote. I understand that some did abstain, but I doubt if it was too many.”⁵⁸⁵ The vote brought obvious joy to the faces of quite a number. “Nitz was very pleased and everyone seemed to be quite happy about the entire thing. [District President] Mueller was obviously pleased. We

⁵⁷⁸ Victor Prange, letter to Richard Balge, March 16, 1962.

⁵⁷⁹ Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 15, 1962.

⁵⁸⁰ Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 15, 1962.

⁵⁸¹ Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 15, 1962.

⁵⁸² Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 15, 1962.

⁵⁸³ Initial report of Committee No. 16: Protéstant Study Committee Report to the 1961 Western Wisconsin District.

⁵⁸⁴ 1962 *Proceedings* of the Western Wisconsin District, 49.

⁵⁸⁵ Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 15, 1962.

can only hope now that the Protéstants will be ready to evangelically discuss our mutual problems.”⁵⁸⁶

Too Little, Too Late?: A Missed Opportunity

The next order of business was to acquaint the Protéstant Conference with the Western Wisconsin District’s action. “Nitz (or W. Gieschen), Wicke, and I will attend the June 30th (Saturday) [Protéstant] meeting for a part of the afternoon,”⁵⁸⁷ Prange reported to Arnold Sitz. As it turned out the group included Gieschen, Wicke and Prange. They met with a gathering of Protéstants at Immanuel Church, Manitowoc, the congregation of Pastor Theodore Uetzmann. The meeting was decidedly tense from all accounts. The Protéstants brought many questions, and the three Synod men didn’t always have answers to give. Both sides were in unfamiliar territory. Some among the Protéstant number seemed to be more open to the idea of reconciliation than others. Wicke recalled:

One of the Protéstant pastors made the point that, though they Protéstants had stated that they wanted the suspensions cancelled, yet that that was not really enough. In reading the resolutions, he said he saw no hint at all that the WWD admitted any sin or wrong-doing whatsoever. Another spoke more conciliatory, indicating that one could hardly expect that of so large a body, but that this would be a matter of individual expression.

Speaking of the “more” that was needed, one of their pastors stated that all of this was part of a greater question. Yes, we have said: Remove the suspensions. But you must also be for something and against something. You must be for the Wauwatosa Gospel, which by God’s grace we Protéstants have preserved. Actually, we Protéstants are the real Wisconsin Synod; we have preserved the real Wisconsin theology. You must be for that. You must also be against something: against the sins perpetrated by the WWD, the present Hintz [sic] case, and against officialdom.⁵⁸⁸

With such sentiments on the Protéstant side, it soon became apparent that true reconciliation was still going to be a major undertaking.

Over the next two years several attempts were made by the Wisconsin men to bring about a final reconciliation that would manifest itself in church fellowship. H.C. Nitz wrote his old friend Sitz, “To show the sincerity of our resolution, I immediately invited Zimmermann to preach at my mission festival in Sept. He joyfully accepted at once. But on second thought he declined...”⁵⁸⁹ He had given his reasoning to Nitz, but none was recorded in this particular letter. However, Nitz would state, “He has a point, but I replied it was arguable. But I am in no mood to argue.”⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁶ Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 15, 1962.

⁵⁸⁷ Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, June 15, 1962.

⁵⁸⁸ Harold Wicke, “Meeting with Members of the Protéstants Conference and Representatives of the Western Wisconsin District on June 30, 1962 at Manitowoc, Wis.,” 2.

⁵⁸⁹ H.C. Nitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, July 20, 1962.

⁵⁹⁰ H.C. Nitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, July 20, 1962.

Prange also did his best to reestablish a working relationship with the Protéstants. For example, in his files are several letters to and from Protéstants William Beitz, Paul Hensel and Louis Mielke. Beitz and Hensel both responded kindly to him. Beitz stated, “Thanks for your kind words of appreciation and fellowship. How we rejoice and thank God for such spring zephers [sic].”⁵⁹¹ Hensel would write, “Your letter did, as you hoped, bring the two of us closer together, founded on the blessed expectation of a deeper and truer relationship in the world to come.”⁵⁹² Mielke, on the other hand, was harsher in his comments. For example, concerning the Hinz situation, Mielke wrote, “Past. Prange, entrusted with priesthood and kingship before the Most High, you betrayed Past. Hinz, as he was carrying out his calling as king and priest of the Most High. In him you betrayed your Saviour.”⁵⁹³

One apparently-final attempt was made to seek settlement with the Protéstants in November 1964. Prange and Balge attended the Protéstant Conference meeting at the Stoddard Hotel in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. By this time the Protéstants themselves were a splintering group. Professor Gerhard Ruediger had made some inflammatory statements about a sermon by Marcus Albrecht printed in *Faith-Life*. Ruediger had reportedly called the sermon “a godless thing.”⁵⁹⁴ Others were complaining that *Faith-Life* was starting to become too difficult to understand for the average layman. Interestingly enough, it was William Beitz and Martin Zimmermann who delivered papers “challenging Conference’s dealings with Ruediger, charging the Conference with meddling, with rushing in where angels fear to tread, with hindering in their sanctification the people directly involved, and with bring guilty of sinning against the Gospel.”⁵⁹⁵

Prange and Balge were understandably uncomfortable with the situation. At one point a member of the conference turned to them “saying that we should not be offended at the conflagration.”⁵⁹⁶ Late in the afternoon, both men excused themselves, saying “that it had been a sobering experience.”⁵⁹⁷ Upon leaving, several from the group went outside to thank the two for coming. Beitz and Zimmermann were among the group. Significantly, at that conference both Zimmermann and Beitz left the ranks of the Protéstants, creating a “self-styled group” which would no longer contribute to *Faith-Life*.

By 1964 the old Protéstant William Beitz was already a very sick man, suffering from cancer that would eventually spread to his brain. On April 29, 1965, Beitz’s wife Trudie addressed a letter to her husband’s high school buddy, Tois: “I spend the day with him at the hospital. He seems to take comfort in my being there. It is so heart breaking, but know the good Lord must have a wholesome purpose for us in this sore affliction. . . . I know you will include Bill in your prayers, so that he suffers no pain if it is the Lord’s will. I read him your letter, but it is hard to know if he understood it or not.”⁵⁹⁸ Beitz would slip away into eternal rest on June 14, 1965. *Faith-Life*, the periodical he had championed, had but one brief sentence in his memory: “As this number went to press, word was received of the death of Pastor William F. Beitz, 77, on

⁵⁹¹ William Beitz, letter to Victor Prange, March 20, 1960.

⁵⁹² Paul Hensel, letter to Victor Prange, November 2, 1964.

⁵⁹³ Louis Mielke, letter to Victor Prange, August 23, 1963.

⁵⁹⁴ Paul Hensel, “The Nub of the Split in Conference,” *Faith-Life* 38, no. 5 (September/October 1965): 17.

⁵⁹⁵ Marcus Albrecht, “Conference Report, November 5-6, 1964,” *Faith-Life* 38, no. 5 (September/October 1965): 16.

⁵⁹⁶ Victor Prange, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, November 9, 1964.

⁵⁹⁷ Marcus Albrecht, “Conference Report, November 5-6, 1964,” 17.

⁵⁹⁸ Trudie Beitz, letter to E. Arnold Sitz, April 29, 1965.

June 14.”⁵⁹⁹ A witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel, albeit an extreme one at times, had passed from this life to the next, and *Faith-Life* ironically had nothing to say.

Beitz’s fellow witness E. Arnold Sitz would live another 24 years, dying on July 15, 1989, at the age of 95. With death came true reconciliation wrought by God. For Beitz and Sitz, the fire of the Prot stant Controversy was now extinguished, but their witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel lives on.

Chapter Eight - The Witness Lives On

When Pastor E. Arnold Sitz died on July 15, 1989, *Faith-Life* dedicated almost the entire January/February 1990 issue to his memory. Included were articles by Philemon Hensel and two of Sitz’s former vicars who had since joined the Prot stants, Gerald Hinz and Robert Christman. These three men attempted to sum up the legacy of E. Arnold Sitz and his witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel. All three viewed his dedication to the Wauwatosa Gospel as being somewhat suspect. One subtitle summarized their assessment of Sitz’s witness: “One of the last faltering exponents of the Wauwatosa heritage in WELS forgotten – and remembered.”⁶⁰⁰

In his “In memoriam E. Arnold Sitz,” Hensel recounted a bit of Sitz’s history. He wrote of a letter that Sitz sent to his brother-in-law, Karl Koehler, in the 1930s stating why he could not at that time give an open declaration regarding his convictions in the Prot stant matter. Hensel related Sitz’s reasoning.

Sitz found himself out of accord with William Beitz’s pastoral practices at Grace Ev. Lutheran Church in Tucson, Arizona, where both had served in 1923, the last year of Beitz’s seven year tenure. Sitz did not spell out his objections in detail, but implied that he felt Beitz’s response to opposition was unevangelically abrupt. As to professing his own Prot stant convictions, he wrote that he could not at that time declare them, and that he believed he could more effectively maintain his position from within the organization. Sitz had the air of one who seemed to stand for something above personal interests in Jerusalem beneath, but he remained in bondage with her children, as a result of this equivocation.⁶⁰¹

Hensel insinuates that Sitz’s reasons for remaining within the Synod were either dubious or idealistic and that his witness within Synod was wasted. As a basis for these assertions, Hensel recounts how Sitz reacted when Christman was suspended from the Synod by Northern Wisconsin District President Carl Voss. “Sitz advised his former vicar to this effect: ‘You tell Carl Voss that it will be no fun to face his Creator on Judgment Day with this on his conscience.’ ‘You tell ...,’ not ‘I will tell...’ This was Sitz’s style of protest from first to last, and so he survived, and thrived, an arrow with a rubber tip which never hit home.”⁶⁰²

In his “The Passing of E. Arnold Sitz in a Larger Context,” Gerald Hinz wrote: “The ministry of E. Arnold Sitz paralleled the descent of the Wisconsin Synod from its high position

⁵⁹⁹ *Faith-Life* 38, nos. 5/6 (May/June 1965): 3.

⁶⁰⁰ *Faith-Life* 63, no. 1 (January/February 1990): 12.

⁶⁰¹ Philemon Hensel, “In memoriam E. Arnold Sitz,” 36.

⁶⁰² Philemon Hensel, “In memoriam E. Arnold Sitz,” 36.

as proponent of the Wauwatosa Theology to its present self-assignment of reducing the Gospel to a property to be displayed for the selling of WELS to the commercial public.”⁶⁰³

Hinz maintained that “in his private life [Sitz] intuitively practiced what the Gospel proclaims. As a vicar under Pastor Sitz, I learned many of the pastoral habits that I use to this day by way of work in the study and among the ailing, dealing with people on the basis of faith rather than by the legalism of self-serving categories.”⁶⁰⁴ As a bishop Sitz “was instinctively kind and undemanding in his association with his vicars, giving them room to develop under the Gospel those characteristics that are essential to the development of a pastor.”⁶⁰⁵

“However,” Hinz charged, “as [Sitz] in his own ministry became more involved in the synodical scene by virtue of his election to offices in Synod, a sinister development unrelated to the kingdom of God in himself, and finally hostile to it, also unfolded. As the years went by, the Prot stant Controversy ... became something to ‘fix,’ and Sitz gave his energies and eventually his theology to that endeavor.”⁶⁰⁶ He accused Sitz of not working for the peace “that passes all understanding and keeps one’s heart and mind in Christ Jesus, but the peace that the flesh can understand and relate to: Forgive and forget and don’t learn anything about the devil, the world, and our flesh. We all know this peace well. It permits unrighteousness to run riot in the church and the home.”⁶⁰⁷ In the end, though, Hinz was willing to concede that these shortcomings “are in truth the straw that will be removed from his record at the Judgment; what remains, his innate kindness and evangelical demeanor toward myself and others, which things the years do not dim the memory of, will not be destroyed.”⁶⁰⁸ He finally concluded:

As for his place in Synod’s history and the spiritual significance of his passing, [Sitz] represents that generation raised on the Wauwatosa Theology, enamored by it enough so that it could not kick over the traces completely when it was repudiated by Synod and so always operating at least somewhat under its discipline, but whose half-hearted efforts to stem the tide of violence arising from the Wauwatosa Gospel’s repudiation became a spiritual Dunkirk resulting in what we have today: a leadership at the control of the Synod throttle without the discipline of the Gospel of our sanctification in Christ Jesus, and looking only to hitch on to anything that will make it grow in numbers, as the heathen do, a synod whose leaders do not operate from faith to faith so that the just live by faith, but from “belly” to “belly” (Romans 16:17-18) with the result that the instincts of the flesh are served and preserved.⁶⁰⁹

Robert Christman went into greater detail about Sitz’s life and ministry in his “A Place in the Sun: E. Arnold Sitz in Retrospect.” He related some of Sitz’s stories from the Old West – how he carried a German Luger on camping trips, and how he once escaped death at the hands of an angry Indian. Most importantly, Christman acknowledged that Sitz did not sit idly by in Tucson all those years, quietly allowing his Prot stant friends to be cast out of Synod. From 1930

⁶⁰³ Gerald Hinz, “The Passing of E. Arnold Sitz in a Larger Context,” *Faith-Life* 63, no. 1 (January/February 1990): 12-13.

⁶⁰⁴ Hinz, 13.

⁶⁰⁵ Hinz, 13.

⁶⁰⁶ Hinz, 13.

⁶⁰⁷ Hinz, 13.

⁶⁰⁸ Hinz, 14.

⁶⁰⁹ Hinz, 14.

to 1936 Sitz did his fair share of letter-writing, trying to get answers from Synod and district officials. Christman recalls how in 1931 one of Sitz's Seminary classmates, Otto Kehrberg, held up Tois as an example of someone willing to "fire real shot" in an effort to bring about a truthful solution to the Prot stant matter.

But Christman also charged Sitz with not going far enough. He concluded that by 1935 "things had changed,"⁶¹⁰ as he recounted the story of one wavering synodical who actually had the example of Sitz held up to him as someone, who despite his Prot stant sympathies, saw his "'way clear to continue active attendance and cooperation in Synod's meeting and work.' ... Sitz's real bullets were flying in the other direction."⁶¹¹ Christman wondered aloud:

What happened? ... Did E. Arnold Sitz ... fall victim to his own cowardice? Undoubtedly not. ... If not fear, then what was it that moved E. Arnold Sitz to swallow his objections to the Synod's works and ways and to "see his way clear to continue active attendance and cooperation in Synod's meeting and work?" The answer would appear to lie in his unique niche in life, and the inordinately high value he placed on it. Expulsion from the Synod would have destroyed that niche. It would have stripped him of his status and robbed him of his highly cherished self-image.⁶¹²

Christman accused Sitz of being a self-absorbed man who used his position in Tucson as a opportunity to build a name for himself publicly both in the Arizona as well as in the Synod. On the other hand, Christman suggested that Sitz's position away from the Synod's center also gave him the opportunity privately "to stand apart from the rest in a substantive way, that allowed him to conduct a fundamentally evangelical ministry while remaining in the ranks of the rapidly deteriorating, post-Wauwatosa Wisconsin Synod, that is, to continue to practice the theology which had been repudiated in the excommunication of Professor J.P. Koehler and the Prot stants."⁶¹³ To support his contention Christman concluded:

During his last active years [Sitz] was received by the synodical ministerium with increased amusement and contempt. To a degree this may be attributed to his continued efforts to be humorous ... But part of the disdain rested squarely on his Wauwatosa theology, the evangelical commitment that he learned at the feet of his seminary professors, most notably his father-in-law John Philipp Koehler, which he never entirely forgot, in spite of his continued membership in the Wisconsin Synod and the element of dishonesty that that association required of him. ... A final verdict on his ministry is beyond both our ability and our calling. Yet this much can be asserted. His compromisings, hedgings, ambiguities, and cover-ups most certainly worked havoc. But just as surely his success by God's grace in not abandoning entirely the spirit of the Gospel and his willingness on occasion to make good use of his spiritual weaponry had salutary results. Some of his bullets hit home.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹⁰ Christman, 16.

⁶¹¹ Christman, 16.

⁶¹² Christman, 16-17.

⁶¹³ Christman, 17.

⁶¹⁴ Christman, 19.

Which bullets? The bullets he fired from *within* Synod, bullets that would never have found a penetrable target had Sitz found himself *outside* synodical fellowship.

In summarizing the ministry of Pastor E. Arnold Sitz, Philemon Hensel and Sitz's two former vicars were regrettably and exceedingly unfair, as well as untrue to history. It is somewhat astonishing that men who claim to be disciples of John Philipp Koehler can so arrogantly overlook the facts of history. To suggest, as Hensel did, that Sitz's form of protest was to have someone else do it for him was simple historical irresponsibility. As chapter six of this paper explained in great detail, Sitz fought long and hard for the cause of the Protestants within Synod, and his witness was not a feeble one – it cut to the very heart of the issues involved. Sitz declared unequivocally and untiringly that he thought the suspensions of the Western Wisconsin District unrighteous and that he would not recognize them unless they were undeniably proven to be just.

Christman suggested that this declaration hinted “ever so slightly at a willingness to retreat,” but there was no such retreat. Certainly there will be those who will argue that Sitz *did* retreat by virtue of his silence from 1936 to 1958 concerning the Protestant matter. But the question must be asked: did Sitz's witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel retreat into silence during those years? Christman's and Hinz's own words suggest that it did not. Christman wrote, “His ministry began with a private and public use of Scripture, not merely as a compendium of proof texts, but as a document capable of drawing the attentive reader into the awesome secrets of God and the wonderful development of His saving works in human history in Jesus Christ the Lord.” His description is not limited to Sitz's early years of ministry before the formation of the Protestant Conference. He described Sitz's *whole* ministry, even as Christman himself knew it in the late 1960's and after, as being an example of evangelical practice, both publicly and privately, grounded firmly in the gospel of forgiveness. He accurately portrayed Sitz for what he was: a man who remained within the Synod as a beacon of evangelical practice among the darkness of legalistic practices which inevitably spring up in the church militant on a daily basis.

Sitz was a realist who, like his father-in-law, knew that legalism wasn't something the church was going to totally overcome this side of eternity. To suggest otherwise is triumphalism. But Sitz still fought this legalism vehemently, both within himself and within his Synod, and as a witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel he knew that you couldn't overcome such legalism by means of demands, by means of the law, or, as Koehler put, by means of a “hurrah spirit.” Instead legalism is overcome through the quiet and inconspicuous use of the gospel. To the very end, Sitz remained a witness to this truth within a synodical body that needed it badly. As Sitz himself stated in 1929 to Paul Hensel, he “did not wish to bar [his] way to witness within Synod.” Had he been suspended, his witness would have naturally been more strident and out of tune with a true witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel.

As it was, Sitz remained in Synod and his witness was a quiet, unassuming one at times. But its fruit is evident. Today many pastors and people of the Wisconsin Synod are still affected by his witness, even after his own voice has been long silenced. For instance, two current professors at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary were directly and profoundly influenced by his commitment to Scripture, the Confessions, Luther and especially evangelical practice.⁶¹⁵ Even

⁶¹⁵ Professor Forrest Bivens was a member of Sitz's congregation in Tucson as a boy and later served in the Arizona-California District. The author has spoken to him several times concerning his relationship with Pastor Sitz. Professor David Valleskey served in the Arizona-California District and acknowledged Sitz in his book *We Believe – Therefore We Speak*, writing that Sitz “helped shape my attitude toward the ministry ... [with] his evangelical

now Sitz's witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel echoes loudly through the halls of the Mequon seminary through these men, as well as through their colleagues and students whom they have in turn influenced. As a district president, Sitz had contact with many pastors, quietly reminding them that it is the gospel only which has the power to work faith, hope and love. As a pastor who oversaw the work of vicars, he gave a steady example of evangelical gospel ministry. All these people to whom E. Arnold Sitz was once a witness have now themselves taken up this witness and are witnessing to others.

Conversely, the Prot stant witness has long been muffled in Synod, not because of a total repudiation of Koehler and the Wauwatosa Gospel, but because of the Prot stants' apparent quest to get results by means of a "hurrah spirit." They simply have preached the gospel too infrequently and have instead so often chosen to make their mark by means of bitter and sneering comments. In the end, Sitz's witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel was considerably more prominent and practical, serving the spiritual needs of a church body that is today greatly indebted to the witness he gave.

Still, one must admit that there remains a lack of appreciation for and understanding of the Wauwatosa Gospel among the ranks of Wisconsin Synod pastors. There is a lack of appreciation for history, for originality of thought. Too often we fall back upon what someone else has said instead of digging into the Scriptures ourselves. Too often the message of the gospel becomes a pre-packaged presentation upon which we place ribbons to disguise it as something new or different. Too often we fail to trust the Holy Spirit to conquer the human heart through the foolishness of the gospel and instead look to the methods of the secular world to sell our message to the human mind. Too often we pat ourselves on the back for the "purity" of our doctrine, sneering or poking fun at others who have denied the gospel rather than weeping over them, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem, as they have put their souls in eternal danger. We are always in danger of falling into legalistic habits because our faith is not perfect and our lives are far from sinless.

It would be going too far to say that the Wisconsin Synod has totally repudiated the Wauwatosa Gospel. One does not need to know every nook and cranny of the Wauwatosa Gospel to be a Wauwatosa theologian. Someone can be a witness to the Wauwatosa Gospel despite a lack of understanding. As a Synod we would certainly hope and pray that our pastors, despite a shallow understanding of the "Wauwatosan" tenets, put those tenets into practice simply because they are Christians under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Simply stated, if the pastors in our Synod are not Christian, we have a deeper problem than a repudiation of the Wauwatosa Gospel. But we trust the Lord that this is not the case, and we continue to look to him in faith as we proclaim his gospel with trembling voices and administer it with trembling hands.

There is no excuse for failing to appreciate, understand and meditate upon the particular theological heritage that our Wauwatosa fathers have left us, especially now as Northwestern Publishing House has begun to publish that heritage in English translation. Neither is there any excuse for simply equating the Wauwatosa Gospel with our practice of Scriptural exegesis. If our definition stops there, we have fallen short of what the Wauwatosa theologians intended. Such a definition will so easily lead one to look upon even Scriptural exegesis as a mechanical process by which we come up with a set of rules to deal with precious souls. Instead we should look upon our theological and pastoral work as something that is continuously enmeshed with the

approach to ministry" (12). Both of these professors are known today in the Wisconsin Synod for their thoughtful, evangelical approach to ministry.

gospel of Jesus Christ for the purpose of dealing evangelically with precious, blood-bought souls. We should strive to do what William Beitz encouraged so many years ago in his infamous paper: make Scripture our very own and suffer to be a Christian – Luther’s *oratio, meditatio, tentatio*. Beitz wrote, “Our further study in the ministry should be done for that one purpose also, to grow in Christ in the LIFE BY FAITH. Only when that is done will all else be right. As that is not done our ministry becomes a formal, mechanical dealing with souls.”⁶¹⁶

As for the controversy that lingers between the Prot stant Conference and the Wisconsin Synod, it continues to hurt. But not because of the harsh statements made on either side by the warring parties. The Prot stant Controversy continues to hurt because of the foolishness of its preservation. It hurts because as Christians we long to have fellowship with one another and to express the unity of spirit in the bond of peace as we speak the truth in love. Let us all continue to pray for such peace while it is still day. If it should not happen, however, let us then look forward to that day when all the saints will raise together their united voices in praise and thanksgiving to the blessed and eternal Lamb of God who washes away all sin – even our sins of stubbornness and pride – and supplies us with every good thing.

Finally, let us all, both synodicals and Prot stants, thank our gracious God for the rich heritage he has bestowed upon us in the Wauwatosia Gospel. Let us treasure it. Let us pray God to preserve it in our midst. Most of all, though, let us remember that the Wauwatosia Gospel is but a servant to a much greater gospel, the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pray God that we never repudiate his eternal gospel, of which we are but poor stewards, because of some argument over who really possesses the Wauwatosia Gospel.

In that vein E. Arnold Sitz wrote a letter to William Beitz in 1959 questioning Beitz’s judgment that Synod had repudiated the Wauwatosia Gospel. In the spirit of Wauwatosia, Sitz calmly responded.

I believe that your judgment upon Synod that it has “trampled under foot the Gospel” is subject to some modification. One must frankly admit that the Gospel does not ring as it did in the heyday of JP, Pips, and Schaller. But the Holy Spirit has not permitted it to be wholly submerged and mired down. I am sure you agree. On the other hand, let us face the fact also that the “Wauwatosia Gospel” is not ringing out clearly among the present-day Prot stants either. It seems to be the pure possession of none of us. Already the term “Wauwatosia Gospel” is one step away from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What indeed have we got of our own possession? We do well to join Luther in the last words he ever wrote, found after his death at Eisleben: “No one can understand Vergil in his Bucolics or Georgics unless he has been a shepherd or farmer for five years. No one can understand Cicero in his letters unless he has served in a significant position in government for 20 years. No one can apprehend the Holy Scriptures unless he has governed a congregation for a 100 years with the Prophets, Elijah and Elisha, John the Baptist, Christ and the Apostles. We are beggars. This is true.”⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁶ Beitz, 13.

⁶¹⁷ E. Arnold Sitz, letter to William Beitz, April 7, 1959. NB: The Luther quotation is translated from the German.

As witnesses to the Wauwatosa Gospel, we strive to make this attitude our own to the glory and honor of our dear Savior Jesus and the salvation of many.

Soli Deo Gloria!