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Luther Albrecht

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_albrechtl@csl.edu

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORY OF THE PROTESTANT CONFERENCE

FROM 1927 - 1932

A

48280

A Research Project Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for course H-505

by

Luther Albrecht

November 1966

Approved by:

Phil J. Schroeder
Advisor

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CHAPTER I

The late Professor F. E. Mayer, of Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis, Missouri, summarized the whole history and controversy of the Protestant Conference in one sentence in his book, The Religious Bodies of America, by saying, "The Protestant Conference (Lutheran) is a society of pastors and congregations who in 1926 protested against alleged deviations of the Wisconsin Synod." The Yearbook of American Churches for 1965, published by the National Council of Churches in the U.S.A. states that the Protestant Conference was organized in 1928 in Wisconsin as a result of differences with the Evangelical Lutheran Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States. The statistics are: 8 Churches; Inclusive Membership 3,000; Sunday Schools & Sabbath Schools 10; total enrollment 250; 7 Ordained Clergyman having charges.¹ The Lutheran World Almanac and Encyclopedia 1931-1933 did not list the Protestant Conference.²

If one were to ask a sample number of active Lutherans today, I feel that most of them would not be able to answer the question, "What is the Protestant Conference?" While discussing what the Protestant Conference is, other questions would also be raised such as: What did the Conference discuss in early meetings? Where did they meet? What type of organization, if any, did they strive to have? What insights into their theology can we gain? Who were some of the men that

wrote and contributed to Protestant scholarship and theology? And many more questions could be raised.

This paper will strive to answer some of these questions. Since there is very little written on this subject and since official Synodical publications are mute on these matters, we must turn to the internal evidence and record as published in the Faith-Life periodical. In this paper I will not deal with the setting from Synod, nor with the records after 1932, nor with the theological implications as were evidenced at that time. I intend to write an analysis of the history of the Protestant Conference from 1927-1932, as found in the Faith-Life periodical publication.

That the reader might be more informed on the issues and theological climate of that time, I suggest the following articles from the first five volumes of Faith-Life: "Report on Sessions of West Wisconsin District Synod Meeting Held at Watertown, Wisconsin, Nov. 15-18, 1927", by Rev. Robert E. Ave-Lallemant, vol I, No. 5, pp 2; "Declaration of Independence", by Rev. M. A. Zimmermann, vol III, No. 5/6, supplement pages; "Another Moratorium", by Rev. A. Zeisler, vol IV, No. 9, pp 11; "Calendar 1924-1927 Of Meetings, Events, References, Recollections, Side-Lights and Observations, as 'Vorgeschichte' to serve", by Rev. W. P. Hass, vol V, No. 4, supplement pages.

As we study this group called Protestants, we can readily

see with the aid of nearly forty years of history, that they did not intend to start another church, demonination, or segment of the church. They considered themselves members of a group being part of the Wisconsin Synod. For over twenty years on the front page was printed both the Policy and Purpose.

"POLICY": Our procedure arouses much hostile attention and is condemned by friend and foe as uncharitable, because it conflicts with pet but mistaken dogmas current in the church. Our periodical was born of controversy, and our publication of the wrongs in the church and of the sins of individuals in thought to be prompted by self-righteousness and by personal resentment, embitterment, and vindictiveness. It is sufficient to say, we class ourselves with our opponents under the common denominator of sinners.

Controversy, as a study of life and psychology, is enlightening to the outsider too, and thus our paper challenges the attention of every keen reader to whose ken it comes. The New Testament largely was born of controversy, and the alert Christian will in our controversy also be able to recognize the fundamental factors of Law and Gospel at issue and in operation.

We hold that our policy of not mincing our words and speaking in unvarnished terms is in character with the Word of God. We do not make any assertions which we have not carefully verified. We do not betray confidences. Charity often prompts us to withhold information which would help to prove our case, because we know too that no proof of fact will convert hearts, but the Gospel alone. We have a larger purpose than the venting of personal grievances and the winning of our case.

"PURPOSE": Our purpose, as it grows from our history, is to break down the influence of the misleaders of the church and free their followers from their thraldom, to break down within our Lutheran church, and wherever else it may flourish, the spirit of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency which breeds uncharitableness and unwarranted judgment of others, and thus leads to controversy.

Our larger purpose 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, not having our own righteousness but that which is through the faith of Christ, to apprehend that for which, too, we are apprehended of Christ Jesus; forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Our message is that of the Gospel of Forgiveness of Sins through Our Blessed Saviour, coupled with the warning of the hardening of hearts and of the judgment upon those who reject this message and its implications. That is the full message of the Word of God, as it is sounded in the New Testament from the first book to the last, and no less in the Old Testament from the first book to the last.

The reports and meetings as described in chapters two and three follow in chronological order.

CHAPTER II

The earliest roots of a group meeting together to protest certain actions on the part of officials of the Wisconsin Synod go back to Monday evening of November 14, 1927.¹ Both pastors and laymen having certain concerns met at a Lutheran clubroom at Watertown Wis. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss plans of procedure and to draw up a "Memorial." This meeting was called to order by Pastor John Abelmann. Pastor Robert E. Ave-Lallemant was elected chairman and Pastor Lutzke secretary.

"Different views and plans were proposed and discussed to put all matters before Synod in such a way as to give hope for a just and final settlement of all grievances."² A committee was elected to draw up a memorial. The personnel of the committee listed: Pastors Robert E. Ave-Lallemant, chairman, J. Ablemann secretary, W. Parisius; laymen Krohn of Wisconsin Rapids, and Oehlers of Elroy. The memorial was to be presented to the session of the District Synod Meeting opening on November 15, at 10 A.M. "All were determined to stay even then and to try their best in settling the grievances in a fair and just way to all parties concerned."³

The "Memorial" was not read on Tuesday of the opening session. On Wednesday the "Memorial" was read after Synod had voted to have it read. Some spoke sharply against it,

while others argued that this matter should not be discussed because of the shortness of time. The result was that those protesting were not satisfied with the actions taken. Since the protestants felt that injustice still prevailed, they felt it necessary to proclaim their position in print. The first publication of the Protestants was the Easter edition of Faith-Life 1928, printed at Marshfield, Wisconsin.

We shall trace the history of the Conference by way of the reports from each of the conferences in chronological order.

Alma Conference May 22-23, 1928⁴

"With One Accord" was the theme of this conference based on Acts 1:14, 2:1, 2:42-47, 4:23-37. Passages quoted from Acts that appear in the prologue are: "They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. They were all with one accord in one place. They lifted up their voice to God with one accord...continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." The opening sessions were informal; interested pastors and laymen arrived from Rice Lake, Marshfield, Wisconsin Rapids, Alma, Elroy, Burr Oak, La Crosse and other areas. It is interesting to note that laymen far outnumbered the pastors. In the afternoon session Pastor M. Zimmermann read an essay pertinent to the situation entitled "Souls Are Troubled".⁵

The evening session was a Communion worship service in which Pastor R. E. Ave-Lallemant preached the German confessional message on the text: Luke 8:43-56. In the same service Pastor William Beitz preached the English sermon based on Acts 2:42-47.

The morning sessions of the second day were devoted to the report by Mr. Krohn on the proceedings of the February meeting of the Western District of the Wisconsin Synod. Similarities between the February meeting and that of November of the preceding year were pointed out. The developments between November and Spring of 1928 are pointed up in the article by Karl Koehler, "The Confessional".⁶

In a discussion a decision was reached as to how the publication of Faith-Life should be continued. Up to this point this periodical had been sent gratis to all congregations and individuals. A subscription price of one dollar was set. The closing moments of this first conference were devoted to planning the next conference to be held at Rice Lake, Wisconsin.

Rice Lake Conference July 24-25, 1928⁷

At this meeting the Conference took up the discussing of "Law and Gospel". "There are many definite statements, concerning the Law and Gospel in the Scriptures, but when we seek the life of Holy Scriptures, the matter of Law and Gospel throws the soul into a heart-struggle for life."⁸

The paper read by Pastor M. Zimmermann "By the Law Is the Knowledge of Sin" is reported to have provoked profitable discussion. It was resolved that the study of "Law" be a topic for the succeeding conference led by Pastor P. Hensel, based on its use in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul.

The following morning Pastor W. Bodamer presented an essay from the Gospel of Matthew. It was pointed out that it is necessary to understand the gospel writer's view point in order to receive the full impact of the gospel.

It is of note to recognize how this assembly stated its purpose of existing.

"What are our plans? The sentiment expressed is 'now to speak that what we wanted to say in the Wisconsin Synod and were not permitted to say. We are going to tell the truth. We have many friends and ties in Wisconsin, and we owe them something, as well as our own congregations. We are seeking to hold fast that which we have. We have a great heritage from the Wisconsin Synod. It made Jesus lovely to us. We went out and tried and failed. We have learned that we must crucify self. There was much opposition to that which was given us by our professors. Seeking to hold fast that treasure, made so priceless to us, has brought on the clash (because the devil will not be converted).' Being convinced of the righteousness of this cause, we will continue as we have, and the organ which brings our testimony is Faith-Life. Does that which Faith-Life brings to the church at large give it a right to exist? Have we been loveless? Love must be our guidance, and 'to be truthful is the beginning of love.'"9

This is one of the early statements in which the Protestant Conference delineated its purpose of speaking to the church at large with no intent of organizing another segmented fragment of Christ's church here on earth.

Mr. H. Arndt, the treasurer, gave the financial report in detail and stated that the financial condition was better than at the time of the first conference. It was pointed out that many of the congregations were not in a position to assist with large offerings. Much of the support had been coming from individuals. It was felt that "If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

This conference concluded with the comforting Communion service in which Pastor O. Hensel preached a sermon entitled "Walk in Truth" based on 2 John. Pastor M.A.

Zimmermann preached the other sermon on Joshua 13.

It was decided that the next conference be held on October 23-24 at Klondike, near Marshfield, in the congregation of Pastor Phil. J. Schroeder. Thus the Rice Lake conference concluded with a spirit of optimism, looking to the future work of the Faith-Life publication.

The Klondike Conference October 23-24, 1928¹⁰

On Tuesday, October 23, Pastor P. Hensel preached the opening sermon in German. It seems that this sermon set the tone for this session. "To do our work for the Lord wherever we are, to be instant in season, and out of season, was the nature of the message given us by Pastor P. Hensel in the opening service of the Klondike Conference,

Oct. 23, 1928. Picturing unto us vividly the meeting between Elijah and Obadiah, the believer-servant at King Ahab's court (I Kings 18), he brought us face to face with the issues of the present struggle in the Church and our relation to the Wisconsin Synod.¹¹ The first matter to be taken up in the formal session was the paper by P. Hensel on "The Term Law As used by the Apostle Paul." Much of the paper and ensuing discussion centered around the concept of Law as found in Romans 3:20. As the discussion developed it was agreed upon that for the next conference a paper be presented on the Biblical term: gignoskein or Erkennen. Pastor H. Parisius prepared this paper with special attention to Romans 7.

A letter from a member of the Wisconsin Synod was read to the assembled conference and this letter brought forth discussion on the topic of the Catechism which was a burning issue. Pastor Beitz led this discussion since it related to the misunderstanding of his paper, "The Just Shall Live by Faith;" it provoked much controversy in the area of catechetical instruction. Mr. Beitz pointed out that, "Much time is spent on the first 12 chapters of Genesis and Exodus, where the Catechism, as it is, begins in the Bible to see what God wants to tell us there. Then Luther's explanations to the Commandments are used to get his additional wonderful testimony. Then the prophets are studied; then the New Testament, where we come to Baptism and Holy Communion.

Redemption is also studied here. In the sermon on the Mount, prayer is taken up, always using in each case Luther's testimony given in his explanations. Thus each part of the Catechism is studied in a special course of the Bible."¹² It seems that this clarification was well received and counteracted the false accusations concerning the stand Beitz took on catechetical instruction.

On the second day of this conference Pastor Phil. J. Schroeder presented a timely paper on struggles of that day entitled, "What Price Unity?" This analysis presented the conflict in the church circles of that day. One would point out the timeless message fitting for several decades found in this paper. "In the message it is shown that 'a division of spirits is responsible for the present chaos.' Regardless of consequences the one essential is to keep 'the unity of spirit in the bond of peace,' which is not superficial, external, and often means separation, and to take care of the sheep entrusted to our care. The tenor of the paper was such that we felt the warning against pride which is always the Devil's means to spoil the unity of spirit."¹³

Pastor J. Abelmann read a paper based on Acts 4:12. No record of discussion or comment is found since the text of this article had been published in Faith-Life.¹⁴

Other matters were taken up, such as the reading of letters of greeting from Miss G. Koch and Pastor Wm. Hass

and the presentation of the treasurer's report by Mr. H. Arndt. In the closing session the group heard a brief of Pastor G. Gieschen's paper on, "Synodaljustiz". In this paper he "analyzes the psychology of certain forces in church-life."

The Lord's Supper was celebrated in the closing evening service in which Pastor E. Abelmann invited all to partake of the Holy Supper through the message based on the Pharisee and the Publican. Pastor W. K. Bodamer preached the other sermon based on Matthew 11:28. Special music to provide harmony and unity to this service was supplied by the choir of Immanuel church of Marshfield and the organ-playing of Miss E. Reuter.

It was agreed upon that the next meeting be held at Marshfield, Wisconsin on January 22-23, 1929. This meeting closed with the hope that the next meeting would supply much needed, refreshing strength.

Report on Meeting of the Protestant Conference
at Marshfield, Jan. 22-23, 1929¹⁵

The conference was opened on Tuesday morning with the reading of Psalm 146 and a prayer by the president for a greater measure of the Holy Spirit. Despite unfavorable weather conditions this conference was considered to be well attended. Men and women were in attendance from: Burr Oak, Wilton, Neillsville, Wisconsin Rapids, Algoma, Klondike and

Beaver Dam. Many members of Immanuel congregation of Marshfield attended every session.

The reading and discussion of Pastor H. Parisius' paper lasted through the first morning's session and extended into part of the afternoon session. The paper was written to give greater enlightenment on the exegetical meaning of the word, gignoskein, Erkennen, to know. Romans chapter 7 verses 7 and 8 was considered in detail.

On the first evening of the conference a special German Communion worship Service was held. The sermon preached by Pastor M. A. Zimmerman was based on Matthew 4:4, "It Is Written," being the title. The reporter considered the Christmas tree to be a silent preacher and that the spirit of Christmas prevailing at this conference would long be remembered. Special music was supplied by soloists, a mixed choir, and the male chorus.

A paper entitled, "Case-finding Psychosis" given by Pastor G. Gieschen pointed up some implications that might be felt. "In this paper he analyzed the state of mind which brought about the chaos in the churches, developing the thought by the miracle of Christ's healing of the man born blind, because of which the leader of the Jewish Church tried to make out a case against Christ, a parallel case today being the Ft. Atkinson case."¹⁶ At this point further study was pursued. Relating this particular part to the modern church was to be taken up by Pastors: O. Hensel, Robert

Ave-Lallemant and Prof. K. Koehler. More on this subject was to appear in the publication of Faith-Life.

Mr. H. Arndt read the financial report immediately after the noon recess on Wednesday. He pointed out that all financial support with the exception of subscriptions received was by free will offering. Since there was a deficit of funds, Mr. J. Bruesewitz took it upon himself to raise some funds to cut down the deficit.¹⁷

The Neillsville Mission was the topic of discussion in the evening session. At that time the people in that area were being served by Pastor G. Gieschen of Marshfield, but the demands were such that needs could not be met by the existing arrangement. A partial solution was advanced that Prof. Karl Koehler become editor-in-chief and that he serve the families in the Neillsville Mission. From the record this is one of the few references that speaks of mission outreach.

The final matters of this conference were: invitation accepted of Pastor W. K. Bodamer to meet at Prairie du Chien for next meeting, May 21-22 agreed upon as the dates, and finally that Pastor H. Parisius duplicate and make available letters of greeting and encouragement that had been written to the conference, some of which had been read publicly but all of which should serve for encouragement.

The English service concluded the conference to which the public was invited. Pastor Wm. Beitz delivered the ser-

mon and special music was supplied by the Sunday School and Day School children, the Junior and Senior choirs. We have recorded the comments of the editor of the Marshfield News-Herald who attended this service. He states, "The spirit of the Christmas season figured prominently in the English service of the Protestant Conference in Immanuel's Lutheran Church Wednesday evening. The Rev. Wm. Beitz, La Crosse, gave an inspiring address on 'Post Christmas Reflections.' 'Christmas is not a matter of the day, but a matter of fact,' said the Rev. Beitz in entering upon the main part of his sermon."¹⁸ Thus ended the Marshfield conference with hopes high for the next meeting at Prairie du Chien. Between these two conferences the first volume of the publication, Faith-Life, was completed.

The Meeting at Prairie du Chien

May 21-22, 1929¹⁹

There were about fifty persons attending the two day sessions, sixteen of whom were pastors and teachers. "Sensing the problems we were to face, the chairman, Pastor J. Abelmann, in the opening devotion led us to beseech the Lord for the testimony of the Holy Spirit, to bear in us the witness that we are the children of God. How much we need the comfort and strength of the Spirit for the work we have to do!"²⁰

The first item of discussion was whether members of the conference should join others synods. Part of the discussion revolved around a brotherly letter from a professor of the Missouri Synod, which showed the concern to be recognized by a larger body. At that point the discussion bore out the fact that some of the brethren were having private meetings with officials of the Missouri Synod. No further information is available to us on that point. In this matter as in other matters the members of the group felt this should be handled in a personal way. However, "the sentiment of Conference revolved about two things: first, that the statements contained in the so-called Elroy Declaration cannot be modified because of the truth preached thereby; second, as concerns affiliation with other synods, each individual must answer that question for himself, the Conference cannot now consider that matter because we are trying 'to get the consciousness of our own mission', to keep the heritage we have received as children of the Wisconsin Synod, therefore naturally devoting our efforts and testimony to the Wisconsin Synod."²¹ In Pastor K. Koehler's paper on, "Our Mission and Our Plans" many of these points were again discussed in both the reading and ensuing discussion. It was felt that it was a mission to examine oneself, to speak to the audience within Synod, and to complete the written record for the sake of history.

It was agreed upon by the group after the suggestion had been made that all controversial matter be published under separate cover and supplementary to Faith-Life. This was to be done under the heading of: The Wisconsin Synod Protest Library, and without incurring any extra expense to the reader. It was also reported that changes and innovations include the possible beginning of a Faith-Life library. Beginning with the following December issue Christmas material, especially a Christmas liturgy to be used in children's services, was to be in print in time to be used for Christmas.

Treasurer Herman Arndt reported that the future appeared brighter. The treasurer was instructed to pay all bills monthly, with the hope that more money would be forthcoming. It was noted that, "As we believe, so let us live."

A new matter was up for consideration. The changing of the name of the Conference. It was pointed out that, "The name Protestant dates back to the Diet of Speyer 1529, and when that name is applied to our Conference it is generally misunderstood. Our aim is to carry on the Wauwatosa Gospel, our heritage. The name Monitor Conference (the word 'monitor' being derived from the Latin word 'moneo' meaning to remind, warn, teach) was suggested as very apropos because it is a scholastic term and we must all go to school again. The name Faith-Life should be reserved for our organ, being too precious a name to cheapen by making a slogan of it or by apply-

ing it to our persons. However, no definite steps were taken toward this change at this meeting."²² As we know at the present time nothing ever came of this change of name. The group continued to be known as the Protestant Conference.

The final moments of the sessions were devoted to routine business. It was agreed upon that the next conference be held at Burr Oak, Pastor M. A. Zimmerman being the host pastor, that the date be toward mid summer, and that finally A. Zeisler prepare a paper on: "Our Heritage" while O. Hensel write on the topic: "Each Man Has a Mission in the World."

Pastor O. Kehrberg preached the sermon at the concluding service of Holy Communion on the text of Hebrews 11:23-28. Thus the conference concluded at Prairie du Chien, the state's oldest city located on the banks of the Mississippi River.

The Burr Oak Conference
September 11-12, 1929²³

The Reverend M. A. Zimmermann, the local pastor, conducted the opening devotions by the reading of John chapter 17. Two appropriate songs were sung: "Guide me, Oh, Thou great Jehovah" and "Let me be Thine Forever." The idea of unity was central, stemming from the Scripture reading.

The first item for consideration was the paper written by Pastor A. Zeisler on the subject: "Our Heritage as Former Members of the Wisconsin Synod." In this paper he asserted that each generation must express the Gospel in current terms, yet having the core of the Gospel message in the center. He pointed out how gospel was present in the Old Testament but that the heritage was expressed in different ways. This living message is continuing. We read from the record, "It is always the same Gospel, the same heritage, differently expressed. So every period in history has that heritage in its own form. One form of this heritage as we have it, which the reader impressed upon us that we might appreciate its value, was the hymn of Luther and his day."²⁴ Since only a portion was read the group urged Pastor Zeisler to continue with this project, giving special consideration to the Lutheran hymn, showing its poetic and musical value.

The subject of finances occupied most of the time of sessions on Wednesday. Since the treasurer was absent, Karl Koehler told of the needs to cover the budget for the coming year. Pastor P. Hensel read a paper in which he had given serious thought concerning the purpose of the conference and outlining the possible means of financial support. These and related thoughts were again discussed when the duties of Pastor G. Gieschen were spoken of since he was devoting much time and effort to managing the affairs of

Faith-Life. As a result of the discussion it was decided to give Pastor Gieschen a vote of thanks and appreciation.

Routine matters of business were; that Pastor Avellallemant write a paper on: "Faith-Life as Lived in the Early Christian Church"; that Karl Koehler's paper once printed in the Northwestern Lutheran, "The Teaching of Christianity," be prepared for further discussion; that the next conference be held following the second Sunday in Advent, the date and place to be announced later.

The sermon based on Gen. 9:24-27 preached by Pastor A. Zeisler was part of the Holy Communion Service of Wednesday. A small number of the pastors assembled in a male chorus to sing appropriate songs which added to this worship service. Thus concluded the conference at Burr Oak amid the beautiful autumn scenery and which might be considered a conference centering around the theme of unity.

CHAPTER III

Chapter two brought to a close the description of activity of the Protestant Conference from November 1927 through September 1929. Chapter three begins with the spring meeting in 1930.

The Beaver Dam Conference¹ May 13-14, 1930

The main item on the agenda of this conference was the reading of Pastor Zeisler's essay on "Our Heritage". No further comments are available at this time on this essay.

It was agreed upon that the editorial staff go ahead with the printing of the Oconomowoc story, that finally resulted in the resignation of Pastor W. P. Hass; that this be the second number in the Protest Library, and that the project finally be paid out of the fund of the Protest Library. It should also be pointed out that Pastor Zimmerman's Appeal was printed, that a copy was sent to every pastor and teacher in the Wisconsin Synod, and that the additional burden of cost was borne by the congregation at Burr Oak.

It was decided that the next conference meet in the Globe-Neillsville area, to be held on August 23-24. The first day of the conference was to be on Saturday, and be devoted to essays, articles and discussion thereof, and that Sunday be a day of general get-together and fellowship. The papers slated for the August meeting were: Every Man has a

Mission in the World-- W. K. Bodamer; Straitening the Spirit--John Abelmann; Der Pietismus--G. Ruediger; Church and Office--O. Hensel. Other articles that were still on the program: The Antichrist, by M. A. Zimmermann; Faith-Life in the New Testament Church, by R. Ave-Lallemant; and Our Heritage, by A. Zeisler.

At this point we recognize that the writings and articles were not as polemic as earlier ones, but that members of the group were trying to investigate their position in the church at large. Here we mention that the group of Protestants did not consider themselves forming a new church or organization. From this conference report as well as others it seems that the main purpose of assembling together was for mutual concern and edification.

The Globe Conference, August 23-24, 1930²

Much of the Saturday afternoon session was devoted to the treasurer's report and other financial matters. For the first time we read that the financial situation was quite satisfactory. From this conference we read of the first reference to the Faith-Life Foundation. The sum of this endowment fund was at this time \$1,000.00, \$900.00 of which was invested in Liberty bonds. There was also discussion and careful scrutiny of the salary of the editor, based upon what had been agreed upon in previous meetings.

An innovation was announced. It stated that a Conference Council be instituted to meet prior to each meeting to discuss the general welfare of the Conference. Since most matters would revolve around Faith-Life, the following men were chosen on this standing committee: Pastors O. Hensel and G. Gieschen and Mr. H. Reich, all of whom were from Marshfield, Wisconsin.

Mr. Fred W. Krohn of Wisconsin Rapids was elected to the office of treasurer to replace Mr. H. Arndt, who resigned. It was also agreed upon that next conference be held at La Crosse on November 6 and 7.

Pastor G. Ruediger of Marion Springs, Michigan preached the Sunday sermon on the text from Matthew 16:24,25. This sermon and other discussion is best summed up in the following statement.

Time and again during our discussions at conference it was so evident that we are nothing; and that is wholesome for us. It is only by the grace of God that we exist. Follow me, the Savior continually calls to us. Like the blind man whom Jesus healed at Jericho on His last journey to Jerusalem, and who followed Jesus in the way after he was healed--the way that led to Jerusalem, Gethsemane, Calaphas, Pilate, the Cross and a glorious Resurrection--so we are to follow Him in the way, take up our cross, lose our life for His sake; that is the only way that leads to a glorious resurrection.³

In the above statement Pastor Otto Kehrberg expresses himself and related his view and function of conference to that of being on the "way" with Jesus whatever might be

ahead. This statement is not to be taken as pessimistic but rather realistically.

The La Crosse Conference October 30-31, 1930 ⁴

The local pastor, W. F. Beitz, opened the Thursday session with a short devotion after which the Reverend W. P. Hass was chosen to act as chairman of the sessions. The Reverend G. Ruediger asked that he be relieved of his assignment, since he had no access to any library for his work on Pietismus; his request was granted.

The Conference Council report was given by Mr. H. Reich. The other active members of this committee were Pastor G. Gieschen and Mr. A. C. Knief; the latter had been chosen to take the place of Pastor O. Hensel who had requested that he be relieved of this office.

It was agreed upon that the secretary coordinate all essays and papers to be read at each meeting in order that enough material be available for reading and discussion. The next item on the agenda was the reading of Karl Koehler's essay on the Teaching of Christianity. Another paper that was read and discussed in detail was by Pastor M. Zimmermann dealing with the topic of the Antichrist. Another installment of this paper was to be given at a later date; however, the outline of the conclusion was presented.

The financial report was read by Treasurer Krohn who reported that finances were in a favorable condition even

though new obligations had been assumed. It was agreed that a financial report be prepared and sent to all interested persons at the close of the year. From this time on all checks were to be made payable to The Protestant Conference.

In the evening services the local choir sang and Pastor G. Ruediger preached on Matthew 11:6. One other item should be mentioned: arrangements had been made for the next meeting to be held in January at Neenah, Wisconsin, with Pastor Hans Koch the host.

A statement of the secretary which captured the feeling of this conference held on the festival of Reformation: "Therefore now more than ever it is well for us that we again get our bearings and live out the faith of our fathers."⁵ Thus was concluded another year.

The Neenah Conference January 20-21, 1931⁶

To start this conference Pastor Zeisler read his paper on, "Our Heritage," which provoked much interest and discussion. "It goes without saying that the Bible is our heritage by using it," might be the summary of the first part of this paper which went on to discuss the heritage of Luther's hymns. Another essay that was in the process of being prepared was also discussed, namely the one by Pastor O. Hensel entitled, "Church and Office."

A strange situation evolved that led to a unique worship service. "Our evening service with the celebration of the Lord's Supper was unique and impressive. Unique, because we had no regular sermon--the preacher did not arrive and there were no volunteer speakers. Impressive, because the Luther hymns and Scripture readings together with the Faith-Life Order of Service served as a healthy sermon to us all." ⁷ There seems to have been a certain healthy attitude toward worship in special circumstances within this group.

The financial condition as reported by the treasurer almost seemed too good to be true. At this point there was a sum of \$1,000.00 in the Faith-Life endowment fund, while there was an \$800.00 balance. Other matters that were disposed of were future meetings to be held at Marshfield, Rice Lake, and Klondike, in May, August and October in that order respectively. In the record we read of a debt of gratitude expressed toward Pastor and Mrs. Hans Koch who served the meals for the entire group. There seems to be little or no indication of the direction that the conference was taking at this point in the history.

The Marshfield Conference May 5-6, 1931 ⁸

The Tuesday sessions were opened with a short devotion by the chairman, J. H. Abelman. Here for the first time we note that minutes of a previous conference were read and accepted. Prior to this, little concern had been given for

written records of meetings. Pastor Zimmermann began the discussion period with his continuation on the topic of the Antichrist. He dealt with all the passages of the Old Testament that speak to this point. This topic was considered to be timely and brought forth much discussion from the floor. From the exchanged conversation it was felt that,

the powers that are against the Gospel of Christ are becoming more pronounced from day to day. It was the opinion that according to the teaching of Scriptures all things in the world and in the church will finally shape themselves so that one man-- called the Antichrist--will be at the head of both and employ them for his purpose against Christ.⁹

From the record we read that the group moved on to other related subjects while discussing these issues, namely the preaching of the gospel with "teeth". By this is meant that it is more difficult to preach a message of curse than to "spout" "sweet gospel." Here again we see some traces of the haunting problem of stating law and gospel in understandable current terms.

On Wednesday afternoon three men from Redwood Falls, Minnesota had the floor to question the matters and tactics of the Wisconsin Synod as seen in the Minnesota District. These three men wanted to receive both sides of the matters in question and then report back to their local congregation.

To help them in their plight the following resolution was adopted: that a committee of three Conference members together with these three Redwood Falls protestants work out an appeal to the Redwood Falls congregation and its pastor and ask them once more to act in this matter and of their stand to-

ward these three men, and that if the appeal is rejected that then they will be forced to look for spiritual care elsewhere.¹⁰

This is an instance in which the Conference actually gave advice to individuals, but this rarely was the case. This action seems to have taken place as a result of the particular men and their peculiar situation.

Further business involved a report from the Conference Council of which we have no record. A report stating a balance of \$516.12 was given by the treasurer. Other routine matters involved the assigning of papers: to W. Motzkus on Luther's conception of the Antichrist and his method of dealing with him; a paper to G. Gieschen on the exegesis of John 16:8-11; and finally a paper to Prof. J. P. Koehler on the exegesis of Ephesians.

This conference was brought to a close following the worship service conducted by Pastors A. Zeisler and P. J. Schroeder. One additional note might be stated and that is a vote of thanks was extended to the pastor and congregation of Marshfield, Wisconsin.

The Rice Lake Conference August 23-25, 1931¹¹

This conference began on Sunday as the congregation celebrated its annual mission festival. The speakers in the morning, afternoon, and evening services, were Pastors A. Hillmer, P. Hensel, and E. Abelmann respectively. The ladies of the Rice Lake congregation served dinners and sup-

pers during the three days of this conference. From the three states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Iowa came more than sixty delegates; in addition there were ten pastors from other Synods who were welcomed to take part in the discussions.

On Monday Psalm 91 was read as an opening, followed by the exegetical presentation of Prof. J. P. Koehler which lasted the entire morning. This essay was continued on Tuesday morning and extended into part of the sessions on Tuesday afternoon. It was noted in the introduction that,

The epistle contains more than the doctrine of the church. It is a song, and only when we view it from that angle will we get the full appreciation of it. Because the truths of the epistle can be grasped only by faith, therefore it is important that we notice that Paul addresses it to the saints and believers at Ephesus.¹²

Prof. J. P. Koehler here shows his influence on his former students as they assembled at his feet.

A report of the meeting of the Joint Synod of Wisconsin and Other States from August 12-18, was read to the conference. This was of vital interest since much time at that Synod meeting had been spent considering the status of the Protestants.

You will notice that the Gutachten is discredited, that the suspensions no longer rest on the Gutachten, that the broadcasting of the Gutachten is at fault for the sorry mess Synod is in, that the application of I Cor. 5:11-13 putting the protestants on the same level with idolaters and drunkards must be corrected, that the charge of false doctrine is no longer held against us; in fact, all props are knocked out from under the suspen-

sions, so that any person would conclude the suspensions no longer exist. But, according to the report, they still do. They are hanging in the air and are to be respected by Synod pastors because of Faith-Life's mode of attack.¹³

For a further detailed study on these issues one can consult the above cited issue of Faith-Life on pages 11-14. In that article Pastor A. Zeisler takes each incident and case individually and considers how it was acted upon by the assembled Synod in session at Watertown, Wisconsin.

For the remainder of the Tuesday afternoon session two matters were taken up. First of all the treasurer's report announced a balance of \$266.59, and secondly Pastor Zimmermann read another portion of his paper dealing with the New Testament passages speaking of the Antichrist. Thus the Rice Lake Conference came to a conclusion, after hearty thanks had been given to the hosts.

The Klondike Conference November 5-6, 1931¹⁴

On Thursday, November 5, at 10 o'clock Chairman J. H. Abelmann opened this session with a short devotional meditation. After the welcome had been extended, Pastor G. Gieschen read an essay on the work of the Holy Ghost as it is specified particularly in John 16:8-11. The complete text of this paper was later published in the January and February issues of Faith-Life of 1932.

The afternoon session took up the third installment of Pastor Zimmermann's article on the "Antichrist" dealing

with passages from the book of Revelation. The fourth and final portion of this study was to deal with the topic "The Antichristian Power, as it is Revealed on Old and New Testament History."

Pastor E. Abelman preached the sermon of the worship service in which the Lord's Supper was celebrated. The following morning Prof. J. P. Koehler continued to lecture on the epistle to the Ephesians. A summary statement of this presentation is worth noting.

God here reveals a mystery to us through the Gospel according to His good pleasure, namely that He is going to govern the times, all times, the whole creation, all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. Everything is to be gathered up in Christ. That is the mystery which God has revealed to us through the Gospel. Therefore all things, everything or anything in the world, can only be understood in Christ the Savior. If it were not for Christ the Savior then there would be nothing and nothing could exist; for all things have been created to Him and for Him and through Him.¹⁵

From the above statement we can observe the Christocentric emphasis held by the members of the Conference and can clearly see that their interests transcended their position of that time.

The session on Friday afternoon dealt with routine matters among which was the treasurer's report showing an adequate balance. It was agreed upon that the January meeting be dropped and that a contribution be made to the treasury in lieu of spending traveling expense. Further discussion revolved around the matter that funds be set aside

to enable Prof. J. P. Koehler to pursue research work in libraries in the eastern states. No final decision was reached concerning this matter.

The conference session concluded after proper thanks had been extended to Pastor and Mrs. Phil. J. Schroeder and the people of Trinity Lutheran Church for fine hospitality. The adjourning of this meeting pointed all to look forward to the May meeting to be held in Milwaukee.

The Milwaukee Conference May 17-18, 1932¹⁶

As the Conference met as guests of the Golgotha parish, it is significant to note that an added interest and dimension is recorded. In this meeting we observe that a mission outreach was felt and was discussed. Very little of the literature of Faith-Life deals with a specific mission outreach. In the words of Pastor Kehrberg we read,

After a few preliminary matters had been disposed of, such as the election of a chairman--W. P. Hass acted as chairman the first day in the absence of J. H. Abelmann--, the reading of the minutes of the foregoing conference, the welcoming of the visitors, the reading of letters of greetings and excuses for absence, the floor was given to the Rev. Alfred Boerger, executive secretary of the Lutheran Orient Mission. In about one hour's time he gave Conference an interesting picture of the mission in Persia founded by representatives of eight Lutheran synods who met in Chicago in 1913. The board of directors now is also made up of men from various Lutheran bodies. Brother Boerger explained the work proper that is being carried on among the Kurds; who these Kurds are; as to their customs, religion, political policies etc. After acquainting us with this Orient mission, its needs,

and the amount of work that ought to be done, the speaker bespoke our further interest in this work by perusal of the printed literature to be obtained at the following address: Lutheran Orient Mission, 534 Buckeye St., Hamilton, Ohio.¹⁷

We know from later evidence that this mission endeavor did become very close to the hearts of many of the Conference members. For many years sums of money from Protestant congregations were channeled toward this mission activity in the Orient.

Since Treasurer Krohn was absent, Mr. A. Knief read the financial report showing a balance of \$87.26. It was agreed upon that Mr. Krohn and Mr. Knief borrow money if necessary and that they notify members as to the rate of the replenishing of funds in the treasury. Further items on the agenda were: the continuations of essays by Pastors Zimmermann and Zeisler on, "The Antichrist" and "Our Heritage". Pastors Paul Hensel and W. F. Beitz conducted the service of Holy Communion on Tuesday. A vote of thanks was extended to the hosts, Golgatha parish and pastor. The Conference adjourned with plans to meet in the latter part of August of 1932.

The Neillsville Conference August 14-16, 1932¹⁸

The Holy Communion service conducted by Pastors A. Hillmer and G. Gieschen on Sunday marked the beginning of this conference which was considered to be well attended.

The Monday morning session opened with doctrinal discussions led by Prof. J. P. Koehler and Pastor A. Zeisler. The former continued his exegetical presentation on Ephesians reviewing the first ten verses and concluded with a detailed lecture on verses eleven to fourteen. The latter read the fourth section of his essay, "Our Heritage".

The economic situation of our country in 1932 also affected the Protestant Conference in as much that a deficit of \$183.10 was reported by Mr. Krohn. The idea of a Faith-Life Society was proposed as had been advanced by Paul Hensel at the conference at Burr Oak in 1929. The discussion led to agreement that a society be further developed and that in so doing the following factors be considered:

that the pledges of members be renewed every year. That membership means moral support as well as contributions. That the entire financial work be conducted in the business office of Faith-Life at Mosinee in order to make planned expenditure possible, and to avoid duplication of effort. That a list of members and the amount pledged and contributed by them should be available to members, so that there may be brought about a closer touch between those who are thus associated.¹⁹

It must be emphasized that there was no intention to have an ecclesiastical structure but merely an organism to support the publication activity. The reporter went on to say that,

In order to carry out the above program and in order that some one keep in touch with the Society members giving information and encouragement, all financial matters as already mentioned will be conducted in the business office of Faith-Life at Mosinee

under the head of Executive Secretary-Treasurer. Pastor O. Kehrberg was chosen to fill this position. Hence all business matters concerning Faith-Life magazine and all moneys, such as subscriptions, as well as pledges, collections and donations will hence forth be sent to Faith-Life, Box 311, Mosinee, Wis. Under this new arrangement our former treasurer Fred Krohn will no longer serve in that capacity.²⁰

It is reported that those who were at the conference in Neillsville did renew their pledge in the society. Others had the opportunity to do likewise at their own convenience.

The conference agreed to meet at Town Liberty near Manitowoc, Wis. for the next meeting to be held late in the fall. As usual an expression of thanks was extended to the hosts.

The Liberty Conference November 1-2, 1932²¹

Acts 14:22b: 'We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God', served as the text for the opening sermon delivered by Pastor Walter Motzkus. The same preacher was the first one to read his essay on "What was Luther's Interpretation of the Antichrist?" The essayist pointed out that Luther felt that the Pope was the Antichrist.

The next major item on the agenda was that Pastor Gieschen,

read a paper on 'Reorientation' in which he reviewed the history of the Protestant Conference to date and showed the need for reorientation, particularly in respect to the Wauwatosa Gospel. In the dis-

cussion of this paper it was stressed that what we have learned to call the Wauwatosa Gospel is all of that for which the faculty of the Wauwatosa seminary stood over a period of a quarter of a century. This was a period of intensive work on the part of the professors and resulted in leading the students into a thorough study of all branches of theology.²²

This paper was to have been printed, but for lack of funds it was placed into the hands of a committee. We have no record of the direction of the discussion that took place at this conference.

This author feels that the economic situation of 1932 tended to draw members of the Protestant group closer together. The year of 1932 seems to bring organizational matters to a high point in the history of this society.

The financial report of Pastor Kehrberg showed that Conference has been able to operate thus far without making debts, for which we are very thankful. Because of the condition of the time, however, the treasurer was instructed to inform all members of Faith-Life Society as soon as he felt that the condition of the treasury became precarious, and if this did not result in alleviating the condition, to call a meeting of the conference at once. To relieve the executive secretary-treasurer of part of his increasing work the present writer was elected recording secretary.²³

The feeling and sentiment of the group must have been captured by the reporter when he says in the last line of the record. "In the meantime let us not grow weary, for 'we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God'."²⁴

These were indeed trying times for the group of the Protestant Conference. This chapter concludes with the year 1932. The first time that the Conference met at Oconomowoc,

Wisconsin in May 1933, it opened up a whole new chapter of history referring back to the controversy there. 1933 also brought another recording secretary to the scene in the person of Pastor Hans Koch. Though most of the activity of the Conference was much the same as we compare the record year for year, we at this point choose to conclude this study with the economic dilemma of 1932.

CHAPTER IV

In conclusion as we look at the Protestant Conference from the vantage point of time, we find that it is a hapax in history. The group that first assembled around a protesting cause is no longer intact. The earliest discussions centered in exegetical studies and doctrinal evaluations of the concept of the church universal. Since time has passed on, it is clear that now another generation exists within the ranks of the Wisconsin Synod and that the initial protest of 1928 is no longer heard today. The individuals and places mentioned in the above paper give us a clue as to the involved members and where interest and activity centered. No real organizational structure was established by the Protestant Conference and as a result no church body exists today espousing the feelings of 1928. Of all the individuals mentioned in this paper, only one is associated with the evolved Protestant Conference of today. This one individual is the admired and respected octogenarian, Pastor Paul Hensel.

I feel that this chapter of history in American Lutheranism must be written before the passing of time makes such historiography impossible. May this paper promote interest so that the Protestant Conference does not pass from the scene without ample documentation.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER I

1. Landis Y. Benson, editor. Yearbook of American Churches for 1965. Published under the auspices of the National Council of the Churches in the U.S.A., New York, New York: 1965. p. 63.
2. See Faith-Life. vol. V (August 1932), p. 16.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 2

1. A [ve]-R [obert] L [allemant] E., "Report on Sessions of West Wisconsin District Synod Meeting Held at Watertown, Wisconsin, Nov. 15-18, 1927", Faith-Life, I (June 4, 1928), 2-9. Here after Faith-Life shall be referred to as F-L.
2. Ibid., pp. 2.
3. Ibid.
4. Paul Lutzke, "With One Accord", F-L., I (July 16, 1928), 1.
5. See essay printed in F-L., I (June 4, 1928), 10.
6. See essay printed in F-L., I (July 2, 1928), 2.
7. Paul Lutzke, "Rice Lake Conference", F-L., I (October 15, 1928), 7.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid. p. 8.
10. Paul Lutzke, "The Klondike Conference", F-L., I (January 7, 1929), 7.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid. p. 8.
13. Ibid.
14. See "Salvation In Only One Name", F-L., I (October 29, 1928), 1.
15. Paul Lutzke, "From Bethlehem to Calvary", F-L., I (March 18, 1929), 1. and II (April 15, 1925), 2.
16. Ibid. p. 3.
17. See the exact words of Mr. Bruesewitz on above cited page.
18. Ibid.
19. Paul Lutzke, "The Meeting at Prairie du Chein", F-L., II (July 1, 1929), 2.

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p. 3.
22. Ibid., p. 4.
23. Paul Lutzke, "Burr Oak Conference Echoes", F-L., II
(October 1, 1929), 2.
24. Ibid.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 3

1. Otto Kehrberg, "The Beaver Dam Conference", F-L., III (June 1930), 10.
2. Otto Kehrberg, "The Globe Conference", F-L., III (September 1930), 7.
3. Ibid.
4. Otto Kehrberg, "The La Crosse Conference", F-L., III (November 1930), 10.
5. Ibid.
6. Otto Kehrberg, "The Neenah Conference", F-L., IV (January 1931), 5.
7. Ibid.
8. Otto Kehrberg, "The Marshfield Conference", F-L., IV (May 1931), 14.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Otto Kehrberg, "The Rice Lake Conference", F-L., IV (September 1931), 1 and 11.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Otto Kehrberg, "The Klondike Conference", F-L., IV (November 1931), 12.
15. Ibid.
16. Otto Kehrberg, "The Milwaukee Conference", F-L., V (June 1932), 10.
17. Ibid.
18. Otto Kehrberg, "The Neillsville Conference", F-L., V (September 1932), 3 and 4.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

21. H. W. Parisuis, "The Liberty Conference", F-L., V
(November 1932), 12 and 13.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.

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- "The La Crosse Conference," Faith-Life, III (November 1930), 10.
- "The Neenah Conference," Faith-Life, IV (January 1931), 5.
- "The Marshfield Conference," Faith-Life, IV (May 1931), 14.
- "The Rice Lake Conference," Faith-Life, IV (September 1931), 1-2.
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II (July 1, 1929), 2.

----- "Burr Oak Conference Echoes," Faith-Life, II
(October 1, 1929), 2.

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