

“Casting Sand in the Eyes”: Conrad Bröske’s Literary Dispute with the Orthodox Reformed Preachers in Elberfeld, 1704-1706

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I. Introduction

The present study examines a controversy between Conrad Bröske (1660-1713) and the Reformed preachers of the Elberfeld Classis. At issue was the decision by the Reformed parish Church in Elberfeld, Germany, to call Bröske as its “Second Preacher” against the advice of the Classis.¹ Lasting from November 1704 until mid 1706, the controversy provides significant insight into the personalities, issues and conflicts that dominated much of the religious landscape of the German Empire at that time, and which affected the German Reformed Church in particular. This paper is part of a larger investigation into the life and influence of Bröske, a German Reformed Court Preacher, radical Pietist and member of the German Philadelphian movement.

The study argues that while *theology* and *official formalities* were certainly significant to this dispute, it was *personal issues* that drove the controversy and took on a life of their own. On both sides matters of personal reputation and influence, perceived injury and injustice, Christian integrity and truth-telling were the driving force that prevented an easy resolution. These personal issues magnified Bröske’s suspected heterodoxy, a suspicion due largely to his numerous eschatological writings and millennialism. The study concludes that the same *ad hominem* factors that

scholars have previously found at work in Pietist-Orthodox controversies among the *Lutherans* were operative to a high degree in the *Reformed* context as well. One explanation for this phenomenon could be that Protestants generally, and Reformed churches in particular, faced a special problem: who decides if someone's interpretation of Scripture and the Confessions is acceptable?

A. Conrad Bröske (1660-1713), A Man of Controversy

Max Goebel's *Geschichte des christlichen Lebens in der rheinisch-westphälischen evangelischen Kirche, Bd. III* (1860) introduced Bröske as "a disciple of the English Chiliast [Thomas] Beverley, the latter a member of the Philadelphian Society in London, a group committed to the union of all true Christians among themselves. Bröske translated Beverley's apocalyptic-minded *Zeitregister* into German in 1696, as well as writing his own chiliastically-minded works which reflect Beverley's influence. He taught that the preparation time for the thousand year kingdom of Christ would begin around the year 1700. The first fruits of this kingdom he saw in the English Philadelphians and the beginnings of the Philadelphian movement among Pietists, Chiliasts, Quietists, and all those who found fellowship with each other without regard for confessional differences. The expected thousand year kingdom would last from 1772 to 2772."²

Bröske seemed to be a man born to controversy. An earlier study examined Bröske's controversy with a fellow Philadelphian, Johann Conrad Dippel. Lasting from 1700-1702, this dispute was intense, vigorous and acrimonious, with some sixteen treatises written back and forth and with accusations from both sides of duplicity, heresy and hypocrisy. Dippel took special offence at Bröske's Reformed theology and position as a Court Preacher within the State Church. The fact that Bröske retained outward ceremonies, including infant baptism, made him suspect to Dippel. Just two years after the first dispute had died out, Bröske again faced opposition but from the opposite flank. This second dispute forms the subject of the present study. Here Bröske found himself accused of compromising Reformed teaching on the church and sacraments. In facing this kind of double opposition, from both more conservative and more radical critics, Bröske was in good company, joining such famous Pietists as Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705), August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) and Johann Wilhelm Petersen (1649-1726).³

B. The Sources for Investigating the Dispute between Bröske and the Elberfeld Classis

Volume three of Max Goebel's *Geschichte des christlichen Lebens in der rheinisch-westphälischen evangelischen Kirche* (1860), published posthumously, provides the best scholarly survey to date of the conflicts within the Reformed Church in the Rhine region in the eighteenth century. Goebel rejoiced that "the sources flow so richly" concerning the story of Philadelphian Chiliasm in Elberfeld, of which this controversy forms a part.⁴

The dispute in question ran to some eight treatises over a one and a half year period, four by Bröske and four by the Elberfeld preachers. Of these, six were available to me in whole or in part in researching this paper. Hans Schneider lamented in 1993 that two of Bröske's contributions, his *Rechtmäßige Schutzrede* of 1705 and *Billige Zurückweisung* of 1706, were "no longer obtainable."⁵ In fact, both of these Bröske works are available to scholars.⁶

II. Max Goebel's Presentation of the Controversy

A. Goebel's View of the Conflict: A Clash of Theologies

Goebel characterized the controversy as a classic conflict between the mystical Pietist religion of the heart and the Protestant Orthodox religion of doctrinal precision. He argued that the Elberfeld parish Church (*Gemeinde*) was inwardly-oriented and held to new, chiliastic, Philadelphian, erroneous teachings; the Classis, on the other hand, followed proper outward forms and held to old, strict, ecclesiastical traditions of right belief.⁷ And so for Goebel the conflict was first of all a clash of theologies and secondly one of formalities; the two sides disagreed over who held the correct *theology* and who was following proper *procedure* in appointments to church office. By contrast, we shall argue that while *theology* and *official formalities* were certainly at issue in this controversy, it was *personal issues* that constituted the real basis for dispute.

B. Goebel's Overview of the Conflict

At this point it would be useful to provide a brief sketch of the course of the controversy, as Goebel outlined it, before examining the parties and issues in detail. In fall of 1703 the Reformed Church in Elberfeld was shocked by the deaths, within just a month of each other, of

their two pastors, Andreas Austen of Rinteln and Peter Türk, at only 45 and 44 years of age. In Austen's place Johann Grüter was chosen, and in November of 1704 there followed the election of the second preacher of the Elberfeld Church. Issues related to the latter election would draw the recently arrived Grüter into angry quarrels with his Church lasting for several years.⁸

For some time various individuals in the Elberfeld Church had had their eye on the Court Preacher in Offenbach, Conrad Bröske, despite Bröske's reputation as a Philadelphian Chiliast. Indeed, noted Goebel, "on account of his pious, impartial and Philadelphian thinking, he [Bröske] had had on his side for some time a large and determined party among the electors, the members of the Consistory and the Church leaders or officers in the Elberfeld Church, with the result that he was officially elected and called."⁹

Grüter, at that time also Inspector of the Classis, sought in vain to hinder Bröske's election. For example, before the election he sought the judgment of the other preachers of the Elberfeld Classis concerning whether the Church should even be permitted to elect a preacher from outside the Classis (*der Wahl eines fremden Predigers*) before the Classis had received reliable testimonies as to his "pure teaching, blameless life and good behaviour." Even though the Classis voted ten to one against Bröske's candidacy, the Church went ahead with the election. The presbytery of the Elberfeld Church became embittered against Pastor Grüter since, without its prior knowledge, he had directed a circular letter to the Classis outlining his concerns.¹⁰

After the election on the 7th of November 1704, the Classis, with Grüter at the head, made a formal objection against Bröske's call and forbade the Church from issuing an official invitation. The Elberfeld Classis met on the 15th of December 1704 and identified some forty-two "strange, dangerous, offensive expressions and dogmas" in Bröske's writings¹¹ and raised the matter for investigation to the Provincial Synod. At the same time it warned Bröske from too quickly accepting the improper election.

Meanwhile Bröske felt deeply offended by all that had happened. He turned down the call, but then complained at length in his writings about the hasty and arbitrary proceeding of the Elberfeld Classis. He authored for this reason his *Rechtmäßige Schutzrede (Legitimate Defence)*, published on the 12th of March 1705. To this the Elberfeld Classis set in opposition

its *Gerechtsame Ablehnung* or *Justified Refusal* followed by Bröske's *Billige Zurückweisung* or *Reasonable Rebuttal*. The Classis replied in 1706 with the *Wohlgegründete Verthätigung* or *Well-founded Defence of the truth and innocence of the Elberfeld Classis against Brüske's Illegitimate Defence and Unreasonable Rebuttal*. In that same year the Classis produced, with the approval of the Synod and with the support of the theological Faculty in Leyden, a massive critique of millennialism entitled, *Wagschale* or *The Scales, in which the newly conceived thousand year kingdom of Mr. Conrad Bröske is weighed and found to be too light by the Evangelical Reformed Preachers of the Elberfeld Classis* (1706).¹²

The Consistory of the Elberfeld parish Church decided to consult its own experts, seeking an opinion from the theological Faculty in Frankfurt on the Oder. The Frankfurt Faculty found nothing seriously heterodox or sectarian in Bröske's writings so as to make him ineligible. This judgment strengthened the opposition of the Church's Presbytery against Pastor Grüter and the Classis. Only in 1706 did the Synod succeed in settling the dispute between the Elberfeld Church and Grüter by a formal agreement and a new election which appears to have satisfied the Bröske party.¹³

III. Parties to the Controversy

We now take a more careful look first of all at the parties and then at the issues involved in this controversy. The parties include the Reformed parish Church in Elberfeld, the Classis of Reformed preachers in the surrounding region led by Johann Grüter, and finally Conrad Bröske. The purpose of this section is to indicate for each party something of their social perspective and theological standpoint as background for understanding their positions on the issues of controversy.

A. The Reformed Church in Elberfeld

Elberfeld is situated about 25 km or 15 miles east of Düsseldorf, in the Ruhr region of northwestern Germany. It was completely destroyed by fire in 1687. Thanks to the protection of special regional privileges, this small municipality was soon thriving again. By 1719 it would number some 3,000 people, leaving behind its far older sister cities of Solingen and Düsseldorf, the Prince's residence city.¹⁴

There was at that time only one Reformed Church in Elberfeld. It joined other Churches in the lower Rhine Reformed Church region in

making the *Heidelberg Catechism* the foundation and norm of public teaching. The Bergische Synod called it "the only symbol book of these churches." The *Catechism* served as the teaching norm in all credentialing and certification of pastors. It was used in schools and in catechizing, and Sunday afternoon sermons were based upon it.¹⁵

There were also other forces at work in shaping the piety of the Elberfeld Church. This is evidenced in the Church's openness towards Pietist thinking and its interest in Bröske's writings and teaching.¹⁶ In the first third of the 18th century, the Reformed Church in the lower Rhine region around Düsseldorf found itself influenced by a variety of separatist groups and individuals. One list of these includes: Hochmann from Wittgenstein, Johann Conrad Dippel from Hessen, Hummel from Heidelberg, Conrad Bröske from Offenbach, Schleyermacher from Gemünd in Hessen, Gerhard Tersteegen from Mülheim in the lower Rhine region.¹⁷

B. Johann Grüter and the Elberfeld Classis

In his *Schutz-Rede* Bröske indicated the names of some nine pastors "who have not conducted themselves towards me in a brotherly fashion."¹⁸ He did this, he said, in order to spare the innocent. His list included: Johannes Grüter, pastor in Elberfeld and Inspector of the Classis; Johannes Sethman, Assessor (Assistant) of the Classis; Conrad Gülcher, secretary of the Classis; Rütgerus Henckel, minister in Düsseldorf; Thomas Kolhagius, minister in Gruten; J.H. Ovenius, minister in Cronenberg; Johann Halffman, minister in Sonborn; Friderich Johann Sethman, minister in Belbert; Johann Caspar Kersten, minister in Gräffrath. These are the individuals who represented Bröske's main opposition before, during and after his election as Second Preacher in Elberfeld.

During the first third of the 18th century there were constant conflicts and battles between church authorities and separatist groups.¹⁹ This evidently created a climate of suspicion that helps to explain the anxiety of the Classis over the candidacy of an "outsider" whose theology was suspect. Goebel notes that "all Klass and Synod minutes from this period contain bitter complaints about the spread of the Pietists and 'Schwärmer' or of the sectarian character of the itinerant, unauthorized Schwärmer in the churches."²⁰ "All pastors and consistories are repeatedly and earnestly encouraged not only to be watchful against such people, so that no poison from their erroneous teaching should creep in, but also where necessary to

implore the help of the regional authorities.”²¹ For example, the Elberfeld Classis affirmed and reaffirmed in 1711 that, “the presbyteries, after brotherly admonition, warning and discipline, should finally seek the help of the regional authority, so that the Schwärmer and such, who confess none of the three tolerated churches and religions in the Roman Empire, might be driven out of the churches.”²²

C. Conrad Bröske (1660-1713), Reformed Court Preacher

Conrad Bröske was a complex individual, indicated by his two-fold identity as a radical millenarian, looking for the present age to pass away, and a Reformed Court Preacher, making him a prestigious and influential member in the Court of his Count.

Bröske’s credentials as a Reformed Preacher were impressive. He came of a family of Protestant clergy going back to the 16th century.²³ He completed his studies at the Reformed (Calvinist) Philipps-University in Marburg in 1682, and then made several study tours that acquainted him with leading Reformed scholars in Heidelberg, Geneva, Utrecht, Leiden, London and Oxford. In 1686 at 26 years of age Bröske took up the position of Court Preacher to the Reformed Count Johann Philipp of Ysenburg (1655-1718) in Offenbach near Frankfurt am Mayn, whom Bröske served until his own death in 1713.²⁴ As Court Preacher Bröske faithfully taught the fundamentals of the Reformed faith according to the *Heidelberg Catechism*, instructing young children as well as preaching them publicly year by year to his congregation in Offenbach. Bröske published an explanation of the *Catechism* that went through three editions and was used as a model by churches in other regions.²⁵

As Court Preacher Bröske evidently enjoyed considerable prestige and influence both within the Court of his prince and in the county. Bröske was successful in winning over Count Johann Philipp and the Countess Charlotte Amalie to his views on religious tolerance, and to his chiliastic hopes for future peace and unity within Christendom. Under Bröske’s influence Offenbach became a refuge for persecuted Radicals and the germ seed (*Keimzelle*) for the growing Philadelphian movement within Germany. One scholar speaks of Bröske’s “significant influence in the Court and position of unlimited power in directing the region’s churches and schools.” It was Bröske’s efforts that “essentially produced the cultural establishment of the region.”²⁶ Bröske’s close relationship with the Count and the trust that Bröske enjoyed are especially evidenced by the fact that

in 1692 the Count gave his own half sister Luise to Bröske as his wife, “going against every convention of his class.”²⁷

However, Bröske also joined fellow “Philadelphians” in looking for a new church age marked by heart-felt faith and Christian unity. Bröske joined his fellow Marburg student Johann Heinrich Horch in presenting himself as the true defender of the Protestant Reformation, calling the Church back to its reforming vision after generations of decline. When Horch was dismissed as Professor at the Reformed Seminary in Herborn in February 1698, Bröske welcomed Horch to his pulpit in Offenbach. There Horch proclaimed: “The Protestant Church had indeed been delivered from spiritual Egypt during the Reformation, but like Lot’s wife it had looked back and returned there again.”²⁸ Their reform and publications focussed on four issues: improvement of schools, improvement of pastoral teaching and public worship, the coming kingdom of Christ, and divine revelations.²⁹

This two-fold identity as radical millenarian and prestigious member of the Court surely caused Bröske some inward conflict and helps to explain the outward conflicts he encountered throughout his life.

IV. Issues in the Controversy

Our concern now is to describe and illustrate from the primary sources how theological arguments came to be over-shadowed by *ad hominem* arguments and personal conflicts including power struggles, pettiness and name-calling.

A. Theological Issues

1. From the Perspective of the Classis

On the 15th of December 1704 the Elberfeld Classis held an extraordinary meeting in Tönneseide, where it examined several of Bröske’s published works including: *Wahre Christen-Tauffe* (True Christian Baptism), *Alte und Neue Religion* (Old and New Religion), *Das Gebeth des Herrn* (The Lord’s Prayer), and *Schlüssel der Offenbarung* (Key to the Book of Revelation). The Classis recommended that the Synod conduct a further investigation of Bröske’s views, based on the fact that “so many foreign, dangerous and ill-considered statements and ways of speaking were found in Bröske’s published writings.”³⁰ It identified some

forty-two specific extracts from Bröske's writings that illustrated these concerns.

From the perspective of the Classis there were three key issues in their opposition to Bröske: Bröske's views on the sacraments, the outward ministry of the Church, and the thousand year kingdom of Christ. The Classis cited Bröske's own words in *Wahre Christen-Tauffe*, noting his statement that the sacraments have been "ordered and established by the Lord Christ really more as a service to the weak than to the strong."³¹ "Those well instructed in the secrets of true godliness and whose hearts are truly cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ and have been truly nourished with the true bread of heaven, could well dispense with all these elements, such as a Word outwardly seen and heard and also an outward bath of water and the bodily eating and drinking of bread and wine."³² These statements were taken to be evidence of potentially heterodox thinking.

Closely related to this was Bröske's suggestion in his tract, *Alte und Neue Religion*, that the outward ministry of the Church, which involves attending in a certain prescribed place, with singing, reading, praying, preaching, listening, etc. is itself a middle thing (*ein Mittel-Ding*). To Bröske it mattered little whether this happened in private or in homes, only that the practice was sensible.³³

Finally, the Classis cited Bröske's comment in his *Schlüssel der Offenbarung* regarding the circumstances of the thousand year kingdom, where he explained the verses in *Revelation* 20:7-11: "While Christ rules splendidly along with the resurrected saints in the heaven in the clouds freed from the vanity of the world, and with their fellow saints on the new earth, then the dragon, the old serpent which is the devil, sits for a long time shut up in the abyss along with his angels, and the godless stand on the pillory, so to speak, in the four corners of the earth during this time and must see, to their great torment and shame, how those whom they previously hated, tortured, persecuted and killed, now rule and are comforted. That represents the two-fold condition in this time of judgment."³⁴

Bröske interpreted the millennium as the time of Christ's reign when he would exercise judgment on the world. (II Timothy 4:1)³⁵ Bröske observed that the world was now indeed in a vain condition; on the day of judgment it would attain a condition where it was freed from vanity; and then when judgment was complete, everything would be changed to the condition of eternity.

2. From Bröske's Perspective

Bröske insisted that nothing in his writings could be shown to be inconsistent with the Reformed confessions. "I maintain that in the excerpted statements not the least thing can be found that is in conflict with God's Word and the Symbol Books based upon it of the Churches Reformed according to the Gospel of Christ."³⁶ This argument is reminiscent of earlier arguments by Spener and Petersen. Both Spener and Petersen were at pains to prove that their Chiliasm was not in violation of the *Augsburg Confession*. In 1695 Petersen wrote a work arguing that the idea of Christ's thousand year reign "does not go against the 17th article of the *Augsburg Confession*."³⁷

Bröske noted that impartial observers were amazed at how little substance there was to the Classis' accusations of suspect theology against him. Those who knew Bröske, both educated and uneducated, had entrusted their own children to him for instruction and spoke well of him; how strange that those who scarcely knew him should so readily condemn him without consulting those who did.³⁸ For Bröske these theological issues were all a smoke-screen for envy and hatred, the real issues.

3. Summary

Clearly a lot of theological discussion did take place, culminating in the 440 page *Wagschale* produced by the Classis and which appeared in March 1706. Along the way the Classis had consulted with theologians in Duisburg and in Leyden. The parish Church in Elberfeld consulted with theologians in Frankfurt.a. Oder. But by the time the two sides got down to this theological work, the lines had been drawn, sides taken and the power struggle had been engaged.

B. Procedural Issues

A case can be made that it was the lack of a clear procedure for resolving the question of Bröske's heterodoxy that resulted in the bitter conflict of personalities. Both parties appealed to the larger Christian public to "judge" which side had truth and Scripture to recommend it. The repeated argument by both sides went as follows: "Any impartial Christian reader can easily recognize . . ." or "let everyone judge according to God's Word how far Bröske's writings can stand with the Orthodox and right-minded teaching of the Reformed Churches."³⁹

The Classis felt that it clearly had a role to play in the election of a second preacher for the Elberfeld Reformed Church.

They hoped I would hold off my decision on this call until the Classis was able to inquire properly into my teaching and as well as be assured of my right-mindedness in doctrine and faith from sufficient testimonies such as my writings and explanations to which examination they are obligated according to church law. And then afterwards with the agreement of the Bergischen Synod and of the Elberfeld Classis a proper and in their region required Certificate of Calling could be sent to me.⁴⁰

There were also procedural issues here from the perspective of the Classis. The Classis was evidently disturbed by the fact that Bröske came from outside the Elberfeld jurisdiction and that proper procedure had not been followed to clear his candidacy with them. Bröske was referred to as “an outsider” (*fremder Prediger*).

It is surely significant that the individual who won the next election for Second Preacher was Pastor Meyer from Urdenbach⁴¹, a parish within the Bergischen Synod and only about 25 km from the community of Elberfeld. Bröske’s Offenbach, on the other hand, lay some 150 km away, to the southeast of Elberfeld.

Bröske and the Church, however, lost confidence in the fairness of the Classis in judging Bröske’s fitness as a candidate. Bröske learned, however, that their purpose was not really to clear the way for his coming, but to do all to hinder it.

These gentlemen have sufficiently demonstrated that they had in mind not to pave the way for my coming but to hinder it, not to deliver me from false slanders but to make me more and more loathsome (*stinckend*) among the residents of the region and especially in the Christian Reformed Church in Elberfeld.⁴²

Thus unclarity and lack of confidence over procedure paved the way for full-blown antagonism and power-play to stream forth.

C. Personal Issues – The Real Issues!

One need not read far in the extensive contributions to the controversy by Bröske and the Classis to realize that the main issues had more to

do with the manner and tone and motive of speaking than with theological content. Today's postmodernists would point to issues of power and control as the operative factors. A cursory over-view of the polemical writings on both sides confirms this interpretation.

1. Bröske's *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede* ("Legitimate Defense against the insulting rumours (*Schmachreden*) being spread behind his back unjustly by some Preachers belonging to the Elberfeld Classis.")

As indicated by the work's title, Bröske's main complaint against Grüter and the Classis concerned the "various unjust and evil rumours" about him and his teaching that were being spread by "those with a reputation for being godly." They had done this behind his back, in order to "disgrace his good name, so that they might turn the thoughts and affections of truth-loving people away from him."⁴³ He especially "hated" the behaviour of those who praised him to his face for his convictions, but then among others spoke insults and scorn concerning him. He attributed their behaviour to two things: want of judgement and total lack of love.⁴⁴ Bröske's passion and indignation are transparent in his writing. He felt badly used, and that theological issues were a mere pretext for personal enmity on the part of the Classis.

Bröske then accused Pastor Johann Grüter of instigating "this depraved game" and of showing unreasonable prejudice against him as an "outside" candidate by opposing his candidacy on the day of the election. "Herr Grüter sufficiently demonstrated and showed his partiality by his behaviour, and that he had been seized at least with prejudice against me if not with hatred and envy and a resulting willfulness to be a hindrance and also obnoxious towards me."⁴⁵ After the Church went ahead and elected Bröske instead of the other candidates, and the next day sent him an official letter of call (*Beruff-Schein*)⁴⁶, Grüter went to work and met with his fellow preachers. They drafted a letter advising Bröske that his call had been highly "irregular" and that he should wait upon their investigation of his credentials. Then the Classis prepared some excerpts from his writings and sent them to the Church's Consistory as grounds for their concern. Here as well, complained Bröske, they had not acted forthrightly. First, they had not sent these passages to him for clarification, but to the Church. "They made no mention of these excerpts in their writing to me, much less sent them to me and sought my explanation, which would have been the most direct, proper, loving and reasonable way

to proceed, but sent them to the Consistory in Elberfeld.⁴⁷

Second, the passages from his works were taken badly out of context and so did not truly represent his thinking. “They wrote out some passages from my writings out of context, calling them a shocking, foreign, dangerous and inappropriate manner of speaking and without in the least demonstrating wherein the error consisted.”⁴⁸ Bröske insisted that he would only feel thankfulness and love for the person who could show any heretical teachings in his writings, and point him to the right path. But this they had declined to do.⁴⁹

Bröske concluded the *Schutz-Rede* by saying that he wrote especially to serve those who complained that the accusations of the Classis “put them in doubt as to whom they should believe . . .”⁵⁰ His whole intention was simply to “redeem” his innocence and his good name among these people. Finally, Bröske called on his accusers to recognize their error and to seek God’s forgiveness.⁵¹

2. The Gerechtsame Ablehnung (Justified Refusal) of the Classis and Pastor Grüter

The Classis responded by refusing his invitation to apologize, hence their “justified refusal.” The Classis insisted that it had proceeded “with all considerate care and provided the Synod with complete information regarding Bröske’s thinking and his consequent eligibility, in order to relieve itself of any accusation of improper proceeding in his case, and so has entered upon no loveless or twisted ways with him, as he now does with the Classis, but have dealt with him according to love and in an approved manner . . .”⁵² If anyone lacked love, it was not they.

The Classis argued that Bröske’s *Schutz-Rede* (Word of Defense) was itself a *Schmach-Rede* (Word of Insult) against the Classis. They expressed their amazement that Bröske, “has not blushed to go publicly into print before the whole world against the preachers of the Elberfeld Classis with his so-called *Schutz-Rede* which cannot be seen by honourable readers as anything but a bitter *Schmach-Rede*.”⁵³ They provided evidence to prove how unjustified Bröske’s own approach had been, and to show “what unChristian lovelessness and careless folly” he had instigated against them.⁵⁴ For example, he had undertaken to circulate in the region “a bitter and stinging writing against the Classis” so that the Classis might be wounded and insulted by it.⁵⁵ Was that really necessary and motivated by love on his part?

This was all carried on in public through published proceedings. he Classis justified this publicly held dispute as follows:

This is set before the reader's eyes, of whatever class and position he might be, in a provisional way by open publication, so that the Elberfeld Classis might challenge the untruthful accusations of Herr Bröske with these few reasons and at the same time show that he himself has no reasons with his groundless so called *Schutz-Schrift* to break forth in so untimely a fashion, where he, being ignorant in these matters, was so impudently minded so as to **cast sand in the eyes** of the unlearned and to cover over the pure truth and right nature of things with dull clouds of mist.⁵⁶

3. Bröske's *Billige Zurückweisung* (Reasonable Challenge)

To this Bröske replied bitterly in his *Reasonable Challenge*:

It should now be more clear than the mid-day sun, that the Classis has used no modest care in this case, that they would in no way apologize for their unceremonious behaviour and lovelessness against me . . . which did not pertain to the matter at hand nor was of any help.⁵⁷

He added:

This too is set before the reader's eyes in print in order that each might see how fairly I challenge the *Ablehnung* written against my *Schutz-Rede*. And that I have set forth the facts clearly in my *Schutz-Rede* and have invited the Classis to answer me, and, once the answer followed, have invited friend and foe to form an impartial judgment. Yet the Classis has addressed the matter with not a word, passing by with silence all the questions put to them.

Bröske concluded, "I leave it to the reader to judge who among the two of us, whether they or I, **cast sand in the people's eyes**, and cover over the pure truth and right nature of things with dull clouds of mist."⁵⁸

4. The second Appendix to Bröske's *Schutz-Rede*

Bröske provided his own brief account of the course of the conflict in the "Second Appendix" to his *Schutz-Rede*. It is significant that there he highlighted and summed up what are best described as the "personal"

points at issue, rather than raising theological issues. Bröske's list noted:

- i) the attacks by Pastor Grüter and the other Preachers on Bröske's "good name";
- ii) the resulting damage that had been done to his reputation at home and elsewhere, his good name thereby having suffered "shipwreck";
- iii) the failure of the Classis to proceed in the most direct, proper, loving and reasonable way, which would be to deal with Bröske directly, and to seek his clarification on matters of concern; instead making matters public and proceeding to inform the Consistory and the Synod of their concerns;
- iv) the spread of a false rumour "so far abroad, high and low," even so far as Offenbach, that Bröske very much desired to go to Elberfeld but could not go there on account of erroneous thinking in his doctrine;
- v) Bröske's desperation in threatening a lawsuit if they would not clear his name by a favourable statement concerning him and his writings: "I would pursue my legal rights and would either accuse them before Synod or publish a *Speciem Facti* in defence of my good name";
- vi) Bröske's concern that this bad reputation be turned aside if he were any longer to be edifying in his office of Preacher in Offenbach;
- vii) Bröske's conviction that since the controversy had become known to "many thousands of people" in many places, only a published true account of the controversy could make things right;
- viii) finally, Bröske's concern to have what was entitled to him "by natural, civil and divine law."⁵⁹

5. Summary

In a situation where lines of power are not clearly drawn, personal conflicts come readily to the fore. Who should decide if Bröske was an admissible candidate for "Second Preacher" in Elberfeld? The Church? The Classis? Bröske's own reputation, friends and writings?

The Classis concluded the *Wagschale* by noting: "If only Bröske would choose the truth and not grieve for his own respect and honour . . . Bröske would not be the first Court-Preacher who had spoken according to his own inclination and wisdom and upon later instruction had retracted his teaching . . ." ⁶⁰ St. Augustine, after all, had written his "retractions." Bröske should swallow his pride and do the same. Bröske, however, found

it unjust and arbitrary that his interpretation of Revelation and appeals to authorities were questioned when others were accepted.

The freedom which another preacher takes to follow the explanation of Cocceius concerning the thousand year kingdom, the same freedom have I exercised to follow the explanation of the first apostolic Christians, who personally heard the apostle for themselves . . . It is an aggravating thing that I for my part should not have the same freedom as others to choose the meaning most agreeable with the holy scriptures.⁶¹

From Bröske's perspective, it was the Classis which should swallow its pride.

V. Conclusion: A Paradigm for Understanding Seventeenth/Eighteenth Century Protestant Controversies?

We conclude that matters of personal reputation, truth-telling, unloving behaviour, hatred and envy, unfair prejudice and personal rights were of paramount concern in this eighteenth century controversy. Both sides seemed to have had good reason to accuse the other on at least some of these points. Matters of theological difference became secondary and were ultimately unresolved.

It may be asked whether we have found a "paradigm" for understanding seventeenth/eighteenth-century Protestant controversies. Certainly the same *ad hominem* factor can also be found at work in Pietist conflicts with Orthodox Lutherans at the time. For example, one sees personal motives and political factors at work in the opposition against both Philip Jakob Spener and August Hermann Francke.⁶² Johann Friedrich Mayer, described by a contemporary as *malleus haeticorum et pietistarum* ("the destroyer of heretics and Pietists"),⁶³ had initially been positively impressed by Spener.⁶⁴ What seems to have turned him against Spener and the Pietists had more to do with personal motives than theology. It was shortly after Spener's move to bring official discipline to bear against Mayer on account of adultery that Mayer began his attack on Spener as "the patron and protector of all the *Schwärmer*."⁶⁵ In 1690 Mayer composed a scathing opinion concerning August Hermann Francke and sent it to the city council in Erfurt. In 1695 he warned theology students against Francke's Bible commentaries.⁶⁶

We have suggested that one explanation for this phenomenon could be that Protestants generally and Reformed churches in particular faced a special problem: who decides if someone's interpretation of Scripture and the Confessions is acceptable? Theological differences easily resolved themselves into power struggles. Today many historians perceive in such personal disputes larger issues of power and control. This paper provides a case study to illustrate how perceptions of theological "heterodoxy" have often been determined by social groups in ways that protect their own power. Parties to disputes based on personal jealousies invariably misrepresent things, "casting sand in the eyes" of others. Then everyone is blinded, and truth suffers.

VI. Bibliography and Chronology of Key Sources

1. Conrad Brüßke. *Wagschale des tausendjährigen Reiches*. Anno 1704.

*2. *Acti Conventus extraordinarii Classis Elberfeldensis*, gehalten auff der Töniß-Heyden den 15. Decemb. Anno 1704. (Gegen die den 7. Nov. Anno 1704 zu Elberfeld gehaltene Predigers-Wahl).

*3. Conrad Bröske. *Rechtmäßige Schutzrede wider die von einigen zu der Elberfeldischen Classe gehörigen Herrn Prediger, ohne sein Verschulden hinter ihm her mit Unrecht ausgestreute Schmachreden*. Offenbach: de Launoy, 12. März 1705. 16pp. plus 21pp of Appendix. [UB Mannheim: Wk 317]

*4. Die Elberfelder Predigern. *Gerechtsame, Abgenöthigte vorauslaufende Ablehnung der Evangelisch-Reformirten Prediger Elberfeldischer Class, im Herzogthum Berge Gegen die am 12. Martii 1705 von Hn. Conrad Brößkens Hof-Predigern zu Offenbach am Mayn Außgegebene so genante Schutz-Rede*. 1705. 8pp.

*5. Conrad Brößke. *Billige und auff die Warheit gegründete Zurückweisung der im Namen der Evangelisch-Reformirten Herren Prediger der Elberfeldischen Class, im Druck herauß-gegebene Ablehnung Gegen Conrad Brößkens Hof-Predigers zu Offenbach Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*. 1705. 11pp.

*6. Die Elberfelder Predigern. *Wohlbegründete Verthädigung der Wahrheit und Unschuld der Elberfeldischen Classe wider Brüßkes Unrechtmäßige Schutzrede wie auch wider desselben Unbillige Zurückweisung*. Duisburg am Rhein: Johannes Sas/der Königl. Universität Buchdrucker, March 1706. 84pp. (Of this work Hans Schneider writes that it was written "against Bröske's writing, which is no longer obtainable, written in his own defence . . ." see Schneider, "Der radikale Pietismus im 17. Jahrhundert," p. 431 n. 147. In fact, both Bröske works mentioned in the title are available.)

*7. Die Elberfelder Predigern. *Waagschale worinnen das neu-ersonnene tausendjährige Lust-Himmlisch-Paradiesische Gerichts-Reich Herren Conraden Brößkens und dessen hierüber geführte unschriftmässige Lehrsätze und andere Rede-Arten nach dem Gewicht des Heiligthums gerechsam abgewogen und zu leicht befunden worden durch Evangelisch-Reformirte Prediger der Elberfeldischen Klasse im Herzogthum Berg*. Duisburg am Rhein: Johannes Sas/der Königl. Universität Buchdrucker, March 1706. 440pp.

8. Conrad Bröske. *Waage der Wahrheit, wodurch entdeckt wird, die Ungerechtigkeit der Waagschalen, womit einige Prediger der Elberfeldischen Classe die durch ihn vorgestellte Lehre der ersten Christen, vom tausendjährigen Reiche, wie auch einige seiner Red-Arten und Meynungen ungebührlich abgewogen haben*. Offenbach: de Launoy, 1706.

* Secondary Source: Max Goebel, *Geschichte des christlichen Lebens in der rheinisch-westphälischen evangelischen Kirche, dritter Band* (Coblenz: Karl Bädeker, 1860), especially chap. 12, "Die philadelphischen und chiliastischen Anfänge in Elberfeld, 1696-1722," 450-455.

* Indicates availability in whole or in part. Six out of the eight primary sources were available to me.

Endnotes

1. The "Classis" was simply a district of neighbouring Reformed churches or the assembled representatives of those churches. It was equivalent to the Presbytery in Presbyterian polity. The delegates to the Classis included the minister and an elder from each church. Normally power resided in the Consistory of the local church; the Classis would oversee congregations and ordain and discipline clergy; above the Classis was the Synod, made up of representatives from each Classis (see L. Praamsma, "Classis," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, vol. III (Marshallton: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972), ed. Philip E. Hughes, 12).
2. Max Goebel, *Geschichte des christlichen Lebens in der rheinisch-westphälischen evangelischen Kirche, dritter Band* (Coblenz: Karl Bädeker, 1860), 81ff.
3. Spener, for example, continually sought to soften the radicalism of his followers and to avoid at once any breach with them or with the Orthodox. See Martin Brecht, *Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), Chap. VI, "Philipp Jakob Spener, Sein Programm und dessen Auswirkungen," esp. 338, 363, 368, 370. This is volume one in *Geschichte des Pietismus*, edited by Brecht.
4. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 449. Goebel writes, "Indem aber diese Geschichte uns wie zu einem Brennpunkt führt, in welchem der Separatismus und die Mystik, die Inspiration und der philadelphische Chiliasmus jener Tage zusammentreffen, so können wir uns nur freuen, daß die Quellen über sie so reichlich fließen . . . sie meist in das Archiv der Rheinischen Provinzialkirche übergegangen sind, dem Verfasser in Größter Vollständigkeit zu Gebote."
5. Hans Schneider, "Der radikale Pietismus im 17. Jahrhundert," 431 n. 147.
6. See Conrad Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutzrede wider die von einigen zu der Elberfeldischen Classe gehörigen Herrn Prediger, ohne sein Verschulden hinter ihm her mit Unrecht ausgestreute Schmachreden* (Offenbach: de Launoy, 12. März 1705) located in UB Mannheim: Wk 317; and *Die Elberfelder Predigern, Wohlbegründete Verthädigung der Wahrheit und Unschuld der Elberfeldischen Classe wider Brüßkes Unrechtmäßige Schutzrede wie auch wider desselben Unbillige Zurückweisung* (Duisburg: Universität Buchdrucker, 1706) located in Universitäts- und Stadt-Bibliothek Köln: RhT 1357.

7. According to Goebel, the conflict was between “the parish Church (*Gemeinde*) which was inwardly oriented and the Classis which held strictly to outward forms; between the independent, new Philadelphian faith and the stubborn, ecclesiastical (*kirchlichen*) right-minded belief”; for Goebel the Classis represented “strict, ecclesiastical (*kirchlichen*) right-mindedness against the intrusion of new and foreign teachings (*Lehre*)”; finally, he referred to “the victory of the old ecclesiastical (*kirchlichen*) right-minded belief over the new, chiliastic and Philadelphian wrong-headedness which had squeezed itself into the teaching office . . .” (see Goebel, *Geschichte*, 453, 454 n.1, 455)
8. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 451ff.
9. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 452ff.
10. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 453.
11. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 453.
12. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 454.
13. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 454, 455. Goebel concluded: “This unpleasant story continued on for some time, so that even in 1710 and 1717 misunderstandings had to be removed, which arose among some brothers of the Classis on account of the publication of a book by Bröbke.” The books published by Bröske may refer to his use of the press in Offenbach to publish works by Thomas Bromley and Johann Wilhelm Petersen, such as: Thomas Bromley, *Geistreiches Tractätlein von denen Reisen der Kinder Israels. Welchen hinzu gefuget des Autoris Lebens-Beschreibung* (1710) [Gv 514]; and Johann Wilhelm Petersen, *Mysterion Apokatastaseos Panton. Das Geheimniß der Wiederbringung aller Dinge . . .* Bd. I-III. Pamphylia (Offenbach: 1701-1710).
14. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 450f.
15. Max Goebel, *Geschichte*, 43f. It is noteworthy that, “The essential purpose of catechetical instruction was not preparation for the first communion, as with the Lutherans, but preparation for the public confession of faith, to which no one might be admitted without first wishing to be publicly catechized” (49f).
16. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 453.
17. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 236; and Johannes Wallmann, *Der Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 33. Goebel observed that “among the Evangelical-Lutherans in previous years many and various writings were exchanged on the matter of the thousand year kingdom, while this had not yet

been necessary in the Reformed churches since this newly-conceived teaching had only just been put forward in recent days by Thomas Burnet, Beverley and similar Chiliasts from whom Brüßke derived his views" (454).

18. Conrad Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutzrede wider die von einigen zu der Elberfeldischen Classe gehörigen Herrn Prediger, ohne sein Verschulden hinter ihm her mit Unrecht ausgestreute Schmachreden* (Offenbach: de Launoy, 12. März 1705), 5f.
19. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 236.
20. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 236.
21. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 236.
22. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 237.
23. *Hessen* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1960), ed. Georg Wilhelm Sante, 302f. Bröske's great-great-grandfather Werner Bröske (1500-1575) was appointed the first Protestant pastor in Balhorn in Nieder-hessen by the Landgraf Philipp of Hessen.
24. See Hans Schneider, "Der radikale Pietismus im 17. Jahrhundert," *Der Pietismus vom siebzehnten bis zum frühen achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 409f; and Hans-Jürgen Schrader, *Literaturproduktion und Büchermarkt des radikalen Pietismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 131ff.
25. Conrad Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutzrede wider die von einigen zu der Elberfeldischen Classe gehörigen Herrn Prediger, ohne sein Verschulden hinter ihm her mit Unrecht ausgestreute Schmachreden* (Offenbach: de Launoy, 12. März 1705), 14.
26. Hans-Jürgen Schrader, *Literaturproduktion und Büchermarkt des radikalen Pietismus*, pp. 133f. Schrader writes of Bröske: "dessen Aktivitäten den kulturellen Aufbau des Landes wesentlich gefördert haben." It should be noted that although Bröske had radical chiliast ideas, he was not a separatist. He saw his place as being to remain in the state church and to work for renewal of church and society.
27. Hans-Jürgen Schrader, *Literaturproduktion und Büchermarkt des radikalen Pietismus*, 134. Protestant clergy had long since been recruited from the Bürger class, the clerical loss of political and economic power to princes within Protestant territories making the ministry less attractive to the upper classes. See Wilhelm Pauck, "The Ministry in the Time of the Continental Reformation," in *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives*, ed. H. Richard

- Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 143. See also Bernd Moeller, *Pfarrer als Bürger* (1972); and Bernard Vogler, "Rekrutierung, Ausbildung und soziale Verflechtung: Karrieremuster evangelischer Geistlichkeit," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 85 (1994), 225-233.
28. C.W.H. Hochhuth, *Heinrich Horche und die philadelphischen Gemeinden in Hessen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des christlichen Lebens in der evangelischen Kirche* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1876), 68.
 29. Hochhuth, *Heinrich Horche*, 69.
 30. Bröske, "Anhang," 37.
 31. Bröske, "Anhang," *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 19.
 32. Bröske, "Anhang," 19.
 33. Bröske, "Anhang," 34.
 34. Bröske, "Anhang," 36.
 35. Bröske, "Anhang," 26f.
 36. Bröske, "Anhang," *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 18.
 37. Johann Wilhelm Petersen, Öffentliche Bezeugung für der gantzen Evangelischen Kirchen: Das das Reich Jesu Christi, Welches ich Johann Wilhelm Petersen, der H. Schrifft Doctor, Aus Apoc. am XX. behaupte, Weder mit den alten ketzerischen Irrthümern des Cerinthi noch mit den Jüdischen Fabeln einige Gemeinschafft habe; Imgleichen Daß dasselbige nicht gegen den 17. Artickel der Augspurgischen Confession lauffe (Magdeburg: 1695) [Ts 66 (16)]; Philipp Jacob Spener. *Auffrichtige übereinstimmung mit der augsp. confession . . . samt eine Anhang gegen Herrn D. Johann Benedict Carpovium und Herrn D. Johann Friedrich Mayern* (Frankfurt: Zunner, 1695). HAB: [Tf 108 8'] und [K 393.4' Helmst. (4)].
 38. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 14f.
 39. Die Elberfeldische Classis, *Wagschale . . .* (Duisburg: Sas, 1706), 440.
 40. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 10.
 41. Goebel, *Geschichte*, 455.
 42. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 10.
 43. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 2f.

44. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 4f. “. . . Welches betragen einen unverstand und grossen mangel der liebe zum grunde hat.”
45. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 6f.
46. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 9.
47. Bröske, “Zweyter Anhang,” *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 40.
48. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 11.
49. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 14.
50. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 17.
51. Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 16.
52. Die Elberfelder Predigern, Abgenöthigte voraus-lauffende Ablehnung der Evangelisch-Reformirten Prediger Elberfeldischer Class, in Conrad Bröbke, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 7.
53. Die Elberfelder Predigern, *Gerechtsame, Abgenöthigte vorauslauffende Ablehnung* (1705), 3.
54. Die Elberfelder Predigern, *Gerechtsame, Abgenöthigte vorauslauffende Ablehnung*, 3. “. . . was für eine unchristliche Lieblosigkeit und unfürsichtige Thorheit er dadurch begangen . . .”
55. Die Elberfelder Predigern, *Gerechtsame, Abgenöthigte vorauslauffende Ablehnung*, 5.
56. Abgenöthigte voraus-lauffende Ablehnung, 8.
57. Conrad Bröbke, *Billige und auff die Warheit gegründete Zurückweisung* in Conrad Bröbke, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 48.
58. Conrad Bröbke, *Billige und auff die Warheit gegründete Zurückweisung* in Conrad Bröbke, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 48f.
59. Conrad Bröske, “Zweyter Anhang,” in Conrad Bröbke, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 38-41.
60. Die Elberfeldische Classis, *Wagschale*, 440.
61. Conrad Bröske, *Rechtmäßige Schutz-Rede*, 3ff.
62. *August Hermann Francke: Streitschriften*, ed. Erhard Peschke (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), xiii-xxiii.

63. Peschke, "Einleitung," xx.
64. Peschke, "Einleitung," xx.
65. Peschke, "Einleitung," xxii.
66. Peschke, "Einleitung," xvi.