



Issues, Etc.TM

Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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2015 *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week “Challenges to Lutheranism: Pietism”

Guest:

Dr. Larry Rast

President and Professor of Historical Theology

Concordia Theological Seminary

Fort Wayne, IN

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WILKEN: There is always going to be a challenge to the truth. The truth is a singularity. It's one thing, but error multiplies. In a lot of ways, if you stop and think about it, the truth is vastly outnumbered, because there are far more ways of promulgating error in the church than there are of truth. But the truth, as Jesus says in that famous Reformation Gospel reading that we just heard on Reformation Sunday, "The truth shall set

you free." But the truth has its challenges, and we've chosen as our theme for this coming *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week, that begins this Monday afternoon, October the 26th, the challenges to Lutheranism, past and present. Now, we could have gone about this in a lot of ways, but we just thought, "Let's get the very best guests that we possibly can get for our *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week and talk about the

challenges that have been presented to Lutheranism, past and present.

Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* We are coming to you live from the studios of Lutheran Public Radio in Collinsville, Illinois. I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in. Dr. Larry Rast will join us for this hour to talk about the first challenge: pietism, past and present. He's a regular guest and is President and Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Larry, welcome back to *Issues, Etc.*

RAST: Thanks, Todd. Great to be with you.

WILKEN: We'll be talking a lot about these various "isms," beginning with pietism. Let's just use that as an example. Why does this thing start at a certain point in Christian history, but then it never really goes away? Lutherans and other church bodies never really get them completely out of their system. Why is that?

RAST: Well, I think first of all, there's a theological reason for it. That's the Old Adam, who is essentially an enthusiast that stays with us all so we're always looking for that "feeling," that part of us that can contribute to what our salvation entails, and that way we can say, even just a little bit, that something depended on us.

WILKEN: So we're kind of grasping, as individuals, as a church going forward. That old tendency to try and add something to Christ's work will attract us – these old "isms," especially something like pietism.

RAST: Right, especially with pietism. It's all about the *opinio legis*, as we like to say in theology, the opinion of the Law that there's something, however small, that I have to do. Jesus has done most of it, but I've got to contribute that little part. And pietism as a movement really ended up having that emphasis and leading us away from the pure Gospel that Luther had rediscovered.

WILKEN: It also has, for lack of a better term, a Lutheran pedigree. Pietism really got started by Lutherans, sad to say. We've exported it to other people. We'll get into the history, but give us a definition of this thing we're going to call pietism.

RAST: Yeah, the "ism" that is pietism is the emphasis on the individual in the salvation equation in the end. The emphasis that there is an emotional state that a person has to be in, that there's something that the human will releases so that the Word of God becomes effective. And that is really the key to pietism, this notion that the Word of God does what it does, but until we release it, it isn't ultimately effective in us.

WILKEN: So in its original form, what would it have sounded like? What would pietism have said that was going to be dissonant with Lutheran theology?

RAST: Lutheran theology was all about Christ outside of us, what Christ had done *for us*. What pietism began to do was to turn us back inward and talk about what it is *in us* that would release, then, finally, the forgiveness of sins, to make the work of the Holy Spirit effective, to give that little added "something" that finally took the person from hearing the Word of God to making it effective in their own lives.

WILKEN: Okay. And I want to come back to that theme of how it positions itself in relation to God's Word, because that sounds like a very important aspect of it. If you would, just give us a history: a few names, a few dates. It's a big story, but I'm sure you could tell it in a short amount of time. The story of pietism.

RAST: The story of pietism is a long and complex one, but I'll try and keep it to a reasonable length. The proto-pietist was a man named Johann Arndt. Johann Arndt lived in the last part of the 1500s; he died in the early 1600s. He was concerned that true Christianity was not being practiced by Lutherans. Yes, it was true Luther had

rediscovered (and others had then built on Luther's work) justification by grace through faith, but the idea that true repentance, true Christianity, the true life of Christian works in response to the Gospel wasn't being emphasized enough. So Arndt brought that to the forefront. He gave pietism its background, if you will, gave it the first stuff that then others would use, and the key person who would use that material and develop it into a system was the famous Philipp Jakob Spener. Spener lived from 1635-1705, and in the course of his long ministry, took what Arndt had emphasized and began to structure it, to give it a program, if you will. That program then became enormously influential in all of Germany. So Arndt kind of defined the terms in the first place, if you will, and then Spener developed a program that proved to be enormously effective – it just resonated with the people of Germany in the years after the Thirty Years' War, and soon had pushed orthodox Lutheranism to the margin.

WILKEN: So what was Arndt's original concern? You said that true Christianity wasn't being practiced by Lutherans, that there was something that the Reformation had left undone. What was the something that was left undone by the original enterprise of the Reformation?

RAST: What Arndt and then others began to feel was that Luther had not put enough emphasis on sanctification. Luther had articulated justification by grace through faith so well, and so clearly that sanctification had almost fallen to the wayside. Justification had come to dominate so much that the life of good works in response to the Gospel had been obscured. So Arndt said, "What we want to see is people emphasizing the need, almost the necessity, of good works in the Christian life, almost to the point of the necessity for them to salvation."

WILKEN: Okay, I want to be really careful here: diagnosis vs. prescription. Was Arndt right, not in his diagnosis or his critique of

the Reformation, but in the Lutheranism he saw in his day, was he right? Had sanctification fallen by the wayside and then he provided a faulty solution? What I'm trying to get at is – was he seeing a real problem?

RAST: I think it's more the case with Spener than it is with Arndt that he's seeing a problem in this regard. Arndt really does provide a solution to an abstract problem and misses the point, therefore, that Luther was trying to make, to draw us out of ourselves and simply to see Christ for us at every point. By the time Spener is active in the ministry, you're looking at a good 40 years after Arndt's death, and you've passed through the Thirty Years' War – there is an issue. You've had the debilitating effects of war, you've had, in some areas of Germany, two-thirds of the population wiped out, largely due to disease and the problems that go along with the war. And the result is that society has just devolved. It's distended. It's falling apart. And what Spener sees is people pointing to Luther's teaching regarding justification and saying, "Listen, I don't have to do anything. I can live a manifest profligate life and sin to my heart's content, and that's no problem whatsoever." At least, that's what Spener perceived these people's attitudes to be. And so he said what we have to do then is complete the work of the Reformation that Luther began. Luther's "failure" to emphasize sanctification had left something to undone, and it's our responsibility as reformers, co-reformers in a sense, to finish the job.

WILKEN: Was Spener dealing with Luther as a historical figure, or was he dealing with the Lutheran Confessions, in what they said? Was he a critic of the Confessions themselves or just of Luther's task of the Reformation?

RAST: He was a critic of both, I think.

WILKEN: Really?

RAST: Yeah. He criticized Luther to a certain degree. For example, he used the imagery of a dwarf standing on the shoulders of a giant. He said, "Luther was the theological giant of our age. We haven't seen one like him since Augustine. And previous to Augustine, it was St. Paul. So Luther's in pretty good company in this regard. However, like any human being, the scope of vision that he has is limited by his standing, and he can only see so far. The dwarf climbs up onto the shoulders of the giant and he can see just a little bit farther." And that's what Spener said he was doing – "I can see just a little bit farther than Luther." That "little bit farther" was in the realm of the moral life and sanctification of the life. He said, "Luther just didn't have the opportunity to emphasize this, given his historical circumstances. Now we need to finish the job." The era of the Lutheran Confessions "truncated" what was implicit in Luther's theology, and they limited, therefore, the application of what Luther had put forth. So in other words, what the Lutheran confessors, "the second Martin" Chemnitz for example, should have done, Spener was now doing.

WILKEN: Let's take a break. When we come back, we'll continue our conversation with Dr. Larry Rast of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. This *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week, we're talking about the challenges of Lutheranism past and present: today, pietism. Stay tuned.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* We're talking about the challenges to Lutheranism past and present, kicking off this *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week on this Monday afternoon, October the 26th, with Dr. Larry Rast, President and Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Larry, we were talking earlier about Spener's view of the history of Lutheranism up to that point. I find his view of the Lutheran Confessions to be deeply disturbing; in essence, looking at documents and saying, "They left too much undone." In other words, Spener says, "I need to finish what the Reformers left undone."

RAST: Yeah, and in fact, years later, C.F.W. Walther, the first president of the LCMS, would point to Spener and say, "He did many good things in his life; he had a number of important emphases. However, there's at least an implicit *quotannis*, or "insofar as" subscription to the Lutheran Confessions with Spener, because they don't sufficiently articulate the doctrine. "We have to finish it out." And so for whatever good Spener may have done, there is this fundamental problem in Walther's mind regarding Spener, and I think Walther's absolutely right.

WILKEN: Okay, how would you, as a historian, evaluate Spener's critique of both Luther and the Confessions? Luther, it seems to me, had a deep concern, especially in the latter years of the Reformation, about what we would call today – it's not even the Gospel, justification without sanctification – it was a misunderstanding of the Gospel. He routinely said of the German people, "They lived like pigs."

RAST: Exactly.

WILKEN: He wasn't talking about their hygiene; he was talking about their *lives* themselves.

RAST: Yeah, and some of his strongest language is directed towards Lutherans, who believe in justification by grace through faith, who are not living a life that is in accordance with the revealed will of God in Scriptures. And so he just lets them have it. And in this respect, Spener at times will affirm Luther, but critique him for failing to

really follow through on that, and not providing the necessary structures within the church to make sure that happens. For Spener, the key in that regard is a restructuring of the church following the lines of Geneva. And as a student, when he goes through his preparation to become a pastor, he spends a year, a part of his studies, in Geneva, and he is overwhelmed and thrilled with the orderliness that he finds in the city of Geneva, because Calvin has done something that Luther did not. That is, Calvin has made discipline a mark of the church. Spener says, "This is one of the places where we Lutherans have missed the boat."

WILKEN: So he looked at Geneva as a society – Calvin's Geneva, even though Calvin didn't actually "invent" Geneva, it's legendary as kind of this model Christian society. Some would even say "utopia." So he sees there, "Ah! These guys finished the Reformation."

RAST: At least in this respect, yeah.

WILKEN: Okay, so when he tried to take this orderliness, and then, of course, this mark of the church as discipline and the emphasis on the Christian life into Lutheranism and turn it into a program, what did it end up looking like?

RAST: Well, where he really kicked this whole thing off was when he came back and began his ministry in 1666. A few years later in 1675, he wrote a little piece; really, an introduction to a collection of Johann Arndt's sermons – the guy we mentioned earlier. And he appended this introduction; later published on its own, calling it *Pia Desideria*, or *Pious Desires*. And in this little text, he outlined several questions. He said, "What is the current state of the church, particularly in respect to the three estates: the clergy, the nobility, and the lay people?" Then having outlined the situation there, he went on and asked the question, "Can the church be reformed?" And the last part of the book – that middle part is very brief –

the last part is pretty extended: "How do we do this?" Interestingly, in the first section, he says, "The two real culprits are of course the nobility. The nobility, as an order established by God, is not living a life in accordance with what God puts forth in the Scriptures."

WILKEN: They were to set an example.

RAST: They were to set an example for the common people. That's what they should do. They should be teachers in this regard. But they're not. But the real culprits are neither the nobility nor the common people; it's the pastors who are failing to teach what God wants them to do in respect to their sanctified life. And they have given us this profligate world in which we find ourselves.

He's probably right. Again, it's a post-Thirty Years' War situation, where society has come apart, and he's likely observing, responsibly, just how bad things are in German society at the time. But then, when he asks the question, "Can this be corrected?" and answers, "Yes" and then provides his program, what he provides is the system where you get all the problems. He says, "We need to, first of all, make sure that our candidates for the ministry are truly converted." How do you determine, how do you discern whether or not a candidate for the ministry is truly converted? You can't go by his confession; you can only go by his works. "So show me your works," he will say. Secondly, how do we determine this? Well, we need to have apostolic preaching. What does this mean? It means effective preaching, it means preaching that affects the hearers; that gets them to the point where they truly are ready to give themselves to a life of service on Christ's behalf. So he pushes that. Where is the best place for this to happen? In places like the *collegia pietatus*, the schools of piety, where true believers get together and encourage one another, hold one another mutually accountable in respect to their Christian walk, and drive one another along

toward the life of good works that Christ demands of them.

You can hear, I'm using all sorts of legal language here; law-oriented language, because in the end, for Spener, the third use of the Law, as Lutherans had taught it, was in error. It was not simply there to be a schoolmaster, to show us what God would have us do as His people; it was actually there to generate the good works. So the Gospel is not the key to good works; in the end, for Spener, it was the Law in its third use.

WILKEN: So in that sense, he actually went beyond Calvin. Calvinism in its orthodox form will talk about the third use of the Law even being like the primary use for the Christian. But he'll even call it "the little whip" to move you along, but it's not a big whip. Spener took that and went a step further, in essence.

RAST: Right. And his followers then took it and went even farther. And very quickly, you can imagine, advocates of pietism were saying that the heart of this whole thing really *is* sanctification, at the expense of justification. So that the interior state of the individual, manifested in a life of good works, became the entire concern, and Christ *for* us, Christ *outside* of us, was increasingly pushed to the margin.

WILKEN: So this true conversion that is measured by works, what does this do to the Lutheran idea, the Biblical idea, of baptism, of faith coming by hearing – all those things? What does it do to it?

RAST: There are a number of sections in this little book, *Pious Desires*, where Spener takes this up, and he'll talk in very orthodox-sounding terms about the "regenerative character of baptism," for example. Baptism regenerates, it forgives us our sins, but then he'll also say "But baptism isn't enough. You must let the Word that in baptism penetrate into your heart so that true conversion will occur." Same thing with confession and

absolution. It's not enough just to go and hear the called and ordained servant of the Word say "I, by virtue of my office, forgive you your sins," *you* must let that Word penetrate into your heart and effect what God promises there. So in other words, the efficaciousness of the Gospel is dependent upon the willful act of the individual subject.

WILKEN: That gets us right back to where we started here, that the Word itself makes a beginning, but the object of the Word, man, regenerate or unregenerate, must finish what the Word begins.

RAST: Yes. Spener always starts by saying "None of this could happen without the Sacraments, without the Word, and of course without the Holy Spirit attending these things." So we simply don't want to say that, in any way, shape, or form, that this is contingent upon a human being. It just can't be that way. *But* – and that's the problem; there's this "but" that always comes in there. It does push things back onto the human subject, repeatedly. Well, this inconsistency in Spener becomes codified by his followers, to a greater or lesser extent. People like August Hermann Francke, for example, the great founder of the institutions at Halle in Germany, who has such an enormous impact on the shape of German Lutheranism, particularly through pietism. He will get to the point in which he will say, "Not only is this true for things like baptism, confession and absolution, and the Lord's Supper and the like, it also will finally push back to the point of conversion, so that if you cannot point to and locate the place and time, the moment from which you moved from darkness into light, from sin into grace, then you are not truly a Christian." That is to say, Francke begins to put all the emphasis on conversion as a moment in life that you must be able to articulate, and thereby draws people away from the importance of baptism, Christ giving His gifts through baptism, regenerating through that gift, and opening the door to all sorts of enthusiasms.

WILKEN: I take it that the pietists, once they started moving in this direction, they can't be opening the Lutheran Confessions and be finding a lot of support for what they're saying. This stuff flies in the face of what the Lutheran reformers had explicitly been saying! So they're not quoting the Confessions to get this stuff.

RAST: If they do, they're taking them out of context, but really, in the end, they begin to use the Lutheran Confessions primarily as evidence for the "partial reformation" of the Church, how we've gotten to a certain point, but we need to take things further. Because if you let the Spener "dwarf on the shoulders of the giant" genie out of the bottle, you're going to have one dwarf climbing up on one another's shoulders and taking you further and further away from what the Lutheran Confessions have stated. And that's the result of this insofar as, or *quotannis*, subscription, and really, once you let it out, it just works all kinds of mischief.

WILKEN: Okay, so these are the founding fathers. You've taken us through three generations of it. When this thing catches fire in Lutheran circles – you talked before about the apostolic preaching in these associations, these pious associations. How does that eventually manifest itself, especially with regard to what it does to the church as the body of Christ, what it does to the Church as the saints gathered around the Word and Sacrament?

RAST: Right. There's a great irony here, because Spener – part of the reason for writing *Pia Desideria* was to increase communion attendance among Lutherans in his parish. But he wanted them to be well prepared. If you're a good pietist, you've really got to work hard at getting prepared for communion, because if you come to the Lord's table with any kind of sin unreconciled with your brother and the like, you're going to be in a world of hurt. So you've got to prepare, prepare, prepare. That's his point – we're giving the Lord's Supper to people who shouldn't receive it:

these manifest sinners and the like. Well, you can imagine within a congregation, you have some folks who are saying, "All right, we're the truly serious ones regarding spirituality, and those other folks over there are the other ones – thank you, God, that I'm not like that man over there, that publican, that sinner!" The pious groups, the *collegia pietata*, the schools of piety, as they're called, begin to function as small groups within the congregation and then in time begin to break away into independent little ecclesial communities, you might say. And the result is that these little groups will believe that they are the true Christians, and those other folks over there are the ones who are only Christians in name; they are *nominal* Christians. The worst insult a pietist can hurl at somebody is "You're a nominal Christian – you're a Christian in name only." But you can imagine, as well, what will come out of this, as these little groups then break off and begin to function on their own. Within themselves, they then split apart, one group against another, saying, "Well, you're not the true Christians. We are!" "No we are!" and on down the line, so that divisions occur repeatedly. And the unity of the Church is absolutely fractured.

WILKEN: Dr. Larry Rast is our guest. We're talking about the challenges to Lutheranism, this *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week Monday, discussing pietism with him. Stay tuned.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. It's *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week. On this Monday afternoon, we're beginning by talking about one of the challenges to Lutheranism past and present: pietism. Dr. Larry Rast is our guest, President and Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Larry, before the break, you were talking about what pietism tended to do to the congregation of the Church in general. What

does it do to the individual? I'm trying to put myself into the shoes of the average Lutheran man during the heyday of pietism: he's been raised at his parents' knee, he's been baptized, he's been taught his catechism, he's been brought to the Sacrament. Now, he walks into one of these schools of piety that the pietists are running. What's he going to be told?

RAST: He's going to be judged, and really, there's an important pastoral shift that occurs around this time. The responsibility of the pastor is to discern for the individual Christian whether or not they have actually, *truly* been converted. So pastoral care will be asking questions to see if a person has fooled themselves into believing they're truly converted when they're, in fact, not.

WILKEN: You're guilty until proven innocent in this respect, right?

RAST: Exactly. How this then plays out is, to me, utterly fascinating, and here maybe the example of two brothers will work. They're the Falkner brothers – two early American Lutheran leaders. Both served as pastors here in the early part of the 1700s in North America. The older brother is a man named Daniel Falkner, and Daniel studies at Leipzig, and later comes under the influence of Spener and Francke, and is partially working with the institutions at Halle. He's the guy who takes this intensely seriously. He comes from a clergy family; his father's a pastor, his older brother's a pastor. But they're not really, truly Christian – *he is*. So he breaks off with a group of radicals and begins to intensely pursue the "true" Christian church, and the unity of faith amongst "real" believers. So much so that they actually ultimately are, for all intents and purposes, forced out of Germany, and they make their way to the Philadelphia area in the late 1690s. They get there as a small group of individuals. They're working together to prepare for the imminent return of Jesus – they're the last remnant of the true Church, and guess what happens? They all end up hating one another's guts,

the whole community collapses in on itself, and there are lawsuits – the whole works. So Daniel has to go back to Germany to try and sort things out. Well, he's the kind of pietist that falls into Phariseeism. He is convinced he's got it right, and that he's the real deal. His brother, on the other hand, Justus Falkner, a few years younger than he is, by about 6 years, he is pushed into the ministry, coming from a clergy family, of course, and so he begins his studies – actually studies at Halle with Francke and others, but is never convinced in his own mind that he's truly converted. He's being pushed: "Are you truly converted? We know you're baptized, *but* have you truly experienced the visitation of the Holy Spirit?" He's not sure. So he looks inside and what does he find? As he looks carefully at himself, he finds he's sinful, he has sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, that he's concerned about his own wellbeing and welfare and his own status and the like, and he says, "The more I look at myself, the more I realize that I'm a sinful human being and I have *no* business being a pastor at all. In fact, I'm not even sure I'm really a Christian. So here with these two brothers, just a couple years apart from one another, have the two problems of pietism that pietism cannot cure. On the one hand, Phariseeism. You're told, "Keep the law, and you will have the favor of God. You can quantify this by virtue of your actions, your deeds, and the like. And if you do that, well, you have God's favor." And Daniel Falkner says, "I've got it." On the other hand, you have his brother. The Law on his side, if it does what the Law ought to do, it crushes him and the more he pursues the Law, the more it crushes him, and he says, "Lord, I'm an unworthy servant; I don't deserve to be called a Christian at all." To me, the irony is really quite striking that two brothers would manifest the two poles of the problem of pietism, and pietism has no solution for either of them, until they both end up hearing the Gospel. Where? Rightly confessed by Lutherans in Luther's Small Catechism: "I cannot by my own reason and strength come to Jesus Christ my Lord or

believe in Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, etc.” Only once they’ve redirected themselves to the pure confession and located their salvation not in themselves, either works or unworthiness, but only Christ, do they get the point. Their ministries are transfigured. In fact, Justus goes on to be the first Lutheran pastor rightly ordained in North America, on November 24, 1703. It’s quite a story, to say the least, in these guys’ case.

WILKEN: And that path from that pietism to the true Lutheran confession, is not some sort of “I have to go back and learn it all over again.” As you just pointed out, this is the thing that we teach our children here. It really drives home to me as I’m hearing you tell that story, how it’s not just a remedy to pietism, but we can inoculate the next generation against pietism if we teach them the catechism.

RAST: Right. And this is where I think we as Lutherans have such an important role to play within broader American Christianity, certainly within the evangelical sphere of American Christianity, because we don’t celebrate Luther because of Luther; we celebrate Luther because of what he pointed to – namely, Jesus Christ and salvation by grace, through faith. And this is the genius of the catechism, where he reduces it to simple terms and in such a direct and concise way that it can be grasped by just about anybody. And here we have it – all right! Let’s use it!

WILKEN: Well, here’s where the historian proves his mettle, because anyone can tell a fine tale and tell us what happened in the past. Let’s talk about the contemporary context that we have. Is pietism still with us?

RAST: Yes, it is. Pietism never really goes away. As I said on the front end of things, you’re talking about the old Adam, and the old Adam is an enthusiast, and the old Adam wants to have some role to play in his salvation. And he tempts us to that constantly. The temptation can take on very

subtle forms – just that nagging “All right, really?” and the answer is “Yeah, really. Christ has truly done it all. It *is* finished. Look outside of yourself, look to the cross, and you will see your salvation accomplished in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ. It truly is done, once and for all.” But human beings – it’s so difficult for us to accept that; we just have to contribute *something*, we think. And that’s where the temptation of pietism comes in.

WILKEN: For me, the “epi-pen” – you know, that people carry around if they’re highly allergic to something and a bee stings them, they have this little injection they can give themselves to save their lives, until they get to the emergency room – to me, the “epi-pen” that is the emergency procedure against pietism has always been what you mentioned near the beginning of our conversation, and that is that our assurance must and can only lie outside ourselves. Whenever I feel myself, out of pietism, I just grab my *extra nos* epi-pen and give myself an injection in the thigh, which is the realization that there is nothing in me. Pietism was kind of half-right – that second brother you talked about?

RAST: He was right.

WILKEN: He was right! There is nothing in me in which I can find assurance. Talk about that.

RAST: My complaint with pietism – you touched on this a little bit earlier – is not the diagnosis that it provides. In the end, it takes a look around at the church and it says, “You know what? This church is full of sinners.” And then it goes on to say that’s not how it should be. The fact that people are playing fast and loose with God’s Word, that they live a manifestly immoral life, that they revel in their sinfulness – “Let us sin more, that grace may abound more” – that kind of thing. That’s not right. And that’s the diagnosis that pietism begins with, as it looks at its context in the late 17th century. And it’s right. The problem with pietism

doesn't lie with the diagnosis. It lies in the solution that it provides. "So what should we do? Turn inside. Look at yourself. See if you're truly converted or not. Then, how do you know whether you're truly converted? Then you look to the external works that you do. You can quantify your conversion by means of good works." No, you can't. The good works you do are never sufficient. The good works that flow out of a life of faith are oftentimes good works you don't realize you're doing. "Lord, when did we see you? When did we give you that cup of cold water?" Instead, what the Lutherans have said, what we have always said is "Any of this inward-turned-ness, *curvatus in se* attitude, will always lead us astray. Whether we're talking about our salvation in the first place, or even with our sanctification – as a result, if you become consumed with yourself and fail to look to Christ, you're going to end up going down the wrong path. And *that's* the problem with pietism. It decided that it would correct the abuse by pointing us to ourselves.

WILKEN: Dr. Larry Rast is our guest. We're talking about the challenges to Lutheranism – today, pietism. When we come back, the old story is that these pietists didn't stay pietists. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a case in point. It began as a deeply pietistic church movement in Lutheranism. So how do you go from a church movement that is intensely concerned about personal sanctification to one that is as morally and theologically liberal as you can find in America?

Dr. Larry Rast of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana will answer that question right after this.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. Dr. Larry Rast is our guest. We're talking about pietism, one of those challenges to Lutheranism we're dealing with here during *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week.

Larry, the question I have for you – and it's one that's lingered for a long time – I was speaking some time back about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, notoriously liberal in both its morals and its theology. And someone said, "Well, we could have seen this move coming a mile away, because the ELCA began as a deeply pietistic Lutheran movement in America." So the question is, how do you go from a pietism that is intensely concerned about personal sanctification and holiness to *the most* morally and theologically liberal Lutheran church body in the United States?

RAST: I think there are several ways you could come at it. I'll use my favorite example, Samuel Simon Schmucker, and lay the blame at his feet. Old Schmucker was an important figure in the history of American Lutheranism. He, for almost forty years, was President of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, taught an entire generation of students there a form of Lutheranism that he called "American Lutheranism," in which he sought to update the Lutheran Confessions. And for that argument, he turned directly to Spener and this idea that the Confessions were not the final word on things; they were, at best, a contextualized version of what Lutherans were thinking at a particular point in time, but "We have grown beyond that. We have come to learn better." For his part, he would say that applies only to the Lutheran Confessions, not the Scriptures. The Scriptures are God's Word. They are of a different character than the Lutheran Confessions, which are humanly authored works. However, within the Schmucker tradition, where you had such a strong emphasis on morality informed by the Biblical witness, later generations began to say, "You know, the Scriptures are really just humanly authored documents as well." They began to treat them as they would any other human work, including the Lutheran Confessions. And just as they said in respect to the Lutheran Confessions, "Those taught us what Lutherans believed *then*," the successors of Schmucker began

to say in regard to the Scriptures, “The Scriptures teach us what Christians believed *then*. But we’ve climbed up on the shoulders of the giants, and being more progressive, better informed, better enlightened and the like, we now know better than what, say, St. Paul believed about women and women’s service in the church, or homosexuals, and their ordination. We, in fact, in order to be faithful, have to say it is time to change these things. We have to have the courage to progress, the courage to move forward. And just as the Lutheran Confessions were limited in respect to their context, so also the Scriptures were. But what they both teach us is that we have the freedom now to expand, to develop, to progress, even if that means discarding distinctive teachings from the past.” And there the irony is: pointing to these as their predecessors, they practice what the predecessors would have found absolutely abhorrent.

WILKEN: Two final questions here for you, Larry. First of all, why, in a nutshell, is pietism poisonous and antithetical to confessional Lutheranism?

RAST: It points the person to themselves rather than to Christ. That’s the bottom line. The idea that somehow or someday, I release what God has begun in me, in the end makes *me* the controller of my salvation, my Christian walk, and the like, and it pushes Christ to the margin.

WILKEN: How can Lutherans in the 21st century – since it’s still with us, it’s always kind of there as the virus that’s in our system, sad to say – how can we combat pietism?

RAST: This is where the doctrine of justification, the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls, the doctrine that Luther recovered for us in the Reformation of the 16th century, has to remain central. The point here is really an important one, I think both theologically and historically, and that is this: historians like me, we look at all the historical data, everything that’s bound up in all these kinds of questions, the setting in which Spener lived – you heard me talking about the Thirty Years’ War. You probably wouldn’t have had pietism in the exact same shape as we have it, had there not been the Thirty Years’ War. But we would have had pietism in some form. That’s just the natural theological inclination of sinful human beings. And those two interact consistently: history and theology. What we have to realize is that even given our unique postmodern setting here in the early 21st century, the theological problem that faces human beings remains the same. And that problem is the reality of sin: that we have sinned against God in thought, word, and deed, we have committed actual sins because of our original sin, and the only Savior from sin is Christ. Not the Law, not good works, not conversion – looking to ourselves as moving from darkness to light – but rather pulling ourselves outside ourselves and our inward-turned-ness always, only to seeing Christ.

WILKEN: Dr. Larry Rast is President and Professor of Historical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. Larry, thank you very much for coming in.

RAST: My pleasure, Todd.

