



**Issues, Etc.**<sup>TM</sup>

*Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio*

## TRANSCRIPT

*Rev. Todd Wilken, Host*

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

**Guest:**

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**Wednesday, October 28, 2015**

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**WILKEN:** Have you ever wondered why it is that historically, those who are advocates of the Lutheran Reformation have not been really big on compromise? Now, you might think that it's just an artifact of our historical roots: that we came from a stubborn people or something like that. That's not really it. We might have been a stubborn people, but that's not really the reason why Lutheran theology and practice is an uncompromising thing. Why, in matters of the truth and where the truth touches upon practice,

Lutherans have often said no, when so many others have said “Why yes, of course.” One of the constant lures to Lutheran theology, historically, has been something called unionism. It's one of the challenges to Lutheranism, and during this *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week, on this Wednesday afternoon, October the 28<sup>th</sup>, we're going to talk about it, past and present, with Pastor Matt Harrison, President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. He's also author and translator of

several books, including his latest, *Church Order* by Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae. Matt, welcome back to *Issues, Etc.*

**HARRISON:** Hey, Todd. Always a pleasure.

**WILKEN:** We're going to be doing a little history lesson on the Prussian Union in a minute here, but before we get to that history, if our theological forebears, who fled the Prussian Union to come to America, were to look at the landscape of American Lutheranism, the majority of Lutherans in the United States today have altar and pulpit fellowship with Presbyterians, with Methodists, with Episcopalians, with the United Church of Christ – with just about every denomination under the sun. What would our theological forebears, who fled that Prussian Union, what would they make of it?

**HARRISON:** They'd probably something about like what Hermann Sasse said about Wittenberg, "It's a wonderful place," and it really is, "but as far as confession of Lutheranism, it's about like smelling a wine flask where something sweet once was but is no longer present."

**WILKEN:** So let's talk a little bit about that Prussian Union that they fled. Give us the CliffsNotes history of what led up to this 19<sup>th</sup> century exodus from Germany and other places, on the part of Lutherans who fled a Unionistic fellowship. Give us a little history of that, if you would.

**HARRISON:** Well, of course. At the time of the Reformation, Karlstadt split from Luther. He had screwed things up when Luther was up in Wartburg in 1521. And finally Luther had to come back and try to put things back together. Karlstadt was a radical; he had ditched vestments, he forced people to take the Sacrament with their hands instead of receiving it into the mouth. He led a campaign to get rid of the images in St. Mary's. I'm convinced, as you go around the

outside of St. Mary's – that is, in Wittenberg, in Luther's church – and when you view the exterior, a lot of the images and statuary on the outside that had been built very early on were damaged at that time and never repaired. He was a radical. He left town and he went out and began promulgating his views on the Lord's Supper. Those views were that bread and wine were simply symbols, and the Lord's Supper was basically our act of devotion. His views were picked up by the south Germans and the Swiss, Ulrich Zwingli and others. There started to be controversies. Early on, of course, Luther's emphasis was on the view of the Lord's Supper as "a work which is worked," that is, something that just by the performing of it gains merit. The sacrifice, the mass, was carried out in the Castle Church in Wittenberg. There were 17 side altars at the time Luther posted his 95 Theses. You had priests that were endowed in perpetuity to say masses to lessen the time in purgatory for the living and the dead. So all of that goes by the by. Now, by about 1524-25, all of a sudden Luther is being shot at by the other side. The folks that Karlstadt basically led started to attack Luther for his doctrine of the Sacraments and complained that he was not fully "reformed." They aggravated Luther to no end, because they would print his books in the south, and there were very loose laws at the time; Luther never made any money from what he printed, but they would take his books and insert their doctrine in his books. This made him furious, of course! So there was this great difficulty. Of course, everything was bound up with politics, because you had, at the time of the Reformation, about 300 German Dutchies – of course, far fewer of any size or substance. But the major ones were allied or trying to be allied against the Emperor, who could attack at any time. So there were various attempts to bring some unity between what was developing as the various parties, particularly among the theologians. So in 1529, Philip of Hesse

calls a colloquy in Marburg, and at this famous colloquy they basically agree on 14 points. Then the 15th point is basically “What do you receive in your hand or your mouth when you receive the Lord’s Supper?” And they could not agree. They had a long argument. Sasse presents the argumentation in English wonderfully in his magisterial book, *This is My Body*. Zwingli’s great proof text was “The flesh profiteth nothing” in John 6. Luther held, as Augustine and others had, that John 6 was talking not about the Lord’s Supper, per se, but about the faith one has in Christ. So Zwingli says at one point to Luther, “Luther, this text will break your neck.” And Luther says, “Ah, Zwingli, you’re in Germany, not Switzerland. Necks don’t break so easily here.” There were a number of arguments made, especially [Johannes] Oecolompadius on the Reformed side. They were telling Luther, “Look, you’re saying body and blood can be in the Sacrament. We’re think that Christ ascended to heaven and the body and blood is basically sitting down in a throne somewhere in heaven, and that His flesh is not available to us.” Luther said, “Your Christology’s whacked, because Christ ascends and He fills all things. The Ephesians text says *ta panta*, fills the universe, so that Christ, certainly in His body, can participate in omnipresence, etc.” And they say, “Well, is Christ then present in a sewer?” And Luther says, “Well, you’d better hope so, in case you find yourself in a sewer sometime!”

The intercourse is very interesting; the dialogue is very interesting to read. But there was a split there, and they could not come to an agreement. Later on in the course of time, another attempt was made by Butzer, especially, in 1536, they came to Wittenberg, talked and worked through the theological issues, and by the grace of God, these southern Germans came to an agreement with Luther in the Wittenberg Concord, 1536. Martin Butzer and his compatriots broke down and wept when this

occurred, and the Lutheran company in Wittenberg immediately shared the Lord’s Supper with them over this agreement.

For Luther, as for the New Testament, there is an absolute rejection of false doctrine. As was the case for the early church, where there is false doctrine about significant aspects of the faith, where the Scriptures speak clearly, one cannot continue in unity unless it is addressed. Luther was consistent on that, just as the church through all ages has consistently taught this and less consistently practiced it, until, of course, the great period of Unionism and the problems that it brought. The Calvinists, then, arose out of the Zwinglians, and they were more subtle. They actually were heavily influenced by Philip Melancthon, and by the time of Luther’s death in 1546, you can read [Melancthon’s] doctrinal text. He first began it in 1521; Luther said it was inspired, and by the time he had stopped fiddling with it, in Luther’s life, anyway, he was denying the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament, even while Luther lived. The rumor was going around during Luther’s last year, “Uh-oh, the old man is going to blast off against Philip!” Philip’s writing his friends; he’s writing Calvin and others, and he says, “Oh, I think I’m going to have to leave Wittenberg, because the old man is about ready to blow.” It never happened. For whatever reason, Luther decided not to do so, not to attack Philip. What a tragedy Philip became. He located the presence of Christ less in the elements – bread and wine become body and blood – than the *action* of the Supper. And of course, there was a sort of easier connection with Calvin’s view that the body and blood were not in the elements, but that somehow the spirit sweeps up to heaven and partakes of Christ somehow, which is a piece of doctrine that has no basis in the New Testament whatsoever. And then the whole pressure after Luther became trying to control this crypto-Calvinism that denied the real presence. Bugenhagen remained strong,

but there were several folks, Melanchthon and others in Wittenberg who were advancing in this teaching. Finally, around the time of the Book of Concord, they get thrown out by Duke August in 1572, I think. And things get cleaned up for a while. Duke August, he pays for the Book of Concord. He paid in part for our Latin school over there, by the way. Then he dies, and his son takes over and darned if his son isn't a Calvinist too! So they go through it all over again, into the 1590s. Finally, there's a turnaround, and then Wittenberg becomes the seat of orthodoxy until the Prussian kings undo it.

Well, the next great problematic step was in 1613. Brandenburg, Prussia was this emerging kingdom, and by the way, it really dies when a certain man with a little brush mustache shoots himself in the head in a bunker in Berlin in 1945. But the Hohenzollern family had come up from the south in Nuremberg, or in Bavaria, and they got a hold of some property up in Berlin. Then through marriage, acquisition, and war, they create this enormous and growing kingdom. All of a sudden, large stretches of what would become Poland were part of this kingdom. It's expanding both directions. The prince of that kingdom, who had been quite open to the Reformation, although at first a bit wary; his descendant, John Sigismund, decides his dad sent him to the wrong university. I often say he sent him to the wrong Concordia. He didn't send him to Mequon; he sent him to Moorhead. He sent the kid to Heidelberg in the south. And the prince comes back and he's more Reformed than he is Lutheran. Mind you, this is extremely important, because so few bishops came over to the cause of the Reformation, and because Luther appealed to the heads of state to help carry out the Reformation as the chief members of the Church. You had what ended up being basically kings and princes as heads of the church, just like the Queen of England today.

**WILKEN:** We'd say state church.

**HARRISON:** Yeah, state church. Well, in 1612-13, this John Sigismund decides on Christmas Eve he's going to go to the Sacrament in Reformed fashion, in the Berlin Dom. If you've been to Berlin, the remnants of the old castle had lasted up through World War II, then basically in the DDR time the Communists knocked it down and despite all German ideas of resurgence, I'm sure the Dom has been completely redone and is quite nice – they're actually rebuilding the castle, or planning on it, I guess. He goes to the Sacrament in Reformed fashion, so he basically comes out publically and says, "I'm now Reformed." So now you have the head of the Lutheran church, who is Reformed. Then he begins what he calls the "Second Reformation of Brandenburg," or what is called the *Bodo Nischan*, a fabulous book on the topic. By the time of 1600, there were actually more crucifixes, more art, more iconography, etc. in the churches in Brandenburg than there were at the time of the Reformation – that's under Lutheranism. Being Reformed, of course, the king immediately sets out to clean that up. Get rid of crucifixes, iconography, etc. He stuffs it all in his wife's chapel. She's Lutheran! He brings in reformed pastors from the south and they stop wearing vestments, and they start wearing black smocks. Then they start preaching against the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament. At one point, the court preacher in the Dom, a mob of Lutherans – you can't imagine this happening! I'm just thinking of central Berlin and the time I spent there – you can't imagine. A crowd shows up just outside the parsonage, which is just near the castle. They grab the guy and they tar and feather him for this teaching! They had a court proceeding about it later, of course, and it was said from the castle across the street, several floors up, a woman's voice was heard saying, "Get him! Get him!" It was the queen, who steadfastly maintained her

Lutheran faith. When John Sigismund died, he was lying in state with an empty cross, which was the sign that “I’m a Calvinist.” She had her chaplains go and swipe that empty cross and put a cross with a corpus in his hands while he lay dead, and spread the rumor that he had converted back to Lutheranism before he died.

Well, there were a lot of other kinds of pathetic, strange, and funny things that happened. But here, now, you have the royal line of what comes to be the largest Lutheran church in the world, who is Reformed. So sure enough, a hundred years later, under the time of Valentin Ernst Loescher, there’s another push. Mind you, there are only a dozen or two dozen reformed churches in all of Prussia. But there’s another push by the Great Elector at the time of Valentin Ernst Loescher, who’s the superintendent of Dresden over Luther’s church in Saxony. He’s got his own problems, by the way, because darned if the Lutheran prince in Saxony – Luther’s own church, of course, the most significant church of the Reformation – in order to acquire the Polish crown, he decides to become Catholic!

**WILKEN:** Only to complicate things there.

**HARRISON:** Yeah. So now you have, by 1730, you have two of the largest and most significant Lutheran churches in the world headed up by a Catholic and a Reformed prince. Well, the Great Elector puts the pressure on and he fails again. He tries to bring about the union. He fails. There are great stories there. Unionists suggested at one point, “Why don’t we just gather all these hard-headed Lutherans into a room, and then we’ll make it very hot, not give them anything to drink, and they can eat salted herring, and then we will hold large vats of beer that are foaming and cold, and hold it out in front of them, and we’ll see how long these guys will hold out.” Well, they did hold out. But then, all of a sudden,

comes pietism. And Spener comes along in 1685. Spener, by the way, always held to the basic principle that you need full, confessional, doctrinal agreement to go to the Sacrament together. So he did not advocate going to the Sacrament with the Reformed. Isn’t that interesting? Those among us and outside of us today hold positions that are even weaker than Spener’s position, the father of pietism.

Pietism, of course, holds that faith is really a matter of the heart. Feeling becomes very significant. Doctrinal assertions become far less significant. The conviction that I am moved by the Spirit, that the Spirit is working in me, that I am leading a Spirit-led life, and I see this in other Christians, whether they’re Lutheran, reformed, or whatever, leads me to believe that there’s something much more significant than denominational differences. There’s nothing new under the sun, of course. And pietism comes along, deemphasizes doctrine – well, right away, guess what comes? Deemphasizes worship, deemphasizes liturgy, deemphasizes Sacraments, etc., deemphasizes the Office of the Ministry – you don’t need an Office of the Ministry to get the Holy Ghost. In some radical cases, gives up the Bible because God speaks directly to me. It’s all there.

**WILKEN:** Pastor Matt Harrison is our guest. We’re talking about the challenges to Lutheranism during this *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week on this Wednesday afternoon, October the 28<sup>th</sup>. Today we’re talking about unionism. That’s as far as pietism went in relation to this challenge of unionism – giving up a lot of things that were distinctive and essential to Lutheran theology. Next we’ll take up the subject of rationalism and how it played a part in the advance of unionism in early Lutheranism.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I’m Todd Wilken. It’s *Issues, Etc.* Reformation

Week. We're talking about the challenges to Lutheranism, past and present; today we're talking about unionism. We're getting a bit of a history lesson from our guest, Pastor Matt Harrison, President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, on the advance and the formal push for unionism that occurred in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Lutheran circles. He is author and translator of several books, including his latest, *Church Order* by Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae.

Matt, before the break you were talking about pietism. The endgame for pietism was to essentially gut Lutheran theology of all of its substance. That takes us up to the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. What's next that further sets the stage for the main push for unionism with the early Lutherans?

**HARRISON:** Right then at that point comes rationalism. A guy by the name of Wolff, about 1750, very significant year. Valentin Ernst Loescher, the last champion of orthodoxy, dies in 1750. Bach dies in 1750. Wolff, who had been chased out before, comes back to the University of Leipzig, and he's pushing his brand of deism. With pietism and rationalism at work, both of them deemphasizing the importance of Lutheranism, the teaching of the catechism, the basics of the faith, destroying preaching in Germany – you have by 1817 and in Prussia, this enormous kingdom, Frederick Wilhelm III, who was a child of both rationalism and pietism, he is the prince. He's a liturgical dilettante. He decides to write up an agenda himself, but he finally sees the moment to bring these two churches – mind you, 24 Reformed congregations – together with 7,000 Lutheran congregations. He creates one evangelical church, which will not reject either Calvin's doctrine or Luther's doctrine, but they will live together in peace and unity. And so he pulls that off in October of 1817. He was in Potsdam at the garrison church for the king, and I have the account that

Sasse gave in *Union and Confession*, and it's a fantastic section of this document. Here's the account of one guy named Eylert, the court preacher with the prince. He says, "October 31 in Potsdam—"

**WILKEN:** 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation.

**HARRISON:** Yeah, Sasse says beware of Reformation anniversaries. The worst things that have ever happened to Lutheranism happen on Reformation anniversaries.

"The sun shone mild and glittering against the clear blue autumn sky. The air seemed to celebrate the festive day and the heavens to bless it. The fully packed court in Garrison Church resonated with drums and trumpets. The hymn 'Lord God, We Praise You' rose to heaven and every heart sang 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God.' The king was present with his entire family and all were dressed in state's uniform. Chaplain General Offelsmeyer preached a perfect sermon on the text: 'Remember your teachers who have spoken the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of the way of their life and follow the example of their faith,' Hebrews 13. He spoke golden words on the diversity and unity of the Protestant church. He ingeniously tied in the union accomplished with the help of God, and he proved that the union was in the spirit of Luther and traces a masterful characteristic from him. The conclusion to the sermon was that we could not honor Luther, Calvin, and all the reformers more highly now, nor show more gratitude to God and the Redeemer than if in the entire country we formed one, strong, united Evangelical church out of hitherto Lutheran and Reformed churches, and we were of Christian affection. The respectful stillness of deep devotion reigned over the great assemblage, and all were very edified.

"Now the Holy Supper proved the preeminent point of the high celebration. After long separation before the

countenance of Jesus Christ since the ancient days of Christianity, it would be a meal of unity and harmony. The Words of Institution, 'The Lord Jesus Christ, on the night in which He was betrayed,' were spoken, and the choirs began to sing 'Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world,' and so on. Then the Lord Defender of the Evangelical Church in Germany, the king, approached, and with him the crown prince and the rest of his children.

"The king appeared wan and was very serious. The peace of God rested upon his noble countenance, and a tear shimmered in his pious eye. He appeared as one who had prayed and had found the Redeemer, as one who had done a work and received the Holy Supper. He received the bread with the words of Christ, 'This is My body, which is given for you, this do in remembrance of Me,' and the wine with Christ's words, 'This is the cup of the New Testament in My blood, which is poured out for you. This do in remembrance of Me.'"

By the way, an aside – they used these words from the Bible so that, in the dispensing formula, you wouldn't have to actually say what you're receiving.

This is the cup, etc. – "With the sign of the cross these deep words with a sigh were directed to the king, but spoken over the entire united territorial church. And the ancient but eternally new song of praise rang out, 'Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth! And good will toward men.' It was as though one had felt the harmony of a better world. Certainly, the Lord was in this place, how holy a place, from which flowed a stream of life over millions! Here was God's house, here the gates of heaven.

"The king knelt and prayed; he prayed for himself and his subjects. The crown prince bowed in the warmth of devotion, then his brother, the attendants, and a great multitude of men and women from all stations of life. No longer separated by

varying confessions, now united, clergy of the church remained long, breaking bread; and all who took part in the celebration knew that the moment had lasted an eternity.

"The festival service lasted very long. After it was over, the king traveled to Wittenberg in order to be present at the dedication ceremony for the memorial and statue of Luther in Luther's old city."

Now, go to Wittenberg today, and it's nice to be there, and the folks of Wittenberg are fantastic people and I've come to love them. But go to the Luther statue – which everyone knows and sees and recognizes if you see a picture of it – go around the back of it and see who dedicated it. The very king that said, "Lutheranism, confessionally mandated in the Book of Concord, shall no longer exist in the largest Lutheran church in the world."

This happened in Wittenberg because what happened after the Napoleonic wars was a bit of Saxony was carved out and handed over to Prussia. It was called Saxony-Anhalt. That's where Luther and the Reformation began – the University of Wittenberg. Even by 1817, the University of Wittenberg, by that reformation, or nearly so, was the seat of Lutheran orthodoxy, still enduring in Germany. What did the Prussian king do? He closed it. Combined it with Halle University. The university built by the Prussian kings; the university where, by 1800, one of the guys who was bringing about a revival, by the name of [Johann Ephraim] Scheibel, was the teacher of one Martin Stephan, who was the teacher of one C.F.W. Walther. Scheibel said, "In 1750, Halle was known for its deep piety. In 1800, it's known for syphilis."

So there's a bit of the story.

**WILKEN:** Well, we'll get the rest of the story with Pastor Matt Harrison as we talk about challenges to Lutheranism in the form of

unionism during this *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week. Stay tuned.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* It's *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week on this Wednesday afternoon, October the 28<sup>th</sup>. We're continuing Reformation Week, talking about the challenges to Lutheranism, past and present. Today, unionism. Pastor Matt Harrison is our guest. He's President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and author and translator of several books, including his latest, *Church Order*. This is an amazing work by Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae.

Now, before the break, you mentioned C.F.W. Walther and Martin Stephan. What was it about this forced union between Lutherans and the Reformed that these men found so repulsive that they would risk their lives and the lives of others to emigrate to the United States?

**HARRISON:** Well, it's more complex than one immediately would think. Walther and company were not part of the Prussian Union. The Saxon church was legally an orthodox church. It was severely compromised by rationalism and pietism, however. Clearly, Stephan, who was preaching in Dresden at the old Bohemian church – I recently found out that I'm mostly Bohemia on both sides of my family; I preached at Altenburg, Missouri last year and the last time a Bohemian preached in this pulpit it didn't go well. That's because Stephan was run out eventually and crossed the river – but that's another story. Stephan was part of the Lutheran revival. What happened was in the wake of the king forcing this de-legitimization of Lutheranism, there was a growing response. Rationalism was losing its hold. Even in people like Schleiermacher, who was the father of modern theology and taught at the University of Berlin; Brandenburg; Prussia. He's trying to de-emphasize rationalism and

emphasize an approach to God on feeling, on sentiment. There's a revival of this romanticism. There's an openness to the past. Mendelssohn rediscovers Bach. And so along with this, people start reading their Bible again, particularly young theologians here and there, heavily influenced by pietism with all its dregs, but some of pietism at its best, and these guys start reading the Bible and then they stumble onto the Lutheran confessions and say, "Hey! This is what I am! I never knew it. I'm a confessional Lutheran! This is what I believe. This is what the Bible teaches." And certainly, Walther is in that category most strongly. Also Wilhelm Leibl is in that category. von Harless, and many others. And what happens then, even as the Prussian kingdom pushes its program and they continue to push it, even by 1835-40, any pastor who rejects the Union agenda is in jail. And finally, Frederick Wilhelm IV, the king's son, one of the first things he does in '45 is allow confessional Lutherans to exist as a separate church. But there are all kinds of restrictions against them – religious persecution; they can't have steeples. And you have great men like John Kilian, who ends up in Texas. How ironic that the descendants of Kilian should push for open communion! John Kilian fought his entire religious life for fidelity, confessional fidelity. He risked everything for it, left everything for it, and suffered at the hands of the Prussians enormously.

So what happens? The movement with Stephan was a bit kooky. They were a bit apocalyptic and over the top. In some sense, things were said about anybody who stays in Germany – "We're the Christian pod that's going to America to propagate Christianity; everything's going to hell here." It's a little over the top. They later repented of that, of course, after Stephan proved to be unfaithful. But then what do they confront in America? Well, I'll tell you something that happened very close to this very microphone. Walther and company set up

shop. He's up in St. Louis in the early 1840s, and they're starting to rub shoulders with the Germans that are already here. As a matter of fact, when they got off the boat early in 1839, they get off the boat underneath the Arch. And I just want to tell you, the Arch wasn't there yet, in case you're wondering. The Old Courthouse was there. I hope listeners who are other places in the world pull up the Old Courthouse and Arch in St. Louis and just look at it. But the city of St. Louis was right under the Arch; that's where it was. They pull up, and the newspapers from Germany had already been announcing; it had been published in America by the liberal Germans in St. Louis that this crazy, kooky group is coming. They get here, the Germans that are here refuse them any solace, any help. They're already slamming them for being conservative kooks, and they refuse them any help. And who were these Germans who were already here? They were Prussians. Already George Wall, who himself had a heck of a time at the Union congregation, which was Holy Ghost – which, by the way, was right under the footprint of the old Cardinals stadium. These Germans had been going around planting churches, one of them out in Des Peres. They plant this church in the Des Peres area in 1833 or '34; you can go out there to the cemetery in St. Paul's Lutheran in Des Peres and you can find the blocks where this little log building was originally built. I'm told that the remains of that log building are actually in the bushes across the highway, and I'm going to go find them sometime. So you have this little Union church, neither Lutheran nor Reformed, and it's served by Prussians. You have groups of Prussians coming over, Unionists coming over like Milheuser, and I think Milheuser came over, not with Gereg, Benem, and Ball, but there was another guy who was particularly more than the founder of Des Peres. Milheuser was the founder of the Wisconsin Synod. You've got these guys coming from the Rhenish mission society in Basil. Union, union, union. They

found the church. By 1848-49, the Missourians are rolling. The Missouri Synod is founded in 1847. And through later immigrants, there were more in St. Louis, more confessionally-minded Lutherans coming in now. They decided they needed a change of direction after several mostly Reformed-minded pastors. They decided to contact Walther and Bengel, and they decided to become really Lutheran. So they wrote a constitution in '48-49 to be really Lutheran, and the first pastor they called to be a real Lutheran was J.A.F.W. Mueller, the first graduate of the little log cabin seminary in Perry County. And what happened? There was a split. There were a couple different splits, but guess where the split is now? If you go up North Ballas Road, about three quarters of a mile, you will find a UCC church, with all the same German names in the cemetery as are in the cemetery at St. Paul Des Peres.

Now, if you say to me, "Oh, all this unionism stuff is ridiculous," I say to you, "Which was the first church to approve homosexuality? Which was the first American denomination to approve of abortion? Which was the first, formerly Christian, church to allow definitions of God which don't include the Trinity?" Ironically, the UCC is our closest cousin, and ironically, we are farthest away. The UCC is the daughter of the Prussian church. In St. Louis, the *Evangelisches Kirche Befelein* was formed by all these guys that founded St. Paul [Des Peres]. They founded the Altenheim in St. Louis, the UCC old folks' home. They founded the cemetery called Eden Theological Seminary. By the way, where did the walk-out crowd [from Concordia Seminary] go when they left? They were housed over at Eden Theological Seminary, which was only too happy to have them back. And, in fact, the Calvinist view of the Lord's Supper was being taught in the Seminary – at our Seminary – in those years before the walk-out. So you can get an idea, practically, about what's at stake. And that is what, in a

nutshell, the union has meant in Prussia for the world. So by the time of united Germany, Berlin/Brandenburg is running the whole show, and the pressure is put on church after to church to compromise. And they did. And our forefathers knew what Lutheranism is, and knew that the two – “Christ’s body and blood *are* in the Sacrament” and “Christ’s body and blood are merely *symbolized* in the Sacrament” are two irreconcilable positions, and we hold that it is a fundamentally rationalist approach to the text to say that it is not body and blood. Jesus says, “This *is* my body.” If I use my reason – Zwingli told Luther in Marburg, 1529, “God does not propose that we believe incomprehensible things.” Luther shot back, “You’re nuts! Everything God proposes for us is incomprehensible!” If I deny body and blood for the sake of reason, then why should I believe the Bible is really the Word of God, when reason says no? Why should I believe the Trinity when reason says no? Why should I believe life in the womb is sacred when reason says no? Why should I believe what the Bible has to say about marriage when reason says no?

So the Prussian Union sets up, as does, we believe – and we have many fond Reformed friends who would deny this or have not been captive to this in large measure, and thank God for that – the Prussian Union sets up the principle of reason in the Church. The results for Christianity are and have been devastating. Insofar as the Lutheran Church is captive to this, it has been devastating.

**WILKEN:** Pastor Matt Harrison is our guest. We’re talking about the challenges to Lutheranism, past and present. Today, unionism is the subject during this *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week. He’s President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod and author and translator of several books, including his *Church Order* by Martin Chemnitz and Jacob Andreae.

## **[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I’m Todd Wilken. Pastor Matt Harrison, President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, is our guest. He’s joining us for *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week on this Wednesday afternoon, October the 28<sup>th</sup>. The theme of the week is “Challenges to Lutheranism;” today, the challenge of unionism, past and present.

Matt, this idea of altar and pulpit fellowship, where we need to agree in our whole confession of faith: where do we find Scriptural and confessional support for this idea?

**HARRISON:** Well, you find it, of course, in Jesus, and Jesus suffers no false teaching. Jesus says, “Beware of false prophets.” He says, “Reject those who come and say, ‘Here I am’ in the end times.” He says, “Don’t be fooled. People will come and say this or that.” So Jesus inexorably rejects false teaching. It’s also the case, of course, in St. Paul, and Paul’s corpus throughout. Paul expressly, even when he’s dealing with churches that are thoroughly screwed up, like the churches in Galatia, screwed up by zealous Judaizers, saying that you must keep the Jewish law. He says, “To such teachers, would that they emasculate themselves because they’re forcing us to practice circumcision.” He says, “Even if an angel from heaven comes to you with a different Gospel than the one we’ve given you, let him be cursed.” And so there’s an absolute rejection of false teaching. Now, there’s a tolerance of falsity, as long as the Church is dealing with it. There’s no perfect church on earth. Anybody who has wanted to seek one ended up making the matter worse than it was before, frankly. Paul says to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 1:10 that we should have the “same mind.” He says in Romans 16 that we are to separate from those who bring false teaching. He says, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” In

ethical teaching in 1 Cor. 6, he says, “Look, you’ve got to cast out those who want to compromise what the Bible teaches on marriage.” So there are specifically those teachings. He says in 1 Cor. 10:15, “Is this bread which we break not a participation, a *koinonia*, in the body of Christ? Is this cup which we drink not a participation in the blood of Christ?” And the same word he uses for unity, *koinonia*, “participating together in the same thing,” is the word he uses for having fellowship with one another. We have fellowship because of what Christ gives us in His Word and in His Sacrament. And where we reject His Word, where we reject His Sacrament, we are not able to have fellowship. So I would say Paul inexorably, and the rest of the writings of the apostles, absolutely reject participation with false teaching. 1 John 1:10, I believe, is another passage. It says, “Don’t even entertain in the house somebody who comes with false teaching.” So false doctrine is a dangerous thing, according to the New Testament, and it is to be absolutely avoided. It is to be dealt with, to be sure, pastorally. It is to be dealt with patiently. We can see how Paul does that himself, with his own churches. But it is to be dealt with. The Lutheran Confessions pick up exactly the same page. And right from the beginning, the Lutheran Confessions use a word: “we *reject*. We *condemn*.” “Our churches teach” and “We reject and condemn this contrary teaching. “No one is to be received to the Sacrament unless he be examined and absolved.” And that examination, our confessions say about a half a dozen times, is about what a person receives in the Sacrament, but also the broader teaching of the Church: what is the Gospel? What does the Bible teach? A person is not to receive the Sacrament or be giving the Sacrament if he does not know why he comes or what he seeks. So the Lutheran Confessions pick up exactly the same approach to false teaching that the Bible does.

**WILKEN:** We’ve been talking about this in terms of the Lord’s Supper. We would call this altar and pulpit fellowship. What about prayer? There has been some little debate among American Lutherans about whether or not prayer constitutes a kind of fellowship with those with whom we disagree. What are your thoughts?

**HARRISON:** It is certainly the case that we cannot pray with those who are not praying to the same God. There’s no praying with the Muslim God. There’s no praying with the Jewish God. There’s no praying to Allah. This is a falsity that is the result of the American mish-mash of Masonry and rationalism that God has many names, and you can call God whatever you want, and the Bible thumps that with a huge mallet and says, “No one comes to the Father but by me.” That’s quoting Jesus. And we can reject that or we can believe it. I would recommend believing it. So there’s no praying together with those who are not praying in the name of Jesus. I would say, on the one hand, when our fathers were talking about praying together, they were talking about in joint worship, in many of those cases – jointly led worship, etc. – that, likewise, if we don’t have church fellowship, it’s not a possibility for us. Because we do not have unity in the Truth, which the Bible demands. I think, however, it’s always been recognized, and I think from the earliest times – and we disagree with the Wisconsin Synod on this – but it’s always been the case from the earliest times of the Lutheran Church that we, at the Colloquy of Thorn, for instance, and in other instances, Reformed, Catholic, and Lutherans came together and they held prayers before sessions, praying for unity. I think that is certainly not inappropriate. It’s when Christians of differing confessions of faith are being absolutely transparent about the differences that they have. I think we in the Missouri Synod had a big controversy over this with the Brux Case, so-called, and the mission field a long time ago, in the 1930s.

He was praying with some other non-Lutheran missionaries, and a case was brought against him. I believe it was sustained. But what happened was once the Wisconsin Synod broke fellowship with us, the Missouri Synod, in 1963, there was no more talk among us whatsoever about the dimension of prayer as an indicator of fellowship in any way. So I think in our context, we have somewhat neglected this. I think the Wisconsin Synod heightened its position on prayer fellowship and intensified it. It was certainly the case that Walther [and others], in the free conferences, they prayed together. That was people coming together no matter what synod they belonged to. They had prayers, recitation of the Creed, etc. at those conferences – I’ve read the minutes. In fact, I’ve translated a fair bit of them. They certainly had that practice. I think we, in our context in the last 50 years, have not thought about prayer at all in any of its fellowship ramifications. In some of the last meetings I had at Higgins Road with the ELCA, when you’re hearing prayers to “God who sends God’s Son that God’s purposes might be accomplished,” refusing the masculine pronoun, even for Jesus on occasion, I’m wondering, what God are we praying to here? I couldn’t in good conscience do that anymore.

**WILKEN:** Pastor Matt Harrison is our guest. He’s President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. He joins us for *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week on this Wednesday afternoon. We’re talking about the challenge to Lutheranism that is unionism. Stay tuned.

**[BREAK]**

**WILKEN:** It’s *Issues, Etc.* Reformation Week. Pastor Matt Harrison, President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod is our guest. We’re talking about the challenge to Lutheranism in the form of unionism.

One more question for you here, Matt, on that front of what is and isn’t unionism. In your time as President of the Lutheran

Church–Missouri Synod, you have met, and stood with publicly, leaders of many other denominations: Roman Catholic, Baptist, whatever the case may be. On issues of natural marriage, on the issue of life and religious liberty, is that an example of unionism?

**HARRISON:** No, I don’t think it is unionism. Unionism is acting together as Church in churchly ways in such a way that doctrinal differences do not matter. Cooperation in externals is to act together with others in ways – it may be churches, or individuals, or societies, etc. that operate looking for “good ends” in the society. I also think it’s the case, I think it’s very honorable when we honestly disagree with people and we’re honest about those disagreements. We don’t join with the Catholics in any kind of jointly led worship. We’re not participating in the Sacrament together. But we can recognize that these are people of good intent and good faith. Sasse said, “There’s more true unity of the church when Christians are honest about their differences than when they sweep them under the rug as though they don’t matter.” As long as we’re honest with others with whom we’re talking, as long as we’re not acting as though differences don’t matter, I think we’re acting in accord with our confession, but also acting together in ways where we can strengthen whatever message we want to give on life, for instance. I would not join together with other denominations trying to make some theological point about the Gospel, because we believe that Christ is certainly wherever the Gospel is believed, the simple Gospel of Christ’s forgiveness through His cross. And I have heard that message preached and heard it spoken by many Roman Catholics over the years, not the least of which my uncle, who listens to *The Lutheran Hour* all the time. I think cooperation in externals is a way for us to operate in a way that is responsible and maintains our public confession. One time, in doing a neighborhood project back in Fort

Wayne with a neighborhood Roman Catholic church, we never violated any principles of fellowship. But my friend Priest John Delaney said, "Wow, your predecessor was ultra-conservative. He wouldn't even do a wedding with me." And I said, "Well, first off, that's kind of canon law for us." I was trying to speak in ways that he could understand. But then I said, "John, when I consecrate the elements on the altar, you don't believe that's the body and blood of Christ, do you?" "Well, no." "You don't believe that when I absolve my people, that's truly a priestly absolution, do you?" "Well, no." And I said, "Look, you deny everything for which I and my people live. How can I stand up there with you and act like it doesn't matter?" He shut up and never gave me a bit of trouble ever again. I said, "Who's narrow-minded?" [chuckles]

**WILKEN:** Let's do a couple of final questions here. The Lutheran Church in Australia recently, very narrowly, decided, thanks be to God, not to approve the ordination of women. They could have just gone the other way. We're not in altar and pulpit fellowship with them. But *had* they decided to ordain women, what would that have done to any hope of pursuing real fellowship, real unity, with that Australian Lutheran Church?

**HARRISON:** It would be over. On the one hand, trying to move past this issue of women's ordination, or dealing with it in such a way that we restrict women's opportunities and don't have women who are studying theology and serving the church is absolutely wrong-headed. And that's why I have, personally, for years, supported the deaconess [program]. I was the first one to stand up at the Synod Convention in 2001 when the convention actually made a motion to open up both seminaries to deaconess studies. And what a blessing that has brought us! These women who are articulate, excellent, studying theology, and they're working in

various ways in the church – it's fantastic. But we know that where you actually cast the Scriptures to the winds on this issue, you will cast them to the winds on many issues. I love the Lutheran Church of Australia. I have spent the last 30 years studying the Lutheran Church of Australia. Hermann Sasse found a haven in the Lutheran Church of Australia after going into self-imposed exile after the Lutheran churches in Germany decided to voluntarily join the [Prussian] Union in 1948. I've also been very disappointed as things happened in the LCA. They needed a two-thirds vote to change their constitution, their theses of agreement, which brought the Missouri side together with the ALC and Neuendettelsau, Germany side, to become one church. I studied over there in the '80s and there was historical criticism going on at the time – fairly mildly so, but nevertheless historical criticism. And where you have a lesson's view of the Scriptures, a view that really did not accept inerrancy, or at least the rejection of inerrancy was broadly tolerated, that bodes doubly poor for the authority of the Lutheran confessions. I saw also at the time the importation of emotional worship forms, through contemporary worship. Those things, over a long period of time – I understand this last convention was just very emotional. The theological arguments were very thin on the left. It was largely emotional and human rights kind of arguments. This is why we must be very careful with our worship freedom. On the one hand, I think it's very powerful to use a contemporary setting and contemporary songs, etc. that will uphold the Gospel and carry the Gospel. On the other hand, it's very easy to turn worship into some soapy, soupy, emotional *blech* that doesn't deliver the faith. And if we've got soapy, soupy, emotional worship going on at the same in a congregation as open communion, that is a warning sign that maybe what's going there needs to be strengthened, and significantly so.

**WILKEN:** Finally, then, Matt, how would you respond to someone who says, “Look, you’re just a theological stick in the mud. What you’re advocating here and you’re warning against unionism as a threat to Lutheranism is just kind of ecclesiastical isolationism.” How would you respond to that?

**HARRISON:** [chuckles] Well, over the last 15 years, how many countries have I been in? I don’t know, 50 or 60 – visiting Lutheran churches in all those places. I’ve watched closely as, for instance, the EKD [Evangelische Kirche der Union] in Germany, the union where even Sasse’s Bishop Meiser took the Bavarian church to it in 1948. Sasse said no. We had professors from the pre-walk-out days at our St. Louis seminary who were saying yes to the EKD. Today, the EKD has a constitution which approves homosexuality; a church where it is readily taught and believed that there is salvation outside of Christ; that the biggest issue in the church is “being green.” So this is not something about some “stick in the mud” issue years ago. I would say also – look, folks, if you think this isn’t a significant issue, look not to the history of what has happened in world Lutheranism where the Union has endured; that is, the elimination of the substance of the Gospel. Think about this: 200 years ago in the Prussian Union, a *government* stepped in and radically assaulted the religious freedom of the church. Sounds like a familiar theme might be upon us. So I don’t care. You can call me what you want. I’m for the Gospel. And when I’m for the Gospel, I’m for the Biblical Gospel which is confessed in the Lutheran confessions. I will rejoice everywhere I hear

and see that Gospel, and I know many, many people – heaven will be populated far and away with people who weren’t Lutherans in this life, but we have a responsibility to be faithful to the Scriptures and the Lutheran confessions. That’s what I subscribe to, that’s what I confessed I’d do, and I’m going to keep on doing it. It’s our patronage: *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus*, and Scripture alone, *sola Scriptura*. There ain’t no other choice for me. So it’s not pitting the Gospel against some kind of historical obscurantism. Quite, quite the opposite.

**WILKEN:** Pastor Matt Harrison is President of the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod. He’s author and translator of several books, including his latest, *Church Order* by Martin Chemnitz.

Matt, thank you very much for your time.

**HARRISON:** Hey, great to be here, Todd. It’s always a pleasure.

**WILKEN:** This is why, at the beginning of our conversation, I asked the questions, “Why do Lutherans compromise or why they do not compromise these things?” Well, it’s because we’re for the Gospel. And every time, the history shows – the last 90 minutes of rehearsing that history shows – every time the Lutherans have been asked to compromise in doctrine and practice, what has been compromised? What has suffered? The Gospel of Jesus Christ that is the only hope for a lost world of sinners.

I’m Todd Wilken. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

