

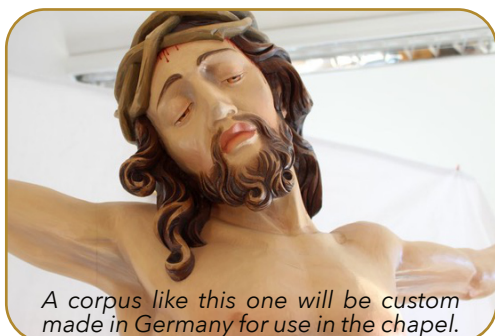
LCC Acquires Academic Facility through \$1.5M Gift



Luther Classical College has acquired an academic facility in downtown Casper through a \$1,500,000 gift from an anonymous donor. The donor explains why he decided to support LCC:

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A corpus like this one will be custom made in Germany for use in the chapel.

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HOW EFFECTIVE ARE RHETORICAL QUESTIONS?

BY DR. RYAN MACPHERSON

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IF YOUR EYES MOVED FROM THE TITLE TO THIS OPENING sentence then the rhetorical question in the title appears to be doing its job. By common understanding, a rhetorical question is one posed by the speaker without expecting the audience to actually answer it. It is a way of grabbing the audience's attention and keeping it. (If you are ready to continue to the next paragraph, then so far, so good!)

A more precise definition would include the speaker's particular aim in asking the question. Rhetoric is the field of study that focuses on effective communication. Rhetorical questions, then, are questions posed in order to enhance communication. (See what I mean?) The curriculum at Luther Classical College includes four required core courses in rhetoric, one taken each year. But should the study of rhetoric be limited to courses explicitly titled "rhetoric"? The point of that rhetorical question is to prompt readers like you to recognize the value of studying rhetoric across the curriculum, and indeed, there is great value in doing so. Unlike nearly all other colleges of the early twenty-first century, LCC's core curriculum comprises about 80% of the entire course study. What is the value of having students study nearly everything in common rather than specializing in their preferred major? One of the most significant advantages of this time-tested approach, which remained the norm until the late 1800s, is that students can apply what they have learned in one course to what they are studying in another course. All their professors,

regardless of PhD specialty, and all of their classmates, regardless of intended career, support them in a common culture of learning. At LCC, Rhetoric 170 includes readings that dovetail with Theology 115 and Literature 121. History 131, History 132, and Philosophy 100 include writing assignments that apply what students learn in Rhetoric 170. Rather than completing each course in isolation simply to “check the boxes” for graduation, students discover the inter-connections across various academic disciplines. They acquire understanding and wisdom that are all-encompassing, not fragmented.

In the Middle Ages, rhetoric was studied alongside grammar and logic. Together, these three disciplines comprised the trivium, the foundation of the *artes liberales*, or liberal arts. At the University of Wittenberg, grammar was valued as a skill for reading what Holy Scripture actually says (rather than filtering its interpretation through church councils or popes). Logic was valued for its guidance in crafting sound arguments and critiquing the arguments of others. Whereas the Scholastic tradition over-exaggerated the abilities of logic, going so far as to force articles of faith to fit the mold of human reason, Wittenberg’s emphasis upon grammar and rhetoric helped to keep logic as a useful



Sermon on the mount 1480 - 1500

servant, not an abusive master. As Philip Melanchthon’s *Commentary on Romans* reveals, rhetorical analysis of Scripture highlights the key points that the Holy Spirit brought to St. Paul’s pen. Without knowledge of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, one easily could be misled into the sloppy and indeed sinister interpretations of the various religious factions.

Have you ever wondered what it really means to read the Bible “in its proper context”? (There goes another rhetorical question!) Recognizing the natural rhetorical flow of the Bible from one chapter to the next gives important insight into the context. In addition to rhetorical structure, rhetorical devices and literary tropes also play a role in clear and effective communication. Melanchthon applied rhetorical analysis to the proper exposition of Holy Scripture in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, where he explained Christ’s words, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much” (Luke 7:47). If reading too hastily, it may seem that Christ was stating that her great love for God somehow contributed to the forgiveness she received. Indeed, the Roman Church taught exactly that very heresy: our love,

fueled by God’s grace, is what achieves our salvation. By examining the rhetoric of Christ’s words, Melanchthon corrected the Roman error. “This often happens in the Scriptures, that by one word we embrace many things. ... He says here, ‘her sins, which are many are forgiven—for she loved much.’ This means she has truly worshiped Me with faith and faith’s exercises and signs. He means the entire worship” (Apol V.34). In other words, “for she loved much” means “for she placed her faith in Me, as you can plainly see by her worship of Me, her love for Me, and so forth.” As Melanchthon noted, “At times we use a word for something, and we use the same word for the cause and effects of that thing.” (Apol V.31)

This sort of conversational shorthand is not uncommon. A daily newspaper uses this rhetorical device when stating, “the White House announced today....” Such a report does not mean that a building in Washington D.C. actually speaks, rather, it means that the president, or more likely, the press secretary, issued an announcement. We all understand this intuitively, yet reading a text slowly and referencing a list of standard rhetorical devices can help prevent misinterpretation. If any doubt remains about Christ’s meaning, Melanchthon points to the surrounding context, where Jesus plainly states, “Your faith has saved you” (Luke 7:50). It is not her acts of love that save her, but rather her faith in Christ, although her love makes her faith obvious to her neighbors.

It also is important to know when a statement is to be taken more literally. “This is My body” in the words of institution plainly teach the real presence. Ulrich Zwingli, however, insisted on interpreting Christ’s words figuratively. The problem is that no rhetorical device supports the term in this grammatical construction. To justify his position Zwingli borrowed the term *alloeosis* from ancient critics of Homer’s poetry and invented a new rhetorical device so that he could claim “This is My body” was an instance of *alloeosis*. The Wittenberg Lutherans, well trained in rhetoric, saw right through this smoke-and-mirrors show. As Luther thundered: “It is indescribable what the devil attempts to do with this *alloeosis*!” (LW 37:210, quoted in FC SD VIII.40)

To some, rhetoric simply means “the art of persuasion,” whether the content is true or not. But that game ends in a stalemate of sophistry. If we instead maintain a tight braid among the three “trivial” threads of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, we can rediscover the tools of clear thinking that aided the Lutheran reformers in restoring the true preaching of the Gospel and the true administration of the sacraments in their churches. *Wouldn’t you agree such an education is worth reviving today?*