

The Concordia Lutheran



"The Scripture cannot be broken." John 10:35.

"Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path." Psalm 119:105.

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**“We all
believe
in One
true God.”**





"The Word is our light and life." John 1:9

"City Meek is a Lamp unto my feet, and a Light unto my path." Psalm 119:105

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To expose particularly the false teaching and practice of the various so-called "Lutheran" church bodies by comparing their teachings and practices with what is plainly recorded in the Word of God, in the Lutheran Confessions, and in the old orthodox Lutheran writings.

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To be truthful and factual in our reporting and freely to correct any misinformation of which we are not aware and which has been called to our attention. Also to clarify any information or statement of doctrine or practice which may be unclear to our readers or which may create a wrong impression.

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How Reformed Theology Attacks the Ascension of Christ

“He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things” — Ephesians 4:10

In Luther’s explanation of the Second Article, we confess, *“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is My Lord.”* Here in this simple identification of the Savior, we confess two vital pieces of doctrine: That Jesus Christ is *true God* and *true Man*, united in one, indivisible person as clearly identified by the Holy Scriptures. When we examine the person of Christ in both His *state of humiliation* and His *state of exaltation*, it is imperative, above all things, that we follow the Apostle Paul’s exhortation in II Corinthians 10:5, *“Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”* Knowing that we are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets (Ephesians 2:20), our only source and standard of Christian doctrine and practice is the Word of God. Therefore, any and all teach-

ings which contradict or deny the clear and certain words of Holy Writ must be condemned as heretical (*Quod non est biblicum non est theologicum* — What is not Biblical is not theological). This exaltation of imaginations against the knowledge of God is referred to as the *magisterial* use of human reason and is common among those who fancy themselves theologians, regarding their own intellect as more significant than the Holy Scriptures. This *magisterial use of human reason* (also referred to as **Rationalism**) is embraced by many heterodox church bodies such as the Reformed. Reformed teaching does *not* consistently subject itself to the authority of Scripture but often *insists* that the Bible must be interpreted according to human reason, or according to rationalistic axioms. In this article we will show just how Reformed theology, according to its rationalistic principle that “the finite is not capable of the infinite,” attacks the ascension of Christ with regard to Ephesians 4:10, “*He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.*”

We know from the Scriptures that Jesus, as *true God*, possesses all of the divine attributes including *omniscience*, *omnipotence*, and *omnipresence* (John 21:17; Matthew 28:18-20). Because of the personal union of Christ, in which the divine and human natures are perfectly united in one person, the attributes of the divine nature are really and truly *communicated* to, or “shared” with, the human nature for common possession, use, and designation. The Scriptures teach that Christ possessed all the divine attributes of God, *essentially* according to His divine nature and *by communication* according to His human nature, from the very time of His conception (Luke 1:35; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; I Timothy 3:16). So Christ, also according to His human nature, possesses all of the divine attributes (John 1:14; Colossians 2:9; I Timothy 3:16).

Forty days after His resurrection, Christ took His disciples out as far as to Bethany, blessed them, and as He blessed them He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9). In Ephesians 4:10, the Apostle Paul declares that “*He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.*” Christ had fulfilled His work of redemption on the tree of the cross (John 19:30), and the time had come for Him to remove His local, visible presence from the world and to go to prepare a place for His true believers in heaven (John 14:2). By His ascension into heaven, Christ acted as our forerunner, since on the last day all true believers will ascend up to be with Him in the joys of heaven forever (John 14:2b-3; I Thessalonians 4:17). Now in His *state of exaltation*, in which He always and fully uses the divine attributes communicated to His human nature, Christ *fills all things* by virtue of His omnipresence. Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father, “*And now, O Father, glorify Thou*

Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was" (John 17:5). The omnipresence exercised by the Savior in the state of exaltation from the time of His ascension is known as Christ's *repletive presence* by which He, according to both natures, is truly everywhere present, *filling all things*.

Reformed theology attacks the ascension of Christ by denying the communication of attributes with its rationalistic axiom, "the finite is not capable of the infinite" (*finitum non est capax infiniti*). In particular, they deny the communication of divine omnipresence to the human nature of Christ and claim that Christ's finite body can only be in one place at a time. Reformed theologian Danaeus writes, "*Nothing whatever that is proper and essential to the Deity can in any way be communicated to a created thing, such as is the human nature assumed by Christ, unless we are ready to admit that a sort of new God can be born and come into existence*" (*Exam. Libri Chemnitii*, p. 104). Reformed theology teaches that when Christ is spoken of as being omnipresent, it is in regard to His divine nature working apart from or outside of His human nature. In defense of their denial of the communication of divine omnipresence to the human nature, they offer the notion that *if* Christ's body were truly everywhere present with the divine nature, it would need to be extremely large and stretched out in order to accommodate the immensity of God (local extension). Their doctrinal position based upon their rationalistic understanding of the communication of attributes directly contradicts the clear words of the Holy Scriptures (Colossians 2:9, etc.).

After His resurrection from the dead, Christ told His disciples, "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*" (Matthew 28:20). Nowhere in this passage is the separation of the two natures mentioned or even implied, but rather the affirmation of the **whole person** of Christ being present with His disciples. The Scriptures teach that, also during His *state of humiliation*, the human nature of Christ was omnipresent **with** the divine nature, not only *locally* (Luke 2:7) but also according to His *illocal* presence (John 8:59). Christ told Nicodemus in John 3:13, "*No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven.*" Here Christ demonstrated how He, specifically according to His human nature ("*Son of Man*"), was at that time **in heaven** even as He was speaking to Nicodemus. The denial of the communication of all the divine attributes to the human nature of Christ contradicts Colossians 2:9, "*In [Christ] dwelleth **all** the fulness of the Godhead **bodily**.*"

Again, Reformed theology attacks the ascension of Christ since it teaches that once He ascended, His body is now locally enclosed, or trapped,

in heaven. It is true that, when Christ ascended *into heaven*, He did so with His true human body, passing through the celestial space of the universe (Ephesians 4:10); but He, at the same time, remains here with *us*, also according to His human nature, by virtue of His omnipresence, just as He promised His disciples before His ascension (Matthew 28:20). Here, we distinguish between Christ's *local presence* and His *repletive presence*. When Christ told His disciples in Matthew 26:11, "*Me ye have not always with you,*" He was referring to His local, visible presence. By His ascension, Christ removed His mode of local, visible presence and "*ascended up far above all heavens*" (Ephesians 4:10). By His repletive presence, Christ "*fills all things,*" according to both natures (Ephesians 1:20-23; 4:10). The Scriptures teach that Christ, according to His human nature, is not only in heaven and sitting at the right hand of God, but is also in all other places, including here among us. In Ephesians chapter 1:20-23, the Apostle Paul writes, "*[The Father] raised [Christ] from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places... and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*"

Moreover, if the accusation that Christ's human body is enclosed in heaven stands, then He is not really present in the Lord's Supper. Christ told His disciples, "*Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you*" (I Corinthians 11:24). Christ had exercised His divine attribute of omnipresence there in the upper room, giving His own true body to His disciples in the Lord's Supper while He Himself sat at the table. Just as the disciples did, so also we receive the true body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine by virtue of Christ's assurance of this in His Word, "*This IS My body ... this IS My blood*" (Matthew 26:26, 28). Yet, the Reformed hold that the *finite* body of Christ is not capable of being *infinitely* present. Therefore, their rationalistic axiom denies the Real Presence of the *true* body and blood of the Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar. At the announcement of Jesus' birth, the angel Gabriel told the virgin Mary, "*With God nothing shall be impossible*" (Luke 1:37). The Lord Himself told His disciples, after His encounter with the rich man, "*With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26). In effect the Reformed challenge this testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ and His divine omnipotence by insisting that the almighty God operate within their way of thinking, rather than bringing *their* thoughts into captivity to the obedience of *Christ* (II Corinthians 10:5).

The Apostle Paul warns us in Colossians 2:8, "*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.*" Because of their

insistence upon being subject to their own rationalistic principles, the Reformed attack, in particular, the ascension of Christ by denying the full communication of all the divine attributes to His human nature. Though Reformed theology denies the full communication of attributes to Christ's human nature, nevertheless it *claims* to hold to the doctrine of the personal union, in which the divine and human natures are perfectly united in Christ Jesus. It must be pointed out that the communication of attributes properly belongs to the personal union, and that therefore, by denying the communication of attributes, Reformed theology implicitly denies the real personal union that is taught in Scripture (Colossians 2:9).

The ascension of Christ into heaven is of such great importance and comfort to us latter day Christians. Christ's assurance to His disciples in Matthew 28:20, "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world,*" is a blessed promise that He, according to both natures, will never leave us. Though we may not be able to see Him, we continually witness in the Scriptures His great love towards us in having completed His vicarious atonement for us that we might live through Him (I John 3:16; 4:9b; II Corinthians 5:15). The Apostle Peter writes that Christ, "*whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls* (I Peter 1:8). As we wait for the second coming of our Savior from the glories of His heavenly kingdom (Acts 1:11; Matthew 25:31), we take comfort in the fact that He is even now still with us here, not just in spirit according to His divine nature, but also, really and truly, according to His human nature, both of which continue to be fully and inseparably united in His divine person. Therefore we may boldly proclaim with the writer to the Hebrews, "*He hath said, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' so that we may boldly say, 'The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me'*" (Hebrews 13:5c-6).

*Lo, God to heaven ascendeth! Throughout its regions vast,
with shouts triumphant, blendeth the trumpets thrilling blast:
"Sing praise to Christ the Lord! Sing praise with exultation!
King of each heathen nation, the God of hosts adored!"*

*With joy is heaven resounding Christ's glad return to see.
Behold the saints surrounding the Lord who set them free.
Bright myriads, thronging, come; the cherub band rejoices;
and loud seraphic voices all welcome Jesus home.*

*From cross to throne ascending, we follow Christ on high
and know the pathway wending to mansions in the sky.*

*Our Lord is gone before; yet here He will not leave us,
but soon in heaven receive us and open wide the door!*

— TLH 214, 1-

3

— **Daniel P. Mensing, Seminarian**
(Submitted through his Pastor)





Are the Old Testament Scriptures Themselves Sufficient unto Salvation?

*“For a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures,
which are able to make thee wise unto salvation
through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” — II Timothy 3:15*

We propose this question as the title of this present article not in any way to minimize the importance of the *New Testament* Scriptures, the glorious record of the fulfillment of all the Old Testament Messianic prophecies and the letters of the evangelists and apostles to various local congregations, to individuals, and even to believers in general, setting forth “*all the counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27) for their, yea, “*for our learning*” (Romans 15:4). For the Scriptures of *both* the Old and New Testaments, “*the apostles and prophets,*” are, as St. Paul writes in Ephesians 2, “*the foundation*” upon which the Church is built, “*Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone*” (v. 20), the indispensable “keystone” or “capstone” in the metaphor of architecture, “*in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit*” (vv. 21-22). Therefore we confess, on the basis of that and still other passages of Holy Writ, that the canonical Scriptures of *both* the Old and New Testaments comprise God’s verbally-inspired, inerrant, complete, clear, and all-sufficient revelation of Himself to sinful mankind, containing all that we need to know and to believe for our salvation and for instruction in holiness of living here in this world, and that we should therefore look for no further revelation to explain them, to supplement them, or to replace them as the only source and norm of faith and life (II Peter 1:20; Galatians 1:8-9; Revelation 22:18-19). No, the reason for the title-question phrased as it is lies in a series of other questions raised by those who, though they should know better

from the words of Scripture themselves (Hebrews 5:12), still ask: “How could the people in Old Testament times know of Jesus Christ, when His name is never mentioned anywhere in those thirty-nine books?” “How could they believe and apprehend the *Gospel*, when the message of the Old Testament was clearly the *Law*?” “How could they have the assurance of salvation — to the same degree that we New Testament Christians have it — when such fundamental doctrines as the Holy Trinity, the doctrine of Scripture, Christ’s vicarious atonement, His redemptive work for our salvation, God’s objective justification of the ungodly, subjective justification by faith without works, the resurrection of the body, and still others are not taught in the Old Testament?”

Sadly, all of those and many other similar questions are either born of **skepticism**, that is, the doubt of unbelief that challenges God Himself and His gracious purpose and primary will toward lost and sinful mankind, namely, that “*all men...be saved and...come unto the knowledge of the truth*” (I Timothy 2:4); **OR** they are the result of inexcusable, abysmal **ignorance** of what the Scriptures of the Old Testament actually say and teach on the part of those who refuse to “*search*” them and to recognize and accept what the Lord Jesus Himself said of them, namely, that “*they testify of Me*” (John 5:39).

We cannot, of course, address all such questions and challenges in this brief article, nor is that its purpose. But in answer to the **skeptic** who rejects the fact that God’s universal will of grace is set forth in the Old Testament Scriptures, we need only cite two abundantly clear passages which show that God’s grace to fallen mankind is not a “New Testament concept.” First, God swears by His own existence that He desires the damnation of no one: “‘*As I live,*’ saith the Lord God, ‘*I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*’” (Ezekiel 33:11). Secondly, God declares His merciful forgiveness to poor sinners, saying: “*The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*” (Exodus 34:6-7a).

And to the “**willingly ignorant**” (II Peter 3:5), who refuse to “*search the Scriptures*” (John 5:39) to determine whether “*those things [are] so*” (Acts 17:11), namely, whether all those precious Gospel truths, those “fundamental doctrines” taught by Paul and others in the *New Testament Scriptures*, were also taught in the *Old Testament* writings, specifically salvation by grace for Christ’s sake through faith without the deeds of the Law, we cite just three summary statements which should indeed settle the matter — even without locating every fundamental doctrine in an Old Testament *sedes* or proof-text: First, Jesus

said to the Jews, “to [whom] were committed *the oracles of God*” (Romans 3:1-2), the Scriptures of the **Old Testament**: “*Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed ME; for he wrote of ME*” (John 5:46). Secondly, to the two disciples who walked with Him on the way to Emmaus on Easter afternoon, Jesus said: “‘*O fools and slow of heart to believe all that **the prophets** have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?*’ And, beginning at **Moses and ALL the prophets**, He expounded unto them in **ALL the [Old Testament] Scriptures the things concerning HIMSELF**” (Luke 24:25-27). And finally, there is the testimony of the Apostle Peter, writing by inspiration of the Holy Ghost concerning the **Old Testament prophets**, who also wrote by inspiration of the same Holy Ghost (I Peter 1:21): “*To HIM [“Jesus of Nazareth,” v. 38] give **ALL the prophets** witness, that through **HIS name**, whosoever believeth in HIM shall receive remission of sins*” (Acts 10:43).

To be sure, every “primary fundamental doctrine,” that is, every doctrine that must be known and apprehended by faith for everlasting salvation, is found in clear and certain terms (Psalm 119:105; 130) in the *Old Testament Scriptures*; otherwise the foregoing passages are outright lies! And even a cursory search of the *Old Testament* reveals those doctrines in all their glory! Our seminarians recently completed a course in *Old Testament Isagogics*, a survey of the content of the *Old Testament*, in which they focused their efforts on locating the rectilinear (direct) Messianic prophecies and the statements that specifically teach “*the grace of God that bringeth salvation*” (Titus 2:11) in Christ Jesus, manifested to men long before His incarnation. Much to their delight, the hearts of our students, like those of Cleopas and that other disciple en route to Emmaus, “*burned within [them]*” as they discovered the precious Gospel like a golden thread running through “*all the Scriptures*” (Luke 24:27) concerning justification and salvation by God’s grace for Christ’s sake through faith! And many of those *Old Testament* statements are either *quoted* or *referred to* by the evangelists and apostles in the *New Testament* as teaching those precious doctrines.

No wonder that Abraham, in Jesus’ narrative of the rich man and poor Lazarus, referred the rich man’s brothers to “***Moses and the prophets***” (Luke 16:29 and 31) as being sufficient to inform them how to escape the fires of hell; for the “*Holy Scriptures*” (II Timothy 3:15), “*which,*” **Jesus** says, “*testify of Me*” (John 5:39; cf. Acts 4:10), are “*able to make [people] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (II Timothy 3:15); “*neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

No wonder indeed that Zacharias in his *Benedictus* (Luke 1:68-75) referred several times to the testimony of God Himself through “*His holy prophets*” in the Scriptures of the **Old Testament** concerning His redemption of His people, His mercy promised to their forefathers, His holy covenant of justification because of the “*Horn of Salvation*” He had raised up in the House of His servant David! — No wonder that Mary in her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55) praised the Lord God, “[*her*] *Savior*,” and His mercy toward His people in remembrance of His promise, “*as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed forever*” as recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures! — No wonder Jesus Himself, as well as His evangelists and apostles, consistently referred to the Scriptures of “*the prophets*” in their preaching and teaching, citing Moses, David, Isaiah, Hosea, Joel, Jonah, Zechariah, Malachi and others as God’s mouthpieces in the revelation of His will and grace in Christ, and the fulfillment of every one of their prophecies as evidence of His Messianic office! — No wonder that the people of Jerusalem on the first “Palm Sunday” and the children in the Temple sang His praises on the basis of His identification in the Old Testament Scriptures as their gracious King (Zechariah 9:9), “*the Son of David*,” come “*in the name of the Lord*” (Jeremiah 23:5-6), the long-promised Savior (Matthew 21:1-9; 15-16). — No wonder that the apostles, and Peter in particular on the Day of Pentecost, preached the Law and the Gospel from *Old Testament* “texts” as the mouthpieces of the Holy Ghost to bring three thousand souls to contrition and true repentance, to create in them faith unto salvation! — And no wonder that Peter, comparing his eyewitness and earwitness recollection of Christ’s transfiguration with the testimony of the Old Testament, said of it: “*We have also a more sure Word of prophecy whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place* [cf. Psalm 119:105]; ...*knowing this first that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation; for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost*” (II Peter 1:19-21).

To be sure, the Jews who heard “*Moses and the prophets*” read every Sabbath Day in their synagogues (Acts 13:27; 15:21), who heard the preaching and teaching of Jesus and of His chosen witnesses (testifiers) on the basis of *Old Testament* texts (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 2:16; 25-36; 4:25ff.; 7:1ff.; 8:28ff.; 13:16ff.; etc., etc.), to whom the “*Oracles of God*” were committed as their special “*advantage*” (Romans 3:1-2), to whom the efficacious Word of God was “*nigh*” (Romans 10:8) and testified (v. 11), though so many did not believe it (v. 16), who knew the way of salvation through Christ Jesus from the objective record of the Scriptures and yet disobeyed the Gospel and dared to contradict it (vv. 19-21) — the Jews had no excuse

for their unbelief! And, since Jesus tells us that “*if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*” (Luke 16:31), it is completely understandable that the **resurrection** of **Jesus Himself** — the “*sign of the Prophet Jonas*” (Matthew 12:39-40) that He is the Son of God (Romans 1:4) and the Redeemer of the world and God the Father’s own testimony concerning His justification of the world for Christ’s sake (Romans 4:25b) — even THAT sign is rejected by them in unbelief!

What a great blessing is OURS, however, and OUR wonderful *advantage* as “*the children of the promise*” (Romans 9:8), the true Israel, that “*from a child,*” from early childhood already, most of us at any rate “*[have] known the Holy Scriptures [of the Old Testament], which are able to make [also us] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus,*” and that we have in their unadulterated truth and purity **also** the Scriptures of the **New** Testament, in which, as Augustine once remarked, the Old Testament is “revealed” with their recorded fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning our Savior and God’s manifold grace to us and to all men in His Son!

Let us never take the Old Testament Scriptures for granted, as if they were a kind of “second rate” manifestation of God’s mercy and grace to sinful men in Christ Jesus. For they were the only written repository of the efficacious Gospel to mankind for about four thousand years; and they, still today, belong to the “*foundation*” upon which Christ’s church is built (Ephesians 2:20), still today “*are able to make [us] wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus!*” May God the Holy Spirit, through those precious Means of Grace, keep us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end, for Jesus’ sake!

— D. T. M.



Why Christian Symbolism Is Inadequate for Describing the Holy Trinity

*“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”*
—Romans 11:33

“The Lord, He is God; there is none else beside Him” (Deuteronomy 4:35). *“There is none other God but one”* (I Corinthians 8:4). In unmistakable terms the Scriptures declare that *there is only one God*. Likewise, with equally clear words, the Bible also tells us that there are *three divine persons* in the Godhead—*“the Father,” “the Son,”* and *“the Holy Ghost”* (Matthew 28:19). *The Father* is clearly identified as *the one true God* (John 17:3); *the Son* is clearly identified as *the one true God* (John 1:1–3, 14); and *the Holy Ghost* is clearly identified as *the one true God* (Acts 5:3–4). And while the essence of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost is *“one”* (John 10:30; I John 5:7), each is a distinct person, or Individual (John 14:16; 15:26). In Romans 11:33 (quoted above), which is part of the Epistle Lesson for Trinity Sunday in the historic pericope, we are told that God’s wisdom and knowledge are infinitely deep, and that His judgments and ways exceed man’s ability to comprehend. But not only is it impossible for us humans to fathom the Lord’s wisdom, knowledge, judgments, and ways, it is also impossible for us to grasp intellectually how the *one true God is three distinct Persons* (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost), with *each person being fully God* (not one-third of God).

When something is hard to understand, we humans typically seek a comparison that is easier to grasp; and then, using the parallel aspects, we make the mental connections to comprehend that which is more difficult. But analogies are not always completely accurate in their comparisons. They often oversimplify things; and sometimes they add unnecessary complexity to a matter—making it all the more confusing. Now when it comes to an explanation of our Triune God, we have to admit that, apart from Holy Scripture, there is no explanation, because *“the things of the Spirit of God...are spiritually discerned”* (I Corinthi-

ans 2:14). Therefore finding even an analogy or imperfect illustration of the Trinity does not cause us to understand it. In addition to the fact that we cannot accurately picture something that has no physical form, we also cannot hope to picture how the Godhead is three persons in one being. The personal beings that we are most familiar with are *humans*; and we cannot even think about three distinct *human persons* without also thinking about three separate *human beings*. There is absolutely nothing else in the entire universe that matches the uniqueness of the Trinity. Because it is impossible for us to conceptualize how the *three distinct persons* (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) are each the *one same divine being*, it is also impossible for us to find a perfectly adequate picture or symbol for the Trinity. Based on this fact, some might think that it is foolish to use any symbols at all to represent the Holy Trinity. However, even imperfect symbols, illustrations, and analogies can be profitably used as long as their limitations are recognized, and their use does not in any way conflict with the express words of Holy Scripture.

Perhaps the most common symbol for the Trinity is the *triangle*—one shape with three corners (also three sides). The single shape of the triangle is compared to the oneness of the divine essence; and the three corners (or sides) are related to the three persons in the Godhead. Similarly, the *three-leaf clover* has been used for the same basic reasons as the triangle. All symbols of this type share the same basic shortcoming: The three parts that make up the shape are not each the entire shape, but only *parts* of the shape. So if the entire shape represents God, and the three parts represent the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, then each divine person is pictured as being only *part* of God. It is the same problem that arises more conspicuously if one tries to illustrate the Trinity with a *pie chart* divided into three segments—neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Ghost would appear to be fully God, but only *thirds* of God.



A symbol of *three interlocking circles* is sometimes used to represent our Triune God. One theological point that is illustrated with this particular symbol is the interpenetration (*perichoresis*) of the divine persons (John 17:21). (This interpenetration is also symbolized in the “*triquetra*,” which is sometimes called the Celtic “*Trinity knot*.”) A circle all by itself is often used as a symbol for God with special reference to His attribute of *eternity* (without beginning and without end). Now if the entire shape formed by the interlocking circles is to represent the one divine being, then this symbol suffers from the same shortcoming as the three-piece pie chart. If, on



the other hand, each circle by itself is to represent God (the divine essence, not specifically one divine person), then the symbol would indicate that there are three eternal beings instead of one. While it is correct to say that each of the three *persons* is eternal, it is wrong to say that there are three Eternals (which would mean that there are three Gods). “The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three Eternals, but one Eternal” (Athanasian Creed).



Just a brief note about a modern kind of geometric image that some have thought to be a good example of the Trinity—*fractals*: This has been suggested as a solution to the pie chart problem found in the triangle and similar symbols, because, it is claimed, that the parts *are* the whole. (In reality, the parts are only *copies* of the whole.) Fractals are, in fact, one of the worst of symbols for the Trinity, because their composition would imply that there are an infinite number of gods (or divine persons) within God.

There is actually quite a good illustration of the Trinity at the top of page 49 in the 1943 edition of *Luther’s Small Catechism* (C.P. H.). It is an English version of an old Latin illustration called “*Scutum Fidei*” (“Shield of Faith”) that dates back to the 1200s (or earlier). What makes this picture *more than just a symbol* is the use of *words* within the image. It is really a series of verbal statements about the persons of the Trinity grouped together in an artistic way. Since the graphic in the Catechism is small, the words (which are necessary to understand it) may be a little difficult to read. The symbol part displays a shield-like shape with *four* circles (three on the outside and one in the center), and connecting lines that run between the circles. The three outside circles contain the names of the three divine persons (one name in each circle); and “God” is written in the single circle in the middle. The *words* in the lines, taken



together with those in the circles, set forth Scriptural statements regarding each person of the Trinity. If there were no words present, this illustration would not be very good (and could easily be misunderstood); but the *words* in the circles and in the lines clearly explain the distinction of persons as well as the unity of essence in the Triune God—“neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance” (Athanasian Creed).

With *words* we can describe the Trinity accurately, for it is with words

that God has perfectly revealed Himself to us on the pages of Holy Scripture. But even though we can *describe* the Trinity correctly, this does not mean that we can visualize, illustrate, or even comprehend how Father, Son, and Holy Ghost can be distinct persons who are each fully God, without there being more than one God. It should not be surprising that no symbol can be found—no geometric object, no mathematical formula, no example in nature, no artistic representation—that accurately parallels or illustrates the mystery of the Holy Trinity. God is so unique, and so beyond our ability to comprehend, that there is nothing else we can point to and say, “The Trinity is just like this or that.” It does not follow, however, that no symbolism should ever be used in teaching about the Trinity, or that all triangles and triple interlocking circles should be removed from our churches simply because they do not represent every aspect of the Trinity with complete accuracy. But when teaching about the Trinity using symbols, care must be taken not to go beyond the legitimate points of comparison in trying to establish parallels.

Even with the perfect parables of Christ, there may be ancillary details in the illustrations that Jesus Himself does not make a part of His point of comparison. Consequently, we must be careful not to attribute significance to details in a parable that lie beyond the point of comparison stated or otherwise clearly drawn by the Lord. If such care is not taken, completely wrong ideas may arise. For example, in *the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins* (Matthew 25:1–13), ten virgins with their lamps waited together in anticipation of the bridegroom’s arrival. Five were wise in having brought an extra supply of oil for their lamps in anticipation of a long wait, while five were foolish, having brought no extra oil with their lamps. Nevertheless, all ten virgins “*slumbered and slept*” (v. 5). The coming of the groom represents the coming of Christ on the Last Day. But it would be wrong for one to say that this parable teaches that, upon the Lord’s return for judgment, the number of those who by faith are admitted into heaven will equal the number of those who in unbelief are consigned to hell. Such a conclusion disregards the fact that the *number* (and ratio) of wise and foolish virgins is a detail that is unrelated to the main point of the parable, namely, that only true believers, who by faith nurtured by the Means of Grace are ready for Christ’s second coming, will be admitted into heaven (v. 13). Likewise, in *the Parable of the Unjust Judge* (Luke 18:2–5), the effectiveness of persistent prayer is illustrated by the widow’s persistent petitioning of the unjust judge to help her (see verses 1 and 7). But it would be wrong to say that this parable teaches that God is unjust or that He is wearied by many prayers. Simply because not every detail of a given parable can be directly connected with the main point does not render the parable useless or detrimental to the proper understanding of the lesson that

the parable teaches.

While humanly devised symbols or illustrations are not worthy to be placed on the same level as the parables given us by God, and while there may be a number of details in the analogies we humans invent that do not perfectly illustrate our point, such analogies, symbols, and illustrations can be used profitably in explaining even points of Christian doctrine, provided that they do not conflict with or go beyond Scripture. Accordingly, illustrating the Trinity with a triangle can certainly be done in a profitable way as long as the details that lie beyond the legitimate points of comparison are not allowed to detract from what Scripture clearly teaches. The parts of the illustration that do *not* accurately represent the Trinity might well be highlighted for the purpose of explaining what our Triune God *is not*. In fact, a good way to present the substance of any matter thoroughly is to include a clear explanation of what it *is not*. For example, a teacher of religion might tell his student: “Like a triangle is a single shape, so also God is one single being; and like there are three corners (or three sides) in a triangle, there are three persons in the Godhead. But *unlike* the corners (or sides) of a triangle, which are only *parts* of the shape, each divine person is completely God—not a *part* of God.”

So if one desires to teach others accurately about the Triune God, he may or may not choose to use some symbolism; but he absolutely must use *accurate words* to describe the Trinity according to how God has revealed Himself in the Bible and thus overcome the inadequacies of any symbols he might use. As with all the doctrines of Holy Scripture, we are to believe, teach, and confess whatever has been revealed therein; and this holds true whether or not we are able fully to comprehend those doctrines which are mysterious (I Corinthians 13:12). The fact that we know of no symbol or analogy that perfectly illustrates the Bible’s description of the Trinity should *not* lead us to conclude that this doctrine, though admittedly a mystery, cannot be taught or explained or believed. However, the doctrine of the Trinity should humble us before the Lord our God and cause us to acknowledge His transcending uniqueness, as well as our very limited mental abilities. It really should not disturb us or surprise us at all that the essence of God is as incomprehensible as are His mind, wisdom, knowledge, judgments, and ways. Let us, therefore, stand in awe before the Lord and declare with the Apostle Paul: “*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been His counselor?*” (Romans 11:33–34).

—P. E. B.

We all believe in one true God,
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
everpresent Help in need,
praised by all the heavenly host,
by whose mighty power alone
all is made and wrought and done.

We all believe in Jesus Christ,
Son of God and Mary's Son,
who descended from His throne
and for us salvation won,
by whose cross and death are we
rescued from all misery.

We all confess the Holy Ghost,
who from both fore'er proceeds,
who upholds and comforts us
in all trials, fears and needs.
Blest and holy Trinity,
praise forever be to Thee!

—Tobias Clausnitzer, 1668



Update on Our Seminary Program

“Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever!” (Revelation 1:5-6).

Thus we cheerfully and humbly credit our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, with the success of our mutual endeavors as we here review the second year of full-time instruction in our Seminary and as we reported the same to the recent convention of our Conference. We gratefully praise Him for His abundant grace manifested *to* and *in* both professors and students as they “*put [their] hand to the plow*” (Luke 9:62) and labored diligently over two demanding semesters of challenging academic course work.

Last September, the students began a schedule of classes that ran **six days a week** — on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from one to two o’clock in the afternoon, on Tuesdays and Thursdays from ten in the morning to two in the afternoon, and on Sunday and Thursday evenings from seven to ten o’clock. The *Practicum* course (our on-going *internship* in the local congregation, which takes the place of the single year’s “vicarage” in other institutions) met in a weekly consult on Saturday mornings from ten until noon.

The present academic year came to a close on Friday, June 3rd, with the administration of the last final examinations for the second semester; and the students immediately began gearing up for their interim colloquy by the Plenary Pastoral Conference at the time of the Sixtieth Annual Convention of our Conference.. It had been a very productive year for both the students and their professors, during which the two full-time students, David and Daniel Mensing, “caught up” with our part-time student, Jason Mabe, in completing the second-year curriculum in its entirety. Beginning in September, all three matriculated students will, God-willing, be studying full-time on the “same page” in the third year of our five-year seminary program. Mr. James Bielefeldt of Sauk Village, Illinois, again participated in courses as an *auditor* since he is not at present a matriculated student and has not taken to date all of the prescribed courses.

We are pleased to report that the pastors of the Conference, having orally examined our full-time students on June 19th and 20th, particularly in *Dogmatics* but also somewhat in *Catechetics*, found them well pre-

pared in those subjects; and the Committee on Theological Education, which had selected those subject areas for the colloquy, also received copies of all final examinations for their information and evaluation, as well as for the official record.

This year Professor Lietz taught ***Dogmatics II*** (3 credit hours each semester) and ***Old Testament Isagogics*** (2 credits each semester) to the two full-time students and to our auditor, Jim Bielefeldt. The second year *Dogmatics* class covered **Anthropology** (the Doctrine of Man before and after the fall into sin — man's state of integrity and his state of corruption), the **Doctrine of Sin** (original sin and actual sin), the **Grace of God in Christ** toward fallen mankind, and the **Doctrine of Christ** (His person, His states of *humiliation* and *exaltation*, and His threefold office of Prophet, Priest, and King). The primary text source for this class was, of course, the *Holy Scriptures*, while the supplementary texts were *Christian Dogmatics* by J. T. Mueller and *Christian Dogmatics* by Francis Pieper.

Old Testament Isagogics is a survey course over the content of the Old Testament. The chief emphasis was laid on the rectilinear or direct Messianic prophecies with their fulfillment in the New Testament and Messianic-related references in the Old Testament with their parallels in the New. Thus the overall theme of the course was the revelation of the Gospel in the Old Testament Scriptures, as capsulized in Augustine's characterization (translated from the Latin): "The New Testament lies in the Old concealed; the Old Testament is in the New revealed." The primary text for this course was the Old Testament itself, with a thumbnail sketch of its content in a handy supplementary text by Christopher Drewes entitled, *Introduction to the Books of the Bible*. In both semesters of both courses taught by Professor Lietz, the students received A's as their final grades. (Auditing students do not receive either grades or credit.)

Professor Mensing taught the third and final semester of ***New Testament Greek*** (3 credit hours) from September to January, and the anticipated course in the ***Exegesis of Romans*** was dropped from the second semester because of an already heavy schedule. It will be offered, God-willing, this coming September along with the Third Year curriculum with the consent of the Committee on Theological Education. Professor Mensing also taught ***Church History I*** (3 credit hours), covering the record of God's providential preservation of the Means of Grace in outward Christendom from the Apostolic Era through the rise and decline of the "Absolute Papacy" to about 1500 A. D., and ***Principles of Teaching*** (2 credit hours), including ***Catechetics*** as the practical application of those principles. He also supervised the ***Practicum*** course (2 credit hours), which included for the first

time our students' participation in the liturgy of divine services. Student Mabe, still studying part-time this year, completed *Church History* and the *Principles of Teaching*, and thus closed the gap with the others, completing the second-year curriculum. All of the students received A's in all of the above course work.

All three matriculated students have maintained excellent grade-point averages, and they continue by the grace and with the help of God to demonstrate diligence, faithfulness, scholarship, and true humility before God and His Word as *workmen that need not to be ashamed* (II Timothy 2:15).



Seminarians Jason A. Mabe and David J. Mensing as liturgists on Sunday, May 1st.

Since the Conference continued this past year to underwrite the work of full-time students with a subsistence-level stipend each month, neither Dave nor Dan was compelled to hold down secular employment in addition to their studies; and this contributed in large measure to their success under the Lord's blessing. The Lord willing, Jason Mabe will soon be terminating his secular employment to join the others as a full-time student, so that, beginning with the Fall Semester, all of our men will be able to devote full-time to their studies, undistracted and unencumbered by secular work. For this blessing from the Lord of the Church through the generous, Gospel-motivated sacrifices of the members of our constituent congregations in this endeavor, both the students and their professors are truly grateful. May the Lord continue to work in our people both to will and to perform the doing of this much-needed support to His glory!

Especially regarding married students, it is worthy to note that understanding, dedicated, and committed Christian wives truly contribute to their success, cheerfully holding up their husbands' hands, lending a sympathetic ear to their frustrations, insulating them from as many distractions as possible, and supporting them in their desire for the pastoral office. All three of our students, Jason, Dave and Dan, have the blessing of such virtuous women as their mates —

Gina Mabe, Missy Mensing, and, as of July 9th, Megan Mensing respectively. We share with our students their gratitude for their exemplary Christian spouses — dedicated and committed Christian wives, faithful, patient, loving and steadfast to the glory of God, serving the Lord Christ to the praise of His grace (Colossians 3:24)! Moreover, their dear children, little lambs of the Savior, add to their abundant joy in the Lord every day (Psalm 127:3-5). Let us continue to remember these precious families in our prayers!

We earnestly beseech all of the brethren to bring the Seminary program of our Conference daily to the Throne of Grace, that the Lord bless abundantly the faithful labors of both of the professors and their students, that He endue them with energy and zeal, health and strength, with diligence and patience, with tenacity and endurance, that, at the conclusion of their training, our students will be properly equipped and “*able to teach others also*” (II Timothy 2:2) and, at the call of the Holy Spirit, be fit and prepared to undertake the ministry of the precious Word of God and the Holy Sacraments as shepherds of Christ’s flocks, “*that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in God*” (Psalm 78:6-7). We pray also that the members of our congregations Conference-wide, motivated by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of His Word, cheerfully and enthusiastically continue to support our joint work with their generous gifts and sacrifices, always abounding in the work of the Lord, that none of our precious flocks may ever lack a faithful shepherd’s leading.

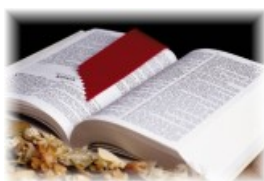


Seminarians David J. Mensing and Daniel P. Mensing after having served as liturgists in a divine service

— **Professor David T. Mensing**



Following a worship service at Peace, Oak Forest, pictured left to right: Professor David T. Mensing; Pastor Paul E. Bloedel, pastoral member of the *Committee on Theological Education*; Professor Robert J. Lietz; and Seminarians Jason A. Mabe, Daniel P. Mensing and David J. Mensing



Prayer for our Seminary and our Students

Merciful heavenly Father for Jesus' sake, because our need for future pastors is presently so critical among us that, if Thou shouldest call *even one* of Thy faithful ambassadors home to his eternal rest, no one is prepared to take his place, we humbly beseech Thee to spare us from the "*famine of hearing the words of the Lord*" of which Thou hast amply warned us through Thy prophet Amos (8:11-12). Thou hast already moved by Thy grace the hearts of three of our dear brethren with the earnest desire to become trained in our Seminary program for labor in Thy vineyard and one day to serve Thee in the Pastoral Office. Now we beseech Thee to move also **OUR** hearts by the love of our precious Savior to "*redeem the time*" in these last evil days with respect to the training of future pastors. Cause us to remember the seminary program of our beloved Conference in our daily prayers, to intercede on behalf of our professors and our students regarding their health, well-being, stamina and zeal, to encourage them in their work by word and deed, and to share generously of our substance to support them financially. Let not fleshly complacency on our part cause the opportunity and challenge which Thou hast graciously laid before us to be squandered and lost due to hesitancy to "*perform the doing of it;*" for Thou art able to make all grace abound toward us, that we, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound, as the fruit of our faith, to this, yea, to every good work, to Thy glory. Graciously move also other young men to desire the Pastoral Office; and grant that Thy precious Name may continue to be hallowed among us and among our children in the faithful preaching, teaching, and practice of Thy pure Word to the salvation of our souls. Hear us, for Thy great mercy's sake!

Amen.

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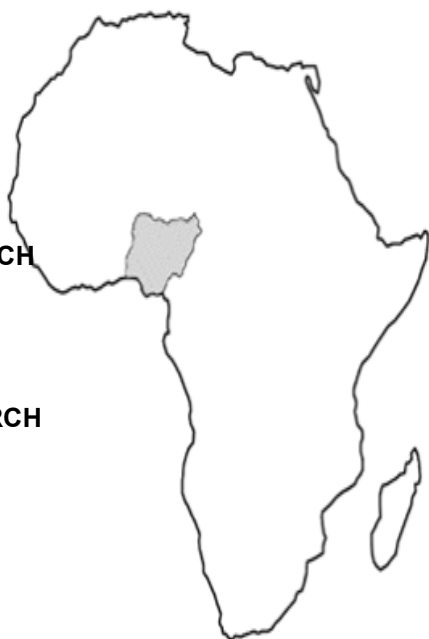
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E-mail: david.redlin@q.com

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E-mail: m.l.natterer@comcast.net

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The Rev. EDWARD J. WORLEY, Pastor

9658 – 54th Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98118

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E-mail: revworley@comcast.net

NOTE: Services are also held in **Victoria, British Columbia** on the 1st and 3rd Sundays. Please call the Pastor for current location.

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E-mail: revbloedel@gmail.com

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Worship Service 10:15 a.m.

The Rev. ROBERT J. LIETZ, Pastor

233 North Cuyler Avenue, Oak Park, IL 60302

(708) 386-4145

E-mail: robertjlietz@yahoo.com

Announcing...

The Sixtieth Annual Convention

of the

Concordia Lutheran Conference

June 24, 25 and 26, 2011

at

Peace Ev. Lutheran Church

Oak Forest, Illinois

The Rev. David T. Mensing, Pastor

with the

Plenary Pastoral Conference

on June 21 and 22

and the

Board of Directors Meeting on June 23

Convention Motto:

The Authority of Holy Scripture

Ephesians 2:20

The Friday Keynote Sermon is on Ephesians 2:20
The Sunday Convention Sermon is on John 8:31-32

Doctrinal Essays:

**I. The Authority of Scripture for the Establishment of
Doctrine**