

Sunday, May 11, 2008

Copyrights on Church-related Works

While I was on vacation, there was a lively little comment discussion at [Cyberbrethren](#) about copyright laws. Since the comment period is ended, and since I have my own blog, I'll add my two cents here.

Pastor McCain and those who left comments expressed one important purpose for copyright laws, and the reason we ought to abide by them. That is, the people who produce works under copyright should be certain that they will receive fair compensation for their efforts. Our society benefits as a whole by their work, so it is in our collective interest to assure creative people that their time and energies will support them and their families.

However, there is another, equally important element in the concept of copyrights. This element was largely left out of the discussion at Cyberbrethren, possibly because it does not apply to the immediate issue of contemporary works from CPH. Yet I think it *does* apply. The other important element is this: copyrights expire.

The expiration of copyrights is not an afterthought, but an essential part of the way they benefit society. You see, if they did not expire, then society would forever have to pay a premium to benefit from the copywritten works. How would you like to pay \$35 today for every copy of *Hamlet* you might need to use? Or how about \$3 per individual license of the lyrics to *A Mighty Fortress*? But thankfully, *Hamlet* is now in the public domain, like [the Triglotta](#). Some day, *Concordia* will also be in the public domain. At that time, its benefits to our society will continue, possibly even increasing due to its expanded availability.

A copyright may be used by those who hold it for more than producing a monetary income. It may also be used to ensure that the copywritten work and its derivative works continue to be available for use by the public as long as the copyright remains in effect. For example, see [Copyleft](#). This is a good thing, which is not to say that the traditional use of copyrights is necessarily a bad thing.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 20:22