

Thursday, February 22, 2007

Dvorak update

I've been suprised at the interest in the Dvorak article. So, just for the fun of it, I installed gtypist to run through a few exercises and see what my current typing speed is. I was expecting to see slower speeds than I was typing before the switch to the Dvorak layout.

It turns out that I'm typing faster than before. On the sentence exercises, my word-per-minute speeds were about evenly split between the high 90's and the 100's. That's about 10 words per minute faster than I used to type with QWERTY, though I do recall occasionally flirting with the 100-wpm mark on a good day. In the word variation exercises using the Dvorak keyboard this morning, I registered in high 70's, approaching 80 wpm. Of course, I'm also listening to Sunday's [Issues Etc.](#) at the same time, and it's a bit distracting from the concentration needed to do those exercises right.

But again, I don't count typing speed as a major benefit of switching to the Dvorak layout. For me, it's the ergonomics.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Technology at 10:54

Wednesday, February 21. 2007

May God bless your observance of this Ash Wednesday

One might wonder why Christians still observe the season of Lent, with its various traditions and rites in this age of casual informality and frequent irreverence. Lutherans have provided an answer to this question in the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* article XV, 38-39. This answer also explains why Lutherans have continued using the ancient liturgy. Though such things are not strictly required by God's Word, notice the strife that innovations of worship and seasonal observances bring to the Church! Likewise, note the great teaching value of such traditions for instructing worshippers in the faith!

(The "opponents" mentioned here are the servants of the Roman pope who were accusing Lutherans in 1530 of forsaking the Christian faith.)

Furthermore, we gladly keep the ancient traditions set up in the church because they are useful and promote tranquility, and we interpret them in the best possible way, by excluding the opinion that they justify. But our enemies falsely charge that we abolish good ordinances and church discipline. We can claim that the public liturgy in the church is more dignified among us than among the opponents. If anyone would look at it in the right way, we keep the ancient canons better than the opponents.

May the readers of this blog all have the opportunity to hear the salutary preaching of our Lord's cross this season, whether by sermon or by liturgy, to your great blessing!

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 15:16

Monday, February 19, 2007

Watch what we say about Missions and Evangelism

[Updated 2/25 to reflect a correction to the original source of this quotation.]

Julie Martinez of [The Fireside quotes](#) from an essay by Rev. Richard Bolland (Kansas City, MO), about a problem in the LCMS in which the material principle of Christian theology (see her post) is replaced with missions.

Like all Confessional pastors I know, I am passionate about the Great Commission! I love to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with those in the faith and those outside the faith as the Lord gives me opportunity. I simply do not know of a single Confessional pastor who would claim or act otherwise. However, what began with Resolution 1-02 at the 2001 synodical convention has initiated a process which is beginning to elevate Christian outreach into the status of a new Material Principle. Instead of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone being the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls, it is now become vogue to say that Christian outreach is the doctrine on which the Church stands or falls. That is simply unbiblical!

I realize/hope that this problem is not as prevalent in the ELS and WELS at the moment, but it would be foolish and possibly dishonest to claim that it doesn't exist. The fact is, I've been troubled at times by the reckless ways in which missions and evangelism have sometimes been promoted and urged upon our pastors and congregations as activities, over against the activity of securing and defending a biblically-accurate, confessional Lutheran expression of our doctrine. As noted at The Fireside, the very substance of evangelism *is* our expression of doctrine, making evangelism meaningless unless we first know what we will teach.

The objection might be raised that our present controversy over the doctrine of the ministry, or even the recent controversy about the efficacy of the words of institution in the Lord's Supper don't really change the message of our mission, and are not the message of evangelism. I would reply: Do you really mean that? Eventually, we hope that our evangelism prospects would enter the adult confirmation program at our churches. Do we really want to omit certain articles of faith from that instruction? I grant that we may not teach them all from the outset with systematic thoroughness, but we will certainly teach even the doctrine of the ministry when the opportunity comes! Beside that, if the doctrine of the ministry is not pertinent to the work of missions and evangelism, then why have we pretended that it's divisive of fellowship in the last year? That's either sectarian, hypocritical, or both.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 09:44

Friday, February 16, 2007

"Clarifying the Issues" and "Statement of the 44"

Consider this quotation I found in *Christian News* (which I don't generally read through, so I'm glad this caught my eye) from Rev. Daniel Preus about the "A Statement" or "Statement of the 44," which was issued in the LCMS of 1945:

Completely apart from the issues involved, the fact that a statement of faith and conviction which had been made and mailed to all LCMS clergy and was contrary to official church doctrine and practice was simply withdrawn from discussion without retraction was a very bright green light to those who wished to see Missouri embrace a more open fellowship practice. But the implications do not end there. When people were permitted to publish a position statement contrary to our doctrine, and were not disciplined or required to retract, it became apparent that people would be able to publish or set forth other statements contrary to our doctrine. To many who believed Missouri too rigid, the 44 became a heroic example of a new permissiveness which would slowly invade the synod and lead eventually to the deplorable positions held by the St. Louis Seminary faculty majority in the early 1970s.... The fact remains that these men were able to flaunt the doctrinal practice of the church body to which they belonged with no significant consequences...

(Quoted from the 1999 paper [The Lutheran Church -- Missouri Synod: Holiday from History.](#))

This is possibly an eye-opening revelation of the thought process behind the suspension of Pastor Rolf Preus from the ELS. It could be that the decision was based upon the notion that Preus' paper "Clarifying the Issues" was equivalent to the "Statement of the 44."

Let's consider the merit of that notion. Do you think that the quote from Daniel Preus above speaks to the suspension of his brother, Rolf Preus? I don't, and I'll give you a reason right off the bat. First, a few supporting observations.

Observation According to the Daniel Preus quote, the Statement of the 44 was aimed against a certain conservative rigidity of the synod, particularly on the doctrine of fellowship. Observation The paper "Clarifying the Issues" is not about fellowship, but about the doctrine of the ministry. Observation Daniel Preus points out that the LCMS president in 1945 failed to demand a full retraction of "A Statement." Observation In 2006, the ELS president would accept nothing short of a full retraction of "Clarifying the Issues." Observation Since the issue advanced in the Statement of the 44 was lax fellowship, the LCMS president's failure to put that very same doctrine into practice was a virtual capitulation to "A Statement." Observation However, "Clarifying the Issues," by contrast, did not advocate laxity of any kind, but instead noted an unacceptable doctrinal laxity on the part of a synodical doctrinal statement. Conclusion from the foregoing In several ways, the positions in 2006 were reversed from the positions of 1945. The difference is that Pastor Preus did not soften his position as the LCMS president had done. Another conclusion from the foregoing Furthermore, a demand from the president to retract "Clarifying the Issues" was not needed in 2006 to avoid a capitulation to its position (as happened in 1945), because it did not advocate a permissive doctrine of fellowship. It could have remained on the table as raising some serious issues for public consideration, requiring close scrutiny and defense.

I wasn't around in 1945. My grandfathers were still on their way back from the war. So maybe I don't know what I'm writing about. If that's the case, then please educate me.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Synod at 20:06

Reasons for Refusing Communion

There has been some confusion lately about "communion fellowship." What is meant by that term? Generally speaking, it means that people are willing to commune (that is, receive the Lord's Supper) with each other. Churches in communion fellowship are willing to encourage their members to receive the Lord's Supper at the other church.

Communing together is an expression of doctrinal unity, because it's a joint act of confessing the death of Jesus Christ, with all that it means.

However, there are times when a pastor might ask a member of his church to refrain from communing, and if the member disregards the request, the pastor might not give the body and blood of Christ to that person to eat and drink. Why ever might this happen? Because the pastor is especially charged by God with the care of that person's soul, and when someone is impenitent about a particular sin, then receiving the Lord's Supper is an act of harmful hypocrisy, which can only contribute to the person's judgment and eventual damnation. That's serious.

When a pastor takes that route, does it mean he's breaking church fellowship with the individual? No. Rather, he's looking out for the person's spiritual welfare, though it's seldom taken that way.

What if the person is in the flock (congregation) of another pastor? In that case, the other pastor has the responsibility. Pastors only have responsibility for their own flocks. For them to take this responsibility for a different flock would be contrary to their call and the call of the other flock's pastor.

What about the synod? I don't have all the answers in that case, because synod is not "church" to the same qualitative degree as the local congregations, since synod, unlike congregations, does not exist for the regular, full administration of God's Word and sacraments. Yet synod does have a somewhat churchly character due to the fact that it is composed of certain joint churchly activities of its congregations, which they accomplish in coordination with each other. Therefore some have stated (perhaps too strongly and simplistically) that synod *is* church, just as congregations *are* church. Presently, there is much confusion and disagreement about this, in spite of our synod having a (somewhat controversial) adopted statement on the church.

It remains certain that pastors only have authority to refuse the Lord's Supper at the altars of their own congregations. It also remains certain that pastors and Christians in general are free *not* to commune at altars outside their own congregations. That much is still certain.

It's also certain from the Lutheran Confessions that the synod, like individual congregations and pastors, does not have authority to interfere with the ministry in one of its congregations by bypassing the pastor whom God called to serve there. However, when no pastor exists in a certain congregation, it must take the recommendation of the synod into account when it extends a call to a new pastor.

Can one pastor or congregation of the synod declare itself to be outside the church fellowship of the synod? Yes. That automatically means that they also leave the synod. But can he or his congregation declare itself to be outside the church fellowship of *part* of the synod, while remaining in the church fellowship of the rest? No. Fellowship is based upon God's Word, and it does not allow contrary interpretations. So much for church fellowship, which is one of the reasons people might choose *not* to commune with each other.

How about the other reason, mentioned earlier: unrepentant sin? Can one pastor or congregation refuse communion to another pastor, a synod official, or church members of the synod, for the reason that they are obviously impenitent about some well-known, public sin? I ask: why not? In fact, it would seem that in such a case, communing (with) the impenitent person would be the height of unloving hypocrisy and a great offense against Christ. Yet that decision is only pertinent if and when the impenitent person tries to receive the Lord's Supper at the church that would refuse it. If he communes at a different church, then the matter must be left with the pastor of that flock, because of his call.

Likewise, is it wrong for a pastor or the members of one church to abstain from communing at the altar of another church in the same synod, for the reason that a well-known, impenitent sinner is communing at the same altar, at the same time? Again, I ask: why not? Especially in the case that some of the fellow communicants would interpret the act of communing together as validation for the individual's impenitence!

So you see, there can be a valid distinction between the term "communion fellowship" and the term "church fellowship." Sometimes communion fellowship *is* church fellowship, or an expression thereof, but other times it is not. Instead of church fellowship, it can be an expression of the binding key. "The Keys" is not synonymous with "church fellowship," but either one can have an influence on "communion fellowship."

I'd love to have readers' thoughts on this topic. Do you see things the way I do? If not, please explain. I realize that those who disagree with me may be more inclined to post their comments, so let me encourage *everyone* to comment.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 15:28

The Cost of Converting to the Dvorak Keyboard Layout

I use the [Dvorak keyboard layout](#). It's an alternative arrangement of the keys on the keyboard for better ergonomics. Most, if not all, computers can accommodate this layout through software drivers. There is quite a following of [advocacy](#) for the Dvorak layout, as well as [detractors and debunkers](#).

I don't claim that the QWERTY layout is bad. It was designed in the 1800's, and was only one of several layouts used in mechanical typewriters, optimized for the smooth operation of those machines. Later, it won the popularity contest and became the only game in town. I used to type up to 100 wpm in QWERTY, usually in the 80's when I bothered to check. It got me a job while at seminary, and helped with many other things. I learned to touch type QWERTY by forcing myself to do it right, beginning on an old 286 machine. Most of my practice was typing the papers of fellow students for money. (They had already been written. But once I got to choose the title myself. "Henry VIII: Can't Get No Satisfaction, or Satisfaction Guaranteed?" Seriously.)

I made the switch to Dvorak well after I made the switch to [Linux](#). I haven't regretted either one, though there is a price for each. The price for Linux is not in dollars, but in willingness to learn. Learning fits my personality, so Linux and I have been inseparable. Dvorak also requires a willingness to learn. In this case, it's willingness to re-learn, essentially retraining one's reflexes so that when I think "toad" the proper fingers jump into action. Why did I switch? Not to type faster. Who really wants to type faster than 80 wpm, unless you're taking dictation in the form of a speech or transcribing something? No, I did it for the ergonomics. I found that my carpal tunnels and my finger joints were aching, and not typing was not an option. So I figured out how to configure my OS (and later Windows and MacOS), and away I went. Initially, the learning was somewhat hampered by the fact that my cheap keyboard still showed the QWERTY graphics. The easiest reference I had was an on-screen diagram. If you try learning Dvorak, I'd recommend buying an IBM model M keyboard and rearranging your keycaps. It's the best keyboard ever made, anyway. The one I'm typing on now was made in 1984, and still works like new. That's right: 1984.

It probably took me about 2-3 months before I was fully comfortable with my Dvorak performance. The adjustment was completely self-paced, with very few exercises. I found a typing tutor program that included Dvorak, and used it for maybe 30-45 minutes per week, tops. It was exciting to see my speed and accuracy increase. Soon I couldn't sit down and touch type on a QWERTY keyboard any more. Exciting, but that brings me to my main point: the cost of switching. (I'd gladly pay it again.)

So now I can't touch type on QWERTY keyboards, so when I use a strange computer, I'm either back to hunt and peck, or I reconfigure the keyboard temporarily. The latter is usually possible, and works well. Then, I have to remember to reset the keyboard when I'm done. Otherwise, someone else becomes frustrated. When I bought a keyboard for my Sony Clie, it only came with QWERTY drivers. So I had to open the driver

program in my hex editor and rearrange the key codes until it was right. That actually worked rather well! But it illustrates the problem: I now type Dvorak in a QWERTY world. It must be like being left-handed. There are no Dvorak keyboards for sale. It's just not an economic possibility. This isn't because Dvorak is inferior, but because QWERTY simply dominates everything. (The [fastest typer in the world](#) uses Dvorak!) It takes real training to touch type, and training is expensive. Consider that the Air Force values its pilots higher than their million-dollar airplanes. It's not just because the Air Force is old-fashioned, and believes in the intrinsic value of human life. No, Mabel, it's the training. No wonder companies won't buy Dvorak keyboards.

The cost of living in a QWERTY world is mostly a nuisance. The real problem arises when I have to use my computer's CMOS or another hardware program that lives below my operating system. At that point, I need a QWERTY reference keyboard, because my fingers just don't remember where those letters used to be! That's also why it would be *wonderful* to find an affordable, high-quality Dvorak keyboard supported in the hardware itself instead of the OS driver. I understand that Apple actually made something like that once. Would that it could happen again!

Why am I willing to pay this cost? Because for me the ergonomics actually *are* better. I had been having some carpal tunnel and joint pain, but with the Dvorak layout, the stresses are all different. In fact, they're better overall than with QWERTY.

Should you make the switch? Only if you're willing to pay the cost. It's not terrible, but it does take some perseverance. Is that still in the American vocabulary? Maybe. I won't say that you'll type any faster than before, though you might. However, I will say that you will find typing *easier* than before.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Technology at 15:28

Thursday, February 8, 2007

Old hardware, MTU, and Google

Yesterday morning our Internet connection became flaky, then stopped. I spent some time over lunch getting it working again. It was a bit frustrating, and the closest I can figure is that it had something to do with the old hardware I use for everything. This web server is running on an AMD K6, 333Mhz machine. Yeah. But it does OK, almost all the time. With all that this machine does, which is much more than serving a blog site, I hardly ever have to reboot it. Linux tends to be that way. When problems arise, they more often than not are caused by flaky hardware. I've been blessed to have few such problems with this machine.

How liberating it is to be using Linux. Sure, there are still problems and challenges; there always are problems, even with Apple products. But at least with Linux (as opposed, especially, to Windows), I didn't pay good money to buy my problems. And beside that, there are fewer problems and more possibilities.

Enough about that. It seemed that my DSL peer wasn't responding to my pppoe configuration requests. I think rather that my NIC was somehow munging the requests or not hearing the responses. In this case, I did a reboot to reinitialize the NIC (I maybe could have just reloaded its kernel driver module, but that can be tricky when performing these things via SSH to a headless machine), and all was well.

Except... I had tried eliminating the MTU setting on my ppp and pppoe daemons, to see if it would allow me to get pppoe config responses from the peer. I hadn't restored the original setting. So when the network came back online, there was some really odd behavior. Until I finally remembered the MTU change, it was quite frustrating. MTU stands, I think, for Maximum Transmission Unit, which is a kind of throttle on the size of data packets that come in through the DSL link. It's useful and even necessary when those data packets have to carry some extra information just to make part of the system work properly.

My home network is masqueraded through this machine. (It's a bit more complicated, but the rest is not pertinent.) That means this machine handles all Internet traffic for the computers at home. The weird thing was that most web sites wouldn't fully load. The browser would make the initial connection, and then sit there waiting for more data. However, Google's web sites worked! How's that for strange? Apparently, Google's web servers are all configured to use a smaller MTU than most of the Internet. Other kinds of traffic worked, too, such as SSH to various servers on the web. Masquerading was working (though I often wondered how well). But apparently those problem web sites were sending data packets too large for our masquerading setup to handle, so the return packets weren't making it through.

I was up too late trying to get things working, and finally shut everything down. I'm sorry if having the Chicken offline caused any problems. But maybe my little experience here will help someone, or maybe I'll remember it for next time!

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Technology at 11:32

The Teacher of Conscience

We close this chapter with Luther's oft-repeated admonition never to substitute a human interpretation for the "text," i.e., for the words of Scripture themselves. He says: "With the text and from the foundation of the Holy Scriptures I have silenced and slain all my opponents. For whoever is well founded and practiced in the text will become a good and fine theologian, since a passage, or text, from the Bible has more weight than many commentators and glosses, which are not strong and round and do not help in the controversy." (Erl. 57, p. 7) Again: "When the fathers teach anything, they do

not trust their teaching, fearing it to be too obscure and uncertain, but they go to the Scriptures and take a clear passage out of it to shed light on their teaching. How should they have overcome the heretics if they had fought with their own glosses? They would have been regarded as fools and madmen; but when they brought forward clear texts which needed no glosses, so that reason was brought into captivity, the evil spirit himself with all his heresies was completely routed." (St. L. XVIII: 1293.) And so Luther further admonishes: "It must be the prime concern of a theologian to be well versed in the text, a *bonus textualis*, as it is called" (St. L. V:456). He complains about the many "commentaries and books," through which "the dear Bible is being buried and covered up so that no one takes note of the text." He refers to his own experience: "When I was young, I familiarized myself with the Bible, read it often, and became well acquainted with the text; so well acquainted that I knew where every passage that was mentioned was to be found; thus I became a *good textualis*. Not till then did I read the commentators. But finally I had to disregard them all and put them away because the use of them did not satisfy my conscience, and I had to take my stand again on the Bible; for it is much better to see with your own eyes than with another's." (St. L. XXII:54 f.) Thus Luther and his conscience stood on the bare text of Scripture, excluding all human interpretation. *Pieper's Dogmatics, volume 1, p. 366-367.*

One of the troubling things about some doctrinal statements -- indeed, even some with official standing in the ELS -- is when they cite scripture passages that don't quite demonstrate the doctrinal point. It's as though we are building our doctrinal expressions upon the glosses or commentaries of such passages, and then citing only the passages themselves, as though they obviously teach what was in the gloss. But often, they don't.

Can I in good conscience claim that scripture teaches the perpetual virginity of Mary? Scripture doesn't necessarily contradict that pious belief. But what if I made such a claim and cited Isaiah 7:14? It doesn't quite prove the claim, does it? That's what I'm talking about. The citation, by its very presence, claims scriptural support. But when you go look it up, something's still missing. In fact, you could on that basis say that such a teaching is *unscriptural*.

Luther was wise to let his conscience be trained only by the Bible itself. Otherwise we run the risk of erring gravely with a clear conscience. That would still be sin, and all the more tragic.

To accept a commentary or interpretation as the basis for an article of faith, instead of what the scriptural passage obviously says on its own, could also become a trap into what Jesus described as "teaching as doctrines the commandments of men." Every Christian should be wary of this, not just pastors or teachers of the church.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in PMW at 11:29

Where does fellowship come from?

Unlike some other posts, this one is short, because I'm inviting your responses. Pastor Rolf Preus, in his paper [The Word of God and the Church](#), states, "Fellowship does not come from agreeing with each other, but from agreeing with God."

True? False? It seems like a "watershed" sort of statement. (For the record, I believe it's true.)

But... but... but how do you know what God teaches? Again, I invite your responses. Be forewarned: email responses to this will be considered fair game for posting here.

Added February 9

Have a look at [the quote](#) over at [ÄŹÄ'ÄŹÄ'ÄŹÄ+ÄŹÄ, ÄŹÄ.ÄŹÄ°ÄŹÄ](#). from Walther's Law and Gospel. I think it relates closely to the present question about the source of fellowship. Do you agree? Here's an excerpt:

When a theologian is asked to yield and make concessions in order that peace may at last be established in the Church, but refuses to do so even in a single point of doctrine, such an action looks to human reason like intolerable stubbornness, yea, like downright malice. That is the reason why such theologians are loved and praised by few men during their lifetime. Most men rather revile them as disturbers of the peace, yea, as destroyers of the kingdom of God . They are regarded as men worthy of contempt. But in the end it becomes manifest that this very determined, inexorable tenacity in clinging to the pure teaching of the divine Word by no means tears down the Church; on the contrary, it is just this which, in the midst of greatest dissension, builds up the Church and ultimately brings about genuine peace. Therefore, woe to the Church which has no men of this stripe, men who stand as watchmen on the walls of Zion, sound the alarm whenever a foe threatens to rush the walls, and rally to the banner of Jesus Christ for a holy war!

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 11:29