

Sunday, April 20, 2008

Why Libronix isn't there... yet.

If you're the sort of person who looks for the most efficient and satisfying ways to get the job done, regardless of the conventional wisdom, then read on. If you're the sort of person who conforms to the expectations of others, and believes that the most popular or the most widely adopted way of doing something is always the *best* way to do it, then you may as well stop reading now.

I am not one of the latter types. Your way of doing things might work fine, but it won't necessarily work best for me. I want the freedom to work my way.

That's why I like the Unix environment, and why I use Linux for just about everything. It fits me. I have the freedom to do things in the ways that work best.

For about ten years now, give or take, I've been using a collection of utilities and systems that provide the following important features:

High quality desktop publishing with a high degree of automation. I'm not talking word processors here.

An extremely efficient and powerful editing environment in which I rarely have to move my hands away from the home row of the keyboard, even when executing complex procedures using multiple programs, like importing some extracted Bible verses, or search results.

Independent programs where each does a specific task in a predictable and efficient manner, which can be interconnected easily to perform complex functions, even from the comfort of my editing environment.

Efficient archival of important changes to my work, so that mistakes can be reversed, old versions found, etc.

Network access to all of this work, so that I can use the system equally well here at my primary computing location, or anywhere I have connectivity.

Freedom and access to adjust the way I work in any way that I might see fit. (This may be the most important feature.)

The ability to expand and augment the system with tools of my own creation.

I enjoy these and other important features in my daily work, because I use [Linux](#) ([Debian](#) GNU/Linux, to be precise), [Vim](#), [LaTeX](#), [Python](#), [Git](#), [SSH](#), [Mutt](#), [Gimp](#), and a many other programs and projects, representing many thousands of programmer's hours. I also use programs I've written too, though they're not so famous.

If you know what [Libronix](#) is and does, you probably already know where it falls short in my view. The problem is not that I want to rip off lots of copyright holders and distribute their work indiscriminately by

means of the Internet. The problem is that I want to *use* those copywritten works fairly, yet without being hamstrung by a computing environment that (a) doesn't give me the freedom and power I need, and (b) charges me a lot of money for my loss of freedom, power, and stability, too.

Unfortunately, the Windows environment is automatically disqualified. (Case in point: DRM is supposed to be a step forward for Vista. It's actually a big step backward for someone like me.) The constant upgrade cycle alone is too expensive, though I'm sure MS shareholders think it's great. I'm probably one of them, come to think of it.

I've enjoyed using the Macintosh environment, mostly because I can use the same Unix tools that work together so efficiently. The next time I have \$2k I don't know what else to do with, I might just drop it [on a Mac](#). Macs are just priced out of my league, and they have an expensive upgrade cycle of their own.

As for Libronix, I understand the philosophy: control. It's like the Matrix. All those snazzy features: searches, hyperlinks, notes, etc. --- it's all about control. The software is written that way in the hope that you never want to leave it. The proof of this is that you can't export works from the digital library. Oh, you can export tiny bits and pieces, but not whole works. So just leave Libronix running *all the time*, and you'll always have access to your digital library. Do you need to search? Just enter the Libronix application. Do you need to extract something? Switch over to the mighty Libronix app. It's your go-to guy for *everything* related to your digital library.

I'm sure the approach works. It's one way to do it. But sometimes it doesn't work. (It locked up on me more than once when running it in Windows 98 under VMWare.) It also takes a while to load and run. It also interfaces only with whatever editing environments the Libronix designers anticipate, and that their marketing model will support. In case you haven't guessed, that doesn't include Vim. It also can't be used remotely over SSH. And so on and so forth. Meanwhile, I'd like to [grep](#) through a UTF-8 file of [Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions](#) and get the results in my text editor, for possible use in my next Bible study. Something wrong with that?

Libronix probably works great as a money-maker for Logos, though I'm sure that's not their (only) purpose in producing it. Libronix probably does a good job of protecting the interests of copyright holders. It probably seems great to the great herds of computer users who don't care to look for "a better way to do it." But Libronix doesn't work for me.

So if you are a copyright holder wishing to publish your work digitally, consider those of us who don't appreciate being locked in to one vendor, even a vendor with good intentions. Frankly, I value freedom. I'll respect your copyright, but if you won't publish your work in a way that I can use it, then your hands are tied. Wouldn't you prefer that your work gets used?

And if you work for Logos, please consider a release for Linux that includes quick access to the digital library from the shell. I'd be happy to work with you on it.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Technology at 18:05

Friday, April 18, 2008

Dissecting the 6th Improvement

I was wrong -- at least partly -- in my understanding of what was happening where the PMW says "This public use of the keys is the Public Ministry of the Word," at the beginning of the second section.

(You might wonder why I waited so long to write this. Well, I've been busy with [other things](#). Yes, even [pastors who write on blogs](#) have other priorities. I apologize if my timing has made you impatient.)

I had suggested to replace it with the wording "The Lord Jesus established the Public Ministry of the Word for the public administration of the Office of the Keys." That was because I thought the PMW was stating scriptural truth here, and that's where I was wrong.

It's not stating scriptural truth here. It's not even making the attempt. That's not to say that it's being unscriptural. Instead, it's being *ascriptural*. In other words, this sentence is orthogonal to the Word of God. Neither has any bearing upon the other.

You may think that's a risky and bold statement to make. Not really. You see, the sentence "This public use of the keys is the Public Ministry of the Word" is really not a statement of doctrine at all. It's a definition for a term that does not occur in scripture.

Do you remember algebra and geometry, where you had to show something step by step? It was also useful in some science classes, too. At the beginning, you might have had something like this:

Given that X is the product of A^2 and B , ...

Of course, that doesn't mean that X is *always* whatever it says. It only applies in the context of the proof or problem. It's a provisional definition of X .

In this sentence of the PMW, we also have a provisional definition. One might suppose that it's a provisional definition of the subject, "this public use of the keys," but it's not. You see, that was already defined in section I. This sentence is a provisional definition of the predicate nominative, "the Public Ministry of the Word." It's not really trying to say anything. It was my mistake to think it was.

So we see that this part of the PMW needs more work than I originally thought. Not because there's anything wrong with defining our terms. In fact, a repeated criticism of this very PMW document has been that it fails to define many of its terms, so we should be (and I am) happy to have discovered a definition. No, the problem is that this definition doesn't look like a definition. It looks like it's trying to state some kind of biblical doctrine.

So, assuming we want such a definition, I have a new suggested replacement for this sentence:

In this document, the term "The Public Ministry of the Word" refers to the public administration of the keys.

On the other hand, this sounds pretty abstract, and it might not be such a good idea to use an abstraction as the basic foundation of the public office that we find concretely instituted by Christ. It may introduce unnecessary confusion on the question of what, exactly, Christ instituted. I'll have to ponder this some more,

but I think Adolph Hoenecke's dogmatics may be helpful, because he writes some about the ministry considered abstractly versus the ministry considered concretely. It's worth another read.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in PMW at 22:01

Saturday, April 5, 2008

Blurb on the Council of Nicea

There's a reasonably good summary on the Council of Nicea [at LiveScience](#). The writer shows small appreciation for the implications of Arianism's divergence from orthodoxy, but in such a short piece, there's hardly room for all that anyway. The bit about the Son being of the same substance doesn't really do justice to the earlier part of the [Nicene Creed's](#) second article: "...God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God; begotten, not made..."

It is worth noting that from a secular-historical point of view, Arians were Christians, and thus the Christian Church at the time was possibly more Arian than orthodox, if counted democratically. From a theological point of view, however, Christians are defined by doctrine, not by labels alone. This might be hard for some of our contemporaries to grasp, but it has been the Christian approach from the Beginning. Therefore, the Arians were not Christians, just as their present-day counterparts (Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and the like) are not Christians.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Doctrine at 22:32

A 6th Improvement for the PMW

The second section is entitled "The Public Ministry of the Word." It's a good title, especially understood in coordination with Article V of the Augsburg Confession:

That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, 2] the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear 3] the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.
[Triglotta translation]

We're not dealing with church-related offices that do not administer the Gospel or the Sacraments. When we call it "the Public Ministry of the Word," we're also including the Sacraments as a necessary manifestation of the Word; as Augustine called them, "a visible Word" (Apology XIII, paragraph 5).

This sixth suggested improvement to the PMW is a small one. Part II begins:

This public use of the keys is the Public Ministry of the Word. "That we may obtain this faith, the office of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted" (AC V).

While starting Part II with the word "This" makes Part I a prerequisite for Part II, this is not necessary, and may not be desirable. The effect is that Part II can't really be cited on its own, without Part I. What's more, it doesn't really explain what AC V means by the word "instituted," instead just stating the effect of that institution. It would make more sense, I think, to say exactly what we mean by that institution, something like this:

The Lord Jesus established the Public Ministry of the Word for the public administration of the Office of the Keys. "That we may obtain this faith, the office of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted" (Augsburg Confession, V).

Note that the translation of the Augsburg Confession here differs a little from that of the *Concordia Triglotta*. I had thought that the PMW was following the translation in the *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, but it's not. I don't think it makes a serious difference, but does anyone know where this translation came from?

Note also that the words "office" and "ministry" are interchangeable. Though they both can have more than one sense, even that variety tends to overlap. The difference is that "ministry" connotes service, while "office" connotes representative responsibility. In this case the office-holder primarily represents God, whose Word and Sacraments are administered, and he primarily serves others, in keeping with Jesus' example on the night He was betrayed.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in PMW at 12:25

Two Years and Counting: Lessons (Re-)Learned

So it's been two years since the Plucked Chicken hatched. Here are a few things I've learned, especially from readers of the PC with their reactions and responses.

Covering a wider spectrum of topics attracts more visitors. So if I could only make the time for posting on more of the things and thoughts that happen each day, the PC might be read more than it is.

Persistence helps, but logic does not always prevail. You might think it should, but remember, we're dealing with human beings here.

People will respect others for sticking to their principles, but it can take a long time before they recognize it. In the meantime, things can be unpleasant.

You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar. Other things can draw flies too.

The quick and practical way is politics. That is the dark side. Matters of truth and virtue are sometimes impractical, but that does not mean they are bad.

There is a difference (though it is hard to express) between merely sticking to one's principles and also publicly advocating them. The latter is risky for everyone, because Christians are sinners, too. However, God would have us take such risks, so that His Word may prevail.

People who leave comments don't necessarily want a response to their comments. They may especially not want a response when I take issue with something they've written. I would encourage them to respond at length on their own blog. Really.

When someone happens to write what others are thinking, the others are thankful and supportive. That does not mean they are ready to write publicly too.

A lone voice in the wilderness is much better than no voice at all.

An effective way to prevail over a lone voice in the wilderness is to ignore it. However, those with truth and virtue on their side do not need such a strategy.

Can you think of other lessons learned these last years? Do you think I'm full of something here? Do you want to suggest other possible topics? Feel free to contribute your thoughts.

Posted by Jesse Jacobsen in Life at 12:25