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## The Y Factor

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Since God was able to get creation (not a small job) finished in six days, why do Christians need seven days to get their work done?

I posed a question to the ACL listserv: If your library is open on Sunday, why? My question was meant to elicit reasons, or justifications, from those who choose to open on Sunday. A number of thoughtful responses returned. It is clear that many librarians struggle with this issue, both on a personal and professional level. Some have solved the problem to their satisfaction; others have assumed a pragmatic stance—they do what they have to do.

Has God spoken on the issue of Sunday (or Sabbath) work? Is there a “right” way, or does it really not matter? I feel like I am stepping into a minefield by addressing the issue. That rarely stops me, however, and I think there is something to be learned by many of us (I have already found it a fascinating study). So, as Jackie Gleason used to say: Away we go!

Before I tackle the forest, I first want to clear some underbrush. I do not believe that our positions on the Sabbath represent one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. God will send no one to Hell because he/she took the “wrong” position on this issue. Saying that is dangerous, because I may have immediately offended someone who believes that keeping the Sabbath is a central issue. I have been around long enough to learn that one person’s non-essential doctrine is another’s essential one, and the first point of difference between two debaters may have nothing to do with the content of the doctrine; instead it may focus upon the importance, or non-importance, of a certain doctrine. I put the matter of the Sabbath in the non-essential category. Knowing my position may help you understand

what I am about to say.

A second piece of underbrush concerns the time of the Sabbath. Is it Saturday or Sunday? Is it sundown to sundown, or is it midnight to midnight? My short answer is: I don’t really think

*If your library is open on Sunday, why?*

it matters, although most people in our society think of Sunday when they think of the

Sabbath, and they think in terms of whole days (midnight to midnight) if they think of it at all. The Old Testament says that God rested on the seventh day. The Jews observed Saturday as the seventh day. In the New Testament, the pattern of the church was to meet on the first day, celebrating Christ’s resurrection as the Lord’s Day. Another reason for meeting on Sunday was a very practical one—since the church grew from Jewish roots, the synagogue was already busy on Saturday! An intriguing question arises from the fact that for most of us in this society, the first day of the workweek is Monday. Is Sunday then the Sabbath because it is our seventh day from Monday? Personally, I believe that the day various Christian groups observe as the Sabbath should not be a matter of division. Since we are all seeking to honor and obey God, let Him judge our hearts rather than have us judging each other.

Regardless of when we observe it, why should we observe it at all? Is the Sabbath (or Sunday) a day for idleness and rest? Is it a day for going to church? Is it a day for doing not-work, or good things? Since most of us have a standard five-day workweek, can it be spread out over two days? Interesting questions. What light does Scripture shed on the dilemma? As I read the Old Testament, the following concepts emerge from its pages: 1) the Sabbath transcends the Law, and 2) the Sabbath has two meanings.

The Sabbath is sometimes thought of only in terms of the Law, and therefore becomes a legal prescription. This way of thinking was rampant when Jesus walked the face of the earth, and it still occurs. It is true that the instruction to keep the Sabbath holy is contained within the Ten Commandments, but Sabbath-keeping predates the giving of the Law. It is useful to note that during the wilderness wanderings of Israel, the people were instructed by God to gather enough manna on the sixth day to cover both the sixth and seventh days. On the seventh day, there was no manna to gather. I believe this suggests that the principle of the Sabbath is larger than the Law subsequently given to Israel, and that is one indication that the Sabbath is a relevant concept for us today.

It is interesting to observe that two different reasons are given in Scripture for observing the Sabbath. Exodus 20 harks back to the creative activity of God “in the beginning.” Israel is instructed to rest on the seventh day because that is what God did. In the second giving of the Law (Deuteronomy 5), however, Israel is commanded to observe the Sabbath because doing so is a sign of their redemption from Egypt. To me this suggests that we need to think of the Sabbath at two levels. One purpose of the Sabbath is focused on physical realities; the other, on spiritual.

At the physical level, God’s creation week modeled for mankind the proper rhythm of working and resting for our bodies. God did not really need to rest, but by choosing to work six days and rest on the seventh, He demonstrated to mankind the proper pattern for caring for the human mind and body—the mind and body, don’t forget, that He had created and therefore understood thoroughly. Even as automobile manufacturers recommend a mainte-

nance schedule for the cars they build, God recommends a maintenance schedule for the people He has created. Jesus, when He stated that the Sabbath was made for man, was quite possibly alluding to this physical purpose for the commandment. If this line of reasoning is accepted, then the need for human rest continues to exist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Keeping the Sabbath for physical refreshment has never been repealed.

Conversely, the spiritual nature of Sabbath-keeping has changed. Israel was asked to look back at their redemption from Egypt and celebrate the event

on the Sabbath. The importance of this “remembering” is continually stressed in the Old Testament. The church in the New Testament, however, is not asked to remember its redemption from Egypt. Instead, the event we are asked to remember during the Lord’s Supper is Christ’s death on the cross. Why has the object of remembering changed? Because at the cross, redemption for all mankind was attained—a redemption that was only prefigured in the Exodus.

Colossians 2:13-17 calls the Sabbath “a shadow of the things that were to come.” Christ is the reality toward which the shadow (redemption

from Egypt) of the spiritual Sabbath pointed. Further, in Hebrews 4, the biblical author argues that the message of redemption that the Sabbath signifies must be combined with faith—even as the redemptive work of Christ must be appropriated by faith if we are to receive the Sabbath-rest that is available. Jesus Christ has worked and sits by the Father; therefore, we can rest in (and not work for) the salvation that He provides.

What does all of this mean for us as librarians? Stay tuned for the next column.

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*(LIBRARIANS ACROSS THE SEAS continued from page 21.)*

These resources and skills are a result of the profound and radical advances made by Melvil Dewey between 1875 and 1880. These advances have put a very valuable resource in the hands of ACL and its members. They must be and are being utilized overseas by ACL and its members, as they are on the North American continent, and in the U.K. They are an integral part of education, as now conceived.

12. We may briefly note other Christian library work. TCL relates that done in England by the Librarian’s Christian Fellowship of Great Britain. Comparing ACL and LCF, there are similarities and differences. The Evangelical Literature Trust organization supplies books in English, French, and Spanish to Third World seminary libraries. On the mission fields, we see librarians at work in mission schools. Librarians with Wycliffe Bible Translators have unique work problems.

### CONCLUSION

The above is clearly an orientation to its topic, the ACL and missions, written for non-librarians. This highly condensed summary is all that is possible here. Detailed information may be found in ACL publications, and contacts with the ACL.

It is also clear that much ACL work

with missions is with Bible colleges, Bible institutes, and seminaries. This is obviously not “unreached people” work. If this work is successful, it will bring about parity in resources, accessibility, and professionalism. What will be the effect of alternate ethnic and national outlooks? Much of mission and education work is still affected by North American outlooks, many of which are not yet conscious. Will the changes be acceptable to North American believers? Note that a complete article on libraries and missions would also treat lower school, literacy, and literature distribution work.

This is an age of rapid and profound change in literature production and distribution. Not since the invention of writing and the printing press has civilization seen changes such as these. I refer to electronic means such as “desktop publishing” and full text transmission by Internet and satellite. The ACL is now working on Internet interactions and CD-ROM distribution. The possibilities may be seen in BJ LINC Live Interactive Network Classroom at Bob Jones University. With satellite transmission, and interactive telephone links, BJ LINC is attempting to bring a wide range of high school subjects to Christian schools. The application to missions schools is immediately obvious, as is that to missionary families in remote location.

A certain obvious problem troubles this writer in researching this article. This is the lack of certain subject headings in the Library of Congress Subject Headings, and Sears Subject Headings. This reduces the researcher to scanning a large number of periodicals and books, one at a time, for relevant materials. This laborious process is exactly what subject headings and indexing are intended to bypass. CPI uses a few fabricated headings and many adapted headings. Some suggestions may include, “Libraries, Missions,” “Librarians and Missions,” “Missions, Libraries,” “Missions and Librarians,” and “Mission Libraries.” There is a sufficiently large amount of material to justify their use.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Librarian*. (Most of the data is derived from this periodical, especially the 25th year issue, May 1982.)

<sup>2</sup> Kayser, John. “How a Bible Institute Imparts Missionary Vision.” *EMQ* 21:406-8 Oct 1985.

<sup>3</sup> *ACL 1997 Membership Handbook*, 21-2.