



Volume 44 | Issue 2

Article 5

2001

The Y Factor

J. Ray Doerksen
Seattle Pacific University

The Christian Librarian is the official publication of the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL). To learn more about ACL and its products and services please visit [//www.acl.org/](http://www.acl.org/)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl>

 Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Doerksen, J. Ray (2001) "The Y Factor," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 44: Iss. 2, Article 5.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1850>

This General Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *The Christian Librarian* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolfe@georgefox.edu.

In my last column, I discussed the Sabbath in terms of its personal, physical and spiritual dimensions. In this column I want to examine its implications for corporate institutions such as Christian colleges and universities—and the libraries that serve them.

As you remember, there is physical significance—as well as spiritual—to the concept of Sabbath. God instituted a rhythm of work and rest. Probably all of us agree that periodic rest is a good thing for us as human beings. Does the same principle apply to corporate institutions, or does the fact that people only work five or six days in a seven-day institution justify continual operation? A number of librarians in the ACL listserv survey indicated that they use other days for rest; therefore, Sunday work is not a personal problem. At the corporate level, though, most librarians expressed sensitivity toward others regarding the subject, curtailing library services on Sunday and preferring volunteers for Sunday duty. Is this an acceptable compromise?

Before answering this question, I want to review the reasons given by librarians for providing Sunday hours. One dominant theme is the service function of libraries. Students want Sunday library service; as service institutions, libraries should give it. Quite often, though, Sunday hours are not provided voluntarily or enthusiastically; librarians are forced to open the library on Sundays because of student and/or administrative pressure. The ultimate argument for keeping the library open on Sunday is essentially an economic one, especially for those in urban areas who serve a large number of part-time and graduate students. The argument goes like this: since other nearby institutions offer seven-day service, if we resist the trend we risk

losing students—and the revenue their tuition represents. But then, if offering library service on the Sabbath is a good thing, why do we not teach classes on

Sunday? This might possibly attract additional students, because it would provide an opportunity for students to pursue their studies in

a real seven-day world. Faculty and administrators reject this logic, of course, because then they might have to work on Sunday too. Ultimately, it is easier politically to offer students and faculty Sunday hours in the library than in the classroom. I have one more suggestion as to why libraries are open on Sunday, and yet classrooms are not. Libraries are perceived as providing an essential service. If you *really* believe this, however, then you are forced to ask: Why are library budgets usually so emaciated?

That is how things are. How should they be? Is there an “ought” for the way Christian colleges and universities should handle the Sunday-library question? I believe there is, but as I did when I discussed personal reactions to the Sabbath in the last column, let me first clear some underbrush. I do not think that closing on the Sabbath (whatever day that is) necessarily earns the institution any spiritual “points.” Doing so does not mean that the institution is “spiritual” any more than offering chapel services is proof of spirituality (although both can provide legitimate evidence). In fact, closing on Sunday and having chapel may become the occasion for institutional pride. This is not a good result. But if the motivation is to humbly obey God regardless of the consequences or perceptions, then Sabbath closings can provide a point of departure for an institutional witness.

A charge that is leveled against

those who seek to observe the Sabbath is that they are being legalistic. It is quite possible for Sabbath-keeping to become legalistic, even as it is possible for chapel attendance, prayer meetings, singing worship songs—or any of the other “spiritual” behaviors in which we as Christians participate—to become legalistic. The problem with this objection to Sabbath-keeping is that it automatically ascribes a suspect motive (one of trying to earn God’s favor, or show off for others) rather than what may be the real motive (one of trying to thank God for his grace by seeking to obey Him). Christianity constantly faces the dilemma of discerning the congruence of outward behaviors with inner reality. We can only see behaviors; we may not know motives, but a disquieting practice has arisen among Christians: When other Christians do something that we don’t necessarily agree with, especially if it is a more conservative practice than we like, we charge them with being legalistic. End of argument! The practice of Sabbath-keeping, however, must be defended or attacked on its biblical merits, not on the nature of the motives that may accompany it. Almost any behavior can be discredited when motives are used to evaluate the action.

It has become my personal conviction (I have not always thought this way) that Christian institutions would be wise to close all academic services on one day in observance of the Sabbath. First, it communicates a sense of who we are; we are God’s people—we follow his pattern for our lives even if it means we must be counter-cultural. God has given his people a six-day work pattern, followed by a day in which we do different non-work things. What is wrong with Christian institutions following this model?

(continued on following page)