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Volume 43 | Issue 3

Article 5

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2000

## The Y Factor

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### Recommended Citation

Doerksen, J. Ray (2000) "The Y Factor," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 43: Iss. 3, Article 5.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.1893>

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In my last column, I discussed the issue of faculty status, trying to analyze why librarians have failed to achieve their most desired target—academic respectability. I concluded that faculty culture does not accept librarians as equals. Yes, librarians may be useful—they may even be expert in what they do—but they are different. Faculty may be ready to grant librarians something, but it is not equal status. Maybe it is time to examine the need for status that librarians exhibit.

It is easy to understand the attraction of status in secular faculty culture; what is surprising is how readily it finds its way into the Christian academy. As I mentioned in my last column, the arrogance of faculty culture (*not* necessarily the arrogance of many individual faculty members) that brings grief to librarians is imported into Christian institutions from their secular counterparts. As products of secular institutions, new faculty may bring the perspectives of that culture to bear in their new institutions. They are asked to integrate faith with learning, which affects the *content* of what they teach, but they are not necessarily asked to revise how they think about their place in the Christian academy. If Jesus and the New Testament teach anything, it is that status seeking has no place in the Christian life. The mother of James and John learned this when she sought a preferred status for her sons, and the epistles to the churches refer a number of times to the fact that in God's economy the humble will be exalted and the exalted will need to experience humiliation to be Christlike. Faculty need to learn this—and so do librarians

Librarians are proud of the fact that they are a service profession. Many

institutions recognize this by placing librarians in a category for support personnel. The "support" model places librarians in the role of servant in the master/servant relationship. Being a servant is not a bad thing by itself, but if one also envies the role of master (faculty), then tension is introduced. This inner conflict, I believe, is what fuels the search for an identity among academic librarians. If being co-masters

*Are we able as a profession to determine whether we are a hand or a foot in the body of Christ and be content with that role? Or will we consign ourselves to always looking longingly at another member and saying: "We would like to be like that."*

rather than servants is what librarians really want, they will not really be satisfied with "supporting the curriculum," or providing service.

A better model than the one of status seeking—at least for Christian higher education—is the biblical model for the church: the body. In fact, the body concept may not be a bad one for any Christian organization. It is instructive to look at some of the basic dimensions of the biblical image of the body. The first striking feature is that there is one Head—Christ. Would our institutions run differently if Christ were the head of the Christian academy (in reality rather than in rhetoric) instead of the faculty, administrators—or constituents? (In fact, as long as I am meddling, would our churches run differently if Christ was more than a figurehead?) If Christ is the head, no one else need apply for the job (or compete for it). All claims to being predominant are rendered presumptuous. In the body metaphor, the emphasis in the organization is placed on the diversity and value of every function represented by the staff of the institu-

tion. All members are deemed important to the health of the body. No one group is more vital than another. Neither is any group unnecessary. Finally, the body concept emphasizes the unity of the organization. The members of the body work together as a unit; they do not compete for recognition—only budget! This unity exists because a common Head is acknowledged.

In the body of Christ as a learning organism, what member describes librarians? This is a vital question, much more important than: How can librarians gain equal status with faculty? Are we able as a profession to determine whether we are a hand or

a foot in the body of Christ and be content with that role? Or will we consign ourselves to always looking longingly at another member and saying: "We would like to be like that." We may discover that we are not among the most prominent members of the body. But that is fine. "God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be...and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it." If we quit seeking our own honor and faithfully do our part, God will give us honor. We won't have to wait for the faculty to credential us.

Don't misread me. Faculty status has value. To the extent that the granting of faculty status has allowed librarians to participate more fully in the academic life of the institution, positive results are evident. Committee involvement gives librarians greater campus visibility. Even more importantly, it allows librarians to be proactive on educational matters. Respect still has to be earned, but it is less likely that librarians will be ignored if they bring their own agenda to administrative and faculty meetings rather than always being reactionary—or completely on the outside. I believe that there is only one good reason for

seeking faculty status, and it is not to gain respectability; it is to gain access to the academic process on campus—a door that might otherwise be unavailable.

There consequently may be danger if librarians do not have faculty status (for the right reason). They may be left on the outside looking in when teaching/learning decisions are made. But if librarians do not want to be marginalized, they will need to bring a *recognized*, specific expertise to the educational process. It may be that having faculty status actually impedes progress towards this recognition, because teaching is *not* a recognized expertise of librarians. A question that begs for an answer is: What do librarians offer as an area of expertise that students and faculty (and administrators) will recognize as a crucial contribution to the educational process? Is it collecting things? Is it teaching? What is it?

To answer this question, I believe that librarians must separate themselves conceptually from libraries. Everyone loves libraries. Librarians, however, must define *their* purpose (not the purpose of the library). In a world of remote databases, electronic fulltext articles, and on-demand ebooks, what will librarians do? Where will they do it? A recent survey revealed that 84 percent of 18 to 24-year-old Internet users are more likely to use the Internet to gather information than the public library. What if the students in our colleges and universities adopt a similar mindset? Despite all the technology that invades our libraries, many librarians still wistfully long for the “good old days” when books were king—when our roles were clear (at least to ourselves). Possibly, it will take a conceptual separation of librarians from the library’s print collections to enable us to think more clearly about the specific role of librarians in the academic process. Faculty status is not an aid in this endeavor.

What I am suggesting is that librarians define their *role* in the new educational landscape more carefully—seeking a *purpose*, not status. We must determine what we offer to the body, and gain recognition on that basis. Who knows? We may be more successful in God’s eyes as faithful armpits than we ever will be as faculty. †

(*PRESIDENT’S NOTE from p. 85.*)

Coordinator and the Director-at-Large: Member Services make a recommendation by June 2001 on whether to resume printing paper copies of the handbook. If any member has difficulty accessing it through the Members Only page on the ACL Web site, including downloading and using Acrobat Reader, send an email to ACL-info@cedarville.edu for assistance. We want all members to be able to use the directory—and to print their own paper copy if they wish.

### GOALS

My overall goal as President is to do all that I can to bring the best of ACL members’ abilities to bear on the challenges and opportunities before us. Regular and effective communication among us is very important. I will communicate a lot and encourage it in others. Much ACL business is conducted in board meetings and by team members and other leaders throughout the year, invisible to many members. I will strive to keep our members well-informed on such business.

I concur with Woodie Moore’s comments in the “good and welfare” time at Pt. Loma about the importance of our annual conference. It is the high point each year of our activities. I will work with the planners to help ensure its high quality and

effectiveness. However, each year approximately half of our members attend the conference. I will encourage exploration of additional ways to best serve all members. I will encourage and support existing ACL activities and services—CILA opportunities; *Christian Periodical Index*; *The Christian Librarian*; the Christian Library Consortium; the Membership Handbook; our discussion list and Web site; and cooperation with other entities.

### THANKS & PRAYERS

Thank you to those who gave me the honor and privilege of serving the next two years as President of ACL. The people of the association have given me much over the years, and I will do my best, with much help from God and from you, to serve our Lord and you.

I shall be praying for each member, especially as needs come to my attention, and for our work together in ACL. Please regularly ask God to guide me and the many others serving in the work. And let me hear from you!

May the Peace of the Lord be with you,

*Steve*

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