



Volume 63 | Issue 1

Article 3

5-1-2020

Letter from the Editor

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Recommended Citation

Trott, Garrett (2020) "Letter from the Editor," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 63: Iss. 1, Article 3.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55221/2572-7478.2148>

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Letter from the Editor



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As I am writing this editorial, the Coronavirus is putting much of what we consider critical to a standstill. Churches are not gathering, many educational institutions have switched to a completely online context, and many public schools are closing for the next upcoming weeks and some for the remainder of this school year. Even though written over a year ago, I believe that in his column, Jeff Gates (2019) provided some perspective through which a situation like this should be viewed. Gates (2019) argued that we should be known as librarian Christians (p. 9). Gates (2019) pointed out that when developing a phrase in English grammar, typically, the first word describes the second (p. 9). In other words, the second word is primary. Subsequently the phrase ‘Christian librarian’ suggests that the word “Christian” is describing the primary word in that phrase: librarian. I argue with Gates (and I think many ACL members would agree): our foremost identity needs to be as a believer in Jesus Christ, not as a librarian. Just as my professional role is an academic librarian (the word ‘academic’ is describing the type of librarian, I am), so the proper phrase for those in ACL, may very well be a librarian Christian, with the word “librarian” describing the context in which we live out our faith in Jesus Christ (Gates, 2019, p.9).

If I am a librarian Christian, how should I respond to the abounding uncertainties that lie before me? As a believer in Christ, I believe in the sovereignty of God. To be very honest, while it is easy to say this, it can be incredibly difficult to live this out. Situations happen that can make life extremely challenging: friends get ill, colleagues get laid off, family members pass away, and those with ill motivations succeed, just to name a few. If I am a believer in Christ, do I believe what the Bible says is true? Do I believe in Romans 8:28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”? While this verse is easy to type and easy to believe in good times, the truth of Scripture remains in challenging times as well. I appreciate Martin Luther’s (1954) comment about this verse, simply reaffirming what it already states: “... for he (Paul) means to show that to the elect who are loved of God and who love God, the Holy Spirit makes all things work for good even though they are evil in themselves (e. g. sickness, persecution, etc.)” (p.112).

In light of what we know about who God is, what are some ways that librarian Christians can respond to the uncertainties and unknowns brought about by COVID-19? One very simple strategy is prayer. Please pray for leadership: leadership at your institution, your Provost, your President, your board of directors, your library director. As we are well aware, the impact of COVID-19 will be deep in many dynamics of life. Leadership needs wisdom (and wisdom comes from God – Proverbs 2:6) to make it through these challenges.

A second means of response comes back to identity. It is easy to say this while writing this editorial, but I do understand, again, that it is incredibly difficult to live out. Our culture looks at profession as a key component of one's identity. There is some warrant behind this ideology. Outside of sleep, my profession is the largest time consumer of my life. Many of us also enjoy some dynamics of the profession we chose: librarianship. Many of us also see our profession as a vocation: a calling, an opportunity to minister the gospel. In spite of all this, however, we must turn to Jesus Christ as the source of our identity. As Gates (2019) suggests we are librarian Christians, not Christian librarians. In other words, our identity must be found in Christ. What does that look like? Brian Rosner (2017) in his book, *Known by God*, argues that there are three dynamics of being known by God: we are made in the image of God, we are known by God, and we are in Christ (p. 39). These three dynamics point to a believer's ultimate identity: a child of God (Rosner, 2017, p. 39). Scripture defines the God we worship as providential, gracious, merciful, and loving in all facets of life. Again, Romans 8:28 summarizes this well when it states: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." As a librarian Christian, this is true of you.

A third and final means of response ties in two dynamics: mourning and suffering. As librarian Christians, we have an obligation and loving responsibility to mourn with those who are mourning (Romans 12:15), whether it is over ill health, death, loss of a job, or any number of things that have come about due to COVID-19. We must acknowledge that life is difficult. If we ignore that idea, we are being ignorant. However, in the same light, as believers we have hope.

I struggle with the word "hope." In my opinion, in modern English, "hope" has become a word that has lost some of its value. When I am using "hope" in this context, I am not trying to say: "I hope things turn out OK," nor am I simply expressing a desire or wish. On the contrary, I have an expectation that God will work through this for my good and for the good of all of his creation (including librarian Christians).

The second part of this third element of response is suffering. Everyone acknowledges that suffering is incredibly difficult regardless of the depth or the cause of it. However, healing, whether physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual, often cannot take place without pain, and sometimes suffering. Spears (2004) argues that “learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration” (p. 13). While I have no intention of downplaying the challenges of suffering, as librarian Christians we have an image of suffering in Christ’s crucifixion which reminds us that God works powerfully through suffering. Christ’s suffering through crucifixion and Christ’s resurrection (which could not have taken place apart from suffering) is the basis of our redemption. What God brought about through suffering should give us hope, an expectation that God will work through this scenario for the good of His kingdom. Again, Romans 8:28 summarizes this: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” As a librarian Christian, this is true of you. †



Soli Deo gloria

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