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The Y-Factor: Why Do Research?

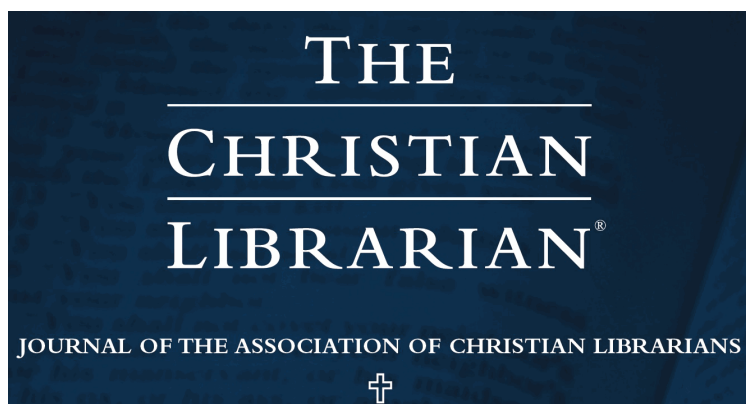
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The Y-Factor: Why Do Research?



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George Washington Carver, the slave who became a scientist, modeled for Christians the correct motivation for research, i.e. to glorify God and serve people. Like him, the Creation Mandate offers the justification for our research and the Great Commandments give the motivation for him to do so. Human beings do research for many reasons that are either unethical, distracting, or secondary to the chief motivation of loving God and people.

The justification for research is found in the Creation Mandate (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001, Gen. 1:28; 2:18–22). In the beginning, God told our first parents to rule over the earth and all living things on it. God made Eve to help Adam with this task. Since this responsibility was too big for them, God commanded them to reproduce so that we, their progeny, could help fulfill God's plan to manage the earth and its resources. Carver taught his students that the natural world was a gift from God to us who are responsible to figure out how best to make use of its resources (Kremer, 2011, p. 67). To help us with this task, God revealed some things about Himself and the world over which He gave us dominion and enabled us to find more information about both through observation and logic. To help us bring the earth and its living creatures under subjection, God also gave us the ability and limited freedom to creatively devise theories, techniques, and tools based upon that information and various aptitudes and interests to specialize in particular tasks within this general responsibility. Additionally, God gave us the ability to communicate to our peers and descendants what we had learned and devised so that they might improve their ability to reign over the earth. Human limitations of space and time necessitates the recording, dissemination, storage, and retrieval of what we have learned so that future generations can carry out the Creation Mandate. (Librarians help people to fulfill this mandate by preserving records of what people have learned and developed, creatively providing organized access to those records, and skillfully bringing learners and those records together (McDonald, 1979, p. 13)). We are responsible to 1) learn from previous generations, 2) make more observations about the world around us, and 3) develop improved theories, techniques, and tools to help us and others to do our part in ruling the earth. This acquisition of what others

discovered and devised; followed by new observations and development of theories, techniques, and tools; and concluded with communication of those observations and developments is what we call the research process.

The motivation for research is found in the First and Second Greatest Commandments (Matt. 22:37-39). By managing the earth's resources and non-sentient creatures, we can show our love for God by obeying Him and benefitting people. Carver understood that his calling was to do research and that his purpose in doing this was to glorify God (Waldrep, 2021, p. 81). He also believed that the natural world was a gift from God which contained all the resources people needed for healthy and productive lives. It was our job to figure out how to take these gifts and make them of use to people (Kremer, 2011, p. 67). There may be additional motivations for research, but the highest motive is to love God and people. All other motives should be secondary and may be useful or distracting to this primary goal. For example, telling someone about our research findings in a well-known journal may give information that person needs, but doing so to impress him or her can distract us from loving that individual. Another positive example is recognizing that curiosity is God's gift to help us discover ways to benefit people. However, researching just to satisfy our curiosity is not a sign of love for God or people. It is, likewise, commendable to find accurate information about God and the needs of people so we can love them better, but discovering the truth about others or our environment could simply be a way to control both, with little regard for God or people. Furthermore, researching to find a cure for a disease is a worthy goal, but it could be a way to alleviate the effects of sin without God's help. In fact, researching for ways to give glory to God and help people need not include a motivation for finding the truth.

Why do research? George Washington Carver is an inspiration to all Christians, whether or not we do research. But for us who conduct research, his answer would be to demonstrate our love for God and people. Let us not only acknowledge the need for this motivation for research, but also by the grace of God adopt this motivation in our own research practices. †

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