

NEWS

Ángel M. Rodríguez Receives A Festschrift



On April 20, 2015 the Biblical Research Institute Committee (BRICOM) convened on the campus of Loma Linda University and honored Ángel M. Rodríguez with a festschrift to celebrate his seventieth birthday. In a moving ceremony, General Conference president Ted Wilson and a number of other BRICOM members highlighted the significance of Dr. Rodríguez' contribution to the world church. Indeed, his distinctive career as a biblical scholar has made a profound and positive impact on Adventist theology. More recently

he has been involved as editor in a major project on ecclesiology, which will certainly remain a landmark on the topic for years to come. Although retired since 2011, Dr. Rodríguez continues to offer his invaluable contribution to the BRI and the Church at large. The festschrift offered to him is entitled *The Great Controversy and the End of Evil* and was edited by Gerhard Pfandl, with contributions from friends and colleagues of the honoree.

BRI Library Inaugurated

On April 12, 2015, the new facilities of the BRI Research Library were dedicated during a special service at the General Conference Spring Council. On the same occasion the exhibition *From Eden to Eden* on permanent display at the General Conference headquarters and the new facilities of the Ellen White Estate were also dedicated. Gerhard Pfandl was honored for his commitment and service to the library. This library contains books, periodicals, and other scholarly resources in printed and electronic formats for use by the BRI staff and authorized visitors.



What About the Upcoming GC Session?

BY ARTUR STELE

The 60th Session of the General Conference promises to be a very important one in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. What makes this session so important is the agenda. One of the most important agenda items will be the Fundamental Beliefs of the Adventist Church. For the first time since 1980 we will discuss and vote on some modifications to the expression of our Fundamental Beliefs. It is true that we added a new Fundamental Belief

in St. Louis in 2005, entitled "Growing in Christ," but so far we have not edited the document of our Beliefs that was voted in 1980.

Our 28 Fundamental Beliefs have a very important preamble that is and should

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always remain a significant part of the whole document. It states:

“Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference Session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.”

It is of importance to quickly add that neither the suggested modifications to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs voted by the 2014 Annual Council as a recommendation for adoption to the Session in San Antonio nor the so-called new Fundamental Belief added in 2005 are really “new” in the sense that we have added something we have never believed thus far. As a matter of fact, the reality is that we, as a church, have always believed what is stated in the Fundamental Belief called “Growing in Christ” and, as we will see at this coming General Conference Session, all the so-called changes to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs are really not changing anything in which we have believed. Naturally the question that results is *if we are not changing anything, why is there a need to discuss and modify the expression of our Beliefs?*

The reason for the suggested revision is mainly better language. This is not to say that the language was not good enough, but the simple fact is that languages change with time. For example, there was a time when everyone understood the phrase “nature of man” as including both genders, male and female. Today, however, it sounds exclusive in some parts of the world. Or, for example, in the Fundamental Belief 23, which speaks of marriage and family, the expression “marriage partners” is used twice. This phrase once had quite a different meaning than it does today. If we would like the statement to continue to say what it meant before we need to adjust the language.

Some other editorial changes are an attempt to state more clearly what we have always believed. Unfortunately, some expressions of our faith have been interpreted in a way we never intended them to be. For example, regarding the 6th Fundamental Belief that states our belief in Creation, we always have believed in a creation week that is represented by a real week as we know it today. This is further underlined in our observance of the Sabbath as a memorial of the Creator and the Creation. For this reason, some changes are suggested to this very

foundational belief of our Church. It is also of great significance to note that at the 2010 General Conference Session in Atlanta the delegates voted a request to harmonize the 6th Fundamental Belief with the document voted by the 2004 Annual Council called “Response to an Affirmation on Creation.”

These are only a few examples of the many suggested modifications to the Fundamental Beliefs. The suggested revisions will be discussed at the Session on Monday morning, July 6, 2015. We invite all the readers of the BRI Newsletter to earnestly pray for the Lord to guide our discussion and the actual decision in this regard by the worldwide representation of the Church.

The next important item will deal with the issue of Ordination. Here we invite our readers to visit the webpage where all the work of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, including the final report, is presented: <https://www.adventistarchives.org/gc-tosc>

As you know, we have been blessed in reaching a consensus in regards to the theology of ordination. As



Reflections

Reflections seeks to share information concerning doctrinal and theological developments among Adventists and to foster doctrinal and theological unity in the world church. Its intended audience is church administrators, church leaders, pastors and teachers.

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far as the issue of women's ordination is concerned we have finished our work with three different positions on the issue. All three groups believe, based on their study of the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, they have something significant to offer the delegates as they consider the issue. Each of these three groups has suggested a position document and a way forward document, which you can find on the same webpage.

This item will be presented to the Session on Wednesday, July 8, 2015. Again, we invite our readers to pray for the Lord to guide His Church to find a way that would be best for the Church as we move forward in accomplishing the mission entrusted to us.

As usual, at the Session we will also deal with some suggested changes to the Church Manual. It will be of interest to many of our readers to note that, among other suggested changes, we will discuss a stronger emphasis on discipleship in this important document for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Only the General Conference Session has the authority to make changes to the Church Manual and to consider the Fundamental Beliefs. The Church Manual items will be discussed on Sunday, July 5, 2015.

So, as you can see, the upcoming General Conference Session promises to be a very important one. If you are not planning to attend, please join us in prayer and watch the daily news reports presented and broadcasted during the Session by Hope Channel, Adventist Review, and Adventist News Network.

Artur Stele, Director of BRI



Ecumenism and the Adventist Church

BY JOHN GRAZ

Ecumenism has a history as long as the division of the Christian church. Unity of the body of Christ has been a prayer and a dream since the beginning. Jesus prayed for unity and the apostles struggled to maintain unity. In the history of every church, you will find unity being challenged. The history of the Christian church is a long and exhausting search for unity. And yet the Christian church has not been able to keep its unity. Those who left it formed new churches and had their unity challenged. Christianity today is divided into three main families: the Catholics, the Protestants, and the Orthodox. The Roman Catholic Church represents the major group with 1.2 billion members; the Protestants

and the Orthodox altogether are close to one billion. The Orthodox are divided into two or three families, such as the Greek Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox. But this grouping does not count several important subgroups such as the Russian Orthodox, the Copts, the Ethiopians, etc. Among Protestants there are a multitude of churches and organizations. Five families are dominant: Lutherans, Anglicans, Reformed, Methodists, Evangelicals, and Pentecostals.

However, we have a problem with the statistics. The Evangelicals say they are five hundred million; the Pentecostals estimate their family as many as seven hundred million. The mainline Protestants are close to 320 million. Among these, there are also evangelicals and Pentecostals, such as the Presbyterians in South Korea. If you read the internal publication of each church, you will find a call for unity. We are no different. We also call our church to unity.

Jesus prayed for the unity of the believers, and the division of Christ's body is a great scandal. Christianity is divided into many organizations and divisions inside each division. So we have to be very optimistic to believe that Christians could be united again as they were in the first century. A few years ago as the ecumenical family celebrated the unity of two churches in a country, I spoke with a leader and asked him if the trends will continue. His answer was, "We have to make sure that the result of the unity of two churches is not three churches instead of one."

After the reformation came several tentative steps to rebuild unity. They failed. As a Lutheran leader said to me, today the division between Lutherans and Catholics is more important than during Luther's time. In the nineteenth century many ecumenical movements began as inter-religious or interdenominational organizations such as the Bible Societies and Missionary Societies.¹

After the First World War, Protestants and Orthodox had several major meetings to study the urgency of working for the unity of the church. Christians killing Christians was not acceptable, and that was the official beginning of the ecumenical movement. A theological commission was organized with theologians from different churches. Their purpose was to study the common beliefs and to see how differences could be overcome. It was the Faith and Order Commission.²

The Second World War stopped the development of the ecumenical movement. Once again, Christian countries led the whole world in an unprecedented slaughter. After the war, Christian leaders saw their responsibility in the tragedy and thought that the division of the Christian world had favored ideologies like Nazis and communism. Something had to be done and fast. The League of Nations, which failed to stop the war, was now

reinvented as the United Nations. In 1948, the countries' members voted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which became a model to constitutions of many countries. The purpose was to promote human rights as universal values in order to avoid wars. Protestants and Orthodox followed the example and organized the World Council of Churches.³ The influence of the European National Churches was predominant. The purpose was to build a visible unity of the Body of Christ. How to do it? By encouraging the advent of one Christian Church. But the Catholics were not members.

The ideas of unity and ecumenism were understood differently in Rome. Roman Catholics conceived of unity as a return to the “mother” and “true Church.” For the leaders of the ecumenical movement, unity had to be built step by step as a process, as a journey with Christ who will lead His children. The achievement of the visible unity is more than going back to Rome. Everyone accepting being part of this journey with God should be ready to change according to the urgency of unity. It would be the condition.⁴ After Vatican II, the Catholic Church accepted being part of the ecumenical movement. But they did not join the World Council of Churches. Instead they organized their ecumenical office: the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.⁵

Given this brief historical overview, we ask ourselves a couple of questions: First, should Adventists be involved in inter-church relations? Second, is the Seventh-day Adventist refusal to become a member of the World Council of Churches an indication of opposition to Jesus' prayer for unity?

These are most serious issues and deserve straightforward answers. Regarding the first question, it is important to keep in mind that the Seventh-day Adventist Church understands itself as a movement with a special message for the world. Although Adventists may appreciate what other branches of Christianity have done to spread the good news of the gospel, Adventists believe they have a distinctive message to prepare the world for the soon coming of Jesus. Thus full participation in the ecumenical movement and certain types of inter-church relations constitute a denial of our church's distinctive message and mission. However, that said, I contend that Adventists should not retract from the world and live in a denominational cocoon, as some marginal groups have proposed. On these issues let me offer some brief thoughts.

Adventists should not shy away from opportunities to share the beauty of our distinctive message with other denominational groups. Some venues improperly labeled as “ecumenical” (in a pejorative sense) may become providential opportunities for Adventist pastors and leaders to share our faith, hope, and view of the

Scriptures. Moreover, such encounters may provide a safe space to explain our Fundamental Beliefs, especially our distinctive doctrines, to people who otherwise would never listen to us. Our pastors and members should never miss opportunities to share the Adventist message with people of other faiths.⁶ As long as we keep our commitment to the Scriptures on which we base our Fundamental Beliefs, we do well in interacting with other denominations so that they may have a more accurate perception of who we are. In a context of publishing ministry, Ellen G. White penned an instructive statement that aptly applies to this reflection:

You may have opportunity to speak in other churches. In improving these opportunities, remember the words of the Saviour, “Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” Make no denunciatory speeches. Clear-cut messages are to be borne; but restrain all harsh expressions. There are many souls to be saved. In word and deed be wise unto salvation, representing Christ to all with whom you come in contact. Let all see that your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and good will to men (Review and Herald, Oct. 7, 1902).⁷

As for the second question—which seems to imply that by not actively participating in the ecumenical movement, the Seventh Day Adventist Church is at odds with Jesus' prayer for unity—the following thoughts are pertinent. Seventh-day Adventists are not against unity and fully abide by Jesus' prayer “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21). In the same vein, Seventh-day Adventists also hold as important that such unity, if ever achieved, must be based on the Scriptures—that is, it must be consistent with truth as it is revealed in the Bible. We should note that in the same context in which Jesus taught about unity, He also spoke about truth. Indeed, two verses prior to the petition for unity, Jesus said about truth: “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (John 17:19). This reference to truth is consistent with Jesus' statement elsewhere in the Gospel of John: “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

To conclude, Seventh-day Adventists should not miss opportunities to interact with other denominations and show them who we are and where we stand as a Bible-believing community. We have a precious and unique message to share with the world, even with other denominations and ecumenical groups. In addition,

although we as Seventh-day Adventists are not members of the World Council of Church and do not intend to become such, we are not against unity per se. We are for truth. Unity built on the foundation of biblical truth would be a marvelous accomplishment. But for now, let us keep in mind what Jesus said: “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:14–16).

John Graz, Director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists



¹ William M. King, “Ecumenism.” In *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Routledge, 2004), 182.

² See William G. Rusch, “Ecumenism, Ecumenical Movement.” In *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999–2003), 2:46–60.

³ Wilbert R. Shenk, “World Council of Churches.” In *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (New York: Routledge, 2004), 821–826.

⁴ See W. J. Whalen, “Ecumenical Movement.” In *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, eds. Berard L. Marthaler, Gregory F. LaNave, Jonathan Y. Tan, and Richard E. McCarron (Detroit, MI: Thomson and Gale, 2002), 5:88.

⁵ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, accessed June 7, 2015, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/index.htm

⁶ See John Graz, *Issues of Faith and Freedom* (Silver Spring, MD: Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department), 141–148.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Publishing Ministry* (Review and Herald, 1983), 306.

privileges; it makes vast amounts of information easily accessible, it interconnects people in ways undreamed of in times past, and makes the realization of many tasks much easier than ever before. In many ways it is a privilege to live in this digital age and enjoy the benefits it brings to all areas of our life. Such benefits, however, come with a price tag because the combination of sophisticated devices with the ever-expanding tentacles of the World Wide Web is reshaping us, our world, and our relationships. So we may want to reflect on ways to enjoy the blessings of the digital age without being harmed by it. This short essay offers some thoughts on some theological, philosophical, and ethical aspects of technology. It concludes with some practical suggestions on how to handle our hyperlinked lives in ways that honor God.

Theological Thoughts on Digital Technology

The term technology designates “the instrumentalities we create in order to actualize the made world”³ and thus facilitate our lives under the sun. As such, technology arises from God-given creativity and should not be regarded as an evil in itself. Created in the image of God, we are capable of shaping the world in ways that are not possible by other creatures. Thus since the Garden of Eden, humans have been in the business of inventing devices to make life more comfortable, enjoyable, and effective. It all began when God put Adam “in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Gen 2:15). But prior to the creation of Adam, Scripture recognizes that “there was no man to till the ground” (Gen 2:23). The act of tilling the ground—which assumes the use of tools and hence technology—appears as a necessary and positive activity. Therefore, “Adam was to take the ‘natural’ world (what God made) and fashion it into something else—something not entirely ‘natural’—but sanctioned by God.”⁴ Technology then appears to help humans better accomplish the mission of tending the earth and caring for creation.

Subsequently, the entrance of sin distorted not only creation but contaminated the artistic and technological products of human creativity. Consequently, technology has become ambivalent and can be used in a way that “not only amplifies the potential for greater good but also for greater harm.”⁵ Technology may serve either to plow the land to sustain life or it can be turned into a weapon to destroy life. It can bless humans with devices that save lives, as modern medicine can testify, but it can also produce nuclear bombs to bring destruction and death. However, despite its risks and dangers, technology is a product of human creativity, which is an aspect of the image of God. And the fact that the first sustained technological development depicted in the Bible takes

Digital Technology and the Christian Life

BY ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA

This essay offers some thoughts on digital technology and argues that we should bring our digital life under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Digital technology makes life more comfortable and enjoyable in many ways. Thanks to the Internet, our digital devices such as desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc. easily connects us to one another and gives us access to information everywhere. Facebook alone has 1.4 billion users.¹ If it were a country,² it would be the largest in the world. Indeed, the digital age has brought us many

place among the descendants of Cain (Gen 4:17–22) does not invalidate the legitimacy of technology. As the Bible shows, technology—in the form of altars, dishes, pans, pitchers, bowls, lampstands, etc.—was as much a part of the sanctuary/temple activities as were the ritual services (Exod 25:29; 1 Chron 28:11–21). In their secular activities the Israelites did not refrain from the use of technology; they went to the Philistines to hone their tools since the latter had the technological expertise to work with iron (1 Sam 13:20). In building the temple, Solomon used the technical expertise of Hiram from Tyre, who was “a skilled craftsman in bronze” (1 Kgs 7:14). The apostles and other early Christians availed themselves of the latest technological developments to spread the gospel message faster. They used the best transportation means available and did not hesitate to adopt the codex, the latest writing technology available, to record, preserve, and communicate God’s Word.⁶ It is not far off the mark to say that the apostolic church was always ready to use the most effective technology to carry forward God’s work.

Remarkably, some eschatological prophecies of the Old Testament conceive of the Messianic time as one in which technology plays a role. Instruments devised to destroy life are turned into life-affirming agricultural tools (Isa 2:4; 60:17, 18; Mic 4:3). And in the closing prophecy of the Scriptures, a city, a paramount symbol of human technological achievements, becomes the very place of dwelling for God and the Lamb. The streets of gold and the precious stones are also symbols of technological creativity (Rev 21:1–22:5).

Thus, technology should not be ignored, avoided, or rejected on biblical grounds; rather, it must be cautiously embraced, just as God’s people have done throughout history.

Philosophical Thoughts on Digital Technology

According to some theorists, technology can be divided, roughly, into four categories: (1) those that supplement or amplify our innate capacities: the plow, the needle, and the car; (2) those that extend the range or sensitivity of our senses: the microscope, the amplifier; (3) those that reshape nature to better serve our needs or desires: the reservoir, the hydropower plant; and (4) those that extend or support our mental powers.—that is, technical instruments used to gather information, articulate ideas, share knowledge, perform calculations, and expand the capacity of our memory—such as books, newspapers, and computers.⁷

In regards to its relationship with and effects on humans, technology may be approached from two main philosophical perspectives: instrumentalism and determinism. Instrumentalism holds that a technical artifact is just a neutral tool under the control of its user. In this

view, our technological devices are merely instruments in our hands and thus subject to the use we make of them.⁸ On the other hand, determinism contends that technology is by no means neutral. It shapes users and induces them to accomplish some predetermined goals. As is often the case, the truth may be somewhere in between. Although an instrumental view of technology may seem more intuitive and self-evident, we should not be oblivious to the fact that technology, and digital technology for that matter, brings some inherent values with it. As several communication theorists have warned, technology retains some values intended by its designers.⁹ Marshall McLuhan warned, “the medium is the message,”¹⁰ a warning echoed by other media theorists.¹¹ It has been amply noted that the technological resources that came into being during the past few decades are now rewiring our brains.¹²

Now it seems clear that a technological device comes with some predetermined values embedded into it. As one theorist put it: “Embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another.”¹³ And the same author continues: “New technologies alter the structure of our interests: the things we think about. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think with.”¹⁴ For example, cell phones were devised to connect managers with their employees. As cell phones were popularized, they transformed most users into “managers” even during a family dinner or worship service. Also, it seems self-evident that every technology brings not only benefits but also problems, the solving of which requires newer technologies. As Freud quipped long ago: “If there had been no railway to conquer distances, my child would never have left his native town and I should need no telephone to hear his voice; if traveling across the ocean by ship had not been introduced, my friend would not have embarked on his sea-voyage and I should not need a cable to relieve my anxiety about him.”¹⁵

As we ponder the benefits and burdens of technological devices, it is difficult to disagree with Freud. Every new technology seems to bring some benefits that are nevertheless accompanied by some problem that in turn requires a newer technology to counter its undesirable effects. For instance, technologies that have increasingly liberated humans from physical work eventually made necessary another technology, the treadmill, to mitigate the effects of a sedentary lifestyle. But the good news is that the downside of our digital devices can be mitigated, and they can thus be used in ways that honor God. In the reflections that follow I attempt to suggest some ethical guidelines to help us handle our hyperlinked life.

Ethical Thoughts on Digital Technology

According to one author, a society's overall perception of technology falls into three categories: First, "everything that's already in the world when you're born is just normal." Second, "anything that gets invented between then and before you turn thirty is incredibly exciting and creative and with any luck you can make a career out of it." Third, "anything that gets invented after you're thirty is against the natural order of things and the beginning of the end of civilization as we know it until it's been around for about ten years when it gradually turns out to be alright really."¹⁶

Whatever age group one belongs to, it is increasingly difficult to live without an Internet connection or mobile devices. To be deprived of a mobile phone may generate anxiety. Nine out of every ten people under thirty years of age admit to suffering from "nomophobia," the fear of having no mobile phone.¹⁷ Given the pervasive role digital devices and the Internet play in our culture, we cannot separate our spiritual life from our hyperlinked life. How we live our digital life has implications for our embodied life,¹⁸ and hence for our relationship with Jesus. In what follows we note that some benefits of digital life come with ethical challenges that need close attention. To honor Jesus with our digital experience, it may be helpful to reflect on how effectiveness, accessibility, information, connectivity, responsibility, privacy, worship, and wisdom play out in one's digital experience.

Effectiveness

Digital technology functions as a time-saver as it can quickly and efficiently organize the execution of tasks and provide access to vast amounts of information. However, it may often be a time drain. What starts as a focused digital search may very easily become a distracted, trivial meandering from link to link, checking social media, or replying messages. Thus a major advantage of digital technology may be offset by the temptations inherent in the medium itself. Wasting time on trivialities with no time for Bible study, reflection, and a healthy devotional life is a major challenge in the digital age; it is a stewardship issue that needs serious consideration. So as we use our digital devices, we should be aware that time management may be a serious challenge to overcome. Never before is the inspired advice so pertinent as now: "Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:15, 16).

Accessibility

Many apps, websites, and other software provide access to God's Word in every conceivable place or circumstance. So much so that in church, many worshipers

prefer to read the Bible from their gadgets rather than from a printed volume. However, our digital devices usually also hold a host of other applications besides the Bible, and in some cases even an Internet connection. Hence the temptation in church to browse the web, check emails, and participate in social media may overcome the worshiper. The ancient Israelites faced the constant temptation to exchange worship of the true God with pagan rituals performed in high places and under sacred trees. Similar temptations assault many worshipers today as "iGods"¹⁹ lure them from true worship. However, the first commandment reminds us: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exod 20:3).

Information

One of the major benefits of digital technology is quick access to data and information. Yet this vast amount of data and information is usually accessed in quick scans—and most likely deserves no more. Such quick scans tend to compromise one's ability to think deeply and concentrate on a specific idea.²⁰ As one Christian author explains,

People who spend long hours reading books with complex ideas tend to become good at that activity. Likewise, people who spend their days consuming small pieces of information such as text messages or status updates tend to have minds particularly suited to performing that task. But just as it is difficult to master both running long distances and lifting heavy weights with our legs, these two mental tasks are mutually exclusive to a degree.²¹

Recent research shows that because of digital technology the human attention span has fallen from an average of twelve seconds in the year 2000 to just eight seconds today (less than that of a goldfish, which averages nine seconds).²² As an additional consequence, Bible memorization tends to be neglected since any passage can be quickly found in a digital device. Aware of such digital risks, we should strive for deeper thinking, reflection, and meditation to handle God's Word responsibly. Shallow thinking inevitably leads to shallow living.²³ As we navigate our digital devices let us always keep in mind what the Lord said to Joshua: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success" (Josh 1:8).

Connectivity

Digital technology allows us to connect with other

people, establish relationships, and form friendships and communities that would not otherwise be possible. Church life has also benefitted from digital media, transcending geographical boundaries in spreading the gospel message and providing worship services to many who otherwise would be deprived of such an experience. Unfortunately, some people opt for a disembodied worship experience in front of a computer rather than physically attending the church to enjoy the embodied presence of other believers. These worshipers forfeit the privilege of experiencing the physical presence of other believers and all the responsibilities that flow from a genuine church community. Mediated or virtual worship, although acceptable in extenuating circumstances, can never properly replace the blessings of embodied presence. We were created for face-to-face relationships and non-mediated interaction with God and our fellow human beings. Interestingly, although the apostle John oftentimes used the technology of writing to communicate with the church, he recognized that a face-to-face encounter was much better: “Having many things to write to you, I did not wish to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, that our joy may be full” (2 John 12). Emphasizing the ultimate value of a face-to-face encounter, the Bible says that one day we shall see God face to face (Matt 5:8; 1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2). And the book of Revelation concludes by stating that in the New Jerusalem, the redeemed will see the face of God (Rev 22:4).

Privacy

We should also keep in mind that as we navigate the Internet we always leave behind digital footprints showing our purchases, searches, photographs, clicks, interests, and much more. Our search engines may know more about us than our spouse, pastor, or psychologist. If our searches indicate what is inside our hearts, our devices tell where we have been. A Christian author so describes it like this:

I spent a few minutes reading the headlines at a news site. I browsed through the latest blog articles collected by my RSS reader and checked in at Facebook to see what my friends have been up to. Even in these few, innocuous activities, I have left behind a trail of data. My cell phone carrier has tracked me as I’ve walked from home to the café, and even now it can get a read on my location to within a few meters—certainly an accurate enough read to know that I am in this building. A few minutes ago, my iPhone sent Apple twelve hours’ worth of location information based on GPS, WiFi connections, and cell phone

towers. Facebook knows the Internet address I have visited from, knows what computer I am using, knows each of the ads they showed to me, and knows that I did not click on any of them. Google knows what blogs I looked at this morning and knows that I did a search or two along the way. MasterCard knows where I am—or at least they knew where I was about fifteen minutes ago, since they now have a record of the purchase I made (quite a good fried egg sandwich, if you must know). A security camera at the bank next door has stored some footage of me as I deposited a check into their instant teller. All of this data has been recorded somewhere—in many somewheres, actually. And this data is likely to remain there forever. It will be the exception rather than the rule if the data is ever deleted.²⁴

Thus, although we may have the impression that what we do on online is private, our lives are more exposed to the public today than ever before. With such visibility we may bring either honor or reproach to God’s name. So as we engage such a useful, albeit potentially risky, tool as the Internet, we should keep in mind Paul’s advice: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2).

Worship

Another issue that deserves consideration concerns the increasing use of digital Bibles in church, especially by young people, the so-called “digital natives.”²⁵ Traditional church members may feel uncomfortable with this situation. After all, carrying a personal printed Bible to church conveys the image of a faithful Christian. However, a close look at some historical developments cautions against any dogmatic position. In this regard, one ought to be reminded that from the times of Moses to the Reformation individual believers rarely owned a personal copy of the Bible. They encountered the Word of God as they gathered to worship in the temple, synagogues, and church settings. Handwritten copies were so expensive that only priests, rabbis, and other religious leaders could afford them, and that too mainly for the use of the community. With the advent of the printing press, families could purchase a copy of the Scriptures. But it was only in the twentieth century that individuals could own a copy of the Bible and hence carry it to church.²⁶ So there are no historical or theological grounds upon which to reject one medium in favor of the other. It may be argued that a printed

copy of the Bible may carry stronger symbolic power because the medium reinforces the message. A digital Bible, on the other hand, usually has to compete with other applications on the same device. Those who opt for a digital Bible are more prone to distractions, as already mentioned. In spite of these considerations, we should not restrict the Bible to a specific medium. Above all, we should focus on encouraging our youth to study the Bible, be it on a screen or in print. After all, whether enshrined in a manuscript, a printed volume, or in a digital application, “the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

Wisdom

As the most fascinating and revolutionary communication technology, the Internet forms a combination of book, radio, photography, telegraph, television, telephone, etc. Such a powerful technology accessed from our digital devices creates a sense of unfettered power over whatever kind of information we may be interested in or curious about. And unlike most previous technologies, the Internet is a two-way road. The user can also reply, respond, and post content without any need for peer evaluation. Consequently, as one scholar recognized, it “massively destabilizes the knowledge structures established by centuries of print (editorial direction, peer reviews, governmental or ecclesiastical approvals, and so on).”²⁷ To properly navigate such a sea of information one has to discern truth from error in ways not anticipated by previous technologies.²⁸

It is instructive to know that search engines, for instance, measure truth by relevance, and wikis measure truth by consensus. The critical issue, as one Christian author has noted,

is not whether Wikipedia is good or evil or whether search engines are good or evil. The issue is one of truth, of the way our technologies are changing our very conception of truth. This happened with the advent of the photograph as well. In an age of print, we believed what we read. But in an age of photography, an age of images, somewhere along the way we decided that a picture was worth 1,000 words—that images carried more weight and authority in the arena of truth. We began to believe what we saw instead of what we read, often demanding visual evidence before we would believe anything at all. Somewhere along the way the image changed the way we understand truth.²⁹

This changes, in fundamental ways, the conception of truth and what constitutes authority. The same author warns that as “Christians, we know that this avenue is nothing more than a dead end. Knowledge and truth cannot be democratized; they flow from the God who is truth. As we create and use digital technologies like wikis and search engines to access information, we must guard against the danger of allowing them to re-create us in their own image.”³⁰

Thus in order to better perceive the usefulness and limits of the Internet and its accompanying technological devices, we may apply a model that organizes the content of the human mind into five categories: data (symbols), information (processed data that answers who, what, where, and when questions), knowledge (application of data to answer the “how” questions), understanding (appreciation of “why”), and wisdom (evaluated understanding).³¹ Technology may be useful as we attempt to acquire the first two or three categories. But no technology can replace the human mind when it comes to understanding and wisdom. Nowadays people tend to confuse data, information, and knowledge with understanding and wisdom. To deal with the vast amount of data, information, and knowledge and turn these into understanding and wisdom, we need to make a proper use of our intellectual faculties. No machine can replace our brains as we separate the good from the bad and turn knowledge into understanding and wisdom to navigate real life. But ultimately, with such an overwhelming amount of data and information poured upon us, we should always be reminded of this sapiential axiom: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov 9:10).

Conclusion

Faithfulness to God does not demand ignoring, fearing, or rejecting digital technology. In fact, we should be grateful to live in a time when digital technology makes knowledge available as never before and allows us to perform tasks and stay connected with our loved ones. It is our responsibility to live our digital lives in ways that honor God, show love and respect for our neighbor, and care for the created world. Thus, a godly use of digital devices is one that honors God with the faithful stewardship of our digital resources. To conclude I offer a few practical suggestions on how to honor God with your technological devices: (1) As you grab your smartphone or any other digital device each morning, first open your Bible app and start your digital day with a Bible reading. (2) During the day, as often as possible, open the Bible app on your smartphone or tablet and meditate on a Scripture passage. Since a cell phone makes you always available to others, why not let God reach you

through His Word? (3) Give priority to an embodied presence over the ringing tone of your smartphone. In other words, do not interrupt a face-to-face conversation or interaction to answer your cell phone or check emails (unless under extenuating circumstances). (4) During meal times, family worship, and other face-to-face interactions set aside your gadgets to better enjoy the embodied presence of your loved ones.

You may have better ideas and ways to reach this proposed goal. The bottom line is this: Be the master of your technology, never the servant. Take control of your technological devices and live your online life in ways that bring honor to God. Ultimately, the foundational principle to guide us as we handle our digital technology remains the old but always up-to-date advice: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).

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¹ *The Statistics Portal*, accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

² I owe this analogy to Jonathan Morrow, *Think Christianly: Looking at the Intersection of Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 188.

³ Ignacio L. Götz, *Technology and the Spirit* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 22.

⁴ John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Redeeming and Corrupting Power of Technology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2011), Kindle location 742-743.

⁵ Derek C. Schuurman, *Shaping a Digital World: Faith, Culture and Computer Technology* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), Vyrso digital edition.

⁶ See Graham N. Stanton, *Jesus and Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 165–191.

⁷ Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011), 78–79, iBook.

⁸ James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 107.

⁹ Charles Adams, “Automobiles, Computers, and Assault Rifles: The Value-Ladenness of Technology and the Engineering Curriculum,” *Pro Rege* 19, no. 3 (1991): 1–7.

¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 7.

¹¹ See, e.g., Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 133; Juval Portugali, *Complexity, Cognition and the City* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2011), 100.

¹² See Carr, chapter 6: “The Juggler’s Brain.” Archibald D. Hart and Sylvia Hart Frejd, *The Digital Invasion: How Technology is Shaping You and Your Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), Vyrso digital edition (see esp. chapter 3, “The Rewiring of Our Brains”).

¹³ Postman, 13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 20.

¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 35.

¹⁶ Douglas Adams, “How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Internet” (this piece first appeared in the News Review section of *The Sunday Times*, August 29 1999), accessed June 2, 2015, <http://www.douglasadams.com/dna/19990901-00-a.html>

¹⁷ News.com.au, June 2, 2013, accessed May 30, 2015, <http://www.news.com.au/technology/nomophobia-the-fear-of-not-having-a-mobile-phone-hits-record-numbers/story-e6frfro0-1226655033189>.

¹⁸ The adjective “embodied” throughout this article points to face-to-face relationships and interactions. In contrast, “disembodied” relates to virtual experiences lived through the mediation of digital technology.

¹⁹ See Craig Detweiler, *iGods: How Technology Shapes Our Spiritual and Social Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2014).

²⁰ See Jun Young and David Kinnaman, *The Hyperlinked Life: Live with Wisdom in an Age of Information Overload* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), Vyrso electronic edition.

²¹ Dyer, Kindle location 587–595.

²² <http://www.medicaldaily.com/human-attention-span-shortens-8-seconds-due-digital-technology-3-ways-stay-focused-333474>

²³ This point is well developed by Challies.

²⁴ Challies.

²⁵ According to Archibald D. Hart, Hart Frejd Sylvia, and Sylvia Hart Frejd, *The Digital Invasion: How Technology Is Shaping You and Your Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), Vyrso electronic edition, “The term digital native describes those born after the advent of digital technology. Obviously, they are the younger generation. This group is also referred to as the “iGeneration” having been born with digital DNA. In contrast, digital immigrants are those born before the advent of digital technology. They grew up without any digital DNA, and have had to struggle to learn how the digital world functions. In general terms, digital natives intuitively speak and breathe the language of computers, while digital immigrants, although they may be capable of adapting to technology, don’t have any digital DNA to guide them.”

²⁶ Dyer, Kindle location 340–347.

²⁷ Paul A., Soukup, Francis J. Buckley and David C. Robinson, “The Influence of Information Technologies on Theology,” *Theological Studies* 61 (2001): 373.

²⁸ For example: “In March 2007 the jig was up for 24-year-old Kentucky man Ryan Jordan. For more than a year he had worked as an editor for Wikipedia, making changes and corrections on thousands of articles and serving as an arbitrator on disputes between authors. His Wikipedia profile described him as a professor of religion at a private university. There didn’t seem to be anything out of the ordinary about his work; no red flags ever came up. But after one Wikipedia user read a 2006 New Yorker profile of Jordan — who only went by the pseudonym Essay, which the magazine also used — the truth about Jordan’s identity began to unravel. Not only was he not a professor with expertise in theology and canon law, but he also never received a PhD, as he had claimed, and often used a book called Catholicism for Dummies as his editing resource.” Frances Romero, “Editor Found to be a Fraud,” *TIME (Thursday, Jan. 13, 2011)*, accessed June 1, 2015, http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2042333_2042334_2042575,00.html

²⁹ Challies.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Gene Bellinger, Durval Castro, Anthony Mills, “Data, Information, Knowledge, and Wisdom,” accessed June 1, 2015, <http://www.systems-thinking.org/dikw/dikw.htm>

SCRIPTURE APPLIED

Lessons from Daniel 4

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

We are confronted with various diseases, among them mental and psychological illnesses. Depression has become a specific problem in our days. In Daniel 4 we read about King Nebuchadnezzar for the last time, and he is suffering from a mental disease.

I. Discussion of the Chapter

1. The Frame

The Aramaic text begins in Dan 3:31 while in English versions that Dan 3:31 is Dan 4:1. We will follow the English verse numbering.

vs. 1–3 The following report is Nebuchadnezzar's autobiography. *What do these introductory words reveal about Nebuchadnezzar's relationship to God?*

- He respects God as the One who is the Most High.
- He testifies to God's work in him.
- He acknowledges God's universal and eternal rule.

v. 37 Nebuchadnezzar's report ends with a doxology.

2. The Dream and the Problem of Its Interpretation

vs. 4, 5 Having reached the climax of his power, Nebuchadnezzar receives a second dream from God. The dream is terrifying.

vs. 6–9 The wise men cannot interpret the dream, although this time the dream is related to them (compare with Dan 2). Again Daniel is brought to solve the problem. The phrase "in whom is the spirit of the holy gods" underlines the high esteem Daniel enjoyed. It is strange that people do not rely on God immediately; instead they first try to solve problems themselves.

v. 8 *What does "according to the name of my god" express?*

- Nebuchadnezzar had somehow acknowledged the true God (Dan 2 and 3) and yet adhered to his own god(s).
- There was no true conversion.
- Maybe for him the almighty God was one among many gods.

3. The Dream

vs. 10–18 The dream refers to a tree that is to be cut

down. A heavenly being announces the judgment on the tree. The tree is a symbol, for we hear about a human heart that will be replaced by the heart of a beast. A time span is given for this "beastly" condition.

v. 17 The main thought of the chapter is that God is the highest authority. He is the Lord of history and the Lord of humankind. This concept appears repeatedly in Daniel (2:21; 3:33; 4:17, 25, 26, 32, 34, 35, 37).

4. The Interpretation

v. 19 *How does this verse describe Daniel?*

- He does not rejoice over Nebuchadnezzar's judgment. Instead he feels sorry about what is to happen to him.
- He cares for the king.

vs. 20–22 Nebuchadnezzar and his empire are the golden head of chapter 2. He is also the tree of chapter 4. He provides protection and support for the nations.

vs. 23–26 The verdict will be executed. There is a Lord who surpasses the ruler of the Babylonian world empire. Nebuchadnezzar is accountable to this Lord. Consequently, he may be cast out of human society for seven years. But the judgment has a goal. Nebuchadnezzar is supposed to learn that God is the true Lord. His kingdom is to return to him. The judgment is mingled with grace.

v. 27 *Daniel turns to the king with a call. What do we learn from this action?*

- The disaster can be prevented, if the king commits his life to God.
- The judgment is linked to conditions and does not happen automatically. See Jonah and the judgment of Nineveh; see the principle in Jeremiah 18:6–10.
- Daniel can now address the king in a clearer way than ever before and call him to repentance.
- In addition to the call the text also contains a promise.
- Therefore, the dream should be understood as a warning.

5. The Dream is Being Fulfilled

vs. 28–30 *In spite of the warning, judgment finally comes upon the king. What are the mistakes that Nebuchadnezzar made?*

- Pride and arrogance
- Self-glorification (see the stress on "I" and "my"; see, however, Dan 2:20–23 as contrast)

- The desire to be independent of God
- Bad stewardship

vs. 31–33 The verdict is executed right away, and the prediction is fulfilled (compare with Acts 12:21–23). God does not always react immediately. In any case, whatever Nebuchadnezzar was unwilling to learn in good times he has to learn under difficult circumstances until he is willing to accept that God is the Lord. Nebuchadnezzar's insanity may be indirectly referred to in historical sources.

6. Nebuchadnezzar's Conversion

vs. 31–34 *What does Nebuchadnezzar express with these verses?*

- He does not blame God for his sickness.
- He praises God and prays to Him.
- He acknowledges God as the only sovereign Lord. We are dust, while God is eternal and omnipotent. God does all things right (see Rom 8:28). God loves humility.
- Nebuchadnezzar is converted to God.

When the king looked up to God and entered into a relationship with Him, he was healed. In addition, he got back his kingly office. Let us “fix our eye on Jesus” (Heb 12:2), not on humans. Nevertheless, people who love the Lord can be of great help on our journey to God. It is conceivable that without Daniel Nebuchadnezzar may not have found God.

II. Connections to the New Testament

- The great tree with animals living in and under it is used by Jesus in a parable to describe the kingdom of God which surpasses Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom by far (Matt 13:32).
- The fall of Nebuchadnezzar resulting from his pride (Dan 4:30, 31) points to the fall of symbolic, end-time Babylon (Rev 14:8; also chapters 17 and 18). The term “Babylon the Great” is found in both books.
- Compare Daniel 4:34 with Revelation 4:9. We should honor God “who lives forever.”

III. Application

- God is the true and highest Lord. He is the Lord over politics. He is also Lord over dictators who plague humanity. He carries out His plans behind the scenes. Soon He will establish His eternal kingdom from which everything negative will be banned.
- As God revealed Himself to Nebuchadnezzar, so He reveals Himself to us. He does this through answered prayers, experiences, and fellow hu-

mans—but especially through His Word, the Holy Scriptures. In some sense we are better off today than people were in the past: we have the full Word of God available to us.

- Just as God drew Nebuchadnezzar to Himself, God does not give up on us in His persevering love. Even when we go through bitter situations and experiences, God's goal for us is our salvation.
- As Nebuchadnezzar made a decision for God, we too need to decide if God is our Lord.
- We must share our experience with others as Nebuchadnezzar did. Everyone should have the chance to experience the joy of belonging to God, our Savior and Lord.

BOOK NOTES



Raúl Kerbs, *El problema de la identidad bíblica del cristianismo* (The problem of the biblical identity of Christianity), Libertador San Martín: Ediciones Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2014), 682 pages, ISBN 978-987-1378-32-6. US\$39.00

This book by Raúl Kerbs, Doctor of Philosophy, will surely make an impact on philosophers and theologians. In it he develops the subject of assumptions or presuppositions and analyzes their effect on Christian theology. On the topic of identity, the author asserts that the Bible claims to be its own interpreter. But the adoption of a philosophical interpretation eventually blurs Christianity's biblical identity. The major concern of interpretation in both philosophy and theology is the concept of God and presuppositions attached to this concept. From that starting point the author leads the reader on a journey through the Western and Greek as well as Western and Christian thought.

The discussion of the subject begins with the pre-Socratics era. For Heraclitus, reality was cyclic and subject to change. Thus he elaborated his reflection from the standpoint of a temporal reality. Parmenides, however, looked for a reality beyond time and change. For him, knowledge and the essence of things were timeless and unchanging. This presupposition would eventually dominate philosophy as a whole. Then Socrates came with the idea that there are true concepts for all things. This inspired Plato to search for these concepts.

Kerbs proposes that Plato endorsed Parmenides in his search for the being of things within a timeless frame, thus labeling the temporal and material things as not real. To define the essence of things is to go beyond

them. It is to stop their temporal flow, to freeze it into an ideal being. Later on, the Aristotelian distinction between form and matter further developed the already installed dualism. The form is the timeless and unchanging reality. It was with Aristotle that metaphysics reached its definite shape.

In the chapter devoted to biblical interpretation Kerbs confronts the reader with the turning point between philosophy and Bible thought. According to him, Exodus 3:14, 15 is a biblical interpretation of self. There, Moses receives a revelation of God's ontic as well as his historic presence. There, God's revelation connects His historical presence with a past and a future. God's being is revealed in His historical manifestation. The Bible does not make a distinction between God's timeless level and the historical level of His work on behalf of His creation. Thus the Bible must be read from its own interpretative presuppositions, and these are not the same as those of philosophy. The Bible offers a cognitive foundation to interpret God's being within time, not from the timelessness and changelessness of the Greek philosophy.

Then the author moves on to show that it was during the conflict between the Christian faith and philosophy that the early Christian Fathers adopted the presuppositions of philosophy that became the unchallenged assumptions of biblical interpretation. Augustine was decisive on the theological thought because for Christian theology the temporal and historical world of biblical revelation is not the realm of the true knowledge. Thus, God's being is interpreted according to Parmenides and Plato. According to Augustine, theology based on revelation is neither the realm of true being nor of true knowledge. For him, theology must seek the truth beyond the Bible. Thomas also applies to his inquiry on God the philosophical categories of timelessness and changelessness. Through Thomas, theology borrowed methods, demonstrations, and presuppositions from phi-

losophy. As a consequence, the harmonization of reason and faith was reached on the basis of the philosophical interpretation. In the chapter devoted to Ockham, Kerbs seeks to break the hegemony of scholasticism without abandoning the philosophic interpretations of the presuppositions about the mind.

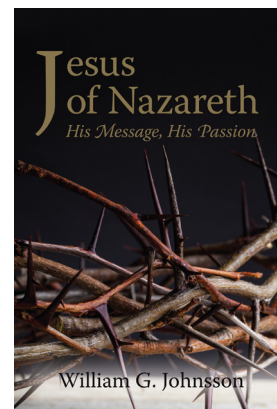
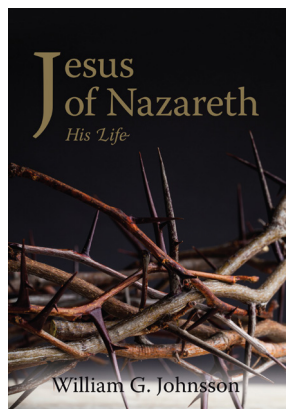
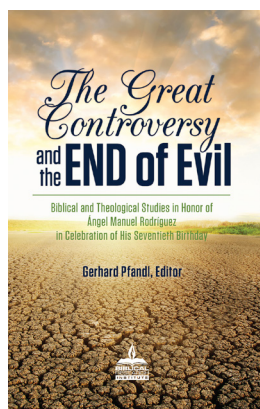
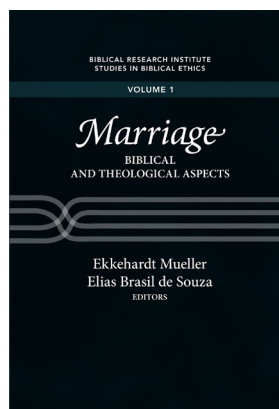
In the chapter about the theology of the reformers, Kerbs shows that there was not a discontinuity with the past in regard to the matters already discussed. Although Luther seemingly tried to distance himself from philosophy, he again interpreted God from the presupposition of timelessness. For Calvin, the immaterial, eternal, and spiritual reality is the only true one. According to him, all—including evil—has been decreed by God beforehand. Orthodox Protestantism did not escape the presuppositions of philosophy on the self and God. In the twentieth century, some evangelicals recognized that the theology of the Protestant orthodoxy was not opposed to philosophy and that a moderated Aristotelianism dominated the Protestant thought of both the Lutherans and the Calvinists.

In sum, Dr. Kerbs's thesis is that the Greek philosophical epistemology based on reason validates the presuppositions of "timelessness" and "changelessness," which in turn conceptualize the *ontos* and the *theos*. In the Bible, on the contrary, the *theos* decides the epistemology and its presuppositions in the "historicity" and "revelation" which in turn determines the *ontos* of the God of the Bible. Here lies the biblical identity of Christianity. This makes necessary not a *de*-construction, but a *con*-struction of Christian theology as a whole.

The book is a groundbreaking, thought-provoking must-read for those involved in the adventure of thinking; it includes twenty charts, 150 graphic helps, and a general and basic bibliography.

Carmelo Martinez,
River Plate Adventist University

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