

ABSTRACT

“Christ-Centered Deconstruction as Biblical Method”— The aim of this study is to reveal the positive gains of postmodernism, particularly in showing that Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction contains elements useful for a biblically faithful, Christ-centered deconstruction of Christian theological traditions. Moreover, this article aims to show that such a biblically oriented deconstruction is not only beneficial to Christian church, but that it is the only method that will lead to greater clarity on current doctrines and the reception of greater light. This method is not a deconstruction applied to Scripture but from Scripture to traditional Christian interpretations, beliefs and practices.

Palabras clave: Jacques Derrida, deconstruction, theological method, hermeneutics, Fernando Canale

RESUMEN

“Deconstrucción cristocéntrica como método bíblico”— El objetivo de este estudio es revelar los beneficios positivos del posmodernismo, particularmente al mostrar que la deconstrucción de Jacques Derrida contiene elementos útiles para una deconstrucción bíblicamente fiel y centrada en Cristo de las tradiciones teológicas cristianas. Además, este artículo quiere mostrar que tal deconstrucción bíblicamente orientada no solo es beneficiosa para la iglesia cristiana, sino que es el único método que conducirá a una mayor claridad sobre las doctrinas actuales y la recepción de una mayor luz. Este método no es una deconstrucción aplicada a la Escritura sino de la Escritura a las interpretaciones, creencias y prácticas cristianas tradicionales.

Keywords: Jacques Derrida, deconstrucción, método teológico, hermenéutica Fernando Canale

CHRIST-CENTERED DECONSTRUCTION AS BIBLICAL METHOD

Silvia Canale Bacchiocchi

Introduction

Most Christians tend to view postmodernism¹ as either monster or savior. The first view instinctively rejects postmodernism as a relativizing, anarchic, and even nihilistic force, where the monster of postmodern deconstruction stomps around destroying all that is good in society—especially faith in God and his Word. The other end of the spectrum embraces postmodernism as a benevolent liberator granting all perspectives a seat at the dialogical table, a place where everyone’s views are heard and valued equally.² As we shall see, while not devoid of problems, I believe postmodernism has, among other positives, opened to view a more biblical understanding of God and exposed the limitations of human reason.

The main Christian argument against modernism—and postmodernism³—is that it removed belief in God in general and Scripture in particular by introducing the historical-critical method, which

1. It is important to distinguish between postmodernism and postmodernity. Postmodernism is the intellectual movement that seeks to construct new meaning, such as in Derrida’s thought. Postmodernity, on the other hand, is the cultural phenomena largely rooted in self-seeking, individualism, and consumerism. Thus, “Derrida’s deconstruction and Foucault’s genealogy of power are examples of postmodernism; adolescent absorption in virtual reality and the triumph of the mall as temple are examples of postmodernity.” James K. A. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). Italics original.

2. In *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), Baptist theologian Millard J. Erickson offers a balanced treatment of postmodernism noting both its positive and negative contributions. He notes seven positives of postmodernism: (1) the conditioned nature of knowledge, (2) the effect of presuppositions, (3) the limitations of foundationalism, (4) the negative elements inherent in any system, (5) the use of knowledge as power, (5) the need for a hermeneutic of suspicion, (6) the role of community, and (7) the value of narrative. On the negative side he sees: (1) logical inconsistency, (2) rhetorical and practical difficulties, and (3) practical difficulties—each area contains subcategories and examples.

3. Most scholars agree that postmodernism was not a reaction against but rather the logical continuation of modernism.

is grounded on two main presuppositions: the autonomy of human reason and the impossibility of supernatural revelation.⁴ Historical criticism sees the Bible as a mere human product, not as the work of a divine Author who guided each writer in developing a cohesive revelation of God's character, actions, and mission. While deconstruction is a valid tool of analysis, the historical-critical hermeneutic of suspicion should be aimed only at human traditions, never at the enduring word of God. For if we do this, the only norm left for us is the ever-changing current of human imagination and theories, which offer no enduring foundation.⁵ However, "when deconstruction is not applied *to* Scripture, but *from* Scripture to traditionally received and accepted beliefs and practices, deconstruction becomes not a postmodern enemy, but an ally."⁶

While many today long for a return to premodern times, at least as regards the belief in God and his Word as a sure foundation, we must not romanticize classical Christianity. For while it upheld belief in God, this was not the God of Scripture, but the God of Greek philosophy.⁷ Premodern Christianity, then, was guided by two basic

4. Frank M. Hasel notes three corollary principles: (1) the principle of criticism, believing all biblical texts are human products and naturally flawed, thus requiring critical analysis; (2) the principle of analogy, that argues for a basic homogeneity in all historical events; and (3) the principle of correlation, which means that "any historical event or text has to be understood and explained solely in terms of its immanent-historical context." Frank M. Hasel, "Recent Trends in Methods of Biblical Interpretation," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Adventist Approach* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2020), 410–425.

5. For example, Joel M. Lemon, ed., *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Petersen* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009) notes some fifty different critical methods! These include psychological criticism, anthropological approaches, narrative analysis, feminist criticism, gender analysis, ecological approaches, Latin American approaches, social-scientific criticism, and postcritical perspectives

6. Fernando Canale, "Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?" *AUSS* 44, no. 1 (2006): 130. Italics original.

7. The Greek presuppositions of Christianity are masterfully explored by Raúl A. Kerbs in two volumes comprising about 2,500 pages. His first volume is titled, *Deconstrucción de la teología cristiana I: Desde los presocráticos hasta la ortodoxia protestante*, Dios y tiempo 3 (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2022); Raúl A. Kerbs, *Deconstrucción de la teología cristiana II: Desde Descartes hasta Stanley Grenz*, Dios y tiempo 4A and 4B (Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2022). A condensed version summarizing both volumes should be published soon.

Platonic presuppositions: First, *God is timeless and impassible*. This means he cannot engage historically in real time or be a loving personal Creator and Redeemer. Instead, the classical God acts by timeless decrees in predestining some to salvation and others to condemnation (this view is still held in Roman Catholicism and nearly all versions of Protestantism). The second presupposition of classical or premodern Christianity is *dualistic anthropology*, meaning that humans are conceived to be a combination of temporal body and timeless soul. Hence the only way humanity can know a timeless (ahistorical) God is by tapping into the timeless soul's reason.⁸ In mounting a critique against these false presuppositions, modernism and post-modernism began to open the way for a more accurate understanding of the true God of Scripture and a correct view of human reason.

The aim of this study is to reveal the positive gains of postmodernism, particularly in showing that Jacques Derrida's deconstruction contains elements useful for a biblically faithful, Christ-centered deconstruction of Christian theological traditions. Moreover, I hope to show that such a biblically oriented deconstruction is not only beneficial to our church, but that it is the only method that will lead to greater clarity on current doctrines and the reception of greater light.

The presuppositions that undergird this study⁹ rest on the *sola Scriptura* principle, which holds that all doctrine should be constructed on, and evaluated by, the rule of Scripture alone (Isa 8:20; 2 Tim 3:16).¹⁰ Along with *sola Scriptura*, this study assumes its three

8. For example, Augustine (on whom Christian tradition is built) held the soul as comprised of two parts: a lower reason (*ratio inferior*), which deals with sensory-temporal contents, and a higher reason (*ratio superior*), which has prior knowledge of immutable truth and gives meaning to sensory knowledge. In his attempt to contemplate God, Augustine begins from material things, then rises to the soul, then goes further to the inner power of the soul, arriving at higher reason and finally to the source of its intelligence—a light which he terms the Unchangeable. Augustine's Neoplatonic view of reason as capable of reaching absolute truth has held sway in Western thought up until the modern period. For a critique of this presupposition in both Augustine and Martin Luther see Silvia Canale Bacchiocchi, "Dwelling with God through the Exodus Sanctuary-Covenant Structure" (MA thesis, Andrews University, 2019), 16–32.

9. See Richard M. Davidson, "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Review & Herald, 2000), 58–104; and John C. Peckham, *Canonical Theology: The Biblical Canon, Sola Scriptura, and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

10. Scripture is the norming norm (*norma normans*) of all doctrine. No other source can stand on equal footing. This means tradition (Matt 15:6; cf. Col 2:8),

corollaries: (1) *tota Scriptura* (all Scripture must be considered; 2 Tim 3:16); (2) *analogia Scriptura* (Scripture is a unified and coherent whole, in which Scripture interprets Scripture; Isa 8:20; Luke 24:27, 44–45); and (3) total submission to the teaching of the Holy Spirit (spiritual things are spiritually discerned; 1 Cor 2:11–14). That said, it is important to note that the *sola Scriptura* approach does not exclude the consideration and use of extra-biblical information,¹¹ but subjugates all non-biblical content to the scrutiny of God’s word, retaining only what is true and beneficial for the elucidation of Scripture.¹² Thus, while not baptizing the philosophy of deconstruction, some of its insights may be adapted to help us understand Scripture in a clearer light.

Regarding procedure, we will first look at the importance of hermeneutics for salvation and examine the role of philosophy in hermeneutics. Second, we will look at modernism in general as well as postmodern precursors who influenced Derrida’s thought, namely Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Ferdinand Saussure, and Claude Levi-Strauss. Thirdly, we will define Derrida’s deconstruction by noting its *textual*, *transgressive*, and *messianic* elements.¹³ Our fourth step will explore how in Scripture Christ himself takes on—and even becomes—these three forms of deconstructive method:

human philosophy (Col 2:8), reason/experience (Prov 14:12), and science (1 Tim 6:20) can only act as resources. In other words, the Bible establishes itself as the sole source and arbiter of truth and everything else is resource which, if it agrees with Scripture, can help us understand it in a clearer light. Ryan Nicholas Claude Brousson, “The Hermeneutical Frameworks of Fernando Canale and Fritz Guy: *Sola* and *Prima Scriptura* and the Science-Theology Relationship” (MA Thesis, Andrews University, 2017).

11. Scripture permits the consideration of extrabiblical sources of information and even revelation, generally termed “general revelation” (Ps 19:1–4; Rom 1:18–23). For example, Paul alludes to pagan authors such as Aratus and Cleanthes (Acts 17:28), Epimenides (Titus 1:12), and Meander (1 Cor 15:33); see J. J. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*, SNTSMS 54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 78. John C. Peckham notes that ignoring the contributions of others usually results “a reductionist approach [that] tends to yield impoverished, solipsistic theology that is thus blindly beholden to the idiosyncrasies of private interpretation.” Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 12.

12. This is applying Paul’s maxim to test all teachings, retaining only what is good in the eyes of God as attested by Scripture and beneficial for instruction (1 Thess 5:21; cf. Isa 8:20).

13. Fernando Canale has noted these three overarching principles or method of deconstruction outlined by Derridean philosopher John D. Caputo. See Canale, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?”

textual, transgressive, and messianic, thus providing the grounding norm for a biblical deconstruction. Fifth, we will look at Adventist thinker Fernando Canale, noting how his Christ-centered deconstruction of Christian systems assists the reconstruction of doctrines established on Scripture alone. Finally, we will note other Adventist scholars who have applied Christ-centered (biblical) deconstruction to assist the recovery of biblical truth.

Hermeneutics and the Fall

*Hermeneutics*¹⁴ is the task of interpreting something, usually a text. *Deconstruction* is the hermeneutical—i.e. interpretive—task of unhinging the traditional interpretation of a text to evaluate it, find loose threads or inconsistencies, and offer a more convincing interpretation. And *biblical deconstruction*, as we shall see, is the interpretative task of critiquing traditions using Scripture as norm. But before we look at the process of deconstruction, we must first explore the process of interpretation. For the need to interpret was not a result of the fall, as if before the fall humans knew all things perfectly without the need to interpret. In other words, God created humans and other sentient beings as essentially interpretive creatures. To know God, humans, or creation in general required interpretation. It is precisely because human reason was not made to grasp truth irrefutably—or know it absolutely—that faith has always been the most essential component for remaining in union with God.

If we go back in time, before the creation of our planet, we note the essentially interpretive nature of sentient beings. It was then that Lucifer, an angel of supreme radiance and glory, began “trading”¹⁵ or

14. *Hermeneutics* is derived from the Greek ἐρμηνεύω, meaning “translate, interpret.” The word references Hermes, the messenger of the gods who worked as an intermediary spokesperson between the gods and human beings. Hasel notes how Paul is called “Hermes” by the folks of Lystra because he was the main speaker and was relaying information from the gods (Acts 14:12). Frank M. Hasel, “Introduction,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 1n1. In philosophy the term was first used by Aristotle in his *On Interpretation* (c. 360 BC).

15. The Hebrew for “trading” (הִתְחַלֵּף) is used again in Ezek 28:18 to denote one who slanders. See Richard M. Davidson, “Satan’s Celestial Slander (Perspective on the Word Dabar),” *Perspective Digest* 1, no. 1 (1996): 31–34; Richard M. Davidson, “Ezekiel 28:11–19 and the Rise of the Cosmic Conflict,” in *The Great Controversy and the End of Evil: Biblical and Theological Studies in Honor of Ángel Manuel Rodríguez in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Gerhard Pfandl (Silver Spring, MD: Review & Herald, 2015), 67–69.

slandering God (Ezek 28:16). Confronted with two conflicting narratives, the angelic hosts were forced to interpret whose “text” was true—Lucifer’s or God’s. Sadly, one-third of the angels interpreted Lucifer’s lies as true and eventually sided with Lucifer and fell (Rev 12:4). However, Ellen G. White notes that many angels remained unconvinced that God’s arguments were absolutely true and Lucifer’s false, and yet these did not sin by siding with Lucifer. By faith they sided with Christ. Yet it wasn’t until Lucifer’s demonic schemes crucified Christ that these heavenly angels were convinced that Lucifer’s text was false and God’s text was fully and absolutely true.¹⁶

Similarly, when Adam and Eve were created, their rational faculties did not perceive God’s truth as absolute and undeniable. When Eve encountered the gleaming serpent, she was free to interpret its words as of equal value with God’s—and in her evaluation of them (weighing their possibly truthful) she remained sinless. It wasn’t until she doubted God’s word and placed her faith in Satan’s words by eating of the forbidden fruit that she sinned. Exploring various truth claims is not sinful, this is simply a reflection of the mental freedom and cognitive flexibility God has given humans to subjectively arrive at what they consider to be the most convincing version of objective truth. God desires each person to weigh the evidence and be convinced in their own mind (1 Kgs 18:21; Rom 14:5; 1 Thess 5:21; cf. Heb 11:1). In other words, “reason does not work ‘absolutely’ from timeless, ontological ‘foundations,’ as modernists believed. Instead, postmodernity argues that reason works ‘hermeneutically’ from the interaction of temporal-cognitive subjects with temporal, changing realities.”¹⁷

Hermeneutics and Plato

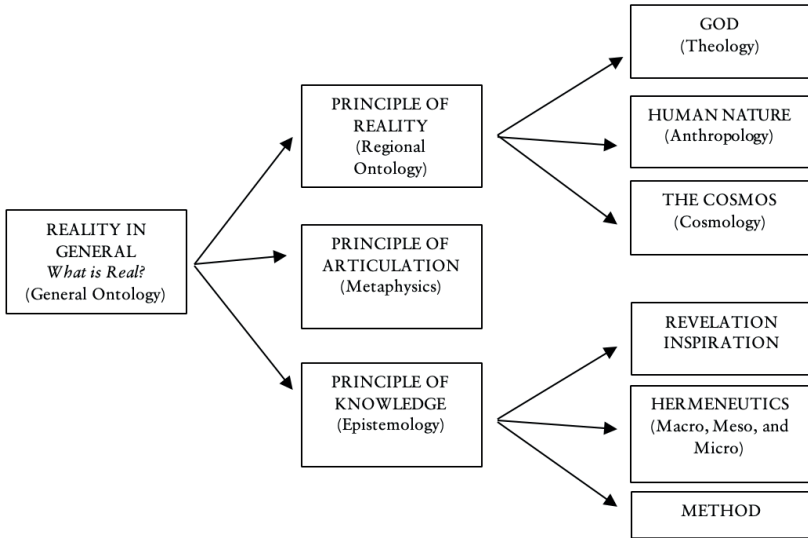
Satan struck gold again when, at the beginning of Western philosophy, he inspired Plato to establish his dualistic philosophy on the same lie he used to deceive Eve—you *will not surely die*. This statement meant there was a part of the human constitution, namely the

16. “Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds. The archapostate had so clothed himself with deception that even holy beings had not understood his principles. They had not clearly seen the nature of his rebellion.” Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 758.

17. Fernando Canale, “Absolute Theological Truth in Postmodern Times,” *AUSS* 45, no. 1 (2007): 92.

soul, that—just as the pagan timeless God—could never die, for it existed as an ephemeral substance apart from space and time. This lie became the bedrock of Plato’s ontology. As conductor of the philosophical symphony, timeless Being then determines the rest of the categories of regional ontology—namely theology, anthropology, and cosmology¹⁸ (see diagram A).

Diagram A: Macro-Hermeneutical Presuppositions



In relation to epistemology (how we know), Plato and all later philosophers held that timeless truth (God or Being) could only be apprehended using reason to extract truth from the temporal shell and, applying a combination of rational and mystical methods, achieve union with a timeless God.¹⁹ In theology, the words of Scripture were considered a mere temporal wrapping—only the word of God *for us*,

18. In theology God was interpreted as a timeless, ahistorical, and impassible (emotionless) being. In the realm of anthropology humans were interpreted as a dualism of temporal body and timeless spirit, a spirit which supposedly pre-exists the body and continues to exist after death. Finally, in cosmology, Plato’s cave myth aptly illustrates the belief in two worlds—where the one we experience on earth is a mere illusion or shadow. It is not real. Only the timeless world is real, and that one can only be accessed by the presumably timeless soul.

19. For a critique of this presupposition in both Augustine and Martin Luther see Canale Bacchiocchi, “Dwelling with God,” 16–32.

but not the word of God *as such*. Scripture contained truth, but it was not *the* truth. The interpreter had to look throughout Scripture, discard all historical chaff, and retain only the kernel of spiritual truth. For Augustine, this meant reinterpreting the days of creation as non-literal; for Luther it meant excluding entire books from the canon, preserving only what taught justification by faith.²⁰ This is still the *modus operandi* in most Christian religions.

It is important to note that the above-mentioned hermeneutical presuppositions guiding the interpretive process are all *macro-hermeneutical*.²¹ In the diagram above, the concept of Being/Reality (first box to the left) is the most grounding level and hence dictates the rest of the macro-hermeneutical categories—and there are *only two possible interpretations* for that box: (1) *Reality as timeless (ahistorical)* as in the Greek tradition begun by Plato, or (2) *Reality as temporal (historical)*.

In short, for millennia this premodern ontological interpretation of Being as timeless and epistemological interpretation of knowledge as capable of accessing truth absolutely was the default philosophy which determined all thought, even in Christian theology.²² However, in the twentieth century a German philosopher named Martin Heidegger boldly defied and deconstructed Greek ontology, offering a radically different interpretation of reality as temporal and historical. But before we get to Heidegger, we will note the man who began the unhinging of classical ontology and epistemology: Rene Descartes.

Modernity Unhinges the Classical View of Reality: René Descartes (1596–1650)

Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, developed a system of methodological doubt which initiated a trajectory that would ultimately dismantle—or deconstruct—premodern belief in human rea-

20. Canale Bacchiocchi, “Dwelling with God,” 16–32.

21. The three levels of hermeneutics: micro, meso, and macro, were adopted by Canale from Hans Küng, and used to define the categories in biblical interpretation. The more specific or micro-hermeneutical level relates to textual interpretation (exegesis), the middle or meso-hermeneutical level relates to doctrinal development (systematic theology), and the macro-hermeneutical level is the grounding, most foundational level (reality) of interpretation. Fernando Canale, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?” 103–104. See also Donkor Kwabena, “Presuppositions in Hermeneutics,” in *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 7-30.

22. See Kerbs, *Deconstrucción de la teología cristiana I*.

son as capable of apprehending absolute truth.²³ And while Descartes, a rationalist and Christian, continued to believe in the premodern view of reason as capable of arriving at absolute truth, later thinkers such as John Locke and David Hume used Cartesian doubt to debunk Descartes's idealism and establish empiricism in its place.²⁴ These philosophers methodologically doubted everything they couldn't establish experientially, and correctly claimed that reality is knowable only through sensory experience.²⁵ Hence epistemology began to shift in the modern era from a belief in reason as objective, absolute, and supratemporal to reason as (1) the experience of the subject who (2) must interpret truth (3) within the historical realm. The groundwork for Derrida's postmodern deconstruction was being laid, but a few other thinkers assisted in paving the way for its arrival, namely Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Saussure, and Levi-Strauss.

23. Several factors were present in raising the Cartesian method to such prominence. First, the discovery of ancient sources and creation of the printing press helped to quickly create and disseminate texts, which resulted in academic flourishing and a growing admiration for human reason. And secondly, the outcry around increasing ecclesiastical abuses resulted in open hostility to any church authority. The combination of these factors brought Cartesian doubt under the limelight as a mean to overthrow blind faith in church authority. These factors then created the perfect storm for the development of the historical-critical method. Craig G. Bartholomew notes that it was largely Descartes's emancipation of reason from the shackles of oppressive church dogma that gave birth to the historical critical method. Craig G. Bartholomew, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 209.

24. While the "empiricists agreed with the rationalists on the central role of knowledge, [they] disagreed on the origin of cognitive knowledge." Fernando Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotec, 2005), 158.

25. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) is a mixed bag, for while he held the validity of sensory experience (phenomena), he rejected that these things in space and time could be truly known because the essence of the things-in-themselves exist in an ideal and separate noumenal realm. Yet this is a realm we can never access, since we can only know what is in the sensory world of phenomena. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant seemed eager to straddle two worlds, placing one foot in the Platonic ideal world of timeless Being (idealism) and another in the sensory realm (empiricism). But as his critics have aptly noted, "to say that something is unknowable is contradictory, because such a statement implies that we already know that something *is* and to that extent it is knowable. . . . [Kant's] conception of the thing-in-itself collapsed." Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 328. Italics original.

Postmodern Precursors of Derrida

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

According to Derrida scholar, John Caputo, two of the strongest influences on Derrida's deconstruction were Kierkegaard and Heidegger.²⁶ Christian thinker Søren Kierkegaard—known as the father of both existentialism and postmodernism—offered up two important critiques on premodern philosophy, which Derrida would espouse. First, Kierkegaard rejected the Greek theory of Being²⁷ and second, he claimed truth is subjectively known.²⁸ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, existentialist thinkers continued to expand this modern perspective affirming both the centrality of the subject and the view that reality lay in our spatiotemporal existence, not in a presumably timeless realm.

26. Heidegger is often referred to as the father of modern German existentialism (Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 93), and although he himself disavowed that title (likely because his project was more serious than those of existentialists like Sartre and Camus, whose philosophies were mainly available in their literary works) it is noted that “Heidegger follows Kierkegaard in using the term *Existenz* to describe the mode of being that is distinctive of human life (or *Dasein*, as Heidegger would put it). . . . Where Heidegger differs from Kierkegaard is in assigning this ‘existential’ thesis an absolutely fundamental role in general metaphysics.” Thomas Baldwin, “Existentialism,” *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Ted Honderich (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 279. Caputo adds, “Despite Heidegger’s own failure to acknowledge his debt to Kierkegaard, and the tendency among Heidegger commentators to ignore Kierkegaard, the Kierkegaardian origin of what Heidegger calls ‘*Wiederholung*’ (retrieval, repetition) cannot be denied.” John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 12.

27. “Kierkegaard’s criticism of rational knowledge was severe. He revolted against the rational emphasis in Greek wisdom, which, he charged, had permeated subsequent philosophy and Christian theology.” Stumpf, *Philosophy*, 485. Caputo notes that Kierkegaard argues for existential movement against the classical view of Greek philosophy which is scandalized by motion. “For Kierkegaard the Greeks do not understand time, and they lack ‘the concept of temporality.’” Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics*, 15.

28. By the truth being “subjectively known” Kierkegaard meant that the human condition is inseparably linked to our existential and subjective knowledge of God over and against a rational objective knowledge. In fact, even if one desired, one simply cannot “bring God to light objectively,” for this “is in all eternity impossible because God is subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness.” Kierkegaard quoted in Stumpf, *Philosophy*, 489.

Martin Heidegger (1889–1976)

Derrida notes the influence of Heidegger on his thought:

My philosophical formation owes much to the thought of Hegel, Husserl,²⁹ and Heidegger. Heidegger is probably the most constant influence, and particularly his project of ‘overcoming’ Greek metaphysics. . . . The themes of Heidegger’s questioning always struck me as necessary—especially the “ontological difference”, the critique of Platonism and the relationship between language and Being.³⁰

Heidegger’s groundbreaking magnum opus, *Being and Time*, contains the primary elements of this “overcoming” or deconstruction of the Greek view of timelessness.³¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002), a

29. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) developed phenomenology (from the Greek *φαινόμενον* “that which appears,” and *λόγος*, “study”) a philosophical method which studies the structures of sensory experience, or “that which appears” to the senses. Husserl’s desire was to formulate a method intended to “save human reason” by developing philosophy into a rigorous science. He rejected the notion of fully objective research, recognizing that the subject brings many presuppositions to his interpretation of data, but he believed that these presuppositions could be completely bracketed out by a process termed *epoché*. As such, he sought a type of pure intuition of essences, void of any presuppositions. Yet, while many applied his method, they arrived at different conclusions. This led Husserl to acknowledge the failure of his project. In short, presuppositions could not be fully overcome. “Philosophy as science, as serious, rigorous, indeed apodictically rigorous, science—the dream is over.” Husserl, quoted in Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 114. Italics original. Husserl’s acknowledgement led Derrida to pursue further the concept of deconstruction, including the deconstruction of Husserl’s phenomenology. Ibid. It is important to note that while a complete suspension of all presuppositions is untenable, a “targeted epoché” is possible, this is where “epoché is targeted to suspend presuppositions in those areas that might be reasonably expected to impinge upon the study in the attempt to let the text speak for itself rather than being forced into an alien mold.” Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 249.

30. Derrida, in Erickson, *Truth and Consequence*, 114.

31. Heidegger states, “Greek ontology and its history . . . determine the conceptual character of philosophy even today. . . . If the question of being is to have its own history made transparent, then this hardened tradition must be loosened up. . . . In our process of destruction we find ourselves faced with the task of Interpreting the basis of the ancient ontology in the light of the problematic of Temporality.” Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans., John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 2008), 44, 47. While offering constructive critiques of his predecessors, Heidegger nonetheless stood on the shoulders of previous thinkers such as Descartes, Husserl, and Kierkegaard. He used Cartesian doubt to critique traditional Greek philosophy, applied Husserlian

student of Heidegger, stated that his teacher “changed the philosophical consciousness of time with one stroke. Heidegger unleashed a critique of cultural idealism that reached a wide public—a destruction of the dominant philosophical tradition.”³² Thus, Heidegger boldly redefined Being/reality not as something outside of time and space, but as a temporal and historical “being-in-the-world.”³³

From the above we may conclude that postmodern thinkers were correct in rejecting the classical-modern view that reason could apprehend truth absolutely. These thinkers rightly realized the essential role of the subject in interpreting the world around them. In other words, while truth itself is absolute, it can never be known absolutely, without one iota of doubt, as if it were a mathematical proof. Instead, the subject is called upon to interpret truth subjectively and ultimately decide (based on what Kierkegaard calls a “leap of faith”) what they will believe.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913)

De Saussure challenged the standard interpretation of linguistic theory which held that there was an innate commonality between languages. Instead, Saussure suggested that languages are based on social structures derived from culture. In other words, the meaning of language is not supra-cultural (arising from some commonality outside of culture) but inherent in and arising from the *structure* of culture itself—hence the designation of this philosophy as *structuralism*. In this we note the postmodern affirmation of temporal reality over some timeless, suprasensory quality in language. Saussure also posited that

phenomenology to study things as they appear, and Kierkegaardian *Existenz* to establish existence as the essential ground of reality, by which we apprehend what is. As a result, Heidegger not only reinforced the new epistemology (the method by which reality is apprehended in the spatiotemporal historical realm), but also a new ontology (defining the *sum* in Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*).

32. Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 138.

33. We should note that Heidegger’s *Destruktion*—from which Derrida derived his term *deconstruction*—is not a negative tearing apart (as in the deconstruction monster of postmodernism); in other words, it is “far from having the *negative* sense of shaking off the ontological tradition. We must, on the contrary, stake out the positive possibilities of that tradition.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 44. Italics original. For Heidegger that was to define Being as *Dasein*, which in German literally means “being there.” In other words, Being is being or existing in the historical present of spatiotemporal reality. Likewise, Derrida would build on Heidegger’s critique of Greek ontology, but he would accomplish this through literary means.

language was a sign which contained a signifier (sign image) and a signified (concept), both of which can change as culture changes.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009)

Building on Saussure, French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss further argued that the cultural structures of language are built around pairs of opposites, such as light/dark, male/female, purity/impurity. Hence structuralism's two primary components are (1) a thing/word is defined by the surrounding cultural structure (de Saussure) and (2) this system's coherency is reflected in paired opposites (Lévi-Strauss). Structuralism claimed that all elements of human life—including motives, behaviors, and action—were bound to a cultural structure and determined by it. In short, Lévi-Strauss and other structuralists rejected human freedom.³⁴ Derrida would soon use structuralism to deconstruct structuralism in what became known as post-structuralism or postmodernism.³⁵

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004)

On October 21, 1966 at Johns Hopkins University, Jacques Derrida, a then-little-known French philosophy teacher, was a last-minute presenter at a conference on structuralism. His short paper, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," took less than thirty minutes to present but by the time he sat down, "the entire structuralist project was in doubt, if not dead. An event had occurred: the birth of deconstruction."³⁶

In "Structure, Sign, and Play" Derrida critiques structuralism (which, as you recall, believed in cultural structures that limited human freedom). Derrida begins by criticizing structuralism's belief in a central organizing principle. For instance, he notes that ethnology was traditionally centered on the structural center of Western culture and philosophy. Yet Derrida observes that Western ethno-centrism has been "dislocated . . . and forced to stop considering itself as the

34. Structuralism therefore opposed the existentialism of Kierkegaard and Sartre which held the individual to be a free and responsible moral agent.

35. In other words, deconstruction is both an expansion on and refutation of structuralism.

36. Peter Salmon, *An Event, Perhaps: A Biography of Jacques Derrida* (New York: Verso, 2020), 3.

culture of reference.”³⁷ In other words, history has dethroned the central premise of Western ethnocentrism. Likewise, Derrida argues, we must loosen the fixed center of Western philosophy’s ruling center, namely metaphysical timeless presence³⁸ and incorporate it into what he terms “freeplay.” He also critiques structuralism’s opposition of binaries, where tradition normally privileges one element over the other (light over dark, life over death, male over female, etc.) noting that in Levi-Strauss’s *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, he finds things in the nature-culture opposition that defy this opposition, requiring the predicates of *both* nature *and* culture.³⁹ Levi-Strauss calls this a scandal, as it seems to break the structure of opposites. But Derrida’s point is that the structure must be deconstructed to allow for the freeplay of all parts.⁴⁰

We will soon explore how Derrida proposes to go about this freeplay (which is neither as free nor as playful as it sounds), but before we proceed a disclaimer is in order. For Derrida is not only prolific in his writings (having published over forty books), he is also notoriously vague, presenting a problem for any would-be interpreter. As Derrida biographer Peter Salmon puts it, “Derrida’s insistence on the equivocal, the ambiguous and the conditional renders unequivocal, unambiguous and unconditional statements instantly suspicious.”⁴¹ Historical theologian Roger E. Olson concurs, “It is not easy to get deconstructionism right. There is something elusive if not esoteric about it.”⁴² Thus, Olson’s treatment of deconstruction hinges, almost entirely, on postmodern philosopher, John Caputo—Derrida biographer and tireless defender. In doing so, Olson’s primary source is Caputo’s *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*.⁴³ I agree this is one of the clearest expositions of Derrida’s

37. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 282.

38. This timeless presence has taken on various names: being, essence, transcendental, consciousness, God, man, etc. *Ibid.*, 280.

39. *Ibid.*, 283.

40. It is interesting to note that Scripture does not uphold the distinction of opposite binaries but allows the flux of time to permit the ascendancy of the traditionally rejected binary—there is indeed a time to die, uproot, kill, break down, weep, mourn, lose, throw away, tear, hate, and war (Eccl 3:1–10).

41. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 283.

42. Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 688.

43. John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with*

thought and will thus be our primary anchor point as well. Also, as Derrida refers to Caputo as a “friend” and “very precious thinker,”⁴⁴ we will assume that Caputo is getting it (mostly) right. Thus, at the risk of oversimplifying Derrida’s thought, which a study of this brevity necessarily risks, we will define Derrida’s deconstruction through three central tenets discussed in Caputo’s work, namely deconstruction’s *textual*, *transgressive*, and *messianic* elements.⁴⁵

Deconstruction as Textual

Derrida’s most famous—or infamous—phrase is *Il n’y a pas de hors-texte*,⁴⁶ usually translated “there is nothing outside of the text.” Caputo calls this “one of the most thoroughly misrepresented utterances in contemporary philosophy.”⁴⁷ Many have understood this to mean that Derrida claims all we have is texts, as if nothing exists except language. However, if this were the case, it would make Derrida a metaphysical idealist along the lines of Plato and the rest of pre-modern tradition—the very tradition Derrida is seeking to counter. Derrida clarifies: “Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the ‘other’ of language [what exists outside language]. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; [“there is nothing outside the text”] is, in fact, saying the exact opposite.”⁴⁸ Derrida’s enigmatic statement is meant to underscore the reality that exists outside of the text, specifically the historicity of the interpreter and his need to interpret language through language. In short, textuality means “there is no reality that is not always already interpreted

Jacques Derrida (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

44. *Ibid.* 5.

45. While not expanding on these terms, Fernando Canale has noted these as Derrida’s three overarching principles for deconstruction as derived from Caputo’s *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*. See Canale, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?” 105.

46. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trad. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 172.

47. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 78.

48. Derrida, quoted in Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 114. To the charge of nihilism, Derrida counters that such misinterpretation of his thought is “symptomatic of certain political and institutional interests—interests which must also be deconstructed in their turn.” *Ibid.*, 115.

through the mediating lens of language.”⁴⁹ And this interpretation is never ending, meaning we will never get to a point where experience is unmediated by language and an interpretation of it. Rather, “interpretation is the inescapable part of being human and experiencing the world. . . . In the line of Martin Heidegger (of *Being and Time*), he [Derrida] is what we might call—for lack of a better term—a comprehensive hermeneuticist who asserts the ubiquity of all interpretation: all of our experience is always already an interpretation.”⁵⁰ In short, *textuality* means that our communication and understanding is mediated by words and our interpretation of words.

Moreover, contrary to other versions of postmodernism which ignore authorial intent (such as Stanley Fish’s reader-response theory), Derrida’s deconstruction requires a rigorous first reading to determine the author’s intent. To this end Derrida advocates the reader learn the text’s original language, become familiar with its author and his or her presuppositions (religious, political, historical, social), know by whom the author was influenced, compare the target text with others the author has written, and so on.⁵¹ In other words, this first reading of the text—which Derrida terms “preliminary [introductory], ground-laying, contextualizing”⁵²—is quite demanding. Yet Derrida maintains that this careful reading is necessary, for “without this recognition and this respect [for the work and author’s intent], critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything.”⁵³ From this we see that the “freeplay” Derrida advocates is far from the irresponsible free-for-all reading many have wrongly accused Derrida of promoting.

Deconstruction as Transgressive

Once the thorough first reading of the text has occurred, the reader may embark on the transgressive second reading—here is where we get into the thick of deconstruction. Now, when we think

49. Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?* 39.

50. *Ibid.* 38.

51. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 78. For Derrida, “a deconstructive reading is exceedingly close, fine-grained, meticulous, scholarly, serious, and, above all ‘responsible,’ both in the sense of being able to give an account of itself in scholarly terms and in the sense of ‘responding’ to something in the text that tends to drop out of view.” *Ibid.*, 77.

52. *Ibid.* 76.

53. *Ibid.*, 78.

of the word *transgressive*, we imagine that something unlawful, and hence wrong, is being committed. However, as Derrida would argue, some laws were meant to be broken. Derrida aims his pen specifically at the traditional “law” of interpreting reality through a Platonic dualistic lens, which he defines using three related terms: *metaphysics of presence*, *ontotheology*,⁵⁴ and *logocentrism*. All three terms refer to Derrida’s ontological critique of Greek philosophy as static/timeless Being. However, logocentrism—or *phonocentrism*—also refers specifically to a privileging of speech (over writing) as closer to the transcendental, timeless ideal.

Derrida thinks logocentrism encapsulates the limiting structuralist approach to Western philosophy that privileges one binary over the other (speech/writing, light/dark, male/female) and thus his goal is to transgress or deconstruct it at its source—Plato. This transgression of the traditional interpretation of the text is not intended to disrespect the author, on the contrary. In Derrida’s words:

The way I tried to read Plato, Aristotle, and others is not a way of commanding, repeating, or conserving this heritage [traditional interpretation]. It is an analysis which tries to find out how their thinking works or does not work, to find the tensions, the contradictions, the heterogeneity within their own corpus. What is the law of this self-deconstruction, this “auto-deconstruction”? Deconstruction is not a method or some tool that you can apply to something from the outside. Deconstruction is something which happens inside; there is a deconstruction at work within Plato’s work, for instance. As my colleagues know, each time I study Plato I try to find some heterogeneity in his own corpus, and to see how, for instance, within the *Timaeus* the theme of the *khora* is incompatible with this supposed system of Plato. So, to be true to Plato, and this is a sign of love and respect for Plato, I have to analyze the functioning and disfunctioning of his work.⁵⁵

54. The term *ontotheological* was coined by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant uses *ontotheology* to define efforts to rationally prove the existence of God. This term was then appropriated by Heidegger to define all philosophy since the time of Plato. See Henry L. Ruf, ed., *Religion, Ontotheology, and Deconstruction* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1999), 4.

55. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 9. Specifically, what Derrida does in the *Timaeus* is to disrupt the Platonic dualism of reality (intelligible realm) and illusion (sensible realm) by discovering in Plato a third entity—*khora*—which is neither reality nor illusion. *Khora* is neither an intelligible form nor one more sensible thing. *Khora* is not born nor does it die; it is beyond the temporal sphere, yet it is not part of the intelligible timeless realm either. *Khora* seems to straddle both worlds

Basically, Derrida rocks traditional Platonic dualism by uncovering in Plato a third, intermediate, entity (*khora*) that had received little press in traditional interpretations. Caputo defines the deconstructive reading as “‘transgressive’ of the protection that the traditional reading affords.”⁵⁶ Hence we see that the transgressive element of deconstruction brings every element under analytical scrutiny, particularly the revered traditional interpretation of Being as timeless that creates a fixed binary approach.

Deconstruction as Messianic

If *textuality* is the mode, and *transgression* the method of deconstruction, then *messianicity* is its end. Messianicity is the “universal structure” of experience.⁵⁷ It is experiencing *the promise* in the present and anticipating its fulfillment in the future.⁵⁸ For Derrida the promise begins with the simple yet loaded act of speech, which presupposes truth in every exchange—for even a lie is a transgression of the truth that is assumed: “Every speech act is fundamentally a promise.”⁵⁹ In the inherent nature of speech as truth-telling, Derrida also sees the promise of something greater—a messianic future. Caputo explains, “The messianic future, the unformable figure of the Messiah in deconstruction, has to do with something absolutely unrepresentable and unrepresentable that comprises the prestige of the present, the absolutely undeconstructible that breaks the spell of present constructions.”⁶⁰

Closely related to messianicity is Derrida’s favorite concept—justice. Messianicity is the embedded sense of true justice in every heart, a felt promise in the present of its full realization to come. This coming of worldwide justice, a complete and harmonious justice, is what fuels the present with anticipation. “Justice, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructible. . . . Deconstruction is justice.”⁶¹ Justice is the virtue by which everything is deconstructed. “Justice is

and thus presents an inherent critique to a neat Platonic dualism.

56. *Ibid.*, 79.

57. *Ibid.*, 22.

58. *Ibid.*, 163.

59. *Ibid.*, 23.

60. *Ibid.*, 162.

61. Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law, The Mystical Foundation of Authority,” in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 14–15.

the absolutely unforeseeable prospect (a paralyzing paradox) in virtue in which the things that get deconstructed are deconstructed.”⁶²

In his attempt to define the messianicity expressive of this justice, Derrida runs into a problem between two binaries. He describes his struggle in the following light:

The problem remains—and this is really a problem for me, an enigma—whether the religions . . . of the Book, are but specific examples of this general messianicity. There is the general structure of messianicity, as the structure of experience. . . . That is one hypothesis. The other hypothesis . . . is that the events of revelation, the biblical traditions, . . . have been absolute events, irreducible events which have unveiled this messianicity. We would not know what messianicity is without messianism, without these events, which were Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ, and so on. In that case singular events would have unveiled or revealed these universal possibilities, and it is only on that condition that we can describe messianicity. Between the two possibilities I must confess I oscillate and I think some other scheme has to be constructed to understand the two at the same time.⁶³

In other words, Derrida sees two options: (1) *general messianicity* as a general longing for justice, of which the biblical traditions, namely Judaism and Christianity, are simply one manifestation; or (2) *special messianicity* as specifically revealed in the absolute and irreducible events specifically outlined in Scripture. In his typical aversion to paired opposites, Derrida believes there must be a way to reconcile these two options. I would suggest that a reconciliation that views the general longing to experience world-encompassing justice is met in the specific messianicity of Yahweh and Christ as revealed in the irreducible events of Scripture. Derrida retains this as a distinct possibility: “I still keep the singularity of a single revelation, that is Jewish, Christian revelation, with its reference to Messiah.”⁶⁴

However, the Christian revelation Derrida espouses refers to biblical revelation, not to that of Christian tradition. In *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, Caputo states that Derrida’s rejection of religion was essentially the rejection of the traditional Hellenistic “God” defined via the ontological

62. Derrida, quoted in Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 125.

63. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, 23-24.

64. *Ibid.*, 24.

presuppositions of Parmenides and Plato.⁶⁵ “Yahweh is not a Greek meaning but a Jewish passion. . . . The biblical God is no ontotheological creature.”⁶⁶ In other words, the Hellenistic God is diametrically opposed to the Yahweh of the Bible, one who is “a God of tears and compassion, who suffered with his suffering people, who was moved by their sighs and lamentations, who was angered by their meanness of mind.”⁶⁷ Referring to Amos 5:21–24 (where God expresses his hatred of Israel’s religious ceremonies, longing instead for justice to run like water and righteousness like a stream) Caputo concludes that Yahweh does not care about religion, but about “religion without religion,” a religion centered on justice.⁶⁸

In conclusion, we can summarize Derrida’s approach to deconstruction as a focus on *textuality*, that is, recognizing the mediating role of language and the interpreter’s need to carefully and methodically interpret a text, seeking authorial intent; *transgressivity* as the rejection of binary opposition which centers on Greek philosophy’s ontotheological structure; and *messianicity* as the present hope of a coming worldwide justice, a justice that hopes in a passionate God, such as the One revealed in Scripture,⁶⁹ over and against the timeless, static, and impassive Hellenistic God of philosophy (which forms the basis of Christian theology).

We should note that in establishing messianicity as a structure, and justice as its undeconstructible force, Derrida is essentially capitulating back to the structuralist mindset he opposed in both structuralism and ontotheology (logocentrism).⁷⁰ This inconsistency is avoidable since it is possible to retain a structure—as Derrida clearly seeks to retain—while rejecting ontotheology. It is precisely such a structure that Fernando Canale, building on the Adventist pioneers and Heidegger, has discovered. But first we will explore how the bib-

65. John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 336.

66. *Ibid.*, 335.

67. *Ibid.*, 336.

68. *Ibid.*, 337–338.

69. It’s important to highlight that while Caputo is attracted to the passionately loving, personal, and historic God of Scripture, he does not believe in miracles and endorses the historical-critical method, which ultimately uses secular deconstruction against Scripture. Derrida is likely along this spectrum also. See Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology*, 703.

70. This inconsistency has been noted by many scholars, including Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 131–132.

lical Christ—the embodiment of undeconstructible justice—reflects the basic contours of Derrida’s deconstruction.⁷¹

Christ as Textual

The “textuality” of Jesus is perhaps most clearly seen in John 1:1 and v. 14, where John calls Christ “the Word [λόγος]” who became [ἐγένετο] enfleshed so he might speak God’s grace and truth to humanity. In other words, at his incarnation Jesus became the Spokesman or Mediator for God to humanity. John’s point in using the term λόγος, a term his Greek audience would have known well from philosophy,⁷² is to show that Christ is the true wisdom from God. Moreover, his use of ἐγένετο (“became,” indicating ontological being) would have been scandalous to the Greeks as it indicated that God was ontologically in Christ, this was not an illusion or appearance, but God himself was entering humanity in the flesh—something the Greeks would have considered utter foolishness. While John doesn’t use λόγος again in his gospel to refer to Christ, he does so in 1 John 1:1 where he calls Jesus “the Word of life” (τοῦ λόγου τῆς ζωῆς) and in Rev 19:13 where he refers to the returning Messiah as “the Word of God” (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ). In 1 Cor 1:24 Paul uses a similar term for Christ: “The wisdom of God” (θεοῦ σοφίαν).

Christ, the Wisdom of God

Moreover, John points us back to the mediatorial role of Christ in the OT when he states, “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made” (John 1:2–3, NKJV). This creation time points us back to the role of the preincarnate Christ before anything was created, hinting at

71. In *What Would Jesus Deconstruct? The Good News of Postmodernity for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), Caputo plays on the “What Would Jesus Do?” movement to ask a similar question regarding Jesus and deconstruction. However, following the historical critical mindset, Caputo rejects *sola Scriptura* and focuses primarily on the NT and ethical concerns—more akin to the meso-hermeneutic category of doctrines. Specifically, he looks at justice in relation to the church’s teachings on topics such as the treatment of the marginalized, homosexuality, and abortion.

72. Heraclitus (c. 535 – c. 475 BC) and the stoics had used λόγος as a symbol of divine reason. Aristotle (384–322 BC) also used λόγος as “logical reasoning” in his rhetorical discourse (along with πάθος and ἦθος). D. Estes, “Logos,” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016).

a prior enthronement in which the second Person of the Godhead was established as the Mediator between God and the soon-to-be-created universe. We find this account in Prov 8, where “Wisdom” is endowed with qualities elsewhere reserved for Yahweh alone. Richard M. Davidson notes that, like God, Wisdom (חֵכֶמָה) gives life and death (vv. 35–36; cf. 14:27), is the source of legitimate government (vv. 15–16; cf. Num 11:16–17), is the One who loves and is to be loved (v. 17; cf. Neh 13:26), is the giver of wealth (vv. 18–21; cf. 1 Chr 29:12), and most importantly is the source of revelation (vv. 6–10, 19, 32, 34; cf. 29:18; 30:3–5).⁷³ Davidson gives other Scriptural evidences to support the conclusion that the second Person of the Godhead (whom we now know as Jesus Christ) “condescended in divine *kenosis* [emptying] . . . , coming close to His creation, mediating between infinity and finitude.”⁷⁴

God and Word: An Indissoluble Union

Hence, we conclude that Christ has always been the Mediator between the infinite God and finite humanity, relaying God’s thought and words to the biblical writers, who by inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote down this *Logos*/Wisdom as text—the very text we see today when we read God’s Word. As noted above, all the text of Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16) and, contrary to what historical criticism contends, Scripture “never had its origin in the will of humans, but humans spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21, author’s translation). Scripture is so inextricably linked with Christ’s being that Paul refers to it as “living and active” (Heb 4:12, NASB). Ellen G. White affirms that “the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of Man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that ‘the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14).”⁷⁵ Because of this intimate relationship we can affirm

73. Richard M. Davidson, “Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 1 (2006): 33–54. See also Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology*, 143.

74. Davidson, “Proverbs 8 and the Place of Christ in the Trinity,” 54.

75. *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), vi. The textuality of Jesus as the Word enfleshed is noted by Ellen G. White, “The union of the divine and the human, manifest in Christ, exists also in the Bible. The truths revealed are all ‘given by inspiration of God;’ yet they are expressed in the words of

that biblical textuality is an accurate portrayal of Christ himself. And just as with Derrida's textuality, we must recognize the mediating role of God's voice in Scripture and be diligent in our role as interpreters of the biblical text. This means we must carefully and methodically study the text, ideally learning its original languages, the interconnectivity of all its books, and especially the divine Author's intent.

Christ as Transgressive

As we saw above, Derrida's *transgressivity* implies reading the text against the grain of traditional interpretations, and Derrida's pen was specifically aimed against the Greek ontotheological tradition of timeless being. Similarly, we could say that from the entrance of Satan's primordial lie—"you will not surely die" (Gen 3:4, NKJV)—God unleashed *enmity* between the woman and the snake—a plan to transgress the philosophy of the new world order established by its usurping ruler (Gen 3:15). Given that even prelapsarian beings needed to interpret, and given that now their fallen nature would be more receptive to interpret Satan's lies as truth, human redemption called for a clarity and discernment that only God's wisdom could engender. This required a deconstruction of Satan's original lie and the system that evolved from it.

Prophets of Deconstruction

Thus God appointed the prophets as his spokespersons. These bold men were commissioned to transgress the misinterpretations promoted in the new milieu. Oliver Glanz notes that all the OT prophets were sent to deconstruct the popular teachings of the false prophets.⁷⁶ First, Glanz mentions God's desire to unhinge the Hebrew mindset based on opposing binaries, primarily that of Israelite vs. foreigner, or us vs. them. God wants to reverse this hierarchy, charging the Israelites to love their neighbors, serve the disenfranchised widows, and treat the foreigner with respect. Just as the ten plagues had

men and are adapted to human needs. Thus it may be said of the Book of God, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.' And this fact, so far from being an argument against the Bible, should strengthen faith in it as the word of God." Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:747.

76. See Oliver Glanz, *Wenn die Götter auferstehen und die Propheten rebellieren: Glauben in einer modernen Welt* (Lüneburg, Germany: Saatkorn, 2012).

deconstructed the Egyptian gods, the Ten Commandments continue the deconstruction. Instead of the many Egyptian gods they only need to worship one, the almighty Yahweh Elohim. Instead of fearing or hating God as a punishing overlord, they are to see him as their gracious Redeemer, a loving Husband who seeks their blessing. Instead of mistreating the foreigner that is within their gates (the way they were mistreated by the Egyptians), they are to treat them humanely and provide rest for them on the Sabbath.

Deconstructing the Gods and Reconstructing Yahweh

Glanz notes a constant prophetic refrain aimed at the deconstruction of idols, such as Isa 44 and Jer 10, noting that while the God of heaven is almighty to create, sustain, and redeem, these gods of wood cannot walk, or speak, or do anything either good or evil. While the Egyptian and Canaanite religions sought to appease the gods to secure prosperity and the safe passage of the soul into the afterlife, God unmasks these gods as powerless as the blocks of wood that represent them. In Ps 115 the psalmist gives the somber warning about those who make gods who “have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. *Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them*” (vv. 4–8, NIV; italics added). It is for this reason that the second commandment deconstructs idol worship and establishes the true worship of Yahweh, who offers grace to the thousandth generation of those who love him and keep/treasure his commandments. And the fourth commandment provides the Sabbath day which welcomes us to rest in the beautiful image of our Creator and Rest-giver who lovingly restores his creation.

Christ as Sword

The best reflection of Christ as transgressive is seen in his statement, “I did not come to bring peace but a sword” (Matt 10:34). Similarly, John pictures Christ, “the Word of God,” at his second coming, riding on a white horse, and “out of his mouth comes a sharp sword” (Rev 19:15, NIV). Scripture reveals this sword as “the *sword of the Spirit*, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:17, NIV). This sword is the only weapon Christ used in the wilderness to win the battle with Satan (Matt 4:1–11). Paul reminds us that this is the weapon of

our deconstruction: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4–5, NKJV).

A Dose of Daily Deconstruction

Finally, Heb 4 tells us that this sword of the Spirit, by which we deconstruct (or transgress) the traditional interpretations of the world, is a double-edged sword. Like a surgeon’s scalpel it cuts deep into the flesh, even to revealing the thoughts and intentions of the heart (v. 12; cf. Luke 2:35; Rom 7:7). The carrier of this living sword is the Holy Spirit, the gentle reprover, whom Jesus sent to convict the world of sin, justice, and righteousness (John 16:8). When at Pentecost the gospel reached the ears of the audience, they were deeply convicted or “cut to the heart” (*κατανύσσω*, “I am pierced;” see Acts 2:37). The Holy Spirit revealed their condition and inspired hope in them of future righteousness. Likewise, before we can deconstruct or cast down arguments that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God, we must first allow the Word of God to gently—and daily—deconstruct us, showing us our true condition daily, and growing us into the loving image of Jesus.

Christ as Messianic

For anyone familiar with either the Old or New Testaments, explaining the concept of Christ as Messianic is like explaining the roundness of a circle or the wetness of the ocean, the quality is simply embedded in the name. More so with Jesus whose Greek title of Christ (*Χριστός*) is the equivalent of the Hebrew *מָשִׁיחַ* or Messiah, meaning “the anointed one.” As we saw above, Derrida’s concept of *messianicity* embraces the present hope of a coming worldwide justice, a justice that is undeconstructible and which serves as the norm for deconstruction. Likewise, Jesus perfectly exemplifies this concept, for Christ is life itself—no one could take his life from him, it was his to lay it down or take it up (John 10:18). In short Christ is undeconstructible, and what cannot be deconstructed becomes the ground of all deconstructions.

Moreover, Christ is the embodiment of justice. In the OT the prophets all pointed to Jesus as the source of all justice, imperfect at present, but perfect in its final manifestation. Moses prophesied of Christ as the seed that would crush the Serpent’s head (Gen 3:15).

Prophet Isaiah anticipated Him as the “Prince of Peace,” who would bring justice to the nations (42:1; cf. 7:14; 9:6), He would be the just Servant who by his knowledge would justify many (53:11). Jeremiah called Jesus “the Lord our Righteousness/justice” (Hebrew קִדְּוָה; Jer 23:6). And Daniel foretold the 490-year time prophecy wherein Christ would finish transgression, put an end to sin, atone for wickedness, and bring in everlasting righteousness/justice (קִדְּוָה) on earth (Dan 9:24).

In the NT we behold Christ, through whom God could be just and the Justifier of those who believe (Rom 3:26). During his earthly ministry Christ echoed the deconstructive prophets when he called out the religious leaders for neglecting justice (Luke 11:42). Although Christ came to fulfill all justice in his life (Matt 3:15), worldwide justice was yet to come. Paul announced that God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice (Acts 17:31; John 5:27; 17:2) and John envisioned Christ on this day waging war with justice (Rev 19:11; cf. Ps 96:13; Isa 11:4; 28:5–6). In that day, the perfect justice of Christ, in which truth and mercy unite, will reign eternally in the new kingdom of worldwide peace.

But before the reign of peace is the reign of deconstruction—Christ-centered, biblically-grounded deconstruction. As we saw, the basic contours of Derridean deconstruction are beautifully met in Christ as Word (textuality), Sword (transgressivity), and Just Judge (messianicity). And while Derrida believed the events and God of Scripture might encapsulate the undeconstructible messianic structure, he never thought to deconstruct ontotheology on the basis of Scripture. However, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, while Derrida was busy writing and lecturing against ontotheology, someone got busy doing something about it.

Fernando Canale (b. 1945)

As we noted above, in establishing messianicity as a universal structure and justice as undeconstructible, Derrida ends up unwittingly endorsing the structuralist framework he sought to oppose. However, this inconsistency is avoidable since it is possible to reject ontotheology (which appears to be Derrida’s main concern) while retaining a structural framework with a guiding and undeconstructible element. It is precisely such a structure that Fernando Canale discovered.⁷⁷

77. “Theologian-philosopher Fernando Canale has called into question the

In 1978, while teaching philosophy at the Adventist college in Argentina, Canale was also studying for a PhD in philosophy at the Catholic University of Santa Fe. During a seminar on Heidegger and the presocratics, Canale discovered two important points: (1) that knowledge centers on interpretation and (2) that Heidegger interpreted Being temporally. However, before he could finish his doctorate in philosophy, the door opened for him to do a PhD in theology at Andrews University and he decided to go through it. Early in his coursework at Andrews, the time came to select a dissertation topic. No other topic had fascinated him as Heidegger's revolutionary discovery of Being and time, and to this he devoted his efforts. In 1983 he successfully defended his dissertation entitled, "Toward a Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions,"⁷⁸ an epochal paradigm shift that completed Heidegger's project by replacing ontotheology with a biblical model.⁷⁹

The Shift from Onto-theo-logic to Theo-onto-logic

Canale studied the structure of theological reason and, by deconstructing the classical (premodern) and scientific models of theological reason,⁸⁰ showed that Christian theology has been constructed on

timeless view of God. . . . Whereas Kant critiques reason, cutting it off from a cognitive revelation of God as He is in Himself, Canale penetrates to the ontological reality of God in time for theological reasons and concludes that theology must be totally independent of all philosophies because they operate from opposite assumptions." Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 10.

78. Fernando Luis Canale, "Toward a Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1983). The dissertation was published later as Fernando Luis Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 10 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987).

79. Heidegger's concluding questions in *Being and Time* are, "Is there a way which leads from primordial *time* to the meaning of *Being*? Does *time* itself manifest itself as the horizon of *Being*?" Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 488, quoted in Gulley, *Prolegomena*, 9. Italics original. "Heidegger unearthed sufficient data to get back to the primordality of human existence. But the work must be continued so as to see the being of God as temporal in His relation with human existence in the historical-temporal flux of divine-human relationship. This was accomplished by Fernando Canale." Gulley, *Prolegomena*, 9–10.

80. Canale deconstructs the philosophical foundations of Christianity's classical and scientific models through their selected representatives, Thomas Aquinas

the basis of a timeless ontology. Simply put, the classical structure of theological (and philosophical) knowledge has always been as Heidegger noted: onto→theo→logical.⁸¹ In other words, the philosophical interpretation of Being (ontos) as timeless then determines the interpretation of God's being (theos) and the epistemological framework of reason (logos), that is, how we know God.⁸² However, in order to deconstruct that interpretation it was necessary to establish a phenomenological reading of the biblical text, where the reader suspends or brackets out prior interpretations allowing the text to reveal its own meaning.⁸³ When the biblical student takes God's words in Scripture seriously, a different structure of theological reason emerges, one in which God himself—through revelation and inspiration—is allowed to define his being, reality in general, and the manner in which he desires to be known. This structure is theo→onto→logical.

I AM THAT I AM

The primary text Canale chose to explore in building the biblical structure of Being (ontos) and reason (logos) is Exod 3:14, 15. Throughout Christian history, scholars have viewed God's self-revelation to

and Rudolf Bultmann, respectively. Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason*, 164–282. His conclusion is that Catholicism and conservative Protestantism have followed the Aristotelian-Thomistic interpretation of reason, while liberal Protestantism followed a Kantian interpretation of reason, both of which are built on the presupposition of Being as timeless. Thus, it is evident that Christianity (whether classical/conservative or scientific/liberal) has assumed that there is only one possible interpretation of Being/reality—the timeless one. However, the hypothetical character of reason (meaning that what reason knows is not certain, but merely possible) implies that there is not one fixed interpretation of reality. *Ibid.*, 54–57. Canale's phenomenological analysis of Exod 3:14–15 then provides an additional possible interpretation of Being/reality, one which is grounded in Scripture and diametrically opposed to the traditional interpretation.

81. *Ibid.*, 49–51. Other scholars who have criticized the onto-theo-logical approach are Iain D. Thompson, *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jeffrey W. Robbins, "The Problem of Ontotheology: Complicating the Divide Between Philosophy and Theology," *The Heythrop Journal* 43, no. 2 (2002): 139; Henry L. Ruf, *Religion, Ontotheology and Deconstruction* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1999); Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

82. Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason*, 298–382.

83. *Ibid.*, 296–297.

Moses at the burning bush as the *locus classicus*⁸⁴ of God's Being and offered various interpretations of its meaning.⁸⁵ Canale deconstructs these viewpoints as part of his quest to unveil the biblical structure of reason.⁸⁶ His analysis reveals that all historical interpretations view God's self-revelation as either an ontological statement on the timelessness of God's being, or as a historical interpretation of God's temporal manifestation indicating his presence but ignoring his ontological being. Canale sees this as an "uncritical surrender" to traditional ontological presuppositions that view God as timeless and transcendent. He then offers a phenomenological analysis of Exod 3:14, 15 to show how God extends his Being in the past, present, and future dimensions of time, thus revealing a theo→onto→logical structure.⁸⁷

In summary, through a careful analysis of the biblical text, Canale established biblical theo-onto-logical reason, thus challenging the pre-modern onto-theo-logical view repudiated by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Derrida, and Caputo. Moreover, Canale's reinterpretation of theological reason as theo-onto-logical means God is able to reveal himself in

84. Canale states that this pericope of God's self-revelation is a foundational reflection on Being similar to that of Parmenides in ancient Greek thought and Heidegger in contemporary philosophy. *Ibid.*, 292.

85. See Robert J. Wilkinson, *Tetragrammaton: Western Christians and the Hebrew Name of God: From the Beginnings to the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

86. Canale organizes his analysis in relation to Thomas Aquinas. Interestingly, prior to Aquinas some Jewish exegetes viewed Exod 3:14, 15 as a metaphysical expression viewing the divine name in a present-past-future *temporal* formulation. Augustine and Pseudo Dionysius, on the other hand, followed a timeless understanding of the text. In a similar vein, Aquinas's interpretation emphasized the ontological components of existence, universality, and simplicity—and timelessness. After Aquinas, there were three positions: (1) the classical ontological interpretation where God exists timelessly yet has a historical manifestation; (2) the refusal interpretation which views God's statement as a barrier against any human definition of his being; and (3) the historical interpretation. Within the historical interpretation three trends focus either on the past, with God as Creator ("hiphil" theory), on the future, with God as Liberator ("future" theory) or on God's continuous presence throughout history ("presence" theory). Yet all three forms of the historical interpretation radically deny any ontological interpretation of Exod 3:14, 15. *Ibid.*, 298–319.

87. For a brief summary of Canale's analysis of this pericope, see Canale Bacchicchi, "Dwelling with God," 51–64. Also Sven Fockner, "An Introduction to Canale's Criticism of Theological Reason," in *Scripture and Philosophy: Essays Honoring the Work and Vision of Fernando Luis Canale*, ed. Tiago Arrais, Kenneth Bergland, and Michael F. Younker (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2016), 11-31.

and through his historical actions and interactions with his covenant people. Yet the transcendent God also extends beyond our limited time.⁸⁸ Because God's temporality is similar yet markedly different from ours, God's time may be qualified as "infinitely analogical temporality."⁸⁹

Adventist Theologians of Deconstruction

Many theologians have followed Canale's methodology of deconstruction to discover the biblical model of various doctrines. One of the first was John C. Peckham, whose over 700-page dissertation, "The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship,"⁹⁰ was later published in a more reader-friendly format

88. God is eternal (Ps 103:15–17; Mic 5:2) and necessarily relates to time differently than created beings (2 Pet 3:8; Ps 90:4). For one, God is from eternity past and continues forever so that we cannot begin to fathom the stretch of God's years (Job 36:25).

89. Time may be viewed *univocally*, where time is the same for God and creation; *equivocally*, where time is totally different for God and creation; or *analogically*, where God's time and that of creation share similarities, but remain different in parts. See Fernando Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotech, 2005), 64–73. The use of analogy (*analogia entis*, or analogy of Being) was first proposed by Aristotle and assumed the *via negativa* (timelessness) of Parmenides and two-world theory of Plato. Thus Aristotle's analogy sought to connect the temporal world to the presumably timeless realm through a hierarchy of compounds, where everything (except God, who was pure act and timeless) was a greater or lesser compound of temporality and timelessness. The traditional *analogia entis* thus implies that, on an epistemological level, Scripture too must be a temporal-timeless compound, so that the job of the interpreter is to extract and retain the timeless spiritual element to the total disregard of the temporal "wrapping" (literal word). There is, however, a second interpretation of *analogia entis*, one that is grounded philosophically on Heidegger's interpretation of Being as temporal, and interpreted biblically in Fernando Canale's phenomenological study of Exod 3:14 (noted in the main text). This temporal interpretation of the *analogia entis* is as rational as the timeless Aristotelian interpretation, yet remains faithful to the *sola Scriptura* principle. In other words, the Bible presents a macro-hermeneutical (philosophical) alternative to classical philosophy that advances a stable foundation for constructing theological doctrine. Thus, theologians have the choice of grounding their rational study of Scripture on (1) many sources (classical/timeless *analogia entis*), which sidesteps the literal word of Scripture in search of the hidden spiritual meaning, or (2) base their theology on the philosophy/macro-hermeneutics of Scripture alone (biblical/temporal *analogia entis*), which upholds and understands the biblical text at face value (phenomenologically). See Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason*, 362–364; Kerbs, *Deconstrucción de la teología cristiana* 1, 144.

90. John C. Peckham, "The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the God-World Relationship" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2012). The published version of this dissertation is John C. Peckham, *The Concept of Divine Love in the Context of the*

(under 300 pages) entitled, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model*.⁹¹ Likewise, Roy Graf's dissertation (defended in 2017) was published under the title *The Principle of Articulation in Adventist Theology: An Evaluation of Current Interpretations and a Proposal*.⁹² It also follows Canale's method to arrive at a biblical view of the metaphysical center (principle of articulation) in Scripture. Similarly, Adriani Milli Rodrigues's 2017 dissertation "Toward a Priestly Christology: A Hermeneutical Study of Christ's Priesthood" also used the method of deconstruction to establish a biblical model of Christ's priesthood.⁹³

While not a dissertation, Adventist philosopher, Raúl A. Kerbs has undertaken the herculean task of deconstructing the entire history of philosophical presuppositions in Christianity, from the Presocratics to the present. The result of his labors consists of two volumes comprising some 2,500 pages. They are entitled, *Deconstrucción de la teología cristiana [Deconstruction of Christian Theology]*. Chapter six of the first volume builds on Canale's dissertation in helping to uncover the philosophical presuppositions of Scripture. The second volume covers the period from the Reformation to Postmodernism and is already available.⁹⁴ Thankfully, Kerbs has nearly completed a condensed and more reader-friendly version of both volumes which should also be available soon. This work (particularly as developed in the two extended volumes) is an essential guide for any biblical student wanting to deconstruct the traditional interpretations of macro-hermeneutical

God-World Relationship, Studies in Biblical Literature 159 (New York: Lang, 2015).

91. John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press).

92. Roy E. Graf, *The Principle of Articulation in Adventist Theology: An Evaluation of Current Interpretations and a Proposal*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2019).

93. Other Adventist theologians who have used Canale's method of deconstruction are Tiago Arrais, "A Study on the Influence of Philosophical Presuppositions Relating to the Notion of the God-human Relation upon the Interpretation of Exodus" (PhD diss, Andrews University, 2015); Marcos Blanco, who evaluates open theism's univocal view of God and offers a biblical alternative in "The Function of Analogy to Interpret the Biblical Records of the Person and Works of God: A Hermeneutical and Methodological Approach" (PhD diss, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2019); Marla Samaan Nedelcu, "Let us Make אדם: An Edenic Model of Personal Ontology" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2018); Karl Tsatalbasidis, "Toward a Biblical Theology of God's Presence in Christian Theology: A Study of How Different Interpretations of the Divine Presence Affect Liturgy," (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2019). See also Canale Bacchiochi, "Dwelling with God."

94. See references in footnote 7.

presuppositions inherent in Christian doctrine and thereby build doctrines on a solid biblical base.

Ongoing Hermeneutical Spiral

Finally, it is important to underscore that all theological projects remain permanently open to the scrutiny of deconstruction. The only undeconstructible norm is the Word of God, to which every person and project must remain open (Heb 4:12–13). This means all theological projects, whether Catholic, Protestant,⁹⁵ or Adventist (including those of the theologians mentioned above and the present writing) are not the final word on any given subject. Peckham describes this ongoing interpretive process—the hermeneutical spiral—in the following light:

The results of canonical theological method are not offered as the final word but remain secondary to the canonical text, which further corrects the system by way of ongoing canonical investigation via the hermeneutical spiral. Accordingly, a canonical theological system will never exhaust the text but endeavors to persistently move toward ever-greater correspondence and inner coherence.⁹⁶

Likewise, Ellen G. White reminds us that “it is impossible for any human mind to exhaust even one truth or promise of the Bible. One catches the glory from one point of view, another from another point; yet we can discern only gleamings. The full radiance is beyond our vision.”⁹⁷

95. Ellen G. White notes the errors of Protestantism that Adventism needed to deconstruct: “Great light was given to the Reformers, but many of them received the sophistry of error through misinterpretation of the Scriptures. These errors have come down through the centuries, but although they be hoary with age, yet they have not behind them a ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ For the Lord has said, I will not ‘alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.’ In His great mercy the Lord has permitted still greater light to shine in these last days. To us He has sent His message, revealing His law and showing us what is truth.” Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1923), 450.

96. Peckham, *Canonical Theology*, 257. Peckham outlines five helpful steps for the canonical interpreter seeking to draw a canonical framework: “(1) approach the canon humbly; (2) read ethically; (3) derive from the canon minimally that which can be held with confidence as discernible, demonstrable, and defensible; (4) move in a disciplined, delimited fashion from the particulars of divine revelation to universal (metaphysical) conceptions; and (5) refrain from premature conclusions and overreaching extrapolations by restricting conclusions to minimal sound inferences that are also discernible, demonstrable, and defensible.” *Ibid.*

97. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press), 171.

Conclusion

We began our journey into Christ-centered deconstruction as biblical method by noting the importance of hermeneutics for salvation, its role in the fall of angels and humans, and the integration of Satan's first lie as the bedrock of Plato's ontotheological metaphysics. We then noted modernism's fledgling critique of absolute reason which was taken up by Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and finally Derrida. After this we explored how the *textual*, *transgressive*, and *messianic* elements in Derrida's deconstruction, while rejecting ontotheology, retain a messianic structure with justice as its undeconstructible foundation. This same structure was seen in Christ: the Word (textuality) who brings the sword (transgressive deconstruction) in order to establish everlasting justice on earth (messianicity). Then we saw how Canale continued the deconstruction begun by Heidegger—and espoused by Derrida—to create a new interpretation of biblical reason where God (theo) defines being (onto) as temporal and establishes historical experience as the means by which we may know him (logos). We also noted several Adventist theologians who are applying biblically centered deconstruction to arrive at a canonical basis for various doctrines. Finally, we saw that all theological projects—whether Catholic, Protestant, or Adventist—must remain permanently open to the scrutiny of Scripture in an effort to arrive at an ever-greater correspondence with Scripture. For no system can ever exhaust the depth and glory of God's Word. "By the world [the Bible] is thrown aside as if the perusal of it were finished, but a thousand years of research would not exhaust the hidden treasure it contains. Eternity alone will disclose the wisdom of this Book, for it is the wisdom of an infinite mind."⁹⁸

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98. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 443.