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COVID-19 a Year Later: Perspectives from Pastor and Doctor Miguel Núñez

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Life and Books and Everything - Clearly Reformed

Dr. Miguel Núñez, Pastor for Preaching & Vision at IBI and President of Ministerios Integridad & Sabiduría, left his medical practice to follow his passion of preaching the Gospel. When COVID-19 broke out in 2020, he used his medical expertise to assess the situation for The Gospel Coalition. Now, one year later, he again offers his insights to you, along with a conversation about how the preaching of the Gospel is spreading in the Dominican Republic.

Life and Books and Everything is sponsored by Crossway, publisher of *The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World* by Brett McCracken.

Helping believers navigate today's media-saturated culture, Brett McCracken presents a biblical case for wisdom. Inspired by the food pyramid model, *The Wisdom Pyramid* challenges us to increase our intake of enduring, trustworthy sources while moderating our consumption of less reliable sources.

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Timestamps:

The Wisdom Pyramid [0:00 - 1:26]

March Madness & COVID-19 [1:26 - 4:05]

Introducing Dr. Miguel Núñez [4:05 - 6:01]

Revisiting COVID-19 a Year Later [6:01 - 10:59]

Why Developing Countries Handled COVID-19 Better [10:59 - 15:11]

Fear & Surprises [15:11 - 19:27]

What's coming next? [19:27 - 22:20]

What COVID-19 Reveals About Our Spiritual Condition [22:20 - 27:24]

The Backstory of Dr. Miguel Núñez [27:24 - 33:17]

The Backstory of the Dominican Republic [33:17 - 43:47]

Influences in the Gospel Movement of the Dominican Republic [43:47 - 51:10]

The View of the U.S. Church from Latin America [51:10 - 59:48]

Americanos Hablando Español [59:48 - 1:04:20]

Transcript

Greetings and Salutations, loyal listeners, welcome back to Life and Books and Everything. This is Kevin DeYoung and I'm joined with Colin Hanson and Justin Taylor, who you will hear from shortly and also our special guest who I will introduce in just a moment who want to thank again Crossway, for sponsoring this podcast, lots of good books coming off from Crossway today. We want to highlight the newest from Brett McCracken, who always is not only a good writer, but lots of thoughtfulness and looking at current events and for someone, Colin, you know, because he writes for TGC all the time, for someone who is so attuned to media and movies and television, he's the right person to have written this book, *The Wisdom Pyramid Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World*.

That may sound strange, but Brett actually thinks a lot about that and is a very thoughtful commenter and intakeer of media. So *The Wisdom Pyramid Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World* published by Crossway, Brett McCracken, check that out. All right, here we are, and as we're recording, this we are on the cusp of many basketball tournaments and March Madness.

I do think that my Spartans are going to make it. Sadly, I don't think that Northwestern winning the first three, losing 13 in a row, and then winning the last three is going to do it. And Nebraska is well-cemented in the basement.

Any comments, Colin and Justin? Let's just say I did not win the life in books and everything tournament and football, due to that loss to Michigan State that I do not want to talk about, but because of yesterday's last second win, I did win it in basketball. So take that Northwestern took down both Michigan State and Nebraska in basketball. Colin and I may have been the only two people in America texting each other about that game.

I wrote Justin right away and said, I was far too emotionally invested in that game. Well,

are you rooting for Alabama now in basketball? Of course, of course. It just makes things more interesting.

They play a very fun brand of basketball. More fun, I might say, than Nebraska, Northwestern's brand. But hey, I'm just glad we've got March Madness back.

I'm just glad we got something to watch. That was one of many smaller losses, but nevertheless, a loss from the last year. And one of the first signs that things were not going to be okay last year.

So I'm just grateful. Yeah, two connections to COVID. I mean, number one, Nebraska, their entire team, including coaching staff got COVID in the middle of the season.

They were out for like a month and a half of no games. And then going back to last year, that was the time I think that I realized, oh, this is a really big deal when I was on an airplane flying back from Chicago to Sioux City and looked at my phone and saw the NBA seasons canceled. They don't just cancel that over the flu.

So that was a big wake up call. Well, you remember earlier that the Utah Jazz player had made a joke about it and wiped down the microphone and everything. And then three days later, he's got it.

And at that time, we didn't know what that meant. We didn't know if that meant, oh my gosh, this guy has got a real chance to lose his life here. A year later, we know that that was not almost, that was almost certainly not going to happen.

But at the time, we just didn't know. That was a scary time. And thankfully we learned a lot in the last year.

Well, that is a good segue to today's guest who is well, knowledgeable, well versed and knowledgeable on many subjects, including COVID. So we're going to ask him about that. We are very pleased to have Miguel Nunez with us.

When I googled that, I found that he is also an actor, just like Stephen Nichols was. There's not Miguel Nunez, but this is the pastor, Miguel Nunez. Miguel has been gracious enough with his wife, Kathy has been in Charlotte for the past several days and spoke at our missions conference at a wonderful job.

He gave two great expositions from 2 Corinthians 5 at our church and has been doing a number of things with our folks. So thank you, Miguel. Miguel has received his Masters of Theology at Southern Baptist School for Biblical Studies, a Doctor of Ministry from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, and a Doctor of Medicine.

And we'll hear about that, but he practiced and taught for many years in New Jersey. He has been for the past, he'll tell us more 15 years, 20 years. The pastor for preaching and

vision at a glacial about Tista Internacionel and President of Ministerios Integridar at Cebidora.

What did I do in Santa Domingo Dominican Republic? He's a council member for the Gospel Coalition, also Vice President at Coelician. He's authored numerous books and is a very smart and humble man. His wife, Kathy, is also a Doctor and Indocrinologist practicing physician.

They've been married for almost 40 years. Miguel! Wow, you sound really smart. Thank you for being with us.

Thank you for the opportunity. It has been a great time to be here. Are you church and I are with these two other friends, Justin Taylor and Colleen Hansen.

So thank you, Kevin, again. Well, thank you. So we will talk about your pastoral ministry, some theology.

That's what's nearest to your heart and what's most important, but also important, especially in this past year, is your expertise in medicine. And this is not just like somebody who years and years ago did a little medicine on the assignment. This is your expertise, infectious diseases, and you have been very busy in the Dominican Republic for the past year.

So here's my first question. You wrote a piece for TGC. I just looked.

It was almost exactly a year ago when COVID first really got the world's attention. Do you feel like your assessment from a year ago was more or less correct? Or would you change what you thought of COVID March 2020? Well, in general, I think I thought about it in the right direction. It was definitely the respiratory illness.

I think by February or last year, they were publications already predicting that immortality was not going to be more than 1% that the behavior of the virus was in the suns and similar to what the flu virus is. And that what we needed to do is what has been done, respiratory isolation type of measures. And that has been maintained.

The numbers in terms of mortality, I think it's just about 0.5, 0.6, 0.7, depending upon the region. Same thing that had been predicted. It's a virus that was supposed to behave the way the flu virus behaves.

And luckily, the virus does not have the mortality that the first SARCs co-op virus had, which was about 10%. Neither has had the mortality of what the Merck's syndrome, which is also a coronavirus infection cause in the Arabian 2012, which was about 35%. So, I think the virus has behaved in some sense in a very similar way that was predicted in other ways.

However, I think some of the complications that we have seen, we did not predict that. I think the virus has been able to do some things that we did not know because the other coronavirus didn't do it. So there is one aspect that we could say no, no one would have guessed it is complications.

I think that we all have to make that. So, looking back, and there's a difference between being an infectious disease physician and being a public policy expert, but looking back now over a year, are there things that you think the globe or the US or the Dominican Republic policies we should have done differently that would have either mitigated the disease better, or if not mitigating the disease, would have been basically the same as what we've had without being as disruptive. What do you think we've learned in the past year that we could have done differently? I think the population in some areas were not as disciplined and they were not as prudent.

And I think if those two things would have been taken into consideration, meaning we would have listened to the instructions in a consistent way and we would have followed them. In general, I think probably we would have done better, at least in certain areas in certain countries. Now, there are other countries and regions where things probably would have been the same no matter what.

So, we have to do with risk factors. We know now that probably the number one risk factor is obesity. And 90% of the deaths have occurred in countries where the obesity rate is highest, that is the US and Europe.

And Italy, Italy, that's what happened in Spain and in the US. And then you look at countries in the third world area where nothing much was done and we don't have a lot of resources and they have done fairly well. In general, Africa has done fairly well.

In general, Haiti, which is a country which has almost no resources, the disease has not been so catastrophic as he was predicted. And I think now we know some things about it. And therefore, I think they are so many areas where I think no matter what probably we would have done the same.

So, Miguel, I remember last year when you published that article with us. One of the things you commended was wearing masks. And a lot of people got upset at you for saying that because Dr. Fauci's recommendations in the CDC at the time were saying no to masks.

So now we know in retrospect that that was, I guess, an effort to keep the public from rating masks and taking them away from healthcare workers as far as we know from that if I understand that correctly. It was a confusing time in some ways a year ago. I'm so glad you talked about the difference around the world because I just read a fascinating New York Times newsletter speculating why this has not been so devastating in much of the majority world in Africa in particular.

I'm wondering if you concur with some of this, you mentioned obesity. I don't think they even mentioned that factor, but I think you're exactly right about that from everything I've seen. But they also mentioned the population, especially in much of the majority world is much younger, less use of air conditioning, i.e. more time spent outside, and also fewer elderly people in nursing homes.

Does that accord with your expectations? Yeah, yeah, I think so. I think that without a doubt, people who are young do significantly better. The mortality for people below the age of 35 is probably around 0.001. That's almost like unheard of, that a person less than 35 would die.

Obviously, when you have 2.5 million people diagnosed with the disease, some of them would be within below that age, but that's not very common. When you look at children, the chances of a child getting into a hospital from COVID, children who have COVID is less than 1 in 20,000. So without a doubt, then age is a significant factor.

And then when you look at the US, you look at Italy, you look at Spain, older population, also there, and therefore higher mortality. So yes, certainly. And obesity, well, an article that came out 3 days ago, I think from Yale University, is looking at 5 proteins related to neutrophils.

That's the kind of white cells that we have. And they have, these people will have higher levels of this protein on a normal day without COVID, without pandemic. Now, when they get hit with the virus, then those proteins go even higher.

And those proteins are now linked to a much higher mortality. So you can see that obesity is, I don't know if I want to call it a disease at this point, but it's a condition that put people at a higher risk for many conditions, including now these coronavirus that we know of. It has been said, and now has been proven, that obesity causes a low grade inflammatory condition in patients who are to have higher than when they should have a weight.

So there is a problem there. And does that apply basically across the board to respiratory viruses, or is there something unique about COVID with regard to age and children and obesity, or is this pretty much part of the course when you're dealing with viruses like this? Well, obesity does add a significant mortality to any infections that they experience. So I think we knew some of that already.

But I think with COVID, we have seen it even playing in more significant role, probably because lungs are affected a lot more frequently with COVID than with other infectious disease agents. So that may be one of the differences. Miguel, has anything surprised you? I mean, any surprise with how things are progressed? I mean, either, either spiritually or medically.

Well, I'm glad you asked us spiritually, because one thing that surprised me is the level of fear and the level of lack of confidence in the future and the level of even panic that I have found among believers. Was not necessarily much different from unbelievers. And that was a shocking surprise to me.

I don't know how you play out in the US, but at least in San Antonio and some of the Latin countries, there were people who did not leave their house for months, which was incredible. I'm being believers and knowing that God is in control and knowing that the end of the day, our lives have been determined by the world and that what days have been counted by God. So that was shocking to me.

The other part that has been shocking is complications. I don't think some of the complications that we have seen and the variety of the complications that we have seen. I don't think any of us expected that because we have not seen them with prior coronavirus, even in 2012, inside the Arabia with that outbreak.

That outbreak was much smaller. It was like 2,400 people only. But even then, and the mortality was 35%.

But the variety of the complications with these virus are central nervous system for ones, cardiac complications, lung complications, skin complications, immunological complications, lung turn complications. And so, I think that has been a little bit of a surprise. Have you detected differences between the two countries that you primarily minister in? Have you had enough experience to see culturally they're playing out in different ways, or does it seem pretty similar? Meaning the Dominican Republic and where are the United States? The US.

I think in the Dominican Republic, people started to wear masks and were more consistent, if you will, than what I saw here, at least from the reports in the news all the time. I don't think that there was so much questioning about the instructions given by the government. The Dominican Republic also has some restriction regarding the time when you could be out.

And that has been used throughout the year. Just now, we are almost back to normal. We are not back there yet.

So, for many months, businesses had to close about 5pm and people had a couple of hours to get home. And then you were out after that. You wouldn't go to jail, but you would be a stop and you would be questioned.

And there were some penalty for it if you don't have a good explanation. So, I think that contributed to a much better. We have one of the lowest lethality rate in the entire region, including below the US and Canada and Colombia and Chile and Argentina and Peru and Ecuador and Puerto Rico.

We are just about 1.2, not the mortality rate, but the lethality rate, which is a much better index because lethality is basically a number of cases diagnosed with a number of cases. And in both cases diagnosed versus people who died. And mortality is a number of people that you estimate are infected in the entire country versus those who die.

So, that's much harder to calculate. But I think some of that is related, at least in the Dominican Republic, is related to a much better control of how the population was allowed to move around during that period of time. Do you sense, Miguel, what may be coming next for us? Is there a historic model that would suggest what might be happening? And I'm thinking specifically here related to church leaders about what they should be thinking about, how they should be planning, what perspective they should be bringing here.

Well, regarding this COVID-19, I think it's going to become just like the flu. It's going to be manageable, but I think it's going to be with us pretty much forever. Once we develop antiviral medication that would be more effective than what we have now, then I think all fears will be gone because between the vaccine, and which, by the way, the vaccines that had been developed, are significantly better than the vaccine that had been developed for the influenza.

In a good year, the flu vaccine is no more than 66% effective. That's a good year. And that year is 30, 40% effective.

And you have vaccines like Moderna and Pfizer with 95% effective. Then Johnson & Johnson, 66% effective. So I think between the vaccines that have been developed, plus antivirals that are continuing to be developed will probably manage the CDC significantly better, but I think it's going to be with us.

I don't think it's going to be gone unless we can develop a vaccine that is almost like 100% and then almost everyone has received the vaccine because we were able to eradicate a smallpox from the planet. There hasn't been a case of a smallpox for more than 50 years, and polio is almost eradicated. It's not quite there yet, but there are very few regions in the world where you find polio and that's the effect of vaccination.

So perhaps in the future, this coronavirus and others could be eradicated as well. So I think the future, unless the virus does something weird and we are in the sense that the variants that would develop would become so different. The mutations would be so different, then we would be left with our vaccines again unless something like that happened, which we don't have any historical model for it.

Then I think we'll probably be okay regarding COVID, but there will be other other viruses coming up in the next 10 years or bacteria. That has been the nature of forever. There are always emerging new infectious diseases.

There's a journal developed just to that to emerging infectious diseases. So I think we need to be prepared for each each. Michael, earlier you talked about just some of the surprise you've had as a pastor with people in your area, being very scared, staying at home, things like that.

What else have you seen in your church? In any positive ways you've seen God at work. One thing I'll just say is I would have expected a little bit more, maybe, contrition. In the middle of controversy, more of what might God be trying to do to help us or to show us something through this.

I just haven't seen a lot of introspection, but maybe you've seen that in your environment. What have you been seeing as a pastor? Well, I'm glad you brought that up because that is precisely my perception and my disappointment. People ask me all the time if I think this is a judgment from God.

And I always say, I don't know. However, I do know that even if this is only being allowed by God, this is not a minor thing. And I think he's a ton when we should be reviewing our lives.

And there's one thing that COVID has revealed is how superficially the world has been living. We have been under significant risk factors of other nature, more powerful than COVID. And the world was totally ignoring of those conditions.

And we have had condition costs in more depth than COVID, A-9, 10 of them. And the world was not even aware or even worried about it. And then suddenly COVID hit us and then everybody was scared.

But certainly there hasn't been much contrition at all. And when COVID started, he started immediately about a week later, a new series of preaching. I did 13 messages on come back to me.

That was the title of the series. And the reason for it was precisely trying to lead the people of God to a time of contrition or reviewing to see where we would find there. And for us as a church was very significant and productive to do that.

And I think the alt estimate was very helpful in doing that, looking at the national situations with the people of Israel and how they reacted and what God was saying. And this is the same situation. This is equal to that.

However, I think since we're dealing with eternal truth, trying to discover how those truths that they were living under would apply today to us as a church. So I'm afraid that because of what you said, there hasn't been enough repentance within the people of God that we will see more of the days in the future trying to do God trying to do the same thing. And I think that's the first time that I was in the church.

I said, right after the pandemic began, the first Sunday when we were close. We were close only for about four weeks in terms of the churches and center the Mingo. That was it officially.

I said, this is the most difficult sermon that I think I had preached in my life, but I will preach this was at the beginning. And the reason was I said, because I need to do two things at the same time they are in two different extreme or polls. One is, I need to encourage you in the middle of a global situation.

And at the same time, I need to call you to repentance and to combine those two things in one sermon was hard, but it was done. And I think people reacted very well. I saw people crying in our church at time.

And I think that produced good fruit. However, in general, I'm with you Colin. I don't think we haven't seen enough of this.

And is, I don't, I'm going to be careful to say this, but in part, I think the part of the responsibility is on the leadership. And the reason I'm saying that is because we are too quick to encourage people is like, you know, your father, your mother, your wife died. Yeah, yeah, yeah, but let's keep going.

And, you know, God will be with you and God will encourage you. God will sustain you. All of that is true.

But if I don't do more than that, and I don't bring the people to be thrown to review their lives, then I'm missing something that God is trying to do as well. So that's why I said what I said. And I know that probably that's not going to be liked by a lot of people that I think is true.

Miguel, it's been really helpful. I want to connect the dots because you've been helping us think through COVID and your expertise as a medical doctor. But at some point you, you felt a call to leave what was a pretty successful, comfortable position for you and your wife in the States and to return back to the Dominican Republic.

So give a little bit of your biography. You're from the DR, but your time in America and then moving out of practicing medicine full time to being a pastor. How did that happen? Well, I graduated from the university in my country in Santa Domingo in 1980.

And I was hired by the university in Mid-Aly to teach basic sciences. So I stayed there from March 1980 until May of 1982. When I left the country in Mary to my wife, Kathy, we got married in October, 1981 and came to the US to do, Kathy had one more year to go of studying.

And then I was going to do my specialties. I did three years of internal medicine in New Jersey at Englewood Hospital. I affiliated at that time with Cornell today with Mount Sinai.

And once I finished, I went to New York to do two years of infectious diseases within New York Medical College. And then when I finished those five years of training, I came back to Englewood Hospital in Jersey to practice medicine and also as an assistant clinical professor for the faculty. And I stayed there until 1997, practicing medicine and teaching medicine as well.

So a year after being there, less than a year, I had a brother who was a pilot. He crashed in North Adams and I said, "Choose it." He was a pilot for a jet, a Lear jet. And it was a snowstorm.

He crashed in Dar. He was only 42. At the time was only the only evangelical believer in our family.

And that shook us up emotionally quite a bit. We were in Santa Domingo on vacation when that took place. And I decided that when I was back in the U.S. I would start reading the Bible and reading the history of Christianity to find out all of these different denominations and groups where they came from.

So you were not really an evangelical Christian at that point? I was not. I was in any church. My father died when I was 11 and a half.

My father was the believer within the Catholic Church and taught me to read the Bible, taught me to pray to Christ only, taught me to believe basically what the Bible said regardless of what the teaching of the Catholic Church was. But when my father died, I did not remain within the Church precisely because what he had told me, taught me. So at that time I began to read the Bible and I began to read.

You may know the book. It's a two-volume book of the history of Christianity by Elah Tourette from Yale University. Then I went out and tried to find a church that would teach what I had found in the Bible.

And I found a church. And initially they had a bookstore. So we went there for months, but books, red books.

Then I decided to ask one day what kind of church they were. They were an independent Bible church. We went there.

I stayed there for a while and then we moved and then joined an evangelical free church. We became an elder there at some point. And as the time was going by, I was developing a hunger for the word.

I started to get involved in ministry, develop a Bible study for AIDS patients in my own office with Kathy and get involved with a small group on Friday night from the church. I did some mission work. I became the doctor for a mission organization called HIBEA, which was an organization working with high school students in Japan, in Russia and the

US.

And through that, I just developed a passion to teach the word and then became a point when I couldn't add enough of the word and the teaching of the word and I wanted to go into ministry and even with medicine behind the God was necessary. So that was the beginning of that transition. And so what year did you move back to Santa Domingo? 1997.

My first impulse to live medicine and do ministry was 1992. Kathy wasn't ready for it. Two years later, 1994, she spoke to me.

I live in a lot of details for the sake of time, but two years later, she spoke to me about doing ministry. I said, "Well, the problem now is that if I do that, I would like to do it in Santa Domingo." To my surprise, she was in agreement. Then it took us three more years to sell the house that we were living in, sell the practice, move her into my office because she was with a different group.

I was by myself, move her into my office, sell the practice to the hospital together and sell the house. And then three years later, we went to Santa Domingo. In January '98, we planted the church.

It was a Bible study of 10, 12, 14 people and we grew to about 20, 400 people in San Domingo. Praise the Lord. Tell us a little bit about the Dominican Republic.

Probably our listeners have all heard of it. Probably most of them haven't been there before. We'll get to the spiritual side, but what's it like culturally, economically? It's probably changed a lot in the 20 plus years that you've been there.

What would we find if we landed in the DR today besides some really good baseball players? For those who do not know anything about the Dominican Republic is the eastern part of the island La Española. The other side is Haiti. It was colonized by Spain.

We became independent in 1844 from Spain. However, we had been on the Haitian domination for 22 years from 20 years. Now, let me go back.

Up to 1822, we were under Spain. 1822 to 1844, we were under domination from Haiti. Then we became independent from Haiti in 1844.

Then again, in 1863, we went back to Spain as a colony. In 1865, we became independent from Spain finally. To this day is a democracy.

We had a dictatorship from 1930 to 1961. A lot of unrest. During the 1960s, '65, we had an invasion from the US for a year.

The US left and 66 to this point. The situation has been a lot more stable. The economy has grown.

The middle class has grown in size as well as economically that has made the country more stable. It's developed in a great deal. A lot of that impulse has come from tourism.

That is the main source of income for the dollars, especially for the country. A lot of tourism in the north, the east, now the west as well, some in the south. If you go now, you will find the city of the world developed.

There's McDonald's probably. There's plenty of food change. Taco Bell, so you can get some authentic Latin cuisine.

Taco Bell, Burger King, you know, they are pizza-hot and same thing with the stores. You know, all kinds of American stores and chains are there as well. Talk about the... I'm really fascinated in this.

We're going to transition now to talk about church and theology. I've heard you say and I've heard Juan Sanchez, our mutual friends say it before, that the Reformation, which grew up out of European soil, and we can look Luther's from Germany, Calvin is Swiss or French, and of course we know a lot about the history in the British Isles and the Netherlands, and there's reformers in Bohemia and Poland. So there's all across Europe to the north to the east, even some small things among Catholic places in Italy.

But the Reformation, it seems, didn't ever really take root in Spain. Is that correct? Well, there was some Reformation movement in Spain without a doubt, but he was not like the rest of Europe. The Catholic Church remained in control of Spain, and the same thing for the rest of Latin America.

It was colonized mainly by Spain, including even Brazil. So the control in Latin America by the Catholic Church was quite severe. The Inquisition was present there until 1820.

There were three main areas where they function as such, and there was Mexico, they had different names at the time, but it was Mexico, Colombia, the Grand Colombia at the time, and then Peru. So with that control, it was almost impossible for the Reformation to get there, or at least to develop as such. So if you ask me, the Evangelical movement didn't begin until the 1960s.

The Church planned in movement, probably did not start until late the 1970s, and that was no Reformation theology. If you ask me, what the knelling of the thesis was in Germany with Martin Luther, a 2010 event with John Piper was the Latin America. That's an event that was organized by our church.

It's called Porso Cowsup for his cause. We do it every year. John Piper came, and we did it with the intention that from that event perhaps something would spread, something would happen, and literally that's the way it happened.

They came from Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, Puerto

Rico, and U.S. even. And then they went back and they started, they are new churches, but they also started new conferences, smaller than the one we were holding. And yet they have continued to do that.

And then the Internet, where the printing press was to, Martin Luther Reformation is where the Internet has been to this very new, fresh, young, immature still movement is in Latin America. And I think that's important for you as people for you to know, because you may judge what's happening in Latin America as if we would have had 200 years of history over fontality. Now over fontality is much younger in Latin America, and yet it's spreading very fast due to the Internet.

It's amazing what is happening. Books are being written by Hispanic authors. Books are being translated, podcasts, programs, conferences, all kinds of things happening.

So, a network in this, a lot of networking at the same time. And by God's grace and by his doing, we have been in the middle of all of that, and he has been enjoyed to see it. Yeah, that's wonderfully encouraging.

And what are, are there, I mean, there are obstacles. There's always obstacles, but humanly speaking, what are some of the biggest obstacles? Do people feel like this is from America or this is from Northern Europe or you don't have those same sorts of obstacles? What is it that would prevent someone from wanting to give the Reformed faith a hearing in the Spanish speaking world? Well, I don't think it would be the kinds of things that you just mentioned because there's a lot that is happening within the Latin countries. But I think it's the culture.

The culture has been so used to emotions and so used to, and so not used to rational thinking and logical thinking. And Reformed theology, it is very logical, it's rational. And that is not necessarily what people had been used to.

So, when I went down back in 1997, a good number of people expressed that the kind of sermons that I was doing was not necessarily their taste. And yet, I think if you were to do it differently now, they will say, no, we don't want those sermons that we were used to. But even the singing, when I was there, when I got there for the first, I don't know how many years, but for a good number of years, the songs were very, in some sense, superficial in another sense.

They were not necessarily anti-biblical, but they were very emotional. Some of them even sounded like romantic songs composed to God, basically. You could have changed the name of God and put your wife there, and I would have fit.

That's not what you see now in many of the churches. We have been blessed by the Lord in many ways, and one of those is that working with Bob Coughlin, that you know, and some of the people, we were able to renew the worship of our church, and from there,

many of the churches had been in front of us. So now when I travel, a lot of these songs that I hear are songs that either were composed by the sovereign grace movement or composed by people in our church, or songs that are very similar that we sing, we sing in our church Sunday after Sunday.

So that has been good, even in Cuba, you know, they are not as open to the outside world, and when I go there, I hear the same songs. So that is good to see, to hear, to worship at a deeper level. So I think that was one of the main obstacles initially.

I don't think that so much they are any longer, except for prosperity gospel is really... I think prosperity gospel lost a lot of ground, and now with the pandemic, the sign of wonder, wonder's movement lost a lot of strength, and I think God is doing that in my view. The signs and wonders couldn't take care of the pandemic. Absolutely.

That almost like disappear from one day to the other, which is good. So talk about books a little bit. What had been some of the influential books in this new Reformation Awakening, either for you personally, or books that have been really meaningful in your church? And these could be books by Spanish authors, maybe we haven't heard of, but what are some of the ones that are really helping the gospel work there? Well, you know, one of the good things that took place was that very early on, we had the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

So you may recall some of the books that were published at that time, and trying to remember some of the titles, but a lot of those books, when they were published in English, new books, then they were published almost at the same time in Spanish, and consequently, people started to read them at the time. And some of them initially were simple books, never extensive. And then some people started to read them books by Calvin and Luther later on, but initially I think were books that were, in some sense, new, and they were coming out with the 500th anniversary.

We did two different things. I published a book called "Doctoring or Teaching that Transformed the World", and that was the five solace and the five points of Calvinism mixed together. I think that worked very well, and people received the book very well, and I think it had a lot of circulation very quickly, especially because it coincided with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, it was probably done that way.

And I did a project of 95 thesis for the Evangelical Church, and they were not written, they were 95 videos of three minutes. Yeah, I remember you doing that. Right, and each video was a thesis.

And then it became a publication as well. And believe it or not, some of those videos have over 100,000, 200,000 views. And I think just two days ago someone wrote to me and said that it was one thesis that changed his life and his ministry.

And I think that's still paying off, and that was also important and significant at the time. I think one thing that helped was the fact that initially there was a lot of rejection, and now thinking about another obstacle, thinking about the question that you asked me, that Reformed theology encounter is that, as you know, young people tend to be proud when they encounter Reformed theology, so now they were teaching the same thing, but in a proud way, in a condescendable way, and that was then helpful. So one of the things that we needed to deal with was if you're going to do this, then you have to teach in a humble way.

Remember that you did not believe this doctrine. This is not something that you were born with and you grew up with. So God was patient with you, you need to be patient with people.

So I think over time that has been conquered to a great degree, but that came to mind, I didn't want to leave it out, and the fact that we still need to teach that theology in a humble way. And secondly, if you just teach that new Reformation theology in a way that is here, this is the right doctrine, this is what you need to believe, I think you'll find a lot of resistance. I think if you're going to teach Reformed theology, and I think that's true for any place, and to people who never heard it, then the best thing to do it is just preach it from the Bible.

Find the text where that doctrine is, and then just do expositional preaching, so that people could see that before the Reformation, this theology was already there, and the only thing that the Reformation did was to discover that theology. I did that in Cuba. I went to Santiago in Cuba, and I went to an Armenian seminary, and they asked me, they gave me one afternoon, I was teaching from under, through Friday, from 8, 30 to 4, 30 every day, and then on Thursday they said, we're going to give you the afternoon to teach Reformed theology, so you could do anything you want that afternoon.

And what I said at the beginning was, look, I... Go to John 6. Well, I did not even do that, but I did use it. John 6 is just probably the most predestined, predestined, an Aryan chapter in the old Bible as you know. But I said to them, indeed I had the whole day, I remember that, another whole afternoon, the whole day.

So early on I said, you know, I'm not here to convince anyone, because I don't have that power. If someone lives here, convince this afternoon, just make sure that it wasn't me. It takes the Holy Spirit to convince you.

So I don't have that expectation. Number two, I'm not even aiming on that. The only thing I want to do is to show you where that theology is, and I'm going to do it in a different way.

I said, I'm going to ask one question at a time, through the entire day, then we're going to find three, four, five passages that will answer the question. And then at the end of

that, I'm going to ask you to teach me what you think those passages that we read are saying. So we took, for example, is the world free, yes or no? Then I said, before you answer, let's just go through these passages.

And then we took something like Second Timothy, Chapter 2, 25 and 26, where Paul is telling Timothy to deal gently with those who oppose you, in case God grant them for repentance, to free them from the, I forget in English how he goes, but you may remember to free them from the-- They're ensnared by the devil. Who has them is snared to do his will. So tell me what you think the passages is saying.

Can you spring yourself out of the trap? That's right. It doesn't sound like it. And then we went through passages like who the son says free is free indeed.

So what happened before the son says you're free. Romans 8, 7, that man cannot please God, be a mind says under flesh, cannot please God, neither cannot do so. So that's inability that is there.

And then at the end of the day, I said, okay, now is the Q&A. Any questions? And there were no questions because they had been so convicted by the words. So I think that represents an advancement of the reformation movement.

That's great. Let me ask one more question, then we'll see what Colin and Justin have. But you're very familiar with the states and you live here in the states.

So really interested from your perspective are the issues facing your church. What seem to be the sort of issues you think we're facing here or give us. Give us sort of an insider outsiders perspective on what you see the state of the church in the United States.

Because it's often said you don't really know one culture until you know two cultures and you can sort of step out. And so you really know both cultures really well. What do you say to the American church, what we need to hear, strengths or weaknesses, good or bad? Well, let me see where I should start.

If you look at Latin America, let me start with Latin America. The problem with Latin America has been that the worldview of the continent had been primarily animistic. So Pentecostal theology was fed by the animistic worldview behind.

Okay, so let me leave that there for a while. When you look at North America and Europe, mother-ness-impacted the church significantly. So it became brainy, cerebral.

And I think that has affected the church if you go back even before all of these issues that we're dealing with now. That's where liberal theology came in. I think he's a theology that in some sense, while becoming very academic at the same time was divorcing from God.

So we teach that God is in charge of everything and God is the one leading and doing. But then when we do theology, I'm sorry, when we do church, we do church dependent upon us, our wisdom, our understanding, pragmatism, methodology. So we go to the pulpit, not saying like Martin L. Jones, I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit, I believe in the Holy Spirit.

But in some sense, even if we don't say it, I think we go to the pulpit saying, I believe in harmonetics, I believe in seduces, I believe in the only. I believe in the Hebrew. And then God says, when then just do it.

If that's what you need it, that's what you think you need it. So one weakness, even before we get to the current issues, is that even though in good churches we say we are not anthropocentric, like the Armenians are, at the end of the day, it's still anthropocentric. Sorry about that, my accent in Spanish.

No, it's hard for us to say. That's why we don't say it. We just need man centered.

So I think the church in America needs more of the presence of God, more dependence upon God, more dependence upon the Holy Spirit. And when you look at the life of Christ, I mean, His life depended upon the Holy Spirit from beginning to end. He was born of the Holy Spirit.

Then He dies on Hebrews 9, 14, I believe says that He offered Himself by the eternal Spirit. That is at the end of His life. He goes to the disaster pushed by the Holy Spirit.

He uses the word "inspired" by the Holy Spirit. He expelled demons in the power of the Holy Spirit. He dies and resurrects by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Why did we miss it? Why did we miss the point, the power of the Holy Spirit? If we couldn't do it without it, how dare us to try to even attempt to do it? So I think that's one weakness that is older than we want to believe and precede the time that we're living in. Now, and I think we need more injection of that. Secondly, I think we need pastors in the pulpit who preach, not just preachers.

We need pastors because at the end of the day, the church is about people. It's about ministering to people. And when Christ summarized life, He did it in two commandments.

One is, "You love God, the other one is, you love the neighbor." And the neighbor, as you know, is everyone. When imagine now, when it comes to the sheep, how much love we should have for the sheep. So my sermon should be exegetically correct.

But it's not aiming at the exegesis. It's aiming at the hearts of the people who are in front of me. You need to be fed.

And I need to be burdened with their needs and their sorrows and their sadness and their

sins even. Their sins should set in me. Paul said, as you know, Paul says, "Who is sinning, who makes someone sing that I'm not burdened and worried about him." So we need pastors in the pulpit who preach, who preach the word.

Not a mere preacher, because sometimes we think that pastoral minister is about preaching. And there's a lot more than preaching in pastoral minister. So we need that.

Thirdly, I think we need less pragmatism in the churches. We need to plan. But church is not about task and planning.

It's about people. So we need to plan to minister to people, not to use people to get our plans and tasks done. So that's another way to say.

And then now the issues of today, which are large and heavy and powerful as gender, ideology and same-sex marriage. And then politics, my goodness. We saw it.

We read from afar. We felt that people even get involved in something to the main goal to that holy ticket that took place. That was hard.

But I think what that reveal was the status of the church. The real status of the heart, of the people in the church. Well, what I really love about your answer, Miguel, is all those things that you mentioned at the end, gender and politics and the rest are really important.

Those are the ones that are most obvious and they need to be addressed. But I'm guessing that for most pastors out there, American pastors, people who would listen to this, who are well-trained and love Jesus and love the Bible. Yeah, we need to be warned against those things.

But what you said at the beginning is so true. It's, are we preaching to the hearts of our people? Are we relying on the power of the Holy Spirit? Those are the things that are probably in rank and file evangelical churches and pastors like me. Those are the things that we can forget and those are the things we can be an expert on all of the most volatile cultural issues of the day.

But when a man has to step into the pulpit, is he going to preach the cross of Christ, which I know is your heartbeat and it's so evident in your preaching, always to direct people to the cross. Is it going to be in the power of the Spirit or is it going to be based on our own man-centered power and pragmatism? And then, you know, we want to have great exegesis. We want to be well-trained.

But are we preaching not just a technically correct sermon? We all who went to seminary can think of the sort of sermons and sometimes even our professors gave us that here's the technically proficient way to do a message. And you got it right and you did your transitions right. But there's no power.

There's no function. There's no preaching. It's an artifact of delivery and it's not preaching to the hearts of people.

So, yes, amen to that. Let me, you've been so gracious, give us your time. Let me circle back here.

One last topic of Supreme Importance. Colin and Justin, did you take Spanish when you were in high school or college? Yes, I did. Justin? See.

See, Miguel, what is most hilarious to you when Americans try to speak Spanish? I don't know if it would be worse hilarious because... Embarrassing? No, no, no, it's not embarrassing. I really love the fact that you are more daring than our people are in trying to speak the language to whatever degree, maybe even a word or a phrase. I think we're a lot more timid and consequently, when an American decides to learn Spanish, I think you find him speaking some of that or a lot of that a lot faster than what Latin America is.

And what Latin do when he comes to speak in English because they're very shippish, very timid about making a mistake. And when I say that you're more daring, I even mean it in the bad way. I meant it in the good way.

Yesterday, you read something in Spanish on the pulpit, the name of integrity, da da da da da, which is not necessarily an easy thing to pronounce, but you try. You do the right. And now I think Latin Americans will be so shy, they would not even try to say it.

So I don't think it's hilarious. I think it's commendable. Well, a comedian that some of us listened to, Brian Regan, has a bit about the things that he learned in high school Spanish, aren't the things that really help him talk to native Spanish speakers sometimes.

And I think we are experts on the colors, on counting to 100. Those are the things. I always joke with our Spanish speaking interns here.

I had to listen in high school to these tapes, and you'd watch these little pictures and you'd hear this speaker and it would say, "Go out, go out." And that's the extent of my Spanish. Well, I know a little bit more, but not much more than that. Some other time, I'll regale you with "Ariburicito." There you go.

"Ariburicito, ariburu ariba." That's the one thing the Spanish Christmas Carol, "Ariburicito" has stuck in my head. I was taught "Donde Esta El Banyo," which I think will come in very handy. Wherever I go in Spanish speaking.

That's important. That's a very important day. Miguel, thank you so much for your wisdom, for your insight and your humility.

We're not here to give you a big head, but if our listeners could see the work and the leadership that you're exercising, in the Dominican Republic, but really throughout the Spanish speaking world in Latin America, it really is immense and it's for good by God's grace and glory. So may God give you a good heart, good head, you and your lovely wife. Lots of good health for years to come because we're really grateful to see the work.

And we have lots to learn from you, dear brother. So thank you for being with us. Thank you, Kevin and Colin and Justin.

And part of my accent, I used to speak English every single day of my life. It's very good. Really it is.

But I'm not doing that anymore, so I'm just trying to refresh what I learned. But think about the opportunity to preach how you pulpit, how with your people, the hospitality was great. And I make me feel at home very quickly.

I had a good time with the intramps as well. We were very grateful to have you and love to talk to you anytime and your accents much better than Colin. So we're grateful for it.

Thank you. Thank you brother and thank you all for listening. Thank you.

Thank you. Or if I got, enjoy them forever and read a good book.

[BLANK_AUDIO]