



A brief Philosophy of Christian Publishing

Seven convictions, each with its opposite

Rick Denham



Why we publish

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:19–20

Brazil, 1966: evangelicals under 5%. Today: 26.9%, 47 million.

1 Publishing is discipleship, not distribution

We are teaching ministries that publish ideas to serve the Church. We are not booksellers who to print for the Marketplace.

A distributor decides logistically: what moves, what stocks, what margins.

A teacher decides pastorally: what do these people need to know, and in what order?



Manaus, 1950s

Pastors on the Solimões and Madeira rivers with almost no sound Portuguese resources. The first answer was not a press but a bookstore: Livraria do Lar Cristão.

Its opposite

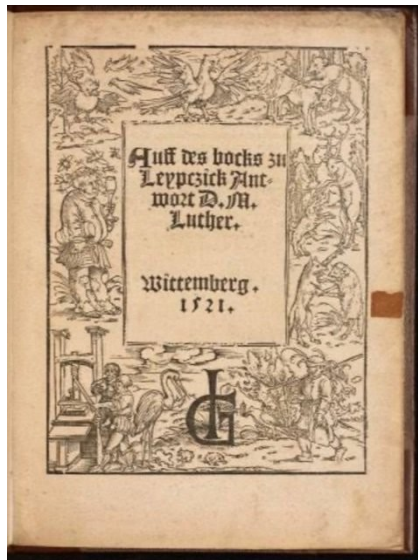
The paycheck culture: a team that shares only a financial transaction.

The question for your house

Your last book acquisition — chosen by an editor-teacher, or by a sales rep?

2

Ideas have consequences



Where the Gospel is not made clear, it is not merely absent. Something else takes its place.

543%

growth in evangelical churches, 1990-2019

17

new churches opening every day

Acre

now has more evangelicals than Catholics

"It profits nothing at all that God's Word is let go out so carelessly and clumsily that we have only mockery and offense from it." Luther to the printers, 1523

Its opposite

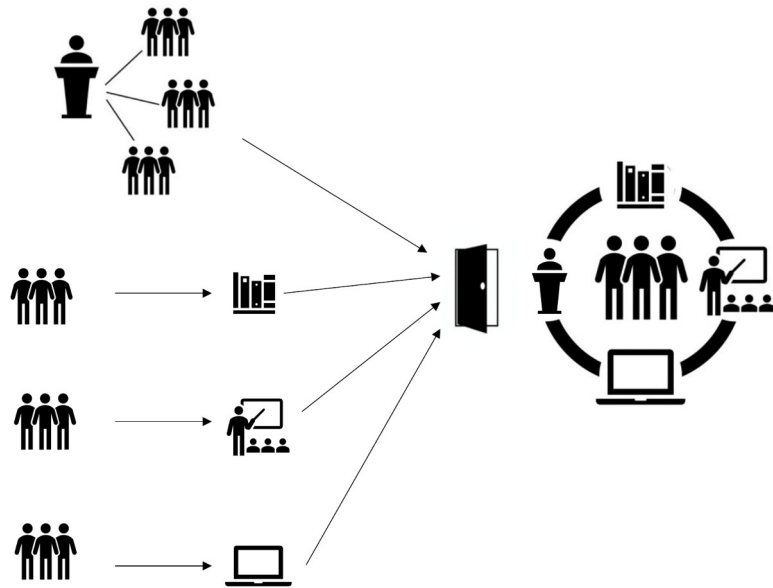
Ideological carelessness: weak or compromised content because it sells or the author is known.

The question for your house

What book did you recently publish for a particular need you felt should be addressed?

3

Demand is nurtured, not found



Four doorways, one DNA

Local churches · Publishers · Training · Technology

The DNA that unites: the Gospel, big-God theology, who Jesus is, the church as the end of missions, the pulpit and the press in tandem.

The community is not defined by any one doorway, but by the common ideas that unite them.

ideas → people → community → demand

Its opposite

The market-driven fallacy: publishing to a market too small to sustain a house anyway.

The question for your house

Have you mapped your Ecosystem, where are you weak? Have you connected the Dot's?



Strasbourg, 1520s

Four doorways in one city. The first self-conscious use of the press to shape a mass movement.



The pulpit

Matthieu Zell brings Luther's ideas to Notre Dame; Bucer; later Calvin among the French refugees.



The press

A major printing center; cheap vernacular pamphlets; Katharina Zell writing them herself.



Training

Sturm's academy, forming the next generation of pastors and teachers.



The technology

The movable Type, Guttengberg Press

Sixty years. Four doorways. One DNA.

The Brazil proof, one line per doorway



Churches

Nationals lead

Pastors' networks grew around the conference; the explicit goal since 2004 was to hand leadership to Brazilians.



Publishers

300+ titles

Banner of Truth, Lloyd-Jones, Spurgeon, and Calvin in Portuguese for the first time; a study Bible with 75 contributors.



Training

2,000 in the room

Conferência Fiel: a handful of pastors in Atibaia in 1985; now Portugal, Mozambique, Angola.



Technology

20 million views

Voltemos ao Evangelho: 4,000+ free resources, a Portuguese gateway to the global Reformed world.

And the demand came.

4

Clarity unites, vagueness divides

United on the elements

Expositional preaching, the Gospel, biblical conversion, evangelism, membership and discipleship, godly leadership. Biblical elements given to every church, not a method or a brand.

Charitable on the forms

Baptism, polity, liturgy, and a hundred secondary questions. Have your distinctives. Keep the fences low enough to reach across.



Marburg, 1529. United on the Gospel, divided on the Supper. Their clarity was right; their charity ran out. We have much to learn from the Reformation, including from where it failed.

Its opposite

Kingdom competition: other faithful houses treated as rivals instead of co-laborers.

The question for your house

Which publisher in your language have you never shared an author or a foreword with? Why?

5

Serving sells more than selling



If you can't hold it, share it freely

Articles, posts, audio, web text: give them away boundlessly. They spark curiosity and remove barriers.

Voltemos ao Evangelho

4,000+ free resources reaching people who would never enter a Reformed bookshop.



If you can hold it, tie value to it

A printed book changes hands when it costs the reader something, inside a discipling relationship, or at a training event.

Adopt-a-Pastor

Monthly books and conference registration for pastors who need theology most and can afford it least.

Its opposite

Mismanaging book value: mass giveaways that teach a country theology is worthless.

The question for your house

How have you used generosity to encourage reading and build your community?

6 People over product

We love people for who God is making them, not for what they can do for the house.



Live among the people

Impact cannot be managed from a safe distance.
Open your home.



Invest in leaders before they're ready

Real responsibility while they still doubt themselves.



Move at the pace of local ownership

Never outrun the national leadership.



Make it about the “we”

The team, your spouse, your children. A family legacy, not a career.

2004: the explicit goal was to hand leadership to Brazilians. Today, nationals lead Fiel. That is the measure of success in missions.

Its opposite

Exploiting people, and the successor gap: a house one founder deep.

The question for your house

Who under thirty is in your home this month?

7

Faithfulness over fruitfulness

Almost nothing of lasting structural value happens in five years. We build for fifty, and we depend on God for the harvest.



Everything else in this talk can be organized. This one can only be prayed. A Müller-like dependency, and no spirit of scarcity: expect great things from God.

Its opposite

The metrics trap: catalog size and quarterly growth over fruit in a generation.

The question for your house

What did you nearly quit at year three that you now see differently?

Martinus Luther den Buch
druckern/Gnad vnd frid.

Ich bitt vmb Christus willen alle die do meine Samen schreiben oder fassen wolten sich derselben zu drucken vnd auß zu lassen anthalten/ es sey den/ das sie durch meine hand gefertigt get obder hie zu Wittenberg durch mein beuelh zu vor gedruet sind. Denn es tauge doch gar nichts /das man das wort Gottes so vnfleissig vñ vngeschickt auß lest gehn/ das wir nur spott vnd greuel dran haben. Ich hatte gehofft/ man solt sich hinfurt an die heylige schrift selb geben vnd meine bucher saren lassen/ nach dem sie nu auß gedienet/ vnd die hertzen yn vnd zu der schrift gefuret haben/ wilchs mein vsach war zu schreyben meine bucher. Was istts/ das man viel bucher macht/ vñ doch außser dem rechten haubt buch ymmer bleybet/ Trinc doch so mer auß de brunn selbs/ als auß den fleslin/ die dich zum brun geleytet haben.

Wills denn iha nicht anders sein / so laß man doch vnter meinem namen nichts auß gehen/ on mein wissen vnd willen yn gottes namen. Wolt Gott ich het meiner bucher das meher teyl widder haym/ sonderlich darinnen ich Papst/ Concilia/ vnd der gleychen noch viel zu geben habe. Gott gebe vns seine gnade
Amen.

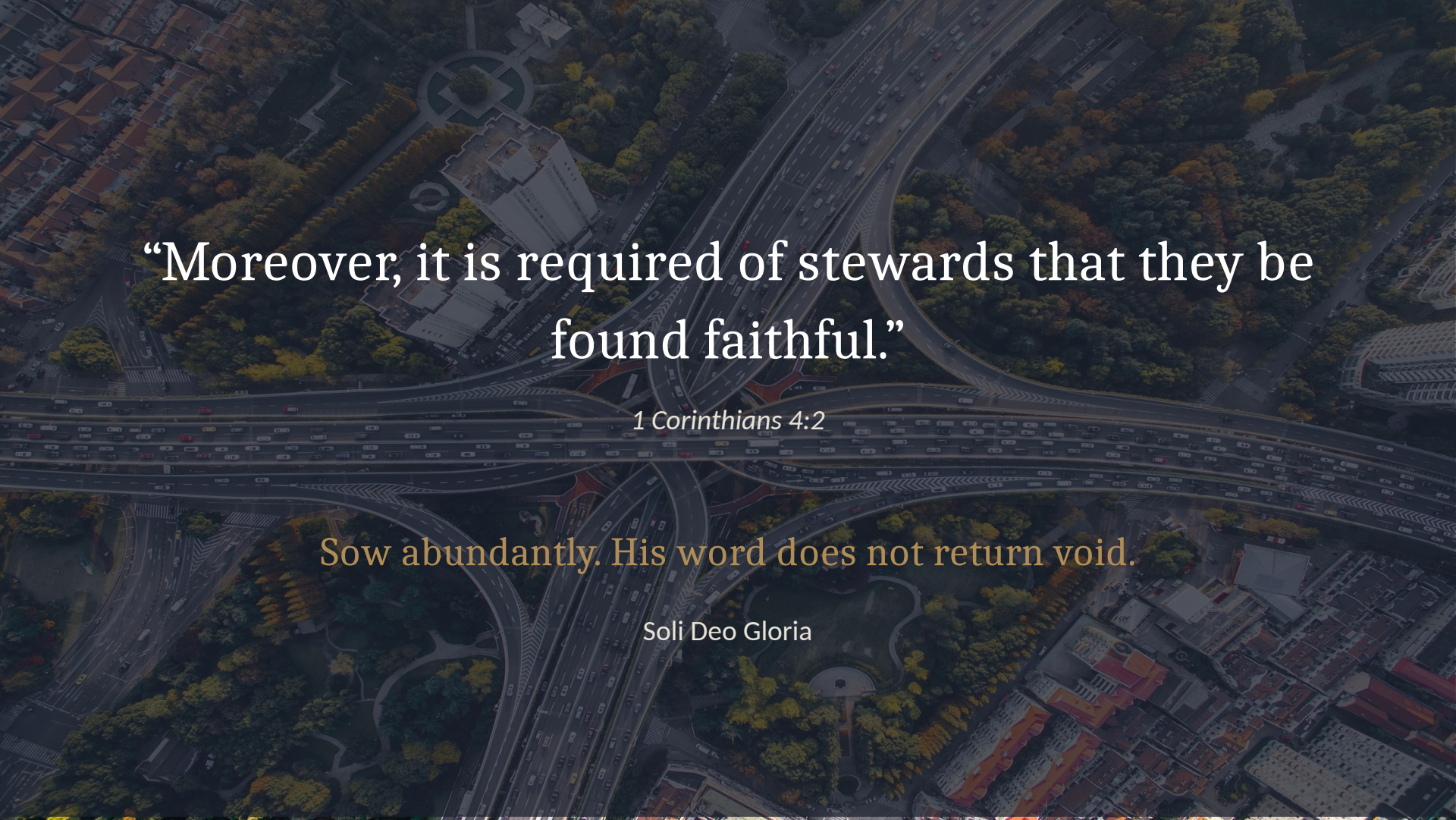
Wittenberg, 1523

The most-printed author in Europe asks the printers to stop.

“What is the point of making many books, if one still remains outside the one true chief Book? Drink rather from the spring itself than from the little brooklets that led you to the spring.”

Martin Luther to the printers, 1523

The books are brooklets. The spring is the Book.



“Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”

1 Corinthians 4:2

Sow abundantly. His word does not return void.

Soli Deo Gloria

Which of the seven is hardest for your house right now?

- 1 Publishing is discipleship, not distribution
- 2 Ideas have consequences
- 3 Demand is nurtured, not found
- 4 Clarity unites, vagueness divides
- 5 Serving sells more than selling
- 6 People over product
- 7 Faithfulness over fruitfulness

 *and why?*