

Monthly Newsletter
Matanzas, Cuba.

Evangelical
Seminary of
Theology



ACONTECER

— SPECIAL —



**ANIVERSARIO
SEMINARIO
EVANGÉLICO
DE TEOLOGÍA**

Declaration of Identity

The Evangelical Theology Seminary (SET) was founded in 1946 in the city of Matanzas, Cuba, and is registered as a Religious Association, Non-profit and independent of the State. It is a Christian academic community of biblical-theological formation and training in the sciences of religions; for the formation of pastors and lay leaders; with an ecumenical, contextual, inclusive and liberating vision at the service of churches and institutions in Cuba and other countries.

Mission

Provide all the people who participate in our teaching programs with a rigorous academic training, a solid spiritual preparation and a vocation for service within a communitarian, ecumenical and diverse experience.

Presentation Dedicated to the 75th Anniversary of SET

75 Years of Ecumenical Education for Service



All the people who currently serve at SET, be it the student body, the faculty, the administrative staff and their governing bodies have been very blessed to inherit the work of that “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) that have preceded us in their work.

Our Seminary has been present in the life of the city of Matanzas for over seven decades of continuous work, since October 1946. The Seminary has been present also in our nation and abroad as a center of excellence, mainly in the academia sphere through its 17 programs: pregraduate (baccalaureate), degree, postgraduate (masters and doctorate), including ISECRE (Ecumenical Higher Institute of Sciences of Religions).

We are also pleased because precisely this year, when we celebrate our 75th anniversary, the Seminary is inaugurating a new program of Doctorate in

Ministry in coordination with the Graduate Theology Foundation (GTF). Our objective is to contribute to the specialization of our pastoral body, as well as of lay persons who have a role in other ministries in local churches. Thus, they enhance their professional competence with the acquisition of capacities and tools necessary for the planning and management of ecclesial ministries.

On the other hand, our institution serves the ecumenical movement – in Cuba and abroad – and the community of Matanzas, offering their facilities and infrastructure to hold events, providing clean water through the Living Waters for the World Project and supplying products from our garden. In addition, this year we served the Provincial Pediatric Hospital “Eliseo Noel Caamaño” in the summer, assisting 900 COVID-19 positive children and their 600 companions during the critical moment when our province became the epicenter of the pandemic in the country.

We still have a long way to go and deficiencies to overcome in our work of ecumenically training for the service of the churches, the ecumenical organizations and the diverse religions in our nation; but we do it Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). We thank all the people, churches and institutions that support us in different ways in our intention to fulfill our mission for the glory of God.

The Rector

THANKSGIVING SERVICE ON THE 75 ANNIVERSARY OF SET FOUNDATION



Celebrating the 75th anniversary of SET foundation, the thanksgiving service took place in the morning of October 30. The service began with by professor Gilberto Caballero’s prayer, that reminded us of our meeting in the Chapel “Resurrection” to praise and thank the Lord for his company through these 75 years of the life of our beloved Seminary. Then students, professors and staff joined in singing The Heavens, So Much Joy. Next Rector Carlos Emilio Ham presented his words on the occasion. After we sang Es Tu Palabra (Your Words Are the Lamp),

student Susana Arévalo read the Apostle Paul’s epistle 1 Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

Our Emeritus Professor Ofelia Ortega then presented her message based on verses 26 and 27 of the passage that had been read: *“...for you see YOUR CALLING, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty...”*



Ofelia began her message by thanking God and remembering the 75 years of existence of the Seminary that has taught not only the word of God, but also His witness has climbed down from this hill in the practice of service and accompaniment to the community of Matanzas. She remarked that from the beginning, the calling of ecumenism was present in the vision and the formation of the Seminary. Ecumenism that aspired not only to the unity of churches but to the unity of humanity; that is why this Institution has constituted a new ecumenical-social platform since 1946 to the present.

She continued by giving details of the best definition of the Mission of God as the ongoing invitation of the Triune God to “cross borders” and “build bridges” among our churches, people and culture. There cannot be walls in the building of God’s reign. The mission, she explained, has to lead us to “the margins of society.” She goes deep into the pedagogical concept of the mission and asks, “Where are the margins of our society today? what kind of training do we need in our theological institutions to reach this missionary dimension? She described Jesus’ ministry according to Luke 4: 16-18 and extolled the fact that Jesus took over the fulfilment of his mission by taking the side of those who are at the margins of society. Starting to work in the

Mission of God gives place to an ecclesiological approach “from below”. She believes that the Evangelical Seminary of Theology had an incarnation theology from the beginning. God has chosen us and called us as the Gospel of John 15:16 indicates, *you did not choose Me, but I chose you.*

“However,” professor Ortega reiterates, “when you read 1 Corinthians 1:12-27 we ask of ourselves, what does God intend with this calling, what sort of madness is this? The calling of God should be addressed to whom? Or is it that the wisdom we received in our theological studies is nor functional for the project of God’s reign?”

She insists in her reflection that the message to the community of Corinth is opportune for our educational processes because of the diversity of that community. The social makeup of the Church of Corinth mostly consisted of the ‘weak’ of the society, those who have no influence or power: artisans, women, slaves. There were also active leaders with power and influence in the congregation. She asks, “Why does Paul write in such a challenging way to this congregation of humble people? Ortega refers next to the analysis of the Bible specialist Irene de Foulkes, “Paul dares to write them in this brutal way because he is convinced that an unprecedented event has occurred: their existential situation has been transformed radically by the message of the cross. Chosen by God to put to shame the wise and the strong (1:27), the “disavowed” of the society are now God’s instrument to surprise those who intend to be something (1:28) (1)

Ofelia believes that Paul tries to explain the message of the cross to show the powerful madness of God. And she asks again, “How is it possible for the wise and powerful to accept a rejected and crucified Christ? He considers that the cross synthesizes the big turn of values [...] God has converted Jesus’ death into a SOURCE OF LIFE. The theology of the cross is, in a certain way, a crucifying theology.

She continues and contextualizes the thousand ways in which the poor are deprived of life: malnutrition, unemployment, sub-employment, by sending them to hovels or poverty belts; the lack of health services, illiteracy, depriving them of dignity as people. In all these cases, the cross presents itself in our world.

“Far from promoting a gospel of success,” the professor says, “or of prosperity like the one that is preached at present, by resurrecting Jesus, God has put his seal of approval to the compassionate, solidarity, combative life he led. In order to participate in this “madness” of God’s calling, our mentality has to change, and theological mentality demands an authentic commitment with the MISSIO DEI since the ‘theological locus’ is ‘outside the camp’ par excellence, as Orlando Costas affirms. It is in the margins, because it is there where we find the ‘excluded’ in the presence of the crucified God.

Due to this ‘madness of the message of the cross’, God chooses those who are not ‘left overs’, thus provoking a change in the values of this world. We must ask of ourselves in each of our contexts, who are the excluded in the space where we live? If the theological education should be directed towards a vocation that places us on the side of those who are ‘not well seen’, those who have no power, those

(1) Irene Foulkes. *Problemas Pastorales en Corinto: Comentario Exegético- Pastoral a I Corintios*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial DEI, 1996, pág. 86.

whose material or cultural survival is threatened, then theological education oriented to this vision of the reign of God has to change, and become permanently dedicated to service and to defending life. To this end, theological education shall dialog with political practices, cultural experiences, the sciences that defend life in all its aspects.

“Theological education,” as defined by the professor, “has to be contextual, transforming, interdisciplinary and intertextual, letting itself be questioned by

our Latin American and Caribbean context. In the Cuban context, it must be questioned by the ancestral and contemporary cultural and religious traditions of our aboriginal and black populations. It will be assumed from the Christian faith, but in an interreligious context and perspective. The excluded in our societies are hungry not only for bread, but also for their denied humanity and for God. Hunger of the God that does not exclude anyone and that lies in the midst of human beings “so that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Ofelia continues and sustains that the text in 1 Corinthians makes us see that we still have to overcome the analysis of the excluded only as victims. They are producers of culture, of logic and of confrontation with reality, which also surprises us, by being able to organize an effort of active and collective resistance which surpasses our social analysis. According to José Míguez Bonino, there is a theological production every time someone swears to god, kisses the earth; blesses their neighbor; “receives the spirit”; drives a demon out or mumbles a prayer. He also affirms that “the subject” of theological work are not the classical subjects – the academic theologian, the hierarchical magistrate – or pastors or priests, who begin to be subordinates; because the primary subject is the experience of the community of believers when they share, assume and live the total experience of the people they belong to and most particularly the poor and unprotected of that society.

“The only proper answer to this Grace of God is that we, His Body now on earth, embody this same option of Jesus Christ “for those who apparently are not.” Saint Francis of Assisi invites us to join this Wise Madness of God with a prayer: May God bless you with enough madness to believe that you can make a difference in this world; so that you can make what others proclaim as impossible.”



“In this 75th Anniversary our reflection ends with that proclamation of the Blessing of the Hill. (2)

***Blessed** be those who dreamed and had faith and went up the hill to found this place, because they foresaw what seemed utopic and planted this work that today is 75 years old.*

***Blessed** be those who believed in this project. With commitment, devotion, wisdom and strength, they have made possible that the doors of his institution remain open serving our people.*

***Blessed** be the professors, students and staff, the graduates who today continue making history so that the Evangelical Seminary of Theology be witness: for its radical hospitality and theological contribution to the mission of the church.*

***Blessed** be those who believe that the God of Wisdom united us in this community.*

***Blessed** be those who believe in the power of the Spirit, because we are called to be prophets of hope in Him.*

Amen”



After the reflection, chaplain Francisco Marrero offered the thanksgiving prayer, commemorating the work and contribution of the Seminary to the biblical-theological formation of the Cuban Church. He remembered the faculty, the Directive Board, the administrative and service staff that with their effort they have made possible the fulfillment of the creation of the Seminary. Furthermore, he thanked the Lord for the Churches that sponsor the Seminary and their indispensable offerings of love for the support of this House of Studies. Specially, he

remembered with gratitude that the doors of this institution have remained open during 75 years, even in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Deeply respectful, he brought to our memory those who preceded us, those who are here today and those who will come so that God continues blessing the people through this institution with the certainty that He will always be on our side, accompanying our history.

With the SET anthem *God of Grace, God of Glory* and the blessing of the Rector we ended the celebration.



(2)) *Blessing of the Hill (Bienaventuranzas de la colina)* written by Elizabeth González (Chavela) and Jesús Martínez (Chuchi).

REPERCUSSION OF ANNIVERSARY

75 ANIVERSARIO SEMINARIO EVANGÉLICO DE TEOLÓGIA

TESTIMONIOS

Alicia Dámaris Sevilla Hidalgo
Graduada del Seminario Evangélico de Teología,
Discípula por siempre del Maestro.

Francisco René Castellanos Morente.
17 de Septiembre de 1914 a 21 Marzo 2012

El tiempo pasa... la presencia permanece. El Maestro ha sido una de las luces que el Espíritu puso en mi camino para alumbrar el siguiente paso. Me guió en la danza, la contemplación, en la Psicología y toda clase de misterios. Buscándole encontré mi primer trabajo como profesional; junto a él -en los jardines- reí, lloré, crecí, soñé... Puse mi hija en sus brazos y hasta el día de hoy su bendición nos acompaña en la danza de la vida... desde y hasta la Eternidad.

The coordinating group for the Communication Strategy of the Seminary has received different testimonies of Professors, students and people related to SET on the occasion of the 75th anniversary. They express what the training and the experience of life in the community of the Seminary has meant for them at different moments of its 75 years of existence.

All these testimonies are published at the institutional website of the Evangelical Seminary of Theology. Up to September 2022, this section will continue receiving messages of interested people who have a sense of belonging and love for our seminary. You can access these testimonies through Facebook and the www.setcuba.org page.

The anniversary of the Seminary has had an outstanding repercussion in the media during this year. Since the month of September, journalists Esther Lilian González from National Television and Lisania La Osa from the provincial program TV Yumurí interviewed the Directive Board, professors and students. This occasion was widely broadcast in the printed and digital press and the TV national channels.

We also received congratulatory messages from member churches and organizations that have accompanied us and our work for many



years. One of these special messages came from Milagros Couso, president of the Fraternity of SET Alumni, who congratulated former and present Rectors, professors, graduates, alumni, students and all those who work in this place. She wished that all those who are being trained here become an example of women and men filled with the Holy Spirit.



On October 6, the Educative Channel aired a thirty-minute documentary by journalist Esther Lilian González and produced by the Informative System of Cuban TV in homage of the 75th anniversary of SET foundation. Furthermore, the CMBF radio station Radio Musical Nacional invited Rector Carlos E. Ham to present reflection on the Cuban Council of Churches radio program El Evangelio en Marcha (*The Gospel on the Move*).

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BIBLICAL REFLECTION BROADCASTED ON RADIO PROGRAM *THE GOSPEL ON THE MOVE*

Queridas hermanas y queridos hermanos en Cristo, Dear brothers and sisters on Christ, we thank God and the leadership of the Council of Churches of Cuba for this opportunity to share this brief message on the occasion of the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas. In the SET inaugural program on October 1st, 1946, they read these texts of the epistle of Apostle Paul to young Timothy, which I invite you to read some other time: 2 Timothy 1:6-7; 2:7-16; 4:1-5.



The Council of Evangelical Churches was founded in 1946

– we are celebrating this year the 80th anniversary of its foundation – and an important decision that was taken: founding a theological seminary that should be ecumenical, not as an end in itself, but with the purpose of accompanying churches in their projects of formation of leaders to make God’s mission true in our Homeland. Thus, this has been the task of our Seminary along these seven and a half decades.

Today, when our Homeland is going through really critical moments, translated into scarcity of essential medicines, but the solidarity of people is evident when they share the few medicines they have; when our State makes efforts to vaccinate and protect the entire population against Covid-19; when there is a general high cost of living but we share our food; when, besides, in a certain way the elemental values of decency and conviviality are eroded, but dignity and decorum of people is recognized we find in these verses some paradigms and exhortations that I would like to extoll this morning to reaffirm all the positive values that we are called to proclaim and to live as the church of Jesus Christ of Cuba today:

- Stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of hands. Overcome any spirit of shyness, for God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.
- Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.
- Always remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead
- Bear witness of a living Gospel that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.
- Remind people of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers.

- Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.
- But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness
- Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching
- Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

And Paul adds, *for if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*

We are then called to *proclaim the Gospel of the reign of God of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*, as Apostle Paul says in Romans 14:17 so that all the *oikoumene*, the inhabited world, becomes an *oikos* a common house, a real *koinonia*, in which we all are included for a dignified full life that our Lord Jesus Christ came to bring for all creation. Amen

RECTORS THAT HAVE SERVED THE INSTITUTION

The Directive Board is the governing body in the Seminary, with representative, legislative, consulting and directing functions. It is made up of 10 Member Churches: Presbyterian-Reformed, Episcopal, Fraternity of Baptist Churches and the Quaker Friends. The Board elects the SET administration, constituted by the Rector, Vice rector, Deans and faculty of professors appointed by each of these churches.

Since its foundation, these have been the Rectors of the Seminary: Alfonso Rodríguez Hidalgo, Presbyterian (1946-1961); Carlos Pérez Ramos, Methodist (acting, 1961-1963); Jorge A. León Rivero, Methodist (1963-1966); Jorge A. Perera Hurtado, Episcopal (1966-1969); Sergio Arce Martínez, Presbyterian (1969-1984); Pablo Odén Marichal Rodríguez, Episcopal (1984-1993); Humberto Fuentes Sánchez, Methodist (1993-1996); Ofelia Ortega Suárez, Presbyterian (1996-2004); Reinerio Arce Valentín, Presbyterian (2004-2015), and Carlos Emilio Ham Stanard, Presbyterian (2015 to date).

In SET 75th Anniversary, we thank God for its existence, because He has accompanied us to this point. We pray that He continues blessing this institution at the service of the Church and the proclamation of his reign in Cuba and in the world. We pray so that He continues guiding us and giving us strength through His Spirit in the task of helping to train leaders of the Church of today and the Church of tomorrow.

To our God of Life, Glory to Him and only Him.

Monthly Newsletter

ACONTECER

SPECIAL

Contributions to Evangelical Seminary of Theology in Matanzas should be made to:

*Ofelia Ortega Endowment Fund,
Fund ID: 89726, Account: 1020094701.*

This information should be written on the memo line of the check. Contributions may be made either by individuals or congregations or presbyteries. The check should then be mailed to:

*Presbyterian Foundation,
200 East 12th Street, Jeffersonville, IN 47130.*

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