



ACONTECER

September 2021

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DEAN'S REPORT.

ACADEMIC TERMS 2021-2022 START



The new academic terms 2021-2022 began on Monday, August 30. Many difficulties we have had to surpass in the last months to be able to continue with the theological training programs. We thank God and the effort of each directive and faculty to go on with our work and service to churches and ecumenical movements in Cuba.

At the beginning of August, a virtual meeting took place with a group of professors of our institution. In this meeting we shared our concerns, visions and suggestions about work at SET, virtually as well as face-to-face, in accordance with what the health situation of the country allows us to do.

We are continuing some of the programs and beginning new issues of other programs in virtual mode.

The courses that continue are:

- **Baccalaureate in Biblical-Theological Studies, with venues in Matanzas and Havana**
- **Baccalaureate in Christian Education**
- **Degree in Theology (4th year)**
- **Degree in Sciences of Religions (2nd, 3rd and 4th years)**
- **Master in Theology**

The new issues are:

- **Baccalaureate in Biblical-Theological Studies in Holguin**
- **Degree in Theology (1st year)**
- **Degree in Sciences of Religions (1st year)**
- **Ministry Doctorate**

Six first-year students began the Degree in Theology program in virtual mode. They come from the Sovereign Grace Pentecostal Church (1); the Pastoral for People with Disabilities from the Council of Churches of Cuba (2); the Christian Students Movement (2) and the Christian Center of Dialog and Reflection (1).



The Diakonia School will call its eighth issue this semester. The School of supposed to work in virtual mode as well as the Pentecostal Studies program. The Biblical-Pastoral Training Program will be graduating its students in the next few months. In addition, this program is in a phase of study to reorganize its curriculum, adjust its objectives to the new national context as well as respond to the needs of leadership training for churches.

The Higher institute of Sciences of Religion (ISECRE) also began its courses in September by virtual mode. In this new issue, the first year has enrolled students from various provinces of the country as well as from other countries.

VIRTUAL MEETING OF SET EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF DIRECTIVE BOARD

Because of the pandemic situation, the Executive Committee of SET Directive Board met virtually on Monday, August 10, 2021. Participants were: Presbyter Pastor Edelberto Valdés, from the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba, President; Bishop María Griselda Delgado del Carpio, from the Episcopal Church of Cuba, Vice-president; Orquidea Margarita Lima, from the Fraternity of Baptist Churches of Cuba, Executive Secretary; Pastor María Armenia Yi, from the Annual Board of Quaker Friends, Secretary. Participants from SET Direction who could speak but not vote were Pastor Rev Carlos Emilio Ham, Rector; Clara Luz Ajo, Vice-rector and Pastor Amos Lopez, Dean.

The Executive Committee recommended the Directive Board – that will meet on December 14 – to approve the new students for the Baccalaureate programs of Biblical-Theological Studies in Holguin, the Degree in Theology and the Degree in Sciences of Religions. Likewise, students who will graduate in December with Degree in Theology, Degree and Master program in Sciences of Religions.

The Executive Committee recommended also to confirm the agreement of the Directive Board to extend the mandate of the Rector and the Vice rector for another period of three years (2021-2024) and directives of the Board for two years (2021-2023) until they can properly meet and conduct the corresponding elections.

EXCHANGE WITH ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

The Directive Board of the **Graduate Theology Foundation (GTF)**, of which Rector Carlos E. Ham is a participant, had a videoconference on August 15 via Zoom. On the 19 of August, the GTF President Reverend Paul Kirbas met with SET Rector to organize in detail the Doctorate in Ministry program which will be done jointly between both institutions.

On August 18 and September 8, Reverend Angel Luis Rivera-Agosto, Executive of the Office for **Latin America and the Caribbean of the Global Ministries of the Disciples of Christ Church and United Church from the United States and Canada** called a virtual meeting to plan the process of **Theological Education and Praxis** with the seminaries and institutions of theological training in the Western Hemisphere. Rector Carlos E. Ham represented the Seminary in both meetings.

The **Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in Latin America** (AIPRAL by its acronym in Spanish) called for a cycle of online meetings since 2020, *Miradas* with the purpose of rethinking diakonia and the mission of the church with the objectives of promoting talks, reflections and practices related to these topics and the post-pandemic vitality of the Church and its prophetic unfolding in society. Likewise, they aimed at linking theologians in Latin America and the Caribbean and generating collaboration and exchange with students in seminaries and pastoral roles and leadership of Presbyterian-Reformed churches. On August 28, SET participated in the topic *Disasters*; on September 25, the Rector presented the biblical study on the topic *Sharing Hope. Mission in Latin America and the Caribbean*, based on the passage of the Gospel of John 6:9. Other representatives of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba present in the meeting were Pastors Dora Arce, Synod Moderator and Edelberto Valdés, Executive Secretary.

The Global Forum of Theology Educators (GFTE) met for the first time via Zoom, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, for three days from September 29 to October 1. The GFTE is designed to offer opportunities for headers in theological education of all the Christian traditions to gather and learn from those who do a similar job, but with a different tradition of faith. Individual theologian educators from each of the six Christian ecclesial families – Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Historical Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Independent gathered to provide a common platform to generate trust through their traditional borders, share experiences and explore commitments and areas of possible collaboration. In addition to participating in this meeting, our Seminary has attended all previous ones; namely, in Dorfweil, Germany (2016) and in the Island of Cyprus (2019).

DIRECTIVE AND FACULTY MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES



Meetings and conferences attended by directives and faculty via Zoom during August and September 2021:

20 - 26 August

Rector Carlos E. Ham attended meetings of the committee that works in the project of renovation of the Conference of Caribbean Churches focusing on their identity and mission on the occasion of their fiftieth anniversary in 2023.

23 August

SET professors Ofelia Ortega, Adolfo Ham y Carlos E. Ham, participated in a videoconference organized by the World Council of Churches entitled *Prophet of God's Oikumene. Celebrating the Life of Philip Potter* on the occasion of the celebration of the centennial of his life and the 73rd Anniversary of the WCC.

24 August

SET Rector participated in the meeting on the process of study on the occasion of the celebration of the centennial of the International Missionary Council (IMC). He also participated in the conference on *Ecumenism in the Dutch Reformed Church: Relationship with the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches on racial relations*, by Prof. Dr. Johannes Knoetze, from the University of Pretoria, South Africa.

14 September

The Swiss ecumenical institutions Mission 21 and the Missionary Department of Lausanne organized an International Summer School online, with participants from Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe with the topic *Missions and Christian Churches between Racism and Respect*. On behalf of the Christian Institute of Gender Studies, Ofelia Ortega Suárez y Moraima González participated and presented the paper *Racism: A Cultural Construction and the Rector presented the topic Racism and Respect among Churches from the SET Perspective*.

23 September

Rector Carlos E. Ham and the head of the Economy Department Waldemar Murguido met with Christie Neufeldt, from the United Church from Canada to deal with affairs of interest for both parties.

24 - 25
September

The Rector participated in the meeting of the Network of Presbyterian Partnerships USA-Cuba on the topic *Hope, Prayer, Patience and Partnership*. The Rector shared information about the Seminary.

29 September

Rector met with Anne Roulet, Secretary for Latin America of the Missionary Department of Lausanne, Switzerland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO SET

Our Seminary served the city during the months of June to August by providing the city with our facilities as a center for the assistance of children positive or suspicious of having Covid-19. The Seminary functioned for 47 days as the annex center of the Provincial Pediatric Hospital Eliseo Noel Caamaño, and received 1500 patients with their companions.

On behalf of the Communist Party and the Government of the city, our Seminary received the recognition of these organizations and of



the people of Matanzas for the support of the SET personnel in the fight against the pandemic. The activity took place on September 18, 2021. Liván Izquierdo, member of the Central Committee and First Secretary of the Party in the province,; Mario Sabines, Governor of Matanzas; Susely Morfa, member of the provincial Bureau of the Party; Mayra Suárez, from the Office of Religious Affairs; Dr. Ailuj Casanova, Provincial Director of the Ministry of Public Health and Dr. José Hernández, Director of the Pediatric Hospital among others were present to thank SET for the contribution to the control of the pandemic situation in the province.



During the activity of recognition, Rector Carlos Emilio Ham presented the participants with photographs of our religious institution.

Dr. José Hernandez spoke about the significance and relevance of the support and help the Seminary provided the city. The meeting ended with a thanksgiving prayer for hope, health and solidarity.



RECENT ISSUE OF CUBA TEOLÓGICA



Number 3/2019 of *Cuba Teológica* entitled *In Memory of Lois* opens with a special editorial dedicated to Lois C. Kroehler Baur, American missionary and composer. Articles in homage of her personality and her work have been published by colleagues Nelson Dávila and Ofelia Ortega and from Yosneis Fleitas, who studies her work.

Other interesting articles include *Sola Fide: The Journey from Doctrines to the Experience of Faith* by David Puig; Eusebio Leal's praise of the late Cardinal Jaime Ortega; Reinerio Arce's sermon *Lord, What Do You Want Me to Do?* about how to answer God's will. Likewise, we can also find the habitual sections of documents, news and book reviews and other novelties for readers.

The magazine is available at the Evangelical Seminary of Theology website <http://revistas.setcuba.org>.

MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES

The administrator Luis Gustavo Cepero reported the maintenance activities carried out during the summer at SET:

- Repairing of the office for digitalizing and scanning materials.
- Plumbing, refurbishing and roofing of buildings.
- Improvement of electrical and telephone and wireless systems.
- Placing of 36 LED lights in buildings.
- Placing of LED lights in gardens and other corridors.
- Fixing plumbing, electrical problems, fixing and cleaning air conditioning, lights, light switches, electrical sockets, and the like several times, since Building 30 served as annex ward for the pediatric hospital.
- Placing new electrification and repairing sockets at present.
- Improving the cold store to refrigerate more food.
- Repairing the garden vegetable beds and flowerbeds .
- Repairing two turbines.
- Ongoing servicing of 2500 liters of filtered water to the population



We appreciate and thank the maintenance workers for all the work done

REFLECTIONS IN MY NINETY YEARS

On the occasion of his 90 years, we asked Professor Emeritus Dr. Adolfo Ham to share with us some reflections about his work along the years:



“The birthdays? They are naturally a convention: because one can be older, or younger, regardless of age. I would venture to say that it is the “spiritual age” that counts. On these occasions, the exercise of analyzing life is done a lot, the meaning that our existence has had for us, and where we are going. I always live safe and aware of the wonderful providence of God throughout my long life, and I have dared to repeat that God has always “spoiled” me. These great texts that allude to God’s fidelity and providence are invariably present: 1 S 7:12 “Ebenezer”: “up to this point the Lord has helped us”; those great Psalms such as 90, 103, 121, 134; and all those that liturgically repeat “praise the Lord because he is good, because his love is eternal.”

I used to say in my eighties, “As a philosophy of life, I am convinced that ‘life is beautiful.’” There is a text that lately has been renewed a lot internally: “Into your hand I entrust my spirit, you have redeemed me, O Lord, God of truth” (Ps 31:5). That is why I think that my basic attitude should be constant “gratitude” to God, for all the beauty that he has granted me in his Grace throughout these long years.

My training and philosophical vocation have also shaped my life and thinking a lot. I have always been a teacher by vocation, still willing to “teach by learning” or “learn by teaching.” One of the current realities is that at this age – out of respect for others and myself [laughs] – I must stop “teaching”. Note that I do not say “stop teaching”, this would be at the end of my life career, although I always remember René Castellanos a lot, who said that in heaven we would continue to do what we typically do, but fully.

Thus, I have taught, first from 1960 to 1965 at the Eastern Cuba Baptist Theological Seminary; and from 1965 to today at the Evangelical Theology Seminary (SET), with some periods outside the country. So how much do I owe the SET? In teaching, I would say that it is more what is received – from students, from colleagues, from the institution – than what is contributed. I have spoken of this in my congratulations on the occasion of the 75 years of life of the Seminary, “I simply have to say ‘I am what I am because of SET,’ because more than what I could have taught in these 56 years, there is what I have learned, and I still treasure.” Another element of joy to celebrate, it is said in the publication, is “the fact, unique in the entire history of SET, that my son Carlos Emilio is the Rector, who studied together with Reinerio Arce here, and we are two consecutive pastoral generations: A privilege that very few parents have. What better accomplishment for me, and the institution?” Now, we always need committed theologies, as Karl Barth has already accurately put it: “Theology is concrete obedience.” For this reason, theology must always be contextual: how far does our obedience extend?

I refer especially to the ecumenical experience lived at SET. The “jubilee book” that my son Carlos Emilio published on the occasion of my 80th birthday, entitled *My Vocation Is Ecumenical*, attests to my ecumenical practice, undoubtedly enriched also by my work for four years, together with my partner Ruth Gaínza, in the Caribbean Conference of Churches, and my membership and participation in various commissions of the World Council of Churches for more than sixty year. (See the graduation speeches / sermons offered at SET: “*Manos*” (Hands), “*Caminos*” (Roads), “*Sueños*” (Dreams) and “*Horizontes*” (Horizons), where I mention aspects of my experience at SET, and the themes of my chapels held there.)

This ecumenical emphasis lived in its broadest sense, leads me to interreligious dialogue and communion, which has transformed my theological/philosophical horizon, because I have already verified that all religions are human creations that respond to certain historical conjunctures and regional characteristics. E. Levinas has rightly said, “Nothing exists in some great spirituality that is absolutely absent in another great spirituality.” So I can say “God is not Christian” and, for that matter, not Muslim or Buddhist. In this sense, there is no doubt that we have made God “in our image and likeness.” We also have to verify that some alleged atheists would be complying with the Decalogue “you will not have other gods ... you will not make yourself an image ...”. The wonderful thing is that, paradoxically, one’s own religion, which for me is another “language”, is expanded and enriched in interreligious communion. Therefore, we must encourage, as much as possible, meetings with representatives of other religions, and promote common tasks of service that help us to know each other better. Fundamentalisms and persecutions are the result of ignorance and separatism.

My Cubanness. In 1948, in the Martí Park, in Palma Soriano, I gave the city speech in memory of the martyrs who were medical students. It was my patriotic baptism and first public speech. Then, around 1950, I had the great opportunity to visit Dos Ríos and Mangos de Baraguá with my Cuban History teacher, Elías Entralgo, who had come from Havana. We had done with him the course-seminar “*Awareness of Homeland-feeling of the Nation*”, which has always inspired me and accompanied me in my Cuban life, along with my three paradigms: Félix Varela, Luz y Caballero and José Martí.

Another mainstay in my thinking is the sociopolitical dimension; of course, always closely linked to Cubanness, the feeling of homeland, and concrete obedience. Unfortunately, for some Christians politics is a dirty word. That sun of the moral world always accompanies me, by Cintio Vitier, who shows us that kind of patriotic “apostolic succession” that comes from Félix Varela.

In my honorary degree speech at the United Theological College, Montreal, on May 7, 2002, I said, “The Cuban Revolution has forced us to rediscover the revolutionary content of the Gospels and the history of the church. So we have tried to develop a theology that responds to these challenges, discovering the contradictions between the church as a conservative and sometimes reactionary institution, and an ideological theology made to justify it, a position that goes against the fact that the Christian message



must always challenge any status quo.”

The acculturation of the gospel. I think a lot about the mystery of the “incarnation” of God in Christ. It is that we always have in theology the danger of Docetism, and not only in reference to Jesus Christ, but in other aspects of life. Thus, we have already seen it, theology cannot be disincarnated from its political-cultural context. This raises many problems for us: What is “Cuban”? What is the Cuban culture? How should this relationship occur? It is true that we have had many prejudices and ignorance in relation to the Afro-Cuban element in our culture, but we forget the other origins: The Spanish-Iberian, the Chinese, the Haitian, the Hispanic Roman Catholic, and other minorities.

Finally, regarding the issue of acculturation, we have to try to better understand the interrelation between culture and religion, which in my particular environment includes participation in our secular culture of resistance – for example, the American Way of Life – or at the time the Soviets with its Stalinist atheism. It is not about the other mimetic opposite trend in which we have fallen, sometimes unhappily. “

OUR CONDOLENCES



María Cristina Verdecia

In the early morning of August 20, 2021, Sister María Cristina Verdecia passed away (November 15, 1927 - August 20, 2021). Born in Manzanillo, former province of Oriente, she was married to Rev. Julio Montes de Oca until the latter’s death. Since 1963 he came to SET first as a student and later as a worker in the administrative area. He then went on to work in the library, where he worked for 23 years until his retirement in 1997. As he expressed, working there was an extraordinary experience, as it totally changed his life as he approached and entered into relationship with the community of students and teachers. He had the ability to know by heart where

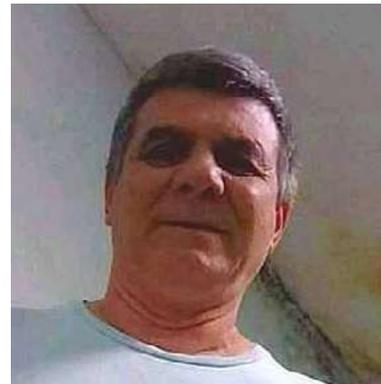
each requested book was stored. During the years after Montes de Oca’s death, María Cristina maintained an independent personality, despite her limitations and being in the care of the Seminary. She remained in a particular way close to the people who directly cared for her and prepared her food, such as the custodian Pedro, Professor Clarita and Alexis. On June 17, she suffered a stroke and was treated urgently at the hospital for tests. From this moment on she required permanent care. The SET leadership, after examining some variants, met María and in the first days of July she went to live with her family in Alacranes. Thank God that Cristina’s last moments were happy days; There she was carefully cared for and recognized by the neighbors with whom she talked, read the newspaper, even sang the songs from the television, to the amazement of all for her beautiful voice. She was a special woman, who a few hours before leaving, asked Luis Gustavo, our administrator, to come and see her; and that was how, without telling him, she said goodbye, because she was part of the SET community until her death. “Happy are those who die in the Lord! Yes - says the Spirit - from now on, they can rest from their fatigue, because their works accompany them. “ (Revelation 14:13).

Patricio Marrero Hernández

On August 20, 2021, our dear brother, the ruling Presbyter Patricio Marrero Hernández (March 23, 1947 - August 20, 2021) came into the presence of the Lord because of a heart attack. He was an enthusiastic leader of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church “El Redentor”, from Versailles in Matanzas. In addition to serving as a teacher for many years, he was secretary of the consistory and was also for several years the pianist in the Seminary Chapel and in his local church. We will always remember Patricio for the Christian values he professed, especially for his humility. When we sing the songs in our liturgical services at SET, we will not forget his dedication and constant defense of our musical heritage, for his responsibility and professionalism in that ministry to which he dedicated part of his life. We thank God very much for the fruitful life of our dear brother Patricio! Rest in peace, dear brother! “Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Ps 116:15)

Nilo Sarmiento

Our brother, Nilo Sarmiento (October 13, 1955 - August 29, 2021) passed into the presence of the Lord, a victim of Covid-19. He was a member of the International Church Ministry “Puentes de Fe” and for more than 20 years he was linked to our Seminary. Our condolences to his wife Zobeida, to his daughters and other family members, and our gratitude to God for the time he allowed us to share with Nilito.



NOTES FOR HISTORY ON OCCASION OF SET 75TH ANNIVERSARY (1946-2021): HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

THE 90s

In this decade a new era begins in the relations between the churches and the State. A relevant and long-awaited historical event was the meeting held on April 2, 1990, by Commander Fidel Castro with seventy-five ecumenical leaders of the evangelical churches, which sealed a higher stage and opened the way for the desired dialogue. As a consequence of this meeting, among other factors, the IV Congress of the PCC held in 1991, modified its statutes to allow believers to join the Party. In 1992, a series of amendments to the Constitution were adopted, which restored the secular character of the State, which led, among other factors, to an increase in pastoral and student vocations in the Seminary.

This stage, called the “Special Period in Peacetime” was characterized by a deep economic crisis, as a consequence of the collapse of the socialist camp; the intensification of the US blockade against Cuba; and the Cuban government’s own internal errors. The SET, always sensitive to the needs of society, expanded its community action, which was developed in conjunction with teaching activities.

During these years the establishment of deep relationships with international associations and institutions continued; professors and students received scholarships in other seminaries and universities; the funds of the library continued to expand; and other churches and ecumenical organizations sent their members.

In 1996, the SET Alumni Association fostered a better relationship between the Seminary and its graduates and continued to host relevant international theological events.

In the second half of the nineties, the publications department was organized, which has provided didactic, printed and digital resources for SET courses and programs. In 1998 the magazine *Didajé* began to be published. The following year, the publication of the magazine *Cuba Teológica*, which had been founded in 1982 and then discontinued, was resumed.

At the end of the decade, new buildings were built, including one for bedrooms and another for offices, currently for teaching use.

*(Taken from the book A Laboratory of the Ecumenical Movement.
Notes for the History of the
Evangelical Seminary of Theology of Matanzas)*

Monthly Newsletter

ACONTECER

September 2021

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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