

## EDITORIAL

I declare, is a popular phrase among many Christians. They use it to predict healing, good economy or success in life. I often hear them affirm: "I declare victory", "prosperity" or "success" over your life. These statements are made with the promises contained in the Bible in mind, which the Christian has the right to claim and the power to pronounce. I do not doubt that the Bible contains promises of blessing, but it also contains claims that should be declared for the edification of the believer.

The declarations, whether they are called prophetic or of faith, concentrate their attention on prosperity, but leave aside the cost of discipleship, which is a fundamental part in the growth towards maturity of the Christian character (James 1:2-4). Success is sought without taking into account the cost of achieving it. It is an offering that avoids suffering (cf. Mt.4:5-11). From the biblical perspective, the success has to fit but not avoiding the cost. For example, Christ's exaltation was preceded by his humiliation. The cross preceded the throne. It models service even at the cost of life. With the idea of growing in this challenge, we reflect on the process of Jesus that the prophet Isaiah details in his 4th canticle about the Suffering Servant in his 53rd chapter.

First, Isaiah predicts the scorn and rejection of Christ. With astonishment he asks, "Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of dry ground; He has no stately form or majesty. That we would look at Him, Nor an appearance that we would take pleasure in Him. He was despised and abandoned by men, A man of great pain and familiar with sickness; And like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised, and we had no regard for Him." (53:1-3 NASB). It was not contempt for his physical appearance, but for Jesus' demanding character. He denounced the hypocrisy of the Jewish leadership, their wrong interpretations of the Scriptures and a religious system that oppressed God's people (Lk.12; Mt.22:29; Jn.9:18-23) It could be stated that "they disagreed with him, and he at the same time disagreed with them" (J. Stott, 1975:7). That is, the Jews did not reject Jesus because they saw nothing good in him, but because he threatened their interests and jeopardized the status quo. Therefore, they rejected him, conspired against him and sought to eliminate him.

Second, Isaiah explains the reasons for Christ's humiliation and death. He states, "However, it was our sicknesses that He Himself bore, And our pains that He carried; Yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted, Struck down by God, and humiliated. But He was pierced for our offenses, He was crushed for our wrongdoings; The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him, And by His wounds we are healed. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all To fall on Him." (53:4-6). This horrific picture of humiliation was brought to the big screen by Mel Gibson in *The Passion of the Christ*. Although it may seem an exaggeration, so was the death of Christ.

The text underlines that Christ was humiliated, beaten and vexed for the sake of our rebellions, iniquities, our peace and salvation. He suffered contempt, violence and death on the cross at the hands of the Jews; and at the same time, He suffered such a death because God the Father willed it, and because Christ gave His life voluntarily (Acts 2:23; Heb. 10:5-7). Jesus had clear that he had to offer his life to achieve our salvation. That his exaltation preceded his humiliation (Phil.2:5-8). Our heart should always burst in adoration to the one who, regardless of scorn, suffering and death, gave his life for us sinners, enemies and incapable of saving us (Rom.5:6,8,10). Today, it is ironic that leaders and many Christians seek success, exaltation or service, but are unwilling to pay the cost of discipleship. Others are surprised when suffering appears because they are not aware that it is part of being a Christian. The cross of Christ is the sign of God's love for humanity, but it is also a symbol that challenges us to serve others even at the cost of our lives.

Thirdly, Isaiah describes the exaltation of Christ and the honors he received. He declares, "After his suffering, he will see the light and be satisfied. By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a place among the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors...many nations shall be astonished, and at his presence kings shall be silent, for they shall see what was not told them and understand what they had not heard" (53:11-12; 52:15). After his humiliation, the light clears the darkness, he enjoys the joy of having suffered for our salvation. His exaltation and rewards come only after he has poured out his life unto death. The Father gives him a throne, he will be exalted and kings will recognize the greatness of his atoning work and his majesty. His example underlines that there is no exaltation without humiliation, no throne without a cross.

The challenge for all Christians is to evaluate ourselves in the light of the paradigm of the Suffering Servant. Especially since in our society success, relevance or profit are the signs of prosperity. Henri Nouwen stresses that, in the face of the quest for relevance, "There is need for the leader of the future to be the one who dares to proclaim his irrelevance... as a divine vocation that allows him to enter into deep solidarity with the anguish that underlies the glitter of success, and to bring there the light of Jesus" (1999:30). It behooves us, too, to evaluate our commitment to the truth of the gospel. The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus because he told them the unvarnished truth and denounced their sins. Do we sweeten the Word so that it does not offend or inconvenience anyone? Let us not forget that the cross is a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:3). Finally, let us remember that God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble (1 Pet.5:5). If we want to imitate Jesus, we must take into account the cost of discipleship. The paradigm of the Suffering Leader is before us.

**Israel Ortíz**  
**Director**  
**Centro Esdras**

## THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

### Diplomas

#### *Pedagogy of Jesus and contemporary education 2024*

On Thursday, February 29th, the diploma course in Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education began. Through a video call, the group of 17 students from Sacatepéquez, Huehuetenango, Guatemala City, Villa Nueva and Mixco got to know each other, obtained an overview of the course and received the first instructions to introduce them to virtual education.

The students have shown enthusiasm for the beginning and with this diploma course they hope to learn how to: "impact lives, minds and hearts through the teachings

and examples of Jesus", "grow spiritually, as well as support others to know more about God" and "improve the methods and knowledge of pedagogy as seen from the teachings of Jesus and thus respond to the context of the church".

We thank God for calling us to learn at the feet of Jesus We are excited that the students are able to know and relate to the Lord while strengthening their abilities in pedagogy and that with the course of the modules they will be able to respond to the current challenges.

**Venez Pérez López**  
Diploma Assistant

### Workshops and conferences

#### *Conference: How to live in a world of digital surveillance?*

**Speaker: Dr. David Lyon**

We held two lectures given by Dr. David Lyon on the topic: "How to Live in a World of Digital Surveillance". Dr. Lyon addressed the subject of "The Eye of God and Surveillance" and "Artificial Intelligence and Surveillance".

Dr. David Lyon was director of the Centre for Surveillance Studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. A pioneer in surveillance studies and a professor of sociology and law. His books have been translated into 18 languages, including *The Culture of Surveillance*, *Pandemic Surveillance* and *Surveillance Society*.

It was an excellent time to share with leaders, pastors, professionals and students on a topic of utmost importance today. We reflected on how the child of God should respond to these challenges. We thank José Garza for their support in the coordination of the event.



## Contributions for the church

### *Presentation of the book "Rethinking the church in the 21st century".*



In February we presented the new book edited by our director Israel Ortíz. Contains 25 articles by writers from England, the United States and Latin America.

The event was attended by leaders of the Evangelical Church of Guatemala and other Christian organizations.

In addition, we had the support of Dr. Miguel Alvarez and Magister David Ruiz who commented on the book.

The activity was held at the Korean Presbyterian Church of Guatemala.

We are currently promoting the book through social Media so that more people can obtain it. Our desire is that this material will lead the church to reflect on its role in the XXI century and thus fulfill the mission of the Kingdom of God. We thank Pastor Timothy Kim for facilitating the church facilities.

## Focal network

### *Diploma program graduates*

It has been a great privilege to accompany the Focal Network of Centro Esdras diploma graduates. As we mentioned in the last newsletter, we had our first retreat in November focused on studying the life of the Apostle Peter. In January we continued with virtual meetings and a second retreat focused on the study of Nehemiah. This month we will accompany the participants in the implementation of projects and initiatives within their contexts



inspired by the study of Nehemiah and the call of each participant. It has been very inspiring to hear of the variety of initiatives that the participants wish to implement or are already implementing. For example: a literacy initiative for children working on the street, working with community leaders to take action in favor of the environment, discipleship and accompaniment for leaders in terms of integral mission, school reinforcement program for children at risk, etc. On the part of the Centro Esdras team, it is very gratifying to see how theology is being put into practice far beyond what we can accomplish as a small work team. We trust that these projects will be a faithful witness in their local churches as part of their formation and commitment to follow in the footsteps of Jesus to serve for the integral well-being of his communities.

**Robert Reich,**  
**Program Director**



## PROGRAMS

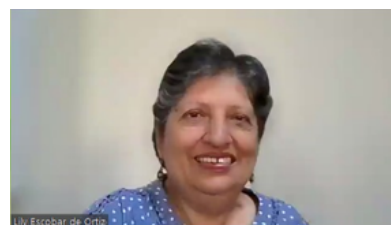
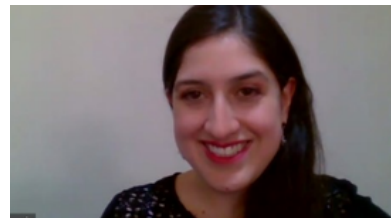
### CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE AND FAMILY



#### Project: School for parents

We began the year with great expectations of reaching the goal of finishing the writing and printing of the Parenting Manual from a biblical perspective. We have been encouraged by conversations with pastors and leaders who encourage us to continue working on this project due to the need they see in their churches for a ministry to accompany families. Today more than ever families are in need of guidance on what it means to "be families" and how to build "healthy families".

**Lily Escobar de Ortiz**  
Parenting School Coordinator



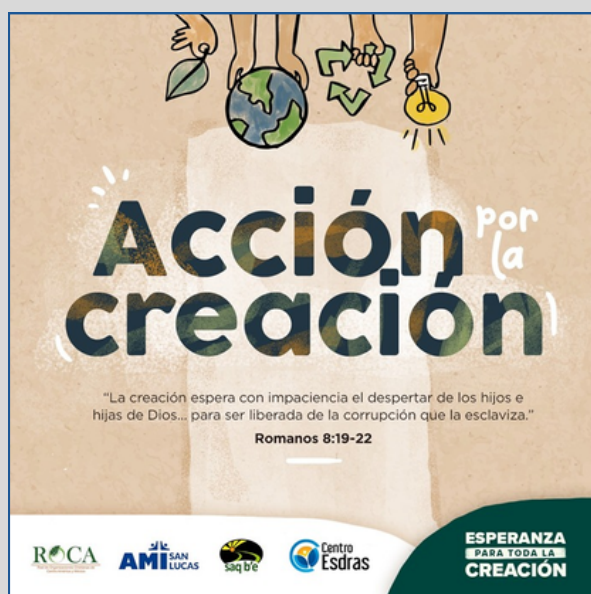
TEAM MEMBERS

### ENVIRONMENT

During January and February the Environment program has continued the coordination of the Roca Guatemala Network. The network is organizing the seminar-workshop: Resilience to climate challenges and the role of the church, for the month of November with the objective of creating a training space for church leadership, generate alliances and strengthen the collective work around resilience to climate change.

Likewise, the Facebook page "Esperanza para toda la creación" (Hope for all creation) will be re-launching the #ActionForCreation campaign. The campaign aims to encourage from a theological perspective to take small actions to model stewardship for creation. We encourage you to follow our Facebook fanpage and support this campaign by sharing it and modeling it.

**Venezuz Perez Lopez**  
Environment Program Coordinator



**NEWS**

***Lyon couple visit***

Dr. Lyon and his wife traveled from Canada to Guatemala and visited the Esdras Center. They both had a break at Lake Atitlan with our director and his wife Lily after two weeks of teaching in Brazil. Furthermore they both shared a beautiful time with the team. It was a very rewarding morning where the couple shared their life lessons and it was an honor to have shared with them and learn from their journey as a couple! We are very grateful for the support that the Lyon couple have given to the Center over the years.



**COOPERATION WITH OTHER MINISTRIES**

***Tearfund Meeting***

In February, Tearfund held a farewell activity for the closing of its offices in Central America. We had the privilege of sharing with others organizations and hearing their testimonies about God's work through Tearfund. We are immensely grateful for the support that Tearfund provided to Centro Esdras for several years! We know that God will continue to glorify Himself in what lies ahead for this ministry.



***Latin Link Visit***

In March we had the visit of Suzanne Potter and Diana, representatives of Latin Link. During this time the Center's team shared testimonies about the legacy of the European missionaries who have previously served in Centro Esdras through Latin Link. We thank God for each one of the missionaries who have collaborated with the ministry of the Center in Guatemala!



## ***Conversations with Canadian Baptists Ministries***

In February and March we had the opportunity to share about Centro Esdras with representatives of the Canadian Baptists Ministries (CBM). We have identified some common goals in our ministry work. We are praying that the Lord will direct each step in our relationship as organizations so that we can work together for the advancement of the mission.

## **GRATITUDE FOR MISSION PARTNER ENTITIES**

- We give thanks to God for the fellowship and ministerial support of Latin Link Switzerland and Latin Link England.
- We appreciate the Lord for our brethren from Hilfe Für Brüder in Germany for their friendship and support to the Focal Network.

## **GRATITUDE**

- We thank God for the printing of the book "Rethinking the Church in the 21st Century" and for what He is doing through this book.
- For the students participating in the diploma program "The Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education."
- For the lives of Dr. David Lyon and his wife. Their visit was a great blessing for the team at the Ezra Center and for those who participated in the conference on Digital Surveillance.
- For new donors from England that the Lord provided through Latin Link UK in the first quarter of 2024.
- For the colleagues who are joining the Ezra Center's work team.

***We extend special thanks to you, both within and outside Guatemala. Your spiritual support and companionship along the journey are sources of strength and encouragement for the Ezra Center.***

## **PRAYER REQUESTS**

- For the editing team of the Parent School Manual. Let us pray for wisdom and creativity in crafting the contents.
- For the finances, projects, and team of the Center. May the Lord guide every decision for His glory.
- For the wisdom and strength of the Lord for the implementation and development of the 2024 Operational Plan.
- The process of evaluation, redefinition, and writing of the Center's theological proposal.
- Pray for wisdom and direction from the Lord in the selection and hiring process of the Director of Theological Studies.



## GET OUR BOOKS NOW!

Los Cristianos y la Política 2a. Edición Q.50  
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Be part of this vision. Together, we can do more for the formation of God's people's leadership.

If you wish to become one of our donors, register by clicking on the following icon:



### Guatemala:

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Fundación Centro Esdras

Account #018-0007479-9

**United States:** <https://uwm.org/projects/65510/>

**Europe:** [www.latinlink.org.uk/donate](http://www.latinlink.org.uk/donate) and select "support a project," then choose "Ezra Centre" from the dropdown menu and follow the instructions.

## ABOUT US

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