



EDITORIAL

The upside-down pyramid The incarnation of Jesus

Social advancement is an insatiable quest. In every society, the search for social advancement is a very important goal. It is a pyramid of ascent that moves from bottom to top. The working class aspires to become part of the middle class. Those in the middle class aspire to become part of the upper class. For its part, the upper class considers itself the top of society and clings to its status at all costs. In the search for the desired social advancement, attitudes such as individualism, ambition or personal interest emerge in order to achieve it. It is a search for prestige, status and material goods..

Christians are not exempt from this search. For example, the apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians points out attitudes such as selfishness, a sense of superiority and the pursuit of personal interest, which were affecting their relationships and fracturing their community life. He affirms that some believers preached the gospel out of personal ambition and not for pure motives (Phil. 1:16); he denounces the presence of bad workers who pressured them to adopt Judaizing rites (Phil. 3:2); and calls on colleagues to agree despite their differences (Phil. 4:2).

In his exhortation he encourages them to “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” (Phil. 2:2-4). It could be inferred that they were seeking some kind of social advancement that would give them identity.

This warning is also for us today. We live in a society that values people for what they have, not for who they are. Hence, many live to work, work to earn, earn to buy, and buy to be worth something. The saying goes: Tell me how you dress and I will tell you who you are!

Paul challenges the Philippians and Christians today to live according to the model of life of Jesus who, in his incarnation, reversed the dynamics of traditional social ascent. He changed the paradigm of ascent because he had an identity. Because he knew who he was, he descended from his throne to serve for the salvation of humanity. What is Jesus' proposal?

Jesus reverses the pyramid of ascent. His incarnation is the most sublime and grandiose mystery in history, and at the same time, it is the paradigm of the Leader-Servant. Paul emphasizes that Jesus did not follow the traditional pyramid of social ascent, but rather “descended” into the world as the Son of God: “Being in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and being made in human likeness. And being found in human likeness, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:5-8).

In the face of selfishness, a sense of superiority, or the pursuit of accumulation, Paul challenges us to “think” or “have the same mindset” as Jesus in his incarnation. What attitudes does he propose? First, Jesus did not cling to his divine status; second, he temporarily emptied himself of his glory and majesty and became like his creatures; and third, being in human likeness, he became a servant and humbled himself to the point of dying on a cross like a vile criminal. Being the Lord of the universe, redemption, the church and history, he decided not to cling to his status, to renounce his glory and to humble himself as a slave in order to effect our redemption.

If our identity is in Christ we should not depend on social advancement to become. Rather, because we know who we are, we should take on the vocation of servants. What was the impact of Jesus' incarnation on history? He identified with our human misfortune, he sympathized with our spiritual tragedy in order to save us in an

integral way, and gave his life by dying on the cross as a vile criminal to dignify us. Because he humbled himself to the death of the Cross, God the Father gave him a name above all names, so that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. Our hearts should burst into joy, adoration and praise before such an example of humility and dedication.

What lessons do we learn from the incarnation of Jesus? First, to adopt his example in the desire for social advancement to achieve identity, because we already have it. Second, to evaluate our motivations. It is valid to improve our social, economic or cultural position, but not at the expense of the values of the kingdom of God. The search for success, prestige or prosperity can drag us into pride or greed. The 2010 Lausanne Declaration states that “Church leaders [today] can be marked by abuse of power, poor management of financial resources, lack of purity and fidelity. Sometimes they distort the Scriptures to justify greed, immorality and arrogance.” Our desire should be to imitate Jesus who models an upside-down pyramid: The vocation of the Servant-Leader.

Third, to take on the “descent” of Jesus to serve those below. In his incarnation he became our brother to serve us from our human condition. Paul affirms that when we were unable to save ourselves, Christ died for us; God showed his great love by sending Jesus Christ to die for us, even though we were still sinners; and when we were still his enemies, God made peace with us through the death of his Son (Rom. 5:6,8,10). Seeking those below implies serving the vulnerable, the discarded and marginalized of society due to their spiritual, social, economic or cultural condition; and recognizing that they have a dignity and the capacity to teach us about the grace of God that visits them, transforms them and makes them ambassadors of his grace.

Dear friends, brothers and sisters in faith, thank you very much for your friendship, companionship and spiritual support during 2024. May the Lord continue to bless you. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2025.

Israel Ortíz
Director, Centro Esdras

THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Diplomas

Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education

After several months of training, on Saturday, November 16, we celebrated with great joy and gratitude the graduation of the Diploma "Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education."

We would like to wholeheartedly congratulate each of the fourteen graduates, this achievement is the result of their dedication, effort and commitment. In addition, we deeply thank our teachers, who with their wisdom and dedication made this diploma a unique experience.



Photograph of some of the graduates.

Diplomas

Upgrading church pastors

This November 28th we celebrate with great joy the Graduation of our students of the Pastoral Update Diploma.

We thank God for the dedication and effort of each student, as well as for the support and commitment of our teachers. We also thank "Asociación Vida" and the "Red de Pastores en Chimaltenango" for working together on this very special project and we appreciate the financial support of our donor brothers from England.

We share some photos of pastors and leaders who obtained their Diploma of recognition. Congratulations to all the graduates!



New paths for the Esdras Center, we evaluate to move forward

In an effort to strengthen the comprehensive mission of the Esdras Center, we conducted a thorough evaluation of our theological proposals, reviewing the programs developed in recent years. This process allowed us to reflect on the good results achieved, showing how the Lord has guided our steps in the impact of the diplomas in churches and communities with the purpose of expanding Kingdom values in every context, through quality theological training...

During this evaluation, we analyzed the content of the diplomas, affirming their relevance and commitment to topics such as social justice, citizenship, and discipleship in complex contexts. We also identified key areas to innovate and expand our reach, with the certainty that accumulated experience must be the basis for moving toward new horizons.

Along these lines, we are pleased to announce the launch of the Master's program in Theology and Society, designed specifically for professionals committed to transforming their environment. This program seeks to train agents of change, equipping them to face social and ethical challenges from a deep and practical theological perspective. Taking this as a great challenge, we move forward as a team toward this goal.

We trust that this effort will allow us to continue being light and salt in the world, renewing our commitment to theological education that transcends the classroom and transforms lives. Let us move forward, guided by the Lord and focused on His Kingdom!



PROGRAMS

CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE AND FAMILY

Project: School for parents



This is a dream that we have been building in recent years at Centro Esdras. We dream of a program that provides families from local churches with a solid foundation from the biblical worldview and the contributions of science, for raising their children.

To achieve this, we have gone through different stages. The first, the formation of a team of people interested in the subject and with experience in knowledge and practice. The other has been the development of materials (phase I). This year, we are grateful to move on to another stage.

We have been able to carry out a pilot project with families from the Filadelfia church in the village of Cojobal, Patzún, Chimaltenango, whom we have visited for 5 months (July-November). At first we thought of only working with the parents, but the teenage children who attended the welcome meeting asked to stay for all the sessions. We had to adjust our program to this new need, but in the end we saw that it was worth it.

We are very grateful for this enriching experience, where we have been able to see, on the one hand, the needs of families, but on the other hand the transformation that they can experience by applying the principles of the Word of God in their urgent task of raising their children. Another important aspect is finding a small community to live in, where they can talk safely, support each other and grow together.

Lily Escobar de Ortiz
Parenting School Coordinator

ENVIRONMENT

Diploma for Facilitators "Hope for all Creation"

On December 7 and 8, as part of the Diploma for facilitators "Hope for all creation", a face-to-face meeting was held in Chimaltenango. This event meant a space to connect and socialize after eight weeks of virtual learning which ended on November 30. During the retreat, the director of the Esdras Center, Israel Ortíz, was present, who shared a reflection on "The care of creation in Christian discipleship." Also present was Byron Velásquez, liaison of the Canadian Baptist Ministries in Guatemala, the donor ministry of this diploma.

Students from the departments of Quetzaltenango, Cobán, Guatemala City, Sacatepéquez and Sololá were present. It is worth noting that the group, which is made up of 16 students from Guatemala, El Salvador, Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, has completed the first phase of training and has made the commitment to replicate the knowledge in their mission spaces, actions that they will present in January 2025.

We thank God for the time and resources to meet the students, share the table and the desire to be the hands and feet of God on earth, bringing restoration to all things, including creation.

Venuz Pérez López , Environment Program Coordinator



NEWS

Special time with our donors and friends

On Saturday, October 12, we had the opportunity to share a special time with our donor brothers and friends. It was a good time to present the achievements and challenges in the ministry we carry out.

We thank each one for their participation and attendance! We praise God for the life of each one!



Missionary Conferences

Our brothers Israel and Lily Ortiz participated in the "Local Mission with a Global Focus" Conference organized by the Central American Church Vida Nueva de la Mesilla on October 25 and 26.

Two workshops were shared with 105 church leaders from the Mesilla Huehuetenango region and members of the Vida Nueva church.

We thank God for Pastor Kevin, his family and team who cared for our Ortiz brothers! We pray that the churches will commit to local and global mission to announce the gospel of the kingdom.

National Meeting of Advisors Student Fellowship of Mexico

Tequistiapan, Querétaro November 14-19, 2024

Our brothers Israel and Lily Ortiz gave biblical expositions on the 1st letter of the apostle Peter and case studies: The prophet Elijah, from success to depression, and Joseph and Mary, open to God's agenda.

Together with the leadership of the national board of leaders, advisors, national office and members of the National Executive Committee, we enjoyed the exposition of the Word, group reflections, friendship and fraternal communion.

We give thanks for the presence of the Lord. The Word that challenges us all to affirm our hope, identity and suffer for doing good as an alternative community of the kingdom of God.

We thank our sister Mary Olguín, General Secretary of the Movement and her team for their invitation and their care for our Ortiz brothers. We pray that the shared word bears one hundred percent fruit in their lives and ministries.



Presentation of the book "Rethinking the Church in the 21st Century" in Chiquimula

On November 27, we had the privilege of presenting this book to our brothers in Chiquimula and its surroundings. We thank God for the opportunity that Dr. Israel Ortiz had to share this valuable material with more leaders in different parts of Guatemala.

Many thanks to all the brothers who attended and to those who made this event possible! May God continue to bless your life and ministry!



COOPERATION WITH OTHERS MINISTRIES

Training for young people ELIJO Compassion Program Guatemala



Brian Soria and Israel Ortiz shared the module "Mission in the Way of Jesus" with 50 young people from churches in the southwest of the country associated with Compassion.

It was a challenge to share the topics with young men and women from 14 to 17 years old, who are emerging as potential leaders. We trust that the Word will produce much fruit in their hearts.

We thank the Lord for the privilege of contributing to the formation of youth; and we thank the Association of Pastors and Compassion for the opportunity to serve them.



Together serving for the Kingdom of God!

We thank our colleagues Latin Link Switzerland and UK, Canadian Baptist Ministries, Tearfund, Korean Presbyterian Church of Guatemala, Union Church; brothers and sisters, local and foreign donors for their financial and prayer support. We also thank GICE, Mesa Global, Horizon Education Network for their fellowship and spiritual support. We wish each of you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. May the Lord bless you, dear brothers!

GRATITUDE

- We thank the Lord for his faithfulness in each of the diplomas taught in 2024: “Diploma in Pastoral Updating”, “Pedagogy of Jesus and Contemporary Education”, “Diploma for Facilitators Hope for All Creation”. We give thanks for the life of each of the students and teachers.
- We thank God for those who have made the School for Parents project possible: an anonymous donor from England, Karen and Eddy Xicay who closely accompanied the families and coordinated the logistics of the events, Dámaris López, Robert Reich and Lily de Ortíz who have traveled, prepared and facilitated the topics.
- We thank the Lord for his provision during the year 2024 to carry out the different courses, workshops and diplomas taught.
- We thank the Lord for the completion of the Strategic Plan for the coming years.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Please pray for:

- The Diplomas that will be taught in 2025. May the Lord provide the students and teachers for each diploma.
- The Lord's provision for the projects of the year 2025.
- The work team of Centro Esdras.
- The completion, printing and presentation of the research report.
- The Lord's provision to cover the 2024 budget deficit.





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