

**INTERNATIONAL FACULTY OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION  
(FACULTAD INTERNACIONAL DE EDUCACIÓN TEOLÓGICA [FIET])**

***“THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN MISSION”***

**Norberto Saracco**

**The Success of a Failure**

Twenty-nine years have elapsed since the failure that changed our destiny. On May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1977, the inaugural class of the Centro de Preparación de Líderes Cristianos (Christian Leaders Preparation Center--CPLC) “EMMANUEL” took place. More than a starting point, it was a point of arrival. My church, Asociación la Iglesia de Dios (The Church of God Association), ALIDD, had asked me that during my last year of studies at the Seminario Bíblico Latinoamericano (Latin American Biblical Seminary), SBL (San José, Costa Rica), to prepare a project of theological education that would serve for the training of church leaders. In fact, several years before the church had started the Instituto Bíblico Emmanuel (Emmanuel Biblical Institute), but now I was being asked to do something more complete and organized. For various months I worked on the elaboration of the bases for a traditional program of four years of study with all the subjects usually used in seminaries, including Greek and Hebrew. The CPLC project was an important step forward for the Argentine Pentecostal Church. We had managed to hire several teachers (Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal), who with a good disposition were ready to help us in the adventure. The first registration was of eighteen students, who took classes from Monday through Friday, four hours a day. Before the end of the first quarter, only six were left. Each of the ones who had dropped out had personal reasons to do it. But the truth is that we no longer doubted the great dream was facing failure. We had not succeeded in reaching the church leadership with what we offered. The project was very good from an academic and theological perspective. But, evidently it did not respond to the church leadership’s needs.

July of the same year arrived and, taking advantage of the Independence Day holiday, a group of churches organized a youth conference. It was in the city of Resistencia, about 600 miles from Buenos Aires. Those were very difficult days for Argentina. A year before, a military coup had taken power. Everything was fear, repression and death. Maybe to take advantage of this small oasis in the desert, more than 1,500 young people attended. During one of the services of that conference, one of the pastors approached me and told me: “Look at the number of young people who want to serve the Lord. Couldn’t you do something to help them? Would you be ready to teach them?” This Macedonian call pierced my heart like a dart.

Back in Buenos Aires, I took two decisions: closing the program I had started two months before and accepting the challenge from the churches in the city of Resistencia. Thinking of a non-traditional, non-centralized program to respond to the needs of the churches was something new for me. A few years before, being a student in SBL, I had had the privilege of being chosen by Rubén Loes to work with him and with a very reduced number of teachers in designing PRODIADIS (Programa Diversificado a Distancia [Distance Diversified Program]). That foundational experience marked me. Rubén Loes had returned from his furlough in order to study, with the “crazy” idea that one day in the near future there would be more than 5,000

pastors in Latin America. If this came to happen, Rubén said, no seminary could prepare so many pastors, and it could not be done using traditional methodologies. It was true, because what he was stating had also been seen by others since the 60s, according to the experiences of the open universities in Madrid and London and to the movement of Theological Education by Extension based in Guatemala.

The first step was to offer a program of ministerial formation for the pastors of Resistencia and its area of influence. The idea was to prove the pastors' level of commitment with theological education and at the same time to develop stable relationships of mutual trust, which could give a solid base for a more ambitious program. Twenty-two pastors registered. The number was very important since only three of the pastors in the city did not participate. We could say that it turned out to be a project of the church in the city. Every other week, I traveled nineteen hours by bus to Resistencia and as many hours back, in order to lecture through the weekend. Between classes, students worked with the course on the Gospel of Mark. This was one of the programmed texts used in Guatemala by the founders of the "Theological Education by Extension" movement (James Emery, Ross Kinsler). The result was amazing. None of the students dropped the class, in spite of their busy pastoral schedules and their numerous ministerial pressures. Though they were pastors, for all of them this was their first theological education experience. They saw they could almost immediately apply in ministry what they had learned. At the same time their preaching and teaching was enriched. In December, at the end of the academic year, in spite of having completed only one programmed course and one with required attendance (every fortnight), the unanimous decision of the pastors was to open the courses to the whole church.

In March 1978 - 76 students began their studies. We did not have much to offer, though they did not know it. We continued with the system of having weekend classes every other week and using some study guides. All we had were some spare materials which did not provide a coherent and systematized plan of studies. In order to put this in context, we must remember that by then, so-called Theological Education by Extension was in full growth. This favored the fact of being able to think in a non-traditional way of teaching theology. However, there were several problems. Trying to follow the fashion, traditional seminaries opened their extension programs, most of them without understanding the radical change this brought about in the philosophy of education. They mistakenly intended to "extend" the seminary. That is to say, the theological institution remained at the center when, in fact, the proposal was that the church and the student, their interests and possibilities, were to be the axis of the teaching program. On the other hand, a good amount of the materials produced did not comply with the necessary methodological requirements in order to be adequately used. In general, also mistakenly, it was thought that it was a matter of issuing a text with questions for the student to answer. Nobody considered that that text, both in content and in methodology, had to comply with certain programming criteria, which made it pedagogically suitable. In spite of our limited resources, students remained faithful and enthusiastic, because they valued the opportunity of being able to study in their own context of life and ministry. They looked at theological education as something possible and accessible for all, and not as something reserved to a certain privileged class, of those who had resources and time for it.

## From Dream to Reality

By the middle of 1978, a few months after having started with the classes, the Comisión de Educación por Extensión (Commission of Education by Extension) of ASIT, the Asociación de Seminarios e Instituciones Teológicas (Association of Seminaries and Theological Institutions), held a consultation on theological education by extension with the purpose of sharing experiences and materials among the theological institutions of the Southern Cone of Latin America. It was on that occasion that we first came in contact with the Compendios de Teología Pastoral (Handbooks on Pastoral Theology). These were six books written by the SEAN team (Study by Extension to All Nations) headed by Tony Barratt of the Anglican Church in Tucumán, Argentina. This course was based on the Gospel of Matthew and following Jesus' chronology, its programmed texts approached basic theology and Christian ministry subjects in an integral way. To us they seemed to be the most coherent and best elaborated of all the ones presented. They also allowed us to count on a two-year program, and they adapted to the methodology we were implementing. We studied the material superficially, and we saw that the content did not raise conflicting doctrinal issues, and that its methodology could very well be adapted to what we were developing. The launching of this program, which we called "Certificado en Teología" (Certificate in Theology), produced a true revolution. Students multiplied by the hundreds, forcing us to adapt our administrative structure. Up to then, I had carried out the educational project personally with the help of a secretary. In order to respond to the new challenges we organized ourselves into regions, and we put "regional coordinators" at the head of each. The function of these coordinators was to promote the courses in their areas, assisting students, implementing the program and giving exams. With this minimal structure, a central office and regional coordinators, the seminary was established in city after city.



**Terrick Barratt of SEAN and  
Norberto Saracco of EMANUEL**

Though the initial growth was explosive, nevertheless the steps we took responded to a vision of the church, of the ministry of theological formation, and of the relationship between both. ***First, we believe that the local church occupies a central place in the educational process. The church must feel fully involved.*** In our case, before beginning with the programs of study, we worked with church pastors and leaders, looking for a way in which what we had to offer could serve the ends of the church itself and what they expected from the students. Pastors were so much involved that they knew what was being taught and created spaces for the students' ministry. On the students' side, they had the obligation of applying each week, in practice, something of what they had learned.

The result was that the seminary mutually affected both the life of the church and that of the students. Thus, theological formation is not an end in itself, but it responds to the needs of the church and the mission it carries out.

Second, we saw that theological education could be an instrument for the unity of the church. At the end of the 70s we were living, as a country, one of the most difficult situations of our history.

Since 1976, a military regime was in power, which attempted to justify its existence on the basis of the deep crisis the last democratic government had undergone. Society was divided and, therefore, so was the church. *Taking this reality into account, from the seminary we decided to work in a city only if more than one church invited us and if, at the same time, they were ready to participate together in this ministry. We did very practical things in order to “force” the churches to walk this way.* Even if we considered with each of them how they could take the maximum advantage of the programs we offered, at the same time we had meetings with the pastors of the city in order to discuss together a global strategy. Programs were individually applied, but decisions were taken in a collective way. Study groups gathered in each church, but for the exams whole day events were organized, in which the students of the various churches gathered in only one place. At first the number of students was so large that we had to use nearby public school buildings for these activities. As a result of this, in many cities pastoral councils were formed, which continue working together till this day as an expression of the unity of the church.

### **The Power of a Strategic Alliance**

Up to that moment (1978-1980), all we had to offer was the “Compendio de teología pastoral,” six books comprising two years of study, which we offered as a “Certificado en Teología” (Certificate in Theology) and some other programmed texts (Gospel of Mark, Romans or Jeremiah). As we worked with these materials, we perfected the strategy for their use (later we will explain in detail), so that the program consolidated seriously. Thanks to this the relationship with SEAN (the Anglican group that published the materials) deepened. They saw that our situation was different from what happened with others who attempted to use the same materials. Maybe they followed the “fashion” of theological education by extension but did not fully understand its philosophy and challenges. In our case study groups remained and advanced, and an increasing number of churches embraced the program. At the same time, from the Centro Emmanuel (Emmanuel Center), we had an enormous debt of gratitude towards SEAN, since they had placed in our hands a key tool in order to make our vision come true. In spite of the successes we achieved, or better said, due to them, we were approaching a crisis. The problem was what to do with the 1,500 students who were about to graduate with the Certificado en Teología (Certificate in Theology). They and their churches were asking lots of questions. ¿How will the program continue? ¿Which other study level can you offer us? ¿How can we complete a true educational program for the church? We did not have a clear answer. We knew we had to do something, and that whatever we did had to respond to the same educational philosophy. But we had nothing concrete to offer.

Logoi, the publishing house located in Miami and dedicated to Christian literature in Spanish, had seen the great need Latin America had for theological formation that would serve pastors already in ministry. From the 60s on the Latin American Evangelical church had begun to grow significantly. The appearance of Latin American evangelists, the development of Pentecostal churches among the masses in great cities, the popularity of ministries dedicated to evangelization, such as “Evangelismo a fondo (Evangelism in Depth)” and “SEPAL,” and the birth of the charismatic movement contributed one way or other so that the church in Latin America could begin a period of growth and multiplication. One of the direct consequences of this phenomenon was that people who had not had a formal preparation entered the ministry. Like now, the “spiritual experience” of the candidate for ministry was privileged over and above

his or her ministerial formation. Facing this reality, Logoi publishing house launched a project which was called "Seminarios pastorales Logoi" (Logoi Pastoral Seminars). These seminars started in the South of Chile and consisted of three gatherings, one per year, each a week long. The event was especially addressed to pastors. Well-known professors were invited, and the publishing house gave each participant in each seminar a group of books with the purpose that at the end of the program they could count on a pastoral library. The idea was that in returning the next year the pastors would have read the books they had received the year before. Regretfully, the pastors did not fulfill this job. For people not used to studying, the mere fact of having a book in their hands was not sufficient motivation for them to read it. In view of this reality, and knowing of the capacity the SEAN people had for programming texts, Logoi asked them to elaborate some guides to be handed out together with the books in the pastoral seminars. As part of the agreement, Logoi provided SEAN with equipment and finances for this task. ***But SEAN already had experienced that, in a non-traditional program of open education, materials were important but not enough on their own.*** By then, there was an exaggerated emphasis on the importance of programmed materials, as if by themselves, almost magically, they could achieve the objectives. The theological institutions, which tried to implement what were called "extension programs," dedicated all their financial and human resources to the production of materials, without paying attention to factors as important or even more important, like implementation and methodology. The consequence was that of those hundreds of programs (more than 400 just in Central America), almost none survived. Taking this into account, SEAN and Logoi asked Centro Emmanuel (Emmanuel Center) for advice and assistance to carry out the program of pastoral seminars, incorporating the new materials and methodology.

The relationship between the three institutions grew, and we realized that each one had its strengths and weaknesses. But if we were capable of working together, each other's strengths could make up for each other's weaknesses. SEAN knew how to program materials, but they had neither the resources to prepare them nor the capacity to implement them. Logoi had resources and a lot of materials, but they did not know how to program them, nor did they know how to use them effectively. In Centro Emmanuel (Emmanuel Center), we had found the way to develop a program with academic criteria and acceptance by the churches. But we now faced a lack of materials to continue and of resources in order to expand. We assumed these realities and decided to carry out a common project of ministerial formation, in which each institution would provide its best. In July 1981, in the city of Salta, in the Northwest of Argentina, we signed an agreement of mutual cooperation, and we decided to work together under the name of FLET (Facultad Latinoamericana de Estudios Teológicos [Latin American Faculty of Theological Studies]). The power of this strategic alliance was reflected in the amount and quality of the materials produced and in the growth of the program. In a short time, we had extended the program to twenty-three countries, most of them in Latin America and the Caribbean, but we also reached the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan and Spain.

Here it is important to note, because it has to do with our ministry and mission philosophy, that FLET was never thought of as a multinational corporation of theological education. In most of the countries, national offices were established, always with national personnel and with a great contribution of national resources. The idea was to share a vision for ministerial formation and support those who accepted the challenge with our experience and materials.

The amount of students surpassed 20,000 per year, and for the academic management of the whole project it was necessary to appoint three deans who coordinated the elaboration of new courses (writing, programming, test groups, academic level, etc.). Regrettably, this alliance only lasted until 1994. Personal and institutional conflicts aborted the project, which has undoubtedly been the most ambitious one Latin American theological education has ever had.

## The Vision Continues

In a time of crisis in Israel God spoke through the prophet Habakkuk and said, “. . . *For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end*” (Habakkuk 2:2-3). With these words, God made clear that beyond adverse circumstances the initial vision continued forward. That has been our experience. The crisis of the alliance served to prove the value of what we had built. In almost all of the countries, programs have continued, they adapted to the new reality and have grown in their contextualization. In each case SEAN courses and Emmanuel policies have remained in place. In our case, since 1994, we became the representatives of SEAN in Argentina and we adopted the name of FIET (Facultad Internacional de Educación Teológica [International Faculty of Theological Education]). We have an average registration of 1,800 students, in levels going from the Certificado en Teología (Certificate in Theology) or Estudios Pastorales (Pastoral Studies) to a Master's degree with official recognition at university level, specializing in mission and ministry. Our vision and mission has not changed since we started the project in 1977. But we permanently incorporate programs or cancel others, always in the search of ways to be sensitive to the situation of the church in its context.



## Our Mission

The mission of FIET is to glorify the name of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), providing the people of God with biblical-theological education and with tools for an effective ministry.

## Our Commitment

1. To serve fully, depending on God, with integrity and holiness.
2. To minister, open to the Spirit, with excellence and quality.
3. To offer pedagogical resources which integrate, in a balanced way, biblical-theological content, ministerial practice and a commitment to the mission.
4. To honor ministries, to respect each congregation's own characteristics and to foster the unity of the Church on the basis of a biblically founded faith.

We do not conceive theological education as a rigid model to which the church must adapt, but as something dynamic at the service of the church and the mission. This demands a high readiness for change and an open mind to understand new realities, from each of the persons involved. As an example, we will consider three of the programs implemented in the last five years.

### **Diploma en pastoral y espiritualidad (Diploma in Pastoral Care and Spirituality)**

At FIET we made a survey in the city of Buenos Aires in order to know the state of the theological formation of pastors. The result was that, out of the 310 Evangelical churches in the above-mentioned city, 40% of their pastors had no theological preparation whatsoever. Another 40% had taken some kind of course on Bible and Theology, and only 20% had graduated from a seminary. This data confirmed our hypothesis that those who are in pastoral work function without having had any previous formation; they also do not make any attempt to study when already in ministry. We know many cases of churches, with which we have agreements to help them in their ministerial formation. Their pastors fully support the project; they send their leaders to the seminary, but they do not study.

A second step in our investigation consisted in knowing the reasons for this phenomenon. We discovered that the pastors who were not studying, but wanted to do so, faced three obstacles. (a) Their complicated and unpredictable pastoral agendas did not allow them to make permanent commitments, certain days, at certain times. Pastors cannot program when church members will get sick, or when they will die, or when a family crisis will break out, neither can they anticipate a problem with church ministries. To the unpredictability aspect, in our context we had to add the fact that pastors make a living by means of a secular job or profession (only 20% receive a salary or some kind of economic help from the church). The consequence of this situation is that many times pastors register in seminaries, but as the academic year goes by and problems arise (they cannot attend classes because of the reasons we have just explained), they end up dropping out. (b) The other obstacle is that those who are in pastoral ministry do not feel comfortable in a class where they receive instruction together with other church leaders, on similar terms. (c) The third obstacle is that, in theological formation, pastors look for immediate answers to their ministerial needs. A program not providing instruments for their immediate ministry does not challenge them.

Taking into account the results of the investigation, we decided to work on a project that might help to solve these obstacles. We had several meetings with pastors in different cities, searching for the characteristics of a program they could attend, and which responded to their needs. Thus the “Diploma en pastoral y espiritualidad” (Diploma in Pastoral Care and Spirituality) emerged.

It is a two-year program, and no previous studies are required in order to enter. Classes are held in intensive events, on Saturdays once a month. Between classes, students receive programmed materials, study guides and books with assigned tasks. Only pastors and pastoral leaders attend these classes. The curriculum was elaborated in agreement with pastors, aiming at covering their ministerial needs. The subjects integrating the program are:

- 1) **Corrientes de espiritualidad (Spirituality Currents)**. A historical and thematic panorama of diverse schools in the field of spirituality.
- 2) **Espiritualidad y lectura de la Biblia (Spirituality and Bible reading)**. Specifics on the devotional reading of Scripture. Differentiation of other reading methods. Exercises, historical examples.
- 3) **Teología de la espiritualidad (Theology of Spirituality)**. Theological foundations of Christian spirituality. Similarities and differences with the spirituality of other religions. Reflection on spiritual experience.
- 4) **Espiritualidad y señorío de Jesucristo (Spirituality and the Lordship of Jesus Christ)**. Importance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all areas of Christian life, as an expression of spirituality: church, work, marriage, social life.
- 5) **Espiritualidad de la oración (Prayer Spirituality)**. Reflection on the importance of prayer in spiritual life. Analysis of historical examples of Christian piety. Prayer models, exercises.
- 6) **Espiritualidad en la evangelización (Evangelization Spirituality)**. Evangelistic implications of spirituality. Historical models, methods and programs.
- 7) **Teología pastoral (Pastoral Theology)**. An introduction to pastoral care in a broad sense, as task and ministry of the church. Theological reflection on pastoral care of the great human dimensions.
- 8) **Culto cristiano (Christian Worship)**. Historical review of Christian worship. Elements and symbols of the worship service. Contemporary liturgical models. Contents and dimensions of liturgy.
- 9) **Resolución de conflictos (Conflict Resolution)**. A survey of the different possibilities in mediation. Strategies, methods, exercises.
- 10) **Ética cristiana (Christian Ethics)**. Ethical principles of the Old and New Testaments. Ethics and theology. Bioethics. Euthanasia. Manipulations. Abortion. Capital punishment. Unemployment. Poverty and wealth.
- 11) **Modelos de iglesia celular (Cell-Church Models)**. Analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of cell work. Distinction between “church with cells” and “cell-church.” Study and application of the diverse models.
- 12) **Historia de los avivamientos (History of Revivals)**. Survey of diverse revivals in the Christian church. Classification of common and different elements. Possible conditions.
- 13) **Iglesia con propósito (Purpose-Driven Church)**. Ecclesiological reflection based on a practical analysis of local church life around its purpose. Methods to keep all areas in constant renovation and evaluation.
- 14) **Aspectos legales de la iglesia (Legal aspects of the church)**. A study about the legal implications of religions in Argentina. Opening of temples, hiring of paid ministers, etc.
- 15) **Liderazgo (Leadership)**. Biblical and theological bases of Christian leadership. Contemporary models and strategies for coordinating task groups.
- 16) **Misión integral (Wholistic Mission)**. Foundations of missiology, goals, outreach and methods.

Over three years of having this program, 230 pastors and 300 pastoral leaders have studied. One hundred twenty pastors and 250 pastoral leaders have graduated. Another direct result of this project is that ten churches have decided to establish permanent programs of theological education for their members and leadership.

### **Capellanes carcelarios (Prison Chaplains)**

One of the most outstanding present phenomena about the impact of the Gospel on society is what is happening in jails. In recent years violence and crime rates have increased. The prison system has collapsed. Prisons have more than double the population they can house. A corruption circle has been formed among the authorities of the penitentiary system and the prisoners. Today jails are true delinquency schools, and most of the ones who are set free, commit crimes again. Amidst this situation, the power of the Gospel has begun to impact lives of prisoners and to affect the penitentiary system. It is a relatively new phenomenon (about six years old) but of great significance. Nowadays, in some jails more than 80% of the prisoners have accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. The environment within those institutions has changed, and corruption has diminished. According to official information from the government, 60% of those who are released commit crimes again. In the case of the so-called “Evangelical prisons,” only 5% do so. Spiritual work in prisons is not carried out by chaplains. Brothers and sisters in the faith voluntarily develop this ministry. According to the laws of our country, only the Roman Catholic Church has recognized chaplains paid by the government. But in spite of not having legislation allowing spiritual work in prisons by Evangelicals the results are so many and visible that the authorities are considering a way to change this situation.

Some of the leaders of this prison movement approached FIET to see if we could help them in preparing prison chaplains. None of those who are working in this ministry have received any formal training. There is no seminary offering courses in this area. Evidently, they did not need any preparation to do what they are doing and achieve the success they have achieved. But, at the same time, they are aware that as they advance in their ministry, they have to face more complex problems, which demand another kind of answers. Also, it is well known that, if the authorities decide to recognize a space for this ministry, they are going to demand certain conditions, which will include an appropriate formation.

FIET we accepted the challenge and three years ago we started a program of “Capellanía con orientación carcelaria” (Prison-Oriented Chaplaincy).” It is a two-year program. With the purpose of creating trust towards the program on the part of students and in order to show that they were respected in their experience and context, during the first two years classes were held within one of the prisons. Students attend classes once a month, during four hours. Between classes, they study with the SEAN programmed materials. In the classes, practical ministry issues are approached from the “professional” perspective of the teacher and from the students’ practical experience. In the first group, 125 students registered and 98 graduated.



Now, we have two groups, one in Buenos Aires and another in an inland city, with a total of 110 students. We have requests to start this program in various cities. Also, a provincial government is using our program materials for the formation of penitentiary personnel. The government of the province of Buenos Aires has invited FIET to be part of a Consejo Asesor en Capellanías (Chaplaincy Advising Council). The success of this program has been such that we have more applications than we can accept. We have also been asked to start something similar in the field of hospital chaplaincy, which we will do next year.

### **Líderes pastorales carcelarios (Prison Pastoral Leaders)**

As we have seen in the previous example, preaching the Gospel in Argentine prisons is attaining achievements never seen before in our country. In some of the jails the interns have three worship services a day, they fast once a week, and they tithe from what they receive from their relatives and friends. With these resources, they help families in need outside the prison. This is a very great spiritual movement, which continues growing. In these circumstances, the pastoral work of external chaplains is insufficient in order to meet the spiritual demands of hundreds of interns.

Taking into account this reality, in FIET we have prepared a program called “Líderes pastorales carcelarios (Prison Pastoral Leaders).” It is an intensive program of biblical and ministerial formation, addressed to the prisoners who have a greater commitment to the Lord and who are in a situation of helping others. This program, which usually lasts three years, in prisons will be completed in one year, due to the evident time interns have. In these days, we are starting the project with 500 interns in different prisons in the country. They will study with our SEAN programmed courses. These brothers and sisters we are preparing in their “Chaplaincy” course will be future tutors and the ones who will implement the project. Various elements come together here, which answer to our vision in FIET. On one hand, we prepare chaplains according to their needs and context. Second, we place in their hands a ministerial tool (our courses), so that they can multiply their ministerial influence. Third, we integrate the educational process to the mission of the church. In order to pass the course of “Líderes pastorales carcelarios” (Prison Pastoral Leaders), there are two requirements. One of them is academic and has to do with passing the final exams for every subject. The other is ministerial. Each student will have to start a SEAN basic discipleship course (eighteen lessons about faith in Jesus Christ and what following Him means) with ten other interns. This means that in fifteen months we will have prepared 500 prisoners serve as prison pastoral leaders, and 5,000 other interns will have received an initial discipleship course. Thus, we will have affected more than 10% of the prison population of Argentina.

### **Lessons We Have Learned**

In 2007, thirty years will have elapsed since we started this ministry. Many of the things we did were successful, and others ended up in failure. From both we have learned something, and today they are part of our rich inheritance.

1. *Every program of ministerial formation must begin in the heart of the church and must remain faithful to it. Theological education is far too important to be left only in the hands of theologians.* In Latin America the traditional models of theological education have been

imported, and therefore they respond to a different reality. The pastor-theologian model is the one that presupposes that every theology student must in the end become a professional theologian. In practice, this shows some kind of depreciation for the pastoral ministry in itself. The student preparing for ministry who does not end up being a theologian will have “failed.” Some institutions try to hide this “failure,” granting ministerial degrees as consolation prizes. *When the theological institution takes the church seriously, the latter takes the theological institution seriously.*

2. In a methodology of non-formal, non-traditional education, firm demands must be established as regards fulfilling times and tasks. The permanent absence of a professor must be replaced with a rigid procedure. This does not mean that the seminary sets the rules without paying attention to particular situations. On the contrary, the standards for work must be set in common agreement, taking into account the characteristics of the context (days to gather, place for the events, schedules, etc.). But once these have been set, they must be respected without exception. If not, the process becomes unmanageable, and students lose interest. At the beginning we had several discussions with the SEAN team around this issue. In their vision they want to make the materials they produce available, without any handicap. Speaking of a minimum managing structure implies personnel and additional costs, that the student must pay. For a time, there was a discussion between a position of free and non-restricted access to the materials and one demanding controlled access implying a cost but assuring quality. At the end SEAN also accepted this possibility when they verified that on one side there were students who advanced and on the other there were students who had obtained the books but did not achieve anything, and they even ended up with misconceptions.

3. *Every educational program must try to be financed in its functioning with what students pay. This is more possible in programs of open education, since they count with an important number of students, which lowers the cost per student. Nevertheless, here is where the greatest obstacles are found in order to apply this basic principle of administration. Like with other ministries which were born economically dependent, modifying this reality is very difficult. In the case of open education the problem looks greater since the argument is: “If we want education to reach the whole church, we must do it with a very inexpensive cost or even free.” This is a mistake because it perpetuates paternalism and dependency. It deprives study of its worth (that which does not cost anything is not worth anything); it creates limitations, and teaching is offered using a wrong example. In the case of FIET, we have demonstrated the contrary.*

a. During the thirty years of its existence, the program has been 100% self-financed, including all personnel salaries (there are no hidden missionary salaries).

b. *The student is dignified when he or she pays, making an effort.* Several years ago there was a flood in the Northwest of Argentina. Many people lost their houses, and for various months they could not return to their place of origin. At that time, we had almost 100 students who had suffered from the flood and lived in train cars. The study groups were not suspended, because they decided to study in the train cars. Neither did they stop paying. Each morning they sold pastries among their neighbors, who were equally poor, in order to collect the money to pay for their studies. With this attitude and dignity, they overcame the pain of having lost everything.

c. *This way of administering resources makes us all more careful, because every cent has a special value. We have learned to thank God for each cent we get and for each course that is sold. Also, our lifestyles are kept close to those of the students, because we do not handle great fortunes, but what is necessary to live and carry out our ministry.* Except for the administrative personnel (secretaries), the rest of the people (coordinators, teachers, assistants, etc.) receive their salaries according to the number of students they have. The idea here is not rejecting or trying not to get external help. But whatever help we get should be used for special projects in order to advance in certain areas, which would otherwise be impossible. Sometimes it is necessary to count on greater facilities, or to buy a certain amount of books for the library, or to invest in the preparation of some personnel member, or to support a project initially. All this is good and necessary, provided it neither affects nor interferes with the normal development of the program. We ourselves have received help to buy Bibles for the prison project, or to pay for the teachers' expenses during the first year of the pastoral centers. This was added to what we were already doing. But if those funds had not come, the projects would have been carried out all the same, only with limitations.

## Conclusion

FIET will be thirty years of age, and we are offering a Bachillerato Superior en Teología (BA in Theology) and a Master en Ciencias de la Religión (MA in Sciences of Religion), both degrees with official university recognition. The objective is to take these programs to every corner of the country. We know there are thousands of Christian professionals who are developing a bi-vocational ministry and who have not had the opportunity of getting a theological education. They are now our mission field. We desire to have a subject on "theology of the future," that is to say, to be able to do theology today about facts of tomorrow. This is not futurology, but it is asking science and technology in what direction we are going and thinking theologically about the future. Of course, we continue being committed to the church and to God's mission, at all levels. We understand that as instruments in the hands of God, we must remain open to the Spirit, in order to discern the times and be useful to His cause.

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