

FACES



of the Latin American Biblical University, Number 31, May 2008



Marc Sommer

Apdo. 901-1000, San José, Costa Rica, Tel.: (+506) 2283-8848 Fax: 2283-6826

E-mail: ubila@ice.co.cr

Edited by: Janet May / Layout: Damaris Alvarez

© 2008

TIME FOR FAREWELLS



By: *Ivonne Mendoza*

For the past nine months, Swiss volunteer Marc Sommer has been responsible for maintaining and upgrading the UBL's computer system. The following is a brief interview with him as he makes plans to return to Switzerland in July.

What are some of the reasons for a young man like you to do volunteer work in Central America?

There are various. First is my interest in working in the future in international relations. Second, a basic requirement for my study program in Social Anthropology and Political Science in Switzerland is to spend a period working abroad. And, at the same time, this gives me an opportunity to improve my skills in Spanish, which is very important. I also am interested in learning about different cultures and other countries. I love to travel and when you can work and live in a different culture, the experience becomes much more intense than simply taking a brief vacation. Finally, living abroad is an adventure, encountering the unknown and having new experiences. So, all of these are reasons for being a volunteer in Central America!

How is this a two-way learning experience, between both you and the UBL?

The experience working at UBL has exceeded my expectations. In one hand, the work has been much more challenging than I had imagined. The experience of working in a country where not all the components for computers are available helped me to be more flexible and to learn to think of multiple options when confronting problems. In addition to improving my computer skills, there is also the relationship side, the personal interaction with the faculty and staff. This is enriching, since I come from a country where my profession is usually impersonal and anonymous.

What do you take with you from this experience?

I take with me experiences not only from my volunteer work, but also culturally. For example, I can speak more Spanish, and that will help me as can travel to other countries in Latin America.

I also hope that I leave behind a better and sustainable computer system. The most important aspect of my work, to me, is to respond to needs which arise on a daily basis, but my desire is to contribute to the development of a system that doesn't need constant support, which in my opinion is a feasible goal. Of course, I also hope that personal contacts will be active although the distance after my return home.

What do you understand by volunteer work?

At first sight, volunteer work is a non-paid job, in which the volunteer gives more than what he or she receives, but only the economical sense. If one considers the rich variety of experiences and opportunities for learning a new language, the volunteer is richly rewarded.

Thank you, Marc, for all you have done for the UBL!

I also hope that I leave behind a better and sustainable computer system. The most important aspect of my work, to me, is to respond to needs which arise on a daily basis, but my desire is to contribute to the development of a system that doesn't need constant support, which in my opinion is a feasible goal.

By: Elisabeth Cook

Eden Theological Seminary at UBL

As the first Eden Theological Seminary student jumped off the bus – several hours later than expected – the first thing out of his mouth was: “Could you point me to a restroom?” And for good reason. After a trip that included 4 hours in customs and immigration, the group was tired and long past ready for a “pit stop”. No, they weren’t detained by immigration at the airport, and no one was stopped by a customs officer. They had decided to travel by bus from Managua, Nicaragua, where they had just spent the previous week, to San José. After the long, exhausting, but very enlightening trip, they were enthused to arrive at the UBL campus and find warm showers, a delicious dinner and individual rooms waiting for them. After a good night’s rest the week’s activities began.

This was the fourth trip to UBL for Clint McCann and Martha Robertson, faculty members at Eden who bring students for a course entitled “Theology, Bible, Church and Culture in Central America”. The week in Costa Rica is an opportunity for exploring different issues with UBL faculty, such as the impact of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, the situation of the Church in Latin America, the geopolitical history of the relationship between the United States and Central America, how we read the Bible from the contexts of Latin America, the realities of the Afro-Caribbean populations in Central America and the situation of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica. Having just been in Nicaragua, this was of particular interest to the group.

But perhaps just walking down the street or visiting a neighborhood is the greatest learning experience of all. One of the students shared, on the last evening before returning home, how as she walked toward the grocery store a neighbor told her about the terrible damage that Nicaraguan immigrants were doing to Costa Rica*. This, after having experienced the reality of Nicaragua, and having shared the struggles of immigrants living in a marginalized community outside San José. Theory and experience come together. May these weeks of walking, talking and sharing be seeds that grow to bear fruit in the ministries of Nadine, Danielle, Robin, Ellen, Shantha, Jennifer, Annie, Jonathan, Ryan and Christopher.

* Editor’s note: This negative attitude is an example of long-standing prejudices that many Costa Ricans have regarding foreigners. Many of the Nicaraguan immigrants fill the need for domestic and agricultural workers and provide invaluable support, both to the Costa Rican economy and to their Nicaraguan families.



... how we read the Bible from the contexts of Latin America, the realities of the Afro-Caribbean populations in Central America and the situation of Nicaraguan immigrants in Costa Rica. Having just been in Nicaragua, this was of particular interest to the group.





An African in Costa Rica

Pamela Idjabe

Most parents probably dream of seeing their children grow up and accomplish great things. The sons and daughters also dream of exploring the wide horizon, but their dream does not necessarily correspond to that of their parents.

As a child, I dreamed of becoming a stewardess and flying all over the world, but that dream faded away. As an adolescent, I was told that it would be best for me to study medicine, but I had other dreams, economic ones. No longer did I dream of becoming a stewardess but I did long to work and to help support my family.

However, an innocent conversation gave my life a new turn. I had talked with Rev. Arturo Piedra and with Susan Grogg, who at that time were in my home country teaching theology courses. I expressed my desire to study theology. I had no idea what would happen next or I surely would have hesitated.

Travelling to Costa Rica from my home country, Equatorial Guinea, caused me a lot of tears. How I cried and prayed that people would forget what I said! But, no, what was said was said and soon I received a message, “Pamela, you have a scholarship to study theology in Costa Rica and you need to go now.”

I struggled with this innocent dream and began to get excited. No I prayed and begged that the visa process would finally finish and I would be able to go. How happy I felt when I arrived at the student residence and was received by companions who made me feel welcome! My first months were like Alice in Wonderland. I couldn’t believe that I was really in Costa Rica studying theology. Sometimes I fell asleep saying to myself, “Pamela, it’s true, you really are here in Costa Rica.”

But, by the end of a year here, I fell into a serious crisis. I was homesick, and this brought feelings of resentment, hatred, anger, loneliness, sadness and desperation. I missed my home country, my friends, my family, and especially my father and my little sister.

Thank God I was never alone. There were always people in the university supporting me. They showed me that here we are all part of a large family. Thanks to this new family, I learned again to love life, to appreciate myself and, above all, to realize that dreams never die and that they really can come true.

Thank you, family, and, if I may, I would like to extend special thanks to: Professor Edwin Mora, who accompanied me through my crisis, not as a psychologist, but as a dear friend; Professor Violeta Rocha, who showed me a maternal image that I had never had the opportunity to know; Geraldine Álvarez, my friend, accomplice and companion. We have lived together the metamorphosis from the chrysalis, becoming beautiful butterflies. As a saying goes, God creates and the Devil draws them together.

One of the gifts that the UBL has given to my dreams is the type of theology that is studied here, that acquaints us with theory while inviting us to practical experience. This university experience has helped me to understand my life as part of a project that God has with all humanity, in which each and every one of us has an important contribution to make, a grain of sand to contribute to the struggle, to create a more just, equitable and human community. My dream is that someday I might be able to contribute my own small grain of sand, sharing what I have learned here with other young people, especially young women, and in this way contribute to their development.

What does 2008 bring us?

Mireya Baltodano

UBL HAS OPEN the gates for the year 2008, with the joy of new students, but also happy to see students who continue their theological studies. The constant flow of students is what affirms the sense of being and the daily commitment to teaching. This is taking place not only in UBL, but also in the various countries where UBL study programs are available. Students all over Latin America are taking classes and will come later to our campus in Costa Rica to complete their degree requirements.

Since last year, a new group of students has become part of the UBL community. This is a group of Latin American pastors who live in the United States and work there with Spanish speaking congregations of the United Methodist Church. The General Board of Higher Education of the UMC, led by the initiative of Rev. Saúl Espino, has created a theological study program for pastors, combining intensive courses in Nashville, TN and residential courses at the UBL's campus in Costa Rica. This is a very stimulating program because it offers the UBL an opportunity to do mission formation the other way around, in a country from which we have received much help

While our classes in regular programs advance normally, three committees work simultaneously in developing new initiatives: a Bachelor's degree in Bible translation, a Master's degree in Pastoral Counseling, and a Master's degree in Religion and Gender. These new study programs will involve a more interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning than our current ones and focus on special needs in the region. The UBL will contribute its expertise in Bible and Theology at the same time as we invite specialists in other fields to share in the teaching and leadership. These fields include the areas of linguistics, psychology and other religious and cultural world-views. They represent both hope and challenge.



Opening worship service

Visiting lecturers

Roy H. May



Left to right, Jaime Prieto, Elsa Tamez, Sara Baltodano, Tony Balcomb, Ruth Mooney.

AMONG THE MANY activities that enrich theological reflection in our institution are opportunities to hear lectures by theologians and other thinkers who visit us from Latin American countries and different parts of the world. In this sense, it was a pleasure to initiate our academic year listening to three presentations on "worldviews" by the South African theologian and member of a Pentecostal church Tony Balcomb, professor of systematic theology at the University of Kwazulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg.

Dr. Balcomb organized his thoughts around the contemporary discussion about premodern, modern, and postmodern worldviews and the differences among them. He emphasized that each of these worldviews is present, to some degree or another, depending on specific contexts. In his own Africa, he explained, although the modern worldview appears to be present everywhere, in reality the premodern worldview predominates. This discussion is important, he affirmed, for the ethical reason of recognizing and respecting the differences that characterize us, but above all because it presents an opportunity to widen and enrich our concept of "rationality". This, then, also has implications for theological discourse about God. Each lecture was followed by a response given by a faculty member, among them Roy May, Jaime Prieto, Silvia de Lima Silva, Elsa Tamez, and Irene Foulkes.

In April, Dr. Martin Hoffmann, rector of the Theological Seminary in Nuremberg, Germany and a Lutheran theologian, presented lectures on the theme of Martin Luther's theology, dealing with the "two kingdoms," "theology of the Cross" and "ethics". He also remembered Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran theologian executed by the Nazis in 1945, as a Lutheran theologian who lived Luther's "theology of the Cross". Dr. Hoffmann emphasized aspects of Luther's thought that continue to be vital for theological reflection today.

Later on, to deliver the annual Mackay Lecture, Graciela Chamorro will be visiting us. An anthropologist from Paraguay, she will speak on the relationship between ethnology and interreligious dialogue. Finally, in September Dr. Pierre Bühler, a Reformed theologian from the University of Zürich in Switzerland, will spend a few days in conversation with us about his work on culture and theology.

These visitors are an integral part of our study program. We are grateful for their willingness to share their thinking with us.

THE UBL LIBRARY once again joined in the celebration of International Day of the Book, April 23rd, as marked by UNESCO. It is a day that honors the immortals Shakespeare and Miguel Cervantes, the great Spanish writer and author of Don Quixote. Also included in the list is the name of "El Inca" Garcilaso de la Vega, a peruvian poet and writer. All of them died on April 23rd, 1616. For the UBL Library this celebration is seen as an opportunity to provide a cultural moment, a time for community gathering, and to get involved in book-related activities as well.



Dra. Patricia Vega, conferencista

**Come work! Come study!
You can do both!**

Have you considered learning Spanish? When space is available, language students are welcome to live on campus. Opportunities to sit in on Bible or theology classes can be negotiated.

Would you like to come for a “hands-on” volunteer experience? Individuals and groups can help out on campus or in local churches, for a week or longer. Or, go to a center in another country!

Do you want to learn about Latin America and what’s going on in biblical-theological thinking? Visiting students and intensive study groups both provide interaction with UBL professors, local church leaders and other community leaders, with opportunities for learning and dialogue. While many of our resource people speak English, we provide translation, when necessary.

How about a “combo”? Do some volunteer work, take Spanish classes at a nearby language school, participate in classes and other activities at the UBL and in the community.

For more information, contact: elicook@ubila.net

F A C E S



of the Latin American Biblical University

Apdo. 901 - 1000, San José, Costa Rica.
Tel. (506) 2283-4498 / 2283-8848 Fax. 2283-6826 www.ubila.net

IMPRESOS

CORREO AEREO - AIR MAIL