

Brazil News



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Editorializing

Evangelization: Missions vs. Colonization

There are statistics available for just about everything under the sun—except for how much is spent annually worldwide to spread the gospel. This includes money spent on missionaries, housing, vehicles, books, tracts, radio, television and personal projects. We believe that this combined effort has penetrated all nations, peoples and major tribes.

The word “penetrated” should not be understood to mean that all seven billion souls on the face of the earth have a working knowledge of the gospel. In many nations this effort has established what could be loosely termed as “information desks”—literature with an address to which the seeker can direct inquires. As God convicts souls in nations with restricted access to the plan of salvation, as they call upon the name of the Lord, we believe that somehow—miraculously—He may choose to lead them to information desks, or the information desks to them. There are countless testimonies attesting to this fact. These information desks have been the launching pad for countless missions and subsequent congregations.

We have no doubt that the ideal situation is for the seeking soul to have direct contact with believers, or at least with literature that clearly and accurately explains the plan of salvation. The establishing of mission posts, and eventually functional congregations, progresses from the information desk stage to embassies, where the seeker can now have face-to-face contact with “ambassadors”—missionaries.

On the day of Pentecost the greatest mission project of all times was launched. The time was right and the people were ripe. These first gospel missionaries reaped what farmers would call a bumper crop. Continents were traversed with the Good News.

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Congregations were established, leaders chosen and ordained. It is perfectly believable that these new congregations of believers sent out their own missionaries.

Then came persecution, which in all probability put a strong damper on the mission effort per se. As tens of thousands of these valiant soldiers of the cross perished, others rose to march in their place. Thus, not only did the plan to eradicate the true faith from the earth forever fail (what Hitler centuries later blandly labeled “the final solution” as he slaughtered millions of Jews), it became the greatest colonization project ever as the persecuted fled from city to city, from region to region and from country to country, indeed, from continent to continent. As these devout brothers and sisters, of whom the world was not worthy, fled their persecutors, their overflowing cups splashed fertile drops of conviction along the wayside that burst into flowers, later to be plucked by other seeking souls.

Concurrently, with the cessation of persecution some 500 years ago, three continents were discovered and colonized, ie, North America, South America and Australia. To understand this era of global exploration we must remember that the world at that time was ruled by principally three nations: Spain and Portugal, papal vassals, and England, now under Protestant influence and with a substantial Huguenot population.

The primordial objective of ships sent out by the kings of Spain and Portugal was to seek for gold and for new trade routes that would result in profitable commercial exchange, especially with the Orient. Intrinsicly woven into the gold lust was a fanatical missionary vision, an unswerving drive to convert all heathen to the “true faith.” Thus, no ship or fleet would set sail without at least one priest aboard to administer last rites to the dying, to hear confessions of the erring and bring new converts into the fold.

Both South and Central America were catholicized by Spain and Portugal, thus inserting into the national DNA of the conquered nations the unfortunate molecules of venality and subservience, effectively repressing aspirations of ever playing lead roles on the world stage.

As the Spanish names of towns, cities and states from Texas to California indicate, without divine intervention this would have also been the fate of the United States.

In sheer terms of territory, no missionary effort has ever replicated territorially what the Jesuit missionaries, and those of other orders, accomplished in South and Central America. Their proselytical thrust, stimulated by a fanatical belief that every soul brought into the fold through baptism was an achievement diligently registered in Heaven. Through their efforts a continent and a half (Central America) were brought under the dominion of the Holy See. No matter what our view of this conquest, we must grudgingly concede it was a *fait extraordinaire*.

North America was settled by colonization, not evangelization. More specifically, the evangelization was the result of colonization, as opposed to South and Central America that colonized as a result of evangelization. (We here use the term “evangelization” loosely, as the process of indoctrination of gospel principles, whether or not we agree with them.)

Historically, the Mennonite faith has propagated through colonization. Even now

this is true as new congregations are constantly being established over the United States and Canada. Mission efforts are directed largely to other nations and continents. And that is what this article is all about. Today, in the 21st Century, what are the pros and cons of evangelization through colonization or missionaries?

The conclusions reached, right or wrong, will be strongly influenced by nearly a half century living on the Colony in Rio Verde.

Economically

This would seem to be a superfluous consideration. Obviously a colonization project, that is funded by the colonists, will have an almost nil effect on church coffers. This means more money can be directed to other projects. It must be remembered, however, that a colonization project is invariably a Herculean undertaking. In an agricultural undertaking, a minimum of 80 percent of those involved must have financial means to purchase land, machinery, build homes and acquire vehicles, clear land, develop infrastructure, which includes drilling wells, building electric lines (which often must be paid for exclusively by the user—and can be very expensive), building roads, fences, a list that goes on and on.

(What about the 20 percent with limited financial means? There are always non-agricultural activities, e.g. builders, school teachers, public relations, which often includes dealing with incomprehensible and utterly frustrating bureaucratic requirements that can leave colonists attempting to put down roots tottering on the brink of insanity.)

In a word, with all that is involved in creating a functional settlement, for at least 10 years, witnessing is going to be pretty much local, which in our case resulted in a sizeable ingathering of converts.

The old saying that you can't get a free lunch certainly applies to evangelization. Someone always pays.

As missionaries deal with third-world evangelization, they often find themselves pushed into a corner when giving financial advice. "For you it's easy to tell us how to do things. You don't have to worry where your next meal is coming from. You have a nice house with air conditioning, a nice vehicle and when you get sick you go to the best hospitals, or even return to N America for more specialized care. While you are here someone is taking care of your farm and you are still making more money in a month than we make in a year. And when you leave the mission your farm or job is waiting for you. You are living in a different world and don't understand our situation." And who can deny there is a certain amount of truth in this?

This is one of the great pluses for the colonist. He has bills coming up when the bank account is down. He must go to the businessman, or banker, and explain his situation. He tells the truth. He asks for time and promises he will pay. He does. With a few exceptions, it didn't take long for the colonists here in Rio Verde to develop a stellar reputation for honesty. In a country in which dishonesty often trumps over transparency, true honesty leaves an indelible mark.

One of our Brazilian deacons freely admits his honesty before conversion was

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very—well, let’s just say Brazilian. He grins and says that when his wife got converted several years later and would go into a business establishment with him, wearing Mennonite attire and head covering, his credit rating immediately skyrocketed. (Since it isn’t unusual for men to wear a beard here, that didn’t necessarily identify us as Mennonites.)

This has been one of the very positive effects of colonization. Instead of telling and telling, as missionaries of necessity must do, we have been able to show and tell. Some catch on. Alas, others don’t.

Culturally

You don’t just dump two cultures into a blender, hit the start button and a minute later come up with a homogeneous blend. So far as I know, no “Cultural Blending for Dummies” book has yet hit the market.

In reality, when two cultures are thrust together, there is no spontaneous long-term blending. Short-term curiosity, yes, after which nationalistic pride kicks in. And that’s where things begin to get sticky.

Someone raised in an affluent setting is annoyed that anyone would have the audacity (stupidity) to criticize his patently superior values. The one living in a less advanced setting resents attitudes he perceives as being condescending or censorious. The result can be open conflict, but usually it can best be defined as a sniping conflict. In either case the end result is never good. We of course have no statistics, but I suspect that the escalation of cultural misunderstandings have been at the bottom of far more losses than we would believe.

It would be unfair to categorically charge colonization or missions as being more responsible for this situation. In reality, it is the group mentality of either the colonists or missionaries that will determine how well two cultures blend.

It is inconceivable that colonists would from day one attempt to immerse themselves in local cultural. Beyond being impossible, it would never work. The success of colonization projects, as well as commercial and other professional endeavors, depends to a great extent on how well imported culture can be integrated in the project or mission without stepping on the cultural toes of the nationals.

I think that missionaries are more successful than colonists when it comes to cultural integration. The reason is both simple and logical.

Missionaries are aware that their time on the field will be measured in “terms,” seldom remaining at the same place for more than six or eight years. Thus, rather than teaching a gospel enveloped in an imported culture, an effort is made to envelop local culture with the gospel.

The colonist, on the other hand, wants to do everything possible to assure a solid foundation for his new homeland which he believes will be good for a lifetime, for generations. In other words, since he will not be leaving after so many “terms,” he wants something he can live with. This is both understandable and laudable. Unconsciously he believes that what worked in the “old country” should certainly continue to work in his new setting. And since in the beginning stages there are

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few, or no national members to give their opinion, there is a tendency to implement generous amounts of imported culture. New converts to the faith are often unable to differentiate between gospel and culture. The days come, however, when, as in the Emperor's New Clothes," someone shouts the obvious, "Wait a moment! Just what do dark hose the ladies wear have to do with the gospel? Book, chapter and verse, please."

A case in point is exactly the issue of dark hose. In the early days of the Colony it was expected that all sisters would wear dark hose in any public setting. As Brazilian ladies became converted it wasn't a question if they would wear dark hose. They did, including to town. The problem: In a tropical climate hose, neither dark nor light, were worn by the local ladies—except by prostitutes.

An additional factor that has a strong influence on the time frame of successful cultural integration is the ability to understand that both missionaries and colonists are regarded by nationals as foreigners—which they truly are. The problem is that all too often both missionaries and colonists think of the nationals as "natives."

A bit of an explanation. No matter what the dictionary says, the term "natives," as commonly used, carries a demeaning connotation, an implied inferiority.

No?

Tell me. Why are N Americans never natives (except for the now obligatory politically correct reference to the original dwellers as "Native Americans)? Why, when the southern border is crossed, do the dwellers suddenly become natives—all the way to the Terra del Fuego in Argentina?

Why are Europeans never natives? But Asians and Africans are?

We can go around and around. I can argue this is the case and you can argue that it isn't. But, since the writer gets the last word, at least in his little paper, this explains 75 percent of our cultural misunderstandings. *We* are Americans. *They* are natives.

Socially

Here I believe the colonist has an advantage over the missionary. I would give the colonists here in Rio Verde a very high rating on social interaction. There are many friendships that go back 30 or 40 years. The fact that the colonist is here on a permanent basis makes this kind of friendship possible.

Fraternally

We now talk about interaction between spiritual brothers and sisters, which, interestingly, is more complicated than social interaction. Much more. The reason is quite simple. Social contacts depend on "Bom dia," "Como vai?" and friendly encounters. Fraternal bonds go much deeper and it isn't surprising that they create greater possibilities for misunderstandings.

I have no statistics on our casualty rate and that on mission fields. I think that in both cases they are alarmingly high. Especially in the beginning there were a lot of misconceptions as to what it meant to be a Mennonite. In a gesture of largesse, Colony farmers hired Brazilian young men to work for them. It was supposed to be a two-way street. In exchange for the work received, the colonist would pay good enough wages,

with enough side benefits, so that the hired man could get ahead in life a lot faster than if he tapped into the local work force. Thus conversion was not only a prerequisite for church membership, but also, it was believed, the door to excellent employment. The mortality rate was high.

The following analysis is personal and most certainly will be disputed by some. I freely concede they may be right and I wrong.

It is perfectly understandable that nationals would question certain church-related practices that make no sense to them. The truth of the matter is that even we, who have adhered to these practices for decades, since childhood, often cannot come up with a logical explanation. So we resort to, “That’s the way the church believes.” And period.

From what I have gathered, in foreign lands when a mission field is transformed into a functioning congregation and handed over to national leaders, there is a certain flexibility on some of these same issues. In other words, the congregations have a national identity. They are not “little Americas.”

In most instances, the issues in themselves are not of an insurmountable or doctrinal nature. The problem arises when nationals feel that the litmus test of their sincerity is their willingness to agree with that with which they don’t agree (read slowly). Not only is this frustrating, but stifles the emergence of talents.

What are some of these practices? I didn’t say (other than for the example given).

Linguistically

To learn a foreign language fluently is not easy, not even for those who have “the gift of tongues.” Those who come closest are children who grow up in close contact with national children. They play together, they go fishing together, they chat together endlessly, they work together... And then, as they grow older—pay attention—they study the language.

It isn’t unusual for missionary children to live in close contact with national children. Their adoptive language can actually become a first language to them. They express themselves effortlessly and have a solid linguistic foundation that many adults would pay big money to acquire.

Then they leave the field and their acquired linguistic birthright slowly erodes. Lamentably.

Most nationalities believe their language is the best in the world. Germans and Americans are the exception. They are *absolutely* certain theirs is. Even when corrupted by generations of exposure to another language, the “mother tongue” continues to be the “apple of their I.”

In my nearly half century in Brazil, I have never run across Spanish speakers from a neighboring country who speak correct Portuguese, even though they have lived here for years. They learn to adapt their Spanish to Portuguese and actually get along quite well.

To a much lesser degree this has occurred on the Colony. In many homes English continues to be the preferred language. There is an explanation for this. Unlike some children who came to Brazil as toddlers, or were born here, and had daily exposure

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to native speakers as they grew up, especially the womenfolk were not granted this immersion learning process. For such, understandably, Portuguese will never come easy.

Because of the palpable American influence on the Colony no non-Brazilian—myself included—speaks perfect Portuguese...

Let me insert here what I mean by “perfect Portuguese.” In the Romance languages, verb conjugation, as well as gender and number orientated nouns and adjectives, are very seldom totally assimilated by non-native speakers. No matter how good the accent, no matter how extensive the vocabulary, verbs, nouns and adjectives are dead giveaways that we have not mastered the “shibboleth” locution. In other words, no matter how hard we try, there are certain subtleties we fail to master (and frequently aren’t aware of it).

Intermarriage

This is the icing. And I believe it is exactly this that really tips the scales in favor of evangelization through colonization.

Of 151 marriages since the inception of the Colony, 61 have been dual heritage. Thirteen now reside in N America.

These “blended” marriages (I detest “interracial” in our setting) are obviously subjected to additional strains. Even when two people marry from similar backgrounds there are adjustments. And much more when from different cultural backgrounds. True, however the cultural blending of the different backgrounds, plus the fact that English almost always is the lingua franca, gives these marriages an important jump start.

Alas, all roses have thorns. Too often in these marriages in which English is the lingua franca, it also ends up being the “mother tongue” of the children, with Portuguese the second language. There are cases in which the children are unable to freely communicate with their Brazilian grandparents and relatives.

It is important to maintain English—as the second language of our children, but never at the expense of the official language of the country. A rule of thumb for our children: Live in N America, speak English; live in Brazil, speak Portuguese. And period.

The bottom line

Evangelization through missionaries or colonization, which wins?

An American diplomat speaking with his Russian counterpart asked, “In just a few words, what is the greatest challenge you are facing in your country?”

The answer: “You Americans like to reduce problems to just a few words. Our problems here in Russia are of a more complex nature and just a few words won’t express what we are facing.”

I think the conclusion to this matter should maybe be in Russian, but since my vocabulary is pretty much limited to “da” and “nyet,” I will make my closing comments in English.

Economically. Colonization is the undisputed winner. The possibility of creating opportunity for those of less means can be managed without aid expensive aid programs. The secret lies in showing and telling rather than giving and giving.

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Culturally. Needs to be answered in Russian. If Americanizing the nationals is a plus, then colonization is the undisputed winner. If the objective is to build on the national culture, then the mission effort is in the lead.

Fraternally. I am unable to answer this question. My very limited contact with missions makes it impossible to draw a logical conclusion. This I will leave to you readers. I would love to hear your conclusions—in English.

Linguistically. Since missionaries spend “terms” on the field, and not decades like we in our situation, how would they handle the language? The simple fact that we are her permanently gives us an advantage.

Intermarriage. Again I say, this is the icing on the cake and makes one wish there were more colonization projects.

And so... May God bless the missionaries and may God bless the colonists. ▲

Life in Brazil

Wal-Mart

I mentioned in the last issue that Wal-Mart will be closing some of its stores in Brazil. It is estimated this will come to approximately 65, out of the approximately 160 that are to be closed worldwide. I understand that many of these are small businesses that were purchased and adapted to Wal-Mart standards—which it should be remembered bear little resemblance to their stores in N America. Basically, it is a culling process and not a sign of economic failure.

Contrary to N America where Wal-Mart is not seriously threatened by competition, here in Brazil the French chain Carrefour is a heavyweight competitor. Personally, I prefer Carrefour over Wal-Mart. The talk of the town is that shortly we will be getting a Carrefour in Rio Verde, across the highway from the new Buriti shopping mall. ▲

Weather & Crops

Crops are beautiful. At planting time when it appeared the weather had forgotten how to rain, things changed and we have had plenty of rain. Using September as the beginning of our rainy season, here are the results for each month:

September	52.2 mm	2.05 in
October	36,4 mm	1.43 in
November	131,3 mm	5.17 in
December	125,5 mm	4.94 in
January...	148.8 mm	5.86 in
Total	494,0 mm	19.45 in

This is well below our average, but the rains were evenly spaced and just the right amount for crops to do well. Some soybeans are beginning to turn and everything indicates yields will be good, prices as well. ▲

Brazil Conference

The first Conference of the church in Brazil took place on January 1 – 3. On the afternoon of December 31 the Annual Meeting was held at the Rio Verdinho Congregation.

The evening of the 31st, at the Monte Alegre Congregation there was group singing and a talk on “My Relationship with the Church.”

The Conference proper began at 9:00 o’clock on January 1 at the Monte Alegre Congregation. The day was dedicated to deliberations with dinner and supper being served. In the evening there was a talk on “The Doctrine of Peace.”

Saturday, January 2, at the MA Cong. was dedicated to more deliberations, again with dinner and supper being served. There were special songs in the evening and another talk.

Sunday, January 3, services in local congregations were cancelled to give time for an additional Conference session. The youth had dinner at the Monte Alegre social hall and spent the afternoon together. In the evening they gave a special program on “The Power of a Life Dedicated to God.”

The front porch at the Monte Alegre Congregation was closed off and air conditioners installed. With this additional seating there was room to spare.

There were approximately 280 members in attendance, out of a total of 357. This included the three central congregations, the Boa Esperança Congregation in Mato Grosso, the Palmas Congregation in Tocantins, plus a representation from the four missions: Acaraú, CE; Patos, PB; Goiânia, GO; and São José do Rio Preto, SP. ▲

Religion

A Mission is Born

[Behind each mission field there is a story, and as already mentioned, it often begins with an “Information Desk.” The São José do Rio Preto, São Paulo mission is no exception. The fine little group there began with Valentina Caldana Bonifácio’s experience. Following are excerpts from her story, reprinted from BN40, September 94:]

I was born and raised in a Catholic home and am married to a Catholic man. We have four children, whom I took to the priest to be baptized as infants. I recited my rosary every day and had images in my home.

But being religious didn’t keep me from being worldly. I cut my hair real short, used jewelry, used makeup and immodest clothes. I saw nothing wrong with this. I believed that someday my soul, and not my body, would go to heaven. And after all, I didn’t steal, kill, or mistreat my fellowmen. I had lots of friends. So surely I was a good person.

When things didn't go well, I would get out my rosary, light candles and make promises to the saints. But it didn't do any good; it never took away the insecurity or emptiness I felt. What I wanted most was to feel peace and love. I thought I was going through all this because I was poor, so I worked all the harder to acquire something in this life. Through this all I went to different churches, but never found anything that attracted me. Because of my desire to raise my standard of living, I was at times very hard. I squabbled with my husband because of the way he spent his money.

That's how the years went by. Many lonely tears were shed. There was a constant cry in my heart, "Oh Lord, how long will this go on?"

One day my married sister came over. She said she had become a *crente* (believer). I told her, "Everyone has the right to do with his life as he pleases."

She said, "But I am truly serving God now." I made it plain that I could serve God without changing religions. After she left I began thinking about what she told me.

A few days later my brother-in-law told me that I was serving the devil and not God, as I thought. These words really hit home. I had never thought it possible that I was serving the devil. From then on I began to search for God's will. I would listen to religious programs on the radio and even visited some churches, but everything was so confusing. I never felt at ease. In one church I was advised to not pay any attention to my husband. I was to leave everything, including my husband and children if it came to that, so that I could be a Christian.

When I heard that, everything got dark for me. I came to the conclusion that I would never find peace for my soul.

That is when I began to really call upon God. The burden became heavier and heavier and I could find no rest. I would awaken early in the morning and begin praying. Even when I was at work I would find a secret place where I could kneel and pray. I would ask God to show me His church, because I really wanted to be saved.

I became so burdened that I didn't know what to do anymore. I decided to ask my husband to go to church with me one Sunday. We got into line to see the priest and confess our sins. When it was my turn, I told him everything I was feeling, but he told me my problem was a nervous condition. He said I was wanting to do things I shouldn't and that was the root of my problems. He advised me to pray to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, who is the sinner's advocate.

I went back to see the priest. I asked him all kinds of questions, but his answers weren't satisfactory. I left feeling downcast and more confused than ever.

When I got home I had a really bad headache. I even thought I might die. I took some medicine, but it did absolutely no good. There and then I promised God I would never again ask the priest questions. From now on I would deal directly with Him and do what He asked of me. Even so, I still didn't have direction.

Then one day something came over me. I felt terrible. I almost ran to my room, where I closed the door and knelt. I wept all the time. I couldn't remember any good I had done, only evil. I felt an enormous remorse, a repentance, for all my sins. I remember what I prayed, "Lord, I believe that You exist and You are the true God of power and mercy, that You are the almighty God of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ as my only Savior. Therefore I place my life, my heart and my soul in your hands.

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Oh Lord, have mercy on me. Pardon my sins and show me the way in which I should go, and I will trust You. I will walk in the way you show me, even though I must do it alone. Please, Lord, hear my prayer and have mercy on me.”

When I finished that prayer, I felt light and a new hope was born within me. I felt that someday God would send me an answer.

Then one day when my husband and my brother were walking home, they found the tract *Ye Must be Born Again* along the roadside. When they got home, one of them gave it to me and said, “I found this along the highway. I think it has to do with *crentes*.”

My heart began to beat fast when I saw the title. I began reading and every word was directed toward me. My emotions were stirred. It was something so marvelous.

When I finished reading, I saw the address of a church that I had never heard of before. And even though I knew nothing about this church, I felt a strong desire to write a letter. I didn’t know how to go about it, but I did manage to say, “I want to be born again in Christ.” I mailed the letter and began an anxious wait for an answer.

I received a little box of tracts. I kept some for myself and handed the rest out. But this wasn’t really the answer I had hoped for. And in my weakness I thought I shouldn’t write any more.

But God is wonderful and He doesn’t forget the lost, but rather He calls them.

The days went by and as I studied the tracts, I came to love those words. I felt something different within me. I felt a great need to talk to someone in the church. So I decided to write another letter.

In this second letter I touched on the problems I was having with João, my husband. I began waiting for an answer. Once again I was hopeful.

The days went by and no answer came. I waited two months and still nothing. I didn’t know what was happening.

Then in November of 84, I received a letter written by a brother in the church. I was so happy. I read the letter aloud so my mother could also hear. When I finished reading, I was crying. I held the letter to myself and said, “Oh God, what a beautiful thing!”

Finally I was hearing some loving counsel. I was being told how to love and respect my husband, because that is God’s will. I began to lovingly follow the doctrine of the church, even though I still didn’t know anyone personally. I confessed to my husband for not having been a good wife. I told him that I now wanted to serve the Lord.

From here on, each letter I wrote was like writing to my best friend in this world. And each letter that I would get was a blessing that God gave me.

The day came that I was able to learn to know the brotherhood and now I am a member of the church.

Today I have my struggles and problems, I have learned to take my refuge in God, which gives me strength. And when I see only thorns, God shows me the flowers. When tears dim my eyes, Jesus is my light and shows me the way. When the way is slippery, the Holy Spirit is my guide.

I received much more than I asked for. I am rich. I am saved. God is wonderful! May He receive all honor and glory. This is my testimony of His love. ▲

Religion

Evangelicals and Believers

Protestants here in Brazil are usually called Evangélicos or Crentes. Mainline Protestants are referred to as Evangelicals. Those belonging to charismatic groups, as a rule from the poorer classes, are called Crentes – Believers. They feel it is an honor to be called by this name. Most everyone else feels it is an honor not to be.

Moderate Pentecostal groups frequently go by either name. At times the distinction between Evangélico and Crente is quite fuzzy, with the names being used interchangeably.

Highly organized, the Evangelicals, which include Baptists, Presbyterians, The Assembly of God..., are a dominant force in Congress.

Few Catholics take their religion really seriously. Most Crentes do. One of the contributing factors is the difference between going to mass or to a Crente service. Mass is highly organized with the priest being the center of action. In Crente services, on the other hand, the action centers around the worshiper. The pastor's job is to fan the flame until the power of the spirit (notice the lower case) takes over.

People are attracted to these Pentecostal meetings in droves. Many of these churches have several meetings a day, every day of the week. It is most difficult to be a member in good standing without tithing.

What is it that attracts people to Pentecostalism? Why do people become “addicted” to this religion?

The following article, *Liberation Services*, was written by a sister who got converted in Goiânia, moved to Pirenópolis and now lives on the Colony together with her husband who is also a member. Their two children, now married, are also members.

Notice the depths of her thoughts in this article she wrote for *O Mensageiro*.

Liberation services, a direct translation of *culto de libertação*, describes what goes on in the services of many of the Pentecostal churches. In a few words, people go to church loaded down with evil spirits, infirmities, and problems. They make their petitions during the service and are “liberated”—thus liberation services. Selionir tells us her own experience of what really happens.

* * *

Liberation Services

A lot of people ask why we don't have liberation services in our church.

Before I learned to know the Church of God in Christ, I went to liberation services in quite a few different churches. During the time that I was inside the church I felt good. It seemed I didn't have any problems or physical ailments. It didn't bother me to see people rolling around on the floor. Some were hollering because they were possessed by an evil spirit. But when I left the church, everything came back again—my disappointments, physical ailments, fears, distress and insecurity.

The next day I would go to church again. There I would see the same people with

the same problems. It would be a repeat of the day before. Some would be singing, some rolling around on the floor, and others shouting. Things went on like this for seven days...seven weeks...seven months. I only found relief when I was inside the church building. I figured that was the way it was supposed to work, but I was deceived. I was misled. I never saw anyone, including my husband and myself, being liberated from anything. It was only while in church that we felt a false security.

Yes, I call it a false security because I never felt any freedom when I was at home, at work, or any other place. What should I do? Move into the church? Was the problem that Jesus only saw me when I was in church? Once I was on the outside He didn't see me any more?

With each passing day I was more depressed. My husband got sicker and sicker. We decided to not go to any more church services. From now on we would serve God without a church. We asked Him to help us and begged his mercy. Our aim was to be faithful without any liberation services, without demon possessed people around us.

That was all it took for God to begin working in our lives. He showed us His people and His church. By the powerful arm of the Heavenly Father and through the help of His people, we were liberated from Satan's clutches. We found the freedom for which our soul longed.

But how did all this come about? It wasn't necessary to be surrounded by people possessed by demons. No one had to vomit, shout or roll around on the floor. [May I insert here that in the liberation services, one of the ways in which unclean spirits are supposedly expelled is through the digestive tract, which explains her comment on no one needing to vomit.] Do you know where we were liberated? It was when we accepted Christ as our Savior and Liberator. We gave Him our heart and life, recognizing what God did for us when He sent His Son to die on the cross for sinners. We accepted the fact that we were sinners.

Before I felt that if I should die, I would go to hell. I came to the Lord and asked His forgiveness and was obedient in all that His Holy Spirit asked of me. That was the end of my distress, fears and depression. I had a different heart.

What about the physical ailments? Today we see a lot of people walking around with a Bible under their arm. We see them in the morning, at noon and at night. They are trying to find relief for a physical ailment. They are looking for the liberation of their flesh. They resort to prayer chains and all kinds of other things. The end result is confusion.

When one of us becomes ill, we should first of all ask Christ Jesus to intercede for us before the Heavenly Father. Only after that should we go see the doctor. We must have faith that God sees all things and everything will take place within His will.

I want to tell you what happened to me some months back. I began to have some health problems, so I went to the doctor and told him how I was feeling. After he had given me an examination, he said, "It may not be anything serious, but I have seen cases like yours turn into cancer." He referred me to another doctor.

I left the doctor's office in a daze. I went to where my husband works and told him what I had found out. I was really down in the dumps. That evening the missionary who is stationed in Pirenópolis came to our house and told us that on the fazenda where he was working, the owner had just died. He said, "I came here to invite you to come along and sing for the family."

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This put my husband into a bind. He looked at me and I knew I would have to decide if we went along to help sing. He didn't know if I was feeling up to going, so I would have to make the decision. So I went to my room and asked God to give me strength to go, even though the last thing I wanted to see just then was a wake.

As we were going there, I told the others what I was going through. After we got there, we shook hands with the widow and then went into the living room where the body was. We sang three songs and the missionary began to speak. His words, together with the hymns, were exactly what I needed. I felt strengthened.

When we returned home, I had good courage. I realized that I had placed more value on my flesh than on my soul. For a number of days everything seemed to go real well. Then I went to see another doctor, who did another test. I had to wait three months to get the results. In the meantime I began to have a lot of pain and run a fever.

One day I got up really feeling down. It seemed that the only thing I could think about was that if I really had cancer, I probably didn't have more than two years to live. I almost lost control of myself.

I went to my room and knelt to pray. I asked God to be merciful to me. I had my face down on the bed. I felt so weak I couldn't even get up. After some time had gone by, I noticed I wasn't alone in the room. I was afraid to look around, but I felt the presence of God.

He began by asking me some questions: "So you don't want to die of cancer?" I told him I didn't, and that I didn't want to die in an accident either. He asked, "Would you like to be in the living room of your house, together with your family, and suddenly die? Would that suit you better?" I was going to answer no, but I became so ashamed of myself that I didn't say anything. He asked me some more questions: "Why are you a Christian? It's so that you can live with Jesus Christ and the Almighty God in heaven, isn't it?" I told Him that was right. "Then why are you so fearful?" He asked. "You have already died once. You died to Christ. The second death is much better. In this death you will meet Jesus Christ and the Almighty God."

I felt strong again. I left the room feeling like I was floating on air. With renewed courage, I felt like once again I could face life. The Holy Spirit was so close to me.

Sometimes I am ashamed of my weaknesses. Especially when I think about the book, *Worth Dying For*, as well as other stories. I remember the woman who remained unmoved, even though she saw her seven sons being put to death for the faith. She didn't betray Christ, but was faithful until the end, when she too gave her life.

I know that someone who doesn't feel the joy of freedom, who doesn't have faith and peace in his soul, will think it's a terrible thing to die like that. But the person who has Jesus Christ in his heart and knows the joy of salvation, understands that death isn't sad.

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 6:24). Let's notice where He says, *take up his cross, and follow me*. What does that mean? What Jesus did for my husband and me and for our children, He can – and will – do for you. Let Him into your heart. He wants to free us. ▲

[Today, some 20 years after this was written, Selionir and her husband, Nilton, are faithful and useful members of the Monte Alegre Congregation. cb]

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