

Brazil News



No. 132
May 2002

Editorial

The Burning Bush

Last month we told about a checkout girl who felt a need in her soul and went to a Protestant church, where she showed her decision to give her heart to the Lord. After the service, talking to the pastor, she asked about using makeup and unisex clothes. She was told that so long as done in moderation, there would be no problem.

Since then we invited this same girl to spend several days with us. It happened that our niece, who was planning to get married within a week, was at work helping us. When the checkout girl heard the news, she immediately looked at our niece's hands and exclaimed, "But she has no ring! How will people know she is getting married?!"

I was intensely interested in her reaction, because for several weeks I had been culturing the wedding band in a mental test tube. Yet something was missing for the culture to take form...

Then came a talk in C.E., in which the speaker spoke of the burning bush, which he translated into the human heart. The culture in the test tube began to grow.

This question is directed especially to married Holdeman Mennonite readers: When you and your husband/wife appear in public, do you ever feel self-conscious because of not using a wedding band? As people look at you and your spouse—and possibly your children—do you worry that maybe they think you aren't married—just living together—because you aren't using a wedding band?

In the world the wedding band speaks with a clear voice. When absent, the message is: "I'm single," or, "I am not presently married." It can also take a leave of absence when away from home. The guileful message then is, "Temporarily available."

A ring on the right ring finger says, "I'm engaged."

On the left ring finger the ring becomes a wedding band and ostensibly says: "I'm married."

Again we ask: Do you ever feel uncomfortable without a wedding band? Do you feel you are smudging your Christian image by sending out a false signal?

Brazil ² News

I believe not. In fact, I believe that for the majority of us this would be a new thought. Call it ignorance, if you wish; call it naiveté...

It's interesting how often God punctuated with fire his most important messages to man (That is material for another article). For now we will concern ourselves with the burning bush, beginning with a quick review of the life of Moses.

The two midwives, Shiphrah, and Puah, who assisted Hebrew women in childbirth during the culminating years of bondage in Egypt, were called into the presence of the king, where they were given strict orders to make sure that all "men children" perish at birth. In an exemplary act of bravery, these two women, as the three Hebrew youth, defied the king's command.

Thus Moses was born into Egypt with a sentence of death hanging over his head, as one not worthy to live.

Not only did Moses owe his life to the midwife called up to assist in his birth, but also to a loving and equally brave mother who also was willing to incur the king's wrath. She, with the help of her young daughter, managed to secrete baby Moses for three months, when he was discovered by the daughter of the king who sought his life.

This potentially calamitous encounter, doubtlessly brought about by the hand of the Almighty, several years later took the child Moses into the palace of the king who shortly before had sought his life. Here he lived for 40 years, being educated in the customs and science of the Egyptians.

There are those who see the 40 years Moses spent in palatial life as so many wasted years, or worse, as years that he later had to shed as totally unprofitable.

Maybe. However, it's difficult to believe that God would place a handpicked child, with a special mission in life, in a totally unredeemable situation, and leave him there for 40 years. We can but conjecture as to how often Moses used his influence during that time in subtle support of his oppressed countrymen. Knowing the deep concern he had for his countrymen, he must have repeatedly sent out veiled warnings that there was danger at hand. Finally, his firsthand knowledge of the pharaonic mind must have been helpful as he and Aaron attempted to obtain exit visas for their enslaved people.

In a bolder attempt to promote the cause of his people, Moses jeopardized his own life and had to flee to the desert, which was the beginning of the second 40 year period of his life.

Moses' thoughts must have resembled clothes in a clothes dryer as he sprinted out of his own land, out into the desert. Yet his flight was hardly aimless. We have reason to believe that he often looked heavenward and besought the Holy One for direction and strength.

It certainly wasn't mere coincidence that he found his way to the region of the priest of Midian, who received him not only as a guest, but shortly as a son-in-law. The lonely nomadic life of a shepherd stood in stark contrast to the bustling life of a palace prince.

Instead of an ivory bed, he spent innumerable nights sleeping under the stars.

Instead of a vast table spread with dainties, he found himself eating the simple fare of a humble shepherd.

Instead of discussing astrology, military strategy and fine arts, he sought to learn how to bind up the broken leg of a lamb, how to defend his flock from wolves.

Instead of marrying a cultured princess, he married the peasant daughter of a herdsman.

Instead of leading men, he led sheep.

Moses, now in the neighborhood of 80 years of age, “led the flock to the backside of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb.”

Far from civilization, “the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush...

Let’s notice what happened:

“...and he looked...” Moses immediately sensed something different was underfoot. We don’t know if at this initial moment he was aware of the presence of the angel.

“...and, behold, the bush burned with fire...” Why would a bush be burning out in the backside of the desert? This was very strange indeed.

“...and the bush was not consumed.” A desert bush tends to be dry and highly combustible. Thus for the bush to burn and not be consumed was truly unusual.

“And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.” This burning bush must have been totally silent. The crackling sound made by a fire is the result of combustion, of a chemical change taking place, which wasn’t the case here. We don’t know if Moses’ first reaction was to regard this as a natural phenomenon, something for which his earlier scientific studies might have an explanation, or if he suspected this was a divine manifestation. At any rate, he decided to *turn aside* and investigate. We don’t know how many steps he took...

“And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush...” The Lord lit the fire, Moses turned aside, and the Lord began to speak.

“...and said, Moses, Moses.” He called him by name, right out of the midst of the burning bush. If Moses thought this fire might have a scientific explanation, certainly all doubt was now removed. His religiosity told him this fire, as well as the voice, were divine.

“And he said, Here am I.”

Moses could have turned tail and run. He could have run back to camp, crawled into his tent and trembled uncontrollably. But he didn’t. It’s very possible this was the first time he ever heard an angel’s (read as: God’s) voice, but it must not have been totally strange. It may be that when the angel said, “Moses, Moses,” that he remembered his mother’s voice, many years back, when she would call him to her and he would snuggle up to her, as she told him yet another story of the mighty Jehova whom he should always serve. He listened closely to the voice, which said...

“Draw not nigh hither...” This burning bush was a harbinger of the holy setting of the temple, the altars, the Ark of the Covenant, which only duly consecrated priests could approach and live. So Moses stopped.

“...put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” The priests who ministered in the temple could not use any kind of shoes or sandals while

exercising their sacred duties. Even though Moses kept his distance from the burning bush, he was already in sacred territory and had to remove his shoes.

“...And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.” The sacred fire in the burning bush causes man to see himself in the light of God and eternity.

We now return to the beautiful scene of the burning bush within the heart.

It is God’s will that all men everywhere repent and be forgiven. Yet for this to happen, the Holy Spirit must establish a link, make some kind of contact, with the needy heart. How can this be done in the case of someone who wasn’t raised in a Christian home, who doesn’t go to church, who doesn’t read the Bible, who lives in an unholy environment? How can such a one be touched?

In a public place—a mall, an airport, a restaurant—there are many roving eyes. There are eyes that burn in lust as they feast on the unabashed squalidness which so often dominates the scene. Eyes weep as they behold human suffering. Eyes rejoice as they behold scenes of joy and tenderness. And then there are those eyes that blink thoughtfully as they behold a scene that touches their heart—a burning bush.

The fire burning in the desert didn’t consume the bush. However, should Moses, or any other man or beast, have invaded the prohibited perimeter, the transgressor would have been consumed, just as surely as Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, were consumed when they overstepped their priestly prerogatives.

The first lesson we must learn about holy fire is that it does not consume that which is holy or has been consecrated, only that which is sinful. This explains why the burning bush fire will never be found in a sinful or unconsecrated heart. It is only after a heart has been washed in the blood of the Lamb that God sends holy fire to ignite the newly established Christian altar.

Once the burning bush is within the heart, it has a dual function: first of all internal, and then external.

Internally, the primordial function of the burning bush is to maintain the heart pure, for everything else is dependent on this purity. The apostle Paul speaks about “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” That means voluntarily exposing all thoughts and actions to this fire, knowing that only the dross will be consumed.

The second internal function of the internal burning bush is that of a communications center. It is here that the Master speaks with the servant, and the servant with the Master. Contrary to Moses’ burning bush encounter, which was a one-time experience, for the true Christian, this communications center is open 24 hours, so long as there is spiritual life, which can—and should—be a lifetime.

This brings us to the external function of the burning bush, which is totally dependent on the internal function. The same as “a city that is set on an hill cannot be hid,” so a burning bush in the heart cannot be hid. Remember this.

Modern religion places a great deal of emphasis on witnessing. At times we are criticized for our apparent “backwardness” in witnessing for the Lord. Indeed, as we compare ourselves with the zealous witness from others faiths, we sometimes criticize ourselves...

Several days ago in our local supermarket, I noticed a good-looking young girl, maybe 19 or 20, earnestly and openly explaining the way of salvation to an elderly lady, possibly in her middle seventies. It was an impressive scene and we hope the elderly lady was given a boost by the girl's witness... And yet to this day I'm puzzled. How could a girl in stonewashed blue jeans and a short blouse that exposed her midriff, transmit the eternal truth of salvation?

Yes, it's true that God is not limited and can very well use disasters, death, dreams, nature, and even the unsaved to get man's attention. This attests to His greatness. But we're talking about a different kind of witness. We're talking about the silent witness in which the Holy Spirit speaks from the burning bush in the believer's heart.

How does this work?

Let's go back to the girl in the supermarket. If she wouldn't have been talking religion to the elderly lady, I would have had absolutely no reason to believe she was a religious person. Rather, I would have had ample reason to believe that she was anything but religiously inclined. Her dress was such that a carnal young man looking for pleasure could very easily have seen her as legitimate prey.

When Moses saw the burning bush, his attention was immediately arrested. Why would a bush be burning in the backside of the wilderness? Likewise, when an unconverted person sees a true Christian with a burning bush in his heart, he tends to mentally stop and *look*. When the world sees a spiritual young sister, they do not see her as legitimate prey. Very seldom will one of our sisters hear a wolf whistle. The burning bush in the heart evokes reverence—even from the irreverent.

Many look, go their way and forget.

But not all. Like Moses, some *turn aside* to get a closer look. They are aware that this is someone who isn't being *consumed* by modern society, and they wonder why.

Then God *calls out of the midst of the bush*. Yes, the Spirit of the Lord knocks on that soul's heart and begins speaking. A desire is born to know more. The Spirit says, "*Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.*" Hesitantly, reverently, the person says, "May I ask you a question...?"

This happens in malls, in airports, in hospitals, in supermarkets, in restaurants. If all of God's people could tell the experiences of this nature they have had with total strangers, volumes could be filled.

In the story of Moses, the angel began speaking out of the burning bush at this point, relaying what he had in store for him. Today God wants us to be that angel and tell the story of salvation.

It would be interesting to know how many today belong to the Church of God because of the burning bush, because of brothers and sisters who quietly were going about their daily lives, about their business, and someone said, "*I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt,*" and they heard the divine message: "*For I know [your] sorrows; and I am come down to deliver [you].*"

Once again we ask: Do you ever feel ill at ease because of not using a wedding band? Do you worry that you are being misread by the world?

God forbid that a true child of God should ever have such thoughts. The burning bush always tells the truth. Wedding bands can lie (Oh, how they can lie!) When the world sees a Christian couple walking down the street, sans rings, they see a holy fire, and often—probably far more often than we imagine—God speaks to them out of the burning bush. ▲

Brazil Today

Where Is Brazil Headed?

The eighth wonder of the world is that democracy functions as a form of government. By all logic it shouldn't.

In a traditional monarchy, the people are voiceless subjects of a king and his court. When the king is considerate, happiness comes by accepting conditions as they are, not by trying to change them. Conversely, in a democracy, the people have a voice, the right to choose their “king” and his “court.” If the leader chosen proves to be incapable of ruling, the people can remove him—and his court—from power at the next election. Happiness comes by not accepting undesirable conditions, but by trying to change them.

Democracy is people power, which makes it a fallible form of government, for people are fallible. Leaders can be elected that campaign to the itching of the ears. Elected, such leaders can, during even one term of office, do both short- and long-term damage to the structure of a nation.

This is election year in Brazil. Contrary to the US, which is basically a dual party system, Brazil has four or five main parties and 15 or 20 splinter parties. Continuing the comparison, while political parties in the US undergo subtle changes over a period of years, each is still identifiable by principles adhered to a hundred years ago. In Brazil both politicians and political parties are in a constant state of mutation. No one party is powerful enough to place its candidates in office without forming alliances. So invariably, as election fever seizes the nation, major parties initiate a frenetic mating game, trying to enlarge their harem to include as many parties as possible. The courted parties always play hard-to-get, demanding their share of the pork barrel and certain key positions in the future government, which can include selecting the candidate's running mate.

As can be imagined, this is not an ideal situation and often results in deplorable political promiscuity. Principles are sacrificed for the sake of votes as parties of radically different platforms become bedfellows. Needless to say, the divorce rate is high. Mortal enemies in one election pat each other on the back in the next. Such unfaithfulness is considered totally normal, so much so, that a popular expression in political circles is: *Nunca diga, desta água eu não bebo*—Never say, I won't drink this water. In other words, one party should never preclude the possibility of a future alliance with a present opponent.

This year's elections, to be held in October, have taken an unexpected turn, creating a serious economic crisis.

Before Fernando Henrique became president, nearly eight years ago, he was the Minister

of Finance for President Itamar Franco. That was back in the days when inflation ranged in the neighborhood of one percent *per day*. In a sweeping monetary reform Fernando Henrique was able to bring inflation down to its present 6-8 percent per year. Once he became president, he began privatizing state-owned industry that constantly operated with enormous deficits because of unscrupulous politicians siphoning off funds.

In his nearly eight years as president, Fernando Henrique has shown himself an able administrator and statesman, nudging Brazil into position to eventually rise from third-world status and take its place among industrialized nations. Agriculturally, this has already happened.

No great man is ever unopposed. Fernando Henrique is no exception. During the last three presidential campaigns, four including this one, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva has made a bid for top office. Lula, as he is called, rose through the ranks as a union leader. Thus it comes as no surprise that he belongs to the Worker's Party, which is socialist.

During each campaign, Lula has managed to begin with a strong lead over other opponents. This time is no exception. The difference is that this time political analysts are giving him a reasonable chance of reaching his goal. It is exactly this "chance" that has upset the economical fruit basket. Knowing that Lula opposes privatization and globalization, foreign investors are giving Brazil the cold shoulder. Foreign analysts today give Nigeria a better rating than Brazil. In fact, only Argentina is given a lower rating than Brazil, which is not exactly complementary.

What we don't know is if foreign investors see Brazil as negatively as they put on, or if they are discreetly—or not so discreetly—campaigning for Fernando Henrique's handpicked successor, and for all practical purposes saying: See what will happen if a socialist becomes president of Brazil?

Now looking at the political situation from a Mennonite point of view, what will happen if a socialist becomes president? Will we lose our liberties? Will we have to catch the first flight out should he take office?

No to all three questions. Lula's socialism is a very watered-down version. Lula is actually quite a nice fellow and while there will be some economical turbulence, basic liberties will be unaffected. Ditto for soybean production.

Brazil today is a stable democracy with a strong economy. However, since internal savings are very low, it must rely heavily on foreign investors to keep the economy afloat. What we are witnessing is a lover's quarrel. Investors make a lot of money in Brazil and by no means do they want to pull out. By giving the cold shoulder, they hope to convince Brazilian voters to vote for progress. ▲

Book Review

Only a Servant

Christians who go through life with their spiritual radars in order, often see errant blips on their screens that stir their hearts. They long to launch out on a rescue mission and "rescue the perishing."

Some of these blips leave us frustrated. We don't know how to carry out a rescue mission. This is especially the case when we meet those who evidently are aware of a deep need in their soul. Yet, because of circumstances, at times there doesn't seem to be an open door to have an in-depth conversation. Tracts are usually in order, but we would like to somehow captivate their minds with the beautiful story of salvation; we would like to show them how that without a personal experience with the Savior, nothing will avail.

I have found the little book, *Only a Servant*, by Kristina Roy (Rod and Staff Publishers) to fit this exact need.

Following is the summary of *Only a Servant*, which we included on the back cover of our Portuguese version of this book:

Only a Servant is the beautiful story of a young man who mysteriously showed up in a small village and offered to work for a local farmer as an indentured servant. It soon became evident that this "servant" was much more than a mere servant. His loving ways soon captured the hearts of the villagers, and especially the hearts of the children, who loved the stories which he would tell them in the shade of an enormous tree.

Why was this learned young man, of a superior intelligence, working as a servant? Why did he become so attached to a cross old Jew?

Read *Only a Servant* and discover the true identity of the young man who assumed the role of a servant—and find out why the Savior came to this world as a servant.

Gospel Publishers has this book on hand. I suggest buying three or four, or a half dozen, and keeping them in the glove box of your car, in your purse, or wherever, for just those situations when you would like to tell the story of salvation in parable form, in a way that can't possibly be offensive to anyone, no matter what his religion—or lack of religion. ▲

In Memory

Taps for a Pioneer

I just received word that Homer Unruh from Versailles, Missouri, passed away. The church in Brazil is deeply indebted to Homer & Hazel for the active role they played in supporting the move to Brazil from its actual conception.

Homer was involved in the exploratory trips and when the first two families moved to Brazil, Homer & Hazel (together with Harold & Emma Dirks and children) accompanied them with tourist visas. Thus Homer was present when Brazil was crisscrossed by a group of brethren in search for land. When a suitable piece of ground was found, Homer bought in with seven other brethren.

Homer & Hazel made a number of trips to Brazil through the years. He showed almost childish pleasure as he saw his predictions fulfilled that one day we would have electricity, good roads, telephones, etc.

It may sound strange to call someone who never actually lived in Brazil as a permanent settler, a pioneer. Yet he was. He helped build the first houses and the first roads. He was present when the church was first organized on the S American continent.

If Homer were to be identified by a single word, it would be enthusiasm. If he discovered he was wrong, he would enthusiastically hit reverse, back up, and about that quick be heading forward again.

In our annals, Homer & Hazel will always be listed as pioneers. ▲

Readers Write

by Don Bleganek

An Open Letter to Rosemere Souza

Christian greetings, Rosemere,

I read your poem in the Feb/02 BN and thought I would compliment you on a fine work. It has been written just as God has inspired you to write. It is you; it is very important; it needs no change in my mind. I will send you a poem that is *me*, but notice how it is not the same as the original.

*Come with me, come to my land,
Where friends hear with their eyes;
Where we communicate in Libras,
Gesturing, with hands that fly.
The grammar of our tongue is silent;
Although words and phrases flow,
Many still consider us impaired...
If only they would learn and know!
Through my observation I can see,
Their story, as it is told;
Hearts now filled with greatest joy,
Once were agonizing cold.
Oh, how sweet the sound of silence,
So restful and so calm!
For God has warmed the spirit,
With this Heavenly Balm.
I pray, dear brother and sister,
God's story needs to still unfold;
Please make the effort, so
His Word may silently be told.*

(My wife, Laurie, and I live on a farm here in Alberta. We have four boys, six girls and one handicapped niece in our home. The two of us joined the church nine years ago... D.R.B.) ▲

Life on the Colony

More Blessed to Give Than to Receive

Back when I had my store, I hated losing a good customer to the competition. However, there was the occasional troublesome client whom one was glad to lose. Doubtlessly my competitors at times chuckled with glee when their pesky customers found their way to my store.

When the apostle said that it is “more blessed to give than to receive,” he was thinking about something nobler than shucking something or someone we don’t appreciate.

Last month we wrote about changes taking place on the Colony, of those who are planning on moving back to N America or to the state of Tocantins. This month this became a reality. We began with three sales. The first, on May 4, was Jesse & Delores Loewen’s garage sale. On the 11th it was Daniel & Linda Holdeman’s auction sale, and on the 25th was Elias & Colleen Stoltzfus’ auction sale. Shortly after their sales, they left for the US. Jesse plans on returning on a future date to have an auction sale.

Our initial reaction to these changes was that of the merchant who is unhappy about losing a good customer. We had especially good reason to feel that way. Elias is a minister, Jesse a deacon, and Daniel a promoter of good singing. So we didn’t only lose some families, but a basketful of talents as well.

In commercial terms, we have lost some mighty good customers, and we don’t like it... But then, this isn’t a commercial transaction. Furthermore, the congregations where these families will be making their homes aren’t our commercial competitors. They are our spiritual sister congregations. So, if the Bible injunction that it is more blessed to give than to receive is true—which obviously it is—then we can rejoice in knowing that they will be enriched by those who have left us. ▲

Tocantins

Today it appears that a settlement in the state of Tocantins will become a reality. As we reported last month, Chris Stoltzfus, from the Rio Verdinho Congregation, has purchased a farm. Jair da Costa, also from Rio Verdinho, has a farm, or farms. Several more brethren from Rio Verdinho are looking around, several from Monte Alegre and one from the Rio Verde Congregation.

From what I have heard, this area is especially good for cattle raising, although part of the land is suitable for farming.

What is the price of land? Somewhere between 17 and 45 US dollars an acre. It sounds like a bargain.

Stay tuned in. We should have more news on Tocantins next month, including a map, showing where the brethren are settling. ▲

Perdigão

For the sake of new readers, we explain that Perdigão is the name of the company that brought the broiler and hog project to Rio Verde, which will be the largest in Latin America.

Today 235,000 chickens and 2,800 hogs are being slaughtered daily. When operating at maximum capacity, these numbers will be in the neighborhood of 650,000 chickens and 7,000 hogs.

The standard module for broilers is four barns with a capacity of 25 thousand each. Today seven such modules are in operation on the Colony. The owners are: Daniel Kramer, Myron Kramer, Cláudio Silva, Divino Cândido (two modules), Bill Miller and Joedson Bessa.

Luís Fernandes has one module that should go into operation within three weeks, at the most.

Tim Burns and I are each putting in a module, with construction to begin shortly.

Jonathan Coblenz and Carlos Becker's projects should be approved shortly. Another project has been begun.

That makes a total of 13 modules, or 52 barns. Perdigão would like for approximately 10 percent of their total broiler production to come from the Colony, because of better results. This means everyone would have to double their production, plus some new ones get in.

The reason for the better results is the family concept of taking care of the barns. Perdigão knows by experience that a dedicated family is the most efficient way to produce quality broilers. This they know from their operations in southern Brazil, where most of their projects are family operated, many of them by Italian families of Italian immigrants.

Before anyone got started, Perdigão made it plain this wasn't a get-rich thing. However, as those involved on the Colony have found out, it is a steady income that can sustain a frugal family.

Bill Miller also has a hog operation, which we will describe in a future edition.

Perdigão is having a definite impact on the Colony. To begin with, Arlo Hibner is doing the earth moving, not only on the Colony, but for others as well. He employs three fulltime men and several part time. Mark Loewen is getting set up to custom clean barns, an operation which has real potential and will doubtlessly provide employment for more brethren.

Those of you who have been readers for a number of years will probably remember that occasionally I have lamented the fact that we had no decent job opportunities here

on the Colony. The way to make a living back then was farming. Consequently, some young men tried to get into farming without the necessary backing. The results were often not the best.

The jobs now available have totally changed the picture for young men. Not only has it increased their earning power, but has also put a spring into their step as they pick up a valuable new profession. Several of the brethren are working for an earth moving outfit from town, where they are doing very well. Once again, Mennonite dedication is making the difference.

I am expecting that sometime, someplace, someone will set up a machine shop and begin labor saving devices for these barns.

So when we speak of changes on the Colony, we can't omit these changes, which are having very positive overall effects.

Needless to say, farmers who have either broilers or hogs will have the additional advantage of a permanent supply of free fertilizer for their crops.

It has been said that the history of Rio Verde will be divided into pre-Perdigão and Perdigão. This is true. Recently Nildemar Secches, the president of the company, was in Rio Verde, to be present as employee number 3000 was hired. I don't know how many truck drivers, chicken catchers, etc. are making their living indirectly in this project.

Perdigão is very interested in the social development of Rio Verde. It has built *postos de saúde*—health clinics—in the poorer sections of town, where people get free care. Many of the local doctors spend several hours each day at these *postos de saúde*. The great disadvantage of this system is the time the patients must often spend in line. Nevertheless, those making use of this service speak very highly of the dedication of the doctors and the quality of their work.

Perdigão has also donated much needed emergency equipment to our fire department, which before was pathetically unprepared for the needs of a city of 110 thousand inhabitants. ▲

Thinking Out Loud

Let There Be Light

Before the creation story, the only light was in heaven. Outside of this enclosure there was darkness, only darkness, for as far as eternity reaches.

When God “created the heaven [space] and the earth,” darkness still prevailed. The clutch of our finite minds begins to slip when we try and imagine how God could work in total darkness to create space and earth.

It is significant that God's first recorded command was “Let there be light.” Everything depended on this, for without light there cannot be life. Indeed, the sun and the stars created on the fourth day could not have given light if light had not first been created. In a strict sense, these heavenly bodies don't generate light; they don't produce

light. They access light—we don't know how—and transmit or diffuse it. (Where is this light stored? Even Job asked, "Where is the way where light dwelleth?")

Seen from this perspective, what we call a generator is not actually a generator, but a transmitter. Like the sun and stars, it accesses and transmits or diffuses the light created or generated on the first day of creation...

And yet, since "generate" and "generator" are such a solid part of our vocabulary, we shall continue to use these words, bearing in mind that when a generator generates, it is, in reality, transmitting or diffusing light created in the creation.

I have just the vaguest memory of the pre-R.E.A. days in Central Kansas. Along one wall in our car garage there was a motor and generator, plus a long line of large square glass jars (later used as pickle jars), filled with an acid solution and a maze of wires that stretched from jar to jar, and then to the generator. This rudimentary electrical system provided our home with a crude lighting system.

I very distinctly remember our first several years in Brazil when we burned kerosene for light, often in little conical tin lamps with a small wick hole on top. While fairly resistant to wind, they smoked generously—and outrageously when filled with diesel fuel instead of kerosene.

With time we managed to acquire better kerosene lamps, and finally the Aladdin lamp, which merits a paragraph.

The Aladdin lamp is a state of the art kerosene lamp, with a most fragile mantle and a tall, slender globe. With the wick properly trimmed, the Aladdin lamps produced a soft, poetical, albeit, fragile light. A slight bump would collapse the mantle, rendering the lamp useless until a new mantle was installed. They had to be watched almost constantly. Left unattended for a short time, the globe would often turn black, like the smoke stack of a steam engine, and begin emitting a cloud of dense, sooty smoke.

A sign of prosperity in those early Colony days was when a family managed to buy a one cylinder diesel engine and a small generator. (The amount of hours these units were run daily was a further indicator of a family's prosperity.)

To have electricity in the house or shop wasn't a simple matter of flipping a switch or plugging in an appliance. First it was necessary to go out to the shed where the generator was set up. It meant: 1) checking the fuel, 2) checking the oil, 3) checking the water level in a large cooling barrel, and 4) cranking the engine by hand. On a good engine, this last item could be a fairly simple matter. But with time it wasn't unusual for an engine to develop an ornery streak, thus producing more sweat than electricity.

Once the motor started, the voltage gauge on the panel would be watched until the desired voltage was reached. A switch would be flipped, and behold! the house would light up.

For the first minutes, the motor would usually run easily. Then the washing machine would be turned on, and the motor would sound just a bit louder, and the lights would get a bit dimmer. Then something else would be turned on. The motor noise would increase and the lights get even dimmer.

Then it would happen; with the motor now pulling at full capacity, one of the

children would decide to take a shower—and remember our showers have a two to three thousand watt electric showerhead. The motor would now let loose a cloud of black smoke, the lights would get dimmer and dimmer...and someone would yell, “Hey, turn off the shower!”

Too late. The house and shed would be dark and silent. The washer would be turned off, the offender in the shower would have to quickly finish his bath with cold water, while someone trudged out to the shed to crank the engine and restore electricity.

Finally the day came that a power line was built up to our house, a transformer installed, and suddenly we could have electricity around the clock. No longer was it necessary to run out in the rain at bedtime to turn off the motor.

Let there be light.

It is important to get to church early enough so that we can be comfortably seated at least five minutes before starting time. If church starting time is 10:00 o'clock in the morning, our starting time should be 9:55, which means getting to church by 9:45, or even earlier if necessary, to be seated by *our* starting time.

Why?

Because at 9:55 (or 7:25 in the evening) is when the generator should begin illuminating our soul.

Those five minutes of silence, of meditation, of prayer, before the service begins, are so very, very important. It's during those five minutes that we should turn off switches: the sick cow, the broken water line, the rain that won't stop (or that won't come), the tractor with a twisted axle, the computer that won't boot up, the cake that fell...so that we can get the spiritual voltage meter up to 110v, (or 220v) and switch over to holy power.

When this happens the Holy Spirit often speaks to us before the service even begins. Our soul is lit up before the song leader gets up to open the service. These first five minutes can easily determine how much light will be generated in our soul during the rest of the service.

The opening songs. Spirit-filled songs sung by Spirit-filled people are a powerful generator. How many introductions have been generated during these first songs? How many burdens lifted? Yes, these opening songs are sacred songs that turn on the lights for the rest of the service.

On Sunday mornings, next comes the Sunday School opening. The superintendent's job, basically, is to turn the congregation's attention to the lesson—*not explain the lesson*. A lengthy Sunday School opening often produces more darkness than light.

Sunday School. The mighty Itaipu hydroelectric plant, the largest in the world, on the Paraná River between Brazil and Paraguay, doesn't begin to produce the light that a good Sunday School session produces. But for this to happen, everyone in the class should speak a little bit at least once, and 70 percent of the class, twice or more.

I never cease to marvel at the light that comes forth in a good Sunday School session. As each one contributes his thoughts, a picture suddenly forms (and an editorial).

On the other hand, I know of few things that can be more embarrassing than to have visitors, especially outsiders, in Sunday School, and no one have anything to say. Not only does it cast a blemish on our belief, but can result in a sincere seeker deciding he still hasn't found what he is looking for.

In our congregation, when we miss Sunday School because of a morning wedding, we try and have our class on Wednesday evening. I appreciate this importance placed on Sunday School.

We return to the main auditorium, Sunday School is dismissed and the service begins. How often doesn't the one who brings the introduction comment on the light brought forth during Sunday School? And how often doesn't the introduction open the door for the message?

The sermon is the heart of the service. At times it happens that the speaker arises with fear and trembling, for he hasn't received a clear indication as to what he should preach. He zigzags a bit, when suddenly a light begins to shine. It illuminates his scriptures, his mind and his heart. He speaks things he never thought of before. What happened? The prayers of those facing him were heard and answered, and light is brought forth. His words are multiplied and divided into each heart, so that often a message is heard that the speaker didn't even preach.

Possibly the most important part of a service is the prayer after the sermon—which, unless there is a good reason—should never be left out. This is where the speaker brings to the Lord the burden of the service thus far. It can be a lengthy prayer, an intercessory prayer, the need of the flock is placed on God's altar.

Testimonies are wonderful generators. There are times when a short testimony touches hearts more than a long sermon. God forbid that we become too sophisticated for testimonies.

In normal circumstances, a closing prayer should be just that; it shouldn't attempt to duplicate the after-the-sermon prayer. If by now the service hasn't generated light, a long closing prayer won't make up for lost time. It should be a prayer of thankfulness for the light generated and an intreaty of God's continued blessings. ▲

This & That

Brazil recycles 85 percent of its aluminum cans. It isn't unusual to see someone walking the highway, picking up cans tossed out of passing vehicles.

Daniel & Anna Kramer spent a month on the Acaraú Mission, filling in while the missionaries, John & Sheila Kramer, were on furlough.

Jesse & Delores Loewen's garage sale was on May 4.

Daniel & Linda Holdeman's auction sale was on May 11. On Sunday evening, the 19th, there was a farewell for them and the Jesse Loewen family after the regular service. Holdemans moved to Georgia and Loewens to Indiana.

On May 16 was the Monte Alegre last-day-of-school program. The graduates were: Beverly, dau. of Clinton & Marie Unruh; Clayton, son of Carlos & Nita Becker;

Crystal, dau. Stanley & Kathy Holdeman; Delbert & Delwynn, sons of Jesse & Delores Loewen; Janice, dau. of Harold & Irene Holdeman; Jenny, dau. of Carman & Celma Loewen; Luana, dau. of Carlinhos & Maria Ferreira; Melinda, dau. of Elias & Colleen Stoltzfus; Pancho, son of Leo & Mim Dirks; Patricia, dau. of Calvin & Donna Hibner. Regina Miller, from the Rio Verdinho Cong., who is presently working at Mercy Hospital, spent several weeks on the Colony, together with her cousin Sharon, who came along.

May 17 was the Monte Alegre play day. School play days are major Colony events.

Beside a day of games, there is a *churrasco* at noon and ice cream in the afternoon.

Talking about a weary bunch of children and youth at the end of the day...

On the 19th, Myron & Martha Kramer had a boy, Alvin. (Abraham & Sara also had a boy when that was no longer in their program.)

The Rio Verdinho School program was the evening of the 22nd. The graduates were:

Rueben, son of Tony & Juanita Lima; Rodney, son of Jair & Connie Costa.

Rose Nikkel, from Pipestone, came to visit her sister Laura, who taught school at Rio Verdinho this past year, and accompany her home.

Elias & Colleen Stoltzfus' sale was on the 25th. On Monday evening, the 27th, there was a farewell for them at the Monte Alegre social hall.

Maxine Loewen and Vada Unruh are spending their vacations on the Colony.

On May 31 a busload of Colony and town folks left for Mato Grosso on a chartered bus to attend a wedding. More on that next month.

FACTS & FIGURES

Temperatures

High	35°C	95°F
Low	8.4°C	47°F
Av high	30.5°C	87°F
Av low	15.4°C	60°F

Rainfall

58.5 mm — 2.3 inches

Relative Humidity

Hi 83% — Low 50% — Av 68%

Exchange Rate

One US dollar buys 2.84 reals

Brazil News

In *Where Is Brazil Headed?* we spoke about the turbulence that is jolting the country. This is felt especially in the exchange rate, which has reached an all-time high since the *real* became the national currency. This is tremendous for people wanting to travel in Brazil. Dollars will yield a lot of reals. On the other hand, it is most unfortunate for anyone from here wanting to travel in N America, or wanting to take money out of the country. It's quite unpredictable how the dollar will behave itself from here on out.