

Brazil News



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Editorial

Affluence

During an evening session of the recent Conference, a talk was given on Affluence (which, fortunately, several weeks later the speaker was able to give in person to the church in Brazil). The seriousness of the problem was emphasized by pointing out that we were probably only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

Affluence is a lifestyle with a minimum of tedium, a maximum of comfort and painless solutions.

A hundred years ago...

People traveled by horse and buggy;

Lived in houses with no insulation or central heating or cooling;

Had no electricity or electrical appliances, no telephones;

Appendicitis was often fatal and mothers frequently died when giving birth.

There were no clothes washers and dryers, vacuum sweepers, gas ranges, refrigerators, microwave ovens...

Families a hundred years ago had a garden. A big garden. Not a hobby garden. The garden was spaded by hand, fertilized by hand (chicken and cow manure), planted by hand, hoed by hand, watered by hand, harvested by hand. Potatoes were stored away in the cellar. Corn, beans, peas...were canned, and also stored away on shelves in the cellar.

Families a hundred years ago had at least several milk cows that provided the family with milk and cream, separated by hand; butter, churned by hand; buttermilk, the byproduct of the butter; and calves, which were raised and then butchered or sold.

They had a little flock of chickens which provided them with eggs. And cash. (Even I remember going to town with my folks on Saturday evening to sell eggs, which was then used to buy groceries.) The chicks didn't come from some hatchery, but from hens that incubated the eggs. Both the roosters and older hens provided a source of fresh meat.

They raised pigs on table scraps and corn or milo, produced on the farm that was picked by hand, husked by hand and shelled by hand. Butchering day was in the fall.

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Often several families would get together and butcher however many hogs would be needed to take them through the winter. The head became headcheese; the hams were soaked in brine and then smoked (I remember going up into Grandpa Becker's attic in the winter and seeing the long lines of hams hanging from the rafters, and oh, the delicious aroma of that place. No, that wasn't a hundred years ago.); some of the meat was canned or precooked and preserved in lard. Scraps were ground and pressed into the entrails for sausage.

With the onset of winter, the cellar shelves were loaded with hundreds of jars of vegetables, fruit and meat. The attic was adorned with savory hams and slabs of bacon.

Folks, a lot of work went into getting a family set for winter. A LOT of work.

And that wasn't all. A lot of wood had to be cut, hauled in and split for cooking and heating the house—or rather, the kitchen and living room—during a long winter.

There were no indoor bathroom facilities. (I have said before, and repeat, that going out to the shanty at night, in a blizzard, made for strong character.)

The rest of this little paper could be filled up with interesting observations on life a hundred years ago. Or even sixty or seventy years ago. Rather, we will ask a question: Does anything we have written fit into our definition of affluence— *A lifestyle with a minimum of tedium, a maximum of comfort and painless solutions.*

Yes, there was affluence a hundred years ago, five hundred years ago, a thousand and five thousand years ago. Royalty, rich land barons, plantation owners, wealthy merchants, were able to surround themselves with a small army of slaves, serfs or servants that took much of the tedium out of their lives and provided them with every kind of comfort. However, it is doubtful if that was ever the case with God's children. Thus, we can conclude that in Christian circles, affluence is a recent development, at least when seen from the perspective of six thousand years of human history.

Affluence in any given country is directly proportional to its GNP, social and educational equality. Broken down, this means that when a nation is prosperous and its wealth isn't concentrated in the pockets of a few; when there is a large middle class with access to education, affluence is a natural and inevitable consequence.

Thus, if the bulk of the church today were located in Haiti, and not in N America, and the Conference would have been held in Haiti, there wouldn't have been a talk on affluence. Nor any discussion.

Affluence isn't something we can put our finger on and say "Lo! It is here," or "Lo! It is there." It's an atmosphere, like Christmas time, when you can hear Christmas, see Christmas, smell Christmas, taste Christmas, feel Christmas. It's everywhere.

And so, where does that leave us, who believe that affluence is detrimental to Christian life? Can we survive in an affluent society?

Affluence is not a take-it-or-leave-it thing. It's take-it-take-it-take-it. It's like walking through an open market (you foreign missionaries will understand this one) in which vendors in each stall hawk their wares. They stand in the crowded aisle and thrust their goods into our hands. We say no and they say yes. We say it's too expensive and they say they will sell for less.

We can ask, in all honesty and sincerity, Is it really possible to keep oneself free of affluence in the midst of an affluent society? We can also ask: Is it necessary?

Let's suppose you have answered both questions in the affirmative.

Now what?

(If you are totally befuddled, remember that Conference has answered both questions in the affirmative. That should serve as a starter.)

Affluence is a lifestyle with a minimum of tedium, a maximum of comfort and painless solutions.

Let's begin with *painless solutions*. There are no painless solutions for the one who takes this concern seriously. Like the drug user who decides to go straight, there will be withdrawal symptoms. In fact, even with repentance, these withdrawal symptoms will probably persist.

A minimum of tedium. We have programmed ourselves to be practical and efficient. Thus, every little gadget we run across that will take drudgery out of our lives we snap up with hardly a second thought. This is true in the shop, in the kitchen, on the farm, in the office. We become more and more and more efficient. And our children become softer and softer and softer. They despise chores or any routine task that would tie them down. Manual labor has given way to machine labor. Too many of our children have lost the traditional Mennonite work ethic. In America today the migrant worker has become the serf, making it possible for the Americans to take the "good" jobs. Education is seen as the solution to avoid serfdom. Even amongst some of our young men.

A maximum of comfort. If necessary, reread the description of life a hundred years ago. Now compare that with your life today. It's hardly a figure of speech to say you are living in a different world. Many of you—not all—go from an air-conditioned house to an air-conditioned car to an air-conditioned workplace or tractor, to an air-conditioned mall, to an air-conditioned restaurant... There's not a thing wrong with any of that.

And that's the whole problem. Affluence is like a jigsaw puzzle. You dump the pieces on the table, turn them right-side up and carefully examine each one. There is nothing wrong with any of them. Then you start putting the puzzle together. The picture that emerges is "pleasant to the eyes, and...to be desired."

Yet we have been told that if we eat of the tree of affluence, we shall surely die... Or wasn't it quite that bad?

We were told that we are probably only seeing the tip of the iceberg. It wasn't the tip of the iceberg that sank the Titanic. The Titanic sank because the captain believed his ship was immune to icebergs.

And we believe we are immune to affluence. That's about the long and the short of it.

We enjoy comparing the church to an ocean liner. It stimulates our imagination and gives us a feeling of safety, for we sincerely believe that this Ship will never sink.

What we ignore, however, is that modern ships make port calls. No matter how great or powerful, ships are still very much bound to the earth. The church too, as

a spiritual ship, cannot detach itself from this earth. That will occur only at the end of time.

In His lesson on the sheep and the Good Shepherd, Jesus makes it plain that the sheep don't remain in the sheepfold during the day, but that "he leadeth them out," and brings them back at night. Similarly, the Ship makes port calls, when the faithful go ashore to work at their jobs, to go about their daily life. But it is the will of the Captain that each evening the faithful again board, after which the gangplank is hoisted for the night.

The Ship has never been a luxury liner. Nor will it ever be. When people begin to live in luxury, they are overstaying their port call. The gangplank is hoisted and they spend the night ashore. Because it's more comfortable. Less cramped.

An occasional night is spent ashore. Then several nights a week. Finally a house is rented ashore. Occasionally a night is spent aboard. A house is purchased...

That is affluence.

If affluence is poison to the Christian, then we have a big, big job ahead of us. It won't do any good to take the puzzle apart and analyze each piece to see if it has any poison on it. We probably won't find anything wrong.

So we're going to have to conclude that our problem is having too many things that are right. We're hyperventilating, that is, we're taking in too much oxygen by our frenetic breathing. Like the hyperventilated patient that is forced to breath into a paper bag to cut his oxygen intake, we are going to have to, in a deliberate effort, reduce our intake of legitimate things. That's going to be about as fun as breathing into a paper bag.

We're going to have to take a good look at our stateroom on the Ship and compare it with the house in which we are living ashore—if that happens to be the case. And then we're going to have to make a decision.

I wasn't present in Conference, but by reading the minutes and listening to reports, I believe that is the message being sent out. We're going to have to decide if we want to occupy the stateroom on the ship. Or if we want to live ashore on our own property.

Caterpillar used to say in its ads: "There are no simple solutions; only intelligent choices." We can say: There are no simple solutions to affluence; only spiritual choices—and they will be painful.

The martyr brethren had to pay a high price to live in a stateroom on the Ship. Jesus told the rich young ruler, "Sell everything you have if you want to live in a stateroom."

If you truly want to know if you have a berth on the Ship, ask, "Good Master, what must I do to have a stateroom?"

He will tell you.

One of these days the Ship is going to hoist the gangplank and lift anchor for the last time. Those who are living ashore will stay behind.

Affluence is a lifestyle with a minimum of tedium, a maximum of comfort and painless solutions. ▲

Thinking Out Loud

Christmas 2003...?

And it came to pass in those days,...Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way... that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus,...Seven more shopping days until Christmas...that all the world should be taxed...On the first day of Christmas, my true love brought to me...(And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria)... Daddy, I want you to get me one of those new games that everyone has...And all went to be taxed,...Oh, I don't know when we'll have our Christmas...every one into his own city...Look! There's Santa Claus; I want to talk to him...And Joseph also went up from Galilee,...I'm so tired of making candy; Christmas plain gets me down... out of the city of Nazareth,...Six more shopping days until Christmas...into Judaea,... Joy to the world, the Lord has come...unto the city of David...Oh, what fun it is to ride in a one-horse open sleigh...which is called Bethlehem;...Mom, I'm so cross! Do you know whose name I got at school?... (because he was of the house and lineage of David)...Rudoph, the red-nosed reindeer, had a bright and shiny nose...To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife,...Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright...being great with child...Silver bells! Silver bells!...And so it was, that, while they were there,... Gifts for the husband who already has everything...the days were accomplished that she should be delivered... And all through the house, not a creature was stirring... And she brought forth her firstborn son,...Dear, if we're out of money, how will we have Christmas this year?...and wrapped him in swaddling clothes,...We wish you a merry Christmas! We wish you a merry Christmas... and laid him in a manger;...Oh dear, I still have 14 presents to buy...because there was no room for them in the inn... Buy now and pay next year...And there were in the same country...Mom, Sally told me whose name she got in school... shepherds abiding in the field,...Jolly old Saint Nicholas, lean your head this way...keeping watch over their flock by night...I can't decide if I want chicken and dressing or baked ham...And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them,...I heard Mom and Dad talking last night and know what I'm getting for Christmas... and the glory of the Lord shone round about them:...Five shopping days until Christmas...and they were sore afraid...If it doesn't snow, it just won't be Christmas...And the angel said unto them,...Did you see the lights on Main Street? They are just gorgeous!...Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings...Would you believe that little Sammy just got the measles; that will do our Christmas in...of great joy,...I have practiced the Christmas program with the children umpteen times, and we still can't get it right...which shall be to all people...It may be expensive, but you know what will happen if Junior doesn't get a pair of skates for Christmas...For unto you is born this day...Four shopping days until Christmas...in the city of David a Saviour,... Do you know what Miss Johnson gave us for Christmas? A stupid pen...which is Christ the Lord... And now, at the last minute, Aunt Joetta calls and says it will **not** suit them to have Christmas on Christmas day...And this shall be a sign unto you;...Three more

shopping days until Christmas...Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,... Christmas tree sales down this year... lying in a manger...Red and green; that looks like Christmas...And suddenly there was with the angel...Mommy, why can't we have Christmas lights?...a multitude of the heavenly host praising God,...I found a turkey just the size I was looking for...and saying...What a relief! I got all my Christmas cards sent out...Glory to God in the highest,...Two shopping days until Christmas...and on earth peace, good will toward men...Oh, so much candy! I've already gained five pounds... And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away...Who do you suppose will win the prize for the best Christmas decorations this year?...from them into heaven,...Local merchants report Christmas sales are better than expected...the shepherds said one to another,...Mommy, can reindeer really come down the chimney?...Let us now go even unto Bethlehem,...Frosty the Snowman...and see this thing which is come to pass,...I just love those wreaths with a candle in them...which the Lord hath made known unto us...Oh, what do you buy for someone who already has everything?...And they came with haste,...Jesus is the reason for the season...and found Mary, and Joseph,... My Sunday School teacher came up with the wise idea we should give our gifts to poor children...and the babe lying in a manger...Deck the halls with boughs of holly, Fa la la la la la la la!...And when they had seen it,...Be careful, dear Santa, on the rooftops where you go...they made known abroad the saying which was told...Dashing through the snow, In a one-horse open sleigh...them concerning this child...O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree, You fill all hearts with gaiety...And all they that heard it wondered at those things...Good tidings we bring to you and your kin...which were told them by the shepherds...One shopping day until Christmas...But Mary kept all these things,...Now Dasher! Now Dancer! Now, Prancer and Vixen!...and pondered them in her heart...Dear Editor: I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus...And the shepherds returned,...I have had it! I wonder if Christmas is really worth it?...glorifying and praising God... Daddy, do we really have to go to church this morning?...for all the things that they had heard and seen,...Oh dear, by morning the snow will all be melted...as it was told unto them...Mom, know what? My Sunday School teacher told me Christmas is Jesus' birthday!... Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men. —Isaiah 29:13 ▲

On Beauty and Happiness

It is universally believed that beauty is the key that opens the door to happiness. Depending on how we define happiness, there can be some truth in this belief.

Happiness, temporal happiness, depends on material stimulus. Thus, not only beauty, but riches, possessions, position, fame, power...all contribute to happiness.

We can logically conclude that famous actresses are some of the happiest people on planet Earth. (What logic doesn't explain is the high suicide rate among these beautiful women.)

The quest for beauty is becoming epidemic. One of the most lucrative and fastest expanding specialties in the medical profession is that of the plastic surgeon.

Erstwhile plastic surgeons dedicated their talents to the reconstruction of damaged bodies—accident, war and burn victims—as well as the correction of congenital defects. Many were given a new lease on life by the efforts of skilled surgeons. Today, only a minuscule part of plastic surgeries performed fall into this category.

Similarly, the dental profession is offering the “perfect smile” to patients. Teeth are aligned and individually sculptured to...to perfection.

“Before and after” ads are found everywhere, even in serious publications, consisting of two photos: one taken of the person before using the product or equipment being advertised, and another after. The fact that these ads bring results is not a tribute to man's intelligence. Guilefully, they transmit the idea that happiness depends on beauty.

Often weight-losing products are advertised. The first photo, usually somewhat blurred, shows a slovenly, overweight person with a sad countenance. The second photo shows the same person, now trim, happy and intelligent looking. No words are necessary to transmit the message: See how this product changed my entire life.

VEJA magazine recently ran a cover story that centers on what medical science can do to change people's lives. The cover shows a slim, good-looking 36 year-old woman, who appears to be only 25 or 26 at the most. In her hand she displays a “before” photo of herself: puffy cheeks, uncombed hair and lackluster eyes. The explanation for this radical transformation is stamped on the cover:

BEAUTY FOR ALL

The before and after of Bárbara Reiter, 36 years old...who is a living example of the new aesthetic order: silicone, liposuction and Botox in twelve payments.

The article tells the story of a number of women, and a young man, whose lives were radically changed through plastic surgery and dental work. And best of all, they found happiness in their new image.

This concept of linking beauty with happiness is certainly a masterstroke of marketing, and of deception, for basically it says that everyone who really wants to—and has the cash—can be beautiful. And happy.

Needless to say, the masses will probably never have access to beauty and happiness. That means that in a world of beautiful and happy men and women, the majority will still be imperfect and unhappy with the body God gave them.

The Spanish explorer Ponce de León accompanied Columbus on his second voyage to the New World (1493-1494) and remained on the N American continent. In 1513 he explored Florida, searching for the legendary Fountain of Youth, which he of course never found.

It is this Fountain of Youth that medical science purports to have discovered in the form of a scalpel. For a woman nearing 40 to appear to be in her middle

20s, or for a woman in her middle 50s to appear to be in her late 30s is no mean accomplishment.

Does looking young make one young? Does that bring happiness?

Eternity can't be measured in years. Even if it could, there is no number on earth that could express such a time. Nevertheless, let's say that our existence is a trillion years (1,000,000,000,000), one hundred years (100) in life on earth—even though very few reach that age—and the remaining 999,999,999,900 years in eternity.

We believe, without a doubt, that the last 999,999,999,900 years will be far more real, joyful or painful, than the first 100. Seen from this perspective, a redeemed soul could wish that the 999,999,999,900 years would go on forever, which they will! The lost soul, on the other hand, would wish that the digits would come tumbling down like so many dominoes, until none remained, which of course won't happen either. Eternity is eternity.

So, doesn't it seem just a bit foolish to try and look 10 or 15 years younger, or more beautiful for a few short years during the first hundred years of a trillion year period?

The wise man sums it up impeccably: "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Will a saved soul rejoice in heaven because of a face-lifting on earth? Or a sinner in hell be comforted because of several added years of beauty on earth?

Just as surely as growing up is part of God's plan for mankind, so is growing old. Not everyone manages to grow up gracefully. Nor does everyone manage to grow old gracefully.

Christians should be examples in all things. We believe that children growing up should be a witness to the world by their good behavior. Why then shouldn't our concept of growing old, as older folks, be a witness to the world as well?

We should live intensely each year of our life. As children, we should enjoy being children; as youth, we should enjoy being youth; as young parents, we should enjoy being young parents; as middle-aged, we should enjoy being middle aged; as grandparents, we should enjoy being grandparents; and as those in the twilight of life, we should raise our head, for redemption draweth nigh. This is God's plan.

It *isn't* His plan that we should try to settle into a geostationary orbit in life, that we attempt to be 30 for 10 or 15 years.

During each age in life we have a special opportunity to bring honor and praise to God's name. To attempt to camouflage our age, to dye graying hair, is tantamount to spraying green paint on a field of ripening grain. How ridiculous! How unbecoming for a Christian!

Beauty is not happiness. God has created some people very beautiful. Yet their chances of being happy are no greater than those of someone with a very ordinary face and shape.

No, beauty is not happiness, but happiness is beauty. Some of the most beautiful people I know in this life have no natural comeliness. They are beautiful because they are happy. ▲

Stories

The Sword of Damocles

[If you do any amount of reading, occasionally you will have seen the term, The sword of Damocles (pronounced dam-a-kleez, with the accent on the first syllable), and probably wondered what it meant. Damocles was a “fourth century B.C.. Greek courtier to Dionysius the Elder, tyrant of Syracuse, who according to legend was forced to sit at a banquet table under a sword suspended by a single hair to demonstrate the precariousness of a king’s fortunes” (AHD). Anytime we are tempted to be envious of men in power, we should remember this little story.]

There was once a king named Dionysius who ruled in Syracuse, the richest city in Sicily. He lived in a fine palace where there were many beautiful and costly things, and he was waited upon by a host of servants who were all ready to do his bidding.

Naturally, because Dionysius had so much wealth and power, there were many in Syracuse who envied his good fortune. Damocles was one of these. He was one of Dionysius’s best friends, and he was always saying to him, “How lucky you are! You have everything anyone could wish for. You must be the happiest man in the world.”

One day Dionysius grew tired of hearing such talk. “Come now,” he said, “do you really think I’m happier than everyone else?”

“But of course you are,” Damocles replied. “Look at the great treasures you possess, and the power you hold. You have not a single worry in the world. How could life be any better?”

“Perhaps you would like to change places with me,” said Dionysius.

“Oh, I would never dream of that,” said Damocles. “But if I could only have your riches and your pleasures for one day, I should never want any greater happiness.”

“Very well. Trade places with me for just one day, and you shall have them.”

And so, the next day, Damocles was led to the palace, and all the servants were instructed to treat him as their master. They dressed him in royal robes, and placed on his head a crown of gold. He sat down at a table in the banquet hall, and rich foods were set before him. Nothing was wanting that could give him pleasure. There were costly wines, and beautiful flowers, and rare perfumes, and delightful music. He rested himself among soft cushions, and was the happiest man in all world.

“Ah, this is the life,” he sighed to Dionysius, who sat at the other end of the long table. “I’ve never enjoyed myself so much.”

And as he raised a cup to his lips, he lifted his eyes toward the ceiling. What was that dangling above him, with its point almost touching his head?

Damocles stiffened. The smile faded from his lips, and his face turned ashy pale. His hand trembled. He wanted no more food, no more wine, no more music. He only wanted to be out of the palace, far away, he cared not where. For directly above his head hung a sword, held to the ceiling by only a single horsehair. Its sharp blade glittered as it pointed right between his eyes. He started to jump up and run, but

stopped himself, frightened that any sudden move might snap the thin thread and bring the sword down. He sat frozen to his chair.

“What is the matter, my friend?” Dionysius asked. “You seem to have lost your appetite.”

“That sword! That sword!” whispered Damocles. “Don’t you see it?”

“Of course I see it,” said Dionysius. “I see it every day. It always hangs over my head, and there is always the chance someone or something may cut the slim thread. Perhaps one of my own advisors will grow jealous of my power and try to kill me. Or someone may spread lies about me, to turn the people against me. It may be that a neighboring kingdom will send an army to seize this throne. Or I may make an unwise decision that will bring my downfall. If you want to be a leader, you must be willing to accept these risks. They come with the power, you see.”

“Yes, I do see,” said Damocles. “I see now that I was mistaken, and that you have much to think about besides your riches and fame. Please take your place, and let me go back to my own house.”

And as long as he lived, Damocles never again wanted to change places, even for a moment, with the king. ▲

Abraham Lincoln Denies a Loan

[Lincoln wrote this letter on December 24, 1848, to his stepbrother, John D. Johnston, who lived on the family farm in Coles County, Illinois. Could there still be a few “Johnstons” around?]

Dear Johnston:

Your request for eighty dollars, I do not think it best to comply with now. At the various times when I have helped you a little, you have said to me, “We will get along very well now,” but in a very short time I found you in the same difficulty again. Now this can only happen by some defect in your conduct. What that defect is, I think I know. You are not *lazy*, and still you are an *idler*. I doubt whether since I saw you, you have done a good whole day’s work, in any one day. You do not very much dislike to work, and still you do not work much, merely because it does not seem to you that you could get much for it.

Let father and your boys take charge of your things at home—prepare for a crop, and make the crop, and you go to work for the best money wages, or in discharge of any debt you owe, that you can get. And to secure you a fair reward for your labor, I now promise you that for every dollar you will, between this and the first of May, get for your own labor either in money or in your own indebtedness, I will then give you one other dollar.

By this, if you hire yourself at ten dollars a month, from me you get ten more, making twenty dollars a month for your work. In this, I do not mean you shall go off to St. Louis, or the lead mines, or the gold mines, in California, but I mean for you go at it for the best wages you can get close to home—in Coles County.

Now if you will do this, you will soon be out of debt, and what is better, you will have a habit that will keep you from getting into debt again. But if I should now clear you, next year you will be just as deep in as ever. You say you would almost give your place in Heaven for \$70 or \$80. Then you value your place in Heaven very cheaply, for I am sure you can with the offer I make you get the seventy or eighty dollars for four or five months' work. You say if I furnish you the money you will deed me the land, and if you don't pay the money back, you will deliver possession—

Nonsense! If you can't now live *with* the land, how will you then live without it? You have always been kind to me, and I do not now mean to be unkind to you. On the contrary, if you will follow my advice, you will find it worth more than eight times eighty dollars to you.

Affectionately
Your brother
A. Lincoln



The Husband Who Was to Mind the House

[This old Scandinavian tale needs no presentation. Nor is it as funny as you male readers may think it is.]

Once upon a time there was a man so surly and cross, he never thought his wife did anything right around the house. One evening, during hay-making time, he came home complaining that dinner wasn't on the table, the baby was crying, and the cow had not been put in the barn.

"I work and I work all day," he growled, "and you get to stay at home and mind the house. I wish I had it so easy. I could get dinner ready on time, I'll tell you that."

"Dear love, don't be so angry," said his wife. "Tomorrow let's change our work. I'll go out with the mowers and cut the hay, and you stay home and mind the house."

The husband thought that would do very well. "I could use a day off," he said. "I'll do all your chores in an hour or two, and sleep the afternoon away."

So early the next morning the wife put a scythe over her shoulder and trudged out to the hayfield with the mowers. The husband stayed behind to do all the work at home.

First of all, he washed some clothes, and then he began to churn the butter. But after he had churned a while, he remembered he needed to hang the clothes up to dry. He went out to the yard, and had just finished hanging his shirts on the line when he saw the pig run into the kitchen.

So off he dashed to the kitchen to look after the pig, lest it should upset the churn. But as soon as he got through the door, he saw the pig had already knocked the churn over. There it was, grunting and rooting in the cream, which was running all over the floor. The man became so wild with rage, he quite forgot about his shirts on the line, and ran at the pig as hard as he could.

He caught it, too, but it was so slippery from all the butter, it shot out of his arms and right through the door. The man raced into the yard, bound to catch that pig no matter what, but he stopped dead in his tracks when he saw his goat. It was standing right beneath the clothesline, chewing and chomping at every last shirt. So the man ran off the goat, and locked up the pig, and took what was left of his shirts off the line.

Then he went into the dairy and found enough cream to fill the churn again, and so he began to churn, for butter they must have at dinner. When he had churned a bit, he remembered that their cow was still shut up in the barn, and had not had a mouthful to eat or a drop to drink all morning, though the sun was high.

He thought it was too far to take her down to the meadow, so he decided to put her on top of the house, for the roof, you must know, was thatched with grass. The house lay next to a steep hill, and he thought if he lay a wide plank from the side of the hill to the roof, he'd easily get the cow up.

But still he couldn't leave the churn, for here was the little baby crawling about on the floor. "If I leave it," he thought, "the child is sure to upset it."

So he put the churn on his back and went out with it. Then he thought he'd better water the cow before he put her on the roof, and he got a bucket to draw water out of the well. But as he stooped down at the brink of the well, the cream ran out of the churn, over his shoulders, down his back, and into the well!

Now it was near dinnertime, and he didn't even have any butter yet. So as soon as he put the cow on the roof, he thought he'd best boil the porridge. He filled the pot with water, and hung it over the fire.

When he had done that, he thought the cow might fall off the roof and break her neck. So he climbed onto the house to tie her up. He tied one end of the rope around the cow's neck, and the other he slipped down the chimney. Then he went back inside and tied it around his own waist. He had to make haste, for the water now began to boil in the pot, and he still had to grind the oatmeal.

So he began to grind away. But while he was hard at it, down fell the cow off the housetop after all, and as she fell she dragged the poor man up the chimney by the rope! There he stuck fast. And as for the cow, she hung halfway down the wall, swinging between heaven and earth, for she could neither get down nor up.

Meanwhile the wife, who was out in the field, waited and waited for her husband to call her home to dinner. At last she thought she waited enough and went home.

When she got there and saw the cow hanging in such an ugly place, she ran up and cut the rope with her scythe. But as soon as she did, down came her husband out of the chimney! So when she went inside the kitchen, she found him standing on his head in the porridge pot.

"Welcome back," he said, after she had fished him out. "I have something to say to you."

So he said he was sorry, and gave her a kiss, and never complained again. ▲

Rio Verde

The Employment City

That is how *O Popular*, the Goiânia daily, describes our local town of Rio Verde in bold letters. “Rio Verde has ignored the recession of the last three years. In full economic boom, it ranks as one of the top five municipalities [in the nation] that produce new jobs. Yet, the rapid growth that has increased Rio Verde’s population from 100,000 inhabitants to its present 140,000, brings many headaches.”

The article that follows calls Rio Verde a *Fábrica de Empregos*—an Employment Factory. Today there are 471 industries, which range from *Perdigão* down to small window and door factories and 3,031 business establishments.

When we came to Rio Verde in 1969, the population was something like 30,000. Growth was slow for a number of years. By the year 2000 the population reached 100,000; 2001, 120,000; 2002, 122,000; 2003, 140,000.

There are 13 banks in town, three of which are agencies of the Banco do Brasil, with a fourth one in the making, plus a new bank that plans on soon opening in Rio Verde.

Perdigão today has 4,950 workers on its payroll. This number is constantly increasing. Last week it posted 250 new job openings. The problem isn’t finding people who want work; it’s finding qualified workers. It’s common knowledge that *Perdigão* prefers workers from southern Brazil because of their superior work habits. The *rioverdense*—someone from Rio Verde—doesn’t adapt well to the strict routine of modern industry. Absenteeism is a constant problem. Today there are over 2,000 unfilled jobs, awaiting qualified workers.

Progress always brings problems. Word has spread nationwide that Rio Verde is a mecca for the jobless. The poor flock in hoping to find employment. Many times they arrive flat broke with no money to rent a house, or even to buy food. About all our mayor can do with these approximately 30 poor people who arrive by bus each day, is buy them a return ticket and send them on their way.

Rio Verde today is a vibrant city with a high cost of living. As always happens, crime is on the increase. Even the rural areas feel the side effects of industry. Because of *Perdigão* poultry and hog projects, large, heavily loaded trucks crisscross the municipality. Roads simply aren’t up to all this traffic. For nearly a month we have had rain almost every day and one of the main roads on the Colony is almost impassible.

Those of you who knew Rio Verde ten years ago will hardly recognize it today. There are quite a few high-rises, with a number more in construction. A really modern hotel is to open in March. Out in the country, slowly but surely pastures are being plowed up and corn and soybeans planted where cattle used to graze.

The progress we have just described has resulted in a number of job openings on the Colony. Between 15 and 20 men are working in chicken or hog barns. We have two businesses run by brethren that clean chicken barns and another two that work with earth moving, although not fulltime.

Rio Verde today is a far cry from the Rio Verde we knew 35 years ago. One of the supermarkets is an enormous affair with 21 checkout stands. There are a number of foreign car and implement agencies, which includes John Deere.

For those of us who have spent the better part of our life here, Rio Verde is home. ▲

This & That

São Paulo is celebrating its 450th anniversary. This sprawling megalopolis, with 18 million inhabitants, one of the largest in the world, is the industrial and cerebral center of Brazil.

Recent visitors, most of them folks who have lived in Brazil in the past:

Richard & Twila Mininger

Ike & Rosalie Loewen

Darren Schultz

Stacy & Jeanette Schmidt and children

Errol & Karen Redger and family

Stacy & Corinne Toews and daughter

Jessica and Barbie Dirks

Galen Gables

Walt & Alberta Redger

Darryl & Lucélia Goossen, from Saskatchewan (she originally from Brazil), were here on a visit. They had hoped to return to Canada before their child was born, but due to complications, the birth was premature. Their doctor in Rio Verde recommended they seek advanced medical help in Goiânia, which they did. Fortunately. Little Delano Luiz was in intensive care for nearly a month. After some very anxious moments, and days, he gained enough weight and strength to where he could make the trip to Canada. (Darryl, how about giving us a rundown of some of the highlights of your stay in Goiânia?)

Soybean farmers in Brazil are alarmed with a new disease, Asian Rust, that is hitting their crops. Daily rains and very high humidity are intensifying the problem. In fact, with constant showers, if the prophet Samuel were here, their would be a long lineup to ask him when the weather would hold long enough to be able to spray and have the necessary two-hour period needed for penetration.

Mervin & Norma Jean Loewen had a little girl, Kelsea Joanne, on Nov. 28.

A youth rally on Dec. 31 at the Monte Alegre Cong. This has become a traditional event before our General Annual Meeting on Jan. 1. In the evening there is a special program for the youth. An effort is made, even by youth in more distant congregations, to be present.

The 2004 harvest, which has already begun where weather permits, is calculated to be 7.31% above the 2003 harvest, for a total of 145.4 million tons of grain. The area planted has increased 6.66% over last year and now is 115.5 million acres. As new

areas are continually being opened, there should be an increase in acreage for quite a few years yet.

January is revival month here in Brazil in order to get ahead of corn harvest. Monte Alegre had meetings with Les Isaac and Staven Schmidt; Boa Esperança (Mato Grosso) with Staven Schmidt and Antônio Oliveira; Palmas (Tocantins) with Arlo Hibner and Dean Mininger. Meetings are being held at Rio Verdinho with Larry Bartel and Antônio Oliveira. (It's going to be interesting to see how these two evangelists get along in their respective languages. Maybe they will have to pray for a Pentecost experience.) The Rio Verde Cong. usually has meetings in July, which is when the Brazilian schools have their mid-term vacation.

The 9th General Annual Meeting was held at the Rio Verdinho Cong. this year. In the past we have had an afternoon session, dedicated to reports, elections and business items, and an evening session, in which lectures were given on a chosen topic. This year the agenda of the afternoon session was switched to a morning session. The afternoon session was dedicated to reporting on the General Conference and in the evening we had our usual lectures. The entire meeting was very, very good (as was the noon meal of *galinhada*, another first in this type of meeting). It was decided that next year will be another full-day meeting.

The editor of Brazil News, poor fellow, was all excited two months ago. He finished BN147 in two weeks and began work on 148, hoping he could have it out in another two weeks and then during January put out 149. Well, it didn't work that way. December is always a very busy month in the office. This year it was even worse. My office assistant and his wife, who also helps when needed, both went to Conference. Then the Conference reports came back, which needed to be translated so they would be available for our General Annual Meeting. And then a two-day teacher's rally that consumed voracious amounts of paper, which had to be printed. All this was extremely enjoyable, but BN had to take the back seat. Once things would have begun slowing down, meetings began. I have learned that it's not good for meetings, nor for BN, to try to do both at the same time. So, again BN was put on hold. Now life is back to normal and, *se Deus quiser*, you patient readers will get your issues more regularly. My goal is to have BN back on schedule by the end of this coming November. My apologies for the donkey train delivery of BN, and folks, please don't blame my publisher.

The exchange rate has been quite stable. In the past I have written that the exchange rate is the thermometer that gives a reading on the political scene in Brazil. When there is unrest, the exchange rate normally goes wild. In the past several months, it has fluctuated between 2.80 – 2.95 reals to the dollar. Economists believe that somewhere in the neighborhood of 3.00 is the ideal exchange for our present economic reality.

President Lula has found out it is easier to talk about being president than it is to be president. His big campaign theme was *Fome Zero – Zero Hunger*. There have been nationwide food drives in which a lot of food was gathered. The actual, lasting

Brazil ¹⁶ News

results probably leave a bit to be desired. It is easier to give the hungry a fish than to provide new job openings so that they can catch a fish. Looking at the political situation from a Mennonite standpoint, I feel we have nothing to complain about. Rather, the man whom we feared for many years would become president, is now president, and once again we find it is vain to worry about what the Lord has under His control.

Talking about rain. During the month of January it has rained almost every day.

When this happens, humidity stays in the 90s and everything begins to feel damp. Contrary to the days of old when we first moved here, the rivers hardly come up. We have mentioned before that no-till farming is doing miracles in keeping runoff to a minimum. Crops are needing sunlight badly. If the weather pattern should change and we get some sunlight, there should be another good crop.

The Parmalat scandal has sent shock waves all over Brazil, even touching some on the Colony who were selling milk to the local agency.

Brazil News

Brazil 18 News

Brazil ¹⁹ News

Brazil 20 News

Brazil News

Brazil News

Brazil²³ News

Brazil 24 News

Brazil News

Brazil²⁶ News

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