

# Brazil News

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Editorial

## **Whom the King Delighteth to Honour**

When Ahasuerus asked, “What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?” Haman’s nimble, political mind immediately sized up the situation. He said to himself, “To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?”

In studied humility, he answered the king, “Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.”

Apparently it never crossed Haman’s rapacious mind that the one whom the king would delight to honor could possibly be anyone but he. The thought of touring the city under the circumstances he proposed to the king must have sent shivers of anticipation up and down his spine. His position as second in command to the king would be even more firmly consolidated and in the eyes of the people he would rise to new heights.

(Rise to new heights he did—on the gallows fifty cubits high constructed for the destruction of his archenemy Mordecai.)

Much as we dislike admitting it, and contrary to what humanists teach, Haman encapsulates the depravity of human nature, as described in 2 Timothy 3:2-5, where the apostle describes men as “lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.”

We don’t know how Haman rose to his elevated position in the king’s court. Doubtlessly he was a talented man. He may have been handsome, with a good

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education. He may have been suave and diplomatic. We can only guess as to what kind of a man he was on the outside.

But we don't have to guess about what he was inside. The short book of Esther gives us a close-up of this man who was willing to sacrifice a people to mollify the anger and hatred he felt because of one individual, Mordecai.

We see such behavior as deviant and adjectives such as cruel, monstrous, barbaric seem totally inadequate to describe him. We see despots such as Nero and Hitler as a subspecies of the human race, to which we don't belong.

When farmers prepare to plant their crops, they must decide what variety of seed they will buy. In the case of corn, they must decide between grain and forage varieties, short term and full term, disease resistant strains (which may cost more and produce less) or some other option. The seed they choose will have a direct effect on the crop they raise.

There may be many varieties of corn, soybeans and wheat, but there is only one variety of the seed of sin. Adam, Haman, Nero, Hitler, and you and I, have the same variety of seed deep within us. Contrary to what we might like to believe, the Mennonites don't have an improved variety of seed, less prone to disease. There are no genetically improved varieties of the seed of sin. The apostle says that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

The true Christian today stands out in sharp contrast to the worldling. Statistics indisputably prove the higher standard of conduct of sincere Christians. Judges and law enforcement officers will readily attest to this. May this ever be the witness of God's people.

Sometimes we say that when people from the "world" are converted, their experiences are deeper and they feel a greater admiration for the church. Our explanation is that they have been living in sin, doing things we never did, and that since the change is greater, so is the value they place on their experience and their appreciation for the church.

There seems to be a lot of logic in this explanation, which attributes the difference to the gravity and number of the sins committed. Unarguably, we must repent of sins which we have actually committed. And so, someone who has cut a wide swath will naturally feel a deep appreciation for the pardon received.

If we follow this logic, it must be concluded that the less we have sinned, the weaker our experiences will be—a meager consolation as we look to the future.

Is there a flaw in this logic?

There is.

We sometimes read stories of those whose lives were violently disrupted because of some serious illness. Possibly the doctors diagnosed a tumor, which was surgically removed and life returned to normal, or at least pretty much so. Such a person, who was on the brink of death, feels a deep appreciation toward the medical staff, toward the hospital and toward loved ones for their support during this trying time. All this makes sense.

But let's suppose that a person who feels perfectly healthy goes to the doctor for a checkup. Tests reveal the presence of a tumor in the very initial stage.

This tumor, the size of a pea, or smaller, is just as lethal as the one the size of a

golf ball, or larger, that was removed from the other patient. Untreated, its ultimate effect will be identical to that of the larger one. Actually, this second patient has more reasons to be thankful than the other. First of all, he didn't have to suffer any of the pain the first one suffered. Secondly, the treatment was simpler, less dangerous and less expensive. Thirdly, the prognosis is much better. Fourthly, there is probably no sequela.

We would be disappointed if such a one who received an early diagnosis and treatment would take an aw-it-wasn't-anything-so-serious attitude and show little gratitude for the doctor's diligence and expertise.

It's even more disappointing to see Christians who fail to place the proper value on the "cure" of salvation. They look at the size of the tumor and not the malignancy. They forget that that little tumor they had was identical to the one Haman and Nero and Hitler had.

Haman took for granted that he was the man whom the king would delight to honor, and he felt deserving.

Mordecai, on the other hand, was in the depths of despair. He was on death row with a double death sentence, condemned by imperial decree for being a Jew, and scheduled to die on the gallows for refusing to bow to the king's servant.

Mordecai knew the absolute futility of trying to plead his own case before the king. His every step would be blocked by Haman, his adversary.

And then it happened! Totally unexpectedly, while dressed in sackcloth sprinkled with ashes, the sound of a trumpet was heard outside of his house. Horsemen, soldiers, a chariot pulled up to his doorstep. There was Haman, magnificently arrayed, but pale as death. Without looking Mordecai in the eye, he forced himself to make a short speech. "Mordecai, King Ahasuerus has decreed that you are the man he wishes to honor above all others. Permit me to help you put on this robe...now this crown... Now, I will help you mount the king's horse."

When Haman went home that evening and told his wife about the humiliating experience of walking before the king's horse and proclaiming Mordecai as the man whom the king wished to honor, she immediately grasped the political significance of this happening. In today's language she would have told him, "Haman, you're done for!"

Even though the events of the day freed Mordecai from Haman's scaffold, the imperial death sentence remained. Through Queen Esther's intercession, the king saw fit to set in motion a plan which would, for all practical purposes, revoke the death sentence and cause the enemies of the Jews throughout the land to be slain. A tremendous victory.

In Mordecai we see a beautiful picture of the new birth. He was condemned to death and this weighed heavily upon him. He dressed in sackcloth and ashes. He prayed and fasted. If someone would have asked him if he thought he was the man the king would delight to honor, he would have emphatically responded, "I can't possibly be. I'm condemned to die."

It was exactly this condemned man whom the king chose to honor. Haman, on the other hand, who saw himself as worthy, died on the gallows.

One of the great perils of the last days in which we are living is the erosion of our

feeling of unworthiness. Instead of approaching God in sackcloth and ashes, we put on our Sunday best and hope He will do the rest.

How old does a child have to be before he can feel utterly and totally lost? Before he can feel the full weight of sin and condemnation in his heart? Is it unavoidable that a young child raised in a Mennonite home won't feel the same burden of sin that someone who has cut a wide swath feels?

Try and imagine what this article would be like if we could have interviewed Mordecai personally and recorded his story just as he told it. That's an impossibility, so let's imagine that a 12 year old Jewish boy from the time of Queen Esther comes to your congregation and you ask him to come up front and tell his experience.

"I was living with my parents in one of the most distant provinces. I enjoyed doing what boys my age normally do. Life was great...until one day when a king's messenger rode up on a camel. In his saddle pack he had a large official looking envelope with the king's seal. He called all of us together from our village, and then with great ceremony opened the envelope, removed the paper and began to read. On the 13th day of the month of Adar, we were all to be killed because we were Jews...It was terrible! Everyone began to cry. We all put on sackcloth and ashes and fasted.

"Some talked about fleeing, but to where? The king's messenger made it clear this decree was being sent to all the 127 provinces. So no matter where we went, we would be found and killed.

"As the day of our death approached, everyone talked in hushed voices. What could we do? No one worked. Why should we work? Our mothers practically quit cooking. We all lost our appetite.

"And then, the day before we were to die, another messenger arrived in our village on a sweaty camel. He too produced a large envelope from his saddle bag. He waved it for everyone to see and shouted, 'Quickly! Call everyone together. I have important news.'

"Something in the messenger's voice told us that maybe this news would be good. Sure enough, it was. Instead of being killed by our enemies, the king decreed that they should be killed by us.

"There was great rejoicing. It was the happiest day of my life..."

That was easy to follow, wasn't it? But let's suppose that the boy's story would have sounded like this:

"Well, a messenger came to our village and said something about all of us being killed. So I talked to my folks and they said I should pray. So I prayed and then another messenger came and said we were saved."

(Now there is time for questions.)

"Did you think you would actually die on the 13th of Adar?"

"Yes."

"Were you scared to die?"

"Yes."

"Did you feel the Lord could help you?"

"Yes."

“Do you feel he heard your prayer?”

“Yes.”

“Did you feel happy after the second messenger came?”

“Yes.”

Did you squirm just a little bit on this second experience? If our children are telling that kind of experiences, what is the problem?

When children—or anyone else, for that matter—get converted, they repent of committed sins, not for their inherited sin, which Jesus paid for when He died on the cross. This sacrificial death does not, however, remove the seed of sin, which lies dormant during the early years of innocence.

When God calls someone to repentance, it’s because this seed has germinated... or shall we say, the tumor has ruptured the capsule of innocence and spread through the entire organism.

Conversion is more than coming to God and saying, “Lord, I have a few sins that are needing to be forgiven. I told a lie to my teacher, I hit my brother...” Conversion is realizing that ‘I have cancer! I’m filthy and if I should die, I would go straight to hell.’ Conversion is a feeling of utter despair, the same feeling that Mordecai had upon learning of the king’s decree. Conversion is permitting the seed of faith, which is also present in every human being, to cry to the Lord for help.

Conversion is more than asking the Lord to forgive all our sins. What if he would do that, and only that? Five minutes later we would be sinners again and would need to get reconverted. Again and again and again.

Can a twelve year old understand this? Let’s rephrase that question. Would God call someone who isn’t able to understand his own sinfulness? Hardly. That is what accountability is all about. So if God only calls when the person is able to understand his sinfulness and lost condition, then shouldn’t the element of deep contrition and thankfulness be present in the experience?

It was when Mordecai was in total despair, dressed in sackcloth and ashes, condemned to death, that the king sent his horse, a robe and a crown. That’s the kind of experience we want our converts to tell about. ▲

## Mozambique

by Eduardo Vieira da Silva – Chapter II

### **A Brazilian in Mozambique**

I remember how José told us one day that in the beginning he wasn’t much interested in what we had to say, but that that had changed and now he wanted to know God’s will. He told us that he always read the Bible with his wife and small children. He was quite sickly.

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Another place that we tried to visit whenever possible was a place called Marara, out toward Tete. This is where a man called Augusto lived with his family. Since he worked in Tete, he would come to our services there. It took an hour and a half to get there and I always felt like we were really out in the middle of the wilderness. We tried to plan our trips in such a way that Augusto would be at home. The people there said they liked our way of saying mass.

One thing that I found interesting was that when we would get ready to leave, different ones, including a bunch of children, would climb up in our pickup and begin singing. They would ride with us for quite a while and then they would get off and head back to their village on a shortcut through the jungle. I admired the willingness to see us off. I believe that even with the shortcut they probably had to walk at least five kilometers. When we asked the distance to another place and they said it was “nearby,” I just assumed it wasn’t what we would call nearby.

Now I want to tell you something about our daily routine.

On August 26 we began to close in our backyard. Two men by the name of Luciano and Daniel did the work. Daniel was a young father from Maroeira who showed interest in becoming a Christian. So this for us was an opportunity to become better acquainted with the people from this area.

We built a grass fence around our backyard and the best kind of grass could only be found around Songo, and even there it was scarce. We would go from place to place seeing if we could find some for sale. The worst part was trying to close the deal. Some charged an outrageous high price and others simply wouldn’t stick to their deal, so we would lose our trip. Either they would up their price or they would say that they had been too busy to get the grass around for us. This is where I would get into a tight spot, because I would have to translate the dissatisfaction of both parties. It was slow going and when I left Mozambique, a small part of the fence still wasn’t done.

Fortunately, we received authorization to buy our groceries in the H.C.B. supermarket for three months. In this supermarket they would give us a list of all their goods from which we could choose. Many of the items had a little number off to the side, restricting how many we could buy. We would fill out the order sheet and return it to them. They would figure out how much it was, we would pay, and then they would give us a little token with a number on it and ask us to wait. When they would call our number, we would go to the next room where the groceries were waiting. Someone would come in and double check everything to make sure it was all in order. I still don’t know why they had such a complicated process to buy from them. Even if we purchased only one item, it was a drawn out affair, especially if there were other customers. It was good while it lasted, because it saved us some trips to Tete and we had access to certain products that couldn’t be had in Tete, besides the price being much better here.

In Songo there was a store that sold a lot of imported stuff. Actually, most everything sold in Mozambique was imported. It seemed that each time we went into this store, they had something new, but the prices were outrageous. If I’m not mistaken

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a pound of margarine cost six dollars! The basics weren't hard to come by, but when it came to "give us this day our daily bacon," that is so dear to the Americans, then we had to go all the way to Malawi. Rice and beans were no problem. Being a Brazilian, I was happy with rice and beans every day, although I must admit that their beans were sort of hard to digest. But living with an American family that appreciated Mexican food, we had rice and beans about once a week, together with tortillas.

What I missed the most was vegetables and fruits. In the open market in Songo they only had a few tomatoes, potatoes, onions, cabbage and collards, and once in a while some bananas. We ate a lot of canned fruit and green beans. We never went heavy on "nisma," their staple food, which is a tasteless mush made of white corn. Anything else that is eaten with nisma is known as "caril," which can be beans, greens, dried fish, among other things.

On September 5 we made a deal with a mason to build our little school. The only problem was that he took a trip and never again showed up to get started. Finally on October 4, we managed to hire another mason, who got the project under way. He was a fast worker and we hoped he would have the project finished in two weeks, since he was building on top of an existing concrete slab.

On the morning of the fifth day it was raining. Later in the day the mason showed up with his helpers. They were all stone drunk. Fernando—that's the mason's name—tried to strike up a conversation in English with Jesse. He had learned a little bit of English while working in Zimbabwe, and now, after a few too many, he felt up to the challenge of speaking in this foreign language. He explained that because of the weather it wouldn't be possible to work, but that he would like an advance on his wages. Jesse told him to come back when he was sober.

On September 24, after Jesse got over his bout of Malaria, we went to Tete to get Tena, Mrs. Dennis Toews, and their daughter Marva, to stay with us for a few days while Dennis was in Maputo, the capital, to work on the church registration.

We were having to register the church in Mozambique so that we could get missionary visas. Until then we would have to leave the country periodically, crossing the border either into Zimbabwe or Malawi, to get our temporary visas renewed.

The day we went to get Tena and Marva, it was extremely hot in Tete. Tena suffered a heat stroke and we took her to the hospital. There the attendants insisted on testing her for Malaria before they would do anything else. We knew perfectly well that that wasn't her problem, so we left. By the time we got to Songo, she was feeling better.

Ten days later Dennis came to pick up his family. He got a lot done on his trip, which included getting the runaround in public offices and gathering stacks of documents. When I left for Brazil, everything still wasn't through.

At 4 o'clock in the morning on Sunday, the 12th of October, Carolyn awakened me and said that Jesse was having some bad pain in his lower back. We had a prayer and then went to the hospital in Songo. Here is how Carolyn tells it:

"The side door was open, but there was no one around. Eduardo finally found a

nurse. By this time it was around 5:30 a.m. He put Jess in a room where there were three beds—old metal frames with a foam mattress and very dirty sheets on them...

“They told us they called the doctor. We waited and waited. Finally Jess was so sick he needed to throw up. I looked for something to give him, but there wasn’t even a trash can. So he finally just leaned over the side of the bed and let go...

“Eduardo and I were very up tight because they weren’t doing anything and Jess was so sick. Finally around 8:30 or 9:00 the doctor came. He had the nurses start him on I.V.’s...he left and soon came back with some medicine... After a while his pain began to let up. Then they did some X-rays. I was shocked they had an X-ray machine. The nurse had to take them several times. Finally she asked me where he was sick and where she should put the X-ray on him. I then realized she didn’t know much of what she was doing.

“When I left the hospital later in the day, the nurse had a bunch of X-rays hanging in the small trees outside to dry. I don’t think that’s the proper way to do it. The doctor later told us the X-rays didn’t show anything, but he was sure there was a stone. He wanted Jess to stay overnight so they could keep the pain down and keep him on I.V.s...

“In this room there were two old beds without sheets or pillows. The smells coming from that room were very bad. The room on the other side of the bathroom had an air conditioner. The doctor put a fan in the door so that it would blow cool air into Jess’s room. He was very thankful for that.

“The nurses told me I could bring sheets and a pillow and a fan for Jess. So I went home and got all of that and some food and water...I felt like we were moving in there. The people sure did watch me as I carried in armload after armload...All we could do was trust that God knew the situation here in Songo, the medical help being as it was.”

Carolyn stayed in the hospital with Jess that night.

On Monday, the 13th, Jesse was dismissed from the hospital. That evening Bernardo and his wife, who attend our services, came to pay him a visit. Over here it’s custom to pay sick people a daily visit. Late that night Jesse began to get worse again. Well before daybreak Dennis took him to the hospital again and then went on to Tete to get their passports which happened to be at the immigration office. That way Jesse could be taken to Zimbabwe, where he could get better medical attention. The doctor also recommended this.

When the doctor came in at 10:30 that night, he said we ought to hire a H.C.B. plane. The sedatives wouldn’t last for the duration of the 5-6 hour trip by car on bad roads. So it was decided to go this route. There was some frenetic activity as we arranged for the flight and got our suitcases packed. Dennis was rushing about to get our passports to us.

Finally at 5:30 we were ready to leave for Zimbabwe. Jesse and his family and Marva and I went. I enjoyed seeing the mountain ranges around Songo, the Zambezi River and the Cahora Bassa dam.

Within 45 minutes we were landing in Harare, Zimbabwe. The pilot took Jesse and Carolyn to the hospital.

*To be continued*



## The Poet's Corner

by Dan Peaster  
(Missionary from Patos, Paraíba)

Learning Another  
Language  
If you would like to try,  
To learn a foreign tongue,  
Take this bit of my advice,  
And do it when you're young.

For even then it seems,  
One gets it all mixed up;  
And thinks he might forget the tongue,  
He knew from little up.

Reminds me of a story,  
That once I was told;  
Was about a certain man,  
Who wasn't very old.

His part within a play,  
Which he was to recite,  
Wasn't very long at all,  
But it must be juuuust right.

So at the proper time,  
A signal he would hear,  
"Hark!" he loudly was to say,  
"I hear the cannons roar!"

And when the evening came,  
That the play was brought;  
The young man stood there waiting,  
To say what he'd been taught.

The signal! There it was!  
He nearly fell down flat.  
With bulging eyes he fairly shouted,  
"What in the world was THAT?!!!"



## Remembering Out Loud

### **Kick the Can**

We had company the other night and as some of us sat on the porch talking after supper, I watched a bunch of children play kick the can. Here are some of my observations:

Kick the Can is played here in the middle of Brazil exactly like it was played 50 years ago in the middle of the USA (except that now the “can” tends to be a two liter disposable pop bottle instead of a tin can).

Kick the Can is essentially a ruleless (not in the dictionary, but ought to be) game. Teams aren’t chosen, because there are no teams. Boundaries don’t have to be established, because there aren’t any. (Sometimes bossy adults will yell, “No hiding in the house, ya hear?” I don’t know if you call that a rule.)

Kick the Can requires only two pieces of equipment: a “can” and company. That’s right. You’ve got to have company to play Kick the Can, the more the merrier.

Kick the Can can be played anytime—day or night—and anyplace where there is something to hide behind. So far as where base will be, it’s usually where the one with the can plops it down the first time. That’s where it is from there on.

Kick the Can requires only one decision, and that is who will be “it” first. From then on it’s the one who gets caught three times first.

Kick the Can needs no referee. Seldom, if ever, do adults have to intervene and straighten things out. Kick the Can is a self-regulating game.

Kick the Can has no scores. No one wins in Kick the Can. The littlest girl who sneaks in at just the right moment and sets everyone free can be the heroine of the game.

Kick the Can has no preset time it must be played. It has no innings. When someone gets tired of playing, he simply drifts out of the game. What shuts most games down is when the parents say, “Children, it’s time to go home.”

Kick the Can is one of the simplest games in the world, at least when you take into consideration all the action involved.

By now you good readers from N America are wondering why a guy from S America would be giving you a lecture on Kick the Can. After all, everyone of you has at some time in your life played it, and there’s not a solitary thing I can tell you that you don’t know. If you’re thoroughly bored by now, just skip over to the next article. (Just don’t cancel your subscription to BN.)

It happens I have some English speaking readers from the southern Brazilian states of Paraná and Santa Catarina, and they don’t know how to play Kick the Can. So for their benefit, I will give a rundown of a typical game.

A game of Kick the Can normally starts at the dinner or supper table. Children know the quickest way to get away from the table is to act like they’re not in a hurry. About the time they start wolfing their food down so they can get out to the game,

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some oldster will say, “Slow down, slow down, there’s no need to be in a hurry. We’ll tell you when you can go.” That can lose precious minutes in a game of Kick the Can, so the idea is to eat slowly, act normal, and then at the proper moment, tell the hostess, “Thank you so much for the good supper,” and politely leave the table.

By now someone has produced a can and has placed it at the spot that will be known as base. If no one volunteers, “I’ll be ‘it’ first,” then in a quick confab that only children know how to have, a consensus is reached on who’ll be it first—no nominating, no seconding, no raising of hands.

What happens next depends to a certain extent on whether the one who is “it” is a boy or a girl. A girl will sedately stand beside the can, tightly close her eyes and in a clear voice begin counting: one, two, three, four...forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty! Whoever isn’t ready, holler “I.” Slowly she will look up and around.

Not a boy. He will dominantly place one foot on the can, or maybe hunker down beside it, and begin counting like a machine gun with a stuck trigger. This is psychological warfare. Instead of heading for a previously chosen hiding place, many now are heading for the nearest bush or car or corner. They know that time is short

And then, when our “it” man should be saying “fifteen,” he’s yelling, “Who isn’t ready, holler ‘I.’”

“I”, “I”, “I”. He hears the chorus of “I’s” and has a good idea in which direction he should direct his search. After firing out another quick salvo of numbers, he quickly picks off those who didn’t have a chance to hide properly. “One, two, three on John. Onetwothree on Susie. Onethree on Pete. Onethre on Dan.” (I can’t get over it. They count exactly like we did fifty years ago.)

Trying to look everywhere at once, our “it” man runs to the nearest bush and speeds back. “Onethre on Hank, onethre on Bill, onethre on Mary.”

Now a new element comes into play. Those who are caught know where the others are hiding, so as our “it” man ventures out, they surreptitiously signal to those in hiding that the coast is clear to come in for a kick. They come running from several directions. The one who is “it,” hearing the beating of feet, spins about and comes roaring back to base.

If a sportscaster were reporting the game, his voice would rise to a crescendo: “They’re all running like crazy! On a collision course! They’re gonna hit! They’ve hiiiiiiit! Right over the can! Down they go! Here comes the third runner! He jumps right over that tangle of legs and arms and kiiiiicks the can! That can is going into orbit!...”

Everyone who has been caught is heading out to hide again. And the two who have collided and suspected they were suffering from multiple fractures? A lot of things change in this modern world, but not Kick the Can. When they hear the thud of that can being launched and sailing through the air, suddenly they are both up on their feet, one running after the can and the other into hiding. Not even a Pentecostal faith healer can get someone upon his feet that fast.

Kick the Can gives opportunity for magnanimity. Since it isn’t unusual for one of

the smaller children to be caught three times first, and thus be “it,” one of the older children may offer, “Here, I’ll help you be ‘it.’”

That’s when the fun really begins—so long as the little guy doesn’t hug base and “one, two three” the ones the big one routs out of hiding. Even that is a problem that seems to take care of itself.

It would be nice if all of our world leaders could have played Kick the Can together as children. Think of what our governments would be like if they could have at least a little bit of the spirit of the children who can play for hours on end without rules or referees.

Come to think of it, in the adult world Kick the Can might be a good substitute for Kick the Brother, Kick the Preacher, Kick the Teacher, Kick the System, Kick the Neighbor, Kick the Storekeeper, Kick the...

Long live Kick the Can! (Even if it’s a disposable two liter Coke bottle.) ▲

## Culture

### Customs

A custom is a regional or national habit. Just as habits can change, so can customs.

Let’s notice some Brazilian customs:

Shaking hands. Latins are an effusive people. They will do anything for a friend—and anything to an enemy. Their handshake is wired to their heart. It isn’t a one-time affair, something you do when meeting someone for the first time, or after an extended absence.

There are different kinds of handshakes. Needless to say, there is the perfunctory handshake, given as a matter of courtesy, or even of obligation. This is a quick touch of the hands accompanied by a routine word of greeting. This is the exception to the rule.

Many handshakes are a firm grip and a smile, accompanied by a few pleasantries, such as, “How’s your wife (husband, parents)?” Often they will name these family members one by one and ask how they are.

The real Brazilian handshake includes not only a handclasp, but patting each other on the back, and a profusion of pleasantries. It can be argued that this is all put on. Maybe it is. But to believe that is to close ones eyes to an important aspect of Brazilian culture, which is that they place a high value on friendship.

Beyond the abraço, women give each other three simulated kisses, which actually amounts to touching opposite cheeks—left, right, left (or right, left right).

But all this is changing, victimized by the rapid pace of modern living. When we first moved to Brazil 30 years ago, children would shake hands with their parents before going to school and upon returning. Many would say, *benção* (blessing) and the parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, or whoever, would reply, *Que Deus te abençoe* (May God bless you). I suspect this custom has pretty well died out. Slowly

but surely the abraços are getting less. It remains to be seen if that will make Brazil a better place.

**Informality.** Brazilians are an informal people. Go to their church services, to their weddings, to their business meetings, to their graduation exercises, to their congressional sessions, to any kind of doings, and you will have the impression that they got started without calling the meeting to order. Their concept of solemnity doesn't include quietness and order.

**Dress** is very informal in Brazil, doubtlessly influenced by the tropical climate. The concept of "church clothes" doesn't exist. Faded blue jeans, a shirt with short sleeves and the top two or three buttons open is the most normal thing.

The interesting thing is how quickly people who begin coming to our services adapt to the church standard of order and dress. As they become interested in salvation, this isn't even an issue.

**Pre-dated checks.** It isn't unusual for a business to run an ad in the paper or put up a sign in the front window of the store, saying, 30-60-90 dias no cheque. This means that if you buy, let's say \$120 from them, you will divide that amount by three and make out three checks for \$40. The first one they will deposit in 30 days, the second one in 60 days, and the third check in 90 days.

Most stores have a good supply of little slips an inch and a half square especially for this purpose. The day that the check can be cashed is filled in and then the slip is stapled to the upper left hand corner of the check. Others simply write the date in under the signature.

This custom is deeply ingrained in Brazilian culture. Even in large stores, it's totally acceptable to tell the clerk what you are interested in buying and then, especially if it is a larger purchase, say, "I'd like to buy this item, but I have a problem. I only get paid at the end of the month. If you can hold this check until the first, I'll take it." Seeing his commission is at stake, he says, "Just a moment. I'll see what my boss has to say." More often than not he'll come back with a big smile on his face. The deal is on.

When I opened my store in town some 15 years ago, I soon found it wasn't a good idea to give the bottom price right off the bat. So, following the example of other merchants, I had two prices: a charge price and a cash price. The customer would ask, "And if I pay cash, what would the price be?" And then would come the clincher: "How much time will you give me if I pay cash?" That, folks, is custom at its finest.

**Birthday parties.** Brazilians love birthday parties. Especially in the case of their children, they will spend money they have and money they don't have to put on a gala celebration that no one will forget. Our Brazilian brethren maintain this custom, in moderation and without the carnality found in worldly parties. If you ever get a chance to go to one of these birthday parties, be sure and go. The emphasis isn't on presents, but rather on the food that is prepared. There is variety and abundance.

**Anesthetized Truth.** When you go to the dentist, if what he plans on doing is going to be painful, you expect him to give you a shot of anesthesia. When the truth is painful, Brazilians will usually anesthetize it. Not only do they see nothing wrong with

doing this, but they are often scandalized by the “brutal” way in which Americans tell the truth.

In court procedures in the US, witnesses must swear that they will “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.” Even though we don’t swear, we closely adhere to this concept of the truth (much more so than those who actually swear). We have been taught from small on up that no matter how painful, the truth should be told as it is.

Anesthetized truth is certainly less painful than the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but beside often being untruthful, it doesn’t gender confidence. In fact, in a nation in which practically everyone anesthetizes the truth, people tend to mistrust each other. I can’t help but believe that down deep they appreciate the “painful” American truth.

As Brazilians get converted, this is not a costum that changes overnight. Centuries old customs die a hard death. It’s disappointing when an American asks a Brazilian about some delicate subject and gets an anesthetized answer. This leaves serious misconceptions.

As the Americans become more Brazilianized, it will be a real challenge to uphold a rigid standard of truth, no matter how painful. In the long run, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is the least painful—and it doesn’t take a shot of Novocain. ▲

## Thinking Out Loud

### **The Offscouring**

The word itself has an unpleasant sound to it. Offscouring—something dirty, despicable, offensive, that should have been thrown into the trash and wasn’t.

The prophet Jeremiah uses the term. “Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people.” The apostle Paul also uses the term. “We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.” For centuries our martyr brethren were the “offscouring of all things.”

Do you know what that means?

It means being a social leper. It means being denied the rights of an ordinary citizen. It means poverty. It means being looked down upon as ignorant, as backward, as scum.

Man has an incredible capacity to adapt to unpleasant circumstances. He may lose an arm, a leg, his eyesight, you name it, and be just as happy as before the accident or sickness. He loses loved ones, which pains him deeply, but even his grief can be an inspiration to others. His house burns down, but not his courage. He loses a fortune, rolls up his sleeves and keeps on working. That is the spirit of man.

But folks, it takes more than the spirit of man to accept the life of an outcast. It takes

more than a strong will to remain happy while being a social leper, while being the “offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people.”

There is a generalized conviction that God’s people won’t face another bout of bodily persecution before the end. However, should this happen, there obviously would be losses. I believe though that many would stand up to the test.

But what would happen if we should become the “offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people?” What does that mean?

It means walking into your local parts store and waiting an hour to be waited on, even though you’re the only customer in the store. And then, although you can see the part on the shelf, be told they’re out.

It means always being in the wrong. In a traffic accident, you’re to blame, and so obviously you pay.

It means buying a new appliance or implement, taking it home and finding out it is defective—but not taking it back because you already know that in your case they won’t honor the warranty.

It means a lot of things we can’t even imagine, because they are so far removed from our life.

It means being treated like the poor were treated by a government doctor in San Rafael many years ago, who would ask the trembling patient, “What’s the matter?” After each symptom described by the patient, the doctor would ask, “What else?” When the patient didn’t know what to say anymore, he would write a prescription and hand it over, without a single explanation as to what the problem was. Or if more of an examination was needed, he would order, “Lay down here.” Then would come the prescription. It was heart-rending to see these poor people treated worse than animals.

A number of years ago when we were making plans to go to the US, we had to get visas for our Brazilian children from the United States Consulate in Brasília. For Americans living in Brazil, this is a very routine procedure, so we had our travel agent send our papers in to avoid a trip to Brasília.

We started well ahead of our departure date so as to avoid any last minute problems. But our visas didn’t come and our travel agent was worried. She suggested we go to Brasília and see what was happening.

We left late one evening, planning on driving all night and being at the Consulate early the next morning. But when we got to Goiânia, in the middle of the night, the transmission on the car went out and we had to get it repaired before we could continue our trip. Instead of getting to the Consulate early in the morning, we got there around 2:30 that afternoon. Since it only takes an hour or two at the most to issue a visa, we thought there would be no problem. And we had reason to believe this. The previous official had been out to the Colony, attended a church service, and even gave a little talk. He was in our home for a short visit.

But now there was a new official who knew not Joseph. She treated us, I believe, very much like her ancestors were treated in the US for many years, and at places still are.

She informed us it would be impossible to issue our visas that late in the afternoon

(even though we knew it was totally possible). We explained that we had had car trouble, but she coldly informed us that she wasn't to blame for that. This was on a Friday, we lost our flight to the US and had to spend the weekend in Brasília.

Early Monday morning we were at the Consulate again. This is when the merry-go-round really started. First she objected to one thing and then to another. She wanted to see our marriage certificate. It happened that to get our permanent visa to move to Brazil, we had to get a copy from the registrar's office in Topeka, personally signed by the governor of Kansas, Gov. George Docking. Even this wasn't good enough. She said the signature of the minister performing the ceremony was illegible. (The lady made me promise that if we went to the US, that I would get her another copy of our marriage certificate, which I did. When I took it to her later, she turned up her nose and said, "Oh, I don't need this.")

She played cat and mouse with us all day. Finally, when practically agreeing to give us our visas, she came to the window again, for the last inning of the game. "I know you may think this strange, but why is your adopted son so fair? It's very important that I know." I made the necessary explanations and soon we had our visas.

(An interesting little addendum to this story is the reaction of the waiting room full of Brazilians, also wanting to get visas, who had sympathetically followed our woeful day. When they saw we had our passports with the visas stamped in, pandemonium broke loose. They congratulated us, shook our hands, gave us abraços, and for a few minutes that waiting room was a noisy place, in the best of Brazilian tradition.)

I didn't enjoy this experience while it was taking place, but I have often been thankful for the privilege of being treated—at least in a very small way—as a second class citizen. It was a little taste of what hundreds of thousands of our martyr brethren went through. And who knows, maybe it was a foretaste of what is still awaiting us.

Is this possibility real? Is it possible that before the end we will, as millions of our martyr brethren, become social lepers, without credit or merit, no matter how honest we may be?

It is. In an article some time ago I suggested that the Web may well be the mark of the beast (which I very sincerely believe). If it is, and we don't carry this mark, then it is very, very possible that God's people may again, maybe much sooner than we think, be the "offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people."

Will we be prepared? ▲