

# Brazil News

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Editorial

## **On Usury**

Economical principals are tightly woven into the Old Law. Included are the rights and responsibilities of both the creditor and the debtor. Interestingly, a greater burden is placed on the lender than on the borrower. Oppression through usury is severely rebuked.

Today we tend to make a distinction between interest and usury, justifying the first and condemning the later for being exorbitant. The Old Law doesn't make provisions for non-exorbitant usury. The reason is simple. The law was a schoolmaster to bring Israel to Christ. It was no easy task to prepare a combatant eye-for-an-eye and tooth-for-a-tooth nation for a peaceful reign of love. The ban on usury—exorbitant or non-exorbitant—was intended to teach a beautiful lesson: that the needy brother should be helped because of love and compassion, and not for gain.

Money or goods thus loaned through love, and not for gain, place an added responsibility on the borrower. The spiritual obligation of repaying a "love loan" (in which at times there may not even be a signed document) is even greater than that of making good a promissory note or equivalent obligation made on strictly a material basis.

But that's not what this article is about.

In life we are all both creditors and debtors. Good creditors are usually good debtors, and vice versa. A prime example is the apostle Paul, who, when converted on the way to Damascus, became a debtor to the Lord Jesus Christ. He was fully aware that by all standards of human and divine justice, he should have been struck down by a shining sword and not by a shining light.

It's true that after his conversion experience, the apostle's debt was paid in full. Technically speaking, his sins had been forgiven and he was debt free. He realized, however, that his relationship with the Lord was spiritual and not technical. Thus he

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understood that though he live a thousand years and though his stripes and sufferings were multiplied exponentially, he would still be a debtor. This realization, instead of bringing despair, brought hope and action. Like Moses, whose face shone after meeting the Lord on the mount, Paul's heart shone with the Good Tidings. The debt of gratitude which he owed to the Lord had become payable to the "Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." Not only did he dedicate his life to the repayment of this debt, but his death as well.

That's only half the story. When the apostle began spreading the Good News, he became a creditor to the many souls who heard and accepted the shining message of salvation which shone forth from his heart. His epistles show how seriously he took this responsibility of being a spiritual father to those who accepted the Way.

It is human to forget and divine to remember. At least when dealing with spiritual debts. Never once did Paul forget. Never once did he in anger strike the rock, instead of speaking to it, as Moses, his Old Testament counterpart did. Never once did he take advantage of or abuse his position of spiritual generalissimo in the New Testament Church, as David did in the kingdom of Israel when giving a military order that would send Uriah into the jaws of death. Never was he caught napping, not even at midnight when in bonds in a maximum security cell in prison. Truly, if ever a man lived who could have boasted, it would have been the apostle Paul.

Paul remembered. We can safely believe that he remembered every single day of his life. It's unconceivable that he would have at some especially stressful time said, "Oh, I'm so tired. I'd like to just forget about this for a while." Paul couldn't forget, so daily he tried to help others. And by doing so he became a creditor to many.

Maybe he wasn't a creditor in the true sense of the word, for he of himself was able to give nothing. He only directed the seekers to the fount of living water. Nevertheless he was a creditor. To each one who became a beneficiary of his untiring and unselfish efforts, he became a creditor. Those who were saved through his preaching became his debtors. Theirs was a debt of respect and obedience which they owed to this man who said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

It is here we get another glimpse of Paul's greatness. As he pastored, instructed, admonished and pled, never once did he force his personal views on his followers. It wasn't that he didn't have certain preferences. Realizing what a burden it would have been for him to have a wife in the work which he was doing, and wishing that many more would dedicate all their time and resources to the spreading of the Gospel, Paul states his preference for celibacy, however making it plain that he isn't speaking by the commandment of God.

Because of the revelations seen by this apostle and the time spent on the spiritual Mount Sinai in contact with the Lord, he could have easily slipped in some of his own preferences when instructing his followers. But he didn't. He demanded full repayment of principal on his teachings which he had received from Christ, but adamantly refused to charge interest or usury, that is, to exact payment on his own ideas or personal preferences.

We do well to learn a lesson from this great apostle.

Raising a family is no easy job. We don't usually understand how great a sacrifice our parents have made to raise us, until we have raised our own family. Yet raising a family can—and should—be an enjoyable experience, a blessed experience. But do parents do all this for nothing? Can they expect nothing in return?

Indeed they can expect something in return. Christian parents have every right to expect full repayment of the *principal of the loan* they make to their children. This repayment is not in dollars and cents, or in days or years of work. It is a debt that is repaid with love, with respect, with gratitude. Spiritual parents ask no more. In fact, they often feel they are overpaid when their children love and honor them as they should.

Unfortunately, it doesn't always work this way. Sometimes parents try to collect this debt with interest.

How? By setting social, intellectual or material stakes for the children. Socially active parents would like to have socially active children, intellectual parents would like to have intellectual children, and wealthy parents would like to have wealthy children. It's that simple. And the child feels it. Even though a noble effort is made to pay off the principal of the loan, it can't manage the interest.

Successful parents, socially, intellectually or materially, have difficulty understanding that their children could possibly be happy with less than what they, their parents, possess. Children who could be perfectly happy with less feel this and may actually "go broke" in a failed attempt to rise to their parents standards. They could pay the principal, but not the interest.

We now flip the coin by quoting an African proverb: "We should think of our resources not as having been left to us by our parents, but as having been loaned to us by our children." This beautiful proverb throws the parent/children relationship into an entirely new light. Here the parents become the debtors and the children creditors. To understand better what we are saying, we will paraphrase the proverb: "We should think of our spiritual heritage not as having been handed down to us by our parents, but as something which we should hand to our children." Our fulfillment shouldn't come only through the fact that we have received a great heritage, but more so in having transmitted it to our children.

Children have the right to expect that their Christian parents will train them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord and transmit to them the Faith once delivered to the saints. This is a debt all Christian parents owe to their children.

Most children raised in church homes are aware of the spiritual responsibility their parents have toward them. Even when rebelliously rejecting their counsels, they inwardly admire their parents when they stand firm. Children have every right to expect full payment on the principal of this debt which their parents owe them.

And this is where many children—teenagers, grown children—trip up. They look beyond *what* their parents taught them and concentrate on *how* they taught it. They zoom in on their parents mistakes and fail to understand how much they would have liked to have done better. By doing so they set a standard for themselves they can't

possibly meet. This engenders a deep and offensive ingratitude that often requires a sincere work of repentance for deliverance. Yes, children have the right to expect that their Christian parents will bring them up in the fear and admonition of the Lord, but never to charge interest on that debt by criticizing them for not having done it in perfection.

A similar relationship exists between the ministry and the laity. Leaders can try and collect interest from the congregation by demanding more than the Gospel requires. The laity, on the other hand, can reject good, solid Gospel teaching and preaching on technicalities, that is, by throwing out the good because of real or imagined imperfections. This is one of the worst and most destructive forms of usury.

A challenge the church has been facing in recent decades, and has doubtlessly faced at many different times during the centuries, is dealing with different cultures. This is happening not only on the mission fields, but in our home congregations as well. We must be careful to regard these situations as “challenges” and not as “problems.”

As we deal with converts of different cultures and backgrounds (both at home and on missions) we must be zealous in demanding full payment of the principal as an entrance requirement to the church of God. This means we never compromise on doctrine. The true doctrine of Christ is suited to the Eskimos, to the Zulus, to the New Yorkers and to the Muscovites. One doctrine is suited to all of humanity.

Today we speak of the Mennonite or Christian culture. This we believe, like doctrine, is applicable to all peoples everywhere. We see it as a standard of behavior derived from the Gospel message. Doubtlessly it is—tailored to the North American Mennonite culture. Thus as we prove converts, we get a good feeling deep down when they show signs of fitting into our established patterns. So good is this feeling that we may at times base our judgements on cultural adaptation more than on true adherence to the Gospel.

Here’s an example. The American Mennonite culture places great value on the ability to refrain from being drawn into a heated discussion. To meekly lower one’s head and silently take a broadside of verbal abuse is considered a tour de force of virtue, never mind that the interior temperature has risen to 212° Fahrenheit and that several hours after the encounter half the congregation knows about the terrible injustice suffered.

A missionary returning from Russia reports that most disagreements there result in altercations that can be heard at a distance. Latins have this same tendency. A Brazilian brother with whom I frequently talk on the phone will suddenly interrupt the conversation and say, “Just a moment! I’ve got to get things under control here.” Next I hear a staccato of orders given to his wife and children that would make a veteran drill sergeant feel at home: “Quiet! Can’t you see I’m on the phone? How do you expect me to hear anything with all this yelling? No more of this!” Calmly he returns to his conversation, “...like I was saying...”

I have no doubts about this brother’s spirituality. He actually is extremely affectionate with his wife and children. Yet, if someone would have heard him put on

one of these performances just before he was to tell his experience of conversion in church, we would probably have used that as a reason to ask for more time.

This is unfair. We talk about the Russians and the Latins, but North Americans do the same thing when they are quite sure no one is in hearing distance. They are, shall we say, more discrete in their hollering.

It is so easy, after someone from a different culture has paid the full price, the principal, on church doctrine, to feel obligated to charge some interest. Especially in our local setting we feel uncomfortable with someone who seems perfectly content to live in a “substandard” house with no screens on the windows or doors. The flies which contentedly enter and exit the house put just a little question mark on the dwellers’ spirituality. If it wasn’t for those annoying flies it would be easier to accept their experience.

Once again turning the coin, it is truly a sad experience when those who have come to the church from a different culture, or are interested in coming, constantly see the imperfections of those who have brought them the Gospel. This is a serious defect. At the best it is a spiritual retardant, and at the worst leads to spiritual disaster.

The teacher/student relationship could be discussed, as could many others. But it isn’t necessary. Just remember: When we charge our brother usury he often ends up defaulting even on the principal. ▲

## Our Trip

### **Haswell, Colorado**

Haswell, Colorado is just a little dot on the prairie, some 20 miles west of Eads. This is where my wife’s family held the Burns reunion. It was there I had the pleasure of meeting Mark & Julie Kelly.

Mark has a scar all the way around his left wrist, proof that his hand was completely severed in a wood splitting accident. They told us the story during lunch and then Julie sent a copy of their Christmas letter, in which she relates what happened. Following are some excerpts.

“It’s not often that you hear about a miracle and even less often that you are a witness of a part of that miracle which God has chosen to show us lowly humans that He is still in control of this world. Let me set the stage for you so that you may rejoice with us on the miracle God worked on Mark in 1998.

“Since 1986 our family has gone to Mt. Ayr, IA, to our friends, the Meesters, to cut a supply of wood for winter heat. While there we cut enough to heat two households for a year, and maybe two—a lot!

“We were cutting the last trailer load which had tree trunks cut in 24 inch pieces. They were heavy enough that it took two men to carry them to the log splitter.

“It was late Saturday evening after Thanksgiving and we were to head home the

following morning. We would be pulling a trailer loaded with two horses and some firewood. Mark wanted to finish splitting the wood that night yet after he and Jay had finished working on the trailer brakes. That way he wouldn't have to get dirty the next morning before leaving.

“We were almost done when it became too dark to continue, so we used the tractor and pickup headlights to light up the area. We had quite a system going. David, 14, rolled the logs to the back of the trailer. Kelsey, 9, sat on the splitter running the hydraulic jam. Jay and Mark carried and stabilized the logs during splitting. Gary, a friend of ours from Colorado who had come along to help, was behind the splitter and removed the logs after they had been split. I, Julie, was behind the splitter, also helping remove the split logs and hand them to the children, who in turn would pass them on to Pat, so he could stack them in the barn.

“We were clicking right along and hurrying to finish. To speed things up, sometimes the jam was not returned the full slide of the cylinder. Then it happened. Mark was still arranging a log when the jam was unexpectedly released. It shot forward and neatly amputated Mark's hand.”

“We lost no time and immediately jumped into the pickup that had the motor running to charge the battery because of the headlights being on and headed to the hospital emergency room five miles away. Pat ran to the phone and dialed 911 so that the hospital personnel would know about the emergency.

“This is where the miracle begins. Jay was driving the pickup. I was sitting in the middle, holding Mark's detached hand and supporting Mark, who was tightly clenching his left wrist with his good hand. I began praying aloud. I prayed for strength and faith to face the trial that we were facing. I asked God to be with the doctors who would be taking care of Mark. As I prayed our hearts were filled with peace and the calm assurance that everything would work out for the best.

“Mark slumped against me once and at first I thought he had passed out from loss of blood, but when I asked him if he was okay, he replied, ‘I'm fine. I just know without a doubt that I'm going to be okay and that God is in control of everything.’

“The hospital had already been notified of the accident and the doctors and nurses were waiting when we arrived. They took care of everything while we awaited the arrival of the Flight for Life helicopter from Des Moines (about 90 miles NE of Mt. Ayr). The first thing the rest of us did while we waited was probably the most important thing in this entire episode. We got on the phone and called—our prayer chains. Within 15 minutes of the accident, many different ones were already praying for us.

“Mark never lost consciousness during this entire time. When the helicopter got there, he was asked if he wanted something to knock him out. Jokingly he said he didn't, that he had never flown in a helicopter before and that he wanted all the frills possible.

“The emergency technicians were so impressed by our attitude that they began to ask questions. We explained that the Lord wants only the best for us, so who were we to tell Him what is best. When Mark got to Des Moines, the Meester minister who lives

one hour from there met him and had a prayer before he went into surgery. By now it was two and a half hours since the accident.

“When Dr. Quenzer introduced himself before the surgery, Mark asked him if he was the doctor who was going to give him a *hand* with the problem that he had. To say the least, Dr. Quenzer was an answer to prayer. We later learned that he was the top hand specialist in this area that is known as “Amputee Capital of the USA” because of all the farm accidents, and he just happened to be on call. Mark would be in surgery for nine hours while they reattached his hand.

“Mark told me before he left on the helicopter, ‘You can’t fly with me and won’t be there when I am taken into surgery, so go back to Jays, have something to eat, take a shower and get packed before coming to Des Moines.’ So that is what I did. I was amazed at how he was totally in control of the situation and able to make logical decisions. Jay and Gary took me to Des Moines.

“Everyone was tremendously impressed how that Mark’s fingers had full circulation within the first 24 hours of the accident. (They measured his circulation by placing temperature probes on the ends of his fingers that were protruding from the cast.) He had lost almost half of his blood. Part of this he lost during the accident, but most of it during surgery, when they had to let the blood flow so they could properly reattach the hand. They also placed a metal plate on the top of his wrist to keep the wrist stable.

“The second surgery was Monday night, in which they harvested a nerve and a vein out of his left ankle to repair two nerves and a vein in his hand. They also had to repair some tendons in the thumb that had ruptured. This surgery took four hours. Dr. Quenzer told Mark that it was such a pleasure to work with a major tragedy with such a promising outlook. All too often there is very little then can do with lost limbs, but the doctor says there is a chance for an 80-100 percent recovery. The nurses at Iowa Methodist were so excited about how well things were going. They asked if they could share Mark’s testimony in their church.

“The next miracle came two weeks later in Colorado Springs when he was examined by specialists. Dr. Hart removed the cast and took X rays of the hand. Because of the limited success in limb reattachments, everyone wanted to see what was going on.

“When they began doing therapy on Mark’s fingers, he already had feeling in the palm of his hand and on the back. Dr. Hart said there was no possible way for Mark to have feeling there. He explained that it takes *at least* one month just for the nerves to reattach and then they only grow one millimeter per day. It should take six to eight weeks for there to be any feeling at all. They ran more tests three days later, which was 19 days after the hand was completely severed and he definitely had feeling. The doctors said there was no medical explanation for this.

“Mark and I can explain. There was more than the surgeon at work that night in Des Moines. Jesus Christ himself suffered the agony of hanging from the nails driven through the palms of His hands, and who but the one who created the intricate hand could repair such a thing? Yes, Christ may work through doctors, but the knowledge must come from Him and there are still these unexplainable

miracles that the medical profession will never understand until they can talk to the Lord face to face.

“If there is one thing that Mark wants to say to all of you, it is this: Don’t put off giving your life fully to Christ. Accidents happen within a twinkling of an eye. This time it was only a hand. Next time it could be a life. Is your salvation secure? If not, now is a great time to get right with your Savior. Mark has a hand now that will forever remind him of what Christ suffered on the cross. Instead of nail holes, it will be stitches.”

Thank you, Mark & Julie, for sharing your story with us. During lunch I asked Mark about the expected recovery of his hand. In answer he extended his hand and asked me to grip it with mine. He gave me a firm clasp. Further proof of his recovery is that he is a trucker. I asked him if he used his hand for driving. He almost look surprised at my question. He drives normally. ▲

## Jake Wedel

*(Following is an excerpt from a short biography of Jacob H. Wedel, written by his grandson, Stuart Wedel, from rural Canton, KS.)*

Grandpa was born in 1880 near Moundridge. It was while living near the Lone Tree church that grandpa lost his right leg, probably about 1917.

They were shelling corn, using a Fairbanks Morse stationary engine. Apparently the belt started running off the pulley. As he kicked it to get it back on, the belt caught his foot and pulled his leg into the pulley. According to the account, he reached over to the engine stop and switched it off.

Two of his children, Clarence and Orlan, about ten or eleven years old at that time, took him home on a wheelbarrow. Someone, probably Grandma, called to P.P. Johnson to come with his car. This car was the only one in the community. P.P. Johnson took him to Halstead.

If medical science had been as advanced then, as it is today, they probably would have saved his leg. As it was, gangrene developed and they had to amputate it above the knee. Grandma was very much against this. He was fitted with a wooden leg. This leg took a lot of maintenance. When they had the work caught up, or there was a rainy day, he spent a lot of time repairing his leg. He wore out three legs, which he had to get in Kansas City. ▲

## The Black Hills

When in South Dakota where two of our married children live, we made a quick trip to the Black Hills. Mount Rushmore was impressive, especially the presentation given in the evening, which culminates in the lighting of the faces. Chief Crazy Horse’s unfinished monument is impressive, but not inspiring. Wall Drug (the Free Ice Water



place) may not be all that it is cracked up to be, but it definitely merits a stop. (Once you do stop they feel they merit some of your money, and they have, oh! so many interesting things to spend it on. So go prepared.)

Really, really good are the hills themselves. There are 1,500 buffalo in Custer State Park. As we were coming through, several hundred of them decided to cross the highway. All traffic stopped as these bison, ranging from new calves to ponderous bulls, leisurely meandered between the cars. One cow decided to raise some dust by rolling on its back in a dry wallow. Just that quick its calf decided to follow suit.

The buffalo are in superb health. They are shaggy, as bison typically are, but not scraggly, like so many that are held in captivity. As I watched these buffalo head into a nearby meadow, it felt like we were having a rerun of a scene from some 150 years ago, or more. If some Indians would have come sneaking out of the woods with bows drawn, I would hardly have been surprised. ▲

## Brazilians Über Alles

*(Those last two words aren't Portuguese. They're German—now part of the English vocabulary (look'em up)—and mean "above everything else.")*

We spent the night in Hill City, SD and the next afternoon we took the train to the nearby town of Keystone. It costs 15 bucks per adult for a two hour roundtrip, but it's worth every cent of it to ride in a train drawn by a steam engine. The engine used that day was a small 2x6 (two guide wheels and six drivers) steamer. It pulled four cars. Ours was a vintage coach built in 1900 in its original condition—actually very good.

As we went up the mountain we went slower and slower and slower... and the huffing of the engine got louder and louder and louder. Unlike internal combustion engines, a steam engine retains full torque at just a creep—and creep we did in a truly authentic and inspiring rendition of "I think I can...I think I can...I think I can..."

All of the children on our little entourage were Brazilians, except one (and he too is a Brazilian at heart). In the best of Brazilian tradition, they soon had a real party going on the train, with other passengers amusedly looking on. The conductor, a man for all occasions, would come by and savor the festive air. Finally he sat down on the end of the seat and said, "I guess I'm going to have to charge you children double. You're enjoying yourselves too much." He spent some time with them teaching them a new trick or two that he knew.

Seeing these children make a party out of a trip brought back memories. I remember the time Jake Loewen and I took the cog train over the mountain from São Paulo to the port city of Santos. A number of young men were sitting together and once we were underway, they broke out a flask of wine they had smuggled aboard. Constantly on the lookout for the conductor, they smilingly passed the flask around and each took a swig. Then seeing us, in a demonstration of genuine bonhomie, they offered to include us in their circle. Jake and I declined.

It's an unforgettable experience to travel with a planeload of Brazilian teenagers. The moment the seatbelt signs flicker off, or even before, they are out of their seats and forming groups here and there, often blocking the aisle. As a rule they don't become rowdy, but simply have a good time.

A Brazilian would never make it in Russia. A missionary reports that on public transportation people sit in morose silence, doubtlessly a carryover from the days when the secret police permeated every segment of society. This mentality has created difficulties for missionaries, whose work is exactly to speak with people. ▲

## McPherson McDonalds

I had a most inspirational experience in the McDonalds restaurant in McPherson, KS. I hasten to assure my readers it wasn't the food that was inspiring. I was working on this issue of BN in my Dad's basement and needed a quick meal, so Faith and I went to McDonalds.

We were still standing in line when someone came up from behind and placed his hand on my shoulder. I turned and it was a brother, now in his eighties, whom I have known as long as I can remember. We chatted a bit and he said he was baby-sitting for his six year old grandson, who was playing in the children's section. The grandfather said, "Oh, I have never heard such noise in all my life!" He then returned to be with his ward.

Some time later I looked through the glass window separating the main area from the children's section, and there was grandpa, oblivious to all the noise and jumping and running, reading the *Messenger of Truth*. On his way out with his little grandson he stopped at our table. "Oh, what a noisy place!" he exclaimed again, only to add, "But I got almost the entire *Messenger* read."

That same evening my Dad took us to Wendy's in McPherson for supper. While seated there a seventyish woman came in, all decked out like a cowgirl. From her cowboy hat down to her cowboy boots with her jeans tucked in, she was Western. My dad says she eats there a lot and has an endless wardrobe of cowboy costumes.

Before the woman could actually sit down to eating her meal, she got up a number of times and strutted to the front of the restaurant. I'm not sure what for. Did she forget something? Or didn't she want others to forget she was there?

As I sit here I compare these two elderly people, one masquerading as a cowgirl, the other charging his spiritual batteries in a noisy playroom, I wish I were an artist. I would divide the canvas in half. On the left side I would paint the cowgirl and on the right the brother reading the *Messenger of Truth*. The caption would be: "How do you hope to end your days?" Then every time I heard of a young Christian growing weary, saying it just isn't worth it, I would send them a copy of the painting. My message would be the caption: "How do you hope to end your days?" ▲

## Thirty Years in Brazil

### Four Periods

The 30 years of the Mennonite settlement in Brazil can be divided into four periods.

#### 1) Conviction and uncertainty.

The first several years on the Colony were strenuous, to put it mildly. Let's notice some of the difficulties the first settlers had to face:

*Isolation.* South America is a big, big continent and Brazil is a big, big country. Relatives, friends and congregations were thousands of miles away. Communications with the "homeland" bordered on prehistoric. Telephone service was nonexistent. A reply to a telegram sent could take four or five days, or more. A reply to a letter could easily take a month. At times we suffered from the "snowed in" syndrome (when too many people are confined to too small a place for too long a time).

*A new climate.* The climate in our area of Brazil is considered subtropical, very different from the temperate zone in North America which we were accustomed to. Farmers discovered that just because the weather is nice almost the year around doesn't mean crops can be planted arbitrarily.

*A new culture.* This is a subject in itself. Suffice it to say that while we had many happy surprises, some were less than happy.

*A new language.* Self-explanatory.

*New farming techniques.* This was a tremendous challenge and I tip my hat to the brave farmers who faced the odds and came out on top. The machinery they used was light years behind what they had been used to in N America. No one had ever farmed the *cerrado*, relatively flat ground with few trees and very low fertility. To become productive, expensive lime had to be trucked a hundred miles or so on craterlike dirt roads. Fertilizer was exorbitantly expensive. The only crops planted on a semi-commercial basis were rice and corn. No one had ever tried soybeans, wheat or milo. Indeed, there wasn't a market for soybeans. The first soybeans produced were fed to the pigs because the freight to get them to market would have been more than what buyers would have paid for the grain. It wasn't easy.

In retrospect one wonders why the settlement didn't fold up in its early years. There's an explanation: Conviction, good solid conviction

We can talk long and loud about the difficulties we faced and the mistakes we made, but quietly we can say that deep, sincere conviction overcame the odds. The conviction that the move to Brazil was of the Lord and would be seen through by the Lord was stronger than the obstacles faced.

#### 2) Challenge and hard work.

After the initial several years during which the main activity of adjusting, looking for open doors, and living off of a rapidly dwindling stack of dollars being held in N America for an emergency, the time came in which it became evident that with hard

work we would be able to make a living. What a challenge! Land had to be cleared, stumps dug out, brush gathered up, termite mounds knocked down, lime spread. It was *all* hard work.

Living conditions during this period were still very primitive. There was no electricity, except for some small generators usually run only in the evenings, no phones, and no modern conveniences. Many of the families lived in a medium sized shed that had one end partitioned off into living quarters. While always looking forward to living in a real house, I believe those families remember those times as the good ol' days.

### **3) Comfort and routine.**

The hard work paid off. One by one the families moved out of their sheds into comfortable homes. Electric lines came snaking their way through the Colony. The only generators left are for standby purposes. Almost everyone has a phone. A good highway comes through the Monte Alegre end of the Colony and the Jataí highway goes past Clifford Warkentin's place at the other end. The roads on the Colony have been graded up and graveled. The horse, the horse and cart, the bicycle, the jeep and the VW bus have practically disappeared from our church parking lot.

Materially, no one doubts if a living can be made in Brazil by farming. We often say that our area has the best climate in the world for farming. Many of the latest technological advances are announced in Brazil at the same time as in N America and Europe. True, our machinery isn't quite as advanced, but we are not that far behind anymore, and especially so now that farmers are going no-till.

Our local stores don't have the variety of goods yours in N America have, but we're narrowing the gap (and I'm not even sure if that is good). Even so, our shelves are sufficiently well stocked so that we can have a very comfortable living.

Life in Brazil has slipped into a definite routine. No longer is it an adventure, as in the beginning. No longer does it take the arduous work it took in the beginning. No longer do we wonder if we'll be able to make it, like in the beginning. Shall we say, the challenge is gone?

### **4) Today and tomorrow**

In meeting different ones here in the US, I repeatedly hear the question: "Is it true that there is a lot of unrest on the settlement in Brazil?"

No, it isn't true that there is *a lot* of unrest. Yes, it is true there is unrest. There would be different explanations for this unrest, but we'll just call it a "middle age" crisis.

Middle age is often the most stressful period in ones life. Until this point, everything has seemed possible, including taking up a new vocation. Middle age is a time when a new reality begins to sink in: "What I'm doing today is what I'll probably do the rest of my life. Is this what I want?" If any changes are going to be made, they will have to be made fast.

We spoke of the conviction of those who moved to Brazil. Most of these pioneers

brought children with them when they moved, or had children in Brazil. Obviously these children had no conviction to move to Brazil. They have grown up and today are staring middle age in the face. As they think about their children someday getting married, they ask themselves: Is this where I want to spend the rest of my life? Is this where I want my children to live?

Bonding is “the formation of a close personal relationship (as between a mother and child) especially through frequent or constant association” (AHD). Cultural bonding would be *the formation of close ties with the people and customs of a country*. When we move to another congregation, even a neighboring congregation, a certain bonding must take place. Happiness in marriage can not be obtained unless husband and wife are bonded together, which incidentally takes more than saying “I do.” Unless we bond with our children, with our spouse, with our congregation, and with our culture, something, someplace, will be out of balance in our life.

The unrest felt in Brazil is not exclusively a middle age syndrome. It is felt in children too, children who were born to Americans in Brazil but have not bonded with their birth country. The question is: Should someone who doesn’t enjoy living in Brazil be forced to live there?

A “John the Baptist” theory has surfaced, according to which *we*—the Americans—must decrease so *they*—the Brazilians, can increase. Proponents of this theory point out that Brazilian leadership has not developed as it should have, and that we, the Americans, are the ones standing in their way. There may be truth to that. The proposed solution is that the Americans put up a “Mission Accomplished” sign and get out. This presupposes that the American culture is incompatible with the Brazilian culture.

This is an important issue that we today are facing in Brazil. We do hope that anyone moving away from Brazil will do so because of conviction, and not for lack of conviction. ▲

## Questions & Answers

### **The Best Question (And Others)**

You will remember that we offered a free one year BN subscription to the reader who came up with the best question. We have come up with a number of excellent questions. The one chosen was asked by Orville Koehn, from Canton, KS.

*Would the Rio Verde area have developed regardless of the Americans?*

We Americans are actually given more credit than we deserve. To this day we are heralded as the ones who brought progress to the area. It’s true that the land we bought was considered worthless when we moved to Brazil. It’s also true that back then tens of

thousands of acres of land like ours could have been bought for several dollars an acre.

There were people back there who owned five thousand acres, or even ten thousand, and were considered poor. That is the value the people placed on the *cerrado* type land we bought.

I think that most locals thought we were crazy. Many years before we moved to Brazil some Italians purchased a large tract of land right near to what is now the Colony. I understand it was a potpourri of butchers, bakers and candlestick makers, all anxious to farm. As can be imagined, they went broke with a splash. Everyone expected we would follow in their footsteps.

There is a firm conviction that the reason we settled in the Rio Verde area is that the cloud stopped there. There is really no other explanation. If those involved in the purchase of the original plot would have spoken fluent Portuguese, or even tolerable Portuguese, and could have asked intelligent questions about the *cerrado*, I wonder if we would have settled there. So if we take the credit for having made a wise purchase, we are actually ignoring the cloud.

How long would it have taken until Brazilians would have broken up the *cerrado*? One can only guess. Maybe ten years.

Whether it's five or 10 or 15 years, one thing is sure. Since we first settled 30 years ago, tens of thousands of acres of land have been cleared and transformed into A-1 farm ground. Through this all something interesting has happened. The Americans used to be the undisputed agricultural leaders in the region. It wasn't that the Americans were such extraordinarily good farmers, but rather that the local farmers did such a very poor job. The locals, I might add, were often sons of the land owners who had hung onto their land, or at least part of them. The Bible says you can't make a leopard change its spots, and folks, you can't make a farmer out of someone who isn't a farmer. Period. Those locals flat weren't farmers.

So what has happened? Many of the locals have sold out to farmers from southern Brazil. Now that's a different story. Some of them farm thousands of acres and use technology that's just right off the griddle. Today we can learn from these farmers.

Is it good or bad that we are seen as the ones who hit the start button for agricultural development in the Rio Verde area? It's probably good. It is felt that we have made a contribution to the development of the region, which has done wonders to offset the negative attitude that is often held toward foreigners.

*Do your young folks all have opportunity to farm?*

It's getting more difficult. Quite a few on the Colony are renting land from non-Mennonite neighbors. In a few cases it works out quite well. All too often it's an unsettling situation in that land owners will seldom give more than a three-year contract. To invest in lime to bring the pH up, bring the production up, and then have to give it up isn't a real appealing proposition. This is especially true for a young man trying to get into farming. He simply doesn't have the means to build up someone else's land, and then lose it.

What especially complicates things for young men is that the banks have absolutely no financing for purchasing land. And if they did, it wouldn't be feasible because of the very high price of land on the Colony.

The most obvious solution is to move to an area where there is cheap land for sale. But even this can be complicated. Unless there are other farmers living there who can help set up a solid infrastructure, the venture will hardly take off.

What we have just said may look a bit bleak, but let's remember that Mennonites are resourceful people. They don't have the habit of throwing in the towel just because there are some obstacles in the way.

*What is the average wage... for carpenters, for mechanics, etc.?*

This is a painful question to answer, painful because there are a lot of really good masons, carpenters, mechanics, equipment operators, etc., who are making between two and three dollars an hour. We're not talking about flunkies, but of dedicated workmen. It isn't fair when their employers are living in mansions and driving late model cars. Until this distortion is corrected, Brazil will never join the club of industrialized nations.

Wealth, like manure, must be spread to do any good. The wealthy man who exploits his workers will buy only one refrigerator, one stove, one automatic washer. But if he ups the wage of his hired men, they may well decide to upgrade their appliances and 20 new refrigerators, 20 new stoves and 20 new washers will be sold. Maybe more, maybe less, depending on the amount of employees.

Of all the evils of Latin American economies, this is possibly the greatest.

*Do you have any ordained Brazilians in your congregations?*

It's a real pleasure to answer this question. We received word that both a minister and a deacon were ordained in the Pirenópolis congregation on July 9. Just to refresh your memories, this congregation is made up exclusively of Brazilians and is located less than a hundred miles from Brasília, the capital.

The brother ordained to the ministry, Antônio Gonzaga de Oliveira, is 36 years old and makes his living garden farming. His wife's name is Raquel.

Ordained to the diaconry is Sebastião Maria de Sá, 34. He makes his living by managing a restaurant. Sebastião's wife's name is Zezé. BN #50 has an article about their wedding.