

# Brazil News



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Editorial

## **God Has No Pets**

We say that all men are equal, that God is no respecter of persons, and that He loves everyone equally. But way down deep, it's a concept we have a hard time grasping. We would like to believe that if we were sitting in a restaurant where all of mankind was represented, and Jesus walked through, He would stop at our table and chat just a bit, and maybe pat us on the shoulder. Then He would walk on. Occasionally He might smile or briefly wave at someone else.

Others would notice that in spite of our plainness, there was something special about us. It would be gratifying.

People with whom we deal give us credit for our honesty and good work habits. Often we are given special treatment because of this. This should be taken as a tribute to our religious principles, and not as a personal achievement.

Obviously not everyone is given this preferential treatment. For us it can be truly devastating to be treated like "anyone else."

Over the years we Americans living in Brazil had excellent relations with officials in the American consulate in Brasília. But one day there rose up an official who knew not Joseph. Then we were no better than anyone else. Our word lost its buying power. Where yea and nay once were sufficient, documents were now demanded.

It's frustrating, to say the least. Yet for us such situations are usually transitory. We look forward to the day when things will change for the better. Which, it seems, they always do. But for the majority of the inhabitants of the earth, this hope doesn't exist. As a Brazilian writer says, "Their hope is stillborn."

One of the most puzzling stories found in the Bible is that of John the Baptist. Let's notice his credentials:

He was "filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb."

## Brazil <sup>2</sup> News

He was Jesus' second cousin. The angel told Mary, "Behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son."

Even as a child his greatness was recognized by men. They said, "What manner of child shall this be!"

His mission in life was to go before Jesus "in the spirit and power of Elias."

He practiced strenuous self denial, living "in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel." His clothes were "raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey."

He was a powerful preacher, "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins."

He baptized Jesus, the Son of God, "to fulfill all righteousness."

Now comes the part of John the Baptist's story that is hard to understand. After being imprisoned by the king, he sent Jesus a message. In essence he asked, "Am I suffering for a worthy cause?" That's all.

Can you imagine! If ever anyone qualified to be God's pet, it would be John the Baptist. He could have written, "Dear cousin, what have I done to deserve this damp, squalid prison . . .?" He could have said, "Every day you help people who have never done a thing for you. I'm sure you can help me, your forerunner, your helper, your admirer . . ." Or even, "What do men say when they find no effort is being made by my 'friends' to get me out of jail . . .?"

Stranger yet, after getting John the Baptist's terse message, Jesus didn't say, "How terrible! We have to get my cousin out of jail." Neither did He say, "It isn't right for a man like John the Baptist to be in jail. He has been a very useful man. I'm sure he can do more for us."

None of that. We know the answer, which in essence was, "John, you're suffering for a worthy cause."

We believe that John the Baptist got the message and shortly thereafter died a happy man. In jail.

Where did we get the idea that God has pets? That some deserve better treatment than John the Baptist? Better than the martyrs?

What about Zion, the apple of God's eye? Doesn't it hold a special place before the Lord? Absolutely. Not only special, but also exclusive, in that it has no rivals. To be part of Zion is the greatest honor that can be bestowed on man. But face it, the most faithful member in Zion is not God's pet.

When a Haitian ferry sank offshore and hundreds of lives were extinguished, among them several dozen of our members going to a national church conference, we were speechless. Pastors, leaders, stable men and women, perished along with everyone else.

When a missionary loses a child or a spouse while on duty – and because of duty – we grope for words. For explanations.

When the only pastor of a struggling congregation loses his life in an accident, we numbly accede God's ways are best, but admit we don't understand.

That we should feel we have a special rating with the Lord is quite understandable.

This is a predictable consequence of modern living. Epidemics that a century ago still ravaged communities, countries and continents, indiscriminately annihilating saint and sinner, have been vaccinated into oblivion. But the idea that individuals or groups engaged in spiritual activities are immune to death or accident is continually refuted in the Martyrs Mirror. Indeed, it was exactly the leaders, the most faithful, who were highest on the hit lists.

No, God had no pets in the past.

A pet believes he deserves special attention. And liberties. Had John the Baptist considered himself to be Jesus' pet, he would never have landed up in jail. What ailed him to tell the king his marriage was out of order? Why make that his business? Why not leave sleeping dogs alone?

The prophet Amos pronounces a woe on "them that are at ease in Zion," or could we say, on those who believe that being a citizen of Zion bestows status.

If Stephen had been at ease in Zion, he would have never been stoned.

Paul had an impressive list of credentials, but he counted it all as dung. Had he watched his words just a bit more, he could have saved himself a lot of problems (stripes, stonings, shipwrecks, hunger, cold . . .) No, Paul decidedly wasn't God's pet.

Why is it we try so hard to be? We thank the Lord for quiet, peaceful lives. To a point that is good. But what would have happened if John the Baptist had kept his mouth shut, stayed out of jail, and then thanked the Lord for a quiet, peaceful life? What if Paul would have kept his mouth shut? And Peter?

Peter didn't consider himself a pet. Remembering his past, he felt a normal crucifixion would be too good for him. Paul said he was the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called by that name, because he persecuted the church of God.

A pet: Someone who feels worthy of special treatment because of real or imagined merits.

Heaven will be filled with people who felt their unworthiness during this life – who know the last thing they deserved was to be a pet. ▲

## Linguistics

### **Why Interpreters Sweat**

I don't know if the chemical makeup of perspiration changes from one type of exertion to another. If maybe some kinds of sweat are nobler than others. But should that be the case, I would like to suggest that the beads of moisture exuded by interpreters rank high in nobility.

To begin with, an interpreter is a nuisance, an intruder, a rude reminder of Babel. Like a garden hose that restricts the flow of water, so interpreters restrict the flow of a delivery. Some more, some less.

But even knowing that there will be a reduction of pressure, hoses are used to water

gardens. Likewise, knowing interpreters are an imperfect solution, they are nevertheless used to transmit messages.

In over 25 years of interpreting (first in Spanish and then in Portuguese), I have managed – or rather, others have managed – to keep my sweat glands unobstructed.

Most public speakers can eventually get used to speaking through an interpreter. A few simply cannot. And for a few it comes naturally.

One problem is that interpreting is done differently on different fields. On the Navajo missions, speakers are expected to keep talking until they have expressed a complete thought, which may take a number of minutes. The interpreter then translates what has been said into the native language, likewise taking a number of minutes. The reason for this, I am told, is that the Navajo language is so structurally different from English that many times it is impossible to interpret phrases, as they have no equivalent expression.

Judging by the treatment erstwhile missionaries from Africa give us, I suspect they say a real mouthful there before the interpreter kicks in. The closest I ever came to speaking in tongues was during a sermon I interpreted for one of them.

For you to appreciate my agony (or ecstasy?), I interpose here that in Brazil we use the “one breath” method of interpreting. That means that a speaker should never say more than his interpreter can process in one breath. Often this means stopping at commas, and not only at periods. One real plus to doing it this way is that the facial expression and gestures of the speaker can be followed and understood much easier by the listeners. Furthermore, Portuguese is a rich language and even the shortest phrases usually have an equivalent expression.

Speakers assume that when the interpreter stops for a breath, he has the green light to step on the gas. When phrases get too long, the interpreter unconsciously reacts by greedily inhaling all the air he can get and then gushing out as many words as possible before his lungs go flat on him. The result is often a rapid, emotionless translation that begins with fairly good volume, but ends up as an almost imperceptible croak.

Now back to the time I almost talked in tongues. The brother for whom I was interpreting is an excellent speaker. He has a lot to say and talks fast to get it said. As I stood beside him on that memorable day, the moment he let out the clutch, I knew I was in for it. I talked fast, but before I finished, he was hard at it again.

In Mexico there is a lot of overlapping between speaker and interpreter. This is an art. The interpreter must be able to make his voice heard above the speaker’s voice when they are both talking at the same time. Here in Brazil this doesn’t work very well simply because part of the listeners understand only the English and others only the Portuguese. So we steer away from overlapping.

There we were. I thought that if I talked just a bit faster, it would be possible to squeeze everything in. But it didn’t work that way. Sensing I had stepped on the gas, so did he. So I went even faster. And so did he. I went faster yet. And so did he...

I think that brother probably has me chalked up as the greatest interpreter of all times. We were both doing 120 m.p.h. in a 60 m.p.h. speed zone. Things were going so well that he hardly even slowed down for me to interpret. I'm sure the Brazilians had no idea what was being said. I doubt if the Americans did. Not even I knew what was going on anymore. Had there been a Pentecostal present in the meeting, he would probably have felt that at least one Mennonite was finally seeing the light.

It isn't usually this kind of a situation, though, that makes an interpreter sweat. It's when the speaker gets up and with gusto announces, "Tonight I feel to speak about . . ." The interpreter tenses up. Then it comes, ". . . our besetting sin." That sets the stage for a sermon and a sauna.

In the English language, and I suppose especially in Mennonite circles, the besetting sin, taken from Hebrews 12:1, where it talks about laying "aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us," is household language. It has a deep and impressive meaning. These same two words in the Portuguese Bible, however, come out in a cumbersome o pecado que tão de perto nos rodeia.

Obviously the North American speaker can't be blamed for not knowing that besetting sin isn't a household word in Brazil. And the interpreter can't be blamed for sweating.

Love and charity in Portuguese are amor and caridade. At first glance it would appear that there would be no problem in interpreting a message on these two virtues. But there is. I have mentioned at different times that both the Catholics and Spiritists put a tremendous stock in good works. The popular word for good works is caridade – charity. So ingrained is the idea that charity – good works – will take one to heaven, that we simply steer clear of talking about charity. Instead of talking charity, we talk about love. In fact, our Portuguese Bible doesn't use the word charity either. First Corinthians thirteen uses love all the way through.

Quite often it's possible to simply substitute charity with love when interpreting without working up a sweat. But then there are the cases when the speaker says, "Now, there's a difference between love and charity . . ." Sometimes it's possible to do what a well-known Brazilian diplomat calls a "constructive translation," that is, to add or subtract a little to get things straightened out and avoid confusion. In this case it would involve saying, "In English charity means . . ." I don't know if people always get the point, but at least it gets the interpreter off the hook.

I got caught on one just recently that so far as I know has no solution. We interpreters have hashed it over time and again, but can come up with nothing suitable. It's the term, "I'm sorry." As used in the English language, "I'm sorry" has a profound meaning. When spoken sincerely, it means, "I have done wrong; I wish I would have never done it; and I desire to be forgiven."

More than a linguistic problem, the absence of an equivalent of "I'm sorry"

in Portuguese reflects the religious background of these people. After wronging someone, the idea was to go to the priest and say, “Father, I ...” This possibly clears the conscience. “I’m sorry” clears the heart. A case where a word makes a world of difference. And what a headache for the interpreter.

Casual. Casual living. Casual dress. Casual conversation. That will send shivers up and down the spine of an interpreter. When one of these terms is used by itself, we can manage. But when the emphasis is on casual – casual this and casual that – then we sweat. (What did preachers in N America say before “casual” came into vogue? Surely they had a different word.)

One of the worst situations is when the speaker makes a play on words. This was the case when during a sermon the speaker said, “I’m going to tell a story about two bears.” The unsuspecting interpreter (not me – fortunately) cheerfully translated, “Vou contar a história de dois ursos.” Beautiful. “Their names are Bear and Forbear.” Poor interpreter. The hue and expression of his face plainly showed how unBearable the situation was. Call that the Brazilian version of the Story of the Three Bears, if you will – Bear, Forbear and unBearable.

Sooner or later an interpreter hears this one: “Tonight I want to talk about a little word with just three letters.” The speaker holds up three fingers. Interpreter: “Esta noite quero falar de uma palavrinha de apenas três letras.” Speaker: “S-I-N. Sin.” (The speaker continues with three uplifted fingers.) The interpreter must now figure out how to turn P-E-C-A-D-O into a three letter word.

The “single eye,” as described in Matthew 6:22, is another rough one. In Portuguese, “if therefore thine eye be single,” reads as, “Se os teus olhos forem bons,” – that is, “If therefore thine eyes be good.” Since stopping the speaker and telling him that what he is saying is untranslatable can really mess up a sermon, the translator at times must resort to a literal translation, even knowing it doesn’t make a whole lot of sense, and hope that the wind will begin blowing from a different direction.

If there is ever a time when an interpreter wishes he could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, it’s when interpreting for a speaker who has memorized a lot of songs and poetry and knows how to weave them into his sermon. It is exactly these masterpieces that get the worst treatment. Not only do I feel sorry for the interpreter in these situations, but especially for the national listeners who have to content themselves with picking up a few crumbs from the floor.

Now let’s turn the coin over. Interpreting isn’t all torture. In fact, the situations we have described are the exception and not the rule. A good interpreter can switch to auto pilot and meditate on what he is hearing. This is especially true when interpreter and speaker have worked together quite a little.

A good interpreter should never upstage the speaker. Theatrics must be guarded against. And yet there must be conviction. There must be feeling. Like a good garden hose, he must transmit the message with as small a loss as possible.

All interpreters at times sweat. But it’s worth it. ▲

## A Brazilian Story

by Mário de Moraes

### **Faithful Trovão**

Trovão means Thunder, and is the name of the dog Mário de Moraes tells us about. The main character has the nickname of Chico Cachaça. Chico is short for Francisco and Cachaça is home-brew. Obviously there is a reason for such a pejorative name, as we will soon see.

Chico was a drunk. He was so far gone that when he was under the weather, he didn't respect anyone, not even his friends. Finally no one wanted to be around him anymore. Every night he would stumble into his little one room shack and drop down on a crude bed, the only piece of furniture he had to his name. When he would get up, the sun would be high. He would do odd jobs to keep himself in liquor. And when he didn't have money, he seemed to always be able to find someone who would buy him a drink. Such was his life.

Then one day Chico became the talk of the town in Salvador. Few believed what people were going around saying.

But it was true. Chico Cachaça no longer drank. One day when he awoke when the sun was high, lying on the sidewalk in front of a bar, a dog was sitting nearby, watching his every move. With difficulty, Chico managed to get up. He leaned against a wall for support for some time and then went lurching down the street. After he had walked several meters, the dog began following him.

Noticing he was being followed, the drunk tried to drive the dog away, but it wouldn't take the hint and stayed right behind him.

Seeing the dog wouldn't take no as an answer, Chico Cachaça decided to take him on as a friend. Finally arriving home, the man flopped down on his crude bed and just that quick was dead to the world. But not the dog. At the slightest noise his ears perked up, keeping watch over his new involuntary master.

This was the beginning of a remarkable friendship. From there on the dog and his master were inseparable. Where you saw one you would be sure to see the other. And strangely – miraculously – Chico quit drinking.

Anxious to forget his woeful past, Chico moved to the town of Entre-Rios, in the interior of the state of Bahia. Naturally, his canine friend was at his side. Here he got himself a job and made enough money to purchase a small plot of land. Then he married a local girl.

Time went by and one day he was happily surprised to find out that their family would be growing. As the time drew near, he and his wife, riding a donkey, made their way to Salvador, the capital of Bahia. Now a man of principle, he, Chico, wasn't about to have his wife bring their first child into this world in the little town where they lived. He had saved up enough money to be able to take her to a hospital in Salvador.

The baby was born. Impatient to get back to work, Chico soon had his wife and the baby on the donkey and they were on their way. As can be imagined, Trovão was at his master's side through all this.

The trip from Salvador to Entre-Rios was hard on Chico's wife and she was quite sick by the time they got home. The only solution was to saddle the donkey and head back to the capital. The doctor felt she should be hospitalized. Chico had no objections, but refused to let the baby stay there. In his primitive reasoning, he seemed to fear that even the baby's life would be in danger if left in the hospital.

Soon he was headed back to Entre-Rios, together with the baby and Trovão.

Chico was thirsty and when they got to a small stream, he decided to get a drink. He dismounted and carefully placed the child in a little bush, and then went on down to the stream. He had just begun drinking water when Trovão began barking wildly. He appeared to have gone crazy. It was almost dark and from where Chico was he couldn't tell what was going on – and he lost his mind too. Ever since the baby was born, Trovão had been acting differently. He seemed to be jealous of all the attention the baby was getting. And worse, the dog was hungry. There was the poor baby, totally at its mercy.

Without a second thought, Chico drew his revolver and fired. The dog went down without a sound.

In several leaps Chico was beside the child. There he had the surprise of his life. The child was unharmed. And beside the body of his dead dog was an enormous fox.

The fox was dead too, lacerated by Trovão's sharp teeth. Indeed, Trovão was his faithful friend to the end.

## Brazilian Brethren Write

### **God Proves His Love**

[Maria de Fátima Tavares Barros is the first chapter of a now lengthy story. Well over 20 years ago her husband, Jerônimo, got a job with Enos Miller, while he lived across the river from Daniel Kramers.

They had been married but a short time and things weren't going especially well between them. Then one day when out swimming in the river with Enos' girls, she almost drowned. This experience left a lasting impression on Maria.

After working for Enos for several years, they quit and Jerônimo worked at different jobs. Life wasn't easy. They lost a child and their marriage was shakier than ever.

But something stuck with Maria. In spite of – or because of – all these problems, she was able to find the Lord and become a member of the Church of God. A number of years later her husband followed her. Today they are faithful members in the Rio Verde Congregation.

Through her faithfulness, Maria's grandparents (both gone), her mother and one



sister, an aunt, a cousin and her husband and daughter, were also converted. Through visits paid to Jerônimo and Maria when they lived in Goiânia, where he drove a city bus, contact was made with another couple who got converted, and whose two children are also converted.

The following article, written by Maria, I have translated from *O Mensageiro*, where it was first published in issue number 10, of February 23, 1985.

Jerônimo and Maria have three children.

Maria talks about having to get a *guia* from the INPS to be able to see the doctor. The INPS is the governmental agency that supposedly supplies everyone with free medical services. Except for emergencies, authorization from a central office – called a *guia* – must be secured before going to see the doctor. In the past this often involved getting in line the evening before and spending the night on the sidewalk to be there early in the morning to get the *guia*. In Maria's case, she had to get up before five in the morning to get in line.]

When I was reading *O Mensageiro*, I felt to relate an experience that took place shortly after I became a Christian.

Shortly after I was baptized, I began to have doubts. I began to wonder if I was really worthy of my baptism. Had I really been honest in the answers I gave the church?

But in all this turmoil I heard a voice that said, "Trust in the Lord. He will take care of your problems." So I decided that the best thing I could do would be to pray and place everything in His hands.

What I really wanted was to be sure God had really accepted me and that my sins were all forgiven. I wanted to know if I was worthy to be part of His people. I asked God to send me a sign that I was really a Christian.

Shortly after this one of my boys got sick with a high fever. I had to take him to the doctor. Since most of us here in Brazil depend on the INPS to be able to see the doctor, I and my sick son had to be in line by five o'clock in the morning. At eight o'clock I was still in line. It wasn't easy since he weighed about 25 pounds and had rested very little that night.

Finally I got my *guia* and when I got to the doctor's office, it was nearly 11 o'clock. The doctor prescribed a shot for my son, which I would have to buy in a drugstore. But to do that I would have to return home and get some money first. I had to walk quite a ways to be able to catch the city bus. Then I had to wait another 15 minutes before the bus showed up. It was now past noon. I was hungry, exhausted and sleepy. When the bus finally showed up, I got on as quickly as I could and sat down, anxious to be able to rest a little.

Once I was settled down, I rummaged through my things to find my wallet, where I had money to pay for my bus fare. You can imagine what I felt like when I discovered I had lost my wallet with all of my documents, my bus fare and the prescription. My little boy was feeling worse all the time.

At the next bus stop I got off and walked back to the drugstore where I had showed

them the prescription and gotten a price on the medications. I thought maybe I had left my wallet there, but didn't find a thing. Then I went back to the bus stop. I did this three times. By now I had no strength for anything and had no idea what to do. The only thing I could think of was to pray. I didn't even have money to be able to catch another bus and go home.

I was on Avenida Presidente Vargas, Rio Verde's main avenue. So I simply stopped, bowed my head and said a little prayer. It wasn't easy because people were constantly going by, but I saw no other solution. When I finished my little prayer, I heard a voice say, "Keep calm. Wait for the next bus, which will be the one you took before. Your wallet is in that bus."

All this took place in front of a store that belonged to an Arabian merchant. He had been watching me and knew that something was wrong. He offered me a chair, so I sat down and told him what had happened.

He said to me, "Lady, take this money. Take a bus home and get some rest." But I couldn't accept his offer because I felt God had told me where I would find my wallet with my documents and the prescription. So I thanked him for his offer. I told him that I had prayed and that God had asked me to wait for the next bus, because my wallet was inside. I could see the man thought I had lost my mind, that I was so tired I was becoming delirious. The merchant said, "Lady, if you lost your wallet in the bus, somebody has picked it up long ago. With people getting on and off all the time, it's impossible that it's still there. Lady, I'm telling you, your wallet isn't in that bus anymore."

But I was sure that my wallet was still in that bus. To this day I am amazed when I think about this happening. So I said to the man, "If you don't mind, I'll just stay sitting here until the bus shows up."

He tried once more, "Lady, take this money. Otherwise you'll be stranded here."

In about 20 minutes the bus arrived. As I placed my foot on the bottom step to get in, I saw my wallet on the second step. I was so happy I didn't know how to thank God enough. I quickly went up to the window and showed the Arab my wallet so that he would know that God had done exactly what He promised.

This experience to me was proof that I was really a child of God and that He loved me. I took that as a sign that my conversion experience was real.

I hope that this little experience can be an encouragement to others. ▲

[Maria just sent me another article to print in O Mensageiro. Lately she has been having serious health problems, and yet here is what she has to say:]

## God's Protection

Lately I have thought a lot about God's protection. So I decided to write to O Mensageiro.

I have been a Christian for many years and can testify that God has protected me through each day.

Sometimes my courage is low because of the battles and struggles of life. But then God draws near and lovingly comforts me: “Stop and look at the victories you have had. Even though you are small and undone, I still give you my love.”

He revives me through the messages I hear, through my spiritual brethren, and even by things my neighbors and relatives say.

When I am in my backyard watering my plants, I feel God’s love and my soul is at rest.

When God corrects me, when He scourges me, like we read in the Bible, I can feel it is because of His love.

He delivers me from Satan’s clutches. When I feel the enemy is about to destroy me, God comes to my rescue and lovingly rescues me.

Many times it isn’t until I have come through some great struggle that I realize how dangerous Satan really is. Through these experiences I see how once again God has been my helper.

I am so weak when I face the struggles and temptations of life, and I believe that is why I suffer so much. But with God’s love and protection, I am striving to serve Him. I ask for your prayers that I can have faith in God and understand that He can protect me all through life. I want to learn to live in God’s grace until my days on this earth are finally ended. ▲

## This Month on the Colony

### **The Rains Have Come**

Yes, the rains have come. Corn was planted, possibly in record time. Because of being so late in the season, some are going right into soybean planting with hardly a break.

But the rains are by no means as steady as farmers had hoped. They are still quite scattered. In 37°C (99°F) weather, the small plants are showing signs of suffering. ▲

### **Cellular Phones**

Progress does strange things to people. On November 8, the company from which we bought our cellular phones came out and began testing to see what kind of tower, if any, would be needed for the phones to be installed. The first stop was at the literature center.

The testing was done with a special mobile phone. Because of being approximately 30 kilometers from the nearest tower, the phone had poor reception at ground level. So Stephen Kramer, the tract office superintendent, suggested they crawl up on top of the thirty foot metal water tank and try out the phone.

When I came out to see what was going on, there were the two of them perched on top of the tower, like a couple of crows, with Stephen jabbering away with someone in Goiânia about a tract order. I understand the reception was fabulous. I just hope the responsible boards don't decide to install the phone up there permanently. I can just hear someone yell, "Hey Charlie, you're wanted on the tower of babel."

Anyway, on November 10 our cellular will officially go into service. By the end of the month everyone who has bought a phone on the Colony should be talking. Next months BN will have a listing of the new numbers.

Our phones will be base units. At least part of them will have an external antenna attached to the eaves of the house, or maybe even to a tower, for those living down in the valley.

Including mobile units, there are presently 400 thousand cellular phones in Brazil. It is expected that by the end of this decade there will be five million.

Prices are still high by US standards, but are coming down. A mobile unit runs between 600 and a thousand dollars. Our base units are costing US\$1,780. ▲

## This Month in Brazil

### **Rio de Janeiro — Problems on the Morros**

A morro is a hill or small mountain. The city of Rio de Janeiro is built in amongst the hills. The city proper is built on the flatter terrain. The hills, conical and very steep, are unsuitable for normal construction. As a result they turned into mammoth slums, where the poorer class stair step their houses (if you can call them that) up the hillsides.

Because of the difficulty of accessing these morros, drug lords saw them as the ideal place to set up their operations. The upstart was that each morro was taken over by a rival gang.

By no means is the problem confined to the morros in Rio. The problem is that both the civil and military police, as well as the local and state authorities, are directly or indirectly involved, to the point where when they do take action, it frequently is an act of revenge that comes closer to being gang warfare than an actual attempt at eradicating the drug traffic.

On these morros the drug barons have become the law. On their home turf and heavily armed, they regard an invasion of their territory as a infringement of their sovereignty. Ironically, those living under their jurisdiction feel safer than if they were to depend on the police. (Read "Life on the Morro," in BN num. 38.)

It has been known for quite some time that things were out of hand in Rio. It was the recent election that brought things to a showdown, when it was found that congressmen were elected by fraudulent voting.

President Itamar Franco decided to send federal troops into Rio to restore order. Little did we in Goiás dream that even we would feel the repercussions of this decision.

The Comando Vermelho, a highly organized terrorist group that operated on the morros decided to show what it can and will do if it comes to warfare. On the same day that two banks were assaulted in Goiânia, a Brink's armoured truck was assaulted between Rio Verde and Goiânia. As a result the military has set up roadblocks on all the main highways and is stopping all vehicles. According to the paper, and the people who have been through these checkpoints, they go through absolutely everything in the vehicles, looking for arms and drugs. Above all, they are looking for suspicious looking characters who might be part of the Comando Vermelho. ▲

## Solar Eclipse

On November 3, Brazil witnessed what could well be its last total solar eclipse this century. The next one is scheduled for August 2, 2046.

The eclipse was total only in São Paulo and states to the south. In Goiânia it was 67%, so the Rio Verde area must have been about the same. Even not being total, the day became perceptibly darker and the sun rays cooler, until it was just as cool in the direct sunlight as in the shade.

Apparently eclipses are an important event here in Brazil. I haven't talked to anyone yet who didn't see it. ▲

## Culture

### We Weren't Prepared

In 1988, Manchete magazine ran an article on the American Colony in Rio Verde. The reporters tried to show the strong influence that our religion has on our social and economic activities.

A young woman living on one of the morros in Rio read the article and decided she would like to learn to know us personally.

Placing her few belongings in a bag, she and her two year old child set out for Rio Verde. At least part of the way they hitchhiked.

Eliana had been on drugs. Her deliverance, some months prior, she attributed to an experience she had with the Lord. I believe she was sincere in what she told us.

She made no secret of the fact that some days the tug of the old taskmaster was almost unbearable. A sincere effort was made to help her pull through her struggles and live as normal a life as possible.

Eliana is an intelligent person. Her cultural level is such that she could easily fit into the Mennonite society. And I believe she wanted to.

Drugs are a terrible thing. Eliana knows far better than any of us what they do to people. She lived on the morros long enough to know all about it. After she had been

with us some time, the day came in which the old tug became stronger than the new tug. And we weren't prepared to deal with that one.

I noticed that professionals who work in drug programs would very diplomatically try and tell us to not get our hopes up very high. One, however, made no effort to be diplomatic. He mercilessly ticked off the different problems encountered in dealing with someone who is on drugs. Especially one item he kept coming back to: "Their specialty is creating division, turning people against each other."

Before we knew it the Colony was in a turmoil. Not only were we divided on whether she was sincere or not, but, like the man from the drug clinic warned us, our feelings toward each other became somewhat less than charitable.

This was unfortunate. And yet, now that the dust has settled, I believe we can glean some real lessons:

God's grace is everywhere. His grace is present on the morros, where Eliana made her decision to serve the Lord. His grace is present in the slums, in the jungles, in the most far-out churches. We today have spiritual brothers and sisters who are living proof of this fact.

There is no place on the face of this earth where God doesn't call man from darkness to the light. Together with this call there frequently comes the realization that a change of heart will also mean a change of address. But not always.

And it is exactly here that we sometimes mess up God's plan. As we find out about these cases, we try to help the new convert (or potential convert), which is good. We "try to put ourselves into his shoes," but it happens that very little in our background has prepared us for what we are stepping into.

Our first reaction often is to exclaim, "Oh! He (She) has to get out of there. Immediately. It's impossible to be a Christian in a place like that." For us it would be impossible. We forget that the same Holy Spirit that called them to repentance, also has power to point the way, to tell them if they should go or stay. Instead of tactfully asking if the Spirit has given direction, we assume this responsibility and tell them what to do. Recognizing our superior spirituality, they take our word as gospel.

At the other end of the spectrum is the hands-off approach, in which it is assumed that if a soul is really sincere, his love for the truth will not only lead him to repentance, but also teach the rudiments of Christian living and possibly even direct him to God's church. So why should we get involved?

Both attitudes are flawed.

For the kind of people we are talking about, coming to the truth is commonly a traumatic experience. Things get bad enough to where life no longer seems to be worth living. Desperately, eyes are lifted heavenward in one last attempt to find an answer, before calling it quits.

In all the confusion and shouting and squalor, a new life is brought forth. A preemie.

The birth in itself is a miracle. Survival, an even greater miracle. We don't know what the infant mortality rate is, but we believe it is high.

Such preemies need special attention. Possibly an incubator. And as everyone knows,

a preemie is taken to the incubator, and not the incubator to the preemie. But also, as everyone knows, the stay in the incubator should be as short as possible.

And that's what this article is all about. This is where we goof up.

We, the medical staff in the pediatric ward, become unprofessional with our patient. Instead of preparing the patient for life outside of the incubator, we prepare the incubator for the patient. We make it bigger and bigger until the first thing we know our preemie is playing hopscotch and eating ice-cream cones in the little protected world we have created.

We must never transform incubators into rest homes. We must be open to the thought that maybe Jesus is saying to our patient, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." Let us hesitate to say, "Oh, but you can't go back there. You'll never make it."

A word of caution. Some times we hire someone who later has an experience of conversion. By no means are we suggesting such a one be fired. Nor should we refrain from hiring a new convert if they are able to offer us services which we need, so long as the job isn't a front to get them into our personal incubator. And if someone is actually homeless, we have every right to offer them food and shelter.

"For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me."

May we never forget these words of Jesus. Nor let us forget that He also says:

"Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." ▲

## **This & That**

October 12 is Children's Day here in Brazil, so the board from the Monte Alegre

School served ice-cream cones to the teachers and students.

The Mark Loewen family is spending six weeks in the States.

In the Monte Alegre School district, the parents and grandparents take turns, alphabetically, having devotions on Wednesday morning. This year it is suggested that some night during that week the same family also have the teachers over for supper.

Carman Loewen, the Colony well driller, drilled a new well for John Unruh. Lots of water.

On the 6th, the Rio Verdinho youth took supper to John & Alma Penners and spent some time singing before church.

On the evening of October 20, the Monte Alegre youth went to Rio Verde and sang at different places. Then they had supper at the Panelão Restaurant.

Eduardo Silva, 18, and Franklin Coblentz, 16, son of Sam & Erma Coblentz, the missionaries from the Patos, Paraíba mission in the Northeast, are spending

## Brazil <sup>16</sup> News

approximately a month here. Eduardo is getting a good taste of what Colony life is like and Franklin is helping work his grandpa Dan Coblenz' land. Dan & Clara plan on getting here the 10th, hopefully with their permanent visas.

Several long awaited adoptions have finally come through: Marsha Ann, Tim & Deanna Burns' daughter, and Bruce Dean, Bradley & Joleen Koehn's son. More on this next month.

Alfrieda Martin is spending some time in Canada with her dad.

Dan Kramer and daughters, Becky and Elizabeth were out from Sorriso, Mato Grosso, for a couple of days.

Cam & Deb Goertzen, the missionaries in Goiânia, were out for a few days with his parents, Henry & Verna Goertzen. When Henry came into my office, the first thing he said was, "This is the place where you have to be careful what you say." Fortunately that didn't keep him from talking and in just a half a shake we were deep in conversation. Henry has a story that needs to be told – in a book. You folks who know him, gently encourage him to get the facts on paper.

Paula Schultz, the school teacher from the Goiânia mission was out for a few days.

Glenn Hibner and son Roger are spending some time in Mato Grosso planting crops.

Sherilyn Yoder is now aiding in the Monte Alegre School.

November 2 is our Memorial Day, and naturally, a holiday.

Emma Burns took advantage of the holiday and invited her grandchildren to come over and help make Christmas cookies.

John Unruhs and Lester Holdemans paid the Leo Dirks family a short visit on the weekend of November 5th.

Susan Schmidt (whom many of us learned to know when she taught in the Rio Verdinho School several years ago) is now in the mission in Bangladesh. We got ahold of some of her letters. I tip my hat to those missionaries. For them the basic necessities of life are luxuries. I hope Susan's letters keep drifting down in South America.

For some reason monkeys have been showing up in strange places. Or rather, monkeys have strangely been showing up at unexpected places – at Stanley Holdemans, at Daniel Holdemans and at Glenn Hibners. I am told that Roger Hibner caught the monkey in their pine trees and exiled it on an artificial island in the middle of a little pond the Hibners made near their house. It supposedly escaped Alcatraz and swam to freedom. If any of you folks living here in Brazil see hide or hair of it, please let Roger know. It's the monkey with a tail.

An anonymous note in decidedly feminine handwriting found its way to my desk:

"That was a nifty article that you wrote in BN about the new addition on our church building and about the ladies using the entrance as a place to 'park.' Indeed I have felt sorry for the men various times. But there is another problem that I hope this new addition solves. When we go to church and get out of the car to head into the church, where are we supposed to walk? I thought a sidewalk was made to walk on, but there are usually some youth boys 'parked' there visiting. So either we detour



## Brazil News

around them or mumble ‘Excuse me,’ and hope to somehow get through . . .” OK, youth and men from the Monte Alegre Congregation, the women cleared out the entrance, so let’s clear up the sidewalks.

There is a good chance the government will soon permit used cars to be imported duty free. It’s past time.