

# Brazil News



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Editorializing

## **New Wine and Old**

We no longer drink a bit of wine for our stomach's sake – nor for any other reason, for that matter. This act of going the second mile with the adherence to voluntary abstinence can be attributed to divine wisdom.

Thus, comments on the difference between new and old wine must be based on what has been read, not on first-hand knowledge. Possibly the most succinct description is found in Saint John, chapter 2: “Every man at the beginning doth set forth good [old] wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse [new]: but thou hast kept the good wine until now.” We tend to limit the miracle performed in Cana of Galilee to the transformation of water into wine. But, there is more. What resulted, by all scientific specifications, should have been grape juice, and not high quality aged wine.

To make a short story even shorter, aged wine is much more desired and costly than new wine, which brings us to what this writing is about.

Have you ever tried to imagine what our church services would be like without singing? Without a single song? (Did Quakers sing?) If you can't imagine what it would be like, no worries, it is unimaginable.

What would your life be like if you couldn't sing or hum a tune while washing dishes, driving your tractor or your truck? Or driving to work in your car or pickup?

So, what about those who can't carry a tune (like yours truly)? Again, no worries. Some songs have only the Almighty as a listener. Others – many, many others – are sung in unison, usually with listeners present. I happen to be one of those listeners. When we don't open our mouth to sing, He opens our heart, especially wide, to listen, and record. Possibly hours, days, weeks, months, or even years later, the Almighty hits the Play button and our heart rejoices, and often is instructed and inspired.

All old songs (read as: old wine) were at one time new songs (new wine). A few,

## Brazil News

very few, go through a miraculous process, like the wine of Cana of Galilee, and are immediately aged. (We cite many of the memorable hymns of Fanny Crosby.) Those are musical miracles, seldom repeated. Most songs must go through an aging process before reaching the respectability of old wine.

In Cana of Galilee it was considered a flagrant affront of social etiquette to serve the good wine when now tipsy guests would be satisfied with an inferior drink. The ruler of the feast believed that good wine should be served only to those who would truly appreciate its superior quality.

The songs we sing, like wine, can be classified. And, in what arguably is more than a mere coincidence, the older songs tend to have greater inspirational value than those that are popping up like popcorn in a microwave. These are the “Juicy Fruit” songs. They are eagerly snatched up, vigorously chewed, praised for their wonderful taste, and then spit out, as more packets of gum hit the market.

Knowing mankind’s ability to misunderstand and misconstrue, I want to make it patently clear that not all new songs are Juicy Fruit. Among these new songs real jewels are to be found, like the “pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, [that] anointed the feet of Jesus, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.” May God bless those writers who sit at the feet of Jesus when writing.

There are connoisseurs “*one who is expert in a subject especially: one who understands the details, technique, or principles of an art and is competent to act as a critical judge*” (Merriam-Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary). This designation is applied especially to those who distinguish the subtle textures of wines.

Would it be inappropriate to suggest we need song connoisseurs in our midst? Indeed, that maybe all of us, inspired, not only could, but *should*, exercise this gift?

What will the song connoisseur look for in songs being sung?

First of all, he will have to determine:

a) Does this song inspire? Does it touch the heart? Does it create in the listener a desire to draw nearer to the Savior? To be a more faithful servant?

b) Does it convict? This is especially true in the case of someone who has lost the way, or feels the Savior calling to repentance.

c) Does the song bring greater honor to the Master or to the performer?

d) Does the ability to sing songs with complex music cause us to inwardly applaud (or even, outwardly)?

e) Does the song play on the listeners’ imagination by attempting to describe heaven in human terms?

f) Does the song play on emotions? Are there “clover patches” in heaven? Are all the “cottages” described based on real experiences, or simple imagination meant to transport the hearer to paradisiacal dreamland (unrelated to heaven)?

For most of Biblical history wine was today’s coffee – and more. It was served ceremoniously, at meals, to visitors...

(In fact, when yet a child, my grandparents would serve a small glass of wine to their married children during visits home. And even a diluted version to us grandchildren when spending the night with them to get us to settle down and go to sleep. It worked.)

## Brazil News

Where does that leave us today? Remember, these comments are being made by one who is sitting in the bleachers, who doesn't know one note from another on paper. (Thus for me, a "rest" is what occurs when relaxing after a strenuous task.)

My wife and I are assiduous listeners to "Gospel Singing" events posted on Telegram. Following are some of my non-professional observations, the way I rate songs:

- What is a "good song?" I believe that at the top of my list is a song heard some months ago by teenage girls (by their voices). It was evident they would not be winning any top awards – if any. They had trouble getting their pitch, at times they were off-tune (even I could tell) and frequently seemed unsure.

So why do I give them a top rating? Their voices rang with conviction and dedication. No matter how talented the singers, no matter how popular or self-assured, if they fail to transmit conviction, they need an extended "rest" to take stock. A humble, pure spirit covers a multitude of off-notes.

Does this mean that "good songs" must be sung off-tune or hesitantly? Of course not! A song well-sung and with conviction is a glory to God and an inspiration to the listeners. It is entirely proper to strive for perfection. But never should it be forgotten that this perfection must be grounded in spirituality and conviction, uncontaminated with pride.

- Appropriate or inappropriate?

Should some songs be complicated to sing? So complicated, in fact, that only "the very best" can sing them? The kind that causes some listeners in hushed – or not so hushed – tones, to exclaim, "Man! They can really sing!"

If you have followed the tenor of this writing, I believe you may have an idea what my opinion is. That should be sufficient.

However, there is a... well, a cultural aspect to this that is true in congregations in new areas with a sizable group of members not raised in Mennonite tradition. It can apply to missions. When certain groups are known for their "more advanced singing," novices may back off. This can also happen with those who received only two, and not five singing talents (possibly a minority) on "Talent Day." More complex songs should be sung with discretion so as not to inhibit the "two-talenter."

As diversely talented voices unite in song, the result is heavenly – when sung to the accompaniment of an humble spirit.

And now, a slight course change.

Our church schools are academic successes. A lot of work and funds are invested in them, but they are worth every dime they get. This is a stand-alone subject. We could mention their infinitely higher moral standards, as opposed to most public schools. However, I believe that of all that has been achieved, time spent singing with the students can be found right on the summit of Mount Everest. Sure, among the students there are those who received two, three, four and five musical talents. But through a miracle of amalgamation these diverse talents come out as a single voice. I tip my hat to the dedicated instructors who hold the scepter to this unmitigated success.

Faith and I enjoy listening to school singing and I really feel badly when I happen

to be in town when the Livingston 8th-10th grade students have their presentation. They now accept outside suggestions for songs and we have the pleasure of hearing our favorite songs sung by them. They, as students from other schools, inspire.

And finally, should we permit or encourage clapping in our circles, and I refer specifically to the subject at hand?

There are different kinds of clapping. Have you ever attended a community meeting in which there were a number of speakers?

When the speech is outstanding, there is prolonged, enthusiastic clapping.

When the speech is good, there is the usual clapping.

When the speech is uninspiring, there is perfunctory (“characterized by routine or superficiality: done merely as a duty... lacking in interest or enthusiasm” –MW Unabridged) clapping. It is not a happy day for the victim of perfunctory clapping.

In circles where clapping is routine, the intensity is spontaneous, indeed, unconscious. The impression made on the brain is transferred to the hands. *Per se*, there is nothing wrong with this. Out there. But in our circles, do we want our evaluation of songs to be visibly and audibly expressed? ▲

Remembering out loud

## Unforgettable

There are individuals who are unforgettable. Fifty-some years ago when working in a mobile home factory in Newton, KS., I worked along side such a person. Even though no name will be mentioned, I suspect a few readers will remember. We will only give his initials. BC

BC could have been a John Wayne double. He had the same rugged looks, dominating personality and natural ability to impersonate others.

BC was *always* the center of attention. He made no visible effort to project himself. Others simply gravitated to him. He was not obnoxious nor invasive. Being the center of attention came natural to him. To be attracted to him was natural. It also came natural for him to make a fool of someone in the presence of others.

He was a practical joker. In fact, I suspect life to him was really a big joke. My uncle, his crew chief, carried his hammer on a belt hook. When he would grab his hammer and find it had been slathered with very sticky linoleum glue his customary sense of humor was overridden and other less laudable emotions brought to the boiling point – especially when he would spot BC watching the show from a distance, nearly keeling over with laughter.

There is no doubt that BC had a very godly mother. He was intimately acquainted with the Bible and had a repertoire of Christian hymns which he could sing in a beautiful voice.

BC's hobby was a drag racing, the forth of a mile version. In an artificially humble voice he would tell of the year he won the national championship. He would come to

## Brazil <sup>5</sup> News

work and tell us what he did on his car the previous evening.

There was more to BC than I have just told you. Unfortunately. He loved to tell jokes, most of them vulgar, unrepeatable. That is only the tip of the iceberg. I mentioned that he had an intimate knowledge of the Bible. With a pastoral mien he would begin quoting a verse. Part way through he would deviate from the King James version and put in the BC version, invariably filthy. The song, God Will Take Care of You, he would sing: “BC will take care of you...”

BC soaked up information like a sponge. When a number of employees would be in a group chatting and someone would ask about a certain Mennonite doctrine or practice, before even a Mennonite could answer, he would raise his hand, palm out, like a traffic cop stopping traffic, and in an utterly serious voice say, “Let me explain.” He would, beginning with the verses we would use, but then his face would lose its pontifical expression and his own version would follow. Then he would roar in laughter at his own improvisation. So would other non-Mennonites.

Why tell this little less than inspirational story?

We returned to the US for the first time after 17 years in Brazil. When together with my aforementioned uncle, I asked, “What can you tell me about BC?”

Astonished, he asked, “Don’t you know what happened to him?”

Of course I didn’t.

“He was in one of his drag races and died when his car caught fire.”

Did he have a few precious moments, or even minutes, to set things straight with his Maker? Or was he whisked from flame to flame?

Again, so why tell this story? Making fun of God’s Word is not a misdemeanor.

## Thinking Out Loud

### Notes

In my work most of what I write is proofread. So I have large stacks of used paper on which proofreaders make their corrections. I save the stacks of paper and periodically make scratch pads. As I run across “quotables” in my work, or remember something from the past, I make quick notes on these pads

So here we go:

“They all know where they are going.” My Mom used to repeat this little item. Once Minister Frank Unruh, from Lone Tree, was in a metropolis with another person, I assume also from a rural area. Seeing all the vehicular traffic and crowded sidewalks, with everyone scurrying to and fro, Frank is supposed to have remarked, “And to think that they *all* know where they are going!” It may seem a bit simplistic, but when thinking about the tens of thousands of large cities on planet Earth, and the millions and millions that at this moment are on the streets, it does seem amazing that they all know where they are going. Lamentably, probably quite a few don’t know where they are going after this life.

## Brazil News

William Blake said, “It is easier to forgive an enemy than a friend.” Or can we amend, to forgive a worldling than a brother?

An old saying: “The proof of a true master is to have instructed students who now excel him.”

In the Arctic Circle where some of the inhabitants live in large circular teepee-like tents made of layers of animal skins, there is a saying: “A house is not a home until smoke comes out of the chimney.”

A Chinese proverb: “You can go uphill only so long before heading back down.” This is true not only in China.

It is said that “There is no fairly close navigation.” For a pilot to miss an airport by a mile can spell disaster.

Word of a wag: “The secret to not growing old is to die first.”

“An event cancelled is better than a life cancelled.”

A mantra: “No one is safe until we all are safe.”

“The end of a cycle.” This is how a Brazilian celebrity described her failed marriage.

“You are the author of the book of your life.”

I discovered that the Old Testament noun, shibboleth, is a definite part of today’s vernacular and can be found in the dictionary: “A sound or a word containing a sound whose proper articulation is difficult and whose mispronunciation is regarded as reliably indicating or betraying a speaker who is not native or whose speech has been influenced by early acquaintance with another language” and “A word or saying characteristically used by the adherents of a party, sect, or belief and usually regarded as empty of real meaning.” – MW Unabridged. Thank goodness there is no shibboleth in aviation communications. All tower/pilot communication must be repeated by the receiver. In fact, in the cockpit, basic communication between pilot and first officer is repeated. (Full flaps – Full Flaps, Gear up – Gear up, You have control – I have control, etc.) It would be nice if we could learn a lesson in avionics. Maybe the 11th commandment, THOU SHALT NOT GOSSIP, could be jettisoned into the Atlantic.

Gear up, Gear up –Thou shalt not gossip, I shall not gossip – Gear down, Gear down.

When citizens place greater value on the liberty to do as they please, than on religious principles, democracy will fade.



## The Hearse

Have you ever seen a hearse with a hitch? Probably not. At least not on a hearse that is being used as a hearse. A hearse that a garden farmer bought and uses to haul vegetables to market in a trailer, now that is a different story. But it is absolutely sure that you have never seen a hearse-hearse pulling a U-Haul trailer.

Years ago my uncle (the same one I mentioned before) told me that he went to the funeral of a neighbor, a religious man who had a cattle ranch. His casket was loaded with ranch paraphernalia, including his hat, and I suppose spurs, chaps and maybe even a saddle.

At every stage in life, beginning in early childhood, we have treasured items. Yes, others may see them as junk, but we clutch them close to our breast. As we grow older they become more numerous, more costly – and more precious. It pains us to think of leaving them behind on moving day. Our mind knows that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. But our heart argues, makes excuses. And so, as the black van carries us to our temporary resting place, the U-Haul trails behind. ▲

Back issues of  
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Audio version of  
**BRAZIL NEWS 215**

This is a first. For those whose eyesight is imperfect, we are attaching an audio version of BN, read in a synthetic female voice. Heteronyms may be mispronounced, e.g. “live” “read” “wind” “lead”...

We are still in the experimental stage and are quite sure there will be some glitches. We welcome your comments.

Since this is a large file, after opening your e-mail, it may be necessary to wait for up to 10 minutes or more for the download to be completed.

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