

Brazil News



No. 217
22 DECEMBER 22

Editorializing

Year-end – Looking Back

“Are you better off today than you were four years ago?”

The question that presidential candidate Ronald Reagan asked the incumbent President Carter during a debate in 1980. Some believe that it was this question that tipped the balance of public opinion and resulted in Reagan’s victory.

(Just as a matter of curiosity, it was also during a debate that Carter had the misfortune of trying to point out Reagan’s age – then in his 70s – as a disqualifying factor to become President of the United States. Reagan’s rejoinder, that set everyone laughing, including his opponent, was: “I won’t hold my opponent’s youth and inexperience against him.” It was instant proof that his mind was still sharp as a tack.)

As the old year gives way to the new, it is common to hear people talking about making new year’s resolutions. The mortality rate of these resolutions probably is in the 90% range.

Since a presidential term is four years, we’ll use it as a basis for a few questions. In the last four years...

- Have you made every day count? Meaning, you have not wasted time?
- Have you worked out old grudges? Or do they continue to fester?
- Are you at peace with everyone? That includes your own family, relatives, neighbors, businessmen and church brethren (including the leaders)?
- Have you made an effort to develop your talents? Or do you have them on hold?
- Can you say that you and the Lord are on good financial terms? That is, He is getting His due?

Brazil News

- Are there any roads under construction in your life? Or have you accepted detours as part of your daily routine?
- Is there something you have been putting off year after year? Something you know has to be done?
- Do you consider yourself to be contented? Or is contentment still on your someday list?
- Has your life radiated hope and vitality? Does your interaction with others leave a positive or negative impression on them?

By nature we are change-resistant. We prefer to illude ourselves, hoping that tomorrow things will “*fall* into place.” Unfortunately, the law of gravity doesn’t apply. Nor do most resolutions. Unless you put changes on your priority list and roll up your sleeves, four years from now nothing will have changed. Today is the day. Not tomorrow.

Thinking Out Loud

Facts

It is said two men were waiting in a train station back in Stalinist Russia. One asked the other, “Where are you going?”

“I am going to Leningrad.”

“Huh,” the first thought to himself. “He says he is going to Leningrad, which means he wants me to believe he is going to Moscow. So he is actually going to Leningrad. The liar!”

Times have changed. When this little joke was first circulating decades ago, it was funny.

Not so funny anymore. Today, under the insidious bombardment of “facts,” we must constantly decide what we should believe.

Facts used to be facts. We believed most of what we heard, saw and read. Yes, there were those naysayers whose negative vision of life caused them to erupt with “Awe, I don’t believe it!” They were the exception to the rule. They didn’t believe that man actually set foot on the moon; an elaborate farce.

Fast forward to the present. It seems like approximately what one half of the population vigorously accepts as truth, the other half with equal vigor labels as false.

Where does that leave us, who put a high premium on “true facts?”

Oddly, it leaves us confused. And divided. To understand this, we need to understand the nature of “true facts.” (We insert here that the term “true facts” is a misnomer. That which isn’t true is never a fact. Period.)

Let’s notice some characteristics of the truth:

- The fact that the majority asserts something to be true does not make it the truth.
- The truth never overrides nor disregards sound principles.

Brazil ³ News

- The truth never resorts to radicalism (neither to the left nor to the right).
- The truth, when accepted and followed, is never divisive; it always strives for unity.
- The truth never masquerades under a banner of ultra-conservatism, nor believes that liberalism solves problems.
- The truth never tries to make a point by condemning or finding fault with others.
- The truth is never a doomsday prophet.
- The refrain, “When I was young things were different,” seldom sheds light on reality. Are what we are experiencing today a new version of a historical cycle?

To a point, yes. Yet, there is a distinguishing factor. With today’s instant global communication, situations that used to be regional, or even national, now collect worldwide adherents almost overnight. In this setting, “movements” can grow exponentially. (If the Gospel would draw disciples as fast as today’s movements, we would witness the greatest revival of all times.)

Historically, movements could be generalized as either secular or religious. Increasingly today, there is a merging. Political movements are joined by religious groups, and religious organizations seek the support of politicians. This corrupts in both directions. Both sides are voluntary participants.

A new modality is emerging, that of the “sympathizer.” The sympathizer isn’t a player. You don’t see him on the field; only in the bleachers. If you have any questions about the team and why it will win, he is your source of information. And should you want to know why the opposing team may win, again you’re speaking to an encyclopedia.

If you have been reading between the lines, you will understand. We aren’t talking about volleyball or football. We’re talking about politics.

There is a vast difference between sports and politics. Sports are conducted under a set of rigid rules, enforced by an umpire. Politics are a free-for-all in which anything and everything goes. There are no boundaries, no fouls. And no reliable facts, for “facts” are what they wish them to be.

Is there a lesson to be learned?

There is. It is important we as a people regain the vision that God raises up and puts down whom He will. Thus, there should be no Christian cheerleaders.

Found in the pile of my scratch notes

WALMART

Quite a few years ago – decades, in fact – Walmart made a grand entry into Brazil. Most major cities had their super center. Needless to say, they tried to adapt their stores to the Brazilian culture. Their most obvious competitor was the French giant, Carrefour, present in most large Brazilian cities.

Our nearest Walmart was in Goiânia, 220 km. from Rio Verde. I paid several visits to their store and went back to the competitor. In order to adapt to the Brazilian culture, Carrefour has gone beyond and created its own culture. The Brazilians love it and continues to grow.

And Walmart? It has pulled up stakes. About the only thing in their stores that was “Walmartish” was exterior architecture. Inside they were neither American nor Brazilian.

Did they go broke? I really don’t know. But in true US Marines style, they didn’t retreat. They did an about-face and continued marching forward in the opposite direction – out of Brazil

DENIABILITY

A word I ran across recently. Increasingly by those expressing themselves with a certain ambiguity that leaves room to deny that it was actually said. In a previous article I called it “leaving a fire escape.” Someone, wanting to make points with President Abraham Lincoln, said to him, “Honesty is the best policy.” Lincoln corrected him, “Honesty is not the best policy. It is the ONLY policy.” No deniability in that little amendment.

THE LONGEST HIGHWAY

To drive from Pruhoe Bay in Alaska to the Tierra del Fuego at the southern tip of Argentina, passing through 14 countries, is a distance of 14,000 km – nearly 12,000 miles. Most of this is on the Pan American highway.

OUT-THINKING THE LORD

We forget that God loves everyone equally. He loved Hitler. Yet, at times we judge others by our own lack of love and unconsciously feel that God has a special classification for such – somewhat below our own. If we would have been told that several criminals were to be executed together with Jesus, we would have consigned both to eternal flames. God had other plans.

NO KEY FOR A QUESTION MARK

God doesn’t communicate His will to mankind on a laptop computer. If He did, there would be no key with a question mark. The period key would be well-used.

SPEAKING TO A TOMB

I purchased my chicken barns from an Italian company. The directors of the local factory were Italians and spoke Portuguese with a very discernible accent. When discussing something with one of them, something I didn’t wish to be spread, he would say, “Você está falando com um túmulo.” (You are speaking with a tomb.) I think we could use more of these tombs. They would be death on gossip.

AND I REPEAT...

People who do things that count don’t stop to count them.

SNICKERS CANDY BARS

For as long as I can remember Snickers have been one of my favorite candy bars. When we first moved to Brazil, I would sometimes ask prospective visitors to bring a

few. Now they are made in Brazil and sold at a reasonable price. The amazing thing is that they taste exactly like those that were sold when I was a boy. I assume they were available in the US long before I showed up. It would be interesting to know how many other products have surfed the decades without a change. A truly remarkable product.

MORALLY FLUID

That describes the approach that a lot of people are taking to moral issues.

THE WASHINGTON POST

Right under the name of the daily, in small italic letters, there are the words:

Democracies die in darkness

This isn't only true of democracies, but of religion as well.

1 Chronicles 29:14 (New International Version)

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

We say that “We need to give to the Lord.” Actually, we never “give.” We only “return” that which is already His.

ANY EXPLANATION?

America has 4.4% of the world's population, but has 42% of the world's firearms – estimated at 270 million. That comes to approximately 0.82 arms per citizen, which includes everyone from the aged to day-old babies.

EASY TO BE WRONG

For the first decades of my life I did all my typing on a manual typewriter. Since copiers didn't exist back then, if two or three copies of a letter or document were necessary, it meant inserting three sheets of paper separated by carbon paper. Thus, a mistake, even one misspelled letter, had to be manually erased. That meant...

1) Stopping (obvious)

2) Placing a small scrap of paper under each sheet of carbon where the mistake was located. Not strange at all. When erasing a mistake on the first page the pressure from the eraser transfer smears to the following two copies. Now the first scrap of paper must be removed and the error erased. Repeat on second page and final page. After each erasure, the crumbs must be brushed and/or blown away. And the scraps of paper removed.

3) Retype with corrected letter. The key must be struck with a bit of extra force, since the erasures have diminished the effectiveness of the carbon.

4) All done? Maybe. To err is human and it is possible to have not removed one, or both, of the paper scraps. Alas, any correction made, or additional typing, will have transferred to the scraps and there will be corresponding blank areas on the corrected sheets.

Long live the backspace and delete keys.

Puns (to tickle your punny bone)

My friend won't leave California despite the earthquake risk. He is loyal to a fault.

The butcher asked if I wanted my meat measured in pounds or kilograms. I said either weigh would do.

Deafness is getting to be quite a problem for me lately. I never thought I'd hear myself say that.

My neighbor's sprinkler is a constant irrigation to me.

Do hotel managers get board with their jobs?

Sleeping comes so naturally to me, I could do it with my eyes closed.

Contemplating my imminent root canal procedure was deeply unnerving.

Dental care in Panama is called a route canal.

The environmentalist rode his bike 20 miles in the morning and 20 more in the evening. He loved recycling.

The inventor of the incubator was the first hatch-it man.

Weight loss mantra? Fat chants!

Losing your head in an emergency is a no brainer.

You want to clone yourself? Now wouldn't that be just like you!

I once heard a joke about amnesia, but I forgot how it goes.

I usually take steps to avoid elevators.

A good wine starts with a good grapevine. A good cheese starts with a good bovine.

My brother told me that serpentine is what you use to get paint off a boa constrictor.

I wrote a novel about a fellow who had a small garden. It didn't have much of a plot.

Short-order cooks in busy restaurants call themselves 'pressure cookers'.

(Real) Facts

In 1667 the Dutch gave New Amsterdam (today Manhattan) to the British in exchange for control of the Banda Islands in Indonesia. At the time, the Banda Islands were extremely valuable because they were the world's only source of nutmeg.

In 1958 Chairman Mao led a campaign to eliminate the sparrow from China, reasoning that the bird was a grain-stealing pest. However, the sparrow also ate insects. As the sparrow population declined, the locust population exploded, devastating crops for years.

Hallmarks of the Wild West, tumbleweeds are not native to North America. They are an invasive plant from Russia and are properly known as Russian thistle.

New Zealand is home to the longest place-name in the world. Taumatawhakatangihangakōauauotamateaturipūkakapikimaungahoronukupōkaiwhenuakitānatahu is Māori for “the place where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, who slid, climbed and swallowed mountains, known as ‘landeater’, played his flute to his loved one.” Locals call it Taumata Hill.

Christmas and New Year

Faith and I wish all our readers a memorable Christmas and a New Year as described in the editorial to this issue.

Notice

We have discontinued the audio version of Brazil News. All back issues of the text version of BN can be found by accessing the following site:

www.mybrazilnews.com

Brazil News is published only in electronic and audio format. Charles Becker, editor. For a free subscription, send your name and e-mail address to charlesbecker@outlook.com. This same address can be used for correspondence. Please ask for permission to reprint articles in other publications. You may request a free subscription for friends or relatives. Thank you for reading BN. cb