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### A Manual for SDA Ministers of South Brazil to Train the Laity in Understanding How to Evangelize Roman Catholic Basic Ecclesial Communities

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**ABSTRACT**

**A MANUAL FOR SDA MINISTERS OF SOUTH BRAZIL  
FOR TRAINING THE LAITY IN UNDERSTANDING  
HOW TO EVANGELIZE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES**

by

**José Miranda Rocha**

**Adviser: Douglas Kilcher**

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project-Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A MANUAL FOR SDA MINISTERS OF SOUTH BRAZIL FOR  
TRAINING THE LAITY IN UNDERSTANDING HOW TO  
EVANGELIZE ROMAN CATHOLIC BASIC ECCLESIAL  
COMMUNITIES

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Date completed: June 1991

Problem

Roman Catholic Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil have been a socio-religious phenomenon during more than two decades. As militant Catholics, members of the communities share four fundamental premises, i.e., a new way of seeing reality, a new way of being the Church, a new way of approaching Scripture, and a new way of doing mission. These premises challenge Seventh-day Adventists to develop new strategies when attempting to evangelize Basic Ecclesial Community membership. To date, no specific study by SDAs

addresses the evangelization of Basic Ecclesial Community members. This raises the question of how Basic Ecclesial Communities can be evangelized. This research intends to provide a manual for the Seventh-day Adventist ministry of South Brazil for the purpose of training the laity in understanding how to evangelize Roman Catholic Ecclesial Communities.

#### Method

The method used to complete this project was a review of representative literature discussing Roman Catholic theology, Brazilian Basic Ecclesial Communities, and the evangelization of such communities. Selected bibliographic sources concerning the training of lay people and techniques used to evangelize small religious groups were also examined with special emphasis placed upon the lay people and their role as evangelists.

#### Conclusions

Four conclusions of this study are: (1) that for Seventh-day Adventists to attain the evangelization of Basic Ecclesial Communities, they must begin by understanding who the members of the communities are and how they think; (2) that Adventists should build an approach based on the common theological ground between those communities and Seventh-day Adventist theology; (3) that those communities must be evangelized through a holistic and relational approach built

through friendship; and (4) that the first and basic doctrinal point to be affirmed by Seventh-day Adventists is the absolute authority of the Bible as God's revelation.



Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A MANUAL FOR SDA MINISTERS OF SOUTH BRAZIL  
TO TRAIN THE LAITY IN UNDERSTANDING  
HOW TO EVANGELIZE ROMAN CATHOLIC  
BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

A Project-Dissertation  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
José Miranda Rocha

June 1991

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BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

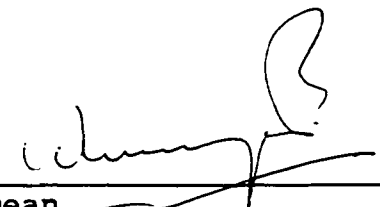
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by

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
BEC	Basic Ecclesial Community
CEBI	Center of Biblical Studies
CEDEFES	Center of Documentation "Eloy Ferreira da Silva"
CEDI	Center of Documentation and Information
CELAM	Latin American Episcopal Conference
CNBB	National Conference of Brazilian Bishops
CRB	Conference of Religious of Brazil
DF	Brasilia, Federal District of Brazil
IBGE	Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistic
LADOC	Latin American Documentation
RGN	Rio Grande do Norte (Brazilian state)
RJ	Rio de Janeiro (Brazilian state and/or city)
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
SEDOC	Service of Documentation, Petrópolis, Brazil
SP	São Paulo (Brazilian state)

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I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all who have contributed to the accomplishment of this study. My profound appreciation to all Christian teachers of Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, especially the members of my committee who have been professionally and spiritually supportive throughout the phases of this project: Dr. Douglas Kilcher, for his competent guidance and insights into the area of evangelism and lay leadership, Dr. C. Raymond Holmes, Dr. Atilio René Dupertuis, and Dr. Fernando Canale.

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Above all assistance received by human means, I acknowledge the constant care and guidance of God. I praise him as the source of salvation to humankind. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding" (Eph 1:7, 8).

## INTRODUCTION

Basic Ecclesial Communities<sup>1</sup> have been described as "schools of sharing," "instrumentalities of social transformation," and even "the reinvention of the church."<sup>2</sup> After more than two decades of existence, they continue to be an influential socio-religious phenomenon, particularly in Latin American countries. These communities, which are formed from the grassroots upward, have introduced a new model of the church and its mission into the Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Some have even perceived them as being a revolutionary way of the church to view the whole socio-religious reality.<sup>3</sup> The rapid growth of the BECs, coupled with their challenge to traditional Roman Catholic ecclesiology and missiology, has led to an increasing

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<sup>1</sup>Hereafter referred to as BEC or as BECs.

<sup>2</sup>Julio de Santa Ana, "Schools of Sharing: Basic Ecclesial Communities," Ecumenical Review 38 (1986): 381. See also Leonardo Boff, EcclesioGenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 6.

<sup>3</sup>A. William Cook, Jr., "Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Study of Reevangelization and Growth in the Brazilian Catholic Church," Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research 4 (1980): 114-115.



concern about them.<sup>1</sup> This concern is not limited merely to Roman Catholicism. Other denominations in Latin America have been affected by the BECs.<sup>2</sup> This is also true of the Seventh-day Adventist Church<sup>3</sup> which could, to some extent, have to rethink its mission and methods of evangelizing the common person in Latin America.<sup>4</sup>

### Statement of the Problem

As militant Catholics, members of BECs share four fundamental premises, i.e., a new way of seeing reality, a new way of being the Church, a new way of approaching Scripture, and a new way of doing mission.<sup>5</sup> These premises

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<sup>1</sup>Guillermo Cook, The Expectation of the Poor: Latin American Basic Ecclesial Communities in Protestant Perspective (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 2-4.

<sup>2</sup>Patricia Ann Powers, "Basic Ecclesial Communities: Their Influence and Effects on the Episcopal Church of Brazil" (M.A. thesis, Crozer Theological Seminary, 1987).

<sup>3</sup>Hereafter The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Seventh-day Adventists are referred to as SDA Church and SDAs.

<sup>4</sup>Guillermo Cook, The Expectation of the Poor, 3. See General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, Working Policy of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1987-1988 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1988): "Because of its Biblical perspectives, the Seventh-day Adventist Church regards as germane its involvement in development and relief aid . . . (ADRA) has been established to express the Church's concern in this area and to meet the following objectives: To awaken concern for the very poor, deprived, the sick, the mal-nourished and the victims of natural and man-made disasters. . . . To deepen the desire to understand the causes of deprivation, injustice and need so that assistance given will be appropriate to the community and to the Church's view of its mission."

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 87-107.

challenge SDAs to develop new strategies for a number of reasons when attempting to evangelize BEC membership. First, SDA growth in Brazil comes primarily from Roman Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> Second, the document "Global Strategy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church" encourages SDAs to reach out and evangelize "people groups" which are bound together by social, ethnic, economic, or religious ties.<sup>2</sup> Obviously, BECs would fall within the confines of the definition of "people groups." Third, people converted from BECs hold that there exists a latent field for SDA evangelism among those Basic Ecclesial Communities. Finally, to date, no specific study by SDAs addresses the evangelization of BECs. This raises the question of how Basic Ecclesial Communities can be evangelized by SDAs.

#### Purpose and Relevance

The more limited immediate purpose of this project is to provide a manual for the SDA ministry of South Brazil for the purpose of training the SDA laity to understanding how to evangelize the Roman Catholic Basic Ecclesial

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<sup>1</sup>Annual Statistical Report (Washington, DC: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1987), 2, 18.

<sup>2</sup>"Global Strategy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," Adventist Review, January 11, 1990: 21-23. Throughout this paper, the term "evangelism" means to preach the gospel according to the whole context of Scripture.

Communities.<sup>1</sup> It is also hoped that this study will contribute to wider a discussion and understanding of the socio-religious phenomenon of Basic Ecclesial Communities.

### Method

The research method used to complete this project was a review of representative literature discussing Roman Catholic theology, Brazilian BECs, and evangelization of BECs. Its intent is to examine BECs from the perspective of their history, sociology, and theology. Selected bibliographic sources concerning the training of lay people and techniques for evangelizing small religious groups were also examined with special emphasis placed upon the lay person and his/her role in the evangelization of the BECs.

This project is organized in two parts. The first part attempts to deal with the challenge of the BECs in Brazil by studying their definition, origins, and sociological and theological thought in relation to the SDA mission. Chapter 1 investigates the origin and definition of BECs. Chapter 2 considers some important sociological and theological positions held by the BECs. Chapter 3 evaluates the positions held by the BECs so an SDA approach to the task of evangelizing them may be developed. Part II of this project describes the actual task of evangelization.

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<sup>1</sup>SDA ministry in the present study refers to the local Church pastors, regardless of whether they are ordained or not.

Chapter 4 defines the task and offers techniques to use when working with BEC members. Chapter 5 contains a set of eight sessions intended for the use of the SDA ministry in training the laity for the task of evangelizing BECs members. A series of Bible studies also is suggested. It is hoped that these can be used in reaching BECs members.

### Limitations

Since there is a great deal of ethnic, social, cultural, and economic diversity in Brazil, and since the task of studying all the various nuances of BEC theology would require many volumes, this project is limited to an investigation of BECs in the southern region of Brazil.<sup>1</sup>

A further limitation exists in regards to the proposed implementation of this project. As an evangelistic experiment, this project is to be used only after its approval of the SDA Church organization in Brazil. After being evaluated by the Church leadership, this project may be corrected and/or altered as needed in order to maintain its effectiveness.

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<sup>1</sup>Clodovis Boff, Feet-On-The-Ground-Theology: A Brazilian Journey (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 174, for example, warns against an approach to understanding Brazil in terms of one method of evangelization when he observes, "The difference between Santa Catarina and Acre is striking, in nature as well as in the economy and culture." See also Estudos da CNBB [National Brazilian Bishops Conference], no. 3 (São Paulo, SP: Ed. Paulinas, 1977), 40. Santa Catarina is a Brazilian southern state while Acre is a northern one.

### Definition of Terms and Presuppositions

In this project, the term BECs refers to small Roman Catholic Communities which are either directly or indirectly linked to liberation theology. They exist in both rural and urban areas and are comprised of common and mostly poor people.<sup>1</sup> The terms laity and lay people simple indicate members who comprise parishes and local churches as distinguished from the professional clergy. The word "mission" is used in the sense of the task of sharing the message which reconciles men and women to God.<sup>2</sup> Liberation theology is understood as a contemporary movement which offers a theological response to the historical reality of poverty and political domination of Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

This project assumes that (1) SDAs have been called by God to proclaim the eternal gospel within the context of

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<sup>1</sup>Cook, The Expectation of the Poor, 50-52. See also CNBB, Comunidades Eclesiais de Base no Brasil: Experiências e Perspectivas, no. 23 (São Paulo, SP: Edições Paulinas, 1979), 101.

<sup>2</sup>2 Cor 5:19, 20.

<sup>3</sup>Atilio René Dupertuis, Liberation Theology: A Study in Its Soteriology (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982), 10. "Latin American liberation theology is a response to the historical reality of the continent, seen as disclosing a situation of political domination and economic dependency." See also Emilio A. Nunez, Teologia de la Liberacion: Una Perspectiva Evangélica (Miami, FL: Editorial Caribe, 1986), 7. Nunez holds that this theology seems to be both a system of thought and a set of ideas or questions which are having profound influence on the contemporary Christian thought. Because of its popularity, it is sometimes it is referred to as "liberation theologies." See also Werner Vyhmeister, Misión de la Iglesia Adventista (Brasilia, DF: Editorial C.A.P., 1980), 92.

Rev 14:6-14, and (2) BECs need to further their knowledge of the eternal gospel as distinctively preached by the SDAs in order to personally experience complete liberation as promised by Jesus Christ.

**PART ONE**  
**THE CHALLENGE OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC BASIC**  
**ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES IN BRAZIL**

## CHAPTER I

### THE BRAZILIAN BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY MOVEMENT

BECs have been dramatically increasing in numbers. They represent a strong challenge to both Roman Catholicism and other denominations, SDAs included. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, which is to provide a manual to train the SDA laity in understanding how to evangelize BECs members in South Brazil, we must first understand the origin and development of the BECs. In pursuance of this goal, I begin this chapter by making an effort to define the terms comprising the acronym "BECs." This is followed by a brief historical overview of the origin of BECs.

#### Defining BEC

There seems to be no comprehensive definition of the term Basic Ecclesial Community. The most common definition, according to Teixeira, is the BEC defined as a gathering of several small family groups within the geographical limits of a village, a district, or a neighborhood. In some places, BEC refers to a small group of faithful people who regularly meet to meditate on the Bible. The purpose of this meditation is to help one cope with the everyday issues



of life and to integrate Christian faith into that context. In this case, there is a tendency to identify the BEC with small cells, i.e., a biblical circle, a mother's club, or a group that meets for reflection within the parish's life.<sup>1</sup>

The term BEC is not an accidental choice of definition but rather a distinctive, intentional way of describing this small cell group within Latin American Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> It consists of three separate terms pregnant with meaning, i.e., community, ecclesial, and base.

The word "community" implies a movement towards the same kind of human togetherness experienced by the early church described in the New Testament by the term koinonia. The dimension of fellowship has seemingly been lost by modern society, particularly in western society.<sup>3</sup> A revitalized sense of community within the Roman Catholic Church seems to have been an outcome of its ecclesiological posture in the post-Vatican II era.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Faustino Luis Couto Teixeira, A Gênese das CEB's no Brasil: Elementos Explicativos (São Paulo, SP: Edições Paulinas, 1988), 305. In Portuguese, Basic Ecclesial Community is termed CEB or Comunidade Eclesial de Base.

<sup>2</sup>Amin A. Rodor, "The Concept of the Poor in the Context of the Ecclesiology of Liberation Theology" (Th.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1986), 192.

<sup>3</sup>Marcello de C. Azevedo, Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1987), 58-59. See also Felix A. Pastor, Evangelização e Comunidade de Base (S. Paulo, SP: Ed. Loyola, 1982), 65-89.

<sup>4</sup>Azevedo, 61. Azevedo has pointed out that the fact that the BECs are a post-conciliar trend to revive "community" by surpassing the geographical limits of the

The term "ecclesial" has caused no small tension between the various supporters of BECs. Leonardo Boff has raised the question whether BECs can be considered the Church in itself or whether they merely contain "ecclesial elements."<sup>1</sup> Jose Marin, on the one hand, defends the ecclesiality of the BECs by referring to them as the Church itself expressed on all levels--the universal, the diocesan, and the local, or basic.<sup>2</sup> Other theologians, however, refer to BECs as not fully church, but, in spite of this, even they, from a pastoral viewpoint, are forced to conclude that BECs must be considered an "authentic ecclesial reality."<sup>3</sup> Both Azevedo and Teixeira hold that the BECs' ecclesiality can be seen in the following three elements: the faith of their members and their oneness with the faith of the institutional Church, their link with the Church hierarchy, and the different forms of service and ministry which constitute a new way of being church.<sup>4</sup> While there is a great deal of difference of opinion, one thing stands out concerning BECs: They are considered to be an ecclesial

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parish as an innovative factor in the Roman Catholicism.

<sup>1</sup>Leonardo Boff, Ecclesiogenesis, 10-11.

<sup>2</sup>Jose Marins, "Comunidades Eclesiais de Base na America Latina," Concilium 104 (1975): 20.

<sup>3</sup>Alberto Antoniazzi, "Reflexões Teológicas Sôbre as Comunidades Eclesiais de Base," in Estudos da CNBB, no. 3 (São Paulo, SP: Edições Paulinas, 1975), 130.

<sup>4</sup>Azevedo, 66, and Teixeira, 305.

reality by most theologians, i.e., they "are" the church in one way or another.

The meaning of "base" has also generated a great deal of disagreement, especially among the theologians of Latin America. Boff explains the meaning of "base" as either related to the low social-economic level of BEC people in which they function as the base of society or as related to their condition as base of the Church in their status as lay people.<sup>1</sup> As "base-level groups," the BECs are a gathering of common people, usually poor, mainly from rural regions (agricultural workers, fishers, small landlords, and their families) or from the suburban areas of large cities (blue-collar workers, housewives, retired people, low-level public workers, and small businessmen).<sup>2</sup>

Dussel points to the three emerging connotations of the word "base" within Roman Catholicism. First, "base" is linked to the sociological trend of establishing personal and fraternal contact among the members of an anonymous and impersonal contemporary society. Second, the meaning of "base" underlines the ecclesial bipolarity which reflects the tension between laity and clergy within the Roman Church itself. Third, "base" is used as an expression of political

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<sup>1</sup>Leonardo Boff, "Comunidade Eclesial de Base e Teologia da Libertação," Convergência 14/145 (1981): 431.

<sup>2</sup>Teixeira, 306.

commitment for liberation.<sup>1</sup> Gutierrez has called for the church to "assume the position of the poor" since the poor do not exist as "an inevitable fact" but as a byproduct of the system in which the Church lives and for which the Church is largely responsible.<sup>2</sup> For him, BECs call the attention of Roman Catholicism to return to the meaningfulness of the local church and to reorient the Roman Church towards a life with the poor by assuming the culture of the poor it is attempting to serve.<sup>3</sup> These two aspects of Roman Catholicism, in his opinion, have been greatly overlooked.

While the theologians of Latin American Roman Catholicism have primarily stressed the meaning of "base" as the poor, especially as the base for both society and the church, and have also highlighted its use in describing the tension between the terms "clergy" and "laity," the people that comprise the BECs have chosen to stress the fact that they are the "base" in the sense that they represent a principle which is fundamental for the Christian faith, i.e., it is among themselves where Jesus Christ comes and preaches the Gospel through the Holy Spirit. This "base" includes all those who live on the margin of society, the

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<sup>1</sup>Enrique Dussel, "A Base na Teologia da Libertação," Concilium 104 (1975): 445-56.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted by Dussel in "A Base na Teologia da Libertação," Concilium 104 (1975): 445-56.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

small group where faith and life are shared in daily existence. It is a place from which they can, through a pedagogical process, reach and affect both the Roman Catholic Church as well as all of society.<sup>1</sup>

While we have seen thus far that the terminology used of BECs is somewhat controversial, there are some trends emerging. The word "basic" or "base" primarily has the connotation of the poor who are the foundation for both the church and society. These poor meet in small gatherings, or "communities," which gather to share both faith and life and to help that faith to be applied to practical life. These gatherings have been described by nearly all as "ecclesial realities," i.e., there are elements of the Roman Catholic Church present in these communities, if not the fullness of the church itself. Now that we have a better understanding of what the acronym BEC stands for, we turn our attention to the question of the origin of the communities.

#### Origins of the BEC Movement

##### The Lay Tradition of the Brazilian Roman Catholicism

Brazilian Roman Catholicism received its distinctive character beginning with the colonial times and ending in

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<sup>1</sup>Leonardo Boff, E a Igreja se Fez Povo (Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes, 1986), 84-85.

the middle of twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> During this time, by means of the "Padroado Regio," the king of Portugal acted as a Pontifical delegate for Brazil.<sup>2</sup> This, in effect, made the king the chief of the church. The crown was thus placed in charge of the task of evangelizing the natives, promoting worship, collecting and administrating tithes, and maintaining the priesthood. Even the very nomination of vicars was reserved for the Portuguese monarch. The Pope virtually only confirmed the religious activities of the king. Within this historical context, the clergy played a secondary role as a kind of governmental worker.<sup>3</sup>

The result of this policy, along with others factors such as the limited number of dioceses, the long vacancy of bishops, and the scarcity of priests to cover the wide Brazilian territory, was that the laity played an increasingly important role in Brazilian Roman Catholicism. During colonial times in Brazil, three levels of lay organizations were introduced in urban Roman Catholicism which were in charge of organizing cults to the saints, devotional life, and the construction of hospitals and lodging-houses for indigent people. These were the

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<sup>1</sup>Teixeira, 15.

<sup>2</sup>"Padroado Régio" was the ecclesiastical institution which gave church power to the king.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 16-17.

"confrarias," "irmandades," and "ordens terceiras."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, these levels of lay leadership were not independent but were officially linked with the clergy.<sup>2</sup>

Again, as in urban Catholicism, there were three levels of lay and non-official organizations in rural Brazil. These were the regional sanctuaries, local chapels, and shrines of families.<sup>3</sup> The primary leader was the "eremite," who was in charge of keeping the image of the saint. The increasing role of lay leadership in Brazil led to a decreasing importance of the ordained priest. Hence, these three levels of lay involvement actually replaced the official institutional aspects of Roman Catholicism in Brazil. The reliquary substituted for the mass, the "eremite" or "beato" replaced the priest, and the "sanctuary" took the place of the church.<sup>4</sup> The result of this replacement of the official institutional aspects of Roman Catholicism allowed the people to be free to express

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid. They were urban lay brotherhoods of the church.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 17. They were linked with the clergy which nominated their leadership.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 18-21. See also Eduardo Hoornaert, "A Cristandade Durante a Primeira Epoca Colonial," in História da Antropologia no Brasil (Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes, 1980), 380. Eduardo Hoornaert, "Comunidades de Base: 10 anos de Experiência" SEDOC 11/118 (November 1979): 719. The experiences of "confrarias" and "irmandades" offered to the laity the practice of organizing church and created in laity an "ethos" which is alive in the BECs people.

their collective faith around chapels at the side of the roads, meetings which were rarely visited by priests. Worship and other devotional activities became the tasks of a lay person, who was called a chaplain.<sup>1</sup>

The most common sign of the lay presence in the Roman Catholicism of colonial times in Brazil was the shrine. There families gathered to pray and sing during the worship services. These services were presided over by the household's chief. Thus, it was the head of the household rather than the priest who became the major agent for religious affairs.<sup>2</sup>

These levels of lay leadership were slowly replaced by a process known as romanization.<sup>3</sup> The beginning of the romanization process came in the period of Pius IX (1846-78). During this time, the "Padroado Regio" and the centralization of Church administration was consolidated under the hierarchy of Rome. The Vatican rejected such innovations as the presence of laity in the administration of the church and their participation in the rites of liturgy. The main protagonists in this process were the

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<sup>1</sup>Oscar Beozzo, "Irmandades, Santuários, Capelinhas de Beira de Estrada," Revista Eclesiástica Brasileira 36 (1976): 755-56.

<sup>2</sup>Pedro de Assis Ribeiro, Religião e Dominação de Classe (Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes, 1985), 129.

<sup>3</sup>Teixeira, 23. This was true on all levels except that of the family.



reformist bishops, i.e., ultramontanists educated in Rome or France who reinforced the orientation of the documents of the Vatican I Council (1870) towards obedience to the Pope. To eliminate the lay leadership, the romanizing agents imported a large number of religious orders and congregations from Europe to Brazil.<sup>1</sup> The only level of lay participation in the church which escaped this clerical control was the rural family shrine. Clerical dominance drove the laity to confine itself to the domestic religious practice. However, the latent lay leadership again found and fulfilled its potential when the BECs appeared.<sup>2</sup>

#### Preparatory Movements for the BECs

Despite the attempt by the Vatican to centralize Brazilian Catholicism, the number of the ordained priests in Brazil was not sufficient to control Brazilian Roman

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 24-28. See also Beozzo, "Irmandades, Santuários, Capelinhas de Beira de Estrada," 748-58. From 1640 to 1820 the Brazilian history recorded no new religious congregation coming from Europe besides the seven which already existed in the country. Nevertheless, from 1880 to 1920, 37 new men's European congregations came to Brazil followed by 97 women's between 1880 and 1930.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 29-33. Even though it is difficult to establish a precise historical and organic correlation between colonial lay Catholicism and BECs, several facts seem to demonstrate a connection between the two. These facts have been termed by Teixeira "explicative elements." Two of those elements deserve emphasis. First, the interference and even the presence of ordained priests is minimal in both colonial lay Catholicism and the BECs movement. Second, the authority of the lay leaders of the colonial period like the leadership of BECs comes primarily from the people's own social group rather than the institutional Church.

Catholicism. By the middle of the twentieth century, the people still referred to themselves as Catholic, although they did not have enough doctrinal knowledge to refute the arguments of either Protestantism or Communism. The Protestant churches, taking advantage of that weakness, won meaningful numbers of Catholics to their ranks. Communism, on the other hand, infiltrated the rural workers and won them to its ideological stance.

The situation was of great concern to the Brazilian Roman Catholic bishops. They immediately took steps to counteract the influence of both Protestantism and Communism by initiating catechetical and social activities to prepare the people to face these external attacks. Those movements are the preparatory ground from which the BECs sprang.<sup>1</sup> Through those programs, the institutional church delegated public authority to representatives of lay people so that they not only could teach but also administer the sacraments.<sup>2</sup> The most important of those movements were: the Popular Catechesis of Barra do Piraí,<sup>3</sup> the Movement of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 29-31.

<sup>2</sup>Azevedo, 25.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. The experience of Barra do Piraí, a rural district of Rio de Janeiro State, initiated in 1956, may be taken as the historical forerunner of the BECs. The progress of the movement led the leaders to build "communitarian halls," instead of expensive churches or chapels, which were used for worship services, doctrinal courses, prayer meetings, and sewing and cooking courses. See also Leonardo Boff, EcclesioGenesis, 1986), 3.

Natal and the Pastoral Experience of Nizia Floresta,<sup>1</sup> the Movement of the Brazilian Catholic Action,<sup>2</sup> the Movement of the Education of Base,<sup>3</sup> the Movement for a Better World,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Teixeira, 62-67, 70-72. Natal is the capital of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Norte. The movement, initiated in 1961, was the first Brazilian experience of base-level education carried by both the Brazilian government and the Roman Catholic church. Nizia floresta is a small town 43 km from Natal that had, at that time, a poor population of 10,300 people, of which 705 were illiterate and lived in extreme misery.

<sup>2</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 54-56, 80-90. For Gutierrez, Jacques Maritain was the author who exercised the most influence in the social-Christian stream of Latin America and inspired the beginning of the Catholic Action. The use of social, political, and economical sciences began through the members of the Catholic Action. They began by denouncing the mistakes of the capitalist system and announcing the beginning of a new civilization grounded on new relationships between developed and undeveloped countries.

<sup>3</sup>Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 19, 40. "The pedagogy of the oppressed, as a humanist and libertarian pedagogy, has two distinct stages." First, the oppressed are to confront the oppression by change in the way they perceived the world of oppression. This is called "conscientização," which means "conscientization" or "self-awareness." Second, the oppressed were to create a new structure in the place of the old myths of old order. The adult student started by searching his/her own vocabulary universe using the process of "generative words" by which he/she discussed concrete situations in his/her particular reality.

<sup>4</sup>Teixeira, 111-114. The movement was introduced in Brazil by Jose Marins in 1960. The purpose was the renovation of the clergy to pastoral action, to which they accorded the spirit of the Christian message. The key note was the spirit of union of dioceses working together in which the laity found their place in the pastoral action.

and the Joint Plans of CNBB (Plan of Emergency and the Plan of Pastoral of Conjunct).<sup>1</sup>

### The New Perspectives from Vatican II

The origins of BECs may also be explained in part by the "aggiornamento" of Roman Catholicism which was especially noticeable at Vatican Council II (1961-1965). Under the influence of two of the most important documents issued by the council--Lumen Gentium (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) and Gaudium et Spes (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), Roman Catholicism allowed more opportunity for the participation of the laity in sacramental activities.<sup>2</sup> Boff holds that through such effort the church was pursuing

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 116-120. The merit of both plans was the valorization of the parish as the local community of the church. The renovation of the local churches should reach the ordained ministry and the laity. The lay people should be motivated to participate as agents in both the temporary and apostolic tasks through the slogan "To see, to judge, and to act." See also Gervasio F. Queiroga, CNBB: Comunhão e Co-responsabilidade (São Paulo, SP: Edições Paulinas, 1982), 367-377. The general objective was the fast adjustment of the church in Brazil to the church's image of Vatican Council II.

<sup>2</sup>Austin Flannery, ed., Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1988), 388. "The faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into the Church, are placed in the People of God . . . to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world." See also Gustavo Gutierrez, A Fôrça Histórica dos Pobres (Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes, 1981), 291.

the redefinition of its place and mission within the modern world.<sup>1</sup>

The new concept of God's people as expressed by Vatican Council II was interpreted by liberation theologians to refer the poor and oppressed within the BECs, whom they held were the very People of God mentioned in the documents of the Council.<sup>2</sup> This ecclesiological posture of liberation theologians has no small point of tension between BECs and the institutional Roman Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leonardo Boff, Do Lugar do Pobre (Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes, 1986), 15.

<sup>2</sup>Rodor, 313.

<sup>3</sup>Louis Michael Collonese, ed. The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, vol. 2, Conclusions (Washington, D.C.: Latin America Division of the United States Catholic Conference, 1973), 28. In regard to the "people of God," it appears that institutional Roman Catholicism is closer than BECs are to the Biblical understanding when stressing the broader concept of God's people. In fact, all human beings who commit themselves to God and His word, either poor or rich, constitute the people of God. In seeing only the poor as God's people, the BECs run the risk of sectarianism. The two meetings of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM II and III) held in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, and in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979, respectively, not only ratified the "option by the poor" made by Vatican Council II, but also gave official status to the BECs as the vehicle by which that option could be manifest to the world. Whereas CELAM II described the BECs as "the first and fundamental ecclesiastical nucleus . . . of the ecclesiastical structures and the focus of evangelization," CELAM III was a commitment of the Church to the evangelization and liberation of the poor who were considered as not only the addressees but also as the bearers of the gospel. Since Puebla, the Church has opted by inserting itself among the people, especially the poor, and strengthening the liberation movement through BECs. See Teixeira, 295. See also Leonardo Boff, O Caminhar da Igreja com os Oprimidos (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Editora Vozes, 1980), 83.

### The Military Movement of 1964

The military coup of Brazil in 1964 deserves special attention because it divided the clergy into two camps, i.e., "Conservatives" (who were in favor of the new government) and "Progressists" (who expressed a reticent attitude towards the government). The result of this division over whether to support the new military government or not was to allow the progressist wing to more strongly exercise its influence.<sup>1</sup> The progressists, who were helped in their influence, assisted the growth of BECs in a number of ways. Among these were the repressive politics of the military regime, the development of a political theology after the meeting of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM II), in Medellin, Colombia (1968), and the enhancement of the practice of the lay pastor in the peripheries of large cities.<sup>2</sup> During the period of repression (1964-1968) which occurred immediately after the military coup, BECs appeared with their foundational characteristics.<sup>3</sup> They existed in the outskirts of the cities and became the guardians of the Christian values of

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<sup>1</sup>Teixeira, 175-78. See also Thomas C. Bruneau, Religião e Politização (São Paulo, SP: Loyola, 1979), 91-115.

<sup>2</sup>Luiz Gonzaga de Souza Lima, Evolução Política dos Católicos e da Igreja no Brasil (Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes, 1979), 55.

<sup>3</sup>Frei Betto (Carlos Alberto Libânio Christo), Prática Pastoral e Prática Política (Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes, 1979), 12-13.

equality and human solidarity. Hence, the Church became the people's voice for their causes.<sup>1</sup>

#### Summary

What we have seen thus far is that BECs can be defined as communities of people who have gathered to share both their Catholic faith and life. They, at the very least, can be considered ecclesial realities and function as the "base" from which a wing of Brazilian Catholics expect that liberation from oppression will take place.

The BECs have their origin in ideas gleaned and interpreted in a specific way from the documents of Vatican II by liberation theologians. The actual BECs came to life after the period of repression following the military coup of 1964. However, their precursors existed in principle in the lay movements of the colonial period of Brazil.

The Brazilian BECs, then, originated as a lay movement involving both religious and social motifs. The presence of pastoral agents who wished to update the church is also a significant factor in the consolidation and increasing of the communities. However, BECs have adopted some unique theological positions which have created tensions between themselves and the institutional Roman Catholic Church. Let us now turn our attention to these unique positions.

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<sup>1</sup>Teixeira, 180.

## CHAPTER II

### IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR THE BASIC ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

Although BECs were officially recognized at Vatican II, Medellin, and Puebla, they represent a theological interpretation of the church which is in tension with traditional Roman Catholic ecclesiology.<sup>1</sup> The tension is not between an official Church and an unofficial one, but between a people's church and the hierarchical system. The problem is that the BECs, while loosely linked with hierarchy, are resistant to rule by a dominated clergy.<sup>2</sup> In this opposition, BECs have developed a number of theological positions unique to their situation which both identify them and place them at odds with traditional Roman Catholic thought. I wish to briefly highlight some of these views, particularly those of their understanding of the new

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<sup>1</sup>Rodor, 192. See also CNBB, Comunidades Eclesiais de Base no Brasil, 11. In this official report issued by CNBB, a "new Church" springing from the BECs is spoken of that is concerned for people's problems rather than the Church's.

<sup>2</sup>Leonardo Boff, "Theological Characteristics of a Grassroots Church," in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 124.



human being, the new society, the concept of the church, and the concept of priesthood and Eucharist. It is hoped that these clarifications will enable one to better understand BECs theological positions in order that they might be effectively evangelized.

### The Concept of New Human Being

The ultimate goal of the formation of BECs is the realization of a new type of human being.<sup>1</sup> This new person is a person of the present, a revolutionary who, motivated by justice and love, acts to transform the existing social structures and build a new human community. This one is so committed to the poor and oppressed that no sacrifice is too great in order to accomplish the goal of formulating the new human being in society. In a spirit of devotion, self-denial, and heroism, the new man and new woman respond to the call of freedom.<sup>2</sup> This revolutionary new person is the kind of person who critically analyses the present, controls his/her destiny, and is oriented towards the future.

Gutierrez reminds us that in the process of the realization of this new human, the liberation of the poor is more than "overcoming economic, social, and political dependence." It means, in a deeper sense, the emancipation of humankind in

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<sup>1</sup>Linda H. Damico, The Anarchist Dimension of Liberation Theology (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Co., 1987), 109-120.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 200-01.

history by and in a qualitatively different society in which men and women "will be free from all servitude." Each human being in this new society is to be "the artisan of his [her] own destiny." He/she is to be optimistic in seeing that this new kind of race is a reality, already present and generalized in present society.<sup>1</sup>

Under the influence of liberation theology, the position of BECs regarding the new man is that the advent of that new human being is a direct result of humankind's

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<sup>1</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 26-27, 91, 214. Gutierrez points out three steps that are to be followed to achieve this socialist goal. First, there must be a radical break from the status quo. This means a profound transformation of the system of private property. Second, there must be access to the ruling power by the exploited classes. Finally, social revolution must occur so that there is a break in the dependence of men on these ruling classes. Gutierrez seems to be close to the truth when he states that the liberation of the human beings is more "than overcoming economic, social, and political dependence." But where he fails is in his neglect of the fact that the root of the problem is the alienation of the human beings from God. The treatment of the problem is basically and first spiritual and personal instead of economic, social, and political as suggested by the liberation theologian. The transforming process of society, biblically speaking, begins in the individual sphere of relationship with God (John 8:32). See also Dupertuis, 128. Quoting Klaus Bockmuehl, The Challenge of Marxism. A Christian Response (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 120, Dupertuis states that such a tentative of synthesis between Marxism and Christianity has only reduced Christian faith into a "motivational faith" bent to revolutionary action.

liberation.<sup>1</sup> Salvation or liberation is conceived as something universal which occurs outside the frontiers of the visible church. It is also collective, i.e., the internalizing process of God's presence in the heart of the whole humankind.<sup>2</sup> This concept of collective and universal salvation primarily stresses the value of human existence through its qualitative and ethical aspects. People are saved if they open themselves to God and to others, even if they are not clearly aware of doing so. This is valid for Christians and non-Christians alike. Since this concept of salvation is based on the human deeds, it clearly contradicts the Bible which offers no room to the participation of human actions in salvation of humankind. Openness to one's neighbors does not cause one's salvation. In fact, it is the expected result of having been saved by Christ.<sup>3</sup> As rightly observed by Dupertuis, such a view gives no attention "to the New Testament teaching that while salvation is meant for all, each person must individually

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<sup>1</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 32-37. The creation of this new human being is called "a permanent cultural revolution" which begins with the social, economic, and political liberation of the individual, changes the structures of society, and goes beyond that until the complete elimination of sin as "the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression."

<sup>2</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 151, 193-94.

<sup>3</sup>Rom 5:1.

appropriate it in order for salvation to become effective for him, otherwise he remains in sin."<sup>1</sup>

Another aspect of the concept of the new human being is that his/her advent must occur as an intra-historical (within history) liberating process. This view is a result of understanding the human being as an indivisible unity. Humankind is not to be distinguished by separating the spiritual and material dimensions of life into two separate, scientifically researched entities. Rather, the human being is a physical, social, emotional, and spiritual unity. Hence, the human being cannot be divided.<sup>2</sup>

Conversion, which is continually being realized, has led BEC soteriology to emphasize sin as synonymous with collective injustice. Hence, sin, in this view, is found in the unjust social-economic structures that maintain the

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<sup>1</sup>Dupertuis, 160.

<sup>2</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 55-58, 153, 204-205. See also Dupertuis, 150. Dupertuis recalls that, according to Bonino, "the elimination of all and every dualism is the clue to liberation theology." See also Phillip Berryman, Liberation Theology (New York, : Pantheon Books, 1987), 94-95. One result of the stress of the unity of mankind has been to dissolve the distinction between the sacred and secular. Hence salvation becomes the liberation of the person in the historical, economic, and social environment where one lives rather than the traditional view of salvation from sin. Conversion is an evolutionary development in which the process of liberation is continually being realized. As Cook records, when one asks a BEC member if he has been converted, his answer will be "I am being converted. . . ." See Cook, The Expectation of the Poor, 166. Such a concept of conversion seems to contradict the biblical teaching, by which conversion is a definite historical point when the human being decides to turn to God (Jer 25:5; Luke 22:23).

status quo.<sup>1</sup> It is the lack of a person's involvement in social revolution aimed at overcoming the oppressive structures. This tends to overlook individual sin and personal guilt. For liberation theologians, there is an intrinsic relation between sin, salvation, and the kingdom on one hand, and the historical process and struggle for socio-political freedom on the other. This connection is defended by Gutierrez on the basis of three interrelated levels of liberation: the political, the historical, and the spiritual.<sup>2</sup> The clue for understanding the unity of these three levels lies in the concept of utopia. Utopia is where faith and political action enter into a meaningful dialogue to create the historical project of the new human being and, consequently, the new society. Utopia, in liberation theology, means the possibility that man can rise above his own historical constructions and project a not-yet-experienced but still possible reality. "The discontinuity between kingdom and general history, between the building of the kingdom and action on sociopolitical structures must be abandoned."<sup>3</sup> The utopia of liberation, borrowed from the Marxist-Christian terminology, is the proper arena for the

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<sup>1</sup>Berryman, Liberation Theology, 48. See also Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 205.

<sup>2</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 36-37.

<sup>3</sup>Rodor, 197-98.

cultural revolution and is also the place where BECs attempt to discover the creation of the new human being.<sup>1</sup>

Thus far, one can see that BECs' anthropology leads to the formulation of a new human being. This man, under the motivation of justice and love and through a revolutionary and self-denying heroism, attempts to emancipate mankind in history by restructuring present society into a qualitatively new society.

#### The Concept of a New Society

The new kind of society for the new man/woman envisioned by BECs is to find its realization in the fellowship of its members. Because the human relationship is not confined to the place of worship only, the new society must be found within factories, societies, etc., i.e., virtually wherever BECs meet. They share life, prayer, material goods, Bible reflections, hopes, and struggles through strong bonds of human solidarity.<sup>2</sup> As every new social phenomenon, the new society of BECs also has its existence based on specific social matrices. The two social matrices in which these struggles take place and which enable BECs society to function are their self-

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<sup>1</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 237-38.

<sup>2</sup>Santa Ana, 381-385.

awareness of the poor and their reflection on their own human possibility of liberation.<sup>1</sup>

### The New Self-Awareness of the Poor

BEC thought has given the poor a new self-awareness of themselves. By becoming a "oasis" of the oppressed, BECs have moved them away from a fatalistic view of life, in which poverty is viewed as a continuing social phenomena, to a perspective that emphasizes that they are poor because they have been systematically exploited under a dominant capitalist system which considers the poor as "non-persons" with no rights.<sup>2</sup>

Pius XI's Quadragesimo Anno (1931) denounced the concentration of power in the hands of a few (art. 105), announced a profound change in the socialism, and stated that, like all errors, socialism also contained some truth (art. 111). Pope John XXIII's Pacem in Terris (1963) has been considered the first Roman Catholic document that spoke

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<sup>1</sup>Curt Cadorette, "Basic Christian Communities: Their Social Role and Missiological Promise," Missiology: An International Review 15 (1987): 17-18.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 19-20. See also Leonardo Boff, Igreja Carisma e Poder (Petrópolis, RJ: Editora Vozes, 1982), 26. See Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 84, 101. Gutierrez writes that the new awareness of the poor gives evidence that the BECs are beginning to see the "signs of the times" of a new era of the poor to whom "the future of history belongs." See Cook, The Expectation of the Poor, 7. For Cook this current tendency of the Brazilian lower society means that "the poor are refusing to give up their own future."

in a positive way about communism.<sup>1</sup> There is in these documents a trend toward a horizontalist emphasis which directs the attention of the Roman Catholic Church more acutely towards the poor. The key words developed by the BEC studies were "liberation" and "praxis" both of which related to the transformation of the sinful social and economic structures of the present world.<sup>2</sup> The building of

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<sup>1</sup>Dupertuis, 68. "On April 11, 1963, less than two months before his death, John XXIII again reiterated his concerns in *Pacem in Terris* which contained some further developments in the area of social justice." Dupertuis criticizes that "notable was the fact that, while not espousing communism or socialism, John XXII did not condemn them." See also Pierre Bigo and Fernando B. Avila, Fé Cristã e Compromisso Social: Elementos Para Uma Reflexão Sobre a América Latina à Luz da Doutrina Social da Igreja (São Paulo, SP: Edições Paulinas, 1982). See also Austin Flannery, Vatican Council II, vol. 1, 688-91.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur McGovern, Marxism: An American Christian Perspective (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 175-76. Both terms are central in the BECs' thought. "Liberation" means that "the oppressed must liberate themselves." Such liberation is a personal commitment to praxis, which implies a commitment to live the gospel by sharing in the lives and struggles of the poor and by striving with them to bring about the changes needed to liberate him/herself and others. See Cook, 91. The primary tool used by BECs to interpret the socio-economic reality is the Marxist dialectical view of history. Cook says that the most of liberation theologians use the social-critical analysis of the Marxist system but reject the determinism and atheism of Marxist dogma. Other sociological instruments are integrated with the Marxist insights such as the sociology of knowledge and the French structuralism. In this philosophy of dialectics, the poor are called to see social reality in terms of polarization between the rich and themselves, oppressors and oppressed, and institutionalized violence by the system and the liberation of the victims. Dupertuis, 101-102. "Informed by the conclusions of the social sciences, some theologians have come to speak of this situation as 'sinful' thus making a qualitative leap from the socio-economic-political sphere to the religious domain, and to see it as their responsibility to give a theological interpretation to the



self-awareness of the poor has three important elements: First, they must be led to see their own reality as being grounded in the "historical praxis," i.e., the poor are not to ask "theoretical questions about invisible realities,"<sup>1</sup> but pertinent questions about their oppressive situation. Second, the poor must be indoctrinated with a sense of "ideological suspicion" about the system.<sup>2</sup> Discussion of the causes and implementing solutions to the problem of oppressive structures is the goal to be reached. Third, religious support for the new assumed position by referring

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engagement of Christians in this process of liberation." Through such a transformation from a sociological to a theological concept, BECs members are thus called to engage themselves in the process of liberation, especially since the purpose of the church is to combat sin wherever it finds it, particularly in oppressive structures. Even though liberation theologians assume the use of the Marxist social sciences to lead the BECs people in their social self-awareness, what must be kept in mind is that Marxism is utilized in a highly selective way. Inevitably, this implies that not everything that Marx has to say is heard. This stratagem is denounced by Kee as a tentative approach, planned by theologians to thwart liberation theology from the criticism of religion appointed by Marx as "the premise of all criticism." Furthermore, he stresses that "any theologian who wishes to make use of Marx, especially in the context of ideology, must surely begin by demonstrating why it is that his own theology escapes Marx's general condemnation of all theology as ideology." Alistair Kee, Marx and the Failure of Liberation Theology (London: SCM Press, 1990), 187, 195, 237, 259.

<sup>1</sup>Dupertuis, 105.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 111. Quoting Justo L. González and Catherino G. González, Liberation Preaching. The Pulpit and the Oppressed (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 52, Dupertuis comments that "one must develop the ideological suspicion without which there is not liberation theology."

to the accounts of the Bible must describe what true "liberation" means.<sup>1</sup>

The philosophical and theological foundations for the new society are laid in this new awareness of the poor. That new society comes about through its transformation into a classless society in which all are equal and in which the oppressors are destroyed. All of the new humanity can then live in peaceful harmony as masters of their own destinies. The manner in which this society comes to function is through liberation.

#### The Ideology of Liberation

The social goal of the BECs is to inspire the poor with the revolutionary ideology of liberation, i.e., that is to fight against the representative classes of the status quo.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, BECs serve as an "oasis" because

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 161. The account of Exodus is one of the basic texts from which one proceeds. God is to be seen in the Bible as He Who is always historically on the side of the poor, fighting against the rich. The result of this is that the classical categorization of people as believers and unbelievers has been changed to the concept of oppressed and oppressors. See also Robert McAfee Brown, Theology in a New Key: Responding to Liberation Themes (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1978), 61. See Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 300.

<sup>2</sup>Cadorette, 21-22, 26. Cadorette holds that the reason the poor tolerate the state of exploitation is because they accept their position in life. Such ideology is more than a mental concept. This is a process which affects the way the poor structure their lives and society. Throughout this ideological process, the poor are induced to waste their constructive collective energy in becoming affluent according to the social standards of consumerism. They are also encouraged in such a direction by sterile

they preserve the sense of selfhood of the poor by keeping alive their distinctive history and culture.<sup>1</sup> Thus, they are not only places of social and spiritual refreshment, but they are also "forums" for generating the critical awareness that is to defy the presuppositions of the "status quo."<sup>2</sup> To the extent that the poor understand their real place in society and the causes of their oppression, they have the capability of becoming powerful symbols and "sources of dialectical opposition to the bourgeois ideology and dominant culture."<sup>3</sup>

The liberating ideological process translates the new knowledge achieved by the poor's self-awareness and social-critical analyses into an effective agenda which confronts the oppressing forces upon their lives. That

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dialogues and internal tensions with the government. The social and economic changes derived from this ideological process are almost always "cosmetic and leave the ideological values and apparatuses of the dominant sector intact." In the method of denunciation, BECs are called to reject the established values and presuppositions of the sinful social-economic structure. When employing annunciation, they are encouraged to deal with real possibilities of social and economic restructuring of human life, or according to liberationist terms, with a new "classless society" where class struggles no longer exist. In communicating the "good tidings" to the society in which they live, BECs establish the Roman Catholic church as the catalyst for involvement in both social and political realms.

<sup>1</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 202.

<sup>2</sup>Cadorette, 23.

<sup>3</sup>Gutierrez, The Power of the Poor in History, 213.

agenda involves two components: (1) an active denunciation of the "sinful" ideology and oppressive structures and (2) the annunciation of the possibility of a qualitatively different social order. Denunciation and annunciation call the BECs to perform a prophetic role within the present society a prophetic role which is supposedly based on the ministry of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

### The Role of Jesus Christ

For BECs, the human being's liberation is centered upon Jesus Christ the Liberator and communicated by the concept of the revolutionary historical Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Christ's image, for BEC thought, is grounded on three historical observations. (1) Jesus connection with the zealot movement; (2) the confrontation of Jesus with the groups in power; and (3) the death of Jesus at the hands of political authorities

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<sup>1</sup>Cadorette, 25-26.

<sup>2</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 149. See also Kee, 222-24. Kee criticizes the use of Jesus' image as the Liberator in saying that such a practice is only to provide a supporter for liberation theology in its posture of being in favor of revolution as the way to overcome the oppressing socio-economic structures in Latin America. For a further study on this issue, see Jon Sobrino, Jesus in Latin America (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987). See also John Howard Yoder, The Politics of Jesus (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 250. Yoder says that the theme of the New Testament is the creation of a new community characterized by a non-violent social style. "The cross of Christ is the model of Christian social efficacy, the power of God for those who believe."

as a zealot.<sup>1</sup> In the particular Brazilian context of the BECs, Jesus Christ is the symbol of a free person among persons who are ruled by leaders who have enslaved them. His death is understood as a consequence of His challenge against the powerful who felt threatened by His liberty. Jesus, therefore, is pictured as the Servant of humankind. The BECs members see Jesus' message as extended to all, as a service for the entire race, not only for those who feel themselves to be religious persons.<sup>2</sup>

#### Scripture and Liberation

To avoid the Marxist charge that religion is only an alienating influence in the service of dominant classes, the

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<sup>1</sup>J. Severino Croatto, "The Political Dimension of Christ the Liberator," in Jose Miguez Bonino, ed., Faces of Jesus (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 117. See also Segundo Galileia, "Jesus' Attitude Towards Politics," in Bonino, ed., Faces of Jesus, 93-101. Differing from Gutierrez, Croatto sees the political dimension of Christ as linked to His radical incarnation to liberate humankind. The connection between Christ and the zealot movement, stresses Croatto, is an ill service to the cause of liberation. Non-violence, he says, characterizes Christ's political dimension. On this point, McGovern's criticism is quite apropos when he states that many of the liberation theologians usually avoid dealing with Jesus' message of non-violence. Exceptions, he says, exist, as Leonardo Boff, for example, who says that Jesus love "rules out all violence and oppression, even for the sake of having love itself prevail"; or Segundo Galileia who holds that "violence cannot be overcome with purely human means or other forms of violence" (MacGovern, 192-93). Credit must also be given to D. Helder Camara who is well-known as a defender of revolution through pacifist means. (Helder Camara, Revolution Through Peace [New York: Harper and Row, 1971]).

<sup>2</sup>Jose Comblin, Jesus of Nazareth: Meditations on His Humanity (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 37-91.

Brazilian liberation theologians have engaged Scriptural symbols to support a person's involvement in the so-called liberating process.<sup>1</sup> Segundo describes this new methodology to encourage the poor to see reality as a "hermeneutic circle," a methodology which can be systematized in four steps. First, one must experience reality and practice ideological suspicion. Second, the ideological suspicion must be applied to the whole ideological superstructure, in general (Capitalism), and to the theological realm, in particular (as represented by the Roman Catholic hierarchy). Third, theological reality must be experienced as a result of the study of the Bible. Fourth, the new hermeneutic must be used and the Bible interpreted as the source of faith. Biblical interpretation, according to the principle of the hermeneutic circle, is "dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and social."<sup>2</sup>

Such methodology is materialistic and

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<sup>1</sup>Rodor, 189, 330. For example: (1) Pharaoh and Herod symbolize the ruling class, while the Israelites represent the oppressed people; (2) the poor are the "People of God" and are nearly always interpreted in socio-economic and political terms; (3) poverty is misunderstood synonymously with the Christian virtue of being righteous and, therefore, as a divine privilege; (4) God is the defender of the rights of the poor and the executioner of the oppressor; (5) Moses is the model for contemporary revolutionary leaders; (6) the ten plagues are representative of the punishment of the oppressor; (7) Jesus is the sponsor of the cause of political liberation.

<sup>2</sup>Juan Luiz Segundo, A Liberation of Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), 8-9.

horizontalistic in its origin. There are, at least, three points in relation to the "hermenutic circle" which are in direct opposition to the theology of the Bible: (1) human reason is above the special revelation of Scripture; (2) human reality becomes the starting point to interpret the Bible; (3) because "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,"<sup>1</sup> the experience of faith never starts with suspicion. Without the Bible, there is no absolute revelation of God. The Bible is the only reliable guide to interpret the human problems. Biblically speaking, the earth and, particularly, humankind are involved as the core center of the cosmic conflict between God and Lucifer.<sup>2</sup> He/she who wants to interpret reality has to consider the existence of this conflict, otherwise he will have a deformed view of human reality. Sin is the ultimate cause of the cosmic conflict. Sin has deformed human nature and earth environment. Because of sin, human reality is an unreliable tool to interpret the human problems. If the interpreter of the Bible overlooks the biblical doctrine of human sinful nature, the result of his/her interpretation will be false. Therefore, the Bible is the ultimate and reliable revelation that God has given about Himself and the human problems. Furthermore, if one

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<sup>1</sup>Heb 11:1.

<sup>2</sup>Rev 12:7-9; Eph 6:12. The entire book of Job speaks about that cosmic conflict in which the honor of God's character and the salvation of human beings are involved.

wants to interpret the Bible, his/her hermeneutics must take the very Biblical context as the starting point. This hermeneutic principle comes from the Bible itself.<sup>1</sup> The Biblical context recalls that God Himself must be taken as the master key to interpret the entire universal reality.<sup>2</sup> In concluding this brief critique on the "hermeneutic circle," we should emphasize that genuine faith only occurs when human beings take God and His special revelation as the starting point in their search for truth. The use of a methodology such as that used in the Segundo's "hermeneutic circle" not only voids the theological meaning of the Biblical text but also confuses its message with the human misconceptions which rise from everyday life.

Thus, through a false hermeneutic, the members of BECs come to conceive the construction of a new society based only on human efforts. The new human of the BECs must live in a new society which comes about by the horizontal "liberation" of humanity from the oppressive structures. In obtaining his/her own freedom, the human being becomes the captain of his/her own destiny. This view of "liberation" attempts to find religious support in the Biblical teaching. Jesus' life and death and the Exodus are aimed by liberation theology as the primary paradigms upon which the new society

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<sup>1</sup>Isa 28:10, 13; Luke 24:25-27, 32; Rom 10:17; Heb 11:6.

<sup>2</sup>Gen 1:1; Ps 8:3-5; 19:1, 9; Job 21:22; 42:1-3; John 1:1-3; Col 1:15-16; Rev 3:14.



is to be constructed. These Biblical events and person are to be interpreted in the context of concern for the poor. This implies that the meaning of Scripture is to be determined by the present-day social reality of the poor. Thus, basic concepts of Scripture are misunderstood, from which BECs come into false conclusions to solve the problems of the poor. This view of anthropology has greatly affected the BECs' view of the church.

### The Concept of the Church

BECs see themselves as the "People of God" in a way which is to challenge the hierarchy which has "monopolized sacred power and kept it all in its own hands."<sup>1</sup>

The view of the four attributes of the church held by BEC ecclesiology, i.e., her oneness, holiness, apostolicity, and catholicity, determines what the church is.

Boff argues that the church's oneness exists in the fact that the church touches every human being through the mystery of God's salvation. Therefore, the unity of the church is seen in historical and concrete terms through "the multiplicity of communities differentiated by city,

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<sup>1</sup>Boff, "Theological Characteristics of a Grassroots Church," 134-35. See Avery Dulles, Models of the Church (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1987), 83: "The tendency is to say that the Church exists wherever there is a community that believes in Christ."

province, local conditions, and socio-cultural idiosyncracies."<sup>1</sup>

Holiness, as understood in BEC theology, is not ascetism but commitment to the cause of the oppressed. Using this criteria, many communities find their point of reference for personal holiness "in people who have suffered courageously because of their commitment to the community and the gospel message."<sup>2</sup> Popular revolutionaries and other local persons are held to be modern saints. This horizontal understanding of holiness allows common people to become saints.

Apostolic succession is understood not in terms of historical-hierarchical succession but in terms of "apostolic life," a life "committed to the following of Jesus" and the sharing in Jesus' life and destiny. Thus, apostolic succession is not a motive for introducing a system of classificatory scale of ministerial levels. The division of services between deacons and apostles was based on "a deeper, underlying fraternity and equality."<sup>3</sup>

Catholicity occurs only when their members are linked by faith to the salvific mystery of God. It is communion with Jesus the Savior and those other particular

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<sup>1</sup>Boff, Ecclesiogenesis, 16.

<sup>2</sup>Leonardo Boff, E a Igreja se Fez Povo, 147-199.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 141-42.

churches that are faithful to Jesus' message.<sup>1</sup> The BECs, argues Boff, might also be the apostolic Church if the word "apostle" were taken in its original meaning, i.e., "one sent out" to preach the coming of the kingdom (Matt 10:5-6).<sup>2</sup>

### The Concept of Priesthood and Eucharist

There seems to be two main factors which hinder the BECs from understanding the Eucharist as held by Roman Catholic theology. These are the sacramental dimension of the Eucharist celebration and the shortage of ordained priests.<sup>3</sup> For these reasons both the sacramental role of the ordained priesthood and the theological values of the celebrations have been questioned. For the institutional Church, there is no Church "without the hierarchy that the bishop represents."<sup>4</sup>

The Eucharistical tension, according to liberation theologians, admits only two basic solutions: immobility or creativity. Immobility forces people to accept the

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<sup>1</sup>Boff, Ecclesiogenesis, 16-20.

<sup>2</sup>Idem, "Theological Characteristics of a Grassroots Church," 141.

<sup>3</sup>Azevedo, Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil, 200. Officially, there are 1.8 priests for every 10,000 Brazilian Roman Catholics. See also Boff, Ecclesiogenesis, 2, 61-62. Boff remarks that, by the official praxis, "a priest can celebrate the Eucharist without the community, but the community cannot celebrate the Eucharist without the priest."

<sup>4</sup>Cook, The Expectation of the Poor, 61.

authority of the official church, which considers the celebrations by lay coordinators as paraliturgicas rather than sacramental. Creativity suggests that the Eucharist has to be celebrated under the presidency of BECs lay coordinators rightly authorized by the local ecclesiastical authority.<sup>1</sup>

### Summary

The main issues for the Brazilian BECs which have been focused on in this chapter are: the concept of new human being, the advent of a new society, the concept of the

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<sup>1</sup>Boff, Ecclesiogenesis, 62-70. Boff defends this idea by three arguments: (1) The bishop has the prerogative to authorize the Eucharist celebration by the lay people. This prerogative is valid under the principle that the bishop represents the Christian church's unity (Acts 13:1-3). (2) The validity of the experience of the Reformed churches sees the apostolic succession as related to fidelity to the apostolic teaching. (3) The concept of the universal priesthood of all believers confers on each believer the ability to perform the role of an extraordinary minister in extraordinary situations. Such situations would be recognized, for example, during persecutions of the church or a shortage of ordained priesthood. Boff claims that since the Brazilian BECs live in an extraordinary situation with a shortage of priests, they must have the right to creatively solve their problem as allowed by the church's canon. Boff grounds his arguments on the analysis of liturgical vocabulary found in sermons and homilies of the first Christian millennium to say that the priests did not celebrate nor consecrate by themselves. He also calls upon the anti-Donatist Council of Arles (314) which promulgated this canon: "We enjoin deacons, who we know celebrate the Eucharist in many places, to restrict those celebrations as much as may be possible." See also the appendix of chap. 4 of Boff's Ecclesiogenesis: "Celebrations of the Lord's Supper in a Basic Community." The new element is the absence of the traditional host, replaced by a cake of sweet cassava (manioc or tapioca), and wine, replaced by regional juice fruits.

church, and the concept of a lay priesthood. Because of the Marxist and horizontalistic philosophy of liberation theology on which these issues are based, BECs members cannot understand the Biblical message. Despite the fact that many members of BECs are unaware of the existence of these philosophical drives in BECs theology, they are motivated, in their beliefs and social lives, by an anti-Biblical teaching. Though they use the Bible, their conclusions about the Biblical message are of materialistic implication. "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit," said Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Even though BECs chronologically precede the emergence of liberation theology, liberation theology has been decisively influential in BECs. Presently, the liberation theologians claim that BECs are the place where the theology of liberation must be put into practice.<sup>2</sup> Optimistically, one wing of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church hopes that BECs will succeed in winning the masses to the cause of Christ the Liberator and overcome the present political contradiction. This, however, is in tension with a trend towards a new emphasis upon centralization which, in

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<sup>1</sup>Matt 7:17, NIV.

<sup>2</sup>Emilio A. Nunez C. and William D. Taylor, Crisis in Latin America: An Evangelical Perspective (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1989), 271.

the perception of Brazilian BECs, founds its roots in the Vatican tactics towards Brazilian Catholicism.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever their future in Brazil, the BECs are, simultaneously, a challenge and an opportunity to the SDA Church mission. The purpose of the next chapter is to attempt to evaluate the theological positions of the BECs and see at what points they can be most effectively reached and challenged.

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<sup>1</sup>"Quem tem ouvidos, ouça o que o Espírito diz as Igrejas" CEDEFES (May 1989): 12 (unpublished material). According to CEDEFES, Carlos Mesters, who is the director of the Center of Biblical Studies (CEBI) for the Brazilian BECs, has been obligated to be in silence by the Vatican. The same punishment was imposed upon Leonardo Boff five years ago.

## CHAPTER III

### BUILDING A SDA APPROACH TOWARDS THE BECs

In the previous chapter, the objective was to survey some of the basic theological positions held by BEC members. In this chapter, my endeavor is to evaluate these tenets in regard to both their strengths and weaknesses, especially in their understanding of anthropology, sociology, liberation, and ecclesiology. It is hoped that by doing this one can find possible ways to reach BEC members with the unique SDA message.

#### The Wholeness of Man

While traditional Roman Catholic anthropology has held that the human being is comprised of distinct entities--one temporal (body) and the other eternal (soul)--BECs view body and soul as unified parts of the being, both of which are in need of salvation.<sup>1</sup> BECs, because of this, are able to emphasize salvation as something that must occur in the present and that must involve both the body and the soul. This allows them to avoid speaking of salvation as something

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<sup>1</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 91.

completely other worldly.<sup>1</sup> According to Padilla, this means that the Christian mission must speak to the whole person.<sup>2</sup> The concept of the wholeness of human beings seems to be one of the convergent features between liberation theological thought and SDA mission. Both BECs and the SDA Church call for mission to reflect on the need of speaking to the whole human being when presenting the gospel. There can be no true salvation if the goal of liberation is merely economic or social. The latter neglects the deepest questions that affect humankind.

In spite of its positive position regarding the wholeness of humans, BEC anthropology faces some real dangers because of its use of the basic presuppositions of liberation theology to build their doctrine of man. Since liberation theology uses a socialistic-humanistic approach, salvation tends to come, for BEC members, as a result of their own effort.<sup>3</sup> While the liberation theologians hold that in struggling to overcome alienation and oppression human beings transform themselves and society, Jesus says, "apart from me you can do nothing."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 155-160.

<sup>2</sup>René C. Padilla, Mission Integral: Ensayos Sobre el Reino y la Iglesia (Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 133-34.

<sup>3</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 111.

<sup>4</sup>John 15:5, NIV.



Even though the BEC position represents an improvement of the Roman Catholic doctrine of human nature, its weakness is evident not only in the fact that human deeds become the basis for salvation but also in the fact that such a view tends to overlook the Biblical doctrine of the discontinuation of sinful history by God's intervention.<sup>1</sup> In the Bible, the word salvation implies more than present historical salvation. The term comprises God's action in pre-historical and post-historical times.<sup>2</sup> Salvation, indeed, is here and now in the course of history where the complete transformation of man must begin. The social, political, and economic human liberation, however desirable it may be, is only partially effected within present history.<sup>3</sup>

SDA mission is oriented towards the development of the whole person. Its objective includes the formation of a new permanent lifestyle which touches every aspect of human existence. This includes the healing of the person in her/his relationships in community. It seeks to liberate individual humans from the past, present, and future consequences of both personal and corporate sin. It aims at

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<sup>1</sup>2 Pet 3:11-13.

<sup>2</sup>Rom 1:16; 5:6; Rev 13:8; 21:4-5. For further study see Gerhard Kittel, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 965-1024.

<sup>3</sup>Rodor, 298.

a total reconstruction of all dimensions of human life in accordance with the original purpose of God. The three times of God's salvation (justification from the guilt of sin, sanctification in the present life, and glorification at the Christ' second coming) relate to the Christian life now. To distinguish between them is possible. To separate them is impossible. God's salvation expresses hope for human existence in the final victory of God in Christ Jesus and provides a powerful incentive for the practice of love among men and women now.<sup>1</sup> The restoration of God's image in the human being is the ultimate purpose of the SDA mission. Such restoration must start in the present historical context.

### The New Society

Biblically speaking, man exists as a social being, i.e., as a person in relationships with others.<sup>2</sup> The goal of mission, therefore, is to reach out to society and restore relationships. A correct vision of the world as the object of the believers' mission may often determine the success or failure in the evangelizing task. Contrary to ancient Israel, many Christians today fail not because they have shut themselves away from the world but "because they

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<sup>1</sup>Padilla, 73-76. Rom 5:1; 14:17-19; 2 Cor 5:16-10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 136.

have become so absorbed by the world that they have lost their sense of mission."<sup>1</sup>

In order for one to be able to reach out to an individual human being or a group, one must be committed to God and, at the same time, be involved in the community.<sup>2</sup> Through involvement in the community, Christ saves humankind (John 1:1-3, 14). The God proclaimed by the gospel is the Being Who has come into human history in order to reach individuals by participating in every contingency of the ordinary life.

BEC theology of a new society is a positive attempt to recover the sense of mission for the church. Their goal in creating a new human being is synchronous with their objective of constructing a new society and has two distinctive strengths. First, BEC theology has moved the poor from a fatalistic view of life in which poverty is seen as a continuing social phenomena to the perspective which emphasizes the fact that they can overcome their state of deprivation. Second, BECs's new society has positively strengthened the social fabric of Brazilian people by motivating them to participate in meaningful relationships within the parish, neighborhood, and working places.

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<sup>1</sup>Gottfried Oosterwal, Mission: Possible (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1972), 12.

<sup>2</sup>Padilla, 31.

Though well-intentioned, this view has the danger of committing the Christian to one that is worldly political. While the Bible exhorts Christians to be at peace with the government, it also reminds them that they are to free themselves from political involvement in order that they may preach the gospel to all humankind.<sup>1</sup> "Every Christian effort towards the creation of a better world," says Lane, "is preparatory, provisional, and penultimate to the final coming of God's kingdom."<sup>2</sup> "Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who," Paul says, "by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."<sup>3</sup>

Another weakness of this attempt to construct a new classless society is its oversimplification of the problem of sin. The oppressed/oppressor polarization appears as a "new formulation of saints-and-sinners dialectic of Christianity."<sup>4</sup> This seems to negate the radical difference between good and evil and overlook the real nature of man's alienation. That sin involves more than

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<sup>1</sup>Matt 5:13-14; John 18:36; 2 Cor 6:14-18; 5:18-20; Rom 12:2.

<sup>2</sup>Dermot A. Lane, Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process, and Salvation (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1984), 66, 137.

<sup>3</sup>Phil 3:20.

<sup>4</sup>Rodor, 284-85.

just the social sin of the oppressive structures is fundamentally overlooked.<sup>1</sup> What this view has produced is a superficial understanding of the nature of sin. Liberation theologians appear to pay insufficient attention to the basic failure of Marx's perception of the true nature of man's alienation as revealed in biblical revelation, i.e., that it is rebellion against God. The mystery of sin has effects which are more deeply seen than the oppression of social-economic structural relations. Sin, in biblical terms, cannot be affected basically by mere elimination of poverty through social and political measures. Only God's intervention can eliminate sin which touches all aspects of human life, including the sin of oppressive structures.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the BEC intent of creating a new society seems to magnify the poor and their social economic context as the locus par excellence for theological understanding. Man rather than God becomes the center of theology.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation affects certain basic missiological concepts, especially that of evangelization. Instead of preaching the gospel message of a loving Father

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Pet 3:11-13.

<sup>3</sup>For a further study see Dupertuis, 164-203. The fact that God has heard the people's cry is not evidence enough to state that God reveals Himself through the clamor of the poor today. This implies that God no longer reveals Himself through his Word but only by speaking to man. This denigrates the authority of Scripture for present world. See also Rodor, 271.

who genuinely liberates human being, the poor preach the liberation of themselves and their rich oppressors by breaking the oppressive structures of society. The kingdom of God is wrongly taken as synonymous with the utopia of a new social order, the new classless society built by the human beings themselves.<sup>1</sup>

According to BEC members, human beings know God through the Word as it assumes concrete forms in their own culture. An effective communication of the gospel and a positive response from the hearers is possible only when the social and cultural barriers of society are overcome and the church uses the language, pattern of thinking, forms of behavior, values, and institutions of the people that the church's members are trying to reach.

However, one must also maintain a right balance between being involved with and separate from the world which is essential in accomplishing the church's mission.<sup>2</sup> Christians can only benefit society while preserving their uniqueness. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men" (Matt 5:13 [NIV]). Those who maintain their "oneness with Christ," says Ellen G. White, "will be

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<sup>1</sup>Alvaro Barreiro, Basic Ecclesial Communities: The Evangelization of the Poor (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 14-69.

<sup>2</sup>Oosterwal, Mission: Possible, 12.

able to exercise an influence far above that of the renowned of this world. While copying the example of Christ, they have, with His grace, power to benefit the church and the community."<sup>1</sup> The SDA influence, she emphasizes, "is felt just in proportion to the distinctness of the line of demarcation which separates them in spirit and principle from the world."<sup>2</sup>

### Liberation

Regarding the liberation of humankind, two points can be considered as positive. First, through the ideology of liberation, BECs have performed the role of "oasis" where the poor become self-aware of their possibilities to struggle for their own development. Second, the ideology of liberation has driven BEC members to see their place in society through active participation in it. This self-awareness and participation of the poor are based on the image of Jesus Christ the Liberator, which is their strongest motivation to take part in society. One of the weaknesses of the liberating BEC thought, however, lies in their overemphasis of the image of Jesus Christ Liberator.

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, Welfare Ministry (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1952), 296.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

### The Role of Christ

For BECs, the emphasis on political liberation which is founded on the image of Jesus Christ the Liberator hinders their perception of what is involved in Christ's sacrifice. The Bible says that Christ died an intentional expiatory death in favor of the human beings. "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it again."<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Bible shows Christ as the Father's Servant and as the Representative and Lord of humankind to whom all the human beings must pay obedience.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the BEC view of liberation has led to another danger in regard to the liberating process. In this process, BEC members are to translate the new knowledge achieved by their self-awareness and social-critical analyses into an effective agenda which confronts the oppressing forces upon their lives. That agenda involves two components: (1) active denunciation of the "sinful" ideology and oppressive structures; and (2) the annunciation of the possibility of a qualitatively different social order. Denunciation and annunciation call the BECs to perform a prophetic role within the present society.<sup>3</sup>

Such an utopian ideology of liberation misunderstands the Biblical teaching of the human

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<sup>1</sup>John 10:17, NIV.

<sup>2</sup>Isa 53; Rom 5; Rev 5.

<sup>3</sup>Cadorette, 25-26.



sinfulness. According to the Bible, society is sinful because human beings are sinful.<sup>1</sup> The transformation of the human society must begin with the transformation of women and men in accepting Christ's salvation from sin. The principle of God's transformation works from inside to outside. The ideology of liberation, however, in tension with Biblical principles, intends to transform the human beings by transforming society. In attaining the same goal, the BECs members confuse the cause with the result of liberation while neglecting the role of Christ in dealing with sin.

#### The New Hermeneutics

BECs have attempted to transform the Bible into a relevant book for the common person. This is a positive point of the new hermeneutic of these communities. Through this interpretation, the Biblical message becomes pertinent to one's everyday life and opens doors for an opportunity to more deeply understand the Bible.

Nevertheless, despite the real possibility of a deeper understanding of the Bible, there is also the danger of misinterpreting the Bible message. Such danger may be seen in the method of contextualization disseminated by Mesters among the Brazilian BECs. According to him, three indispensable elements interpret the Bible: the Bible itself

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<sup>1</sup>Rom 3:23; 7:14, 17-20.

(the text), the community (the Bible in context), and the social and economic reality (the pre-text). "The Word of God," stresses Mesters, "is not just the Bible," but it is the Bible within the reality of the human being.<sup>1</sup> In viewing the Scriptures in such a manner, each BEC member creates his/her own hermeneutic in which Scripture is used to reflect on concrete reality, having its message actualized, applied to life situations, and confronted with reality: basic needs, sufferings, rights, and struggles.<sup>2</sup>

However, if Scripture is interpreted only according to the present historical situation, there is no control over possible speculations which can be generated by the community. There is also no way to avoid a theological-historical reductionism.<sup>3</sup> The matter again emphasizes the importance of the poor, who in actuality become a new "privileged spiritual" class, a kind of a "new magisterium" of the Church in charge of interpreting and translating the biblical message according to different circumstances faced by the human beings as they exist in present history.<sup>4</sup> This can weaken the authority of Scripture. The person or

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<sup>1</sup>Carlos Mesters, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People," in Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds. The Challenge of the Basic Christian Communities (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 199-200.

<sup>2</sup>Rodor, 192.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 270.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 316-17.

the historical circumstances are the controls for the interpretation of the Bible. This ignores the witness of the Bible to its own authority.<sup>1</sup> SDA mission has much to say to BEC theology at this point. Because of their understanding of revelation and inspiration of Scripture, SDAs can offer a more sure authority than the subjective authority of the believer. By emphasizing the authority of Scripture, SDAs can offer not only a real interpretation of history but also a view of God's plan to establish permanent liberation from sin for individuals and society.

### BEC Ecclesiology

#### The Ontological Aspects of the Church

Even though a Marxist bias exists in the theological thought of the Brazilian BECs, they do see themselves as truly Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> This is not a sectarian vision, say the members of BECs, but the result of the official recognition on the part of the clergy and even of the Vatican of their right to exist.<sup>3</sup> BEC ecclesiology,

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<sup>1</sup>Ps 119:160; John 17:17; 1 Tim 3:15-17.

<sup>2</sup>CEDI, "Povo de Deus na América Latina à Caminho da Libertação: Dossiê do Sétimo Encontro Intraeclesial de Comunidades Eclesiais de Base," CEDI (1989): 1-207. (Unpublished material)

<sup>3</sup>Collonese, vol. 1: Position Papers, 185. The document issued by CELAM II, held in Meddelin, in 1968, is a strong support of the BEC which was stated by the bishops as "the first and fundamental ecclesiastical nucleus." In referring to the BECs, the document Lumen Gentium stated that "in these communities, though they may often be small and poor, or existing in the diaspora, Christ is present

however, has both positive and negative aspects. Among its positive aspects is its view of the Church which accents the importance of the church's unity in Christ's salvation, which impinges on every human being separated by the multiplicity of socially and culturally differentiated communities.<sup>1</sup> Other positive points of the BEC ecclesiology are their concept of personal holiness among the common people, their understanding of apostolicity based on the commitment to the apostolic teaching instead of historical-hierarchical succession, and their view of catholicity as their commitment with God's universal cause in their mission to share salvation with human beings.<sup>2</sup>

However, the question must be raised if the BECs have been fully faithful to Jesus' message. Jesus Himself spells out His own definition of faithfulness: "If you love

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through whose power and influence the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is constituted."

<sup>1</sup>Boff, "Theological Characteristics of a Grassroots Church," 126. Boff argues that the Church has wrongly reproduced the unjust structure of the capitalism system and, consequently, created a hierarchical bloc which functions like the ruling bloc of the capitalist society. He denounces, then, that the "unity of the church is defined as the communion of the people with the hierarchy. But the opposite is almost never stated: i.e., the communion of the hierarchy with the people."

<sup>2</sup>Apostolic succession has been based by the liberation theologians as faithfulness to message of Scripture but not as transmitter of propositional truth. The subjective view of authority as maintained by BEC members does not offer room to the authoritative role of Scripture in their lives.

me, you will obey what I command."<sup>1</sup> There is no doubt that God's commandments are clearly given in the Ten Commandments.<sup>2</sup> To keep God's law is the most complete expression of love towards God and human beings.

### The Function of the Church

#### Work in the Vicinity

The presence and work in the local parish among the common people through BECs must be seen as a positive aspect of their understanding of the function of the church. BECs view themselves as agents of renovation through which the poor find a new identity in society and room where their personal gifts can be developed and used. They have given a new missionary impetus to the church.

Christ's church exists for a missionary purpose. Mission includes both the universal and local churches. Christ's desire is "to see the whole church devising ways and means whereby rich and poor, black and white, free and bond, may hear the message of truth."<sup>3</sup> Ellen G. White remarked that in every local SDA church companies of workers should be well-organized to work in the church's vicinity. For her, the workers will know through "the intelligent use of the means, the capabilities, the powers" given by God and

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<sup>1</sup>John 14:15, NIV.

<sup>2</sup>Exod 20:3-17.

<sup>3</sup>Oosterwal, Mission: Possible, 66.

"consecrated to his service" where even they may labor.<sup>1</sup>  
 In 1896, she appealed to the SDA families "to go into communities that are in darkness and error . . . to become acquainted with a new class of society, and to work wisely and perseveringly for the cause of the Master."<sup>2</sup>

The function of the church, however, has been somewhat misunderstood by BECs when they view those communities as a place where political gains are to be emphasized. To be more precise, in motivating the struggle of classes and in inciting their members against the civil government, BECs are far from the example of communities of the early church which maintained themselves apart from the political process in the first century. This procedure was recommended by Jesus and the apostles.<sup>3</sup>

#### The Role of the Laity

Besides rediscovering the function of the church as an agent to the work in the parish, BECs have also reemphasized the role of the laity in the worship and service of the church. The church is organized not to worship God in the sense of a closed community, but to work within, with, and by the community in which it resides.

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, September 29, 1891.

<sup>2</sup>Idem, "Why the Lord Waits," Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, July 21, 1896.

<sup>3</sup>Matt 24:20; Rom 13:1-6; Phil 8-21.

The church must exist as "a people belonging to God" committed to declare "the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."<sup>1</sup> The relation between worship and service is accented in stating that "evangelism is actually the extension of the church's worship into the world as the people of God become the true sacrament, broken bread and poured-out wine in sacrificial service."<sup>2</sup> Thus, "Christian worship does not end when the benediction is pronounced. It continues in the form of service in the world."<sup>3</sup>

Before God can use the congregation, however, it must be formed, firmly established, and instructed in the Word by the Lord.<sup>4</sup> The church's goal is ultimately to share Jesus Christ as the very essence of the community in which it exists.<sup>5</sup> The members of a local church are to recall that "the presence of the church in the world today is a unique phenomenon in the experience of man."<sup>6</sup> God's

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<sup>1</sup>1 Pet 2:9, NIV.

<sup>2</sup>C. Raymond Holmes, Sing a New Song: Worship Renewal for Adventists Today (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1984), 141.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Oosterwal, Mission: Possible, 36. "This is exactly what happened with Jesus' disciples, with the early Christian church, and with the great Advent Movement."

<sup>5</sup>Padilla, 139. The unity that results from the work of Christ is not an abstract unity, but it is a new community in which the life of Christ is a decisive factor.

<sup>6</sup>McDill, 13-14.

people are unique because the message of life and death of Christ has been entrusted to their care. "It is a message of good news and hope which directly addresses the deepest needs of man."<sup>1</sup> The very presence of the church is, in itself, a message to this world. According to Oosterwal, "the success of a missionary movement is proportionally related to its ability to rally the whole church, that is, all its members, to the task of mission."<sup>2</sup> From a theological standpoint, Christ has entrusted His evangelizing task to His whole people rather than to a specialized clergy.<sup>3</sup> It is basically a lay task.

Three biblical aspects of the word people (laos) must be considered in understanding the church's mission. First, the whole of God's church is biblically termed God's people (laos). This implies that all believers in Christ (the body of Christ), including the common people (not necessarily the people who lack technical competence or divine authority to do the missionary task) and their specialized ministers share the same God's ministry. Second, the gifts of the Holy Spirit have been given to the laity, i.e., the people of God, as a whole and not just to individual persons for their own use. Finally, the special goal, according to Ephesians 4:11-12, is "to equip God's

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Oosterwal, Mission: Possible, 64.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 64-65.



people [laos] for work in his service to the building up of the body of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

From a practical standpoint, SDA lay people have the advantage of being able to witness to many people and social groups that are either closed or hidden within the whole society. BECs may represent both cases. To bring them to the fullness of life in Christ, it is essential that someone "share their pain and affliction and work with them for the realization of their hopes and dreams."<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White has defined that "the strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian."<sup>3</sup> She added, if SDAs would humble themselves before God and be "kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 103-112. A meaningful parallel exists between the true biblical meaning of the term laity (laos) and the remnant described by the apostle John. This invitation, addressed to the remnant, states: "Come out of her [Babylon], my people [laos] that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18: 4). Oosterwal emphasizes that "biblically speaking, the first task of the minister is . . . to nourish, strengthen, equip, help, and sustain the laity for its ministry."

<sup>2</sup>Waldron Scott, Editorial, International Review of Mission (October 1983): 491.

<sup>3</sup>Ellen G. White, Ministry of Healing (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1942), 470.

<sup>4</sup>Idem, Testimonies for the Church, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 9:189.

Scripture teaches that every believer receives one or more spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. "For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit."<sup>1</sup> The ultimate goal of every spiritual gift is the "perfecting of the saints, for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Related to the evangelizing task of BECs, the local pastor should discover, with the help of the whole church, who is able to minister Bible studies to those communities located within his/her neighborhood.

#### What We Can Learn from BECs

In building an approach to evangelize BECs, the following facts may summarize some positive points that SDAs can learn from BEC experience. First, there is rediscovery and involvement of the Roman Catholic laity even in face of hierarchical criticism. BEC members participate in the entire worship life of their community. This gives them a sense of belonging. The SDA Church in Brazil needs to learn that the system of one pastor for one congregation seems to be a hindrance to church growth. Second, there is the expression of pastoral concern to meet the personal needs of the common people in face the shortage of clergy. Third, the performing role of BECs as forums for individuals to

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<sup>1</sup>1 Cor 12:8.

<sup>2</sup>Eph 4:12.

express their social concerns can be useful for SDAs. Fourth, there is the openness of these communities to study the Bible. Fifth, SDAs can use the familial groups promulgated by BECs to establish the social and spiritual program of the parish or community. Sixth, the added dimension of parish life in the rural zones and outskirts of large cities calls for a large field of endeavor for SDA mission. Through BECs the parish is present in the poor neighborhood where the suffering people live.

The evangelization of BECs, therefore, should be centered in the local SDA churches because the personal touch makes the task effective and encourages an environment of fellowship. These the local churches can create.<sup>1</sup> To accomplish this evangelizing task, SDAs are well-equipped with a network of established local churches in the southern region of Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Roy H. Short, Evangelism Through the Local Church (Nashville, TN: Abingdom Press, 1956), 13-14. "Only the local church blankets the earth in an intimate way. The local church is everywhere. It is to be found in the heart of the great cities of the land and it is likewise to be found nestling among the trees in lonesome valley." (Emphasis supplied.)

<sup>2</sup>Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 1990 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990), 278. There are 336 organized local churches and 541 companies comprising 89,613 SDA baptized members. Geographically speaking, southern Brazil includes the states of Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul. However, the South Brazilian Union of the SDA Church also includes the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

### Summary

The content of the first part of this project may be summarized by emphasizing the following points:

1. Brazilian BECs originated as a popular and lay movement to reshape the Roman Catholic Church and also as a creative solution to nurture the Catholic people in the face of a lack of ordained priests. The historical trend of lay leadership of the Brazilian Catholicism offered the soil from which the BECs have sprung and grown. Even though those communities precede liberation theology, liberation theology has influenced them towards a participation in the political and social scene of Brazil.

2. BECs see themselves as Christians, characterized by the marks of the true Christian church. The BEC awareness of their ecclesiality as God's people should lead SDAs to consider BEC members as part of those Christians who are to be called by the preaching of the last appeal of God addressed to humankind. This appeal, also called the Third Angels' message by SDAs, is a call to join those who constitute the remnant of God and participate in their destiny. SDAs have not only the biblical credentials to assume such evangelistic initiative, but they also have the knowledge of God's last message to the human beings. This

is a biblical message of righteousness by faith in Christ and an invitation to a holistic worshipping life.<sup>1</sup>

3. The involvement of the SDA laity is crucial to evangelize the BECs because: (a) the laity comprises the whole of God's remnant (laos); (b) God's remnant is in charge of accomplishing the evangelizing task; and (c) BECs are comprised of lay people who are more easily reached through the everyday personal contact of SDA lay people.

4. SDA laity should learn the existing common theological ground between BECs and the SDA church.<sup>2</sup> SDA

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<sup>1</sup>Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 153-68. See also LeRoy E. Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946-1954), 11. William H. Shea, Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation (Lincoln, NE: College View Printers, 1982), 120. P. Gerard Damsteegt, Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 296. Damsteegt states that "from historical evidence the inevitable conclusion is that for SDA 'the third angel's message is the gospel message for these last days.'" See also Hans K. La Rondelle, "For Such an Hour: The Prophetic Basis of Adventism," Adventist Review, June 8, 1989, 10-12.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce Campbell Moyer, "Seventh-day Adventist Missions Face the Twenty-First Century" (Th.D. dissertation, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1989), 133-35. The belief about the imminence of the second advent and the lifestyle which corresponds with this belief, the concern "for the importance of obedience to all of God's commandments demonstrating a total dependence upon God for salvation," enables the SDA church to be a special witness towards other Christians and non-Christians. See also Fritz Guy, "The Future and the Present: The Meaning of the Advent Hope," in V. Norskov Olsen, ed., The Advent Hope in Scripture and History (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987), 225. Guy recalls that SDAs, because they are "those who are confident of the future can calmly attend

eschatology is not a hindrance to reach out to the BEC members but an opportunity for a meaningful relationship.

5. SDA lay people's adequacy to fulfill this evangelizing task is not automatic or self-generated. They need to be equipped by the specialized ministry of the local pastors. Despite their genuine commitment to participate in God's mission, they need knowledge and training in order to use their spiritual gifts according to God's will and to adapt these gifts for their use within the contemporary social-religious context in which the BECs exist.

6. The evangelization of BECs is to be established in the local SDA churches as centers of worship and service. Their members shall be invited to be God's sign within the community in which the SDA local church exists.<sup>1</sup>

7. The SDA local pastor is to train the laity to do the evangelizing task in reaching BECs. To achieve this goal, he needs to understanding of BECs theology and philosophy, and the right strategies to share the biblical message in the context of Rev 14:6-12. Understanding about leadership techniques and androgogical methods is not enough. As a leader of God's people, he needs, above all,

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to the tasks of the present."

<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, 149. "Every church should be a training-school for Christians workers. . . . Let the teachers lead the way in working among the people, and others, uniting with them, will learn from their example."

to know the deepest meaning of God's plan of salvation and be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

With these points in mind, let us now turn to the second part of this project which attempts to develop a program to assist SDA ministers in training SDA laity so that they might be able to pursue the task of evangelizing BECs in South Brazil.

**PART TWO**

**DESCRIPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TASK**



## CHAPTER IV

### THE TASK OF EVANGELIZING BEC PEOPLE

This chapter responds to two basic questions related to the task of evangelizing BECs: (1) What is the task? (2) How is it performed? In the former case, the task is defined through the meaning of the term evangelism beginning with a more general definition and, then, moving to a specific perspective. The latter question is responded to by presenting techniques to deal with the BEC people as the prospective receivers of the unique SDA gospel message.

#### Definition of the Task

The verb "to evangelize" (euangelizomai) is used fifty-two times in the New Testament and means "to announce good news," "to proclaim the gospel." It is directly linked to a living and personal demonstration of that good news.<sup>1</sup> This pattern of "proclamation and demonstration, preaching and acting, saying and doing," which is seen

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<sup>1</sup>David Watson, I Believe in Evangelism (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 26. See also John W. Alexander, "What Is Evangelism?" in Paul E. Little, ed., Guide to Evangelism (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 15-17. For further study, see Gerhard Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 2: 707-737.

throughout the New Testament, indicates that biblical evangelism does not signify the bare proclamation of words but the proclamation of God's Word, the gospel, accompanied by good deeds which attest to its veracity.<sup>1</sup>

According to C. Peter Wagner, the "3-Ps approach" defines effective biblical evangelism: Presence (i.e., the foundation of evangelism involves establishing church presence--through converted people and institutions--in order to build helping and loving relationships with the unsaved people), Proclamation (the communication of the good news of salvation to others), and Persuasion (the goal of proclaiming the good news in order to convince someone else to become a committed disciple of Jesus Christ).<sup>2</sup> To Wagner's formula, Terry Wardle adds a fourth P--the Power of the Holy Spirit--the key element to provide the foundation for the effectiveness of the other three Ps.<sup>3</sup>

The above-mentioned four Ps are also included in Miles's definition. According to him, evangelism is "being, doing, and telling the gospel of the kingdom in order that by the power of the Holy Spirit persons and structures may

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<sup>1</sup>Watson, 28-32, 40-48.

<sup>2</sup>C. Peter Wagner, Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1981), 55.

<sup>3</sup>Terry Wardle, One to One: A Practical Guide to Friendship Evangelism (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1989), 10.

be converted to the lordship of Jesus Christ."<sup>1</sup> Being and doing stands for presence, telling for proclamation, and conversion for persuasion by the Holy Spirit's power. The goal of the four Ps of evangelism is to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).

### Holistic Evangelism

The task of evangelizing BECs has to be defined in terms of its holistic approach because it involves all aspects of both the evangelist's person and the hearer's.<sup>2</sup> When I refer to a holistic approach to evangelism among BEC members, what I have in mind is Miles's five-step definition of the task of evangelism.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Delos Miles, Introduction to Evangelism (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1983), 22.

<sup>2</sup>Confederação Latino-Americana de Religiosos, Projeto Palavra-Vida 1988-1993 (Rio de Janeiro, RJ/Brazil: CRB, 1988), 10. The members of BECs in Brazil are organized in groups to read the Bible guided by the objective of committing the whole individual and collective life to the idea of complete liberation. Because of this emphasis, the task of evangelizing BEC members should also stress the holistic emphasis of gospel message. When I define the task of evangelizing the members of the BECs as holistic evangelism, I only intend to accentuate the need of preaching the Biblical message not only to inform the person about God but also to lead him/her to God as the source of complete and permanent salvation. There are no special needs of the members of BECs which other people do not claim. All human beings have the same need of holistic salvation which is offered through the Biblical message to heal all the aspects of human life.

<sup>3</sup>Miles, Introduction to Evangelism, 19-33, 47.

1. Evangelism is a three-dimensional task.

Christian people reveal what the gospel is through what they are, what they do, and what they say. Those three dimensions seen in the lives of the SDA evangelists truly demonstrate to BEC members what Christian praxis is.

2. Evangelism is linked etymologically and theologically to the gospel. The gospel message may be compared to a two-sided sword. The good-news of the sword cuts so that healing and wholeness can be brought to the human beings. The bad-news, however, announces God's wrath and judgment upon the powers of darkness. Both edges are important because they represent the sharpness needed to confront sin and sinners.<sup>1</sup> BEC members must understand that they themselves are sinners, i.e., that sin has a personal as well as corporate sense, and that all are in need of repentance and change, including the oppressors of society.

3. Evangelism is extensively and intensively a kingdom-of-God enterprise.<sup>2</sup> Evangelism must extend outward to all persons, peoples, and places, including the rich and the poor, the upper and lower social strata. Watson remarks that this social balance is clearly visible in the ministry

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 48, 50. See also G. Kittel, ed., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 2:707, 721.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 51.

of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The goal of evangelism is, and simultaneously, "to touch and transform all facets of human experience and to bring all of life under the lordship of Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

4. Evangelism shall be dependent upon the person and power of the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual work that may only be performed "by spiritual persons who have spiritual power." Hence, the Holy Spirit is the major dynamic of evangelism.<sup>3</sup>

5. Evangelism shall seek the conversion of persons and, consequently, of structures to the lordship of Jesus Christ. The evangelist is an agent bringing change. Evangelizing is to attain, through biblical repentance, the most profound change that any person can experience. It is an open agenda for the evangelist who is to seek for change not only in "the minds and hearts of persons" but also their individual attitudes and actions.<sup>4</sup>

Besides personal repentance, evangelism is also to seek the conversion of structures so that they may be governed by the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The first structure that requires a change is the family, which is the basic cell-unity of society.<sup>5</sup> The extended society

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<sup>1</sup>Watson, 57.

<sup>2</sup>Miles, 51-52.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>5</sup>Watson, 146, 149.

represented by tribe, caste, clan, people-group, and nation is also the goal of evangelism. The transformation through the gospel must be aimed at the natural-group society and its institutions such as church, school, and government.<sup>1</sup> Peters holds, in this regard, that the New Testament "demands the 'conversion' of the church." It is "a mental and practical conversion from being introverted to become extroverted" so that outreach to the world with the gospel may be realized.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the polarity of converting souls or structures is a danger in evangelism to be avoided at all costs. Miles argues that if one overemphasizes the change of social structures as the primary goal of evangelism, he reduces it and loses sight of the individual person for whom all social structures exist. However, the Christian mission may be also truncated if one overemphasizes the change of the individual regardless of "the biblical view of sin and of the demonic powers and principalities" acting in the society.<sup>3</sup> Hence, there is both a personal and a corporate nature to evangelism, both of which remain in tension with each other.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>2</sup>George W. Peters, A Theology of Church Growth (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 210-212.

<sup>3</sup>Miles, 54.

### Relational Evangelism

In addition to its holistic dimension, the task of evangelizing BEC members may be specifically defined as relational evangelism<sup>1</sup> that first overcomes political, social, and religious prejudices, and later announces the gospel message to a receptive and friendly mind. According to McPhee, the greatest witness of Christians is their relationships with both God and others.<sup>2</sup> For McDill, "evangelism will be effective to the extent that it depends on the establishment and cultivation of meaningful relationships."<sup>3</sup> Since a person can sense another's motives and can intuitively feel when someone wants to manipulate them for his/her own purposes, the evangelization of the BECs must be done through sincere and transparent relationships. The best "evangelistic opportunity is the neighbor, friend, or family member the believer already knows."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Monte Sahlin, Sharing Our Faith with Friends Without Losing Either (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1990), 21. Relational evangelism "will be characterized more by an emphasis on sharing one's faith than on teaching a system of doctrines. Friendships will be the primary tool for bringing men and women to Christ and into the church."

<sup>2</sup>Arthur G. McPhee, Friendship Evangelism: The Caring Way to Share Your Faith (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 84.

<sup>3</sup>McDill, 13.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 14.

Relational friendship requires the practice of three things. First, there must be acceptance. This involves respect for the persons themselves, as well as for their racial, cultural, economic, political, and religious uniqueness. Second, one should exercise benevolence. This is the sincere desire to promote the well-being of others and to be instrumental in bringing that happiness about. Third, one must genuinely care for those material, emotional, social, or spiritual needs.<sup>1</sup>

### Three Requisites

Relational evangelism seems to involve three key requisites. First, it requires adaptability. The Apostle Paul was "the master missionary who won more men for Christ than any other man."<sup>2</sup> Paul's work was characterized by adaptability to those people that he led to Christ. Paul adapted not only himself but also "the gospel message and the style of his evangelism to the cultural condition of his hearers and receivers."<sup>3</sup> He wrote to the Corinthians: "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save

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<sup>1</sup>McPhee, 85-89.

<sup>2</sup>William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible: The Letters to the Corinthians, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1956), 93-94, quoted in Miles, Introduction to Evangelism, 89.

<sup>3</sup>Miles, 91.



some."<sup>1</sup> BECs' poverty and illiteracy might certainly demand the adaptability of the SDA evangelist in Brazil, even in the developed areas of Brazil's southern states.<sup>2</sup> One example of this adaptability may be seen in the need for using the same terms and expressions used by the BEC members without embodying their message of hostility against society. This adaptability must be seen not only during the initial discussions with BEC members, but also and especially during the stage of Bible studies.<sup>3</sup>

Second, there must be an intentionality. The intention of the Apostle Paul in his evangelistic work was to win the hearers to Christ (1 Cor 9:19-23). Similarly, there must be intentionality of leading BEC people to Christ as their divine Liberator while, at the same time, not overlooking their social needs. In meeting the people's social needs, the SDA evangelist should go as far as the Bible allows him/her to go. When social involvement is in opposition to Biblical principles, the SDA evangelist must choose to "obey God rather than men."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>1 Cor 9:22, NIV.

<sup>2</sup>Fundação do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, Anuário Estatístico do Brasil 1990 (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Gráfica do IBGE, 1990), 175. For a total southern Brazilian population of 17,320,084 people, 15 years old or above, there is 18.9% illiteracy.

<sup>3</sup>See appendixes A and B.

<sup>4</sup>Acts 5:29. SDAs are advised to keep a distance from political and social riots such as strikes, insurrection, and war.

Third, there should be integrity in the task. Paul succeeded in the adapting himself, the gospel message, and evangelistic techniques without sacrificing his or the gospel's integrity. The evangelist must preach and teach the gospel without engaging in a statistics game of numbers. BEC members need to know the entire SDA message. God's mercy and justice must be placed in balance with one another. There is no place for cheap grace, no dilution of the gospel to its essence or to that of a strictly "social gospel." Miles remarks that "the master clue to understanding the integrity of Paul's evangelism may be found in the words in 1 Corinthians 9:21, 'under the law of Christ.'<sup>1</sup> This refers to the law of love since the whole law is fulfilled in one word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>2</sup>

#### Twofold Purpose

McPhee refers to the evangelizing task as the recovery of wholeness oriented by a twofold purpose. First, God is the goal to whom the people must be led. Second, people are to commit themselves to God's community where the alienating consequences of sin are reversed.<sup>3</sup> The visible sign of this twofold commitment is the baptism of the new

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<sup>1</sup>Miles, 98.

<sup>2</sup>Luke 10:27.

<sup>3</sup>McPhee, 111.

believer in Christ and his or her willingness to witness of Christ's salvation.

The role of the local church as God's community is essential to a meaningful evangelism. If BEC members discover that the life at the SDA local church is as artificial and depersonalized as the plastic, computer culture around them, the evangelizing task would be undermined. The church must make a difference in the world. The people need to visualize that life is shared within the church as a community. This vision is necessary in order that they may decide to participate in it as new members. Paul's exhortation, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves" (2 Cor 13:5 [NIV]), must challenge "perennially" every Christian.<sup>1</sup> The SDA Brazilian Church could specifically enhance its participation in community issues such as adult literacy and preventive medicine.

#### The Role of the Local Pastor

The specific role of the pastor is to equip and to strengthen the laity to carry out its task.<sup>2</sup> This work is not merely the task of the minister. All members should be involved in it.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, there are many well-prepared SDA

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<sup>1</sup>Oosterwal, Mission: Possible, 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 118.

lay people in different areas of human knowledge who can support their local pastor as he prepares the laity for its ministry. Pastors are to be educators of the local church in the gospel work. "They are to teach the people how to seek and save the lost."<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, therefore, the SDA local pastor, as a specialized minister, is to lead the church's members in discovering, training, coordinating, and evaluating their personal spiritual gifts as they use them to participate in the church's mission.

#### Discovering

Five of Graf's seven basic principles are especially useful for the pastoral task of enlisting the laymen for the evangelism in the community. First, the task must be well defined; second, the recruitment must be done through individual contacts; third, the best spiritual stock of the congregation must be invited to be involved in the task of evangelizing the community; fourth, the workers must be reminded that the work is for Christ; and fifth, the workers must remember that God will be the worker's Helper.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1940), 825.

<sup>2</sup>Arthur E. Graf, The Church in the Community (Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 121.

## Training

In training the lay people to evangelize BECs, the local pastor should consider two types of training: (1) training which deals with reaching non-SDA people, in general, and (2) specific training dealing with the evangelization of BECs' members, in particular. Manuals and courses for general training are available through the Department of Lay Activities of the SDA church.<sup>1</sup> A specific course to present the how of training the lay people about the task of evangelizing BECs is offered in chapter 5. Its objective is to convey the basic points which the laity need to know in effectively dealing with the people of those communities.

The training process involves at least five distinct and well-balanced stages: (1) Association. The people who are trained for meaningful ministry should work in direct proportion to their commitment to the pastor as a person. It requires a close relationship between the pastor and the members. (2) Impartation. This is the classroom work. (3) Demonstration. Most of the people learn best by watching another person do something. (4) Delegation. This is the stage of assigning the task. (5) Supervision. The people

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<sup>1</sup>I recommend Segue-Me (Santo André, São Paulo: Casa Publicadora Brasileira, 1980).

must be assisted in whatever way is most helpful.<sup>1</sup> The pastor should be seen as the human source of encouragement and omnipresent assistance of the laity. A positive factor for successful training is the willingness of the church's members and their pastor to accomplish the task. In staying in touch with the volunteer and in recognizing the effort of the lay person and thanking him/her for his/her participation in the local evangelism, the local pastor contributes to the success of the task.

#### Coordinating

The role of the local pastor as a trainer of lay people is not done on the completion of the people's training. It is understood that he should also coordinate the implementation of the evangelizing task of BECs. This involves five parts:

(1) Planning: What activities will be performed for the lay evangelists to reach their goal?

(2) Scheduling: When will each activity take place?

(3) Resourcing: What equipment will the worker need to carry out the activity?

(4) Monitoring: How will the activities be checked to assure the correctness of the plan and schedule? Three important sets of questions should be considered by the

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<sup>1</sup>James L. Garlow, Partners in Ministry: Laity & Pastors Working Together (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1981), 76-77.

local pastor: (a) Where are we in the plan, what steps have been accomplished, and what should we do next? (b) Are the steps being done according to schedule? If not what adjustments should be made to get the plan back on schedule? (c) Are the workers doing their job satisfactorily? Are they in need of resources? Do they need additional human help?<sup>1</sup>

(5) Recognizing the accomplishments of the volunteers.

### Evaluating

Pastors and members need to identify changes or new programs and activities while there is still time for the changes to make a difference in fulfilling the church's mission. The evaluation method should permit the "persons to communicate together in face-to-face settings regarding their opinion of the church program and the gathering of 'hard' data related to the programs." Face-to-face communication may be more effective if a questionnaire is used "to facilitate and focus discussion so that the desired information is generated."<sup>2</sup>

What we have discussed thus far lies in the realm of the theoretical. Evangelism itself means to share the

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<sup>1</sup>Alvin J. Lindgren and Norman Shawchuck, Let My People Go: Empowering Laity for Ministry (Schaumburg, IL: Organization Resources Press, 1988), 83-97.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 91-92. A model of questionnaire to evaluate the evangelization of BECs is offered in appendix C of this manual.

gospel. This gospel can only be shared through presence, proclamation, persuasion, and the power of the Holy Spirit. It seeks the conversion of individuals, and, consequently, structures from the almost overwhelming power of sin. In order for evangelism to be done on behalf of BEC members, it should be primarily holistic and relational and done with integrity. With this theoretical base in mind, let us turn to the actual techniques involved in evangelizing persons connected with BECs in South Brazil.

#### Evangelizing Techniques

Two techniques are basic in relational evangelism, i.e., listening and talking. In the human context of BECs, SDA evangelists find daily situations in which listening and talking skills will be useful tools to initiate and develop meaningful friendships. How can one break the ice? Where should one begin? How can one break into another's life at a deeper level of relationship? How can one open doors to spiritual matters? The master key for answers to these questions is sincere interest in one's person and needs expressed by kindly love. Thus, one's casual acquaintances may be transformed in open and receptive spiritual talking by kind listening.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McDill, 58.



### Learning to Listen

Sincere listening is the starting point from which one can demonstrate care for another. It is a form of affirming. This is a human skill that is to be developed. McPhee<sup>1</sup> lists the listening skills as the first step to establish meaningful relationships. The evangelist must learn not only to listen but also listen to learn about one's desires, ambitions, aims, fears, burdens, and needs. This oftentimes produces the awareness of situations that may be of use in attempting to solve the problems of another. Listening can open doors to share the gospel.

Steve Case<sup>2</sup> presents five techniques to develop listening skills in youth leadership. These skills can be used to enhance outreach to BEC constituents. It behooves one to survey these dynamic principles.

1. **Paraphrase.** This is the restatement of a person's expressed thought in one's own words. Case advises us to paraphrase paragraphs or thoughts and not every sentence.<sup>3</sup> Example: The phrase: "The special music was high quality and it inspired me to sense God's presence." The paraphrase: "I hear you saying that the special music created reverence for you."

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<sup>1</sup>McPhee, 107.

<sup>2</sup>Steve Case, Growing Kids: Making Your Youth Ministry Count (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Seminary, 1989), 24-26.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 24.

2. **Creative Questions.** This means that one asks questions in order to fill in gaps in one's information about another. It also enables a person to place primary attention on the other person's needs and likes. Example: One's information: "I went to the church youth social last Saturday night." Creative Question: "What activities did you like at the social meeting?"

3. **Behavior Description.** This is listening to what a person is communicating beyond the words. It has to do with the tone of voice, the body language."<sup>1</sup> Example: Facial contractions may be signs of physical pain, emotional unbalance. The listener may verbalize his thought by saying: "It seems to me that you are suffering about something or for someone? May I help you?" Sometimes it is not advisable to verbalize the observation about one's behavior. In this case, the evangelist must wait for a more appropriate time to do this.

4. **Direct Expression of Feelings.** This simply names the feelings of the listener. It demonstrates a concern for the agenda of the other person. Example: "I feel happy as you describe the celebration your family had last weekend."

5. **Perception Check.** This is a "guess" of whether the feelings of another person are based on what you perceive about that person. It requires the listener to

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 25.

tune into the other person. The key words are: "I sense. . . ." The responses to a perception check may be positive or negative. The evangelist must know how to use that to initiate deep personal relationships. Example: "I sense you are feeling happy about the wage raise you were given yesterday. Am I reading you right?"

Developing listening skills involves much more than just hearing with ears. It demands the involvement of the total person. According to McDill, five elements express this personal involvement. They are an attitude of genuine interest, the sensible use of eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, and motivating verbal participation by questions, comments, and responses.<sup>1</sup>

People are interested in their own personal concerns. They need someone who will listen to them concerning their poor wages, family problems, close friends, hobbies, deceptions, dreams, and hopes. By listening to another's concerns, the SDA evangelist may be able to open the heart of a BEC member.

### Talking Skills

As with listening skills, talking skills may be learned and developed. The basic rule is to find a common ground from which to start and maintain an interesting conversation.

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<sup>1</sup>McDill, 61-62.

The five following rules presented by McPhee<sup>1</sup> and adapted to the purpose of this manual provide some of the significant elements to be engaged in when initiating a meaningful conversation:

(1) **Keep the conversation simple.**

(2) **Use polite questions.** Do not corner persons.

Do not ask question for the purpose of embarrassing someone for nobody wants to be humiliated.

(3) **Speak from personal experience.** Avoid "canned" language.<sup>2</sup>

(4) **Dialogue.** Permit the interlocutor to change the course of the conversation as they prefer. Attempt to affirm any remarks or insights he/she makes which are in harmony with what has been attempted to be transmitted.

(5) **Avoid denominational language.** The Seventh-day Adventist evangelist must realize that many terms and expressions are known only by the SDA people or, in certain cases, only by those who are acquainted with members of the church.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McPhee, 91-99.

<sup>2</sup>"Canned" language is the language without originality or individuality.

<sup>3</sup>Terms such as "brother," "sister," "soul winning," "to save," "spirit of prophecy," "great disappointment," "mark of beast," "latter rain" must be avoided or used in future dialogues when the interlocutor is studying advanced biblical themes.

In addition to the techniques shown in the previous paragraphs, Miles advises the use of an anagram<sup>1</sup> including the major steps of the specific evangelistic approach.<sup>2</sup> The objective is to facilitate the memorization of these steps in order that the lay evangelist can incorporate them in his/her everyday conversation with neighbors, classmates, factory mates, and so on.

#### Evangelistic Anagram

The following anagram (AFFIRM) is an adaptation of the Miles's form technique.<sup>3</sup> The ultimate goal is to share the gospel message through personal relationships naturally built in conversation. It starts with "small talks" of (A), affirmation, and ends with "big talks" about the (M), SDA message.

A - Affirmation. It may be verbal and non-verbal. Simple listening can be a form of sympathy and support. If it is verbal, the affirmation must be conveyed through natural and sincere words.

F - Finance. Talk about financial issues. The SDA evangelist can talk about popular financial problems of Brazil without committing to the political positions of

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<sup>1</sup>The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary (New York, NY: Lexicon Publications, 1989), 32. Anagram "is a word or phrase made by changing order of the letters in another word or phrase."

<sup>2</sup>Miles, 262.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

neighbors. There are many neutral, common-ground issues that can pave the way for these kinds of "small talks."

F - Family. This topic may furnish enough fuel to start a deeper relationship. The evangelist must avoid intimate issues, as for example, the sexual relationship of the couple. Miles suggests family pictures, as well as the coffee table, end tables, children, parents, grandchildren, grandparents, brothers, sisters.<sup>1</sup> If the evangelist's family is a good example of Christian life, it might be advisable to begin a relationship between his/her family and the evangelizer's.

I - Interests. Seek rapport.<sup>2</sup> Examples of interests may be the personal occupation of the neighbor or mate, hobbies, and social dreams. If there is any opportunity, it is also recommended to engage in a safe activity together.

R - Religion. According to Miles, this is the most difficult transition. He suggests five helpful examples of questions which can be used to introduce religious themes into the relationship. The following questions are an adaptation of Miles'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 261.

<sup>2</sup>Jim Petersen, Evangelism as a Lifestyle (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1980), 141. "Rapport occurs when the people share common interests and/or needs. They will cost time and privacy, but how will others see God's grace in us if we keep our distance."

<sup>3</sup>Miles, Introduction to Evangelism, 262.

1. Have you come to that place in your life where God has become more than a word to you?
2. In your opinion, who is Jesus Christ?
3. In your opinion, what does one have to do in order to become a Christian?
4. Have you reached the point in your life that you know where you will be after your death?
5. If you were to stand before God in the judgment and you were to defend yourself, what would you say?

M - Message. At this step, the evangelist must avoid approaching inappropriate subjects or advanced themes. The more productive approach is to begin by establishing credibility of the Bible as the final and authoritative source of Christian faith.

#### The Use of the Bible

It behooves SDAs to remember that BEC members use the Bible, but not as an authoritative book. The evangelizing task must first establish the Bible as the authoritative source of the God's knowledge and Christian faith. To attain this goal, the evangelist should allow the Bible to speak for itself. The use of the Biblical context is important to explain the meaning of the text. Employing Catholic versions of the Bible may facilitate the process of establishing the Bible as the final authority. Great care should be taken to avoid theological controversy and

doctrinal debates. The emphasis must be on the positive issues of the biblical message.

Two themes should be emphasized in teaching the biblical message to BEC people. First, there is the theme of love. As universal language, love unlocks the hearts of men and transcends all the barriers. Second is the theme of the person of Christ. This is the core of the biblical message and the universal theme of Christianity. "We should never forget that love, the love of Christ, is the only power that can soften the heart and lead to obedience."<sup>1</sup>

#### Church Involvement

The task of evangelizing BEC people has to include both the involvement of SDA evangelists and the local SDA church. These two together provide a crucial element which may also provide additional opportunities to initiate and consolidate meaningful personal relationships. Two fields expertise of the SDA Church should be considered in this involvement of the local churches, i.e., health promotion and educational service. Both could enhance the effectiveness of the task of evangelizing BEC people.

#### Health Promotion

Ellen G. White encourages pastors to instruct the members of local churches to work as health promoters in the

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<sup>1</sup>Ellen G. White, Evangelism (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), 57.



church's neighborhood.<sup>1</sup> The members are not to do the work of the medical doctor or physician, but they should be trained to live the health principles and teach the same principles to their neighbors and friends.<sup>2</sup>

Courses and workshops could be offered to both the upper and the lower social classes as preparation to sharing the deeper aspects of the gospel as taught by SDAs. In relation to the BECs, the SDA local church program should include, at the very least, the "Five-Day Plan to Stop Smoking," "Food Cooking Workshops," and "Stress Management Seminars." These can be conducted in BEC gathering places or in the local community hall of the Roman Catholic parish. The language used to accent scientific issues should be adapted to the social and cultural level of the local BEC member. Personal contacts in offering these services to BEC members should be done carefully to avoid suspicion of proselytism. Health Reform is connected to the second most important manner in which the local church can be involved with evangelizing BECs, i.e., educational services.

### Educational Service

The SDA church in the southern region of Brazil is institutionally equipped to share its educational experience

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<sup>1</sup>Idem, Welfare Ministry, 123.

<sup>2</sup>The Weimar Institute, CA, uses the anagram NEW START (Nutrition, Exercise, Water, Sunshine, Temperance, Air, Rest, Trust in God) to promote a preventive health program. That could be adapted for use in Brazil.

with the governmental task force on the promotion of adult education and literacy programs.<sup>1</sup> From a missiological perspective, these literacy programs can be the "opening wedge to thousands of people who are now virtually shut away from the gospel."<sup>2</sup>

These educational offerings to the members of BECs could be accomplished either through the engagement with the existing programs of those communities or through specific ones organized and launched by the SDAs into the society where the BECs exist. The essential matter is to build good personal relationships before offering the biblical message in order to avoid suspicion about the SDAs' intentions. Educational service should also focus on marriage commitment and family finance.

To this point, we have surveyed both the theoretical basis for doing evangelism for BEC members and examined some of the basic techniques to accomplish this task. Such a goal can be accomplished only as the evangelist and the local church work together. There are, however, a number of

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<sup>1</sup>The Wall Street Journal, Wednesday, September 12, 1990, A18. Among an estimated population of 154 million, Brazil has 32 million illiterates. The government's plan is to reduce this illiteracy figure by 70% by the end of 1995. See also Fundação do Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, Anuário Estatístico do Brasil 1990, 60. See Casa Publicadora Brasileira, Agenda 1990 (Tatuí, S.P.: CASA, 1990), 81-232. In south of Brazil (including the state of Mato Grosso do Sul) there are 101 SDA schools.

<sup>2</sup>Oosterwal, Mission: Possible, 62. See P. D. Kujur, "Adult Literacy Program Paves Way for Evangelism," Adventist Review, December 27, 1990.

barriers existing which need to be dealt with before evangelization of BEC members can take place. We would now like to briefly explore these barriers in hopes that they can be removed and the SDA message carried to individual BEC components.

### Overcoming Barriers

#### Mutual Fear

Petersen has written that "mutual fear" is the major barrier in building honest relationships. He explains by stating that both the Christian and the non-Christian fear the influence of the other one. While the Christian may fear the negative influence of the non-Christian, the non-Christian may see the presence of Christians as "a reminder of God's impending judgment."<sup>1</sup>

The initiative to overcome this "mutual fear" barrier should come from Christians. Personifying Christ's example is the key in achieving this. Jesus interacted with the "greatest" sinners without passing judgment on their behavior. He met them where they were and led them to where he wished them to go. Even demon-possessed men, like the Gadarene, seemed to be intentionally struggling to attain internal peace.

Genuine Christian compassion is one of the master keys to demolish the wall of mutual fear. As Miles points

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<sup>1</sup>Petersen, 89.

out, "before some persons will hear us on a subject as personal [as] faith in Christ, we may have to earn a right to be heard by them."<sup>1</sup> Every evangelist must remember that both credibility and effectiveness are established in direct relation to obedience to Christ who said "you shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8).<sup>2</sup>

### Knowledge Barrier

Many church members worry about their lack of knowledge to fulfill the evangelizing task. Sometimes the knowledge they perceive they lack may be theological or doctrinal, but oftentimes it may be the lack of "know-how" techniques to convey the theological or doctrinal knowledge that prevents members from active participation in evangelization.

The evangelist should attempt to be as thoroughly prepared as possible, but preparedness should not be an hindrance in preventing him or her from beginning the work. The deep sense of concern for the lost neighbors is more important than theoretical knowledge or "know-how." Miles recalls that the best training is to learn by doing.<sup>3</sup> In other words, one must start evangelism by using what

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<sup>1</sup>Delos Miles, Overcoming Barriers (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1984), 99.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 28.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 67.

knowledge one has. In this sense, every evangelist should be a lifelong learner.

Genuine evangelism must be also "lay-centered and pastor-supported rather than pastor-centered and lay-supported."<sup>1</sup> This perspective releases the lay evangelist to do his/her best according to the resources given him or her by God.

#### The Time Barrier

Another obstacle given as a barrier to evangelization is the argument of a busy schedule. It is claimed that there is no time for extra spiritual activities outside of the ordinary worship services. Many people may never overcome the time barrier unless they specifically covenant with God to do so. The prescription for this problem is to develop a witnessing life-style through which evangelism becomes a part of one's everyday life. Jesus, who is the foremost evangelistic model, was busy, but never too busy to bear witness to God's kingdom. He had time to speak to large multitudes as well as to lonely persons. We are called to follow his steps in the task of evangelizing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 53, 60-61.

### The Kinship-Friendship Barrier

This is not an hindrance but actually an advantage. There is a 71 percent chance of success in leading a close friend to Christ, says Miles. When people perceive the evangelist's relationship as one of a "friend," they probably will respond more readily to Christ's love. When people perceive the evangelist as a teacher--an instructor of doctrine who only denounces sin and misguided morality--or as a salesman--manipulating others toward an eventual decision--they have the tendency to reject the evangelist's message.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of BEC members.

The kinship-friendships are the "natural bridges" used by God to reach to humankind. It must be recognized that the results of a lasting submission to Christ's lordship usually takes time. One should not give up but pray for his/her neighbors daily and let it known that they are the object of true concern.<sup>2</sup>

#### Summary

The task of evangelizing BEC people is to be accomplished from a holistic perspective by involving the entire life of the evangelist and that of the hearer. It begins in building meaningful relationships between the SDA

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 124-25.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 129.

believer and the BEC member with whom, eventually, the SDA message is shared.

Whatever barriers the evangelist faces may be overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit. Every person has power to influence others who live around one. If the Holy Spirit is allowed to use one's influence, there is no limit to his usefulness in behalf of God's kingdom. The Holy Spirit's power is the power of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ which should be kindly and persistently preached or taught by a changed person who lives in continual prayer. In light of this, we turn, to chapter 5 which presents a training course including the above-mentioned principles can be taught to both church officials and lay persons so members of BECs can be reached with the unique SDA message of the three angels of Rev 14:6-12.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TRAINING COURSE

The objective of this chapter is to offer to the SDA pastors of south Brazil a set of eight sessions designed to teach the know how of training members of the local churches for the task of evangelizing BECs constituents. These sessions are intended as suggestions. Ultimately, the user of this program must adapt and/or alter either the content or the format to suit the needs of a particular area. The lectures are only outlined. Supplementary material must be added to the outlines so the trainer can convey in detail the task of evangelizing BECs. The previous chapters of this project might furnish some of the necessary additional information to complete the outlined lessons.

The eight sessions were planned so that they could be conducted during a week-end. It seems advisable to allow the local pastor to function not only as a teacher but also as a director of the program. Lay leaders should assist in handling the classes as well as implementing the material in evangelizing BEC constituents.

The subject matter of the course should be handled with sensitivity and discretion. BEC members deserve SDA



respect not only because of their religious sincerity but also because of their willingness to study God's Word.<sup>1</sup> SDA pastors, then, should carefully discourage political prejudice or religious bigotry which SDAs might hold against BEC people. Christian love and compassion are to predominate as the motivation to evangelize the members of those communities.

Each session should be approximately 60 minutes in length. The 60 minutes are to be divided into three parts, a lecture lasting about 15 to 20 minutes, a 20-minute period for questions, and a 20- to 25-minute period for test and/or practice.<sup>2</sup> Additional time could be taken depending on the circumstances and amount of time available for the seminar.

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<sup>1</sup>Despite the liberation theologians urging that BEC members accept the Bible as a non-authoritative book by selecting the Biblical teaching in according to their social situation, there is no doubt that many of the members of BECs want to understand the Bible in its broader dimensions which applies to the material, social, emotional, and spiritual human needs. See "The Battle for Latin America's Soul," Time, January 21, 1991, 68-69.

<sup>2</sup>Use the last period of each session to give a brief test about the content of the lecture or to practice the evangelistic techniques shown on pages 82-89 of this manual.

## WELCOME

Welcome to all of you who have enrolled as prospective evangelists for the members of BECs. Preaching the gospel message has ever been an exciting task for those who love Jesus Christ as their Lord. Nothing can be more thrilling than to see our friends and neighbors come to a personal and genuine relationship with Christ. This vision should encourage us to do everything that we can in order to learn how to share the Gospel with our neighbors. There may be demands to sacrifice some of your leisure time and enjoyments, but you will receive compensations that will far exceed your personal expectations. Therefore, let us make time and take the effort to be here on time at each session of this course. "Come and follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19 [NIV]). May Christ's invitation inspire each of us at the beginning of this program.

## SESSION ONE

### INTRODUCTORY ELEMENTS ABOUT THE BECs

#### Definition

BECs may be defined as gatherings of small Roman Catholic groups within the geographical limits of a village, a district, or a neighborhood. Each letter of the acronym BEC carries a special meaning.

1. **Base** defines BEC as a social base-level group or gathering of common people. BECs are people of the lower class who live in rural regions or in the outskirts of large cities. Base also defines BECs as lay-oriented groups acting as the base or foundation for the church. They are those who live at the margin of church society but affect, through their direct or indirect suggestions, decisions which are taken by the church hierarchy.

2. **Ecclesial** (from ekklesia = church) defines BECs as independent church-groups and not as parish branches of the Roman Catholic Church. There are three elements that characterize the "ecclesiality" of the BECs: (a) religious faith; (b) Christian services and ministries performed by their members; and (c) links with the institutional church,

for example, by the administration of the sacraments and obedience to hierarchical policies.

3. **Community** defines BECs as people-groups which have chosen to share their time and faith experience in their daily lifestyle. BECs see themselves, in essence, as the Catholic church. Because they surpass the social and geographical limits of the parish, the Roman Catholic hierarchy suspects that they are precipitating a revolution in the concept of the church. The place of worship service and sacramental life are transferred from the Parish and its ordained ministry to the BECs and their lay coordinators.

#### Origin

Two elements explain the origin of the BECs: (1) the socio-cultural and ecclesial Brazilian context; and (2) the positive posture towards them from Vatican Council II (1961-1964), and from the Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979) meetings of the Latin American Bishops Conference.

##### 1. Socio-cultural and Ecclesial Brazilian Context

###### a. The Lay Tradition of the Brazilian Catholicism.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century when romanization began, the model of organization promoted in Brazilian Catholicism was marked by the strong presence of lay organizations and leadership. In colonial times, rural Brazilian Catholicism was centralized around the worship of the saint. It was a religious exercise practiced on three levels: (i) the family level, which was organized around the

shrines; (ii) local-village level, which was organized around the small chapels; and (iii) the regional level, which was organized around regional sanctuaries. All three levels functioned without the presence of ordained priests.

In the urban context, there were also three levels of lay organizations. These were more closely linked to the clergy and are: (i) "confrarias," (ii) "irmandades," and (iii) "ordens terceiras." The contacts of ordained priests with the people were limited to (i) the "desobrigas" (a priest's visit to minister the sacraments), (ii) "missions" (pastoral visits), and (iii) "feasts" (popular feasts celebrated in honor of the regional saint). Even though there was a striking presence of lay leadership and lay organization in Brazilian Catholicism during colonial times, there was no general hostility against either the clergy or the institutional church.

The **romanization process**, officially launched by Vatican Council I (1870), brought about some significant changes. The lay element in leadership almost completely disappeared from the religious scene. Mass and religious services were re-centralized around the ordained priesthood and its performance of the sacraments. However, in spite of this, Rome was not able to gain control over lay participation in services at the family level. There, people continued their worshiping around the shrines, a worship which was led by the laity.

The historical tradition of lay leadership of the Brazilian Catholicism explains only partially the origin of BECs. Other significant elements are to be found in the preparatory movements of the 1950s and 1960s.

b. Preparatory Movements.

(i) **Movement of Natal, RGN (1948-50), Popular Catechism of Barra do Pirai, RJ (1956), and the Pastoral of Nisia Floresta, RGN (1966).**

The contributions which led to the rise of the BECs are: the idea that poverty was not God's will but a reality created by man; the foundation of rural unions where social issues were discussed within a religious context; lay leaders replacing the ordained priests as directors of the Sunday worship services in rural areas; Bible reading as a popular practice in worship services; the breaking of the separation between sacred and profane through the use of community halls to meet both the worship and social needs of the community; and women's roles in performing several tasks of the ordained priesthood.

(ii) **Base Education Movement (1961-1964).**

The contributions leading to the rise of BECs are: the use of Paulo Freire's pedagogical methodology for the conscientization of the poor and the use of "monitors" or lay teachers as pioneers of the BECs animators.

(iii) **The Movement of the Catholic Action (1950).**<sup>1</sup>

The contribution leading to the rise of the BECs are: The inauguration of the method "see, judge, and act" which proposed that the Roman Catholic Church should more fully participate in political and social issues, and its ideological roots which suggested that there needed to be the beginning of a new civilization grounded on new relationships between developed and underdeveloped countries.

(iv) **The Movement for a Better World (1961).**

The major contribution for initiating BECs was the movement of the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church in the direction of the renovation ("aggiornamento") which had already begun in other countries.

(v) **The Pastoral Plans of CNBB (1962).**

There were two pastoral plans indirectly related to the emergence of BECs. First, there was the Plan of Emergency and, second, the Pastoral of Conjunct. The major contribution here was the use of the term BEC for the first time in official documents of the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil.

(vi) **Military Movement (1964).**

The contribution leading to the rise of BECs was: Popular oppression carried out by the military rule made the

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<sup>1</sup>The period of reorganization was started in 1950 and was based on the models of France, Canada, and Belgium. It has been of particular interest to BECs.

mystique of poverty reappear. BECs, in reaction to military oppression, became the place and instrument for the people's defense of the Christian values threatened by the military government. BECs emerged with their actual organization at that time.

## 2. Vatican II, Medellin, and Puebla

### a. Vatican II Council (1961-1964).

Through the renovation of Catholic ecclesiology authority was given to the laity to participate as leaders in the sacramental celebrations.

### b. Medellin (1968) and Puebla (1979).

The document of CELAM II, adopted in Medellin (1968), considered BECs as the very nucleus of the church. It also declared the obligation of the church to the poor.

From CELAM III (Puebla [1979]), BECs emerged as the places of communion and participation where new forms of church organization and social structures could be tested.

## 3. Summary of the BECs Origin

Generally speaking, the BECs began through religious or social motifs the initiative of the laity. They did not begin as a result of premeditated pastoral plans on the part of the clergy. Nevertheless, throughout the BECs' origin, the work of the agents of pastoral renovation is present as a significant motif in the consolidation and increase of the communities.



Questions for Discussion

1. In your opinion, what is the purpose of the BECs? How do you understand the BECs in your neighborhood?
2. Discuss this statement: "The final purpose of the BECs is to pursue the transformation of society by relating faith and politics in the social context."
3. Further reading: CNBB, Comunidades Eclesiais de Base na Igreja no Brasil (S. Paulo: Paulinas, 1986).

Test Your Knowledge

1. Mark (F) for false and (T) for true:
  - ( ) BECs exists only in rural regions.
  - ( ) The BECs emerged with their actual organization by 1964.
  - ( ) The BECs were considered as the places of communion and participation in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979.
  - ( ) Vatican II Council occurred from 1961-1965.
  - ( ) Paulo Freire is the author of the methodology of conscientization of the poor used by BECs.
2. Give three elements which characterize the ecclesiality of BECs: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Complete this statement: "There were three levels of religious practice in rural Brazilian Catholicism during colonial times: family shrine, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_."

Evangelistic Practice

Ask each participant to pray for empowerment by God with sincere love for his/her neighbor.

## SESSION TWO

### TRADITIONAL CATHOLICISM VERSUS BECs

#### Defining the Theme

The theme of this second class is the study of traditional Catholicism and its comparison to BECs. Both claim to be different aspects of the same true church. However, BECs have introduced inevitable elements of tension concerning fundamental ecclesiological positions.<sup>1</sup>

#### Elements of Tension

Rodor suggests the following chart to summarize eight elements of tension between the two systems.

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	The Parish	The BEC
1. Structure	-hierarchical	-democratic
2. Doctrine	-fundamental tradition	-Gospel (not the main thing)
3. Run	-by clerics	-by lay people
4. Emphasis laid on	-religious practice	-moral values
5. Social origin	-middle class and upper social layers	-lower strata of society
6. Sacraments	-instruments of salv.	-signs of salv.
7. Religious values	-individual	-communitarian
8. Center of the Church	-Rome	-the poor

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<sup>1</sup>Rodor, 182.

A brief explanation of each element is necessary to highlight the existing tension.

1. **Structure.** (a) The Parish sees the church hierarchy as its ecclesiastical structure. This hierarchy is represented by the pope, the bishops, and the ordained priesthood whom the people must obey. The parishioners are hearers and servants of the church structure in which they are not allowed to participate. (b) BECs see themselves as "God's people" who themselves responsibly assume church structure and government. Roman Catholic hierarchy--the pope at the level of the universal church, the bishop at the diocesan level, and the priest at the parish level--is seen in terms of its service to the church. Instead of a vertical structure--the pope/bishop/priest/faithful--there is now a challenging triangular relationship in which the bishop, priest, and faithful must relate to each other.<sup>1</sup>

2. **Doctrine.** (a) The Parish's understanding of doctrine is that doctrine is determined by both the Bible and tradition. Tradition in this view is the primary determiner of doctrine because it unfolds the teaching implicit in Scripture. Example: The doctrines of God and sin. The traditional system teaches that God is timeless, holy, and, therefore, untouchable by sinful human beings. God lives in a superior spiritual realm. It is only possible to reach Him through the intercession of the

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<sup>1</sup>Cook, 101.

ordained priesthood since it is the legitimate representative of God on this earth. For traditional Catholicism, sin is individual and must be overcome by the cleansing of the soul.

(b) BECs selectively accept the Bible teaching as its doctrinal orientation. Example: BECs believe God as being strongly committed to human beings. God is in communion with the human beings. The incarnation of Christ is the irrefutable argument of that historical communion between God and humankind. Humankind is also the temple of God. In contradiction to the traditional concept of individual sin, BEC theology views sin as injustice present in society. To overcome sin, people must be committed to the liberating and revolutionary process of salvation.

3. **Church Government.** (a) The Parish is run by the priest as representative of the bishop, who is representative of the pope. (b) BECs are run by lay leaders who emerge from the community's consensus. This implies that the church belongs to everyone, i.e., all are owners of the church.

4. **Form Versus Meaning.** (a) The Parish emphasizes religious practice. The focus is more on form than on meaning. Examples of this emphasis is seen on the external religion in the importance of attending daily mass and the practice of penitence. (b) BECs emphasize the meaning of

moral values such as loving one's neighbor and doing justice to the oppressed and poor.

5. **Social origin.** (a) The Parish consists primarily of the middle and upper class of society. It is aligned with the local ruling class and system of society. (b) BECs, from their onset, have flourished more among the poor people. The communities came to be the place where the poor found identity and active integration into the church's society.

6. **Sacraments.** (a) The Parish sees the sacraments as instruments of salvation which can be ministered only by ordained priests, who alone are able to consecrate the Eucharistic bread and wine and to absolve the sinner. (b) BEC theology understands the sacraments as signs which celebrate Christ's salvation. This implies that there is no need of an ordained priesthood to consecrate the Eucharistic bread and wine. Lay leaders may both preside at the community's celebration and minister the sacraments. In regard to sin, human beings need not be absolved. Rather, it is imperative that they be liberated from social sinfulness.

7. **Religious Values.** (a) The Parish is centered on individual values, i.e., individual salvation and sanctification. (b) BECs are communally centered. The religious values are grounded on the collective liberation of society.

8. **Center of the church.** (a) The Parish holds that it is centralized around Rome and its ecclesiastical order constituted vertically by the pope, bishops, priests, and people. (b) BECs are centralized around the poor and their participation in the liberating process of society.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the biblical definition of sin?
2. Why can sin not be defined only in social terms?
3. Which kind of Catholicism is more in line with the biblical model of the church, traditional Catholicism or the BEC? Why?

Test Your Knowledge

1. Mark (F) for false and (T) for true:
  - ( ) BECs view a triangular church structure in which the pope, the bishop, the priest, and the faithful must relate to each other.
  - ( ) BECs accept the Bible as the authoritative norm of faith.
  - ( ) BECs see sin not as individual but as social sin.
  - ( ) BECs view lay leaders as capable to minister the church sacraments.
  - ( ) BECs emphasize love to one's neighbor.

2. Complete the statement: "BECs view mankind as the \_\_\_\_\_ of God. The Bible views each believer as the \_\_\_\_\_ of God."

Evangelistic Practice

Organize the group of participants in pairs to pray for each other and their neighbors.



## SESSION THREE

### HOW DOES A BEC FUNCTION?

#### Elements of Functionality

Despite their informal organization, BECs contain visible elements of functionality. This lesson focuses on the three elements that are important in the functional life of the BECs, i.e., human resources, material resources, and programming.

1. **Human Resources.** Human beings are the raw-material of BECs. Communities are the meeting place for lay men and women who commit themselves to help one another in the so-called liberating process. They are common people in the positive sense of the term. The key word operative for function within the BEC is "commitment." The membership of a BEC may vary from 15 to 30 people depending on the place where they meet.<sup>1</sup> The composition of the community also varies according to age, sex, race, social level, and spiritual gifts of its members. The adult female is predominate in most BECs.

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<sup>1</sup>Because of a new centralizing trend operating in the Brazilian context, bishops and priests are making endeavors to gather many communities in large crowds. The goal of that centralizing movement is the control of BEC's leadership through liturgy and priestly presence.

A common feature of BECs is its socio-economic background. Although the existence of a middle-class-society can be seen in BECs, most of the communities consist of poor people either in rural areas or in the outskirts of large cities, such as São Paulo. The meaning of poverty is a theme discussed by theologians, sociologists, and psychologists. There is, however, an evident contradiction in holding that the poor are chosen to reveal God's grace while at the same time they are prompted to overcome their condition of poverty.<sup>1</sup>

The BEC is a gathering of laity who are properly led by lay leaders called "animators" or "lay coordinators." BECs also vary according to personal skills of their lay leaders. There are those who are talented enough to teach the Bible while others are skilled in leading BECs meetings in their liturgical functions.

2. **Material Resources.** BECs require a minimum of material resources in order to function. Any place that is simple and friendly is adequate for their meetings. A home is considered by BEC members as the ideal place to meet.

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<sup>1</sup>Rodor, 271. "Liberation theologians contend that 'it is the periphery (the poor) or the repercussions on the periphery that is the privileged place for theological understanding.' There is, in this affirmation, however, a certain lack of consistence for the desired elimination of poverty would fatally result in the elimination, hardly to be desired, of a privileged source of both divine revelation and Christian theology. Thus, liberation theology's idealization of its socioeconomic context of oppression ultimately becomes a hindrance to the goal of liberation."

Many BECs use community halls or classrooms of local schools. There is no need of pews, pipe organs, or pianos. Most BECs use guitars to accompany songs during the meetings. A good Bible like Bible of Jerusalem with illustrations and explanations has been a strong influence in BECs.<sup>1</sup>

3. **Programming.** There are four important components in the BEC programming. These are the Bible, the community, reality, and worship.<sup>2</sup> The current need commonly decides the shape of the session. Even though the sessions are planned, there is no rigid liturgical pattern present in sessions. Normally, at the end of a meeting, the members decide the subject for the next one.

O'Halloran speaks of seven types of sessions.<sup>3</sup> A brief description of each type may help the SDA evangelist to understand the religious practice of BEC members.

a. **Worship Session.** This is devoted completely to prayer, the Eucharist, the Word, and reconciliation of the BEC membership. The session includes the following parts:

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<sup>1</sup>James O'Halloran, Living Cells: Developing Small Christian Community (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 66. See also "A Biblia Segundo Marx" Veja, October 31, 1990, 85. A new Bible called "Biblia Pastoral" has been issued by Edições Paulinas in Brazil. The new version has a decidedly socialist bias. The word profit, for instance, is defined as the dishonest gain earned by paying low wages to the workers. Jesus's mother is presented as representative of the poor's communities who look forward to the liberation.

<sup>2</sup>O'Halloran, 59.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 59-67.

Dialogue regarding misunderstandings; Scripture reading, reflection and discussion on the text; prayer expressing the people's repentance; the community's commitment to avoid misunderstandings in the future; and gestures of peace, which usually come at the end of the session.

b. The Eucharist. The celebration of the Eucharist is contextualized into BEC life. Instruments of work such as fishing nets, hoes, scythes, hammers, regional crops or foods are used as symbols of life. Experiences of struggle for justice and stories of popular martyrs are told during the celebration. The celebrant also uses folk language, avoiding liturgical terminology that, in their opinion, hinders effective communication. The Eucharist celebration reinforces the group's cohesion.

c. The Prophetic Session. This type of session has the goal of announcing and celebrating justice and denouncing injustice. The Bible, primarily the Gospels, assumes a central role in exposing the problem and finding solutions. The session also includes spontaneous prayer and practical decisions. Example: The denouncing of the abuse of women. The text might be John 4. The example of Jesus is essential in rebuking the local machismo. Practical decisions are taken to delete male overvalorization and prompt a kinder relationship between husbands and wives. The denunciation may gravitate around many subjects such as

low wages, human rights in the factories, problems about the use of the land, etc.

d. Ecumenical Session. This type of session is designed to invite Protestants and Catholics to come together to pray and plan community activities. Both groups perform parts of the session which includes Bible reading, ecumenical prayer, and usually a fellowship meal.

e. Commitment Session. The objective of this session is to fortify the sense of community between the members of BECs. Appeals are addressed to the BEC members to be bound to one another for spiritual growth and successful completion of the tasks within the society.

f. Evaluating and Planning Session. This is a business session. BEC's goals are evaluated by comparing them with their achievements. Adjustments and new plans which include the participation of the entire community are then made.

g. Exposing Session. The objective of this session is simply to help BEC members get to know each other better. It is based on relating the happiest or saddest experiences of every member. The person is encouraged to share something of how he/she feels. Reflection and dialogue based on a biblical text follows one's disclosure. The personal experience is evaluated by comparing it with the practical implications of that biblical text, and then the person is encouraged to put into practice the new lessons

which are learned from that evaluation. Prayer ends the session.

In summary it must be said that the Bible, prayer, and the Eucharist support BEC programming. Each of these sessions normally lasts approximately two hours. The meetings are usually held once a week according to the people's ability to meet.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. What is your definition of poverty?
2. Is poverty in itself a Christian virtue?
3. What felt needs of the BEC members are being met by the meetings? How would you meet these needs if a member of BEC became an SDA?

#### Test Your Knowledge

1. Mark (F) for false and (T) for true:
  - ( ) The key word within the BEC is commitment.
  - ( ) The male adult is predominate in most BECs.
  - ( ) BECs require a minimum of material resources in order to function.
  - ( ) The parish is the adequate place for BECs meetings.
  - ( ) There is no rigid liturgical pattern in BECs meetings.
  - ( ) The Bible, prayer, and the Eucharist support BEC programming.

2. Cite four types of BECs session.

3. What are some of the positive aspects of the various types of sessions conducted by BECs? How do you explain the difference of what SDAs do to what BECs do in their meetings?

## SESSION FOUR

### THE USE OF THE BIBLE BY BECs

#### Returning the Key to the People

The primary task of pastoral agents or theologians in relationship to the Bible is to give the keys of the biblical interpretation back to the people.

The tools utilized for the accomplishment of this task are the popularization of the method of Biblical interpretation known as historical-criticism through the "Hermeneutic Circle"<sup>1</sup> and the spreading of "Biblical Circles" to study the Bible according to the "wisdom of the people."<sup>2</sup>

In the "Biblical Circles" the Word of God is heard through the "voice of the people." People work as an added dimension to the Bible. Even Scripture, in this sense,

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<sup>1</sup>This method calls the poor to see reality through four steps: (1) to experience reality and hold ideological suspicion; (2) to apply the ideological suspicion to the whole ideological superstructure in general (Capitalism), and to theology in particular (Roman Catholic hierarchy); (3) to experience theological reality as a result of exegetical suspicion of the Bible; and (4) to experience the new hermeneutic and interpret the Bible as the source of faith by the new hermeneutic elements.

<sup>2</sup>Carlos Mesters' methodology is the largely used by the Brazilian BECs.



becomes the subject of its own history. The objective is to reestablish connection between God's Word and the people to whom the Bible was given. The concern is predominantly pastoral and people-oriented. It is based upon the existing gap between scientific-exegesis and pastoral action.

The use of the Bible is central to BECs. However, in spite of its centrality, the Bible is not an authoritative book for them. The community ever determines the final meaning of the Scripture by contextualizing the text into reality.

#### Window versus Mirror

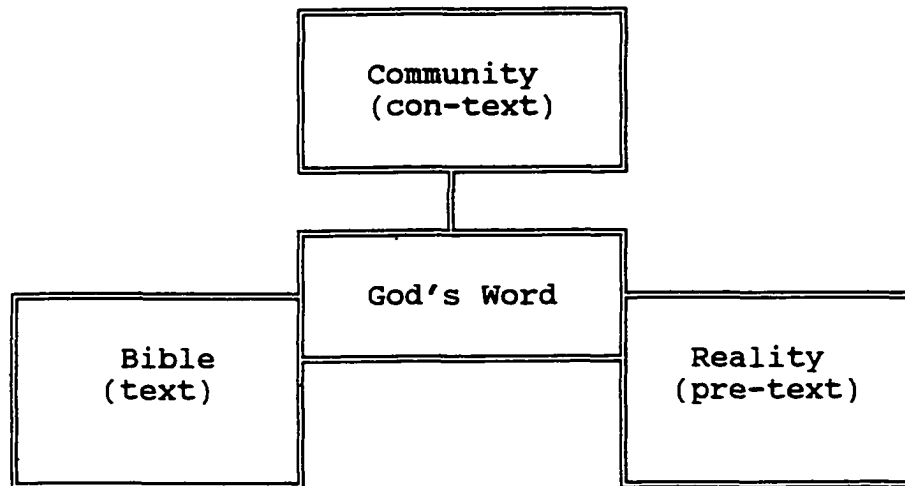
The difference between the reading of the Bible in the manner of the traditional priests and BEC biblical reading may be compared to the methapor of seeing through a window or looking at a mirror. While the traditional Catholic reads the Bible to see what is happening outside the window, BEC people read the Bible as looking at a mirror "to see a reflection of their own reality." In other words, the people discover that the Bible is the story of their own lives.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Frei Betto, "Church Born of the People," LADOC 12 (January-February 1981): 1-19.

### Community as the Context

Carlos Mesters proposes the following diagram to explain BEC interpretation of the Bible. Reality is defined as the real-life situation of the people and their world.<sup>1</sup>



For Mesters, people hear the Word of God today only when these three elements are examined. He openly declares that "for them [BECs] the word of God is not just the Bible. The word of God is within reality and it can be discovered there with the help of the Bible."<sup>2</sup> This implies that "for the common people the Word of God is not just in the Bible, it also lies within the community and their real-life situation."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mesters, 199.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 205.

### Revelation and Inspiration

Revelation, in BEC thought, is linked to the "consensus fidelium" of the communities. Defined by Mesters as a legitimate mouthpiece of the will of God, the "consensus fidelium" is the people's voice working as a kind of "informal prophetic tradition."<sup>1</sup> According to him, the "voice of the people" has greater value than the conclusions of theologians. The Bible has no authority apart from the current historical context, which includes Scripture itself, and the tradition of the church and the people, the conclusions of the church magisterium, and the "consensus fidelium." In other words, the authority of God's Word exists only when those elements interact to each other.<sup>2</sup> Such a concept denies the classical view of revelation. Instead of binding God's special revelation to the content of Scripture, Mesters has created certain problems when he states that the concrete society of the poor and oppressed is the very locus theologicus.<sup>3</sup>

Even though Mesters exhorts us to return to the Bible in order to eliminate the oppressing risk of an

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<sup>1</sup>Carlos Mesters, Por Trás das Palavras (Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro: Editora Vozes, n/d), 22.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Louis Berkhof, Introduction to Systematic Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 142. "Locus theologicus" is a technical term in theology to define the place where revelation occurs.

ambivalent reality, he does not take Scripture in the sense of being God's real Word.<sup>1</sup>

Mesters' concept of biblical inspiration prevails in most BECs in Brazil. What it holds is that the Bible is not the Word of God, but it contains the Word of God. For him, inspiration is the outcome of the growing awareness on the part of God's people of the mighty acts of God performed through history. Inspiration is a "process that is the result of the interaction of measurable external historical forces and the incommensurable internal action of the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

#### Two Hermeneutic Characteristics

1. **Prophetic Contextualization.** This translates traditional biblical theology into political theology. Since the Christian message passes through the ideological filter of the gospel messengers, the proclamation of the Word by BECs cannot avoid being a medium to communicate political ideas. Examples: (a) Elijah's conflict with the worshippers of Baal is contextualized into the struggle of the poor against the avaricious gods of the ruling capitalist system. (b) Mary's social awareness expressed in "The Magnificat" is contextualized into the liberating self-awareness of the oppressed. (c) Jesus' action in banishing

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<sup>1</sup>Mesters, Por Trás das Palavras, 86,

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 160.

vendors from the Temple is contextualized into a popular revolution. The followers of Christ's experience on the road to Emmaus tells that Christ is still an event to occur when one has his/her eyes open by Scripture. (d) The kingdom of God and the hidden treasury is contextualized into the poor hidden in the city's outskirts.

2. **The Centrality of the Orthopraxis.**<sup>1</sup> This teaches that: (a) truth does not exist apart from concrete historical situations; (b) God is truth because people experience His actions in their lives; (c) the Bible is truth because it is validated by God's actions in human lives; (d) the doctrines are not conceived in abstract terms, but only in terms of concrete situations which in the Brazilian BECs context are poverty, marginalization, oppression, and death; (e) salvation cannot be understood unless in terms of political action and economic liberation-conversion is the permanent process to liberate society from its egocentric lifestyle; and (f) that the coming kingdom means the realization of the classless society.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, 708, 788. It comes from the Greek words ortho which means correct, and praxis which means practice.

<sup>2</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 204-5. "Without change in these structures [socio-economic, political, and cultural] there is no authentic conversion."

Questions for Discussion

1. Who is the final arbiter of revelation for BECs?  
Why is it important to understand this?
2. Is the "consensus fidelium" held by the BEC a safe guide for determining truth? Why or why not?

Test Your knowledge

1. Mark (F) for false and (T) for true:
  - ( ) In BECs, the Bible does not speak for itself.
  - ( ) For BEC members, the Word of God is not just the Bible, but it is the Bible interpreted by the community in describing reality.
  - ( ) In BECs view, the Bible has no authority apart from the current historical context.
  - ( ) Prophetic contextualization translates traditional biblical message into a political message.
  - ( ) For BECs members, God is truth because people experience His actions in their lives.
2. Cite two examples of contextualization of the Biblical message by BECs members.
3. How do you define the term "praxis?"

Evangelistic Practice

Ask God to enable you and each participant to live the true Christian obedience to God and love for your neighbor.

## SESSION FIVE

### EXPECTATIONS OF THE BEC PEOPLE

Some of the most important expectations and thoughts maintained by the BEC are liberation and the kingdom of God. It seems that the two goals are pursued as one objective, an objective which occurs through a liberating process that includes both society and the individual.

#### Liberation

The foundational presupposition and the surviving motif for most BECs in Brazil is the hope for liberation. It is, to them, synonymous with evangelization and salvation.<sup>1</sup> There are three reciprocal correlated levels of the meaning of the term liberation.<sup>2</sup>

1. Liberation from physical and moral misery. At this level, liberation is closely connected with political and socio-economic development.

2. Liberation from ignorance throughout history. By understanding history, mankind has the possibility of attaining true freedom. Then a new man and a qualitatively

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<sup>1</sup>Cook, 131.

<sup>2</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 36, 37, 176.

different society are created. Hence, a human being is the master of his/her own destiny.

3. **Liberation from sin and admission to God's communion.** On this level, liberation refers to Christ's work of releasing humankind from the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship, injustice, and oppression. The new person is enabled to live in communion with God and develop a genuine human brotherhood.

### God's Kingdom

The idea of the kingdom of God is an eschatological concept which has its fulfillment in the pursuance of social realities such as peace, justice, love, and freedom.<sup>1</sup> For BECs, these are not to be understood only in spiritual terms. They are also tied to the man's temporal reality and, consequently, affect his/her ultimate salvation or liberation from sin.<sup>2</sup>

Traditional Catholic theology has been grounded on the theory of distinction of two coterminous but separate planes of reality, i.e., the temporal (State's affairs and society's activities) and the spiritual (God's person and activities and the church's affairs). Liberation theology,

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<sup>1</sup>Eschatology is the treatise (logos) of the last things (éscatos) to be fulfilled in God's salvation plan towards man.

<sup>2</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 167. The ground of this concept comes from the contemporary theology represented by Moltmann and Bultmann.



however, sees the kingdom of God as an unifying concept linking the two planes and allowing the church to involve itself in temporal matters.<sup>1</sup> For BEC thought, the Kingdom of God is not a national theocracy, nor a territory, nor something which is merely spiritual, but a new world order, where God is "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

Even though BECs see Jesus in terms of His person, message, and their implications for present history (Mark 3:27), they do not deny a future dimension of the kingdom (Luke 17:26-30) when the sinful world will be past, sufferings will be no more (Matt 11:5), death will have been defeated (Luke 20:36), the last will be the first (Mark 10:31), and the dispersed elect will be congregated again (Luke 13:27). The exact hour for the ultimate manifestation of the Kingdom only God knows and can determine (Matt 24:42-44, 50; 25:13). The message of the kingdom overcoming all the stigmatizing evils which afflict the present world is the total fulfillment of the all joyful reality in God (Luke 2:10).

However, one of the dangers that BEC thought has not been able to avoid in their view of the kingdom of God is an overemphasis on the present reality. This tends to obliterate the expectation of the coming kingdom. Their understanding of the Kingdom takes place within history

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 57. "The Kingdom of God provides the unity; the Church and the world, each in its own way, contribute to its edification."

through the church members who are supposed to live in communion with each other as a result of Christ's resurrection and the Holy Spirit's activity. It is above all a gift from God, they say.<sup>1</sup>

### Questions for Discussion

1. How does the definition of salvation from the perspective of Liberation Theology compare with the biblical witness? Are there points of convergence or divergence? Where do these lie? Why is it important to understand this?

2. If God's kingdom is not of this world, how can one reconcile the tension of being in the world but not of it? What implications are there for the political activity of the church in the present historical situation?

### Test Your Knowledge

1. Mark (F) for false and (T) for true:

( ) Liberation and the Kingdom of God are seen as one goal by BECs members.

( ) For BECs members, the Kingdom of God is a new order which will be established in this world through liberation of human being.

( ) BECs members overemphasize the present reality of the kingdom of God.

( ) BECs members misinterpret the Biblical message about the kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 177.

( ) The Bible says that the kingdom of God will be established on the earth, "but not by human hands."

2. Answer the following questions:

a. If God's kingdom is not of this world, how can one reconcile the tension of being in the world but not of it?

b. What implications are there for the political activity of the church in the present historical situation?

### Evangelistic Practice

Distribute to each participant a copy of the listening and talking skills as shown on pages 89-94 of this manual. Take time to memorize those techniques.

## SESSION SIX

### EVANGELIZING BEC MEMBERS

#### Ten Principles to Evangelize<sup>1</sup>

Since evangelism deals with each human being in his/her own complexity, the evangelist must be able to convey the biblical message to every person according to his/her particular context. There are, however, some general principles which can be summarized from Jesus' ministry that can be helpful in assisting us in the task of evangelism among the members of BECs.

1. **Dignity.** The SDA must reveal a sincere and profound respect for human personality. Every human being has an infinite worth, including the members of BECs. There is no reason for people to be manipulated, nor is there reason to pressure people into the church. On the contrary, SDAs should be sensitive to the thoughts, concerns, and needs of the BEC members. Developing listening and talking

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<sup>1</sup>Delos Miles, Master Principles of Evangelism (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1982). This lesson has been largely grounded on Delos Miles's book. In spite of the fact that this author does not deal with evangelism in Brazilian context, the principles presented in his book are perfectly adequate to evangelize BECs in Brazil.

techniques will enable SDAs to keep both their own and the other's dignity.<sup>1</sup>

2. **Incarnation.** This implies that the SDA must identify him/herself with the persons with whom he/she hopes to communicate the gospel message.

3. **Uniqueness.** As Jesus did, one must deal with every person as an unique individual. Age, social level, profession, ethnic and religious characteristics, and physical condition, among other personal particularities, should, as far as possible, be observed and respected in order to establish a deep mutual relationship.

4. **Opportunism.** One must continually consider every normal happening in life as an opening provided by God to witness one's faith. This can be defined as "Life-Style Evangelism."

5. **Sharing.** Following Christ's model, SDAs need to share themselves more than they do with their friends. Christ not only shared the best that He had regardless of the social condition of the people, but also He shared His own ministry. The principle of sharing includes the poor and the rich since both need to be saved from human selfishness. John 3:16 is the key biblical text for sharing. Genuine love is the soil where sharing finds fertile ground.

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<sup>1</sup>See pages 83-90 of this manual.

6. **Dependency.** Evangelism is a spiritual enterprise that can be done only by persons who walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and live under His divine control. The evidence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us is keeping God's commandments. "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32). A life of confessional and intercessory prayer is necessary for the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in one's life. The principle of dependency will also lead SDAs to depend on the church and its communitarian resources to assist with the evangelizing task.

7. **Happiness.** The gospel word means "good tidings of great joy which will be to all people" (Luke 2:10). The goal of the gospel is to announce that God has sided with those who believe Him. "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24 [NIV]).

8. **Integrity.** One must endeavor to preach the whole gospel message to the whole person in his/her whole context. The entire Bible contains a message which speaks to the person's physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs. Correct doctrine (orthodoxy) and good deeds (orthopraxis) are extremely important in accomplishing the task of evangelization. The hope of eternal life does not make void a person's temporal needs. Faith and

commitment to God must also be in balance. There is no room for cheap grace. Tact and contact are to be in equilibrium if evangelism is genuine.

9. **Intention.** The ultimate intention of the SDA shall be to win the person to Christ, who becomes his/her personal Liberator. "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more. . . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:19-23).

10. **Adaptation.** Adaptability to the uniqueness of people and situations is one of the keys for the success. It involves the correct contextualization of the message and methods and techniques which take into account the condition of the hearers without risking their integrity.

In addition to these ten general principles of evangelization, the SDA evangelist should keep in mind seven specific keys to convey the SDA message to BECs members.

#### Golden Keys to Evangelize BECs Members

1. **Establish the authority of the Bible above human reality.** How? By interpreting the Biblical text through its own context. Use Biblical prophecies.

2. **Demonstrate that God is interested in the whole human person and society.** How? By explaining the Biblical doctrine of salvation (justification, sanctification, and glorification). It can solve the dichotomy between the spiritual and the material realms.

3. Explain the human suffering through the perspective of the great controversy. Use the doctrine of the sanctuary.

4. Explain the existence of poverty through other alternative consequences of sin. These alternative consequences could be manifested in disasters, diseases, illiteracy, lack of professional skills, consumerism, lack of a familiar budget, and destructive habits and vices.

5. Emphasize the failure of any materialistic solution to the human poverty. Both Communism and Capitalism are materialistic in their essence. Exemplify through the insolvency of Communism in Russia and East Europe and the problems presented by Capitalism.

6. Emphasize the need of Christian love among the poor and the rich based on Christ's ministry. The emphasis of the Jesus' ministry was to love the neighbor rather than the struggle between classes. Christ did not prompt social, cultural, ethnic, or religious prejudice.

7. Demonstrate the power of the gospel in your own life. Let the BECs members see your living relationship with Christ and your sincere love to your neighbor.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. How does the principle of dignity relate to the involvement of SDAs in friendship evangelism?



2. What are examples of correct contextualization of the gospel? How does it relate to the contextualization of the Bible in the BEC's "Círculos Bíblicos"?

Evangelistic Practice

1. Practice the listening and talking skills with another person who is attending this session.

2. Become acquainted with the terms and expressions used by BEC members.<sup>1</sup>

3. Use the steps of the evangelistic anagram (AFFIRM) to make the transition from talking to the study of the SDA message. Accentuate the importance of the use of transitional questions to introduce the invitation to the study of SDA message. Practice the suggested questions to make the transition from the religious to the Biblical message.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See glossary on Appendix B.

<sup>2</sup>See pages 94-97 of this manual.

## SESSION SEVEN

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BECs IN THE SOUTHERN REGION OF BRAZIL

The Southern Brazilian region comprises the states of Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul and has a resident Roman Catholic population of 16,431,493.<sup>1</sup>

Since the church in one sense reflects the characteristics of society, the Brazilian Southern BECs, in relation to their sociopolitical orientation, are basically more conservative than innovative. Charity, liturgical and sacramental activity, and Bible Circles seem to be the main thrust of the meetings of Southern Brazilian BECs. There are BECs which are also engaged in political activities; most of these are linked, however, to the landless people who live in "acampamentos"<sup>2</sup> waiting to be settled in a

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<sup>1</sup>Almanaque Abril 1990 (São Paulo, S.P.: Editora Abril, 1990), 486. Because this project will be implemented in territory of the Brazilian South Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Roman Catholic population of Mato Grosso do Sul state (1,177,339) will be also included. The total, therefore, is 17,608,832 Roman Catholic people.

<sup>2</sup>"Acampamento" means a camp of landless rural workers. The term landless means people who do not own land. The reasons for not owning land vary from the need of selling the property to pay debts owed to banks to the fact that so little land can be distributed among a large number of inheritors.

small property. Many BECs begin in the "acampamentos," whereas others begin in the new settlements. The people in the camps--many of them young people--take the biblical words, "Go up and possess the land" (Num 13:30), as an up-to-date motivation to pursue their economic conquest.<sup>1</sup> Although social reflection and political debate are common activities of BECs, decision-making and implementation of community action are centralized in the local church, which is the chief unit of the universal church.<sup>2</sup> Diverging from the conservative BECs in the Southern states, the communities in Mato Grosso do Sul state seem to be more innovative in promoting the poor's self-awareness and in participating in sociopolitical action. About 64 percent of BECs in Mato Grosso do Sul appear to be involved in the conscientization of the poor, while only 9 percent in the other Southern states do so.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Michael Knoch, "Os Sem Terra--The Landless," International Review of Missiology 78 (January 1989): 68-74.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas C. Bruneau, The Church in Brazil (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), 94, 98, 109, 139, 144. This trend is confirmed by a BEC member from Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, by a letter written on December 23, 1990. This BEC member holds a new posture in denouncing the injustices suffered by the poor who live in the outskirts of Porto Alegre.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 138. Most likely it is the high social and economic level and the high visibility of the Roman Catholic Church organization in the Southern Brazil which are responsible for explaining such a differentiation of characteristics between the communities of Southern Brazilian states and Mato Grosso do Sul state.

Other strong characteristics which are commonly found in BECs of Southern Brazil are a dependence on the church for resolution of societal and individual problems, possession of a Bible, and an ecumenical view of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

#### Question for Discussion

Knowing the characteristics of the BECs of Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio Grande do Sul, and Mato Grosso do Sul, how should the SDA begin his/her work towards those communities?

#### Evangelistic Practice

1. Recapitulate the practice of listening and talking skills.
2. Explain the barriers which could hinder the accomplishment of the task.<sup>2</sup> Ask the participants to speak about the existing barriers in their relationships with friends, relatives, or neighbors. Encourage the participants to overcome their hindrances. Offer examples of victorious people. Use names of people from the Bible and SDA common people.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 41-42. See also II Semana Teológica CEBs (Londrina, BR: Instituto Teológico Paulo VI do Norte do Paraná, 1987).

<sup>2</sup>See pages 94-98 of this manual.

## SESSION EIGHT

### SIMILARITIES AND DISSIMILARITIES BETWEEN BECs AND SDAs

The subject of this lecture focuses on some theological similarities and dissimilarities which exist between BECs and SDAs. In dealing with these issues, we mostly quote from liberation theologians' representative books which have influenced BECs, Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, and the Bible.

#### Attitude towards the Bible

**Similarity:** Both BECs and the SDA Church defend the importance of the Bible.

**BECs:** (1) The Bible is very important in the life and growth of grassroots communities.<sup>1</sup> (2) The word of God is not the Bible, but it is the Bible itself (the text), the community (the con-text), and reality (the pre-text).<sup>2</sup> (3) The BECs members "are putting the Bible in its proper

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<sup>1</sup>Mesters, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People," 197.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 199.

place, the place where God intended it to be. They are putting it in second place. Life takes first place!"<sup>1</sup>

**SDAs:** (1) "God graciously calls us to become acquainted with Him by searching His word. In it we can find the rich blessing of the assurance of our salvation."<sup>2</sup>

(2) "Thus the Bible is the written Word of God."<sup>3</sup> (3) "But when we discern God's voice speaking through the writers . . . the Scriptures become the absolute authority in matters of doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16)."<sup>4</sup> (4) The Bible must be interpreted through its own context.<sup>5</sup>

**Dissimilarities:** The attitude towards the Bible is basic to understanding the theological and missiological difference between BECs and SDAs. The use of the Bible by BECs mostly justifies, from a religious perspective, the horizontalistic conclusions derived from social and economic analysis of reality through social sciences. The Bible text performs a secondary role for BECs members. The Bible content is a kind of religious illustration to convey BECs conclusions on real life. On the other hand, SDAs take the

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 209.

<sup>2</sup>Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 14.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>5</sup>Isa 28:10, 13; Luke 24:25-27, 32; Rom 10:17; Heb 11:6.

Bible as the starting point to understand not only the human reality but also the cosmic realities. Human reality cannot be a reliable source because of sin.<sup>1</sup> The human beings cannot answer the major questions about God, the origin of the universe, and the mystery involving the earthly environment. They need a special revelation about those issues, which is given by means of the Scriptures. "The Bible both contains propositions that declare the truth about God, and reveals Him as a person."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, from this perspective, the Bible assumes the role of an authoritative source to SDAs not only know to God Himself but also to interpret reality and God's solution to the human problems.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the revelation of God, through His written word, is the final arbiter to the believers.

#### The Transformation of Human Being

**Similarity:** Both BECs and the SDA Church claim the transformation of human beings as part of their mission.

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<sup>1</sup>Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 6. "The world around us gives mixed signals, presenting as many questions as it answers. It reveals a conflict between good and evil, but does not explain how the conflict started, who is fighting, why, or who will ultimately win."

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. "And by means of the Scriptures God breaks through our mental, moral, and spiritual limitations, communicating His eagerness to save us."

**BECs:** (1) Human beings transform themselves; (2) human transformation is a result of a deep understanding of history; and (3) humans transform themselves in an intra-historical process. Gutierrez says that "this understanding provides a dynamic context and broadens the horizons of the desired social changes."<sup>1</sup>

**SDAs:** (1) Human beings are transformed by God, not by themselves. "God hopes to change fallen beings into His image by transforming their wills, minds, desires, and characters."<sup>2</sup> (2) The Holy Spirit is the agent of human transformation. "The Holy Spirit brings to believers a decided change of outlook. His fruits, 'Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control' (Gal. 5:22,23), now constitute their lifestyle--even though they remain corruptible mortals till Christ's return."<sup>3</sup> (3) The human transformation will be completed at the Christ's second coming.<sup>4</sup>

**Dissimilarity:** While for SDAs God is the starting point and the agent of human transformation, for BECs this role is performed by the human being himself as the controller of history. BECs overlook the Biblical doctrine of sin and its consequences for human nature. Such a

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<sup>1</sup>Gustavo Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 36.

<sup>2</sup>Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 126.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 126-27.

<sup>4</sup>1 Cor 15:51-57; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Rom 8:18-25.



position is a kind of human self-divinization. Jesus said, "apart from me you can do nothing."<sup>1</sup>

### Salvation

**Similarity:** Both SDAs and BECs view salvation as involving the whole human being.

**BECs:** (1) Salvation is universal. A human being can be saved if he opens himself to God and to others, even if he is not clearly aware that he is doing so."<sup>2</sup> (2) Salvation is based on human deeds. "Man is saved if he opens himself to God and to others."<sup>3</sup> "We love God by loving our neighbor."<sup>4</sup>

**SDAs:** (1) Salvation is individual. "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. . . . Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, He cannot enter the Kingdom of God."<sup>5</sup> "Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.'<sup>6</sup> (2) Human salvation is based on God's deeds. "Only through Jesus Christ can one experience salvation, 'for there is no other name under

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<sup>1</sup>John 15:5.

<sup>2</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 151.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 196.

<sup>5</sup>John 3:3, 5.

<sup>6</sup>Acts 2:38.

heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12). Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me' (John 14:6)."<sup>1</sup> (3) Salvation is "a present experience . . . [and] includes living a sanctified life on the basis of what Christ accomplished at Calvary."<sup>2</sup>

**Dissimilarity:** For BECs members, salvation is basically human-centered, and ethically and worldly oriented. For SDAs, however, salvation is God-centered and spiritually-oriented. Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."<sup>3</sup> While for BECs members, the human being is saved if he opens himself to God and others, for SDAs, one loves others as a result of being in relationship with God.

### Conversion

**Similarity:** For both BECs members and SDAs, conversion means a radical transformation of the human being.

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<sup>1</sup>Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 120-24. Rom 5:18, 19; 2 Cor 5:17.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 123-24.

<sup>3</sup>Gal 2:20.

**BECs:** Conversion means a commitment to change the social structures which oppress the poor. "Without a change in these structures, there is no authentic conversion."<sup>1</sup>

**SDAs:** (1) Conversion is to back from sin to God through the work of the Holy Spirit. (2) Conversion implies in living a new life under the power of the Holy Spirit. "In response to God's call people see their lost condition, confess their sinfulness, submit themselves to God, repent of their sin, accept Christ's atonement, and consecrate themselves to a new life with Him. Without conversion they cannot enter a personal relationship with Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

**Dissimilarity:** While BECs links the authenticity of human conversion to the commitment to change the social structures, SDAs relate it to people's personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Biblically speaking, conversion does not presuppose the break of social structures. The example of Jesus is normative on this point.<sup>3</sup> The attitude of Onesimus who decided to go back to his master offers also an example that conversion does not imply breaking the social structures.<sup>4</sup> Paul also supported the social structures of his time in spite of the fact that he was oppressed by them.

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<sup>1</sup>Gutierrez, A Theology of Liberation, 205.

<sup>2</sup>Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 188.

<sup>3</sup>Mark 12:13-17.

<sup>4</sup>Phil 12, 18.

He emphasizes that the government authority is a minister of God to maintain the social order.<sup>1</sup>

### Questions for Discussion

1. Since the members of the BECs see themselves as Christians, why it is crucial that SDAs preach the biblical message to them?

2. Which doctrinal points preached by BEC people and SDAs could be used as a common ground to share the SDA message?

### Practicing Evangelistic Techniques

1. Recapitulate the listening and talking techniques.

2. Repeat the practice using pairs of participants.

3. Demonstrate how to teach a Bible study to a BEC member. Repeat the practice by using pairs of participants.

### Five Steps to Begin the Task

1. Ask God to show to you a person who is member of a BEC. Perceive the needs, concerns, and hopes of your neighbor or colleague. Care for your neighbor's needs in as many ways as is possible for you. Use the learned techniques to attain this goal.

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<sup>1</sup>Rom 13:1-7.

2. Pray that you may be able to show your neighbor or colleague God's answer to his/her needs, concerns, and hopes.

3. Intensify your relationship with your neighbor. Ask God to show to you the right opportunity to make the transition to the Biblical message. Use the learned transitional questions in your conversation with him/her.

4. Invite him/her to investigate the Bible to see what God says about his/her needs, concerns, and hopes. Start with the studies about the authority of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

5. Make sure that your ultimate goal is to relate your neighbor or colleague to Jesus Christ as his/her personal Savior. Do not push him/her. Give him/her time to respond to the action of the Holy Spirit.

#### Post-session Training

Under the leadership of the local pastor, all SDA evangelists who are working with BECs members should be gathered on a weekly basis, keeping the following objectives in mind:

1. Report the progress of the task.
2. Share experiences with each other.
3. Receive encouragement to continue the task.
4. Find solutions to the relationship hindrances.

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix A: "Bible Study Outlines," page 151.

5. Find Biblical answers to objections of BECs members.
6. Receive new evangelistic supplies to share with the BECs members (booklets, magazines, etc.).
7. Pray for BECs members with whom the SDA people are sharing the gospel.
8. Ask the power of the Holy Spirit for accomplishing the task.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research on BECs demonstrates that the Southern Brazilian communities are mainly located in socially deprived rural and urban areas. Few communities exist among the urban middle and upper social level. By definition, a BEC is an active unit of persons that through spontaneous social interaction becomes integrated by links of friendship, emotions, common historical circumstances, and religious and cultural background. Even though elements of Marxist social sciences are present in BEC thinking, the trend of the majority of the Southern Brazilian BECs is the allegiance to the institutional Roman Catholic Church which serves as a kind of mediator in the disputes for land, shelter, and wages.

The concept of praxis as taught by liberation theology is central not only for BECs of the Southern Brazilian region but also for communities throughout the country. By critically reflecting on praxis, the members of BECs are encouraged to analyze their historical context of poverty and to draw a line of action towards social and economic changes they hope to implement. Their theologians see the need to start from praxis, and for this reason, they commit themselves to experience faith from the eyes of the

poor. Thus, they intend that the structural changes they work for will grow from the bottom up.

Nevertheless, two risks related to the use of praxis by BECs must be stated. First, there is the risk that the theologians and pastoral agents impose their own views on the poor and prescribe what concerns they should have and tactics they should follow in realizing their liberation. Second, there is the risk involved within the limits of praxis itself. Praxis cannot be considered a final criterion of truth because it must be tested through the standard of Scripture. In lacking such a standard, members of BECs "arrive at very different and conflicting views" and lines of action.<sup>1</sup>

In dealing with the evangelizing task towards BECs, the first and basic doctrinal point to be affirmed is the absolute authority of the Bible as God's revelation. It is the normative standard to judge praxis and the line of action of human beings.

However, the mission of the SDAs towards BECs must be carefully performed by avoiding doctrinal, theological, and political quarrels. BECs see themselves as the true Christian church. The people of the BECs already feel that they live at the margin of the system or out of favor with it, a suggesting evangelistic approach, which first seeks to establish solid links of friendship before teaching the

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<sup>1</sup>McGovern, 180-81.



Biblical message, seems to be the most efficient way of going about the task. The role of the local pastor as a trainer of the SDA laity and the role of the local church as an operational and supporting base are vital to accomplishing the evangelizing task. Personal commitment to Christ and His mission is the foundation for training the lay people. Humility and dependence on the Holy Spirit's power are to characterize all who intend to lead people to Christ.

The following points might summarize the whole content of this project and offer some general guidelines to accomplish the evangelization of BECs people:

1. **Know who they are and what they think.** It implies studying the history and the theology of the movement. There are basic points that distinguish them from traditional Catholics.

2. **Know that only sincere love may unlock one's heart.** The spirit of love of our Lord Jesus Christ will open the sinner's heart to the transforming power of His grace.

3. **Be acquainted with the BECs members' concerns and expectations.** Be willing to listen more than talk.

4. **Know in depth the Biblical identity and doctrines of SDA Church.** A correct understanding of the doctrine of the believer's experience-salvation (justification, sanctification, and glorification) "helps to

solve the seeming tensions in emphasis relative to justification and sanctification."<sup>1</sup> The problem of human suffering cannot be explained apart of the comprehension of the doctrine of sin and the great controversy between Christ and Lucifer.

5. **Start by studying the authority of the Bible as the special revelation of God.** This Biblical doctrine is the corner stone that supports the whole doctrinal system of Scripture.

6. **Teach them all of the doctrines of the SDA Church.** Let each doctrine lift the person of Christ in the eyes of BECs members.

7. **Know that the Holy Spirit is the Agent who convicts and converts the human mind and heart.** Ask daily for His power.

Two recommendations for further research deserve special mention: (1) There is a need for further study concerning the positive participation of small SDA groups of prayer and Bible study directly involved in the task of evangelizing; and (2) there is a need for the development of an evangelistic strategy for the SDA Church's participation in social activities that can be shared with other Christian denominations.

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<sup>1</sup>Seventh-day Adventist Believe, 119.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Suggestive Bible Study Outlines**

## BIBLE STUDY OUTLINES

### God's Perfect Book (Study Number One)

Question # 1: What kind of book is the Bible?

Answer: The Bible is: (1) God's own word (Ps 119:1; Jer 30:1-2; Luke 8:21); (2) a testimony about God (John 5:39); (3) a book preserved by the very God (Prov 30:5, 6); (4) a complete book (Rev 22:18-19).

Question # 2: Why was the Bible written?

Answer: Because sin blocked the face-to-face communication between God and mankind (Gen 3:8; Isa 59:1-2).

Note: The complete story of the human fall comprises the three first chapters of Genesis.

Question # 3: What is the central theme of the Bible?

Answer: God's salvation of human beings (1 Pet 1:10-12; Rom 1:16) through Christ (John 5:39).

Question # 4: What factors contribute to the evidence of divine authorship of the Bible?

Answer: (1) The fulfillment of prophecies that point to the fall of ancient worldly empires and famous cities, such as Babylon (Isa 13:19-22), Assyria (Isa 14:24-27), Jerusalem (Matt 24:1-3, 15-20), and Tyre (Eze 26:2-8, 12). These empires and cities were overthrown in the following

years: Assyria: 612 B.C.,<sup>1</sup> Babylon: 482 B.C.,<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem: 70 A.D.<sup>3</sup>, Tyre: 333 B.C.<sup>4</sup>

(2) The correctness of the Bible in scientific matters is another evidence of its authority. Examples: Isa 40:12, 22 and Prov 8:27 speak of the earth as a globe. Job 26:7 tell us about the earth as suspended over nothing. Both texts anticipated the scientific findings of the roundness of earth.

(3) The unity between the Old and New Testaments, despite the fact they were written by more than thirty different authors, who lived in different places and times over a period of 1600 years.

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<sup>1</sup>Siegfried H. Horn, The Spade Confirms the Book (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1957), 27. Niniveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire was destroyed by the combined forces of the Medes and the Babylonians.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 48-49. Even though the fall of the empire occurred in 539 B.C., the kingdom of Babylon still survived until 482 B.C. when the Persian king Xerxes commanded its complete destruction. Since then, Babylon has never been rebuilt.

<sup>3</sup>The fall of the city and the complete destruction of the temple in 70 A.D. by the Romans confirm Jesus' prophecy in Matt 24:1-3, 15-20).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 244, 277. The later Tyre built on an island succumbed to the combined sea and land forces of Alexander the Great who ordered the construction of a causeway from the mainland to the island, using for such construction the debris of the extensive ruins of the old Tyre and its fortifications. "Since Alexander's removal of the ruins was so thoroughly carried out, very little has been left to serve as a clue for an identification of the mainland city, and it will probably never be possible to locate the exact site and extent of old Tyre."

(4) Christ's testimony (Mark 14:49, Luke 24:27; John 5:39; 10:35).

(5) The Bible's indestructibility when faced by centuries of suppression (1 Pet 1:25).

(6) The testimony of transformed lives in both biblical and contemporary time. Examples: The Apostle Paul's conversion (Acts 22:1-21); contemporary examples.

Question # 5: What is the purpose of the Bible?

Answer: It is to prepare people to live in a perfect world (2 Tim 3:15-17).

Question # 6: What must be our attitude to the Bible?

Answer: (1) To listen to God's Word and believe it (Acts 4:12-14) and (2) to store its message in our minds to prevent us from sinning against God and our neighbor (Ps 119:11, 105).

Question # 7: According to the Apostles Peter and Paul, what is the safest way to view and interpret the social and historical human reality?

Answer: Through the words spoken by God to the prophets (2 Pet 1:19-21; Rom 15:4).

Question # 8: According to the Psalmist, what can give light and understanding to the sincere human being?

Answer: The unfolding of the Word of God (Ps 119:130).

Appeal: Ps 119:105. Invite your friend to accept the Bible as the light of his or her life.

A Dependable Guidebook  
(Study Number Two)

Question # 1: How did God produce the Bible?

Answer: He used men and women to whom he gave special revelation (1 Pet 1:21; Heb 1:1, 2; Rev 1:11), through dreams and visions (Num 12:6; 24:3-4; 2 Cor 12:1-4). Some of the Bible's authors were inspired to write about past history in order to communicate God's truth. Example: Moses received special revelation to write the account of creation and early history of humankind as found in Genesis.

Question # 2: How much of the Bible was inspired by God?

Answer: The whole Bible was inspired by God (2 Tim 3:15-17).

Question # 3: What did the Bible's writers claim about to the reliability of the Bible?

Answer:

(A) The Old Testament's writers claimed that they received the message spoken by God (Examples: Gen 1:3; Exod 3:7; Lev 1:1; Num 1:1; Deut 1:3; 2 Sam 23:1, 3; Isa 55:8-11; Jer 1:4-9; Eze 2:7; Amos 3:7). The expressions "The Lord spoke" and "Word of the Lord" occur some 3,800 times throughout the Bible.

(B) Christ claimed that Scripture was a trustworthy testimony about His own life and sacrifice on behalf of human beings (Luke 24:27, 44-48; John 5:39-40, 46-47). He also used the Old Testament as a source of power to overcome temptation (Matt 4). Christ's life was the exact fulfillment of Old Testament predictions (Matt 1:21-23). He claimed, on many occasions, to be "the sent of God" (John 14:10; 21:21).

(C) The New Testament writers claimed that the things they wrote were commanded by God (1 Cor 14:37; 1 Thess 2:13), and that they were channels through which the Spirit of God spoke (1 Pet 1:10-11; 2 Pet 1:16-21).

Question # 5: What kind of wisdom does the Bible message provide for human beings?

Answer: He who learns from the Bible becomes "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15).

Question # 6: What kind of figure did Jesus use to illustrate the wisdom of depending on God's Word?

Answer: A house's solid foundation built on the rock (Matt 7:24-25).

Question # 7: What are the three results of listening to or reading God's Word?

Answer: Eternal life (John 10:27-28), hope (Rom 15:4), wisdom to avoid the same errors made in the past (1 Cor 10:11).



God Controls the Future  
(Study Number Three)

Question # 1: What attitude must we have toward Biblical prophecy?

Answer: We must "pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place" (2 Pet 1:19).

Question # 2: According to a Daniel's prophecy, what happened to Nabuchadnezzar, King of Babylon?

Answer: Dan 2:1. Summarize what happened to the king (his dream), the failure of the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers, and how Daniel revealed the dream and its interpretation.

Question # 3: What was the purpose of God when he gave the dream to the king?

Answer: Dan 2:29. God wanted to reveal the future of the world. Each part of the statue represented a phase of the world history.

Question # 4: What different ages were symbolized by the parts of the statue?

Answer: (a) The head of gold = Babylon (606-538 B.C.), (b) the chest and arms of silver = Media and Persia (538-331 B.C.), (c) the belly and thighs of bronze = Greece (331-168 B.C.), (d) the legs of iron = Roman (168 B.C.-476 A.D.).

Question # 5: What change occurs in the fourth king?

Answer: Dan 2:41-42.

Question # 6: Despite the remaining nations of the fourth king being united through family ties, what would be impossible for them to do?

Answer: Dan 2:43. They would not merge ever.

Discuss the tentative ways in which many tried to reunite Europe throughout the centuries.

Question # 7: Symbolized by the stone that hit the statue, what kingdom would be finally established?

Answer: Dan 2:44 - God's kingdom.

Question # 8: When would God's kingdom be established?

Answer: Dan 2:44 (first part) - "In the time of those kings."

Question # 9: In facing the future, what advice does the Apostle Peter give us?

Answer: 2 Pet 3:11-13.

Emphasize these following elements: (1) Time element. The kingdom of God comes after the appearance of the four world empires and not during the existence of any one of the four (Dan 2:34, 43). (2) Destruction of world kingdoms. The coming of God's kingdom requires the end (Dan 2:44) of the world kingdoms. (3) Divine origin. God's kingdom will be established without the human help (Dan 2:34, 45). (4) Eternal duration (Dan 2:44). (5) Universal extent. (Dan 2:35, 44). "There is no hint that the kingdom

of God will exist contemporaneously with all 'these kingdoms."<sup>1</sup>

Appeal: Wouldn't you like to put yourself in God's hands and expect to take part in His eternal kingdom?

Who is the Liberator?  
(Study Number Four)

Question # 1: What mission did Jesus announce in synagogue of Nazareth?

Answer: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:16-19).

Question # 2: Which aspects of Jesus' life and mission had been predicted by the Old Testament prophets?

Answer: (a) His birth (Isa 7:12; 9:6); (b) His birth place (Mic 5:2); (c) His mission (Isa 53; 61:1, 2); (d) His betrayal (Ps 41:9); (e) His words on the cross (Ps 22:1); (f) the soldiers' dispute over His garments (Ps 22:18); (g) the soldiers' mocking (Ps 22:7, 8); (h) His crucifixion between lawless ones (Isa 53:12); (i) His burial among the rich (Isa 53:9); His resurrection (Ps 16:9).

Question # 3: How long has Christ been in existence?

Answer: John 17:5; Ps 90:1, 2; John 1:1-3, 14.

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<sup>1</sup>Gerhard F. Hasel, Understanding the Living Word of God (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1980), 197-99.

Question # 4: How did John introduce Jesus at the Jordan River?

Answer: John 1:29.

Question # 5: What did those who knew Jesus have to say about Him?

Answer: (a) Peter (Matt 16:15), (b) Thomas (John 20:28), (c) Roman centurion (Matt 16:15, 16).

Question # 6: What does the Bible tell about Christ's part in the creation of the universe?

Answer: Heb 1:1-3; Col 1:13-16.

Question # 7: How did Christ humble Himself in becoming our Savior? Why did He leave His heavenly throne to come to this earth in human form?

Answer: Phil 2:5-8; 1 Tim 1:15; Matt 1:20-21.

Question # 8: What did Jesus say to disciples when they asked Him to show them the Father?

Answer: John 21:25.

Question # 9: According to the Apostle Peter, what was the life of Christ like?

Answer: 1 Pet 2:22-23.

Question # 10: Where is our only hope of salvation found?

Answer: Acts 4:10-12; Rom 5:10-11.

Appeal: After studying the Liberator's life and sacrifice, is it your desire to know more about the liberation provided by Christ?

Everlasting Liberation  
(Study Number Five)

Question # 1: What was the condition of the first human being soon after creation?

Answer: Adam and Eve were free to enjoy life and all the goods produced by the earth (Gen 2:15-16).

Question # 2: Was Adam and Eve's freedom absolute or conditional?

Answer: Their freedom was conditional on their obedience to God's will (Gen 2:17).

Question # 3: What were the consequences of failing God's test?

Answer: Death for them and their descendants (Gen 3:1-19; Rom 3:23; 5:12, 14; 6:23), hardship in survival (Gen 3:17-19), and hatred among their descendants (Gen 4).

Question # 5: How did the Apostle Paul describe the human condition after the disobedience of Adam and Eve?

Answer: Human beings became slaves of sin and servants of Satan (Rom 6:17, 20; John 8:34).

Question # 6: How did human disobedience affect society?

Answer: The Bible highlights violence, gluttony, and licentiousness as the most common sins existing in society (Gen 6:11-12; Matt 24:37-39).

Question # 7: In facing their individual sin and society's, what sincere claim have the godly people, such as David, expressed through the ages?

Answer: They have claimed God's promises for liberation (Ps 119:153-154; 107:13).

Question # 8: To what extent does God liberate men and women?

Answer: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). God sets human beings free from death (Rom 6:9), from the effects of sin in their minds (Rom 6:18, 22), and from the effects of sin in the present earthly environment (Rom 8:18-30; 2 Cor 5:4; 2 Pet 3:7, 10-13).

Question # 9: What plan did God use to liberate human beings from the effects of sin?

Answer: He planned the voluntary sacrifice of His only Son as substitute for all sinners (John 3:16-18; Rom 5:18-19; Phil 2:5-11; Rev 13:8).

Question # 10: What element is indispensable in order to receive Christ's liberation from sin and its effects?

Answer: John 5:24-25. Whoever believes in Christ will be liberated eternally. The indispensable element is personal faith in Christ and His word (Rom 10:17).

Question # 11: How did the Apostle Paul define faith?

Answer: Eph 2:8. Appeal to accept Christ by faith.

The Advent of the Liberator  
(Study Number Six)

Question # 1: Because of the tragedy of sin, what is the longing of all godly human beings throughout the ages?

Answer: Job 19:25-27; Acts 3:20-21.

Question # 2: How does the Bible characterize each of the advents (comings) of Jesus?

Answer: Jesus's first advent was characterized by his sacrifice on behalf of humankind (Matt 16:21, 24). The second advent will be characterized by manifestation of Jesus' power and glory (Matt 24:30).

Question # 3: What is the purpose of the second coming of Christ?

Answer: He will come to take His people from the earth to heaven (Matt 24:31; John 14:1-3). His purpose is to reward every human being according to what he/she has done (Rev 22:12). For this reason, the Apostle Paul terms the second coming "the blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), while the Apostle John says that this will be a day of anguish to the ungodly (Rev 6:15-17).

Question # 4: What kind of coming will Jesus' second coming be?

Answer: (a) literal/visible/audible (Acts 1:9-11; Rev 1:7; 1 Thess 4: 16); (b) glorious (Matt 24:27, 30-31).

Question # 5: What supernatural events will simultaneously occur in connection with the second coming of Christ?

Answer: (a) the resurrection of the just and the transformation of the living righteous (1 Thess 4:17; 1 Cor 15:51-52); (b) a big earthquake which will shake the entire earth (Rev 6:15-17; Jer 4:23-27).

Question # 6: Where will Jesus take His people?

Answer: To heaven (John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:17).

Question # 7: What specific warnings did Christ give so we would not be deceived by Satan?

Answer: (a) He warns us against Satan's attempts to counterfeit Christ's second coming (Matt 24:23-27); (b) He also warns us to be aware of the nearness of His coming (Luke 21:34-36).

Question # 8: Who only knows the day and hour of Christ's coming?

Answer: Only God knows the exact time of the second advent (Matt 24:36, 44).

Question # 9: What does the Bible tell us to do to be prepared for His coming?

Answer: (a) to acquire Christ's character (1 John 3:3); (b) to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:9-14, 18).

Question # 10: What will God's people enthusiastically proclaim at Christ's coming?

Answer: God's people will enthusiastically proclaim their liberation (salvation) through Christ (Isa 25:9).



God's People's Land  
(Study Number Seven)

Question # 1: What promise did Christ give to His people?

Answer: God promised that they would be the heirs of the earth (Matt 5:5).

Question # 2: What kind of earth will God give to His people?

Answer: An earth purified from sin and its effects (2 Pet 3:7, 10, 13; Rev 21 and 22).

Question # 3: When will this promise be fulfilled?

Answer: At the end of the period of one thousand years (the millennium) described in Rev 20. Summarize the events of the beginning and the end of the millennium using texts of the study number six.

Question # 4: Why didn't Jesus fight to take control of the secular order of this world during His first advent?

Answer: (a) He is the real owner of the earth and everything it contains (Ps 24:1-2; Hag 2:7); (b) Satan has usurped both the earth and humankind from God (Job 1:6-12; Matt 4:8-10); (c) Satan has fraudulently portrayed God's character throughout this cosmic conflict (John 8:42-47); (d) Christ became human to show through His life and sacrifice God's real character, thus destroying the devil's work (1 John 3:8); (e) the fullness of God's kingdom is an order of new things and beings to be established on earth

after the intervention of Christ (John 18:36; 1 Cor 15:23-28).

Question # 5: What does the Bible say about the destiny of the wicked?

Answer: They will be completely destroyed (Ps 37:9, 10, 20, 35, 38).

Question # 6: When will this event occur?

Answer: Partially at the second coming of Christ (2 Thess 2:8) and definitively at the end of the millennium (Rev 20:11-14).

Question # 7: Which persons will be immune to the final destruction?

Answer: Only those who have their names written in the book of life (Rev 20:15). They are those who have committed their lives to Lamb of God, Christ, as the Deliverer of their lives (Rev 5:8-12; Luke 10:20).

Question # 8: Did God intend to destroy human beings?

Answer: God has never intended to destroy human beings, but rather "He is patient not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9). Those people, however, who identify themselves with Satan's character will be thrown "into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Explain that this fire will not burn forever. The examples of Sodom and Gomorrah may exemplify how the eternal fire will work.

Question # 9: What attitude should God's people show while waiting for the end of evil?

Answer: Ps 37:4-8, 34-37.

From Bondage to Obedience  
(Study Number Eight)

Question # 1: What did God promise to Abram?

Answer: (1) God promised that he would be the father of a large nation of believers, and (2) promised that his descendants would possess the land of Canaan (Gen 15:4-6).

Question # 2: What sorrowful experience would the Abram's descendants live before the fulfillment of God's promise?

Answer: They would be "strangers in a country not their own and . . . enslaved . . . four hundred years" (Gen 15:13-16). In the fourth generation they would be liberated from slavery.

At this point, summarize the content of Gen 41-50 and Exod 1 and tell the BEC member how those prophecies about the slavery were fulfilled.

Question # 4: What hope did the Israelites maintain during their captivity in Egypt?

Answer: They hoped for the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abram and his descendants (Gen 50:24).

Question # 5: What did God remember after 430 years of slavery of His people in Egypt? What did He do by His people on the base of His own promise?

Answer: He remembered of His covenant made with Abram (Exod 2:23-25). Despite all sort of obstacles imposed by Pharaoh, God liberated His people by His own power (Exod 15:1, 2, 11, 19). There was no political revolution provoked by the Israelites against the government. The people was invited by God to go towards the promised land and to live according to what they would learn at Sinai.

Question # 6: What did God ask the people to do at Mount Sinai?

Answer: God asked His people to obey His will and serve Him (Exod 19:3-6).

Question # 7: By what words did God express His will to the Israelites?

Answer: Through the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1-17).

Question # 8: Should the Christ's followers obey those commandments nowadays?

Answer: They should not only obey all the Ten Commandments but also teach them to others (Matt 5:17-20).

Question # 9: What is the proof of our love for Jesus?

Answer: To keep Jesus' commandments (John 14:15).

Question # 10: How the Ten Commandments are termed by the apostle James?

Answer: James calls them the law of liberation from all kind of sin (James 2:10-12).

Question # 11: Which precept expressed in God's law is the enabling principle to liberate human beings from selfishness?

Answer: The principle of love (Mark 12:28-34; Rom 13:8-10). The first commandment is a call to begin a close relationship with God as the source of love.

Question # 12: What another name does the apostle Paul use to describe this kind of enabling love?

Answer: He names that the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22).

Appeal: God wants to write His law on your hear and mind (Jer 31:31-33). Wouldn't you like to allow Him to begin that now.

The Signal of Our Liberation  
(Study Number Nine)

Question # 1: What specific commandment did God use to remind the Israelites that they had been liberated from the slavery?

Answer: The fourth commandment (Deut 5:12-15).

Question # 2: What other Biblical writers confirm the same meaning of the Sabbath?

Answer: Eze 20:12, 20; Isa 58:13, 14.

Question # 3: Of what other historical event does the fourth commandment recall us?

Answer: The event of creation (Exod 20:8-11).

Question # 4: When was the seventh day established as memorial of creation?

Answer: At the end of the sixth day of creation of all things and beings by God (Gen 2:1-3).

Question # 5: What three things did God made in regards to the seventh day of the week?

Answer: God rested from all His work which He had done, blessed and sanctified the seventh day (Gen 2:1-3).

Question # 6: What two things did Jesus say about the Sabbath of the seventh day?

Answer: (1) The Sabbath was made for man, and (2) He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Question # 7: Did Christ and His disciples keep the Sabbath?

Answer: Luke 4:16-17; 23:56; 24:1; Acts 13:42-44; 18:4; Rev 1:10.

Question # 8: What kind of work does God allow us to do on Sabbath?

Answer: "Therefore it is lawful to do good on Sabbath" (Matt 12:12).

Question # 9: According to the Bible, when does the Sabbath begin and end?

Answer: At the sunset of Friday to the sunset of Sabbath (Lev 23:32; Luke 23:54, 56; Matt 28:1).

Question # 10: What detailed instructions and promised did God give His people concerning the keeping of the Sabbath?

Answer: Isa 58:13, 14.

a. "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath."

b. "Call the Sabbath a delight."

c. "Not doing as you please."

d. "Find your joy in the Lord."

Appeal: John 14:15.

Who Is the People of God  
(Study Number Ten)

Question # 1: What request did Moses present to Pharaoh?

Answer: They asked him to liberate God's people (Exod 5:1).

Question # 2: What was the God's intention in liberating His people from slavery?

Answer: God intended that Israel were a peculiar people among the nations (Exod 19:5, 6).

Question # 3: Despite the apostasy of most Israelites, through whom has God achieved His objective?

Answer: Through the remnant of Israel (Isa 1:9; Eze 6:8; Rom 9:27; 11:5).

Question # 4: What major characteristic did the remnant of Israel have in the Old Testament time?

Answer: Fidelity to God (1 Kings 19:18; Haggai 1:12). The word remnant means the rest of the people who remained faithful to God.

Question # 5: Until when will God have His remnant on the earth?

Answer: God will have the remnant of His people until the day of Christ' second coming (Rev 12:17; 14:12-20). Observe that the dragon went off to make war against the rest of God's church. The following event after that war, which is moved against the rest of God's church, is the harvest of the earth (Rev 14:14-20). Christ said that the harvest of the earth is the end of the age (Matt 13:39).

Question # 6: According to Rev 12 and 14:12, what are the characteristics which identify the last remnant of God's people on the earth?

Answer: (1) The remnant reappears after the time of persecution moved by dragon against the church (Rev 12:13, 15-17); (2) the remnant is characterized by patient endurance; (3) obedience to God's commandments; and (4) faith in God (Rev 12:17; 14:12).

Question # 7: What message does God use to call the sincere people in the last days to take part in God's remnant destiny?

Answer: Rev 14:6-12.



Question # 8: What is the emphasis of that message?

Answer: (1) Worshiping God as the Creator and putting God in the first place in our lives. There is no place to human deification. The human beings must give glory to God. Be prepared to God's judgment. (2) Be aware that Babylon is fallen. Babylon is symbol of all human system that excludes God as the Creator. (3) Do not worship the beast and his image and do not receive his mark.

Question # 9: What attitude does God expect from those who want to be part of the last God's remnant?

Answer: "Repent and turn to God" (Rev 3:19; Acts 3:19).

Question # 10: After repenting and turning to God, what is the promised to the new believer?

Answer: God promises complete liberation from the guilt of sin (it is the effect of Christ's righteousness), from the power of sin in one's life (it is the work of the Holy Spirit is sanctifying one's life), and the liberation from the presence of sin (it is the day of glorification at the second coming of Christ). "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). God promises the times of refreshing through the presence of the Lord (Acts 3:19).

Appeal: Christ is tenderly knocking at the door of your heart. Wouldn't you like to open your mind and heart to Him? (Rev 3:20).

**APPENDIX B**

**Glossary of Terms and Expressions Used  
by BECs Members**

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND EXPRESSIONS USED BY BECS

- Agentes Externos.** Outside factors which involve people or facts.
- Agentes de Pastoral.** Pastoral ministers who guide BECs.
- Amarração.** Idea that unites BECs.
- Animadores.** Animators or lay catalyzers of BECs.
- Assessores.** Advisers who assist BECs.
- Associação de moradores.** Association of neighbors.
- Anunciar.** To announce God's kingdom.
- Base.** Base; the marginalized sector of society.
- Beato.** Devout; usually a pious lay person.
- Bem Comum.** Common good; politics to overcome social and economic oppression.
- Bispo.** Bishop; he who administrates a diocese.
- Caminhada.** Journey or process of liberation.
- Campanha da Fraternidade.** Annual religious programming organized by CNBB.
- Capitalismo.** Capitalism or a system of economic oppression.
- Catequista.** Catechist, i.e., a person in charge of indoctrination.
- Celebrações.** Liturgical or religious celebrations.
- Centro Comunitário.** Community center or hall used by BECs as places for worship, social meetings, and community programs.
- Círculos Bíblicos.** Bible Circles oriented to study the Bible, usually, in accordance with Carlos Mesters's method.

Clamor do Povo. The cry of people; expression of liberation theology which signifies the public verbalization of the poor's social awareness.

Classes dominantes. Ruling classes; expression usually associated with oppression.

Clube de mães. Church mother's club.

Colono. Peasant.

Comunidade. Community; term usually used to describe individual BECs.

Conscientização. Conscientization; the process of awakening and enhancing social and political awareness.

Conversão. Conversion; commitment with the liberating process; commitment of someone with his/her neighbor.

Convivência. Sociability; intimate relationship among the members of BECs.

Culto Católico. Catholic service which replaces the mass.

Democracia. Democracy; government system.

"Democradura." Dictatorship; term to criticize abuses of government.

Delegados(as). Representatives; those who represent a BEC in regional or national meetings.

Denunciar. To denounce; the act or process of denouncing social and economic injustice.

Diocese. Diocese; the territorial jurisdiction of a bishop.

Direitos da mulher. Woman's rights.

Dívida Externa. External debt; the debt due to other countries.

Eclesial. Ecclesial; belonging to the Church.

Eclesiogenese. Ecclesiogenesis; ideological process of generating the church.

Ecologia. Ecology; the study of the natural systems of the earth.

Egito. Egypt; symbol of place or structure of oppression.

**Ecumenismo.** Ecumenism; movement to unite Christians into one church organization.

**Equipe.** Team; task force working in or with BECs.

**Encontro.** Encounter; local, regional, or national meeting of BEC members.

**Esperança.** Hope of becoming liberated.

**Espiritualidade.** Spirituality with strong nuances to Brazilians.

**Estruturas.** Structures; term which designates the oppressive social or economic structures.

**Exodo.** Exodus; departure or releasing of oppression.

**Faraó.** Pharaoh; symbol of oppressing ruler.

**Grupos de evangelização.** Groups of evangelization; small witnessing teams of BECs.

**Hierarquia.** Church hierarchy.

**Igreja Popular.** Popular Church; another term for BEC.

**Intereclesial.** Intraecclesial; national encounter of BECs.

**Jesus Cristo Libertador.** Jesus Christ Liberator; image of Christ used as symbol of liberation struggle.

**Justiça.** Justice; social justice.

**Libertação.** Liberation; key word to describe the process of releasing individuals and society from social and economic oppression.

**Maria.** Mary; Jesus's mother; symbol of the poor.

**Marginalização.** Marginalization; social process which expels the poor of society.

**Militante.** Militant; person committed to the cause of liberation.

**Ministerios.** Ministries; services in BECs.

**Monitores.** Monitors; BECs animators.

**Nova sociedade.** New society; social project of BECs.

- Novo homem. New man; human being socially and politically liberated.
- Opressão. Oppression; socio-economic, cultural, and religious situation of the poor.
- Paróquia. Parish; local Roman Catholic church.
- Partilhar. To share goods, time, and life with the others, especially those who suffer.
- Pobres. The poor; term usually used collectively.
- Povo de Deus. People of God; the members of BECs.
- Praxis. A course of action that demands reflection and reflects back upon action.
- Projeto Político. Political project of a new classless society.
- Realidade. Reality; socio-economic, cultural, and religious situation of the poor.
- "Reduções." "Reductions"; concentrations of natives into large self-sufficient societies under the supervision of Catholic missionaries (Jesuits) in the South of Brazil.
- Reforma agrária. Agrarian reform; government project of redistribution of the land.
- Regional. Regional; organization under which gathers a group of BECs.
- Reino de Deus. Kingdom of God; synonymous with new society.
- Resistência. Resistance; the struggle to achieve liberation.
- Rosto. The face of poor people, nation, church.
- Sabedoria popular. People wisdom or the wisdom born among the poor.
- "Santos." "Saints"; images of saints venerated by the faithful and worshiped in popular Catholicism.
- "Sem terra." "The landless"; rural workers who do not own a piece of land to farm.
- Sertão. Hinterland; Northeastern part of Brazil.

Sindicato. Labor Union; term usually used for the organization of workers of industry or commerce.

Sistemas. Systems; the core group in the MEB radio-transmitted literacy program that went underground and later emerged as nuclei for BECs.

Socialismo. Socialism; social philosophy present in BECs.

Traditional. Traditional; concerning to Church hierarchy.

Utopia. Utopia; the idealistic project of a classless society.

Vigário. Vicar; local church priest.

Vizinho. Neighbor, brother, intimate, friend; he who lives besides someone else.

Voz profética. Prophetic voice; the voice of BEC members.

**APPENDIX C**

**Suggestive Forms to Evaluate the Results  
of this Project**



EVALUATION FORMS

Form One

Use this form at the end of the session # 8.

1. Are you a baptized member of the SDA Church?

Yes  No

2. Name and address of the local church you attend:

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3. Sex: M  F

4. Age: Young Person  Young Adult  Adult

5. Education:  Elementary school  Academy

College  Graduate .

6. Did you attend the training classes about how to evangelize BECs?

Yes  No  Part time

7. How much did you know about BECs before attending these classes?

I had heard about them.

I did not know anything about BECs.

I knew just a few things about them.

8. Encircle a number of the scale below to evaluate the training course about BECs.

(Poor) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Excellent)

9. After attending the sessions of the training course, what is your definition of BEC?

( ) A Christian group in need of salvation.

( ) A group of people who want to destroy the social structures?

( ) A group of people who are committed to needed social reforms.

( ) Anarchist people.

( ) Communist people.

10. Do you want to be committed to evangelizing the members of BECs? ( ) Yes ( ) No

Form Two

The following questions should be answered to evaluate the success of the task of evangelizing BEC members one month after the end of the training course.

1. Did you have any contact with BEC members?

( ) Yes ( ) No

2. Evaluate your contact with BEC members?

( ) Accidental contact.

( ) Meaningful contact.

( ) Personal friendship established.

( ) Bible studies in course.

( ) BEC member expressed interest in SDA message.

( ) BEC member has already visited the SDA Church.

( ) BEC member wants to become a SDA.

3. Where did you meet the BEC member?

- Neighborhood
- Factory
- School
- Another place.

Where? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Who is the BEC member you have met?
  - a. M  F
  - b. Young  Young adult  Adult  Senior
  - c. Poor  Rich  Middle class
  - d. A BEC member  A BEC leader

5. What kind of concerns did that BEC member

express?

- Material and economic
- Socio-cultural
- Political
- Religious-spiritual

6. Can you see any connection between the BEC member you met and liberation theology?

(Weak) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strong)

7. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of the training course to evangelize BEC people in helping you experience the task of evangelizing them? Use the scale below.

(Weak) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (Strong)

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