

A PROFILE OF A PECULIAR PEOPLE



The ten distinctives of Betel

ELLIOT TEPPER

A PROFILE OF A PECULIAR PEOPLE

By Elliot Pepper

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A PROFILE OF A PECULIAR PEOPLE

The ten distinctives of Betel

Who are we? What are we? What exactly does Betel do?

Many Christians have never heard of us. Some have heard, but remain confused and have only the fuzziest idea of what Betel is about. I can remember a decade ago walking through Canillejas in the Barrio of San Blas in Madrid and seeing a police car and an ambulance, both with their blue and red lights flashing. In front of them gathered a large noisy cluster of people between the sidewalk and a building. I drew near to see that they were reviving an addict who had overdosed. The medics saved his life and put him on a stretcher and rolled him to the emergency vehicle. As the crowd began to disperse, I spoke to the police officer, offering Betel's services and our card. The police officer examined the card and then told me he had never heard of Betel before, but thanked me and was glad to know that in San Blas there existed an organization like Betel that helped drug addicts. I was a bit surprised by his answer and asked him if he was new in San Blas. He replied, "No. I have been stationed here almost ten years." He got into his patrol car and drove off. The neighbors went about their business as if nothing had happened and I just stood there wondering: how could it be possible that that officer knew nothing about Betel?

Betel started on the streets of San Blas, just a few blocks from the Police Station. We had many positive contacts with the police, and not infrequently they would come to our church, or office, or stores in the San Blas area to inquire



International Presbytery of Betel Pastors in Birmingham, England

about the whereabouts of a *chico* or *chica* in *busca y captura* (on the wanted list). We always cooperated with the police and they appreciated us. How could that officer not know us? Amazing. Or is it?

Today, twenty five years since Betel took in its first addict, once in a while I still find people in San Blas who have no idea who we are or that we even exist. More often I discover people who have heard of us and recognize our white vans with our distinctive blue dove, yet haven't the foggiest notion of what Betel really does and represents. Some have quite fantastic opinions about us. Some good, some bad.

If Betel is not fully known in the little microcosm of San Blas, why should we expect the wider world and the larger Body of Christ to know us?



So, who are we? What are we? What does Betel do?

Let me offer 10 distinctives that make Betel uniquely Betel.

ONE

WE ARE A DESPERATE PEOPLE HELPING DESPERATE PEOPLE: Addicts, Alcoholics, and the Marginalized

We believe the greatest need humanity has is to know that they have a need. Therefore we target the desperate and the needy. Betel has grown and the Gospel has prospered through our lives and ministries because we know that we have a need and believe that only Jesus can meet that need.

Paradoxically, in the light of eternity, the least needy are the neediest, simply because they think they have no needs. This is perhaps the single most important explanation for the



Street Ministry in the Gypsy Camp of Madrid





decline of the Church in the post-Christian western world, a world that says, *“I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing.”* It also explains the anomaly of Betel and our success in preaching the Gospel to those few who have discovered that they are *“wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked”* (Revelation 3:17).

TWO

WE ARE A CHURCH PLANTING MINISTRY

We are a church planting ministry first and foremost, and secondly, a rehab ministry. Betel was born out of a church planting ministry in the Barrio of San Blas in Madrid, Spain. The first Betel church began in the Teppers’ home. Two years later, Betel initiated its first rehab community in the McKenzies’ flat.

Betel is a WEC International ministry having been started by WEC missionaries who were members of the Spanish WEC Field. About a decade ago WEC International separated Betel from the “regular” WEC Field and created a new field called the WEC-Betel Transnational Field because Betel’s growth had spilled beyond Spain into dozens of cities in many other nations. Shortly after the creation of the new WEC-Betel Transnational Field, in a meeting of the leaders of WEC International, I was asked, “Why did WEC in Spain split?” I was about to respond that because our ministry was no longer exclusively centered in the Spain, but rapidly expanding into many diverse linguistic and cultural national entities, that it was only reasonable to make a functional separation on the Spanish field.

But before I could speak, the field leader of “regular” WEC jumped in and said, “It is simple. We are church planting and Betel is working with drug addicts.” I took a bit of mild

offense and umbrage to his comment and responded, "Yes, it is true that Betel does work with drug addicts, alcoholics, and other marginalized peoples. It is also true that we do have a significant para-church ministry, serving the whole Body of Christ, receiving addicts and the marginalized, converting and discipling them, and then returning many of them to the local churches and their families who sent them to us. But, we also plant churches. We just do not do it in the 'traditional' way with 'normal' people."

We have planted dozens and dozens of Betel churches and dozens and dozens of embryonic church plants are in the process of turning into Betel churches. In addition, more and more of Betel's churches are attracting and being filled with not just the marginalized, but with "normal" people. Many of our older church plants have grown, matured and prospered so that it is difficult to tell them apart from "normal" churches and "normal" Christians, other than that they may be a little more enthusiastic than the average "normal" church.

Recently, Kent Martin, the director of Betel of Britain received a visit from a journalist representing a major magazine. She was visiting our Birmingham center and church. For years she had had contact with the needy, helping to feed and clothe addicts at homeless refuges in northeast England. She was shocked upon entering our evening church service to interview one of our couples. "Are these the addicts?" she asked me, scanning the room full of men and women in front of her. Most, awaiting the start of the worship, were chatting, laughing or reading their Bibles quietly. "They...they," she stammered, "just look so clean and normal, certainly not like the addicts I work with."

But that is the whole point. Betel takes men and women off the street into our communities that, through the grace of God, they might truly find their place in the Body of Christ. We do our part giving them a shower and clean clothes,

and also a home with order and a rich spiritual environment where the Gospel is proclaimed and lived. Then we allow God to do His part. In His good time He translates those who are willing from death unto life that they might form part of the Church.

Are we really church planting?

Betel has given birth to a worldwide church fellowship and denomination called AEMC, which translated means “The Assemblies of Worldwide Evangelization for Christ” with over 100 ordained ministers, most of whom are ex-addicts who have come through Betel’s communities and program.



Betel of Madrid Church

THREE

OUR REHAB COMMUNITIES ARE PEER-DRIVEN AND PEER-LED

Yes, there are WEC, Amistad, and other missionaries serving in Betel, but most of our leadership comes from within. Our leaders come largely from people born in our own house.

In Genesis 14:14, Abraham took 318 men, trained servants *“born in his own house,”* to free Lot after he had been captured along with the king of Sodom.

Yes, there are some professionals: doctors, dentists, social workers, psychologists, accountants, lawyers, architects, and IT specialists sprinkled into our leadership teams, but the foundation and backbone of Betel remain our pastors and our monitors (we call them *responsables*, the “responsible ones”). They are almost exclusively ex-addicts saved in our communities.

There is no “professional” distance between the members of Betel’s communities and the leadership. We have no client-professional relationships in Betel. There are only *Betelitos* and the friends we invite to live with us, in the hope of their finding Christ in our midst.

What makes a *Betelito*? What distinguishes a *Betelito*?

When Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin, the Scripture tells us, *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.”* (Acts 4:13).

I have shocked people saying, “I have absolutely no interest in curing drug addicts. I only want to make addicts into men and women of God.”

We may not be “professionally” trained, but our leaders have been with Jesus. They may not meet the world’s or the modern Church’s standards, but they are well qualified to minister according to C.T. Studd, the founder of WEC, “I do not care if they have turnips for heads, as long as their hearts are on fire for God.” Norman Grubb, the second International Director of WEC and C.T. Studd’s son-in-law once said, “Betel is the revival of the old WEC.” We are Primitive Christians.

The selection and preparation of our leaders is very similar to the Early Church’s approach. We promote men and women who have been with Jesus and have heard and answered His call.



Eduardo of Betel of Nottingham, England



House clearance work, New York

FOUR

WE TAKE GREAT RISKS WITH RISKY PEOPLE

As we have already mentioned, promotion and leadership usually come from within the Betel communities. We not only believe that the redemptive work of Christ and regeneration through the Holy Spirit make a person fit for heaven, but also make men and women able to assume the responsibilities of ministry.

People are amazed that Betel's rehab communities, churches, and income-generating projects are almost entirely run by the ex-addicts who have come through Betel's program. We understand that the grace and mercy of God cover and forgive all sin, but they may not always erase all the old scars. Many of our leaders still must reckon with severe health problems like the AIDS virus and hepatitis, criminal records, and the emotional, educational, and cultural deficits associated with addiction and their old life before Christ.

Are we being irresponsible?

Is it dangerous to entrust the lives of the members of the Betel communities to the care of such "damaged vessels"? Is it reckless to place the administration of our resources and the operations of our income-generating projects in their hands?

Yes, from the human perspective, but when God is in the equation, it is not nearly as risky as one might think. Relative to other Christian ministries and worldly NGO's, we have very low indices of moral failure and theft. They occur, but rarely, and hardly ever in the upper levels of Betel's leadership. Why? We have a saying in Betel, "We live on the edge of eternity." In what sense? Because we, as the Apostle Paul, can truly say, *"We carry the sentence of death within*

ourselves.” (II Corinthians 1:9). In the early days of Betel’s history, about half of our leaders were HIV positive. True, in the last decade the profile of the health of our Western European communities has dramatically improved, but still today in Betel the same can be said of our leaders in Russia, Eastern Europe and India. Our people stay holy because the fear of God and eternity are ever present realities in their lives.

Is it possible to build the Kingdom of God with men and women from less than ideal backgrounds? Yes, resoundingly yes. Betel trains its leaders in our in-house Bible Institute called *La Cueva de Adulam* (The Cave of Adullam). We believe that God takes “*beggars from dung hills and sets them among princes*,” (I Samuel 2:8). In the book of First Samuel, David drew his first followers from among the poor and outcast, the debtors and bitter in spirit. Those same men’s names are listed 30 years later in the genealogies of Second Samuel, but no longer as beggars and debtors, but rather as David’s valiant and mighty men. The early marginalized men who first followed David had become his princes, generals, and the administrators of his kingdom. Today, many of our Betel pastors are recognized as leaders in the greater Body of Christ and sit on the highest counsels of the Church in many lands.

Recognition is not always easy. It takes time for character, godliness, and the fruit of one’s ministry to trump the visible signs of authority: a seminary degree and a university education. But they always do in the end.

One day, early in Betel’s history in Madrid, a friend and Christian leader came up to me and said, “I finally figured out how Betel works. I am trained, educated, and have experience in how a church and business ought to run. I know you cannot just take the kind of people you have and run a ministry like Betel. But you, you are *tan tonto*, (so stupid, naïve) you do not understand that it cannot be done, so it works for you!” In Betel when God does something or asks us to do

something, we are *tan tontos*, we cannot understand why it cannot or should not be done.

Betel owns a beautiful property on the slopes of the Southern Pillar of Hercules overlooking the Straits of Gibraltar in Spanish Ceuta on the Moroccan Coast. It is the highest private home, situated just under the guns of the Spanish military. One morning after the devotional, I climbed up to the observation patio above the third story of our house with our guest speaker, Jack Groblewski, a very erudite theologian with a philosophical bent. He had been touring Betel with me and was very impressed with the lives of our *Betelitos*.

As we stood there in the early morning light, we looked out across the Straits to Spain, and then west to the Atlantic and then east to the Mediterranean. Below, the men filed out of the house with their tools and began loading up the vans to drive down the mountain to the port for the day's work. Jack turned to me and said, "Betel is like the ancient Franciscans..." He paused, and I thought to myself, "He is right. We are godly, other worldly, mystical..." Then Jack continued, "You are just like the Franciscans: a bunch of poor, ignorant jerks who do not know their right hand from their left hand, living together and trying to scratch out a living while glorifying God." I thought, "Jack is probably more right than I am." But nevertheless, God has chosen us. And we have agreed with God, and that has made all the difference.

FIVE

WE PLACE SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE CROSS

The cross is central to Christianity and to the message of Christianity. In Betel we make a distinction between the process of the Cross and a personal revelation of our union with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection.

We teach the message of the Cross: that Christ died for us and rose from the dead. We explain the process of the Cross: that each believer must walk out his or her own identification with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Or as Paul declared, "I die daily." In Betel, we die daily.

However, we also believe and teach that there is a very high level of victory and spiritual reality available to believers through a personal revelation of our union with Christ. We believe that Galatians 2:20 is absolutely true and means literally what it says:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

Yes, there is a process of dying daily and seeing the old life fall away bit by bit. Yes, we sin and err, but there is also the possibility of attaining to a very real identification with the perfect and complete victory of Christ's life which has now become our life, right now in this present life.

The Apostle Paul proclaimed:

"That is the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches

of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:26-27).

The oldest and most successful alcohol and drug rehab program is AA. Certainly more people have been helped through AA than any other rehab program in the world. We admire and have learned much from AA, but there is one point where we make a distinction between AA and Betel. When an AA graduate introduces himself, he often says something like this, “Hello, my name is John, I am a recovering alcoholic. I have been clean for so many years. I am only one drink away from becoming an alcoholic again.” AA finds that kind of frankness and humility helpful. We would



Sunrise, Betel of Almeria, Spain

not encourage our people to think or talk like that. In Betel, *Betelitos* are not recovering addicts who are one step away from falling back into addiction. We teach *Betelitos* that, *"if any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature: old things are passed away. All things are become new."* (II Corinthians 5:17).

Betelitos, through revelation, are conscious of the righteousness of God which is revealed in their lives in Christ. This is a very big distinctive, and perhaps the most important.



A Betel Men's Residence



WEC Missionaries Serving in Betel



Betel of North India



Betel of Genoa, Italy

SIX

WE ARE A GREAT COMMISSION PEOPLE

We are not just a rehab program that has birthed a few local churches. Yes, we have dozens and dozens of rehab communities and local churches, but we aspire to much more. We believe that God has placed an apostolic mantle on Betel to take the Gospel to the whole world. We aspire, and not just the missionaries, but the entire Betel family, to plant Betel communities and churches in all the nations of the earth. We embrace John Wesley's declaration: "The whole world is my parish."

Returning from our first exploratory trip to Italy, Lindsay McKenzie and I were driving in a van with a few of our Betel leaders along the beautiful and winding Mediterranean coastal highway in southern France. We were full of excitement and enthusiasm having just located our first Italian Betel community in Naples. As we sped along the coast, around the curves and through the tunnels towards Spain, suddenly a thought occurred to me, and I turned to Lindsay and said, "What do you call the coastline of Israel?" Lindsay replied, "The Levant." Then I asked him, "What do you call the Mediterranean coast of Spain?" He responded, "*El Levante*." Then we both cried out, "That's it!" The Spirit of God fell upon us in the van as we raced 100 km/hour (60 miles/hour) along the edge of the Alps as they descend into the sea. And I said, "I believe that God has called us to preach the Gospel and plant churches and communities all around the Mediterranean coast from Spain to Israel, to follow the Apostle Paul's steps backwards."

Has that declaration made almost 20 years ago been an empty presumptuous boast, or a prophetic declaration revealing the mind of God which, if obeyed, would empower Betel to follow in the steps of the Apostle Paul?

Since that divine encounter, racing along the edge of the sea in southern France, we have established communities along the northern rim of the Mediterranean in Spain, France, and Italy in: Algeciras, Malaga, Motril, Almeria, Valencia, Castellon, Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, Girona, Marseilles, Genoa, and Naples. In the south, along the southern coast of Morocco, Betel has started communities and churches in Ceuta, Tetuan, and Melilla.

We have only just begun, and we have not limited our ambitions to the Mediterranean world. Today, Betel has grown from Raul Casto, the first Betel convert in San Blas, and our first church and community in Madrid, to over 80 communities, 40 churches, and dozens of embryonic church plants in over 80 urban areas in 22 provinces of Spain and 20 other nations: Portugal, France, Germany, the UK, Ireland, Italy, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Russia, Finland, the Ukraine, India, Nepal, Mongolia, Australia, the USA, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Morocco. This may not be the whole world, but it is a start, and not bad for a group of poor *tontos* from the Barrio of San Blas *"who do not know their right hand from their left hand."*

Today, our centers in 75 of those 80 cities are run by recovered men and women, now trusted disciples and pastors, who first came to us off the streets desperate for help. And our churches in a few nations have grown to become missionary sending bases in their own right, seeding the start of new Betel church plants around the world. Betel of Spain in 25 years has sent over one hundred missionaries, at first from Madrid to the Spanish provinces, and then, beyond to the nations. Betel of Britain in its first 15 years has sent more than 50 short and long term missionary workers to help found or support new Betels in ten nations. Betel of India in its first 10 years has sent missionaries and workers from their headquarters in Gurgaon, Haryana, to start new centers and churches in nine new Indian cities, and also be-

yond India to Mongolia and Nepal.

In 2010 the Betel leadership took a faith stand and declared that we will enter 18 new nations in the next decade. Are we crazy? Or are we simply following in the steps of C.T. Studd who wrote his wife Pricilla in 1913 from the port of Marseilles, not far from where we received our commission to follow the Apostle Paul's steps back to the Levant. C.T. Studd wrote these words shortly before sailing from Europe for the Congo, "I believe that this trip is not just for the Congo and Africa alone, but for the whole unevangelized world."



Betel in the world



The Adam family serving in Betel of India

SEVEN

WE BELIEVE THAT THE GOSPEL RESTORES NOT JUST THE INDIVIDUAL BUT THE WHOLE FAMILY

Betel has been successful planting churches, most notably in post-Christian Europe. How have we overcome the coldness, hostility, and resistance of a secular and materialistic population? We have found the key in the link between a converted addict and his family. If one wins the son or daughter, one has a good chance of winning the mother and father, and the brothers and sisters. Our very first church in San Blas was composed primarily of mothers and their sons. At first the mothers would come to our meetings because we were able to place their sons in rehab communities. In the beginning, the mothers converted before the sons. But soon mothers and their sons and a few daughters would each, in their own time, find God, and then one by one, other extended family members would be drawn to the Betel Church and to Christ.

In Betel's first book, *Rescue Shop Within A Yard of Hell* by Stewart and Marie Dinnen, we dedicated the book to a restoration of "the image of the Father...in a generation that had lost the image of the father." We have noted a very significant commonality in the personal profile of the addicts who come to Betel in all the cultures in the many nations where we have established rehab communities. Very often there is no father in their lives. Their father is either dead or absent because of divorce or abandonment. Often, if there is a father in the home, there is alcoholism or abuse. Of course, there are exceptions and wayward sons and daughters who choose a destructive lifestyle despite the best efforts of good parents. But more often than not, it is the lack of the true "image of the father" in the child's life that stunts his development and sets him on the pathway to self-destruction.

This is very clear to us. Much has been made of the dysfunction of the Black American male. We can testify that the very same dysfunction appears in White European males in Europe. What is the commonality? They have no father figure in their lives and often come from a broken family.

Consider Paul's story, not unlike thousands more in Betel. When Paul arrived at Betel in Birmingham, England, forty of his friends were already dead from heroin overdose. He was 34 years old. When not in prison, he lived in a derelict, needle-ridden flat and ate out of rubbish bins. He had not seen or spoken to his parents in years. Since his mid 20's, his doctor had told him that, at best, he could expect to live on methadone and government welfare for the rest of his life. No one had EVER told him he could be free from drugs. Betel was the place where Paul first heard of and then encountered that freedom. Today, Paul is a Betel pastor with a wife and a family. His transformed life and restored family are touching and transforming countless other broken lives and families.

This is where the hope found in the Gospel of Christ becomes the key that opens the locked door of the secularized post-Christian heart. If the image of the Heavenly Father can be restored to the individual and to his or her family, all can be made whole again. More than 140,000 individuals have passed through Betel's communities in the last quarter century. Most entered Betel, not to find Christ, but rather to "fix" their lives and families. Tens of thousands of men and women and their families have been "*surprised by joy*" and restored to the true happiness God proposed for their lives. It is just as God has promised. If we love and obey Him, He has promised, "*I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you.*" (Psalm 81:16).



Betel of Bulgaria

EIGHT

WE BELIEVE THAT JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY AND FOREVER (HEBREWS 13:8)

We believe in the personal and present ministry of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, in the believer, in the Body of Christ, and in the world. We believe that what Jesus did during his earthly ministry and what the early disciples did as recorded in the Book of Acts is both historical fact and still is possible today.

I can remember a group of mothers in our Madrid church that came up to me one Sunday and asked, "What kind of Christians are we?" Most of them had experienced the new birth and baptism in water years earlier in Betel, but they still were a little unclear as to just which "brand" of Christianity they belonged. One might very reasonably think that to have such an elementary question still unanswered, after years of listening to the teachings of the Word of God in Betel, would reflect very badly on our competence. Actually, for our part, we purposely avoided branding ourselves so as not to offend the sensibilities of Spanish Catholics. I explained that we were just plain *Christian* Christians: Catholic in our relationship to the mystic universal Church, Reformed in our understanding of salvation by grace through faith and our absolute trust in the authority and truth of Scripture, Evangelical in our commitment to the Great Commission, and Pentecostal-Charismatic in our willingness to openly seek and express all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Though we may try to avoid labels as much as possible, we are not ashamed of our Pentecostal-Charismatic roots and believe and preach that the same spiritual gifts manifested during the Apostolic Age of the Church are still for today. We believe that healing is part of the Gospel. We be-

lieve in miracles. We do not see miracles and healings every day. We do not even see them regularly, but we have seen God work in power to heal, deliver, and perform miracles at key moments in our history as a ministry. And those moments and supernatural events have authenticated the Gospel and greatly advanced the Kingdom of God in our midst.

In the early days of our ministry in San Blas we saw no converts. Mothers and fathers would come to our meetings simply because they hoped we might help their sons and daughters escape from addiction. Their motives were straightforward. They had a natural need and thought Betel was a kind of “super” social service able to meet their need for free. For a long time neither the parents nor their children came to a real personal saving knowledge of Christ. Then suddenly that changed. Why?

We prayed for Maruja, the mother of Herman, the Sunday before her Monday surgery for cancer, and God healed her miraculously. The doctors sent her home from the hospital without surgery. After Maruja’s miraculous healing, the attitude of the neighborhood changed towards us and the Gospel. People who were once skeptical and cold began to find Christ in our meetings, and more and more signs began to follow our preaching.

For quite a long while, only mothers and children were saved in our meetings. Working-class Spanish men are notoriously anti-religious and resistant to the Gospel. But even that wall of unbelief came tumbling down. Alberto’s father, Bernardo, lay dying in the hospital with an uncontrollably accelerated heartbeat. The family asked us to pray for him. We prayed and he was instantly healed. After his miraculous healing, other fathers began to find Christ in our meetings. Finally, the Gospel we preached was beginning to resemble the same Gospel the Apostles preached in the Book of Acts.

Though God has seasonally blessed us over the years

with sovereign visitations of His miraculous power, they have remained just that: sovereign, serendipitous, and pure mystery. We have learned not to try and make God repeat Himself, but have accepted that *"the wind blows where it wills."* We take comfort and rest in the blessed truth that He is most likely to *blow* in the midst of a people who believe that *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever."* That is enough for us as we wait and believe, that *"times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord."*

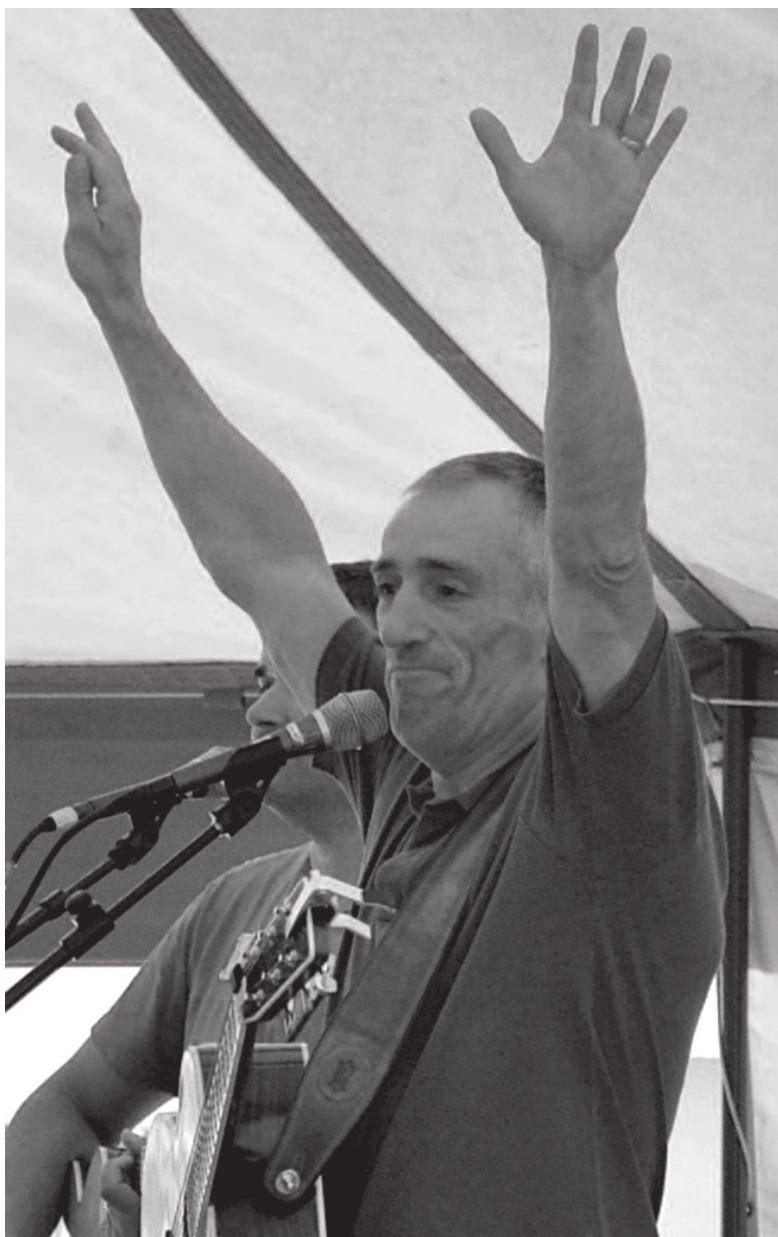
In Betel we are both excited and relaxed in the presence of the Holy Spirit, both awed and comforted by the manifest presence of God. We have discovered that it is not necessary to put human restraints on the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit.

He is a gentleman and is usually quite willing to work within the bounds of Scripture, decency, and order if we are willing to trust Him to do *"more abundantly than we can ask or think."*

We are not afraid to invite speakers from other streams of the Body of Christ to minister to us. We have been blessed by ministers from the whole spectrum of Biblical Christianity. Rich, deep conservative teachers have enlarged us. Fiery Pente-



Mary with the first mothers of first *Betelitos*



Javi and Seve leading worship at Camp Meeting



Betel painter

costals have ministered in power in our midst and brought in waves of revival.

Neither have we closed our doors to the different fresh waves of visitation that have blown through the greater Body of Christ in the last 25 years. Has that been risky? Have we been contaminated by occasional fleshly excess? Not much. We have learned to lift up our sails to catch the present divine winds of visitation. We are shaken from our slumber. We advance with greater speed. We grow in numbers. We are refreshed. And once the present visitation has run its course, we find ourselves still who we have always been: Betel.

Have we ever “gone a little over the top”? I do not think so, but then again, we cannot always please everyone’s tastes or sensitivities. A visitor once asked Raul Casto why Betel’s worshippers were so exuberant, jumping and dancing around when they worshipped. He replied, “I suppose we dance because we cannot fly.” Is our liberty offensive? Perhaps to some, but not to many.

One Sunday I invited Sr. Monroy, a senior statesman of the Evangelical Church in Spain and friend of the King of Spain to speak. He was also one of the principle figures responsible for the legal recognition of all the Protestant and Evangelical Churches before the Spanish government. In addition, he was the leading spokesperson for one of the most conservative Spanish denominations. After the Sunday service he came up to me and said, “I only wish that the King of Spain could have been here today to hear Betel sing.” It is curious, but we have no trained musicians in Betel, save those who have been trained by the Holy Spirit.

NINE

BETEL WORKS AND IS FREE

Betel works and has created a network of income-generating activities around the world that enable us to offer a totally free program to all who wish to enter our communities.

I had just finished the morning devotional at Betel of Germany's Rabenhorst Farm. A new man came up to me. He had arrived just a day or two earlier. He was perplexed and said, "All Betel does is sing and pray and read the Bible and work! Where is the program?" I looked at him and then said, "That *is* the program." He was not satisfied. He wanted his own private room and he did not want to participate in devotionals. He especially did not want to work. He only lasted a few days.

We must work and we want to work. We work to provide the resources necessary to support our large communities around the world. Betel has never charged anyone for our program or for living in our communities. In some nations and regions we receive a housing benefit from governments for accepting prisoners, and in a few regions, some governments give addicts small grants to enter our programs. But those cases are rare exceptions. We are cast upon God and our own efforts to pay our bills.

Betel is free. But if a member is healthy and able to work, he or she must be part of the family and actively participate in the duties of the community: the preparation of food, the cleaning of the residences, the maintenance of our properties, and the supervision of new community members. Some will form part of our work teams and income-generating projects in the street: manning our charity/thrift shops, driving Betel's fleets of vans and trucks, processing scrap metal, caring for our chickens, pigs, and other animals. Some will form part of our teams of painters, brick masons, electricians, plumbers,



Gardening Team of Betel of Britain



Former Muslim girl being baptized

gardeners, and builders who work on the street. Others will work in our mechanics shops, coffee bars, Christian bookstores, the food services we provide for the public, and in our many other income-generating activities.

No one receives a salary. All the income generated belongs to the Betel charity and is used to defray the costs of the program. It varies from nation to nation, but over all, Betel can generate sufficient revenue to cover between 90 and 95% of our operating costs. We still need to receive millions and millions of dollars of donations each year to cover the remaining 5 to 10% of our expenses which are not covered. We have a big family with more than 350 properties which range from large residences for single men and women, married couple's hostels, and single family flats, to over one hundred charity/thrift shops, mechanical and furniture refinishing shops, and dozens of church buildings. Over 2,000 men, women, and children live, worship, and work in our free communities around the world.

A dear brother from another Christian mission once came up to me and said, "Betel has no faith! Betel works!" I asked him, "What takes more faith, to pray and believe that God lives in a mailbox, supplying our needs? Or to take drug addicts, prostitutes, thieves, and irresponsible people and entrust them to faithfully run businesses and manage the finances without stealing? You have faith to believe God will give you money. We have faith to believe God can enable a needy people like Betel to earn money." He went away to think about it.

Beyond money, work is therapy. Work builds character and allows men and women to help themselves and others with dignity. When we put people to work in Betel, they learn skills that will one day make them fit to live outside Betel, hold down a good job, and care for their own family.

TEN

BETEL IS A CALLING FOR SOME AND A PLACE TO REST AND TO HEAL FOR OTHERS

Betel is not a sect. It is not a trap. It is not a place where weak, dysfunctional people come to hide from the challenges of the world and real life.

The statistics speak for themselves. Over 140,000 individuals have passed through Betel's communities since 1985. Our present community population is over 2,000 individuals. We would like people to stay at least a year to 18 months in our program. Most only stay a few days or months and do not complete the program. Our turnover rate is high. But of the tens of thousands who have successfully graduated from Betel, most of them return to their homes and families and then incorporate themselves into the churches of their own choosing. Only about 340 individuals of the present Betel community population would be considered pastors, house leaders or monitors. They choose to stay with us on a long-term basis because they feel called of God to serve in Betel. We are talking about 17% of our present population. When we compare those 340 individuals who have decided to stay with us to the 140,000 who have lived with us over the last 25 years, but left, we are talking about an infinitesimal percentage.

Betel is more like a sieve than a sect, retaining a few who are called to our ministry, while allowing the vast multitude to pass on to do God's will for their lives outside Betel. In a sense, we are like Elim in Exodus: a place of wells and palm trees, where weary pilgrims can rest on their journey into God and His Promised Land.

When we opened our first church building in San Blas



Eduardo rescuing a man from the *vertedero* (dump) of Madrid

we painted over the doorway into our sanctuary this verse:

"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven..." (Genesis 28:16,17,19).

Jacob called the name of that place *BETEL* (BETHEL, in Spanish). Jacob, the deceiver, was on a journey. He was tired and stopped to rest, but as he rested, a door was opened for him to the heavens and a place of a greater rest and a high calling set before him:

"And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of your father Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'" (Genesis 28:13-14).

All who enter Betel may choose to rest and then go on their way. Some are called to lift up their eyes to heaven and to accept the blessing and the calling of our Father Abraham: to be a blessing to all the families of the earth. That is the calling that a true *Betelito* has embraced.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Though we are a very imperfect people, we would like to believe that the greatest distinctive in Betel is the *Betelito* and his or her likeness to Christ. A brave few have taken Moses' exhortation to slaves set free by their masters, to step forward and place their ear against the doorpost of the house and say, *"I will not be free, but I will serve my Master and His house forever."* (Deuteronomy 15:7).

As a truly free people, may the Lord accept our offering and seal us to Himself forever.

This, in a few words, is who we are and what we do. No one is a very good judge of their own character. Only God knows if we are really who we think we are. Nevertheless, we hope.

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”
(II Corinthians 3:18)



Raul Casto: the first *Betelito*

