

RESCUE SHOP 2

The amazing success story  
of Christian Drug Addiction  
and Rehabilitation Centres  
around the world

SACKING THE  
FRONTIERS OF  
HELL

Stewart & Marie Dinnen

*'I have watched the amazing growth of Betel....  
it has become a model for many others'*

Patrick Johnstone



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SHOP II**

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OF HELL*

**STEWART & MARIE  
DINNEN**

**CHRISTIAN FOCUS**

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# Contents

<b>DEDICATION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>FOREWORD.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>PART I – TRANSFORMATION .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>PART II – MULTIPLICATION .....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>PART II – EXPLANATION.....</b>	<b>177</b>



## DEDICATION

To RAUL CASTO,  
who ‘though dead yet speaketh’,  
and to all those Betelitos\*  
who are following the example of his life.

Great men are found in unusual places. Myth and history are populated with kings and heroes whose human lineage was humble. Moses, the son of a slave, was drawn out of the river to become a prince and a saviour of Israel. Jesus our Lord, the Son of God and true King of all kings, was born in a manger and raised in a carpenter’s home.

Raul Casto, ‘Tocho’ – the stocky one, the stubborn one, was born in one of Madrid’s poorest suburbs. When I first met him he was dirty; his arm was swollen and bandaged to hide the abscesses in the track marks of his veins. But that was in the beginning.

All who later came to know him and observed his life or were touched by his preaching of the gospel knew that they were in the presence of a great man. Raul was the first member of the Betel community. Through the years he grew in grace and stature to become God’s champion from San Blas. He left his unique signature in the hearts of that first generation of ‘Betelitos’. Shortly before he died he removed his oxygen mask to exhort his wife and the friends who surrounded his bed, ‘If we do not surrender, we will conquer.’

This book is dedicated to Raul Casto and to the many other men and women of Betel, all great hearts for God who are laying down their lives, leaving the world behind, and casting off the weight of sin, crime, and drugs. Though many are stricken with

AIDS, they are not moved by their own weakness, but rather in their day are fully proclaiming the gospel.

This book is dedicated to them and offered to their posterity in the hope that like men and women will not cease from the earth.

Elliott Tepper

Madrid, January 1999

\* See pages 179-180 for definition.



## FOREWORD

Where can we find an outstanding model of vigorous kingdom expansion as we move into the 21st century? Look no further than this dynamic and moving little book. Read here of God's transforming power in shattered lives, the dregs of society becoming the cream of the kingdom, and even those at death's door coming into new life. Then, more, see God remould them into co-workers with Him in rescuing others still enslaved.

For Betel staff, hard work, stress, pain, disappointment and heartbreak are the order of the day – but yet there is much fruit. The quality of their efforts and the good success rate of deliverance from drug addiction has drawn admiration from believers, Christian leaders, grateful parents, social workers and many others in public life.

I have watched the amazing growth of Betel in the short space of little over a decade from small beginnings, caring for a few drug addicts, to an impressive church planting movement in a country not known for its welcome to evangelicals and then into a mission outreach to many nations. Betel has become more; it has become a model for many others:

- \* in methods of ministry to drug addicts,
- \* in coping with a large number of church members and workers living with HIV and AIDS,
- \* in a simple faith that God's power can transform lives and release the resources needed for the ministry,
- \* in effective discipling and training of former addicts to become pastors and missionaries.

I commend this wonderful account to Christians around the world so that by reading, their faith be strengthened, their intercession for this work gained, and their commitment made to the evangelisation of those around the world that are, humanly speaking, too far gone for any expectation of change. This min-

istry is truly in keeping with WEC's founder, C.T. Studd, whose original words provided the title of this book!

Patrick Johnstone  
Author, *Operation World*  
International Director for Research,  
WEC International,  
Bulstrode, Gerrards Cross.  
March 1999.

## PREFACE

Since *Rescue Shop Within A Yard Of Hell* was written in 1993 Betel has powered ahead both within Spain (where it now has 82 residences) and elsewhere. This second volume details the miraculous developments in Italy, Germany, France, Portugal, Britain, USA and Mexico. These accounts occupy Part II of this book.

But the main feature is, again, the mighty transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of drug addicts, gamblers, alcoholics, prostitutes and criminals, as described in Part I.

The authors, for all their familiarity with the gracious workings of the Lord in many countries, have been constantly staggered by the breakthroughs accomplished in lost lives as a result of God's working through the Betel ministry.

There is a secret to this. There is a pattern. Become a sleuth and see if you can find it! It will bless your heart when you do.

If you fail to discover it then Part III, with its explanation of Betel's principles, will help you further.

Once again we express our heartfelt thanks to Diane Griffiths for computerising our tapes and writings. We thank Elliott for his thoughtful contributions, for his and Mary's gracious hospitality in Madrid, and for lining up many interviews. Thanks also go to Keith Bergmeier, Graham Single and Kent Martin for their helpfulness in translation work and lastly to Dorothy Russell who carefully checked the manuscript.

Stewart and Marie Dinnen  
Launceston, Tasmania.  
March 1999.

Stewart and Marie Dinnen have fulfilled numerous roles in WEC International, including the leadership of the Missionary Training College in Tasmania, 1960–76, and general leadership of the mission from 1984–87. They continue to have a speaking and writing ministry within WEC and beyond, and are based in Launceston, Tasmania, Australia.

**‘Some wish to live within the sound  
of chapel or church bell.  
I want to run a rescue shop  
within a yard of hell.’**

**C.T. STUDD**

**A Swedish journal, *Svensk Export Strategi*, published for the benefit of business travellers, ranked nineteen nations according to seven modern deadly sins – smoking, drinking, drugs, gambling, lavish eating, nightlife and prostitution. The clear winner was:  
SPAIN**



**PART I**  
**TRANSFORMATION**





# 1

## I FELT AS IF THE ROOF WAS CAVING IN

The story of Reme and Damian

I wanted to die! I could not bear the thought of spending five long years locked away behind bars. I felt so desperate that all I could think of was drugs. I didn't care what drug it was. So long as it made me forget. After all, I had held up that bank only because I was desperate for a fix! And now I was alone.

It was extremely difficult to get drugs inside the prison and my attempts caused me many tears and fights. Friends would send in twenty or thirty amphetamine tablets sewn into clothing when I received my monthly parcel. And I managed to make friends with fellow prisoners who also kept me supplied. But I would often wake up to a new day afraid to get out of bed. I knew it meant coming face to face, yet again, with danger. Doing drugs in jail is playing with death every day!

I managed to keep going like that for eighteen months. My family meanwhile had found a lawyer who was drawing up the necessary documents to take the custody of my young son from me. They, too, had become tired of it all, and were resigned to the fact that I was a daughter without a solution. (How tragic it is that one should be driven to thinking that of one's very own child!)

During this time, Damian, my husband, wrote regularly to me in prison. He repeatedly urged me to reject my present lifestyle and encouraged me to try my hardest to change, assuring me of his love. But the life of a substance abuser really is overwhelming. It produces unreal sensations all day long. Anyway, I had long ago stopped loving Damian and had become involved with another man. I'd even written to him saying that he should forget

all about me because I had already chosen my lifestyle, and he formed no part of it.

\*\*\*

To back-track, half my life has been lived in desperation, knowing neither peace nor love. As a little girl I recall the tense atmosphere at home due to the situation in which my parents co-existed. I remember trying to commit suicide when only eleven years old. I swallowed a huge number of tablets, but failed to achieve my objective. The years passed by and I continued to grow up without the parental love I craved.

I guess that was what made me want to be out with my friends rather than staying at home. By the time I was fifteen my friends and I were spending our weekends at discotheques. I had my own agenda now. My group and I started smoking marijuana daily. It wasn't long before that failed to satisfy us, so we tried amphetamines. Now they really made us feel different. These pills transformed my personality. I felt more attractive, more extrovert, more sociable. I especially liked the way they helped me to forget all my problems.

These sensations satisfied me until I reached adulthood. At eighteen I wanted something more. And I found my answer in heroin. Heroin was a summit experience. But it also held me on the edge of death on more than one occasion due to overdosing. I was admitted and discharged from hospitals at an incredible rate. (Only now I understand just how merciful God was to me through it all.)

At twenty-two a man I had known for years, Damian, and I began a relationship. Together we did the craziest things, deceiving, robbing, and mistreating people. Heroin became an increasingly intimate friend. We were sent to jail several times, but not even this was sufficient to break our 'friendship' with heroin. On the other hand, the relationship that Damian and I had shared became more and more superficial. Our life only

consisted of experiencing unreal sensations. We were dominated by a substance that little by little was dragging us down into the mire. We no longer thought of each other. Our only thought was heroin.

Our families were overcome with grief watching our lives disintegrate right before their very eyes. Ironically, Damian and I were oblivious to their pain, hate and love. Nothing in life was important to us any more. All we cared about was getting those daily doses of heroin that our bodies desperately craved.

About a year later I fell pregnant with David, our eldest son. I thought that perhaps this baby might be the incentive we needed to escape from heroin's hold. How mistaken I was! However, with this hope in mind we booked into a Christian rehabilitation centre. I lived with the women, and Damian with the men.

There, I gave birth to my first child. I also had my first encounter with God. Everything was beautiful, and we were very happy at last. We'd been there for nine months and had been given the go-ahead to marry when, one day without premeditation, we spontaneously made the decision to leave the centre and return home to Alicante. We naïvely believed that we were prepared to face life together without help.

So we were married on the crisp spring morning of February 3rd, 1989. It was a wedding with all the trimmings! Family and friends joined in the festivities. After the banquet, we went off to the discotheque with friends to dance the night away. In the euphoria of the evening we celebrated without restraints. Glass after glass of alcohol led to the ultimate trap – a fix. 'Just this once,' we thought! It was our biggest mistake!

Within two months we found ourselves perpetually chasing after that cursed white powder – heroin. For several horrific years we repeatedly and unsuccessfully attempted to break with our addiction. We tried everything. We booked ourselves into rehabilitation centres, we commenced the methadone programme, and we had sessions with psychologists, but all to no avail. Our families did all they could to help us too.

On the 12th August, 1992 I was arrested for armed robbery.

It was Damian's birthday. The shock of our separation jolted my husband into booking into the Betel centre, in Madrid, determined that this time he would make it – for the sake of both of us, and our son. Meanwhile, after three months in jail I received my sentence: five years imprisonment! I spent most of it drugged up, constantly getting into fights, and giving the wardens all the trouble I could.

It so happened during this time that Damian had to leave the Madrid centre where he was already a new man. He had been ordered to report to the Alicante prison for a three month sentence because of a previous offence. Ironically the admission cells were situated immediately in front of the women's punishment cells. I happened to be serving two weeks punishment there for pushing a warden. I was busy yelling out to the girl in the next cell as the police brought him in. Damian recognised my voice and shouted, 'Reme, Reme, is that you? It's me, Damian!'

What a shock! But so conditioned was I to my prison lifestyle and friendships that I shouted back. 'Hey, have you got any dope?' And when he once more begged me to leave this way of living, and think of us, I coldly yelled back through the walls that I wished him well, but my decision to go our separate ways was unchanged.

Little did I know how close Damian came to throwing in the towel because of my response. If it hadn't been for some Christian friends from the area, he'd have done so. On return to Madrid, his leader, Juan Carlos, (now the leader in Betel, France) encouraged him to keep going and make the best of his life, even if it meant being without me. His letters to me stopped. When the leadership approached him about forming part of the new pioneer team for Naples, Italy, Damian said yes. He thought that perhaps this was the new beginning God had in mind for him.

In December I received an unexpected letter from Italy. Eight months had gone by. Damian told me of his new venture in a new country. But his message was clear. He told me that for the last time he was writing to ask me to change, because if I didn't, he would, sadly, be forced to make a drastic decision. This was

the first time that Damian had spoken of divorce.

My reaction was dramatic. I felt as if the roof was caving in on top of me. I've no idea what took place, but from that moment on, something broke and began to change within me. I actually felt ashamed. Right at that time, my cellmate, Rosa, fell ill. She was in the terminal stages of AIDS. The doctor ordered two weeks of bedrest, and I offered to be her cellmate and helper for that time. I spent those fourteen days weeping. I couldn't explain my tears. All I knew was that I wanted to get out of this mess. Rosa didn't know how to help me. Looking back, I now realise that God's mercy was being poured out on me.

However, simultaneously the Enemy fought to keep me. At times I felt a great desire to leave everything behind and start all over again in my marriage. At other times I wanted to stay as I was. But I didn't budge from the cell and I refused to see anyone. All I could do was cry. It was an inner battle, a spiritual struggle.

One evening after the two weeks were up, I went downstairs to eat in the dining room. We usually stayed on to pass the time playing Bingo or Dominoes. But this night was different. I wanted to go back to my cell. I needed to be alone. I distinctly recall the key turning in the lock. I felt a strong urge inside of me to ask for forgiveness. I fell to my knees and from the very depth of my being asked God's pardon for all that I had done. I didn't know whether He would have mercy on me, yet again, or if He was even listening. I just kept talking to Him, repentant, begging that He give me another opportunity.

As I groaned, a sense of consolation flooded into my being. Never before had I physically felt such a strong, loving, warm embrace as I did that night. I was filled with a burning desire to escape from this hell. I knew that someone loved me. God filled me to overflowing with a new, strong courage to overcome.

I can't explain why, but I began to spend less and less time with my old friends. I left drugs completely and started attending the meetings held by some Christians who visited weekly. In this way, little by little, God began to give me the strength and courage to change. Strangely, from the moment I decided to leave

drugs, I felt no desire to return to them. I had thought it would be very difficult, especially as my cellmate was trafficking and using heroin before my very eyes. Many temptations tried to pull me under again but, thanks to the strength that God kept giving me, no temptation succeeded! I am amazed as I think back to this stage in my life. Never would I have dreamed that in spite of being in a prison I could feel so free!

In fact, it was a fantastic time. I had so many opportunities to share about what was happening to me with others. Everyone was so amazed by the change in me. Several times the prison wardens called me to the office and asked me to explain just *what* had happened to me. They had been accustomed to seeing me dragging myself about the yard, drugged up, arguing and picking fights with everyone. They wanted to know what had happened to make me serious, interested in others, and so well behaved!

Their questions filled me with joy because they gave me opportunities to talk about the Lord. Two of my friends in jail also gave their lives to Christ – one of them was Rosa! What a thrill that was! In spite of my lack of freedom, in spirit I was completely free. In fact, the Bible says that ‘where sin abounded, grace did much more abound’ and it’s true, because I’ve experienced this for myself and now know that *nothing* is impossible for God.

Of the five years I was due to serve, I served only half. God made it possible for me to complete my sentence in Betel, Valencia. My son, David, joined me after several months. I put every effort into making the most of my year with the women there. Then, to my joy, the director in Valencia, Lindsay McKenzie, arranged for us to join Damian in Italy for Christmas, 1995.

My arrival in Naples marked the beginning of a new era – difficult, but special. As a wife, a mother and as a helper to Damian in the ministry, I have been stretched on every level. We shared a flat with another couple for a year and a half. What a lot I learned about sharing and forgiving! I also learned to cook. Each morning I worked with the others, and in the afternoons I cared for David. As a wife I learned about Biblical submission to my husband and to share my thoughts and ideas with him.

I had to learn to ‘help’ Damian. Together we learned to parent our son, on a biblical basis. We had to undo many old habits. The Lord has blessed us with another son whom we have named Samuel, because ‘God has heard his servant’.

*Damian now gives his side of the story.*

In 1965 I was born into a very normal Spanish working-class family and from what I remember of my childhood I did the very normal things that a child does – going to school, playing football and having fun with my friends.

When I was twelve or thirteen years old some friends and I skipped school and began smoking together in a hide-out. It made us feel grown-up. Some time later my friends and I began to visit other suburbs and came to know another circle of friends who began to introduce us to the world of drugs, so we started smoking ‘joints’.

Initially it was something new and ‘cool’. It seemed like a lot of fun at the time. It was not a daily practice – just now and then – mainly at weekends, but gradually it became a daily habit. Something made me aware that all was not well with this new lifestyle but nothing changed. Later, smoking hashish didn’t satisfy me anymore and so I looked for other drugs to fill the void such as amphetamines, speed and cocaine, all this coupled with an ever-increasing alcohol consumption. By this time I was seventeen or eighteen and was completely dependent on these things; they helped me to forget my problems and the heated arguments at home.

I discovered at this time that my father, who was always lecturing me, was himself an alcoholic. This pushed me further into despair so I resorted to drinking more and taking more drugs in an effort to push all these problems out of my mind.

The 1980s arrived and with them something that would become my constant companion for eleven years – heroin! I had heard about it and had feared it at the same time. But when I finally did try it I realised that this was different; it was special. I liked it so much that I fell in love with it! I began to use heroin

almost continually. Whilst I could afford the doses everything was fine but when my wages were used up I began to ask for advances from my employer; finally I resorted to stealing. Problems piled on top of problems as I tried desperately to support my habit. While at first I carefully planned the thefts, before long I didn't care if anybody saw me or caught me in the act.

When I first started on heroin everything seemed fine. I kidded myself that I could leave it whenever I chose to but after a couple of years I knew that I was helplessly addicted to it and that my only escape from it would be my own death. My life continued with each day presenting me with the challenge of discovering new ways of financing my habit. I was arrested by the police on more than fifteen occasions and in ten of those I ended up in prison.

In 1988 Reme became pregnant and so we decided to go to a drug rehabilitation centre. I desperately wanted to leave drugs once and for all, for the sake of the baby. But after the birth of David and ten months in the centre the only thing that changed was our external appearance. Inside we were the same Damian and Reme. Soon after we left that centre we decided to get married. We'd been able to stay off drugs all that time, but after the wedding ceremony when we found ourselves with a lot of cash given to us as wedding gifts, we decided to 'celebrate' by shooting up. Once again we were plunged back into the old addiction cycle but this time it was worse than ever.

Our relationship began to suffer and our marriage fell apart. We each went our own way. David was looked after by Reme's family.

In 1992 I decided to make a last-ditch effort to leave this white powder which had converted me into its slave. I phoned the Madrid Betel centre and asked for help. I had been to Betel in Valencia and before that to Madrid, but this time, I was at the end of myself. I was so bad that I don't recall how I managed the five hour trip from Alicante. Never before had I been so desperate for help as I was that time.

When I reached Madrid they took me in. I remember crying



out to God and He answered that sincere cry. I found myself amongst people that were so loving and caring and I found the help that I was searching for. The folk that attended to me had all been where I was. Through them I began to understand that Jesus was the only One who could change my life. These things I had heard before but this time I actually opened my heart to Him and experienced such a peace and forgiveness – something that I had searched for, for so many years.

Now I can say, looking back over six years, that He has restored to me everything that was broken in my life. He has restored my marriage with Reme and brought David back to us. Today we are happily serving God. He has saved us from a certain death and given us a new life. Two years ago Samuel arrived on the scene. We named him Samuel which means ‘asked of God’ because God has indeed answered our prayer.

*Reme concludes, giving an outline of their present situation.*

A daughter work in the province of Bari, directly east of Naples, on the Adriatic coast, had been going for two years when the leadership decided that a married couple should go to develop the existing men’s house. We were chosen. It was an exciting time, to think we would have a flat to ourselves for the first time, and the challenge of being trusted to care for a group of fifteen men.

It’s lonely being so far from the other couples and families at times. And, as in any work, you see men doing well, having commenced a real and vital relationship with the Lord, then without explanation throwing it all overboard and leaving. This saddens us greatly. But the battles and difficulties that sometimes burden us down have also been instrumental in making us go to God to know His consolation, help and direction.

Just recently, during a discouraging time, the Lord lifted my spirit saying, ‘Reme, even if only ONE life goes ahead with Me, it’s worth it!’ He also encourages us daily, reminding us that the work doesn’t belong to us anyway. It belongs to God! Together Damian and I, with our sons, continue to serve the Lord here in Italy. We have decided to give our lives to help others, in thanks

to Him for all that He has done for us.

## STABBED THREE TIMES, I ALMOST DIED

### THE STORY OF MOHAMMED FROM NORTH AFRICA

*In the world of missions, gaining a convert from Islam is a major victory, but to see such a convert disciplined and led on to vital Christian living and service is a gigantic triumph.*

*Reading of Mohammed's troubled Islamic family background and the depth of degradation to which he sank, one can only stand back in wonder, love and praise as the story of how the grace of God reaches this life unfolds.*

My parents are from Tetuan, a port city on the northern Moroccan coast midway between Ceuta and Melilla. My father worked in Spain and in 1952 married a Moroccan woman. They then moved to Ceuta during the time of the Spanish colonial rule. She had actually been previously married and brought two daughters with her.

I was the oldest child of that marriage, and three years later my next brother was born, both of us born in Ceuta. After a number of years my mother fled to Morocco taking her two daughters, my brother and me with her. My father was angry; he chased after us and caught us in Morocco. Then there was a big fight. He went to the authorities and they gave the custody of the two sons to him and the daughters to my mother. My parents were divorced and she stayed in Morocco; I went back to Spanish Ceuta with my father.

He went back to Morocco from Ceuta and married another Moroccan woman, bringing her back to Ceuta with him. They had a daughter but later he divorced his wife. Then I discovered

that my first two sisters were from an earlier marriage. I had always believed that they were my sisters. In all these problem situations I was present, observing and being part of the rough fights between my parents. It affected me a lot.

As a very young child I was placed in a Koranic school where I sat on the floor with the other students. We had to learn to recite the text of the Koran from memory. We didn't understand what we were memorising but I was conscientious. After seven years I left.

We were very poor. We hardly had anything in the house. My father was a casual labourer, with no rights, or insurance. In those days whenever any employer needed a worker he'd take you on but if he didn't need you, you would be sacked. Dad began to work in the market selling whatever goods he could. When I was nine years of age he took me there with him and taught me how to sell.

After so many divorces and so many fights with women my father decided he would never marry again. When we worked in the markets our life improved because we began to earn money. But even though we had more I felt that I was missing something in life. I would see other people with their families and I felt an emptiness and a longing for affection. I began to seek that by joining gangs and groups of people in the neighbourhood. Dr Dobson says, 'Weak family – strong gang'. I substituted relationships in the street for a mother and family. So I began to drink and get into drugs and misbehave. Along with this longing in my heart for affection there was a growing bitterness and hatred because I felt so left out and wronged.

My father was a very strong Moslem and believed in Allah. He also believed in spiritism, demons, and so on. So from my early years on I accepted my father's Islamic faith. I had a real faith in Islamic supernatural spiritism. I didn't want to do wrong when I was younger because I did fear God and was a good Moslem.

I started off in drugs by smoking hashish, which is easily available in Morocco. I had lots of problems with my Dad

about this. He didn't want me to do it. Every time I did it I was condemned by my conscience but bit by bit I ceased to care. Then I began to drink alcohol as well. I read lots of pornography and was obsessed by it and masturbation. I was always an introverted person. I began to build my own little introverted world and live inside it.

I continued working with my father in the market but he was more and more angry with me because I wasn't performing well. I was heading downhill. Pornography really began to destroy my life. I was totally corrupted inside. My mind was totally reprobate. I felt really worthless. I cried a lot and didn't know how to escape from the corruption of my mind. Because of that I didn't care what I did. Nothing mattered – right or wrong.

Then I started to gamble. I put money in slot machines. All the money I earned I put in these machines and for seven years it was hashish, pornography, alcohol and gambling, then heroin.

At nineteen I left home and started sleeping in the streets. One night I was sleeping in an old abandoned car and an older bigger man came by and violated me.

I was in that state for eleven years. My father became old and sickly and eventually died. He left me 3.8 million pesetas, which was a lot of money then. All of a sudden I had lots of friends. Then we all began to buy and sell drugs and I began to shoot up every day.

My father had a big house that he was renting so I assumed the rental contract and lived in it but very soon I had so many problems with the neighbours, they wanted to get rid of me. So I left the house and even with all that money in the bank I lived in the streets. I continued to buy drugs while I had money but it only lasted six months. I just used it all for drugs. I had to start robbing more frequently, had lots of problems with the police, and was in and out of jail. I did have some friends that wanted to take me into their home but I never wanted to live with anybody. I just wanted to be alone. Drugs – jail – solitude. Sickness was a problem too. I began to pick up lots of sicknesses. I was in and out of the hospital – hepatitis, tuberculosis and many other

things. Before I had time to get well I'd escape from hospital and get more drugs; so I never quite got over my sicknesses.

After doing a robbery, I would have lots of money on my person. One time some of the street people tried to take it and stabbed me three times in the back. On another occasion they stabbed me in the stomach. Both times I almost died.

When I was feeling so bad I wanted to leave drugs but I didn't know how. I used to follow the dealers to see where they had their stashes, then I'd rob them. I got off heroin and got on to cocaine, but that was worse because it makes you even more anxious and depressed. I really thought I was going to die. An addiction to cocaine, in my opinion, is much worse than an addiction to heroin because you have to rob with more frequency because you're desperate. I was very desperate, robbing more and more. Finally the police caught me and took me to the police station. I was three days there passing through the withdrawal syndrome. I was desperate. Then from the police station they sent me to prison.

After that I was very sick. I was very thin and yellow. Prison was so full that I was put in a little tiny room – not even a regular room. While I was there I found a book called *Light and Guide*. I really had no interest in Christianity. But this book was written in Arabic and it had Arabic decorations and Arabic inscriptions. So I opened it up, I didn't really care what I was reading. As I began to read, all of a sudden I felt myself drawn right into the story, and then I began to weep as I read about the life and death of Jesus. I just wept, and wept. Something entered into me and I began to float. I had a sense of peace. Then I felt as though I was being hugged and I heard a voice saying to me, 'You're going to change, and you're going to be all right.'

I spent thirteen days in the jail and during this time this sense continued. It was like light in the midst of all the darkness. I knew that I wanted to change so I talked to a social worker and said, 'I want to go to a centre.' I left prison, but I didn't go to the centre. I forgot the address and started taking cocaine again. During that week I kept hearing a voice telling me to go to a

centre or I'd die. So I went back to the prison to get the address from the social worker. So I entered Betel in Ceuta.

When I got there I said to them, 'Send me far away from here because I've got all kinds of problems with the police and everyone.' But I stayed. The first time they began to sing and worship I began to cry and when they opened the Bible I'd cry. I knew there was something very special in Betel. I knew that I wanted to be like the people there. I sensed God's presence.

Betel opened the Algeciras centre in '93 and I went there with the first group from Ceuta. We rented a big warehouse in the port and built a second hand furniture store there. Some of us lived in this store. About that time, Thomas Spyker, an American missionary, with a group of Mexican missionaries, had a concert in the area and Betel co-operated. I remember being at that concert. There was an altar call and I went forward and publicly gave my life to Christ.

All that happened in Algeciras was just a confirmation of all that had happened before in the jail and in Betel Ceuta. It was almost like a baptism of the Holy Spirit, and a deepening, a public declaration that what had happened was real.

I spent nine months in Algeciras and then was transferred back to the Betel Ceuta. I had so many judgements and sentences against me that I went into jail three times after I was a Christian. The first time was for a month, then I came out; then they put me back in for another month. I said, 'Please put all my sentences together and I'll serve them at once. I want to get them over with.' They sentenced me to two years, ten months and twenty three days in jail.

In view of my good behaviour, after only two months in prison they allowed me to go out on what they call the 'third grade', which means that I had to sleep in the prison but I was free during the day and at weekends to go to Betel. They were astounded at the change in my life. They even gave me a key to my section of the prison. I was almost like a boarder! I simply had to be there at night to check in. I could spend Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights at Betel, and just had to be back at prison

Monday night. I really was basically free apart from checking in four nights a week.

I went from being the worst behaved citizen of Ceuta to being an example of a radically changed life. The police said to me, 'We know what you were and now we see how you've really changed.'

*Elliott Tepper adds: During this time Mohammed was very hungry for the Word of God. I saw such hunger in him that I went to the Bible Society and I bought him a Study Bible, with notes and cross-references. I came back about three months later and said, 'How are you doing?'*

*He said, 'I'm having a great time.' I said, 'Have you read the whole Bible?' He said, 'I'm only up to about the middle of Genesis – I follow every one of the references so it takes me a long time!' He had not only read half of Genesis but he probably had a theological education reading every single cross-reference and note diligently. After seventeen months of his sentence they gave him a parole and pardoned him. He's been with us now about six years and during this time he's always been in the leadership team, supervising the new people, and with special ministry to the other Moslems that come in to the programme.*

*He's a very talented musician. He is one of the most gifted guitarists we have. From the very beginning he has been in the ministry of praise. He's had his personality problems and deep complexes to work through. You have to rebuild the mind of a converted Moslem. They have all kinds of wrong ideas and concepts – about women and society. Even though he was born again and knew God, theologically he had a tremendous intellectual barrier that had to be overcome and we had to explain doctrine after doctrine, point after point, because it was so alien to him. He expressed such a hunger for the Word of God, we transferred him to Madrid for about a year and he did a whole year at our Adullam Bible Institute. After he finished we sent him back down to Ceuta and Algeciras – the two centres work together. He will probably be in the leadership team that*



*develops the Moroccan work.*

*His health has improved a lot but he still has lots of problems. Strangely enough he doesn't have the AIDS virus; he's cured of his tuberculosis; his hepatitis seems to be dormant. He has problems in his spine and his stomach. His health has improved dramatically but he is still in the process of being physically renewed.*

Mohammed concludes:

If I hadn't come to know Christ I would have died. I know God still has a lot to do in me yet and I'm trusting Him to finish His work.

### 3

## COCAINE GAVE ACCELERATION

### THE STORY OF CLAUDIO DE ROSA

I am forty-three and I've spent half of my life here in Italy dependent on drugs. From my adolescent days I was a rebel. At thirteen I was expelled from school for playing with knives. Then I did an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner. When I had finished that my brother, who owned a driving school, offered to take me on as an instructor.

My introduction to drugs began with smoking hashish. In spite of that, my one ambition was to make a lot of money and get rich quickly, have a fast, sleek car, and plenty of sex – anything that would give me a thrill. I vainly looked for satisfaction. Life, as far as I was concerned, was only worth living in the 'fast lane'. For this reason my best friend was cocaine. Cocaine gave me the acceleration that I looked for. It enabled me to be the fun-filled, life-of-the-party person that I couldn't be when I was 'normal'. The problem was that the cocaine effect was only very brief, and so in order to continue on a 'high', I had to buy larger quantities. My salary was very limited in comparison with what I needed to keep up the habit. I began asking for advances from my brother, and when that ran out I started borrowing from other family members and friends.

Finally at twenty-six, I lost my employment. I'd pushed my brother too far and after money was missing from the till, he reported me to the police as a thief. When I sought sympathy from my friends, I found that there too the doors were closed. I had abused their friendship just once too often. I was prepared to pay the price of losing their friendship in order to find the

satisfaction that I looked for, but instead of satisfaction I was frequently left feeling empty. Something was missing – something vital, but I had no idea what it was, so I kept looking and experimenting.

In 1984 I was put in jail on remand as I was rounded up with a group of pushers in a police raid. I wasn't selling drugs then. I just happened to be buying from one of the pushers when the police arrived. However, soon after that I did indeed begin trafficking in order to sustain my habit. By this stage I had 'graduated' from cocaine to heroin. Heroin enabled me to come down off the cocaine merry-go-round when I couldn't 'come down' by my own means. But soon I was hooked – something I had always sworn would never happen. By this stage I had no friends left. Heroin was my only 'friend'.

One day, in another police raid two years after this, I was rounded up and found to have in my possession fifteen grams of pure heroin and fifteen grams of lactose. The lactose was used to dilute the heroin to make it go further and hence I made more money on each sale. I was later convicted for trafficking and sentenced to five years jail.

Six years prior to this I had formed a *de facto* relationship with a girl. We lived together until I was convicted for trafficking. Just before going to prison she informed me that she was expecting a child. At this moment I couldn't see beyond these five years in prison so I told her not to wait for me, that she needed to begin a new life without me. Nevertheless we wrote to each other for a few months but the letters became less and less frequent until they finally stopped. Later I heard that she had married another fellow. Even though I had told her not to wait for me and to begin a new life, when she did in fact do that I hated her for abandoning me. I desperately wanted to see the daughter that she had given birth to but she refused. That hurt me deeply. Once I did see my daughter very briefly, when she was four years old, but, sadly, I have never been allowed to see her again even though I have tried hard to do so.

I was filled with hate and loneliness. The experience of being

in prison usually makes the prisoner more religious and superstitious. He clings to religious symbols like crucifixes, images of the Virgin Mary, etc. One Sunday the prison guard came around as usual wanting to know who would like to attend mass (the chapel was small so only a limited number could attend). That day something inside me made me put my name down. I had not been to mass for years but I felt the need to go and get close to God even if just for a few minutes. At the end of the mass, we all lined up to touch the feet of a marble statue of Jesus. After touching the statue with our hand we were to make the usual sign of the Cross. When it came my turn, suddenly an electric shock went through my hand and arm. It was so strong that I immediately withdrew my hand, as it hurt. I walked away astonished thinking that not even the church accepted me now. That incident, inexplicable as it was, affected me for years afterwards.

My five year sentence was eventually reduced to four because of a new law that had been passed offering a certain amnesty for particular crimes. Mine happened to be one of them. Part of the condition of my release was that I agreed to go to a rehabilitation centre for the year that remained. Soon I found myself in a centre in Foggia on the Adriatic coast. There we could do whatever we liked, as we were given so much freedom: women, drugs, alcohol, tobacco – the works! After two years there I got tired of it and approached my brother who was willing to take me into his house. Whilst there, I asked what happened to my share of our parents' estate. They had both died some years before. I discovered that it had been put in trust for me. When I finally got my hands on it, I blew it all within two months – it all went into my veins. Without a place to live (my brother had since thrown me out of his house when he saw me back on drugs and wasting the inheritance) and with no economic means, I became a beggar living in abandoned buildings, sleeping at night in cardboard boxes. I tried to take my life on a number of occasions by purposely injecting what I thought were fatal doses of heroin, but I always woke again. I felt like a man on death row just waiting for the day when he would finally meet his death.

It was during this time that I was walking in a town called Castel Volturno, near Caserta, when I came across a large circus-size tent with the words 'Christ is the Answer' written in large letters on top. I discovered that it was an itinerant mission that travelled around Italy doing evangelism. During that day, I met many from that tent who invited me to the meeting that evening. But each time I refused. Then an African man, whom I recognised as a fellow vagabond, asked me to go with him, as he didn't want to go alone. So I went just to accompany him.

As I entered the tent, to my amazement, I saw many people praising God together. I had never seen a sight like it before. They were so friendly and genuinely interested in me. Later an invitation was given to go out to the front so they could pray for me. At that moment a female voice from behind me called my name: 'Claudio!' I turned and recognised her as an old friend from years before. She ran over to where I was and hugged me. But at that moment it was more than just a hug from an old friend, somehow I knew that God was embracing me. I was feeling miserable and dejected and that embrace told me that God loved me in spite of all that I was and had done. Part of me wanted to accept Jesus as my Saviour as the folk (including my friend) urged me to do, but my pride welled up inside me and I left the tent to return to my lonely world.

Some months later, I was alone in a ruined house and at the end of my tether. I cried out to God in as loud a voice as I could muster: 'God, I can't stand this loneliness any longer. Please, help me! You who can do anything, make me die, relieve me from this suffering. I can't do any more!' I just sobbed and sobbed. A few days later, on a Sunday morning, I was walking along the street going through horrible withdrawal symptoms, wondering how I was going to make money to buy a 'fix', when I recognised the car of a friend of mine. I waved for him to stop and when he did I asked him if I could accompany him to church. An incredible force took hold of me that morning, because when an addict is going through withdrawal nothing interests him until he has got his 'fix' of heroin. But that day that overwhelming desire made

me insist on going with him to church!

The Christians there spoke to me later about a Christian rehabilitation centre called Betel. The next day I went in, although I had decided that the rules were too strict and that I would stay for only a month – just enough time to recuperate physically in order to look for my old girlfriend and my daughter and somehow win them back. I had learnt every trick in the book about stealing and making easy money. I knew that with a bit of help from this centre I could continue on as before, but this time without drugs.

Nevertheless, when I sat and listened during the devotional times, I was astonished at how much they knew about my life. ‘I haven’t shared those facts with anyone!’ I wondered in amazement as they described almost to the last detail what my life was like. The more I stayed and listened, the more I realised that it was God who was speaking to me through His Word. One day I decided that enough was enough. I had to make a clear decision whether to continue on as always or to leave that old life and accept the new life that Jesus was offering me. I chose the second course, and all I can say is that I have had a marvellous experience with my Lord and Saviour, and have found a family, a tremendous peace, joy and above all – hope! That was five years ago!

God has given me so much in these last five years. The verse in the Bible that most describes the change that has occurred in me is when God says to Israel in Ezekiel 11:19, ‘I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.’

I am currently leading the Betel men’s residence in the province of Bari. It is a daughter work from Naples. Each day I see new men arrive at the centre, their lives in ruins, as mine was. As I reflect on how my life was and what it is today, I can say to them, ‘You know, there is hope for you too!’

Today God has blessed me with a wife – Isabel, another cured addict sent as a missionary from Spanish Betel. She, like me, has experienced God’s ‘heart transplant’. God has united us together as husband and wife; He is making two restored hearts into one!



## DRUGS AND GUNS – AN EXPLOSIVE MIXTURE

### THE STORY OF LOURDES AND EDUARDO ARMESTO

*To read the stories of Lourdes and Eduardo is like having a theatre curtain raised on a glorious revelation of the manifold grace of God. Here is a young woman deeply into drugs, playing around with guns which, through an accident, led to her being confined to a wheelchair for the rest of her life.*

*Here is a young man from a wealthy family fighting everyone in prison and having to be sent to maximum security. Yet both, in desperation over their hellish existence, cry to God – and He hears them and begins a process of transformation. Today they are a team together in Betel, working to help others who need the same release and deliverance that they have found. First we have the story of Lourdes.*

I grew up in a divided family where my mother was an alcoholic. I have two brothers but we never lived in the same house. My brothers are older than me and were brought up by my aunts and uncles. I, being the one left at home, suffered from the effects of my mother's alcoholism.

Going back as far as I can remember I always seem to have been alone. My mother was never at home and I never had much of a relationship with her. In one sense you could say my friends and our neighbours were my parents because I was always in their houses and often finished up eating with them and staying the night with them. I felt afraid when mother came home and I didn't want to be where she was. This experience made me feel inferior to other children. I suppose I was looking for affection.

40 When I was thirteen I became involved in discos, smoking,



and in taking pills and marijuana. When I was sixteen I found out that I was pregnant. At that stage I wasn't sure what to do, whether to have the child or to have an abortion. The father of the child was my boyfriend but we never lived together. Finally I decided to go ahead and have the baby, perhaps for no other reason than just to have someone with me.

After giving birth I began to have problems with depression, and suffered a lot of nervous disorders. Psychiatric treatment didn't help me. A couple of years later, when I was eighteen, I tried heroin for the first time. I didn't really like it but by taking it I could stop taking the other pills and didn't need the psychiatric treatment any more. But of course I became hooked on it. Later I also tried cocaine. This was the drug I enjoyed most. The group of people that I mixed with also trafficked in drugs and played around with firearms.

One day when I was twenty-three I finished up in the hospital because of an accident. I was sitting beside somebody who was playing with one of these guns; it went off accidentally and I was shot. The bullet entered through my left arm, went through one of my lungs, and finished up in my spine. The operation took five hours. It was a success, but the doctors didn't think I would live longer than twenty-four hours.

I remember crying out to God for the first time in my life while in the intensive care ward. Something within me gave me the certainty that I wasn't going to die. After forty-eight hours the doctors saw that I was starting to get better. But I had another problem. They realised that I would never walk again. After five months I was allowed to go home in a wheelchair and I went back to mix with the same group of friends I'd been with before the accident. Once again I was hooked on heroin, and trafficking in drugs as well. But the drugs weren't helping me and I started to feel really bad. I would look at my child – he was six years old at that stage – and I wanted to do something for him, but couldn't. I felt so powerless – I didn't know what to do.

Through one of my neighbours I met an evangelical pastor who offered to help me and spoke about Betel in Madrid. I was

twenty-four years old by then. I was accepted and found myself with a lot of people who had been through problems similar to mine. I was impressed by the number of lives that had been changed and how they were being released from the world of drugs. People in the programme spoke to me about Jesus, telling me He had changed their lives and that He could change my life as well.

Not many days after that I received Christ into my life. When I did this my mind went back to that day in hospital when I cried out to Him and how I had that certainty that I wasn't going to die. I had the confidence that Someone was going to be at my side forever. God has continued to do great things in my life. He is also working in the life of my son. When he was seven he asked Jesus into his life, too!

After some time in the centre God spoke to me and told me I had to share what He had done in my life and to communicate His power and His love to other people. For this reason I decided to stay on in Betel even though I was cured. I became the leader of the girls' house.

After being there a year I met Eduardo. I spent time talking to him as a friend, but I never thought of the possibility of a closer relationship. At that stage I thought God and my son were sufficient for me. But six years later God united us together. We've now been married for a year and a half, and I continue to experience the love of God in my life. I currently work in the Betel office as cashier and secretary.

*Now Eduardo tells his amazing story.*

I was brought up in a fairly well-off home. We weren't the richest family in Spain but we had all we needed. When I was little I was brought up firstly by my father's parents, my grand-father being a senior army officer. When I was five years old I shifted to the home of my mother's parents. From an early age I was given everything I wanted.

I lived with my grandparents because my parents were going through a process of separation. My father was living his own

lifestyle and didn't have much to do with us children. He was a lieutenant colonel in the infantry. My family tried to give me a good education and sent me to the best schools and colleges. But I was expelled from most of those because of my behaviour. There was rebellion in my heart.

We always had the best of holidays at Christmas and Easter. We would go away and stay in the best hotels or go on a pleasant journey somewhere. After being expelled from various places for my behaviour I was sent to boarding school. Deep rebellion began to grow in me; and as a ten year old I wasn't at all interested in studies. During this period I spent some time staying with my mother. She was living with a man whom she later married. He's the man that I suppose I now consider my father.

As I grew I became involved in other forms of delinquency through mixing with the wrong sort of people. When I was thirteen I experimented with drugs and at fourteen my mother told me I could go and find my own way in life. By this time I was hooked on amphetamines and other softer drugs. I mixed with people in a hippie-type world, but it didn't give me satisfaction and I kept looking for something stronger.

I continued for another three years like this until I reached a stage where I thought I was going to die. I was taking so many pills and other drugs that I would go weeks without proper sleep and for long periods without eating. I felt I was losing my mind. The pills weren't very expensive. To obtain them we either robbed pharmacies or stole money from some source or another to buy them. I began to feel delirious and had all sorts of strange sensations. I would see my skin go peculiar and the hairs on my arms would rise up. I had all sorts of strange illusions. When I listened to someone talking it was as if I was far away in a different world. I was very weak physically. I weighed only a little over thirty kilos, and at sixteen years of age I was just like a beanstalk.

I decided to return home and tell them I needed to see a doctor, because I was dying. We went to a psychiatrist the very day I arrived. I was sent to a hospital because my state of health was

so grave. They put me under sedation for a week. The only time I was wakened was to eat. I left the hospital having almost doubled the weight I was when I went in, but I wasn't really cured.

After spending some time at home I started taking marijuana and alcohol, and began to experiment with acid drugs. These didn't do anything for me; I didn't like them. Then I went back to amphetamines again. My career as a delinquent continued and I found myself in prison for bigger robberies. Then at eighteen I started to take heroin.

In order to obtain money we broke into shops at night time, and during the day we held up people in the street or shopkeepers. We tackled security companies, travel agencies, and places like that. We began to use knives, pistols and sawn-off shotguns. From these robberies we gained a lot more money; we found it was an exciting life. Meanwhile I was getting more and more hooked on heroin. But finally I was arrested and spent a total of eleven years in prison.

The first stretch was eight and a half years for two hold-ups in which I'd been involved. While I was in jail my heart grew even harder than it was before. Also while I was there I was eaten up with pride and hatred. I continued on with heroin. I was consuming just as much in jail as I was beforehand. I had already done much damage while out of prison but I continued doing damage and hurt while in prison. I didn't care what way or how I did it. I was just determined to get my dose of heroin each day. I didn't have any consideration for anybody else.

In those days it was easy to get heroin in jail. Often the guards themselves would have it available through contacts with the outside world. You had to use some intimidation to get it. At times I even stole it from other prisoners who were weaker than me. There is a 'pecking order' whereby the strong ones live off the weak ones. I made sure I joined the big fish – the ones that were running the place and causing the most trouble.

My behaviour was really bad. I got into many fights and I would stab people; I often had blood on my hands. So I was transferred to a maximum security prison. I was thirty years old

when I finally got out of jail. I went back to the same lifestyle I'd been involved in before. But it wasn't the same world any more. Times had changed. There weren't the same people that I'd mixed with before and I was afraid. I didn't have the courage and bravery that I'd had before. I continued taking heroin but my physical state deteriorated so much that I finished up as a vagabond. I didn't care whether I was clean or filthy dirty. I'd sleep in hostels or doss-houses, in the street or in an underground railway station, or under a bridge. All I wanted was to keep on consuming heroin, and carrying out enough robberies so that I could satisfy my craving.

Of course I wasn't happy and at one stage I was sleeping in a warehouse in Madrid. I would go for lunch at a place where they fed down-and-outs like me. It was operated by the Sisters of Calcutta. One day I was talking to someone at the door of the Hostel of St. Isidro. This man spoke to me about a Christian centre. The only problem there was they didn't let you smoke. The other problem was that they talked a lot about God.

At that time I didn't take a lot of notice and I just continued on. But one night in this warehouse I became really desperate. I remembered the words this man said about the centre. I began to talk to my friend about it. He didn't have a drug problem; he drank a bit but not a lot. He said, 'Why don't you go to this centre tomorrow?' So the next day we went to the office of an evangelical church that I knew about in the suburb of Lavapiés. I spoke to the pastor and gave him the name of the centre that I'd been told about, but he suggested Betel instead. He rang Betel and we went there that same day.

I entered with a very hardened heart, closed to the things of God; however I saw the love of the people at the centre so I was obedient to those who were over me. But despite my obedience my heart was a long way from God. What had a really big impact on me was their love and devotion, and the way they treated me. I spent a year there and I got to the stage where I had to decide whether I was going to leave or ask God to do a miracle in my life.

One day there was an altar call at the Betel church and I went forward. I started to get closer to God then. But I continued to have doubts, and an inner battle still raged within me. Nevertheless God started to change my heart.

A week later I cried out to Him and actually challenged Him to do a real miracle in this life that had been so messed up.

Well, He is answering my prayer. He is still dealing with my stubborn character – that in itself is a miracle. And He’s given me back my family, plus an even bigger family – the fellowship of Betel. Also, He has given me my very own family – with Lourdes. I would never have believed, when I arrived here, that all this was possible.

I’d just like to highlight the fact that God is dealing with my strong nature. Lately He has been challenging me to become more involved in evangelism, and that’s my main delight here at Betel at the present time. When I meet with people in the street it’s like looking in a mirror – I see what my life was, in other people. The thing that gives me the most joy is the fact that each morning I can give thanks to God for rescuing me from all that.

*Elliott adds:*

*Eduardo is Betel’s most active street evangelist. Each month he keeps a log of the people he has picked up and have entered the programme. Most he personally escorts right to our registry office. Hardly a month goes by without him rescuing up to forty addicts.*

## I WAS OLD BEFORE I WAS YOUNG

### THE STORY OF PAQUI AND ANGEL

*When one realises the depths of degradation to which Paqui and Angel (pronounced Anhēt) had sunk, it is almost impossible to believe that they are now missionaries in Italy. Yet, such is the grace and power of God.*

*Paqui commences.*

I'm from a small city called Badajoz in western Spain, and I'm the second last daughter of eight brothers and sisters. Our parents were poor; my father was a shoemaker and my mum a housemaid. For that reason, four of my older siblings were brought up as wards of the state. Mum and Dad simply couldn't afford to keep them. Another sister lived with an aunt. In fact, only three of us actually lived with our parents. My eldest sister got a job so as to be more independent, while I cared for our little sister. Mum worked all day, and Dad drank too much. When he wasn't drunk he was out with his friends.

Consequently I missed out on family love and discipline; however, I was a very extrovert child. I'd always believed in God and liked going to catechism in the village Catholic church. I found there the love and attention I'd never known at home. Another bonus was that I got to go free on excursions I'd otherwise never have enjoyed!

Dad died in 1974 when I was eleven. His passing opened up the way for me to go and live with an aunt in Barcelona. I saw it as an escape. What I didn't realise was that from that moment on, the devil began to manipulate my life.

My aunt's neighbour was a hairdresser, and her husband ran a bar. It was arranged that, in exchange for free board, I would help out in the salon, the bar and in the house. They were rarely at home. I was physically very well developed for an eleven year old girl and the hairdresser's nineteen year old son began fondling me. Finally, the inevitable happened. He found me alone one day and raped me. Overnight I became a frightened, hurt and marked young woman. I felt that what had happened to me was written on my forehead. Over the next two years, however, he repeatedly forced himself on me. I was too afraid to tell his parents. Instead, I began drinking regularly to help me cope. (I'd taken my first sip at eight.) I was only a child who was old before I was young.

At fourteen I decided I'd had enough. A girlfriend and I found work as cleaners in a hotel, receiving lodging as part of our pay. At last we were truly independent. Now we could really enjoy our free time with mutual friends. Smoking pot was part of the scene. One day, when partying in a bar, the police detained me believing that I had escaped from home. They made investigations, but, as nobody claimed me, the head constable suggested that I apply for legal emancipation (release from legal custody of parents). So there I was, free to come and go as I chose at fourteen!

In 1979 I moved to Madrid to stay with my brother-in-law's sister. There I found work in nightclubs. I had become used to living it up on my own, and this was a fast way to make quick cash. I was paid to sit and drink with the men customers. I sure met a lot of men – mostly the wrong sort. I was introduced to strong alcohol and learned to sniff cocaine. Taking drugs just became a normal part of daily living.

A club owner took a fancy to me and forced me to sleep with him one night. Out of fear I submitted to the rape, but after that kept out of his way. When I discovered that I was pregnant, I decided to go home to Badajoz for the baby's birth. Rebeca Vanessa was born four weeks early, but my aunt agreed to have us stay with her. When the baby was six months old, I felt I ought



to return to work and with my aunt's consent, left baby Vanessa with her and set off for Madrid, promising to send money and to visit regularly.

I meant well, but my words proved to be empty promises. I was soon trapped in my old lifestyle, becoming emotionally involved with my girlfriend's cousin – a man who trafficked in cocaine. I was soon hooked on the white powder. And once again I ended up pregnant.

A girlfriend was looking for an opportunity to end her affair with a well-known boxer. So we decided to run away together and start again. We packed our scant belongings and set off to find work in the nightclubs of Alicante, enjoying our new-found freedom.

But, unbeknown to us, after several months of detective work, the furious boxer traced us to our flat. We were fast asleep after a night's work when he and his three friends arrived high on cocaine and began beating us up. In his drugged, vindictive rage, he stopped at nothing. I was five months pregnant but this didn't stop him from violently stripping and raping me while the other men looked on. It was the most terrible moment of my life. As I sobbed on the floor he continued to beat both of us until he fell in exhaustion himself. While the four men slept off their doses of cocaine we made our escape – bruised and terrified.

So emotionally traumatised was I that I sat on a friend's bed for a week, unable even to talk. I felt as if I was trapped in a dark hole. Anger and revenge built up inside me, and obsessed with rage, I began searching for someone who would murder the boxer for me. I was even willing to prostitute myself if it meant getting money to pay a hit-man. Mercifully I found no willing person, despite the monetary reward I offered.

Well, I gave birth to my second child – a perfect little son, and decided that this time I would raise him myself although I paid a woman to care for him while I worked. But I hadn't realised that there would be so many bills to pay and finally gave into the temptation to sell my body in order to pay my debts. This was the first time I had willingly sunk to prostitution. I justified

my decision, insisting that I was doing it for my son. And so I descended one step further down the ladder to hell.

It was then that I met a man that said he loved me and my boy. We lasted eight years together. We had seen how others had become rich quickly through trafficking heroin, and tried it for ourselves. It really did bring in the money fast. One day, just for fun, we decided to try a snort for ourselves. ‘Just once,’ we promised. How blind we were to heroin’s insidious hold! Once became twice, and twice three times, until we were regularly sniffing. But each time our bodies craved more, which meant we had less to sell. We were forced to begin injecting as, that way, one needs less powder to keep the withdrawal pains at bay – but only for a while. In no time at all we had no powder to sell. We needed every bit we could beg, borrow or steal.

And so, just like all the others we fell totally into heroin’s deadly trap. We could think of nothing and nobody else – not even Carlos, my five year old son. I had changed his ‘carers’ three times by now. They were becoming too emotionally attached to him. And they could see the state I was in. Finally I was reported to the police, and the Family Courts ordered that Carlos be taken away from me. He was eventually adopted into another family. (I live with the longing that one day he will make contact with me. I long to ask for his forgiveness and have our relationship restored.) But right then nothing else mattered: heroin was my master. I was its slave.

After nine long years of heroin addiction someone told me about the Betel centre in the suburb of San Blas, Madrid. Up until then I didn’t even know that evangelicals existed! So, with my body, soul and spirit torn in shreds I entered Betel’s doors. Betel means ‘House of God’ and ‘Gateway to Heaven’.

At first I thought that everyone was crazy. However, I soon began to feel more relaxed. The leaders actually treated me like a person – something I had forgotten that I was! Betty, a Mexican missionary, spent most of the first weeks with me, constantly talking about Jesus. She gave me my first Bible.

On my twentieth day I set off with some five hundred others

for the annual WEC church camp held at the beautiful campsite, 'Peña de Horeb,' near Guadalajara. We all slept in makeshift plastic tents. Tom Spyker, an American missionary to Mexico, was the speaker. He challenged us to try God. I decided that I would put Him to the test for myself. I needed a sign that He really existed after all my hurtful experiences. I simply asked Him to wake me in the night. If He did, then I would follow Him with all my heart. Now, I sleep heavily, but to my surprise, the Lord did wake me. I was so totally awake that I was unable to go back to sleep for the rest of the night! Instead, I was filled with a certainty of His reality and of His presence in my being. There in the tent I knew He was for real. 'Thank You for waking me,' I whispered. 'I promise that I'll serve You from now on.'

You see, I understood in that moment that Jesus was the only One that could save me from certain death. I had known only drug abuse and corruption. I asked myself how it was that I was even still alive! (Today I know why. Jesus had a special plan for my life.) The next morning I began to listen intently to the preaching and entered into the worship with joy, lifting my hands to God in thanks and new liberty.

After I promised to live for Him, God began changing me. It was a tough process, but precious, too. He took away all the hate I held in my heart, all the bitterness and resentment. Even my face began to glow with new life.

After two and a half years at the Madrid centre I was transferred to a daughter work three hours away in Cuenca. It was there that I met Angel. I knew in my heart soon after arrival that he was the man that God had prepared for me. Mind you, it wasn't an easy time, because a year passed by and Angel did not seem to notice me. I kept praying, 'Lord, please put in Angel the same feelings for me as I have for him. But if he is not for me, then take these feelings away from me.'

God finally put those feelings in Angel's heart, and with the blessing of the leadership he asked me to marry him. After six months of engagement we were married in 1993. A friend, Sue Single, lent me her beautiful white bridal gown. I felt clean and

pure, forgiven by God for my past. Mum, accompanied by my aunt with my beautiful twelve year old daughter, Vanessa, and two of my sisters, came to the wedding. We didn't have a thing, but God supplied everything! Even our honeymoon was made possible by Christian friends who lent us a lovely little apartment by the beach. This was just the beginning of many other new things God has been doing for us. He continues to work in us both. But He has never thrown any of our past at us. In fact He has made EVERYTHING new.

We had been married for only about eight months when Miguel Jambrina, the leader of the Betel centre in Cuenca, responded to the call to lead the new advance into Italy. He spoke with Angel and me about accompanying him and his wife, Mari Carmen. After praying about it, we replied that we were open to going. Excitedly we applied for our passports. On returning to collect them we were shocked and embarrassed to discover that I was on the police 'wanted list' for two offences – both for trafficking heroin. I was escorted to prison. I would stay there for two and a half years. I panicked.

Angel, too, was frantic with worry. He never stopped praying and doing everything within his power to free me. Miraculously, the judge pardoned me by phone for the first offence on hearing that I was now cured and helping others in rehabilitation work. But the defendant for the other offence refused to budge. Angel made endless trips back and forth to Madrid to talk with the judge and lawyers. Things were not looking good.

In the meantime, the prison director, who knew of Betel, gave Angel special visiting privileges. When it came time for the court case, I told the truth. It could only have been the Lord. I was sentenced to only ten days of imprisonment! The other two years I could complete on a good behaviour bond outside of those four walls. Angel and I fell into each other's arms weak with relief, filled with thanks to God for His unmerited kindness.

After another month in our own small flat we were asked to open a community house for couples. By the time we left, there were four of us sharing the upstairs area of a converted barn.

Though not an easy time, it was another important learning experience.

Miguel and his team had been in Naples for a year by the time the Lord freed us to join them. We went in great excitement, but we soon discovered how difficult it was being missionaries in another country. There were so many changes to make, not the least being the language. Being the only woman, and without children and in a men's centre, I had to stay at home for the first year. Angel found it an uphill struggle trying to catch up and feel a part of the original leadership team. We battled often with loneliness, anger and frustration. We couldn't wait to put our feet on Spanish soil a year later when we took our two weeks annual holiday. But to our surprise, we immediately began to feel that we no longer belonged to Spain. Our home was back in Italy! From that moment on we had no doubt that God had truly called us there.

The work has passed through many ups and downs. Miguel became desperately sick with AIDS. He was wasting away in a Naples hospital, hoping to recover and continue the work. We all prayed earnestly for his healing. But finally Lindsay and Tomas had to come over and escort him and his wife and baby son back to Spain for urgent medical attention.

We also saw Damian's marriage restored. When Reme and their son joined him, for financial reasons, we all shared a house. Again we had to learn to share and forgive one another. However, I found that my relationship with the Lord was more intense when we met each day to read the Bible and pray together with them. Besides, after a year of feeling rather useless, I was thrilled when Paco said he was putting us to work. Together Reme and I practised our Italian by offering the Betel calendar to the local businesses. We also helped out in the office answering the phone and typing finances into the computer. Angel and I were sent to Madrid for five weeks to learn about restoring furniture and upholstery.

Now after four years in Italy, we are fulfilled. Although God continues to work in us both, He has never thrown any of our past

at us. He encourages us to admit our mistakes, ask forgiveness and move on. My husband organises the work programme for the men and women and sees that the bills are paid. I continue to oversee the upholstery workshop, and together we are learning to care for the new women's work.

Today I have a good relationship with my eighteen year old daughter, Vanessa. We call each other by telephone, and I visit her and my little granddaughter each time we can manage a trip to Spain. We are both longing for the day when Carlos, now sixteen, makes contact with us. Angel and I also have contact with his sixteen year old son, Miguel Angel.

We are open to going anywhere the Lord would want us – especially if it means seeing Italy opened up for Christ. With all our hearts we feel that there is no work more honourable than that of being a servant of Jesus Christ.

I have shared with you many of the unseemly details of my past life but only to give glory to Christ, because, 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound'.

*Now Angel shares his experience.*

When I was ten my father died. Losing Dad devastated me so much that I reacted by withdrawing from others; and my personality began to change. At that time I began to smoke and drink alcohol and do all kinds of crazy adolescent things. As I grew into teenage years I left school and began to work as an apprentice electrician. My weekends were filled with discotheques, girls and parties. I felt empty within and tried to fill that inner void with many other things. It wasn't long before smoking 'joints' became a regular part of my leisure time, but from there it was easy to go the next step to sniffing heroin; then sniffing gave way to 'mainlining'.

This new drug had the potential to destroy my life and everything for which I had worked, up until then – employment, physical health, family, social standing. Eventually heroin took them all! By nature I was a fighter but heroin took all the 'fight' out of me and transformed me into a defeated man. From my

viewpoint life made no sense at all. The only thing that I lived for was heroin. I got to a stage where I thought that death would be my only escape from this living hell. Desperately I went to my family and begged them to help me. By then I was living in the street without a roof over my head, without food to eat, and filthy because I didn't wash. My appearance must have been disgusting because people, when they saw me, immediately avoided me. I felt rejected by my family, society, everyone.

One day a neighbour spoke to me about Centro Betel which had an office near where my family lived. When I got there, they told me that it was a Christian rehabilitation centre. This fact didn't impress me as I had attended a school where the teachers were priests and I had received such harsh treatment from these religious men that I vowed never to set foot in a church again. Nevertheless I entered the Betel centre and was immediately astounded to listen to guys like me who had been in the same world of drugs talking about God in such a genuine and personal way that I decided to stay in order to find out what had changed them. Many of them I had known previously on the street.

It was beyond my comprehension, but each day watching and listening to these men gave me an inner strength. I saw something special in them. They loved each other, and new people like me as well, without asking for anything in exchange. By nature I was a very indecisive person but one day I decided that I definitely wanted what they had so I asked Jesus to come into my life and to change me. It wasn't long before I knew that I had been given the opportunity of a life time. That was eight years ago. That day God began such a magnificent work of restructuring in my life – I mean, from the ground up! He is still doing it even today. He has given me so many positive things and I know I haven't deserved any of them.

I never imagined that one day I could be doing what I am doing now, because when my time in the rehabilitation programme was finished I decided to stay on as a staff member and help other men as I had been helped. I am so grateful to God because what He gave to me, and therefore what I am able to give to others, is

something that this world can never give – a hope and a future.

Five years ago I married Paqui who came from a similar background. We met at Centro Betel. She is literally a gift from God, not just my wife; she is my companion and friend but even more than that she is a woman who loves God. We are together in this vocation of serving God and serving others. Today we are working with Centro Betel in Naples, Italy, where we feel useful, very satisfied and content as members of a big family in which God has placed us.

I thank God that when every other person and avenue failed, He was there with His hand held out waiting for me.



## 6

# STEALING NEW CARS – PROFITABLE, TILL CAUGHT

## THE STORY OF JASON WOOD

I'm from Wigan in Greater Manchester. When I was ten my mother and father were divorced. My father was an electrician and mum was a cleaner. I had a choice of going with either mum or dad. My two brothers went with my father and I stayed with my mother, but she couldn't handle me because I was so wild. As a result I was sent to a children's home in Standish near Wigan. I was there for five years but while there I started to inhale butane gas. It has a hallucinogenic effect; I did it because all the others were into it. That led to glue sniffing.

When I was fifteen I went back to live with my mother in Marsh Green. Then I was into hashish and smoked that for a number of years. At seventeen I started taking amphetamines. After school I went to train to be a builder; this involved working on building sites.

I began to have a relationship with a girl called Joanne, from Liverpool. But I ran into trouble; I was into drink and became aggressive. In court I was given a large fine but failed to pay it – it was a daft thing to do, as I would later discover.

By this time Joanne and I were living together. I was making good money in the building trade, so we were able to have a house. One day just as I was leaving for work there was a knock on the door. Three policemen were standing there and arrested me for failing to pay my fine. In court I was sentenced to twenty eight days in jail. I was taken to Strangeways prison. While I was inside my partner's father came to my house and told her

a pack of lies about me. She was four months pregnant but in view of what her father said she decided to have an abortion. While still in jail I had a letter from her telling me about this. I freaked out and because of my behaviour had to serve the full twenty eight days without any remission.

When I came out three of my mates and I went to Liverpool and beat up Joanne's father – he ended up in hospital. I sold our house and used the proceeds for drugs. I don't know what happened to Joanne. From that time I started to take heroin. I was nineteen by then. I went downhill on heroin and crack, using up all the house money and what I had saved for the past two years.

Things went from bad to worse. I began stealing and selling cars in order to have money for drugs. I even stole new cars from dealers' lots and sold them in Manchester.

I used to go to a place called Moss-side to buy heroin. The people there were from Scotland so I made new contacts in Paisley and Glasgow. This led to a job, picking up cars there, and driving them to Manchester. When I was in Glasgow I ran into trouble with the police. I was caught stealing a brand new SAAB and was sentenced to twelve months in jail – Barlinnie, supposed to be the roughest prison in Britain. I lost my remission because of fighting. (I was the only Englishman in a Scottish jail!)

After that I lived in Paisley making a living by delivering drugs. But I had a bad experience there, which I simply can't talk about, and had to leave the area, so I returned to Wigan.

I ended up going back home to see my stepfather and mother, mainly because I had no money. My stepfather was pretty well off so I started stealing from him. (When you are on heroin you have no feelings for others.) My mother had me arrested because I stole and sold all her rings. I was put in a bail-hostel. The doctor put me on methadone, which, I think, is worse than heroin – it makes you feel so desolate. On methadone you can't sleep; you get more and more depressed, so one morning I just cracked. I cut my wrists. There was blood all over the place. I dropped to my knees and cried: 'There must be more to life than this and if God is there please do something to help me!' Instantly I felt

a peace come over me – a sense of relaxation. That’s when I knew Jesus was real.

I was sentenced to six months in prison for stealing mum’s rings. When I came out, a friend, Andrew Whittle, took me to a church in Wigan – the Christian Community Centre. I went right up to the front as the worship service was starting. I dropped to my knees and cried, ‘God, help me!’ The pastor, Ray Bellfield, came over to me and prayed for me and I was filled with the Spirit. After that I knew God’s hand was upon my life. I made a decision about what things would have to change. Arrangements were made for me to go to a Teen Challenge rehabilitation centre in Scotland but they could not take me immediately.

I met a lady called Pat in the church who was in charge of outreach. She had links with Betel so I called them on the phone. I expected to be told I would have to wait but I was told I could go there that very day!

I decided to wait a couple of days so that I could have one final ‘fix’.

I came to Betel and stayed two weeks then left – for three hours! After I came away a cloud of condemnation came over me. I got as far as Birmingham bus station but then decided to phone back and say I was returning.

Since entering Betel I don’t even think about heroin. I’ve no desire for it. I’m free from drugs. Jesus is real! I praise the Lord for what He has done for me. I feel FREE and I’ve never been happier in all my life.

God has put a vision in my heart to help save young people from the depths that I’ve been in and I’d like to stay with Betel and work with those who come in.

## THE WHEELCHAIR FRAUD

### THE STORY OF GAETANO CASTELLONE ('NINO')

Born in 1969 into a normal working-class family in Naples, I am one of five brothers. Three of us ended up immersed in the world of drugs. In our inner city suburb, drugs, delinquency and unemployment, sadly, are all a part of life.

From thirteen onwards, I preferred to hang around with friends that were older than me. This gave me a sense of being different, of feeling that I was a cut above others my age. They introduced me to hashish. It made me feel mature and I congratulated myself on having discovered things of which other fellows my age were ignorant. I'd discovered the best that life had to offer and I was still so young! I could hardly wait until the weekends when my friends would take me out and show me the nightlife. I would often not return home until the next day having partied all night. I was 'OK' in their eyes. That was important to me. I thought, as they did, that true freedom manifests itself in rebelling against the social system, the status quo. I honestly believed that real happiness lay in enjoying all the pleasurable experiences that this world had to offer, so I set off to do that at breakneck speed. I was young; I knew I was good-looking, and I had the world at my feet.

When my friends in the neighbourhood 'graduated' from smoking hashish to sniffing heroin, I decided that I wasn't going to be the odd one out! I wanted to prove to them that I was as game and 'mature' as they were. I was amazed at the effects of sniffing heroin. It wasn't like the other drugs. Heroin filled me with a sense of security that I had not known before. Being a

shy person by nature, I yearned for this feeling of being sure of myself and being able to confront any problem that came my way. With heroin, I became the person that I always wanted to be. It was great... for a while at least. I was hopelessly unaware of the subtle slavery to which I was submitting myself.

Before long the desire to take heroin so that I would feel secure and 'in control' was replaced with the need to keep sniffing heroin just to do the most basic functions. To get up in the morning, I needed to sniff the stuff. Then in order to be able to go to work, I needed another dose. At lunchtime I needed still another in order to keep going in the afternoon. Then to keep the withdrawal pains at bay in order to sleep, I needed yet another dose. This habit that began as a 'great discovery' now had me in its grip and I had no idea how to escape. Far from being able to confront any problem that came my way, I couldn't even face the new day when the light came into my bedroom. I abhorred the morning because it meant thinking up new ways of finding my next 'fix'.

My so-called friends didn't want anything to do with me; they had their own problems. I felt so alone. Solitude was like a black cloud that followed me everywhere. The lights had gone out in my life – everything just seemed dark and hopeless. I felt reduced to nothing, as if my personality and 'personhood' had been obliterated.

The cost of keeping up the habit made me turn from snorting (sniffing through the nose) to mainlining (injecting directly into the vein). When you mainline you can get by with a lesser quantity. It wasn't now a question of getting 'high' as it had been in the beginning, it was rather a question of just being able to cope with the basics of living. This, of course, had its consequences with my work. I had a good, secure job with the Italian Post Office working at the Central Branch in the heart of Naples. Jobs were hard to come by in our city where the level of unemployment is the highest in Italy. Finally, after many warnings, the Post Office terminated my employment and I was left without any income. I was desperate.

At that time it occurred to me that I could make money begging, and by pretending to be physically handicapped. From somewhere I got hold of a wheelchair in which I sat while a friend pushed me from shop to shop in the main street. Before long, people began to get wise to me so I had to go to other towns and cities. Eventually I made my way around most of the major cities in Italy. My friend and I made a lot of money that way but it all ended up in our veins as we spent it on heroin.

One day in Naples I met up with a friend from the old, drug-experimenting days. I hadn't seen him for years. But I couldn't believe that he was the same person! He was radically changed, very different from the man that I once knew. He told me that he had been in a Christian drug rehabilitation centre called 'Betel', and gave me a tract called 'I am the drug'. It was written as if the drug, heroin, were a person. It was strange, but as I read it, it virtually described in detail my own life. It was uncanny! The tract was a Christian pamphlet printed by Centro Betel. As I read it, something long-extinguished and deep within me came alive as I yearned to change and return to being a real person again. I never once thought that God would have anything to do with giving me a new life, as the tract suggested. Nevertheless, its message touched my heart as nothing ever had before and I went to find this Centro Betel. I immediately asked for admission.

Though I had always believed in God, I had never seen Him as a merciful God and one who deals with each individual on a personal level. What struck me about this Centro Betel was that the leaders, who had all been addicts themselves talked about a *living* Jesus Christ. I had never thought of Christ as a present-day, *living* Person. I was used to seeing Him represented in paintings and statues as crucified on a cross or lying lifeless in Mary's arms – in each case *dead*. But in Betel all they talked about was a living Person who, in spite of all that I had done in the past, put an enormous value on my life, enough to die for me! As I began to comprehend this, for the first time hope began to dawn in my life. I was being offered the chance to recommence my

life, taking a new and different direction. But I realised there was a cost – a total commitment to Him and a complete renouncing of my former ways.

Today, three years later, I can say that I am learning what it means to be forgiven and also what it means to serve God. When I think of when I used to go around deceiving people in the wheelchair, and the hundreds of lies that I told every day, and now know that God has forgiven me for each one of those lies (amongst many other things), it just fills me with a tremendous gratitude.

Currently I am a leader in the Betel centre just down the road from where my family lives! My father frequently comes to the church meetings. God has radically changed my life and I am constantly aware of the fact that He demands a radical and unconditional commitment from His followers. He tells us to ‘take up our cross’ and follow Him. Each day I am conscious of the need of self-discipline in my own life and the responsibility to disciple the lives of those under my care. What a salvation! What a privilege to serve Him!

## FROM DISC JOCKEY TO DISCIPLE

### THE STORY OF PACO GIMENEZ

I am thirty-two now and for the last six years I've been with Betel. My mother died when I was a lad of thirteen, then one year later on the same day in the same month my father died. From that time onward my two older sisters guided me. I was sent to a boarding school for orphans and in the summer my brother would send me to camps. In reality my family relationships were very thin, very scarce.

One older sister was married and I lived with her and her husband in my parents' former house. One night when I was about sixteen I went for a walk. I returned home an hour later than my designated hour and knocked on the door. My brother-in-law answered and asked me why I was so late. 'I told you to come home at 8 o'clock and it's now 9.30 pm!' I went upstairs to my bedroom, took a knife, went down and pointed it at him: and said, 'You're not going to tell me how to run my life.'

Just a few months after that my sister and brother-in-law went to live in Alicante. I was left to live alone. Little by little I established my own pattern of life, doing what I wanted and working at what I wanted. I had some success. I liked working in discotheques. I liked working in radio, and became a disc jockey and a radio announcer. Eventually I was a popular media figure climbing the ladder of success, but actually I started to move towards a precipice. I began to take drugs because of a personal emptiness. After a short period of time all my successes turned to failures and I began to find myself in debt. Creditors were chasing me and people were against me. To escape all this I went ~~64~~ five hundred kilometres away from where I lived – Ciudad Real



– to Almería where my second sister was then living.

My sister was aware of my problems. She gave me lodging in her house but after a while she told me to go, because she had her own family to care for. I got a job in a national radio station there and after a few weeks went to live with one of the other employees. It looked as if my problems were now solved: I didn't use drugs, I had a good job, and I lived responsibly. But after three months the temptation to use drugs returned. One day I went to the bar by the beach where I used to buy drugs. In the next six months I used them more than ever and during that time I embezzled 3,000,000 pesetas from the radio station. It got so bad I had to leave the house and live in a hotel. Then I was forced to leave the hotel and went to live in a single room. My world kept getting smaller and smaller, my health started to deteriorate and I felt so trapped that one day I seriously considered suicide.

As people knew me well from the radio, I thought that perhaps my last great stab at fame would be a headline and article to say that I'd committed suicide. I thought of that as my last great success! I was sniffing cocaine which produces a level of anxiety much greater than heroin does. The huge quantities I consumed produced a very high degree of paranoia. I got to such a psychological state of entrapment, that I went to the director of the radio station and confessed that I had been keeping the money from the advertising accounts. I thought that if I confessed but kept working I would have a chance to return the money to him over time. But things went from bad to worse. I felt worse every day and finally I just couldn't stand being where I was, so I went and talked to a social worker in the city and to a lawyer, to see if they could help me. The social worker told me there were centres that could help me. She asked how much I could afford to pay.

Then she asked whether my family could help me. I told her that I had hurt them so much that they wouldn't. As a last resort they gave me the telephone number of Betel (which is free). I decided on Betel in Málaga because that had the best tourist environment with the sea and beach. My idea was just to

go there for a few months and have a good time. I thought they would give me pills to cure me then I could go back to selling drugs to recoup the money I had embezzled and lost.

I entered Betel on 18th February, 1993, in bad shape. The only baggage I brought was a little bag of dirty clothes. I just didn't fit in. They would get us up at 7am, and I would ask, 'What are we getting up at 7am for?' But I did have a passion for the songs they were singing. I made my first friend there; his name was Andres. As time went on, I began to have continual tensions with the people; I seemed to live in a different world, and had a way of seeing things that was different to everyone else. So every night I would find my one friend Andres, who was a leader, and would say, 'Why can't we do it this other way? Why can't I talk to the girls? Why do we have to work like this?' He encouraged me. One night I came to him; I was very angry about things that had happened during the day. He said, 'You know what you really need. You need to accept Jesus, as your Saviour and Lord, in your heart and be quiet. Your problems aren't going to disappear. You will see them in a different way.' And that night I accepted the Lord because I didn't have any more defences.

There was no radical change in my life but I noticed that my ego, my person, began to change gradually. I remember one night shortly after that the leader of the house rebuked me in front of all the men. He raised his voice and really had a go at me, but everything he said was true. I remember leaving the meeting, humiliated, and going down to the orange tree; I sat there and cried. There was a war in my heart. I had to decide either to leave or to change. I cried because I wanted to leave. But I knew that this was my last opportunity. I heard the voices of my friends up the hill calling me to go to work but I did not pay any attention. I just kept on crying. I had never cried like that before. By the time I walked up the hill to the houses everyone had left for work except those who were keeping the property. So I went to the responsible person and I said, 'What do you want me to do? I'm willing to do anything.' I believe it was from that day that things changed in my life.

I felt a certain call to serve God. When they asked for volunteers for Italy I raised my hand and said I would go. I was only four or five months old in the Lord, but I continued thinking I had to go. They kept telling me that if I didn't have a call to go I would be a flop. Once a month we would visit the big church which Daniel Del Vecchio ran. He is the grandfather of the rehabilitation movement in Spain.

One particular Sunday I was given permission to go to the evening meeting. Even though I was a very young Christian at that time I said to the Lord, 'If You want me to go to Italy, You'll speak to me and confirm that call.' But in my heart there was a struggle because some were going to the movies to see Tom Cruise in *The Fourth of July*. Would I go to the movies or the tabernacle? I decided to go to the church. It wasn't by chance because Daniel chose to preach on David. He preached about killing giants, and reaching out to others. Sitting in the big tabernacle to the extreme right in the very last row, it was as if everything he preached was for me. Then he made an appeal at the end and said, 'Where are the Davids, to go to the nations?'

I knew God was speaking to me. The start in Italy was delayed because Jambri, the designated leader, was sick. My leader said to me, 'Italy is off now. It's not going to happen, so just forget about it and focus on serving God here.' But I knew that what had happened in the tabernacle wasn't emotion. God had confirmed to me that I would go.

Time passed and eventually a team went to Italy and I went with them. I was the least mature – only seven months old in the Lord.

We began to live in a large old house on the outskirts of Naples. Our team task, at the beginning, was simply to renovate it and make it ready as a centre to receive addicts.

We had a teacher who would come to the house to teach us Italian. We realised the first love we had to have was for our teacher and to communicate with him. The locals used to call me crazy because I would go to work with a dictionary in my hand. That way I learned what a brick was called and what a shovel

was called; I began to learn a little more than the other men.

Jambri, the leader, was very much loved by the men. We really appreciated the physical exertion he made to attend all the meetings because he was very sick with AIDS. Even the Italians realised that here was a man who was consumed by a desire to serve God. We saw him as a grandfather even though he was only in his thirties. He had strength to preach for only thirty minutes, but his messages were really powerful and inspiring.

One day when he was preaching he took a tape from Marcos Vidal, a Christian singer, and talked about it, and that had a tremendous impact on us. His sickness was progressive and he had to enter the hospital in Naples which was a very dirty place. Finally Jambri with his wife, Mari-Carmen, had to go to Spain for medical attention because the health care in Naples for AIDS sufferers was bad. As soon as he got a little bit better in Spain, he came right back to Italy. But he didn't last too long and when his health deteriorated further he had to leave.

*Elliott continues:*

*We were left with sixteen single men with no pastor in Italy. We had seven Spanish workers and nine Italians. When Jambri went back we didn't know exactly whom to make leader. It was between another man called Augustine or Paco. Augustine was a little older in the Lord; he'd come from Betel Barcelona and he spoke the best Italian. So he became leader not because he was the best but because he spoke the best Italian at the time. He proved unsuitable so we had to send him back to Spain. This led to Paco becoming the leader when he was only one year old in the Lord.*

*His gifting in communications was put to great use by God. He began a promotional campaign by letter and by visits and he really made dozens and dozens of friends for us all over Italy. He really promoted Betel and let the churches know that we weren't coming for money but we were there to serve them and that they could send their drug addicts and their outcast people to us, without any cost to themselves. He was leader for two years and*

*was quite heroic. He was obviously the most gifted person and the best Italian speaker and was the one that had to do it. But the responsibilities were just too weighty and he hadn't had the maturity or the experience of the cross working deeply in his life. The Bible warns us not to promote too quickly. Paco never fell into sin but he was overloaded with responsibilities like pastoring and counselling which he couldn't carry at that time and since he was a gifted person naturally, with very high intelligence, he was able to run the centre in his own natural strength. But a soulish giftedness is not a substitute for a spiritual giftedness. Paco realised that; we realised that; and we agreed that it would be good for him to come back to Madrid to mature, surrounded by other pastors.*

*Paco lifts the curtain on his inner battles:*

I have to admit that those last months in Italy I wasn't being very conscientious. I had reached the place where I was depressed, disillusioned, and I was making errors of judgement. I started to live purely in my own strength. I was at the point of making an appointment with one of the women in the church who was showing some interest in me. While I was dialling her a spirit of heaviness and sadness fell upon me so I hung up and went out and sat on the kerb.

I realised I was going to lose all that I had attained in God up to that point.

*Elliott continues:*

*Paco has come back and he's humbled himself. He's doing more Bible study. He is gaining new skills. He's been very helpful in communications. He has been a big help in programming, in the development of media and church relations, and is designing new literature.*

*After a year in Madrid Paco has been given responsibility over our Ciudad Real Men's Center and our Betania Conference facilities. God has given him Melanie, a young girl from Naples, Italy, as a wife. They hope to return to Italy one day.*

*Paco concludes:*

One of the reasons why I have stayed here in Madrid is that I don't want to be another failure. I don't want to be a stumbling block to other people. I want to be an example. Every time I go through any doubt or struggle I remember the covenant that God made with Abraham. I want to keep my covenant and be a man of my word.

## **‘YOUR CONDITION IS FATAL’**

### THE STORY OF EDUARDO HERNANDEZ

My parents are Catholics and I had a good Catholic education. My father owned many properties in Seville and we lived off the income derived from them. We had chauffeurs, maids, servants, tutors, but as the costs of our education increased (I had three brothers and four sisters) my father over-extended his business and then it crashed. He had to sell the family home in Seville; my brothers and sisters were separated and my mother went to live in Salamanca with my aunt.

Eventually my father got on his feet again, but I had a lot of rebellion in my heart. I didn't accept authority and just wanted to have a good time.

I was sixteen when I finished high school and it was then that I started to get mixed up with people who were involved in the drug world. I began to smoke marijuana and to take amphetamines. I was very interested in politics and because things like drugs and drinking had been banned in Spain there was a tendency for us young people to take up everything that was prohibited.

I wasn't a communist but I sympathised with them simply because of their rebellion against the government system. I started at the University of Seville but during the first two years I didn't really study at all, I just got involved in drugs. I stole my father's car and wrecked it in an accident. That was the night my parents realised that I had real problems. They offered me the opportunity to leave Seville and go to Salamanca to study. So I went there, lived in my aunt's house and began to study. But I didn't finish my course. I stole a lot of money from my aunt

and then went back to Seville.

I still had one year to finish my degree but I knew that I couldn't complete it because of drugs. I had to do something serious, so I paid to go into a rehabilitation centre.

I was there for twenty eight days but never came free of drugs; I just changed to different ones. I finished up taking morphine and, using that, I managed to finish my degree course at the university. I got some work as a trainee lawyer and that lasted for two years but it was a total disaster because of my drug-taking. I left work and went into a very deep depression. For the next three years I just stayed at home. I hardly went out at all. I closed myself in a bedroom, without any desire to live, just really wanting to die.

I continued taking drugs, mainly pills and morphine. My brother is a doctor so he was able to prescribe these for me. After that a friend of mine came and took me to a psychiatrist. I didn't want to go, but my friend said he'd helped him, so I went. He did some tests and asked me about 500 questions. When I went to get the results he said, 'Your situation is fatal. You've had it.' He said I was so mixed up in my mind he didn't have any solution for me. Then he said, 'Look, I want to be honest with you. I can't help you. I don't want to take your money but if you really want help the only one who is able to help you is Jesus Christ.' He was a Catholic psychiatrist but he'd heard people talking about Christian drug rehabilitation centres. He knew that they were working very well and having a lot of success. He said, 'I don't have a solution for you. The only thing I can give you is pills to make you feel more relaxed. The only one that can change you is God.' He looked for a centre for me and that turned out to be Betel in Málaga.

I entered under compulsion. The friend who had taken me to the psychiatrist and my mother and sister all forced me to go. That was in the middle of 1992. I was so ill when I entered that I didn't realise what was going on around me. I ran off and phoned my mother to come and pick me up, but she said she wouldn't. She said she was sick of me and until I got cured not



to bother turning up again.

I either had to live on the street or go back to the centre, so I returned. They put me under discipline for a month. I was unable to sleep for forty days because of my physical condition.

One day I was out working in a house with another fellow, Kiki (Enrike). He was testifying to the lady who owned the house. Kiki said that he was working for love. I hadn't been in the centre very long but something in those words touched me. I believe God touched my heart and tears began to roll down my cheeks. I saw myself as very dirty. I was ashamed. I saw myself as I really was. I had never done anything for the love of anyone. And here was this person saying he was working for love. But nothing really changed.

When I could find an opportunity I would smoke. One of my motives for continuing in Betel in Málaga was that in Seville it is very hot, but in Málaga there are lots of beaches. I thought I could stay here and enjoy going to the beach!

At that stage there weren't many people in the centre and instead of having our own church meetings we went to meetings run by Daniel Del Vecchio who also had a drug centre in Málaga. In one of those meetings they had an altar call and that's when I committed my life to Jesus Christ.

After this happened God broke me. He humbled me. My life changed completely. My first encounter with God really impacted my life. I remember during those early days I spent a lot of time really broken and crying, as God dealt with me.

After being in the centre a year and a half I was given the job of managing our thrift shop. It is a position with a lot of responsibility because I had to control everything – the work, the money, the people coming into the shop and managing the workers as well. The leader, Manuel, put a lot of confidence in me. He has since died. But I realise that during that time there were still things in my life that hadn't been committed to the Lord.

After four years I decided that I was now cured and began to feel a desire for the profession for which I'd studied. I decided to

go and work for my brother in his law office. But Manuel died about that time and it wasn't the right time for me to leave. Apart from that there was a secret sin in my life. I felt that the Holy Spirit spoke to me and I realised I had to confess this.

I spoke to Elliott by phone and the elders asked me to go to Madrid because of what I had done. I had to start there as though I was entering for the first time. I came from being the second in charge in Málaga to being like someone who had just come in off the street. I really had to humble myself, but God gave me the strength to continue, and I've experienced that the person who humbles himself God will raise up.

There wasn't any dramatic change in my attitude after this time. It was really something that developed little by little and as time went by I realised that God was shutting doors and that He didn't want me to go back home to Seville for a professional career. He opened doors for me to take on more tasks here in Madrid. I began to develop a burden for the work and God began to give me more responsibility. There's a depth and excitement in this that I love.

*Eduardo is now in charge of Betel's legal affairs. He liaises with the local government regarding the registration of the centres; he advises on the constitution; he looks after all the legal aspects of Betel's various ministries.*

## A WEEKLY BANK ROBBERY FINANCED OUR HABITS

THE STORY OF JOSÉ AND TONI

*The test of a true transformation is the capacity to re-integrate into normal life. No better example of this can be found than the lives of José and Toni who have been back into city life in Madrid since 1990 and are active members of the Betel church.*

*Toni shares her testimony first.*

My parents worked hard because they wanted to upgrade our house. My two brothers, sister and I really looked after ourselves because they were so busy working. Mum and Dad wanted to give us the best they could but they only thought of that in monetary terms. We were brought up in the Madrid suburb of Vicalvaro. When I was nine we moved to San Blas and at fourteen I left school and started working. I began to drink alcohol and go to discos where I met my husband, José. I started going out with him and when I was seventeen I found I was pregnant. A little while later we were married.

This was the beginning of some of our troubles because we were so young. We hadn't really found out what life was all about. When Oscar was two years old we started going out with our old friends again. We were drinking very heavily and spending whole nights out, leaving Oscar with my mother. That led to us taking soft drugs and then we got on to taking heroin. In the beginning José had work and we were able to buy the drugs we used. At the same time we were able to buy a house in Mejorada Del Campo. Before that, we were living with my

parents but from this time on we were able to live by ourselves. Without parents to influence us our lives became less and less controlled. We just did whatever we wanted.

Even though José was working, we weren't able to pay our debts and we fell behind with our house payments. We moved further and further into the drug world and to injecting heroin. Then I fell pregnant for the second time and our first daughter Ana Belen was born. Even during the pregnancy I was taking heroin. In order to get money for this, we began to hold up and rob people. José was sentenced to jail several times, the last time for nine years, although he served only five. During that time I left the children with my mother so that I could work in San Blas trafficking in drugs in order to support my habit. This was the lowest point in my life because I would do anything to get money.

About this time the Teppers, with Lindsay and Myk began to evangelise in that area.

Myk (later to become Lindsay McKenzie's wife) spoke with me many times in the street and tried to convince me that I should go to a centre, but I kept refusing. I went to a couple of the meetings and I saw what was happening, but my life was such a mess that I didn't believe anything. At the same time Raul Casto was being cured in Lindsay's flat. He also spoke to me in the street, because his life had begun to change. I finally decided to go to a centre in Santander because at that stage Betel didn't have a house for girls in Madrid. The night before I went I injected the biggest quantity of drugs possible and I left myself just enough money to buy the ticket.

I didn't tell anybody in Madrid that I was going to Santander. All I had was the address written on a bit of paper. I found my way to the reception office. They asked who sent me. I said that I'd just come. They didn't want to give me a place in the girls' house there because it was almost full but they rang Lindsay and Myk in Madrid and they recommended that they take me in. The next day when I woke up I wanted to leave. But I know that in some way God took my strength away. I didn't have

enough energy to go. The time of passing through ‘cold turkey’ was difficult for me because my body was in a terrible state. I weighed less than thirty kilos.

During this time I tried to take my own life by cutting the veins in my wrist. They took me to the hospital and the doctors put me on a drip. When I was released the girls asked me if I wanted to give my life to Jesus Christ and I said ‘yes’ but I wasn’t really convinced in my heart. Then one Sunday after the meeting all the girls went to the beach. While I was there I began to feel good; something was happening within me. There was a song that I liked very much – ‘Make me into a new vessel.’ On the way back I really began to desire that the Lord would make me a new vessel. I began to sing that song with a lot of enthusiasm. I know that that was the day I committed my life to the Lord.

I spent a year there. At that stage my husband was in jail in Vitoria, so I was transferred to another centre there so I could be close to my husband. I spent three years in that location until he was released.

*José gives his side of the story now.*

We were a big family because my grandparents, parents, brothers and sisters all lived in the one house which had only two bedrooms. There were twelve of us altogether. My parents didn’t get on very well so my mother left home and abandoned us. That’s the reason my grandparents came to live with us. I was brought up in the Madrid suburb of San Blas. My father was a truck driver and he was seldom at home.

Such was the relationship with my grandmother that I’m used to calling her my mother. With so many people in the house, it was a disaster area. Grandma did her best to educate and bring us up well but there were so many of us it was impossible to keep control. I was only twelve years old when I began working.

I was fourteen when I first met Toni. I hadn’t known much happiness in our home so I was very happy with her. I believe that one of the reasons we went back into the world of drugs after we were married is that we were reacting to the previous culture

and politics of Spain at that time. After Franco died there was a new age of liberty and everyone wanted to try new things. I had a job but all I thought about was how to enjoy life. I started to deal in drugs as well as my normal work.

Once we started on heroin what we were earning wasn't enough to support us so we had to look for other means. In the beginning I had never robbed anyone but I had friends who were doing it so I began to do it too. We started with shops and restaurants, and then later we went on to banks. I had several periods in jail but each time I came back I got into more trouble than before.

There was a stage in my life where we had to hold up a bank each week otherwise we didn't have enough money. Our lives at this stage were totally uncontrolled. We were injecting cocaine as well as heroin so my mind was absolutely 'blown out'.

I was charged with having robbed twenty-two banks with menaces and finally convicted, but they could only find evidence for me having robbed three banks. I was sentenced to nine years and eight months. Our lives were just a mess. Our relationship began to change when Toni went to Santander and came to the Lord. She spoke to me of what had happened and how God had changed her. When I was released from jail I had everything worked out in my head. Even though she had spoken to me about God I wanted to come to Madrid to look for friends – people who could help me find firearms – and start robbing again.

When I got out of the jail, and reached Santander I thought we would be put in the same house together but it didn't happen like that. She was in one house with the women and they put me in another house thirty-five kilometres away. I really wanted to be with her but we saw each other only at weekends. I began to have feelings for my wife that I'd lost during my time in jail.

I suddenly felt that I didn't want to go back to Madrid; there were a lot of difficulties there. I remember one day we had an evangelistic campaign in the streets in Vitoria. Somebody prayed for me and I felt the presence of God. This was the first time I really felt that God was by my side and I wanted to give my

life to Him.

After six months we returned to Madrid with the children. The house that we had before was returned to us! It appears that my in-laws had been paying the bills while we were away hoping that one day we would come back to Madrid. By arrangement with Elliott Tepper I went to work in Betel in one of the boys' houses at Mejorada Del Campo. I worked alongside some of the men like Tito and Raul. I saw something in their lives and I decided that I wanted my life to be like theirs.

While we were in Madrid, working at Betel, God began to reveal Himself and to deal with our lives in a deeper way. I was living and working among people of my own neighbourhood. They were the people with whom I'd been in the world of drugs. They were the people with whom I'd robbed. Now they were off drugs and I was able to see their changed lives.

Toni and I started to build our relationship again. It was not without difficulties, but gradually it got better and better. Rebecca was born in Madrid. Then the people in Betel helped me find work and I had my first job. During this time I've never been without a job and God has always supplied me with what I have needed. We are active in the church and the children are involved in the Sunday School.

Our son Oscar continued attending the church for some time, in fact he went over to Betel in Britain and worked there for a period. Unfortunately he had to come back to do his military service. After that he stopped going to church. We've tried to encourage him to come but at the present time he doesn't want to, so we have to leave him in the hands of God.

Eighteen months ago some of us started to talk about the possibility of a co-operative. This was a vision that Betel had had for some time, but then we began to discuss it seriously. Setting the co-operative up hasn't been easy but our goal is to provide help for people that come out of Betel and want to work again in normal life, but with the covering of a Christian organisation.

*[See the chapter in Part III entitled 'The Biggest Challenge'.]*





## THE ONE-WAY TICKET MISSIONARY AND THE TROUBLE-SHOOTER

THE STORY OF JUAN CARLOS, ANITA AND ‘BETANIA’

*The start of this story is unrelated to Betel but it describes happenings that led up to Betel's involvement in the end.*

*Juan Carlos and Anita are mature pastoral workers with Betel in Madrid, but we begin with the testimony of Anita, daughter of an evangelical pastor who has a huge church in South Mexico.*

My family lives in the southern part of Mexico. When I gave my life to the Lord I was ten years old. My father and mother pastor a big church in Chiapas where they have a building that holds about ten thousand people. They have one hundred and seventy branch churches in the state of Chiapas. My culture was really evangelical and I never learned much about Mexican culture; all I knew was school, home and church.

I wanted to know about the world outside of Chiapas, so decided to leave Mexico, learn English, and then experience other cultures. At seventeen I went to a Bible School in California which was bi-lingual. After that I went to ‘Christ for the Nations’, a college in Dallas, Texas, for which I had a scholarship. That was when the Lord spoke to me about Spain, in 1981. The course lasted a year and a half, and as soon as I graduated I flew to Spain, without returning to Mexico.

I didn’t have any supporters; I just had a word from the Lord. I was sure He was calling me; when I asked Him how I was going to live, I had an assurance from the Word that if He called me He would sustain me. To this day I don’t know how

it all happened, but my ticket for Spain came through the mail. I don't know who paid for it. It was a one-way ticket so I came to stay! I told the Lord I would take one step at a time, and I did.

I knew of a missionary couple in Ciudad Real – David and Lyn Myers – so I went to them and offered my services. They were running a radio programme, so I was given the job of secretary – answering mail and sending out New Testaments. There was no church when I arrived but gradually a fellowship developed. We also started women's meetings and I helped the pastor's wife with that. In fact I did any job that needed doing.

Once a lady evangelist came to minister to the church and some people were touched by the Holy Spirit. Nothing like this had happened before; a number were upset and did not understand what was happening. Our numbers dropped from ninety to about a dozen.

We were cast upon the Lord so we started to pray earnestly and asked Him to show us the next step. We felt that God had something different for us, not just a church. As we were walking outside the city we found a property. We thought it looked like a good place for a Christian centre so after a few weeks of praying we went to talk to the owner and asked if it was for sale. At first he said 'no' but after a long time he finally decided to sell it to us. We had a vision for a centre to minister to missionaries, pastors and other Christian workers. Because of the trials we had gone through we felt there was a need for such a place.

After a while some people started to help us and others from overseas gave money to help buy the property which we called 'Betania' (Bethany). God was faithful and we were able to acquire it, and then started to build.

*Elliott Tepper explains further:*

The original idea was that it should be a retreat centre for missionaries and Christian workers. Others who wanted to support this venture, particularly from Texas, saw the possibility of it becoming a Bible School. However, in the long run the project was never completed. At a certain point in 1993 the small team

felt that they had to discontinue. Considerable finance came from the father of David Myers, namely Wayne Myers, who with his many contacts in the USA and the world, not only raised money but encouraged churches to send teams of workers so that considerable progress was made with the construction.

At the beginning of 1994 David Myers contacted me and raised the idea of Betel taking over the Betania project and turning it into a rehabilitation centre, Bible school or conference centre. We immediately warmed to the idea because it was a wonderful property and his team had done a lot of good work. They had assembled almost all the building materials; they had the roof on and the walls up, and a lot of the main systems were already installed. But it was worth a lot of money and he wanted 45,000,000 pesetas for it (about \$350,000). At that point in time Betel had never purchased a property that big. So we said we would consider it. We went to our bank, the Caja de Madrid. They assessed the value at \$400,000, (60,000,000 pesetas) which was considerably more than the purchase price. They actually gave us 100% financing and we were able to take over the property. However having the finance is one thing; meeting the monthly payments is another! They were about 700,000 pesetas (\$4,500), which was really a lot of money for us to find.

We felt that Betel International could undertake this and we would all support the project. We would set up some stores and businesses in Ciudad Real and what the centre couldn't cover, the rest of the Betel family would provide. Of course we looked for a special person that would be able to pioneer this new work, and we thought of Juan Carlos.

He went there and really raised the centre up from nothing. He started four different stores and at the same time ran a rehabilitation centre while finishing the construction. In fourteen months he had completed the whole thing!

*Juan describes the early days.*

When I arrived I saw a half finished project that seemed to be part church, part Bible school, and part conference centre. But we realised we were in the purposes of God and that the hand of

God was upon us. It was a difficult situation and we had to work closely with the missionary team and the church fellowship.

*We interrupt the Betania story to inject a note of romance. Anita tells how she and Juan Carlos met.*

Juan came down to Ciudad Real as Betel's representative and we worked together during the takeover.

At a Women's Aglow retreat, a woman felt it on her heart to tell me that 'there was a man coming to my life very shortly.' She gave me a verse: Ecclesiastes 3:11. By now I was thirty-nine years old. Marriage for me was a dream, but it wasn't number one on my prayer list! I was very content with my 'freedom', serving the Lord and surrounded by people that treated me well. A week after the women's retreat Juan Carlos told me he had something important to tell me, and that was when he proposed. What shocked me was that he mentioned the same scripture, Ecclesiastes 3:11. Three months later we were married.

*Juan continues.*

I had to balance the construction work, the creation and maintenance of the centre, and the producing of income through the Betel businesses, all at the same time. It was very difficult. The only way we could have done it was through the grace of God. I realised that a furniture store rightly organised and run could be a very important economic resource. We began to collect furniture and other used items from people who didn't want them. Then we restored them and sold them.

We opened the first store immediately on our arrival. It very quickly became profitable. We took a second one in the town of Puertollano and it also became very profitable. We started an upholstery shop in downtown Ciudad Real and that functioned very well. Then we set up a fourth one in the town of Manzanares.

*Elliott picks up the story.*

From those stores we generated very significant income – over

\$12,000 a month. This more than paid our mortgage and maintained the cost of the community of up to twenty-five young men.

We grew to about thirty people in the centre and in the Betel tradition we maintained good relationships with local churches who began to refer people that had problems to us.

The two buildings slept one hundred and forty people – ninety in the main building and fifty in the second building. There were other facilities – an auditorium for one hundred and twenty people, a dining hall for one hundred and twenty, and lots of individual sleeping areas and small conference rooms. Juan also set up a painting business and a construction business, and had our calendar and poster businesses functioning smoothly.

At that point in time we began to operate as a public conference centre. The WEC missionary team was the first to use it. We had been spending lots of money renting other people's facilities but now we had our own Betel/WEC facilities. Local churches, denominations, and other Christians came to know of us and now use the centre. Almost every month we have groups of up to one hundred and forty people using the facilities. It is becoming almost self-sufficient just through conference work.

It still functions as a rehabilitation place for Betel. Our workers run the conference centre – that's one of our businesses now. We have rented a small house, about a quarter of a mile from the property and so when we have a conference we take all the new people away from the property and put them in that. Then Julio, the leader who is also a professional cook, plus a crew of cooks, cleaners and waiters tend to the people at the conference. When the conference is over they move the people back from the little house. It works very well. We have constructed a large swimming pool and additional toilets and showers for campers. We can now hold our annual 1,300-strong camp meeting there.

*Juan Carlos now shares how he came to the Lord.*

When I was thirteen I left school and went to work. My first job was as a bus conductor. I began to smoke and drink and by the time I reached sixteen I was smoking hashish, going to parties,

staying out at night and taking amphetamines. From there I advanced to cocaine and then to heroin. Then I began to work with my brother in his drug trafficking business. He would bring hashish up from Morocco through Ceuta and we began to earn a lot of money. I went right into the depths of the heroin culture.

At first when I tried to get off heroin I went to the government and tried their methadone programme. Then I got a job with a doctor actually driving an ambulance. But there were times when I would take a sick person to the hospital and then go on to buy some heroin. Even though I was on a methadone programme I was consuming more heroin than ever. I spent about four or five years in this condition.

I lived for six months on the island of Ibiza without consuming heroin, but finally I went back to it and returned to Madrid. I started to live with a prostitute and was with her for two years. She earned a lot of money and we used it for drugs. I was twenty-eight years old then.

I was so sick I dropped down to fifty-eight kilos. (Today I weigh one hundred!) I became incredibly weak. In fact just before entering Betel I visited my parents and did not have enough energy to talk to them.

Someone told me about Betel so I went there and asked to be admitted. I remember that on the fifth day there was a meeting in which an invitation was given to receive Christ. I responded to this and accepted the Lord. Everything changed!

After four or five months they transferred me to Alcalá and I began to assume more and more responsibilities in the house. After eleven months there they made me the house leader at Torres De Alameda. After that, every time they had a problem in a residence they would transfer me and make me the leader of it! I was the Betel trouble-shooter!

*Elliott gives this evaluation:*

He is a hard worker; he has drive and he's a pusher (in a good sense); he gets businesses running and he inspires people, but more than being just practical he is a real intercessor. Among

the pastors in Madrid he more than any takes a personal burden for intercession. He's quick to enter in and he has a sense of the presence of God – a sense of God's working in the heavenlies. That's probably the key to why he has been so successful in the ministry.

Juan Carlos is in his second year back in Madrid now and is supervising approximately one half of the men in the Madrid area – probably over one hundred men; he supervises the six thrift stores in the northern half of Madrid and five of the residential homes. He is one of the three principal Spanish pastors in the large Madrid church.

*Juan concludes:*

I'm just very grateful for all that God has done in my life – taking me from what I was, saving me, putting me in Betel, giving me my wife and daughter and calling me to the pastorate. I thank Him. He's enlarged my world, allowed me to visit much of Europe, travel to Mexico, California, visit the churches including Anita's father's in Chiapas, and the Amistad churches in Mexico. I'm very grateful for the way God has enlarged my life.

## **BLESSINGS IN BARCELONA: BEGINNINGS IN BILBAO**

### THE STORY OF JUAN CARRASCO AND CARMEN

*Juan Carrasco and his wife Carmen are one of the ablest couples in Betel. A man of faith, vision, and tenacity, he has seen a great work built up in the Barcelona area. His early testimony appears in Rescue Shop I. He continues his story by describing developments in Barcelona and then the challenge that Elliott put to him about raising up a new work in Bilbao, seven hundred kilometres west on the Atlantic Coast.*

*We also include two more examples of totally changed lives, reached through the Barcelona work.*

Starting a work is slow going for the first few years. After 1992/93 – when Rescue Shop was written – the ‘boom’ began. Then, there were fifteen or seventeen people in Betel Barcelona. We had just obtained a thrift shop with a front section which we used as a church, but hardly anybody from outside attended. Bit by bit some of the families of those who had entered Betel began to attend the meetings. So we started to grow. Then we developed a good relationship with other churches in the area, and they began to see that Betel was more than merely a rehabilitation centre. Numbers rose to the point where we could not fit the people in any more.

After commencing a men’s residence we opened up a girls’ house in Sabadel not too far from Rubi. We also started another Betel centre an hour and a half to the south in the large city of Tarragona (200,000 inhabitants). We had a group of visiting



Mexicans, and our third leader there, Rafa, fell in love with one of the Mexican girls, Sandra, who was a university graduate in psychology; she returned to Mexico, then came back for their marriage. When it came time for them to be married we couldn't fit the wedding service or celebration in the church so we asked the owner of a large warehouse to lend it to us for the occasion. Out of curiosity we asked the owner how much it would cost to rent this place to use as a church. To pay the contract price and the deposit we would have needed 750,000 pesetas. We were paying only 80,000 for the place we were then using.

At that time we had a girl who had been in an accident. She was referred to us and we picked her up from the hospital. She came on crutches, and we began to take care of her. She was very appreciative. We would take her to the hospital regularly for treatments and check-ups. In court she was awarded 5,000,000 pesetas in damages. The Sunday before this happened I had preached on tithing. The next week I went to the girls' house for a meal. After dinner she said, 'I've got something to give to you.' I thought it was 5,000 pesetas; so I folded it up and said goodbye. When I opened the cheque later and looked at it again I counted the zeros: it was for 500,000 pesetas! We deposited it at the bank immediately. So we had enough money to get the building! The only problem was it was just a warehouse, ugly, unfinished. Then we had all the challenges of the legal work, licences, and building permits. The rules for legalising a church were very rigid because it was to be used as a public auditorium. We had an architect to draw up plans according to required standards, and we had to put in an extra staircase, a second exit, and so on. The final cost was over 2,000,000 pesetas, so now we have a fine church building seating four hundred.

There are now about one hundred and twenty in the three centres that have grown out of the original Barcelona work, plus one hundred and fifty attending church.

The professionalism and the integrity of the programme have been recognised by the Catalonia government, and by the evangelical council of Catalonia. The first congress of an evangelical

federation asked Betel to do a presentation on our evangelical rehabilitation centre, so we have very good standing.

\* \* \*

Let me give you just a couple of examples of how God has worked in lives.

Vicente entered Betel in Tarragona. Before coming to us he had been in thirty three other rehabilitation centres but never stayed. He ended up selling everything he had in his house and what he didn't sell, in wrath he threw out the window. His wife and his one child, a son, left him and went to live with her parents. The father of his wife was a member of the federal police. He wanted to give him two bullets in the brain! His wife refused to have anything to do with him. He had lots of legal judgements pending because he had committed many robberies. He received a sentence of over three years in prison but, through an arrangement with the authorities, was able to serve his time with Betel. His wife refused to visit him and refused to let the child visit him. She didn't trust him. Her excuse was that Tarragona was too far away from her home in Barcelona.

So we transferred him to Barcelona. Then we had to work more with her than with him. We brought all the family together for a meal in our own home and invited them to go out with us for walks in the park. We said if she had to miss going to work on Saturday (and thus lose money) we would make it up to her. Little by little she began to attend church. They went out on weekends together either in our home or in the home of another couple in the church. So things began to change.

His parents started to come to our services and relationships between them were restored. The good news of this reached her parents. He finished serving his three and a half years sentence with us so he then thought he would leave Betel and get a job. He was a professional upholsterer and found employment in the company that he had worked for previously, but his boss was dishonest. A creditor of the company would call and the boss

would tell Vicente to say that he wasn't there. He could not do it. So he came to me one day and said, 'I really can't continue in this situation.' We had a weekend together to talk it over so I said, 'Well, return to Betel, work with us.' He didn't want any money. He was able to get help from a government programme as a released prisoner. He had a government-subsidised home, and only paid \$2 a month (300 pesetas) rent. His wife has a salaried job. Now he just wants to serve God, and so he is a volunteer with us in Betel. Furthermore he has a good relationship with his in-laws.

\* \* \*

Graciela handles accounts in our office. When she was eighteen she was robbing banks. She would pull a ski mask over her head and go in with a knife or a pistol. She would have a man with her, but she'd be the first to go in and put the knife or pistol on someone's throat. When she came to Betel she was like a man. Her face, her expression, and even her clothing, exuded a male appearance. She arrived when she was a little over nineteen. She had lived a life of crime and had a whole string of criminal judgements against her. For one of these the prosecutor asked for seven years in prison but it was reduced to four years and two months. She was able to serve the time at our centre, but after a year and a half the police arrived with another citation and took her to the Barcelona prison for women. She felt deceived; we were upset and felt betrayed. She had been serving God and us for almost two years.

So I went up to Galicia, in the north west of Spain to talk to the judge. Although she was put in prison in Barcelona the crime was committed in Galicia. I was able to talk to the magistrate. He said, 'I can't re-open the case. What I have to do is give her a pardon.' So he wrote her out a pardon, but said, 'This will take some time to come through.' The prison social worker called us later and asked, 'Will you people give this girl a place in the centre?' We said, 'Of course we will'. I went and talked

to the prison authorities and within two months she was out of the prison and back in Betel! We made ourselves responsible for her. She's been with us five years and she does all the cost accounting for Barcelona, Tarragona and other centres.

*Elliott continues with a later episode in Juan's testimony.*

I was visiting some of our European centres and I had to stop over in the Amsterdam airport for about eight hours. I was trying to read and work on a level up above the crowds of people below, and was thinking about Barcelona. Juan had told me that he felt bored. Here he was – a man with a very successful centre with one hundred and twenty people, a dynamic, pioneer personality, and no more worlds to conquer! I started thinking about what we could give him. Then I thought about Bilbao and the two million people in the Basque country. Bilbao is one of the largest industrial areas in Spain and we had no work there. We had avoided it because there had been other centres in the north and we didn't think they needed us. Then I thought, 'Why don't we start Betel in Bilbao? That would be a challenge for Juan, because it would be very hard, a different language, a different culture, and a very closed society.' So I whipped out my mobile phone on the spot and called him. 'Juan, what do you think about starting Betel in the Basque country? There are millions of people in the area and no Betel. It would be a great challenge for you. Why don't you start it as an outreach from Barcelona?'

*Juan continues:*

We had been seven or eight years in Barcelona and for the last two God had been saying, 'You've got to move; you've got to do something new.' There was a quickening in my heart when Elliott called and so the very next day we went to the Basque country, drove round, looked at various towns and left our address with several real estate agents. Actually the day we went was a holiday and everything was closed. So we returned to Barcelona. Then a few days later an agency called us to say that they had a flat for us to rent. So we made the trip. We arrived

at the meeting point.

The estate agent said, 'Please forgive me, there's been some mistake, that flat is not available anymore.' I said, 'Wait a second, you can't make a mistake like that. I've travelled seven hundred kilometres for this appointment. It's six in the afternoon, what am I going to do?' He said, 'I don't know what I can do or say. I'm just telling you what my boss told me to say.' So he left and we found ourselves standing in the middle of the street like fools wondering what to do. There were two more hours before everything closed so we got in the car and said, 'Let's see if God has anything for us.' There was one place in Bilbao that we had a lot of interest in because it is a problem area; there's a lot of terrorism there. But it was so wet we could hardly see. We hadn't found anything and at eight o'clock we were just going to give up and go back home. Then we stopped at a stop light, looked to the left and there was a place that said 'Real Estate Agent'. We decided to try one more time. We asked if he had anything to rent and he said, 'Right in this very building we have one'. We asked him how much the rent was and he said, '80,000 pesetas.' 'That's a pretty high price for a little apartment.' He said, 'Let's call the owner.' He called him and then said, 'You can have it for 60,000.' We said, 'Give us the keys.'

*Carmen, Juan's wife, describes her turmoil about the idea of moving to Bilbao.*

I didn't want to go to Bilbao, I was very happy in Barcelona. We had the church. We had the women's meeting. We had the girls' house. I had a fifteen year old son in school. We had a nice home. Our own families lived here.

For four months Juan travelled to Bilbao every week, leaving on Mondays and coming back on Thursdays. One day after the Monday night leaders' meeting in Barcelona I just gave up and said, 'Well, Juan, if you want to go to Bilbao, it's okay with me, I'll go.' Next day he went specifically to look for a house for us. Two days later he called me and said, 'I have one.'

I started to think about all the nice things we had around us, but God said, 'I'll give you the same or better.' I said, 'Lord, I'll do whatever You want. I'm going to Bilbao.' Then I thought, 'It rains all the time there; there's no sun.' But I am very happy here. There are about fifty in the community already, counting the couples, men and children. Our son is happy. We thought he'd have difficulties but he's settled right in to a good high school and has made friends right away.

*Elliott adds:*

*In less than one year Juan and Carmen and their team from Barcelona and other Betel centres in Spain had established two men's residences, a women's residence, a married couples' hostel, two thrift stores, a carwash, and a large outreach centre in the very centre of the city! During their second year Juan opened a third store and converted an old car agency into Betel's first church in the Basque country.*

## TOWERS OR WELLS?

*Chapter one of Rescue Shop I tells the story of Raul Casto's deliverance from drug addiction, conversion and growth to maturity, as evidenced by his pastoral role at the Betel church in Madrid, with its 500 plus membership.*

*But AIDS was taking its toll during the latter years of his ministry. Many said that as his condition deteriorated he had glimpses into eternity that made his ministry uniquely powerful and effective. Here are just a few paragraphs (abridged) from one of his talks at the Betel church.*

In Genesis 11, the men of Babel rebelled against God and decided to build a tower. When they came to a place that was flat and easy, where there were fields and water, they said, 'We will build a tower and its highest point will reach heaven. We don't need you, God. We are happy here.'

But the Lord said, 'We will go down and cause confusion.'

I want to say tonight, that if we build a tower in a comfortable place for our own sake, sooner or later confusion will come. 'Why is this happening?' we will say. 'What have I done wrong?' In our Christian lives it is important that we don't stay where the way is flat and without difficulties.

In contrast, Abraham spent his life digging wells. He looked after his people and their livestock, digging wells so that they could have water. And Isaac, his son, also dug wells, working as his father had done. He dug in the valleys and discovered wells of fresh water.

I want to say to you, that if you are in a valley or a desert, or any place where there is no water, where your life seems to be

dead, don't try to flee from the situation to construct a tower. Don't look for that small gap to escape through. Stay in the valley and dig a well. The well of Jesus is inside us, deep within, with crystal clear water, with water that quenches thirst. Although we are still in the valley, we can find living water.

Are you building a tower or are you digging a well? It is more comfortable to build a tower, because when you dig a well you are in a confined space. You don't have much room to dig as you go down. It's difficult and it's costly.

Last Saturday, here at the church, there was a funeral – a memorial service for a missionary who had been in Spain for over twenty years. He was in a shop in the middle of Madrid with his wife when he suddenly had a heart attack and died. He left a widow and four children. If you had been in the service without knowing this man, you would have heard what he was like just through the testimonies people gave. Listening to what they said, you could see that this man was a 'well'. In his heart and life he was a well, from which hundreds of Spaniards had the privilege to drink.

What about you? Is your life like this? Are you building a tower or digging a well? By what do you want to be remembered? I decided almost nine years ago that my life was going to be a well, and I want to encourage you to pray that your life will be a well for others too.

*At the age of thirty seven Raul passed into the presence of the Lord, leaving his wife Jenny, (née Scantlebury), a missionary from New Zealand, and two daughters, Séfora (5) and Kelly (3). What follows is the poignant story of Jenny's reactions to Raul's death and then the subsequent dealings of the Lord, leading to her re-marriage.*

JENNY

Right up to the last moment I believed there would be a miracle of healing even though Raul was on his deathbed, so it was quite a shock when he died. Towards the end he must have known,



because to visitors he would make indications with his hands (he couldn't speak much) that he would be seeing them in heaven.

When he did go there were eight around the bed. I burst into tears and then a peace came over me. I said to everyone, 'I don't understand, but I accept it.' I was quite peaceful. Then for several days I was walking on air, so conscious of the grace of God. It was incredible.

In Spain funerals take place within twenty four hours, so Pastor Luis Pino stepped in and took care of all the details. The State covered the expense of the funeral apart from 50,000 pesetas (about two hundred pounds).

I thought of our girls, particularly Séfora (5) whose relationship with her father had been so close. I had never discussed with her the possibility that her father might die. I went home and told them. They both burst into tears but they accepted it.

I bought a red rose and wrote on a card that Sefi, Kellie and I would see him in heaven. I put it beside his body in the casket. I also bought myself six pink roses, feeling that he would have wanted that for me. I treasured them over the next few days. At the cremation service I felt a sense of exhilaration. I just sang my heart out. I felt Raul's presence so close to me at that time.

When things quietened down after the funeral I told the Lord I would stay where I was for a year. I continued to do the work I had been doing. I visited Elliott to ask what my position would be and he encouraged me to carry on as before. So I continued with pastoral work, hospital visits, Sunday School, organisation of the creche, and began working for one day a week in the reception office.

## EDUARDO

I came to Betel seven years ago. I was the first to enter the centre in Ceuta, N. Africa. I came to the Lord there, and after a year I joined the Betel staff and served in various centres – Madrid, Albacete, and Cuenca. Then in 1995 the elders in Madrid felt that I should be part of a team to open up the new work in England under Kent Martin. I had no sense of personal guidance about that

but I felt it was right to obey the leaders. Two months after this, and before leaving for England I gave my testimony at the Betel church in Madrid. It was the time of our missionary conference and God spoke to me while I was on the platform and showed me that I would marry Jenny. I felt guilty because Raul had been dead only a few months. I thought, 'Was this just 'the flesh'?'

A month later I came to England, and around Easter Kent told me that Jenny would be visiting Britain! So she and the children came. I hadn't spoken to anyone about my feelings.

### JENNY

Each year we tried to get a break around Easter and that year I took the children to England mainly to have a complete change.

### EDUARDO

While Jenny and the children were here I spoke a couple of times to her. I asked her if she would like to live in England and she said she would, but she added 'but my place is in Spain.' I found it very hard to open my heart to her and so after a few days she left. My feelings grew stronger and one day when I was talking to Sandra Bautista she asked me if I had anyone in mind. I said, 'Someone like Jenny.'

### JENNY

When I returned to Spain I had a strange lack of peace in my heart. I started thinking about returning to New Zealand. A few weeks later, Kent Martin, with Sandra and Victor Bautista (Betel workers in Britain), came to Spain for a conference. During the Friday night service Elliott came up and said to me, 'Jenny, I have a good husband for you. Eduardo in England.' I thought, 'Oh, yes; that's just Elliott'. Afterwards I told Sandra that Elliott had someone for me, but without naming Eduardo. She replied, 'Oh well, I know a good husband for you too.' 'Who's that?' I asked. She replied, 'Eduardo in England. You should pray about that.'

Since Raul's death I had never thought of praying along that line. I continued to have an unrest in my heart so I went to talk to

Mary Tepper, Elliott's wife. She encouraged me to think seriously about moving to England. I did this and the Lord confirmed that this was right and that Eduardo was right, too. I was amazed. I told Elliott and he was pleased. He talked to Kent in England and then I had a phone call from Eduardo asking me to marry him. I accepted his proposal over the phone! I just knew it was right. I came over in August and we were married in December.

#### EDUARDO

When I came to England God took me into a deeper level of fellowship with Himself. Now I was a 'missionary' – away from my own country and out of my 'comfort zone'. I have known dealings from God in these last two years that have been far deeper than the five years with Betel in Spain. It has been God's way of bringing me to maturity.

The culture in England is so different to Spain. I had a lot of fear to begin with. God also spoke to me about my leadership role and showed me that I was producing not fiery 'out-and-out' Christians but 'wishy-washy' ones because I was afraid to offend aspects of their culture.

I remember speaking to Elliott about it during one of his visits. He said, 'Don't confuse culture with Biblical principles. Take a stand on what is right and what is Biblical.'

#### JENNY

The girls were fearful about going to school in England but they have adjusted beautifully and within four months they were speaking English fluently. They have made friends and they enjoy their school. They miss the Betel church life where they had lots of little friends, but that will develop here too in time. They have taken to Eduardo so well.



## SEVEN YEARS FOR A HATCHET JOB

### THE STORY OF JOHN KAVANAGH

My home was in Dublin, where I was born in 1966. From the age of fourteen I took valium and temazepam tablets. That led on to stealing. Then I started drinking as well as taking pills – the two together were a powerful combination. I became very difficult to live with and eventually left home to get away from my father, who was a foreman builder, because he wanted to discipline me.

I lived rough – sleeping in derelict houses and wherever I could find shelter. Mother would come looking for me at night but I still would not return home. The police got hold of me and took me home one night but I stayed only a week; I needed ‘space’ and freedom to continue my habits.

At fifteen I started to take heroin and in order to get money for that I started robbing houses and shops. I was only smoking heroin at this stage. On one occasion I was caught and sentenced to twelve months in a detention centre. I was released after nine months and went straight back on to valium, heroin and drink.

I went to rob a house and hit the owner with a hatchet. I was sentenced to seven years for that. When I was released I managed to stay away from drugs for two years. I met a girl and we came over to England but then I started the drug habit again. After my girl friend had a child we moved back to Ireland where I stayed off drugs for a few months but soon went downhill once more.

My girlfriend and I decided to split up. She applied to the court for custody of the child. I was high on drugs and never contested this.

In 1996 when I assaulted a tourist in Dublin using a syringe I

was sentenced to eleven months jail. My mother visited me as she had done when I was serving the previous seven year sentence. She used to talk to me about God. She said I needed to ask God into my life, but I never took any notice of her even though she brought me cassettes and written prayers. I was aggressive to her and to everyone.

I attempted to commit suicide by cutting my throat – I was so sick of life. I even plunged a syringe full of air into myself but it had no effect. I had no hope – I was just drifting. I couldn't hack it, and no one seemed to be able to help me. But I know now that God preserved me.

One day my mother quoted Scripture to me. 'Ask and it will be given you. Seek and you will find. Knock and it shall be opened to you.' This time I listened and called out to Jesus. Two weeks later my mother came to see me and told me about someone who knew about a drug rehabilitation centre in England where I could get help. When I came out of prison this person gave me the address of Teen Challenge. My mother gave me money and so I flew to Liverpool where I was to take the train to Preston, but when I looked for the piece of paper with the address I couldn't find it.

I phoned home and my sister answered. My mother gave me the Preston phone number but when I called, it was the wrong number. I asked at the police station if they knew where it was but they couldn't help me. (There was a mix-up over the name of the place which had been recently changed.)

So I went into a church service and started praying to God. I was so fed up with life. After the service the pastor came up and introduced himself. I told him about my situation. Well, he knew where the centre was and he took me there. But the people at the centre could not accept me because there was a hold-up regarding it being officially registered with the local council. I was desperate. I knew that if I went back to Ireland I would succumb to drugs again.

At that point the pastor said, 'Well, I know of a new place in Birmingham where you could get help.' He phoned Betel and

it was arranged that I should go there the next day.

But there was a snag. My girlfriend was now living in Birmingham and I had a restraint order not to go near her. When I explained this to the pastor he said, 'Look, it would be a million-to-one chance that you would cross her path.' I insisted he ring Betel again to explain the situation. They gave me reassurance, so I agreed to go.

I reached Birmingham, was accepted into Betel and started to listen to the teaching, but I couldn't understand it. I still had this vague belief in God but I could not relate to these folk. I started to become aggressive again and badly wanted to leave.

In my desperation I really cried to God. I said to someone, 'If something doesn't happen to me, I'm gone. I'm going back to the old life.' That night God touched me. I seemed to be wrestling with Him and I know He met me and touched me. That was it. I knew it wasn't just my feelings, it was a real experience. Of course, I had my doubts afterwards but I kept praying and looking to Him.

I heard that there was a 'Grapevine' Conference coming up and I wanted to go. At the same time I was listening to tapes. One in particular by Don Francisco really spoke to my heart; it was on being a disciple. The Lord was dealing with me. I said to Elaine, one of the staff workers, 'Isn't it true that when we are weakest, God is at His strongest?' She said, 'Yes.' So I decided to fast during this conference because I wanted to be totally changed. On the first night I know that God met me, and on the second day a real peace came. God calmed my heart.

When I came here, at first I was full of worries but I have handed them over to God. I don't worry about my child, or my partner, or my family. I want to stay here because I've found peace. I have a vision for being used by God to help others who have had a similar experience.

God has been answering my prayers and I now have access to my daughter, Natasha, who is six years old. My sister has been in touch with me for the first time in eight years and my father is asking questions about what has happened to me.

*Kent Martin, leader of Betel in Britain adds:  
John's case is a story of genuine change. The social worker in  
Dublin who has been handling this matter said to me over the  
phone, 'I want you to know that the complications with this  
man – relationships with his partner, his crimes, and his drug  
addiction – constitute the worst case I have ever had to deal  
with. If you can make an impact on this man you will really have  
done something very significant.'*

*So we are thanking the Lord for His wonderful working in  
John's life and we rejoice in the changes we are seeing in him.*



**‘YOU’RE NOT MY SON ANY MORE!’**

## THE STORY OF ALEXIS PERES

We lived in the Canary Islands, in the main city of Great Canary called Las Palmas. When I’d finished primary school my father, who had been manager of a factory, asked me what I wanted to do. Because I’d never been a good student and was rebellious I decided to get a job. I’d always been interested in mechanics. In fact, when I was a child, I would pull my toys apart and then put them back together again.

I started my apprenticeship when I was fourteen in a mechanic’s workshop and was paid the equivalent of about \$3 a month. Very soon after that I started to be involved in drugs. Two of the mechanics were smoking something similar to marijuana, so I joined them. I enjoyed it and little by little progressed into taking higher doses and harder drugs. I also played soccer and met people who were into cocaine, so I started to take that as well. I was good at soccer and my father was proud of me. I reached a fairly high level but then I suddenly realised that I’d become hooked on drugs. In fact I had to take them in order to be able to play football.

But I deteriorated so badly that I had to stop playing. My father was so disappointed. From that point he stopped taking any interest in me. Gradually a separation came between us and as a result I became more rebellious than ever. I resented the attitude that he’d shown towards me. It was rebellion, more than anything, that pushed me more into the world of drugs.

I also left my work and gradually became a delinquent. As time went by my father became aware of all this so he took the

final step of kicking me out of home. While he was working my mother used to come and look for me; she'd take me home, give me a change of clothes and generally look after me.

For one of the robberies I committed I was taken to the police station. My mother suffers from heart problems so she couldn't stand visiting me. My father did come and said, 'Because of what you have done, you are not my son any more. As far as I'm concerned you have died.' The neighbours had all signed a petition to say that I was selling drugs in the area. I spent seven months in jail. My father never came to visit me and the phrase that haunted me the whole time I was there was what he had said to me earlier. My mother, with the help of a lawyer, arranged for my release after seven months but I went straight back into the world of delinquency. Through everything that happened, hate was really growing in my heart towards my father.

After that I became involved in what is really the mafia in the Canary Islands. They offered me work driving a truck loaded with drugs from one island to another on the inter-island ferry. One day I tried to rob a kilo of heroin from one of the trucks. Because of that one of the mafia tried to kill me, so I had to leave Las Palmas and go to another island. While I was there I worked in the construction industry and managed to free myself of drugs.

I worked there for two years but then I went back to Las Palmas and I soon fell back into the old world. I went to visit my home but the door was firmly closed. My mother looked out the window and was crying as she watched me. She said, 'I can't let you in, you'll have to go away.' It was seeing my mother in that state that gave me the impetus to do something about my life – to look for a place where I could get help.

So I went to a centre in Las Palmas. It was Sunday and there was a meeting in progress; everybody was singing and it all looked a bit strange to me so I lasted only a day and then took off, but my mother persuaded me to go back again. She even gave me money for a fix so I could get filled up before going in. I agreed but only to get the money. I left after a day.

I knew I needed to do something about my life so I went and

spoke to the leader of the centre again. Since it hadn't worked out on two occasions he recommended that I go to Betel in Madrid. I went there in 1990 and at that stage there were fifty people living in the house at Mejorada Del Campo. Because of my experience in mechanics I was put on to repairing vehicles. In the beginning I suffered a lot from the cold, having come from the warm Canary Islands. Madrid was a very cold place. We also felt hungry during those times because one of the few items that we had in abundance was lentils; I got sick of them after a while!

So as you can imagine it wasn't very pleasant – the cold weather, eating lentils, drinking camomile tea and passing through 'cold turkey' at the same time. The planes that land at Madrid fly over the house. As I was passing through cold turkey I would watch them and hope that one would fall out of the sky so that I could rob the gold and stuff that people had, and then just take off.

But as time went by I began to hear the messages about God and I started taking notice. I also liked the attitude of the leaders. They impressed me. But despite this I realised that to follow God wholly you had to renounce the world. I didn't feel I was ready to do that. Running through my mind was the idea of taking off, finding work, finding a girlfriend, getting married and having a family.

I continued there for a year but after that I left. I found a job very easily; I found a girlfriend; I had everything I needed, but I kept thinking about God and about the centre, knowing that God had something special for me. But, sad to say, after nine months all that went out of my mind and I started to take drugs again.

One time during this period I was on a high but suddenly a phrase that Raul had said came to mind: 'God has something special for your life.' The next morning I went to one of the gypsy houses to buy drugs and on the wall someone had painted the words 'God is love'. This really had an impact on me because I had known something of the love of God at Mejorada and I started to think about going back to Betel but I was afraid

because I was hooked on cocaine and I knew that cold turkey would be a struggle for me.

Finally I went back and they took me again to the house in Mejorada Del Campo. The total time I'd been out of Betel was a little over nine months. It wasn't easy going back because apart from the fact that I had to go through detoxification again the person who was made responsible for me was the person who had been under me the time before! It was really hard. I had a terrible time going through cold turkey and I asked the leader if I could go to a doctor. He said, 'No, you are only trying to think up a reason to leave.' It was so bad I couldn't eat, I couldn't even drink, and after six days like this God brought Elliott to the house.

He looked at me and I could tell by the expression on his face that he was concerned about my condition. He prayed for me and told the fellows that I was to be taken to the hospital. While there I vomited blood caused by taking cocaine. A kidney had burst and I also had an infection in my throat. I was taken to surgery, where they put a tube down my throat, then poured water down so as to force the blood out. They continued this for about three hours. Later they took me to the infectious diseases ward. I didn't know, but I then found out I had the AIDS virus, so they put me on drips – one with vitamins and one with antibiotics. I had tubes in each arm and tubes up my nose and down my throat; I had bronchitis as well. I could hardly breathe. Lying there in that hopeless state I remembered God. The doctor that did rounds came and said, 'Look, you are not in a very good state.' At that stage I was urinating blood as well. I was taken back to surgery and again they went through the procedure of taking the blood out of my stomach; they also x-rayed my kidney to see what was happening.

That afternoon, back in my bed, I was crying out to God. Then Antonio El Abuelo (which means grandfather) came to visit me. The doctor came in while Antonio was there. She asked him to leave the room. She said my state was very bad and they were going to call my family because it looked as though I was going to die. I was dehydrated, I couldn't take water and my

kidneys weren't functioning. I begged the doctor not to ring my mother – I knew I wasn't going to die. She looked at me and almost laughed but at that stage I began to cry. El Abuelo came back into the room and asked me what was wrong. I told him what she had said and he replied, 'Well, the first thing you need is forgiveness from God.' So Antonio prayed beside me and as we were praying I felt something special. I felt as though God had come into the room. I felt forgiven and then I sensed the power of God come into my body.

As the days went by I gradually improved. I was able to eat little by little and able to take fluid. The doctor came in and said she couldn't understand what had happened but I was looking better. I said, 'Well, God has done a miracle in my life.' At that stage I made an agreement with Him that if I got out of the hospital alive I would give my life to Him. That was six years ago.

Now I'm very happy. I love God a lot and my life is committed to Him. After I was released I went back to Betel and since that time I've sought to do what God wants. After ten months I was made the leader at Mejorada Del Campo, then later at Zulema where I have been the leader for a time. I am also responsible for the mechanical workshop there. In the Alcalá area there are four men's houses under a pastor – Javi. When he is not there I'm his deputy. When I left Betel the first time I mentioned that I'd been with a girlfriend for a period of time but as I got back on drugs the relationship didn't work very well and eventually we broke up.

After I'd been at Betel for two years I found I was able to forgive my father. Since then I've visited my family and I'm now able to hug dad. He accepts me, and my relationship with my mother is good.

I'm very grateful for the six years I have been back in Betel and for what God has done in my life. He knows also that I need a companion and He's given me Marisa; she's also in the programme and is a leader in one of the girls' houses. We plan to marry in the near future.



## AN ALCOHOLIC FOR THIRTY YEARS

### THE STORY OF DEREK (DEL) & IRIS WHITMORE

*The following story from England is unique because it takes us away from the world of drugs to the chaotic experiences of alcoholism. In this case Betel became not only the channel of deliverance from drink but the means of salvaging a ruined marriage.*

*The Whitmores are currently helpers at Windmill House and are making a good contribution there, Iris helping with the accounts and Del training ex-drug users to restore and repair furniture.*

DEREK:

For the past thirty years I have been a heavy drinker. Drink ruined our marriage and I moved out of our home four and a half years ago to live in the bedroom of a flat.

A friend invited me to Windmill House which was a Christian centre but not a rehabilitation centre. Its ethos did not involve exercising control or authority so I continued drinking and even got into stealing. When this place was handed over to Betel I was faced with a problem. If I stayed I would have to submit to their programme which was strict. I would have to give up my job, give up my car and give up everything in order to be part of the fellowship. My doctor had warned me that if I continued drinking I wouldn't live for long, so it was either imminent death or Betel!

I had tried going to church in 1983 but that didn't change me. I had no relationship with the Lord. So I got no help. I tried

Alcoholics Anonymous, had non-Christian counselling and so on, but to no avail.

Staying with the Betel programme was very difficult for me. There was no freedom. Every time I walked down the road I had to have someone with me. No TV when I wanted it, and no newspapers; I couldn't even answer the phone!

I had had a good job as a car spray-painter. I made good money – there was always plenty of work and though I say it myself, I was good at my work. Of course I made extra on the side by being dishonest – selling paint that wasn't mine and so on. I even stole from my wife's mum and dad. So Betel meant an enormous change in my lifestyle.

I was the first British Betel resident and had problems submitting to Eduardo. These were compounded by his limited English and I felt like leaving. However as time went on I was given more responsibility and was even put in charge of a group. But on one occasion I had a lapse; I went out and drank and so lost my status as a helper.

I attended the Betel meetings and tried to pull myself together. Again I was given responsibility. In one meeting the speaker talked about the influence of our background and I realised that a lot of my problems stemmed from the hatred in my heart toward my father who was an alcoholic and who had treated my mother so badly. The Lord really dealt with me over that, and I think that was the turning point. Since then the Lord has been real to me.

The Lord showed me that I was to stay here and that my wife would rejoin me. She came to visit me but she wasn't happy about me working for Betel and doing nothing for her around the house. Neither of us had a clear understanding at that stage of what living by faith meant.

I'm now in charge of a department, remodelling used furniture and using my spray-painting skills.

IRIS:

Derek and I were married in 1974 and after a couple of years I



began to realise he had a drink problem; I had our first child, a girl, and three years later I had a little boy.

I always kept feeling that Derek would get over his problem and change. I thought of leaving him but also realised the children needed a father. So I went on, putting up with his lying, stealing and cheating as well as the drinking. Thankfully he was never violent but the pattern just went on and on.

In 1983 we sent the children to Sunday School and when we went to a Christmas Carol Service Derek put his hand up to receive Christ. I didn't, because I had enough problems – I couldn't face that as well.

Friends gave me books and just gradually I seemed to move into an awareness of salvation. But we continued to have lots of problems and lots of arguments, because he continued to drink. After seventeen years of that I reached the end of my tether. As a Christian I felt, up to that point, that we should stay together, but I could bear it no longer. I told him to go. He persisted in staying around for another three weeks, but I demanded that he leave, so he went.

I was very bitter, very angry. One of the things that upset me most was the fact that he didn't stop drinking. I thought the shock of leaving may have jolted him, but he just went on as before. So we didn't have much contact.

I kept the children and found full-time work. It wasn't easy juggling work and care of the children who were then sixteen and thirteen. We became very close. I remained very bitter – up until the time he joined Betel. I continued to go to church and actually became secretary to the pastor. Later I was made manager of the nursery attached to the church.

I was talking one day to the assistant pastor and after that discussion I had the overwhelming feeling that we would only ever get together again if I joined Betel as well, but in the meantime nothing actually changed.

About eighteen months ago I reached the point where I said, 'God, I know You exist but I have to say I don't really want You. My life is simply working to live and living to work. It's

no life at all. I feel like going the way of the world and getting a divorce.’ I was like this for a couple of months. Things got darker and darker, until one night in desperation I said, ‘All right, Lord, I surrender. I’m Yours. You can do what You want but I don’t want this kind of life.’

A little time later I phoned Kent, the director of Betel, pointing out that Derek was doing lots of work there but nothing for us at home. Kent agreed that he should help me by doing jobs around the house. So we started to come closer again. Betel allowed us to have regular times together.

The result of that was a mutual desire to renew our marriage vows, and the decision was made that I would also join Betel and work at the centre. This happened on July 5 this year and it was a great day – a beautiful service and then a banquet. It was lovely.

I have sold the house. I finished work at the church only recently and I started working in the Betel office today. Liza is now twenty one and Lee is eighteen. Liza has left the church and lives on her own. Lee is at a School of Evangelism with Teen Challenge and next year he will work full time with them.

## PRISON MADE ME REBELLIOUS

### THE STORY OF ROSI AND ALBERTO

*Alberto and Rosi carry big pastoral responsibilities in the Madrid Betel church. It has been a long hard road for them both, but, again, the grace and grit that God provides have taken them through. Both have been into robbery and both have been sentenced to jail terms. But the radical change that the Gospel produces has turned wasted lives into wonderful workers.*

*Rosi gives something of her background.*

I was thirteen when I left school and since I didn't have work and didn't want to do further study, I was soon involved in the delinquent behaviour of my peers. I started smoking marijuana and sniffing heroin but after a while they didn't do anything for me, so I started to inject heroin. I was sixteen by then.

For the next seven years I was hooked, and took part in many gang robberies so that I could have money for drugs. I tried to give it up at different times but without success. When I was twenty three I was feeling really bad – it was one of the lows in my life. I also discovered that I was pregnant with my first daughter, Karen. Her father is Alberto who is now my husband. At that stage we were not married.

I was living at home and, being pregnant, I wanted to get off drugs. At one stage I was put into hospital where they tried to get me off heroin but they were unsuccessful. For most of the time my mother had to look after Karen. When she was eight months old I decided to do something about it. Some of my friends in the streets had mentioned a centre called 'Betel', but they didn't speak very highly of it. They said it was run by nuns and monks.

At this stage I was beaten up in the street by some of my ‘friends’ so I was in a very bad state. I had to find help somewhere and the thing that really attracted me to Betel was that it was free. My mother really encouraged me to do something about it. Now in order to get into Betel I had to attend some of their meetings first. My mother took me there, so that I could demonstrate that I was interested in being cured. Finally they gave me a place, but I behaved so badly that they showed me the door after a few days, and advised me to go to another group that had a centre in the North, away from Madrid, where all my temptations were.

After a few months the leaders felt I was getting on pretty well but the truth was that I wasn’t.

Then I had to go to a delayed court case for holding up a hairdressing salon. I was given a year’s jail, but it was arranged that I serve that year with Betel in Madrid where Alberto, my child and my parents lived. But my attitude still wasn’t right, I was still rebellious and after five months I left and went back on the street, and back to drugs. I got so desperate that it was then I realised the only hope for my life was God.

I went back for the third time but with true repentance in my heart because I really regretted what I’d done. I realised how much time I’d wasted and I received Christ virtually straight away. After I’d been back in Betel for two years Alberto and I were married and then Karen came back to live with us.

One thing I look back on as being special for me was the help I received from the missionaries that were working with Betel. They were a real example of what it was to live a mature Christian life. They especially helped me to grow in my prayer life.

In 1990 Alberto and I were married, and a year later we had a son, Daniel.

*Alberto now tells his story.*

My father was a carpenter and I didn’t have much interest in studying because I wasn’t a very good student. What interested

me most was playing soccer and other sports. When I turned fourteen I became involved with young people who were always getting into trouble. I thought I was creating a 'macho' image, but inside I was afraid and didn't like it, but little by little I overcame that fear. I teamed up with another delinquent in the area and did robberies every day. The normal thing was to break into cars and take things out of them. On one occasion we did a hold up with a sawn-off shotgun.

When I was sixteen I was caught robbing a car and was taken to a reformatory in Carabanchel prison; I was there for only two days. I came out and went back to the same thing. I was also taking heroin by then. I had a fight with another young person and I was put in prison again for two and a half months. Prison made me very rebellious. From that time on until the time I entered Betel my life was one of injecting heroin, visiting police stations, being in jails, and being treated in hospitals.

I became separated from my family. My parents didn't want to have me in the home any more. It was during this time that I met Rosi. I heard about Betel because Elliott and others came evangelising in our area. My health deteriorated and at heart I was sick of robbing. I realised I needed help so I went to Betel because of Rosi's connection with it.

I soon realised it was a Christian centre and I felt everything was a bit strange, however I always had a basic belief in God. After about a month a delayed court case came up and I was put in prison again.

*[The legal system moves very slowly and so court cases can come up months or even years after a crime. This accounts for the time lag.]*

During the few weeks that I'd been in Betel I'd heard the gospel but none of it had really entered my heart. I did take a Bible to prison with me but I hid it. I was in prison for about three weeks and then I went back to the centre. I started then to seek after God. After three months I was back in prison again. This time I

put the Bible on top of my table. Some of my friends asked me about it and I openly shared my faith. They would share their problems and I would try to help them. After a month I was back in Betel.

I started to grow in the Lord. I began to realise and feel that Christ was really in my heart.

I had a hard time for a while and it seemed as though the devil was trying to get me out of Betel. But God gave me the victory and I continued to grow. But because of my previous problems with the law I've had to go into prison a total of five or six times while at Betel. Two of these times were four month periods and during one of them our son Daniel was born.

Rosi and I continued to grow in the Lord and were given more responsibility. In 1992 we were sent to Málaga. Betel opened a new centre there so we went to help in that venture. Then in 1994 we were transferred to Albacete where the leader wasn't very well. In fact he died about a month after we arrived so from that time on until recently I was the leader. We have been called back to Madrid to serve in a pastoral capacity, being involved more with the church than with the centres. One of our main responsibilities is caring for the house church groups. We also have a pastoral role in the church. Rosi is involved in the Sunday school and during the week I'm also involved in street evangelism, and in visiting prisons and hospitals.

## WORN OUT AT TWENTY-FIVE

### THE STORY OF PEDRO & ESTRELLA

*The testimony of Pedro and Estrella gives an excellent example of how two lives can be straightened out and then become stable and consistent members of society as well as making a vital contribution to local church life.*

#### *ESTRELLA*

I was brought up in a humble home and I was a hard worker. I had a father who was strict and wanted everything done right. He was a drinker and gambler and I grew up under the pressure of what my father expected of me. I finished up rebelling against him. And so I began to look for things that I thought would make me happy. I mixed with lesbians and that led on to being involved with drugs. I took heroin for three years. It was a hard time – I was involved in a very perverse world, a world of homosexuality and drugs. One night when I believed I would have to become a prostitute, I cried out to God. I realised that there was a God out there. I went to my father and he said he would help me, and that I could return home. He would help me look for a place where I could be cured.

Betel did not have a centre then but my aunt talked to some of the WEC missionaries and they recommended me to a place in Vitoria. But I didn't like it there and left after seven days.

For the next little while I stayed at home. My family wouldn't let me go out of the house. From time to time I went down to the meetings at Betel in San Blas. Once, I used that excuse to go and buy heroin. When I returned Myk asked me why I had injected

heroin again. I felt I was a fraud. I was putting on a good front on one hand but in reality I was doing something else. At the same time I was deceiving my family while they were putting a lot of effort into trying to help me. During that time I went to visit another church in the suburb of Coslada. I talked to a missionary there, Ronnie Deelen, and I believe that was when I accepted the Lord into my life.

Eventually I said to Myk, 'I want to go to Santander.' I spent two years in the community there. After that time I came back to Madrid and later became a leader of the new Betel centre for girls.

After seven months in the Betel community I left to marry Pedro.

### *Pedro shares his early life.*

Like my wife, I was brought up in a humble home. I was born in a city called Leon to the north of Madrid. My parents moved to Barcelona and I lived there from when I was two till I was sixteen. I was a difficult child at home, I suffered from a lot of sicknesses of the stomach. I had rickets resulting from inadequate diet. After I started school they discovered I was dyslectic.

When I was sixteen I started to try drugs, and to get money I became involved in prostitution. Of course I did all this without my parents knowing. When I was eighteen I left home and didn't return until I was twenty when I had to do my military service. My parents knew absolutely nothing about where I was during those two years. I had been living as a prostitute and doing anything that was easy for me. The only things that interested me were drugs and living for pleasure.

When I was twenty five my body was tired and worn out. Once I was in a cinema, watching the hero in the picture dying. The film depicted what he was thinking at that moment, 'I haven't had anything in life; no children, I haven't achieved anything.' I saw my life reflected in that film – I had achieved nothing and I was dying. I didn't know God because I didn't believe in Him, but I knew within myself that someone would



have to help me. I thought about the possibilities of someone rich falling in love with me and helping me. Of course that would be the easiest thing.

But I decided to go home. My parents received me with open arms but they warned me that this was the last time they were going to help me. We looked for a rehabilitation centre that would be free and we found one in Vitoria. There I met God. One night I cried to Him and asked Him to change my desires. The following day I was another person. I could hardly believe it. I hadn't liked reading the Bible but the day after I changed I liked it, and from that time on I haven't stopped reading it. This was sixteen years ago.

Estrella and I met each other during an evangelistic campaign in Gijon organised by two rehabilitation centres.

It wasn't difficult to leave a homosexual background when I married Estrella because I never really considered myself to be a homosexual. I only used the relationship I had with other men to get money. The day of conversion was a true conversion – a total change. I asked the Lord to come in and change my desires and He has done just that.

*Estrella describes her present situation.*

For the past nine years I have been participating in the worship team in the church. For about the same time I've also been teaching in the Sunday school. And for the last two years I've been one of the leaders of the Sunday school team. I also lead the worship in the women's meeting and participate in the worship in our weekly home group. I have a normal weekday job too. I work three hours each morning from Monday through Saturday as a cleaner in a bank.

*Pedro explains his present role.*

I'm a deacon in the church and I help with practical and administrative matters. With my wife I'm involved in leading the worship in the Sunday School meetings. We work pretty well together. My weekday job is the most demanding part of my

life. I work for a company which has a contract to clean banks, including the airport bank. At times during the year we have to start work at 4am and often don't finish until 5pm or 6pm. We have two children, Marta (9) and Samuel (7). They both go to school and are doing very well. They both get good reports. They like going to the church and the Sunday school with us.

I left the community eleven years ago and Estrella finished a year later. Life out of the community hasn't always been easy. For example there was a time when I was out of work for two years. We were just married and didn't receive any help from our parents. Because we had been in the drug world for so long I didn't have any training. Paco Corrales, who was also in Betel, showed me how to do plumbing and how to install central heating. This was a real help because I was able to get some work at that. I use this knowledge in my present job because as well as cleaning we also do maintenance and installation of heating systems.

## THE CANCER HAS GONE

### THE STORY OF MYKA CONTERAS

My name is Myka and I am thirty-eight years old. At an early age I was sent to boarding school, and had little contact with my family during those years. Consequently, when I left at sixteen, I didn't have a very good relationship even with my mother because we had never come to know each other.

I never had any work, and soon finished up in the world of drug-taking. I got mixed up with a gang that robbed pharmacies. I took soft drugs and pills for about a year. On one occasion I was arrested, taken down to the police station and searched, but I didn't have anything with me, so I was released.

Then I started taking hard drugs and learned to inject heroin. I had to rob to get money and lived with a guy who was doing the same. After six years hooked on heroin I had a daughter, but that was by a different man. When she was three years old I went to a drug centre in Alicante, where I stayed for nine months. When I first entered I didn't believe anything, and I thought it was all just put on. I thought the smiles I saw on the people's faces were false. But through their testimony, I realised where they had come from and could see how they had changed. I realised that if God could help them He could help me, and that I needed a personal relationship with Him.

While I was there the State took my child away to care for her, so after leaving, my only desire was to get her back. But I was soon on the streets and hooked on heroin again. After four months I realised I had lost everything. I was sick and knew I needed help, so I went back to Alicante. This time I was deter-

mined to look to the Lord and leave the matter of my daughter in His hands, because I realised I wasn't able to do anything about it. After I had been there for three months the authorities began to let my daughter visit me. Then I was transferred to Betel in Madrid, so that I would be closer to my child who was then about four years old.

After I had been in Madrid for nine months I went with a team to open a girls' house in Cuenca. During this time the rest of the team began to trust me and give me more responsibility. I began to help other girls, and gradually realised that God wanted to use me. He had a purpose for my life. After two years I had the total responsibility of the house, and I was the leader for another eighteen months after that. Altogether I have been in Betel for eight and a half years. I have learned to trust in God a lot more, but I still need to enter into a deeper relationship with Him.

Two years ago I had cancer at the base of my spine. My bodily defences, because of AIDS, were very low. The doctors said they couldn't give me much hope of living very long. They had to give me chemotherapy and injections in the bone marrow. At first I felt very disappointed with God. I wondered, 'Why has this happened to me?' But then God spoke to me from Isaiah 40:31, 'Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.' From this verse He gave me the promise that I was going to come through. At that stage I was going to hospital virtually every day, very fearful, but He kept encouraging me, giving me strength to get up and walk. Today I am completely healed and the doctors don't know how to explain it! I know it's a miracle from God.

## **GAMBLING RUINED MY LIFE**

### **THE STORY OF ANTONIO FERNANDEZ**

I'll cover my early life briefly. I suppose I was a fairly good Catholic – largely through my mother's strong influence. I actually took a course on how to share my faith, although I never really knew the Lord, personally.

My father was a bank manager and I had a good education, later joining him at the bank. After marriage and raising three children we moved to Argentina where I took charge of my uncle's business for seventeen years.

When we returned to Spain I began to be involved in gambling, lotteries, bingo, and things like that – activities I'd never participated in before. This brought difficulties into our marriage so I hid what I was doing from my wife. But she realised from our bank accounts that money was disappearing and that I was taking it to gamble. Relationships deteriorated during this time and my children began to reject me. I realised I wasn't being accepted in my own house so I decided to leave.

I had some money with me so I lived in a hostel till it ran out. Things got so bad I didn't have anywhere to stay so I finished up sleeping in underground stations for three or four nights. One morning I came out of the station and looked in the rubbish bin. I noticed a four-page magazine so I began to read it. I saw an advertisement saying that if you had a need or a problem in your life, 'call us'. There was a phone number to ring. I rang and discovered that it was the Salvation Army. The man on the other end of the phone asked me where I was and said he would come and pick me up.

He took me to the church and on the way there he told me that he heard a note of concern in my voice and he was very worried and thought I might do something desperate. He offered me accommodation in the back of the church where they had a little flat with a bedroom and kitchen. He brought me some food and said I could stay there. After a few days he asked me to come with him because he wanted to introduce me to the director of a rehabilitation centre.

I went with him. That was in April 1989. He took me to Betel which at that stage was in Calle Raza. He introduced me to Elliott Tepper, the director, and Elliott said it was up to me whether I would make a decision to stay or not. My first reaction was that if this was a rehabilitation centre for drug addicts what was I doing here? I was not a drug addict! At that time I didn't realise that I really was an addict too; I was enslaved to gambling.

It was some time before I gave my life to the Lord because when they first started speaking to me about Jesus as Saviour I said, 'Yes, I know this. I've known this for ages.' But when they told me that to be saved I had to commit my life to Christ I was offended because I felt I'd already done that. During this time of doubt something happened that really convinced me. It was listening to the testimony of others who had been involved in a level of sin which to my mind was a lot worse than what I'd done. I could see what God had done in their lives. I saw the change; former criminals were now living honest lives and seeking to help others.

This was the thing that most convinced me and led to my true conversion. After that, my wife saw the change in me and the peace that I had. She began to come and visit me at the centre. She saw the joy I now had but when I told her about what had happened she didn't believe me. She said, 'I know that the evangelicals are honourable and sincere people, but I don't believe what you say, because you've lied to me so much lately.' So I asked God to give me the right things to say to my family, and that God would open her heart so that she would understand that what had happened in my life was really of God. She said

to me, 'Look, before you were a leader in the Catholic church but you were really leading a double life. So if you've done that you could be doing the same thing now.' She did start coming to the meetings and she was learning something from them, but as she works and is very tired she does not attend regularly.

I will be seventy this year. Certainly I am the oldest 'Betelito'. While my family has seen the change in my life there has not been the complete acceptance and forgiveness I had hoped for. For the last few years I have been living at the centre during the week and going home at weekends. This may seem awkward, but God has had His purpose in it.

I have been able to develop a close relationship with the men and because of my legal and administrative training have served as their advocate in hundreds of court procedures. In the last decade I have developed Betel's office of legal intervention working on behalf of the community members who still have judgements against them. Hundreds have been pardoned or have had their sentences shortened. At this very moment we have almost one hundred serving their sentences in Betel rather than prison because of the ministry the Lord has committed to me.

Although I lost everything because of gambling, and still suffer from a sense of rejection from my family, today Betelitos call me 'Abuelo' (grandfather) and I feel their love and appreciation. I am a friend on a first name basis with many of the principal judges in the Spanish judicial system. I often represent Betel before the public in various capacities. Recently I was ordained as an elder. So while things have not turned out exactly as I had hoped, God has, in His way, recompensed me and said, 'Well done my faithful servant.'

I would like to say something about the death of our youngest son, Felix. While he was doing his military service, he was infected with AIDS through a blood transfusion. The virus developed in his body and he finished up in hospital. My wife, my second daughter and I would take turns to be at his side twenty-four hours a day. While I was visiting I took him a Bible and said, 'Felix, when you feel well enough and have enough strength just

read a little bit of the Bible. God will speak to you through it.’

I asked Elliott, all the Betel leaders, and all my friends to pray for my son. So they prayed daily that he would be healed, and more importantly, that he would be saved and come to know the Lord. One day, at midday, when it was my turn to be there Elliott came in to visit. At this stage Felix was very delicate, very weak. Elliott told Felix that he needed to trust in the Lord and explained how he had lost his own son in very difficult circumstances. At this moment Elliott looked at me as if he was asking me if it was okay to continue. Then he looked at Felix and said, ‘Felix, would you like to receive Jesus Christ into your life as Lord and Saviour?’ My son said, ‘Yes’, as though he was just waiting for someone to ask him!

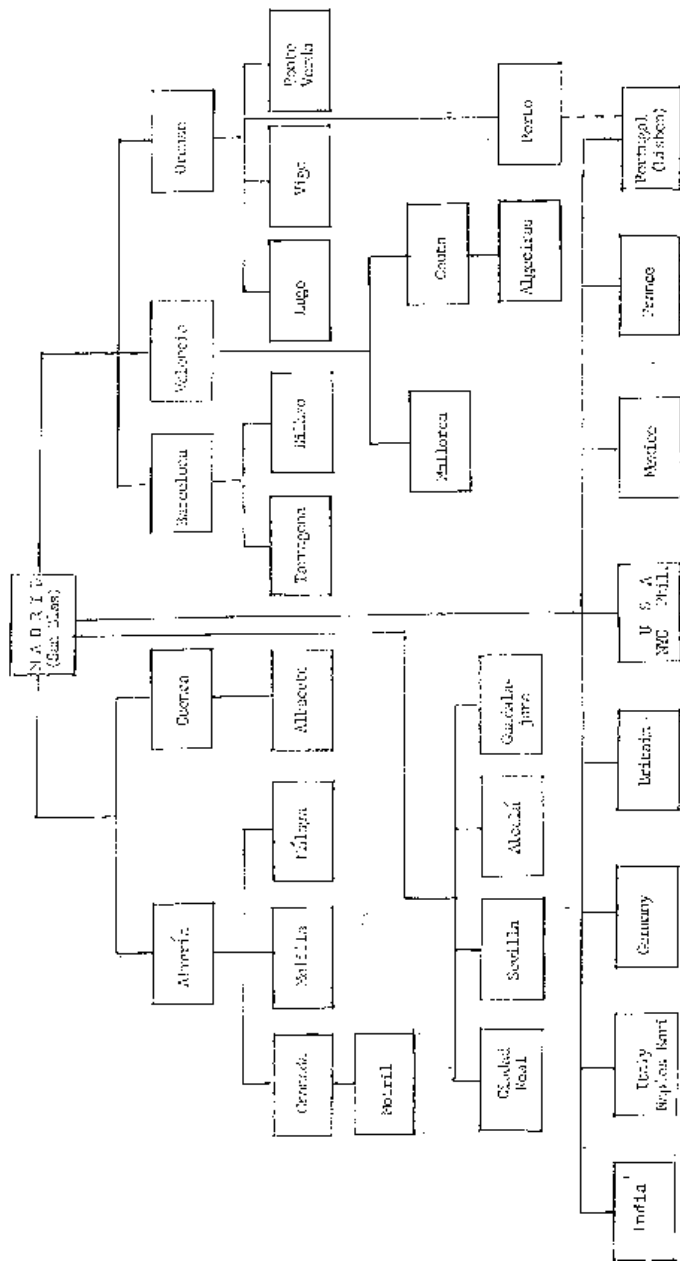
Elliott was on one side of the bed, I was on the other and Elliott prayed. Felix repeated the prayer. He said it with such sincerity and I saw a joy in his face immediately after he said it. When my wife arrived the first thing Felix said to her was, ‘You know what’s happened, Mama? Elliott came in, and I received Jesus Christ in my heart.’

*[Felix went to be with the Lord two days later.]*





# THE GROWTH OF BETEL



**PART II**  
**MULTIPLICATION**



# 1

## A BRITISH CENTRE – READY MADE!

KENT & MARY ALICE MARTIN

*Kent Martin is a trained journalist and gifted musician. He and Mary Alice are a great song leading team and made a vital contribution to Betel's worship in Madrid during their first term.*

*God is constantly looking for faithful couples whom He can stretch by giving them increasing responsibilities, and the Martins were no exception. Faithfully supported and prayed for by their home church in Pennsylvania they relate how God started to prepare them for a big change of ministry.*

*Kent commences the story.*

Roughly three and a half years ago a pastor in USA had a word from the Lord for us and said, 'Kent, you are coming to a sharp turn in the road that you are not expecting.' This was during a short furlough. When we returned to Spain, to our complete surprise the Betel leadership in Madrid asked us if we would consider opening up Betel in England.

We started to weigh this up before the Lord and felt quite positive about this change of direction. I had links with David Partington of Yeldall Manor, a rehabilitation centre in England. He and Terence Rosslyn-Smith set up meetings for me to meet people in Britain. They welcomed us – hesitatingly at first – and then opened the doors wider for us. They arranged for Elliott and me to meet with a wide cross-section of leaders concerned about drug rehabilitation.

So we landed in Britain in May 1995 and came to Birmingham to meet with fifteen church leaders and other concerned

people. They asked us, 'What is Betel looking for and how can we help you?'

We had originally thought of opening in Manchester or Liverpool where needs were great, but in this meeting we said we were looking for a property reasonably close to a city where we could establish a centre and have links to the business community. They proposed that we seek a large country property that would meet British regulations. They also recommended that we establish a 'Christian Community' rather than a 'rehabilitation centre'. In other words, have a low profile.

At the meeting we were introduced to Alex Elsaesser, an American missionary, who was in charge of a property leased from the Bournville Village Trust. The group said, 'Alex is going to take you to look at his place while we continue our discussions here.'

While other members of this group were very well dressed, Alex was quite casual and seemed quite detached during the meeting. In fact he had actually spent most of the time reading *Rescue Shop*. We had the impression that we were being politely invited to leave an 'important' meeting to take a tour of an old run down rehabilitation work. But we were very mistaken.

He took us in his van to Windmill House. As we walked through the property we looked at a checklist that we had written up and found that this place fitted the criteria perfectly. We asked how far it was from the centre of town. 'Twenty-five minutes' was the reply, 'and the buildings meet the regulations of the local council.' He showed us through the dormitory rooms, the well-equipped kitchen, the lounge with its adequate seating. Outside was a furniture workshop, and the buildings edged a five acre sports area.

We discovered that he had been running this place as a Christian Community, not a rehabilitation centre – and this, too, fitted our objective. Over a cup of tea Alex opened his heart. He said, 'I invited you here because I would like you to take over this property.' It turned out that he and his large family (a wife and nine children) were hoping to move out to a less stressful

type of service. Apparently he had been given authority from the Bournville Trust to transfer the lease to us!

He had been praying and asking the Lord to bring along a reputable group who could take over. When he discovered that we were part of WEC, and after he had read the book, he felt assured that we were the answer. Elliott and I invited him there and then to come to Spain at Betel's expense so that he could see the nature of the work firsthand. Alex finally said, 'When can you come and take over?' We had thought of starting in Britain in eighteen months' time, but he wanted us there much sooner than that, so it was arranged that we come in January 1996 – just six and a half months ahead.

*Mary Alice continues.*

We were shocked to be asked to go to Britain but God spoke to us separately. I remember I was in Granada for a weekend break with Kent's mother. The Lord wakened me in the middle of the night (amazing – I sleep like a log!) and told me to read Isaiah 62. I came to verse 10: 'Go through, go through the gates, clear the way for the people, build up the highway, remove the stones, lift up a standard over the peoples. Behold the Lord has proclaimed to the ends of the earth, say to the daughters of Zion, Lo your salvation has come; his reward is with him and his recompense before him. And they will call them the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord and you will be called – a city not forsaken.' I felt this was the Lord's encouragement to go forward.

This of course was before Kent visited England and the property was offered. That scripture has been a rock for us. It hasn't been easy pioneering a new work but there has been no escape for us – we know God is in this. He is going to build a work here, so it is not a burden.

*Kent explains:*

In the Gospels all that Peter needed to move him out of the boat

was the Lord's word, 'Come!' The rapid unfolding of God's plan, with the leasing of this property worth millions of pounds, was God's 'come' to us. Once we opened we were in business almost immediately. Within one weekend we had our first man, and within a couple of weeks we had seven.

Unlike what happened in Spain, these men contacted us. This came about through the few contacts we had made and through the Betel literature that we had distributed to churches and groups. It was a good confirmation that there was a need here.

*Mary Alice describes how work became available.*

Regarding finance, we began to put out flyers indicating we were open for lesser skilled work such as gardening and painting. The jobs came immediately. Initially we had a gift to support us from Madrid Betel but since then we have been financially independent. Lots of work opened up for us. Fortunately we had some men who could do gardening and painting! Then we started a charity or 'opportunity' shop, selling used furniture, clothing and bric-a-brac. It is in a large supermarket-type building that we obtained for a very low rent because we fixed it up ourselves. It has two floors, totalling 7,000 square feet.

*Kent describes the march of events.*

David Partington and Terence Rosslyn-Smith have both been very helpful in getting us established and giving us a wide variety of contacts. I was introduced to David by an ex-heroin addict. We've been working with these men to develop co-operatives or employee-owned businesses where men can integrate back into society once again.

The most noteworthy aspect of all this is the speed and extent of developments in the two and a half years we have been here. Another major factor has been WEC's reputation in Britain; this has made the fledgling unknown branch incredibly acceptable in churches and fellowships. We've watched faces change when they realise we are part of WEC's thrust.

One hundred and forty WEC prayer groups now have had our



printed testimony and we have been invited to speak at WEC gatherings as far north as Edinburgh. The Evangelical Alliance accepted us quickly without requiring the prescribed two year probationary period.

Another group that has given good support is the 'Ground Level' churches – an association of about eighty fellowships largely between the Humber and the Wash in eastern England. They, under Pastor Stuart Bell's leadership, supported us in Spain long before we came to UK. We have been invited for many years to their annual festival where about 5,000 people attend. We have given workshops and presentations there and these have spread the word about Betel.

A number of teams have come from churches in Pennsylvania and Virginia and have done building and maintenance work. They have built us a small house, put in showers, and so on. They pay their own expenses, including food costs, and help finance the projects in which they have been engaged.

*Mary Alice describes the family situation.*

The children went right into the local school. For Ian, who was ten when we arrived, it was a hard adjustment. We had spent almost five years in Spain and because he spoke Spanish fluently the other children did not realise that he was not a 'foreigner' so he had more 'ribbing' than in Spain. Patricia was six and just starting school when she came so she picked up the Birmingham accent very rapidly. They have both settled well now. Ian recently won the gold medal for the high jump in the local school boy's competition.

In the early years Kent and I had to work very hard for long hours, so we know the tension between the demands of work and family. We have made adjustments in that area for the children's sakes.

*Kent discusses the fruit of their labours.*

We have started to see some fruit develop. God has told me to take my eyes off 'fruits' and to concentrate on 'roots'. The life-giving organism is what matters. Fruit is the long term

result in a healthy tree. During the first two years we had our numbers go up and down rarely passing twenty men in the program – with much turnover and little maturity. But this last year the roots of the tree have found firm rich soil. Today we have about thirty-five men steadily with us, and all our leaders are now British, the last single Spanish monitor having returned to Spain. We have more men now than we have ever had, and a number of these are acting very responsibly. Most of them are now born again. They are eager; they are praying and seeking the Lord – it is such a switch from the early days. We're looking for another place in Birmingham where we can help families and do some church planting. In the last few months we have started a church here in Windmill House. Outsiders are starting to come in and we usually have around fifty at services. There is a sense of bonding and a desire for outreach.

One afternoon at our charity shop in Yardley Wood a gentleman entered and asked what we did. Our men started to talk to him about Betel and the nature of our work. It turned out that he was a director of the Aston Re-investment Trust which is also partially funded by Cadburys. They lend money to charities and new businesses that can't get conventional financing because they don't have a high credit rating.

We told him we needed a truck to move furniture to our warehouse. 'I think we could help with that,' this gentleman said. Within a few weeks we had a loan that enabled us to purchase a suitable seven and a half ton vehicle. It turned out that he was a member of the Charities Aid Foundation which gives or lends up to half a billion pounds a year to deserving charities around the world.

Through him I was introduced to the chairman of this Foundation in London to whom I was able to explain Betel's function; later Elliott Tepper was able to meet him and discuss other ways in which the Foundation could help, namely by brokering a \$4,000,000 loan to purchase a building for use as an international headquarters and church, in Madrid.

\* \* \*

We are tremendously grateful to Alex and Irene Elsaesser. They have been so generous not only in handing over the property but also in handing over a lucrative franchise owned by Service Master. This is an American business based in Chicago that franchises the rights and technology to repair and restore quality furniture. One of our men, Derek Whitmore, now handles this department. The name has been changed to 'Furniture Medic' and we now have the franchise for the Birmingham/Coventry area. We would like to see this develop in Spain also.

The Bournville Trust rents this property to us at the princely sum of £33 per month. This lease extends to 2001 with the option of renewing until 2005. The property is worth between one and two million pounds.

We thank God for the contribution of Victor and Sandra Bautista. Victor (from USA) is in charge of the mechanics and Sandra (from New Zealand) has set up the office accounting system. Also for Chris Garrett, a British engineer who gave us two years, working on the sewage system, the well, the computer, and buildings. God has certainly blessed us since coming to Britain!

In July 1999 Kent, Elliott and Mary were invited to Ireland by Bill and Helen Lacy to explore the possibility of opening Betel in Dublin. Betel of Ireland is now in the process of being incorporated as a charity and a search for the right installations is under way. Betel of Britain will sponsor the new community.

## 2

# ‘I’VE GOT JUST THE PLACE FOR YOU’

## BETEL IN ITALY

Elliott Tepper

In 1993 God moved in our hearts and we had a sense that He wanted us to go beyond Spain to other nations. After the start in USA I felt that Italy ought to be one of our next steps; I had a tremendous burden on my heart for that country but I didn’t know how to begin. We didn’t have any contacts; I knew WEC was there but I didn’t know any of the team personally.

One day I was sitting in my office in the Madrid centre. It is on a mezzanine floor that overlooks the main auditorium below. I was praying, ‘Lord, how can we find a way into Italy? Whom do we know there that can help us?’ Suddenly I remembered that about two years before, Manuel Fernandez, the director of SEFOVAN (which is an evangelical Bible School in Madrid where one of our WEC missionaries, Uwe Hutter, lectures) had been to Italy and had made contact with a church there. In fact it was one of the largest in the country with about one thousand members. Michelle Romeo is the pastor – a former milkman whom God has taken up and used to start a number of churches. Manuel had remarked about the dynamic of this church, and how spiritually-minded the people were. This pastor was seeking more theological understanding for his people and had asked Manuel over to give help and advice. That was two years ago and I hadn’t seen him since then.

So I thought, ‘That’s the man I need to talk to.’ Just as I said that I looked out of my open office door, and who was standing

in the middle of our sanctuary but Manuel! I shouted, ‘What are you doing here?’ he shouted back, ‘I’ve just brought a young man in to go on your programme.’

‘Manuel, you were in my mind a moment ago. We want to start up in Italy and you are the only person I know who has contacts there! Can you help us?’ He said, ‘Sure, I have just returned from Italy this week. I’ll send a fax off right away and get you an invitation.’

Within a day we had an official invitation from the largest church in Italy to go over, spend a week with the church and investigate possibilities. And that’s how we were directed – I believe supernaturally – to Michelle Romeo.

Lindsay McKenzie, a group of Betel leaders and I set off in a van for Italy. We drove along the coast from Barcelona, through France into Italy and down to Naples, stopping for two nights en route.

South Italy is so different from France or Switzerland, or even northern Italy. Everything is neat and tidy as far as Rome but from there on things are different, especially in the greater Naples metropolitan area. Public works show signs of neglect; buildings are in disrepair (because the mafia and often public servants have to be paid before any work can be done). In Naples there is crime and corruption and piles of garbage on the streets. The traffic, confusion and noise are unique in the western world. There is, of course, another Naples. Inside their homes there is beauty, even elegance. The people are very warm and there is a cosmopolitan air to the city. It is hard not to fall in love with Naples despite its ‘warts’.

We were well received by the church. They put us up in dormitories in the basement of their building; they gave us access to their kitchen; prepared many of our meals and treated us like family.

The pastor warmed to us and flung his whole weight behind our efforts. He introduced us to Guy Sottile who is an Italian married to an American. He is the director of the principal interdenominational Evangelistic Association in Italy. He is the

equivalent of a young Billy Graham to the Italian churches and is one of only a few that can bridge the differences between denominations.

The very week we were there he was in the process of planning a big national conference and had pastors assembled from all over the country. We were invited to give a presentation to them – a unique and strategic opportunity. During the same week Guy was also in the process of organising a city-wide campaign in Naples itself, so we had a further opportunity to speak to all the Neopolitan pastors. Needless to say, we had a tremendous introduction to Italy, and Betel's association with Guy Sottile was not lost on the Italian pastors.

Pastor Romeo introduced us to a lawyer who was a member of his congregation and he immediately started the legal process of obtaining government recognition for Betel.

Of course, we needed a property. The church people showed us a few places but none of them were suitable. I said to the young man from the church who was showing us around, 'Let's follow the ring-road round the city and we'll pray as we go.' At one point I felt urged to say, 'Let's turn off here.' We pulled up at a bar to ask if there was a real estate agent nearby. Someone said, 'There's one right across the street.'

When we explained to the agent what we wanted, she said, 'I've got just the place for you.' We had a look at it and it was quite suitable. The agent said she would arrange for us to meet the owner. The next day we met at the agent's office. But when the owner realised we wanted the property for a rehabilitation centre she was immediately put off and refused to consider a deal. I said, 'Please, we're here from Spain staying in Pastor Romeo's church and...' She broke in: 'Pastor Romeo? Why he's one of my best friends! If you are a friend of his then I'm prepared to rent the property to you.' Out of a population of two million people the Lord led us to a woman who was a friend of Michelle Romeo!

Then when it came to drawing up a contract I suggested we meet at five pm with the lawyer who was handling the Betel reg-

istration. When she heard who it was she exclaimed, ‘Why, that’s my lawyer too! And I have an appointment to see him at four!’

Again we sensed the hand of the Lord in all this. We had brought enough money for the contract (the deposit and first month’s rent), but had nothing left to purchase fittings or furniture – and we were leaving the next day.

But here is how God worked. During the week we had paid a courtesy visit to a WEC missionary working in the Naples area. He was a Swiss called Daniel Bachman and had been involved in church planting for many years. On that last day Daniel called on us just as we were loading the van to return to Spain. He said, ‘This is a gift from our church to help Betel get started in Italy.’ He handed us a large envelope full of money, three million lira (\$2,500) to be exact, which was enough to cover the cost not only of fitting out the villa but the charges involved in signing the contract!

One more miracle was the granting of fiscal cards. You can’t open a bank account without one, but you can’t get this card if you are not a permanent resident.

We went to the taxation office and were referred from one department to another all the way up to the eighth floor. Finally we met a supervisor who simply asked us to fill out a form and issued them on the spot! We then promptly opened a bank account before we left for Spain.

The Lord had worked in every aspect of this new beginning in Italy.

### 3

## IN MAFIA COUNTRY

LINDSAY & MYK MCKENZIE

*While the previous chapter covers the good things about Betel's entry into Italy, it has to be admitted that there were many problems in the early development of the work. This was to a large extent due to the poor health of the pioneer leader, Jambri, who eventually died of AIDS.*

*As time went on it became apparent that strong mature leadership was needed and gradually, through having to visit Naples from time to time, the burden came on Lindsay and Myk McKenzie and Armando and Emma Garcia.*

*Leaving Spain was to be a huge wrench for both families, but, obedient to the leading of the Lord and with the blessing of the Betel leadership in Madrid, they moved to Italy in August 1998.*

*Space prohibits a detailed examination of the local situation which they faced but the contrasts they encountered in dealing with Italian drug addicts make fascinating reading.*

One of the big differences that we noticed between Italy and Spain was the influence of the family. It is a big factor in the life of the Italian people. It is often the controlling factor. In Spain individuals can make personal decisions, but in Italy a decision is conditional on what the family thinks. So when it comes to a basic issue like conversion a person is often hindered by how he thinks the family will react. Also, the families often are more loyal to sons or daughters than to us who are trying to extricate them from the bondage of drug-taking.

Another factor is that the Spanish character is much more 'gungho' – willing to go out and conquer without worrying



about details. On the other hand, the Italian wants to know all the details before launching out. That works for good and bad. For instance, in Spain we have terrible trouble maintaining our vehicles. The Spanish driver starts the engine and thinks, 'Let's go; we'll look at the oil later', whereas the Italian mentality is more concerned with details and the aesthetic side of things. 'Let's check the oil, and make sure the tyres are good.' But we may not get off when planned, because there are so many details to be addressed.

Italy is wealthier than Spain and people can afford to cover up their son's drug addiction longer. Some Spanish families will pay for drugs for their sons rather than disclosing their shame to others. Covering up is even more prevalent in Italy where image – what you project yourself to be – is a lot more important. It's very hard to recognise drug addicts in Italy because they will have had the latest haircut, and they will wear designer clothes. In Spain their teeth are falling out, they are unshaven, dirty, unkempt, and are wearing ragged clothes. In Italy their parents will make sure they look good in spite of their drug addiction. The young people play on that too. 'I'll go to a centre if you buy me the latest Nike shoes.' The parents of one lad (a plumber) bought him a three piece suit for our end-of-year celebration. He looked stunning. This is just normal for south Italy.

In the beginning, we received a lot of men through church contacts. They would often come in with a Bible under their arm, spouting verses, and praying, right from the first day. They had been baptised; but they were hooked! Even though going through cold turkey, they wanted to be made leaders! They couldn't be taught anything. More recently we've returned to the old method of going out into the streets, to the plazas, and the stations and bringing them in from there. We would rather have people with no church background because they are far more responsive.

One of the things we had to undo with church contacts was their praying in the meetings. They pray in such a 'religious' way. I have had to say, 'If anyone wants to pray it will be one sentence, about something specific, and in your own words.'

We've seen an improvement, but there's still a way to go. I think this is a reflection on the culture more than the churches. Religion is part of the life-style. There is a God-consciousness at every level, even though their practical living doesn't reflect it.

Another feature in Italy is the difference between the northern and southern cultures. The one thing that is apparent in the southern culture is generosity. Initially there is suspicion; you walk into a shop, and you don't get a smile; it's almost a scowl, until they get to know you and the opposite occurs. They are very generous and hospitable.

One thing that most shopkeepers have to contend with is the payment of the local mafia 'tax'. In Naples they are involved in every level of society from politics right down to the man that stands on a street corner selling contraband tobacco. They are the scourge of the local shopkeepers. In the week after we opened our first second-hand shop Miguel Jambrina had a visit from the local mafia (complete with pistols in their back pockets). They made noises about payments that had to be made to them every month. Miguel played ignorant and said that he knew nothing about what they were talking about. Having a heavy accent probably reinforced that; he said he would have to talk to the owner of the premises that they were renting. He gave his name and at that point the two mafiosi looked surprised and said, 'No problem, that's okay.' They never came back! We found out later that the owner of the building was higher up the ladder than they were, so the Lord protected us there.

The other second-hand shop was opened in August, 1997 and began to make a profit from the first day. Elia, one of the Italian leaders, was put in charge. He had spent one and a half years with us in Madrid. Incidentally he was spectacularly delivered from demon control as well as drug addiction, whilst there.

One Monday morning in the beginning of December, a lady from next door came in to the shop and angrily accused the boys of having burgled her apartment during the weekend. (Gold and jewels were stolen apparently). Of course the boys denied such an unfair accusation and finally the lady, unconvinced, left.

Three hours later five thugs stormed into the shop and without warning began to beat the men who were there, throwing them to the ground, kicking and punching them. The customers that happened to be in the shop all fled at the sight. The thugs yelled out, 'Where are the jewels that you stole?' 'Don't resist or we'll shoot!' yelled one, who immediately reached inside his suit coat for a pistol. Elia managed to say amidst the chaos, 'We've come to bless this suburb not steal from it. Even though you are beating us up, we love you and mean you no harm.' Finally the five thugs left threatening, 'If the goods don't turn up we're coming back to give you more!' The four boys were badly bruised and one was treated in hospital for a sprained wrist. Another had only just come out of hospital days before after having been in a diabetic coma.

The rest of the neighbourhood was soon buzzing with comments and opinions. Apparently the man who had organised and participated in the beatings was the lady's live-in companion who was also a member of the local 'camorra', the name of the Neapolitan mafia. He was hooked on cocaine and was consuming ever-increasing amounts. He needed money for his habit so he stole the jewels from his girlfriend but blamed the robbery on the 'addicts' next door! Dealing and trafficking in drugs is OK in the mafia code of ethics, but taking drugs is not, so any mafioso found hooked is immediately kicked out.

Soon neighbourhood support built up for our Betel boys (such was the good testimony that the fellows had created in just four months) and finally the woman came down and apologised to our men. Elia replied, 'We hold no grudge against your friends!' The lady couldn't understand their attitude and asked, astonished, why they didn't hate her and her boyfriend for what they had done. Elia then shared his testimony with her. She began to cry and confessed that some years before she used to attend an evangelical church. Seeing how our fellows had behaved she blurted out, 'But I am going to start attending that church again because I have seen genuine Christianity right here.'

Two days later the boyfriend came by and sheepishly made

peace. He stopped short of apologising but that was probably the best that he could manage. He has been back on numerous occasions since then to buy second-hand furniture. A few weeks later the man that had threatened us with his pistol also turned up and (in his own way) showed remorse. He too has bought furniture. What the devil had planned, God has turned to our advantage.

\* \* \*

At a family level there are lots of pressures. We were able to put the girls into a small school so that they could have more individual attention, but we discovered that they were not allowed to go out and play at breaks or lunchtime because of fear that something will happen to them. School authorities don't want to be sued for any mishaps. There's a general fear of kidnapping. We don't allow them to play alone.

Another thing that we are up against continually is ever increasing government regulation. In Spain it took twelve years for local authorities to come upon us with rules governing drug rehabilitation. But in Italy it has come a lot quicker. Fortunately we have had these four years to become established, but now they are making noises about closing us down if we don't have everything in order. They see us as a 'clinic' which we are not. In fact what we do challenges most definitions of drug rehabilitation, because (a) the work is done by the ex-addicts themselves; (b) we take them out into society and (c) we see social insertion as an integral part of the rehabilitation process. So after a fifteen day drying-out period our people are back into the world, always accompanied by somebody. We are facing having to abide by government regulations and either changing our modus operandi or being closed down. We need the Lord's wisdom on how far we go, and at the same time guarding a very precious part of what we do. So far the police and authorities have a positive attitude towards us and are giving us a lot more time than we would normally be given because we have gained

a good reputation.

Betel is now part of the principal secular organisation which represents many drug rehabilitation programmes in Europe as well as in Canada and the States. It is based in Europe and acts as a pressure group with governments. We were able to go and speak to members of the European parliament in Brussels in June, 1998. This is part of our duty to be 'salt of the earth'.

The World Council of Therapeutic Communities, based in New York, has also recognised us as authorised counsellors.

\* \* \*

*To conclude this account of developments in Italy we now share the recent testimony of Armando and Emma Garcia, a Mexican couple who were members of the initial team that went from Spain to Italy. Armando writes:*

Our call to Italy came after nine marvellous years with Betel in Spain. During that time I had the privilege of living in the first residence near Madrid and serving as a missionary through all these years of amazing growth, from the first few men in Mejorada to the establishment of almost one hundred residences around the world.

In the midst of all this, God began to stir my heart deeply for the nation of Italy. One day, as I was seeking confirmation from the Lord, almost as a whim I said to him: 'Show me a reference to Italy in my Bible reading today.' (It had never been my custom to seek guidance in this way.) So I opened the Scriptures and my eyes fell on Acts 27:1. It said, 'And when it was determined that we should sail to Italy....'

The issue was settled for me but I waited for the Lord to speak to my wife also, so that she would be in full agreement with my vision. I knew that that would not be easy. When we had made an earlier exploratory trip she had exclaimed, on seeing the traffic in Naples, 'I could never live in a place like this!' But Emma heard the call from God, too, and it was precisely in Naples

that God commenced our training in this culture. We spent two years learning the language. It was a great day when I preached my first sermon in Italian and someone said ‘Amen!’. At last I knew I was communicating effectively.

With a vision and burden to advance the Kingdom, God spoke to me through Psalm 72:16: ‘There shall be an abundance of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.’ We visited different parts of Italy looking for a place to start a new centre, and we felt the promise of that verse lay in the North. Finally we focused very specifically on the city of Genoa and the mountains surrounding it. We knew that it had only six hundred evangelicals in a population of one million. We sensed that that was the land that would ‘flourish like grass of the earth’, but we never imagined how hard it would be, how violent the spiritual warfare against the forces of the enemy, or how jealous the devil was to preserve his domain.

In April 1999, Emma, Francisco Elia and I made some trips there to explore the region and find a house. There were few houses in the country available for rent and those that were had an exorbitant price tag. The city is located on a very narrow strip of land between the sea and foothills of the Alps and housing is at a premium. Finally, after much searching two possibilities arose, but we discovered that the first house had been destroyed by bombing in World War II and the second – a five storey building with eighteen rooms – had been burned down, so we went to the Lord again in prayer. We just knew he had a house set aside for us and that it was only a matter of time before we would find it.

Sergio, a member of a church in the historic centre of Genoa, told me about a house in the mountains near Torriglia which, in his time, had been used as a Christian conference centre, but had been unoccupied for eighteen years. We went to see it and found that although not bombed or burned, it was not far removed from such a condition. Next to it lived an old man named Giuseppe who for the previous thirty years had been

the caretaker. When he found out our intentions he vehemently opposed us and presented us with a long list of impossibilities. But once he came to know us better his attitude changed and he became a good friend and, indeed, a collaborator. In fact he set us on the trail of the owner whom we were eventually able to locate in New York. We reached an agreement to occupy the house and so made a start.

A team of eight with Francisco Elia as leader arrived on June 20th. During the first days the church of the Reconciliation gave the team hospitality and helped us tremendously in restoring the property. Another Christian group called 'Veri Amici' led by Daniel Bachman, a WEC missionary, gave us lots of help also. It was a great adventure fixing up this house, with its leaky roof, broken pipes, fallen walls and so on, and doing it all in the presence of 'girls' – little squirrel-like animals that kept jumping over everything.

We discovered that the water supply did not come from the city or a well, but from a natural fountain in the mountain. It was a marvel of the Lord for us to see it leaping out as if some invisible hand was squeezing crystal clear water out of the rock just for our benefit. It was a constant reminder of Christ our Rock and our Fountain of Living Water.

If we had not had this wonderful base, it would have been impossible to carry on in the face of all the trials and difficulties that we encountered in the next few months. Hell seemed to oppose our advance in every way. The spiritual warfare was intense. My family was attacked. Our goods were attacked. On the first day we went to look for a separate place for my family, my car would not start – the motor had seized up. We had to have it taken to a mechanic who took two weeks to fix it. During that time I borrowed another car from Daniel. It had always gone well but I had driven it only a few kilometres when the motor began to throw out water and smoke. The floor of the car resembled a swimming pool and the engine went on fire. Later, after my car had been fixed I had a phone call from our men to say that their van was stuck in the middle of a highway, and the motor had

broke in two. Yes, they had checked the oil and water, but for no apparent reason the engine block had simply broken up, so now we had men living up the mountain with no transportation. I had to give them my car so that the centre could function.

These extra expenses were unexpected and enormous. I remember one night I sat down on the sofa in the home where we were being given hospitality. Without turning on the light I explained the situation to my wife. She tried to encourage me and then said, 'A letter has come for you. Would you like to see it?' I asked her to open it. She said, 'It doesn't seem like a letter; it's a bunch of banknotes.' I said, 'How many? How many zeroes?' She counted, 'One-two-three-four.' I turned on the light and looked carefully at the money. 'This is exactly the price of a new motor for the car.' A Christian, the same morning that the van had broken down, had felt led to donate this amount to Betel!

The story doesn't finish there. The same day on which we picked up the van with its new engine some of our men went to work in my car and on the way the whole transmission broke down – another expensive job.

The material losses were costly but they were nothing to what was to follow – a tragedy in the spiritual realm, and our worst experience. While I was still coming to terms with the transmission failure in my car Francisco Elia called me on the telephone (at that moment I was then in England at the Betel leaders' conference) to tell me that the second leader of the house had taken the van with six others, and had tried to persuade them to 'shoot up' with him. It was so unexpected, unthinkable – diabolical. At the last minute three of them got out of the van and would not participate. Only the newest and weakest stayed with him. They first got drunk and then shot up with heroin. The shock was devastating. We had been like a family. Two of the men who did not take part were so sickened that they left the community, totally discouraged. In the end only two of the original team remained.

From these ashes God has raised up another group. What pleases me most is the fighting spirit and the willingness to



co-operate that now exist in the team. There are still battles, but I remember one of the last words of Raul Casto, the first Betelito, shortly before he died: 'If we do not surrender, we will conquer.' The Lord has spoken to us much about 'walking in the light'. When we do that we have real fellowship with one another and give no place to the works of darkness.

Some of the new arrivals have gone through tremendous withdrawal symptoms, with vomiting and convulsions – things that we have not seen for a long time in the older larger centres where our spiritual covering has longer been in place. But all of this has focused our minds on why we are here. We do not want to lose sight of the love of Jesus and his great compassion for the lost. Genoa still has a great place in the plan of God for the blessing of Italy and the world.

## **BETEL'S BATTLES IN THE BIG APPLE**

ELLIOTT TEPPER

While we experienced great growth in the eighties in Spain, the burden for the nations was upon our hearts – we worked diligently where we were, but we had a missionary vision as we developed in the Spanish provinces.

It was in our nature to be thinking beyond Spain. The logical step would have been to France, Portugal or Italy – particularly the last two because of the similarities of language. But Portugal was poor (then) and I wasn't sure it could sustain our type of ministry (although I was eventually proved wrong).

In early 1992 we became aware of the great need in the inner cities of America. The media was full of terrible stories. The USA was experiencing the effects of the Savings and Loan debacle, and of recession, rising unemployment, crime, and drug addiction. It appeared that American cities were almost more needy than those in Europe.

Also there was no self-supporting, peer-driven rehabilitation programme in America. Such centres that existed were largely supported by churches and denominations or they were private, expensive and merely psychologically focused. We had a close link with Paul Johansson of the New York School of Urban Ministries (NYSUM); he is also the president of Elim Bible Institute in Lima, New York. Paul had a great burden for the inner cities and through him we were made more deeply aware of the need. We also knew that the USA was home to about thirty million Spanish-speaking people and that the drug problem was greatest among Afro-Americans and Latin Americans. The more

we talked about it, the more we investigated the American scene, the more we prayed – the greater the burden grew. Finally the Betel leaders felt that a work among the Spanish-speaking drug addicts in the inner cities of USA was of God. We were sure that the success we had experienced in Spain could be repeated there.

We arrived in early 1993 and stayed with Paul Johansson at NYSUM; we shared our vision with him and he was excited about it. He had visited Spain and knew that our programme was distinct from others in America and that we had something to offer in New York City. Paul took us around; we looked at David Wilkerson's Times Square Church, Teen Challenge (on Clinton Ave., Brooklyn), and other ministries to the marginalised. New York City was full of them, but we felt that Betel had something special to offer.

We found an old curtain factory in Hart Street; a rough area in Brooklyn. We talked to the owner. He still had a factory running on the ground floor but the second floor was empty. It probably had 10,000 square feet or more, so we signed a contract to rent it.

Then we went to visit my home church in Wilmington, North Carolina – Myrtle Grove Presbyterian church – and Robert Warwick who is one of the senior elders and a senior partner in a large accounting firm, offered to help with the legal work needed to register Betel. William Hill, a prominent lawyer, also helped in drawing up a constitution for Betel America.

Within a few months I returned with a team from Spain. It consisted of Tito and Isabel, Ivan and Encarne, Victor and Sandra Bautista, Manuel, Noel, Antonio and some other young people. 'Tito' (Lorenzo Herrera) was one of our first five pastors. He had founded the Almería work and the Málaga work. He was a pioneer type with lots of personal dynamism. He had been a gang leader who lived by his cunning in San Blas – a real 'tough guy'. He had French and we thought he could quickly learn English.

Having rented the Hart Street property we began to remodel it. In the early stages the team stayed in the basement of NYSUM, in the Astoria district of Queens, thanks to the generosity of Paul and his staff. We raised up dividing walls, constructed

dorms, a kitchen, dining room, office, toilets, meeting room, etc.

During our first visit Tito, Paul and I had located a three storey building in 79th Street, East Elmhurst, on sale for \$169,000. At that time interest rates were low, it was a buyer's market, and so, for 10% down we were able to purchase a home with three apartments. This became the residence for the pastor and his wife, and the other two couples. Then we found a place suitable for a second-hand furniture warehouse on Roosevelt Ave. This we rented for \$5,000 a month. It was a busy commercial street underneath an elevated train line. The neighbourhood was almost entirely Latin, though our landlord was Indian. It looked, sounded, and smelled just like Latin America. Our next door neighbour ran a grocery store that specialised in Mexican foods. The owners were from Puebla, Mexico!

In the beginning, progress was slow. Not too many were interested in our programme. We hadn't taken into account the American welfare system or realised how much help was available for the poor. These people would carry a set of cards that told them where free meals, accommodation and clothes were available on each day of the week!

Between the government and the churches, drug addicts didn't have much motivation to be cured. But people started to come in – Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, South Americans and a few African Americans. Many were illegal immigrants with no papers. At its height the community grew to forty or fifty (staff included).

Suddenly city officials started to inspect us – fire department people, housing, gas and water inspectors, etc. (New York City rivals any of the old marxist or socialist states for government regulations, bureaucracy, nomenclature – and tax burden.)

Then the fire department and zoning authorities issued injunctions against us because we had established a residential complex in an industrial area. We tried to get the zoning changed. In court we explained we were taking drug addicts off the street, but they closed us down. We simply could not meet their demanding requirements. Without a doubt we had the

neatest, cleanest building in the area; on our street there were stores that sold drugs, and an illegal nightclub/casino, but they ignored them and closed us down.

I remember one memorable day just before we closed, asking the Lord, 'Why New York?' There were so many difficulties. The Lord directed me to Jonah where I read, 'Get thee to that great city.' How could we give up? We knew we were doing what God wanted. But life was hazardous. The team felt, and I agreed, that maybe a better neighbourhood would help. After all, life on Hart Street was like an action movie.

Two policemen were shot in the doorway of our building. A neighbour across the street committed suicide by throwing himself out of the window with an electrical cable wound round his neck. Almost every week someone was shot or killed near us. The walls were covered in graffiti; many buildings were burned out. A high percentage of the people were on welfare.

Once, the police parked in front of our building while they examined a stolen car that had been abandoned nearby. They called for a tow truck to remove it. It was expected in about fifteen minutes, so they drove off but in that short time twenty or so people descended on it and removed everything – windshield, windows, doors, bumpers, even the motor. Only the frame was left standing by the time the tow truck arrived. And they did it all without vehicle tools, because if someone is found with a tool in possession he is immediately arrested. The man who took the engine did it with a piece of pipe.

Yet on every corner there were Latin American missions. There was lots of religion but the salt of the gospel did not seem to be changing things. Of course one wonders how much worse the inner city would have been without these store-front light houses.

We found another house opposite the 79th Street property which Tito's family and the men moved into, Tito in the flat and the men in the back. We turned Tito's old home into a girls' residence, with Marie José and two Mexican missionaries, Josefina and Elba in charge. (Elba had been one of our dentists in Madrid.)

We started another furniture store on Steinway Avenue in Astoria and another men's home in another part of Brooklyn. So it seemed that we were beginning to take off.

But for one reason or another we started to lose workers. Noel felt the Lord's leading to join NYSUM. He was a university graduate and an engineer whom we had sent for Bible training to the WEC Missionary Training College in Holland. Today he is serving Habitat for Humanity. Then a number of single Spanish men left us, some with good reasons, but others just lost heart. We began to realise that New York City was a battlefield.

When Betel of Britain opened it seemed right for Sandra and Victor Bautista, who were English speaking, to go there, so we found ourselves understaffed. After two or three years we had only a few Americans who had gone through the whole programme. They were good fellows; we loved them and I think they loved us but they just did not have that spiritual 'steel' that we were accustomed to seeing in Spain. Perhaps they gave the best they could, given the spiritual climate of New York City. But the fact remained – workers left and indigenous workers were not formed.

Our costs were high – the highest of all Betel centres, yet our housing was in some ways sub-standard. New Yorkers were generally less generous than other cultures. Often we were given junk. The City even charged us \$100 for every visit to the dump. It was a struggle. Tito and Isabel and the few remaining Spaniards were working hard, even sacrificing their own family and personal times to try to make things work. I know that often Tito used his own money to pay Betel's bills. Betel International sent money to our USA work more than to any other outreach. Mary and I tried to help them financially but it seemed at times more like a black hole in space, absorbing energy rather than giving radiance to the dark night of New York City.

About this time a group in Philadelphia was put in touch with us through our WEC headquarters there. It was the Kensington Street mission, and they were interested in us taking over their

work. We wondered if this was God's answer because we were realising that New York was not the best place for a drug centre. We should perhaps have gone to a smaller, friendlier, lower cost city first.

We visited this work. There was a large theatre that had been turned into a rescue mission. They had a large dining area and some offices, a small two-bedroomed house plus a small piece of property in the Pocono mountains. So we accepted their offer less the Pocono gift. It had a tax lien on it. The plan was to place Tito and Isabel in one city and Ivan and Encarne in another. We had dreams of sending addicts and resources from one city to the other. We thought that with a little faith and creativity New York and its new frontier in Philadelphia would generate new synergistic energy.

But once again we experienced a set back. Because of moral failure one worker had to return to Spain for discipline and restoration. Praise God he is now fully restored and serving God faithfully in another centre.

So by now we had five properties in New York, two in the Philadelphia area, and inadequate leadership to carry the work. Although we had been up to forty or fifty in New York, including staff, now we were only twenty five between there and Philadelphia.

Another negative factor was that our Spanish workers never really got on top of the English language. We could communicate with the Latin Americans but we cut ourselves off from English speakers. We made no impression in English speaking churches which might have supported us. We took a short cut that turned out to be a long way round. We should have developed church relationships from the very beginning. We were too cocky. We had come out of the boom years in Spain self-sufficient and we discovered later that we needed to relate to the churches – as we have done in Britain and Italy.

Then we proliferated into too many properties too quickly, and we weren't prepared for losses of workers. So we were caught with a number of contractual agreements that we could

not comfortably sustain. We did meet and fulfil every obligation – with the help of Betel’s international fund.

Finally in the summer of 1998 Mary and I made a trip to New York to talk with Tito and Isabel. We went with the backing of Betel’s International Council of Elders. Essentially we told the team that drastic changes would have to be made to save the work and that if in the next year Betel of America was not self-supporting and fruitful, we would have to consider closing it. We were not condemning them. In fact, we felt that Tito would be better used by God in Spain, Portugal or Italy. Of course, Tito and Isabel at first were very reluctant to quit, but came to appreciate the seriousness of the situation.

I told them that we would do everything possible to help them. First, we closed down one house in Philadelphia. Then we closed the men’s house and the thrift store in Brooklyn. We also closed the little church in Ozone Park. We moved Tito’s family out of the front half of the Queen’s men’s residence and created one large consolidated men’s programme on all three floors of the property. Tito moved across the street into our former girls’ residence. There was sacrifice on all levels – and savings. Then God intervened and granted us three new permanent visas for Spaniards. In six months the community was viable and economically sound. They have hope for the future.

Numbers in Philadelphia have been strengthened and some helpers have come from Faith Training Centre in South Carolina. Also in Philadelphia another group sold us a large three-storey house in a better area on very favourable terms, so we have moved the men there, but still retain the Kensington Street property for a furniture warehouse, large thrift store, office, meeting place and welfare centre.

We must thank Glenn Kling and the Baptist church in Wilmington, North Carolina. He and his church have greatly helped us with donations and with work teams that remodelled the theatre.

What have we learned from all of this? Grace – all is grace. When God blesses and enables, that is because He has been at work, not us. When we seem to fail, despite our efforts, then



we must count on God's grace again. This time to endure and not faint.

It is very easy to project successful methods from one cultural context and spiritual theatre to another. It is quite different to discover the actual lie of the spiritual terrain and move with God accordingly. It has taken us a couple of years to make adjustments, but we are still there, still on our feet. Tito and his team may not have conquered New York City and Philadelphia but hundreds of lives have been touched for God. They have two living rehabilitation communities and a small Latin church in six years of work. We'll let God decide if it has been worth the battles.

## HARD LESSONS IN MEXICO

ELLIOTT TEPPER

Around 1994 we began to have an interest in Mexico. We had never considered it as a goal, principally because it was experiencing revival. The church was doubling in size every five or so years. The national church was dynamic and there were thousands of missionaries in the country. All sorts of para-church groups were springing up so I did not feel we had a place there. Neither did I think our kind of activities like selling used furniture, painting, and light construction would fit in a poor economy with very low wages and high unemployment.

Then we received a missionary from the Amistad Cristiana ('Christian Friendship') Church in Jalapa – Dr Carlos Rodriguez, a dentist in his late thirties. He came to set up our first permanent dental clinic in Madrid and quickly became a 'Betelito' at heart. He lived on the farm with the men and he really loved Betel. He kept pushing the idea of opening up in Mexico. One day he came to me and said that there was a family in Jalapa that would lend us a property to get a rehabilitation centre started.

I made a visit but found that the property was tucked away in the mountains. We had thought that there were facilities but the offer was only of undeveloped land, which meant we would have to build buildings and construct a road. We therefore declined.

The Amistad church in Jalapa is pastored by Ricardo Marcello, an American missionary, and a graduate of Faith Training Centre. We visited his church and through him we discovered that there was a large house in the town for sale. We were able to purchase this on very favourable terms. It was a beautiful

well-appointed place. So that's where we started. We had chosen Fulgencio Suarez, who was the director in Galicia, to be the leader, and assembled a team around him.

The centre prospered and soon we had twenty people resident. We decided to extend to Vera Cruz, one hour down the mountain on the coast. Things seemed to be going well. Then we commenced in Puebla, an industrial city, five hours away where there was another Amistad church with 5,000 members.

But then we ran into trouble, or rather, a brick wall. We had made the mistake of calling all our young workers 'missionaries'. This gave them a kind of status that went to their heads. After all, even WEC workers with Bible school training and candidate course behind them are still only called 'probationers' or 'new workers' for their first two years! It wasn't all their fault. Out of the goodness of their hearts the church members received them warmly and treated them well. In fact, too much attention was showered upon them by the families and particularly by the young girls.

One of our men who was a plumber fell in love with a Mexican lady who was a doctor, so he left the team and married her. Several others started to have friendships and also left Betel. Remember, some of these were young men just recently delivered from drugs! The two with girlfriends repented and returned so we accepted them back again.

However, in the midst of a calendar-selling campaign they suddenly left again, taking the money and the van with them – \$2,000 in cash and our best vehicle! Our testimony in Pueblo was ruined.

We finally located the van. It was in a police compound but they would not release it till we paid certain fees which amounted to the total value of the van! While it was in the compound it was totally stripped. So after paying the equivalent of the price of the van to get it back into our possession we had to pay that much again to refit it. Even the calendars which these men stole were sold on the streets and the money kept for themselves. They lived for a few months as imposters – Betel's ambassadors of

'bad' will.

Finally when they had spent all the money on drugs one decided to return to us. Fulgencio felt it right to receive him but because of what he had done we decided that he should be returned to Spain. He went to one of our centres, is restored and is making good. The other is still begging on the streets of Puebla in Betel's name.

All this brought our work in Puebla to a temporary halt. In addition we came to realise that the centre in Jalapa was too far from sources of hard drug addiction and not the ideal starting point. What we should have done was go to the USA border where there is much drug addiction, high crime, heavy industry, and denser population.

So again through over-extension, economic pressure and the failure of workers we have learned some hard lessons. We have closed Vera Cruz and Jalapa (though we still own the Jalapa house) and have concentrated our efforts in Puebla where we still have friends in Amistad. We rented a farm in Chautzingo, about thirty miles from Puebla, where we have a really successful men's centre with about twenty men. We also have a pastoral residence, an office and a furniture store in the centre of Puebla. So after much struggle we are becoming established.

We are running a small farm in Chautzingo where we have chickens, rabbits and sheep. A government grant is helping us with that and also with a furniture making project. We have even started a small church at the farm for the village people. In this part of Mexico alcoholism is rife, and is relatively a greater problem than hard drugs. In fact, most of the addicts who come to us are on soft drugs like marijuana, hashish, cocaine and glue. Those who sniff glue have usually suffered some degree of brain damage.

We've also started meetings in the centre of Puebla for unchurched people and the parents of the addicts. We certainly could never have started Betel in Mexico without the help of our Amistad friends.

The pastors of the Puebla church have been so co-operative

and supportive, even helping us to gain legal recognition. They have generously lent us the help of their accountant and other administrators in the setting up of our office. One of their pastors, Sergio Trevino, is the president of Betel of Mexico and our legal representative before the government. Fulgencio is particularly grateful and appreciative of Amistad's contribution. He has married Cristina, a member of the Jalapa Amistad congregation.

## HORROR IN HAMBURG

ELLIOTT TEPPER

The story of Betel's beginning in Germany starts with Lutz Damerow – a young man who came to spend a summer with us. He was referred to us by people on the Spanish Decision magazine staff. He wanted to familiarise himself with Spanish language and culture. He was a Lutheran but I'm not quite sure where he really stood then, spiritually. Staying within the Betel community at Mejorada he came into a very vital relationship with Jesus and his life was revolutionised.

He returned to Germany to study at university and prepare for ministry in the Lutheran church. However, he found very few keen evangelicals in the liberal spiritual environment of the university and only a few in the School of Theology. Nevertheless he was hungry for God and sought out and found lively spiritual fellowship in different local churches. He had a real burden to see Betel started in Germany and would talk freely about the value of our work.

He informed us that there was a family near Krogaspé, half-way between Keele and Hamburg, who owned several farm properties. On one of these, which was very rundown, lived a woman who was an unsatisfactory tenant because she had failed to pay any rent for ten years and had not taken care of the place.

Lutz invited us to his church in the nearby town of Nieuminster. Raul Rayes, who had developed a close friendship with Lutz during their time together at the Mejorada farm, came with me. We visited this two-storeyed farmhouse, with some acres of land. It was eminently suited for our purposes although only two

rooms were immediately useable. We entered into negotiations with this family and eventually in 1995 sent a team of six with Raul Rayes as leader.

The owners of the farm, Reimer and Helma, did not only allow us to use the property rent free, but, when we started to renovate, supplied us with almost all the materials. They helped us to put in a new septic system, a new boiler, new insulation, and so on. Of course we bought a lot of items too, but they were so generous.

Another German who became a great help was Meyke Pingel. Earlier, her desire to learn Spanish led her to Madrid where she worked as a short-term worker with Betel. She came to know our Mexican Amistad missionaries and when they heard of her desire for Bible training, encouraged her to go to Amistad's Bible College in Puebla. Once in Mexico she met up with Raul Rayes who later came to Betel Madrid as an Amistad missionary. After graduating, Meyke returned to Germany and when Betel began there, was a very active volunteer in the new centre in Krogaspé. The friendship with Raul blossomed and they were eventually married, which was a good thing as it gave Betel natural 'roots' in Germany!

Lutz became the president of the Betel board. When he graduated from the Lutheran seminary he was able to arrange for a year of his probationary period to be spent working with Betel. His wife, Tina – for he was now married – had banking experience, so she took over the books and set us up with a suitable German financial system.

Concerning fruit in the work we had major difficulties. The government's social system provided so much that drug addicts had very little incentive to come to us, and when they did, they expected the moon! They would arrive with their tape decks and videos asking where their private room was! Our system of rising at 7am, devotionals, work without pay, no smoking, etc., meant that very few stayed. We also knew we were not getting the real down-and-out addicts because Krogaspé was an hour from the larger centres of population like Hamburg. Raul and the team

made regular trips there. I accompanied them when I would visit Germany and have never seen so many addicts concentrated in one place as at the Hamburg train station. It was common to see upwards to a thousand addicts openly buying, selling, and using hard drugs under the station roof, the police and citizens walking around them as if nothing unusual was taking place.

We made contact with the Salvation Army and another evangelical group that visited this area and they started referring people to us. But we realised that while the Krogaspé farm was a lovely place to live we were in the wrong place, in terms of making contact with addicts. We needed to be in or near Hamburg.

In 1998 Raul found a place suitable for a thrift store and office in one of the main streets. The rent was reasonable so we took it (although it was high compared to Spanish costs). We now have about twenty men. Four of them have been with us over a year and have matured into leaders. Increasingly we are getting men from East Germany and Berlin, and also from the poorer parts of Eastern Europe.



## GRACIAS, AMISTAD!

ELLIOTT TEPPER

The Amistad connection is primarily the result of the fact that Mary and I were part of the early formation of the Amistad (friendship) church in Mexico. We went there at the invitation of Jack Knowles who was a fellow student with us at Faith Training Centre in South Carolina. Our first book describes how we went to Mexico and worked there for four years. We were involved in a number of projects and developments in the city of Cholula, and during the last year and a half we were involved in raising up a work amongst the university students in the University of Americas where I was teaching economics. God worked graciously and there was a small movement among the university students and some of the faculty and staff, so that we were able to leave a group of about twenty students and other contacts linked to Jack Knowles. He began making weekly trips up from Oaxaca to attend the group. It prospered more and more and Jack had other contacts in Puebla especially through the family of Ernesto Alonzo. Jack, Ernesto and the students from the home group formed the beginning of Amistad Cristiana in Puebla which was related to Amistad Cristiana, a fellowship of churches with similar backgrounds. There are different Amistads now all over Mexico. They do meet and have conferences together but they are all independent. The work didn't just prosper – it exploded, is growing by leaps and bounds, doubling almost every year.

Today, in 1998, the principal Amistad fellowship has 5,000 members in Puebla. Ernesto Alonzo was formerly an architect specialising in building auditoriums and large public buildings.

He built this incredible centre. Dozens of other daughter groups have grown out of it. Originally it was rooted in the upper/middle class, although now with this mass movement it consists more and more of working class, city people.

I have visited Mexico almost every year, and different members of Amistad have come and visited us here in Spain. The first missionary to join us was Armando Garcia. He arrived when we were just moving into the first house at Mejorada Del Campo, the one that we ‘camped’ in – with hardly any roof, no lights, no water. He and Raul and other men were camped out under the trees while we built the house bit by bit. Armando has a long history with us.

He was principally involved in developing the worship ministry in Betel. He is a university graduate in science and engineering. He was a Christ for the Nations Bible school student – very well prepared – so he, along with Paul Anderson, built our Bible institute. Paul was the director, Armando was his helper. Armando was naturally drawn to using Amistad’s sophisticated and well-developed Bible study materials, so he took these and other Latin American studies, edited them, and produced our first teaching manuals for the Adullam Bible Institute and for our home groups.

Paul Johansson, the president of Elim, also president of NYSUM (New York School of Urban Missions), visited us and recommended that we develop some standardised materials because we were a diverse, widely-spread group with lots of young leaders who didn’t have a very strong Biblical base. They needed some materials in their hands. So Armando developed at least half a dozen manuals for this purpose.

Amistad, unlike many indigenous churches, seemed to catch very early the foreign missions vision. They sent missionaries to other places, not exclusively to Betel, but we took the lion’s share because of our relationship with them, and also because it was more economically feasible to send a missionary to us than to send them to other parts of Europe where it would have cost two or three times the middle class Mexican salary to

support them. But if they came to Betel, and if they were single missionaries and lived in our homes and residences, they could survive very economically. They gave us a lot of assistance in the early formative years and were very helpful. We'd had lots of Americans, British and Australian volunteers and so on and even Mexicans from other churches (non-Amistad). But I have to say Amistad produces the best missionaries. They come with a better attitude; they're servants. They come with a real vision for the nations. They are prepared and educated. Their Bible school gives new workers a good Bible base and a good missionary preparation, like a WEC Missionary Training College. They arrive with anthropological understanding of what it means to be a missionary. They have had good practical experience because they've been taken out to the mountains and to the streets of Mexico's teeming cities to work among the poor people.

Of course, since they speak Spanish they don't have years of language learning like the Americans and British. They are able to move right in. Also we have to recognise that they have a great worship style. Men like Rodolfo Garza, Ernesto Alonzo and Roberto Torres made important contributions to worship. Armando, because he was on the original worship team, brought their worship, and brought their materials, so he designed our first worship manual which, I think, is superior to any other available in Spanish today.

Amistad people have been very wise as regards religious 'labels'. They didn't say they were Baptists or Brethren or Church of Christ. They said they were just Christians. So a lot of Catholic charismatics would come to the early meetings for fellowship because they didn't feel rejected, and they purposely adopted a programme in which they tried to dispense with the religious jargon of Christianity and talk with reality. They never called each other 'brother' or 'sister'; they would use the word 'congregation' rather than 'church'. They would just try to avoid all the catch words that have become clichés. They wouldn't get up and rant and rave against the Catholic church. They would never speak out against Mary as sadly many Protestants do.

But on the other hand they were totally reformed in doctrine, evangelical, and eschatologically right. They were just wise, circumspect – all things to all men. In fact sometimes people would ask, ‘What kind of Christians are you?’ They didn’t have people shouting ‘hallelujah’ all the time. They didn’t raise their voices and scream and shout, and there wasn’t a lot of emotionalism. It was really what you would call the third wave – freedom in the Spirit, all the gifts affirmed, but no one gift a hobby horse.

So Betel has adopted the Amistad attitude. We have been able to relate to the Catholics and not drive Catholic parents away. We’ve never in the history of Betel spoken against the Catholic church from the pulpit but rather affirmed what was good. Amistad has made a great contribution to Betel.

## 8

# STRATEGY FOR NORTH AFRICA

ELLIOTT TEPPER

*Rescue Shop I tells how a centre was established in Ceuta, a Spanish enclave on the north coast of Morocco, and a 'toehold' gained in Melilla, another enclave four hundred kilometres to the east.*

*Elliott explains:*

We have already told how we were able to rent a suitable but very rundown property in Ceuta. We had strong faith that the Lord would have us buy it because it was such a strategic centre for developments in the Maghreb.

Then, in 1993, two groups from my home church – Myrtle Grove Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, North Carolina – paid a visit and caught the vision of what Ceuta represented for the gospel in North Africa – a door to the Moslem world, a launching pad for ministries in the surrounding area, and a place of rest for missionaries in the Moslem world. They saw Ceuta as a bi-lingual, bi-cultural, bi-religious centre. So they went back to our home church and challenged the mission board to take up the matter. With great faith and great sacrifice, they elected to give us the first fruits of their own building project, and designated \$90,000 for Betel's use.

It's the largest gift we have ever received and it makes me proud to be a member of Myrtle Grove Presbyterian. Consequently God has blessed them as a congregation with a real missionary vision and as they have been generous so God has been generous to them. We paid off the building in three \$30,000 payments. Myrtle Grove gave us \$30,000 for three years. During

this time we fully restored the big house and now we have new bathrooms downstairs, women's facilities on the second floor, proper windows installed, good plumbing and electricity. Then we restored an out-building and made a hundred-seat dining hall. We raised a metre-high wall round a large sunken area, put windows around the top edge, skylighting in the roof and a big bay window on the fourth wall overlooking the straits of Gibraltar. Now we have a hundred-seat auditorium for conferences. The facility has three buildings, a residence that will hold about forty or fifty people, a dining hall and an auditorium. It's become a very profitable centre both spiritually and economically, with the vision to serve the Maghreb.

We began to collaborate with the Bible Society and the two American missionaries that were resident in the city. We came up with the idea of sponsoring the first Hispanic conference for the Moslem world. There are many English, German, Dutch and French conferences with this goal but no Hispanic. The motive was to create a conference that would minister to and promote the work of missionaries in the Maghreb. They periodically need some refreshing because they are usually isolated, living separate from each other, working undercover using tent-making ministries. There are hardly any churches. If they do have a 'church' it is usually a handful of people in a housegroup. So the goal was, firstly, a ministry to the missionaries, secondly, to inspire the Spanish speaking church in Spain, Latin America, and in the USA to take up the vision of the Moslem world, to call for missionaries to the Moslem world, and to challenge the church to support all this by prayer and giving. We decided to call this effort the Ramon Lull conference. (He lived in the twelfth century, and was the first missionary to have a burden for the Moslem world. I believe he was martyred in North Africa.)

In the first year we had about sixty people. It was a great success. We had Spaniards, Mexicans, Europeans, Americans, and national church representatives. In the second year we had ninety delegates, with Dr. Ehab El Kharratt of Cairo, Egypt, as speaker. He is a member of the largest evangelical church there. He is the

director of the Presbyterian Rehab Centre outside Cairo, in the desert. There was great enthusiasm. We had representatives this time from Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Spain, Europe and America. The third year we had more than one hundred delegates with Paul Johansson, the President of Elim Bible Institute, as speaker.

We discovered that Ceuta was not viable economically because it was poorer than the rest of Spain. There was a large Moslem population that worked for very little and our kind of jobs didn't produce the same kind of money as in Madrid. Our store could sell any second hand furniture that we had but we couldn't get it. And we couldn't ship it from Spain because that was too expensive.

About this time, Tom Spyker, an American missionary, had rented a large warehouse in Algeciras but was not finding a use for it. He asked if we could take it off his hands, so we thought we could put a store, an office and a residence right there in the port.

We assumed his contract and began to build a typical Betel office, store and residence complex facing the port where all the Moslems coming from France, Belgium and Holland pass through every season. More than two million take the ferry to Morocco from Algeciras each year. We appointed Juan Capilla as the director of the joint Algeciras/Ceuta work which we treated as one single centre. He commutes back and forth across the straits at least once a week. He supervises both centres, generates funds in Algeciras and transfers the money to Ceuta. He contacts drug addicts in Algeciras and sends them over to Ceuta on the ferry.

As we began to develop the work we realised it was a much more important strategic point than we had thought. Algeciras is the jump-off point for the Moslem world and it is a key location for all the work in the southern part of Spain. As the work grew, there were some pastors in the southern part that began to realise that Betel wasn't just some tiny para-church organisation but was fully involved in the work of church planting and evangelism. We also saw Algeciras was the key for ministry in Gibraltar.

From there we established a house a few miles north of Gibraltar, then we established another store in La Linea – the

last Spanish town before you enter Gibraltar. Then we bought a four-storey building in Algeciras that now houses our church, a major antique store, a married couples' hostel and a men's house. We have about fifty people there.

The Gibraltar government social services department sends English speaking Gibraltans to Betel in Birmingham because it knows us. We've had quite a number at Birmingham and because of that I've written a letter to the Governor General asking if he will allow us to open a Betel branch there.



**PART III**  
**EXPLANATION**



# 1

## THE BETEL ETHOS

ELLIOTT TEPPER

It is *life* not *theology* that begets life – the reality of Christ in you, the reality of the Holy Spirit’s presence. That doesn’t mean that we don’t need theology or the Word or that we don’t need to study – we do need a systematic approach to the Christian life – but it is *life* that begets life.

In Betel we can certainly codify our methods in social or scientific terms but that is not what makes Betel work. Unless you have the heart of the matter there can be no success. The fundamental issue is being Christ-centred and having Christ-centred relationships which produce *koinonia* and allow us to enjoy the communion of the Holy Spirit in our communities.

Betel is a church – it is a part of the mystical universal body of Christ. When people come to us we open our hearts to them; we let them live with us, come under our covering and dwell with us. There is no pressure for them to be converted or accept our doctrine, but they need to be part of the fellowship and accept the minimal rules that are in place. We want them to become part of the community and to imbibe our ethos, which is nothing less than Christ living His life through us. ‘Ethos’ can be defined as a way of life exhibiting a set of values which reveal the love or character that makes a person or a group what it is.

A ‘Betelito’ is someone who has chosen, for a season, to be part of our community, has been born again, and, we hope, is willing to submit to its authority, take part in the work, contribute to the common good, embrace a spirit of sacrifice, surrender

some freedom of individual movement and even be willing to work without remuneration so that the needs of others may be supplied. Of course it must be realised that half the people in Betel do not work in income-generating activities. Part of the community at any one time has just not fully entered in. They are either going through detoxification or are sick and too weak to participate in communal businesses. They stay back in the residences and serve in household duties like cleaning and preparation of food. There are also many young mothers with small children or couples with older children in which the mother's time is at least partly taken up with their care.

From the very first day members encounter in a very personal and practical way the Betel ethos: others serve them unselfishly. The natural response is for them to serve others when they are able. This is not the ethos of the world. When new members savour it they quickly realise that the heart of Betel is not of this world.

One big difference between a Betel community and the usual 'methadone'-based programme or even a psychologically-based counselling community, is that Betel does not provide extensive counselling. We have a minimal number of professionally-qualified people. We do have access to social workers and psychologists whom we can use in extreme cases. We do have doctors and nurses who watch the health of the community. We don't have 'encounter groups' or extensive counselling sessions; what we have, simply, is *Christian community* which means church activities, devotional sessions, regular meetings on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, and Bible school for those who have been in the fellowship for a year or year and a half.

What happens, then, to the individual who joins us? What kind of programme do we have to offer him? I can remember the complaint of an addict who had just entered our farm in Germany. He came up to me and said, 'I thought I was going to a rehabilitation centre, but there is no programme here! All they do is live together, study the Bible, sing and work. Where are the counsellors and the psychologists?' Betel does have a

‘programme’. He just could not recognise it.

We have what is called a peer-driven programme. It’s a programme that is motivated from below rather than from the top down. When you come in someone who is a bit more advanced helps you. Once you have grown and shown stability in your life, you are allocated to help a new arrival. Everyone who comes has a ‘shadow’. There is a dormitory leader, then a house leader, then a regional supervisor, and finally a pastor. And the pastor is almost always a cured addict who has been in the fellowship for five, seven or ten years. Every responsible person is someone who has been through the system. Daily encounters with authority are at a ‘grass roots’ level rather than with professionals or pastors. Of course when there are problems we do step in with a word of pastoral wisdom, even professional counsel as needed.

What we have is a tried and proven structure that puts example and peer pressure before counselling. It has proven to be much more effective and efficient than the mere words of some stranger who comes from a totally alien world (as an addict perceives it). We also make sure that there is plenty of liberty for people to seek God personally and respond to what is being shared by life, example and teaching. The Betel ethos is a spirit that encourages people to believe that there is a way out, that they can change, and *that God* can take a beggar off a dunghill and turn him into a prince. They know that their leaders were once where they are. They have a living hope and example of a peer-leader right before their eyes.

If they look at me – well, I’m from a different planet. I’m American, I come from a different culture and class, but when they look at Luis Pino or Juan or Javi – people they have known on the streets – they realise that they can change too. The peer system works. One of the beauties of it is that there is upward mobility for all. Certainly one of the prime motivating factors is the esteem the recovering addicts seek and receive as they become role models to others.

If the Great Commission didn’t exist we would have invented it to give scope through the challenge of new frontiers, and places

for pioneers. People need to grow. They need to be offered the chance to scale greater heights and move on spiritually. We've never had a split. Why? Because whenever we find someone who is anxious to develop, restless with strong ambitions, we find something bigger and challenging for him to do.

In the ethos of Betel there is a certain optimism and a certain confidence in the power of God's Spirit. We have no riches but we have faith to believe that God will work for us and through us. Yes, there are charismatic aspects in Betel's worship and practice. Yes, we are Baptist in practice. Yes, we are Presbyterian in our government. We embrace the whole spectrum of the evangelical church. We are not Roman Catholic in doctrine but we are in sympathy, and willing to co-operate, with Catholic Christians or with anyone in the body of Christ, even those who are far from the reformed position that we take.

This may sound overly broad, but bigness of heart is no threat to true orthodoxy and sound faith. Our roots are in Christ and WEC; we flow in the deep mainstream of evangelical life.

I want to comment on one last attribute in the Betel ethos; that is courage in suffering. We have had so many people suffering physically, mainly from AIDS. I think of Raul Casto and Jambri, of Trini, of Manuel, and many others who kept on ministering even though they were so very weak.

One instance of this that comes immediately to mind involves Manuel El Vasco ('Manuel the Basque'). He was the oldest pastor and was well into his forties when he died. He was the first pastor to manifest full-blown AIDS yet he kept on for four or five years. He served as pastor in Cuenca, then we transferred him to Málaga where he was instrumental in developing the work.

A few months before he died he and I were at the auto-shop where we wash cars and do oil changes. At only half of what his body weight should be he lifted up a five-gallon drum of oil and carried it across the street. I thought, 'How can he do that?' I picked up another full drum and I had a hard time carrying it yet I am a trained wrestler! I said, 'Manuel, I do admire you for your courage and long-suffering.' He smiled and looked at me

with his one good eye and replied, ‘I don’t have any alternative, other than giving in and dying.’

On another trip – just a week before he died – we stayed, at his wife’s request, in his home. I got up early to wait on the Lord. I usually have a cup of tea so I went into the kitchen to find the teapot. I found it on top of the fridge. In the early morning light I took it down, put some water in and put it on the stove.

Their little daughter walked into the kitchen. She looked at me and then at the stove and said, ‘That’s not a teapot, that’s a decoration.’ Then she ran out shouting, ‘Mama, Mama, Brother Elliott is boiling daddy’s medicine!’ Manuel came in, dressed in a bathrobe and sure enough his medicine was in the teapot. He said, ‘Elliott, let me make you breakfast.’ Think of it. Here is a man, so weak and at death’s door, but he wants to serve me by making me breakfast! He decided to put the coffee pot on instead of tea. After a few minutes there was an awful smell and smoke – the plastic handles on the pot started to melt and then fell off.

Manuel’s wife came running out of the bedroom, ‘What are you two doing?’ There’s no water in the pot! You’re both like Laurel and Hardy trying to help each other.’ (In Spain they are called El Flaco and El Gordo – the thin one and the fat one. I think she was referring to me as the fat one. He certainly wasn’t.)

Manuel had a marvellous servant spirit right to the end. He died just a few days later.

## **BETEL'S LEADERSHIP CONCEPT**

ELLIOTT TEPPER

Betel is a complex organisation with complex structures – spiritual, social, charitable and legal. In the nine countries where we operate we have to assume the form that gives the best credibility to the authorities. In Spain, Betel is a charitable organisation; it is also organised as a church, and we have begun an economic co-operative called Cadmiel. As we investigated the possibility of entering Asia we realised that we needed a limited trading company for visas and for the export-import of Asian furniture as an economic support for our community and a new source of supply of furniture for our many thrift stores around the world. That led to the incorporation of a limited company, our trading area. Each of these are separate legal entities. In Britain we are a charitable trust and a trading company. In Germany we are organised as a sportsclub! In France we are a charity. In Italy we are a para-church organisation. In Portugal we are a beneficiary association. In Mexico we are a civil association. In America we are a church. But Betel in its essence, in spite of all the different structures, is an expression of the mystic body of Christ.

All these entities are really governed by the same people, that is, our presbytery or council of elders. We have chosen a presbyterian form of government which is leadership by a group of elders capable of mature decision making. Once you are an elder/pastor you are one for life, if you continue to meet Pauline standards of eldership. (We have had to remove some from this role.) Of course there are elected officials to carry specific



responsibilities, and there is a periodic general assembly, but it is really the group of twenty-six national Betel pastors, seven missionary pastors (five from WEC and two from Amistad, of Mexico) and two directors of Kadmiel that govern Betel International. When we talk of a national pastor or missionary leader we consider the couple as a leadership unit. The wives are pastors too. Mary and the other wives participate and make important contributions on all the highest councils.

The guiding principle is found in Proverbs 11:14, 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.' We listen to one another, we submit to one another and we take counsel from one another. We may argue; we may debate, but we seek the mind of God together. This is the WEC pattern as established by Norman Grubb and exemplified in the two schools where I trained – at Faith Training Centre with A.S. Worley and at Elim Bible Institute. It is great and wonderful when everyone comes to see the same thing and we have spiritual unanimity and consensus.

I can say that in our thirteen year history only on one or two occasions – and only at the very beginning (when our people were immature) – did I ever go against the counsel of the young Betel eldership. I wanted to start a Bible School and they thought it was not a good idea, but we went ahead and eventually they agreed it was right.

I *do* give direction and I *do* receive the same kind of criticism that Norman Grubb experienced. 'Too strong', 'too dictatorial', 'too directive' are terms used about me. I *do* have strong opinions and I *do* have powers of persuasion, but we really do seek the mind of God as a body. I am not ashamed to provide leadership as God enables. There must be leadership even in a presbytery. Consequently, because of that tension between collectively listening to God, and, at times, to leaders, we do know where we are going. Some of us hear the 'Thus saith the Lord' more quickly than others; some of us are able to articulate it, move people's hearts and persuade others, but that is all part of the presbytery function. Domineering individuals don't get away with anything! Spaniards didn't conquer half the world

for nothing! They are not easily led.

Very often when we come together we have no idea about where we are going to go or what decision we'll make until we wait in the presence of God together. Then when we abide in God it is easy to take a decision together and it is very hard to argue when everyone is in the Spirit. It is when we are in the flesh and when there is more heat than light, when there is a conflict of personalities, that we can't make good decisions.

We really do get down before God and humble ourselves before each other. I can think of many instances when God has broken strong individuals and outspoken opinions so that His mind has come through in the end. The presbytery principle really does work if there is a dwelling place for the Third Person of the Trinity in the hearts of those He has called into leadership.

Sometimes I or others feel we do get a word from the Lord and when we share it with the council, others express their views. Many times there is the recognition that it is a word from the Lord so we say, 'Let's do it!' Sometimes we are not sure, so we wait.

People often ask, 'What will happen to Betel when Elliott and Mary Tepper go?' Recently when seeking a large bank loan the very first question asked by the banking official was, 'What will happen to Betel after you go?' The truth is, it will go on because it is not dependent on one man. It does not have a 'corporate' pyramidal shape; it has a mystic presbyterian structure which allows us to rest in a fellowship of love – that multitude of counsellors where safety dwells. The mind of Christ abides in us collectively. Paul said, not 'you', 'but "we" have the mind of Christ'.

I personally seek the advice of the other pastors, firstly because I need it and secondly I want confirmation from them, to make certain that we are doing the right thing. Also it's great to be able to share the blame if things go wrong! Believe it or not, collective error and shared wrong decisions strengthen unity, if they are made in good faith by all together.

We are a faith people and we do take tremendous risks. We've done ridiculous things. Our projects sometimes scare others out

of their wits. We take very big leaps of faith where the ‘0’s’ in our figures are not just two or three, but often up to six!

Recently we had been negotiating to buy a large international headquarters facility to house our church and all our many departments here in Madrid. We needed millions of dollars for this. Some thought we were crazy but every single Spanish pastor and almost every missionary immediately caught the vision and embraced it. All of the senior pastors came to me individually and said, ‘We are with you even if this fails.’ Over the eighteen-month period of negotiations and being turned down by a number of banks, and then to have the building stolen from us by speculators at the last moment, all the stops and starts and frustrated hopes certainly contained all the ingredients of a colossal failure and error in judgment. As a testimony to the strength and mutual bond of fellowship that holds the Betel presbytery together, even in the darkest hour when the property was bought out from under us, there was no fracture in our abiding together in Christ – no recriminations, only expressions of consolation and solidarity. At one point, I think Mary and I were actually standing alone and even the most hardy of the Betel pastors had begun to doubt. And yet even then we all stood together.

The details of God’s deliverance will have to wait another book. But in short, we bought our new headquarters and entered it on July 18, 1999 – thanks to the heroic efforts of Malcolm Hayday and the CAF (Charities AID Foundation) of Great Britain which provided the guarantees. The Triodos Social Bank of Holland, through the mediation of Esteban Barosso of Proyecto Trust of Spain, granted us a \$4,300,000 loan.

To give you a sense of the unity that exists in our hearts, we have never had a division in our midst. Churches split, denominations split, yet we have stuck together.

In our last day of some special meetings at our Betania Conference Centre recently, Juan Carrasco of Bilbao – one of our senior pastors – came to me and said, ‘Elliott, I haven’t been able to sleep all night. God has asked me to do something I don’t want to do, but I’m going to do it.’ I asked, ‘What is it

He's asked you to do?' 'God has told me to support you and to symbolise it before everybody by lying down on the floor lifting my arm and taking your hand. And I really don't want to do it.'

I said, 'Well, if God has told you this, you will have to do it.'

Then after the worship time in the first meeting he stood up and told everyone what God had asked him to do. So he lay down and stretched out his arm. I decided to lie down as well alongside him and we joined hands. After thirty seconds another senior pastor, Luis Pino, came over, lay down and took my other hand. After that every pastor (and most of their wives) did the same. We covered the floor and lay there, not saying a word, in the presence of God for half an hour.

A marvellous sense of spiritual alignment filled our hearts. There was a shifting in the heavenlies that brought us to a higher and deeper place of unity as a fellowship, as a presbytery.

I cannot pretend that that same unity exists at all levels of Betel's government. There are about 1,200 living in our communities. Under the covering of Betel's ruling council we have city, regional and zone leaders. Under each one of these we have a number of house leaders and in each house there are monitors – the 'responsables' or responsible ones. Then there are the shadows, the 'sombras' who are appointed companions who stick with the new entrants. They may have been in the centre only for a few months but even they can take on some measure of responsibility within the Betel family. And then of course there are also the churches with their own local deacons, committees and so on.

One reason it works is because we have a 'peer-driven' programme that fosters respect for servant leaders on all levels of the chain of command. Even our most senior pastors are only ten years old in the Lord. Our pastors have a fresh memory of what it was like when they occupied humble stations.

We require all our leaders from senior monitor upward to have some Bible training. Our 'Adullam' school is only two afternoons, six classes a week, for one year. The studies are not particularly academic. This may seem strange but it is not so

by Latin American and African standards. The second and third world church is not particularly well educated. The church in these countries has made major advances with little theological training. The churches in North America and Europe are obsessed with professional training but the growth rate doesn't compare with Latin America or Africa. So obviously while Bible training is very important, under certain circumstances God manages to do quite well with little of it.

In the first few centuries of the church the growth was through inspired Spirit-directed leadership which for the most part was not highly trained academically. It wasn't till the third and fourth centuries that we had highly developed academic structures preparing the ministry. If I were free to choose, I would choose the early church rather than the sophisticated imperial church. Betel is not a true image of the early church, but we would like to be.

## BETEL THROUGH OTHER EYES

*Graham and Sue Single from Australia and New Zealand and Jim and Sue Regan from Britain are two missionary couples now serving with Betel. Both have had periods of 'straight' missionary work with WEC in Spain.*

*The authors sat down with them in Madrid and plied them with questions about life in Betel and their evaluation of the Betel ministry generally.*

*We begin with the Singles.*

*Graham and Sue, you worked with Betel in Valencia for some years and then you worked with WEC in Madrid. These are two very different ministries. How do you compare the two in terms of job satisfaction, fulfilment, challenge?*

GRAHAM: With Betel in Valencia the job satisfaction was high. We were always on the go, there were always plenty of things to do. You are never bored working with Betel! In Madrid, with WEC we served as business agents for the whole missionary team, so we had less contact with the Spanish people. I think our return to Betel has to do with the fulfilment of working directly with people who need us and want our help.

SUE: In the Betel work it was very much building relationships and investing time and energy in people, although of course that was not without its frustrations!

*I suppose there is an element of success but also a pretty large element of disappointment dealing with drug addicts.*

GRAHAM: Yes. Having spent nine years in Spain we have seen

some people who have been in the centres five and six years yet suddenly they go back to the streets; that's most disheartening. But you can see, looking back, that they haven't really given their whole life over to the Lord. One man had been in the centre for seven years and badly wanted a wife. He married a girl that had not been in the centre very long, and then a few weeks later they both went back on drugs. So it is frustrating. But then we look on the positive side, and see the ones that are growing and maturing, so we have to weigh up both sides.

SUE: I remember in Valencia, one of the girls had a very soft heart towards God; one could see God working in her life. She was given certain areas of responsibility and seemed to be faithful in those and then one day she just left. It was quite a shock to everybody and within a short period of time we heard that she had overdosed and died. That's absolutely heartbreaking. Others do go on, become stronger and stronger, and are still serving the Lord today.

*As visitors we have been amazed – staggered – at the growth of Betel, both in terms of numerical growth – and spiritual growth – the maturity of the leaders, and so on. How do you feel about this? Has it grown too fast? Are there dangers in the speed with which things have developed?*

GRAHAM: I think you can always say there are dangers and I think the leadership knows that too. I think Elliott tries to keep it from growing too fast. God is blessing the work. You have to take risks. You can't just sit back. Having been out of the work for a while and coming back into it, we see the growth of the work and the leaders moving on to maturity. It's thrilling.

SUE: I think a lot of what we call 'risks' are actually steps of faith. It's moving with a God-given vision. The key is to step out at the right time and with the right people. So I see it more as venturing in faith. A few years ago, while we were working

with WEC we attended the Betel church in Madrid and Elliott talked a lot about consolidating the work. I think that's where Graham and I felt we could come in and help.

GRAHAM: If these risks weren't taken Betel wouldn't be what it is today. I don't think God would have blessed us otherwise. We've stepped out in faith and sometimes we've failed, but we learn from that and keep on going ahead.

Depending on their progress the men and women are given certain amounts of responsibility. They are not just thrown in at the deep end, they are always with someone else who has been there a bit longer; as they mature they are given more responsibility, and are expected to teach others what they are learning. So it's a learning/teaching situation all the time.

*To western Christian standards the leadership training programme seems fairly minimal. What do you feel about this?*

GRAHAM: These men and women have come from the street. Their education and understanding are minimal. They are working full time and they have only about six hours of training a week; it's just touching those areas that are needed at that point in time. It's a needs-based thing. It's not an extensive or an exhaustive training. But it's giving them something to use while they are working and learning.

SUE: As Jesus taught His disciples, they used what they had and then they came back for more. That's what I see happening in Betel. They learn something from the Word or from the preaching or teaching, and apply it as they have opportunity. There is accountability, discipline, encouragement and continual training.

*Having been in Betel services on a Sunday as visitors we have seen the differences between that and what we are used to in an average church service in Britain, USA or Australia. Would you like to compare the two? What are the dominant features*



*in a Betel service?*

GRAHAM: I think it's possibly a simpler service in some ways. There is order and it's usually very similar most weeks, but I think there's a difference in that we are always having people give testimonies of what God is doing in their lives – not just the ex-drug addicts but also those who are part of the church. That encourages people to see that God is working and answering prayer. We might have five or six hundred people in the service and probably only one to two thirds are people from the centre. So a third don't know anything about God, or they haven't committed their lives to the Lord. Then we have addicts' parents and families that come in and they see what God is doing in lives.

Then worship is a strong element and lasts thirty to forty five minutes – just being in His presence and opening our hearts to Him in singing and prayer. This prepares us for hearing the Word.

SUE: I think the fact that at least a third of the people are unbelievers means that there's constantly a focus on salvation and what being a Christian really is. That often comes out in the preaching and testimonies, but not every message is evangelistic.

GRAHAM: In mainline conservative churches at home an altar call isn't the done thing; here we've seen that this helps.

*What happens when people respond to an altar call? Are they prayed for? Are they counselled?*

GRAHAM: It really depends on why they have come forward. But usually they are prayed for. The pastors and elders of the church come forward and they pray for the various ones, mostly individually. It gives us a chance to sort people out.

*As Betel churches are developed, Spanish leadership and Spanish pastors are appointed. You are missionaries within the same group. How does it feel to be there but not carry full responsibility? Can you accept it? Or is it frustrating?*

GRAHAM: In some ways it's hard for us, but on the other hand I was sitting in the pastors' planning meeting the other day and listening to their conversation. I thought, 'I'm glad I don't have to do that. I'm glad that I'm not involved in some of these areas.' They have so much insight. Having the pastors take more responsibility is really the aim of a missionary. In a sense we are only gap-fillers.

SUE: We don't feel threatened by the national pastors. We just respect them and thank God for what He is doing in them and through them.

GRAHAM: Some of those gaps pertain more to the church side of things, like following up people that have left, sorting out relationship problems, and visiting people. The national pastors are really managers, running the centres, the men's houses, the women's houses, the marrieds' houses, and the work programme, so they are on the go, supervising and organising.

\* \* \*

*Now we quiz the Reagans.*

*Jim and Sue, for many years you were in a WEC church-planting ministry; now you are working in Betel. How have you handled this change?*

JIM: I went through a period of grieving, which I found hard to handle, because we had been church-planting for eight years. But coming into Betel meant working with people who were eager to hear what you had to say about the gospel and interested in having their lives changed. In our other situation it was more a question of trying to stimulate people's interest. So that was a big change.

SUE: It was hard to transfer from a tiny little group to a big city church with loads of people, but we got used to that. It was nice to be appreciated!

*What are you doing now?*

JIM: My job is the administration of Betel at the Madrid level, at the national Spanish level, and at the international level. We handle all the legal, financial and administrative matters. My job consists of leading a team of about eleven people, mainly ex-addicts who are learning to take responsibility in this area.

*So are you at a desk most of the day?*

JIM: Yes and no. I tend to move round the office a bit. I have to go out to visit other offices, to banks, to see law firms. Another part of the job is to give pastoral care to the people in the office.

SUE: On the pastoral side, we have team members round regularly for lunch just to see how they are doing, to encourage them, and to pray for them.

I lead a ladies' intercessory group on a Thursday morning. There are so many things going on – people are ill, people in prison, financial pressure, kids' troubles at school; we take all these things to the Lord. But my main ministry is the children's work.

*Every job has its pluses and minuses. Could you describe some of the good things?*

JIM: We are dealing with lots of Spaniards who are open to the Lord. Another plus is, although we are not really involved in direct evangelism much, we are part of a mechanism that is reaching Spaniards. The plusses for me are that I am in a job that I like. It obviously has its frustrations but I feel as though I am accomplishing something – putting some system into Betel – I

suppose it is because I was an engineer at one time.

SUE: It's great to watch little ones whose mothers have just been admitted into the community. The children come with lots of problems, lots of hang-ups and we pray and try to deal with them. Then we see them change over the months and become stable and receptive to the gospel.

JIM: All jobs have their problems! Working with people who are not professional office workers can be a hassle. But then I'm not a professional office worker either! One of the disappointments is when people you get to know leave the centre without coming through to the Lord. You have a relationship with them, then they go. That happens quite often. It's intrinsic to the ministry.

We have difficulties on the admin side, but in one way they are good because they have to do with growth. Betel, in the last four or five years, has doubled in terms of residences in Spain and in financial flow. Trying to put a system in place is like open heart surgery on a man while he is running a four minute mile!

*I suppose it's difficult because every centre is having an income from various activities, and at the same time there is expense involved in maintaining the centres, the vehicles, food and so on.*

JIM: Yes. The problems come mainly on the accounting side. To help us become, and stay, legal we have to have proper accounting methods. We are dealing with twenty different provinces. Betel is a unity in Spain so we have to bring it all together. There are times when there's not enough money and you have to trust! That's a pressure, but obviously I don't bear that one alone.

*Jim, overall is it worthwhile? Is there the lasting fruit that justifies the effort?*

JIM: Yes. An example – Tomas, who is now the pastor in Valencia, leads the church and centre there, and also helps to oversee the centre in Majorca. He came to us about ten years ago as a

drug addict and we see him functioning now as the father of a family, a responsible pastor involved with other pastors in Valencia, and a leader of the centre and of that area. There is genuine lasting fruit, so it is worthwhile.

SUE: To see families come together again when husband and wife have been apart is so encouraging.

Jim and Sue returned to Britain in June 1999 where they have located in the Midlands. Jim continues as a financial counselor for Betel of Britain and Sue is developing, along with the Selwoods, a Betel sponsored drug prevention program for British schools.

## 4

# BETEL IS GROWING UP

ELLIOTT TEPPER

Betel developed out of a WEC church-planting concept. As the pioneer work in San Blas grew, we realised that we needed to be organised as a social work in its own right, leading to the planting of churches which became part of the AEMC (the WEC-related association of churches).

Over a period of time Betel has gained recognition in the Evangelical Church of Spain and in International Confederations. First we were received into the FEREDE, the Protestant national confederation, which represents all evangelicals before the government. Then we became charter members of the newly formed CEM, the Provincial association of the Comunidad de Madrid, and, over the years, with each provincial evangelical grouping where Betel functions.

Just this year the evangelicals and protestants of Spain have formed 'DIAKONIA' – a national association of evangelical social groups. It would be the equivalent of the Catholic CARITAS – the largest social agency outside of the government in most Catholic countries. We are one of the principal members and organisers of DIAKONIA.

I have been invited to sit on the board of directors – a position that allows us to represent the evangelical community before the government in relation to social issues, and even to help formulate petitions to the government for funding. Our first national conference on social work has just been held in Madrid where I was invited to speak at one of the plenary sessions. The government provided their Pavilion of Congresses as the venue

and also underwrote the cost of the event.

Beyond Spain we have been drawn into two organisations. The first is called ISAAC – the International Substance Abuse and Addiction Coalition – started by David Partington of UK. Lindsay McKenzie and I were invited to be foundation directors. Its goal is to form a worldwide coalition of Christian rehabilitation centres. Lindsay made the first trip to Cairo to meet some of the world leaders, then I followed with a trip to a conference in Florida, then another in Cairo. We will be holding the first world conference of Christian Rehabilitation Centres in August, 1999 at the University of Kent. We hope to attract hundreds of representatives. Recently I have been elected president of ISAAC. This is a great honour for Betel and an affirmation of our humble peer-driven model of rehabilitation. Most of the International Substance Abuse and Addiction Coalition organisations are highly professional with doctors, psychologists and trained counsellors as leaders. For ISAAC to choose a ‘Betelito’ rather than a rehabilitation professional is extraordinary!

We are also part of a secular organisation which is principally made up of European rehabilitation centres. Lindsay has been more involved in that because the push came from the largest rehabilitation centre in Italy. We are on its board of directors.

In June 1998 there was a world conference at the UN of world leaders involved in the war against drugs. The Presidents of USA and Spain were present with departmental heads from many countries. Betel was invited and I attended. So Betel’s place and role in the whole area of rehabilitation is being recognised worldwide.

But from the beginning, Betel has always been more than a rehabilitation centre. We are orientated to the goal of church-planting, and we have always kept before us our responsibility to fulfil the Great Commission.

Every three or four years the Spanish evangelical church has held some kind of a national missionary conference, but there has never been an annual conference with this theme.

Because of our world vision and WEC’s worldwide involve-

ment we felt we should organise an annual missions conference. Can you imagine it? Here we are – a group of churches made up of cured addicts, ex-prostitutes, former robbers, yet we assumed the mantle of leadership and have had acceptance by the body of Christ in organising the main national missions conference in the country!

We contacted Patrick Johnstone in WEC's International office. His book, *Operation World*, is in Spanish and used by the churches here. He gave us permission to use the Operation World logo and he agreed to initiate the first conference by being our principal speaker. This was held in 1994 and over seven hundred people attended. Thirty different mission organisations were present; we had fifteen workshops organised by YWAM, Open Doors, Pocket Testament League, Wycliffe, Decision magazine, Christian Literature Crusade, Bible Society, and so on.

For the second conference in 1995 we had Rev. A.S. Worley of Faith Training Centre (a missionary statesman in his own right) and Wayne Myers, the grandfather of modern missions in Mexico, and for decades one of 'Christ for the Nations' roving ambassadors.

In 1996 we had Ralph Mahoney of the World Missionary Assistance Plan which produces the Acts magazine that goes to 130,000 pastors, ministers and missionaries, and is published in eighteen languages. Just recently, eight hundred attended, and heard Brother Andrew of Open Doors.

We have had the support and praise of the whole church. Gabino Fernandez Campos – the leading Protestant historian in Spain – has said that Betel is one of the principal agencies for missionary activity in the Spanish church. People tell us that the impact of these conferences has been profound. They certainly have had a great influence on Betel!

Before the first conference in 1994 the only 'foreign mission' point we were maintaining was in New York City, but after that we opened Betel of Italy, Mexico and Germany in 1995 and then Betel Portugal, UK and France in 1996. So it has stirred our own missionary vision. Recently, Betel of India was formally



legalised as a charitable trust. In October, 1999 Keith Berghmeier (WEC Australia) and Lauro and Rosane Castelli (WEC Brazil) will begin our first residential programme in Asia.

For these conferences we bring in our own overseas leaders and let them share what God has done, so it has proven to be a forum for us, too. From the onset we felt we wanted to make these conferences as broad based as possible so we invited all the mainline Protestant denominations. That has been significant because that kind of unity and co-operation is not easy to obtain in Spain – or indeed, in any nation.

There has been a notable upsurge of interest in missions by the evangelical church here, and in a small measure Spain has become a sender of missionaries, not just a receiver.

Operation World conferences have also had a significant role to play in stimulating interest in the Maghreb in the North West corner of the African continent. Out of that has come our second effort in promoting world missions in the Hispanic church – the annual ‘Raymond Lull Conference’ in Ceuta, with its emphasis on the needs of the Moslem world.

## 5

### WHY COMMUNITY?

ELLIOTT TEPPER

We are often asked, ‘Why community?’ I have given much thought to the question because it is a good one that demands an honest and thorough answer. The question, or better said, the challenge, to community, is usually made because of a misunderstanding of what our community is and does: and of what role community may play in the building up of Christ’s kingdom.

The critic almost always assumes that there is a sectish agenda in our community living which robs the individual of his rights and freedoms and imposes unfair or outdated religious restraints upon his or her life. Often there is the insinuation that Betel has a design of entrapping vast numbers of weak and helpless people in its communal web. If that were so, our trap is like a sieve. Of the 33,000 individuals who have passed through Betel’s residences over the last years, only 1,200 live with us today, the rest leaving to return to their families or the street. Some choose to live drug-free and some choose to return to drugs. (Our cure rate has ranged between 10% and 15% over the years.) All are free to select the church of their choice or a purely non-religious lifestyle. Of the 1,200 Betel residents only about one hundred and twenty would be permanent or semi-permanent members who exercise some kind of full-time ministry either in the pastorate, as staff, or as monitors in our residences and shops. These are hardly the kind of statistics one would expect from a sect. In reality Betel is really more of a temporary rest stop where weary, broken people can piece back together their shattered lives before continuing on their journey.

Would-be community members usually address the question of ‘why’ before they take their first step to join Betel and then ask it again and again along the way. When the pressures of their personal journey of faith increase, they naturally ask, ‘Is community worth all the trouble and sacrifice? Is it still for me?’ I always remind them that Betel has always embraced the refrain, ‘Easy entrance, easy exit.’ Men and women are free to respond to the hospitality and love we are willing to show them in any way they please.

Being a religious community is not always easy. In general, today, religious communities are looked down upon by the world and by the church at large. Why? There are some good reasons. There have been abuses in the past: extreme monasticism, closed convents, and the deadly religiosity that was at times institutionalised during the Middle Ages. Present day abuses: fanaticism, and sects like those of Jim Jones and Dr. Moon have also coloured popular opinion. The modern mind-set with its obsession for individualism, freedom, and ‘rights’, with its tendency towards rebellion and the rejection of all authority views a religious community as an affront to human dignity.

The question is: does community deserve this kind of shunning? The answer is yes and no. Each Christian community must be judged by its own fruits and by what it really is and does.

When I challenge Betelitos to consider whether community is for them, I first tell them why I think that the right kind of community experience might suit them. I point out that millions of men, women and children have voluntarily chosen to live in Christian communities throughout the centuries. Some have chosen because of direct revelation, others because of necessity. Why? Perhaps for no other reason than that for them as individuals community was the will of God for their lives for a season. This is not to say that their choice was higher or better, but simply a choice God permitted them to make.

The Bible is full of community. The very first large community was Noah’s ark, a veritable floating married couples’ hostel, only with a few more pets. To be precise four families lived

under one roof and formed one congregation that had everything in common. The world was corrupt, perverse, and destined for judgement. Yet, out of that world one man found grace in the sight of God – Noah. One privileged man and his family were chosen out of all the race to be set apart. He was chosen for the specific purpose of forming that redemptive community which would preserve the human seed from the coming judgement of God.

Most addicts who come to Betel come reluctantly. We are usually the last remedy chosen. Compared to other programmes, both private and governmental, a Christian residential rehabilitation community appears, at least at first sight, to be overly restrictive. When sharing with the new members I emphasise not their ‘perceived’ plight, but their privilege in being allowed by God to live in Betel’s family. Only a fraction of hard addicts seriously seek help and only a fraction of that fraction are willing to live in a residential community long enough to be really changed. We let them know that they are privileged even more than the average Christian who is a member of a normal non-residential congregation. God’s purposes and preparation for their lives can be worked out quickly in the intense twenty-four-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week discipleship programme they have voluntarily and temporarily joined. And, if their attitude is right, and if they are truly seeking God, they may find community to be a kind of spiritual paradise. The mature faith and prayers of the older members of the community, the disciplined study of the Word, and the rich atmosphere of worship create a favourable environment for their growth in grace. While they are privileged guests for a season beneath Betel’s spiritual covering, a covering that they themselves would be incapable of finding or building on their own, and if God is gracious, they may from time to time encounter a foretaste of heaven.

At one of our camp meetings our second son Jonathan got up to testify before more than a thousand Betelitos. He said, ‘I thank God that I grew up in the Betel Community – a “Chaval” from San Blas. Who would have ever thought that a Rhodes

Scholar would come out of Betel?’ (Jonathan grew up as one of the community and went on to win a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford where he is completing his doctorate in history at Christ Church College.

Unlike a possessive sect, if we find a personality that is not happy in Betel and cannot find rest, we make a way for them to leave gracefully. Once we see that their lives are flowing at cross purposes to those of the community, rather than try to persuade them to stay, we try and direct them to some other place better to their liking. Fellowship and calling cannot be forced. It is best that they leave in peace, loved and loving, than that in overstaying they are provoked to criticism and the sowing of the tares of division. As Abraham said to Lot, ‘Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen, for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee?’ (Gen. 13:8, 9).

Sometimes I feel moved by the Spirit of God to strongly encourage some individuals to tough it out and continue in Betel. Certainly the majority of those who leave before they finish the programme leave before God has finished doing in their life what He would like to do. Most addicts have compulsive, obsessive and impatient personalities. The easiest thing to do when things get rough is to quit and run to some other supposedly easier, more sympathetic place. When personalities rub against each other in the community, when the demands and rules of the community start to cut against the grain of a rebellious will, that is when individuals decide that Betel is not the ‘will of God for their lives’. If we think that God really has something better for that person, we open the door wide and help them leave. But if they are leaving to escape the dealings of the cross in their lives or if they are leaving for lower reasons, that is, they want to go back on the street, I will do my best in the free market place of ideas and argument to convince them to stay. I like to point out that although Betel’s community may appear to be ‘hard’, they may find, like Jacob, that ‘Laban’s community’ is harder than their father’s house. Changing places has never been a successful way

of evading the dealings of God. The Lord will manoeuvre His children into the circumstances that will lead them to brokenness and that final stroke of grace that changes a Jacob to an Israel.

Betel's community is certainly not the only place God deals with men's lives, nor is it the definitive place even for committed Betelites. The world and the Kingdom of God are both much bigger than Betel. Nevertheless, we have tried to do our best to make it a loving and challenging Christian community for the nurture of God's family and the raising up of an army for His glory.

## 6

### THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

PETER STEPHENSON & ELLIOTT TEPPER

*Elliott explains the crying need for an effective mechanism which will help ex-drug addicts re-enter society.*

Right from the beginning of Betel we have known that the people in our programme, the vast majority, have to leave and return to normal life. Only a very small percentage is called to stay in the community as pastors or staff or monitors.

Peter Stephenson from England arrived at Betel as a new WEC missionary. He is a very thoughtful, creative person and became deeply concerned about this problem. It was then that we began to think very seriously about creating a workers' co-operative.

We received valuable help and advice through a visit of Terence Rosslyn-Smith, a specialist in this area with wide experience in Britain.

*Peter continues:*

What really excited us about the co-operative concept was the idea of the owners being the workers. There's a high incentive for work, for keeping things on the straight and narrow, and for running things legally. There is high motivation for mutual supervision because if your work colleague starts to take drugs and his work performance goes down that starts to affect your end-of-year bonus. Spanish law allows a very strong disciplinary framework for co-operatives because the owners are also the workers, so they don't need protection from the 'owners'. Thus

we were able to put into our statutes that the use of drugs at any time could be a sackable offence, whereas in normal Spanish law an ordinary employee cannot be sacked for drug taking until it seriously affects his work. We used the name ‘Cadmiel’ which comes from a character mentioned in the book of Ezra who helped in the rebuilding of the temple in the 6th century BC; the name Cadmiel means ‘God at the forefront’.

*Elliott adds:*

Peter did the hard work of drawing up the statutes, of learning the co-operative law, of creating an entity that we could legalise, and of really inspiring the first five founding members to take a step of faith and start a totally legal business. As Peter pointed out, most of the unemployed in Spain usually look for work that’s not official, so as to avoid paying taxes and social security. Our method meant that they would have to pay taxes and keep records for the government.

We wanted to keep the membership to people that had the Betel ethos, the Betel experience, because there is a heart loyalty there. So we were taking a risk. On one hand when people graduate from Betel with no chance of work and you create work for them, you are helping the family, and you are also helping the church because it encourages them to form a family, and stay part of the fellowship. But on the other hand there is a certain selfish motive on our part to keep faithful workers and monitors in Betel as long as possible. We can’t keep them forever. So we make a doorway out after eighteen months; we make a leak in the system; we are ‘bleeding’ ourselves in a positive sense to bless families.

One of the chief reasons for creating our own co-operative is a statistic that was passed on to me from Terence Rosslyn-Smith. He noted that in Britain people with a history of drug addiction, criminal background, or AIDS, have only a fifteen percent chance of ever finding permanent work once they leave a rehabilitation programme. A second statistic came to my attention through the *Economist*; it was from an American study in the American



Department of Labour. They noted that the lack of skills or lack of professional training was rarely the important factor in unemployment, that most of the people were unemployed because they lacked the social skills and the character necessary to be faithful in whatever job they took. Their problem is lack of character, lack of self discipline, lack of honesty, lack of integrity, lack of punctuality, laziness. We feel that the Betel community puts those qualities into folk.

*Peter gives this account of the beginnings.*

In June 1997, Cadmiel was legally formed and in September it began trading. It was a very rough ride to begin with. We had a lot of additional costs, families to support and feed, rents on their homes to pay. Betel tried to cushion the blow as much as possible and offered to pay social security for the first year for the five founder members, and we also lent them about seventy square metres of space to set up an upholstery workshop. Its main line of business was in building services, renovating flats and warehouses, bricklaying, plumbing, and heating. The first six months were very much touch-and-go as to whether it would succeed.

There were other sources of external funding that helped. We had a £3,000 grant from the Besom Foundation, which is a Christian charity based in London which provides seed capital for new initiatives. Betel also gave them a permanent loan of a vehicle to help with moving materials and workers.

At the end of the first year there were sixteen owner members; all but two of those being former addicts who have come through the Betel programme. Salaries are still artificially low and they have decided to keep them low to try and guarantee as much as possible the long term stability of Cadmiel. By the end of our second year we should have twenty four members. We already have a waiting list of Betelitos who want to join.

Although we are not out of the woods yet, things are beginning to look a lot more positive and clients are recognising the work they are doing. They are beginning to get a reputation.

They are getting second and third jobs from the same clients and are beginning to have major establishments like the social services and the army as customers. This will increase as they continue to produce good quality work; the future looks bright.

We are very aware that there is always a danger that the whole thing could go horribly wrong and that the original ethos could disappear and turn into pure selfishness and desire for individual financial gain. So we just have to trust the Lord; we have to trust the people concerned, to pray for them and do all we can to influence them correctly.

*Elliott mentions a further danger.*

One of the dangers is that of losing the ethos and losing the Christian spirit of holiness that is in Betel. We are wrestling with the question of whether the people should be required to go to church, or be strongly encouraged to go to church, or if they choose not to participate in a Christian church should they be on the governing council? All these things we are working through right now because we don't just want to create a mere business organisation.

*Peter explains further:*

We are anxious that people do not leave the centre until they genuinely are ready. So nobody can even consider joining Cadmiel until they have been in Betel for at least eighteen months without any major hiccups. During these eighteen months they have to have shown a sense of responsibility, a sense of Christian discipleship. Then, even after they join Cadmiel they are on a six month trial period, in which the company can cut the contract whenever it likes if the person fails to perform well morally or spiritually or in the work environment.

We really are right at the front end of thinking in the whole area of rehabilitation, without even realising it. I was recently at a conference on social re-insertion run by one of our brother organisations. The conclusion reached was that unless we have re-integration into the workplace at the front of our minds right

from the first moment, then we are really wasting our time. It doesn't matter what you do, in terms of rehabilitation; at the end of the day, if they are incapable of holding down a job, you are failing. So it's ironic that after twelve or fifteen years of being criticised for placing work so central in our Betel programme, everyone is now saying unless work is integral, you are wasting your time!

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## **Rescue Shop Within a Yard of Hell**

**Stewart and Marie Dinnen**

This book takes us to the streets of Madrid – amongst drug users, pushers and prostitutes – where God transformed lives made hopeless by sin. ‘Living on the edge of eternity’ is a reality in Betel as they take the gospel to those who otherwise would have no hope.

Stewart and Marie Dinnen, with the help of Elliot and Mary Tepper, Lyndsay and Myk Mackenzie, and Kent Martin, describe the origins and activities of Betel. Several, who found Christ through Betel, tell their own stories.

Norman Grubb writes in the foreword: ‘I am delighted that Stewart Dinnen...has put together the stirring testimonies which comprise this totally surprising development in our Spanish work. Faith always means shocks, because it causes something to happen – a release of God’s power – not as a result of human reasoning but as a manifestation of his purposes for the world....It is just like the Lord to take on what appears to be impossible and turn it into one of the most dramatic responses to the saving truth of Jesus in Europe today.’

First published in 1996, the book has been reprinted several times.

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