BRAZILIAN EVANGELICAL MISSIONS AMONG ARABS: HISTORY, CULTURE, PRACTICE, AND THEOLOGY

by

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SUMMARY
The aim of this work is to tell part of the story of the Brazilian evangelical missions movement by focusing on the work and Brazilian evangelical transcultural workers serving in mission in the context of the Arab-Muslim world. These participants are members of a broader movement of more than 5000 Brazilian evangelicals serving around the world—an evangelical labor force larger than that of England or Canada—which has grown significantly since 1976.

In order to locate the work of Brazilian evangelicals in an Arab-Muslim context, it was important to first offer a historical narrative showing how Brazil has shifted in the twentieth century from being a “mission field” to being a base for sending missions. Relying on key historical literature, this has been accomplished first by recounting how Brazil was evangelized largely by North American missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Building on this narrative, the argument has been made that while the Brazilian evangelical church does share common characteristics with North American and global evangelicalism, it has also begun to forge its own evangelical identity. One important part of this identity is its concrete participation in global mission efforts.

As transcultural mission necessarily involves cultural adaptation, forty-five past and present Brazilian evangelical workers were invited to participate in a collective case study and reflect upon their own “Brazilianness” and how they have adapted in the Arab world. The perspectives of ten Brazilian mission leaders have also been included. In this study, I have treated Brazil as an affinity bloc of cultures in which there is clear diversity as well as some elements of cohesiveness. I have approached the Arab world in the same way. Hence, the framework for discussing Brazilians in the Arab world has been to reflect upon two affinity blocs and to ask members of one group (Brazilians) to share their collective experiences living in a second group (the Arab world) specifically regarding seven aspects of culture that have clear missiological implications. They include: race, economics, time, communication, family, relationships, and spiritual worldview. After hearing these Brazilian voices, it has become evident, culturally speaking that Brazilians are not Arabs and that Brazilians must surely work to adapt culturally. However, it also appears that there is generally less cultural distance between the Brazilians surveyed and their Arab contexts than what is normally experienced by Western missionaries in the Arab world.

This study was also concerned with asking, how are Brazilian evangelicals approaching mission in the Arab-Muslim world? Following a collective case study methodology, this question was posed to individual Brazilians and teams, but also to Brazilian evangelical missions organizations working in the Arab world. While a number of themes (strategies and practices) emerged, it seems that Brazilians are particularly concerned about humanitarian work and personal evangelism and would regard these areas as strengths of their movement. On the other hand, Brazilian workers and mission leaders also identified the most apparent challenges in their work among Arab-Muslims. They included: a lack of Brazilian local church support for missionaries, deficiencies in language learning, lack of financial support, and difficulties faced by Brazilian women in Arab contexts. For each apparent difficulty, I have proposed some solutions based on the collective input of Brazilian voices.

Finally, in this study, I have posed the question, how do Brazilians think theologically about mission? Also, how is this Brazilian missiology relevant to transcultural mission work in the Arab-Muslim world? While I have approached this question primarily through surveying the literature from Latin American and Brazilian
theologians, I have also looked for missiological themes in the thoughts of Brazilian evangelical workers and through observing their concrete mission practices. From this, four theological themes have emerged that are descriptive of Brazilian missions. They include: that mission is holistic (*missão integral*); that mission is church-centered; that authentic mission originates from “below” or from a posture of vulnerability; and that one’s missiology must be undergirded by an awareness of the spiritual world.

In summary, through this work, I have have endeavored to tell part of the story of an emerging majority world missions movement by listening to the voices of Brazilian transcultural workers who serve in the Arab-Muslim world. The goal of this study is to inform the global church of this phenomenon in order that the global church would learn from the Brazilian experience as it moves forward in mission and missiological reflection. Secondly, my desire is to provide a framework of self-reflection for Brazilian evangelical missionaries and missions organizations serving in both the Arab-Muslim world but also in the entire world.
Keywords: majority world missions, two-thirds world missions, emerging missions movements, Brazilian evangelical missions, *missão integral*, holistic mission, missions from below, Arabs, Arab-Muslims, ministry to Muslims
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<td>AMTB</td>
<td>Associação de Missões Transculturais Brasileiras (Association of Transcultural Missions Agencies)</td>
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<td>APMB</td>
<td>Associação de Professores de Missões no Brasil (Association of Brazilian Professors of Mission)</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAM</td>
<td>Business as Mission</td>
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<td>CCI Brasil</td>
<td>Crossover Communication International Brasil</td>
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<td>CEPLA</td>
<td>Comisión Evangélica Pentecostal Latinoamericana (Latin American Evangelical Pentecostal Commission)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLADE</td>
<td>Congreso Latinoamericano de Evangelizacion (Latin American Congress on Evangelization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMIBAM</td>
<td>Cooperación Misiononera Iberoamericana (Ibero American Missionary Congress)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FTL</td>
<td>Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamérica (Latin American Theological Fraternity)</td>
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<tr>
<td>JMM</td>
<td>Junta de Missões Mundiais da Convenção Batista Brasileira (global missions board, Brazilian Baptist Convention)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAMP</td>
<td>Language Application Made Practical</td>
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<td>OM</td>
<td>Operation Mobilization</td>
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<tr>
<td>PMI</td>
<td>Povos Muçulmanos International (Muslim Peoples International)</td>
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<td>PMM</td>
<td>Professional Ministry Model</td>
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I hereby declare that the thesis, *Brazilian Evangelical Missions Among Arabs: History, Culture, Practice, and Theology*, which I hereby submit for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

________________________________________  __________________________
Edward L. Smither                                      August 2010
Student No. 29075972
Dedicated to Brennan, Emma, and Eve Smither:
You are blessed to be a blessing so that all of the families of the earth will be blessed.
VITA

Dr. Edward Smither was born August 11, 1971. He received a BA in History from North Carolina State University (1993), an MA (1999) and MDiv (2001) from Liberty Theological Seminary, and a PhD in Historical Theology from the University of Wales-Trinity Saint David (2006). He is married to Shawn Michelle (Davis) Smither, and they have three children: Brennan, Emma, and Eve. Prior to coming to Liberty University in 2006, where he presently teaches church history and intercultural studies and directs the MA in Intercultural Studies, Dr. Smither spent ten years in transcultural mission work in France and North Africa.

The purpose of this work, “Brazilian evangelical missions among Arabs: History, culture, practice, and theology,” is to tell part of the story of an emerging majority world missions movement. First, these efforts are located historically through an initial survey of how Brazil went from being a mission field in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to a mission sending base in the late twentieth century. Second, this study describes the experiences—including apparent successes and challenges—of Brazilian missionaries in both cultural adaptation and practical ministry in the Arab world. Finally, the work describes some prevailing themes of Brazilian theology of mission. The goal of this study is first to inform the global church of this phenomenon in order that the church would learn from the Brazilian experience as it moves forward in mission and missiological reflection. Second, the intent is to provide a framework of self-reflection for Brazilian evangelical missionaries and missions organizations serving in both the Arab-Muslim world and also in the entire world.