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## Interview of Tom Douglas

Tom Douglas

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LIVING HISTORY OF MISSIONS

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I am Joe Hacker, and this morning we will be interviewing Tom Douglas who has been working in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The date is October 5, 1971

Hacker: Tom, would you give us a brief historical background in which you have been engaged from the time you began until this date.

Douglas: My wife, Karen, and I arrived in Brazil October 4, 1969, to work on a two year program similar to the Faith Corp program at West Islip several years ago. I believe that program could be still be going on. The missionaries in Sao Paulo felt that they could recruit their own two year workers and train them themselves in Sao Paulo and perhaps, get a few more months use out of thw workers. Howard Norton came to the United States in 1968 and the spring of 1969 to recruit two year workers. My wife and I met Howard on Harding's campus. We agreed to go to Sao Paulo for two years on a subsistence type basis. When we arrived, we immediately entered into an intensive language training program. After the language study for six months we began working with the Avenida congregation in the city of Sao Paulo as youth directors and also worked with the Christian camp in Sao Paulo. We recently returned from Brazil after our two year stay.

Hacker: You have been working primarily with the young people. What kind of attitudes do they have about religion in Brazil, the young people with whom you worked?

Douglas: The young people in Brazil have what I would define as a much more interested outlook toward religion than the young people in the Unites States. They're a very inquisitive type people and very interested in religion.

Hacker: What is their primary religious background? Are they nominal Catholics or are they serious about Catholicism? What is the real religious attitude?

Douglas: I would define most of the young people as nothing really. Most of them come from Catholic background, but they really are not too serious about Catholicism, and most of them haven't attended church in several years.

Hacker: Do you find them very easy to convert or are they quite difficult? Do you receive serious questions from them? What do you think is the major thing that draws them to you and to your work?

Douglas: The young people are very well educated in high school, and they ask some deep questions about life in general, not so much about religion as about the purpose of life. Is the Bible really true? Is there really a God? We are beginning, I feel, a very good youth program across the city. We are drawing young people through youth conferences once a month and the camp. We draw them with the interest in knowing other young people. We are trying to use our young people to draw other young people to Jesus.

Hacker: You say you have a youth program across the city. What kind of methods have you developed there in Sao Paulo that attracts these young people and can you give me something of the history or evolution of that method?

Douglas: Lynn Huff came to Brazil in 1963 and had a dream of a youth camp to work with the young people in Brazil. He began working with that camp as early as 1964. Lynn has always had a dream of working with young people. When camp was in construction and when it was finished, Lynn turned more full time to working with the young people in Sao Paulo, and he has tried to organize these young people. This is a fairly new program and it is hard to say how effective it is or how effective it is going to be. In our first meeting of the young people from the five congregations in Sao Paulo we had 98 young people present.

Hacker: So this stretches across a number of congregations; it is not just a single congregation effort. How do you coordinate this with the other work?

Douglas: Our meeting with the young people was designed to organize the young people in this phase of work. Now, this is just one program in the youth program in each congregation. We are trying to set up a situation where we are controlling all the young people in the congregation; of course, this isn't true. This is a separate program from the normal youth program in each congregation. Each congregation has its own youth program. But this is an attempt to organize the youth in the city in an organizational set-up in which each month each congregation has the responsibility for the program on a particular Saturday night. Plans were made to what kind of get together we wanted it to be—a know your neighbor type program, study the Bible type program, discussion type program or entertainment type program; plans were made for each specific month.

Hacker: How do you evaluate the success of this at this point?

Douglas: I evaluate that the interest is growing in the program. I think the camp and the availability of the camp is strengthening this program. Most young people in the city don't have a place where they can get away from the city—it is a quiet place, and they are very interested in sitting and talking about problems about spiritual things. I think it is the program of the coming thing, so to speak, in the city of Sao Paulo.

Hacker: With the work in Sao Paulo a number of innovative methods. The youth program is one of them. What are some of the others they are using over there?

Douglas: The leadership training school is a new program which we began not too long ago in which we put Brazilian men chosen by Brazilian congregations on a scholarship type basis to study full time in the leadership training school. I think they have had remarkable success in the leadership training school. I don't know of anything appreciably about leadership training schools or preacher training schools abroad but what I understand there tends to be a high dropout rate in the classes during the two years of program. We have had only two persons drop out, but not because they had a falling out with the school. One man was close to the age of retirement and he was under pressure to finish off his retirement with his job so he dropped under this pressure. The other man dropped out just before the last semester of the leadership training school, and I really couldn't comment on this dropping out. I don't know anything about it. With only really one man dropping out for personal reasons, I think it is a highly successful program. The proof of the pudding, so to speak, will

not come until the men graduate and are back in the congregation from which they came from. The whole school was designed to train leadership in the congregation and not necessarily preachers and that is the reason we never called it a preacher training school. The congregations were asked to choose men that they desired to go to school, subject only to the approval of the directorship of the school. They were required to partially support each man that they sent and the scholarship was supplied to pay for the remainder of the cost while he was in school from American sources. This salary was estimated as exactly that which he was receiving when he entered the school. When he terminates his stay with the school, the school and American missionaries have no responsibility for his salary. It was designed to take the leadership and rapidly train him to be an elder and deacon and put him back in the particular congregation, not to spread him out across the country, to train leaders in the congregations in Brazil. I think this will rapidly increase the possibility of elderships and deaconships in the congregations in the city of Sao Paulo and the rest of the country in years to come.

Hacker: Now you have what is called the follow-up program. What is that?

Douglas: David Rose and the follow-up team work separately from the mission team in Sao Paulo; however, he has his offices with us and works out of the city of Sao Paulo. It is a follow-up program geared to contact correspondence graduates which were contacted through the radio program out of Sao Paulo. Even before David arrived in Brazil, there were missionaries who did this follow-up. When he arrived he formed a group and we turned over this responsibility to David. They have done a fine job. From the beginning there has been more than 25 congregations established in the state of Sao Paulo and recently the follow-up team is back full strength. It is a two year type program also where people come for two years and travel in interior congregations. There just recently arrived more recruits, and now they are full strength, and they do a fine work in the interior. They have five people working from them and they have done a fine job so far.

Hacker: Now you have the radio program as an outreach. Do you have a correspondence school in Sao Paulo?

Douglas: The radio program reaches 200,000 Brazilians daily and the correspondence course is primarily advertised over the radio. Other advertisements methods are used, but primarily most of our contacts come through the radio program. If I am not mistaken, they are having a contact rate of 90 new students a week on the correspondence course. I am not sure of that number, but we have hit a peak here recently of a new plateau of correspondence students. The correspondence course began early in the work about 1964. Gaither Vanderveer came approximately five years ago and worked in Sao Paulo for five years with the correspondence course. When he took over the correspondence course, he had an enrollment of 3,000 and left four years later and had an enrollment of 27,000. Dale Brown moved from Belo Horizonte to Sao Paulo to take over the directorship of the correspondence course and more specifically the work with radio. Since he has taken over it has had another increase of 3,000 in a year or a year and a half. That is our primary method of contact for evangelism. We can study with as many people as we have time for, but we have narrowed it down to try to pick our best contacts because of a matter of man hours. We have found that our best contacts have been people who have finished the eleven lesson correspondence course.

If they have the initiative to finish a eleven lesson correspondence course they have usually the desire to know the Bible and to know God's will. That has been highly successful. Everyone of the men in Estudos Biblicos training school were originally contacted through the correspondence course.

Hacker: About how many people do you baptize in a year in Sao Paulo?

Douglas: Of course, that varies with each congregation. The Nove de Julho congregation had more than 35 baptisms this past year. From the time Karen and I arrived in October 1969 until we left the number of Christians in Sao Paulo had almost doubled. Every congregation now except one, four out of five congregations are averaging over 100 every Sunday. When we arrived in October of 1969, I suppose only one was averaging over 100 in attendance on Sunday. So I suppose there were 200 baptisms or more in the city of Sao Paulo in a year.

Hacker: I wonder, what were some of the real challenges that you had to personally face, you and your wife in making the adjustment?

Douglas: I would have to define that in two terms. First of all, the big problem that any missionary feels is language where it is different. If a man cannot learn a language or doesn't learn the language as far as I am concerned he is useless. That is the thing that he needs to spend full time at when he hits the field, the language. The second problem that I found personally this is more of a personal problem is a problem which I would say arose from a lack of experience with a local congregation. I preached while I was in Harding studying in small congregation around but I am talking of a real knowledge of the mechanics of operating a congregation of the preacher's life in the congregation. What is he to do Monday morning after the preaching on Sunday? Just things like this—a problem which comes from a lack of real knowledge of the mechanics of a congregation of how it is run and how to build a congregation.

Hacker: Did you have to kind of stumble through this or did the brethren have a program of intensive training to help in this?

Douglas: I was very lucky to work with two fine evangelists from the Nove de Julho congregation, Howard Norton and Ted Stewart. Both of these men upon graduation from Abilene spent two or three years working with congregations before they went to the field. Part of their specific purpose after graduation from ACC was to get this practical training in the congregation before they went to the field. Brother Howard Norton had the opportunity to work under C. E. McGaughey which he contributes a lot of his knowledge and ability in the ministry to. So I had a lot of help over the two years with these two men in seeing how a congregation is built. They have done a tremendous job at Nove De Julho.

Hacker: How do the Americans enter into the support of these national preachers?

Douglas: We enter in as little as possible. I think that the ideal is to use as little of American money as possible. There is always going to be some things you are going to have to use the money, even if it is your own. The American support was raised as a scholarship type fund and it directly given to the congregation and the congregation pays the man they have in the leadership training school. That way they are controlling the man and we are not controlling financially. And that is our

desire, the missionaries in Sao Paulo try to have the least financial influence over the men as possible.

Hacker: The group approach has worked quite successfully in Sao Paulo. What do you attribute as some of the major reasons for this?

Douglas: I would attribute the success of group missions mainly to the idea of group missions and also there are three or four reasons why the group in Sao Paulo succeeded. 1) The caliber of men took upon themselves to do this project. All these men were leaders from ACC in student politics on the campus of ACC while they were in college. Howard Norton, for instance, was the president of Boy's State and Boy's Nation in high school and went on to be student body president of ACC. They were all involved in campus activities, I am talking about spiritual leadership on the campus. 2) They were prepared. They got the education they wanted, all or most of them have their master's from ACC. They have their practical experience from a congregation for a year or two. 3) They went as a tight-knit group. They were very close. Their business ran very closely. They have monthly business meetings in which problems are discussed, and it is on a very close eye type situation. They watch their work, every-one of the groups projects. They are a tight-knit organization. I think this is one of the main reasons for the longitivity of the group in Sao Paulo. 4) I would say are the methods they have employed. They haven't made all the right choices the ten years they have been there, but the general attitude was to establish a national church or a nationalized congregation in Brazil. Having this in their minds this also helped.

Hacker: What are some of the problems that you have encountered in gaining your support and keeping your support?

Douglas: I guess, I might be unusual in this, but I didn't have a lot of trouble in getting support. I went to congregations in which I knew someone or they knew me to seek our support. I believe it was probably easier to have support for only a two year basis than for a longer time on an indefinite basis. We did have some individuals drop out along the two year period. I would very much counsel against getting funds from individuals because there is a tendency of a set-back in the family or something of this sort in which a man can physically continue to support you. I would say that if the person is going a longer type basis than he ought to find a congregation to support him. Since we have been back we have gotten to see all of the congregations who supported us for two years, and that is not a good situation.

Hacker: How long do you plan to be home?

Douglas: Long enough to get my master's. I am hoping to work with a congregation that sent us to Brazil as I work on my master's. I really believe that at least in Sao Paulo that graduate level work would be a tremendously asset to the work we do in Sao Paulo.

Hacker: How do you look at the future of your work and the future of the work there?

Douglas: We hope when we go back to establish congregations because if you don't have congregations you know, you don't have anything. That is the main goal of every-thing we do, to establish with leadership. I probably spend a lot of time working

with the Christian camp when we go back since I have already been involved in that. I think that a master's will help me to develop quality leadership in the congregations. It will give me a quality type rounded basis for my own work; personally I feel there will tend to be a polished outlook on the work that we can do when we go back to Brazil.

Hacker: We appreciate you taking the time to talk with us this morning and participate in our Living History of Missions series. We wish the very best to you and your wife as you continue your preparation to go back to Brazil.

Douglas: Thank you.