



## Searching for the truth in Brazil

This month we bring you an update on the work of Paz y Esperanza Brazil and specifically on one of their partners called the **Berea Collective**. The project started three years ago and monitors religious news and the social media of digital religious influencers. It checks the facts in the news to make sure that fake news is not disseminated, as well as responding to news sent in by the public who want to check whether it is true. We talked to the executive editor **Marcos Lessa** about the importance of the work in light of the upcoming general election on 2 October.

There are many news verification services in Brazil because of the amount of disinformation in society, but Berea is the first to check those which target the **Christian public**. It focuses on statements by politicians who identify themselves as religious. Brazil has a population of 200m people and half of them are eligible to vote. The majority of people used to identify themselves as Catholic but now evangelicals have growing political power and therefore candidates want to get their votes, sometimes by means of manipulation.

The Berea team is made up of 14 people, including journalists and editors. The collective has its own website and the journalists and other prominent authors write stories highlighting the truth or otherwise of stories they have checked, as well as reflections on current issues affecting Christians. The team also participate in interviews, lectures and contribute to academic papers. The website has had 222,000 visitors since 2019. It can be found at <https://www.coletivobereia.com.br>

Marcos gave some examples of the news they verify. These included a story that Lula's Workers' party would close churches and endorse religious persecution of Christians if they

come to power. When the team delved into this, they found no evidence.. Another incident involved a well-known Catholic priest named Marcelo Rossi. A video was circulating with a voice-over that gave the impression he was endorsing current president Jair Bolsonaro, but it was found to be digitally manipulated. Another incident was a recording of a priest closely associated with the current government, trying to discredit him by claiming that he was offering a cure for Covid. Again, words were completely out of context and the claim was proved to be false.

He said: "*Part of what we do is educating our audience as we need to explain the editing, photoshopping and creative techniques used to create fake news. We want Christians to be able to make informed decisions. We are politically neutral and are here to help and listen as it is not good for anybody if fake news is shared*".



Please pray for Marcos and the rest of the PyE team in Brazil as they highlight these levels of disinformation and fake news.  
Your gifts to us at <https://www.justgiving.com/pazyesperanza> will help further this vital work

**Please pray for the presidential election on 2 October.**

Current president **Jair Bolsonaro** is standing again and former president **Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva** wants a third term. Pray that people may be able to understand and respond to what is true and not the fake information being circulated. Brazil faces numerous economic, social, environmental and political issues so there is much to grapple with.

Welcome to Jorge Arboccó, who is the new director of Paz y Esperanza Peru. Jorge has been part of the PyE team in San Martin since 2003. Former director Alfonso Wieland has started a new position as Peru country director for International Justice Mission (IJM). As a founder of PyE back in 1996, serving for over 25 years, he will continue to be connected to the work in a personal capacity. Please pray for Jorge and Alfonso as they settle into their new roles

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