



# AVIVAMIENTO

## *Bogota 2007*

### REVIVAL THEN

*"The impression of that day was extraordinary. The place was like a battlefield strewn with the dead and dying. Not a few survived to testify that the Lord was of a truth present that day".* So wrote an eyewitness during the mid 1840's of a revival service in Invermoriston, a small hamlet in the Highlands of Scotland. The famed Dr. John MacDonald, the Apostle of the North was the preacher. On that occasion he was returning from the Isle of Skye where he had witnessed similar scenes. Another correspondent had recently reported of one such service in Skye – *"Between 12,000 and 15,000 attended, and that hundreds fell down as if they were dead. This usually commences with violent shaking and crying out, with clapping of hands."*



On one occasion while preaching in the Sleat area of Skye the people became so agitated that the local parish minister, who was in the audience, rose to his feet and warned MacDonald not to *"set the people mad"*. However the warning was

ignored and MacDonald continued preaching to great effect. Such a reaction gives us some hint of the emotion and phenomenon, which accompanied MacDonald's preaching. These were days of revival!



Similar phenomena follow most if not every true revival. Under the power of the Holy Spirit of God man will always be overwhelmed. But what must that have looked like? What if there were television, sound recorders and digital cameras in these meetings? Would we be shocked and appalled at the scenes recorded? Would we be open to the phenomenon that accompanies real revival today?

## REVIVAL NOW

For me the journey to Bogotá, Colombia was a trip in to the unknown and the unfamiliar – but from the little information I had received this city was in the grip of something akin to what had taken place in Skye over 150 years ago. I had travelled to with Colombia my friend Duncan Macaskill at the invitation of Avivamiento (Revival) Church of Bogotá in order to attend their yearly revival congress. The church, which meets in an old warehouse in the industrial zone of West Bogotá, has, in the last year, grown by an estimated 10,000 people.

Bogotá is a city of some 10 million. Estimates today put the evangelical population of the city at some 2 million. Even if this is an exaggeration what we witnessed was the church in revival and a city in transformation.



Avivamiento Church grew from a small group that initially met in a Bogotá apartment. By 1990 the group had grown to about 100 rising to 300 some 7 years later. Today in excess of 60,000 people pass through the doors of the church building every week, 45,000 attending the three Sunday morning services and 15,000 on a Friday evening.

Walking through the rear doors of the warehouse on the morning of Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> June, the first day of the conference, I was unprepared for the vast number of people who packed the dimly lit building. It seats some 15,000 (all on one level) – and every seat was taken. Others stood. The gathering was primarily for pastors and leaders but I suspect that was not exclusively the case! These people are hungry for God and it appears nothing will keep them from the blessing they seek. Indeed that was the mark of everything I witnessed – passion and hunger!

The morning started with prayer for the nations represented in the gathering. These were predominantly from Latin America. The emotion of seeing men on their knees weeping in to their national flag as they prayed for God to work in their nation was overwhelming. Although much of this was not translated – the language of love, passion and desperation needed no translator. When an old Argentinean gentleman in his 90's stood at the microphone to pray and later prostrated himself on the floor the sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit was tangible. Scotland was represented and prayed for more than once during the conference!



There were five meetings in all – two in the warehouse building and the others in Simon Bolivar Park near the centre of the city. The Bogotá press reported attendances in the park at 300,000 for each service. The actual figure was possible lower – but the numbers in themselves are immaterial. The sense, prominence and presence of the Holy Spirit marked every meeting! The

theme of the whole conference was – *“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit.”*

The evening meeting in Simon Bolivar Park on Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> June, was without doubt the most powerful I have ever witnessed (Duncan and I had the privilege of being on the platform that evening). With only background music and quiet but passionate prayer from Pastor Ricardo Rodriguez, the power of the Holy Spirit swept over the vast crowd. Hundreds *“fell down as if they were dead.”* Hundreds more fell to their knees and wept while others (including me) trembled under the awesome presence and power of the living God. Reports were later received of

passers by outside the park kneeling on the pavement weeping – wondering what was happening to them! What was the result of all this? Many hundreds indicated they had begun following Jesus while others testified publicly to having been healed physically. Thousands more received a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit.

What is the secret of this revival? The answerer is simple – the presence of God the Holy Spirit!

During the early years of his ministry in Bogotá, Ricardo Rodriguez and the small church he led tried all of the things we tend to - looked at different strategies for church growth, laboured as hard as they knew how, went out on the streets preaching etc, etc. However, God clearly told him not to look to any strategy but simply to seek His presence! It was the overwhelming experience of the presence of God in his own life that changed everything! The strategy of Avivamiento Church now, one leader told us, is not to have a strategy! That is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit! Amazingly there are no individual meetings for youth, men, ladies etc – all worship, learn and grow together. Yet, the church is at present building a medical centre to serve their community – many of who are poor.



In and around Bogotá there are indications everywhere of the transformational effect in the community. Many of the 80,000 small yellow taxis that serve the city have a fish badge on the rear. Even among the graffiti you will find witness to this – “*Christo my power*” read one we passed most days on our way to the conference!

But it is not only Avivamiento Church in Bogotá that is experiencing revival. All over Latin America similar stories can be told.

## **REACTION**

The spectacular growth of evangelical churches in South America is viewed with alarm in certain circles. On 9<sup>th</sup> May 2007 Max Seitz, BBC World correspondent in Sao Paulo, reported that the Pope, on the eve of his trip to the continent, confessed to being “*very worried*” by the advance of the evangelical church in Latin America. Indeed this subject was high on the agenda during his recent visit. Seitz reports in the same article that there are about 40 million evangelicals in Brazil, almost one fifth of the population of 188 million.

However, Brazil and Colombia are not the only countries in the continent experiencing such spectacular growth. BBC correspondent Maria Hope Sanchez writes that almost 20% of the Latin American



population belong to protestant churches. In her report, which analysed three countries she concludes that in Brazil and Guatemala, protestants make up a almost a third of the population and that in Colombia, in recent years, five million people have left the Catholic Church to join evangelical groups.

Guatemala is a spectacular example of what BBC correspondent Fernán González refers to as the “*religious fervour*” sweeping the nation. He also concludes that Guatemala has the greatest



percentage of evangelicals of any Latin American country – accounting for some 30% of the population of an estimated 13 million people.

Alarmed and concerned the Catholic Church might be but there is evidence to indicate that some amongst her leadership are supportive of this fresh move of the Holy Spirit. I certainly heard this reported privately in Colombia



during my recent trip. Even publicly some speak supportively. In Guatemala González found that many Catholic leaders lived in a climate of coexistence and not confrontation with the evangelical church. Some even spoke of working together for the good of the country.

Others are pragmatic. Cardinal Francisco Javier Errázuriz, Chilean Cardinal and president of the Conference of Latin American Bishops, admits – *“The people have a yearning to know Jesus Christ, to know the Gospel, and for that reason when evangelical pastors have arrived they have found a deep interest among the people - not by a rejection of the Church, but I would say, they have a hunger for what the Church is not giving them.”*

## **CHALLENGE**

Is there amongst the traditional churches in our nation a reflection of the dilemma now faced by the Catholic Church in South America? Will the day come in our country when people will desert dead traditional religious establishments and groups for those who demonstrate the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps the answer to some to these questions is closer than we think!

Are we willing to give up our personal agendas - to seek privately and publicly the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives and gatherings? If this is the secret to personal and national revival are we willing to pay the price - to seek Him above everything else, above our own reputations, positions and plans? Do we really care enough about our people and nation to give up all of these things and let the Holy Spirit have his way among us?