

Sustained Revival Ignites Holy Ghost Transformation in Latin America

It was as if I stepped into a river of Holy Ghost fire. The rain of the Spirit was falling and the wind of the Spirit was blowing. In one accord, over 25,000 people worshipped Jesus with all that was within them. Some lay prostrate on the ground while others stood with hands raised and tears streaming down their faces. I thought I heard angels singing.

I was caught up in the glory when Pastors Ricardo and Patricia Rodríguez, founders of Central Mundial de Avivamiento (translated World Headquarters of Revival) in Bogotá, Colombia, walked onto a colossal circular platform. Suddenly, the atmosphere shifted from adoration to anticipation.

Praise and worship continued thundering from skilled musicians praising Him on trumpets, violins and other instruments when Ricardo started doing publicly what he does many hours every day privately: crying out in surrender to a living God who saves, heals and delivers.

Moments later, Ricardo started calling out words of knowledge about various sicknesses and diseases—and people responded in droves. Demonized Christians were toted to the front for deliverance. Doctors stood nearby to verify miraculous healings. Testimony after testimony glorified the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus was truly exalted.

Avivamiento is living up to its name. What I experienced in that Sunday service has been the norm for nearly 23 years every time the congregation meets. But it wasn't always that way.

When Ricardo and Patricia started the church 25 years ago,

there were only a few members, and nobody came on time. They showed movies. Nobody came. They evangelized in the streets, and nobody came. They did everything they could think of to build the church God called them to plant—but all of their efforts fell to the ground.

After Ricardo confessed his frustration one night in prayer, he says God told him to stop worrying about numbers and start seeking His presence. Once he obeyed, that surrender revolutionized his life and his ministry.

“Twenty-two years ago, I started spending time with God from before the break of day until 1 in the afternoon,” Ricardo, who was once a nominal Catholic, told me. “I would sit all day long in His presence. It was not an experience. It was a relationship with God. And I won’t stop. There is not a single day when we don’t seek Him.”

Relationship Leads to Revival

That relationship birthed a spiritual awakening that’s impacting the nations. Indeed, when I was there, the Holy Spirit told me, “Colombia is the drumbeat of Latin America.” Ultimately, that’s not because of a husband-wife team who sold out to God 23 years ago—it’s because the Holy Spirit has found churches in Colombia like Avivamiento that will let Him have His way.

“All this started when Ricardo sought the Lord in a passionate way in his secret place and the Lord manifested Himself,” Patricia told me. “We had a one-person revival. This made us feel the same hunger, and we caught that fire. The Lord told Ricardo to bring that fire to the 70 people in our church. The presence of God came, and the musicians were not able to keep worshipping. They fell on the ground and wept. When the Holy Spirit has first place in the church, you can feel revival.”

And if you sustain that revival, you’ll see transformation. Indeed, transformation is a key word at Avivamiento. Several

members I spoke with shared testimonies of their entire families getting saved after they plugged in. Others report financial prosperity, and there are too many verified healings and miracles to list here.

Avivamiento has satellite campuses in Cali, Medellín and Olavarría in Colombia; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Corona, New York; and a Miami location that meets on the campus of Florida International University. Leaders from around the world come to the church to catch the spirit of revival and take it home.

Of course, Avivamiento is also impacting its own city. The ministry holds a New Year's Eve service in Colombia's largest park that sees over 1 million people gather to worship and adore Jesus. Major media outlets and people from other nations attend the prophetic event—and people are saved and healed just as they are in the church services. To accommodate constant growth, Avivamiento is building a new auditorium over its current facility that will expand seating to 40,000.

Sustained Revival Leads to Transformation

Revival for revival's sake feels good, but it doesn't really change the big picture. Revival must reach the top of society and trickle down to bring true transformation. And no single church can take credit for transforming revival. Avivamiento is one of many churches in the nation—and in Latin America—contending for a societal awakening. But it has happened before, and it is happening again.

Two decades ago, Colombia was the scene of martyrdom. Julio Ruibal had moved to Cali, the drug capital of the world, with his wife, Ruth, to plant a church and mobilize congregations to oppose the cartels. The Ruibals held their first all-night prayer meeting in the civic auditorium in 1995. More than 25,000 intercessors cried out to God while others circled the city in mobile prayer caravans.

"They prayed against principalities and powers," Ruth says.

“They prayed for unity. They believed God to see Him move in the churches.” Ten days later, the first drug lord fell. Corruption was dramatically reduced.

The cocaine drug cartels were shattered—and the devil hit back. Notorious drug lords dispatched an assassin to slay the Bolivian preacher, known as “the apostle of the Andes,” on the streets of Cali that same year. But the fruit of this transforming revival is still visible. The year 2014 was Colombia’s most peaceful since 1984, according to Insight Crime.

Transformation doesn’t happen overnight, but it does happen. George Otis Jr., founder of The Sentinel Group, a community of researchers, filmmakers and ministers documenting and preparing communities for awakening, says the 1,000 communities in which he has documented transforming revival have passed through several stages. It starts with what he calls the “invitation stage.” This is when people humble themselves, fast and repent of sins.

“They recovenant with God,” Otis told me. “They form unity kernels, and they prevail in prayer. And with clean hearts and pure hands, they ask God to rend the heavens and come down—not first and foremost to repair the community, but because they cannot bear to live apart from His presence a moment longer.

“They are not summoning a handyman. They’re summoning a lover. And when they do this, there is a certain moment in time where the presence of the Lord comes. God comes in response to that entreaty.”

The Awakening Has Begun

Habakkuk 2:14 reminds us, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas.” God wants to bring transformation to all of Colombia, all of Latin America—and all of the world. It seems Latin America is among the ripest regions for transforming

revival, with many believers there having recently tasted it and hungering for an even greater move of God.

Tens of millions of Latin Americans have left the Roman Catholic Church in recent decades to embrace Pentecostal Christianity, according to a Pew Research Study. By 2025, the number of Pentecostals and charismatics in Latin America is projected to surpass 202 million. That compares to just 10,000 in 1900, according to the *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*. Indeed, Samuel Rodriguez, president of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference (NHCLC), told me the majority of Christ followers around the world are now Latinos.

“Even here in America, the majority of Christ-followers will be of Latino descent by 2030,” Rodriguez told me. “This is our reformation. Seventy years ago, the majority of Latin Americans were Catholics.

“We haven’t had 500 years of Martin Luther’s theses on the door. This is not Wittenberg, so we’re giddy about Christianity. We’re like little kids super excited about not having to go to a priest and confess and take penance and do 10 Hail Marys. We can speak to Jesus directly, and He can fill us with His Spirit, and we have a prayer language. And there are signs and wonders and miracles.”

C. Peter Wagner, president of Global Harvest Ministries and a former missionary to Bolivia, says this grass-roots movement started in the 1970s and picked up in the ’80s. One of the major twists he has observed in recent times is the emergence of an overwhelming number of Pentecostal and charismatic ministries, which he attributes to a sovereign move of the Holy Spirit.

“Many were never trained in seminary; a lot come from the business world,” Wagner says. “These people have multiplied megachurches in every metropolitan area. Many number in the

tens of thousands; few are led by people who have gone to theological school.”

In Brazil, apostle Rene Terra Nova has used the M12 cell-church model—a spinoff of the G12 movement founded by Bogotá’s Cesar Castellanos—to develop his church of 100 to one that today numbers more than 70,000. And Ministerio Internacional de Restauración (International Restoration Ministry) is the base for a Pentecostal group of more than 1 million that is one of the world’s fastest-growing church networks.

Peru is also seeing revival. Robert Barriger and his wife, Karyn, moved to Peru in 1983 and now pastor Camino de Vida, a church in Lima of over 10,000 with 12 services on three campuses on a typical weekend. Barriger says this revival is not like the miracle meetings in Argentina in the 1980s but more “a real healthy, church-growth revival.”

“For the first time, the fastest-growing church in the world is Third World, especially Latin America and especially Peru,” Barriger says. “God has arranged it to such a point that not one person can take credit for it, which is good. It’s not based on a personality or a person, but it’s God doing stuff, and it’s happening everywhere, and it’s happening across denominational lines.”

Explosive Church-Planting Movement

According to Ricardo Luna, who once served as Peru’s ambassador to the U.S. and who works with Harvard University’s Institute of Politics, in just four years, over 85,000 church leaders from 19 countries have participated in transformation summits, where they have been inspired by and adopted God’s dream of transformation as their own. Transforming revival is the ultimate goal. But it starts with a visitation.

“There is a move of God sweeping so many parts of Latin America that nobody can claim they have a corner on that,” says former *Charisma* Editor Lee Grady, an evangelist who

frequently visits Latin America as part of his ministry, The Mordecai Project. "I have yet to go to any place in a major metropolitan area there where there's not an outpouring of the Holy Spirit."

He points to Uruguay as one example. The nation is opening up after past resistance because of atheist influences in the country. When Grady preached at a Foursquare church last March in Colombia, 1,000 people showed up at 6 a.m. for the first of four services that Sunday.

"In every service I preached in, at least a dozen people gave their hearts to the Lord, and that's typical," Grady says. "There's one movement in northeastern Peru where more than 100 churches have started in the past 30 years. There are churches in different cities, big and small, planted in places where there was nothing before."

Eloy Nolivos, a native of Ecuador who grew up in California and now serves as a professor of practical theology at Oral Roberts University, says church planting is a strategic key. The Church of God plans to establish several thousand Latin American churches over the next few years. And during a visit last year to Peru, an overseer with the Church of God of Prophecy told Nolivos, who specializes in the study of Latin American Pentecostalism, they had 500 church plants in progress. He says that would have been unheard of five or 10 years ago.

"They're not just talking about Latin America, but everywhere they are—different continents where they have churches," Nolivos says. "To me, that's pretty amazing and evidence that something historic is happening with Pentecostals."

Small wonder why Grady calls this "their season."

"I don't know if anyone knows why this is happening," he says. "God's favor and power are being manifested there. I think He's honoring the labor of a lot of people who went and sowed

the seed and prayed. There's a sovereign openness to the gospel in Latin America that we can be grateful for."

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Ken Walker and Richard Daigle contributed to this article.

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