

Cali, Colombia 1978-1998

Praying for a people and territory by asking Jesus to employ God's work in the heavenlies through the unity of the churches. Here is a summary of a peoples desire to claim God's will for their city, Cali, Colombia 1978-1998. Drug lords, mafia, and corrupt government officials controlled Cali and its people. They



enlisted the powers of darkness by consulting "spirit mediums" and the famous "fortune-telling parlor of Madame Marlene Ballesteros" (who was the "Pythoness of Cali"). As many as 15 people were killed in Cali a day and a "pervasive darkness" was over the city. The church was in "disarray" and "disunity" and "no one wanted to join"! In the early 1990s, a couple came together asking the Lord "show us how to pray." They focused on prayer, unity, holiness, and repentance. In May of 1995 a wave of the Spirit began to move, 25,000 people "filed into a civic auditorium for prayer" and the city's famous "all-night prayer vigil -- "the vigil" -- had been born." Within the next 24 hours, the local news paper proclaimed "No-Homicides!" "The powers of darkness were headed for a significant defeat." Many intercessors reported dreams in which "angelic forces apprehended leaders" of the gangs. The local churches experienced "stratospheric growth" and it was being "fuelled entirely by new converts." How could the powers of darkness be defeated? Geoff Waugh cites: 'In partnership with the Holy Spirit, Cali's Christians had taken effective control of the city. What made the partnership work are the same things that always attract the presence of the Lord: sanctified hearts, right relationships, and fervent intercession. "God began changing the city." According to Ruth Ruibal, it was "because His people finally came together in prayer.'"

I know this power struggle to be true. I have personally met a pastor's husband in Medellin, Colombia, who was formerly a "hit man" for these drug lords. As he was telling me the story of Jesus appearing to him, he pulled up his shirt showed me the scars caused by bullet wounds. You see, he had been a bandito, a member of a local gang, and he was the shooter who would ride on the back of a motorcycle firing upon anyone who would not submit to their rule. During one of his jobs, he was shot and hit himself. After this visitation from Jesus, God told him to leave the gang or he would die. He resolved to tell the gang leaders that he was done and upon hearing this the leader pulled out a pistol and put it to his head. The gang leader asked him why he wanted to leave because he was going to shoot him dead. This new Christian said: "Jesus told me to leave." The gang lord removed the gun from his temple and told him to get out and never to come back. This was miraculous because gang membership was only terminated through one's own death. He stood and was now free to follow Christ. After hearing this, I have come to believe we need to pray more. There must have been people praying the heavenlies, like the churches in Cali, who came together in unified prayer to bind up the darkness that released this man from death and into God's salvation. (Full article available on www.thegreatstory.info)

The following article was written by Dr. Geoff Waugh and is available online from Word Press at <http://renewaljournal.wordpress.com/2011/09/12/snapshots-of-glory-bygeorge-otis-jr/>

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For years Colombia has been the world's biggest exporter of cocaine, sending between

700 hundred and 1,000 tons a year to the United States and Europe alone (13). The Cali cartel, which controlled up to 70 percent of this trade, has been called the largest, richest and most well-organized criminal organization in history (14). Employing a combination of bribery and threats, it wielded a malignant power that corrupted individuals and institutions alike (5).

Randy and Marcy MacMillan, co-pastors of the Comunidad Christiana de Fe, have labored in Cali for more than 20 years. At least 10 of these have been spent in the shadow of the city's infamous drug lords.

Marcy inherited the family home of her late father, a former Colombian diplomat. When illicit drug money began pouring into Cali in the 1980s, the Cocaine Lords moved into the MacMillan's upscale neighborhood, buying up entire blocks of luxurious haciendas. They modified these properties by installing elaborate underground tunnel systems and huge 30-foot (10-metre) walls to shield them from prying eyes and stray bullets. Video cameras encased in Plexiglas bubbles scanned the surrounding area continuously. There were also regular patrols with guard dogs.

"These people were paranoid," Randy recalls. "They were exporting 500 million dollars worth of cocaine a month, and it led to constant worries about sabotage and betrayal. They had a lot to lose."

For this reason, the cartel haciendas were appointed like small cities. Within their walls, it was possible to find everything from airstrips and helicopter landing pads to indoor bowling alleys and miniature soccer stadiums. Many also contained an array of gift boutiques, nightclubs, and restaurants.

Whenever the compound gates swung open, it was to disgorge convoys of shiny black Mercedes automobiles. As they snaked their way through the city's congested streets, all other traffic would pull to the side of the road. Drivers who defied this etiquette did so at their risk. Many were blocked and summarily shot. As many as 15 people a day were killed in such a manner. "You didn't want to be at the same stoplight with them," Randy summarized.

Having once been blocked in his neighborhood, Randy remembers the terror. "They drew their weapons and demanded to see our documents. I watched them type the information into a portable computer. Thankfully the only thing we lost was some film. I will always remember the death in their eyes. These are people that kill for a living and like it."

Rosevelt Muriel, director of the city's ministerial alliance, also remembers those days. "It was terrible. If you were riding around in a car and there was a confrontation, you were lucky to escape with your life. I saw five people killed in Cali."

Journalists had a particularly difficult time. They were either reporting on human damage – car bombs were going off like popcorn – or they were becoming targets themselves. Television news anchor Adriana Vivas said that many journalists were killed for denouncing what the Mafia was doing in Colombia and Cali. "Important political decisions were being manipulated by drug money. It touched everything, absolutely everything."

By the early 1990s, Cali had become one of the most thoroughly corrupt cities in the world. Cartel interests controlled virtually every major institution – including banks, businesses, politicians and law enforcement.

Like everything else in Cali, the church was in disarray. Evangelicals were few and did not much care for each other. "In those days," Rosevelt Muriel recalls sadly, "the pastors' association consisted of an old box of files that nobody wanted. Every pastor was working on his own; no one wanted to join."

When pastor-evangelists Julio and Ruth Ruibal came to Cali in 1978, they were dismayed at the pervasive darkness in the city. "There was no unity between the churches," Ruth explained. Even Julio was put off by his colleagues and pulled out of the already weak ministerial association.

Ruth relates that during a season of fasting the Lord spoke to Julio saying, "You don't have the right to be offended. You need to forgive." So going back to the pastors, one by one, Julio made things right. They could not afford to walk in disunity – not when their city faced such overwhelming challenges.

Randy and Marcy MacMillan were among the first to join the Ruibals in intercession. "We just asked the Lord to show us how to pray," Marcy remembers. And He did. For the next

several months they focused on the meager appetite within the church for prayer, unity, and holiness. Realizing these are the very things that attract the presence of God, they petitioned the Lord to stimulate a renewed spiritual hunger, especially in the city's ministers.

As their prayers began to take effect, a small group of pastors proposed assembling their congregations for an evening of joint worship and prayer. The idea was to lease the city's civic auditorium, the Colisco El Pueblo, and spend the night in prayer and repentance. They would solicit God's active participation in their stand against the drug cartels and their unseen spiritual masters.

Roping off most of the seating area, the pastors planned for a few thousand people. And even this, in the minds of many, was overly optimistic. "We heard it all," said Rosevelt Muriel. "People told us, 'It can't be done,' 'No one will come,' 'Pastors won't give their support.' But we decided to move forward and trust God with the results."

When the event was finally held in May 1995, the nay-sayers and even some of the organizers were dumbfounded. Instead of the expected modest turnout, more than 25,000 people filed into the civic auditorium – nearly half of the city's evangelical population at the time! At one point, Muriel remembers, "The mayor mounted the platform and proclaimed, 'Cali belongs to Jesus Christ.' Well, when we heard those words, we were energized." Giving themselves to intense prayer, the crowd remained until 6 o'clock the next morning. The city's famous all-night prayer vigil – the 'vigilia' – had been born.

Forty-eight hours after the event, the daily newspaper, *El Pais*, headlined, "No Homicides!" For the first time in as long as anybody in the city could remember, a 24-hour period had passed without a single person being killed. In a nation cursed with the highest homicide rate in the world, this was a newsworthy development. Corruption also took a major hit when, over the next four months, 900 cartel-linked officers were fired from the metropolitan police force (16).

"When we saw these things happening," Randy MacMillan exulted, "we had a strong sense that the powers of darkness were headed for a significant defeat."

In the month of June, this sense of anticipation was heightened when several intercessors reported dreams in which angelic forces apprehended leaders of the Cali drug cartel. Many interpreted this as a prophetic sign that the Holy Spirit was about to respond to the most urgent aspect of the church's united appeal.¹⁷ Intercessors were praying, and heaven was listening. The seemingly invincible drug lords were about to meet their match.

"Within six weeks of this vision," MacMillan recalls, "the Colombian government declared all-out war against the drug lords." Sweeping military operations were launched against cartel assets in several parts of the country. The 6,500 elite commandos dispatched to Cali (18) arrived with explicit orders to round up seven individuals suspected as the top leaders of the cartel.

"Cali was buzzing with helicopters," Randy remembers. "The airport was closed, and there were police roadblocks at every entry point into the city. You couldn't go anywhere without proving who you were" (19).

Suspicious that the drug lords were consulting spirit mediums were confirmed when the federalés dragnet picked up Jorge Eliecer Rodriguez at the fortune-telling parlor of Madame Marlene Ballesteros, the famous 'Pythoness of Cali' (20). By August, only three months after God's word to the intercessors, Colombian authorities had captured all seven targeted cartel leaders – Juan Carlos Arminez, Phanor Arizabalata, Julian Murcillo, Henry Loaiza, Jose Santacruz Londono and founders Gilberto and Miguel Roddquez.

Clearly stung by these assaults on his power base, the enemy lashed out against the city's intercessors. At the top of his hit list was Pastor Julio Ceasar Ruibal, a man whose disciplined fasting and unwavering faith was seriously eroding his maneuvering room.

On December 13, 1995, Julio rode into the city with his daughter Sarah and a driver. Late for a pastors' meeting at the Presbyterian Church, he motioned to his driver to pull over. "He told us to drop him off," Sarah recounts, "and that was the last time I saw him."

Outside the church, a hit man was waiting in ambush. Drawing a concealed handgun, the assassin pumped two bullets into Julio's brain at point-blank range. "I was waiting for him to arrive at the meeting," Rosevelt remembers. "At two o'clock in the afternoon, I received a phone call. The man said, 'They just killed Julio.' I said, 'What? How can they kill a pastor?' I rushed over, thinking that perhaps he had just been hurt. But when one arrived on the scene, he was motionless. Julio, the noisy one, the active one, the man who just never sat still, was just lying there like a baby."

"The first thing one saw was a pool of crimson blood," Ruth recalls. "And the verse that came to me was Psalm 116:15: 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.' Sitting down next to Julio's body, I knew one was on holy ground.

"I had to decide how one was going to deal with this circumstance. One option was to respond in bitterness, not

only toward the man that had done this terrible thing but also toward God. He had, after all, allowed the early removal of my husband, my daughters' father, and my church's pastor. Julio would never see his vision for the city fulfilled. My other choice was to yield to the redemptive purposes of the Holy Spirit, to give Him a chance to bring something lasting and wonderful out of the situation. Looking down at Julio I just said, 'Lord, one don't understand Your plan, but it is well with my soul.'

Julio Ruibal was killed on the sixth day of a fast aimed at strengthening the unity of Cali's fledgling church. He knew that even though progress had been made in this area, it had not gone far enough. He knew that unity is a fragile thing. What he could not have guessed is that the fruit of his fast would be made manifest at his funeral.

In shock, and struggling to understand God's purposes in this tragedy, 1,500 people gathered at Julio's funeral. They included many pastors that had not spoken to each other in months. When the memorial concluded these men drew aside and said, "Brothers, let us covenant to walk in unity from this day forward. Let Julio's blood be the glue that binds us together in the Holy Spirit."

It worked! Today this covenant of unity has been signed by some 200 pastors and serves as the backbone of the city's high-profile prayer vigils. With Julio's example in their hearts, they have subordinated their agendas to a larger, common vision for the city.

Emboldened by their spiritual momentum, Cali's church leaders now hold all-night prayer rallies every 90 days. Enthusiasm is so high that these glorious events have been moved to the largest venue in the city, the 55,000-seat Pascual Guerrero soccer stadium (21). Happily (or unhappily as the case may be), the demand for seats continues to exceed supply.

In 1996 God led many churches to join in a collective spiritual mapping campaign. To gain God's perspective on their city, they began to gather intelligence on specific political, social and spiritual strongholds in each of Cali's 22 administrative zones (a scene reminiscent of the 41 Hebrew clans that once rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem). The results stitched together like panels on a patchwork quilt, gave the church an unprecedented picture of the powers working in the city. "With this knowledge," Randy explained, "our unified intercession became focused. As we prayed in specific terms, we began to see a dramatic loosening of the enemy's stranglehold on our neighborhoods.

"A few weeks later we used our spiritual mapping intelligence to direct large prayer caravans throughout Cali. Most of the 250 cars established a prayer perimeter around the city, but a

few paraded by government offices or the mansions of prominent cartel leaders. My church focused on the headquarters of the billionaire drug lord, José Santacruz Londono, who had escaped from Bogota's La Picota prison in January (22). His hacienda was located just four blocks from my home. The next day we heard that he had been killed in a gunfight with national police in Medellin!" (23).

In partnership with the Holy Spirit, Cali's Christians had taken effective control of the city. What made the partnership work are the same things that always attract the presence of the Lord: sanctified hearts, right relationships, and fervent intercession. "God began changing the city," according to Ruth Ruibal, "because His people finally came together in prayer" (24).

As the kingdom of God descended upon Cali, a new openness to the gospel could be felt at all levels of society – including the educated and wealthy. One man, Gustavo Jaramillo, a wealthy businessman and former mayor, told me, "It is easy to speak to upper-class people about Jesus. They are respectful and interested." Raul Grajales, another successful Cali businessman, adds that the gospel is now seen as practical rather than religious. As a consequence, he says, "Many high-level people have come to the feet of Jesus."

During my April 1998 visit to Cali, I had the privilege of meeting several prominent converts, including Mario Jinete, a prominent attorney, media personality and motivational speaker. After searching for truth in Freemasonry and various New Age systems, he has finally come home to Christ. Five minutes into our interview Jinete broke down. His body is shaking, this brilliant lawyer who had courageously faced down some of the most dangerous and corrupt figures in Latin America sobbed loudly. "I've lost forty years of my life," he cried into a handkerchief. "My desire now is to subordinate my ego, to find my way through the Word of God. I want to yield to Christ's plan for me. I want to serve Him."

Explosive church growth is one of the visible consequences of the open heavens over Cali. Ask pastors to define their strategy and they respond, "We don't have time to plan. We're too busy pulling the nets into the boat." And the numbers are expanding. In early 1998, I visited one fellowship, the Christian Centre of Love and Faith, where attendance has risen to nearly 35,000. What is more, their stratospheric growth rate is being fuelled entirely by new converts. Despite the facility's cavernous size (it's a former Costco warehouse), they are still forced to hold seven Sunday services. As I watched the huge sanctuary fill up, I blurted the standard Western question: "What is your secret?" Without hesitating, a church staff member pointed to a 24-hour prayer room immediately behind the platform. "That's our secret," he replied.

Many of Cali's other churches are also experiencing robust growth, and denominational affiliation and location have little to do with it. The fishing is good for everybody, and it's good all over town. My driver, Carlos Reynoso (not his real name), himself a former drug dealer, put it this way: "There is a hunger for God everywhere. You can see it on the buses, on the streets, and in the cafes. Anywhere you go people are ready to talk." Even casual street evangelists are reporting multiple daily conversions – nearly all the result of arbitrary encounters.

Although danger still lurks in this city of 1.9 million, God is now viewed as a viable protector. When Cali police deactivated a large, 174-kilo car bomb in the populous San Nicolis area in November 1996, many noted that the incident came just 24 hours after 55,000 Christians held their third *vigilia*. Even *El País* headlined: "Thanks to God, It Didn't Explode" (25).

Cali's prayer warriors were gratified, but far from finished. The following month church officials, disturbed by the growing debauchery associated with the city's *Feria*, a year-end festival accompanied by ten days of bull fighting and blowout partying, developed plans to hold public worship and evangelism rallies.

"When we approached the city about this," Marcy recalls, "God gave us a great favor. The city secretary not only granted us the rent-free use of the 22,000-scat velodrome (cycling arena), but he also threw in free advertising, security and sound support. We were stunned!" The only thing the authorities required was that the churches pray for the mayor, the city, and the citizens.

Once underway, the street is witnessing, and rallies brought in a bounty of souls. But an even bigger surprise came during the final service which, according to Marcy, emphasized the Holy Spirit "reigning over" and "raining down upon" the city of Cali. As the crowd sang, it began to sprinkle outside, an exceedingly rare occurrence in the month of December. "Within moments," Marcy recalls, "the city was inundated by torrential tropical rain. It didn't let up for 24 hours; and for the first time in recent memory, *Feria* events had to be canceled!"

On the evening of April 9, 1998, I had the distinct privilege of attending a citywide prayer vigil in Cali's Pascual Guerrero stadium. It was no small event, even in the eyes of the secular media. For days leading up to the *vigilia*, local newspapers had been filled with stories linking it to the profound changes that had settled over the community. Evening newscasters looked straight into the camera and urged viewers, whatever their faith, to attend the all-night event.

Arriving at the stadium 90 minutes early, I found it was already a full house. I could feel my hair stand on end as I walked onto the infield to tape a report for CBN News. In the stands, 50,000 exuberant worshippers stood ready to catch the Holy

Spirit's fire. An additional 15,000 'latecomers' were turned away at the Coliseum gate. Undaunted, they formed an impromptu praise march that circled the stadium for hours.

Worship teams from various churches were stationed at 15-metre intervals around the running track. Dancers dressed in beautiful white and purple outfits interpreted the music with graceful motions accentuated by banners, tambourines, and sleeve streamers. Both they and their city had been delivered of a great burden. In such circumstances one does not celebrate like a Presbyterian, a Baptist or a Pentecostal; one celebrates like a person who has been liberated!

Judging from the energy circulating in the stands, I was sure the celebrants had no intention of selling their emancipation short. They were not here to cheer a championship soccer team or to absorb the wit and wisdom of a big-name Christian speaker. Their sole objective on this particular evening was to offer up heartfelt worship and ask God to continue the marvelous work He had been undertaking in their city for 36 consecutive months.

"What you're seeing tonight in this stadium is a miracle," declared visiting Bogota Pastor Colin Crawford. "A few years ago it would have been impossible for Evangelicals to gather like this." Indeed, this city that has long carried a reputation as an exporter of death is now looked upon as a model of community transformation. It has moved into the business of exporting hope.

High up in the stadium press booth somebody grabbed my arm. Nodding in the direction of a casually dressed man at the broadcast counter he whispered, "That man is the most famous sports announcer in Columbia. He does all the big soccer championships." Securing a quick introduction, I learned that Rafael Araújo Gámez is also a newborn Christian. As he looked out over the fervent crowd, I asked if he had ever seen anything comparable in this stadium. Like Mario, he began to weep. "Never," he said with a trembling chin. "Not ever."

At 2:30 in the morning my cameraman and I headed for the stadium tunnel to catch a ride to the airport. It was a tentative departure. At the front gate crowds still trying to get in looked at us like we were crazy. I could almost read their minds. *Where are you going? Why are you leaving the presence of God?* They were tough questions to answer.

As we prepared to enter our vehicle, a roar rose up from the stadium. Listening closely, we could hear the people chanting, in English, "*Lift Jesus up, lift Jesus up.*" The words seemed to echo across the entire city. I had to pinch myself. Wasn't it just 36 months ago that people were calling this place a violent,

corrupt hell-hole? A city whose ministerial alliance consisted of a box of files that nobody wanted?

In late 1998, Cali's mayor and city council approached the ministerial alliance, with an offer to manage a citywide campaign to strengthen the family. The offer, which has subsequently been accepted, gives the Christians full operational freedom and no financial obligation. The government has agreed to open the soccer stadium, sports arena and velodrome to any seminar or prayer event that will minister to broken families.