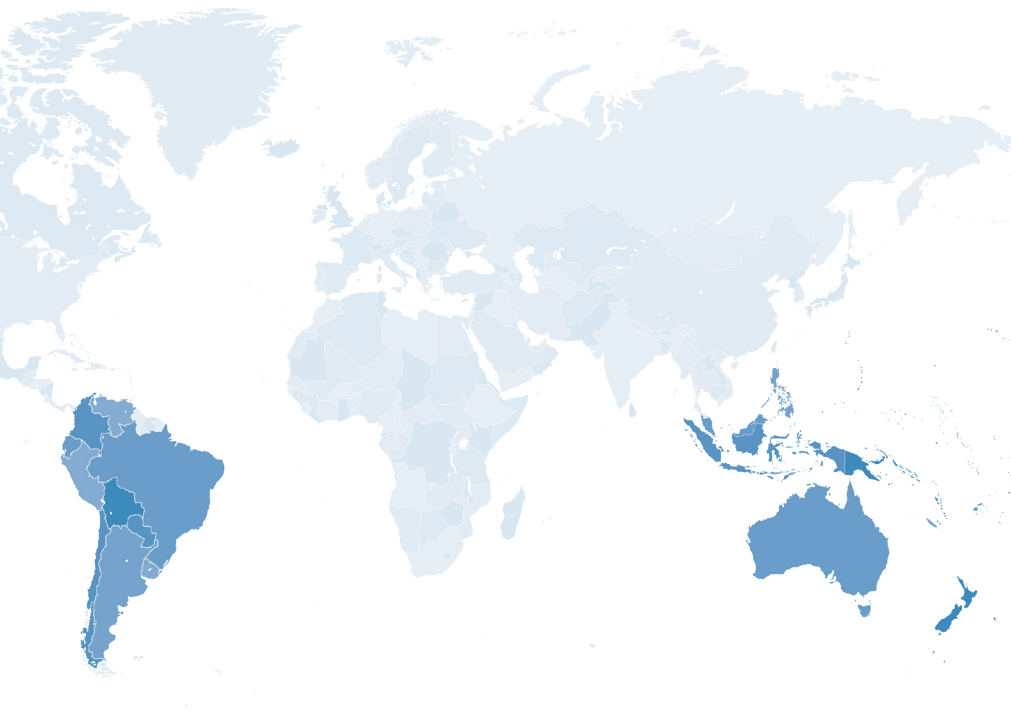


# SENT! VOL. 2



## A HISTORY OF UPCI GLOBAL MISSIONS

South America and the Pacific

DORSEY BURK

# Contents

<b>Part I: South America</b> . . . . .	7
Preface . . . . .	9
1. Colombia . . . . .	11
2. Venezuela . . . . .	35
3. Brazil . . . . .	51
Central Andean Zone . . . . .	65
4. Bolivia . . . . .	67
5. Ecuador . . . . .	75
6. Peru . . . . .	89
The Southern Cone of South America . . . . .	97
7. Uruguay . . . . .	99
8. Argentina . . . . .	111
9. Chile . . . . .	125
10. Paraguay . . . . .	133
<b>Part II: The Pacific Region</b> . . . . .	139
Introduction . . . . .	141
11. Australia . . . . .	149
12. Timor-Leste . . . . .	159
13. Indonesia . . . . .	161
14. Malaysia . . . . .	171
15. New Zealand . . . . .	173
16. Papua New Guinea . . . . .	181
17. Philippines . . . . .	191
18. Singapore . . . . .	213
19. Islands of the Pacific . . . . .	217
Afterword by James Poitras, Global Missions	
Director of Education/Short-Term Missions . . . . .	243
Notes . . . . .	253

# 1

## Colombia

*I have seen the vision and for self I cannot live;  
Life is less than worthless till my all I give.  
—Oswald J. Smith*

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:13–14)

Although these verses of Scripture can be applied to many groups of believers around the world, many Apostolic scholars would suggest that it aptly describes the birth of the Apostolic church in Colombia.

On May 12, 1937, Verner and Abigail Larsen arrived in Colombia as missionaries from the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Larsen

## *South America*

witnessed to missionaries Charles and Clara Berchtold. When the Berchtolds saw the oneness of God, they talked to their followers who all asked to be baptized in Jesus' name. In a single day in June 1937, Charles Berchtold baptized fifty-two Colombians in the name of Jesus as Verner Larsen watched. In a service that evening, they prayed for the Holy Ghost, which fell upon each one. This occurred at a farm called Loma del Salado, Pene Colorado Trail Enciso, Santander. This was the first record of the Holy Ghost being poured out in Colombia.<sup>1</sup>

The Berchtolds and Larsens worked together for a while but then went their separate ways. The Berchtolds founded the Church of the Good News, the oldest oneness organization in Colombia, and the Larsens founded what became the United Pentecostal Church of Colombia.

The Larsens settled in Bucaramanga, a major commercial hub in northeastern Colombia, resting on a plateau at 3,258 feet above sea level in the Cordillera Oriental of the Colombian Andes.<sup>2</sup> They faithfully labored for eighteen months in Bucaramanga before seeing any visible results. From the beginning they faced fierce opposition from the Roman Catholic Church.

To understand the persecution the Larsens and others faced, one must understand the indivisible relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Colombian government. The two are so intertwined it

is almost impossible to separate the secular from the ecclesiastical. Oftentimes clergy members also served as government officials. Cornelia Butler Flora stated in *Pentecostalism in Colombia*:

The Catholic Church entered Latin America with the conquistadores in their search for gold. It helped establish the Iberian empires and was an essential function in the political calculus of the New World. In Colombia, the Church has remained “a major bulwark of the traditional Colombian political system and of elite rule.”<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, any attempt to convert a Catholic was tantamount to assaulting the government. Flora further stated:

The political violence, which some had used as an excuse for committing religious violence, began to affect the new Pentecostal groups in 1951. Conservatives, often supporting groups of hired killers, were not hard to convince that Protestants must be connected with Communists, or worse, with Liberals. In the isolated mountain communities in Valle, it was often the priest who urged the elimination of Protestants. The *chusmerors* began adding Pentecostals to their lists of those to be eliminated. The police also threatened the evangelicals, saying that freedom of worship did not exist, that Protestantism was prohibited.<sup>4</sup>

## *South America*

Missionary Lewis Morley wrote:

Colombia is devoutly Catholic, even more so than Venezuela, and takes religious feasts more to heart. They have no time or place for any other kind of faith whatever. If you do not belong to the established church, you are lost. Anyone trying to teach or preach any other doctrine came straight from the pit of hell. . . . Villages were controlled completely by the local representative of the state religion, who had the power to appoint all the civic authorities, including the mayor. It was impossible even to open any sort of store or business without first having him come to say some sort of incantation over it and to sprinkle holy water all over the place. If one dared to try to do otherwise, he would find that no customers would come to buy at his store. They would stay away on orders of the religious representative, who would threaten them with excommunication.<sup>5</sup>

Verner and Abigail quickly realized they were confronting gross spiritual darkness and determined to make whatever sacrifice necessary to tear down the evil stronghold. During this intense spiritual battle, Abigail died following childbirth. The local religious leaders refused to allow Verner to bury his wife, whom they considered a heretic, in the Catholic cemetery. Consequently, a brokenhearted Verner gathered lumber, handcrafted a casket, prepared Abigail for burial,

located a plot, dug a grave, shouldered the casket to the grave, and shoveled dirt atop his beloved.

Although the missions board urged Verner to return to Canada with his young son and newborn daughter, he felt that he should remain, and a small group was started. Among the early converts were members of the Bernal family, including eleven-year-old Campo Elias, who would later become the first national pastor and one of the primary leaders of the Pentecostal Church in Colombia.<sup>6</sup> Hence, a site of untold sacrifice and heartache, Abigail's lonely grave became a part of the seedbed of revival. Today Verner Larsen's story is an integral part of the history of Colombia's great church.<sup>7</sup>

Of the sacrifice, Mollie Thompson wrote:

Today there are thousands of Colombians baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Spirit—men, women, and children who might have never heard the Gospel had there not been a grave in the Protestant cemetery of Bucaramanga, and a lonely man that walked the streets of that city with an aching heart.

There are other graves—graves where many of these same Colombians have been placed after laying down their lives for the glorious name of Jesus. It can be said of them, as it was said of the primitive Christians, "Of whom the world was not worthy."<sup>8</sup>

## *South America*

Canadians James and Grace Ball arrived in Colombia in time to relieve Verner and Fayette Barnard Larsen for furlough. Stanford Johnston, a Canadian carpenter, went to Colombia in 1943 as an independent missionary because the missions board questioned his calling. Illness forced him back to Canada. However, after a year's recuperation in Canada, Johnston returned to Colombia in 1949 with [his new wife] Eleanor Leonard Johnston, widow of Garland Leonard, who was killed by the Japanese in China in 1937. They went without the endorsement or support of the missions board.<sup>9</sup> In 1949, the Foreign Missions Board of the recently formed (1945) United Pentecostal Church, Inc., sent three missionaries to Colombia: Miss Sallie Lemons, an American, and William and Ruth Drost from New Brunswick, Canada.<sup>10</sup> (More about Bill Drost's exciting life can be read in *Bill Drost the Pentecost* by Bill Drost with Mike and Lorna Wieteska, Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1983.)

Of Bill Drost, Dr. Flora stated:

William Drost had an ideology of missionary work that differed from the classical colonial model of the missionary setting up a compound staffed by a personal following of loyal and subservient nationals. He felt that he should treat the Colombians as brethren in administrative as well as spiritual matters. He immediately designated as pastors nationals he felt were ready, although others connected with the mission



doubted the wisdom of the move. Drost gave the people freedom to work, allowing them to innovate to fit Colombian cultural needs. Short of money, he was not able to support a large paid staff of pastors. Evangelization occurred when people were inspired to do it for the Lord, unpaid by the missionaries. They did not become hirelings or dependent on foreign sources for funds or leadership.<sup>11</sup>

“Bill and Mollie Thompson went to Colombia in 1947 as missionaries of the Calvary Holiness Church, a traditional fundamentalist church in England. Although Bill had had a Pentecostal experience of speaking in tongues in 1943, he had not looked further into Pentecostalism.”<sup>12</sup> However, their first baby was born in 1949 with hydrocephalus (water building up in the brain) and a facial deformity. The doctors gave him only four days to live. The short story is that Tommy survived the four days and continued to live. The Thompsons then took the baby to Barranquilla to see the doctors and stayed with the Larsens and Sallie Lemons. Verner laid his hands on the baby and prayed. Miraculously, the child was healed of the abnormality, developed physically, and was normal mentally.

Mollie wrote:

Tommy was healed instantly by the laying on of hands in Jesus’ name. When he was a year old this was confirmed by the English brain specialist who examined him. He concluded his

## *South America*

examination by asking us, “What did you bring this baby to me for? I’m a brain specialist, and can do nothing for him.”

Shocked, we looked at each other and then at the doctor.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean this child has no need of a brain specialist; he is as normal as you or I. He was hydrocephalic, but the water has dried up on the brain.”

Breathlessly, we asked him at what age it had happened, and he, without knowing our deep interest in such a question, answered us nonchalantly, “When he was about three months old.”

And even as God worked in the body of a baby, so He also worked in the hearts and minds of his parents, for He taught us the truth as it is in Jesus. We were baptized in Jesus’ name the following year in the city of London, and came back to Colombia as missionaries of the United Pentecostal Church.

The Thompsons spent thirty-one years in Colombia. In her witty way, Mollie wrote:

Like all missionaries to Latin America, I have slept in smoke-blackened chozas (hovels) where the bathroom was described as “behind the tree and watch for snakes.” I have climbed into beds whose deceptive white sheets covered mattresses so thin that one could feel the