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THIS IS A
CALL TO PRAYER
FOR
THE LORD'S WORK
IN
COLOMBIA

COLOMBIAN NEWS



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THINGS AS THEY ARE

The past few months have witnessed a great change in the legal status of Protestantism in Colombia. Decrees restricting the free expression of the gospel have followed each other in rapid succession.

Under the former conservative regimes of Ospina and Gómez from 1946 to 1953 evangelical groups suffered few legal restrictions although violence was rampant and many government officials were guilty of arbitrary treatment of non-Roman Catholic Christians.

With the military coup d'etat of June, 1953, many observers predicted a new day for the evangelical cause since the religious hierarchy had supported so completely the former corrupt Gómez administration. But loyalty shifts were immediate. The dominant church experienced no difficulty in maintaining and even strengthening her position at the expense of minority groups.

Protestants began to foresee difficulties when the new military president told a group of visiting newsmen that Colombians, not being savages, hardly needed missionaries. Later Protestants were accused of creating a spiritual void by undermining

confidence in the Roman Church, a void which Communistic ideology, according to the president, is quick to fill.

The first decree aimed at evangelical work, dated January 28, 1954, limited Protestant evangelistic activity to approximately one-third of the land area of Colombia. The remainder of the national territory, under an agreement with the Vatican, was to be the exclusive spiritual domain of the Roman Church despite the fact that Protestants, both nationals and foreigners, had been working these areas for years with numerous schools and churches. Since that date, even in the area not considered Roman Catholic mission territory, it has been illegal for evangelicals to distribute Christian literature or engage in personal evangelism outside of church buildings. Added to this, permits for the erection of Protestant chapels and churches are frequently refused.

The decree of June 3, 1954, stated that Protestant pastors must notify the local authorities of the time and place of their religious gatherings. This was followed by another executive order which makes it a serious crime to state anything which can be interpreted as insult calumny. This measure effectively silenced the voice of the oppressed.

More recent decrees have resulted in the curtailment of Protestant educational efforts in Colombia. Since February all private schools are required to have a government license. Despite a population which can boast only 49% literacy, the requirements for this license are of a nature that few if any private schools can meet them. Thus far no Protestant School has been granted a license. Many have been closed.

The most recent decree dated July 14 states that non-Catholic schools which accept within their student body children from Roman Catholic homes must employ a teacher of religion approved by the local priest. Without bowing to this infringement of freedom, no private school can continue to operate. Recognizing that for the Roman Church all children baptized in infancy, regardless of later convictions on the part of their parents or themselves, are considered Roman Catholics, the future of Protestant education in Colombia looks very dark indeed.

Despite these growing restrictions it is still possible to carry on a positive witness for Christ in many areas. This day may soon end!

CHILDREN'S HOME THREATENED WITH CLOSURE

The following excerpts from Arthur and Helen Keiser's recent prayer letter describe the situation in the Cachipay School:

"New and serious restrictions are being placed on Evangelical Schools in Colombia. Already this year over 30 Protestant schools have been closed, bringing the total for the past six years to over 160 in spite of the fact that Colombia is about 50% illiterate and that there are not enough schools to accommodate the children of school age. Our school home which has functioned unmolested until the present time is in grave danger of being closed.

"On May 26 the mayor of Anolaima came to the school along with a Jeep-full of men and ordered us to close immediately. We asked for a written order, which he

refused to give, and without which we refused to close. The next day we presented the matter to the American Embassy and the Colombian government without any conclusive results. We then heard no more concerning it until June 27 when the Police Inspector of Cachipay and his secretary came inquiring about a school license.

"On Sunday afternoon, July 3, the mayor returned with a policeman and a secretary and demanded that we close the school immediately or else he would take other measures. (Eunice, our oldest girl, said later: 'When he said that we must really close, my heart began to beat fast and I was afraid.') We told the mayor that he could put us in jail, but without a written order we could not close the school. We have appealed the case before the American Embassy.

"We have also had some difficult discipline problems with the children during the last semester; so along with the threatened closing of the school it has been a hard time with ~~Satan~~ active on every hand. Therefore, you can imagine the joy there was this week when eleven of the children accepted Christ as their Saviour. Truly He is still on the throne and the final victory is His.

"We assure you that the children here are praying daily that God will intervene and the school may continue. It is only through prayer that the school has remained open until now. Will you join in prayer with them and us for this serious situation?"

OPPOSITION IN LA MESA

After several weeks of heartening work with the evangelical children from the congregation of La Mesa, the young student pastor and teacher, Armando Hernández, was summoned on April 21 to appear before the mayor. There he was forced to sign an agreement to close the school with a threatened fine of from \$200 to \$500 should he try to open it again.

The following Sunday, April 24, two uniformed policemen, at least one well armed, appeared in the doorway of the chapel just as Senor Hernandez began his sermon. They declared that all Colombian Nationals in attendance were to be conducted to the local jail. LaVerne Rutschman, a missionary in attendance, immediately called on the local mayor, seeking his intervention. His attitude was completely negative.

Upon returning to the chapel he found that the policemen had taken the names of all believers, nearly 50 in all, in order to intimidate them by giving the list to the local priest. Apparently satisfied with their accomplishments, they left and the meeting was concluded with a time of prayer.

In June the La Mesa school was reorganized and reopened under the direction of Vernelle Yoder. For two months Miss Yoder taught the children and cooperated with the local congregation in their witness for Christ. But the triumph was short-lived. Despite the fact that only Protestant children were studying in the school, and that at a great sacrifice the building was remodeled to make the education of the La Mesa children possible, the mayor ordered it closed again on July 30 due to not having a license. For the second time within three months the La Mesa children find themselves without educational opportunities.

HULDAH MYERS VISITS COLOMBIA

For the second time this year the Mission staff welcomed a voluntary service worker. Miss Huldah Myers, professor and librarian at Grace Bible Institute, reached

Bogotá on June 4. In 1950 Miss Myers was appointed as a missionary to Colombia under the Mennonite Board, but numerous efforts to secure a visa failed. New missionaries have been barred from Colombia since 1947.

During her busy three months' stay she has proved herself a true missionary. Few people have been so successful in receiving the love and the loyalty of the children so quickly.

Last week, Huldah Myers, Janet Soldner, and Vermelle Yoder returned from a two-week tour of the mission fields of the Mennonite Brethren in the Chocó and the Gospel Missionary Union in the fertile Cauca Valley. By traveling in dug-out canoes through a tropical deluge, they were able to visit a missionary outpost where Mennonite Brethren workers are endeavoring to reduce to writing a very difficult Indian language.

AMONG THE COLOMBIANS

"This day we perceive that the Lord is among us ..." Yes, since my coming to Colombia early this summer I have frequently perceived that the Lord is among those who labor here. And what a joy it has been to see His Spirit at work among the boys and girls who live and learn under the direction of those whom He has sent as witnesses.

Lights are His witnesses, indeed, for they are serving in a dark area of the world. It's hard to conceive how great that darkness really is for to the outward eye there is an abundance of beauty. However, after a bit of living in this land one's heart becomes heavy with a concern for the souls of so many who are so difficult to reach. The difficulty is caused by the awful devices which Satan uses to keep them ensnared.

Praise God for the lights glowing here because of the faithfulness of His workers. When one begins to understand the awfulness of a religion which brings fear rather than peace and rest, a strong feeling of "It must be told" possess one. We dare not withhold the message of John 3:16! What if we were the ones who needed to be told? Some of those who have been told have received the light and permitted it to glow in spite of the enemies who so quickly began efforts to quench the light. Sometimes I have been compelled to ask myself how long I would stand under such fierce opposition. It has never been asked of me. Has it been required of you?

Yes, the Lord is among those who live and work in the Mennonite Mission of Colombia. He is also among us, I believe, and waiting for us to intercede more than ever in behalf of a work which Satan would like to terminate right now. Are you praying that God's power might be greatly manifested among the Colombians?

Never will I be able to thank Him sufficiently for this privilege that has been mine. I have seen the beauty of glowing souls and the beauty of His creation, but I have also seen the plight of those who know not our "Beautiful Saviour." Indeed, "How great is that darkness!"

--Huldah E. Myers

PIANO RECITAL

In the gayly decorated chapel opening with the melody of Bizet's "Toreador's Song" Harriet Rutschman presented her students in their first piano recital on Friday evening, July 8, to a full house of friends and neighbors.

Ten pupils played solo numbers while several duets, solos, and interesting rhythm band pieces were given as special numbers. The final number was the meaningful "The Stranger of Galilee." In closing every one joined in singing the Colombian national hymn.

NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME

Just as I turned off the diesel after the weekly wash was done, the familiar face of don Otoniel appeared in the doorway of the shop. I could see that he needed help. His face was troubled.

I greeted him: "How are you? How unusual to see you here!" Quickly he related his trouble. His younger brother was the victim of a cowardly attack--shot in the back by a cunning enemy with an ancient fire-arm.

As the Mission Jeep curved around the mountain roads toward La Mesa where his brother was waiting in the poorly equipped local hospital, Otoniel told me that for months he had urged his brother to accept Christ and His Gospel. But he had put it off promising to consider the decision seriously at some later date.

Upon reaching La Esperanza, the half-way point and the home town of Otoniel and his brother, we were detained by relatives who told us that we were too late. Word from La Mesa had announced his death.

This was a tremendous blow to don Otoniel. His younger brother was dead--and without Christ. Nor was there much that I could do. There is nothing more sad than to see eternity lost through procrastination.

Slowly now we continued our trip. Tears filled his eyes as don Otoniel told me in a broken voice of his early life, the immature death of his parents, the struggle to keep alive, and his piercing sadness.

Finally we reached La Mesa, an old colonial town situated on a small plateau. There in the plaza other relatives were waiting. "Mentiras" (Lies), they called. "The boy is not dead. He is somewhat improved."

Within a few minutes he was in the Jeep with us. Three hours later we left him in Bogotá where competent medical attention was available. God had given this young man, in answer to his brother's fervent prayers, another opportunity to let Jesus Christ change his sin-filled life.

HERE AND THERE

The work in Girardot under the leadership of Alice Bachert continues to show promise despite strong opposition. Although there is no organized congregation in that section of the city, Bible classes are held for both children and adults.

Over 100 members of the Mennonite Churches in this area gathered at the Cachipay Children's Home on July 9 for their annual convention. After a challenging devotional by Armando Hernández, the guests enjoyed a musical recital by the children of the school.

Peter Klassen, after three months of voluntary service work, returned to Hague, Saskatchewan, early in May.

Due to the failure of all efforts to get the Calvin Flickingers into Colombia, word has been received that they have been assigned to the Oraibi, Arizona, field.

Rev. and Mrs. Walter Dyck are scheduled to arrive in Colombia in September en route to the States after a ministry of several months among the Mennonite colonists of Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. Not since the visit of Rev. and Mrs. J. J. Thiessen in 1950 has a member of the Board visited the Colombian field.

PRAYER REQUESTS

1. Pray for the evangelical schools of Colombia that Protestant children may not be denied an education.
2. Pray for Colombian evangelical Christians that they may remain firm in the face of great trials.
3. Pray for your representatives on the foreign fields.

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