

Movements in Latin America

by J. Edwin Orr

J. Edwin Orr discusses the powerful revival movements in Latin America, highlighting their historical significance and ongoing impact despite governmental oppression.

Duration: 25:39

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 85:6, Isaiah 57:15, Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17

Topics: "Revival Movements", "Holy Spirit"

Description

This sermon recounts powerful movements of revival in Cuba and Brazil, highlighting the significant growth of evangelical Christians amidst challenges and opposition. It emphasizes the impact of revival on various denominations, the importance of simple faith, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit leading to widespread conversions and spiritual growth.

Transcript

One reaction we get from people who hear about these great times of revival in the past is, why don't the things happen like that today? Did you know that in Cuba, which is the problem child of the Americas, a great movement of revival began in 1950? In Santiago de Cuba, in the east, an evangelist came to hold two weeks of meetings. Soon there were 15,000 gathering each night. And a mighty wave of revival began sweeping all over Cuba.

In Banez, a very small place, 10,000 people were gathered on the North Shore. Great meetings, outdoors, everywhere. There wasn't a church or a theater able to accommodate the multitudes.

In Holguin, a church of 2,400 was born in less than three weeks. And an offering of \$9,000 was made by poor converts, just enough to purchase a disused shoe factory, which they used as a sanctuary. In 1951, another evangelist from Phoenix, Arizona, began with great overflowing crowds in Havana.

And the work accomplished was reported as something that several missionaries couldn't have done in a lifetime. One of the leaders, H.C. Ball, insisted that all the churches in Cuba were enjoying the benefits of this revival, which had strong Pentecostal charismatic overtones. Now, as I said to you before, there have been many great awakenings without all these accompanying signs.

But in Cuba, it had these overtones. For instance, the Episcopalians increased to 3,700, Presbyterians 3,200, Methodists 8,000, the Baptists 14,710. And by the end of the 50s, there were 264,927 evangelical

Christians in the Cuban population.

And that, of course, would include only active church members. During the first two years of the awakening, there were prophetic messages with regularity that the revival would flow like waters from an artesian well all over the island, but the trouble with the government would put a stop to this great flow of living water. Now, in 1952, Batista set up his dictatorship and began to suppress the churches.

Many Christians were stoned, some were killed, others lost their homes just because they didn't support Batista. But then, of course, what happened was they thought they were going to be delivered by Castro. And, of course, when Castro took over, he eased all the missionaries out.

Yet the work of God has continued. You must not assume that under a communist dictatorship, the work of God stops. It does not.

But it seems to be rather interesting that God sends revival like that before trouble comes. Not always the case. Now, I could talk to you about revival in other parts of the Caribbean, but there wouldn't be time.

Perhaps I may give you something of a personal testimony of the great revival in Brazil that began in 1951. Now, in 1951, I had a strong urge to go to South America. My wife wasn't too happy about it.

We've been married 44 years. I'm sure I've been out of the country more than 22 of the 44. Now, a missionary in the field has his wife with him.

Sometimes they have to send their children home to school. But in this particular case, I've had these long separations for the sake of the gospel. My wife said, you're just restless.

I said, no, I feel I must go. So I gave her all the money I had. I didn't have a salary.

I didn't have much money, but I gave it to her. And I started off for San Diego. I preached for Youth for Christ.

They gave me a thank offering. Went across to Tijuana and flew on the Mexican Airlines down to Mexico and on down to San Jose in Costa Rica. There I ran out of money.

When I arrived there, Kenneth Strachan, a very famous Latin American missionary, said, you couldn't have come at a better time. They had just moved the language school from Colombia, because of the Civil War, to Costa Rica. And so I had a week of meetings with American students of every denomination, and we saw a revival among those students.

My big problem was, how do I go on from here? I went to Pan American on Saturday morning, and I said, I want to fly on Monday right across the top of South America, across to Trinidad. I think the fare at that time was about \$239. Something like that.

I didn't have it. They said, because you're not Costa Rican, you must pay in American dollars. Where was I to get the money? I was told also, you must get your ticket before 12 o'clock noon, because the plane leaves 5 o'clock in the morning, and the new office is open on Monday morning.

I was walking up and down outside Pan American office, when a jeep pulled up, and there was Kenneth Strachan with the president of the student body. He said, we've been looking for you. I said, well, here I am.

I'm down to talk about my travel. They said, you know, we took up an offering behind your back, and we didn't have time to bank it or give you a check, so we just brought it here in American dollars. I said, how much? It was 29 cents more than I needed.

Maybe I shouldn't have done it, but I blurted out, I said, what an answer to prayer it was. Kenneth Strachan said, look, I have an air credit card. You take my card and buy your ticket right around South America, back to Los Angeles.

I said, no, thank you. I'm not going to borrow money to do it. The Lord can provide.

What have you got to eat? As they always feed you meals on the plane. And so I traveled on down. Went to Brazil, spoke in the cathedral in Rio.

One minister got up and said, it's interesting to hear of these great revivals in other countries in other centuries, but we don't expect such a revival in Brazil where Protestants are a minority. I got up again, I said, I'm from Ireland, and in Ireland the Protestants are a minority, but we have seen great revivals in Ireland. We went to Sao Paulo, and after I left, got back to Los Angeles, I found that 81 churches had started weekly prayer meetings for revival in Brazil.

So I said to my wife, let's go down there for a year. She said, what about the children's schooling? I said, we'll find a place. So we went down.

You say, how was it provided for? I got a letter from the Presbyterian Church of Brazil through the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America asking me to go down and help the Presbyterians celebrate their centenary. I'm a Baptist minister. Why did they want me to come? Well, they said that 1959 would be the 100th anniversary of the first missionaries to Brazil.

They thought the best way to prepare for it was tell them what to do to pray for revival. I wrote and said, well, I'll come if you invite the Baptists and the Methodists and the other denominations to join. When I got back down there, I was disappointed.

The commission told me, we don't want you to preach. I don't understand. They said, Brazil is very nationalistic.

There are more than 50 million of us here. The people say, if this man wants to talk to us, why doesn't he learn our language? He said, you couldn't learn it in time. But most pastors and theological students speak some English, and you can lecture to them.

I was disappointed. On Friday, the secretary of the commission called me and said, I want you to come and preach for me on Sunday night. He said, I have an interpreter for you.

He said, I've been so busy writing letters on your behalf, I don't have a message for my congregation. I went down there. An Englishman interpreted for me.

He was married to a Brazilian lady. And in the vestibule, or rather in the pastor's vestry, four of us were praying. When the Lord told me, don't speak on revival.

Speak on the way of salvation. I know when the Lord speaks, so I decided to do this. I spoke on Romans chapter 10, verses 8 to 13, with special stress on if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised from the dead, you will be saved.

I spoke on who must decide, why we must decide, how we decide, what we decide, where and when we decide, and I made it as plain as I could make it. There were 310 people in the meeting. He said, how would you know? There were 300 seats filled and 10 people standing.

At the end I said, if there's anyone here for the first time in his life wants to declare his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, let him stand up. To my amazement, more than 100 stood. I said to my interpreter, did they understand me? He shook his head.

So I said, now please sit down again. Look, I'm not calling for rededications. Oh, if you want to dedicate your life to the Lord, do that.

But this is for people who must confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord to be saved. Now would you stand? Again 100 stood. I said to the pastor, did they understand? He shook his head.

I was told afterwards that the average pastor in Brazil was delighted if he could report 10 conversions in a year. And here was 100 people standing. I was going to explain it again when an American friend of mine in the meeting said in a hoarse whisper, do something.

I said, all right. If you really mean this, will you go to the social hall where my friend, Reverend Buenos Rios Ribeiro, and my colleague, William Dunlap, will talk to you? And 103 professed conversion that night. One third of the audience.

We just stayed on for 11 weeks. Only we had to move to bigger and bigger places, and finally our biggest meeting in Sao Paulo was in the Pacaembu Stadium. The revival had begun.

Went to a place called Campinas, and there we saw the churches fill at 6 o'clock in the morning for prayer. The biggest church in town was Presbyterian, and it was just packed out. Went from there to Belo Horizonte, started in a tiny little Methodist church, so small.

It was like an upstairs room, and the stairs came right up into the middle of the room. But we had to move from there to the big auditorium of the Secretariat of Health, and then out to the open air. Then we went to a town called Governador Valadares.

The churches were excited about the revival that was coming. They had been bickering among themselves. Brazilians are very competitive and individualistic, but they decided they'd meet in a sports field.

I felt sorry for people standing for five hours at least. By the way, all the meetings lasted until midnight. We closed always at midnight.

I said, no meetings after midnight. But then the churches were filled at 6 in the morning again. So I said, tomorrow night we're going to have benches here.

I want the Presbyterians and the Baptists and the Methodists and the Pentecostals to bring their pews. Nobody had ever done that before, but they had emergency meetings. They said, well, oh, servant of God, the servant of God has asked us.

We must do what he says. There were Presbyterian pews and Baptist pews and Methodist pews. The Pentecostal pews squeaked a little, but otherwise there's no difference.

But then guess what happened? The believers came and sat in the pews. I said, no, no, that's not for believers. This is for our visitors.

If any believer wants to sit during the meeting, let him bring his own chair. Next night, supposing you're a Brazilian, never darting the church door, and you're walking home from your work, and you meet 2,000 people coming along the street, each with a kitchen chair over his head, looking through the bars, what would you do? You'd follow them. Oh, wait, the crowd's all right.

The next place we went to was a college town called Presidente Soares. There we saw the streets packed from wall to wall, so the buses couldn't run. Brazilians are very easygoing.

They enjoy any interruption with their routine. Young people sat on the roofs of the buses. I had to go and speak to the people outside this great auditorium as well as inside, and a lot of them kneeled in the street and crossed themselves.

Four churches packed from about ten till midnight. Then they came back to the auditorium for a prayer service. That was a revival.

I had to fly over the great Sierras there to the State of Espirito Santo. When I arrived in Cachoeiro, I was met by six ministers. Now, they had difficulty arranging a place.

The rainy season had begun, and they said, Where are we going to have the crowds when the revival comes? They knew a revival was coming. They prayed for it. Somebody said, Well, let's take the Gloria Theater, Teatro Gloria.

The pastor of the First Baptist Church said, My church is bigger than the theater. They said, Well, we don't want it really in a church to get everyone to come, but all right, let's use your church. He said, My church would be full of Baptists.

What are you going to do with the Methodists and Presbyterians and others? They said, Maybe we should try the open air. They said, We may be drowned out the first night. A circus had come to town.

So the six ministers went to see the manager of the circus. Now, in America, you go straight to business. You say, Look, you're a busy man, and so am I. Let's go right to the point.

Could we do thus and so? Not in Brazil. You ask, first of all, about the senora and the children, and you drink coffee, and then you all mention the business by accident, you know, as if it weren't too important. They said, How is the circus going? It's very poorly.

Well, what's the trouble? Well, our lion is old. He can roar, but he can't bite. And the clowns are on strike.

The monkeys have dysentery. And people are just not responding. They said, How much money are you making? He said, I'm losing money.

Well, how much would you need to make to break even? He mentioned so many thousand cruzeiros. They said, You could re-rent the circus for that. He said, What would your reverences want with a circus? Oh, we don't want the circus.

We want your big top. You get the lion fitted with false teeth or whatever he needs, and have the medical attention for the monkeys, and just give us the men to work the lights. Now, the arena was filled with

church pews.

The amphitheater was very primitive. You walked on a plank and sat on a plank higher up, left your feet dangling. I waited five nights before I gave any kind of invitation.

I couldn't give a Billy Graham invitation. They couldn't walk forward. You had a captive audience.

So I just said, If anyone wants to declare his faith in Christ for the first time, let him stand up. The first man to stand up forgot he wasn't standing on anything. He just disappeared away into the depths.

There was a great roar of laughter, and I thought, Oh, they've spoiled my meeting. But no, the Brazilians are very humorous. That was the talk of the town.

The next night, the crowd was bigger than ever, and there was a Catholic priest in his tasset and girdle and sandals, concert head, listening very intently. We offered him a seat, but he didn't want to compromise his position. But he went back and told the people at mass, I have been to hear the Irish Evangelist.

He said, No, I'm a Protestant, I'm a Christian. He's a Christian, because I preached Jesus Christ and didn't attack his denomination. Maybe one third of all the converts were professed or nominal Roman Catholics.

By the way, before we started, I said to the minister, Are we all here? Yes. Six churches? Yes. I said, You're Baptist and Presbyterian and Methodist? I said, Isn't there any Pentecostal church here? He said, We don't count the Pentecostals.

As I moved, we adjourned the meeting until our Pentecostal brother comes. They hadn't much choice. They got a taxi and went looking for him.

They arrived outside the pastor's house. His wife was quite surprised to see six competing ministers, you know. What did you want him for? I said, We want him.

He's praying with the sick. He's going to visit the congregation. Where will you find him? Well, you'll find his bicycle outside some house.

That's all I can tell you. When they told him, We want you. Leave your bicycle.

We don't want your bicycle. Just you. He didn't know if he was going to be taken for a ride.

He came back and he sat in the middle and the other three in each side. All the believers were there, so we went ahead. Oh, we had meetings like that all over Brazil.

The great city of Bahia, downtown, there are nine churches, old, old churches with gold ornaments and so forth. We started in the open air in the great Praça. About 5,000 people.

Now, do you know that most, there are more Protestant Brazilian ministers than Brazilian Roman Catholic priests? Nearly all the priests in Brazil are foreign missionaries from Spain and Portugal and Holland and Germany and the United States and so forth. These were Italian Franciscans and they ran from one church to another. They were affronted by us having a meeting there in the town Praça.

So they started to ring their bells to drown us out. Oh, it was a cacophony of sound. All the bells ringing at once.

And I didn't like it, but the Brazilians didn't seem to mind. They just turned the microphone, the loudspeaker louder and it almost became like an artillery duel. On Wednesday, in the *Diario*, the daily, there was an editorial apologizing to me.

It said, Do these Italian Franciscans realize the best protection His Holiness the Pope has in Rome is not the Italian police, but United States Army? How then dare they insult a chaplain of the United States Air Force, of our sister republic to the north? That was me. We urge all Brazilians who feel indignation at such a breach of hospitality to attend these meetings. Take bus 11A to the college gates and there you'll find the crowds.

There we had the crowds again. Now you might say, What was the result? We lost track of the converts. We just couldn't keep a track.

The Bible Societies of Brazil, British and foreign, American Bible Society of Brazil said it was a year of triumph, the largest distribution of Scripture in the century-old history of Bible distribution in Brazil. And they mentioned in their annual report, In a nationwide evangelistic crusade that crossed denominational lines and drew the interest of the multitudes, a special evangelistic team went from center to center calling for repentance and dedication to Christ. Time and time again, the largest auditoriums could not seat the thousands who came to hear the gospel, and hundreds upon hundreds came forward accepting Christ as Savior.

Some there were who compared this movement with the great nationwide revivals that laid the foundation for Protestant growth in the United States. And there was a strong feeling that 1952 had been a crucial hour of victory in the winning of Brazil to Christ. The churches in Brazil are multiplying about ten times as fast as the population, and there's a population explosion.

I won't say more about that movement, but we took a little vacation down in Argentina to get away from the crowds. We couldn't go anywhere without being mobbed by friends. We went down to Buenos Aires and spoke in several Bible schools, and they wanted us to come there next.

I said, no, I feel I have to go to Africa. But the Lord will send someone. An evangelist from California went down, a novice.

Tommy Hicks was his name. He was so much of a novice that he asked the stewardess in the plane, he said, there's a name in my mind. I wonder, does it mean anything? It keeps repeating itself in my mind.

And the stewardess, the Argentinian girl, said, what is it, sir? He said, does the name Peron mean anything to you? She thought she was being put on. She said, you mean our president. Oh, he said, is that your president's name? Well, he said, the Lord has told me to go and see him.

So he went to see him. Now, he was there for a campaign for the Christian Missionary Alliance and the Assemblies of God, and they'd taken a little auditorium seating, I think, 500. He said, I want a stadium.

So we went to see Peron. Of course, Peron wouldn't see him. He turned him over to the minister of cults.

While he was talking to the minister of cults, in came a man limping. And he said, what's the matter? Oh, he said, my leg is so swollen. He said, nobody.

He said, I've tried everything. Even Jesus Christ couldn't help me. Tommy Hicks couldn't understand Spanish, but he said, what did he say about Jesus Christ? He said, well, he said, Jesus Christ couldn't help him.

Tommy Hicks got down on his knees, put his hands around the man's leg, and prayed for him that he was healed. It was Peron's bodyguard. He went back to tell the president.

So Peron said, what can I do for you, my boy? And he said, I want a stadium. Do you know that the attendance at the meetings was 100,000 a night for 60 nights? And it shook Argentina. Now, when I said Tommy Hicks was a novice, he was a novice.

I heard him declare there were 3 million conversions. So we asked, how did you count? Well, he said there were 6 million attended the meetings, and I used to give an invitation, and many wanted to be Christians. About half of them raised their hands every night, so that makes 3 million.

That was very naive. Because Latin Americans will raise their hands for any invitation you give them. If you want to love Jesus more, of course they want to love Jesus more.

I said, any other kind? Well, about 100,000 took decision cards. But if you're piling out of a stadium and somebody's handing out cards, you take one. But one of my students made a research into the movement.

He found that more than 18,000, not 3 million, but more than 18,000 had joined the church. The biggest number in the history of Argentina. It shook Argentina.

But it just shows you how the Lord uses people. Tommy Hicks was a novice in that sense, but the Lord used him because of his simple faith. Now, there are many other things we could say about times of revival in Latin America.

There was a great revival that began in Ecuador. Guayaquil. Among four square missionaries.

It's too long a story to tell. Perhaps I could, maybe I'll be invited back again, so maybe I could tell you about other great revivals. I'd like to talk to you about the Indonesian revival, about revival in India.

But there isn't time tonight. But this is a testimony of what happens in our own lifetime. Power of revival.

Everywhere the churches are increasing, it's through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in times of revival, and it is also interdenominational. God doesn't read labels when he sends a revival. He sends a revival to those who pray in simple faith, trusting him to answer their prayers.

God grant we may see another great time of revival throughout the world.

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