

Review: Brad Konemann, *Colombia: The Gospel Invades Enemy Territory*, Living Sacrifice Book Co., Bartlesville, OK, 2011

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Drug and Catholicism-Fuelled Violence

The history of Colombia is dense and complicated, supposedly dominated by a struggle between the Communist Left and Catholic Conservative Right, although most likely the Church was (and is) behind *both* sides.

This is great information to understand the mindset of Colombia and prepare for any outreach there. The stories of rabidly Catholic (“Conservative”) areas in the mid 20thC are likely to repeat, even though since 1991 it has no longer been the state religion.

Since the 19thC and arrival of ‘Protestantism’, one clear unifying force in the internal conflict has been anti-evangelism; missionaries are targeted by left *and* right groups.

Extreme violence is no doubt exacerbated by the fact Colombia is the largest cocaine producer in the world. This also results in missionary persecution since the gospel is against drugs and so is an attack on criminal network revenue stream.

There is an air of hope today though, with a small but relatively free group of evangelicals in the country.

Colombia’s decades-long war is between Communist guerillas and right-wing paramilitaries.

Colombia is the largest cocaine producer in the world.

There exists a kind of dualism; the cities experience great freedoms while violence rules in rural areas under the reign of FARC Communists.

Protestant missionaries arrived in the 19thC and have been opposed by both the Catholic Church and Communists.

Indigenous tribes were the Muiscas and Taironas.

In 1499, Spaniard Alonso de Ojeda discovered the land, and Spanish expeditions were then sent in search of gold, also, an ocean route to Asia. They called their colony New Granada.

Catholicism held sway and was enforced by the sword with native refusers burnt at the stake as heretics. This led to a shortage of manpower, so slavers brought in Africans from the Congo, Sudan, and Guinea to work gold mines and sugar plantations (there was a 30% death rate).

The Spanish forbade all Protestant gospel activity; only in 1819 and independence under Simon Bolivar were restrictions removed. The area became Gran Colombia (Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama).

Venezuela and Ecuador seceded in 1830, and Panama and Colombia remained as The Republic of New Granada.

In 1824, Pope Leo XII published *Ubi Primum* which condemned the work of Protestant Bible Societies.

Scotsman James Thomson arrived in Bogota in 1825 and managed to get the Colombian Bible Society setup, the first in Latin America. However, it only survived a few years.

In 1829, Lucas Matthews went on a missionary trip into Colombia's northern interior, but disappeared. It is thought he was robbed and murdered by his boatmen.

A new constitution in 1886 increased religious freedom.

In 1899, Communists started a "Thousand Day War", which claimed 100,000 lives.

In 1909, missiologist Robert Speer labelled the country as a "spiritual desert".

“Conservative” in Colombia means to be under the thumb of the Catholic Church.

In 1943, the mission agency OMS International began work in Medellín but faced opposition. Two pastors were invited by the city council of Embejico to preach the gospel, however, when they arrived were confronted by the residents with, “long live the Catholic church; long live the Virgin!”.

In the town of Envigao, OMS missionaries were met with, “Down with the Protestants! Death to heretics! You don’t believe in the Virgin!”.

The *La Violencia* conflict lasted 1948 to 1958, with a death toll ranging from 100K to 1M. Tensions reached a boiling point when leftist presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated in Bogotá. on 9/4/1948 on his way to meet Fidel Castro for lunch.

Most deaths in the war were in rural areas, and Protestants were targeted by Conservatives simply because they were not Catholics.

Conservatives got victory in 1950 and persecution against Protestants increased, and Christian literature prohibited.

Richard Gott on *La Violencia*: “Crucifixions ... hangings ... prisoners thrown from airplanes in flight ... infants bayoneted ... scalps removed.”

Castro’s overthrow of the Cuban government in 1959 spread to Colombia in 1964 with the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (ELN). ELN was influenced by Che Guevara’s doctrine.

The *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo* (FARC-EP) was established 1966. Its goal was a Marxist state.

The 19th of April Movement (M-19) arose in response following the 1970 elections.

FARC was initially a self-defence organisation of leftist peasants in the south and central rural zones.

The U.S. created Plan LASO (Latin American Security Operation) to eliminate Latin American Communist guerilla groups.

FARC specifically targets Protestant pastors since they stand in opposition, also they are seen to represent “Imperial interests”. In 2007, it numbered about 18,000.

From 2004 to 2009, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) documented 35 pastor assassinations there.

FARC also tries to extort money from pastors and churches. They also take children between 12 and 14 under threat of killing their parents.

Colombia has the second highest rate of internally displaced people in the world (4.3M), behind Sudan.

In the early 1980s, President Belisario Betancur began negotiations with FARC, however, a right-wing conglomerate *Muerte a Secuestradores* (MAS) took matters into their own hands, killing over 1,000 FARC-affiliated members.

In 1991, Colombia adopted a new constitution removing Catholicism as the state religion. There are now at least 2M Protestants which enjoy relatively good freedom.

In 2000, Colombia’s homicide rate was 0.063% p.a.

John Kerry, 2002: “the line between counternarcotics and counterinsurgency is not at all clear in Colombia”.

The ironically-named Bella Vista prison in Medellín is the most violent in Latin America. When inmates become Christian they are moved to a Christian cell block for safety.

The FARC don’t consider themselves terrorists, rather, freedom fighters conducting a legitimate revolution, yet they put a price on the head of anyone who leaves.

Guerilla warfare has impoverished rural Colombia.

Origins of Indians are said to be from the Russian steppes as Aryans.

The Rig Veda was composed 1500BC but only put in writing 300BC. It has hymns to various Aryan gods and goddesses.

India's Supreme Court has stated, "no precise meaning can be ascribed to ... Hinduism." [p10] However, core beliefs include an ultimate reality of *Brahman*; the soul (*jiva*) is everlasting and developing across lives via reincarnation under the laws of *kharma*.

In the Acts of Thomas, written in Edessa cAD200, has a reluctant Thomas going to India who ended up as a slave taken to build King Gundaphores' palace.

Indian tradition has a more reasonable ring of truth, that a free Thomas went to the south of India but was killed by Brahmin priests near Pelayur in Kerala, AD70.

Written records of Christianity date from the 8thC, including the Kerala copper plates.

During Persia's Great Persecution (AD 340-404), many Christians fled from Shah Shapur II into India.

The Gupta dynasty ruled part of india from AD319-500.

In AD431, the Council of Ephesus condemned Nestorius for his claim that the divine nature of Christ was capable of suffering.

In 977, Mahmoud of Gazna raided northern India. This Turkish invasion continued till Delhi fell in 1202.

The Muslims massacred Buddhist monks and destroyed monasteries of Bihar.

The Turks ruled India for three hundred years.

In 1498, Vasco de Gama arrived in India from Portugal.

On 24/8/2008, Hindu extremists attacked Christians in Orissa state in response to the murder of a Hindu leader (for which Marxists claimed responsibility). At least 121 were killed.

Zoroastrian Parsees fled to northern India from Persia to the 7thC after Islam conquered.

The Muslim Mughals ruled India from the 16th-18thC.

The Indian Mughal Akhbar tried to create a new religion *Din-i-Illahi* in an attempt to unify his subjects.

Shah Jahan, who built the Taj Mahal, waged a jihad against Christianity.

The last Mughal Emperor Aurungzeb reinstated the *jizya*.

Hindus believe washing in the Ganjes river cleanses from sin.

Karma is a great obstacle to evangelism as Hinduism is antagonistic to free will.

The British East Indian Company (BEIC) was concerned only with profit, and took measures to prevent religious conflict. By the end of the 1700s, they were openly anti-missionary with any Christian required to obtain a licence.

Missionary William Carey left for Calcutta in 1793 and arrived after five months, finding refuge in a Catholic Portuguese settlement.

The BEIC recruited Sepoys (native Indians) to protect colonial interests.

In the mid 19thC, the gospel became very popular amongst the Dalit caste.

The British troops were outnumbered 20:1 by Sepoys, which mutinied in 1857 after new-issue rifle cartridges were coated in cow and pig fat.

“Where is your Jesus now, we will shortly show what will become of the infidel dogs”. [p79]

A mission at Futtehgurh was ransacked and destroyed.

The Indian National Congress was founded 1885.

Gandhi's tactics, including the "Quit India" campaign, forced freedom concessions in 1935, and finally independence in 1947, which led to the formation of Pakistan and later East Pakistan (i.e., Bangladesh).

Gandhi was assassinated in 1948 by a National Volunteers association member (who advanced *Hindutva* ideology).