

THE MINISTRY TRIP OF A LIFETIME

In 2007, we were contacted by two sisters working as missionaries in Colombia who expressed their desire to publish *Schizophrenia Defeated* in Spanish. Anita and Kathleen Keith-Gillon have worked in the city of Armenia since 1979 and had picked up a copy of the book during a holiday visit to a healing centre in south-east England. On the plane journey home between Madrid and Bogota, Anita read my story and felt challenged by the Holy Spirit to pursue bringing out a Spanish translation. She believed it could have a huge impact for good and minister to so many Colombians struggling with schizophrenia and other mental bondages.

Tina and I were overjoyed with the prospect of seeing the book made available in another language. After consulting my publisher, Eileen Mohr at Crossbridge Books, I was given a free hand to begin moving out on my own into the international market. I had always been impressed when seeing an author had had his work published in numerous languages, some in well-over 30. Something stirred in my spirit that God would use my testimony in other nations across the world. After all, this was the media age where the sky seemed to be the limit!!

Aged 62 and 58 respectively, Kathleen and Anita are the grand-daughters of missionaries in the Brethren movement. In 1949 their parents emigrated from India to New Zealand.

Kathleen and Anita began their missionary work in Armenia as school teachers of Australian missionaries' children. When that initial ministry ended, they opened up their large house as a home for children from dysfunctional families offering the compassionate love of Jesus to more than 30 boys and girls. Over the years, their ministry enlarged and became more effective as they saw the need of Christians, in particular, to experience healing and deliverance. It was this expansion that opened up the interest in the whole subject of schizophrenia.

The revelation that Christians need personal deliverance and freedom in their lives brought a major change in the way they began to minister to people in the Body of Christ. Pastors unable to solve cases in their own congregations

sent them to be sorted out by these two sisters on fire for the Lord. As the ministry became better known, pastors from other cities began to send their “hopeless cases”. Anita saw the need to introduce a three-day course, called *Broken Cisterns*, which ministers healing to born-again believers who have not experienced the full freedom of the love and power of Jesus in their lives. She also introduced another course, *Freedom from Bitterness* which emphasizes the importance of forgiveness in the process of inner healing. Much of their time is now spent travelling to share these seminars in different parts of the country.

For three years, Anita and Kathleen laboured over the Spanish translation of *Schizophrenia Defeated* making painstaking efforts to get everything as correct as they could. They wrote to say how advantageous it would be for the book to be released at a time we were able to come over to Armenia to coincide with the launch. Ministry in the city would be arranged in the churches where they already had gained a standing, and appointments could be secured in other large cities, too. Tina and I prayed about the whole idea and thought we ought to co-operate and plan to travel to Colombia to support the publication of *Esquizofrenia Derrotada*.

We were a little concerned about the safety of such a ministry trip on hearing such discouraging reports over the years coming from Colombia itself. The “Transformations” video had portrayed the city of Cali, the third largest city in the country, as one heavily impacted by the drug culture causing bloodshed and kidnapping. It was in this city that the whole community was transformed by the concerted prayer efforts of Christians throughout the city churches coming together for mass prayer events in a large football stadium. Those unable to gain entry into the stadium became part of a Jericho-type walk outside performing their own-conducted intercession. Such intercession and calling out to God so transformed the whole city that homicides were dramatically reduced as the presence of God changed everything. Even leaders of drug cartels were rounded up, this being seen as an answer to prayer. I remember seeing the video and being forcibly impacted of how a city could be transformed through the determination and resolve of Christians stirring themselves into prayer and calling out to God for a change.

The various missionary reports we kept receiving was that Colombia was still actively dealing in drug cartels and pastors risked their lives in leading church congregations. We did not know what to expect by taking on such a trip, but in the end felt it was right to proceed and gave the go-ahead to Anita and Kathleen to start planning meetings and counting on us to be there for the book launch. Their plans for an itinerary for us were well ordered, and we realised that the trip ought to be over at least four weeks so that everything could be accomplished comfortably. We felt at peace about going and trusted God to undertake.

On arriving at Cali Airport, Kathleen and Anita were present to welcome us, along with their pastor William Muñoz. We sensed in our first meeting that our hosts were two unusual servants of God totally dedicated to the spread of the gospel. Within days of our arrival, an international symposium was being held in Armenia focusing on the high suicidal rate, and the loss of four lives in the district during the month of January alone. Psychologists and other specialists from various countries were offering their solutions aimed at bringing an answer to so much despair among teenagers. Their earnest desire was to avert further tragedy in the lives of more young people.

The organisers of the event, through the efforts of Kathleen and Anita, knew of our coming and because they believed that I had something to say on mental freedom, albeit from a Christian viewpoint, they were keen to allow the free use of the University lecture hall for the launch of the book on the night after the symposium. They also paid the majority of the cost of producing large colourful A3 size posters advertising our launch in both Armenia and neighbouring city of Pereira with the facility for obtaining tickets for the events.

Looking through the itinerary, we sensed that our weeks in the country were going to be busy indeed. Not only were there preaching appointments but five radio interviews were lined up, plus several personal interviews with Christians suffering mentally, and other ministry opportunities. We were soon

made aware that Colombia was so different to the United Kingdom in respect of facing up to the presence of mental problems, hence the symposium event. This soon became apparent during our first interview on the national radio in Armenia. Walking to the studio we discussed how long the interview would last. Perhaps 20 minutes, no more than half-an-hour. It actually lasted just under two hours with the phone lines being opened up for questions, details given over the air concerning our book launch in three days' time, and an appreciative airing about the new Spanish translation.

It was only at the close that we understood why we had been given an extended length of time. Our pleasant interviewer was so interested in my story because his own son was receiving hospital treatment for a psychotic condition. It felt right to pray for both him and his son and extend an invitation to the launch. The openness of the interview and willingness to hear of God's intervention in bringing freedom was something of which I was immediately aware, and this was to continue at the other interviews which followed.

Although I had preached in the United Kingdom, in Uganda and Rwanda and fulfilled radio and television interviews, there was something different about this tour. It lay in the fact that my testimony was being launched in the Spanish language plus the amazing interest that my presence in Colombia was creating. The fact of coming out of the "deepest entrenched mental prison of all" after 26 years through the delivering and healing power of Jesus was no mean feat. I was aware of the honour of telling my story for the glory of Jesus and lifting him high. I felt at times as though I had been doing this kind of "work" for a very long time.

Tina and I had never ministered together like the way we found ourselves doing in Colombia. Since she was part of my story, I was desirous of giving her time to detail the way in which she had helped me to get free. I would start the testimony and introduce her to follow on as I moved to the day of deliverance. A fact of great interest was that we had a love story to tell, both on the human and divine levels, and that always goes down well. Anita did a

sterling job in getting the translation over, and we could tell from the expression on people's faces just how much they were "into our story."

Staying in the large house, where Anita and Kathleen have lived for some 22 years (even during the earthquake of 1999 which wrought some havoc on the building), we were soon aware just how much they are loved by the children they had brought up. Now grown up, they were always calling in. Some brought their own children to see their "grandmothers." Phone calls from people requiring help, even during the time we were there, kept coming in thick and fast. Anita herself said: "Since we received the revelation of the Cross of Jesus about healing and deliverance, we just seek to pass it on. No matter how much a person may be in bondage, when they step through our doors, we just take them to the Cross where everything is dealt with. There is always progress doing it that way." During a party at home attended by a psychologist friend, I was unaware that I was being observed for a couple of hours. Anita was later told: "I have been watching James's behaviour and I want you to know that he is perfectly normal." I was fed the report and laughed with joy.

As the tour continued, we were less and less concerned about our safety. There were still criminal activities going on in the country, but these were located in the hills far from the areas we visited. Being able to enjoy a couple of days away in the country, confirmed for us that Colombia was indeed a beautiful country, with plants and rare fruits not found in any other countries. By the time of our "second launch" in the neighbouring city of Pereira, I was more and more convinced that the message of hope we were carrying was as much needed in this country as in any other. The interest our visit engendered was almost unique. There was a real thrill of feeling a divine appointment about our trip to Colombia. We certainly wanted to uplift the Lord Jesus Christ for He is worthy of receiving all the glory.

Some meetings were held in the setting of a health centre-cum doctor's surgery. We made good friends with one psychiatrist who was so encouraging of all the work we were doing. He even suggested that the details in my autobiography were so thrilling that it ought to be the subject of a film. It was

noticeable that some of the congregation at these meetings were Christians who were still held in the bondage of a mental illness. The news that Jesus had delivered me from a condition they were still carrying was for them the best hope they could receive. If our trip to Colombia had just been for the sole purpose of creating visible hope in some of these people that we saw, then the trip in itself would have been worthwhile.

We visited a rural area where there was a mental institution. We agreed that a visit ought to be made to leave a book or two. Our deputation was well-received and the head of the hospital department was very happy to take the copies. Even the short digest of what the book was all about proved to bring a light to their eyes. On another occasion we were fortunate in making contact with a psychiatrist who was more than interested in the freedom I was now enjoying. Anita interpreting her response in Spanish said: "She will read the book with interest."

Tina and I spoke at several churches in the city of Armenia including two with congregations of over 500: the Church on the Rock invited us to speak at their monthly fast day, and Shalom Adonai arranged for us to share at a mid week service. The attendance at both meetings was amazing.

It had been arranged that just prior to leaving the country from the Cali airport, there would be a city-wide meeting which had been publicised by the church Jesus Christ Lives Today. It was a thrilling opportunity to be in the city which had inspired me with its commitment to prayer and the news of that impact which had reverberated throughout the world in general. The morning meeting was advertised as being for church leaders and counsellors on the subject of healing and deliverance from schizophrenia. Both Tina and I were given opportunity to speak and reply to many questions covering aspects of mental bondage and deliverance, manic-depression and dementia.

The final meeting before a packed church was a memorable time of testimony and declaration to a congregation containing a large number of people with mental bondages. Among them were twin sisters in their fifties who said they had been diagnosed with schizophrenia for more than 30 years but now the medical world was giving another diagnosis, that of manic-depressive. At the

close of the service, already past the agreed finishing time, the pastor invited people to come out to the front. A crowd of more than 100 hungry for a breakthrough packed the whole of the sides of the church about four or five-deep. Individual prayer was not possible, so general intercession had to cover for the situation.

Tina and I flew back to the U.K. the following afternoon grateful for the opportunity of sharing testimony to the delivering and healing power of Jesus among such needy but receptive people. What impressed itself upon us most of all was the openness of the Colombian people to seek an answer to the mental bondage of schizophrenia – totally different to the situation in the church in the United Kingdom, where, sad to say, so much fear reigns both about the presence of spiritual darkness responsible for much mental illness and lack of faith to believe that Jesus Christ alone is the answer.