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Bogota Is Talking About

# Regina's Charisma

By Charles A. Krause  
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## Bogota

EVERY AFTERNOON, thousands of Colombians, most of them women and the vast majority of them poor, gather outside the temple of Regina XI, located amid warehouses, factories and karate parlors in one of Bogota's industrial slums.

The women wait for hours to enter the temple's meeting hall, a three-story auditorium where they will be greeted by their "mother," Regina Betancourt de Liska, who calls herself Regina XI.

The small, attractive 43-year-old woman claims to be a mystic, a faith healer, a seer and a prophet. She is now clearly a political force.

She enters to the screams of delight from her fanatic followers. They count to ten and then exclaim: "Regina Eleven! Viva Regina Eleven!"

They rush to touch her, receive her blessing, press money into her hands, and begin an hour-long ritual of hand-holding, guttural chanting and bizarre rites which she says impart her "magnetic energy" to those who believe.

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IN JUST ten years, she has gathered several hundred thousand followers throughout Colombia.

Regina XI outraged Colombia's Roman Catholic Church three years ago when she drew at least 50,000 of her followers to a mass at the Bogota cathedral to celebrate her 40th birthday.

Newspaper headlines the



next day trumpeted "Scandal in the Cathedral" and began referring to her as "Regina the Witch." The sobriquet, which she says she finds amusing, helped her movement grow.

In local elections held last week, the irrepressible Regina again infuriated the political establishment by getting herself elected to not one but two city councils, in Bogota and Medellin, and two state assemblies.

The feat made her a political power to be reckoned with.

She radiates charisma to the masses who buy the olive oil, youth creams, perfumes, half-nude plastic Regina statuettes and T-shirts that she sells.

Two years ago, she ran for president and lost. But she pulled off a stunt that has earned her a place in Colombian history: she was the first aspirant for office to sell votes rather than buy them.

It is the practice in Colombian elections for political parties to provide their backers with ballots. Regina says more than 180,000 of her followers bought her ballots for 10 cents

apiece, demonstrating their loyalty and helping to finance her campaign.

Some political observers say Regina has tapped a segment of potential voters, the working poor, who normally do not vote.

The abstention rate in elections here fluctuates between 63 and 75 percent.

Regina's message is health, money and love, in that order. She gives her poor followers the hope that they can improve their lives — by believing in her and, through her, in themselves.

Her temple contains a free dental clinic, an employment agency, a printing plant and a restaurant that offers subsidized hot meals.

Regina XI says she made mental contact with Angelo Roncalli, who was later Pope John XXIII, in 1941 when she was 4. She claims that he endowed her with the "XI" of her title after telling her that he was tenth in a line of teachers and prophets.

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DANNY LISKA, 51, her American husband, who once worked as Yul Brynner's stand-in during the filming of "Taras Bulba," still owns a ranch in his native Nebraska.

Regina XI now has five temples, in Bogota, Medellin, Cali, Pereda and Manescales. She says her monthly budget is \$20,000.

Liska says she sometimes earns \$30,000 on a single weekend from the courses she teaches. More money comes in from the plastic dolls, clothing and toiletries she sells.