

CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

PLACE: LAKELAND, FLORIDA

DATE: June 9, 2008

D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

R= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

AR= ALIDA RODRIGUEZ

D: Today is June 9th and I'm once again here with Armando Rodríguez and we are beginning a new day. Again this is June 9th. We are going to begin today by discussing and talking about the dissident movement of 1973 through 1976.

R: Yeah. This was the year when we had a big trouble with the dissidents because they went to our sanctuary and having their activity and so, but thanks be to God...

D: Now let me ask you make sure we understand, the dissident movement were people within the church or people outside the church who were opposed to the government or the church? Explain what that means.

R: Yeah. We call dissidents a group of pastors and members who had a very special experience with the holy spirit, and they were, as I said in some moment in other previous interview, the pastor and members that were more evangelistic, they had a biggest life of prayer and...

D: So they were dissidents of the Methodist church within the Methodist church.

R: But they were, I repeat, the group of pastors and members who had a better spiritual life, and their churches were the more growing churches and the more evangelistic churches. But they, in the Annual conference in 1973, they resigned from the Methodist church, and they began to make some trouble with the Methodist church. Of course, they made some prediction that "the Methodist church in Cuba will be destroyed by God" and they were only the best people of God. But our membership, the majority of them, maybe 90% of our membership, they were loyal and faithful to God and the Methodist church and they began to pray and to seek more blessing from God and to ask God for a great revival in the Methodist church in Cuba. In that emphasis, we had different pastors who had special participation, spontaneous participation in that movement, and this was the pastor Emilio Gonzalez that was pastor in one of our churches in Oriente, in Báguanos

Revolution, and also other pastor who was very active was Rev. Ricardo Pereira, the actual Bishop of Cuba.

D: Today.

R: Today, actually, yeah. They had some big experience in their personal spiritual life, and they began to pray together with their congregation and the theme was growing and growing spontaneously, and then they had some special experience. For example, in the prayer group that they had, they felt some special perfume, and they

D: Perfume?

R: Perfume

D: Odor, aroma.

R: Yeah, aroma, yeah, perfume And they understood that this was a sign of the presence of God with them. And this was a very, very exciting experience for them, but of course, some of them had the experience to speak in tongues and they had good experience, they were praying for sick person and the person was in good health after that and so, and so, and also in all our gatherings, in the district or national in our annual conference, they had simultaneously with our session, they had little groups of prayer of intercession, praying for the church, the conference and for the future of Cuba. And then, this was growing and growing. Of course, there were in some churches some other members that disagree with that movement. All of them came to me asking to finish this situation. But my position was that they were spontaneously; this was not promoted by anybody, and in that time we were isolated in Cuba. This was not in any way one impact from the charismatic movement that in that time was in many other countries, because we didn't receive any visitors from outside, and was a little more than impossible to have visitors in Cuba at that time.

D: So you viewed it as a spontaneous movement within the church that was naturally inspired by God and was not influenced by any other source from outside the country.

R: And then I cannot stop this spontaneous manifestation. I supported them, but understanding the people who did not have...

D: So your impression was that this was just a spontaneous movement, and where did it proceed from there?

R: I heard the people who were not in accordance with this movement, they disagreed with that experience and so, but I

D: Ok, and just so t

provinces, they had a big, big gathering in each churches coming to our service. Then I recommended to them that every church made some ticket or little card with different days and hours and the number of these tickets or little cards from each hour of every

amount of people would interrupt the traffic in the street around the church and it was very interesting, we had some problems, but we had also very great experiences and anecdotes of that situation. For example, one weekend I visited the churches in Santa Clara, and then when I was in the service in San Juan de los Rios I saw a person very

R: Vacation in my work, but I explained to them that this will be good and because in those six months they must have the annual conference matter without my presence, and this will be a good training for them in the way to be ready to manage the church in Cuba. We discussed that for four hours, but in the end they understood the idea, the purpose of that sabbatical vacation, and they granted it to me and I came six months to United States and Canada and they had by themselves the experience in 1989 all the responsibility. And then, when I went back to Cuba, I was retired in 1990. It was very interesting because the day that I was officially retired was the eleventh of February 1990. That was exactly twenty-two years when I was consecrated the first time as the Bishop in Cuba. I was re-elected in the Autonomous conference in 1968, but this term was only three years, because we liked to put our little General Conference in Cuba one year before the General Conference in the United States, in the way, the Bishop that will be elected in Cuba, in the next year he can come to the General Conference in the United States and to have this experience and this participation and to know the leaders of the church around the world. And when I was elected in the Autonomous Conference in 1968 for three years, and then I was re-elected in 1971, I was re-elected in 1975, 79, 83 and 87, and then, my last quadrenium ended in 1991, but I explained to them that will be good if I finish my work in the episcopacy in Cuba in 1990. Why? Because after that day there will be some special gathering with the General Board of Global Ministry and so, and then the new leader that elect in 1990 can have the direction of the church in the gathering with the General Board of Global Ministry and other church people, and to have the direction of the church in Cuba after that. This was accepted and I was officially retired in February 11, 1990.

D: Did you have any roll at all in selecting the new Bishop? Were people coming to you and saying, "Well I would like to be a Bishop," would you support me? Would you use your influence to help me?"

R: No. Thanks be to God, we established a church without any kind of politics. And I assure you and the Methodist people in Cuba knew perfectly well, that I didn't do anything in pro- or against any other pastor. I finished my work with a great amount of security that God will guide the church after my work. And I had a great amount of confidence of the Methodist church in Cuba. And we taught them not to do politics inside the church, but only to seek, to ask God what every one of them must do and what they think will be the best leader after myself. Of course, many, many leaders came to my office before this occasion February 11 of 1990, and asked me "oh Bishop, why you are asking to retire? You are in good health; all the Cuban Methodist churches approve your work and so. [But I told them] that my time was finished and then I have a total confidence that God will guide you and you will be able to do the best for the future of our Methodist church. You must be ready to take all the responsibility of the church. The church is not mine; the church belongs to God and to you. And then, before my

D: How many people were on the ballot?

R: Well, we had the election of the Bishop without nominations and without debate. Debate?

D: Debate.

R: Debate. And then we put before the General Conference all the names of the elders in the Methodist church and each elder can be elected as Bishop.

D: So that would be as many as a hundred people?

R: In that time not so much. Only elders, because we had pastors but in other categories. We had around, in that time, around eighty-eight pastors, but only as elders thirty-five or forty. And then this was the amount, and then by ballot and secret vote, everyone put the name that they chose and then we had the, what do you call?

D: The run off?

R: Run off?

D: Select maybe two or three people, the highest votes?

R: Well, but not officially. We didn't exclude any person. They can vote for the same people even when the person has only one vote. But of course, they followed the people who had the big numbers of votes and so. And then, they had as I said, about eighty ballots without election, and then was presented to the General Conference a motion telling them as they don't have the two thirds of the votes, no elder had this amount of votes, they must finish the session and to appoint the person who had the most votes

next year, in 1991

without any acknowledge of the situation and so, this was a great challenge for us, and we accepted it with faith and we think that, thanks be to God, God blessed our work and right now they have a pretty good work and so. Of course, I have a different strategy for the work in Honduras. I told the Honduran people that we were Methodist missionaries living there and we liked to help them to start the Methodist church, but the main task to gain the Honduran people for Christ, this will be a task for the Honduran people. We the missionaries were there transitorily, but the main task must be for them, and then our vision was to train and to develop a wonderful and big group of Honduran people for helping them to develop the Methodist work. The strategy of the General Board of Global Ministries

work. I respect, I appreciate a lot the work that the American missionaries did in Cuba, but this is my own...

D: Well this seems to me the difference is that you don't consider the missionary activity a permanent thing, in other words in a certain country you do your best, you train up the people to create the institutions that you help them create and then you move on, you don't stay.

R: And then you do the same in other part. Even in the same country. For example...

D: Yes because it created the notion of colonialism in a way, doesn't it? It's almost a dependency.

R: Yeah, but colonialism or dependencies not in the political way.

D: Right, not in the political way, but in a spiritual way.

R: In a human way, you know? When you are the father of a creature you feel more responsibility than if you have an adopted son. Is that not right? Well this applies to the church and we have the best example as I'm telling you in the apostle's work. He was not the pastor in Corinthian, or Ephesus or in any place. He was the traveling missionary and he was in contact with them through letters and so. This is the model that I love for the missionary work and I like to start in Honduras. I did my best I suppose, but of course, who has the money? They decide. But I am not angry. I am expressing you only my personal view of that.