CENTER FOR FLORIDA HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

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D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM
R=

D: Do youthink he was allowed to come to Cuba because he thought in that way? Maybe he was acceptable to the Germans and the Cubans and maybe he was trying to influence you in that way?

R: I am sure, personally that the Cuban government gave him, only to him the Cuban visa, because they thought that in that way they will convince us to be more open to the Revolution and the atheistic matter. But, of course, we must understand the difference between Cuba and East Germany. In East Germany and also in the other communist countries in Europe, the communist or socialistic government had more respect for them and so, because they belonged to a more organized society. They had more rights. In Cuba, the protestant church in that time, had only less than 100 years, and they thought that if Cuba was a Catholic country nominally, and the protestant church was very new, they can make a better job ideologically in Cuba than in these countries. But of course, I am sure that they, our Cuban government, thought that the influence of Dr. Karl Ornundwith us would turn our church in a more open situation before the Revolution.

More than that, the problem that the Methodist Church in Cuba lost missionaries, all the schools, the college, the clinic the social work, many of national pastors left the country,many of the laymen and members of the church left the country and others were close to the Revolutionary movement, more than the ideological battle that they had against God and the church and so. We had a personal D O E D W W O H V D O V R 7 K H \ « worked to influence all the leaders and specially myself as the new Bishop of the church. For example, my wife shared with me the situation that many times, somebody called her by telephone to our house and said to her that her husband, I was in trouble, that I was L Q Y H U \ G L I I H U H Q W G L I I L F X O W L H V D Q G ³ K H P X V W E H D Z D they liked to put fear in her and to make some personal problem with me. And even personally, in one occasion, when I was in the parsonage of the Marianao church in + D Y D Q D R Q H P R U Q L Q J V R P H E R G \ F D O O H G P H E \ W H O H S K S R O L W L F D O S R O L W L F D O [illegible] M D L, O V D L G ³ R N , Z L O O ´ E H W W H Z D L W Q R W L I \ R X U R U P R U H D Q U H F H L Y H D Q \ Y L V L W R U $ Q G W K H \ F D O O H G P H D J D L Q D Q G

work to do. Of course, we were not prepared. We did not learn how to become an D X W R Q R P R X V F K X U F K , G L G Q ¶ W O H D U Q so, and also, of E H F R P H course, as our Bishop was the Florida Bishop of the United Methodist Church, we did Q ¶ W have one office for the Bishop in Cuba. We did Q ¶ W K D Y H R Q H K R P H R U K R X V H

Methodist, the remnant that were faithful to God and church, we had a wonderful time. We were very happy and we enjoyed the life and the work of the church. One of the first steps «

D: Can I ask you something?

R: Yes sure.

D: In 1968, Z K H Q \ R X Z H U H E H J L Q Q L Q J D Q H Z « L²V kWk W K H U H D Q \ Z L W ¶ V K D U G W R G H V F U L E H beh Jk W Q R Z Z EXW Z K H U H people, what kind of person would have been in the Methodist church? Would it have been wealthy people? Would it have been poor people? Would they have been highly educated? Would they have been very minimally educated? Would there be any way to estimate the kind of people that were attracted to the Methodist Church, as loyal, as loyal members?

R: Yeah. This is a good question, brother. In my opinion, all the wealthy people left the country.

D: That were in the church before?

so.

to participate, but in that time, it was very, very hard to obtain permission from the government for a Bishop or leader of the church to go and participate in that gathering. Then, there was about three days before the establish beginning of this gathering in 6DQWLDJR GH &KLOH DQG , GLGQ¶W UHFHLYH WKH SHUPL government. And they used this system. 7KH\ GLGQ¶W VD\ ³QR, you cannot JR´ EXW WKH\ did Q¶W JUDQW \RX WKH SHUPLVVLRQ before the beginning of this gathering. 7KHQ WZR GD\V the ambassador from Switzerland that was in my consecration and maintained a pretty JRRG UHODWLRQVKLS ZLWK XV DQG «

D: He was very friendly with you?

R: He was very friendly with us and then, in that occasion, I can say that we, the leaders of the different churches, we were special guests at the National celebration of each important country in the world. For example, the English Ambassador invited us to their special day of celebration and so, and the same with Switzerland embassy, the Canadian embassy, and also after the 1970 when Carter was the president

D: Jimmy Carter?

R: Jimmy Carter

D: President Carter

R: Jimmy Carter was the president in the United States and he started the interest section of the American government in Havana, they invited us also to their consulate.

D: Not areal embassy but a, some sort of location.

R: Yeah, the American Consulate that worked under the Switzerland embassy in Cuba. But the Switzerland embassy in Cuba was also, also the representation of the Chile government, and then two days before the gathering in Chile was started, the ambassador FDOOHG PH DQG , WROG PH ³%LVKRS, I received here in the Chilean Consulate your visa for the trip to the South American gathering here,´ DQG , WROG KLP ³ZHOO , WKDQN news, Mr. Ambassador, but I must tell you that Cuban government has Q¶W JLYHQ me the permiVVLRQ´ $QG KH VDLG ³, that so´ , GLG ³, GRQ¶W UHFHLYH W GLGQ¶W UHFHLYH either. W´KH $SHQGHG, FDQ G WKHQ VRPH KRXUV DIWHU WKDW WZR GD\V EHIRUH WKH spoke with Dr. Carneado in the office for religious affairs in the Central Committee of the Party, and I wish you the best WULS´ $QG , VDLG ³RK WKDQN \RX \RX GLGQ¶W UHFHLYH WKH SHUPLVVLRQ IURP WKH JRYHUQPHQ very early in the morning, Dr. Carneado called to my home. But I was on the way to the office. My wife told him that, and then when I arrived to my office, I received a call from Dr. Carneado, very kind and so, and he WROG PH ³%LVKRS, thought about your KDYH permission to this gathering, and we, the government, we are interested in your participation. Then, go to that, and that office, and you will have the permission already for you.´ This was one day before. Immediately, when he said that, everything was ok in

every place. I had my passport, I had my permission and so, but how can I get to Santiago de Chile? Because in that time, Cuba had only three times in a week flight from Mexico

people. We had not difference between the Bishop and the pastors, we had no difference between the pastors and the members of the church, and that was very, very happy reality, because we were one, we were together, we had the same thing in our reality, in our experience. And for that reason I think that the Methodist church in Cuba in that time grew up a lot, because we are together with all the Cuban people, and then now, after the 50 \ H D U V R I 5 H Y R O X W L R Q Z K H Q W K H \ D U H V H H L Q J W K D W V come, and they saw how we, the Methodist Christians, we lived and we are together and we are happy and so, this is a great challenge for the Cuban people. And for that reason, even we are having in this time, some officials, retired officials of the Army, colonel, major, and so, that have been converted in church. We have had many youth communist members that have been converted to the church. We have many, many people that were