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INTERVIEW WITH: ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

INTERVIEWER: DR. JAMES M. DENHAM

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D= DR. JAMES M. DENHAM
R= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

D: It's, May 12, 2008, and I am once again here with Armando Rodriguez. We are here at his

R: Well, there was in that moment a divided reality in the Cuban people. There were many different groups of people struggling by themselves against the *Fidel* government. But on the other hand, there was a good amount of people thinking that *Fidel* and his Revolution will do a good thing for the future of Cuba. This was a very difficult time in that aspect and I think if, this is my personal opinion of course, but I think that if in this moment they will win a battle, this will make *Fidel* and the Cuban Revolution one idealistic person and movement because in that time, I will repeat there were a lot of Cubans thinking that *Fidel* and this Revolution will be the solution for all the Cuban problems. But after that, in 30, 40, 50 years of government now, the Cuban people in the majority they think that the Revolution and *Fidel* don't fulfill their promise, their offer, their idea. Why? Because we have now difficult situation, for example, in the first time, *Fidel* had a good action to eliminate the prostitution in Cuba. But now they said that the government has developed the jungle in Cuba for the good of the people who come as tourists in Cuba.

D: Right. So the government is supporting the prostitution and profiting from it?

R: And then they for the Cuban people, *Fidel* and Raul and the Revolution, they are taking the money that they received, they don't accept the reality right now that, for example, the Cuban people who work with the other, the European, Spain enterprise, this company must pay in our currency in dollars to the government and the government pay in Cuban pesos to the worker. And this meant that the Cuban workers are receiving more or less the five or ten percent of their salary in high currency that the Cuban government are receiving. And for that reason, and many other reasons, that we are in Cuba all the people are the same. They are on the same level. But in the level, in a very low, low level. And this was the idea that they expected from this Revolution.

D: If we go back to 1961, do you think that the destruction of the invasion or the successful defense against the invasion strengthened Castro very strongly, made him almost impossible to overthrow by that time?

R: The understanding that now we have is that the invasion was planned by President Eisenhower.

D: Right.

R: And then when John Kennedy took the power, he didn't agree with that kind of struggle. And many writers said that originally the invasion must go to Trinidad, very, very near to the *Escambray* Mountains. And the way that they can go to the mountains and escape from the Cuban Army but Kennedy changed the plan to

R: Kennedy liked to have this group of Cubans out of the States. And of course, he didn't bring the support that was planning to have

D: Okay. October 22 is the Cuban Missile Crisis. Before that though, Castro had come out in favor of encouraging the Soviet Union to be more involved in Cuba. Did *Nikita Khrushchev* come to Cuba before October? I'm trying to remember did *Khrushchev* come to visit Cuba?

R: I think that the visit that we have in Cuba was the visit of *Mikoyan*.

D: Okay. Yes.

R: In the '60s, in the end of the '60s, he was the first Soviet leader to visit Cuba.

D: I knew there was somebody, yeah.

R: And he visited many different places and so there are a lot of jokes about his visit. Somebody said that *Fidel* was with *Mikoyan* in airplane seeing all the Cuban territory and *Mikoyan* asked to *Fidel* when he was in *Camaguey* and the places where they lost a lot of farms of cows and he asked to *Fidel*:

"*¿Todo esto es ganado ?*"

We call ganado the cow. And *Fidel* said:

"No, this is not *ganado*, this is *robado*."

D: *Robado*?

R: They take it. And also in general in Cuba the people said, "Oh, we are having the visit of

R:

women that they were wives or people who were members of the party. And then the Communist Party spoke with their husbands and said:

> *ñIf you like to be a member of the party, you must stop your wife coming and your children coming to the church.ò*

And then many of them spoke with their wives and tell them:

> *ñOh, my wife, I love you, you are the mother of my children but you must decide, the church or myself. If you continue to go to the church, I will separate you, I will divorce.ò*

But, thanks be to God, a lot of these women, they answer to their husbands:

> *ñOh, my dear, I love you, you are the father of my children and so but who you are, who need to take the decision. If you like to be my husband and to be at home, I will welcome you and I will appreciate but if you donôt like my way of life, my faith, my faithfulness to God and the church, I am sorry but you must leave.ò*

And this was a great testimony. And we had family with four or five children in that situation and then the husband done left the wife and the family and all of the four children have been worker on the church. And for me, this is the greatest admiration, this is the people who maintain the Methodist Church in Cuba. This was the people who work and establish a new

I was in jail, maybe I stole another moment in six occasions. We will explain every one in the future interview, but for me, this was the great blessing. Why? Because the *Oriente* district, my district, my people were in the first place given to the general budget in Cuba.

D: Now this was obviously very important but did this continue over time, did this continue as far as the contributions to keep the churches going?

R: This was the spirit that we continued to have, the spirit of victory. But of course, the reality was big and so in that time, we were able to have some help. For example, all the evangelical churches in Cuba were in the same way. And then we received one visit from the World Council of Churches in Geneva and we spoke with them about that situation. Then the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, they made what they call the Cuban Project where they put all the historical denominations in Cuba that had Board of Mission in the state and then they asked to the Board of Mission of different churches to make contributions for this project. The leader of the United Methodist Board of Mission and other mission leaders of other denominations had an interview with a high

R: Work camps. Yeah.

D: An indoctrination camp.

R: An indoctrination.

D: Would this be for the youth or for everyone?

R: This was for youth, but some pastors that were in the 40s, in the 30s.

D: Now was this specifically meant for religious people to change their minds?

R: This was one of the goals but this was a place where they could also be lack *sociale*, the antisocial person. And then for that reason, they said we have here the antisocial person including the pastors and the Christians and the leaders. Also you must know that *Cardenal Jaime Ortega y Alamino*, the Catholic cardinal, he was also in that work camp in Cuba.

D: So were you put in there?

R: No. For the grace of God, why? Because in June 1965, two or three months before they started this work camp, I was moved from *Holguín* to *Marianao* in *Havana*.

D: By the church?

R: By the church, yeah. They appointed me from *Holguín Oriente* to there. And then the Revolution work in the level of province or state work and then as I was transferred from the *Oriente*

R: Yes.

D: How had *Havana* changed since you lived there as a student? I guess you'd gone back and forth a couple of times?

R: Of course.

D: But you left there to live -- the years you lived there before were 1950 --

R: The first time?

D: Yes, the first time you lived in Havana, what was that?

R: That I live in *Havana?*

D: Yes.

R: Well, I leave in *Havana* in 1952, when I went to work in the office of my sugar mill company.

D: Right. So you had not lived there since 1952?

R: Yeah. 1954.

D: How had things changed since 1954 for you?

R: Well, of course, in 1950, I was in *Havana* in the capitalistic period.

D: Exactly.

R: Then there was a very special recognition for people who were living in *Havana*. We had very good transportation system and we have all the opportunity in *Havana.* When I came in 1965, there were six years of socialistic government that this situation changed completely. Then there was not a very good public transportation. There were not a lot of cars in the street and there were some problems to find food. The reality that we have for all the people because when in that situation we were living in the rural area out of big city, we can find some vegetables, some fruit, some milk from the farms in the rural areas. But in *Havana*, you must live only with your quota, the amount of food that you receive as your ration. But, thanks be to God, my wife Alida, she is a very nice administrator of food and of home and our children were growing in a pretty good situation.

D: So how many children did you have at that time?

R: I have in that time four and we had the last one, Otoniel, when we were in *Havana*. I say that my youngest son, Otoniel, was a gift that we received from God when I was elected for the first

time as bishop of Cuba because he was born January 26th of 1968, and I was elected to the Episcopacy in February the 1st in this year, six or seven days after he was born.

D: So were you going to be a superintendent again of the *Havana* district?

R: Yes, I was the district superintendent in that region.

D: Would you say that would TBToTBToTBToT.mdst posegrint(r M(i)-pe)3thods bind4nt

D: Was he an American?

R: Yes, of course. He was an American. And he and Bishop Short, they established the International Evangelistical Campaign in Cuba every year. He send more than 100 American Methodist pastors, everyone who was in the different local churches in Cuba, have an Evangelistical campaign in every church, in every school and of course, in Cuba. This was a very good impact in the development of our church in Cuba. Also of course through this campaign, International Evangelistical Campaign, we had a very good relationship with different churches in the United States and Cuba. This made many, many good things. For example, in one year, we had in the Methodist Church in *Cienfuegos* where I was converted in the Methodist Church in *Cienfuegos*, we had the pastor from Grand Rapids in Michigan. Then when he went back to his local church in Grand Rapids, he spoke about his experience. So there was an American family in his church, the Thomas family, that they asked to have one younger in their home for study high school.

D: I think we covered some of that.

R: Yes, we covered that. Then two of my sisters came to the Thomas home and they started here. So of course there were many, many other spiritual offering cooperation between the churches. So Bishop Short together with Dr. Harry Denman, they establish this wonderful work. His faith, his humbleness, his personality, his character was very, very good and the Cuban Methodist people received him with a lot of love. In the end of the 1950s decade, was a project that was not possible to do. The project was to build a big church in *Santiago de Cuba* in *Oriente* with the name of Roy Short. But as the Revolution take the power in 1959, and so and so, was impossible. But the will of the Methodist Church in Cuba and Florida was to build in his memory a sanctuary in *Santiago de Cuba*. After him in 1956, Bishop John Branscomb was appointed to Cuba and Florida and also he did a great contribution to the development of the Methodist Church in Cuba. He appointed a new group of missionaries to different places in Cuba. He supported the school, clinic and all the social work that the church was doing there. I finish my seminary in 1957, but one year before in 1956, in my last year in the seminary, he approved that I was married because in that way, my wife, Alida, she can come one year in the seminary and study in

R: Yeah. Bishop Branscomb was not only a great leader here in Florida and also in the Methodist Church in Cuba, but he visited the missionary in Brazil and many other Latin American countries. For that, great work, very hard work, he died in 1958 from a heart attack. In that situation, Bishop Short, who was the bishop in Louisville, Kentucky Annual Conference, he was appointed by the Council of Bishops in U.S.A., as the bishop of Cuba transitorily. And then I was ordained as deacon in 1957 by John Branscomb and then in 1959, when Bishop Short was transitorily in the Annual Conference of Cuba, he ordained me as elder. I have this as a great privilege to be ordained for this great servant of God.

D: Now we're going to resume our conversations and go back a little bit in time to times that we've already discussed but the new subject we'd like to take a look at is your various incarcerations, your jail experiences, going to jail, both before and after the Revolution.

R: Especially after the Revolution.

D: Would you like to talk about the period after?

R: After the Revolution. This was a very interesting experience because we thought that the Batista Army was very bad and they put in jail the people very easily. But after the Revolution, we had the same experience.

D: Even more so?

R: Yeah.

D: Even worse?

R: Even worse, yeah. Especially my problem was that I was a Methodist pastor, a Methodist leader in Cuba. My first experience in jail was very early in October of 1959. I was pastor of the Methodist Church in *Manzanillo Oriente* in that time and I invited Reverend *Ovedio Amaro*, one of my student colleagues in the seminary to have one evangelistical activity in my church in *Manzanillo* and of course in that year, 1959, less than one year when the Revolution began, one day I bring him to different important place for this Revolution in the *Sierra Maestra* region. We were visiting different places. One of them was the Barrack of *Central Estrada Palma* near to *Yara* where when *Fidel* was in the mountain, he took this barrack with the *Coronel Varela* as chief of the Batista Army in that place. And in that moment, when we were seeing the barrack, the Revolutionary Army put us in jail for some hours because they thought that we were against this Revolution.

D: Do you remember what month that was?

R: This was in October of 1959. This was a great surprise for us because we considered ourselves in favor of the Revolution, in favor of the *Fidel*, but even in that time, they were very hard thinking that any Cuban person can be against them. This was for some hours in the day and when we back to *Manzanillo* I spoke with --

D: I'm sorry, I didn't get the purpose of your visit. What was the purpose of your visit to the Barracks?

R: The purpose of the visit was to show my friend, Pastor *Ovedio Amaro*, the *Estrada Palma* Barrack where *Fidel* took in battle.

D: So you were just trying to show him a place of interest.

R: Yeah.

D: And all of a sudden, you were taken by the authorities and put in jail because they suspected you.

R: Yeah. We didn't take any picture, we were only seeing.

D: Now were you surprised at this?

R: I was very surprised because in that time, I thought that nobody in Cuba had any bad feeling against *Fidel* and against the Revolution. This was a great surprise for me. But this can we see as them were very afraid of anything.

R: In reality, but of course the problem was that they liked to have everything in their hands.

D: They wanted to have everything themselves distributed themselves.

R: By their control.

D: By their control.

R: No other people can do anything. Then visiting in the rural area, visiting the poor people, giving to them Christian literature, Bible and so, they don't like that. For that reason, I was visiting the group of young people that were working in the *Baracoa* Mountains. Then I was in the home of some Methodists there and in the morning, the first day, I begin to visit different

ñOh, you donôt know the way and it is not recommended for you to be here. Where I can bring you?ò

And I tell them the name of other Christian who live very near there. And, thanks be to God, in that moment when we finish our dinner and I was ready to leave, there was other truck who will go in the same way where live other Christian family. The army person asked the driver to pick up me there in that home and then at 9:00 I was in a very good place, in the home of other Christian, sleeping in a very good bed and very happy. And the next morning, the person at

D: A lot of people gather around and increasingly, more and more people are coming.

R: There was more angry and he told me:

> *ñOh, you must know that you donôt have security for your life here in this region.ò*

And I asked:

> *ñWhy? I am a Christian, I am a pastor. I am doing good things for the poor people.ò*

> *ñNo, you are not doing anything. You are a Christian and you are telling people many stories that are not true.ò*

And then a little far from there was the soldier that the day before pick up me and in some moment when the Communist leader was a little quiet, he made a sign to me, asking me to go where he was. And then I go from this group of people to him and he told me:

> *ñOh, pastor, I am sorry for this situation.ò*

And he repeat to me:

> *ñI am a soldier and I am against the bad people but when I see a good person as you are, I like to help him. Come with me and I will see what car you can take and go to the home where you were.ò*

And so I finish this experience.

D: So the leader left after this spectacle, he left and just left you all?

R: No, he was in the group but I left the group.

D: So you were able to leave after this tongue-lashing or warning?

R: Yeah, because in my opinion, he was happy to finish in that way the discussion because he didn't have any strong argument against me in front of the people. And then in that way, when I left the group, everything was finished and he has not to do anything more. After that, I back to the home where was my suitcase. They had a great concern about me but I told them:

> *ñNo, everything has been okay.ò*

I can tell you my brother that when the soldier pick up me in that rural area in the mountain, in the first place, I need to say to you, I have fear. But after that first moment, I prayed to God by myself, and then God help me. And after that first moment, I felt in my life, the presence of

God, the company of the Holy Spirit and I was not in fear in any way. On the contrary, I thought, “Oh, it’s nice to have problem because we are testifying of Jesus and preaching the

R: The number three was *Baracoa* this is in. Now the number four.

D: Four.

R: Was in *Buey Arriba* a town in *Sierra Maestro*

was in the Christian people having this opportunity. When I finished my service, my sermon, somebody told me:

ñOh, there are two soldiers outside of the home that like to speak with you.ò

I went to them and they asked:

ñPlease accompany us to the barrack.ò

I would repeat the barrack of the Revolutionary Army was in the parsonage that belonged to the church. I went there and asked them:

ñWhat do you like with me?ò

And he said:

ñOh, we had a lot of concern because in your sermon, you said that and that and that. More than that, we are now bringing people from all Cuba to the mountain to pick up coffee and to work and you are coming here to have this other gathering without any important matter for the economy of Cuba.ò

And I said:

ñOh, forgive me, but, you know this family asked me to baptize the children and as pastor, I need to do my job.ò

And I didn'

leader of the student directory in Havana, who attack the Batista palace and he was dead.ò

D: Okay. He began to knock on the door.

R: Yeah. And then come some guard and open the door and he ask:

ñDo you have a cigarette for me?ò

And he bring the cigarette and was everything okay. After that, I told the guard:

ñI like to go to the restroom before sleeping.ò

And the guard bring me to the restroom. And I come back and I sit down in the same place. But after some time, maybe at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning, some guard came to us, open the door and told us:

ñOh, both of you, you can go.ò d us:

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against the real Christians, the good Christians. You can go and leave and you will not have problem.ò

D: So did you suspect this might be the case all along?

R: No.

D: Did you ever have any idea this was the case?

R: No, no, no.

D: Because they brought him in to interrogate him just like you.

R: Yeah.

D: And they roughed him up a little bit.

R: Yeah.

D: And then they threw him in the same cell with you.

R: Yeah, but my concern was that he was not a good person and they put us together for to hear by microphone what we thought.

D: Sure.

R: But I never, never thought.

D: So he was a good actor.

R: He was a very good actor. I congratulate him. *ñOh, you did a wonderful job. I didnôt thought that you were.ò*

D: Okay. This was March 13, 1965 and this is in what town again?

R: This was in the town called *Buey Arriba*. The translation will be cow up, you know, because this was in the mountain, up in the mountains in the region of *Bayamo Oriente, Sierra Maestro*.

D: So this is in 1965, March. Were you in *Havana* then or were you still located in --

R: No, this was in March and I was in *Holguín* as district superintendent. I was moved to *Havana* in June and I move in July of 1965. This was my last experience in *Oriente*.

D: Okay.

R: What was the five and the end of my experience? This was in February of 1967. I was living in *Havana* but as I told you, in January

D: Also, we'd like to talk today about a gathering in *Buenos Aires* that you attended in 1962?

R: Yes. This was a very important gathering. They called this gathering *Viva la Mision de la Iglesia Metodista in America Latina*, Life and Mission of the Methodist Church in Latin America. This was a meeting organized by the Board of Missions and there were delegations from all the Latin American Methodist Churches. Also there was in that time the bishop here in Florida and officially the bishop of Cuba was the Bishop James W. Henley. Then he was in that meeting and we had a Cuban delegation from two sides. Two or three Cuban Methodist people who lived in Miami, and three of us, myself, Reverend Junior Gomez, and *Dr. Endrika Suelo*, a layman from Cuba, and we were in there representing the other side, the Methodist Cubans that were living in Cuba. This was a great experience for me because this was the first international Methodist gathering that I participate in and I learned a lot about the Methodist Church in different places. And I heard the goal, this challenge and saw that the churches around all Latin America had and we hear some confidence from Methodist people from Europe, India and other areas. This was a great, great blessing experience for me. But what happened when the conference was finished, in that time, we had jet commercial flight between Miami and *Havana*. The Pam American flew in that occasion. Of course, we like to go to *Buenos Aires* through Miami because there was more communication between Miami and all Latin America and also because I like to prophet the occasion to greet other friends and Cuban Methodists. Then we came to Miami and then from Miami to *Buenos Aires* and went back from *Buenos Aires* to Miami but when I was ready to go back to Cuba, the Revolutionary government start one new law, any Cuban citizen who left the country, he need a special permission for to back to Cuba. This was new in the time when I was out of the country. But of course, there were many other pastors and evangelic leaders in the same situation that myself then the leader of the Cuban Council of Evangelical Church in Cuba present one least of all the pastors and leaders of the different churches that were out of Cuba asking for the permission for to back. After two or three days, when they back to the office and receive the answer, the answer was that all of these can have permission for to come but this one not. This was myself. I can tell you that this was the more sad time in all my 78 years. Why? Because I was in Miami and all the other friends, Methodist pastors, laymen were asking me:

> *ñOh, Armando, you must prophet this occasion, ask your wife and children to come here and be here.ò*

D: This is your chance to leave. All the way.

R: This is my chance to leave. But I don't think so because I have not only my wife and my children that they can come and unite with me, but I have about 25 or 30 young lay preacher in charge of different churches and so.

D: That you've been working with.

R: I say, *ñOh, God, I donôt like to be out, I like to go back.ò* But this was about one month and a half. That has been the only occasion that I took some medicine for my nerves.

R: Yeah. Three or four times a week, I spoke with her. And so of course, the mail was also very, very good. In one week, we can receive and send letter. But then *Dr. Carlos Perez* met with the 25, 30 young preachers and he told them:

> *ñWell, Armando is in Miami. He will not come back and every one of you must make your circuit and back to your home.ò*

But all the young people said to him:

> *ñNo, Armando told me that he is working for back and we will wait for him here.ò*

He didn't have any success in his task. Why? My brother, because I will speak about that in the future, but he was only thinking not in the necessity of the Methodist Church in Cuba, he was thinking how to manage the business and to go other place out of Cuba. But my vision and the vision that I put in the life of these young people was different. We like to stay in Cuba, we like to pay the price of our testimony and so and so. We like to remain in Cuba until the last moment. Don't think that we will be martyrs but thinking God will pick up us in the last moment. This was our faith. Then what happened after four or five, six weeks calling to the leader, I told them:

> *ñOh, please, make other application for my permits, back permits.ò*

Then they went to this office and they spoke my good wish to back to Cuba. And then they said:

> *ñWell, do you know what happened? There are one person with the name of Armando Rodriguez that we are looking for him because he is doing very bad thing against this Revolution.ò*

D: Again, the same person that you thought before if they mistook you for?

R: Yeah. But this was the great occasion. They then told the government official:

ñWell, we are sure that this is not the man that you are looking for but maybe we are wrong and you are right. But how will you lost this opportunity if you are looking for this person and he like to come back to Cuba, please give to him the back permit and then you can take him backò

D: Now you are back in Cuba

R: Yeah

D: And you are able to get back.

R: I was able to go back and I knew that many government persons were very interested on me and I knew that they interrogated other Methodists asking about myself and what was my work and such. I'd like to speak also…

D: Now, let me ask you one more thing before we move on. So this was after the Bay of Pigs, this event that you are talking about, this would have been after the Bay of Pigs and before the Cuban Missile Crises, correct?

R: Of course, yes

Oriente. But they said that I was crazy and all the young people that were working with me without money, without any…

D: support?

R: support, they were all a group of crazy people. This was their thing and so, and so, but when I participated in the meetings I was very disappointed, but when I was back in Holguín meeting with our lay leaders, visiting churches and so, there was other spirit and I was very, very happy to be there, very far from Havana and the other situation. Even Carlos Perez, when I was here in Miami waiting for my permission, he sent a message to me: Armando, don't come to Cuba because I received some visitor from the secret police of the Revolution and they asked me about you and what was this group of young people that you have in Oriente. They are very concerned about you and your work and so on; for your safety, don't come back to Cuba.

But of course, I was sure that the will of God was that, and thanks be to Him, I went back to Cuba. Then there was other important event in that period of time: in December of 1963 we had an extraordinary session of the Cuban Annual Conference in Santa Clara. The only matter that we discussed was the application to the general Conference of the Methodist Church in the States that would met in March or April of the following year, 1964, asking to the General Conference of the Methodist Church in the USA to grant us the permission to organize our church in Cuba as an Autonomous Church. Of course, this petition was approved by 99% of our Cuban and lay members of the Annual Conference and we sent this petition to the General Conference in some city here in the States where it was being held in 1964. When Bishop Henley in the name of the Cuban Church presented to the General Conference our application, in that time, Carlos Perez was here in the States--she came before that—and he asked to the General Conference the opportunity to speak against this petition and somebody told me that he said: in this time the Cubans are asking for many thing. The Cuban Revolution leaders are asking to the United States that they leave the Guantanamo base to them and now you have other petition. The Cuban… people, Methodist people in Cuba are asking to grant the permission for the autonomy, and this is not good, because this will be the separation from the Methodist Church in Cuba and the Methodist Church in Florida and you must be loyal to the American missionaries and so, and so, and so… But Bishop Henley answered and said: This was the will of the 99% of the Methodist pastors and layman living in Cuba and I support their application. And then the General Conference approved the permission for us in Cuba to organize as a Methodist Church. After that, we worked very hard writing the Constitution, the … points of Faith of our Methodist church, and so, and our Discipline and organization as the Autonomous church. Of course, Dr. Angel Fuster did a great work in that way and a group of us contributed in that way and we were working ready to have the Autonomy conference. But, as I told you, in January 5th, 1967 when Dr. Fuster was here he died in an automobile accident in Florida. This was a great impact but we in Cuba, we said: well, if God is with us, even with this great loss we will go ahead in our Church.

D: OK, two questions: one is: by 1963, how much money was coming in from the Unites States still in the way that had been going before? Was that shut off already?

R: This… we received without any difficulty month by month 60% of our budget, but this was until June 1963.

D: OK, so you were receiving money after that point. So this really meant something… this really meant that after that you would not receive any money…, any more voluntarily.

R: Exactamente… exactly. And more than that, we didn't have a Bishop for the ordination of our Cuban pastors.

D: So the Bishops ah… Dr. Short and the others, were not coming any more… they were not able to come any more…

R: No. The last Annual Conference that was presided for an American Bishop was Roy Short in the second term in the Annual conference of 1959. Eh… I would say 1960. 1959 was in Santa Clara when approved the advance plan…

D: Right…

R: and then, in June 1960, was the last Annual Conference that Bishop Short presided in Marianao church, and then, after that, from 1960, well… let me see, I think that after the election

D: Now at that time…

R: But in that time Carlos Perez was here in the States without any idea to go back to Cuba…

D: OK, so he was not going back… by that time…

R: No, no, but he liked to have the power even outside Cuba and he liked, he was this, his personality. And every one of us, we have good things and bad things in our life. I am not criticizing him in any way, but, this was the reality. He thought that he had the power even outside Cuba, but Bishop Henley did a great job telling the General Conference: This is the will of the Cuban pastors and lay delegates in Cuba and they are in charge of all the work in Cuba and we must obey their will and they like to be autonomous. And this was a reality.

D: So at that time, I guess everything went to Fuster. He was obviously by that time, with that break, even more recognized as the leader of the church. Would you call him a Bishop?

R: Well, we didn't call him Bishop, but for us…

D: Everybody…

R: …he was our great…

D: …your leader…

R: …Bishop, our great leader… even in February of 1968, when we, after his death in January 1067, when the Autonomous Conference was gathered in Havana, the first action that they took was to elect postumally…

D: Posthumously…

R: Dr. Angel Fuster as the first Cuban Bishop, and after that they elected me as the first active Bishop of the Methodist Church in Cuba. This was a very great honor in recognition of his great leadership and his faithful life. And then, after that, Dr. Carlos Perez was outside, was here in the States, and he wrote to me a letter telling me, Oh, I don't agree with this election, because if you will, you must be the first Bishop. Why? Because he was still, because he said, the person with whom he had struggle of power, he was recognized and he didn't …

D: He was jealous. Even in death with recognition to his rival

R: But these are the realities that we had and we must understand, even in the church that is founded by human beings, in the same way that the mother of two of Jesus' disciples

D: Brothers

R: Brothers, asked to be the first one, the human

D: instinct

R: instinct works in that way. Even myself, I need to be very careful, because in some way, my human instinct must put me in the same way. For that reason I mention that but I don't criticize, because this is the human reality in the life.

Ok, eh, (voice in the background)

D: OK we're, we are back on now.

R: OK. Well, we are finishing our recording this time, but before the end, I would like to share with you some of my philosophy, my principles in my life as leader of the church in a very difficult political and philosophical situation in Cuba. Of course, I participated in Cuban politics in the time before, with the Orthodox party with Eduardo Chivás, and this was a very good experience for me, because I was clear that my task was not philosophical, political, economical, or any other aspect of the life. God called me to be His servant. God called me to be an ambassador of the kingdom of God in Cuba, and for that reason from the beginning I had 3 clear ideas about what I will not do. In the first place, I said to myself: I don't like to do anything that will not be in accord with the Bible and with God and his faith; second, not only I will not do anything that was not approved by the will of God, but I don't like to say anything that was not approved by God's will, and the Holy Spirit. But more than that, I don't like to do, I don't like to say, but I don't like to think anything that will not be in accordance with the will of God and with the word of God. Why? Because I like to maintain my mind, my spirit, my thinking only concentrated in the spiritual matters, in the Bible message, in the prayer spirit and all that was agreeable before that. I thank God for that principle, because in that way I feel free to be in conferences, in meetings with the government leaders, I was free to do my task of reconciliation between the divided families that we had in Cuba, some members of the family were in favor of the Revolution, other members were against the Revolution, but we go to them without any, eh… being in any side

D: With any, without bias

R: Yeah, only to be an instrument of reconciliation and love and understanding. And for that reality, thanks be to God, in all my time as leader of the church, we had a monolithical and united Methodist people in Cuba.

D: Monolithical?

R: Monolithical. Yeah. Because we received as pastors, as members of the church, people, in spite of their political or philosophical thinking. If they like to be Methodist, Christian Methodist, and to work for the extension of the kingdom of God in Cuba, without any political personal position, they were welcome to our churches, and so, and in my cabinet, with all my time as Bishop, I had some representation of all the positions and the different opinions in the church. Because we liked to have one united church with the contribution of all persons, no

matter what was their personal position philosophical, or ideological position. We only saw their faith and their decision to work from the extension of the kingdom of God in Cuba.

D: OK then, we'll conclude with that and we'll pick up with this next time.

R: OK. Thanks.