

**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= ARMANDO RODRIGUEZ

D: Today is April 14, 2008 and I am here once again with Armando Rodriguez. We are here to continue our oral history today. Good morning Armando.

R: Good morning Mike, welcome to our home.

D: We left off last time with your work in *Matanzas* at the sugar mill. Now we are about to move into another phase of your life. Can you tell us about the transition of leaving *Matanzas* to going to Havana? What was that like?

R: This change was very good for my life and it was a great blessing, because I changed not only from the rural area to the big city of Havana, but in my life I had a lot of new opportunities there. And I am sure that God was preparing me for the ministry.

D: What year did you leave to go to Havana to work in the new offices?

R: This was in 1952. And then, when I was in the sugar mill in the rural area, I learned a lot, especially in the human relationship. I learned a lot from the workers in the company. I learned a lot from the land owners in the sugar mill. But, when I moved to Havana I was living in the home for evangelical university students in Havana, near the University Church in *El Verdado*. The pastor was a great servant of God, Reverend Ernesto Vasseur, and he helped me a lot in my spiritual life. But also, in the students home where we lived, we had a very, very intensive spiritual life. Every evening after dinner we had a service for all the students and employees, and the sermon was the responsibility of each student and this gave me the opportunity to develop my ministry.

D: How many students were there at the same time and what were the age levels or groups?

R: There was, I suppose, about thirty or thirty five students. This was the first project that I know in this way; to have a home for Christian students studying in the university. In that way,

the Christian students, when they were in the university, could develop a pretty good spiritual life. The age was between eighteen years until twenty-seven, twenty-eight years old.

D: That was in 1952. What is that building currently used for today?

R: At that time we rented the building. That rented building is now the Havana Hilton or *Havana Libre*. I lived in that building when the Havana Hilton was not building, they bought the property and then paid the person who had some business, for them a home was a business, and they paid them. And then, with this money and other offerings, the Church built the actual **K and 25[?]** building. That was a very nice and new building.

D: That building is today . . . ?

R: When the revolution came they offered the university students other places that were free for the university student. Then, at that time, the Church used this building for Church gatherings. And we had about one-hundred beds in that building and we used it, not only for the United Methodist activities, but we facilitated freely other denominations to have their regular meetings and gatherings without any ties. This was a very good place for fraternal relationships between all the Churches. And then, they recognized the love of the Methodist Church bringing them the use of this building.

D: And today the building is still used in that way, correct?

R: Yes, but not in the big amount that we used it before. Why? Because now the Methodist Church has the *Canaam Camp* in the central part of Cuba and the other Churches have their own facility for meetings. The place now is used especially for the group of Americans and other people from outside the country that came to Cuba to visit and to have some activity.

D: In 1952, this would have been one year after the tragic death of Eddie Chibas and one year before you came to Havana, were you involved in politics at all at that time or was this a period of discouragement in that area?

R: My participation in politics, the Orthodox Party, was a very nice experience. This is another point that I am sure God was preparing me for the ministry, because I participated in politics in the youth organization and also I was elected a commissioner in 1950. I had a lot of activity with Eddie Chibas in the meetings that he had in the *Matanzas* Province, and also in *Cienfuegos Las Villas*. And, as I told you, I met with Dr. Mario Muñoz, a doctor from *Colón* that was at the *Moncada* battle and also Julio Reyes. I participated at different levels of politics and I learned a lot, because in politics we saw, we knew, the real character of the person. Some of them are real politicians, even in the Orthodox Party, where we thought that there was the best person in Cuba. There were some that had a personal interest and there were a lot of other people that had a nice, honest character and really, they struggled for the best of Cuba.

D: Can you summarize what people were thinking about in terms of politics in 1952? There was an upcoming election, I think, at that time. Were people optimistic, pessimistic . . . ?

R: Before that, let me tell you that when Eddie Chibas died, I was in the university. At his funeral I was with all the high level leaders of the Party. And I remember when we had the internment for Chibas, at the cemetery, and after that time I learned something; that the young person, Fidel Castro, asked some of the leaders to bring the Eddie Chibas corpse to the presidential palaces where Prío Socarrás was, and then to push Prío Socarrás in this way. To fight with the Cuban people, there were hundreds of thousands of people at this internment, but of course, the other leaders in the Orthodox Party didn't agree with him and we brought the corpse of Eddie Chibas to the Havana cemetery and José Pardo Llada, a special leader of the Orthodox Party, had a very popular radio hour in Havana, and he was elected representative to the congress at that time with the largest number of votes that any representative had had in Cuba until that time. Pardo Llada was the main speaker in the Chibas's funeral.

D: So there were hundreds of thousands of people that turned out for the funeral. Was the feeling, of course they were very sad and discouraged, was there any idea that anyone specifically might be able to carry on that idea, that movement? Were people thinking that it may be Fidel or other people?

R: Yes, of course, José Pardo Llada was a very special leader but not for the president. Our candidate for the president, when Chibas died, was Dr. Roberto Agrimonte, a professor in the University of Havana. There was Emilio Ochoa, a politician from *Oriente* that also had a very important run, and Jorge Mañach and Manuel Bisbe, people with a very high moral standard. They were the leaders that continued the leadership in the Party. There was, of course, a very sad time, but we had other leaders and the opinion was that the Orthodox Party would gain the election in June 1st in 1952.

D: And the funeral was in '51?

R: Yes.

D: So at this time you are working and you are taking classes at the university, correct?

R: Yes.

D: And as time goes on, about a year, in June of 1952 there was quite an upheaval in the presidential election, is that true? Can you reflect on that a little bit, what your thoughts on it were at the time?

R: Yes. Well, we were hoping to gain the presidency on June 1st of 1952, but on 10 of March of 1952, Batista gave the Coup of State and then the political situation changed. They had a very strong secret police. They closed the Havana University and the situation had a big, big change at that moment. This was very sad for the Cuban people and, also at that time, some leaders

asked themselves if the 10 of March of 1952, the Batista Coup of State, was with the blessing of the American government because, maybe, some person in the American government didn't want to have Eddie Chibas and his Party in the government in Cuba.

D: There was a lot of speculation about that. And were there hard feelings and people saying that this was wrong and that we should do something about it?

R: Yes. Well, there were a lot of bad feelings in that way, but the situation from Batista was very strong, very hard and then the people were quiet, really quiet. And then, one year after that on July 26 of 1953, Fidel attacked the *Moncada* Barracks in *Santiago de Cuba*. Of course, at this time, I was completely disconnected from all my political contacts and so, thanks be to God. But, of course, this was a very strong experience for me because, on that occasion, two of my good friends died, Dr. Mario Muñoz and Julio Reyes. But, I was completely inserted in my new Christian way of life.

D: Did you have any idea before that this was building up? Did you have an idea that Fidel Castro may do this kind of thing? Did you know that other acquaintances or friends of yours were involved in this kind of thing or was it a surprise to you when you heard about this?

R: Yes, because as I went to Havana in 1952, and I lost all my political contacts, I was very surprised to know that situation, as all the Cuban people were surprised. And, of course, we felt very sorry for the situation and for the death of a very nice group of young people.

D: We know that the attack was a disaster and we know that Fidel was eventually put on trial and all of that. Can you remember what you were thinking at the time about the trial and what you were thinking about the whole situation? What did you think of Fidel at that time?

R: I, as many, many of Cubans, thought that he was a very good young person and very idealistic. Many of us thought that he wanted the best for Cuba. But, in my case, in my personal situation, at that time, I was involved in my work, in my studies, and my local Church and I was convinced that my task for the future, and for the best of the Cuban people, did not work through politics.

D: You had kind of given up on that?

R: Yes, I was sure that my testimony and my work as a Christian young person was a better contribution to Cuba than a political contribution.

D: And we want to move into that really quickly here, but just one more question on that. Was the trial very well publicized throughout the Island, the trial of Castro? Did everyone seem to know about it and was it covered in the newspapers?

R: Yes, this was a very public trial and, of course, Fidel took his own defense and it was a very nice defense. His speech, *La historia me absolverá*, was very good and accepted by all the

people. The Cuban people thought that this was the leader that Cuba needed. For that reason, he gained more and more and more support from the Cuban people. But, you must know that his speech, the people cannot have this today and many years ago because they said a lot of things in that speech that he didn't accomplish, he did a different things. He was against this argument that he used and also, Mañuel Urutía, a doctor, the chief judge, was the first president of Cuba when the revolution took the power because he was very impressed with the reality of the trial.

D: Now let's go back to your work in Havana. You were attending school and you were working at the same time, a very tough schedule. Did you have to go to night school? What was your day like?

R: Well, as I told you, this was a very, very important time in my life. I worked eight hours a day in my work and this was . . . I was, at that time, twenty-two years old when I moved. The work was very different than what I did at the sugar mill because my task was to work in the bank for the money operation for the company. My work was to work with the big enterprise of commerce when we bought everything for the sugar mill. I learned a lot here about administration. God was preparing me for my task in the Church because I used this contact for the benefit of the poor people as I will tell you after, when I was in the seminary. The studying I did the same. I studied by myself and I did the test in June and September, as I did it when I was in the rural area.

D: So you really did not attend classes at the university day by day?

R: No, I was working. But, this was a very good time for my spiritual life. And sometime when I had a bad note on my test, my strong feeling was, "Well, no matter what my qualification will be in secular study, I need to prepare my life for my test before God." And this was a very good time to gather strength in my faith and, also, in that situation when I was living very close to the local Church, I did a lot of work in the local church. I participated, not only in the Sunday service, but also in the Bible study in the mid-week service. I was a leader in the youth department of the Church. I was a member of the administrative council in the local Church. I made the Sunday bulletin for the service and I was a local preacher in a mission that we had in Martín Perez in Guanabacoa. And God was, as I told you, preparing me for the ministry because, in that way, I participated in the life of the local Church in a very full way.

D: By this time it sounds as though you decided, at some point, to go to seminary?

R: Well, on some occasion, I felt some little calling from God to the ministry. But, my answer was, "Oh, I am a Christian person, I am working in the local Church, and God needs, not only people in the ministry, but God also needs people that can testify in this work in his normal life."

D: So you really had not decided to become a minister yet?

R: Not yet, no.

D: How many Methodists were there in Havana? How many people would have said, "I'm a Methodist" in Havana at that time?

R: There were three main congregations in Havana. The University Church in *El Verdado* was the new one. This Church was founded in 1950 or so and there was a very strong university student work, and for that reason, this congregation grew very fast and we had a congregation of maybe two-hundred members. But there were other Churches, the Central Havana, in the old city, that was the first, and also there was the Church of *Marianao* where the Candler and Buena Vista Colleges were started.

D: What would the numbers have been?

R: One thousand, twelve hundred or so.

D: Were there other Protestant Churches organized in Havana?

R: Yes, there are a lot of different denominations in Havana; the Baptist, the Presbyterian, the Episcopalian, the Assembly of God, the Nazarene Church, and many others.

D: In the Methodist Church, what was the degree of American participation in those Churches?

R: There was, in this new sanctuary, the University Church, we had two congregations . . . three congregations; the Cuban congregation, the West Indian Congregation, and also the American congregation, and this was a very strong congregation, the American congregation. They had their own missionary pastor and they had a very nice organization, very good work.

D: How did your co-workers, where you worked at the mill, how many of them were Christians and were involved in the Church like you were? Were there any or just a few?

R: No, they were normal Cubans. The normal Cuban in that time said, "I am a Christian, I am a Catholic, I believe in God, but I don't go to the Church." That's the reality, and they belonged to a Catholic Parrish somewhere. Of course, when I was converted, at the time I was in the sugar mill, many of them criticized me because I was a very good Christian. I changed all my way of life. For example, before I smoked as the other young people in the office did and then I stopped smoking, I stopped drinking alcoholic beverages, I stopped going to the *Bailes* and the popular fun and they criticized me a lot for that reason. There was a little child in the sugar mill that, her mother asked her, "Go to the office center and cry, 'Armando *cura*, Armando *cura*.'" This means a priest, a Catholic priest, because they don't understand. There were not evangelical, Protestant Churches there and, when they heard that I would be a Christian and I would go to the seminary, they had a bad joke about me about that.

D: Would you like to express any other things about your time in Havana from '52 to '53?

R: There was a very important experience at that time. One of them was that, in October 10 of 1952, there was a national gathering in the Holguin City in *Oriente* for the National Youth Fellowship. And there was a very special moment because, on that occasion, I had the opportunity to visit my new friend Alida. She and her family lived in Holguin. Her father was a Baptist pastor in Holguin and, also, at that gathering I was appointed as promoter of the Christian Youth, not only Methodist but all the other denominations in Havana. And this gave me the opportunity to have more acknowledgements from other Churches and other groups of young people and God was preparing me, in that way, for the ministry. And also, on January 1, 1953, I visited my girlfriend in Holguin and we made the official engagement of us.

D: How did you first meet?

R: We met in the home for evangelical university students because she was a primary teacher in *Oriente* and she was studying the same way I was, by extension, in the School of Education at Havana University.

D: You met at Havana University? She had to visit?

R: Yes, but not at the university. She lived at the same home because she came to take the test in Havana.

D: So that was 1953. Can you go through your ideas about going to seminary?

R: O.K. 1952 and 1953 were very busy for me. My work, my studies, and my activities in the local Church, but on July 26, 1953, the *Moncada* Barracks attack in *Santiago de Cuba*, and I told you this situation. But I was participating in the life of the Church, especially in the work of the mission in Martín Parrish in *Guanabacoa*, and this September 23, 1953 was the biggest day in my life. It was a Sunday. I participated in a very nice service in the University Church and then, in the afternoon, I was having my personal devotion in my room in the home for evangelical university students and, at that time, when I was reading the Bible and praying, I felt in a very, very special way, the calling from God to the ministry. And immediately I answered to Him in the same way that I answered on other occasions before, "Oh I am a Christian, I am learning in the Bible, I am working in the Church, I am a layman in the Church, and the Cuban society needs a lot of Christian layman who testify in his work, in his life and everything." Then, I am doing my best but He continued telling me, "I need you in the ministry." I gave other answers, but He continued asking me, "I need you in the ministry." And then I told Him, "Well, if you are calling, I need you to tell me that through the Bible." And then I had a box of some special Bible texts that my new girlfriend gave me and I took one of these Bible texts, and do you know what the text was. It was Matthew 4 verse 19 and 20. This text said, "And Jesus said to them, follow me and I will make you fishers of man. Then they immediately left their nets and followed him." And then I told God, "This is enough, I will answer your calling, I will leave everything in my life and I am putting my life in your hands." And this was the biggest experience, the best decision that I could make in this world. I thanked God for this calling and I don't forget this date and this experience and now fifty-five years after that I thank God for this occasion.

D: What date was that?

R: September 23, 1953. A little less than two months after the *Moncada* Barracks attack.

D: So, where did you go from there? Did you investigate the idea of going to a seminary?

R: Yes, I spoke immediately with my pastor, a very good pastor. I thank God for the two pastors I had in my Christian experience at that time. The first of them was Reverend Luis Diaz de Arce, the pastor in the *Cienfuegos* Methodist Church where I was converted three years before that, and also my pastor, Ernesto Vasseur, who was one of the great Cuban servants of God at that time. I spoke with him and he prayed with me and he guided me to what steps I must take for that reason. I was to make an application through the local Church to the Board of Pastors in the conference and to ask them to go to the seminary in *Matanzas*.

D: Was *Mantanzas* suggested to you or were there other places you were thinking about going?

R: No, this was the seminary that was established by the Methodist Church, the Episcopalian Church, and the Presbyterian Church. It was understood that all the Methodist students for the seminary in Cuba must go to *Matanzas*.

D: What date and month did you move to *Matanzas* and establish yourself there at the seminary?

R: Well, there was a special arrangement at this time. In the first place, when I told the owner of the sugar mill company that I would resign my work, he asked me, "How much salary will you have in your new enterprise." Maybe thinking I would move to another company because I was not receiving a good salary. But I answered to him, "Oh, I will not receive a salary. I will go to the seminary and I will receive seven pesos a month for my personal needs and four pesos to clean my dresses." And then he accepted it and it was very interesting because, when Fidel Castro took their sugar mill, he came to Florida. And he and his wife were attending the Methodist Church in West Palm Beach. One time I visited here and I met with him and we spoke a lot about the change. But at that time he understood, better than me and, really, he told me that he admired me and he was happy about my decision. This was very interesting for me because I did not doubt the real decision, and even more, when I decided to resign my work in the sugar company, in that time to work in the sugar company was very important work because the sugar company, the electricity company, the telephone company, they were the most appreciated enterprises in Cuba. And when I spoke with other lay leaders in the Methodist Church, they were very disappointed with me, "Oh Armando, do you know what it means to be a Methodist pastor? Armando, the Methodist pastor has a very little salary. Armando, you are finishing your university studies, you have a very great future." I was disappointed of that reaction from other Methodist fellows, but I was sure and I was happy with my decision. I said to myself, "God will be enough for me. God will be the best for my life, for my future." I was happy to make that decision and there was no doubt in my mind, and this has been for all fifty-

five years my brother, I felt like the most happy person in this world being a Methodist pastor. The arrangement was that, at this moment, I had a very good amount of savings. I had more than two-thousand pesos in my savings account, and this was more or less the same in U.S. Dollars because at that time Cuban pesos were worth about the same as, or very little more value than, the American money. But I said to myself, "I don't want to go to the seminary with a big savings account." I wanted to go to the seminary and live by faith. And then I used it, all the money, in a very special way. For example, my father bought some equipment for the farm and I gave him the monthly payment for one month, I bought dresses and shoes and everything, I visited my family in different places in Cuba and when it was time to begin as a seminary student, the 1st of October of 1954, I did not have any money. I had to ask my pastor, Ernesto Vasseur, for ten pesos for my trip to *Matanzas*. And I was happy because I said to myself, "This is the way I want to begin my training as a pastor."

D: What was the seminary like? What were your first reflections or observations of the faculty there and the other students? How many other students were there and how many faculty members were there?

R: Well, my class was the biggest class in the seminary. There you studied three years and we had sixteen students and other classes had eight or ten or so. We were the biggest class and this was a very good experience. Also, I went to the seminary with big ideas. I thought that the seminary was a very saintly place, that there would not be any sin there. In this way I had some misconceptions and bad experiences. For example, one of our tasks in the seminary was that we must have a service for all of the faculty and student body and I was nervous about that. And then, the day before, I didn't do my student work and I thought, "Oh, tomorrow when I will tell the professor that I was preparing my sermon and my service, he will understand." But, at the end of the day, when I went to the professor and said, "Oh professor, yesterday I had my first service in seminary and I didn't have time to prepare my student work," he was very angry with me and did not understand that. We saw other realities in the life of other students and other professors and didn't agree with that and I had a very strong conflict in my life. But, thanks be to God, every time that I had some special problem in my life, God solved it for me in two or three minutes. On that occasion, I went to my room and I prayed, "Oh God I cannot understand that." And God told me, "Armando, you need to learn a lesson, an important lesson. You have come here to get training from this professor and they have a lot of things to teach you. But listen, you are feeling here as a little person, as a lesser person in this place, and that is good. But listen, your faith, your way of life here, I need to use you as a testimony for all these people. You must accept the good things that they can give to you but you must think that also, even when you are a student in the first year, you had from me something, little thing that they need to learn from you." And this gave me a very nice perspective for my life and my relationship with this real situation in the seminary. And another reality was, before that time, I had very little time as a student in a room. I made my studies by myself, not in a room with a group and this was a great challenge in my life. But, thanks be to God, as I was a working person from sixteen years old, I was well disciplined in my life and then after my experience with this professor the first time, I made all my student work on time and it was a very, very nice experience for me to be in the seminary. And I learned A LOT there, not only in the theological and intellectual

matters, but also in the life of the people and the Christians and so. And, of course, I had other big blessings at that time. It was, as they called at that time, field work. Every one of us, as a student, had one place to preach, and I worked with a very saintly American missionary, Miss Lorraine Bock and she was a very nice to me. The first year I was her helper in the *Boca de Camarioca* mission. That was about twenty-five miles east of *Matanzas*. At that place I preached every week and I had a great blessing because in the last two years of my studies, I was alone in the work. Miss Bock was not working there and I was the pastor of this mission. I had a great, great experience on that occasion. I can tell you that I had more success that I could think in the pastoral work. I visited every week the community and the children, and I was very identified with the people. In this place, *Boca de Camarioca*, it was the first place that a large amount of Cubans came to the United States at the time of the revolution. This was, more or less, in 1963 or '64, hundreds of thousands of people came and this finished when the Cuban and American government are called to have the flag of liberty from *Varadero* to Miami. But, at that place, the people lived only as fisherman and also there was an American enterprise of henequen. This is some agricultural matter. And there was a fabric factory maybe four or five miles from there and they had maybe eighty or one-hundred workers there. And then there was an occasion when there was no rain and the factory stopped for two or three months, and this was a very dangerous situation for the people there. Then I had an idea. I spoke with the workers and I said, "I have contacts from my work in the sugar company in Havana with the big commerce enterprise. We can have a special price for food and, if you would like to invest your money in food, I will bring the opportunity to do so for you." Then, the wife of the American administrator of this factory, she was a very good Christian and she attended my service in the chapel there. Through her I spoke with the administrator about my plan to go to Havana and buy food for the people in a way that they could buy more things with little money and he facilitated to me a big truck from the company. Then I asked one of the leaders of the workers to go with me and work together in this plan. He agreed. He was a very honest man with great respect from the workers. We went to the workers and said, "Before this, I was at Havana to the big commerce enterprise," and had the price of a piece of rice, beans, and oil, the main foods that they needed, in a little amount, about six pounds, ten pounds, and I brought, with the leader this list, and we said to every worker, "This is an opportunity, you can buy rice and beans and everything at this low price." At then we made a list and the leader of the workers received the money. Then, one day when everything was o.k., the leader of the workers, the driver of the truck, and me, very early in the morning, went to Havana. It was about a two-hour trip and we went to the commerce enterprise with the list ready to buy and to pay, and went back and distributed in the same way, house by house, all the food. And this was a very nice experience for me because the people were very, very happy and they came to me and said, "Oh Armando, how good is this rice that you bought for us!" This was great, but do you know what, the commercial people, the people who had the store in *Boca de Camarioca*, they were very angry with me because they thought that I took their business. And then somebody told me that the very same day that we went to Havana to buy the food for the workers, some of them went to *Cardenas*, a close city, to see the association of commerce people and said, "Oh, there is a young person doing that, and that, and that . . ." "To bring me to the cops because I was doing commerce without a license. But the leader asked them, "Where is he putting the food. No, no, no, he is a seminary student and he is living in the Church." And they said, "Oh, we cannot act

because he is not doing anything illegal.” They were not satisfied in Cardenas and then they went to the capital of the province, to *Matanzas*, and they stated the same, but the people answered the same and they did nothing against me. But, before that day, they knew what we were planning to do and then they said to the workers, “Oh, this young person will take your money and then you will be without money, without food, and don’t come here asking us to give you food.” But, of course, the experience was very good, the people were very happy and this was a very good experience for me to serve the people, not only spiritually, but also in their needs. This food brought me closer to the people I was serving.

D: What were some of the backgrounds of the students? Where were the students from who attended the seminary? Were they from Havana? Were they from all over the country? Were they rich? Were they poor? What were their backgrounds?

R: Well, geographically, they came from all the provinces. And not only Presbyterian, Methodist, and Episcopalian, there were also the Friends, or the Quaker students, from *Oriente*. In general, we were a group of people at a pretty good intellectual level and, of course, pretty good development in general. But, listen, for us, the Methodists, we were the low level. Why? Oh, because the Presbyterian people were the intellectual people and the Episcopalian were the high Church. And we the Methodists received less support, less salary, and we were last in every aspect, but we were very happy with our situation, and we had a lot of dreams and ideas about what we would do for the future of Cuba.

D: Who were some of fellow students that you remember that you worked with for a long time after? Were there very close friends of yours that you knew in later years?

R: Yes. There were three Methodist students in this group. The biggest group was Presbyterian, there were about seven, and the three or four Episcopalian and the other three were Quakers. And there were also some from other countries because the *Matanzas* seminary had a very good level of education and we had, for example, in my group, two from the Dominican Republic and one or two from Colombia and there was another from Panama and Guatemala. There was a pretty good group of people and the seminary had a very nice level. One, as I told you we were three Methodists, was Dr. Justo Gonzalez. I don’t know if you have heard about him. He is a good writer. He has written more than one-hundred books about the history of Christian thought. The other fellow was Omar Diaz de Arce who was the nephew of my first pastor, Luis Diazde Arce, but his father, the father of Omar, was a communist all his life. Then, when the revolution came, he left the Methodist ministry and he was a professor at the University of Santa Clara. But, do you know what? There for about ten or twelve years he was living in Miami because he was an intellectual communist. But when the communist reality in Cuba asked him many things, he was not able to answer and then he had some participation in one Mexican university and, on that occasion, he crossed the border in Mexico and he came to the United States.

D: Now, of those, there were how many professors? Those are two, how many other professors were there at the seminary?

R: At the seminary, we had a pretty good number; about . . . there was a group of full-time professors. There were about six or seven and there were another five or seven that were part-time professors.

D: Were there other professors that left the country or stayed?

R: We had both. Of course, we had an American professor. I'd like to give you, in the end, the name of one of my professor, Dr. David White, but the director, the president of the seminary was Dr. Alfonso Rodriguez Hidalgo, and he was a very intelligent Presbyterian professor and his life, his concept of ministry, his theologian teaching, was a very hard challenge for me. Really, he made a great contribution to my Christian life. He, and of course all the American professors, left the country because they didn't agree with the politics. But there was one other special professor, Dr. Sergio Arce, who was a very hard, very good supporter of the revolution. He said that socialism was akin to the Kingdom of God. And he was, until this last year, for five or more years, a member of the National Populist Assembly. You can ask why.

D: Why would that be?

R: There was in both sides, we had professors in both sides.

D: I'm not sure that I understand.

R: A professor that, when the revolution took the power left the country and a professor that was a strong supporter of the revolution. And, of course, he was, for many years, for eight or ten years, the president of the *Matanzas* seminary, where, in my understanding, is in a very left line in Cuba. And, for that reason, two years ago, the Methodist Church there, left the seminary of *Matanzas* and they are starting their own Methodist seminary in Cuba.

D: Would there be anything more about your seminary years that you would like to share?

R: Yes, a very important occasion. When I finished my second year, this was in 1956, the bishop, that was Bishop John Branscomb, the same bishop that was here in Florida was our bishop, approved that I was married in the way that my wife Alida can profit my last year in the seminary learning Christian education and this was a very special experience for me to be a married student. In the end, April 7, 1957, my first daughter was born, Alidita, and this was a very good experience.

D: Were there any women in your seminary? When you attended seminary were there women also?

R: Yes, there were women students and men.

D: One or two or three?

R: There were a pretty good amount of them. Maybe a third of the student population was women.

D: How were they treated by the male students? Did they treat them well? Also the professors, did the professors treat them well?

R: They were appreciated a lot but, normally, they don't study theology, they studied Christian education. They thought that women could not be a pastor. But, of course, many of them, with their Christian education studies, became pastors, especially in the Methodist Church.

D: Can you tell us a little bit about your thesis?

R: O.K. I had to write a thesis and it was a very nice experience for me as I was an accountant. I selected a subject of one study of the self-support of the Methodist Church in Cuba during the ten years before my thesis. And I studied the Christian stewardship in my Church and then I compared this study in the Methodist Church with other Churches, for example, with the Baptist Churches, with the Presbyterian Churches. In that way, I learned an important lesson; that faith is very important in the Church, the theology and Bible study is very important, but all these important matters in the Church are incomplete. As a whole, if we don't have a good Christian stewardship.