

INTERVIEW with Enrique Miguel Sanchez Motos

How the Unification Church in Spain received legal Recognition by the Constitutional Court in 2001

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Interviewer: Peter Zoehrer



P: Enrique Sanchez, thank you for taking time for this interview. When were you born and what is your religious background?

E: I was born as a Catholic in Murcia, Spain, in 1947. When I was 17 years old I left the Catholic Church because it did not really fit to my intellectual approach to life. I was interested in other ideas such as Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Free Masonary, and tried to look for some truth behind all that. I was always open-minded to find new ways. I met the Unification Movement 1975 in London. But I only got really committed to work within the Church in Madrid in 1984.

P: So, you were searching for the truth?

E: Yes, very much indeed!

P: Could you mention briefly how you first met the UC?

E: When I was 29 years old in 1976 I was in London, while Marcia was back in Brasil, so I was alone. I was walking by Piccadilly Circus when some people stopped me and asked if I was interested in God. I said: "Yes, I am interested in God but not now!" Another time they approached me and asked: "Are you interested in the unity of religion?" And again I replied: "Oh yes, this is even more interesting, but not now." and walked on. Eventually I met this group for a third time and found the person who had approached me before. He asked me: "Would you like to come to our center to have some tea?" I accepted the offer and went to the center. I was surprised that when I received the tea, nobody asked me to pay for it. That was shocking. However, my English was not so good and it was also late. So they told me that I should come the next day as there would be a Spanish person who could explain to me more. So, on the following day I met Pablo de la Peña who began to teach me about the Coming of the Christ. I asked him: „When is he going to come?" He replied: „Oh, he will come soon!“ I said: "When he comes, please tell me!“ He replied: „Actually, he did come already!“ Then I said: "But if he has come already, you may know who he is." Then he pointed at a picture and said: „It is him." I was surprised and asked: "Oh, is he Chinese?" Laughingly, he denied and said he was Korean. I became interested in deepening my knowledge about the teachings of this group and was introduced to the Divine Principle. During my stay of six months in London, I went to the Swindon Farm for several weeks. I dedicated a lot of time to study the Divine Principle and soon became convinced that this is the truth. I also had other experiences after returning to Spain, but this would take too long to explain.

P: When did you come back to Spain?

E: I returned to Spain in December 1975 and stayed here. I tried to find a job and started my studies to become a senior civil servant. After graduating I entered public administration in 1978.

P: Tell me about the general situation during the 1970s, 80s and 90s regarding religious discrimination of minority groups. I assume at that time the Catholic Church was predominant in Spain, right?

E: Yes, the Catholic Church was predominant and any other groups including the Protestants, the Mormons, Adventists, etc. were simply called “sects.” But I felt I was a free man and I didn’t accept this discrimination. And of course, I was confronted with those ideas and my family and my friends were surprised about my connection to the Unification Church. But in 1978 there was not yet much persecution in Spain. This began a later in the beginning of the 80s. And especially from the 80s to the 90s there was a big wave of persecution of any group that was labeled a "sect", i.e. the Mormons, the Adventists, the Hare Krishna’s and of course us, the Unification Church. The media published very bad allegations against us and that was very tough. In 1986 we gave an interview to the main newspaper in Spain (El Pais). Together with another brother I talked to the reporters about our

movement in Spain. That was how the people in the public administration got to know that I was a member of this group and from then on I suffered persecution in my professional career.

P: Did state actors or non-state actors mainly instigate the persecution of religious minorities? Were the Anti-Cult offices mainly created by the mainstream churches?

E: Initially, the persecution of sects was mainly done by two people: One was the national deputy from the Popular Party and the other was a journalist from Barcelona with the name of Pepe Rodrigues. He wrote a book titled „The Moon Conspiracy“ and he was very active against the so-called cults, especially against us. But the state itself did not persecute us. Of course the Catholic Church discriminated against us and we still suffer from that persecution until today but to a much lesser degree.

P: Was there a change in the media regarding the reporting on religious minority groups?

E: Yes, but the change occurred only after a long period of time. In 2001 when we won our case in the constitutional court in Spain, the ministry of justice was ordered to register our movement as an official Church. But until that moment, we suffered strong persecution, individually and as a group.

P: And how did you start your struggle against religious discrimination? Surely you personally took up the fight at some point. What was your strategy?

E: Well, I like to fight against injustice because this is my nature. And I am against lies and things that are not correct. And I like to fight to clarify things. There is a lot of hypocrisy in our society. People say that they are for freedom, but when it comes down to it they are not really for freedom. They just say they are, but they are not.

Regarding our church, I could see that their allegations were wrong, so I wanted to clarify this. In our church I was in charge of relations with the media and public institutions. During this time, I would often call the media, radio stations, the TV, newspapers, etc. I would expose myself to fight for the truth...

I always liked to take a pro-active approach and didn't just expect to be called by the journalists. Whenever there was an inadequate or untrue coverage in the news, I would immediately write to the editor in the name of our church and offer them to have a talk in order to clarify the facts. Also I did the same with the police. Whenever we had a CAUSA conference I invited the police. I told them that they are welcome and do not need to come undercover or as secret-police. „You can just come openly and stay with us.“ I even gave them a pass to our VIP room in order to show them that there was nothing to hide. I think that this open door policy helped the truth to be known.

P: I can see when you wrote your first book you took the bull by the horns. You titled it: „I am a Member of a Sect!“ You even put your picture on the book cover. That was very brave.

E: I wanted to put my face in front. I was inspired by John F. Kennedy when he declared in front of the Berlin wall: „Ich bin ein Berliner!“ Similarly, I wanted to say to the Spanish people: „I am the member of a sect! Read my book and tell me what is so bad about our behavior in front of society!“, and so on. That was my intention. That is why I wrote such a tough book. Even now, people remember that I am a member of a “sect”. But in the book I explain clearly that all the things that they have read or heard in the media was a bunch of lies. Unfortunately, 2000 years ago Jesus Christ was crucified by the mob. There was no democracy and no rule of law. Fortunately, today we live in the age of democracy. However, it is unfortunate if as members of a minority religion we can still be crucified in our social lives. I strongly think that we need to fight against this injustice. That is my position.

P: Right. You said that you have written another book titled *Religious Intolerance and Discrimination in Spanish Democracy*.

E: Yes. These two books have prologues that were written by two different persons. The first one in *I am the Member of a Sect*, was written by a Catholic theologian, Enrique Miret Magdalena, who was quite leftist, but open-minded. And the second book on religious intolerance was a chronological analysis of our fight to be recognized as a church and to show that the only hindrance in the recognition process was religious intolerance. There was no other reason. The prologue of this book was written by the main spokesperson of the Spanish atheists, Gonzalo Puente Ojea. He belongs to the Spanish diplomatic corps, he was Ambassador at the Vatican, and he is really a brilliant intellectual and an expert in explaining atheism. By having these two prologues in my books, a Catholic one and an atheist one, I wanted to demonstrate that we are open-minded, because we are trying to look for the truth from all different angles and like to cooperate with persons of good will regardless of their worldview or background.

P: In retrospect, do you think that these books really helped to change people's perception of our movement?

E: The books don't really change people. They are not so useful for that. But they are useful for the purpose of witnessing. So, whenever people ask you, you can tell them: „I wrote that, we have nothing to hide!“, and show them the book. Indeed, people don't read this type of books very much. But they are important because they are historical records. And the second book, *Religious Intolerance*, was published just six months before our church got legal recognition in 2001, even though I did not send a copy to any member of the constitutional court in respect of their independence. It was quite funny to see once time has passed and once the agony has subsided, how exactly those people who have created associations for tolerance have never helped us when we were severely discriminated. These stories have been recorded in my books and it is very interesting to show to people that we should be open-minded in the fight for truth and we should include everyone. Human rights and in particular the

freedom of conscience do not just apply to the Catholic Church, the Unification Church or others. These rights are for everyone. They are universal and we need to fight for them.

P: In other words, this historical record has an educational purpose.

E: Exactly! Now this book is being used in several universities as an example for the struggle for religious freedom. And our victory at the Constitutional Court has even opened the door for other groups to be legally recognized.

P: So your work was indeed very effective then.

E: Well, by now the books are having an impact. But most effective is the actual fight. And the strategy for the fight in my point of view is to always go with the truth and don't wait. As General McArthur said „The story of any defeat in any war can be summarized in two words: Too late!“ So we must go and stop the intolerant attitudes and show that a free and constructive world must be created.

P: This is a very important lesson. You have just mentioned the word „fight“. Let me ask you: When did you start your fight for religious freedom?

E: Well, I think it was quite early. It was in 1984. Once I got involved in the church I had this idea of fighting for the truth. And I was appointed by the church to be in charge of PR, media relations and the contact with public institutions. From then on I understood that I needed to clarify points and whenever I needed to respond to false allegations in the media I would go to the media to express our viewpoint. I went to the media to the parliament, to the ombudsman and even to the police. I also went to institutions that were standing for tolerance and religious freedom, but most of them washed their hands in a Pontious Pilate like manner, and they didn't fulfill their responsibility.

P: Another question I would like to ask you: Did you find allies in your struggle? Or have you just been a lonely voice in the wilderness?

E: We only had a few allies, mostly other groups that were labeled as a sect, for example Mormons, Hare Krishnas, etc. But even they were not fighting very strongly against intolerance. Even the Adventists, who had a strong organization to fight intolerance, were only fighting for themselves, not for religious freedom for all. So, we did not have many allies. Still you need to go on step by step. I also created an organization to advocate religious freedom not just in the name of the Unification Church, but in the name of a private association. Anyway, in the end you need to accept the fact that often you are just going to be alone in your struggle.

P: I do understand very well what you are talking about... When did you get the idea to aim for legal recognition by the government?

E: Already in 1973 our Church applied for a legal status by the government. However, the government refused. We applied again in 1974 and in 1975. Each time our application was turned down. The next time we tried to apply in 1991. This time I was responsible for the application and I considered it to be extremely important to get legal recognition. Again we were refused. But at this point we decided that we were going to fight through the courts as well, not just on the administrative level. So, we engaged a lawyer and started to challenge the system. We went to the Court called National Audience because this was a matter of human rights and they were under its competence. We were defeated. Then we went to the Supreme Court and we were defeated again. Finally, we went to the Constitutional Court and there we finally won. So we needed to go step by step, receiving refusals, but knowing that we were right. We just continued until we reached the top of the Spanish tribunals. But besides that, we did a lot of things in the meantime. Simultaneous with our legal struggle we have also talked to the police, the parliament, the ombudsmen and the media. We just kept talking. We did not know what would be the final decision of the Constitutional Court. Even if the decision would go against us, we just needed to fight for the truth in any case. So, besides the legal action we just kept up our campaign as we did all the years before. We kept acting and explaining the truth: We were not at all a problem to the public order. On the contrary, we are an open-minded and constructive religious movement.

P: Did you engage top lawyers for this legal battle?

E: Only one lawyer who participated in CAUSA and at the Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA) before. However, when he presented some petition to the court, he wrote this in a very formal way. I was not satisfied with this approach. Therefore, I pursued him to go to the bottom of things. I asked him to write appeals in a more straight and direct way, and I cooperated with him in proposing changes in the appeals texts. He did it and that was good.

P: Please tell me if or how the Unification Church of Spain celebrated this victory in 2001.

E: Well I think we were happy, but I do not remember any big celebration. For us it was most important that we finally won this amazing victory at the Constitutional Court. We also wrote a press release and the most important newspaper in Madrid (El Pais) published it in a full page article about our legal victory. This was sent to True Father who was so happy about it. So he signed the article and we received a copy of this historical document. After that, things began to change. For example, TV reporters came to my home and made an interview. A real change began from this time on.

P: I see that you have written four books. How long did it take you to write them?

E: Well, *Religious Intolerance* took me only about a year. This is the history about our fight for our legal recognition. So, I had already collected all this information and it was just a matter of putting all the details together. In this book you can find the police reports, the report of the ministry of justice against us and many other articles and documents. I published not only the story of the Spanish

Unification church fight, but also all the documents, so the readers could judge by themselves about them.

P: How would you describe the impact of the legal recognition of our church in 2001?

E: There really was a big difference compared to the time before. However, what we need is not just legal recognition but from now on we also need social recognition. To get that, our movement needs to do more things. Especially we need to do inter-religious work. I consider this extremely valuable. In Spain we did that 10 years ago and it was very positive but we need to do this again. Through this approach we can work together with other religions. All of them are under the umbrella of God Himself. So, we can show that together we can create a new world and that is very valuable for social recognition. Also we have true love! True love is a great idea! True Love for the people, true love for the country, true love for freedom. We need to give these ideas to the people, not only the Divine Principle. The first Chapter of the Divine Principle is the most important for the future. Also Unification Thought is very important. I think, if we do that, we can increase the social recognition of our movement. I also think that these books are very important now, even more than before. Why? Because we can present them and say: "See what we told you 10, 20 years ago..."

P Please allow me to summarize: You are saying that legal recognition in society is a precondition for gaining social recognition. Is that correct?

E: Yes! The reason is this: If you gain social recognition without legal recognition, in other words, if you are in legal terms still regarded as a cult, you will be creating problems for those who recognize you. Our allies will be hurt in the long run if they are associated with us. So, to get legal recognition is not only good for us. It is also good for our allies.

P: What would you suggest we should do in order to improve or change the public image of our European Unification Movement?

E: I think it is necessary to work on two levels. The first level is action to promote inter-religious cooperation and we need to teach our basic idea of the Divine Principles, the content of the first chapter broadly to society. Additionally, we need to get legal recognition in our countries all over Europe. To do that we need to assess each countries law, etc. Those countries which have already legal recognition can help other countries who do not have this status yet. Also at least in Spain the anti-cult activities are not as intense anymore as they were in the past, but maybe in other countries still they are. Therefore, we can help those countries. The history of the nations who have had success in this battle for religious freedom can be very helpful to others.

P: This is a very important point. In other words, you are saying that just as negativity can spill over to other countries, also the victory of one country can spill over to neighbor countries?

E: Exactly! It is very important to share our victories! As you can see in my book, I used a positive declaration released by the British Parliament at the time and sent it to the Spanish police, institutions and Spanish deputies. I really made use of these documents at that time. I think we should do the same in other European countries as well. We should send them the declarations, the court sentences, etc. in order to show that we are not a problem or a danger to the public order at all but the opposite.

P: So you would advise leaders of the Unification Movement and its PR experts that we should pool our resources and our experiences together and help case by case?

E: Yes, I think that would be very good. As you said just before, to spill victories is important and sharing our experience is important, too. Why? Because if we want to change the world, but neither have legal nor social recognition, we will not be doing very well. As there are already European countries where we do have recognition. Those countries serve as examples that recognition in our own society is possible.

P: Would you agree with the metaphor, that our movement sometimes acts like a soccer team without defense and goalkeeper, but still dreams about victory?

E: (Laughing) Yes, I am sure one could say that.

P: As you know, True Mother outlined three focus points for achieving victory for Vision 2020. The first focus point is witnessing and Tribal Messiahship. The second focus point is creating a conducive environment for witnessing. That means creating a positive environment in society to enable successful witnessing. And the third focus point is promoting young talents and involving our youth. Would you agree that the work we were talking about today is very relevant to the second focus point within the framework of the VISION 2020 strategy, which is to create a conducive environment for witnessing?

E: Absolutely yes. We need to create the atmosphere in which we can say that we are good people, we are positive, we are constructive people. We need our church and our providential organizations to be recognized legally as well as socially. In this context we can successfully witness. Otherwise it will be very difficult. The time to go witnessing on the street and approach people one by one has passed. We now live in a different time. We need legal and social recognition as a condition to win people.

P: Well, Enrique, this interview was very insightful indeed. Thank you that you have taken the time for this talk and I hope we can enrich and inspire many European Unificationists with your incredible story.

E: Thank you very much, Peter!