
PROFILE

CLAYTON ROSSI

Dialogue with an Adventist Solicitor General in Brazil



Since 1967 Clayton Rossi has been a solicitor general for the federal government of Brazil. As such, he

advises and defends the national government in Brasilia when legal cases are brought against it by parties at home or abroad. In addition, he teaches Criminal Law at the University of Brasilia.

Born in 1930, Attorney Rossi obtained his law degree in 1957 at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, in the city of Belo Horizonte. Before being appointed to his current position for life, he was in private practice and later served as legal advisor to a regional branch of the federal civil service.

He has lectured widely on ethical issues, while remaining active in matters

involving religious freedom and drug dependency. He has participated in several international legal conferences and also received numerous honors, including the President's Distinction awarded to him in his homeland in 1977.

Clayton Rossi is a charter member of the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in Brasilia and has served as its first elder since it was founded in 1969. His wife, Djanira, is a teacher. They have two daughters, one pursuing a university degree in psychology and the other completing her secondary studies.

Attorney Rossi, how did you discover your vocation as a lawyer?

When I was 10 or 11 years old my father began taking me to the local court in my home town of Pouso Alegre. I really enjoyed listening to the defending lawyer and the government prosecutor argue their points of view in front of the seven-member jury, and then watching as the verdict was pronounced and the judge applied the law.

What attracted you to the study and practice of law?

I suppose that the fact that several of my relatives were lawyers had an influence on my decision. Basically, however, I was drawn by the continuing intellectual challenge of the legal profession and by the possibility of contributing to the application of justice in real life.

Some people believe that it is almost impossible to be a good

Christian and a good lawyer at the same time. What is your view?

On the basis of my own experience, I do not agree. As a lawyer and as a law school professor I find that the consistent application of Christian principles truly enhances the practice of our profession. In my courses I speak frequently about the validity of the ethical principles of Christianity in the practice of law. I like to say, for example, that if Paul's statement on having learned to be satisfied with what one has were applied by all, we would reduce tremendously the case loads in our courts.

How did you become acquainted with Seventh-day Adventists?

I was born and raised in a traditional Roman Catholic family. When I was in my teens my mother began reading Ellen G. White's book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, which had providentially

reached our home. She was struck by the relevance of the seventh-day Sabbath as God's day of worship, rest, and service. For several years she sought a satisfactory answer to her questions on this matter among the Catholics and the Presbyterians. At that time the Roccas, a devout Adventist family that had moved to our neighborhood, began visiting her.

What happened next?

By then I was 18 or 19 years old and was studying away from home, in Sao Paulo. My mother told me in her letters that she had begun studying the Bible in earnest. Later I learned that she and my brother had been baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Then I myself met the Roccas and was impressed by their biblical knowledge and authentic Christian piety.

What role did the Bible play in your conversion?

A very important one. It helped me, for example, to understand that salvation is a free gift of God through faith in Christ, not something that one can earn through religious activities and rituals. I must admit, however, that at first I found the Bible very heavy reading. But the Roccas led me into the Gospels, Psalms, Proverbs, the New Testament Epistles. Slowly I began to understand and appreciate the Bible.

How long did it take you to join the Adventist Church?

It was a process that took approximately three years. I had many friends and was quite involved in the social life. But once the Holy Spirit led me to a favorable decision, I started making changes in my outlook and life-style. The Sabbath became important as a special time to get acquainted with God's plan for my life. I adjusted my eating and drinking habits to the biblical pattern. I began setting aside the tithe of my modest earnings even before my baptism. And so I made changes as I understood, evaluated and applied to my life what I was learning. My family, the Roccas, and especially the Scriptures, each played a part in my conversion. Today I consider the Bible an extraordinary book, truly God's message for us.

This conviction has led you to be quite active in the Bible Society of Brazil.

That's correct. I served as vice-president for two years and as president between 1980-1984. We carried out several important projects. Each year, in cooperation with other Christians involved in this ministry, we promoted the massive distribution of the Scriptures in our country, provided incentives for reading them, and erected monuments in honor of the Bible in several cities of Brazil. We also supported the development of a new translation of the

Bible into Portuguese for the common reader, a project that is now coming to fruition.

How do you keep a balance between your professional, spiritual, and family life?

It is not easy, but it can be done. Whenever I sense that my professional and social demands are crowding my schedule, I purposely allow extra time for my spiritual activities: morning devotions, study of the Sabbath School lesson, systematic reading of the Bible, meditation and prayer. I find it essential to keep an equilibrium between private, family, and public worship. These activities empower me to be effective in my other responsibilities.

Do you find it difficult to serve as a solicitor general for the government and remain active as an Adventist?

No, I don't. When I was a law student I had to make some difficult choices when confronted with examinations on the Sabbath. But thank God I was able to work them out in each case by approaching either the teacher or the academic authorities at the university. Now as a government employee I find that in Brazil there are no required official activities on the Sabbath and I can observe it in a climate of religious freedom.

Have you been able to assist your church or your fellow members from your government position?

Yes, many times, but always within clear ethical principles. Recently I had to plead our case when there was a plan to hold elections on the Sabbath. There are also occasions when my advice is sought by the leaders of my church. I believe much can be

achieved when denominational and lay leaders work together, supporting each other. Perhaps my most dramatic case involved an Adventist Brazilian missionary who had been unjustly jailed abroad during a major political upheaval in that country. After delicate negotiations, through contacts at the highest level in our government and other international agencies, we were able to obtain the release of our brother and his safe return to his homeland with his family.

Do you find opportunities to share your faith?

Yes, frequently, with colleagues, judges and government authorities, as well as with my students at the university. However, this must be done in a tactful way after praying for the intervention of the Holy Spirit. A couple of years ago I had a moving experience. A former student of mine stopped me in the street and excitedly told me that he had two great news items to share with me. "I have been recently appointed judge in my home state and you can be proud of me," he said. "I have also joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Now I am your brother!"

Finally, what advice would you give to a Seventh-day Adventist young man or woman who is considering a career in law and perhaps in public service?

On the basis of my experience in Brazil, I would encourage them provided that they have a good grounding in their faith. They should aim high in their studies while remaining true to their convictions. Then, as professionals, they will have to compensate through careful analysis and research of each case their unwillingness to resort to questionable legal behavior. Faithfulness to God's principles in all their activities will bring them fulfillment in life.

Humberto M. Rasi