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## PROFILE

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# RUT ALONSO CARDONA

### Dialogue With an Adventist District Judge in Spain

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**B**orn only 26 years ago, Rut Alonso Cardona is a judge in the town of Basauri, in the Basque region of Northern Spain. She is also an attractive young woman—articulate, gracious, self-assured—and an active Seventh-day Adventist.

**P**lease tell us about your background.

I was born in a devoted Adventist home. In fact, on my father's side I'm a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist. Two of my uncles are ordained ministers; one of them is also a lawyer, a professor of constitutional law and the legal advisor to our Spanish Union.

I still remember the day of my baptism—March 8, 1975, when I was thirteen years old. Since then I've had several responsibilities in my home church in Bilbao and have remained involved in its activities. Right now we are in the midst of an evangelistic campaign, and I rarely miss a meeting.

At home our faith has always been a top priority. For years my mother has been organist and choir director in our church, while

Miss Alonso's family roots run deep in the city of Bilbao, where she was born in 1962, during the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. She attended law school at the prestigious University of Deusto, Spain, and received her degree in 1985. She went on to take two years of post graduate courses in preparation for the government contest in which a limited number of candidates are chosen to be trained for the judiciary. After emerging among the few selected, she completed her training at the Superior Institute of Judicial Studies in Madrid.

October 17, 1988, was a historic date for Seventh-day Adventists in Spain. On that day Rut Alonso Cardona, along with her colleagues, was inducted in the judicial corps during a formal ceremony presided by Spain's attorney general. Present for the event, in addition to government per-

my grandfather and later my father served as elders. The kitchen and dining room of my grandparents' home were the first Seventh-day Adventist "temple" in Bilbao, precisely when our church was experiencing the most severe repression in our country.

In my childhood there was no religious freedom in Spain. A Seventh-day Adventist was considered an odd person, even a socially despised individual. When I was attending elementary school, the parents of some of my school mates had forbidden them to speak to me fearing that I might "contaminate" them with my strange beliefs.

In spite of these experiences, I'm happy and proud to be a Seventh-day Adventist. My Christian faith and our denominational heritage constitute an invaluable

sonalities, were several Adventist ministers. They did not want to miss the ceremony in which a fellow Seventh-day Adventist—a member of a Christian community that for years had experienced intolerance and injustice in their own homeland—was to be charged with the solemn duty of dispensing justice for all. Silent tears glistened on the faces of the veteran pastors who were witnessing something unthinkable a few years ago.

Miss Cardona was sworn in as judge in Bilbao and in November of 1988 assumed her responsibilities as district judge.

We have come to the town of Basauri to interview her. She receives us graciously in her courtroom, flanked by the colorful flags of Spain and the Basque Provinces.

treasure for me. As I observe my contemporaries I know that we have beliefs and principles that can be of great value to them.

**Why did you want to become a judge?**

I felt that I could be more valuable to my church and to my country as a judge than as a lawyer. This position gives you a good deal of visibility and I wanted people to know that it is possible to be a good judge and also a Seventh-day Adventist. All those who work with me in the court—prosecutor, lawyers, clerk, assistants—know and respect my religious convictions.

In addition, I believe that our solid Christian principles help us to remain incorruptible and beyond reproach. God, the Supreme Judge who leads my life, can assist me through the Holy

Spirit in dispensing better justice. I know from the Bible that in the early history of Israel there were judges, even lady judges! And as the Lord uses ministers and literature evangelists to advance his kingdom, I'm convinced he can use me to impart justice to those who seek it.

**To what extent your religious convictions influence your decisions as a judge?**

I make a conscious effort to apply the Golden Rule, which I learned in my childhood, to all the activities connected with my office. I try to place myself in the situation of the person that is brought before me. I also conduct careful research on the background and the circumstances surrounding each case.

In arriving at a decision, I seek a balance between individual rights and the basic principles of justice. At times the simple application of the law seems the easier approach, but the best verdict may be found beyond the cold letter of the law. The teachings of the gospel lead me to see those who are accused of breaking the law as Jesus saw us—as fallen men and women in need of understanding, forgiveness, and restoration.

**Is it an advantage or a disadvantage to be a young woman in your assignment as a judge?**

In the Basque region of Spain the vast majority of judges are women. During the last three years, one half of those completing the training for the judiciary in Spain are also women. In my case I find that people treat me with respect and don't seem to mind the fact that a lady judge will rule in their cases. It is said in popular circles—although I'm not qualified to settle the matter—that women possess a sixth sense that allows them to see under the

surface and to decide with a more subtle feel for justice.

On the matter of age, it is still too early in my career to give you a definite answer! I acknowledge that a mature judge has the advantage of experience; but a young judge has also the advantage of openness to new views and approaches.

**Do you think that your work in the judiciary may have an effect on your faith? How?**

It has already affected me, positively, in leading me to longer sessions of prayer seeking supernatural wisdom when I'm about to deliver a sentence. A sensitive judge can't avoid feeling the weight of responsibility when he or she is about to deprive someone—a father, for example—of his liberty. I feel keenly the presence of God in my study and in the courtroom, encouraging me, guiding my thoughts.

**You live in an area of the world where violent terrorism is not uncommon. How would you deal with a terrorist accused of an assassination?**

I don't believe that political motives can justify violent crimes. Therefore I would treat him as a common criminal. There is no justification for taking somebody else's life. As a judge I would avoid by all possible means sentencing someone to death, because even in the best researched cases we base our decisions on partial information. There is only one Judge in the universe who can render such a verdict.

**And what would be your counsel to Seventh-day Adventists who are considering coming to court in search of justice?**

We live in an increasingly litigious age. But for Christians it is better to follow the advice of the Bible and seek an amicable agreement if at all possible. This ap-

proach is usually quicker, less costly, and avoids bitter confrontation and revenge. As we say in Spain, "Better a bad accord than a good lawsuit." Our legal team makes an intense effort to seek conciliation among the parties involved in a lawsuit before formally bringing the matter to court.

I would be much more emphatic if an Adventist plans to bring a case against a fellow member. This approach brings disrepute to the church we love. As believers we have a broader understanding of justice and a deeper concept of forgiveness than the rest of society. True Christians can find ways to achieve an equitable conciliation, and recently the church has established guidelines to help in this process. In addition, during each communion service Christ encourages us to take part only after settling all disputes among ourselves and arriving at a state of true unity in the Spirit.

**Finally, how would you define the duty of a judge and relate it to your concept of divine justice?**

I like Socrates' definition of our task: "To listen courteously, to answer wisely, to ponder prudently, and to decide impartially." The difference between human and divine justice is immense! We are fallen creatures who judge imperfectly, based on limited information and a stunted sense of justice. God knows everything, even the most secret motives of our actions, and therefore his decisions are perfectly just and beyond appeal. The most we can do is to be willing to learn from him day by day, acknowledging him as our wise Creator and our merciful Judge.

**Andrés Tejel**

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