

THE GOD OF EXCELLENCE

Joan Tonge

One of the most important things a Christian can do is to ask questions. Some people think that is very dangerous, but it's actually vital. I would like to ask what I consider to be the most significant question facing Seventh-day Adventists today.

Do we know where our church is going? Most of us are familiar with our roots. We know where we've come from—but do we know where we're going as a Christian movement? Do we know where we're going in our own division? Do we know where we're going around the world?

One thing is certain: our church is changing and moving! We are experiencing phenomenal growth in Africa and Latin America. Should North America, Europe and other parts of the world be experiencing the same thing? Our understanding of Bible prophecy says an emphatic, Yes!

Some people tell us that education and affluence have turned our sophisticated contemporaries off to our religious beliefs. They have no need for God, and they certainly don't want to be bothered with our church's high standards.

I say, Nonsense!

I'm acquainted with many of these people, and I know that they're concerned. They see a society morally headed down hill. They see their children heavily involved in alcohol, drugs, and free sex. They worry about their health just like you and I do. They're interested in quality education too. Educated and affluent men and women are searching for meaning in life as much as any of us.

And the Seventh-day Adventist Church has something very important to offer them. There's a buzz word in the business world today that our society fawns over and almost reveres: *Excellence*. Today's sophisticated, educated men and women demand excellence.

*I am convinced that many of our contemporaries would respond to the Adventist message if they really understood it, because in it they would find the excellence they seek.*

All efforts to develop true excellence are consistent with our understanding of God. After he created the world he "looked over all that he had made, and it was excellent in every way."<sup>1</sup>

In the Psalms we read: "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is your name in all the earth!" "You are . . . glorious and excellent."<sup>2</sup>

God constantly invites us to aim for excellence: I will show you "a more excellent way."<sup>3</sup> "Higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children."<sup>4</sup> "All the varied capabilities that men possess—of mind and soul and body—are given them by God, to be so employed as to reach the highest possible degree of excellence."<sup>5</sup>

Review with me some of the high points of the excellence of Adventism.

**Teaching.** The Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy offers an explanation of this world's troubles that is very satisfying to people who are hurting. Our teaching on righteousness by faith and sanctified living through Jesus Christ is far in advance of

that understood by most Christians.

**Health.** For more than 100 years we have taught what science is just now discovering: that cigarette smoking and a meat-rich diet destroy the life forces, whereas temperance and a simple diet prolong life.

**Sabbath.** The Sabbath provides a weekly rest in an age of unending stress.

**Lifestyle.** Our simple way of life sets us free from the world's obsession with fashion.

**Sacrifice.** Our system of tithes and offerings, and our emphasis on service for Christ's sake deliver us from the world's madness over materialism.

The list could go on. Unfortunately, we have often kept our teachings and our lifestyle hidden. I don't mean that others can't see them. But they aren't attractive because we've wrapped them in *religion*, and the world sees religion as an effort to manipulate people and control them.

Have you ever wished you could control people who didn't eat or dress or keep the Sabbath quite like you do? You thought the church would be more pure that way.

*That's what I mean by wrapping our beautiful teachings and lifestyle in religion.*

Excellence starts with personal revival and reformation. It begins with a commitment to faithfully represent Christ, to make God's glory the first object of our lives. God wants his name to be honored all over the world. This excellent God has all power and

all knowledge. He loves perfectly, and he wants to show the world his excellence through you and me, if we are willing!

God's promises to the Jewish nation are ours: "I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people;" "The Lord will make you the head not the tail;" "He will prosper you and multiply you."<sup>6</sup>

"Be strong and of good courage," God said to Joshua. "Do not be afraid nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."<sup>7</sup> God will be with us in our pursuit of excellence!

If we believe God, we can be different and achieve more than others—or we ourselves—ever thought possible. We can look at every possibility with God's vision, because we know that his help is available to reach every noble goal.

Moses sent twelve men to spy out the promised land. Only two of them saw the land through God's eyes. Only two believed that God would fulfill his promise through his people.

Three thousand were converted the day Peter preached at Pentecost—after he had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Under the power of the same Holy Spirit we see thousands more added to our church each month in other parts of the world. We can shake our heads and wish things were different where we live, or we can allow the Holy Spirit to show us the changes in our own lives and in our methods that will make it possible for us to reach the millions of people on our own continent.

Excellence demands that we be committed to God at all times. He is anxiously waiting for us to be "agents who will represent to the  
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## AND COMPASSION BECAME FLESH

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**C**ompassion is real only if it moves us to alleviate the suffering of real people—to take risks; perhaps to die. In Jesus Christ, the theory of heavenly compassion became an earthly fact.

God could have chosen to come to this world as a dazzling Light, but we would have been blinded by its splendor. Had he come as a powerful Sound, we would have gone deaf and missed his message.

**The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us.**

God could have chosen to become the King of Beasts. But we would have trembled at the fierceness of a mighty lion and his roar would have been unintelligible to us.

**It was through him that all things were made.**

The Creator who is so big that the entire universe cannot embrace him became a cuddly creature. The one who in an instant spoke the galaxies into existence, came to this world as a babbling baby.

**Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God.**

The Source of Life became an embryo, a fetus, a tiny, fragile, crying newborn. He exchanged the scepter of an all-powerful monarch for a baby's rattle and a carpenter's hammer.

He became a human being so that we could hear his winsome voice, see his harried brow, feel his strong but sensitive hands.

The Shepherd chose to be the Lamb. The Baker turned into the Bread of Life. The Worker accepted the wages of sin.

**He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even a criminal's death on the cross!**

The Way walked up to Calvary. The Truth was called a liar. The Life died for us.

The divine General of Heaven became an earthly foot soldier that gave up his life in the greatest battle of timeless infinity.

The God Immortal who robed himself in unapproachable light, hung naked and dead on an indifferent cross.

But the broken Man shattered death, broke the tomb, and demolished Satan's kingdom.

**At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow in heaven and on earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.**

Can God be compassionate? Can he really understand us and help us? The cross of Calvary and the empty tomb yell at the top of their lungs . . . Yes!

**Let this mind be also in you and me.**

**Luis F. Acosta**

*Luis F. Acosta, born in Puerto Rico, is a senior theology major at Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, Maryland, U.S.A.*

them to unravel and they referred my case to the superior council of the university.

I submitted a letter outlining my reasons for not taking classes on Saturdays. I also explained why I had nearly finished my program without taking a few courses along the way. I expressed my determination to remain true to my religious convictions as well as my desire to become a competent civil engineer. While I awaited the answer, I prayed fervently. One member of my church encouraged me with these words, "Don't worry, sister. I believe that angels protect any document that contains eternal truths." I thanked him and continued to pray.

In March of that year I received word of the decision of the superior council. They had reviewed my academic record and decided to treat me as a "special case." They allowed me to continue with my studies and even assigned me a special teacher to help me clear the course on roads and highways I still "owed" from the fourth semester. However, the council also ordered that, because of recent changes in the curriculum, I had to take three additional years of coursework before obtaining my degree!

While I was delighted to learn that I could continue my studies, I felt sad about the additional courses that I was required to take. Had I faced the issue during the fourth semester, trusting in God's providence, I might have avoided months of anguish and years of delay. After all, Christ had said that "all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27, RSV).

I proceeded steadily with the additional requirements until I encountered another obstacle. One of the last courses I had to take was taught on Thursday and Friday evenings, with the practicum on Saturday mornings. The

academic dean had helped me to solve the problem of classes on the Sabbath, but now I had to tell him that from God's point of view Friday evening was also "Saturday"! After struggling with myself, I gathered courage and decided to tell him the truth. To my surprise, the dean told me that he already knew that the Bible marks the days from sunset to sunset. Again I was assigned a teacher to clear that course. I was so thankful to God and to that kind teacher!

The three years of additional coursework were finally over and at the December 28, 1988, commencement exercises, the dean handed me the diploma and said with a broad smile, "You've made it! Congratulations!" The following day my husband and I visited him in his office to thank him for his kindness. We presented him a plaque inscribed with these words: "From the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its members to Dr. John Elkin G. Castrillón and the University of Gran Colombia, with warm appreciation for contributing to the professional training of our youth while respecting their religious convictions." We also gave him several denominational books that I knew he and his family would enjoy.

As I was about to begin my professional career, after those long years, I had learned to believe in David's promise, "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act" (Psalm 37:5, RSV).

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## God of Excellence

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world his spirit and character. There is nothing the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour's love."<sup>8</sup>

I believe that God has a dream. Above all else, he wants us to so excel through him that our lives will reveal his glory to those all around us—the glory of the God of excellence. *That is the direction Seventh-day Adventists should be going!*

### NOTES

1. Genesis 1:31, The Living Bible.
2. Psalm 8:1; 76:4, NKJV.
3. 1 Corinthians 12:31, NKJV.
4. Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 18
5. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 595.
6. Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 28:13; 30:5, NKJV.
7. Joshua 1:9, NKJV.
8. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 418.

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