

Editha Arciaga Santos**GRACE IN LITIGATION****Jophen Baui**

Attorney Editha Arciaga Santos is a senior partner in Ocampo Arciaga-Santos, Nunez, Lomangaya and Guerrero Law Office. She is engaged in the traditional practice of law, otherwise known as litigation. She also teaches law at Jose Rizal University. Their law office has always been an advocate for national change and people empowerment. Hand in hand with the law office is a corporation called the Institute of Continuing Legal Education and Studies, accredited by the Supreme Court as a provider for the Mandatory Continuing Legal Education for lawyers. Being the wife of a musician, Attorney Santos wrote the lyrics of the songs included in an album she and her husband produced. Most of those songs testify to God's grace in their life.*

As a first year pre-law student, Attorney Santos read “*The Way*”, then a modern version of the Bible intended for teenagers. The end pages of her copy of “*The Way*” included an enumeration of the promises of God in His Word. As a teenager confronted with pressures from her peer group, she found comfort and direction in those promises. Subsequently she joined the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship chapter in her college. She accepted the Lord Jesus as her personal savior in one of the Bible studies IVCF conducted. As she “tried to soak up the Word into the very fiber” of her being, she proved that what is stated in 2 Timothy 3:16 -17 is absolute: “*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instructions for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.*”

“I try to live and strive to always be consumed in the passion of the Word. ‘*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness*’ (2 Corinthians 12:9a) is one of the very first assurances in the Bible that I held on to in life. And I still do. I couldn’t imagine how my existence could have been if not for the fact that I have learned to trust God and His Word early in my life... My marriage and career in law, my

husband Henry's ministry, and even the way that we are now raising our children are manifestations of God's sufficient grace as affirmed in 2 Corinthians. 12:9a."

Her children are testaments of God's grace and goodness. Attorney Santos considers them as miracles from God. Kevin Matthew Henri, her son was God's answer to a prayer she had which was also *Hannah's prayer** in the Bible, when she asked the Lord for Samuel. "I had previously suffered from a miscarriage and it took two and a half years before we had him." Meanwhile, Kristabelle Miracle Edithe, was born prematurely at six months. "She struggled at the hospital for almost a year, and had to go home on low-flow oxygen. Our bills piled up and we were financially broke. My daughter was sickly until she was six years old." Instead of wallowing in depression over those seemingly insurmountable trials, Attorney Santos and her husband Henry held on to God's promises in the Bible. "God never failed to answer our prayers according to His will. Kevin is now in college and Kristabelle is a beautiful sophomore high school student."

God's grace has also manifested itself in Attorney Santos' practice of litigation. Being a lawyer is "not a trade nor a craft but a profession. Its basic ideals are public service and the administration of justice. Because of the influence and impact of lawyers in the society, there is a need to uphold the highest moral and ethical standards.

"But Legal ethics demands that only those who possess high moral character should be admitted to law and should be allowed to maintain one's good standing in the exclusive and honored fraternity. That people nowadays have ambivalent views of lawyers is one difficulty that a practitioner like me encounters. The public image of lawyers in recent years has undoubtedly become less than irreproachable. The challenge, therefore, is to exert all efforts to elevate the profession to what it really is – an honored calling, always bearing in mind that a lawyer is an officer of the court and an instrument in the advancement of justice."

Given this uncompromising stand about her profession Attorney Santos draws the line between giving even the guilty his day in court and standing in her Christian faith. "My practice brought me to frequent situations where my conviction to follow God's mandates and the lure of worldly ways came to clashes. I fell in a number of times and suffered the consequences. But the Lord is ready to forgive. I have learned to commit these to Him and be guided by the Word.

“There was time in my career when I faced the challenge of taking on a case of a foreign national for drug trafficking. While he was entitled to his day in court my convictions on the basis of the Word of God deterred me from handling his case. The retaining fee was huge but was I was prevailed upon to refer him to another lawyer. Among other verses, I remembered Proverbs 11:4: “Riches will do you no good on the day you face death, but honesty can save your life.”

Throughout the span of her career, Attorney Santos has also embraced and advocated women’s rights. “It’s a veiled fact that so many women are suffering. You cannot imagine how they have suffered; their cases will break your heart. You would think that those cases are stuff that happens only in telenovelas; but truth is really stranger than fiction.

“Women are made in the image of God as men are. Every right that a man has, a woman also has those rights. Yet since most of our legislators are male, there is a huge impartiality even in the law. The law will remain letters if you do not give it life. The law should give life and not deduct from it. Women should know that a law exists for their protection and that they can avail of it and take hold of it and become empowered by it.”

“There was a time, when I was still a young lawyer, when I took a woman in my house. I felt that I had to protect and shield that woman. So a lawyer’s day does not always end in the courtroom. You eventually get entangled in the drama your clients are involved in, even at the risk of your own life. And only God can provide the grace for a perspective that sees a person as He would see her.”

Attorney Santos spoke and participated in women’s rights forum and seminars, but what she considers as “the most significant and life-changing” involvement was when she became a part of the project committee that put up the first Gender Justice Awards in August of 2004.* That committee selected, from all over the country, decisions of judges that showed gender sensitivity and keen understanding of violence against women.

“To be able to contribute to the education of women on their human rights and in raising the level of awareness of judges on the need for rendering gender sensitive decisions on violence against women is, to me, a momentous episode in the exercise of my profession.

“My conviction is that God gave us His Word to make it as our foundation in life; for us to build our whole existence around it. He handed to us His Word so that we

would know and experience Him. Hopefully, as a “Christian lawyer” and a “Christian professor” I demonstrate a life of faith in Jesus. While it may not be that unprecedented, it is to me, a manifestation of God’s grace that I am walking a life before my community of peers and students that is worthy of carrying His name.”