

Il-Lehen tat-Tama

"THE VOICE OF HOPE"

47, Mannarino Road, Birkirkara BKR 08, Malta - www.adventist.org.mt

BY THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN MALTA

WHAT IS JESUS DOING FOR YOU?

What is Jesus doing for you? Are you among those who think that Jesus' work stopped at the cross and that after His ascension He is on holiday, letting us deal with our troubles on our own? Some imagine even something worse, as if Jesus were just getting ready to destroy this world because of our sinfulness. If this is your case, we have very good news for you: Jesus is not on holiday and He is working to help and save you ... if you wish to.

God is not like those mothers who give birth to their children and then to abandon them at birth so that others would look after them. He promised: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isaiah 49:15).

Neither Jesus, our Saviour, the Son of God, will abandon us. I have to leave, He said, but not forever: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). I'm just going to prepare a better house for you, He said, and when this house will be ready, "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Jesus loves us and if He left, it was not because He wished to abandon us, but to look after us in a better way and give us a better hope.

Meanwhile, as good parents do when they have to leave, He entrusted us into the hands of Somebody Who can look after us, not a man or a woman, but the Holy Spirit Himself: "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever" (John 14:16). You see, as Jesus was our helper, so the Holy Spirit will be on the part of Jesus Himself.

But we have something more. Jesus is not just working for us through the Holy Spirit. He is not just preparing a better home for our future. He is con-

tinuously, every day and every single moment, working for our personal salvation.

The Gospel says (see next article on p. 2), that in heaven there is a temple, the true temple of God, and in this temple Jesus is ministering as our High and only Priest: "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since *He always lives to make intercession for them*" (Hebrews 7:25).

When we need to go to God, to receive forgiveness and support, we know that we are not worthy of that because of the many offences we have made against Him through our unbelief and our disobedience. But Jesus has given His life for us, He tells us that God is still there, loving us and wishing to receive us.

On one hand, Jesus took our nature and became a man as we are. This way He can represent us in front of the Father. On the other hand, since He never sinned, He can represent us as if we were perfectly holy. Can you imagine yourself clothed with the righteousness of Jesus in front of God

in the heavenly sanctuary? This is the experience you can live, if you just accept Jesus as your priest, which means, your mediator, in front of God for "*He always lives to make intercession for them.*"

"Always," not just when He is at the office, not just on working days, not just in the morning or in the afternoon, but "always", twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, all the weeks and months and years of your life. And you do not need to go anywhere to enjoy this service, for you just need to kneel in your "secret room" (Matthew 6:6) and pray to your heavenly Father in His name (John 15:16). Also, you do not need to pay anything for it, for Jesus paid it all for you: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified *freely* by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:23,24).

Can you say "thanks to God" for this? We hope you may join us with all your heart.

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

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BIBLE DOCTRINE

KNOW THE IMAGE AND THE TRUE

A BIBLE STUDY ON THE SANCTUARY OF GOD, IN THE OLD AND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

What kind of God is ours? How does He care for us and our salvation?

There are many ways to get an answer to these important questions. One that includes them all comes through the Bible teaching about God's sanctuary. Two full books of the Bible are dedicated to this doctrine: Leviticus in the Old, and Hebrews in the New Testament. Many other texts deal with it in almost all the books of the Bible and yet, very few Christians know about it. So we hope, that discovering what the Bible says about this issue may help you realize God's great love and concern for you.

The Immanuel in the Old Testament

We know that Jesus was the Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). This is why Jesus, the Son of God, assumed our nature and became a man, to share in our life, with all its joys and pains; to give us a sign of God's love, and a hope for our eternal life.

But Jesus' incarnation was not the first and only time when God revealed His will to be "God with us". A long time before Jesus' incarnation, God had manifested to the ancient Israel His intention to be with them. It happened when God freed Israel from the Egyptian slavery and led them to the foot of Mount Sinai. There, He made them a promise: "I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. *I will walk among you* and be your God, and you shall be My people" (Leviticus 26:11,12).

God didn't wish to be considered a distant, not caring, God. Instead He wished to be perceived as a caring Father who shares the life of His children, to love, lead, and support them. This is why He commanded Israel: "Let them make Me a *sanctuary*, that *I may dwell among them*" (Exodus 25:8).

That time, Israel was living in tents, and so God asked them to make a special tent, a tabernacle, for Him too. So, when Israel moved, God's house moved. When they stood, God stood too.

This tabernacle was also called "sanctuary" for it was to be considered holy in the sense that it was dedicated to God.

This happened about 1,400 years before the incarnation of Jesus. Some centuries later, king Solomon changed the sanctuary into a majestic temple in stone. Yet, he was aware that the house he had prepared for God, was not worthy of His glorious majesty. So He prayed for the dedication of that temple: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). If this could be said of the magnificent temple, what could we say of the much more modest tabernacle made by Moses? And indeed God accepted to represent His presence among Israel through a modest tent made by His people. God is really a close and loving Father. We should remember this fact, when we are tempted to think that He is a distant God. This is the first lesson we receive from the Jewish sanctuary: God wishes to share with us, whatever humble our condition may be, if we just wish to be His people.

How was the sanctuary made?

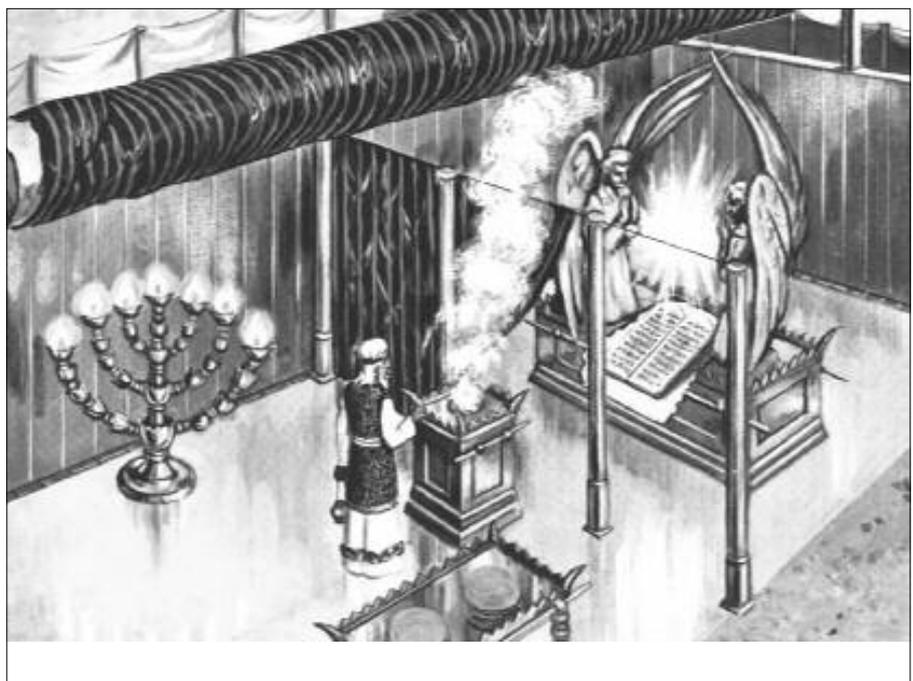
The full description of the sanctuary is found in Exodus 25 to 27. In short there was a court of about 25 per 50 meters.

Inside this court, at its back, was the tabernacle, a tent of about 5 per 15 meters divided in two smaller rooms, the "holy place," 10 meters long, and the "holy of holies" or "most holy place" with a perfect cubic shape with each side 5 meters long.

A shadow of heavenly realities

This sanctuary, with all the furniture, the services and the people ministering in it, was a plastic representation, a symbol, of God and of the salvation He is offering to us through Jesus Christ. As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, all this was a "copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle" (Hebrews 8:5). This heavenly sanctuary is "the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man" (Hebrews 8:2). This means that now, Christians have no tabernacles made by men where they can find Jesus, for the only true tabernacle is that in heaven.

The Jewish sanctuary doesn't exist any longer. It was definitively destroyed by the Roman armies the 70 A.D. But the heavenly sanctuary is still there and all children of God can meet and worship their God and Saviour there. By faith we can go there and enjoy the vision of God's glory and love. We do not need to build luxurious sanctuaries to meet



The internal aspect of the sanctuary built by Moses

God. As Solomon said for the earthly temple he had built, God doesn't live in a house made by men, but if men go to God in humility and sincerity in their hearts, He will "hear in heaven," His "dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to everyone according to all his ways, whose heart" God knows (1 Kings 8:39,40).

Let's go to the sanctuary to obtain forgiveness.

If you were a Jew living in that ancient time, you could go to the sanctuary to thank God, to worship Him, to celebrate His feasts and for many other reasons.

If you entered the court of the sanctuary, the first thing you would see was the great "altar of the burnt offerings" (Exodus 27:1-8). It was called so because on it were burnt some special sacrifices. At its foot, you could offer your own sacrifice as a sign of gratefulness or to receive forgiveness. According to the condition of the offerer, the sacrifice could be an ox, a goat, a lamb, or even a dove if the person was very poor.

When these animals were offered to obtain forgiveness, they symbolized Christ, "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). By themselves, these animals had no power. They had just a symbolic value. Only in Jesus they acquired their true meaning of salvation: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). "You were not redeemed with corruptible things ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

As offering a sacrifice was the first step for the Jews to enter the sanctuary of God and receive forgiveness, so it is for us Christians. The only difference is that they offered a symbol, while we offer the reality of Jesus who gave His life for us.

How was the sacrifice for the sin offered?

When a Jew offered a sacrifice for his sin, he had to lay one of his hands on the head of the animal (Leviticus 4:4,15,24 etc.). This special gesture had a special meaning. Every time somebody laid his hands on the head of another being, the transferral of something happened. For instance, a blessing is given by laying the hands on the head of the blessed while

words of blessing are pronounced: "Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head ... and his left hand on Manasseh's head ... And he blessed ... and said ..." (Genesis 48:14,15). When Moses wished to give authority to Joshua, so that he could help to lead Israel, "the LORD said to Moses: 'Take Joshua ... and lay your hand on him... And you shall give some of your authority to him'" (Numbers 27:18,19). So we can rightly understand that when the sinner was laying his hands on the head of the sacrifice, he was transferring something to it. What? The only explanation we find is that he was transferring his sin, that same sin for which he was asking to be pardoned, on the innocent animal that would die in his place.

Another element must be considered to have the full meaning of what that sacrifice meant. While offering his sacrifice, the sinner had to confess his sin (Leviticus 5:5). It is very probable that this confession of sin was made while laying the hands on the sacrifice. We haven't a full description of this fact in the Bible, but there is at least one special occasion when we read that it happened this way. On the Day of atonement which we will consider in a following study, the high priest, representing all Israel, had to "lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions ... The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities." (Leviticus 16:21,22).

That moment of sacrifice was a very tragic one, and we can understand why some people feel uncomfortable with these killing of animals. The fact is that sin takes us away from God and from life that abides only in God. The consequence is death: "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We have to understand it, not to underestimate the danger of sin. That killing of an innocent animal, plastically represented all the tragedy of our reality of sin and death. We had to die, and die for all eternity. But God, in His infinite mercy, found a



The sanctuary at the foot of Mount Sinai.

way to free us from eternal death: an innocent being would accept to receive our sins on Himself, and pay the penalty for our sin dying in our place. This is what the Jew had to understand while laying his hand on the sacrifice. This is what we have to understand when we sin and we ask for forgiveness. Only that we confess our sin on Jesus and we receive forgiveness in His name.

Every time we sin, we become the cause of Jesus' death for "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). The Prophet Isaiah wrote about Jesus: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." (53:4-7).

Jesus offered His life for us without protesting and shouting. He was not obliged to do so, but He accepted because of His love for us. Do you not think, dear friend, that if Jesus has done that for us, we should at least receive Him as our best friend and decide to follow Him doing His will with all our heart too?

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

[To be continued. In the next issue: "Priests in the old Israelitic sanctuary and in the Christian Church".]

CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

LETTERS RECEIVED AND ANSWERED

WHY NO LONGER IN MALTESE?

An esteemed reader asked us why we are no longer publishing anything in Maltese. As he says, there are some who cannot handle English so easily and they would surely appreciate reading something in their native language.

We are very sorry for our inability to offer a better service in this perspective. It would be our wish to have all the newsletter in Maltese, but at present it isn't easy for us to find co-operators who can write articles for us, or translate them in Maltese. With God's blessing, we hope the moment will come. Meantime, we hope that our readers will be patient and make an effort to receive the Word of God as we can offer it now.

YES, ROMAN CATHOLICS ARE CHRISTIANS

Your *Il-Lehen tat-Tama* number 27 states that we Roman Catholics do not know that we are Christians.

As a pastor you should know that there is a lot of ignorance everywhere in everything, including religion. There are people who believe that being a Christian is being a Protestant. Since they were young they were told that they were Catholics, not knowing that being a Catholic, includes all Christians, whatever their denomination. In fact when we Christians say the common Creed, we say that we believe in the "Catholic Church", meaning world-wide.

In Malta, since the Catechumenal, the Charismatic and other Renewal Movements gained ground since quite a few years back, the Christian aspect of religion is being understood better. I used to think, for example that as I am a Roman Catholic, I had to be a Roman Catholic first and foremost. Now, that I am born again, I know that I am to be a good Christian first, then be able to be a good Roman Catholic. In fact when I am asked what denomination I am "afflicted" with, I answer that I am a Catholic Pentecostal, or Pentecostal Catholic, or just Christian, to show that I am a born again Christian.

I keep telling my British friends that their denomination does not save them; Jesus does! When I know for sure that when I die, Jesus will be asking me about my denomination, then I'll start worrying about it. But the Bible says that He will not be asking anything, except about how

I treated my "neighbours" in their needs.

God is love, and that is what is expected of us to be in Love's presence for all eternity. That is being a Christian, not adhering to laws, and more laws, or just by knowing the Bible by heart.

Thanks for your interest in my interpretation of Christianity.

Yours in Christ,

Mr Henry (received through e-mail)

Dear brother, I am very grateful for your friendly reaction to our question. We hoped that some Roman Catholic ministers could accept our invitation to express their conviction and their willingness to teach that even Roman Catholics are Christians, but none has done. We do not know why but we continue to hope that moments of a better dialogue will arrive.

As for your understanding of Christianity, I am happy to say that I agree quite a lot with you. At the end, what will make us acceptable in God's eyes is not so much the church or the leader we have followed, but our willingness to live in love, for our neighbours - as you say - and for God and His will - as I would add.

THANKS AND ANGELS AS MESSENGERS

When I first found N° 27 issue of *The Voice of Hope* together with the "fullet parrokkjali" posted in my letter box - I was quite surprised. When I found a few minutes to read it, I realized how interesting this magazine is, especially for those Christians who are trying to deepen their faith in our Lord's love. Thanks for the wonderful service you are giving!

I managed to read articles about "Stress without distress" (Neadly) of which I would appreciate if I could receive the first three keys to successful stress management. I often studied about this topic but when it is presented in a Christian way it seemed to impress me more.

As regards the article about angels - it's enjoyable to read too besides being informative. If possible I would appreciate to read also about what exactly is the meaning of the angels when they act as messengers or as messengers in dreams.

J.F. (Ghargur)

We are very grateful for your kind letter and your appreciation. We are happy to send you and all readers who wish so our back issues for free.

As for the angels working as messengers, I am not sure I understand your question, but I shall try to clarify the issue as much as possible.

The main element to be considered is not the angel himself, but the fact that there is a God Who wishes to communicate with His children. He is not a faraway God and has a lot to share with us. Because of our condition of sin that separates us from Him (Isaiah 59:2), God cannot reveal Himself to anybody but chooses some people, the Prophets, who become His messengers in front of us. It may be interesting to know that the word "prophet" literally means "the one who talks on the part of another," or "spokesman."

This communication usually comes through a vision or a dream. Two facts must be noticed when this happens: 1) The normal human sense of hearing and seeing are bypassed and the message of God reaches directly the mind of the prophet. 2) While in a dream or in a vision, the words and the images that the prophet perceives are not part of the environment in which he is actually living. In other words, God speaks to His prophet by taking them mentally away from their actual environment.

In exceptional cases God works the other way round: He Himself enters the environment of the prophet and speaks to him through his physical ears and eyes. One among the few ones who enjoyed this privilege



An angel is sent to tell Abraham not to sacrifice his son Isaac, and directs him to a goat, symbol of Christ who dies for us.

was Moses, as God Himself says in Num. 12:6-8: "If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD."

For the angels the process is quite the same, only that they are not human beings and must make themselves visible for us to see them. As it happens when God speaks to us through a prophet, so then an angel can appear in a dream or a vision, or make Himself perceptible to our physical senses.

An example of angels physically appearing to men, is when they appeared to the patriarch Abraham, before going to save Lot from the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18). Angels appeared to the women going to the tomb of Jesus to assure them that their Lord was alive (Luke 24:5,6), and to all the disciples just after Jesus' ascension, to reassure them that their Saviour would return one day to take them with Him (Acts 1:10,11). In these cases they assume a human aspect.

Angels can appear in a dream as it happened to Joseph, Mary's promised husband, to encourage him not to be afraid of Mary's pregnancy (Mat. 1:20). They can also appear in a vision as it is in the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation where they work to give messages, courage, and understanding (Dan. 8:16,17; 9:21,22; Rev. 19:9).

Sometimes, we do not know if they are really angels or just images of the vision or dream of which they are part. But sometimes their presence is so personal and powerful that, even if in a vision, they create an impression of awe and reverence. Daniel was so impressed by the presence of one of them and by his message, that he fell sick: "So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face" (Dan. 8:17). John was so impressed by the glorious appearance of the angel that was guiding him through the visions he was receiving, that twice he "fell at his feet to worship him" (Rev. 19:10; 22:8,9). We can imagine what a wonderful show when we will see Jesus returning with all the angels! (Mat. 25:31).

However glorious angels may be, still they give us a great ex-

ample of humility, not letting anyone bow in front of them. When John bowed in front of one of them, he said: "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." In other words, "I am just a messenger of God, like my human brothers, the prophets. Worship God alone, bow only in front of Him." In the same way, God's human servants should never allow their brothers and sisters to kneel in front of them. Angels and prophets are important, but only because they point us to God and to His will. We love the messenger, but we worship only their Sender and we obey only to His will.

The book of Revelation offers us an important idea. Sometimes, God's people is described as an angel preaching the gospel of God to all nations (Rev. 14:6; 18:1,2). We have to be these angels, we have to be those faithful messengers.

Sometimes angels may appear in our own dreams. We have to be wise and prudent. It doesn't mean that whatever we dream comes from God. If we think that a dream is really coming from God, we should compare it with what the gospel tells us, for, as the apostle Paul said, "though ... an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8). This advise is good even when other people say that God is speaking to them in a dream or in a vision for God says that there may be people who imagine God is speaking to them, while God is silent (Ger. 14:14; Ez. 13:1-9).

PURGATORY, WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Some months ago a Christian lady asked us: "Where does the idea of purgatory come from?"

We offer here just a short answer.

1) The doctrine of purgatory exists only in the Roman Catholic Church while all other Christians refuse it as unbiblical.

2) The word "purgatory" comes from a Latin word meaning "purification" or "cleansing." For the Roman Catholic doctrine it is a place where the souls of those who died not in mortal sin, but not even totally purified of sin and its consequences, have to spend a certain time to get totally purified before being admitted to the presence of God in paradise. In our understanding Jesus is our "purgatory" for, as the gospel says, "the blood of Jesus Christ ... cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

3) As the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church says, "The Church formulated her doctrine of faith on Purgatory especially at the Councils of Florence [1438-45 A.D.] and Trent" [1545-63 A.D.]. The support for this belief comes from traditions based on some church fathers who, in our understanding, forced and misinterpreted a few Bible verses like that of Mat. 12:31, or that of 2 Mac. 12:46. We hope we will be able to go deeper in this important subject in the next issue of *Il-Lehen tat-Tama*.

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

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A THOUGHT FOR EASTER

GRATITUDE AND INGRATITUDE

Ingratitude is our deliberate unwillingness to acknowledge what we receive from others, be they our neighbours or God Himself.

Strange as it may seem, ingratitude has its root in a sense of inferiority, an inferiority complex.

Ingratitude is a destructive force, whereas gratitude is constructive. Everyday in our activities, we express either ingratitude or gratitude to our fellow beings. Each time we express gratitude, we show our love.

Gratitude looms large when we are given the opportunity to be of service to others.

Even Jesus experienced this deed sadness of ingratitude. What did He not do for man? He healed the leper (Matthew 8:2-3) and Peter's mother in law (Mark 1:30-31); the woman with a haemorrhage (Luke 8:43-48) and the man with a withered hand (Matthew 12:10-13). The deaf and dumb man could hear and speak again (Luke 7:31-37) and so many more too numerous to name were benefited by His love.

And after all He did, He was condemned to die by crucifixion on Mount Calvary!

Because of His great love for us, Jesus accepted a heavy cross on his shoulder! He embraced so much sufferings with patience and resignation! And why all this?

To understand we have to go back to the very beginning of human history. Man, in Adam and Eve who were representative of the entire human race, rebelled against God and were mastered by sin. They became servants of sin and death. Starting with them and following them on with all their descendants, we are all sinners and mortal. We are corrupted and live in a corrupted world.

But God is love and, in His love, He devised a scheme of restoration by which man could be redeemed, and receive forgiveness and eternal life again. This is why Jesus gave His life for us.

Jesus' death is not a question of God punishing His Son instead of us, as some think. But in Jesus, God takes on Himself the penalty of our sin and pays a ransom to redeem us.

Jesus carried His heavy cross and who knows how many times He fell as it was so heavy! Every fall renewed the pain of His wounds.

His weakness must have been extreme and the cruelty of his executors was excessive as they tried to quicken his pace when He hardly had enough strength to move up to Calvary! Who knows what violence the executors had, when they stripped him off His clothes! His Skin must have been torn!



Let us consider for one moment as He was thrown on the cross, stretching His arms and fastening them with huge nails! Then, after three hours in agony, Jesus, consumed with anguish, bowed His head and died!

And all this to save us poor sinners from eternal death! But his death has become our hope! And this is why I wish to pray to Him:

“Our gratitude to you, dear Jesus because by your death you redeemed us. Make us love You with all our hearts and make us repent whenever we offend You! “We also know that you rose again on the third day! We are grateful for that, as we too know that, on the last day, we will rise glorious to be united with you to praise and love you forever.”

A Christian hymn says:

“He stood, the kindest, bravest man - The world has ever seen - Amidst a sea of envy, hate and pride - Could not destroy the peace He had inside. - With human nature at its worst, - God's love was at its height, - Christ had to suffer thus—it had to be. -

This man, so full of grace and truth, - The sinless Son of God, gave all - To save poor sinners—you and me!”

May this come true, for you and for me, my dear friend.

Miss Rosalie Chetcuti



Please, send without obligation, and free
(Mark what you wish)

Next issues of *Il-Lehen tat-Tama* (if you do not already receive it regularly).

The illustrated Bible Correspondence Course “Discover” in 26 lessons.

I would like to have a personal meeting with Pastor Leonardi to know better about your faith and/or discuss some problems.

■ You can use the space below for a question or an opinion. (Card n° 28)

Mr./Mrs./Miss _____

Address: _____

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NEWS FROM THE WORLD

Malta in the European Union

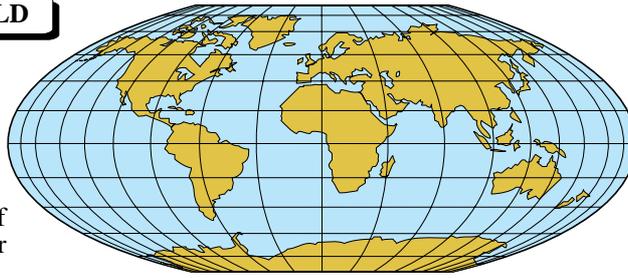
The political elections of last April 12 have definitively made clear that the majority of the Maltese people is in favour of joining the EU. As Seventh-day Adventist Church we have no position on this issue (as it is for every political issue) and we leave to each member the right and responsibility of deciding by him/herself.

Nevertheless we are in favour of everything that can help the different countries of the world to live together in friendship and solidarity. In this sense we hope that the enlargement of the European Union may become a contribution for peace and cooperation, in the frame of reciprocal respect and justice for all the world.

We congratulate those who have honestly worked for Malta to achieve this goal, and we pray that the fear of those who opposed it, may be revealed wrong, so that everybody may rejoice for the new opportunity that is offered to our country.

War in Iraq
Nicosia, Cyprus [Julio C. Muñoz/ANN Staff/ANR. Adapted]

At the moment we close this issue of *Il-Lehen tat-Tama* (17 of April) the military war in Iraq is definitively won by the Anglo-American allies. We now pray that the humanitarian and political aspects of this tragedy may find a positive solution, which is much more difficult and long. If guns can



win an army, only love and justice can win the hearts.

There are more than 200 Seventh-day Adventist members in Iraq, mostly in Baghdad. Organized in 1923, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Iraq is one of the Christian churches among 13 denominations recognized by the government.



The SDA church in Bagdad

The bombing of Baghdad did not deter the members of the local Seventh-day Adventist Church from attending weekly worship services on Saturday, the Sabbath, praying for peace.

“We can report, confirmed by a phone call to Baghdad, that our church members remain safe and met on Sabbath at our church as usual,” said Michael Porter, president of the Adventist church in the region, from his Nicosia headquarters. “The members are of good courage and expressed special thanks to the world church for the many prayers going up on their behalf.”

The Baghdadi believers noted a very good attendance at Sabbath worship, including visitors as well as regular members. “They were going to church because it’s the same thing that was happening in 1991 ... we

used to go to church every Sabbath,” the member said. Church members also expressed gratitude for the global prayer support exhibited during the conflict.

Seventh-day Adventist Church official statement on war in Iraq March 20, 2003 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States.

The outbreak of war in Iraq is yet another opportunity for people of faith to stand for hope in the face of despair. Seventh-day Adventist Christians are people of peace who join with their fellow world citizens in praying for a speedy end to the current hostilities.

As a faith community active in every nation on Earth, we cannot view any country as a nation of villains, but rather see them as people for whom God’s Son, Jesus Christ, died. We remember the hundreds of Seventh-day Adventist Church members in Iraq, who worship in three congregations including Baghdad and the ancient city of Nineveh; our fervent prayers are with them and for all who are connected with this conflict.

We recommit ourselves to minister hope in the midst of hopelessness. We wish to offer healing and be responsive to those whose lives have been shattered, wherever they are. This is an integral part of our calling.

Churches should not only be known for spiritual contributions — though these are foundational — but also for their support of quality of life, and in this connection peacemaking is essential. We appeal to Christians and people of good will all around the world to take an active role in making and sustaining peace, thus being part of the solution rather than part of the problem. As we pray and work for peace to prevail, we also recognize — and declare — that the only true peace will come when that blessed hope of Christ’s return to Earth is a reality. May that day come soon, and may that hope shine brightly even in these dark hours.

HELP TO IRAQ

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, through her social agency ADRA, is fully engaged in the humanitarian mission to help Iraq. For instance, ADRA has received by the Spanish government 500.000 to install and manage two camps for the first aid in the districts of Atrush 1 and Sarsink. A team of doctors and nurses will be sent as soon as possible.

New service for our readers

You can receive *Il-Lehen tat-Tama* also through the Internet, either as a PDF file or as an e-mail. The PDF format brings the Newsletter to you as it is in its printed form: it is ideal for storing all the issues on your computer (we can give you all the past issues in this format). According to how many photos are included, you need from a few seconds to about one minute to download it. The e-mail format is much smaller but without photos and with a simplified layout.

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CHRISTIAN HEALTH

STRESS WITHOUT DISTRESS: CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Eight keys to successful stress management

This is the last part of a longer study prepared by Dr. Neil Nedley, M.D., in *Proof Positive* [adapted from]. See the four previous issues of *Il-Lehen tat-Tama* for the previous material.

7) Christian meditation

The seventh measure for controlling stress is Christian meditation. I believe we have a critical need for meditation and prayer on a daily basis. It is a form of rest and rejuvenation that few appreciate to its fullest extent.

Meditation and prayer have their greatest benefits when they provide a respite from stressful thoughts and feelings, and an opportunity to find solutions for dealing with life's most pressing stressors. In order for such processes to occur, the reasoning powers of the brain must be active during the meditative process. Our highest intellectual powers, including spiritual reasoning, reside in part of the brain called the frontal lobe. When this brain region is intimately involved in our thinking, a type of brain wave called the beta wave predominates. If you were to measure brain activity with an electroencephalogram (EEG) and it shows the beta wave, it would indicate that healthy thinking is occurring, characterized by dynamic frontal lobe activity.

Studies show that Christian meditation involves the frontal lobe and beta activity. This is what one would expect. After all, prayer from the biblical perspective is an extremely active process. Whether we are reflecting on God's goodness, thanking Him for helping us in specific ways, seeking to know His will in a perplexing situation, or praying for individuals who have specific needs, Christian meditation and prayer involve an active frontal lobe.

Even though it can involve a high level of mental activity, Christian meditation and prayer are also very relaxing. A biofeedback monitor can be used to detect the relaxation inherent in such meditation. For those unfamiliar with the process, biofeedback is simply a means of making any internal process of the human body externally visible by the use of monitoring devices.

One method of assessing tension is by measuring the skin's electrical resistance. When a person is emotionally tense, there tends to be a drop in this resistance. The skin more readily conducts an electric current which can be measured by an electric meter. The familiar lie detector test works on this

principle. As part of a medical school class, I carried a portable biofeedback monitor that took such a measurement as I went through my daily routine. I was impressed that it demonstrated the most relaxed state when I was actively praying to God.

Not every form of meditation, however, is characterized by beta activity and frontal lobe involvement. In sharp contrast to Christian meditation stands the meditative practices popularized in the eastern hemisphere, called "eastern meditation." It appears that its effectiveness results from a form of escapism. Many research studies have demonstrated an accentuation of what is called an alpha brain rhythm instead of the beta rhythm when an experienced subject engages in such eastern-based practices as yoga or Transcendental Meditation. Alpha waves are brain waves of a lower frequency (8 to 13 cycles per second) than beta waves, that indicate a person has entered into a trance-like state where frontal lobe activity is weak. When the brain has an alpha rhythm, we cannot critically analyze incoming information. From the standpoint of both this alpha brain rhythm and the means to induce the meditative state, eastern meditation is strikingly similar to hypnotism.

Hypnosis, by design, bypasses the frontal lobe as it helps the subject enter a trance-like state. Eastern religions use the principle of a solitary focus to induce a meditative state. As one author put it, mental focus for Transcendental Meditation can be achieved by focusing on a single word (called a mantra), a single shape, or a body part. He mentions that "another ancient practice is to focus on the navel, the forehead, or some other body part." (PL. Rice, *The Concentration Techniques: Meditation and Biofeedback*. In: *Stress and Health: Principles and Practice for Coping and Wellness*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1987 p. 308.) Just as the hypnotist requires this single-minded focus and an environment free from all outside diversions, so does the meditator.



Contrary to eastern meditation, the Christian prayer doesn't take us out of ourselves. At the same time it helps us to get in touch with the source of all power and peace.

Dr. Herbert Benson, the Harvard researcher and physician, has presented what some have called a "secular version" of eastern meditation. However, Benson uses the same elements of the eastern meditator and the hypnotist: a quiet environment and a single-minded focus (in his case a word or phrase of Hindu worship). Benson also mentions another "essential element" in this process: "a passive attitude." In fact, he states that this is "perhaps the most important of the elements." Rice observes that all of these eastern-style meditative relaxation techniques "emphasize a passive attitude."

It is this "passive attitude" with a prominent alpha brain wave that illustrates one of the greatest problems with this meditative style. Although it may provide relief and relaxation by removing the mind's focus on certain stressors, the practice does not appear able to help in constructively addressing stressors. This stands in sharp contrast to the reflective meditation of the Christian. With biblical meditation and prayer, the emphasis is on an active reflection that helps to focus the frontal lobe. Rather than striving for a passive state that represses thoughts,

Christian meditation emphasizes communion with God, thinking His thoughts, sensing His presence, and knowing His will. In addition to providing release for stress, this type of meditation also provides an opportunity to get meaningful answers and solutions to problems.

There is further concern that the passive mental state cultivated by certain meditative techniques may do more harm than good. It has long been known that eastern meditation and secular relaxation training may have deleterious effects on the nervous system. A classic study found higher levels of sympathetic activity with increased adrenaline output resulting in the acute physical effects of stress mentioned earlier in the chapter in most measurements made on eastern yoga practitioners when compared to an American control group.

In another study, subjects who received training in Transcendental Meditation actually displayed a higher cardiovascular stress response after learning this meditative practice.

It is possible that problems arise when escapist meditative practices are employed in place of constructive strategies to deal with stressors. Such a hypothesis is consistent with work cited by Dr. Larry Dossey. Research that studied stress hormones before, immediately following, and then two days after surgeries yielded a surprising result. Immune-weakening stress hormones significantly increased only in those that had formal relaxation training. Those that apparently addressed their anxieties and fears—without using escapism relaxation techniques—did not show the rise in stress hormones.

A third difficulty with eastern methods relates to their potential danger when employed in a group setting. Remember that in eastern-style meditation, alpha waves predominate and the reasoning powers of the frontal lobe are suppressed. In such a hypnotic-like state, an individual may record information and suggestions without interpretation and without frontal lobe evaluation. Some have thus wondered whether eastern religious cults take advantage of adherents who enter a meditative state in a group setting. Such critics point out that the brain would be in a state where it would not critically analyse any information it received. The meditator would then be extremely susceptible to mind control techniques. These concerns appear to be well founded; such meditation in a group setting should be avoided.

8) Exercising trust in God

Exercising trust in God is the eighth key defence against stress. It is human nature to become overly concerned about circumstances in our life and ignore the help that God is willing to provide for us. Trusting God involves complete confidence in our Heavenly Father. We put Him and His will first in our lives. Then we depend on Him to act on our behalf in the way and at the time that is according to His will, while using the energy that God has given us to do what we are able to do. This defence against stress may be looked at as a direct extension of the previous aspect of not being anxious. I find tremendous help in trusting God when dealing with temptations to worry. Trust in God will provide a buffer against stress and a hedge against anxiety.

Thousands—perhaps millions—of faithful lives testify to God’s faithfulness and the reasonableness of placing our full confidence in Him. We have many documented examples in the Holy Word of individuals who, through their living faith in God, remained “in control” despite facing staggering stressors. Christ

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:35,37, NRS)

stands out as the model in demonstrating the power of faith in the midst of stressful surroundings. Who has faced greater stressors than Jesus? His 40 day fast followed by temptations in the wilderness, His heart-rending betrayal, His agony in Gethsemane, abandonment by His closest friends, and His cruel and disgraceful torture just before and during His crucifixion, all graphically illustrate this assertion.

Despite His struggles, Jesus maintained a faith relationship with His Father and a love for people. Even after being nailed to the cross, He said those immortal words, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34). Indeed, in His last hours before His death, Jesus did not utter even one word of criticism. He expressed no bitterness to those who drove the nails into His hands, those who falsely accused Him, or those who condemned Him to die and arranged for His execution. He exhibited superior stress control as He stood before His accusers as a sheep lead to the slaughter.

He was unjustly punished for something that He did not do. His control of stress was made possible by His unwavering

faith in His heavenly Father. He is a wonderful role model for those who want to be in control of their words and actions rather than being controlled by stress. We would do well to read and re-read about His life and His dealing with the many stressors He encountered. A knowledge of Christ’s life provides a strong source of encouragement for us today.

The Apostle Paul was another biblical character who was subjected to incredible stress. He, too, was able to rise above the stressors that at times threatened to engulf him. See 2 Corinthians 11:24-27 for a long list of his troubles.

Despite the stressors that Paul suffered, he was not overwhelmed. He could say with confidence: “I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.” Philipians 4:11.

True stress control does not provide a promise for eliminating stressors, but it does provide the necessary coping resources so that even though we may be troubled on every side we need not be distressed. Paul, himself a champion of stress control, provides the title to this chapter, “Stress Without Distress.” He revealed the secret of his contentment in the letter to the Christians in Rome (8:35,37).

Paul asks the rhetorical question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” His answer is reassuring: not even the most harmful stressors can interfere with Christ’s love for us.

Through Christ, Paul states that he won the victory: “in all things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.” Yes, Paul’s faith was rewarded—through Christ he became a conqueror.

I believe that Paul’s use of the term “more than conquerors” is significant. Being a conqueror should be enough, but why “more than conquerors”? Paul was executed as a Christian, a member of a hated sect that was falsely blamed for the burning of Rome. (History tells us that the Roman Emperor Nero was actually responsible for the city’s fire but he attempted to fasten the blame on the Christians.) Tradition holds that there was a statue of Nero in ancient Rome with the inscription “Nero, Conqueror.” It is likely that Paul had passed that statue many times. His statement, “we are more than conquerors” was in contrast to the caption on the statue. Yes, Nero was a conqueror. But because of God’s love for us, we are more than conquerors. We can conquer the stressors that are around us through the power given to us by God.

Dr. Neil Nedley

CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

FROM HEART TO HEART: I OFFER YOU MY FRIENDSHIP

I am Gianna Russo and I am the wife of pastor Leonardi. I am not a writer but I wish to share with you my personal testimony of faith.

I am especially writing for other ladies for I know them better, but if gentlemen wish to read this letter, they are naturally welcome too.

I know that you are very busy. Even I, as you, have a thousand things to do everyday. As I wake up in the morning I start working and I do not stop until when, exhausted, I go to bed. Can I just invite you to rest a moment? Please, sit down a few minutes and take a breath.

We dedicate a lot of time to study, to work, to the house, to our children, to the TV, but we are not able to find a moment for ourselves. Even during the holidays we are stressed.

Well then, after some reflection, I realized that I couldn't stand it any longer, and I decided to live my life in a different way: I have to tell you that now I feel much better.

Do you know? I have discovered that if I start my daily work with Jesus, dedicating a few minutes to read the Gospel and raise to God a prayer of praise, of thankfulness, of help ... I do not need coffee, for God gives me a better charge. I face life with a different spirit. I am experimenting what Jesus says in the Gospel: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

I do not know if you are a believer or not, if you are a Christian or a Buddhist, a Muslim or an atheist. I can just tell you about my experience. I am a Christian. I believe that there is a God Who created all things. I believe that He didn't just create them, but continues to look after them even if we are doing our best to destroy the wonderful world He gave us. We, as humanity, are responsible for most of the wrongs that afflict our life, but when something goes wrong, who do we complain against? Against God, naturally! Wouldn't it be better to admit that we are the cause?

Many times we build a god in our own image and it is clear that we cannot love him. Do you wish to know God as He really is? Go to the source! Do not listen to what others say about

Him. Go directly to Him and listen to His Word. It is for this reason that He gave us the Holy Scriptures - to let us know Him personally.

Jesus came to the earth, renouncing the glory of His divinity, and became a man as we are, to show us His love.

Many had misinterpreted God's love, but when He came to stay with us, many believed in Him for they could meet Him personally. And nevertheless, the Bible says that even among those who believed in Jesus, some did not confess Him. Why? Because they were afraid that they would be expelled from their church (John 12:42). The same happens nowadays. For fear of being criticized, not accepted by their neighbours, parents, friends, even by the church - I would dare to say - we have no courage to stand on God's side.

In Jesus' time, everybody in Israel knew the Holy Scriptures. They knew that theirs was the right time for the Messiah to come. And still, when He came, the scribes, Pharisees, priests didn't recognize Him. Instead they refused and condemned Him, discouraging the people to go to Him. Why? Because they had got a wrong idea about Him. They were the majority, but this doesn't always mean to be right.

In John 8:31,32 Jesus says: "If you abide in My word,



Mrs Gianna Russo while celebrating the birthday of a foreign young member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Malta.

you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." God has given us freedom: do not let others choose for you.

I would be very glad to offer you my friendship. If you like you can call me on the telephone number 21413696. Just ask for Gianna. I'm sorry I cannot speak Maltese, but I know a little English and, if you like, God will help us to communicate.

Mrs Gianna Russo Leonardi

Write to Il-Lehen tat-Tama

We are pleased to receive comments and opinions. You can comment on our articles. You can write about spiritual, familiar, and social problems, about your hopes and troubles. If you wish we do not publish your letter, we will answer personally. If you wish we do not write your full name, just let us know. We are at your service and with your co-operation we will be able to serve you better.

LAW OF GOD

JESUS AND GOD'S COMMANDMENTS

Some believe that Jesus abolished the Law that God had given His people. In reality, the opposite is true. As a matter of fact, Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). In the same chapter Jesus Himself explains what it means "to fulfill." For example, He says about the commandment against adultery (vv. 27,28): "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart". Jesus doesn't encourage us to obey that commandment less but more, for we have to obey it from our heart.

When God first gave the Ten Commandments, they were written on two tablets of stone. But now He wishes to write them in our hearts, as we read in Jeremiah 31:33: "But this is the covenant (agreement or contract) that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts: and I will be their God, and they shall be My people".

Some people might say: "Yes, but here God is talking about Israel and not for us Christians today." Our opinion is different and we try to explain why. This covenant with "Israel", as God Himself says, is a "new covenant" (v. 31) and all Christian Churches agree that it is the same "new covenant" made by Jesus on the cross with all those who receive Him (Matthew 26:28), both Jews and Gentiles. If, in Jeremiah, God is speaking to Israel it is because that time Israel was the only people which knew Him, but now we have to apply it to all those who wish to be part of God's family thanks to Jesus. God loves Israel, but He loves all other people too.

A "new covenant" was necessary for - as God says through Jeremiah - Israel had forsaken His master and disobeyed His covenant: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers ... My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD" (Jeremiah 31:31,32).

The synthesis is that the people enjoying the new covenant would be more obedient of the ancient Israel, for they would have God's law written in their hearts, that same law that Israel had disobeyed.

When Christ came in the flesh, He fulfilled (obeyed) the law of the Ten Commandments, and established a new covenant, not with the sacrifices of animals for sin as in the days of Israel, but with His own blood for all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, with all those who would believe in the gospel, the good news of the kingdom of God. Jesus gave Himself as the alternate sacrifice for the sins of the world and all the nations of the world should believe in Christ who is the Son of God, and to keep His commandments (1 John 3:23,24).

The Ten Commandments synthesized by the great commandment of love

In Matthew 22:34-39 we read of a Pharisee who was a lawyer, asking Jesus a question to test Him: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second commandment is like it (the first)" You shall love your neighbour as yourself." These words are precious and dear to all Christians, but unfortunately they are often misunderstood. In fact, some believe that we do not need to

obey the Ten Commandments if we only love God and our neighbours, as if we could love without obeying God's law. The reality is that love and obedience go hand in hand, for Jesus Himself said: "If you LOVE me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

When Jesus says that the great commandment is that of love, He isn't saying that love abolishes the others. He just says that love synthesizes all the law: "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:40). We love God by keeping His commandments, doing what He commands us to do. Humanly, to love someone is to respect that person, trying one's best to please the other, and at the same time making some sacrifice to keep the love flowing. All of God's commandments are based on love, love towards God, and love towards our neighbour.

Jesus' answer to the lawyer was formed in two parts: the first was about our love for God, and the second about our love for our neighbour. Well, the same happens in the Ten Commandments: the first four express our love for God, and the remaining six our love for our neighbour. Consider the Ten Commandments in this perspective of love and they will become much more meaningful to you. You can read them in the book of Exodus, chapter 20.

Mr Anthony Stagno

THE DECALOGUE: LOVE YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART!

- 1) If you love your God, you will accept Him as your only God.**
- 2) If you love your God, you will not lower His glory by identifying Him with material things or representing Him in a material way.**
- 3) If you love God, you will not misuse His holy name but will sanctify it.**
- 4) If you love God and accept His lordship as your creator, you will spend time with Him by keeping holy the day that He commanded, the seventh-day.**

THE DECALOGUE: LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF

- 5) Your first neighbours are your parents, and then, if you love your neighbours, start loving and honouring them.**
- 6) If you love your neighbour, you will protect his life and not kill him.**
- 7) If you love your neighbour, you will be faithful to your partner and not commit adultery.**
- 8) If you love your neighbour, you will respect what your neighbour has and not try to take it away from him.**
- 9) If you love your neighbour, you will be true to him and not say lies or give false testimony against him.**
- 10) If you love your neighbour, you will not be jealous of the blessings he has received and you will not covet them.**

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

THE APOSTLES' CREED

"Be careful! Do not abandon the right way! Remember the Apostles' Creed!" - the lady said to a friend of hers, a new member of our Adventist community.

Being a Roman Catholic, she thought that to be faithful to the Apostles' Creed, one had to remain faithful to the Catholic Church, as if all the other Christians were not honouring this Creed and had abandoned the true original doctrine.

As a pastor, to encourage and help my sister in Christ I told her: "But that is not a problem, for we believe everything the Apostles' Creed says." Later on, a doubt came to my mind: "A long time has passed since when as a student I studied that Creed, might it be that I do not remember well and that Roman Catholic lady is right?" So I decided to consider that ancient Creed again. I hope you may like sharing with me some few reflections about it.

A first negative fact is that the title "The Apostles' Creed" may give the impression that it was formulated, in its actual form, by the Apostles themselves, which is not true. It was formed little by little by the Christian community, to give testimony of their faith in a simple way. Nevertheless, and this is the second fact, positive this time, we believe that this Creed honestly and quite faithfully reflects the teaching of the Apostles. As such it can be and is received as a common expression of faith both by the Roman Catholic Church, and by the Church of England and all Protestant Churches as well. Even if as a Seventh-day Adventist believer I prefer basing my faith on the teaching that I directly receive from God through His Holy Word, yet I can share everything the Creed says ... with some few clarifications.

What can mislead some simple Roman Catholic believers is the fact that this creed mentions "the holy Catholic Church." It may lead some to think that it refers to the Roman Catholic Church as the only true Christian body. The misunderstanding is fast avoided when people become aware that "catholic" doesn't mean "Roman Catholic", but simply "universal." By this statement of faith, the first Christians meant that the Christian fellowship is not limited to a special nation, social class, or race, but includes all people - without any limitation - who accept Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. This is just the

opposite of what some incorrectly think. The Roman Catholic Church would easily avoid this misunderstanding by not using the capital letter for "Catholic Church", which gives the impression that it refers to the name of a specific church, different from others, and, even better, by translating "universal church" instead of "Catholic Church."

There is just one true problem, with the statement "He descended to the dead," not with the statement itself, but with a possible misinterpretation of it. Many Christians believe that Jesus, after dying, went to preach to the dead in the Limbo, and our statement might be understood in this perspective. In this case we would clearly refuse it for the idea of a Limbo is unbiblical. Notwithstanding the controversial text of 1 Peter 3:19,20, the Apostles believed that death was an unconscious condition, as when we sleep (John 11:11; 1 Thes. 4:13; Ecc. 9:10), and nobody can preach to anyone in such a state. Most probably, this statement refers to Eph. 4:8,9, where the apostle Paul says that Jesus "descended into the lowest part of the earth" to redeem those who were dead and to give "gifts to men." But nothing is said about people being conscious in the grave. It just says, using a poetic text and language, that Jesus, humiliated Himself and by dying has become the winner over death and the benefactor of His church. The same original Latin text softens the problem saying not that Jesus descended to the dead," but "ad inferna", which literally means that he went into the grave, the kingdom of death. It may be worthy of notice the fact that the more widely received Nicene Creed doesn't contain this statement at all.

Once we have clarified these two elements, we can share together with our Roman Catholic brothers this same Creed. We have just to consider that this Creed doesn't include all we have to believe, nor that we have to believe all that our Roman Catholic brothers mentally include in this Creed. For instance, when we say that "we believe" that Jesus "was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary" it doesn't mean that we have

THE APOSTLES' CREED AS TRANSLATED IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

I [We] believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I [We] believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead (ad inferna).

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I [We] believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

to believe in the perpetual virginity of Mary, even after she gave birth to Jesus. The Creed is not about Mary, but about Jesus, and to say that He was born from the virgin Mary, is a simple way to confirm the fact that Jesus "was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit" and not according to the normal way human beings are conceived.

May I ask a question? What does it mean "He will come again to judge the living and the dead"? Our Roman Catholic brothers, and most Protestants, believe that we are judged in the same instant of our death, since that is the moment when people are taught they are sent to hell or to paradise. If this were true, wouldn't the original Christian belief in a final judgement be totally destroyed? Instead, we believe that, according to the Bible, when we die, we just sleep and wait for the coming of Jesus, when He will judge everybody and give everybody his/her reward. May it be that we, suspected of not believing the Apostles' Creed, believe it more than those who criticize us?

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi



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