

Il-Lehen tat-Tama

"THE VOICE OF HOPE"

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BY THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN MALTA

IN MEMORY OF OUR LOVED ONES!

Next to my house in Lija there is a nice garden where many children go to play games and have fun. On the main road, the garden is bordered by a low wall where in the evening, when the weather is warm, many young people sit and talk of their loves and of all the things that make their youth a challenging adventure. At the bottom of this same wall there is a small niche with a marble memorial tablet. On it, the photo of a smiling dead boy with a short writing remembering the cause of his death and, at the bottom, a bouquet of flowers and an always burning candle.

I do not know who that boy was, nor why that niche has been placed just there, next to the legs of the other boys and girls who sit on the wall. I like to imagine that once he was one of them, and that he too was used to sit on that wall and talk with his friends. It seems to me, that his parents wished to think of their child as if he was still alive and sharing with the other boys and girls.

Sixteen years have passed since that boy died, and I suppose that his friends do not sit on that wall any longer. Those who sit now, maybe do not even know who that boy was and what his life meant. But something has remained as it was in the past: that lamp always burning at the bottom of the niche is the proof that his parents' love hasn't lessened.

If I knew these parents, I would thank them for their enduring testimony of love and faith. That lamp always burning should represent our faith in a life that will overcome and win death, our faith in Jesus as the one Who died and raised from the dead to give us hope.

Most probably I do not understand death as these parents do, but I strongly believe in Jesus' promise that one day, on His return, all God's children will enjoy an everlasting life in a better world where death will not exist any longer, but only love, peace and harmony.

Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (John 11:25).

And the apostle John wrote: "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. ... I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the



Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son." (Rev. 21:1-7).

With love,

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

Index

Sacrifices in the Old and in the New Covenant (G. Leonardi)	p. 2
Loneliness can be won! (A. Stagno)	p. 4
Archaeology and Moses (Sigfried H. Horn)	p. 5
Following Jesus	p. 6
News from the world	p. 7
My struggle for faith (G. Leonardi)	p. 8
Can you become a child again? (Dora Stagno)	p. 10
Stories (John Ash III, Bruno Ferrero)	p. 11
Protest against the Cisk campaign	p. 12

BIBLE DOCTRINE

KNOW THE IMAGE AND THE TRUE

A BIBLE STUDY ON THE SANCTUARY OF GOD IN THE OLD AND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.
3RD PART: SACRIFICES IN THE OLD AND IN THE NEW COVENANT.

Have you ever felt uncomfortable because of some dirt on your face or on your clothes? There are situations when even a little dirt under our nails may become a tragedy. It depends on our self esteem and, maybe, on the person whose hand we are going to shake. There are moments when we would do all that is possible and even the impossible to be clean! If you have ever felt too dirty to be well with yourself and with others, I am sure you will appreciate this study.

The Bible considers sin like a moral and spiritual dirt that destroys our dignity and our relationship with God and our neighbours. To restore our welfare, sin must be removed or, as we are used to say, forgiven. How can this happen?

Difference between Christian and unchristian understanding of forgiveness and salvation.

Unchristian religions stresses the idea that forgiveness and salvation depend on something man must do. In their understanding, forgiveness must be conquered through something we do: it may be a gift offered to the gods, a sacrifice, a pilgrimage, a penance. A religion such as Buddhism denies the existence of sin as it is defined in the Bible, that is, the transgression of Gods' law (1 John 3:4). They cannot admit sin because they do not admit the existence of any law giving God. What they believe is the existence of karma, a universal natural law that binds all creatures to the destiny they create by their own doings. In this perspective, salvation doesn't pass through the forgiveness obtained by any supernatural God, but by the self purification obtained through their own effort.

The Christian good news is that salvation doesn't depend on our human efforts and abilities, but on a gracious gift on the part of our heavenly good Father. Otherwise, who could hope to be saved? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil" (Jer. 13:23).

The apostle John writes: "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the

propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." (1 John 2:1,2).

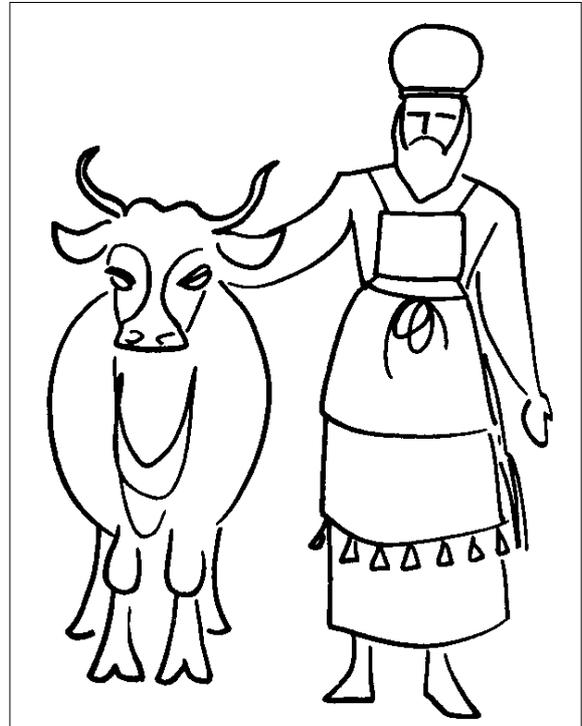
All humanity is offered forgiveness and salvation in Christ. All we have to do is to accept Jesus as the One who gave His life for us (John 3:16), confess our sins (1 John 1:8,9), and go to God in full trust to let Him take care of our life (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Many Christians suspect that this is too easy, too simple, and that there must be something more difficult to do on our part to be worthy of forgiveness. By doing this they do two mistakes: 1) They continue to think as pagans who think that their salvation stands on their own shoulders and 2) they do not understand what it really means to accept God's grace. It is much more difficult to surrender our own pride and go to God with humility, without pretending to have any merit or ability, than to offer God some results of our own spiritual vanity. When the Gospel invites us to receive God's grace, this is nothing else than accepting to live the experience of a new birth (John 3:3), to become a new creature (Gal. 6:15). This is not easy at all but, thank God, it doesn't stand on our own power, but on His.

Salvation and sacrifices in the Old Covenant.

It is a privilege for us to know about God's love and Jesus' sacrifice that give forgiveness and salvation. Our life wouldn't be the same without this knowledge. But what about those who lived before the incarnation and the death of Jesus? Could they be aware of God's love and of the way of salvation provided by Jesus? Did God leave them in total ignorance, or did He give them hope?

Just after the first sin, our first parents discovered themselves naked and un-



The high priest ready to sacrifice a bull.
(Image from the Good News Bible).

comfortable, a symbol and a sign of their moral and spiritual uneasiness. They tried to solve the problem by covering themselves with some fig leaves (Gen. 3:7). A stupid solution indeed, if we consider how uncomfortable fig leaves are on our skin and how they can cover just nothing. Then, the story continues, God provided a better solution: "Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21). Since skins do not grow on trees, we have to see here the first sacrifice, the model of all future sacrifices, till when the true sacrifice of Jesus would be accomplished.

To cover human nakedness, an innocent living being is sacrificed and, to avoid any misunderstanding on the origin of forgiveness and salvation, this sacrifice is not offered by man but by God Himself.

Thousands of years later, God would offer a complete representation of the way of salvation, by asking Israel to build a sanctuary (Ex. 24:8), a symbol of the future Christian realities (Hebrews 8:1-5. See *Il-Lehen tat-Tama* n° 28). In this sanctuary, sacrifices had a very central role.

How did sacrifices work in the Old Testament covenant?

The sacrificial system was too complex to be fully described here. In extreme synthesis, it happened that "if a person [sinned] unintentionally against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them" (Lev. 4:2), he had to go to the sanctuary with an animal to offer it as a sacrifice for the sin. According to the status of the sinner the animal could be a bull (v. 3,13), a goat (v. 23,28), a lamb (v. 32) or even two small pigeons or two turtledoves for a very poor person (Lev. 5:7). In case of extreme poverty, a person could offer just a little flour (v. 11), but this is an exception for all the sacrificial system is based on the offering of a life.

Once in the yard of the sanctuary, next to the altar of the holocausts, the sinner had to lay one of his hands on the head of the sacrifice (Lev. 4:4,29) and confess his sin (Lev. 5:5). The laying of the hands, in the Bible, is usually related to the transmission of something. It may be a blessing (Gen. 48:14,15), the authority for a ministry (Num. 8:9-11; Acts 13:2,3; 1 Tim. 5:22), or even the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:6). In our context, what was passed to the animal? The simplest answer is sin. That same sin committed and confessed by the sinner passed on to the innocent animal that died because of it.

This is what happens when we, as Christians, confess our sin to God: it passes on to Jesus Who, as the Gospel says, takes our sins on Himself and pays the ransom for us: "For [God] made Him who knew no sin [Jesus] to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

"[Jesus] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

"You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18,19).

The texts of Leviticus we have considered says that the sinner had to lay one of his hands on the head of the sacrifice. Where was the other? It was holding a knife to kill the animal. How tragic the situation! Imagine you are that sinner, and the lamb is in front of you! You confess your sin and ask for

forgiveness, but the lamb must die for you to be forgiven. Probably you would look around to see if somebody can do the job for you, but you have to do it yourself. You have to understand that if the lamb dies, it is because of your sins. The Gospel says that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), and the innocent lamb, dies in your place by your hand.

That lamb represents Jesus, we already know, and the sanctuary service helps us understand what it meant for Jesus to be our Saviour. Who killed Jesus? Usually, we answer: "The leaders of the Jews." Others may rightly say: "Pilate and the Roman soldiers." But the Gospel says: "You and me." Our sin is a knife killing our Saviour. Our sins killed our precious Jesus: "Christ died

for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3).

The consequences of Jesus' sacrifice in our life

How, then, should we consider our sins? Can Christians ask God to forgive their sins in Jesus' name and not hate those same sins that put their best Friend to death? Christians do not consider forgiveness an easy business. It doesn't cost so much to us, but it cost a lot to Jesus. We do not wish any longer to sin. We wish to be obedient and keep God's commandments, not as a penance we pay to be forgiven, but as an answer of love and faith to the love that God bestowed to us in Jesus.

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

Questions about Jesus' sacrifice and the Holy Communion

1 Do Seventh-day Adventists believe that Jesus is our only Saviour without any merit on our part?

Yes, without any reservation! They gladly believe that Jesus is the only Saviour, and that we can receive His salvation only because of faith. The Gospel clearly states: "Nor is there salvation in any *other*, for there is *no other name* under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by *faith* apart from the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28).

2 Do Seventh-day Adventists believe that Communion is a representation of Jesus' death for us?

Yes, they do, because Jesus said: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28).

3 Do Seventh-day Adventists believe that through Communion we physically receive Jesus' body and blood?

No they do not! They believe that Jesus' words "this is my body ... This is my blood" must be understood in a spiritual sense. In fact Jesus himself clarified: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). Jesus Himself said that Communion must be celebrated "in memory," of Him. The word "memory" conveys the idea that Jesus is not in the bread or in the wine, for what is present doesn't need to me remembered. We have to remember what is absent. We highly consider the value of Communion, but we believe that through it, Jesus is received not in the mouth but in the heart.

4 Do Seventh-day Adventists believe that, through Communion, Jesus' sacrifice is repeated even if without the shedding of blood?

No, they do not believe so because the Gospel clearly refuses this idea! The letter to the Hebrews clearly compares the Old Testament sacrifices that were to be "repeated" many times, with the unique sacrifice of Jesus: "[Jesus] does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself" (Heb. 7:27). "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another — He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (Heb. 9:24-26)

CHRISTIAN LIFE

LONELINESS CAN BE WON!

Have you ever felt lonely? There are many people today who feel cut off from society. Their struggle is one of isolation. They feel trapped in their own private world of loneliness. These people cry out but nobody seem to hear them.

The Bible talks about such people as the fatherless, widows, elderly, and many more lonely souls. Such people cry out in discouragement, desperately in need to feel that they are wanted, for they too need to make friends who would support them in their needs and enjoy companionship. Stressed out feelings of painful trials and isolation, physical mental emotions make one cry out: "Is anybody out there, doesn't anyone care."

As the saying goes, "no man is an island" and there is good reason why, for, as God says, "man should not be alone" (Genesis 2:18). No one wants to be alone. It's frustrating and brings boredom and negative thoughts about wanting to quit on everything, including life itself. Satan preys on such people, he wants them to fail in life, he makes them depressed as he works on their emotions and makes them feel guilty, hopeless outcasts of society. But do not despair: for those of you who are lonely there is a merciful loving God who has an antidote for loneliness.

These people search to be part of a group of friendly people who care and show love, for we all need to be loved. The early Christian church offered an example of such a fellowship. In Acts 2:42 we read that the church (group of people) continued in fellowship. Fellowship is a fundamental part of life and of our Christian experience but one must be careful in choosing the good fellowship which brings us closer to God and His people. Fellowship is friendship or a oneness body of people dedicating their companionship in concern for the others. In John 1:3 we read, "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us". In order to draw closer to each other we must first draw closer to God, this is the first line of defence against loneliness, and any other negative emotions we may feel. Establishing contact with God first contributes to true and good fellowship with others.

Christians who wish to help, must be hospitable: "Be hospitable to one another," the apostle Peter says (1 Peter 4:9). Let this be your credit, for we read in James 1:27, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their trouble." To the orphans and widows we can add all those lonely people out there who are reaching out to us in their depression.

But, if you feel lonely, you too must do your part to make friends and meet the right people to fellowship with. This is another antidote against loneliness because we read in Proverbs 18:24, "A man who has friends must himself be friendly." If you need company, offer your company. If you need hospitality, try to offer your hospitality. Try not to isolate yourself from effective contact with others. Develop friendship with others and remember that fellowship is a two way responsibility, you must seize every opportunity when someone calls to reach out to you for friendship. You need not be lonely anymore, there are people who care about you, Jesus also cares. He said in Matthew 25:35-36, "For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was in prison and you visited Me." Jesus knows what it's like to be lonely: in the desert He was alone when the devil tempted Him and He suffered and died alone because all abandoned Him. This is also why He sends His own to help the lonely. If you think we can help, we will be happy to visit you. Just let us know.

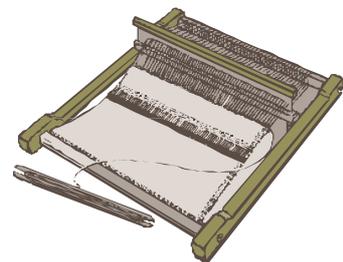
But remember: every time Jesus felt lonely He looked to the Father for comfort and strength. Jesus is the example of us all. For those of you who feel lonely, trust in the lord for He says "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37, NIV).

Mr. Anthony Stagno



"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." (1 Cor. 5:16-18).

Can you help?



Some years ago, a foreign lady leaving Malta left us a wooden hand-loom to make small carpets or any other tissue. It would be nice to use it to prepare ornamental tissues, but it is totally disassembled and we are looking for somebody who has enough knowledge to help us put it in function. Can you? Do you know anybody who can? Please let us know by phoning us at n° 21 413 696.

Thank you very much.

BIBLE ARCHAEOLOGY

HOW GOD HELPED MOSES WRITE THE FIRST BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

The Cairo Museum houses some unpretentious-looking stone slabs with crudely incised inscriptions, which are noticed by very few visitors. These brown stones were found in ancient copper mines of the Sinai Peninsula. When Flinders Petrie discovered them some eighty years ago, he could not recognize the nature of their script. It was Alan Gardiner, the famous British Egyptologist, who made the first successful efforts at deciphering these inscriptions, during the first world war. He was ably followed by Cowley, Sethe, Albright, and others, who advanced our knowledge concerning these short stone inscriptions, so that they have now revealed their secrets.

Although they are short and their contents are of little historical value, these inscriptions are of great importance because they are the witnesses of the earliest successful attempts to develop a workable alphabetic script. Some Palestinian workmen, employed by the Egyptians in the copper mines of Sinai, had learned something of the way of writing used by their Egyptian masters. Then one of them must have gotten the bright idea that the pictures used by the Egyptians as hieroglyphs to express ideas could be employed also to express single sounds.

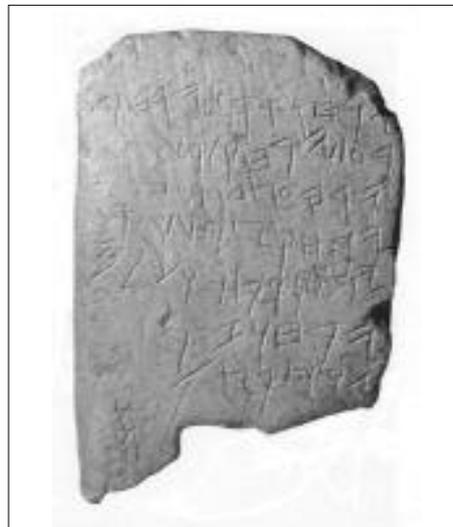
The Egyptian hieroglyph for water, a wavy line, was used by the inventor of the first alphabetic script to express only the initial letter M of *mayim*, his Semitic word for "water." With the discovery of this principle, called acrophony, the ancestor of our alphabet was born. It proved to be the greatest discovery ever made pertaining to the art of writing. This original alphabet has been improved, but has not been replaced by anything better, and is still used in its essential features. This can be seen from the fact that our letter M still shows in an abbreviated form the original wavy line of the Sinai script.

This great invention was made in the providence of God shortly before Moses came to Sinai as a fugitive, so that he could find a script

suitable for writing books of the Bible that could be read not only by a few learned scribes, who knew the hundreds of characters in which ancient scripts were written, but also by the man in the street with an average education.

When I stood in front of the brown sandstone slabs from Sinai and copied the crudely carved inscriptions that Palestinian miners had cut into them, I was thrilled to think how God always takes care to have inventions and discoveries made at the time when they are needed. When Moses as the earliest Bible writer was commissioned to write the early history of this world, he found a script ready and suitable for this purpose. When the Reformers were raised up to do a great work for God, their work was facilitated by the printing press, which had recently been invented. And now, while God's last message is being given to the world, means have been provided by which its messengers can travel speedily, make their voices heard far and wide, and spread the good tidings to all the world.

These and other thoughts came to my mind while I was studying the Sinai inscriptions, the earliest records written in an alphabetic script. Hardly any visitor



The Gezer Calendar. An example of the early Hebrew writing (3,000 years ago).

of the Cairo Museum notices them, but they form a very important link in the transmission of God's will to mankind, by providing the means by which that divine will could be written down and preserved for coming generations in the simplest way possible.

Sigfried H. Horn [Adapted from, *The Spade Confirms the Book.*]

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CHRISTIAN LIFE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW JESUS?

1 First, we have to know Jesus, for we cannot follow Him without knowing who He is and how important He is to us. This is why it is important to know the Holy Scriptures, for they are the only source from which to know our Saviour. Jesus Himself says: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

2 Accept Jesus for what He is according to the Scriptures: the Son of God, Who became a man and offered His life to be our Saviour. Let's accept Him with all our heart as our only Saviour, and let's rejoice in His friendship. The apostle Peter preached: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And Jesus says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20).

3 Let's be grateful to Jesus for what He has done, is doing, and will do for us. If He is our only Saviour, let Him be our only Lord too. Let's obey Him, let's follow His teaching, let's obey His commandments. The Apostle Paul admonishes us that there is just "one Lord" (Eph. 4:5). And Jesus says: "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). We have to love other people, but we have to obey only Jesus: "Thus says the LORD: 'Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD'" (Jeremiah 17:5). "So we may boldly say: 'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'" (Hebrews 13:6).

4 Let's love our neighbour for we cannot follow Jesus, the highest example of love, without ourselves loving others. Jesus taught: "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

5 Let's give testimony of our faith in Jesus to help others know about Jesus' love for them, and about His teaching.

If Jesus is important to us, He must be important for others too. Do not be afraid of your faith for Jesus said: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Do not be afraid of what others may say, for Jesus promised: "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 10:32,33).

6 Let's wait with confidence for Jesus' return for He is our friend and He promised that one day He would come to take us with Him (John 14:1-3). So finishes the whole Bible: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." (Revelation 22:20,21).



"You are the light of the world." (Jesus)



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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° 30)

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NEWS FROM THE WORLD

Rome. Pope John Paul II celebrates his 25th anniversary of pontificate.

Pope John Paul's pontificate is one of the longest in all the history of the Roman Catholic Church. During his pontificate many important events have happened, like the fall of the Soviet Union, in which some role was indirectly played by the pontiff himself.

Surely, John Paul II is a great man and deserves the admiration that he receives within and outside the Roman Catholic Church. He is also a great pope, and the Roman Catholic Church is receiving many benefits from his ministry.

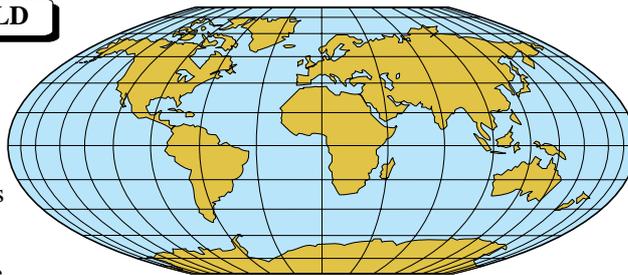
As Seventh-day Adventists, we highly respect the man. We also respect him as the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church. Nevertheless we give testimony of our faith in the Gospel, that the Christian Church should be led not by a man, but by the Holy Spirit, according to the truth that is given us by God's revelation that we find in the Holy Scriptures.

We may share many of the moral battles the pontiff has fought, but we complain for the fact that, theologically, his pontificate has seen a strong advancement of the Marian theology to the detriment of the centrality of Christ, the only Lord and Mediator that God has given His church (John 14:6; Acts 14:12; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Cor. 8:6).

Europe. The European Constitution and our Christian roots.

Some voices are raised to obtain an explicit reference to her Jewish and Christian roots in the European Constitution.

Actually, the present preamble suggests as follows: "Conscious that Europe is a continent that has brought forth civilization; that its inhabitants, arriving in successive waves from earliest times, have gradually developed the values underlying humanism: equality of persons, freedom, respect for reason, Drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, the values of which, still present in its heritage, have embedded within the life of society the central role of the human person and his or her inviolable and inalienable rights, and respect for law ...".



It is evident that the humanistic aspects of the European culture and history are emphasized with an explicit reference to "equality of persons, freedom, respect for reason," but Christians can happily recognize them as values that are part of their own faith. The religious aspect is mentioned among the elements that inspired the proposed constitution, but no reference is made to any Jewish or Christian heritage. Should Christians be satisfied with this or should they ask for more?

It is evident that we do not deny the importance of Christianity in the formation of modern Europe. Nevertheless we believe that Europe will not become more Christian if Christianity is mentioned in her constitution. Christianity is not the religion of a state or government, but of individuals who freely answer to God's call in Jesus. We strongly support the separation between state and church, and an explicit mention of Christianity might appear as availing a religion over others. We hope and we pray that the European citizens may really be Christians, in their hearts and in their actions, so that Europe may give a testimony of justice, solidarity, and peace. Christianity must be written in our lives, not necessarily on official documents.

Nigeria. Amina lives. 25 September 2003.

Mrs Amina Lawal, previously condemned to be stoned for having a child outside the marriage, has been freed, at last, by the Sharia Court of Appeal of Katsina State, in northern Nigeria. We rejoice for this



decision and we thank all our readers who signed the petition for her liberation.

Malta. Seventh-day Adventist Church joins the Malta Ecumenical Council.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Malta has joined the Malta Local Council formed by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of England, and other Protestant and Orthodox ones.

The Council is not aimed to form a common church, but affirms the willingness of everybody to establish honest and friendly relationship with others, while respecting the theological differences that exist among the different Christian bodies. Also it is useful to discuss common problems. We hope that our modest contribution may help increase the reciprocal understanding and a better relationship.

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 TESTIMONY

JESUS HAS TAKEN MY LIFE

2nd part: My struggle for faith

My experience with Jesus has not been simple or easy, but I wouldn't change it with anything else.

As it happens to most children living in a Christian family, I discovered I believed in God with the same facility I was able to breathe. Faith was part of my environment and of my life in the same way as the air. I didn't decide to believe, I just knew that faith was in me. I didn't know why I had to believe, I didn't know how faith worked, I didn't search for faith, I just received it as a gift. But things had to change.

My problems with faith

My problems with faith started, as usual with young people, in my teens. When we are children we live from what we receive, we are totally dependant on our parents, on our teachers, on our world. All seems normal and good for us. But the time comes when we have to re-examine what we have received and the world we live in. I remember one day, when for the first time I was given the opportunity to preach in my church: I explained that life, for young people, is like a pair of shoes: as we grow up and our feet become bigger, three things may happen: either we suffer to continue wearing the now too small shoes, or the shoes, by the use, become a little larger so that we can continue to use them for a while, even with some pain; or we assume the most revolutionary attitude of throwing the old ones away and buying new ones. I loved my faith and I didn't wish to change it with anything else, but I had problems with it and couldn't find solutions.

I hadn't a specific problem about the teaching of my church. I didn't think that God could not exist. On the opposite, I was apparently convinced both of His existence and of the soundness of the teaching I had received. My problem was that I couldn't feel God present in my life. I was always repeating to myself all the good reasons I had to believe in God, but I couldn't see Him. God had to exist but it was a theoretical conviction that didn't fill my heart with assurance and joy. God was in all the universe, but not next to me.

Many times I thought of my faith as a cut tree. Sometimes, walking in the

country, I could see some of them: their leaves were still green, and there were flowers on their branches. Sometimes, I could see fruit being produced by such cut trees. But I knew that their destiny was already established: in a short time they would totally die. They were living of their past, but the roots were cut and they were not receiving any longer any nourishment. How long would my faith stand?

The problem continued for many years, even when I was a student at the seminary and was preparing myself to be a minister of that God that I couldn't feel close to me. How could I be a minister of God, how could I encourage others while I needed to be encouraged myself? One night I woke up with such a sadness that I started crying. Only my young wife knew of my internal struggle. I couldn't talk to others about my problem, so I thought. How could they accept me as a future minister in my condition? The problem became even worse when I started to minister a community, for you cannot go and share your problems with the same people that have been entrusted to you to help them be strong in the Christian faith.

How long would my faith stand? Would my heart find rest at last? Thank God I'm still here, and I can say that our Christian faith is the most precious reality of our life.

Do not think, naturally, that all my days were filled with this spiritual anguish. Life is good enough to take care of us and help us not to think just of our problems. Usually I had quiet and joyful days, but even then, the fire was still alive under the ashes, just waiting for a blow of wind to hurt me again.

The reason of my enduring faith

How did my faith successfully resist all this long time? My only reason is JESUS. I loved Jesus so much, for



Pastor Leonardi (on the right) in the day of his graduation at Andrews University, Michigan, in 1982.

His teaching and for what He represented in my life and in the life of the world. I admired His example of love and I thought that nothing better could happen to me than living according to His example and teaching.

Jesus was so important that, even when I doubted of God's presence in my life, He still remained strong in my heart to give me courage and perseverance.

I knew that my feelings were not due to a lack of evidences about God. They simply were the result of my wish for a better experience with God, and I continued to believe that one day God would find His way to help me. Meanwhile, I would continue to serve Him with the little faith I had, and I trusted in His help.

Help from Dostojevskj and Peter

Dostojevskj, the known Russian writer, once wrote: "I believe that there is nothing nicer, more simpatico, more virile and more perfect than Jesus; but I say this with a jealous love, that not only nothing similar exists but that it cannot exist. I wish to say even more: if somebody would prove that Christ is outside the truth, and if truth really were outside Christ, I would better prefer being with Christ and not with the truth".

This quotation, that I found in a small book bought at half price, seemed to correspond perfectly to my own experience, and I started loving it. It became a strong encouragement to remain with Jesus whatever might happen.

Something similar was said by the apostle Peter. The crowd had decided to make Jesus their king because He had miraculously fed hem. But when He started to talk about the spiritual

gift of salvation, they were not interested any longer. Little by little they left Him and Jesus felt like a misunderstood and abandoned person. Full of sadness He addressed the Twelve, apparently the only ones that had remained: “Do you also want to go away?” But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’” (John 6:67-69).

Why do we remain with Jesus when it seems that we have so many reasons to abandon Him? What is the reason that keeps us with Him? Peter’s relationship with Jesus was not based on a simple feeling or on interest for the material blessing he could receive in this world. He just knew that he couldn’t find anywhere anything better than Jesus and the hope of everlasting values He was giving them. Also Peter knew, even if in a confused way, that Jesus was special, so special as nobody could ever be, and He loved Him for what He was and represented.

Many times, with Peter I also said: “Where could I go, my Lord, away from You? I know what you offer me, and I know Who You are. I don’t understand everything. Many times I am confused, lonely and sad. But I prefer to remain with You. Just, please, help my unbelief!”

I had to learn something

Now my heart has found peace, and I am happy to serve my Lord and my neighbour. I strongly believe in the reality of God and in His love for humanity and for me personally. Still I believe that faith is not arrogance. I believe that faith doesn’t exclude doubts. Only dead people have no doubts. Doubts help us be humble, and look for a better understanding and experience. They also help us understand the others’ problems and not be too judgmental. What I ask for myself is not that God may give me a faith without doubts, but that He may never allow doubts to overcome my faith.

My faith is not based on a feeling, but on the awareness of God’s reality manifested through the glories of His creation, and through the testimony of the Holy Bible. I do not need to feel that God exists, I simply know that He is with me. My faith is believing what cannot be seen (Hebrews 11:1). It isn’t based on a comfortable reality, based on the communion with many, but on the

awareness of truth represented by that Jesus Who said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

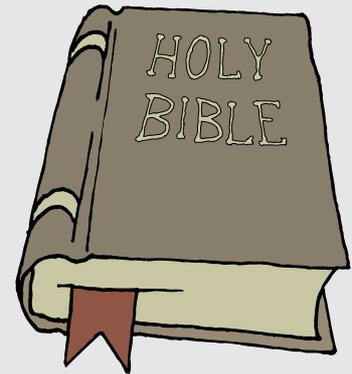
To those who have doubts I say: “Do not think you are bad Christians! Just do not become proud of your doubts as if they were making you more intelligent than the others. Never let your doubts become your master. Just walk by the little light that you have, with honesty and sincerity in your heart, looking for a more shining one.

If you are honest, God will give you what you need. This is God’s promise for you: “And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

(In the next issue, pastor Leonardi will describe his ministry in Malta.)

**THE BIBLE,
A BOOK WE CAN
REALLY TRUST?**



When I first started to read the Bible I was a child, and I received it with the open mind and the simplicity of a child. All in it was wonderful and precious, and it was normal because it was the Word of God, wasn’t it? It was just bread and water for my soul, a light to know where and how to go. No criticism ever passed in my mind, but I had to grow and then the situation changed.

At the seminary, while studying to become a pastor, I had to study the Bible in a more critical way and problems started to come up. Do not misinterpret me, there is nothing wrong in reading the Bible with a critical eye. Criticism, in this case, is just a technical word meaning that we have to read with an intelligent eye, considering the elements in favour or against a reality or an idea. God doesn’t ask us to believe without being aware of what faith is, and without giving us good elements to support our faith. My professors strongly believed in the Bible as a divinely inspired book, but we had also to study what others believed. This way I started to become aware of all the negative criticism that the Bible was receiving. Nevertheless, it was only when I started to study at the university, that I had to face the problem more directly.

At the university, the first book I was given to study was about the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, that the Bible itself attributes to Moses. Instead, for the author, Moses had nothing to do with these books, and most probably he never existed. I became aware of Historical Criticism, Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism and so on. The Bible text was analysed as our body under a microscope, to discover all inconsistencies, contradictions, and errors. It was no longer the spiritual food that God had given us, but just a long list of problems.

It was a big challenge for my faith, but since the critics of the Bible are not stupid persons, and I didn’t wish to believe because of ignorance, I had to consider them seriously. At first I found a lot of difficulties. Everything I was reading seemed so logic and well based that I had difficulty in answering the objections that my faith was receiving. I looked for other books that could help me, but I didn’t find any. Other people, even in my Church, didn’t appear equipped for such a task. So I was alone, well, not really, because God was helping me.

Little by little I understood how the mechanism of criticism worked and how I could face it. There were very good answers and I had simply to look more for them. Little by little I discovered them, and my faith in the Word of God has been confirmed.

Now, I still continue to read the Bible critically, I know the problems that it presents, but I also know that they cannot destroy my conviction that through its pages, God is speaking to me and to everybody who looks for truth.

P.G.L.

BIBLE MEDITATION

CAN YOU BECOME A CHILD AGAIN?

In Matthew 18:3, Jesus says: "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

Becoming a child again presupposes two facts. The first is that we have lost our childhood, and the second is that we wish and we know that it can be restored once again. Why do we need it?

Let's first look into the cause for the lost childlike nature. We are familiar with the first three chapters of Genesis. God created everything perfect and good. When God created Adam and Eve, he clothed them with the beauty of innocence and purity. They lived in the garden of Eden in their natural state. Their mind was undefiled. Life was so good as they enjoyed God's creation! But the scene changed as soon as Satan entered the picture.

The devil came to destroy the children that God had made. Did he succeed? Yes because as soon as they let Satan pervert their minds with his lies, they let sin enter their lives through their pride and disobedience. Shame overtook them as they lay naked hiding from God. The garment of perfection that clothed them was removed by the craftiness of their adversary who had them captive in his grasp and power. That is why we need the restoration, so we may be renewed again to that perfect character, as God's children, in the likeness and image of God

We will cover this subject in 3 stages.

1st stage: The innocent stage: childhood.

Every child is born innocent of the human way of life. There is peace, joy and serenity in its life. Children are sweet. In the mind of an innocent child there is no corruption or pollution. There is truth, forgiveness, love and a carefree nature. Children believe what is said to them and take it in with an open heart. Jesus in his ministry teaches about the kingdom of God, "Jesus said, let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew 19:14). Children receive with joy what they are given. Our adversary doesn't give up, he's always scheming ways of how to devour God's children. If he doesn't succeed when they are young, he will keep trying as they grow older. When Jesus

was born Satan tried to destroy Him through king Herod, and only a miracle saved Him. When Jesus was older, Satan tried to destroy His ministry by tempting Him into sin but he did not succeed. He tried many a time to destroy our Saviour but in vain. Jesus overcame Satan every time by the power of the Holy Spirit. This power is for us too, if we wish to protect the purity of our life.

2nd stage: The teen stage: becoming independent.

In the first years of our lives we are surrounded by love and protection but, as we grow older, we learn to do things by ourselves, we feel independent. We feel that we don't need protection anymore, because we can face life on our own. We think that we don't need advice from our parents, and we want to do things our own way. A certain independence and responsibility are good, but not when they become pride and selfishness, especially in front of God. How wrong we are then! When we turn away from God we look into the environment around us and it appears so attractive and desirable. But we forget that it is our adversary's field that we are threading on.

When all this happens, we take off the garment of purity that was given us by God and step into Satan's world. A big change takes place in us. We start seeing things differently, think differently, and act differently. Problems and sufferings take their toll in our lives.

There are many who suffer and are robbed of their childhood through abuse and cruelty. We forget the childlike nature and we are left insecure and filled with fear. We choose to live by the standards of our environment and put aside the purity and innocence that we were clothed with. The more problems we face the further we go away from God. Life becomes meaningless and empty. But there is hope and we are not to despair.

3rd stage: God's calling and restoration.

When does the restoration take place for the inner child in

us? In Revelation 3:19-20 Jesus calls on us: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." It is up to us to invite Him in our lives or not. This is the time of conviction, when we realize that we have been wrong in our conception of life. We cannot make it on our own, it is too dangerous, as there are many perils that may engulf us through their huge waves and we may drown. Jesus came to restore that which was lost and held captive, to free us from the bondage of sin. Restoration starts when we receive God's calling and accept the voice that is compassionate and loving towards us, when we truly believe God and accept Him as our personal Saviour and life restorer.

Our freedom is Jesus Christ. He has already won the victory over sin and death. He purchased our lives with his own blood. Now it's up to us if we let him restore again in us that childlike nature. God wants us to enjoy life to the full but we must invite Him into our lives to restore in us His nature. We need to look for God every day. Trust Him for he is faithful and true. Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:3. Do we really believe these words? Let's trust Jesus and take heed. Let's open our heart and let Him in.

Mrs. Dora Stagno

[Mrs. Stagno is a simple housekeeper, not a theologian or a pastor. This is the text of a sermon that she offered to the Adventist community this past summer, as a testimony of her faith.]

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.

MISSION STORY

THE TENACIOUS CHRISTIAN

When Lin,* a 39-year-old Chinese woman from Inner Mongolia, became a Christian three years ago, she began inviting people to her home to study the Bible and worship. Within a short time, many of her neighbours had joined her worship group.

The Chinese police and religious authorities began watching Lin's activities. As attendance at her weekly meetings climbed to nearly 100 people, the police ordered her to disband the group. She refused, so the police began intimidating those who attended the meetings. 'If you keep going to these meetings, we'll throw you in jail!' they warned. The threats worked, and the attendance at the house-church meetings dropped to about 40. But additional intimidation had little influence on the remaining believers.

The police decided to jail Lin. But publicly arresting her was not so easy. So the police persuaded her to come to the police station to fill out some paperwork. Once she was at the police station, she was arrested and jailed without anyone filing charges or going through the proper channels.

The police made it difficult for her husband to visit her, and she was not allowed to have a Bible or any other religious material. But her husband wrote Bible texts on a blanket and sent it to her. The police officer who delivered the blanket to her had no idea what it contained.

While in jail, Lin made friends with other prisoners. As the months passed and their relationships deepened, she began sharing her faith. Soon a large number of the prisoners accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour and changed their disruptive behaviour.

The police had planned to keep Lin in prison for a year, but six months after her arrest she was released. She asked the police officer why she was being released halfway through her sentence, and he admitted that if she had stayed in the jail any longer, all the prisoners would have been converted to Christianity!

Soon after her release the group of believers was meeting in her home again, and on any given Sabbath at least 50 people attended. The government officials have not changed their

stance toward house churches and small groups, but they have learned by experience that jailing Lin will not stop her, for even in prison she will share her love for God with others.

John Ash III

[Secretary of the Chinese Union of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.]

* Not her real name. John Ash III is secretary of the Chinese Union Mission, headquartered in Hong Kong.

A STORY FOR THE YOUNG

A CARPENTER'S EYES

There was once, in a small village a carpenter's shop. One day when the carpenter was not there, all his working tools held a long and animated conference. It was a question as to who should leave the honourable community.

One said: "We must expel our sister Saw because she screeches and hurts our teeth. She has the most screeching noise on earth!" Another interrupted: "we shouldn't keep amongst us our sister Plane. She sharpens and smoothes all that she touches."

"Brother Hammer" - protested another - "has the heaviest and most violent character. He hits back everything violently, continually, and makes everybody nervous."

"And what about the Nails? Who can live with such sharp tongues? If only they would leave! as also the Saw and the Plane!" - they continued with irritation. "And what about the Sandpaper?"

At the end of the sitting all were expelled. Of course they also wanted to expel the Nails and Hammer!

The meeting was interrupted as the carpenter arrived and walked to his bench. He took out a Plank and sawed it with the sharp Saw. He cut it with the Plane and smoothed it all with the Sandpaper. He picked the Hammer and with some Nails began his work. He fabricated a lovely cradle to receive a child that was about to be born.

God looks at us with the eyes of a carpenter.

Translated from **Bruno Ferrero, Cerchi nell'acqua.**



This is
the victory
that has
overcome
the world,
our faith.

(1 John 5:4,5)

SOCIAL WELFARE

A PARTY DOESN'T START WITH CISK BEER

Just a word about the Cisk advertising campaign

Just in the last issue of *Il-Lehen tat-Tama*, we were discussing about the problem of juvenile alcoholism in Malta, which is the worst in Europe. And what do we see now? The Cisk Company just encouraging young people to drink their beer!

In our understanding, it is evident that their advertising campaign that identifies the joy of a party with music and Cisk beer is especially targeted at young people for they are the ones who most enjoy this kind of parties. In any case, even if the intended target was larger, we would have something to say.

All advertising campaigns about alcoholic drinks try to associate the use of alcohol with joy, or with a life style characterized by friendship, wealth, and fine taste. This is an evident lie, for alcohol can hardly be associated with all these good qualities. Alcohol doesn't help people to be happy or make friends, but risks to create lowliness and despair. Nor does it help people become rich or develop their life style. On the opposite, it deteriorates our life and our ability to support ourselves and our families.

The Cisk campaign conveys the feeling that to have a good party, what we need is music and beer. We would say that what we need to start a party is having good friends and a happy heart. The music may help, perhaps not too loud, otherwise we cannot communicate and we would remain alone in the midst of a crowd. Beer is not necessary at all, for it creates an artificial joy that we do not need when we are happy and with friends. There are many other drinks that we can enjoy, while keeping our minds and hearts clear and aware of ourselves.

A party should be a recreational opportunity, that is an opportunity to recreate, to restore our energies and be able to walk in our life with all the power that we have. Alcohol does the opposite.



NEW PREMISES FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

We are working hard to offer all of you a place where to follow programs to increase both our physical and spiritual health. After a long time spent in research and in development, the site is going to be soon ready. You can see, in the above photograph, the facade of the existing building before its enlargement and restoration. Our hope is to use this building to honour God and to serve you. We hope that we may go on with God's blessing and your support. The site is located in Birkirkara on the main road, with many bus facilities. Be ready to have more information in the next issue of *Il-Lehen tat-Tama*.



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