

# Il-Lehen tat-Tama

## "THE VOICE OF HOPE"

47, Mannarino Road, Birkirkara BKR 08, Malta - www.adventist.org.mt. Tel. 00356/21470238

BY THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN MALTA

# HERE WE ARE, AND HAPPY!

It is such a long time (about five months) that our dear readers haven't received our magazine, that we suspect they were thinking it had died. And instead here we are, and happy, ready to share with you our love and the precious Word of God. It simply happened that we had to overwork to finish the new premises God has offered us to serve you and honour Him in a better way. The building is not yet totally finished, but we have already started using it and you are invited to come and visit it whenever you wish.

These new premises are a true gift of God, for our small local congregation never could have afforded it. For many years we met in a modest apartment in Gzira, but it strongly limited our opportunities to render a better testimony and service. We needed a larger and independent new accommodation, and with the support of the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist Church, we started looking around for something that could be convenient.

Nevertheless, our best wishes were overcome with a new opportunity when Mrs. Kathryn H. Proffit became the American ambassador in Malta. Even now, many remember her as a very kind person who has done her best for our country. What most do not know is that Mrs. Proffit is the descendent of the first pioneers of our Seventh-day Adventist Church and that while in Malta she faithfully worshipped God with us. Knowing our needs, and wishing to leave a testimony of her love and faith, she provided us with everything we needed to buy a much larger premises than those we were looking for. The help of the rest of the world-wide church has provided the means for the alterations and the necessary furniture.

These new premises have been developed to honour God and to give testimony of His love, will, and hope.

(Continues at p. 4.)



The "Adventist Centre" at 47, Mannarino Road, Birkirkara. The Centre spreads on three floors and includes the chapel for our spiritual meetings, an office, the pastor's apartment, two guest rooms, one children's room, a common kitchen and two large halls for social and cultural activities.

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## BIBLE THEOLOGY

## WHO MOVED THE STONE?

**T**he Resurrection is a fact of history. And Christian belief is invalid without it. As the first great front-runner of Christianity contended, "If Christ was not raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your trust in God is useless" (1 Cor. 15:14, NLT).

Two Jewish authors (Joseph Klausner and Pinchas Lapide) and four lawyers (Ross Clifford, Simon Greenleaf, Charles Colson, and Frank Morison), having examined the evidence from either a neutral or a hostile perspective, reached the conclusion that it had indeed been an "historical event." Each of the four "witnesses" (the Gospel writers) passed the most rigorous of their tests.

All the alternative explanations of the empty tomb are based on the eighteenth-century "closed system" belief, that the resurrection of Jesus could not have happened because it was not repeatable. Recent authors have taken the view that the universe is more like a great thought than a great machine. They argue that the case against miracles is acceptable only if every report of a miracle has been investigated and found to be false.

Historians do not force the evidence to fit a preconceived conclusion, but permit it to speak for itself. Here we examine the nature of the sources, the evidence for the death of Jesus, and the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

**Evidence for the death of Jesus**

Before the crucifixion verdict was pronounced, the Roman governor had already ordered that Jesus be whipped. The 39 lashes of the *flagrum* across the shoulders, back, and legs of the prisoner would cut through the subcutaneous tissue; would render the back an unrecognizable mass of torn, bleeding tissue; and would cause arterial bleeding from blood vessels in the underlying muscles. Many did not survive 39 lashes.

In the recent past, Israeli archaeologists have learned much about crucifixion from an excavation on Mount Scopus. A seven-inch spike was driven through both heel bones. A heavy wrought-iron spike would be driven through the front of the wrist. Muscular pain would be excruciating. Air would be drawn into the lungs that could not be exhaled. Carbon dioxide would build up in the lungs and the bloodstream. Death would come by suffocation.

Romans were grimly efficient with crucifixion. There were no survivors.

**Evidence for the Resurrection**

Two wealthy Jews prepared the corpse of the crucified Jesus for burial. They would willingly have relinquished all their wealth and influence for one vital sign that He was alive. The women were witnesses. There were no signs of life. Jesus was buried.

**The weight of the stone.** A stone which would have weighed between one-and-a-half and two tons was rolled over the entrance of the tomb. On the Sabbath? the next day? the Jewish authorities went to the Roman governor and asked that the tomb be secured by a guard. A seal was placed on the stone so that it could not be removed without the knowledge of the authorities, and a guard was posted (Matt. 27:62-66).

**The soldiers.** Whether the guard was Jewish or Roman, the story that they were bribed to tell that the body had been stolen by the disciples while they were sleeping, would not have been passed on except by the frightened, the unintelligent, or those who had a strong vested interest. How could the guards have known who stole the body if they were asleep? "Soldiers and priests and Pilate evidently believed that something supernatural had happened, wrote John Wenham. "Hence the willingness of the authorities to screen the soldiers" (see Matt. 28:11-15).

**The broken seal.** Among the many difficulties is the evidence of the broken Roman seal; those responsible, if apprehended, would have automatically been executed. The idea that a group of disci-

ples would have taken on either the temple guard or a detachment of a Roman legion in order to take the risk of breaking a Roman seal is preposterous. One authority says: "No approach to the origin of faith in Jesus' resurrection will get far unless it realizes what a shattering blow his crucifixion had been for his followers. His execution had been followed by a horrific crisis of faith." "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel"—hail hoped, past historic tense—was how one disciple expressed it (Luke 24:21, NIV). Sunday morning found the disciples in a state of shock and spiritual disillusionment. The disciples were not prepared for His resurrection.

It took an objective encounter with the risen Jesus to crystallize the disciples' faith in Him and cause them to proclaim His resurrection. Visions and subjective experiences would not have done it. Something had been seen. Something real.

**Appearances.** The Resurrection witnesses identified the risen Jesus with the earthly Jesus. "After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days" (Acts 1:3, NIV). When Jesus is said to have been seen or to have appeared, the disciples saw Him with ordinary vision. "Look at my hands and my feet," He said. "I have seen the Lord!" the witnesses announced (Matt. 28:17; Luke 24:34, 39-46; John 20:14, 18, 20; 1 Cor. 15:5-8). Jesus is reported to have spoken (Matt. 28:9, 18-20), to have walked (Luke 24:13-16), to have distributed food (Luke 24:30), to have eaten (Acts 1:4), to have performed signs (John 20:30), to have given a blessing with His hands (Luke 24:50), to have shown His hands and His side (John 20:20), and to have been touched (Matt. 28:9).



**Empty tomb.** The empty tomb was the indispensable Exhibit A of the launch of Christianity in Jerusalem. If Joseph's new tomb had not been empty, the very-much-under-pressure temple establishment would have simply aborted the movement by making a brief trip to the sepulchre and parading the body of Jesus around the city. "They did not do this because they knew the tomb was empty. Their official explanation for it—that the disciples had stolen the body—was an admission that the sepulchre was indeed vacant." Both Roman and Jewish sources and traditions acknowledge an empty tomb. The sources range from Josephus Flavius to a compilation of fifth-century Jewish writings called *Toledoth Jeshu*. If a source admits a fact decidedly not in its favour, then that admission becomes strong evidence that the fact is genuine.

The high priests and the Sanhedrin had shown political skill in handling Pilate. It would have required little skill on their part to have handled Christ's followers had they known the location of the body. Instead, the Jewish authorities were reduced to hauling the disciples in from time to time in order to threaten them with death if they did not stop preaching the risen Christ (Acts 5:17-42). There was little else they could do—with the tomb empty, a strong impression on their part that something supernatural had occurred, and a growing number (including priests) embracing the truth of the resurrection.

**Moving the stone.** Frank Morison entitled his compelling account of the evidence, *Who Moved the Stone?* That question must have baffled those who wanted to believe that the disciples had stolen the body. A stone weighing between one-and-a-half to two tons had been removed. Matthew said that a large stone was "rolled ... in front of the entrance to the tomb." The Greek verb "to roll" is *kulio*. In his account of the position of the stone after the Resurrection, Mark had to use a preposition with the verb. In Greek, as in English, to change the direction of a verb or to intensify it, a preposition is added. Mark added the preposition *ana*, which means "up" or "upward."

Mark's word, *anakulio*, can mean "to roll something up a slope or incline." Luke adds to the picture by adding a different preposition, *apo*, which means "a distance from." So the stone was not just moved! It was moved up a slope, for a distance.

John (chapter 20) uses a different Greek verb, *airo*, which means "to pick something up and carry it away." Even had the

soldiers been sleeping, they would have had to have been deaf not to have heard a stone of that size being moved in that way.

**Circumstantial evidence**

**The existence of the Christian church.** How could such a movement be founded on a lie? Why would men described by an enemy of Christianity as being of "pure and austere moral" allow themselves to be beaten, imprisoned, tortured, and executed for a lie? If this were a fraud on the part of such people, why, under pressure of death, did not at least some of them break and recant?

**Changed lives.** Gethsemane's cowards became Pentecost's heroes. This is inexplicable without the Resurrection. Had prestige, wealth, and increased social status accrued to new believers when they professed Christ and His resurrection, their profession would be logically understandable. In fact, however, their "reward" were of a different type, eventually involving lions, crucifixion, and every other conceivable method of stopping them from talking. The revolutionary change in the lives of the early apostles has been replicated millions of times in the two millennia of Christian history.

**The inadequacy of opposing arguments**

Three theories have been advanced to "explain" the Resurrection: the removal theory, the wrong-tomb theory, and the swoon theory. None of them stands up to inquiry. The removal theory suggests that the body of Jesus was removed. If either the Jewish or the Roman authorities had removed and reburied the body of Jesus, all they had to do in the ensuing days and years to quash Christianity was to say, "We gave orders to remove the body," and then to show where His body had been buried or disposed of. That action was not taken.

Did the disciples remove the body? The disciples could neither have taken on the temple guard nor a unit of Roman soldiers, nor could they have removed the stone.

The wrong-tomb theory holds that the women went to the wrong tomb. According to this theory, the women were so distraught that, in the dimness of early morning, they went to the wrong tomb. The seal and the guard, one imagines, would have made the right tomb conspicuous even in the first light of dawn.

Nevertheless, this theory falls because had the women gone to the wrong tomb, the high priests and the other enemies of the faith would rapidly have gone to the right tomb and produced the body.

The swoon theory argues that Jesus swooned and revived in the tomb. This theory teaches that despite the flagellation and blood loss, the spikes in the ankles and the wrists, the hours of exposure on the cross, and the spear in His side, Jesus somehow survived. This theory first appeared 18 centuries after the Resurrection when, apparently, it was possible to believe that a man could survive burial in a damp tomb without food or water or attention of any kind; that He could survive being wrapped in heavy, spiceladen grave-clothes; and that He could then summon up the strength to extricate Himself from the grave-clothes, push away a heavy stone from the mouth of a tomb, overcome the guards—and walk miles on pierced feet to be hailed as Conqueror of Death and Prince of Life.

David Strauss, a noted nineteenth-century critic who did not believe in the Resurrection, rejected this idea. "It is impossible that one who had just come forth from the grave half dead, who crept about weak and ill, who stood in need of medical treatment, of bandaging, strengthening, and tender care, and who at last succumbed to suffering, could ever have given the disciples the impression that he was a conqueror over death and the grave," wrote Strauss.

Richard Swinburne, who recently examined the case for the Resurrection from the scientific, rationalist position, reached the conclusion that "the detailed historical evidence" is "so strong" that, "despite the fact that such a resurrection would have been a violation of natural laws, the balance of probability is in favour of the resurrection." A dispassionate lawyer or historian would have to consider the case proven.

**David Marshall**

**NOTE:** There are discrepancies of detail among the four Gospel accounts. John Wenham reconciled these. Lawyers, however, assert that they are evidence that witnesses had not been in collusion. Those who first presented the resurrection message did so in Jerusalem and within a few hundred yards of the empty tomb. Any of those listening could have made the short trip and ascertained if the tomb was, in fact, empty. Three thousand were converted to the good news of the Resurrection in one day (Acts 2:41); 5,000 on another day (Acts 4:4); and "a large number of priests" (Acts 6:7).

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

# A GRACE WORTHY PRAYING FOR

**N**ot long ago I had the privilege to attend a week of prayer organized by our church, the Seventh Day Adventist. The theme of reflection was the Abundant Grace of God.

I have discovered what grace is and what it isn't. Grace is not something I am to take for granted, but to be cherished and treasured as it is a very precious gift for me.

I tried to define what grace is for me by evaluating each letter carefully.

**G** is for gift. Grace is a gift from God. Through grace I've been saved, not because I deserved it, or did something to earn it, but because God is gracious and abounding in love for His creation; you and me.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

**R** is for repentance. By the power of God's grace I came to repentance. Through the truth of His Word (the Bible) God showed me that I am a sinner and I was walking on the wrong side of the road. His grace

helped me to change and walk on the right track.

"And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:1-5).

**A** is for atonement. Through God's grace, Jesus atoned with His blood for my sins. He shed His blood on the cross on Calvary

"Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation [atonement] for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17).

**C** is for citizenship in God's kingdom. Through God's wonderful grace I have become a citizen in His kingdom.

"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

**E** is for eternal life. Through grace I have eternal life in Christ Jesus.

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

This is grace, God called me to know Him. Through Bible study, prayer and fellowship with my brothers and sisters in Christ, I have learned more about God my Father and Saviour. His will for me is to change and grow spiritually day by day. He loves me and is teaching me how to have a better relationship with Him and those around me.

To God be all glory and praise forever. May God's grace abound in each and every one of us.

**Dora Stagno**

## HERE WE ARE, AND HAPPY

(Continues from first page)

Our wish is that this new accommodation may receive all people looking for a better experience with God, people who wish to receive all God's love and grace, live by faith in the paths of His commandments, and patiently wait for the accomplishment of the final Christian hope that focuses on the soon and glorious return of Jesus, our only Lord and Saviour.

When Jesus greeted for the last time His disciples: He gave them a great and solemn commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to

the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19,20). This is our wish, to help all people of good will to know and live "all" that Jesus commanded to His Church, without adding and without taking away anything. If you wish, come and meet us. We are sure that new horizons of faith and hope will be opened to you. And if you simply wish to come to have friends, or just because you are curious, or if you just wish to give us a testimony of your love, in any case, you are always warmly welcome.

**Pastor G. Leonardi**

### MEETINGS TIME

**Wednesday, 7.30 P.M.**

Family Bible study in private homes. Call for the address of the meeting if you wish to enjoy this friendly opportunity in a family environment.

**Friday, 7.30 P.M.**

Songs and Bible meditation. At present we are studying the life of the Patriarchs and receive - from their lives with God, teaching for our present life.

**Saturday, 9.30 A.M.**

Communitarian Bible study in groups. At present we are studying what God teaches about human relationships.

**Saturday, 11.00 A.M.**

Divine service.

**NEWS FROM THE WORLD**

**ADRA: 20-YEAR ANNI-  
VERSARY CELEBRATED  
AT WORLD CHURCH  
HEADQUARTERS**

Silver Spring, Maryland,  
United States [Tereza  
Byrne/Todd Reese/ANN staff]

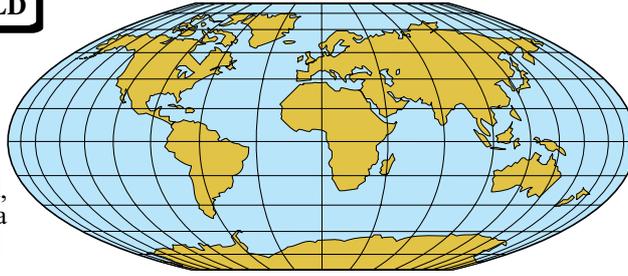
The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) International has just celebrated its 20th anniversary of providing development and relief assistance world-wide.

“Over the past 20 years, ADRA has forever changed the lives of tens of millions of people—both the lives of those directly benefiting from our projects as well as the lives of each staff and volunteer who dedicated moments and years of their lives to further the mission of ADRA,” said Charles Sandefur, president of ADRA International. “As we celebrate this anniversary, we’re grateful to each individual, foundation and government who has partnered with ADRA through financial support, prayer, time, and advocacy.”

ADRA has experienced tremendous growth in the past 20 years. In 1984, it had less than 600 staff members world-wide, operations in 75 countries and provided total aid of US\$24.7 million. ADRA currently has more than 4,000 staff members world-wide, a presence in 120 countries, and has provided development and relief assistance valued at more than \$120 million in 2003, benefiting more than 22 million people.

Among projects aimed at helping those around the world is a new “Give 20” campaign for rural farmers in Myanmar, also known as Burma. In the Nyuang Oo dry zone region of Myanmar, life is hard. The main source of income is Toddy Palm farming. Toddy Palms are tall trees, some as high as 60 feet, and their leaves produce a syrup juice that, when boiled and processed, turns into Jaggery. Jaggery is a form of sugar and is used for baking, eating as candy and other treats.

ADRA introduced an innovative energy-saving cooking stove that enables families to heat four pots of Toddy Palm juice at one time. Just US\$20 provides all the materials necessary for one family to construct and operate an ADRA



energy-saving stove. This is one type of project ADRA has undertaken in many communities around the world.

**SUDAN: DARFUR ADVENT-  
ISTS “IN A DIRE AND DES-  
PERATE SITUATION”**

Darfur, Sudan ... [Alex Elmadjian/Michael Porter/ANN]

Concern is mounting over the increasingly desperate humanitarian crisis in the Darfur region of western Sudan, according to Paul Yithak, secretary for the Adventist Church in Sudan.

In a July 8 e-mail to the church’s regional Middle East headquarters, Yithak expressed his anguish that Adventists from the church in Nyala province “have no access to help.” Around 50,000 people from Nyala have been displaced and moved to Matarik. Nearly 100 Adventists were among the thousands who spent 17 hours aboard slow-moving trains headed for this distant area, making them even less accessible.

The only way of accessing these Adventist believers, whose church building was destroyed by militias in May, is a three- to four-day train journey from Khar-

toum, where the church’s regional office is located, or a three-hour flight. Adventists have lost two churches in this recent conflict.

Recent expressions of international concern over the crisis in Darfur — including visits by United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and United Nations Secretary-General

Kofi Annan — are bearing some fruit: the Darfur region has opened up to international humanitarian agencies and human rights groups, but far more intervention is needed.

With the sketchy information available from the Matarik Refugee Camp, Adventist administration in Sudan have learned that there is only enough food for one month and no medication or clothing is available.

“We had initial plans to use the tents we have for evangelistic meetings, to accommodate our members on the Sabbath day for worship. However the needs are much more severe than having a place of worship.

We have lost contact with our members and it is getting impossible to have direct access to the new camp that was set up. Plus we have no funds to help and assist our members in that region,” says Yithak. The situation in the Darfur region is grim. The Church’s emergency relief agency, ADRA, is hard at work distributing tents, food and medicine and will begin drilling wells in the region shortly.

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**ADVENTIST CENTRE  
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**MISSION STORY**

**SVETLANA FINDS FREEDOM FROM DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION**

**F**or ten miserable years Svetlana was a drug addict. She searched for ways to overcome her addictions, but even medical professionals could not help her. Desperate, Svetlana prayed, "God, if you exist, please help me." God heard her prayers, and she felt the stranglehold of drugs begin to weaken.

Svetlana sought out a church. She hoped to find someone there who would talk with her, pray with her, and help her.

But not even one person talked to her. Disappointed, she left.

Svetlana became discouraged. She gave herself credit for overcoming drugs. But she still searched for peace.

Eventually she turned to alcohol, and she quickly sank into another addiction. When she contracted tuberculosis, she gave up hope and prepared to die.

One day some Adventist neighbours visited her and offered to help her. But she had heard that Adventists were a sect, and she refused their help. For three years she refused their offers of help and prayer. Finally, in desperation she agreed to listen to them and let them pray for her. She went to church with them.

Svetlana was touched when the church members prayed for her by name. After church one woman gave her a Bible and a copy of Steps to Christ. As she read them her life began to change.

When Svetlana went to her next doctor's appointment, the doctor found no trace of tuberculosis. She had been healed.

The emptiness that Svetlana had tried to fill with drugs and alcohol was now filled with the peace of God. Her old life was transformed, and her former friends noticed. "What has happened to you? You are like a different person," they told her.

Recently Svetlana was baptized. Because the nearest Adventist church is some distance from her home, she has opened her home for a small group of believers to meet on Sabbaths. Half of the people who attend the services are drug addicts. These former friends have seen the change in Svetlana and want to receive God's help in their lives as well.

One of her former addict friends has accepted Jesus as Saviour and now is drug free. "I thank God for the Adventists who did not give up on me when I refused their help. Now Jesus is giving me the opportunity to help my friends find a new life also," she testifies.

**QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK**

**When we are in God's kingdom, will we recognize each other?**

Sure, we shall do. There is no reason to doubt it. In Matthew 8:11 Jesus says: "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." It is then evident that we will know who the patriarchs are, as we will know each other and our Saviour Jesus.

Some problems come from a misinterpretation of Isaiah 65:17 where it is said that in the "new heaven and new earth" that God is going to create, "the former shall not be remembered or come to mind." But it is evident that what the text means is not that our memory will be deleted. If this were the case, we wouldn't even know that we have been saved by Jesus. Without our memories, we wouldn't be any longer ourselves for we are our memories. The text simply means that in the new world that God will give us, the past sad experiences caused by sin, will not effect our hearts any longer. We will know, but we will not suffer because of them: God will comfort us and "wipe away every tear" from our eyes (Rev. 21:4).



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 Leonard 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° 33)**

**Mr./Mrs./Miss** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Postcode:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Tel. (optional):** \_\_\_\_\_

**TELL US WHAT YOU THINK**

Why not tell us what you think about the articles you read in *Il-Lehen tat-Tama*? Many find them very inspiring and/or challenging. If you wish, tell us your opinion, whatever it may be, either positive or negative. Your opinion may help us correct ours, or maybe clarify it better. If you like we keep your opinion private, just tell us, and we will respect your wish. May God bless you in your search for truth and fidelity.

**CHRISTIAN MEDITATION**

**UNDER THE SPELL OF THE CROSS**

Say thank you for the cross. If we had it in our power to create new worlds of beauty, hills and valleys of a thousand hues, if we gained the greatest riches from all corners of the world, if we wrote the sweetest sounds of music that would echo throughout the world, or could pen the brightest and most ingenious words that would turn the world around the course of history, yet there would be nothing we could give to thank the Lord, our loving Savior, for the Cross.

The four Gospels tell us how Jesus died on the cross for our sins. The religious leaders did not want to accept Him as the Messiah. They were jealous of Him and wanted to kill Him. They accused Him before the governor and hired witnesses to tell lies about Him at his trial.

Pilate, the Roman governor, knew that Jesus was not guilty, but gave in to the demands of the religious leaders and the mob they had gathered. They called for His death, and Pilate handed Him to be crucified as if He were a criminal.

Some ask: "Why did Jesus have to die to save us?" He had to die so that we might live, for Jesus took our place and paid for our sins so that we might be forgiven. Sin is very serious, it causes suffering and death. We all have sinned and God couldn't just forgive us and let us continue to live in it, as if nothing had happened. God had to find a way to manifest at the same time, both the gravity of sin, and His saving love. Jesus was the solution. Sin requested a sacrifice and God's mercy provided it in the person of His Son.

When we understand why Jesus died, we no longer accuse the Jews or the Romans. We are all involved in the passion. Our sins — yours and mine — nailed Jesus on the cross.

Jesus gave His life willingly. Though wicked men gathered against Him, they had no power to kill Him. He could have called on His Father to judge them, but He did not. He freely chose to do His mission. On that fateful day, His enemies led him out to the place called Golgotha. They nailed Him to a cross and lifted Him up for all to see.

Between two thieves He died, the Lamb of God, the sacrifice for our sins.

Some time ago, I saw in Valletta a writing about the cross, that I wish to share with you. It says:

"The Cross.  
 One board nailed across another. For more than 2000 years, people have followed this sign.  
 In the middle of the cross is the heart of the man who died upon it.  
 A peasant who established a kingdom.  
 A carpenter who built a Church for all time.  
 A sentenced criminal whose death won eternal life.  
 The Cross is a sign of contradiction;  
 We gain our soul by losing it.  
 Our weakness is our strength.  
 The last shall be the first.  
 Our enemies deserve our love.  
 The greatest deed is to care for the least of humanity.  
 At the juncture of two planks, all truth can be found:  
 The crux of life and death.  
 Let us make the way of the cross our way of life".

**Rosalie Chetcuti**

**THE APOSTLE PAUL AND THE CROSS**

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

"For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2)

"God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Galatians 6:14)

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2:20).

"For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." (Colossians 1:19,20)



Sunset at Laferla Cross. The cross reminds us of God's love and justice. Jesus, dying on it, changed its meaning from a sign of shame to a sign of hope.

TESTIMONY

# MY DISCOVERY OF GOD

From my fathers' faith to my personal relationship with Jesus

In 1955 my parents emigrated to Australia in search of a better life and education for the whole family. I was five years old in those days and about to enter school for the first time in what seemed to be an alien world, for I also had to learn a new language. On my first day at school, I remember being welcomed by a catholic nun. She was very loveable and caring knowing also that I was an immigrant in that big country: she understood my feelings of helplessness and fright.

### Looking at my inherited religion with the eyes of a child

Mum did her best to make my school uniform which I had to keep clean at all times. The first thing I learned at school was how to pray to Mary, the mother of God. This was not a new teaching to me for dad would say the rosary every evening with the whole family present gathered together around him. It took a few years for me to realize that I was attending a Roman Catholic school, and that my parents were members of the Catholic religion. I learned that my God was an unseen God that I had to worship, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, but Mary was the most influential unseen personage in our family life, and little did we know about the teachings of Jesus.

When I was about six, I was taught that God and Mary along with some other people lived in heaven somewhere in the sky. I was taught that's where I will go when I die—if I was good. I guess it was at school when I was first taught about sin, and if I sinned I would go to hell and burn for the rest of my after life. I couldn't imagine myself burning forever so I tried to be good. Unfortunately, I realized later that trying to be good was hard work, for the things I shouldn't have done, that I did. Nevertheless, I was told, there was nothing to worry for Mary would see to it that I wouldn't go to hell.

When I was seven I was being prepared for my first Holy Communion. I don't remember much of the details but I do remember, as I was told, that from now on I would have to confess my sins to the priest and that to me was very embarrassing; because I didn't quite understand what sins to confess, or maybe it was the simple fact of telling the priest what I did wrong. But I had to keep the catholic tradition because my parents and family generations before them kept the same tradition.

At Communion I was told that I would have to take part in eating the body of Christ: this was hard to understand for I didn't even know Him, let alone eating His body. I was taught not to bite the body of Christ (Eucharist) but just swallow it. However it always got stuck to the roof of my mouth and I would rustle with my tongue to peel it off. I often wondered why I was eating Christ's body in the first place, at that age it just didn't make any sense. "Why should I eat this man's body, and why is he living inside me?" Questions which I never understood and never had the chance to truly study them. Anyway, how could I understand if I was only seven years old? I only did what I was told!

After confession the priest would give me what was called penance. It consisted of either saying some Hail Mary's or some other prayer. It depended on how bad the sins were, but, by doing this, I was assured that my sins were removed. Everything was getting complicated and I didn't quite understand what this religion was all about and how it was going to effect my life.

### Exploring the world around me

My life as a child was very ordinary, like other children I played with friends and had plenty of energy to explore the wonderful world around me. Dad was a scout master in the area where we lived and often, every time he could, he would take us on field trips and camping with his scout group in the forest. The bush was a fascinating sight in its abundance of wild life and wild flowers amongst the tall trees. Never had I seen so much beauty around me, yet little did I know then that someone created it all for people to enjoy and to marvel. The beauty of nature that God had made wasn't yet saying anything to me about His power and love. Ever since those days I have always enjoyed the outdoor

life. Man and nature were always meant for each other. Like Adam in Eden we need to go back to our natural roots, we need to go back to God and His way of living, obeying His commandments and trusting in Him, living in harmony with His creation.

### Christian tradition?

My parents made sure that all the family went to confession on a Saturday and to church every Sunday. We would also keep all the religious festivals during the year, the best, of course, being Christmas, mainly because I knew that a present was waiting for me no matter how upset I made mum and dad. I didn't believe in Santa Claus for he never brought me the things I wished for. Anyway I knew that mum or my elder sisters would buy the presents, for sometimes I would watch them wrap them up and put them under the Christmas tree. But even as a child I would wonder and reason why I had to go to church. I was taught that the church was a building, and that it was God's house, but, to me, Holy Mass was a meaningless ritual. I felt no reason for attending the assembly even because the Mass was said in Latin and the only thing I understood was *dominus babis-cus*, which was some sort of a blessing and a relief that Mass had ended.

There were times when some of my friends and I would pretend going to the toilet to skip Mass. Each would go at intervals, and we would run to the church play grounds passing the time, and going back just before Mass ended. To be quite honest I never understood the meaning of Holy Mass - or why we were celebrating it at all.



The author - at the centre - with his brothers and dad, at the beginning of his story.

One thing I did observe during Holy Mass was the fact that the priest would read from a large book with his hands parted as though he was reading a magical book. I never took any notice of what was written in that book the priest was always bowing to. As I said, it was all Latin and only the priest could read from it, so I understood that the book was holy and we couldn't touch it. The only thing I knew was that I had to worship little baby Jesus, His mother Mary, the Pope and some other saints like Don Bosco, Saint Francis or Saint Martin.

I tried hard to understand the meaning of my faith but it was of no avail. I remember that once, some of my non catholic friends invited me to Sunday school. It was here that I learned some Bible stories but I still did not know what this Bible was. I attended a few times until dad found out and he warned me not to attend those meetings again. "They are not like us Catholics," he said. I didn't understand that they were Protestants and that they didn't worship the Madonna as we did, but they still worshipped the same God as us.

**Religious instruction**

When I was about eight, my parents decided to send me to catechism to better know the Roman Catholic faith. I would be given a small booklet each lesson to help me in these studies and I had again to recite a prayer to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph or some other saint. It was at this time that I was encouraged by my religious teachers to start attending Mass every morning and I was given a small pocket alarm clock to help me wake up. The nearest church was two miles away and I had to walk on those cold mornings. At church I would pray to the Madonna for she was my religious star, and only she could help me sort out my life to know my faith. I would light candles in front of her image and, looking at her en-

chanting face, I would kneel and say a prayer to her that if I should die I would not go to hell. This was my greatest fear for I was taught that I would burn in hell fire for all eternity if I died with mortal sin, even if I had no idea of what it was, at that age. I was also taught that the Madonna would save me from hell fire, for our school mother superior told me that if I attended mass every first Friday of the month for seven months I would be given a cloth neck charm with the image of the Madonna—this would insure me that if I died in sin I would not go to hell.

There were times when I learned more about the Devil and hell fire than I did about the true God. Focusing on hell rather than the true love of God didn't make my Christian teaching any meaningful, neither did it better my relationship with God. Instead it raised my fear of a hell fire which sometimes haunted me and I would have bad dreams and not talk about them to anyone. But tradition must be kept and I tried so hard to be a good catholic boy. Nevertheless, even at this age, I understood that being perfect is totally impossible.

Looking back at those days, I would have to say that nobody explained to me what sin was, so I had to figure it out for myself. Not knowing what repentance meant and what to repent of, to me my faith was a teaching of fear and punishment and not a true teaching of love, God's love for me. When I reached grade four, I was transferred to a State school for dad couldn't afford to keep us in a catholic school. There I realized that not every one was of the Roman Catholic faith but I didn't take any notice, then. In State school we would have religious instructions about twice a week but still we attended Mass with the family every Sunday, and confession every Saturday. At home dad would continue to say the rosary every evening with the whole family. I remember we had a statue of

Saint Paul whom dad loved very much—today I can understand why for Paul's writings are full of truth and love about Jesus and the gospel, but sadly to say these same writings are so misunderstood today as they were in ages past.

I remember the first time I ever saw a circus—there were so many different animals which I had never seen or dreamed about before. "Wow!" I remarked to my brother, "what are they?" as I stared in amazement. And again I had no idea that it was God Who created these beautiful animals, and that it's up to us to look after them.

There were times when I got into mischief. A bruise or getting my clothes dirty would start to worry me: "How am I going to explain it all to mum when I get back home!" At first glance mum didn't have to speak for I could read her face: "What happened this time? Just look at yourself!" "Well mum, it's like this," I would start apologizing, and I would either blame my brothers or someone else which seemed to be the easiest way of getting out of trouble, and escape dad's disciplinary belt. But when I knew that I couldn't escape the punishment, then I tried placing a magazine or some clothing in my pants so as not to feel the stinging sensation of discipline the hard way.

I always liked to explore things and places. Sometimes I would stray away from our home but only to return under the watchful eyes of my elder sisters. In a way they were my guardian angels protecting me from trouble, mischief, and danger. Now, looking back at those days I know how loving and caring my family was, and it was they who formed me into the man I am today, and I thank God for that.

**Anthony Stagno**

[To be continued]

**A PASTORAL PRAYER**

**My dear heavenly Father,**

**Give my brothers and sisters, whom I serve in Your name, certainty of your love so that they may rejoice in You and be strong in their faith and faithful.**

**Give me wisdom and strength to help them in their daily life, in their joys and sorrows, in their success and discouragement.**

**Give me souls with whom I can share your love and grace, and lead them to the foot of the cross, so that they too may be saved.**

**While we walk in the ways of this world, help us to always discern the narrow path that leads to your kingdom, so that we may never miss the right way and meet you safely at Home.**

**(Pastor Giovanni Leonardi)**

GOD TEACHES

# JESUS IS COMING AGAIN

When we say that Jesus came on earth and died to save man, we cannot forget the fact that suffering and death are still a reality. With His death, Jesus gave us the forgiveness of our sins, transformed us into sons of God, and gave us the certainty of salvation. Nevertheless, salvation is now something we experience in a spiritual sense, for we are still waiting for a salvation fully accomplished in all creation and for all eternity. It will be accomplished when Jesus comes again to restore everything to its best according to God's proposal and love.

Let's discover what the Holy Scriptures say about:

## 1) How can we know that Jesus is coming again?

Jesus Himself promised so: "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:30)

The angels at Jesus' ascension renewed the promise: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This

same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11)

Saint Paul was waiting for this extraordinary event: "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing." (2 Timothy 4:8).

Saint James shared the same hope: "Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord.." (James 5:7)

Saint Peter admonished Christians not to renounce their faith in Jesus' return: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

The first Christians greeted each other with "Maranatha" which means "The Lord is coming" (1 Corinthians 16:22).

In the Lord's prayer Jesus prays: "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10).

The last promise in the Bible is about Jesus' return: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20). Wouldn't it be good if you too, dear reader, might join the apostle John, by repeating with him: "Yes, come Lord Jesus"?

## 2) After the Apostles died, did Christians abandon this hope?

Certainly not. The ancient apostolic creed says: "He will come again to judge the living and the dead."

## 3) How does the apostle Paul define Jesus' return?

He says: that it is the "blessed hope", that is, a hope that gives joy, peace, assurance. (Titus 2:13)

## 4) Why is Jesus coming again?

To take us with him: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:1-3)

To transform this world corrupted by sin: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:13)

## 5) How will He return?

Unexpectedly, as a robber. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2 Peter 3:10). "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matthew 24:44).

Visibly. Nobody needs to inform us about it for we will see it directly: "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; nor 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:23-27)

## 6) Some believers hold on to the idea that Jesus' return has already happened in the past but in a spiritual form, visible only to the eyes of faith of the true believers. How can we know instead that Jesus' return is visible to all people?

If white means white and black black, and if the Scripture is read, not to accommodate it to our prejudices, but to receive what it plainly says, then there will be no doubt. Just to make an example, about the people that will assist to His return, Jesus said: "... all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:30). Jesus is not talking of the believers here, for He mentions "all" the nations of the earth, most of which do not believe at all, and this is why they "mourn". And nevertheless, these unbelievers, who have no eyes of faith, "will see the Son of Man coming from heaven", for this coming is a literal, physical one and not a simple spiritual or symbolic experience. See also Luke 21:26,27 where the people who see Jesus coming are, again,



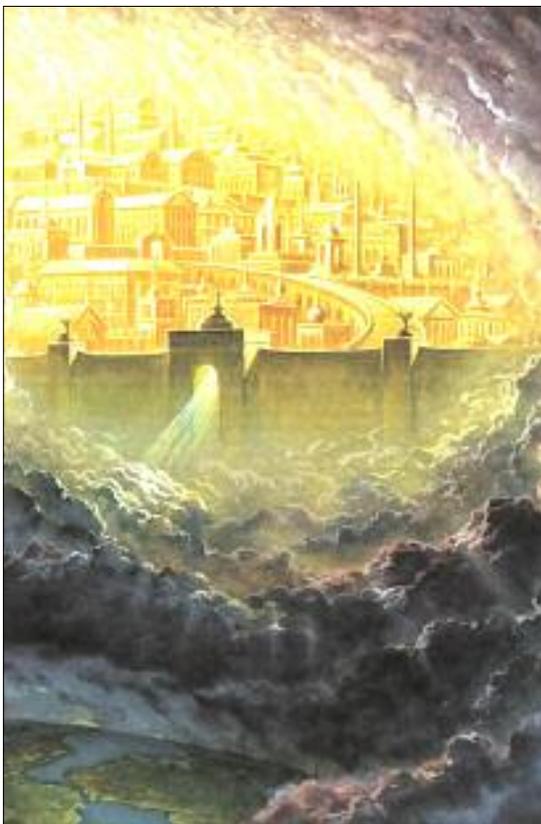
"They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." (Matthew 24:30)

“all the nations” and Revelation 1:7 where it is said that even those who crucified Jesus will see Him coming.

**7) How will people react when Jesus comes?**

1. Sinners will be scared: “The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, And the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; The LORD alone will be exalted in that day, But the idols He shall utterly abolish. They shall go into the holes of the rocks, And into the caves of the earth, From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily. In that day a man will cast away his idols of silver And his idols of gold, Which they made, each for himself to worship, To the moles and bats, To go into the clefts of the rocks, And into the crags of the rugged rocks, From the terror of the LORD And the glory of His majesty, When He arises to shake the earth mightily (Isaiah 2:17-21; see also Revelation 6:15-17).

2. The faithful will rejoice: “And it will be said in that day: ‘Behold, this is our God; We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the LORD; We have waited for Him; We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.’” (Isaiah 25:9)



”Then I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Revelation 21:2)

**8) What will be the destiny of men that day?**

They will receive a different destiny:

1. Sinners are annihilated: “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.” (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

2. The believers will go to heaven with Jesus: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

**9) Which will be the final home of the saved?**

As extraordinary and surprising as it may be, the Bible says that, at the end of salvation history, God’s people and God Himself will come to this renewed planet of ours and enjoy life on it: “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then 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.’” (Revelation 21:1-4).

**10) Conclusion**

Jesus’ return in glory is one of the most important teachings of the Holy Scriptures. We do not know with what feelings you have read this Bible study, but if you love Jesus as we do, and if you are waiting to enjoy the fullness of His everlasting

kingdom, then, we are sure you have enjoyed it. The Scripture has much more to tell you about this subject and about many more others. May God bless you as you search for an always better knowledge of the Gospel. If we can help in your search, it will be a joy for us.

**A VISION OF JESUS’ RETURN**

Soon there appears in the east a small black cloud, about half the size of a man’s hand. It is the cloud which surrounds the Saviour, and which seems in the distance to be shrouded in darkness. The people of God know this to be the sign of the Son of man. In solemn silence they gaze upon it as it draws nearer the earth, becoming lighter and more glorious, until it is a great white cloud, its base a glory like consuming fire, and above it the rainbow of the covenant. Jesus rides forth as a mighty conqueror. Not now a “man of sorrows,” to drink the bitter cup of shame and woe, he comes, victor in Heaven and earth, to judge the living and the dead. “Faithful and True,” “in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” And “the armies in Heaven follow him.” (REV. 19:11, 14.) With anthems of celestial melody the holy angels, a vast, unnumbered throng, attend him on his way. The firmament seems filled with radiant forms,-- “ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.” No human pen can portray the scene, nor mortal mind is adequate to conceive its splendor. “His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light.” (Hab. 3:3, 4.) As the living cloud comes still nearer, every eye beholds the Prince of life. No crown of thorns now mars that sacred head, but a diadem of glory rests on his holy brow. His countenance outshines the dazzling brightness of the noonday sun. “And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords.” (Rev. 19:16.). (From Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*).

CHRISTIAN HEALTH

DO ADDICTIVE FOODS EXIST ?

“Do drug-foods exist? It seems they really do. New Scientist, the authoritative American scientific magazine, reports the risk of a real dependence on fatty and unnatural tasty foods, both sweet and salty. They challenge our ability to resist their temptation.”

rothoine and noradrenaline, substances that give a feeling of calm and pleasure.

This explains the success of the so called drug-foods like those offered by the fast-foods, often full of ‘empty’ calories - that is, without those important nutritional

such as meat, cheese, and sugar. These foods contain substances that, according to some studies, would cause addiction, just like cigarettes. Neal Barnard, professor of medicine at the George Washington University, explains that it isn’t simply a matter of gluttony or weakness. It is the biochemistry that requires the daily “dose” of meat, cheese or sweets. Why? Because these foods would force the brain to release substances that ask for more. Cheese, for instance, contains casein, a protein that, during the digestion, produces caseous-morphines, substances that are similar to morphine. This is why researches say that we should not abuse foods that give dependence. Instead we advise to use the “true” Mediterranean diet, now unfortunately forgotten, that includes raw carbohydrates. The reasons are explained by Walter Willet, dean of the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard Faculty of Hygiene. He encourages a drastic reduction of sweets and saturated fats of animal origin, and an increase in vegetables, fruit, olive oil, nuts, and legumes.”



Seventh-day Adventists let everybody free to eat or not meat, but they encourage a vegetarian diet as the best for us, both physically and spiritually.

The above news was published by the Seventh-day Adventist health magazine Vita & Salute in the issue of September 2003, in the article “Mangiare con la testa”. Here is a larger quotation: “Recent research confirms that just the ‘sinful’ foods are those that is more difficult to resist to. It was already known that, in obese people, the leptin, a hormone that regulates the appetite by sending a stop message when we have eaten enough, doesn’t work properly. More recent studies seem to prove that just a few fat meals are able to harass the system: ‘We have seen that if we nourish with a fatty diet some mice already genetically predisposed to a weight increase, they start over eating without any self controll,’ says Luciano Rossetti of the Albert Einstein college of New York. Similar experiments made on humans show that, with the same amount of calories, a meal rich in fat helps to feel full less than a meal made mainly of carbohydrates. Other researchers have discovered that a diet rich in sugar causes - in rats - a true addiction. ‘In the long term, very caloric foods affect the cerebral neurochemistry that is not so different from that caused by drugs,’ says Ann Kelley of the University of Wisconsin. Yet a controversial thesis, even if we know that glucose helps the activation of the dopaminergic system - the same system affected by the use of drugs - producing se-

elements that must go hand in hand with the caloric contribution - disguised with a pleasant aspect. ‘These foods have a sharp taste, sweet or salty, easy to remember, so to encourage the consumer. Exalted with integrators of sapidity or with syrups of glucose or fructose that emphasize their sweet taste in an unhealthy way’, explains the nutritionist Oliviero Sculati.”

Recently, the problem has been represented by the monthly magazine Focus - February 2004 - that added more information and confirmed what Vita & Salute had already anticipated: “The World Health Organization has given the alarm: it is in progress an epidemic of obesity and diabetes. It seems that they have discovered that the difficulty some people have in losing weight is caused by eating foods

But it is even more surprising knowing that these news have already been anticipated about a century ago by Mrs. Ellen G. White. She wrote: “When the use of flesh food is discontinued, there is often a sense of weakness, a lack of vigor. Many urge this as evidence that flesh food is essential; but it is because foods of this class are stimulating, because they fever the blood and excite the nerves, that they are so missed. Some will find it as difficult to leave off flesh eating as it is for the drunkard to give up his dram; but they will be the better for the change. When flesh food is discarded, its place should be supplied with a variety of grains, nuts, vegetables, and fruits that will be both nourishing and appetizing.” (Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 316. Published in 1905.)



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