

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

KIND OPPOSITION YES INDIFFERENCE NEVER

We live in a world of indifference. We are addicted to emotions and ideas. We are so continuously exposed to strong emotions that we are losing our ability to feel emotions ourselves. We can eat while on the TV screen scenes of human tragedies pass by without feeling any embarrassment. Every day, we receive so much information that we do not give it any value. We are informed about so many ideas but we just listen and forget. We are full and we want no more. If we had to give attention to all the messages we receive, we would stop living. Forced by this situation we build an armour of indifference. So we just hear and pass on.

To attract the attention of people, mass-media must invent all sort of tricks. Everything must be exciting and short, always more exciting and shorter. In a movie, a scene must last just a few seconds. Long talks annoy the average people after a few minutes. Music must have an always harder and faster rhythm to help our young people feel alive.

In such a context, sometimes, we wonder if it is worthy publishing a magazine like *Il-Lehen tat-Tama*. When we consider all the effort and the money we spend to pub-

lish it, we ask ourselves if we couldn't do something better. We know some readers receive it with joy but we do not know about the majority.

We are aware of the modesty of our magazine, but we know that even if we share it "in earthen vessels" - as the apostle Paul would say - still what we offer is a treasure, for such is the Word of God. But what can we do? In our world full of so many words, even The Word is heard with the same inattention as the others. People are not used to react. Jesus Himself knew the problem: "But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned to you, and you did not lament'" (Matthew 11:16,17). Now it seems much worse. We are Christians after all, we already have all that we need, we know all that is necessary. We do not need anything else, and please do not disturb us by saying that there is something wrong in our Christianity for we cannot be wrong and if we are wrong that is not a problem as long as we do not disturb others.

Describing the situation of Christianity in the last times, the Book of Revelation says that we are like people pleased with ourselves, unable to see their true condition and the remedies that God offers. "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of

nothing' — and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 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." (Revelation 3:15-20)

It is a strong language, but it is the language of God's love and passion for us. God is not indifferent to us. We can't be either. Jesus says that among so many people living in the world, He knows the name of each one of us. He took a stand on behalf of each one of us on the cross, and we should take a stand in front of Him and in front of the truth for Jesus is the truth.

Jesus says that He is knocking at the door of our heart hoping that we open to let Him in. Not taking a decision is already a decision. We have to react to Him and to His Word, and we hope you may also react to what we share with you through the pages of this magazine. Please, do not be indifferent. Say "no" if you think you have good reasons to say so. Do it with kindness and love, but never be indifferent for indifference is not a Christian virtue.

With love,

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

Special issue:

SATURDAY VS SUNDAY

WHICH DAY IS THE LORD'S DAY?

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CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

MY SURRENDER TO JESUS

TESTIMONY OF MRS. DORA STAGNO ON THE DAY OF HER BAPTISM



Mrs. Dora Stagno gives testimony after her baptism, celebrated on the 1st January 2005. A very good way to start a new year making a covenant of love with Jesus.

About 19 years ago I started studying the word of God. I accepted with an open heart the new teachings and became a Christian. I learned many things which I did not know before, about the law, obedience, health laws, tithing and discipline. These all were new things that I wished to grow in knowledge of and cherish.

I learned about healing and God's blessings for those who obey Him. Many

events took place in my life. When I was very sick I felt God's personal intervention. I encountered happy and sad moments in my walk with God, but as Jesus promised us in Matthew 28:20 He was with me all the way.

About six years ago, God brought me to a better experience with Him. He showed me grace and His true love for me. God introduced me to new friends with whom I started intense Bible study

that filled me with great inspiration and excitement to know more and spend more time with God and His people in my new experience. I learned more about love and the true meaning of the word. I learned about the necessity of unity and sharing

among the Christian brothers and sisters, and the importance every brother and sister are given as children of God and as a church.

The importance of doing things together as studying, praying, working, and eating was very fulfilling to me. Through all this I came to know who God really is. I could feel His presence around me and in my life, now I could enjoy the moments we share intimately together. It took me a while to make my decision, but with Jesus on my side, leading me all the way through, I managed to make a stand for Him; this time more meaningful and sure through a better understanding.

I thank the Lord for guiding me here, and for being so patient with me. God doesn't give up on us. What He starts He finishes. I would like to encourage those who have not yet surrendered their life to Jesus to be their personal Saviour, not to delay any longer as Jesus is waiting patiently with open arms to reconcile us all to His beloved Father and become God's sons and daughters, heirs with Christ to everlasting life in His glorious Kingdom.

This is a testimony of my surrender to Jesus and my commitment to Him as my Saviour and to you as my brothers and sisters in Christ to be at His service and yours.

Dora Stagno

WHO TOLD THE EVANGELISTS ABOUT THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF JESUS' BIRTH?

After reading the last Christmas issue of *Il-Lehen tat-Tama*, a dear friend asked: "Who told the Evangelists about the circumstances of Jesus' birth, the annunciation and all the other related events? Can we think of Mary?"

The Gospel says that Mary "kept all these things in her heart" (Luke 2:51). She may have shared what had happened with the disciples after Jesus' resurrection while they were praying in the upper room for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14). This is the only time when Mary is said to have stayed with the Apostles. Before it is excluded and after that she is never mentioned again. There is also another possibility. Mary and Joseph (we should not forget His personal part in the events) could have shared with Jesus Himself the story of His birth and Jesus could have passed it on to the disciples. We must also be aware of the fact that Jesus, since when He was a boy, had a miraculous knowledge of His origin and nature (Luke 2:49). However it may have happened, what is important to know is 1) that even the Evangelists who didn't personally know Jesus, like Luke, wrote their Gospel after having "carefully investigated everything from the beginning" (Luke 1:3 NIV), and 2) that all the writers of the Bible have been led by the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21), so that we may be sure that all that they say is true and profitable for our life and salvation.

TO SMILE SERIOUSLY

A friend of ours was listening to some colleagues working at a ministry in Valletta. Hearing that they were criticizing Muslims he said: "Do not criticize them so much. At least they honour God much more than many of us, who call themselves Christians but dishonour God continuously by blaspheming His name." Their candid answer was: "Oh, that is all natural - blaspheming is forbidden by their religion!"

MY REASONS WHY I DO BELIEVE THAT SATURDAY AND NOT SUNDAY IS THE TRUE DAY OF REST FOR CHRISTIANS

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” (Exodus 20:8-11)

In many places we can read a label inviting people to “**Keep Sunday Holy!**”

Behind this invitation there is the honest and good wish to help our people not to lose the feeling of God’s presence in our life and honour Him. There is a true risk that we forget that life comes from God—a very dangerous risk, for if we forget God, we forget our true identity and the true meaning of our life. The day of rest, if kept as God commanded, is there just to help us put everything and everybody in the right perspective. It helps us know who we are, where we come from and where we are going to.

Nevertheless, despite all the evidence that you may think you possess, the problem is that God never asked His people to keep Sunday which is the first day of the week, but the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week which corresponds to our Saturday.

This may seem totally strange, as it seemed absurd when Galileo started saying that not the sun was going around the earth but the earth around the sun. Nevertheless, despite the common affirmed understanding of his time, Galileo was right, as we are right saying that God commanded His people to keep Saturday and not Sunday.

You may think that even if we were right, the issue wouldn’t have any importance as long as we keep a day, whatever it may be. But this is the problem—If God did really command us to keep a specific day, He must have had a very good reason, and if we change it without His permission, how can we continue to say that we do it in love and obedience for Him? So, please, before you decide anything about this issue, consider what we have to say with an open heart and mind, and pray that God may give you light to understand and obey, or us a heart to understand that we have to change our opinion. Only, please, do not be indifferent for nobody can be indifferent in front of God’s will and still be considered innocent.

The Sabbath issue is not just a matter of days, but of fidelity and love for our God. God gave the seventh day Sabbath at creation, so that humanity might enjoy fellowship with the Creator and celebrate His power and love. Christ kept the Sabbath on the seventh day, which is Saturday, and so did all the first Christians. The Sabbath was abandoned little by little by Christianity, as many other aspects of the revealed faith. Restoring the true day of rest is a sign of our willingness to restore the fullness of God’s teaching. Our aim may seem presumptuous but for us it is just a question of love because Jesus said: “If you love me, you obey my commandments”.

Many believe that as Christians we are no longer supposed to keep the Sabbath rest on the seventh day of the week. Some think there is no longer any day to be kept, and Sunday is kept only as a custom, not as a law. Others, instead, believe that Sunday must be considered the new day of rest commanded by God. We do not judge anybody’s conscience, but it is our Christian duty and privilege to invite all our brothers and sisters, to consider this issue on a Biblical basis, to really see what God teaches. As the Apostle Paul says: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). If what we say can be proved wrong with the Bible, we will be happy to renounce it. But if what we say is true, please consider it as your privilege to love and receive it.

A SHORT HISTORY

Believing that the seventh day Sabbath must continue to be a holy day even for Christians, is not a strange idea created by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some Christians all along church history have observed the Sabbath. Here we can propose only some few examples. We know from the ancient Christian writer Epiphanius that the Christians who fled from Jerusalem, and who were known as the Nazarenes, continued to observe the Sabbath till the time of his own life (c.

314-403). In the Roman province of Asia (the modern Turkey) there were Christians who observed the Sabbath till the fourth century. The canon 29 of the synod of Laodicea (c. 364) admonished Christians “to not judaize by resting on the Sabbath,” which means that there were still Sabbath-keeping Christians even if others were criticizing them. Sozomen (c. 400-447) says that “The People of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria.” Where did this Sabbath observance come from if not from the ancient Christian custom? The last document quoted tells us that in Orient, before becoming the only day of religious observance, Sunday was first observed together with the Sabbath. Only after some time Sunday became the only day to be observed. As we know from many ancient sources, Rome was the centre of this change. As we can see in the preceding quotation, Rome had abandoned the Sabbath, together with Alexandria in Egypt, a long time before.

The Protestant Reformation, with its call to the Bible, helped some people to learn about the Sabbath. Luther himself thought that “Since our Lord has come, we have the liberty, if Sabbath or Sunday does not please us, to make Monday or another day of the week and make a Sunday out of it.” But some of Luther’s partners, as Andreas Carlstedt, started thinking in a different way, asking if it was really possible to observe the Sabbath on Sunday. Among the Anabaptists some were Sabbatarian. The Seventh-day Baptists seem to be the first group of English Puritans who observed the Sabbath. When they fled to America, they took their faith with them and one of them, Mrs. Rachel Oaken, shared it with some Adventists who, since that moment, became the largest group observing the Sabbath in our world. But since our faith must be based on the the Word of God and not on church history or on human tradition, let’s go to the Bible to see what God says.

REASONS DRAWN FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

1) *The Sabbath is the eternal memorial of creation.*

The Bible story of creation says that “on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation” (Genesis 2:2,3). This text makes it clear that the Sabbath was established by God at creation, when just Adam and Eve, the foreparents of all humanity, existed. The fact that God blessed the seventh-day Sabbath points to two facts: 1) God wishes to give this day a special position in the frame of all creation; 2) since the day itself doesn't need any blessing, it is evident that God's blessing is put in the seventh-day for human beings called to keep it. The fact that the seventh-day is “hallowed” or “sanctified” means that it must be set apart for a holy purpose, to get in touch with God and worship Him. God instituted the Sabbath for all humanity as a memorial of His creation, that men could never forget that they come from God and live by His grace. This value of the Sabbath cannot be limited to any specific time or people, but is valid for everybody at all times. It is especially important in our modern age, when humanity, because of atheism and evolution, is more and more forgetting God, especially as our Creator.

2) *The Sabbath is eternal because it is part of the eternal Law of Eden.*

Many Christians think that in the Bible there is only one law: that given by God to Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai. The main element of this law was the Decalogue which includes the commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. In reality there was another fundamental law given by God just after the creation, while man still lived in Eden.

What is the difference between these two laws? At Sinai, the law had to face the already existing sin and weakness of man. Instead, the Eden law expressed the perfect, uncontaminated, and eternal will of God for then, “everything was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Jesus clarified this issue when He invited the Pharisees to consider God's will about marriage and divorce. He said that God, through the law given at Sinai, allowed people to divorce, not because it was good, but because people's hearts were hardened and unable to do the best. But, He added, “from the beginning [when in Eden God created man and woman to be just one being] it was not

so.” Jesus' conclusion was that, because of this Edenic law, “anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery” (Matthew 19:4-9).

By His teaching, Jesus gave us a principle: if we wish to know the perfect will of God and live by it, we have to look beyond the Sinaitic law, which may have some limits, and go back to the perfect and still abiding law of God in Eden. In Eden two divine institutions are mentioned: marriage and the Sabbath: both of them must be valid for Christians. It is not by chance that in the story of creation, while everything made by God is good, only two things are explicitly blessed by God: marriage and the seventh-day Sabbath (Gen. 1:28; 2:3). They are the only two institutions created by God at creation, and both of them are binding for Christians.

3) *The Sabbath is eternal because it is part of the fundamental and moral law of the Ten Commandments.*

The Law God gave His people at Sinai is a very complex one. In it, we can find moral, sanitary, religious, civil, agricultural, and many other kind of laws. We cannot understand and judge all these laws as if they were just one. Some of them had a transitory value because they were connected to a specific economical or social context, while others have an eternal and universal value. As we have seen, some were limited by the hardness of the human heart. All Christians agree that the Ten Commandments constitute the fundamental part of all the Law. They are like the Constitution of a Country in front of the other particular laws. The moral and spiritual content of these commandments are of great value. The special meaning of the Ten Commandments in front of the other laws is shown at least by three facts:

1) While the other laws were written through Moses (Deuteronomy 31:24), the Ten Commandments were written, twice, directly by God's hand (Exodus 32:15,16; 34:1).

2) While the other laws were kept beside the ark (Deuteronomy 31:26), the Ten Commandments were kept inside the ark (Exodus 25:16; Deuteronomy 10:21).

3) Only the Ten Commandments are called “the covenant”, not the others (Exodus 25:16). It is because of this, that the ark, which contained the Ten Commandments, is called the Ark of the Covenant.

No one can say that as Christians we can disobey the commandments about murdering, committing adultery, saying lies, honouring our parents, or worshipping other gods. Even those Christians who say that the Old Testament law has been abolished by Jesus [which is not true as we soon will see], in practise abolish only the commandment about the day of rest. This is very inconsistent: since the Sabbath is part of a unique law, the Decalogue, if this law as such is abolished, then all the ten commandments should be abolished, even that on divorce or theft, not only the Sabbath. But if instead we have to continue to observe the other nine, why should we not observe also that about the Sabbath?

4) *God honoured the Sabbath day with a double miracle lasting forty years.*

This miracle started after Israel had been liberated from Egypt, while they were journeying to Mount Sinai. It is the miracle of the manna and we can read the story in Exodus 16:13-35. Everyday, everybody had to collect only the manna they needed for that day. If they collected more, to keep it for the following day, the manna would “breed worms and become foul” (v. 20). Nevertheless, on Friday, the people spontaneously collected twice the normal daily amount to use it on Saturday. When the leaders saw that, they went to denounce this fact to Moses, he said: “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.’ So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none’” (vv. 23-26). The first miracle is that of the manna coming down every day except on the Sabbath day. The second miracle is that the manna collected on Friday did not breed worms and could be kept for the following day. So for forty years God made these two miracles to teach His people how important the Sabbath was.

We can also consider another important element in this story. The people knew that on the Sabbath no manna would fall and they collected on Friday what was necessary for the Sabbath too. They did so without being afraid the manna could get wasted. How could they know that no manna would fall on the following day? They had not been informed about that before, otherwise their leaders would had too. The only explanation is that they knew because of the story of creation

revealed by God to their forefathers. This fact strongly supports what we have already seen about the Sabbath in Eden.

5) *The commandment about the Sabbath, is the only one that explicitly asks to remember it.*

When a parent gives his child some commands, to emphasize them or a special one among them, he adds "... and do not forget ...!" The same happens with the commandment about the seventh day. This commandment is not just the longest one in the Decalogue, but also the only one starting with: "**Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy**" (Exodus 20:8-11). It is as if God knew (and He really knew, did He not?) that the Sabbath would have been the most neglected among the Ten Commandments. As usual, God is right, and we are wrong if we forget to keep the Sabbath as and when God commanded us to. What will you do? Will you decide to remember or will you ignore what God commanded?

6) *The Sabbath was intended to be a sign of grace and fidelity for all people and not only for Israel.*

We have already seen that the Sabbath is connected with creation and humankind. It existed before any specific nation existed, even before Israel. When God called Israel to be His people, He gave them the commandment of the Sabbath not because they were the only ones who were called to observe it, but because they accepted to enter into a covenant with the Lord while other peoples had abandoned Him. So all peoples or individuals that would accept to enter into a covenant with God, as Israel did, would have called to observe the same day of rest. Israel was called to be God's people, not because God loved only them, but because through Israel the knowledge of God could be extended to all other nations. This is what God told Abraham, the forefather of Israel: "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Nations had to know and admire the law God gave to Israel. God hoped that, through the example of Israel, they would wish to have the same for themselves. This is why Moses told them: "See, just as the LORD my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!'" (Deuteronomy 4:4-7). And through Isaiah God says of Israel: "See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know,

and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you" (Isaiah 55:1-5). The prophet Isaiah states explicitly that the foreigners were called to enter into the covenant with Yahweh and to observe the Sabbath: "And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant..." (Isaiah 56:6). Among these foreigners are we, you and me, if you wish to serve the Lord.

7) *The prophets of the Old Testament, inspired by God, taught that the Sabbath would continue to be observed in the messianic era.*

You might say: "Yes pastor Leonardi, the Bible really says what you say, but it was true before the coming of Jesus, not after!" My answer is that the truth is totally different and that the prophets were talking just about our Christian age. Read again Isaiah 56:6 in its context. It is part of a larger talk in which Jesus' coming, death and resurrection is prophesied (Isaiah 53). In Chapter 55 everybody is invited to receive the free grace of God, and in chapter 56, the one where we read about the Sabbath, God's grace is clearly offered also to the foreigners. If, as Christians, we take for us Isaiah's preaching about God's grace coming through the Messiah, why should we renounce his invitation to keep the Sabbath?

On his part, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied that "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." (Jer. 31:31). All Christians accept that this "new covenant" is nothing else than the New Covenant made by Jesus through His blood (Luke 22:20). What does God say about this covenant? "It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jeremiah 31:32,33. Cf. Ezekiel 11:19,20). As you see, God says that, in the New Christian Covenant, His law, the same law given to Israel, the law that Israel disobeyed, this law which included the commandment about the Sabbath will be in the heart of His people, the Christians. Isaiah 66:22-24 is very important: "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the LORD; so shall your descendants and your name remain. From

new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the LORD." So, if also in the new earth the Sabbath will be kept by God's people, how can we say that the Sabbath is no longer valid now?

8) *God did not ask His people to observe one day every week, but the seventh day.*

Many Christians believe that as long as we keep a day every week, whatever it may be, it is good for God. But this is not what God asked. He didn't ask us to keep a day every week but the seventh-day. Changing the day that God establishes would place us on the same level of the original sin. In Eden, God asked Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which means that they had not to decide on themselves what was good or evil, but let this decision to God. Imagine they decided to eat from the forbidden tree of knowledge and abstain from another one. Could we consider them to be observers of God's command? Surely not. They were not asked to abstain from a tree of their choice in the garden, but only from that specific tree chosen by God. Similarly, we cannot choose ourselves our day of rest, but we have to keep only the day chosen by God, because only that day can accomplish its function as a sign of creation, of God's fatherhood, as God intended.

The Sabbath is a symbol, but as such it has a very great value. If we alter the symbol the meaning may totally change. We are used to wear our nuptial ring on the left hand annular. It is a sign of our covenant with our partner, of our fidelity and love. But, at least in Italy, if you move it from the left to the right hand annular, the meaning totally changes. It means that your partner has died and that you are free to choose another one if you wish. The day of rest keeps its value of fidelity and love for God, if we keep it on the day God has established. If we change the day, it may mean that we have decided to follow another "lord" and "father". I keep the Sabbath because I wish to be faithful to my only Lord and Father, and nobody and nothing else can change the signs of love that He gave me.

9) *The prophetic book of Daniel says that an illegal power will change the times of the law, not God Himself.*

Through the prophet Daniel, God told His people that one day, somebody would try to change the times established by God. But this personage, wouldn't act on God's behalf. Instead he would have been an enemy: "He will speak words against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the times and the laws" (Daniel 7:25 NIV). Which "times", and which "law" will this awful power try to change

if not those established by God Himself? So yes, the times established by God, and the seventh-day Sabbath is the most important of them, must be changed, but against God's will. Will we stand by the side of God Who gives us His law or by the side of His enemy who tries to change it?

10) The Sabbath, even in the Old Testament is a sign of grace.

Many Christian brothers, mainly in Protestant Churches, believe that keeping the seventh day Sabbath means to go "under the law", which means pretending to be saved thanks to our human efforts to keep the law. They rightly say that we are not and cannot be saved by the law (Romans 3:20). Salvation is only by faith in the grace of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:23,24). We may understand the point but we do not understand why this problem is raised only for the commandment about the day of rest and not for the other nine too. Nobody in effect consider that we are "under the law" because we do not kill or do not commit adultery. Why should we go "under the law" only because we keep the seventh day Sabbath? Anyhow, it is a joy for us to underline the fact that the Sabbath, in the Bible, is a sign of justification, or salvation by faith (grace) and not by works. Let us consider Ezekiel 20:12: "Moreover I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, so that they might know that I the LORD sanctify them." Through the Sabbath we do not sanctify ourselves by offering God something, but God offers us a sign of His sanctifying will. The Sabbath is a sign of our inactivity, the day in which we rest, while we celebrate the life that God gave us at creation and that He graciously continues to grant us every day. Probably, no other Christian doctrine, except those regarding directly Jesus, can be better related to the doctrine of justification by faith than that about the Sabbath.

This teaching given by the prophet Ezekiel had already a long history. The first time we find this teaching is in the Torah, the Law given through Moses (Exodus 31:13). In the Law many days of a feast were called "Sabbath". This is because, in Hebrew, Sabbath means "rest" and so all not working days were Sabbaths. Nevertheless, when we read that God gave His Sabbaths as a "sign," He refers only to the seventh-day Sabbath, not to the others, as the context makes it clear: "You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is

a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the Israelites shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:12-17). As you see, only the seventh day Sabbath is a sign of His fatherhood, of the fact that He is the Giver of our life. It is because of this that we observe the seventh day Sabbath while we are free in relations to the other festivals.

REASONS DRAWN FROM THE GOSPELS

11) Jesus, Who is my example, observed the Sabbath.

"When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom" (Luke 4:16). There is nothing in Jesus' life that we cannot do because it was just a Jewish habit. Every time a Jewish custom was contrary to God's will, Jesus denounced it. But He faithfully kept the Sabbath every week because it was God's commandment. When Jesus says that he is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), we must understand not only that He is the way to God's salvation, but also the way through Christian life. We cannot be Christians in a different way than that followed by Jesus, and Jesus honoured God's law also by keeping the Sabbath. Can I follow a different example?

12) Jesus, restored the Sabbath according to its original meaning and gave it to us as a pure gift from God.

By the time, many human alterations were introduced into God's law about the day of rest and a reform was needed. This is why Jesus didn't keep the Sabbath according to the Jewish custom but cleansed it from the many traditions introduced especially by the Pharisees. This way the Sabbath was restored to its original meaning as a day of joy and freedom, as a sign of the perfect and healthful life in Eden. Jesus never spoke against the Sabbath. He never taught that the Sabbath was to be abolished.

Instead He observed it, restored it and gave it to us as a gift: "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath," He said (Mark 2:27). It means that the Sabbath should be received not as a burden that God places on our shoulders to make our life difficult, but as a blessing to enjoy a better life. The Sabbath is God's gift to humanity, not just

to the Jewish people. It was made for "man," for all men. If I love someone I will honour his gifts, not throw them away or hide them. The Sabbath is a sign of God's love for me, and this is a reason why I keep the Sabbath, because I rejoice in my Father's love and I wish to love Him too.

13) Jesus, my Lord, is also the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus said that "the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath" (Matthew 12:8). In which sense? 1) As the powerful God He created the Sabbath. 2) As the gracious Redeemer He restored the true meaning of the Sabbath. 3) Jesus has also the power to tell us how we must observe the Sabbath. What did He teach us with

His example and His words? Jesus made clear that the Sabbath must be observed, not according to the Pharisaic tradition, but according to the true, original meaning that this day had received by God, and which we find in the Scriptures. This is what He was just doing in that very moment, when He made that solemn statement against the Pharisees who had accused the disciples of transgressing their tradition about the Sabbath (cf. vv. 1,2).

14) Jesus taught that the Sabbath would remain part of His disciples' life, even after His death.

Speaking about the fall of Jerusalem by the Romans (fall that would happen about forty years after His death) Jesus invited His disciples to pray for their "flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath" (Matthew 24:20). We may easily understand why not in winter: the bad season would add more difficulties to the tragedy of the flight. But why not on a Sabbath? Jesus is not saying that the disciples had not to fly in winter or on a Sabbath. But a flight on a Sabbath would not allow them to keep holy that sacred day as they wished. Evidently, if Jesus and the disciples worried about this day, it means that the Sabbath continued to be a holy day of rest for Christianity even after our Saviour's death.

15) Jesus taught the permanent function of the Law.

The teaching of Jesus about the Sabbath is perfectly in harmony with His general teaching about the Law. "Do not think" - He said - "that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and

teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven". (Matthew 5:17-20). The verb here translated "to fulfil" is in the original Greek text "pleroo" whose main sense is that of "completing", "bringing to perfection". Jesus has not come to abolish the law or the commandment about the Sabbath, but to bring them to perfection. When we read how Jesus brought to perfection the commandment about killing, or about adultery (Matthew 5:21-28), we can understand that He did not ask us less than He asked the Jews. In reality He asks us more in understanding and in observing.

16) Jesus' disciples did observe the Sabbath even after Jesus' death.

We know that Jesus died on Friday in the afternoon. "It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared." (Luke 23:54-24:1). We can see that Jesus had already died but the disciples, continued to observe the Sabbath, not according to a Jewish tradition, but, "according to the commandment" of God. If Jesus had taught that the Sabbath was no more in force after His death, as many Christians think, why did the women who continuously followed Him did not know? The truth is, as we have seen, that Jesus never told anybody that the Law of God or the Sabbath were binding only till His death.

REASONS DRAWN FROM THE APOSTOLIC LIFE

17) Paul observed the Sabbath.

Many texts say this in the book of Acts: "But they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down" (Acts 13:14). "As Paul and Barnabas were going out, the people urged them to speak about these things again the next sabbath ... The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord" (Acts 13:42,44). "On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there" (Acts 16:13). "And

Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures" (Acts 17:2). "Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks... And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.' And he left there and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God [a gentile]; his house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized. And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack you to harm you; for I have many people in this city.' And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:4-11).

It is true, as some object, that all these cases are occasions in which Paul goes to the synagogue to talk with Jews. So, some say, since the Jews met on the Sabbath that was the only day when Paul could meet them. Nevertheless it is also true that the Book of Acts never presents things in this way. It presents Paul going to the synagogue on the Sabbath, not because it was the custom of the Jews, but because it was Paul's own custom. In towns where there was no Christian church, Paul went to the synagogue to meet believers according to God's commandment (Leviticus 23:3), and how Jesus was also used to (Luke 4:16). Naturally he hoped he could have the opportunity of giving testimony of his Christian faith, but he would go all the same if it were not so. Consider also that the synagogue was a meeting place for Jews and Greeks as Acts 18:4 says. The first Christians among the Gentiles were people already used to keep the Sabbath with

the Jews, and there was no reason for them to change the day of rest when they became

Christians. The Bible never says that they did, and we have many reasons to believe that they didn't do that at all. In the last text quoted above, it is said that the Christian Gentiles separated from the Jews. But, while it is evident that they gathered together with the Jews on the Sabbath day, it isn't said that they started to keep Sunday when they separated (Acts 18:6-11). If they had done so, it would have been a very important occasion for Luke (the author of Acts) to state the different practise between Christians and Jews. Why didn't he say anything? Because there was nothing to say: Christians kept the Sabbath as the Jews did.

18) Paul had no problems with the Jews because of the Sabbath, as he had because of circumcision.

One of the main Jewish distinctive signs was circumcision. All males had to be circumcised as a sign of their place in God's people. Many Christians coming from Judaism gave circumcision such a high value to pretend that even the pagans who accepted Christ had to be circumcised to be saved. Paul didn't believe that and, because of his disagreement, he had many arguments with them (cf. Galatians 5:11). But he had no problems at all because of the Sabbath which, for the Jews was equally important. This is a clear sign that Paul not only taught but also lived the Sabbath. At the end of his life among the Jews, just before being arrested, he accepted, following the counsel of the other Apostles, to join other men into a rite of purification for, in this way, "all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself observe and guard the law" (Acts 21:24). It is evident that for Paul keeping the law was not against his Christian principles. Instead he could honestly give testimony of his keeping the law. He could say, after being arrested: "I have in no way committed an offense against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor." (Acts 25:8). If he had transgressed the Sabbath and taught us to transgress, could he honestly say that he had not offended the Law?

Naturally what we are seeing is against the opinion that, for Paul, the law has been abolished. As Seventh-day Adventists we believe that for Paul, as for Jesus Himself, the law continued to be in force, but it is not possible to discuss here the problem. Let us only quote a text from Paul: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but obeying the commandments of God is everything" (1 Corinthians 7:19). Evidently Paul distinguished between rules such as that about circumcision (we can define them as "symbolic" or "ceremonial") that foreshadowed Jesus' work for our salvation, and other commandments having an everlasting moral and spiritual value. The first group included circumcision and all the rites about the sanctuary and found their end in Jesus. The second group included the Decalogue with its everlasting rules. The Sabbath is part of this second group of commandments and there is no reason for us not to keep it.

19) The same language used in the New Testament about the Sabbath makes clear that this day remained as a day of rest for the Christian Church many years after Jesus death.

We must consider that when the Gospels or the Book of Acts were written, a long time had passed since the events they narrate, sometime thirty or fifty years. If in the

while the Sabbath had been abandoned and Sunday accepted and Jesus' or the Apostles' authority, we should find some indications of this fact. But, as we will see, there is no sign, in all the New Testament, of Sunday observance. In all the circumstances in which Sunday is spoken about, it is always called "the first day of the week", without any other qualification. If it were kept as a holy day, the inspired writers could use expressions such as "the new day of rest", "the holy day of the Christian church" and so on. But we find nothing. Instead we find that the Sabbath is called "Sabbath". In our culture, this fact doesn't mean so much, but we must remember that the Hebrews named week days only through numbers, as we still do in Malta (the first day, the second day etc.), except Friday that they named also the *parasheve*, meaning "the preparation" for the Sabbath (Luke 23:54), and the seventh day that they called "Sabbath", that is "rest". Now, if the seventh day was no longer a day of rest, why should they continue to call it "Sabbath", "rest"? To avoid misinterpretations, they could add some specifications as "the old day of rest", or "the Jewish day of rest" and so on. But they never did that. Why? The only answer I can imagine is that they continued to consider that day as a day of rest for themselves, a Sabbath day.

20) *The Apostles, trying to solve the problems arising from the coexistence between Jewish and gentile Christians, never asked to eliminate the Sabbath.*

In the Jerusalem Council, held at about the year 45 A.D., a decision was made: "to impose on [the Christians coming from paganism] no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well." (Acts 15:28). Some years after they renewed the ancient decision: "But as for the Gentiles who have become believers, we have sent a letter with our judgement that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication" (Acts 21:25). These texts show that there was a serious problem between Jewish and Gentile Christians. To keep unity, even the Gentiles had to comply with some laws considered especially relevant in their context. On the other hand the Jews were asked not to impose circumcision upon the Gentiles, that is, they had to accept the Gentiles as brothers in Christ without entering into the Jewish community.

The fact that the Apostles did not consider necessary to say anything about the Sabbath, may be interpreted in two totally different ways. 1) One may under-

stand that the Sabbath was not imposed on the Gentiles. But this interpretation would be in contradiction with the main aim of the Council - the maintenance of the unity of the Church. In fact if the Sabbath remained only for the Jewish Christians and was not kept by the Gentiles too, it would imply that these two groups would meet on different days and so the unity of the church would be split. 2) The other interpretation is that at the Jerusalem Council, the problem of the Sabbath was not raised because it was not a problem at all since all the first Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, were already used to keep it according to the common Law of God, and the teaching of Jesus and of the Apostles. That the Sabbath may not be a problem becomes more understandable when we consider what we already know - the first Christians coming from paganism were already used to meet with the Jews on the Sabbath day. James is pointing to this reality when, closing his address at the Jerusalem Council, he says "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). In other words, even Christians coming from paganism are well acquainted with these elements of the Jewish faith since they have received them when meeting with the Jews at the synagogue on the Sabbath.

21) *The Letter to the Hebrews teaches that there is a "Sabbath rest" for the Christian people.*

"So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his" (Hebrew 4:9,10). The text is not very clear and the context must be considered, to understand it. In the original Greek text, the word used for "Sabbath rest" is "sabbatismos". Most probably, in my personal opinion, this "sabbatism" is related both to the seventh day Sabbath and to the spiritual rest we obtain in Jesus, that is the joy of salvation, the forgiveness of the sins, the peace of the soul, the entrance into the kingdom of God.

As a matter of fact, the author of Hebrews draws his teaching from God's rest after the creation (v. 4), the rest that gave origin to the Sabbath observance, and from God's promise to lead Israel into the rest of the promised land (v. 3). So, even if the passage is very complicated, we may understand that the "Sabbath rest" which he is speaking of, is a bridge between creation and salvation, a bridge between Eden and the New Eden, between the Old

and the New Dispensation. The Sabbath day is then a sign looking back to God's creative power, and a sign looking ahead toward the salvation in Jesus' name. As a Christian, I consider it a privilege to manifest my acceptance of Jesus' peace by observing the Sabbath.

REASONS DRAWN FROM THE BOOK OF REVELATION

22) *The message of the Sabbath is part of the last message to be given to the world.*

Revelation 14:6-13 speaks about the last messages that must be given to the world. These messages call all men to be ready to meet their Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ whose return is described in vv. 14-20. The first message says: "Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation and tribe and language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water'" (vv. 6,7). The Gospel that has to be preached includes a message about judgement and about creation. Both messages are related since God has the power and the right to judge because He is the Creator, the Master of everything and of everyone. But we see that to say that God is the Creator, Revelation uses an expression very similar to that used in Exodus 20:11 in the commandment of the Sabbath: "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it." To convince us that this text really points to the fourth commandment we can read the v. 12 of the same chapter: "Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus." John is really thinking about the commandments. So when he says that God created "heaven and earth, the sea and..." we may know that he is thinking about the God who asked us to accept Him as our Creator by observing the Sabbath, the memorial of His creation.

In a world like ours, in which faith in God as Creator has gone away even for many Christians who more easily accept evolution instead of Biblical creation, observing the Sabbath becomes a living testimony of our faith in God as our Creator and Lord.

The Christian church in the last days has this message to give to the world: we are saved by grace in Jesus name, we are to obey God's commandments including that about the Sabbath, there is a judgement for every one.

FACING OBJECTIONS

23) *It isn't true that Jesus taught that His disciples are not supposed to keep the Sabbath.*

We have already seen that Jesus did observe the Sabbath and taught it was to be observed. Some misunderstand Jesus position about the Sabbath because of His polemic against the Pharisaic or the Essenian way of observing it. They confuse Jesus' correction of a wrong way to observe the Sabbath with the abolition of the Sabbath itself. The difference between Jesus and Pharisees may be seen mainly in the fact that Jesus chose the Sabbath to heal people while Pharisees taught that was not legal. The Pharisees held their understanding not on the basis of the Scriptures but on that of their oral tradition. Jesus, on his part, was free from the bondage of human tradition and held on God's Word alone and so taught His disciples to do. Let us consider some of these controversial experiences.

Matthew 12:1-14: "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath.' He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him or his companions to eat, but only for the priests. Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests in the temple break the sabbath and yet are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.'" He left that place and entered their synagogue; a man was there with a withered hand, and they asked him, 'Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?' so that they might accuse him. He said to them, 'Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.' Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and it was restored, as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him." What is the reason for the controversy? Jesus is not condemning a biblical law for never the Bible says we cannot pluck a fruit and eat it on the Sabbath. It never says that we cannot heal a sick person on the Sabbath day. These prohibitions were elaborated by some spiritual leaders of Israel after the Babylo-

nian exile. God had punished His people because of their infidelity and disobedience. Not to risk to disobey the law, not even by mistake, they built a fence to protect the Law, a fence made of many rules and details. The intention was good but, as a leader of them admitted, the fence was going to suffocate the tree that it had to protect. What Jesus did was showing that behind the Sabbath there was a loving and caring Father who wished to bless and help His children. So Jesus filled the Sabbath with actions of love and mercy, as it was at the beginning, overcoming all the legalistic understanding that was added to it.

Some could maybe say that the examples drawn from the priests and David show that Jesus is teaching that we are not obliged to observe the law and the Sabbath. But Jesus is doing just the contrary. What the priests accomplished during the Sabbath was done according to the law. So, what Jesus is teaching is that if we really understand God's law we realize that the Sabbath was not just given to rest but to honour God with our rest. During the Sabbath, the priests had to offer sacrifices (this was their service) to show that the Sabbath is a day of love and grace. In a similar way, as it is shown in the case of David, we all have to fill the Sabbath with love because the law can never be understood as being against life and love. Not the Sabbath Jesus was discussing, but a legalistic way of understanding and living it.

The fact that Jesus fought to restore the Sabbath means that He cared for it as something precious and good. Had he intended to abolish it, He wouldn't have tried to restore it at all. We do not restore something that is going to be thrown away, do we?

John 5:18: "For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God." To understand what it meant "breaking" the Sabbath, we must remember once again that the word "Sabbath" means rest. So, every action we do in this day is a "breaking" of the Sabbath-rest. Priests, for the holy service, broke the Sabbath-rest but not God's commandment. Jesus also did break the Sabbath-rest by healing sick people. He did so to show God's love. In the same way we can break the Sabbath-rest, not to do our own business, but to love and serve our neighbour. This in fact is what Jesus taught: "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:12).

Again: If the Sabbath had lost all meaning for Jesus, why does He say that it is legal doing good actions in it? By saying this, isn't He saying that not everything is le-

gal? Isn't He confirming the validity of the day of rest?

24) *It isn't true that Sunday must be observed because Christ did rise from the dead on that day.*

To honour Jesus is a must, but should Christians honour Him by changing His commandments or by observing them? Jesus gave His life to forgive our sins, which means our transgressions of the law as it is written in 1 John 3:4: "Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." As Christians we do not wish to sin, we do not wish to break God's law. As Jesus said, if we love Him we shall honour Him by keeping His commandments. At the cross we can see the full greatness of His love, at the cross we understand that we must love Jesus and keep His law. The cross doesn't take us away from the Law, as many unfortunately understand, but closer to it, in an attitude of love. As the prophet Jeremiah prophesied long before, with Jesus, the law would not have been written only on the tables of stone but in our hearts. The cross is the pencil to write it there.

We can consider Jesus' Pascal experience in another perspective that brings us closer to the Sabbath issue. Many scholars see the passion week of Jesus as a repetition of the week of creation. At creation Jesus made the world good, in the passion week He laid the foundation to restore the world again. On the first Friday of the world (the sixth day) he finished everything, on the Friday of the Passion he said again "It is finished. And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit" and entered the rest of the Sabbath (John 19:30) as He had done at the end of the creation. Jesus died on Friday, rested on Saturday in the tomb, and rose to a new life on the first day to start working again for His people. So we see that even in His death Jesus kept the commandment about the Sabbath, that same Sabbath that He himself - as the divine agent of creation - had established at the beginning of our world. If it is so, shouldn't we better honour His death by resting on the Sabbath day as He did? We honour His resurrection also, by living according to His example of love and service. By keeping the Sabbath, we honour Jesus both as our Creator and our Redeemer.

If Christians observe Sunday it is only because of tradition, not because of the Bible. It is in Church history that we can find the reasons for the change from the seventh to the first day, not in the Bible. But as Christians we must believe and act according to God's Holy Word, not according to Church history.

25) *It isn't true that after Jesus' death the first day of the week received a new emphasis.*

What the New Testament says is only that it happened that Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to the disciples on the "first day" of the week, after the Sabbath. But no emphasis is placed upon it. Never is it called "the day of the resurrection", or "a holy day", or "the day of salvation", etc. It is just the "first day", and this is all.

26) *It isn't true that the first Christians were used to meet on Sundays.*

We have only two occasions in which we find the disciples or the church meeting on the first day.

The first is in John 20:19: "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" As we can see it was not a Christian meeting for, in that very moment, the disciples did not yet believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. They were together, not to honour Jesus but only because of their fear and confusion.

The second occasion is in Acts 20:6,7: "in five days we joined them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days. On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight." At a first glance we can see that it was not a usual meeting. The meeting was held on the first day of the week for a special circumstance, "since he intended to leave the next day". If it would have been a usual meeting it was not necessary to specify that reason. But we must go beyond this and notice that this first day meeting was an evening meeting. Why? According to the Biblical and Hebrew custom, days start at sunset and finish at the following sunset (cf. Lev. 23:32; Nehemia 13:19). Luke, the same writer of Acts follows this custom in his Gospel. In Luke 23:44 it is said that Jesus died at about the sixth hour of the day, that is, about three o'clock in the afternoon. We must allow some hours for the soldiers to accomplish their work and for Joseph to go to Pilate, asking for Jesus' body and taking it away from the cross. Because of this, Luke can say, in v. 54, that "the sabbath was beginning": it was just before sunset, the time when the Sabbath, a new day, was going to begin.

If Luke follows this custom in his Gospel, we are encouraged to think that he does the same in Acts which is the continuation of the Gospel (cf. Acts 1:1). In this perspective, we must conclude that in Troas, the meeting could be said to be held on the first day of the week even if just a few hours had passed since Saturday sunset. What could have happened is that Paul had spent all the preceding week

with the church (v. 6) waiting for the Sabbath to have the possibility to talk to all the church assembled together. Since the day after, the first day of the week, he had to leave, the church wished to prolong the meeting after sunset, having dinner together and continuing to listen to Paul for some hours in the night. This way they entered into the first day. But it happened so, not because they honoured the first day, but because they wished to continue, in an exceptional way, the usual Sabbatical meeting.

27) *It isn't true that the Corinthian church was used to collect offerings on the first day of the week, which would demonstrate that Sunday was the day for church meetings.*

The text used to draw this conclusion is 1 Corinthians 16:1-4: "Now concerning the contribution for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable that I should go also, they will accompany me."

As we may easily see, in this text there is no church meeting. In reality the collection is not done at church on Sunday, but as other translations put it in a clearer way, at home: everyone had to put, in his own house, something aside for the poor brothers in Judea. Sometime later, somebody, with the approval of the church and sent by the Apostle, would collect every thing and bring it to Jerusalem. The Italian translation Nuova Riveduta says: "Ogni primo giorno della settimana ciascuno di voi, a casa, metta da parte quello che potrà". The King James Version: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay **by him** in store". The American Standard Version: Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay **by him** in store."

Why did he not ask to bring money at church? An obvious answer may be that there was no church meeting at all on Sundays. But yet, why did Paul ask them to put aside their offering for the poor on the first days of the week? Many answers have been given. The most convincing for me is that which considers this request according to the ancient custom for the Sabbath observance. The first Christians tended to observe the Sabbath according to the Jewish tradition, which forbade them using money on the Sabbath, even for church service. During the Sabbath, the day which reminded God's blessings, the believers were asked to think about the needs of the community. But it was after the Sabbath, in the first day of the

week that they could give what they had decided. In this perspective, the Apostle's request is not a demonstration in favour of Sunday, but on the contrary, of the Sabbath.

28) *It isn't true that Paul's rebuke to the Galatians about their custom of observing "special days, and months, and seasons, and years," involves the abolition of the seventh-day Sabbath.*

The first observation we have to do is that Paul is not explicitly mentioning the Sabbath. So we have to be very careful including the Sabbath in His discussion. He simply talks about the observance of some days considered "special." If his criticism refers to the weekly day of rest, why should we think of the Sabbath? If Sunday had replaced the Biblical Sabbath, as many erroneously believe, would we say that Paul was condemning Sunday too? In reality Paul is not talking about any biblical or Christian day of rest. The complete passage is the following: "You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted" (Galatians 4:10,11). It is clear that Paul sees something wrong in this observance, almost a refusing of the Christian belief. Why? Because of some Jewish festivals, Sabbath included? If we consider the context we will see that Paul is not speaking about Old Testament feasts. We can say this for at least two reasons: 1) the list of feasts given by the Apostle does not correspond to the Old Testament series of feasts. In the Old Testament we find days as the seventh day Sabbath, months as the new moon, and years as the Sabbatical year. But we do not find any season observance. 2) The second reason is even more important. Paul says that the Galatians, because of their observance, are going back to their former customs (v. 9: "how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits? How can you want to be enslaved to them again?"). But the Galatians were not Jews before becoming Christians (v. 8: "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods." Paul could not say that for the Jewish people who worshipped the true God!). They were pagans and worshipped "beings that by nature are not gods". It is to these gods that the Galatians were going back observing their "special days, and months, and seasons, and years". What relation may exist between the pagan gods and these recurrences? The best answer can be found in astrology for which the Sun, the Moon and the stars were gods influencing life with their daily, monthly, seasonally and yearly cycles and moving. As many modern Christians, the Galatians thought it was possible to conciliate the belief in Jesus with astrology. In reality, by doing this, they were abandoning the absolute lordship of Jesus. This is what Paul is talking about, not about Sabbath or Sunday.

29) It isn't true that Paul says that the choice of a day of worship is a personal affair.

The text quoted to support this idea is Roman 14:5-6. Let us read it: "Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God." We can notice that Paul does not say which days he is talking about. To say that he is talking about worship and church meeting days is only a supposition that cannot be supported by any evidence. Instead, we have some evidences against it.

A) If the problem was the church meeting day, and if anyone could choose this day on his own, this would split the church in pieces. We would have the church meeting on Saturdays, the church meeting on Sundays, that meeting on Mondays and that meeting on any of the other weekdays. This interpretation would destroy not only the Sabbath observance, but the Sunday observance too, and even the possibility for any church to choose any day for a common meeting. May we think that Paul, who so much fought for church unity, could teach something similar? What would become the command not to "neglect to meet together" (Hebrews 10:25). We must find another way to understand the days he is talking about.

B) We can see that the question about days is connected to the question about eating. So we could think that the days Paul is talking about are days of fasting. According to tradition, the Jewish people were invited to fast two days a week. Listen to the Pharisee who goes to the temple to pray: "I fast twice a week" (Luke 18:12). In the first Christian community there was a strong Jewish component who fought to keep their traditions, and maybe to impose them upon the believers coming from among the Gentiles. On their part, these last could not welcome the Jewish tradition, which they were not used to. This situation created problems of coexistence. As usual, when it is not a question of fundamental faith in Jesus, Paul was tolerant and invited people to be tolerant. Everybody may fast whenever he wishes if he fasts to honour his Lord. This wouldn't have destroyed church unity. Neither would it have dishonoured God's law.

30) It isn't true that Paul teaches that the Sabbath is only a shadow of Christ and nobody should be judged if he keeps it or not.

Let's read what Paul says in Colossians 2:16,17: "Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." Paul doesn't say that these festivals had no more meaning for Christians. This is the only Biblical text used against Sabbath observance that contains the word "Sabbath". But even here, if we look at the passage without prejudice, we do not find anything against it.

What does it mean "do not let anyone condemn - or judge - you"? For discussion's sake I offer three possibilities:

A) Let no one condemn you if you observe or not observe the Sabbath.

B) Let no one condemn you because of your manner to observe the Sabbath.

C) Let no one condemn you for the reasons you observe the Sabbath.

In my personal opinion we must exclude the first and the last interpretations. We must exclude the first for the reason we discussed in the previous point: it would destroy church unity, and because it is against Paul's general teaching on the Law. Those who think that here the Apostle is abolishing the Seventh day Sabbath are usually influenced by a wrong understanding of v. 14: "having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross." They think that, for Paul, what Jesus destroyed, nailing it to the cross, is God's Law. So they think that Jesus abolished the fourth commandment about the Sabbath rest. Our objection is that if Jesus abolished the Law, it would mean "all the commandments", not just that about the Sabbath. Also we have to notice that when Paul writes about this "bond" nailed to the cross, he is not referring to the law but to the cheirôgraphon, the "hand written document" which at his time referred to a document written to state the existence of a debt. Jesus says that our sins are debts ("Forgive us our debts") that we cannot pay. On the cross Jesus paid them on our behalf. So, what was nailed is not the law of God but our transgressions of the law—our sin. In this perspective, Paul cannot say that the fourth commandment of the Decalogue is abolished by Jesus.

We must exclude the last hypothesis because, for the apostle Paul, it is important to know why we do or not do something. For the Apostle, keeping the Sabbath or any other day to conquer merits in front of God, should be totally condemned. It would be legalism and would take us away from Jesus' grace. The substance of our faith, of our salvation, of our hope is

Jesus and nothing could be His rival, not even a religious observance whatever its nature may be. If we observe the Sabbath or Sunday as a substitute of Jesus, then we are going away from our Lord and Saviour: Paul could not be so tolerant in front of such a danger for his brothers.

So, we have to consider the interpretation about the manner to observe the Sabbath. As we said in the previous point, the first ancient church was a compound reality: Jews and Gentiles coexisted. As it happened for the fasting days, it could happen even more for the Sabbath. The Jewish tradition had overcharged the Sabbath observance with so many rules that it was very heavy to live it with joy, mainly for the Gentile Christians. They had accepted the law, but according to the Bible only. They were not used to the Jewish and pharisaic tradition, so they resisted it. We can only imagine the discussion that could rise among them. It is in this context that Paul invites the believers in Colosse not to judge one another, and to consider that the substance or, as he says, the body, of our life is Christ. In front of Jesus everything becomes a shadow and has a value only pointing to Him. In Christ we can find reciprocal understanding, unity and love even if our traditions are different. Even when we observe the Sabbath we must see Jesus in it, otherwise what we get is just a shadow and not the substance. This passage is in total agreement with Paul understanding of grace and law. We are saved only by grace without the law, but in the grace of Christ we find the true meaning of the law and the only good reasons to obey it.

31) It isn't true that Revelation 1:10 says that Sunday is the Lord's day.

Revelation 1:9,10 says: "I, John, your brother who share with you in Jesus the persecution and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. I was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet..." Many Christians think that this Lord's day is Sunday. In the Greek we have "kuriaké (kurios = lord) heméra (=day)". Only after many years (in the apocryphal Gospel According to Peter 9:12, written at the end of the 2nd century) some started to apply this expression to the first day of the week. But at the time when John wrote Revelation it had not that meaning. We must not interpret this expression according to our modern way of understanding. We must try to understand what John himself could mean by this expression in his own cultural and religious context. In the Roman Empire the "Lord's day" was the birthday of the emperor, but John would never refer to it because for Christians the only Lord was Jesus (1 Corinthians 8:6). Some

think that the expression is the equivalent of the Old Testament “day of the Lord” that is “the day when God judges the world”. In this perspective they understand that John, in vision, was led by the Spirit into the day of judgement. There are two objections to this interpretation: 1) Since John has just described the place where he had the vision (Patmos), one would expect to know the time, the date of the vision, not directly the argument of the vision. 2) In the Old Testament (in the Greek translation of the LXX used by the Christian church) the “day of the Lord” is said “hemera (day) tou (of the) kuriou (Lord)” or “hemera kuriou”, never “kuriaké hemera” as we find in Revelation.

It remains to be seen if there is a literal day that can be called “Lord’s day” according to the Bible. If Jesus is the “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mat. 12:8), is not the Sabbath the “Lord’s day”? This we believe is the best interpretation of this Biblical expression.

32) It isn’t true that changes have been made in the weekly cycle and that our Sabbath does not correspond any longer to the day established by God.

As we have seen, in the Old Testament God has clearly shown which day was the seventh day through the miracle of the manna lasting forty years. Since then Israel has kept the Sabbath regularly without any changes till when Jesus came and lived on this earth as a man. He also kept the Sabbath and we can follow His custom: for sure Jesus knew which day was the right one and if we follow His example we cannot be mistaken. But some say: may we be sure that after Jesus died no changes have been introduced in our calendar?

In 1582, because of a discrepancy between the legal calendar and natural seasons, Pope Gregarious XIII decided to reform the calendar. It was decided that **Thursday 4 October** 1582 had to be followed by **Friday 15 October** 1582. So you see that the date was changed skipping from the fourth to the fifteenth of October. But the weekly cycle was not affected at all and Thursday was followed by Friday as usual. So we know that our Sabbath day perfectly corresponds to the same Sabbath Israel, Jesus, and all the first Christians kept for thousands of years according to God’s revelation.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to consider all the main reasons to keep or not to keep the seventh day Sabbath. We hope we have represented everything in an honest way. We do not pretend to be right in everything we have said. Even in the Seventh-day Adventist Church you may find scholars explaining some texts in a different way, but the substance of our conclusions may be shared by all Seventh-day Adventists. What will be your answer? Just a few small Christian churches will agree with our position, we know. Most of the Christian churches will not agree at all. We think that among those who oppose the seventh day Sabbath, the clearest position is that of the Catholic Church.

We present here just one quotation, but many others could be added, both ancient and modern: “The first positive command in the Decalogue is to ‘Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy,’ ... But the Sabbath Day, the observance of which God commanded, was our Saturday. Yet who among either Catholics or Protestants, except a sect or two ... ever keep that commandment now? None? Why is this? The Bible, which Protestants claim to obey exclusively, gives no authorization for the substitution of the first day of the week for the seventh. On what authority, therefore, have they done so? Plainly on the authority of that very catholic Church which they abandoned, and whose traditions they condemn” (John L. Stoddard, *Rebuilding a Lost Faith*, New York 1826, p. 80).

This document claims (1) that the Bible teaches to keep Saturday and not Sunday, (2) that Sunday is kept because of tradition and church authority, (3) that all who wish to obey the Bible should keep Saturday. We do not judge anybody’s heart, and we respect the conscience of all. We know that many

honest people, and even religious leaders, do not keep the fourth commandment because they honestly think this is God’s will. But we have to remind everybody that the Christian Church should not pretend to change God’s law but to teach and keep it. The apostle Paul considered the Church to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Jesus plainly taught that whenever we have to choose between tradition and God’s law, we should choose obedience to God: “And he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ... And ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition. ... In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men” (Matt. 15:3-9).

When first God instituted the Sabbath, He blessed it, and this blessing is for you, if you wish to obey God according to His Law instead than according to human tradition. We imagine you have many questions about what you have discovered through this modest writing. Why do you not ask us for further information or for a personal dialogue?

Past. Giovanni Leonardi

SATURDAY was established by God at Creation. SUNDAY comes from church tradition.

SATURDAY was blessed by God. SUNDAY was never blessed by God.

SATURDAY is a commandment of God. SUNDAY is a commandment of men.

SATURDAY was kept by Jesus and the Apostles. SUNDAY was never kept by them.

SATURDAY is the day of the Lord. SUNDAY is not.

SATURDAY is a sign of fidelity to God. SUNDAY is a sign of fidelity to the Church.

SATURDAY will be kept even in God’s kingdom. SUNDAY will finish as all things made by men.



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