

Il-Lehen tat-Tama

"THE VOICE OF HOPE"

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

BY THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN MALTA

WHO ARE YOU JESUS?

Here is the problem: On one hand we see many people highly estimating Jesus, on the other hand we find in Jesus the tendency to have such pretensions to appear megalomaniac. In this respect there is no similarity, no relation, between Christianity and other religions. C. S. Lewis writes: "If you had gone to Buddha and you had asked him: 'Are you the son of Brahma?' He would have answered: 'My son, you are still living in the valley of illusion'. If you had gone to Socrates and you had asked: 'Are you Zeus?', in his turn, he would have asked you another question: 'What do you mean by Zeus?' If you had gone to Mohammed and had asked him: 'Are you Allah?', first he would have tore his clothes and after that he would have cut your head. If you had asked Confucius: 'Are you the sky?' probably he would have answered: 'Observations not in harmony with nature, have a bad taste.'"

Not even one among the moral teachers of this world has ever, not even remotely, attributed to himself anything similar to what Jesus said of Himself. We are more used to find such pretensions in despots like Cheausesku or Adi Amin. Truly, only a mental sick person or an impostor can say of himself what Jesus said, unless he is a person really different from all other human beings because his existence can be explained only by considering a non human origin.

If we seriously consider Jesus' words, we face an upsetting alternative: Either Jesus is what He says He is, God in human form, or He is a mad person or an impostor. There is no other alternative: Either Jesus is the Eternal God, or He is His and our enemy. Either Jesus is God, and then we can trust His word as truth (John 14:4), or He is its opponent, the father of lies. Yes, either Jesus is God or He is Satan, the prince of this world (John 14:30) in a disguised form.

In front of Jesus, you cannot remain neutral, such is the strength that radiates from His person. You can refuse Him, but not remain indifferent.

Ernest Renan, at the age of forty, in his *Life of Christ*, wrote: "Some would like to make of Jesus a wise man, others a philosopher, some a patriot, somebody else a moralist, others a saint. The truth is far away from all this. He was an enchanter."

But, at the end of his life, Renan, contemplating Jesus of Nazareth whose divinity he had previously denied, together with the authenticity of the Gospel miracles, busted out in this invocation: "What a prodigy! He who wishes to draw the ideal of virtue and sublime, can borrow the strokes of his pen only from Jesus ... The most open rationalism recedes from its criticism and I cannot look at Him but on my knees ... Oh Jesus, enlighten me, You truth, you life ... Oh, tell me who you are!"

And also: "I suffer, Jesus, of having raised your problem which is too heavy for me, for I am just a man and you are something more. Tell me, who are you?"

The illuminist Jean Jacques Rousseau, acknowledged: "If the life and death of Socrates are that of a wise man, the life and death of Jesus Christ are that of a God. Shall we say that the gospel story is a mere invention? My friend, it isn't this way that inventions are made; and Socrates' facts, which nobody doubts, are less attested than those of Jesus Christ. It would be more inconceivable to think that

many persons have together made this book (the Gospel) than just one given the subject. Jewish authors would have never found this tone, this morale; and the gospel has characters of truth so great, surprising, so perfectly inimitable, that the inventor would have been more extraordinary than the hero."

"As the idea of God - writes the theologian Neander - cannot be the spontaneous product of our limited intelligence, and can be explained only by a self revelation of God to humanity, so the image of Christ couldn't be conceived by the conscience of a sinful man. It necessarily requires a corresponding reality. This reality is the life, is the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Which human mind could ever generate the upsetting idea of a God who kneels in front of His creatures and serves them? Which fervid imagination would be able to create a God that lets His creatures kill Him? Which soothsayer could anticipate tens of situations extremely specific like those prophesied by the Scripture about Jesus?

Only a God of love could speak in such a way of Himself. Jesus is He.

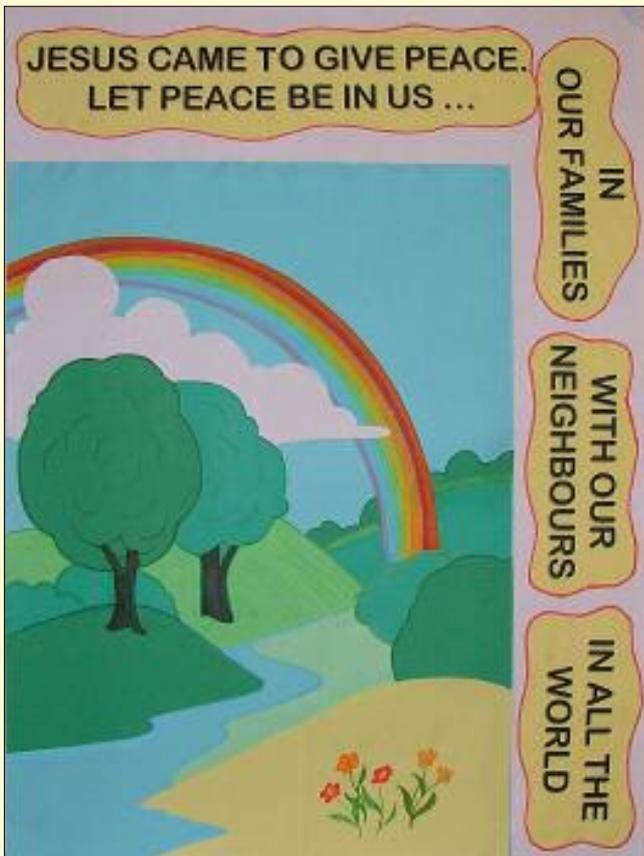
A. Pellegrini (Seventh-day Adventist pastor)

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CHRISTIAN TESTIMONY

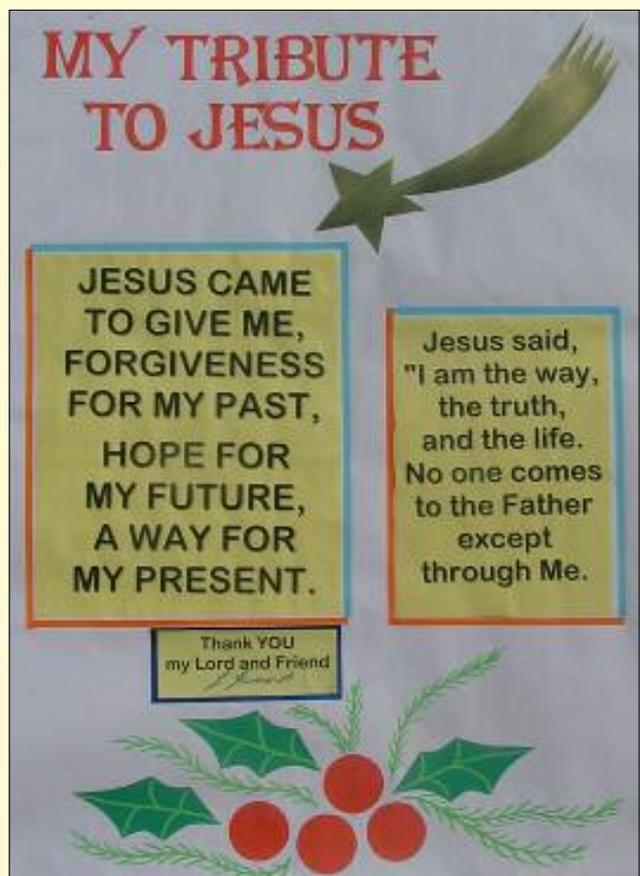
OUR TRIBUTE TO JESUS



These three posters have been created by some of our church members to ornate the bay windows of our Adventist Centre and give testimony about Jesus in these past Christmas days.

Our prayer is that God may bless you in this coming year 2006.

"Love the LORD your God, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land."
(Deut. 30:16)



CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

MARY, JESUS, THE MADONNA

The writing you are going to read faces a very sensitive issue. It is written in love but it will be disturbing to some of our readers. Our only hope is that they will just examine with an open heart if what we say is true or not. We will be happy to receive and publish your reactions.

Originally we wrote these notes for an ecumenical meeting held in Valletta last 3rd of November. We are offering it to all our readers for we believe the subject is of a very great importance. The Madonna is receiving more and more attention every day, and we believe this is at the expense of the unique lordship and mediatorship of our Lord Jesus. The last example of what we are saying was given by the plenary indulgence that Pope Benedictus XVI offered last 8th December to all those who accepted to honour the Madonna.

Christmas and the Madonna

These last days, almost everybody has been celebrating Jesus' birth. The Gospel tells us that Jesus is no longer a baby, but our powerful, glorious and yet merciful Lord. He, the Gospel says, is the ONLY Lord, the ONLY Mediator, the ONLY name, the ONLY way by which we can go to the Father. Unfortunately even while we celebrate Jesus, only a few are aware of the importance of His birth and life. For too many, Jesus remains in the background of their faith and for too many the Madonna is everyday coming more to the front. We apologize with those who may feel hurt, but it seems to us that for too many Christians, the main result of Jesus' birth was that of giving us a mother, not that of taking us back to our living and loving Father.

We love Mary

As Seventh-day Adventists, with all other Christians, we love and honour Mary, the human instrument chosen by God to reveal to humanity the immensity of His love and provide salvation for each one of His children in Jesus Christ.

What does the Gospel say?

The only Biblical information we have about Mary comes from a few statements in the Gospels and from one single verse in Acts 1:13,14 where Mary is presented as part of the first nucleus of Christian believers praying and waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis of the text is not on Mary who is simply mentioned together with Jesus'

brothers as to say that now even Jesus' relatives have accepted Him as the promised Saviour, in contrast with their previous negative attitude (Mark 3:21). The emphasis is on the Apostles, the foundation of the church having Jesus as her cornerstone, as Paul would later say (Ephesians 2:20). After this notation, nothing else is said in the New Testament. Evidently the first Christian Church didn't attribute to Mary any particular role.

In the Gospels, the longer texts where we find Mary mentioned, are related to the birth of Jesus, and what is said about Mary is instrumental to give glory not to Mary herself but to Jesus, the promised Saviour, the Immanuel, God with us. Any reading of the Gospel intended to give glory to Mary or to any other human being, detracts glory from the only One to Whom the Gospel intends to give such a glory, Jesus. "The Gospel" is that "of Je-

We love and honour that Mary that said "yes" to God's call to be His servant.

sus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1).

Mary is declared "full of grace" since only because of God's grace she could receive such an extraordinary privilege as becoming the mother of the incarnated God. The expression "full of grace" points neither to the fact that Mary can give grace because she is full of it, as often people understand, nor that she was without any sin.

The intention of the Bible text is not to magnify Mary's supposed holiness, but God's great mercifulness in letting a humble human being to assume the role that God intended to give her. In the same way, the Lord told Moses who wished to see His glory, that even if man cannot see God and live, nevertheless "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Exodus 33:18-20). In the same way, the apostle Paul speaks of God's grace in overcoming his previous opposition to Jesus and calling him to be an apostle: "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the

church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:9,10).

Dogmas as that of the immaculate conception have no space within the Gospel which clearly states that "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23). And there is no reason why Jesus should be born from a perfect woman. If God could give Mary the grace of protecting her from original sin, He could do the same directly with His own Son. Saying that Jesus couldn't be born from a normal human being, has as its only result that people continue to see Jesus as being different and distant. Instead, the Gospel says that He mingled with sinners and was not afraid of touching the leper. He can come closer to us and touch us too, if we wish, because He loves us and for us renounced all Himself.

In the Gospel, Mary humbly calls herself "maid servant of God" and adds, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Answering Elisabeth's greeting, she says, that God "has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:45,48). Mary declares herself blessed because she had received a grace that she didn't deserve. She is only the unworthy, little, maidservant of the Lord. (1 Cor. 8:6).

When the Gospel calls Mary "blessed," certainly it gives honour to Mary, but Jesus calls blessed the poor, the persecuted, the poor in the Spirit ... All humble people, all children of God are blessed. But the glory isn't to us. It is only for the one that gave grace both to Mary and to all of us.

The story of Cana is often interpreted as manifesting Mary's authority over Jesus as the authority of a mother over her son. By doing so, many think that they can go to Mary to force Jesus doing what He would not like doing. However the story may be understood, we cannot use this text to say that Mary has power over her Son (Jesus keeps Mary at a certain distance as a mother: "O woman, what have you to do with me?"), or that Mary loves us more than the Son, or that Mary is our privileged mediator in front of God. In the opposite, Jesus tells us that all Christians have the possibility to discuss with God and, in a certain way, force Him. Consider the parable in Luke 11:5-13 which Jesus concludes with the words, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

At Cana, Mary, is not the possessor of a special power on her own right, but the example of what all Christians can do when they humbly go to the throne of God's grace.

Jesus loved His earthly mother, but He didn't concede her any special privilege in relation to our salvation. All the synoptic Gospels tell us that one day Mary and Jesus' brothers tried to divert our Saviour from His mission. Jesus' answer is very enlightening: "Who is My mother, or My brothers? And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, 'Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.'" (Mark 3:32-35. See also Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21).

Mary and Jesus' brothers had not gone to Jesus just to pay a visit, but to stop him since He appeared to them as being out of mind: "But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, 'He is out of His mind.'" Mary is not explicitly mentioned here, but in vv. 32-33 she is included. This should avoid the excessive exaltation of Mary's understanding of Jesus' mission. We cannot say, for instance, that she offered Jesus for our salvation. Mary, as all Jesus' disciples who followed Him for three and half years, was in front of a mystery that greatly surpassed her ability to understand, and only after the resurrection she could fully grasp its meaning.

Is Mary the mother of the church?

Another text that is used to exalt Mary, making of her the mother and patron of the church, is that describing Jesus on the cross when He invites John to receive Mary as his own mother, and Mary to accept John as her own son. It is a tender story about the despair of a mother whose heart is broken by the pain caused by the vision of her dying son, and Jesus' pain in front of a mother that He loves and who is now going to remain alone. Jesus has words of tenderness for her, as He had for everybody. Instead of just thinking about Himself, He prayed for the forgiveness of those who were crucifying Him, and entrusted His mother to the disciple He loved. As usual, the only one that is exalted in this story is not Mary which remains totally silent and inactive on the Gospel scene, but Jesus Himself, His love and care, even in such an extreme situation. This way we can learn that we can trust our Saviour however hard the situation or great the problem may be. Jesus totally renounced Himself, and always cared for each one of us.

The aim of the story is not to take us to Mary, but to take us to Jesus as the one

we can fully trust. In any case, even if we wish to consider John as the symbol of the church (as some Roman Catholic theologians do), what we can say is only that Mary is entrusted to the Church to receive protection, as the church should protect all weak people, not that the church is entrusted to Mary to receive protection from her.

The Gospel says that we have just one Advocate or Mediator in front of God: "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:5,6). "My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 1:2:1). Instead, the Madonna has been made our privileged mediator in front of God and of Jesus Himself. The Madonna is even becoming more than just this. She is becoming the one that saves us together with Jesus, for in Jesus Mary's blood would be offered. Mary is represented as the one that gives Jesus to us, the one without whom God could not save us. What is the reason of the development of these unbiblical beliefs? Can all this be deducted from the story of the crucifixion? Not at all! All these beliefs are the result of a slow historic development arising from the loss of the original Gospel teaching about God's love as Father and Lord, in favour of a feminine character that could introduce in the religious perspective the feminine tenderness and mercifulness that we attribute to mothers. The following document makes it very clear: "In his boundless generosity (God) has provided his own Son to plead for us from the cross, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' If some fear the majesty of the Godman, he has provided his own mother, a creature like us, only spotless, to be the advocate of even the most wretched and abandoned sinners if they turn to her in their affliction and place themselves in her care. Jesus was obedient to her on earth and he will grant her requests in heaven." (www.udayton.edu/mary/resources/titles/Advocate.html)

When we consider these views we wonder if we are still in front of the same Gospel the Apostles passed to us. The Gospel tells me that God cares even for the flowers of the fields and the sparrows of the sky. Jesus came in human flesh and gave His life to us, so that we could feel well in front of God and not be afraid of Him: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest (Jesus) who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have

a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16) So we wonder, "If we still need someone else to feel more comfortable in front of God, did Jesus die in vain? What could Jesus do that He didn't do to convince us of His love?"

We live in an ecumenical age. We love and try to understand one another. But we cannot accept any ecumenism that so evidently detracts glory from Jesus to pass it to another human creature. If the true Mary could be with us, she would refuse all the exaggerations, titles and functions that have been given her. She would tell us that her unique privilege was that of being the instrument of God's grace so that we could have Jesus among us as part of the human race. But once Jesus came, she lost her function. As at Cana she said: "Do whatever He will tell you," so she would say, "Go to Jesus, for this is my only glory and function, pointing to Jesus as the only One through whom you can know God and receive salvation." This is the message and function of all the true servants of Jesus, and I love with all my heart her example as I love all the other witnesses that helped me know and love Jesus.

The Pope, Mary, me and you
Pope John Paul II, he who had to be the representative of Jesus on earth, dedicated all himself to Mary ("Totus Tuus"). It was his privilege to do this. But he had no right to dedicate the world to Mary, for we can dedicate only what we possess and he was not the owner of the world. In a special way he couldn't dedicate me to Mary, for even I am part of this world, but I have already been dedicated to Christ and to Christ alone. Jesus, and nobody else, redeemed me: "not ... with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." (1 Peter 1:18,19) Only in His name I continue to call you brothers and sisters, for the Gospel doesn't give me any other name through which I can go to my and your heavenly Father (Acts 4:12; John 14:16).

Please, help us to be brothers and sisters in Jesus' name. After all, Christians are such only because of Christ, aren't they?

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCES

THE MAN WHO COULDN'T BE KILLED

An incredible story of faith and persecution during China's Cultural Revolution

RESUMÉ OF THE FIRST PART

Mr. Glorious Country Wong, after a moment of distress, found a good accommodation in life. He became a police officer and acquired a second wife. Wishing to enjoy life, he started gambling. Because of this and of his bad manners, the life of his family became very painful.

But an unplanned discovery changed his life. During the Japanese occupation of China, in a desolated Shanghai filled with dangers, he discovered a book whose paper was good enough for his wife to draw shoes models. Instead, he discovered that those pages would draw out of him a new man: it was the Holy Scripture. Faced with a new perspective for his life, he decided to honour the only true God by receiving Jesus as his Saviour and Friend, and by obeying His commandments. So he took away the idols he had at home.

SECOND PART

Divorcing his second wife
Soong, Mr. Wong's second wife, gave birth to a beautiful baby girl in 1946, a week before he graduated from his long distance Bible course. He was so proud of her and loved her mother so much. But studying the Word of God, he discovered that God was not pleased with polygamy and he had to make a decision. He had to renounce one of his two wives.

With the baby in his arms and with all his heart full of love for his wife, Mr. Wong dared to suggest:

"I think we should become like brother and sister."

"I bore your child, Old Husband," Soong retorted. "How can I be your sister?"

"Soong, I've decided to be a Christian." Mr. Wong flashed a smile. "A true Christian can be the husband of only one wife if he wants to be baptized."

It wasn't easy for Soong to understand and accept, and she had some very good reasons to refuse.

The only solution, Mr. Wong knew, was divorce but he hadn't even the courage to pronounce the word. When, the day after, he found the strength to



ask for it, Soong refused. Her complaints filled his heart with a deep pain. He should have thought before asking her as a second wife, but that time he didn't know anything about God and His regulations. The dilemma was almost impossible to solve. On one hand he loved his wife and baby, and didn't wish to hurt them or create difficulties in their life. On the other hand, he had to honour God and be a true Christian. The only way to solve the problem was to take on himself the burden of evil consequences for his past sinful life.

Mr. Wong found encouragement in a Bible story, that of Abraham asking his second wife Agar and child to leave the family. The story continued saying that even if they went into the wilderness, God provided for their needs, and they prospered. He shared this story with Soong. She understood the meaning and just asked: "How can we save face?"

"I want to take care of you, Soong."

Proudly Soong replied: "I am an opera singer. I have money, so I can take care of myself. Do not worry about me and the baby."

But Mr. Wong didn't accept. He didn't wish to send her away with empty hands: "I give you all the family wealth and jewellery, I hope it'll provide for your future." He also gave her the apartment he owned in another town where she could go and live. Practically he remained without anything except the apartment where they lived in Shanghai, but that sacrifice was not a big burden if in this way he could manifest his concern for Soong and his love for Jesus.

Resignation

Once the problem of the commandments forbidding idols and polygamy (the second and the seventh) were solved, he had still to honour another two: the fourth about keeping the seventh-day of the week (our Saturday) as a holy day of rest dedicated to God, and the eighth about not stealing.

As a police officer he had transgressed both of them by working all days of the week, as it was customary in China, and using his power to accept and even ask for bribes.

Striding into the police station, Mr. Wong's mind raced with the challenge

ahead of him. As he walked, he prayed to his new friend: "You know I'm living in conflict with your Regulations. Help me to do the right thing regardless of pain. Show me how to care for my family, for we have so little since Soong left."

How could he present his case to his superior? He started:

"I found a new friend."

His superior lighted a cigarette. "Who is he?"

"Jesus Christ."

The superior laughed in disbelief, as if saying, "Did you find him on the street?"

Mr. Wong told him the story of his conversion but only raised the opposition of his superior because Christianity was considered a Western superstition and China was going to be a communist country. If Mr. Wong persisted in his superstition, he would be considered an enemy of the people. In such a situation, Mr. Wong realized he couldn't work any longer with the police and he resigned. To avoid misinterpretations on his reasons, he explained: "I'm not concerned about which government controls China. That's determined by the Real God who lives in heaven. If I keep this job, I'll be expected to take bribes."

Mr. Wong had counted the cost. He knew bribing was deeply ingrained into Chinese culture (we know not just there).

The superior took a deep drag from his cigarette and laughed defensively, as if saying, "That's the Chinese way! Why fight it? Bribes are like bonuses supplementing the meagre wages."

"I'm a Christian now," Mr. Wong explained. "The Bible teaches that we should be satisfied with our wages. God wants honest men who stand for their beliefs though the heavens fall, so I can't take bribes. But this is not the only reason. I've decided I can no longer work on the seventh day. I believe it's a holy day to celebrate with my new Friend Jesus and the real God. I cannot work on the Lord's day."

The resignation was accepted. While Mr. Wong was leaving the room, his former supervisor asked, "You'll never find a job in which you can follow your impractical ways. How will you support your family without money?"

The answer came spontaneously, "My Friend Jesus will provide all our needs.

He who clothes the lotus blossom will clothe my family."

Things get worse

Life was becoming hard for everybody. After the victory over the Nationalist Party, Communism controlled China with an iron fist. Mao Tse-tung wished to take away all religious superstitions and Christianity was especially in danger for it was considered an emanation of capitalism. Mr. Wong longed for another child to fill the emptiness left by the little girl he'd sent away with Soong. In due time his wife Lu gave birth to a girl they named Lin. But soon after, Lu began to show signs of tuberculosis. Mr. Wong, who attended church on Sabbath instead of working, earned too little money to give her proper medical care. Happily, the church members visited Lu and provided medicine as they could.

On his side, Mao started his "medical" treatment on the spiritual condition of Chinese people by expelling all missionaries. Many Christians who had joined churches only to get the bowl of rice offered after the church service, re-

nounced their faith. Also they confessed they had been deceived by the missionaries. Some of them became spies. Mr. Wong feared some of these "rice Christians" could report his words and deeds to the government.

To control remaining Christians, the government invited all to join the national newly formed church, so that they could infiltrate it with communist agents and with Marxist ideas. They were sure that without external support and thanks to the new prosperity Communism would give everybody, Christianity would die. Will Mr. Wong's faith die too? How is his family going to survive?

Reduced from, *The Man Who Couldn't be Killed*, written by Stanley Maxwell

[To be continued in the next issue. Be sure you do not miss it. If you do not receive **Il-Lehen tat-Tama** on a permanent base, use the included card at page 8 to apply for a free subscription.]

THE TEN REGULATIONS MR. WONG WISHED TO OBEY

I: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.

II: You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.

III: You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

IV: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour 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.

V: Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.

VI: You shall not murder.

VII: You shall not commit adultery.

VIII: You shall not steal.

IX: You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

X: You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour's.

NEWS FROM THE WORLD

PERU: ADVENTIST CARAVAN OF HOPE TO WALK THE INCA TRAIL

December 13, 2005 Cuzco, Peru [R. Dabrowski/ANN]

Adventists in Peru announced plans for 2006 to conduct an innovative initiative, fitting with the local environment, during a recent visit of Pastor Jan Paulsen, world president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

“Our goal is straightforward — to share the gospel of Jesus Christ right on the Inca Trail,” said Melchor Ferreyra, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Peru.

Ferreyra said that no other venue was more fitting for such a “creative approach to our Christian witness” than the ancient Inca Trail with its starting point in Cuzco and reaching the world-wide known Machu Picchu.

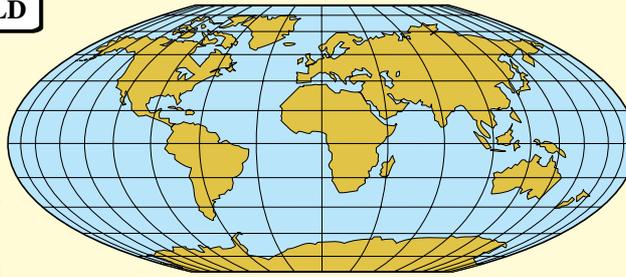
In the last 12 months a small but vibrant congregation was established in Machu Picchu along with a small school. The Adventist Church in Peru was ready to purchase a new building in Machu Picchu, near the central plaza, to house church activities and provide space for a tourist information centre.

AFRICA — ADVENTISTS SHARE HOW CHURCHES CAN HELP THOSE WITH HIV/AIDS

December 13, 2005 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States [Taashi Rowe/ANN]

While it is not a hospital, many have testified that the love and warmth experienced in churches can be a healing balm for the soul. Oscar and Eugenia Giordano, both medical doctors who agree with the concept, are working to help Seventh-day Adventist churches in Africa become “support centres for the communities in the fight against HIV and AIDS.”

With the message that the church can be more than a place just to go once a week, the Giordanos shared their own experiences as director and associate director for the Adventist AIDS International Ministry (AAIM) office in Johannesburg, South Africa at the annual American Public



Health Association (APHA) meeting Dec. 13. APHA is the oldest and largest organization of public health professionals in the world. This year's meeting is being held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States.

The Giordanos joined other presenters in exploring the link between faith and health at the meeting. In promoting the faith-health meetings, APHA says, on its Web site, “according to literature, faith-based organizations can help fill an essential role in providing programs and services to local communities. Some would even say that faith-based organizations are more effective in enabling people to overcome personal health challenges.”

Love and compassion is one of the main components used in the implementation and approach to those infected and affected by this epidemic, said Dr. Oscar Giordano.

“In most of the churches there are many people willing to participate in the outreach to PLWHA [People living with HIV and AIDS], but the reality is that they do not know how to help. This approach gives the opportunity for them to

‘know how’ and to fulfil their mission,” Dr. Giordano continued.

Some of this outreach includes forming support groups, leading workshops about how to live with the disease, visiting those who are sick and providing income-generating activities for those infected with the disease.

CROATIA — HELP TO REBUILD HOUSES

December 13, 2005 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [Compiled by ANN Staff]

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is repairing homes and distributing winter aid supplies to war-stricken families in Croatia who continue to return to their homes after the Croatian War of 1991 to 1995. In co-operation with local government authorities, the ADRA office in Croatia has repaired 806 houses through support provided by the German and Canadian governments, as well as other donors. ADRA also distributed winter supplies for returnees and, for the next three months, ADRA will distribute food and hygiene parcels, firewood, bed sheets, blankets, and kitchen utensils to 600 families. The distribution project is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs through ADRA's office in Norway.

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CHILDREN STORY

LET THE TRUTH COME OUT!

“Let not mercy and truth forsake you” (Proverbs 3:3)

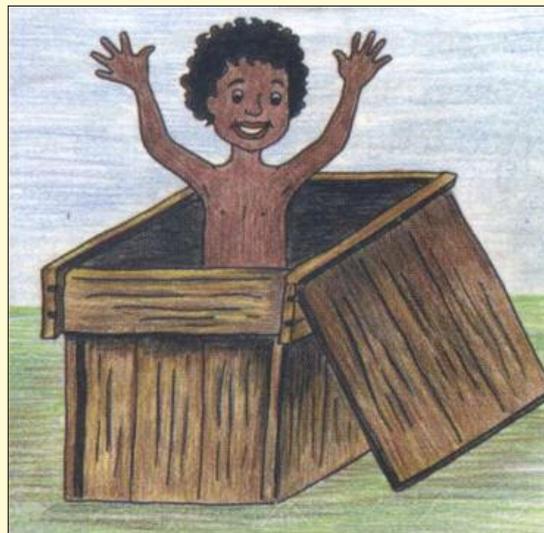
Some time ago, a judge sentenced that telling an adult that he is a child is not an offence. Somebody, having been called a child, felt offended and took the question to the judge to receive justice. And you, children, would you feel offended if somebody calls you adults? Let’s see if after reading the story it is the case that an adult may be offended if somebody calls him child.

In an African village there was a very wise chief. All people who had suffered any injustice were used to go to him to receive justice. So it happened that one day, Ahmed and his mother went to him. They said that Bumbo and his wife had cheated them. The two denied: “No, it isn’t true that Ahmed lent me 100 coins. If he had given me that money he would have asked me for a receipt.” But the young Ahmed insisted he had given the money without asking for a receipt because he trusted Bumbo as an honest man.

The chief was doubtful. He thought the young Ahmed was true but, unfortunately, he couldn’t offer any evidence of his right. Since the case was really difficult, he decided to take time and find a way to solve the problem. So he

said, “Come all you four tomorrow morning and we’ll see if the truth will come out.”

Next morning, at the chief’s feet, there was a wooden box. “Take this box on your shoulders - the chief told Ahmed



and his mother - and carry it all around the camp.”

The box was very heavy and the mother was suffering while she was trying to help her son to carry it. “I’m sorry I’m causing you to carry this burden” - he said to his mother - “It is all my fault. If only I had asked for the receipt!” “My dear” - the mother replied - “don’t be sorry. You are young but

honest and believed that Bumbo was like you. Don’t repent for having trusted him. Pity him if he is a man without conscience.” And so, all wet with perspiration, mother and son completed their tiring walk around the camp.

“Now to you”, the chief said to Bumbo and his wife. Even Bumbo’s wife was suffering under the heavy box. “Courage, my wife!” - said the husband - “Resist, so that after this test we’ll not be obliged to give the 100 coins back to Ahmed. He has been very simple-minded not asking for the receipt and we will have all the advantage on our side when, even after this test, we’ll confirm that we didn’t receive any money.” While talking, they too finished their circle.

When they put the box on the ground, the chief commanded, “Let the truth come out!” The box opened and an intelligent and lively child jumped out. He referred all the talks he had heard and this way the chief could order Bumbo to give back the 100 coins and receive 100 whips.

Dear friends, why did the chief put a child and not an adult in the box? Ask an adult, maybe he will tell you. Do you like to know? You are the mouth of truth. And even Jesus, to rebuke the priests of his time and teach his disciples some important truths, referred to children. Also I believe that often, when He was troubled by the problems created by adults, He received comfort from children, thanks to their spontaneous sympathy. Jesus gave so much consideration to children. He loved and called them to Himself (Mark 10:14). He presented them as models (Mark 9:37). He identified Himself with them (Mark 9:37). He protected them (Mark 9:42).

So you see. If you are considered so precious by your Saviour, I just need to encourage you keep the characteristics that make of you citizens of His kingdom, your purity, simplicity and that confident love for truth, that so often distinguishes you from us the adults.

(Adapted from an African tale)

G. Negro

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

- Next issues of *Il-Lehen tat-Tama* (if you do not already receive it regularly).
- The illustrated Bible Correspondence Course “Discover” in 26 lessons.
- I would like to have a personal meeting with Pastor Leonardi to know better about your faith and/or discuss some problems.
- You can use the space below for a question or an opinion. (Card n° 40-41)

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CHRISTIAN SOCIOLOGY

WHY ARE YOU HAPPY TO PAY TAXES?

“The government is exploiting us! They always raise taxes and don’t care for the need of the people!” Have you ever heard or made such a complaint? Even if an honest citizen (and such we have to be) faithfully pays his taxes, usually we are not happy with them and everybody would like that the government may reduce them. This may be all right! What I wonder is why then so many people, while they complaining (not always correctly) about the taxes they are obliged to pay, are instead so happy to pay additional taxes they are not forced to pay at all? Are you one among them?

Am I joking? Do really such people exist? Yes, sure, and they are a very large crowd. You can meet them going to special tax booths, not just once a year, but every week and there, deposit their savings. And when they go away they say, “thank you” to the clerk, what I suspect they don’t say at all when they pay normal taxes! Some of them leave there just a little amount of their savings, and do it as a game, but many really give the clerk what represents a sacrifice because they are poor and could use that money in a better way, for themselves and for their family. But they are very faithful, and every week go to this special tax office and gladly and hopefully leave their gift.

Week after week the paid amount of these taxes increases, and if we could have them back, it would be of great help.

This reality exists in most of our modern countries and in Malta too. In Malta, to pay normal taxes, we have to go to Floriana, which may be an annoyance for many. To facilitate the payment of these other voluntary taxes, we have been offered many options and everybody can find an office in each quarter and small village of our islands. The only difference is that you don’t read “Tax payment office” at the entrance, but “Maltco lotteries.” But this is not all, for other fee agents can be found everywhere, in front of Valletta gate, and in many other places.

What is the secret of this modern tax paying office? Very simple: They take your money and offer you a dream. Many need a hope to live, for they are not happy with their life, and they think that the lotto or the lottery can give them a joyful life. Every time they give their money at the booth, their heart is



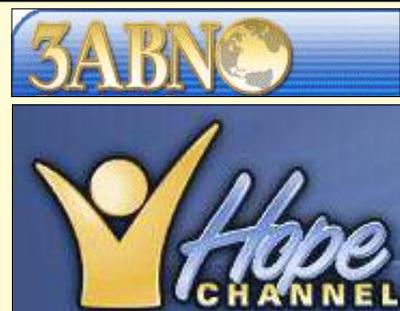
The most known and appreciated tax paying office in Malta

full of hope, and they dream wonderful dreams; they dream, you dream of a joyful life with happy people that you love and that love you. It becomes like a drug to which we are addicted: it adds a thrill to our life but we forget something important. The joy of our life doesn’t depend on the money we have, but on what we have in our heart. So the Gospel says: “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those

who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” (1 Timothy 6:6-12)

Past. Giovanni Leonardi

KNOW THE BIBLE ON YOUR TELEVISION



Many friends are enjoying the Gospel through the Television. Why don’t you join them?

What you need is either a satellite system pointing to Hotbird or an ADSL Internet connection to receive them on your computer.

We offer you two world-wide networks: The 3ABN (Three Angels Broadcasting) Networking and Hope Channel.

The first is privately held by some members of the Adventist Church, the second is the new official network of the church herself. Both are equally worth to be watched. You will not find any artificial religious excitement but a quiet, spiritual atmosphere, and a sound explanation of the Holy Scriptures.

For more information, visit their web sites: WWW.3ABN.ORG and WWW.HOPETV.ORG.

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

WHEN JESUS PASSES BY, DON'T LET HIM GO AWAY

Did you ever think of how it would have been if we were living in the days when Jesus walked on earth?

Jesus' first preaching was that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Jesus needed the help of people of good will to preach this news. Would you have liked to be one of the chosen ones? Let's see how the first disciples reacted when the Master called them.

Let's take a walk by the Sea of Galilee where Jesus was passing by as He met his students.

When John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God!", the two disciples who were with him immediately left their teacher "and followed Jesus". It also happened that "One of the two ... Andrew. ... He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" ... And he brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" ... The following day Jesus wanted to go to Galilee, and He found Philip and said to him, "Follow Me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote — Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." (John 1:36-37; 40-45).

When he discovered Jesus, Andrew was filled with so much joy that he went to fetch his brother Peter. What about Philip? He too hurried to his friend's house Nathanel to tell him. They received their calling with joy. They all followed Jesus to the end.

Let's go to Samaria, to the town called Sychar. Here Jesus met a woman with so many problems and with probably no hope. But Jesus spoke to her with love, and the woman started looking at herself in a new perspective. Filled with enthusiasm, she left the pot she had carried a long way, and went to tell her people about her new friend: "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). They too, with great enthusiasm begged Jesus to stay with them.

All of us know the story of Mary and Martha. Let's read it once again: "Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her

house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42).

Mary had been possessed by demons. When Jesus redeemed her, she accepted the change in her life and wanted to stay close to Him. Even her sister Martha loved Jesus, but her experience was different. While Mary would not leave His side but listen to Jesus' teachings and grow in His grace, the other loved Jesus but her focus was on physical things which distracted her attention.

Everybody knows the story of the rich young man who asked Jesus what he should do to enter the kingdom of heaven (Mark 10:18-22). Jesus' reply was to obey the commandments, to which the young man responded that he had kept them all his life. Jesus knew that the only problem was that his attachment to his possessions was too strong. Though he loved the message Jesus was teaching, his heart focused on other things. That is why he left Jesus' side and went away sadly.

What about our experience? Do you think it would have made any difference if we were in those days or now? It all depends on us, on you and me. Jesus has called us for His kingdom. We have been chosen. We have a mission to accomplish. What will we do?

Am I happy that Jesus chose me? Is my answer "Yes" to His invitation? Am I showing the same enthusiasm Andrew, Philip, the Samaritan lady and her people showed? Is there anything in my life that is occupying my time and I'm finding it hard to give up? Have I surrendered everything to Jesus that I may follow Him without being distracted? Let's consider

that when Jesus called the disciples, they left everything and followed Him with no questions asked.

We all have a different experience and approach to the calling. In my experience, when I started following Jesus and walked by His side all was well. The peace and joy in my life were tremendous. There were trials yes, but my trust was always in Him. Several years passed when suddenly we were taken off course into another track which seemed right in our eyes but not according to Jesus' way. Trouble started and the light started fading away till it was very weak. Why? Because I was losing sight and letting go off Jesus. Jesus Himself did warn us that there will be ferocious wolves that would come into the fold dressed in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). This is when Jesus took me by the hand and brought me back to the light, here, to the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Jesus put me back on the right track. Brothers and sisters, study the Word of God thoroughly so you will know when someone comes with new ideas. Know the Scriptures well, become familiar with their meaning, so you will not be driven off the track (2 Peter 1:16-21). Stay side by side to Jesus because He knows the way and He is the one who leads. By Jesus' side I feel well and secure. In Him I have assurance as He is faithful.

The key to the kingdom is Jesus. Salvation is a free gift by the grace of God. The choice is mine to follow or to let Him go by. I made my choice, I want to follow Jesus and nothing must come between me and Him. My life and time belong to Him. I was purchased with a very high price, His precious blood. I must show my appreciation and thankfulness toward my Redeemer. We need not let God wait for ever for our answer to his calling. We need to say, "Here I am Lord, I will follow You. Take hold of my hand. Please don't let me slip away."

Mrs Dora Stagno



"Mary has chosen that good part."

HEALTH & ADVENTISTS

LINKS BETWEEN LIFESTYLE AND LONGLIFE

An article published in last November's issue of *National Geographic* inquired what could be the secret for long life. The article, "The Secrets of Long Life", written by Dan Buettner (photographs by David McLain) considered three groups of people living in different areas of the world and known for enjoying a life span superior to the average population. These groups were the Okinawans in Japan, the Sardinians in Italy, and the Adventists living around the university of Loma Linda in Los Angeles, California.

One emphasis of the article was the link between life style and the concept of longevity. In an ageing world like this, where the average life expectancy is always rising, scientists are trying to find reasons and means to improve both the quality and quantity of years a person can live.

Our Adventist health reform has been one that has been dated back to the late nineteenth century with principles and results that till this day have stood the test of time.

Quoting from the *National Geographic* "... the Adventist church popularized organized vegetarianism, the graham cracker, and breakfast cereals (John Harvey Kellogg was an Adventist when he started making wheat flakes).... It expressly forbids smoking, alcohol, and eating biblically unclean foods such as pork. It also dis-

courages the consumption of other meats, rich foods, caffeinated drinks and 'stimulating' condiments and spices."

One of our founders, Mrs Ellen White, goes on to say "...grains, fruits and nuts, and vegetables constitute the diet chosen for us by our Creator."

In this article some Adventists were given an opportunity to express their experience and testimony in the Adventist faith health reform. Dr. Ellsworth Wareham, a heart surgeon at age 91, still assists in heart operations and expressly says, "to accept Christ is to be free, which reduces stress.... God directs and God protects". Indeed Adventists observe the Sabbath on Saturday, socialize with other church members and enjoy a sanctuary time that helps relief stress.

"The bible tells you not to eat pork" says Lydia Newton who prefers to eat beans, cheese, bread, and a slice of a birthday cake. She ranks among the worlds 20 oldest people three years shy of the lists leader.

From 1976 to 1988 the National Institutes of Health funded a 34,000 California Adventists to see whether their health oriented lifestyle affected their life expectancy and risk of heart disease and cancer. The study found



that the Adventists' habit of consuming beans, soy milk, tomatoes, and other fruits lowered the risk of developing certain cancers. It also suggested that eating whole wheat bread, drinking five glasses of water a day, and most surprisingly, consuming four servings of nuts a week reduced their risk of heart disease. And it found that not eating red meat had been helpful to avoid both cancer and heart disease. In the end the study reached a stunning conclusion. The average Adventist lived four to ten years longer than the average Californian.

It may be of interest to consider that while the Okinawians and the Sardinians may due their longevity to genetic reasons, the Adventists are not part of a homogenous ethnic group, so that theirs must depend only on their life style.

Dr. Timothy Muchay



Lydia Newton at the age of 112 years.

Please, do not call me father

Some days ago, a gentleman called me on the intercom asking if the father was in? I taught that maybe he was looking for the Franciscans who have a chapel just close to our church in Birkirkara and respectfully invited him to go there. Only when he left I started worrying, "Could it be that the gentleman had been attracted by some of our posters placed on our bay windows and he really wished to talk to me calling me "father" as Catholic people are used to call their spiritual leaders, and not "pastor" as we are used to? Could it be that he was a person needing help and I didn't offer anything because of this misunderstanding?" I felt really sorry for the incident, but it was too late to go and call him back and ask. He had already gone away.

I'm not used to be called "father" because we wish to honour Jesus' teaching, "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven." (Mathew 23:9). So my church members call me "pastor" which is an official title taught in the Gospel, or simply by name, "Giovanni" which makes me very happy.

So please, if you come and call on me, do not ask for the "father". Ask for "Giovanni" or if you really wish, for the "pastor", and everybody will understand.

Giovanni Leonardi (Pastor of the Malta Seventh-day Adventist Church)

HABITS & HEALTH

AVIARY PANDEMIC

Considerations from Italy

Mass media have so much insisted on the certainty of a pandemic flu caused by the chicken's virus that people, to protect themselves, have drastically reduced the consumption on white meat. A reduction of about 60% in chicken consumption has broken down this commercial sector. And this happens even if, not to risk losing many jobs, authorities continue to say that chickens are safe and there is no problem buying them. It is important noticing that when people realize that they are in front of a possible danger, accept to reduce drastically the consumption of a risky product.

Why, I wonder, doesn't it happen the same in relation with cigarette smoking and alcohol drinking even if we are sure they cause enormous and evident damages? Every year, cigarette smoking kills 90,000 people just in Italy, more than all deaths caused by accidents, drugs, aids, murders, and suicides together. Lung cancer, almost always caused by cigarette smoking, is nowadays the third cause of cancer death for women. Cigarette smoking reduces life of 8 to 12 years. Every two smokers, one will die because of tobacco caused diseases, says a statistic reported by Adn Kronos last May. Passive smoking causes about 1,700 deaths each year. If tobacco were a new product to be launched on the market, it would not satisfy the security rules of any country.

And if we consider alcohol, the 36 million of Italians who consume it (and the number is on the increase) put themselves at risk of extremely serious pathologies as hepatic cirrhosis, oesophagus cancer, cardiopatic ischemia. Not to say that while car accidents due to other causes are lessening, those due to drunk driving are on the increase. If we had to calculate the damages caused by alcohol consumption we would discover figures as 30,000 people dying every year; 3,000 because of car accidents. Also, alcohol is the first cause of death among youths from 15 to 29 years. Among them, alcohol abuse has increased by 3% for males and 103% for females in the decade 1994 - 2004.

How it is that hypothetical future damages influence people more than the already ascertained ones?

May it be that the financial interests of the great multinational companies gag the organisms that should inform us? Whatever it may be, we assist, without flinching, to the massacre. But we are invited to buy the vaccine against the aviary pandemic, vaccine that will be produced by other multinational companies ...

It's true that on the cigarette packets we find some threatening writings, but there is no daily pressing campaign to make people sensitive about the true effects of cigarette smoking and alcohol.

Considering that information organisms may be influenced by the enormous economical interests of the multinational

companies, it is time for us to become aware of our responsibility in avoiding or in increasing the consumption of some products. It is time to wake up and make our own ... interests!

Annamaria Di Benedetto



Women alcoholism is increasing. In case, never be ashamed of asking for help.



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