

Il-Lehen tat-Tama

"THE VOICE OF HOPE"

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BY THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN MALTA

An appeal to the Catholic clergy:

LET THE PEOPLE KNOW THAT ROMAN CATHOLICS ARE CHRISTIANS TOO

Dear colleagues in the Christian ministry, I know that this way of addressing you, may make some of you uncomfortable. When we consider the differences existing among us, can we really consider ourselves "colleagues in the Christian ministry"? I do not ignore this, and still I'm convinced that all of us wish to honour Christ and help people to know and love Him. We understand Christ's function and teaching in some different ways, but we still love Him and work for Him. This is why I consider you my colleagues and I hope you may consider me so.

Having this hope in my heart, I wish to ask you something important.

We are not Christians, we are Roman Catholics!

I couldn't believe it! Some months ago I was conversing about the Gospel with a kind Catholic lady, and I was explaining what being a Christian means. Attracted by that word "Christian" she asked: "But, are we Christians? We are told that we are Roman Catholics, not Christians." I explained that there exist different ways of understanding Jesus and following Him. Not all people go to the same church, and still all are Christians for they believe in Christ. "You may be a Roman Catholic, a Greek Orthodox, a Baptist or a Seventh-day Adventist as I am, but all of us are Christians." What I was saying seemed so evident to me, that I thought that lady had surely misunderstood what other people had said.

Unfortunately, some days later I asked a friend of mine about what had happened, and he confirmed that fact. It happened even to him that people said they were not Christians but Roman Catholics.

My surprise increased when an English friend told me that in England, when a priest was trying to encourage his community to think that they have to consider themselves, first of all, Christians, the assembly almost made a revolution saying: "We wish to be Roman Catholics!"

Some days ago, I was dialoguing with a contractor who seemed a good Roman Catholic and a kind person. We were talking about a building we wish to dedicate to God and that needs some alterations for this use. To help him understand, I told him that I was the pastor of a small Christian community and we wished to use the building as a place dedicated to worship God and to help people in need. Without any malice, he replied: "O, it will be like a mosque!" Being a Christian is such an unknown reality, that people think Christians meet in mosques like Muslims?

I wonder: How can all this happen? I understand that in our confused

Christian world, sometimes, to affirm our specific identity we need to say that we are not just Christians, but Christians according to the Roman Catholic or to the Seventh-day Adventists understanding. I can understand that simple people may simplify and, instead of saying "I'm not **just** a Christian, but a Christian in the Roman Catholic Church", say "I'm not a Christian **at all!**" But how sad it is when this happens!

There are already so many differences among Christians of different faiths: only Christ allows us to consider ourselves as brothers and sisters. If we renounce our common name of Christians, then all is really lost.

Can you help avoiding this misunderstanding? Can you clearly say in your churches that being a Roman Catholic doesn't mean you are not Christians?

And if you can, would you accept to write something for our readers? It would be a sign that we can accept each other with friendship and love even if we are partly different. It would mean that Christ is still the main value in our faith.

With Christian love,

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

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BIBLE BIOGRAPHIES

PAUL, PRISONER FOR JESUS

To know how God's grace helps people discover the truth, and change their lives

(This is the last part of a short biography dedicated to the apostle Paul)

I am ready to die at Jerusalem for Jesus!

In the spring of 58 A.D. I reached Jerusalem, and the brethren received me gladly. On the following day I went to see James, the Lord's brother, and all the elders were present. When I addressed them and told them in detail the great things that God had done among the Gentiles through my ministry, all of them glorified the Lord. The next day I went with the brethren into the temple for it was the feast of Pentecost. There were there some Jews from Asia, who had already opposed me in their towns, and when they saw me there, they stirred up the whole crowd and laid their hands on me. I was almost killed by the mob, for they accused me of preaching against Moses and the law and for bringing Gentiles into the temple. Sure, their accusations were untrue, but you know how prejudices can distort reality!

Under Roman custody

As I was still being beaten by the mob, I was rescued from their violence by the Roman commandant. He had me put in chains and I was to be taken to the barracks, but I asked him if I could address the people, and he permitted it. I told the people the whole story, who I was as a Jew, and who I had become as a Christian. But they all rejected my testimony and the crowd wanted to do away with me. So I was taken into the barracks for my own safety.

The next day I appeared before the chief priest and the council to be judged according to the Jewish law. I was quite sure they would condemn me, so, to save myself, I took advantage of the theological differences existing between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, the two main parties existing among them. I cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" And when I said this, a dissension arose between them for Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then there arose a loud outcry, and the scribes of the Pharisees' party, to oppose the criticism of the Sad-

ducees, arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." Now, since the dissension risked to become violent, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by

was not totally honest, and he listened to me only until he realized that, to receive the Gospel, he had to change his life. At the same time he hoped that I could pay him some money to be left free. As a consequence he kept me under arrest for two years, until he remained in charge.



"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." (Acts 26:19)

force from among them, and bring him into the barracks (Acts 23:6-10). So my life was saved, at least for that moment!

The Lord stood by me

The following night the Lord stood by me and said that I hadn't to fear because of my imprisonment. Instead, it would become a wonderful opportunity for me to enlarge my missionary field, going to Rome to bear witness for Him there.

In the meantime my sister's son came to tell me that a mob was ready to kill me as I was to leave the safety of the barracks, so I told him to go and tell the commander. To avoid any injury, he decided to give me a safe escort to Caesarea to appear before Felix the Roman governor. Felix gave me the opportunity to give my testimony before himself and his wife Drusilla, but his heart

To please the Jews, even Porcius Festus, Felix' successor, left me in prison. Because of the Jewish pressure, he asked if I would go up to Jerusalem to be judged, under Jewish law. I replied that I would only be judged by Caesar for I was a Roman citizen, and Festus said "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!" (Acts 25:12).

Appearing before king Herod

Some days later, at his request, I appeared before king Herod Agrippa 2nd, and Bernice his sister and incestuous lover. I was reminded of what Jesus said to me at my conversion, how I must give testimony even before kings. Now Festus (governor of Judea), unable to understand what I was saying about my faith in Jesus, stood up and with a loud voice said, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" (Acts 26:24).

My friends, if you study the bible never let anyone tell you that learning God's Word will drive you mad. On the contrary, learning God's Word will set you free from commandments of men. Whatever anyone teaches you, make sure it is backed up by God's Word for I – Paul, say to you "But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel, which was preached by me, is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but {I received it} through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:8-9, 11-12, NAS).

Now king Agrippa knew that what I was saying was not madness, for he himself was an expert in all customs and questions that have to do with the Jewish faith. So the king himself told me that he was "nearly persuaded to become a Christian." Unfortunately he was just "nearly" persuaded and never became a Christian. Nevertheless, he testified that I was innocent and worthy of being liberated. Only because I had appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen, I couldn't be liberated for such an appeal could not be disregarded (Acts 26:27-32).

Journey to Rome

So it was decided that I should go to Rome and, along with some other prisoners, we were given over to Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. Boarding a ship we put of to sea. My friend and colleague Aristarchus from Thessalonica travelled with me to Rome. I remember how he accompanied me on my third missionary journey through Asia Minor, and he was with me during the riot at Ephesus. He also attended to me and shared in my imprisonment. He was really a faithful companion and friend! (Acts 19:29)

Within a day at sea we landed at Sidon and Julius treated me with kindness and gave me liberty to go and see my friends. After that we sailed on to Myra (south Turkey), Rhodes, Cnidus and Fair havens in Crete. It was in this last location that, I realized that sailing was getting dangerous, and advised the men that this voyage would end up in disaster with loss of lives. Nevertheless, the owner of the ship thought that we should carry on with the voyage because the

harbour was not suitable to winter in, and this persuaded Julius the centurion to look for a better harbour.

Caught in a tempest

As we sailed close by the shores of Crete the wind blew softly, but it didn't take long before a tempestuous head wind arose. It's name is Euroclydon and is a fierce, tempestuous wind often experienced by navigators, in the eastern Mediterranean, sometimes of hurricane or typhoon force. This tremendous wind is so called because it blows from the northeast and the ship was caught in this tempest.

Never let anyone tell you that learning God's Word will drive you mad.

We were now sailing under the mercy of this tempest and, being tossed to and fro, we lightened the ship. On the third day at sea the tempest did not subside, so we threw the tackle overboard to lighten the vessel even more. For many days neither sun nor stars appeared, and the tempest was still blowing strong. All hope of getting through this storm was lost and we stayed without food for many days. The men were weak and losing hope of making this voyage through, so I stood in the midst of them and said, "I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve,

saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' "Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island" (Acts 27:22-26).

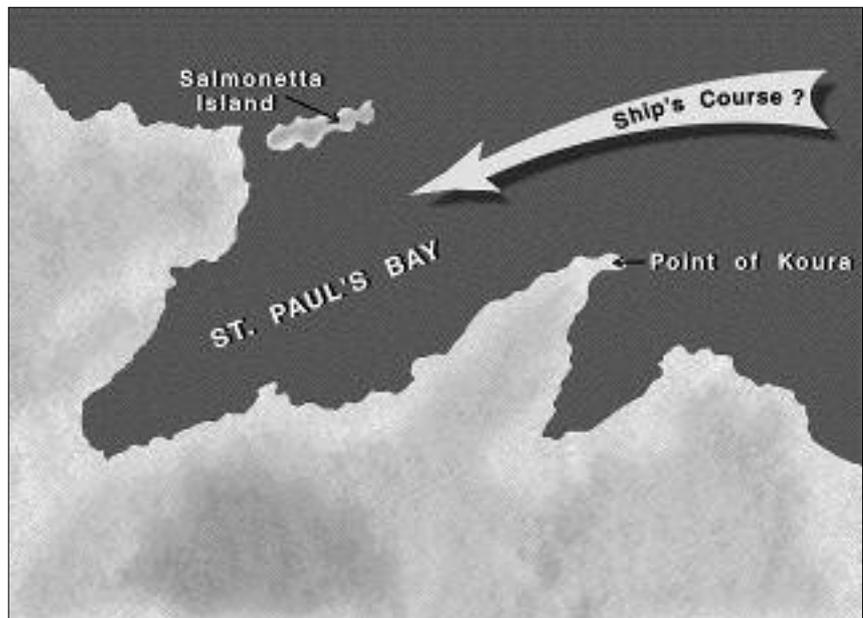
Shipwrecked on Malta

We were now in our fourteenth night of the storm, and at midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land. So, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, we dropped anchors from the stern, and prayed for the morning light.

Some sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and I said to Julius that unless these men stayed in the ship he and his soldiers would not be saved. So they didn't let them go.

Early in the morning before dawn I implored them all to take some food, saying, "you need nourishment for this is for your survival." To give example, I took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, and so they took courage and began to eat. We were two hundred and seventy six persons on the ship.

When it was day, they did not recognize the land but they observed a bay with a beach onto which they planned to run the ship if possible. So we hoisted the main sail and made for shore, "but striking a place where two seas met," we "ran the ship aground."



The apostle Paul's shipwreck on Malta

The ship started to break up by the violence of the waves. Because of fear that the prisoners would escape, the soldiers wanted to kill them, but the centurion wanted to save my life and commanded all to swim for shore, and so it was that we all escaped safely.

I, Paul, remember that day to be very cold and rainy. We were drenched with water and shivering. Looking for some place to shelter we were greeted by the natives and they told us we were on an island called Malta. The people were ever so kind and friendly; the first thing they did was to kindle a fire for us to keep warm. Looking around I decided to gather some wood for the fire, and when I had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on my hand. Immediately I shook it off into the fire, and I remembered what Jesus had promised for those who believe on Him, "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" (Mark 16:18).

The natives saw the whole incident and they thought I was a murderer who had escaped justices and wasn't fit to live. Most probably they said this because they saw the chains on my hands. Expecting that I would soon die, being no doubt familiar with the effect of such bites, the natives looked on in wait, but no harm came to me and they marvelled and said amongst themselves that I was a God. You see how easy it is to misjudge people when we do not really know them: from being a criminal, which was not true, I became a god, which was even more untrue. I had to assure them that I was just a man like any other, even if I was serving God, the only true One.

Publius' father healed

For the next three days we were the guests of a leading citizen whose name was Publius. Sadly it happened that his father was very sick with fever caused by intestine inflammation. So I went to him and prayed in the name of Jesus, and when I touched him he was healed. "So when this was done, the rest of those on the Island who had diseases also came and were healed" (Acts 28:9). For three months we stayed on the island, and I preached the Gospel to the Maltese people and many believed

in Jesus. They honoured us in many ways and when it was time to depart, they provided such things as were necessary and we boarded an Alexandrian ship that had wintered on the island and set sail for Syracuse. At the end, after a long and perilous voyage, we reached the imperial city in the early spring, probably, of A.D. 61.

At Rome

Arriving in the city I was permitted to occupy my own hired house, even if under constant military custody, what you would call "house arrest". The soldiers who kept guard over me were of course changed at frequent intervals, and thus I had the opportunity of preaching the Gospel to many of them during "two whole years," with the blessed result of spreading among the imperial guards, and even in Caesar's household, an interest in the truth about the gospel (Philippians 1:13).

After three days in the city I called the leaders of the Jews together, and I gave my testimony of the kingdom of God, trying to persuade them concerning Jesus from the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Many disbelieved and did not agree, and I quoted to them what the prophet Isaiah had written.

"Go tell His people and say: Hearing you will not hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the heart of His people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears. Lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them." (Isaiah 6:9-10). But when the Jews heard what I had to say they departed, and I said to them "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the gentiles, and they will hear" (Acts 28:28).

Set free by Nero

For two years I stayed in my rented house, and, to all that entered, I preached the Gospel, the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence and faith. During this period I wrote the Epistles to the Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, and also to the Hebrews. At the end of 2 years, in A.D. 63, I was tried at the judgement seat of Nero and released, probably because no witnesses appeared against me.

During this period of freedom, I set on my mission-

ary labours once more, visiting many places (1). I also wrote my First Epistle to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus. The year of my release was signaled by the burning of Rome. A fierce persecution broke out that time against the Christians. I was again put in chains and once more conveyed to Rome as a prisoner. During my imprisonment I wrote the Second Epistle to Timothy, the last I would ever write. I was tried, condemned and delivered over to the executioner. I knelt beside the wooden block and I thought that in a few short seconds my memory would be resting in my grave. Finally, however human judges may judge me, "there is laid for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge will give to me on that Day" (2 Timothy 4:8).

Paul testifies to the return of Jesus

But my friends! "I tell you a mystery, we shall not all die, and for we shall all be changed, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, for the trumpet will sound and Jesus will return, and He will raise from the dead His elect, incorruptible and immortal, and those who are still living and belong to Christ will also be changed, and together we shall meet the Lord in the clouds and be with Him forever more, therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

My friends, treasure my testimony, and believe in the Gospel. Men can give you wonderful teachings, but they can also misinterpret God's Word and teach you doctrines and commandments of men. Study and believe what is written in the Bible, the Word of God, for His Word is true and just, and it will set you free to start on a new journey of truth, change and commitment towards God.

The headsman's axe fell; and my head rolled down in the dust. I now await the risen Saviour to call me from my sleep. Will you be there on "that" day?

Interpreted by Anthony Stagno

[In the two previous issues: My name is Saul, the Pharisee; My name is Paul, the apostle.]

(1) Where Paul travelled can be partially inferred by some information we have from His last letters. We can mention Philippi (Philippians 2:24), Colossae (Philemon 22), Macedonia and Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), Crete (Titus 1:5). In A.D. 65 he had to be in Corinth, and Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20). He spent a winter in Nicopolis (western coast of Greece) (Titus 3:12). Some wonder if he went to Spain (Romans 15:24,28) but no sure information is given.

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NEWS FROM THE WORLD

MOLDOVA: ADVENTIST CHURCH TO APPEAL COURT DECISION

Kishiniov, Moldova [Becky Scoggins/ANN Staff]

After more than eight months since four Seventh-day Adventists were fired by a railroad station in Bessarabka, Moldova, for refusing to work on Saturday, the day of worship for Adventists, the country's top appeals court overturned the decision of both local and regional courts.

Railway officials said that Adventists breached the country's labor laws. According to Mihaela Copots, communication director for the church in the region, the workers were not only fired, but had negative evaluations placed in their permanent work records, making it difficult to obtain other jobs.

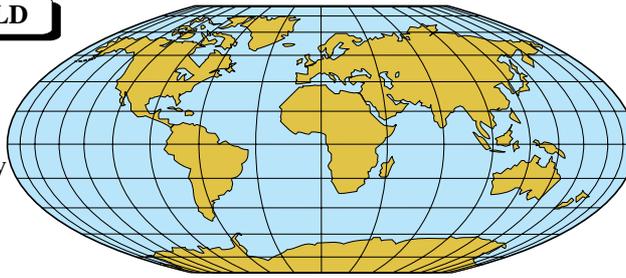
The four Adventists involved in the case are Elena Solokhina, Elena Tarachilo, Sergei Dobrovolski, and Nadeshda Gyumshli. According to local sources, the Bessarabka section of the Moldova railroad and the labor union made a joint decision to fire the four.

Sergiu Latco, director of the State Service for Cults Affairs, says that legislation grants religious freedom for all faith groups and calls on the company to rehire the workers.

"We are surprised by the recent ruling," says Valery Ivanov, communication director for Adventists in Euro-Asia. "According to our church leaders in Moldova, their national constitution gives religious believers the right to observe holy days. The final outcome of this case could affect not only Adventists but also devout believers of many faiths."

Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders in Moldova have requested a written decision, which the court has 15 days to present, and plan to appeal to Moldova's chief prosecutor. If this attempt is unsuccessful, according to Copots, the church will appeal to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, France.

A small Eastern European nation between Ukraine and Romania, Moldova has some 12,000 Adventists,



more per capita than in any other Euro-Asia country.

WHY DO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS GIVE SO MUCH IMPORTANCE TO THE SABBATH REST ON SATURDAY?

Because they wish to honour God by obeying all His commandments. The Fourth commandment in the Decalogue says: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day [Saturday in our week] 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). The Gospel says: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:2),

GHANA: EDUCATION AND HEALTH TOP CHURCH'S INVOLVEMENT

Accra, Ghana [ANN Staff]

Seventh-day Adventists will continue to partner with the government in the areas of education and health said Peter Mensah, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana, addressing the opening of the Second Triennial Session of the church in East Ghana on Jan. 29.

Mensa also said that the church is accelerating its efforts in educating the public and its members about HIV/AIDS.

According to press reports, Anne Nyamekye, deputy minister for environment and science, said the church should continue to pray for the neighbouring countries going through war. She commended the Adventist Church for being in partnership with the government in its development efforts, mentioning the first private university to receive accreditation in Ghana at Oyibi.

The minister also singled out the participation of women in the church and said that their involvement in curtailing HIV/AIDS epidemic is important.

There are more than a quarter of a million Adventists in Ghana worshipping in some 730 congregations.

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CHRISTIAN HEALTH

STRESS WITHOUT DISTRESS: Eight keys to successful stress management

This is the third part of a longer study prepared by Dr. Neil Nedley, M.D., in Proof Positive [adapted from]. In this part, DR. Nedley offers three keys to win stress. See the two previous issues of Il-Lehen tat-Tama for the previous three.

There are many techniques that can be helpful in dealing with stress. However, I have identified eight key stress control or stress management measures that I believe are under-utilized, but are of profound importance in helping us deal with stressors.

The first three keys (healthy adaptation, health lifestyle, and commitment to a cause that helps others and is approved by God) were considered in the previous issue. Let's consider now some others:

4) Plan properly

The fourth key approach for controlling stress is to take time to plan properly and be organized. Many people suffer stress-related problems because they have not planned properly. Life becomes confusing and uncertain without order and organization. In Luke 14:28 Jesus asks: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it?"

We can all think of instances in our own lives in which trouble—and perhaps even misery—resulted from a lack of planning.

5) Do not be anxious about the future

The fifth key approach to controlling stress is to refrain from being anxious about the future. At first, this may seem inconsistent with the previous point that emphasized planning and organization. However, the two principles complement each other. Without proper planning, it is natural to become anxious about the future. A student who is preparing for an upcoming test is benefited by a certain amount of stress. This type of "eustress" should provide motivation to study and prepare for the examination. However, it would be self-defeating to be worried and anxious about the test. Actually, worry tends to incapacitate, whereas a healthy attitude toward the stressor—seeing it as a challenge—tends to motivate. Fearful of his lack of knowledge, the student may be



Can we cope with stress? Sure, we can!

tempted to say, "Why even try? I can never master this subject in time for the test." A more constructive attitude would involve organization and planning without worry. The student may say: "I have three hours yet this evening; let me see what I can learn." Again, the Scriptures are of help on this point: "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things" (Matthew 6:34).

Jesus is not speaking against planning. This would contradict His previously quoted statement in Luke 14:28 that lends implicit support to the importance of planning. Jesus is saying, "Once you properly plan and carry out that plan, do not worry about tomorrow."

In other words, tomorrow will bring what it will. However, in our illustration of taking a test, it would be foolish for a student who was not studying to say, "I am at peace. I will not worry about the test next week. God will help me when the day comes." On the other hand, the student who is diligently studying should not worry that the teacher will make the test too difficult, or that studying will not help, or that a failing grade will be the result.

Worry and anxiety about things that we cannot change are self-defeating. No one today can address what tomorrow will bring. However, if the problem exists today and needs to be

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addressed today, then we should address it today.

This takes planning, organization, and motivation. Before we have the time or opportunity to address the issue, however, we should not worry about it. Jesus is calling us to do whatever work or planning that is necessary for today. At the same time He is advising us to stop agonizing over the future. Such worrying will always be a source of significant stress, and be counterproductive.

This dimension of freedom from worry may not only have benefits concerning stress management, it may also have profound physiological benefits regarding our body functions. Spontaneous regression of cancer (SRC) may be linked to a mental attitude that is free of worry. In SRC, a person with a fatal cancer survives independent of any treatment. Based on the research of Yujiro Ikemi, Dr. Larry Dossey has observed: "Often a prayerful, prayer-like attitude of devotion and acceptance—not robust aggressive prayer for specific outcomes, including eradication of the cancer—precedes the cure." He further pointed out "all the patients [who experienced SRC] gave themselves totally to the will of God after learning they had cancer." It may be connection with God through prayer—and a willingness to accept even ill health and adversity that best paves the way for healing.

Furthermore, anxiety has the ability to short circuit one of the most important stress-relieving lifestyle choices; namely, adequate rest. Two observations regarding rest are applicable here. First, sleep is a needful restorative process that is essential to maintain our maximal coping resources. Second, sleep experts identify stress and anxiety as key causes of insomnia. Dr. James Perl in his book, *Sleep Right in Five Nights*, observes that anger—one of the most common human responses to stressors—is a cause of insomnia for many people. These two points lay the foundation for a "vicious cycle." Stress interferes with sleep leading to more difficulty dealing with stressors. This in turn can promote more distress and further worsening of sleep difficulties.

One way to break the cycle is to address the anxiety or anger by bringing your concerns to God through an active process of meditation and prayer. Realizing that you can trust God with the future may be the missing ingredient in addressing this dilemma. Other cycle-breaking

approaches focus on maximizing rest and sleep even in the midst of distress. We talk about this in a different chapter.

6) Think on elevating themes

The sixth key defence against stress comes from thinking on elevating themes. The Holy Scriptures again provide meaningful guidance here, as we read in Philippians 43:8: "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely,

If we want to deal optimally with stress, we will do whatever it takes to protect ourselves from the commercial culture of our day and the spirit of discontent that it arouses.

whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things."

Unfortunately, most of us have a tendency to dwell on the negative. It is easy to forget the many good things that we have enjoyed in the past and are presently experiencing. But is our pessimistic bent without foundation? Madison Avenue is successful largely because they focus our attention on what we do not have, awaken in us a desire to acquire those very things, and make us discontent. Fanning the flames of discontent makes for good marketing. However, we make the choice to listen to the ads on the radio and watch them on TV. We choose to read newspapers that contain the ads. We need to realize that what we see and hear—even in the way of commercials—is largely under our control.

If we want to deal optimally with stress, we will do whatever it takes to protect ourselves from the commercial culture of our day and the spirit of discontent that it arouses. We must strive to focus on what we do have—rather than on what we lack. Let us not allow the bad to overshadow the good, but in the words of the old hymn, let us "count our many blessings, name them one by one." Such an attitude will help to strengthen our immune systems and our abilities to cope with difficulties.

Some families formally express gratitude and praise to God at mealtime. This is a good start, but a spirit of gratitude and praise goes beyond a few short prayers each day. It implies a continuous attitude of thankfulness for all the good gifts God has given us.

Such a realization of God's blessings will go far in warding off distress.

A "spirit of gratitude and praise" should be awakened in all of us because of the many blessings that the Lord has provided. There is a sharp contrast between the many comforts that most of us have in our country with the lack of such comforts in many other parts of the world. The severity of stressors in the life of most of us is small by comparison.

In my stress control seminars I give another assignment to the participants that, ironically, at first they usually find to be stressful. The assignment is to refrain from saying anything critical about anyone or anything for a minimum of two weeks. Not one critical word is allowed. During those fourteen days, if their children do something good, they are encouraged to praise them for it. If they did something bad, no criticism is to be given. In their work and other associations, the stipulations are the same. The class participants can only say good or neutral things. Criticism is strictly forbidden. Furthermore, if they catch themselves saying anything critical, the two-week process must begin again. Fortunately, the seminar spans eight weeks because virtually everyone finds it necessary to begin again the second day. Some may require a third or even a fourth beginning. The first few days are very stressful. However, when the two weeks are successfully finished, no one as yet has expressed regret regarding the assignment. In general, participants feel that it was a rewarding experience that helped to change their outlook on life and encouraged them to focus on the good.

This does not mean that criticism should never be offered. The class exercise is simply calculated to help people become more aware of their habits of faultfinding. It is designed to demonstrate to the participants that, with effort, they can control their acts of criticism; and thereby realize benefits to themselves and others. Certainly, criticism can be beneficial, if it is appropriate, constructive, and tactfully given. However, much of our criticism has its roots in a negative attitude. Worse still, we often are critical of things that we have absolutely no control or influence over. Such criticism damages ourselves and others. Furthermore, it tends to foster negative attitudes in those around us.

Dr. Neil Nedley

DAILY LIFE

A BEAUTIFUL ENVIRONMENT BASED ON LOVE

Environment is not just a beautiful planet. Loving it is not just living at one with nature all around us. We ourselves make part of it and spoiling the environment is not only smoke pollution, and garbage thrown around the countryside. We also pollute this planet and those around us with foul language, blasphemous words and immoral behaviour. We see public signs reminding us to keep our country tidy. Keeping our cities tidy means doing the exact opposite of throwing rubbish about and leaving a mess behind. The same is true for our behaviour.

Our speech behaviour should be pleasing to those around us. If we practice good speech behaviour in our home and a good relationship with our family, we will be more polite to our neighbours and the society we live in. The saying goes "charity begins at home". So what is charity and love? "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Galatians 5:22). When we have love we practice kindness and patience toward each other.

Showing kindness is an act of love by example. When the husband returns home from work, he usually thinks of his own needs. So he picks up his newspaper, sits himself comfortable in his favourite chair and calls on his wife to wait on him. He forgets that his wife was busy with housework all day long, and not sitting around doing nothing. The husband shouldn't feel that, because he worked from seven until three, his work is over. The working hours of a wife start early in the morning and go on all day, without ceasing. She has little time for rest.

This is the time when patience and kindness should come in, both for husband and wife. Mutual understanding is practised so that everything would be done heartily and correctly in a loving manner.

When the husband returns home from work, instead of sitting down to read the newspaper or watch television, it would be a loving gesture if he went straight into the kitchen where normally his wife is; greet her with a kiss and the two of them can chat a little over tea or coffee (better if it is decaffeinated!). In this manner they both would be having a break. Then they can help each other in preparing the evening meal. Shared responsibility is showing love through the act of caring one for the other: by so doing the relationship becomes stronger. This leads also to the setting of a good example for the children, teaching them to be kind.

For a good and strong relationship between married couples, they need to stay loyal and faithful toward each other. They should pay compliments to each other. Sometimes we find men and women who flatter and compliment others with words and smiles but they seem never to find an encouraging or complimentary word for their own spouse. This is where trouble begins in marriage, because they stop respecting each other.

We ourselves make part of our environment and spoiling the environment is not only smoke pollution, and garbage thrown around the countryside.

"However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:33).

Here I would also like to mention that when the husband and wife quarrel between themselves, they should never do so in front of their children. That is setting a bad example. When one of the parents disciplines a child and the other parent disagrees, he or she should not interfere in front of the child but wait until they are alone. Then they can discuss the matter with a loving attitude and reason calmly.

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else" (1Thessalonians 5:15).

Leading by the right examples

A good family relationship is vital for children too. When this mutual love relationship is exposed between parents, they are helping to build strong foundations for their children, which in turn will help their children be able to face their future. This is a wonderful experience shared by the family who enjoys peace and happiness.

The parent-child relationship is very important. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother' - which is the first commandment with a promise" (Ephesians 6:1-2). The relationship has to be a strong one. Parents are to show love and care toward their children, to be patient and kind too. Help them have confidence and security of assurance in the home. When love is planted and nourished at home it assures the children a

strong future: "Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness." (Titus 2:6-7).

When we show this love to our children and educate them in life, a relationship is formed. Whenever they come across a problem, they will come to open up to us to help them with their difficulties and problems. They won't go to another source outside their family because they will trust you for guidance. Let's not forget the great problem we have today with drugs, alcohol and wrong sex. We have to be strong and show kindness toward our children, bring them up with love and a dedication that helps them to face any problem they come across in life.

Tell them and show them the truth in love. Educate them well about abuse and its consequences so as not to become addicted. "Discipline your son and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul" (Proverbs 29:17). At the same time, when disciplining their children, parents should remember the following teaching: "Father do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Also teach them the value of true competition. In our society it seems that happiness is to be always on top of the others, but this is not true. They should learn that it is not always the winning that matters, but taking part with honesty: "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off" (Proverbs 23:17).

If we are well behaved ourselves, our children will have strong foundations based on moral values. This will remain a treasure with them forever. In this manner we will be investing in a sound, clean and good future for our children, for us and for the society to which we belong. When the environment is morally and materially clean we will all live in solidarity with the creation God gave us and with one another. If the environment around us is based on love it will be a pleasant one. In this manner we will be happy and we'll feel the effect that love gives. By this we show that God's love is in us because God is love.

Mrs. Dora Stagno

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

HOW I FOUND MY INNER PEACE!

I always needed 6 or 7 hours of sleep and my waking hours I thought how to make life better to those I loved.

When eventually I was no longer needed and after I worked so hard for them I had to leave with a broken heart. I thought to myself: How could the good God allow such things to happen? I rebelled and started to get away from God. I started to feel lonely. Something powerful was entering my heart. Slowly but surely I started abandoning the things I loved so much. I began to turn away to other things to fill the long days. The world has many things to offer and I followed what came to my mind. Deep down I was lonely for the friends I had, even though I made so many others.

Little by little I was getting away from God but did not care. My mind was filled with other things and I forgot God.

It was then or rather one morning that a young man, Christopher Bright came to my home. I had met his mother when I went to England for a refresher course. We then became friends.

In the afternoon Christopher asked me to take him to an address which of course I did. We knocked and were welcomed by a very kind lady. We sat down and talked of the temperature in England. It was very warm here. Eventually a gentleman joined us. He was pastor Leonard.

He spoke so lovingly of God's love that somehow, something started melting in my heart. I felt that I wanted to hear more. Seeing me looking at a booklet, he asked whether I wished to receive such ones. They were Bible courses. I had attended many seminars before but found these so very warm that I loved answering the questions. It suddenly dawned on me that, that what was missing: I had to return to God.

Finding God again changed my life. It brought me peace and joy. It helped to give me confidence again. It's wonderful to have that security because life is not easy without Him and we all need help.

Two years later I became a Seventh-day Adventist.

As a committed Christian I try to help wherever I am needed. I think I now have a fruitful life with never a dull moment. I thank and glorify the Father by speaking to Him in my heart though I wish with all my heart that I could do so aloud.

I ask God again and again for Faith and implore Him to "Help my unbelief". I know that Jesus emphasizes the fact that God wants to work for my needs. He wants me to know that He and only He is utterly faithful and trustworthy and that He will not fail me if I have confidence in Him. I learnt that the One Person in whom I should have Faith is my Heavenly Father. He may use a human instrument to give me help, to meet a need. But that Human instrument is His answer to my faith in Him. I must have faith.

As we were studying the Bible recently we came across a very important experience narrated in the Gospel. When Jesus came down from the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James and John, He was confronted with the failure of the other disciples to cure a possessed boy. After Jesus healed him the disciples asked "Why could we not cast it out?" So Jesus said to them: **Because of your**

unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Mat. 17: 19-20).

I knew this but now it has gone down deeper. I may speak many prayers to Jesus and ask Him many things BUT- do I pray to Jesus for this kind of faith? That is the burning question! Jesus wants to teach me to pray with this kind of faith.

I often hum my favourite hymn, "What a Friend we have in Jesus."

It says: "What a friend I have in Jesus - All my sins and griefs to bear, - What a privilege to carry - Everything to God in prayer! - Can we find a friend so faithful - Who will all our sorrow share? - Jesus knows our every weakness. - Take it to the Lord in prayer! - Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? - Take it to the Lord in prayer!"

Miss Rosalie Chetcuti

THE FATHER'S PROMISE

A father and his 10-year-old daughter were spending their holiday at the seashore. One day they went out to enjoy a swim in the ocean and, although they were both good swimmers, some distance out from shore they became separated. The father, realizing that they were being carried out to sea by the tide, called to his child: "Mary, I'm going to shore for help. If you get tired, turn on your back. You can float all day that way. I'll come back for you."

Before long, many searchers and boats were scurrying over the face of the water hunting for one small girl. Hundreds of people on the shore had heard the news and were waiting anxiously. It was four hours before they found her, far from land, but she was calmly floating on her back and not at all frightened. Cheers and tears of joy and relief greeted the rescuers when they came back to land with their precious burden, but the child took it all calmly. She seemed to think it was strange the way they acted. She said, "Father said I could float all day on my back and that he would come for me, so I just swam and floated, because I knew he'd come." (This story is told by H. M. S. Richards, in 'When Jesus Comes Back', Voice of Prophecy News, March, 1949, p. 5.)

We are living a very similar experience. One day Jesus had to leave us. When He went to heaven, after His resurrection, he knew that we would have to live in difficult situations. He knew what troubles and pains are. He personally knew how violence and egoism can sadly affect our lives. He knew what loneliness is. This is why He didn't leave without giving us a reason for hope.

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

Yes, sometimes we are troubled and discouraged, but Jesus is not forgetting us. His promise is sure as it is sure that He gave His life to save us. The waves may be frightful sometimes, but Jesus has another wonderful promise for us: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

When you feel tired, just remember Jesus' promise: "Your pain will not last forever. Just be patient. Wait quietly for I'm coming to rescue you."

BIBLE STUDY

ANGELS? WRONG IDEAS ABOUT THEM

According to the Bible, angels are creatures created by God at an unknown time, before the creation of our world according to Job 38:4,7: "Where were you when I [God] laid the foundations of the earth? ... When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God [the angels] shouted for joy?"

In Hebrews 1:14 they are described as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation". The word "spirits" can be easily misinterpreted. What we mean, when we use this word, is that it refers to a reality that is not made of the same substances we know at present, but how it is we do not know. What is important to know is that angels live in heaven with God, and also come to our planet to assist God's children.

One day, the patriarch Jacob was fleeing away from his angry brother Esau. He was alone in a foreign wild country, away from his parents, with just a very uncertain future in front of Him.

In the evening he took a stone and made a pillow of it. While sleeping, God sent Him a dream: "Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said: 'I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.'" (Genesis 28:12-15). The dream meant that Jacob hadn't to be afraid: God was with him and would bless him. The angels were working as a connecting line between God Himself and Jacob. The same is for us: God's angels look after us if we love and trust God.

It may be useful to know that the word "angel" means messenger. Angels are called this way because they act to represent God to humanity.

Usually angels are represented with wings (Seraphim have six - Isaiah 6:2), but it is just a symbol, to say that they can "fly" to go to heaven. You know that wings are useful only where there is air to support the body, while in the outer space there is no air at all.

Other times, they are represented as assuming a human form. In these occasions they can even eat our food. It happened to Abraham who was visited by three "men" (Gen. 18:1-8). One of them was Jesus Himself (vv. 16,17; John 1:18) while the other two were angels who later went to Sodom to save Abraham's nephew, Lot, before the town was destroyed (19:1 ff.).

Sometimes people are used to say that when a child dies, he becomes a little angel. It is a way to comfort those who mourn for his death. In many modern movies, dead people are represented as angels too. Many times they are represented as coming to stay with us again to help somebody. All this may be very poetic but is totally wrong, for three reasons. 1) Angels are not humans since they existed before the creation of humanity. 2) Dead people do not go to heaven to be angels, for the Bible says that when we die we just sleep waiting for the resurrection, which is not just the resurrection of the body, but the resurrection of all our being, of our own self. 3) We should avoid all ideas of reincarnation that is totally foreign to the Biblical perspective and comes from oriental re-

ligions like Hinduism and Buddhism, and from the new paganism of the New Age.

The resurrection will happen when Jesus, our Saviour, will return in all His glory and power to definitively save His people: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel [Chief of the angels], and with the trumpet of God. and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). That moment all the angels will follow Him and Jesus will send them to "gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Mat. 24:31).

At the resurrection, not before, Jesus says, we will be "like angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).

Believing differently, thinking that angels are dead-living people, is contrary to the teaching of God and should be rejected by all honest and learned Christians.

It may also be worthy of attention the fact that angels shouldn't be worshipped or prayed to (Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; 22:8,9). As they themselves say, they are just God's servants, and we do not pray to the servants. We pray directly to their Lord and ours.

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

CAN ANGELS MAKE SEX?

If angels can assume a human form, this doesn't mean that they can have sexual intercours and even have children, as some believe. If this were true, Jesus would be wrong, since He says that angels have no marital relations, which must also mean that they are not sexually distinguished.

One might imagine that maybe the sinful angels, the devils, can do this, but the only way the Gospel says that the devils can exploit a human body is through demonic possession, not sexual intercours. Imagining that the devils can make sex and have children, would mean to attribute them the power to change their biological nature, which is only in the power of God.

Genesis 6:1-4 is used to support this wrong idea. We read here that, before the flood, "the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. ... There were giants on the earth in those days." Some also believe that the "giants" the same text talks about are the result of such unions. If this interpretation were true, one should wonder why the devils get in love only with the "daughters" and not also with the "sons" of men. Are devils only males, or are they "maschilisti" as some humans? It is evident that such an interpretation is too much depending on wrong human presuppositions.

So, who are these "sons of God"? The context deals with the corruption of humanity, not that of angels, and it is among humans that we have to find the answer. It is true that in the Bible, the angels are called "sons of God," as we read in Job 2:1, but it doesn't mean that this expression always means the same. Other times it simply means "people who are faithful to God" (Matthew 5:8; Romans 8:14,19; Galatians 3:26). In our context, the expression "sons of God" refers to that part of humanity that had remained faithful to God and the "daughters of men" refers to that part of humanity that had abandoned Him. When these two groups mingled together, then humanity became totally corrupted and God could allow a new beginning only by sending the flood. As for the "giants", the text doesn't allow us to think that they are the children of devils and women, for, it says, that they existed before these unions and even after the flood. So they cannot be the result of these unions. Most probably a better translation would be "powerful or violent men", not "giants".

CHRISTIAN SOCIOLOGY

COMING ELECTIONS: A CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE!

Some days ago, some people wishing to give testimony of their faith told me with pride: "We do not mingle with politics!" as if they were good Christians because of that. Others say: "You can never trust politicians, they never say the truth, they only work for their own pocket."

We understand the reasons for such an attitude, but we cannot totally agree with it. 1) Politics may be a corrupted reality, but not much more than others in our society. 2) Honest Christians can give a contribution to make politics a better reality. 3) The Bible presents us with many example of political involvement on the part of men of God and we are sure that even in our time there are honest, not

perfect, politicians too. We suggest some few principles we may follow to help people feel better with politics.

1) Churches should not say how people must vote or for which party they have to vote. Churches should point the moral values of truth, justice, solidarity, not how to solve administrative or political issues.

2) Let politicians never try to support their ideas by offending the adversaries. They have to analyse ideas and facts, not people.

3) Let politicians of one party honestly recognize the good reasons the others

may have to support their ideas. We have to be suspicious in front of people pretending that all the truth is on their side, and all the wrong on the others'.

4) Let citizens listen to all parties and form their own conviction, not because of the party they support, but of the goodness of the cause that is presented, and the honesty and expertise of those who have to fulfil it.

5) Christianity is love, so let Christians never vote for egoistic reasons, but taking care of the common good.

Pastor Giovanni Leonardi

LET'S SAVE AMINA

From Amnesty International. Several Northern States in Nigeria have introduced new Shari'ah Penal Legislation. Thus, they opened the door for the application of death sentences, torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading punishments. This despite the fact that Nigeria recognizes human rights standards and has signed and ratified many international human rights legal instruments. Join the campaign to spare dozens of people in Nigeria from being victims of human rights violations under the new legislation:

Amina Lawal, a 30 year-old Muslim woman, was sentenced on Friday 22 March 2002 to stoning to death by a Shari'ah court at Bakori in Katsina State in northern Nigeria. Amina allegedly confessed to having had a child while divorced. Pregnancy outside marriage constitutes sufficient evidence for a woman to be convicted of adultery according to the new Shari'ah-based penal code for Muslims.

The man named as the father of her baby girl reportedly denied having sex with her and his confession was enough for the charges against him to be discontinued. Amina did not have a lawyer during her first trial, when the judgement was passed. But she has now filed an appeal against her sentence with the help of a lawyer hired by a pool of Nigerian human rights and women's rights organizations. Amina is awaiting trial at home. The Shari'ah Court of Appeal of Funtua, Katsina State, set 27 May as the date for the hearing of Amina's appeal against her sentence to death by stoning.

The first hearing of the appeal was scheduled for 27 May 2002, but adjourned

twice, first to 3 June 2002 and then to 8 July 2002 after Amina Lawal's lawyer argued for an early hearing to take place instead of having the hearing postponed until next year as previously proposed by the court. Amina Lawal is still weaning her baby. Such a long adjournment of the case would have not served any useful purpose and would have deepened the climate of uncertainty created by the whole process. The terms of the bail have also been reviewed. Under these new terms for bail agreed by the court, Amina Lawal will no longer be reporting fortnightly to them. The only condition, however, is that Amina Lawal had to have a 'surety'.

On 19 August 2002, a Shari'ah court of appeal in Funtua took the decision to uphold the sentence of death by stoning imposed on Amina Lawal. This confirmation of the sentence has shocked the civil society in and outside Nigeria, especially all those who have been actively campaigning for Amina's rights to be protected.

Amina Lawal was granted 30 days to appeal against the decision. Amina's lawyer filed another appeal to the Upper Sharia court of appeal in Katsina.

On 23 January, the Upper Sharia Court of Appeal of Katsina announced that the hearing of Amina Lawal's appeal against her sentence to death for adultery was set for 25 March 2003.



Amina Lawal © BBC

Il-Lehen tat-Tama encourages all its readers to take part in the international campaign to save Amina's life. We are still in time to do something. We do not discuss here if Amina is morally guilty or innocent. We just refuse any death penalty and all judgement passed on others because of political or religious reasons. Do not think it is useless: other cases have been positively solved because of the international pressure. Please, ask your friends to sign the form printed on next page and return it to us. We will pass it to the Nigerian authorities. We invite you, if possible, to make a clean photocopy of the form, before signing it, so that it may be presented in a worthy way. Thank you.

The Editor

Write to Il-Lehen tat-Tama

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

