

There is No Turning Back

Elisita da Silva & Orathai Chureson-Saw

Timor Leste Mission

My name is Elisita da Silva. I was born to a devout Catholic family and grew up with two brothers and four sisters in Dilli, Timor Leste. Through the influence of our parents, we all took great pride in Sunday worship. We put our trust in man-made images that we worshipped throughout our childhood years. Although I always wondered why we hardly had enough of God's word and why God's law was not being fully followed, I had always thought that the faith we shared since young was the only truth and we would never waver or wander from it.

Growing up in Timor Leste had never been easy for us. With little income and many mouths to feed, my parents struggled hard daily to provide food and necessities. We had few resources to live on, so one of my brothers went to England to work in order to financially support our family. Our joy was centered more on faith-building and worshipping on Sundays which we assumed to be the God-given Sabbath day for man.

During the war in Timor Leste that led to the country's declaration of independence from Indonesia, I was studying with an Adventist Indonesian missionary. Beside regular subjects, he also taught and shared with me some truths which I did not know existed in the Bible. When I was given a Bible to read, I soon discovered the truth from God's law on forbidding of idol worship and Saturday Sabbath keeping. I immediately realized that I had not been following God's commands. I was spiritually blinded by men's traditional way of worship and false belief for many years. The kind missionary did not tell me what to believe; instead, he patiently showed me what I should believe and place my trust upon.

After I found the truth in God's word, I sent the news of my conversion to my family. I proudly became a baptized member of the Adventist church and eagerly shared with my two sisters, the truth about the Sabbath and the original lifestyle that God desires for us to live by. They both followed my path and joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I did not fully realize that the news of my new-found faith and my effort to share it were not warmly welcomed and appreciated by the remaining members of my family. After my baptism and while serving as a missionary in Baucau district, my siblings called me back home for a short visit, indicating that they would like me to spend Christmas with them. I was thrilled at the thought of going

home for a short visit with my loved ones. Little did I know that they were planning something more than just a family reunion.

I was surprised to be greeted by my brother who had been working in England for years at my family's home. While walking towards the house I could feel the tensed atmosphere surrounding us. From his sullen looks, I could sense danger ahead. He immediately called me to the house terrace. Walking toward it, I began to pray that he would take my conversion lightly. The other brother came by and without any preamble, he slapped me right across my face. I did not see that coming so I nearly fell from where I was sitting. Soon my other brother from England joined him.

It was a long period of physical and emotional torments. My brothers took turns in beating and hurting me. They kept telling that I was a disgrace of the family. Living among the Sunday worshipper community, they felt ashamed and dishonored by my conversion into Adventist Church. During that difficult and painful ordeal, I was surprisingly strong and courageous. Although I was repeatedly beaten by them, I did not let out a cry. I closed my eyes hugging the songbook Zion that I had in my hands, bearing all the pain that kept coming again and again without physically defending myself.

Because of the shouting and beating noises a crowd of neighbors came by to watch. "*Leave your faith!*" my brother sternly and harshly spoke to me. Little did they know that I was willing to die for the truth than being enslaved by false beliefs. Those who came were in shock to see what was going on. Some tried to convince my brothers to stop abusing me. One of them even said, "*She is like Jesus's disciples who were persecuted but refused to deny their faith in God!*" That statement had reassured me. I felt empowered and gained added strength to endure the painful blows.

When it was past noon, my mother asked my brothers to stop the beating. She brought food for me to eat. When I saw that the dish was cooked with pork, I refused to eat it. When asked why by my mother, I responded, "Pork is an unclean meat." Upon hearing me speaking, one of my brothers totally lost his control. He grabbed his machete, wanting to kill me. The neighbors who stood by instantly intervened. They too began to persuade me to leave my faith. "*What I believe now is the truth,*" I heard myself insisting.

The beatings lasted from 9 am until 3 pm in the afternoon. Feeling exhausted and failing to persuade me, both of my brothers gave up and left me. One of my brothers' last word was for me not to ever leave the house. I was left with aches and pains from all the beatings, but my spirit was

extraordinarily high. I felt God's presence as I sat down and prayed to him on the green grass in the lawn behind the house.

I went inside the house looking for my Bible that I brought along with me. I regained my strength after reading God's word. The pains seemed to disappear faster than I expected. As I looked in the mirror, I was surprised to see only small bruises and a few swollen parts on my face and on my body while they should appear bruised and sore much more. I sensed that God's protection was upon me. He walked through that difficult hours with me and endured the pains for me. At this point in time I realized that staying on with my family would not be easy for me to remain faithful to my Adventist faith. I had to do something to be able to leave my family and keep my faith.

Late that evening I told my mother that I was going to the church in the morning to repent. I was actually planning for an escape. During the night I managed to call an SDA pastor and asked him to wait for me at the bus station with bus fare because my bag was taken. When the morning arrived, instead of going to the nearby church, I got on a bus and headed for another city. The pastor was already waiting for me when I reached the destination. He paid my bus fare and sought help for me. I never returned home for a long period of time.

I am now happily married to Reinaldo De Jesus Xavier, an East Timor missionary, and we have 3 lovely sons together. By the grace of God now my family is more open and accepting. They sincerely apologized for what they had done and allowed me and my sisters to practice our faith freely. My brother from England has even given us a car to use for my ministry. I am now currently serving as the Children's and Family Ministries director of Timor Leste Adventist Mission and continue to witness to the Catholic community in whatever ways possible. Once we know the God of heaven, there is no way that we could turn back. Our faith in the true God is worth everything!