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THE FOUNDATIONS AND FUNCTIONS OF

Public Affairs and Religious Liberty



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Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty



O 1

WHAT IS PARL?

A. AN INTRODUCTION TO PARL'S MISSION AND MANDATE

A Broad Mandate

The mandate of the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department is to provide the Seventh-day Adventist Church with visibility in the public space and to work to position the church and its services to a standing of credibility, trust, and relevance. Achieving these goals and objectives takes diligent work.

Our mandate is to connect with every public officer in every world church region. That means contacting presidents, prime ministers, governors, government officials, politicians, decision-makers, justice ministers, lawmakers, religious leaders, community developers, mayors, and any other public official whose functions have a bearing on, or intersect with, the mandate, ministries, or interests of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

PARL also works with the academic world, the human rights advocacy community, and with agencies that have like-minded goals or values.

PARL and Religious Freedom

Obviously, as its name indicates, one of PARL's core functions is to promote religious freedom. This freedom is one of the fundamental freedoms, which undergirds all the other human freedoms.

PARL is also involved in mediations—legal or political—to solve religious freedom challenges faced by Seventh-day Adventists around the world. These challenges often include religiously based discrimination in schools, workplaces, and society in general.



PARL and Public Affairs

But PARL is much more than religious liberty. Our primary task is to make known the identity, mission, and message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This means that PARL promotes the work of the General Conference, the divisions, unions, conferences, and church departments. We share with the world who we are and what we do, including our church's impressive portfolio of services: health, education, humanitarian aid, human rights advocacy, women's ministry, family ministry, youth ministry, and children's ministry.

PARL has therefore a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to its mandate, mission, and responsibilities.

PARL needs pastors, administrators, lawyers, theologians, social scientists, political scientists, economists, and professionals in every field.

PARL and the Church

PARL is an intrinsic part of the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and serves the General Conference and the world church. It is the most visible public face of the Adventist Church, and functions as the official liaison between the Church and the world.

PARL is also one of the original core departments and belongs organically to the church's family of departments. We must work together.

PARL makes plans and endeavors in all its activities to present the distinctive voice of the Church, its identity, message, actions, worldviews, and values. We strive, through all means possible, to make the case that Adventists are assets to the world. Ultimately, Adventists are spiritual assets to the world, especially at a time when religious organizations are seeking to legitimize their claims, teachings, and doctrines.





What does a typical day look like for a PARL leader? What activities will drive his or her agenda?

The responsibilities of a PARL leader include:

- Promoting the identity, mission, and message of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
- Developing strategies to provide the church with visibility, credibility, trust, and relevance.
- Sharing the Adventist Church's portfolio of services in the public space.
- Developing good relations with governments.
- Developing good relations with international and regional organizations, such as the United Nations or the African Union.
- Seeking good relationships with politicians and people in public office.
- Building relationships with legislative assemblies, parliaments, and parliamentarians.
- Developing relations with the diplomatic communities of major capital cities.
- Building good relations with other Christian churches, world religions, and philosophies.
- Conducting mediations on behalf of discriminated or persecuted Seventh-day Adventists.
- Using social media, websites, TV, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to further PARL goals.
- Organizing events, such as congresses, symposiums, festivals, and meetings of experts to promote religious freedom.
- Publishing journals, articles, pamphlets, world reports, and other resources.
- Participating in, and presenting at, different events, including international and regional forums.
- Writing articles for scholarly journals.



- Providing support to Seventh-day Adventist leadership in their encounters with political and religious leaders.
- Mediating on behalf of the Church in countries where the Church needs registration authorization.
- Proactively working to protect Seventh-day Adventist assets around the world.
- Organizing protocol luncheons to welcome and introduce the Seventh-day Adventist Church to public leaders, decision-makers, and dignitaries.
- Collaborating with other Church departments to promote a comprehensive portfolio of Church services. These services include health, education, humanitarian services, human rights advocacy, and services to women, families, youth, and children.
- As with every other Seventh-day Adventist Church department, PARL promotes “the way, the truth, and life,” with a particular emphasis on a relationship with God characterized by mindfulness, gratitude, and worship.
- PARL promotes religious freedom and other fundamental freedoms.
- PARL is involved in capacity building for both church members and other organizations with like-minded values.
- PARL encourages and assists in the work of Seventh-day Adventists in public office (also known as World Adventists in Public Office Association, or WAPOA).
- Upon request, PARL assists governments and international organizations in furthering the work of select commissions in a way that does not compromise the separation of religion and state.

C. A CLOSER LOOK AT PARL

God's Representatives

Every Christian is a witness of God. But more than just witnesses, Christians are God's representatives—signs and symbols of God's character. The primary function of all God's witnesses is to testify to the good reputation of God. That God is just, God is good, and God is love.

This mission is grounded on God's covenant with His people, Israel. They were supposed to promote God's good reputation among the nations. The main indictment the prophets addressed to Israel was that Israel had not sanctified the name of God among the nations: a way of saying they had not preserved God's good reputation. They had thus betrayed His covenant, which explicitly contained the clause that Israel was to be God's witnesses to the end of the earth.

Jesus commissioned all His disciples to be witnesses of His resurrection and signs of His presence until the end of time. His Holy Spirit reproduces Christ's character in His followers. Their witness is thus authenticated by the visible signs of Christ's character, the fruit of His Holy Spirit:

"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:20).

In the case of PARL directors, our additional mandate is to proactively work for the good reputation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This mission is to intentionally work for the visibility of the Adventist Church to position the Church and its services to a standing of credibility, trust, and relevance.

PARL in Practice

PARL departments are established in every division, union, conference, mission, and local church with an overarching mandate to contribute to the fulfillment of the mission of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Nations establish state departments, or departments of public or foreign affairs, to promote protect or defend their national interests. Likewise, the Church has established a department of Public Affairs to promote the values of the Church and to engage governments, political leaders, legal advisors, lawmakers, decision-makers, community leaders, religious leaders, human rights and humanitarian institutions, and international organizations.

Thus, Public Affairs is the department at the General Conference that works to promote the good reputation of the Church. The PARL team tries to achieve this goal by engaging in conversations and dialogues with decision-makers, government officials, politicians, legislative experts, religious leaders, scholars, and community developers.

The PARL team intentionally and deliberately seeks to introduce all the above-mentioned entities to the identity, mission, and message of the Adventist Church. We make the case that Adventists are assets to society. Our task is to show that Adventists promote life in all its dimensions: physical, mental, emotional, familial, social, and spiritual. Consequently, Adventists offer a wide range of services: health, education, humanitarian relief, and promotion of human rights.

This is far more than simply offering a better quality of life. Seventh-day Adventists are committed to pointing everyone to the One who alone can give eternal life.





0 2 AN INTRODUCTION TO PARL

A fitting place to explore the various dimensions of PARL—its meaning, goals, and objectives—is the form of an advisory: a gathering of PARL leaders committed to deepening their understanding of their responsibilities, and to developing a strategic plan for the goals and objectives they intend to achieve.



A. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF A PARL ADVISORY

The goals of a PARL advisory are the following:

- To collectively participate in outlining a clear vision of the nature of PARL as a department, its mandate, and its various responsibilities.
- To build capacity, specifically in developing tools for PARL leaders considering this quinquennium's major Church initiative—Total Membership Involvement. Thus, our goal is to find concrete means to introduce the Church to others to develop a good reputation for the Church's identity, its multifaceted mission, and its end-time message.
- To highlight specific means to introduce the Church's identity, mission, message, and services to public leaders within the international, national and local contexts.
- To explore ways to fulfill the goal of positioning the Adventist Church and its services to a standing of credibility, trust, and relevance in every context.
- To discuss inter-church and interfaith relations. This involves learning how to mingle with and engage, other Christian denominations, religions, and worldviews without syncretistic alliances or the loss of the distinctive Adventist identity, mission, and message.
- To consider ways for partnering with the academic and scholarly community to promote core values of truth and religious liberty.



- To explore avenues for engagement with decision-makers, lawmakers, and legislative affairs personnel. This needs to be done while carefully maintaining the distinction between the mandates of the Church and state or the mandate of religion and state.
- To develop creative ways of partnering with Adventists who hold public office in countries around the world, and to help develop greater awareness of the fact that all Seventh-day Adventists are God’s ambassadors in their respective contexts.
- To explore ways to communicate a global PARL vision, develop tools for capacity building, and share proven experience in engaging world leaders, decision-makers, lawmakers, parliamentarians, government officials, and social media.
- To learn how to use a broad range of media and communication tools to advance the work of PARL.
- To help position our Church leaders as relevant community advisors; people who are useful references for solving societal challenges.
- To learn to present the Adventist Church as a provider of a portfolio of services that we offer for the good of the human family. To also learn how to present Adventists as providers of critical wisdom and prophetic insights to a world in search of its soul.
- To develop strategies to help Seventh-day Adventists who struggle to enjoy their religious freedom rights.

B. PILLARS OF PARL

For a PARL leader to fully understand the breadth of his or her responsibilities, it is important to understand the pillars that support the whole edifice of a PARL department.

The pillars of PARL include:

- Developing a strategic plan to improve the reputation of the Seventh-day Adventist identity, message, and mission.
- Providing the Church with visibility in the public square.
- Endeavoring to demonstrate the credibility and worth of the Church's identity, mission, and message.
- Developing relationships of trust with governments, and with political, religious, and community leaders.
- Associating with governments who work through international programs that benefit the whole of the human family.
- Partnering with international and regional organizations with whom the Adventist Church shares values—such as in the promotion of health, education, humanitarian work, and human rights.
- Working for the restoration of justice, to vindicate those who are wronged, discriminated against, persecuted, unjustly detained, and abused.
- To train every Seventh-day Adventist to become an ambassador of freedom and truth.
- To mingle with fellow Christians to promote Jesus Christ and His kingdom.
- To work to further and fulfill all the principles of the Reformation.
- To collaborate with the UN and other international agencies to promote the principle of human dignity, and the values of peace, justice, and freedom.
- To work with international and regional organizations to promote comprehensive religious freedom.

C. THEOCENTRIC FOUNDATIONS OF PARL

Before talking about PARL mandate, functions, strategic planning, and activities, it is vital to cast a foundational vision that should determine every course of action in our service to God, the Church, and the larger human family.

God, Our Ultimate Reference

Each one of us ought to be clear about why we do what we do as PARL leaders.

For me, the most important activity of my entire life so far is to have baptized people from all over the world in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

What is your most meaningful accomplishment? Are you clear about who you ultimately serve and represent?

Let us never forget:

- God is our reference, the source of our being and doing.
- We live for Him.
- We work for Him.
- We speak on His behalf.

Consequently:

- We cannot be impressed by anybody on earth but Him.
- To God be all the glory (which is, by the way, one of the core principles of the Reformation).
- We cannot be intimidated by anything or anybody because of the fear of the Lord.
- We are not intimidated even by death.

God, Our Ultimate Model

Here is what we need to know about the God we serve:

- Only God is good.
- All good gifts, all perfect gifts, come from above, from God.
- When we work for people, we are in fact working for God.
- When we deal with people, it is as if we are dealing with God. This is the secret of any authentic, genuine Christian living.
- In our daily lives, we show our solidarity with God.
- Whether we eat, whether we drink, or whatever we do, we do all in the name of Jesus to the glory of God the Father.
- We imitate God, for God is our model.
- He has shown solidarity with the whole human family, and thus we, too, show solidarity with the human family.
- In all things, God is first.
- In the beginning, God.
- In the end, God. He is the first and the Last.

For PARL leaders, God is our ultimate reference. We model our behavior on the fact of God's Sovereignty. God is the owner of the whole universe and all that is therein. All glory, therefore, goes to Him. He alone is worthy to be worshipped. He alone deserves all the credit. Yet, in God's sovereignty and mystery, He chose to partner with us—human beings—to fulfill His purpose of saving the whole human family.

PARL's work is therefore grounded on God's mission, which is His overarching purpose of saving the human family and the universe.





03

GOD'S AMBASSADORS

A PARL representative is foremost God's
representative—His ambassador.

A. WHAT IS AN AMBASSADOR?

The root idea of the word “ambassador” is associated with the Latin word *ambactus*, which means servant.

In today’s global culture, the meaning and functions of an ambassador are not difficult to delineate.

An ambassador is:

- A diplomatic official of the highest rank, sent by one sovereign or state to another as its resident representative (ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary).
- A diplomatic official of the highest rank is sent by a government to represent it on a temporary mission, as in the case of negotiating a treaty.
- A diplomatic official serving as permanent head of a country’s mission to the United Nations or some other international organization.
- An authorized messenger or representative.

When the word ambassador is used in compound expressions, it has the following nuances:

- Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary. This is a diplomatic minister of the highest rank, accredited as a permanent representative to another country or sovereign state.
- Ambassador, extraordinary. This is a diplomatic minister of the highest rank sent on a special mission.
- Ambassador, plenipotentiary. This is a diplomatic minister of the first rank with treaty-signing powers.
- Ambassador-at-Large (a special designation used by the United States government). This is an ambassador with special duties who may be sent to more than one government.

B. 'AMBASSADOR' IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT

“Ambassador” is a polysemous word in Scripture—it is a pivotal concept that carries different shades of meaning. For instance, there are:

- Ambassadors of peace (Isa. 33:7)
 - Ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20)
 - Ambassador in chains, referring to the Apostle Paul and to the difficulty of carrying the work of an ambassador (Eph 6:20)
-

Yet for us, the safest way to understand the function of an ambassador is to look at the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

C. JESUS, THE MODEL AMBASSADOR

From a Christian perspective, Jesus is the ambassador par excellence. His life and ministry provide the foundation and justification for our own mission, today, as Christ’s ambassador.

- Jesus came to this world as an ambassador. Repeatedly, He insisted that the Father had sent Him (John 5:23, 36, 37; 6:44, 57; 8:16).
- The nature of His ambassadorship was essential to the place He was sent to minister, planet earth. In essence, He came to mediate a covenant; a new covenant, which consists of deliverance, indwelling, and empowerment for mission through teaching and commissioning.
- The ultimate outcome of His ambassadorial mandate is that He came to reveal who God is. He did that by revealing who He was: God in human flesh (John 1:14, 18).
- He came to bring grace and truth, says the Apostle (John 1:17).

- According to the Gospel of John, Jesus came to bring life, freedom, joy, justice, and peace (John 10:10; 8:36; 15:11; 14:27).

The Apostle Paul revealed another perspective: Jesus Christ “became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption so that, just as it is written, ‘let him who boasts boast in the Lord’” (1 Cor. 1:30).

Jesus had also the specific mission to reconcile the world with God (Col 1:19).

- Jesus came to personify the kingdom of God. He was the demonstration of what a citizen of God’s kingdom looks like. He was the demonstration of what the righteousness of God looks like. It is then understandable that Jesus invited His disciples to seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness (Matt 6:33).
- At an essential level, this was equivalent to asking them to seek Him, Jesus, who embodies the character, values, and will of God.
- The One who is the righteousness of God came to give and live His righteousness for us, in us, and through us.
- Jesus taught us that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees, no access to God’s kingdom is available to anyone.
- He was talking about His own person. He was the subject and content of His own message and teachings.
- The entire preaching of Jesus is about the mystery of His person. It is not possible to separate the mission and the message of Jesus from His person.
- Jesus is the kingdom of God in person. The kingdom is a veiled Christology. Jesus is the very presence of God. He is the manifestation of the life of God, the truth about God, and the way of God. He came to give us a share in God’s life, which is His own deepest identity.
- The beatitudes, the parables, and the sayings of Jesus are all veiled biographies of Jesus, snapshot portraits of His person.
- Jesus is the Torah in person. He is the word of God in person.
- Jesus is also the Temple of God in person, the manifestation of God, Immanuel.
- Moses sealed the covenant with the blood of a sacrifice; Jesus said, “this is my blood of the covenant.”

- Jesus is the new Covenant in person. All the promises of God are in Him. They are fulfilled in His person.
- God had a final word about the revelation of His character, absolute will, and ultimate purpose. He sent His Word, an expression of His thought and character, His unique Son. This word is Jesus.
- Jesus testifies to the oneness of God.
- The teachings of Jesus in the beatitudes are the gospel condensed. The Beatitudes are a self-portrait, an autobiography of the incarnate Son of God. They all point to the righteousness of God.
- The poor in spirit
- Those who mourn
- The meek
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
- The merciful
- The pure in heart
- The peacemakers
- Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake
- The blessings bestowed on those who fear the Lord are the following:
 - Theirs is the kingdom
 - They shall be comforted
 - They will inherit the earth
 - They will be satisfied or filled
 - They shall obtain mercy
 - They shall see God
 - They shall be called sons of God
- All followers of Jesus are Ambassadors



D. ALL ARE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS

In association with Jesus, the Christian ambassador reveals God. He or she is an instrument of grace and truth. He or she testifies, as a witness to Christ, of God's life, freedom, joy, justice, and peace. He or she lives according to God's wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. He or she is an agent of reconciliation. He or she is a subject of God's kingdom, participating in God's character and values, and obedient to God's will.

All followers of Jesus are called to join Him in His ambassadorial roles and functions. We promote His kingdom, a kingdom in which coercion has no place, and a kingdom where the joy of freedom is the prerogative of everyone. For without freedom, no peace is possible, and without freedom, no joy can be genuinely experienced. Jesus' insistence on freedom demonstrates the importance of such a concept.

There is a legitimate justification for why Adventists, while not neglecting justice and peace, insist on freedom in general, and freedom of religion in particular.

The key thought is this: All Christians are called to be Ambassadors of Christ. Every Christian institution, and in the case of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, every local church, Conference, Union, Division, and the General Conference, would gain to fully integrate official ambassadors.

In general, this mandate has been associated with the Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty. But it should go beyond. Every Adventist is an ambassador. Every church should have an official person as an ambassador.

What does it Mean to be an Ambassador for Christ?

It means that we are:

- Ambassadors for God's Kingdom.
- Ambassadors of the values Jesus promoted key among which is the righteousness of God. Jesus said "If your righteousness does not surpass that of the Scribes and the Pharisees you shall by no means enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:20).
- Ambassadors of freedom, just like Jesus (He came to liberate people, Luke 4).
- Ambassadors of religious freedom, or freedom of religion or belief. This is the right to profess, practice, proclaim, and propagate one's convictions. Freedom of religion or belief is central to all other freedoms. It is a compound freedom. It includes the freedom of conscience.
- Ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19).
- Ambassadors of peace.
- Ambassadors of truth.
- Ambassadors of justice.
- Ambassadors of witness to God's sovereignty.
- Ambassadors to invite others to God's table, to God's fellowship.
- Ambassadors of hope.
- Ambassadors of joy.

E. PROPHETIC FUNCTION

A word that captures well a critical function among God's people is the word "Prophet."

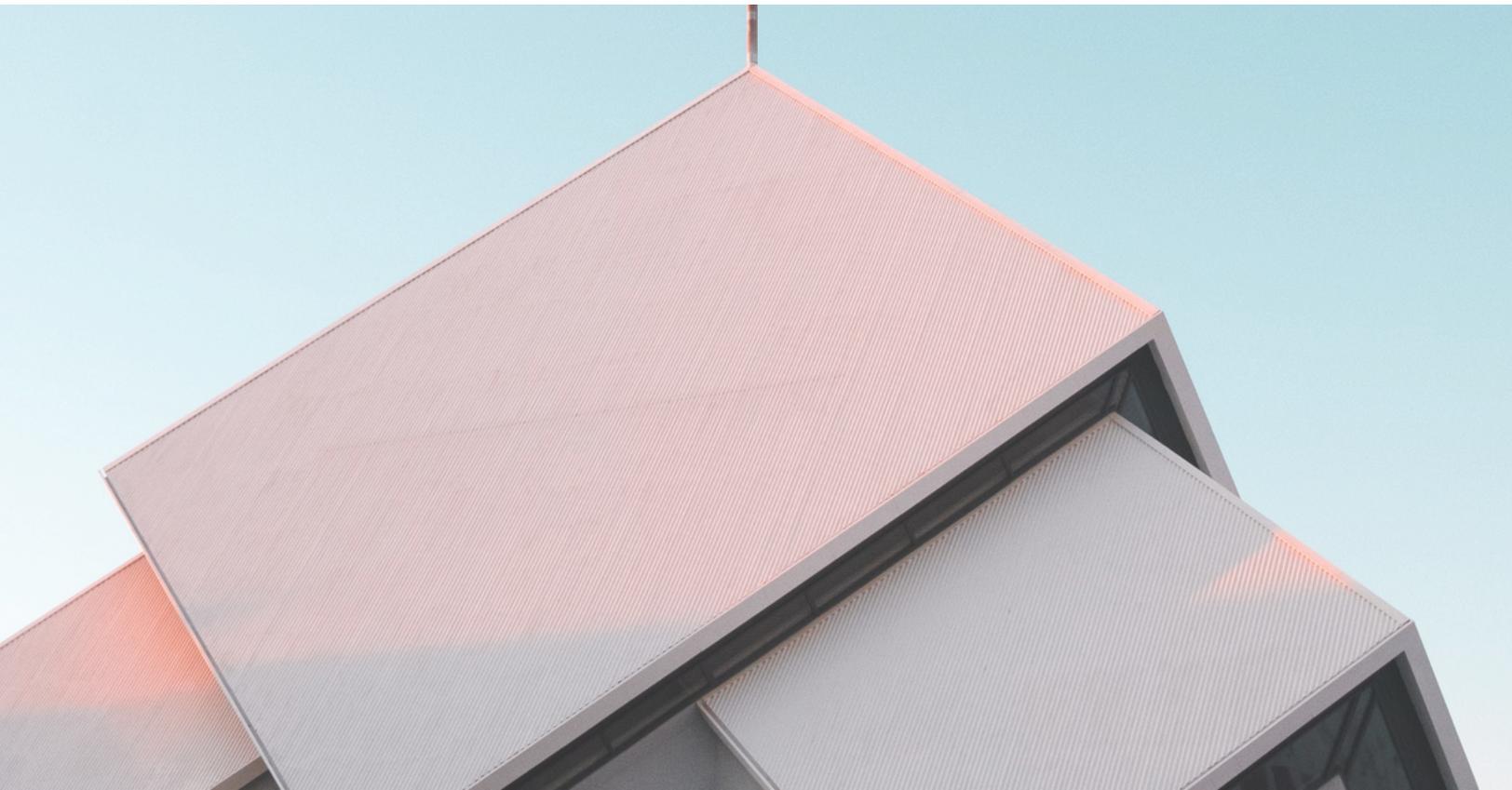
Every one of God's witnesses is part of a special group of those who speak on behalf of God, with the responsibility of sharing God's point of view or worldview as expressed in Scripture.

We are not just promoters of information collected through the web or social media, as important as these may be. We are fundamentally called to be providers of critical insights about life. And those insights do not come from human-collected data or from academia. Our studies and degrees cannot provide us with this kind of competence.

Foremost, God's people direct people to God. This is our primary mission. The best we offer is our theology, and then from there a biblical anthropology, and then ecclesiology, then eschatology, then the eternal destiny of fellowship with God in love.

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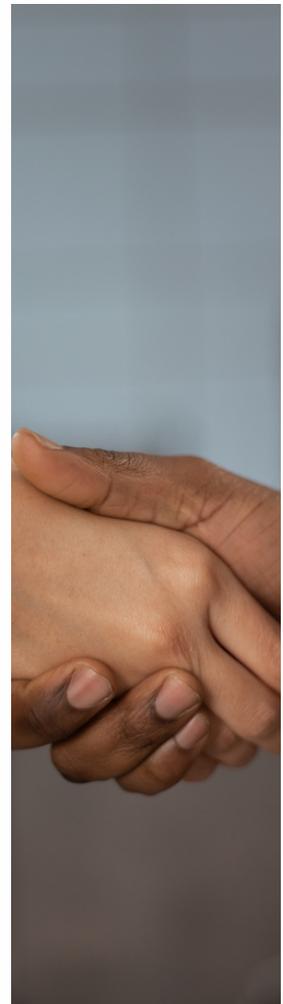
MORE THAN JUST A JOB:
LIVING IN SOLIDARITY WITH
GOD



To truly be an effective PARL leader, it is vital for each of us to take time to reflect on our calling as Ambassadors for Christ and as public representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its services.

Let's ask ourselves these questions:

- Why should I be involved in the work of representing the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
- Why should I promote a culture of human rights, especially all the fundamental freedoms?
- Why promote religious freedom?
- Why dedicate oneself to defending others?
- Why identify oneself as the voice of the voiceless, and the defender of the defenseless?
- Why would anyone be committed to helping develop awareness about the core role of public affairs in view of the fulfillment of the Seventh-day Adventist church mission?



A. GOD'S SOLIDARITY WITH HUMANITY

Before you answer these questions, above, consider the following.

In a church setting, the root justification for our promotion of human rights, advocacy for religious freedom, the claim to be the voice of the voiceless, the defense of the powerless, and all legitimate endeavors, is solidarity with God. And if it is not this root cause, then we may be playing God, or be a victim of a narcissistic delusional illness.

One of the most significant and moving revelations in the Christian faith is the depth of solidarity God shows to human beings He created in His own image.

God identifies with us to such a degree that our attitude vis-à-vis the poor is correlated to our attitude toward God.

Proverbs 14:31: "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him."

Proverbs 17:5: "Whoever mocks the poor insults his maker."

God freely chose to be involved in the destiny of human beings He created in His own image. In Scripture, God showed solidarity with His people Israel. Moreover, in the first covenant, God told Israel, "Whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye" (Zechariah 2:8).

But the climax of God's solidarity occurs when God became a man in Jesus Christ.

God is free. He can be without us, but we are not without Him. He chose to come down to dwell among us, to be with us, and to be in us through His Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, Jesus so identified with human beings that He said whatever is done to the least of our brothers or sisters, it is done to Him.

And again, He identifies with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the prisoner (Matthew 25:35-36).

B. GOD'S SOLIDARITY WITH THE CHURCH

The depth of this identification goes even further. The idea of Jesus' followers being temples of His Holy Spirit is highly significant. God indwells every believer through His Holy Spirit. The church is also called the "temple" of God. One of the most profound images of the church is the idea of the body of Christ. "You touch the body you touch the person."

He asked Saul of Tarsus—persecutor of the church—"Why are you persecuting me?"

Clearly, Saul was persecuting Christians in his attempt to spread terror among the followers of the Way, to dissuade them from following Jesus the Messiah.

The enemy of God understands that clearly. When in the book of Revelation he could not devour the child, Christ, he pursues the church, and in its end, time phase the remnant, those who keep God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus. In harming those associated with Christ, the enemy aims at Christ Himself. This is the reason why Christians find it an honor even to suffer, because of our intimate association with Jesus Christ.

When we deal with people,
we deal with God.

C. OUR SOLIDARITY WITH OTHERS

The connection to Christ through other human beings is a core part of the New Covenant, which stipulates that if we do not love humans, whom we can see, we cannot love God, whom we do not see.

Moreover, whatever is done to the least of Christ's followers is done to Him. Expanding this further, whatever is done to any human, is being done to God, for humans are created in the image of God.

God experienced the plight and predicament of humans and creation to liberate the world from evil, and death. This is the ground for affirming human dignity—every person's dignity—because, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, God is the model for humans. Our very being, our values, our deeds, and our behavior find their justification in who God is and what God's purposes are. The whole edifice of the Christian faith is built on the premise that God assumed humanity to model what it means to be human.

Thus, God's solidarity leads us to another core understanding of Christian life, and one that drives all that we do as leaders of PARL. When we deal with people we deal with God.





05

SPEAKING FOR THE CHURCH: UNDERSTANDING WHO WE SERVE

God's Representatives

It may seem self-evident to say that when we speak as a leader of PARL for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we do not represent ourselves, our own opinions, or our own agendas. Instead, we are representing a very clearly defined parcel of values and services.

Yet, as an ambassador of the church, it can sometimes be difficult to relinquish personal biases or priorities, or even to recognize when personal agendas are intruding.

It is thus one of the central tasks of every PARL leader to become thoroughly familiar with the unique identity, values, and worldview of the Church we serve. It is only then that can we fulfill our mandate as PARL leaders and begin to authentically represent the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the public realm.

A. FOUNDATIONS MATTER

To live, we need a ground to support our existence and every movement. This is because on our own we cannot float in the air. The same applies spiritually. Our thoughts are too precious to build on a shaky and unstable foundation. Every person is too valuable to God to allow oneself to be carried away by counterfeit winds of doctrine. Therefore, we need the solid foundation God has graciously provided.

The ground a person stands on informs and expresses his or her worldview and values. Institutions, also, are like edifices with pillars. There are specific “pillars” or values, that support the United Nations. The Islamic faith is grounded on five pillars.

I would like to submit for your consideration the idea that an edifice, with ten supporting pillars, sustains the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

B. TENFOLD FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS

The foundational pillars of Seventh-day Adventists are tenfold:

PILLAR ONE

God, who is wholly other, the only One who is free and in need of nothing, the only One who is totally independent, has created the world and human beings out of nothing (Creation ex-nihilo) and out of love.

Regardless of parental circumstances, every person is conceived from the depth of God's love (Primordial love).

The whole edifice of the Christian faith is grounded on the revelation of the Trinitarian nature of God. God is a relational being within God-self. The plurality of persons within the One God, and therefore the relationality within God, is expressed in the Bible in the statement that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Without this pillar, the whole Christian faith collapses. But with this pillar, love, faith, and hope can translate into the worship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this revelation is also the foundation for freedom. Because freedom has its origin in God. Freedom is, first of all, an attribute of God.

PILLAR TWO

God created human beings in His image to reciprocate God's love. Our lives are unfulfilled until we reciprocate God's love.

PILLAR THREE

For this covenant love to be a reality, God created freedom: freedom of conscience, freedom of choice, and freedom of expression. This is because love cannot be forced.

PILLAR FOUR

Human beings chose to mistrust God. That was the beginning of a process that led to sin, curses, and death. The whole of reality is affected by the intrusion of evil and its variegated manifestations: fear, hiding, hypocrisy, accusation, violence, and murder are all symptoms of evil as indicated in Genesis 3.

Sorrow, suffering, and death as the result of human primordial choice have become the share of all human experience.

Human beings choose to compete with God, choosing power over peace, domination over devotion, subjugation, conquest over service, and over-commitment to the wellbeing of others.

Fame and addiction to being affirmed are chosen over a humble spirit that chooses to glorify God alone. God chose humility as an antidote to this existential insecurity.

PILLAR FIVE

The great controversy between Christ and Satan affects every aspect of reality. Principalities and powers compete to negate love, to disrupt peace and security, justice and joy, freedom, and fraternity. As a result, addictions plague the existence of millions of human beings. Evil spirits inhabit people to dehumanize other people.

Instrumentalization and exploitation of fellow human beings dehumanize both perpetrators and victims. Human trafficking, organ trafficking, extra-judicial killings, wars, conquests, violations, and violence of all kinds are all expressions of the evil that disfigures the noble image of God in humans.

PILLAR SIX

Justice and righteousness have become the condition sine qua non, the essential non-negotiable condition for salvation and for the overcoming of evil. But only a righteous one, the only righteous one—God—qualifies to provide both justice and righteousness. God chose to do that. God the Son came to offer His life as a substitute, a ransom, and a model for sacrificial love, to which all humans are called to identify.

PILLAR SEVEN

God chose to defeat evil, sin, suffering, and death by absorbing the evil of the world at the Cross. He chose powerlessness and unconditional love over intimidation and force. The Cross is central to the process of Atonement, or cosmic reconciliation. The Cross is God's means of saving the world. It is the necessary condition for the gift of substitution to take place, for justification to be granted, and for Christ's righteousness to be imparted.

But there is more to the story of salvation than the Cross, just as there was more to atonement than sacrifices. In the Old Testament, the priest was necessary to apply the benefits of the sacrifices to the worshipper. In the new covenant, a priest is needed to complete the atonement.

PILLAR EIGHT

Christ's heavenly high-priestly ministry is as essential to the plan of salvation as the Cross of Calvary.

"The subject of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment should be clearly understood by the people of God. All need knowledge for themselves of the position and work of their great High Priest. Otherwise, it will be impossible for them to exercise faith, which is essential at this time or to occupy the position, which God designs them to fill. All who have received the light upon these subjects are to bear testimony of the great truths, which God has committed to them. The sanctuary in heaven is the very center of Christ's work on behalf of men. It concerns every soul living on the earth. It opens to view the plan of redemption, bringing us down to the very close of time and revealing the triumphant issue of the contest between righteousness and sin. It is of the utmost importance that all should thoroughly investigate these subjects and be able to give an answer to everyone that asks them a reason for the hope that is in them. The intercession of Christ on man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross. By His death, He began that work which after His resurrection He ascended to complete in heaven. We must by faith enter within the veil, 'whither the forerunner is for us entered.' Hebrews 6:20. There the light from the cross of Calvary is reflected. There we may gain a clearer insight into the mysteries of redemption."

- Ellen White, *The Great Controversy*, 488-89.

Christ's heavenly high-priestly ministry is God's means to seal our eternal destiny by interceding to vindicate His people, reversing the verdict the world of God's enemies places against those who are loyal to God. The blessings of the priests must reach those who are saved.

Judgment and the gift of freedom from all evil, pain, and suffering are God's response to the human predicament. God promises He will eradicate all evil once and for all. Satan and all his allies, including fear and death, will come to their end.

PILLAR NINE

God promises to come again. He promises to create a new heaven and a new earth where there will be no more controversies, either great or small. It will be a world where a covenant of love can flourish. It will be a world where there will be peace and harmony, justice and righteousness, freedom, and fellowship with God, with one another, and with the whole of creation, forever. To prepare the world God raised the Seventh-day Adventist Church, endowing it with the gift of the Spirit of Prophecy to ensure doctrinal correctness, mission awareness, and focus on Christ the current heavenly high priest and soon coming King of kings and Lord of lords.

PILLAR TEN

Worship and fellowship. The pertinence and permanence of worship are key to God's overarching plan of salvation as we wait for the Second Coming of God the Son. Worship is a vital component in the life of Seventh-day Adventists. "Worship God" is not only a temporary event or an experience, but also a lifestyle, mindfulness of God in everything, and total dedication to God's reputation, honor, and glory. This is signified in the Three Angels' messages destined for the whole world.

The gift of the Sabbath signifies the multifaceted dimensions of worship. The Sabbath is specially set apart for us to express gratitude for creation, especially creation in the image of God. It is a celebration of redemption, a weekly Independence Day. It is a reenactment of sanctification and stewardship of time. The Sabbath is a time of prefiguration of eternity, anticipation of cosmic harmony, universal justice, and peace.

A dimension of worship of God is present in the service of fellow human beings in the name of God. As Seventh-day Adventists wait for the Second Coming they are also deeply committed to a life of selfless service to the whole human family, through health, education, humanitarian assistance, human rights, and various other services focusing on the needs of women, youth, children, and people with special needs.

C. THREEFOLD MANDATE

The threefold mandate of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is:

O1

To prepare all peoples for the coming of God. This is equivalent to preparing the way of the Lord, as prophesied in Isaiah 40. It corresponds to the mission of Elijah and the mission of John the Baptist.

O2

To contribute to completing the fivefold principles of the Reformation (Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, and to God alone be all the glory) with a twofold focus:

a) To emphasize everyone's non-negotiable prerogative of freedom of conscience, religious freedom (freedom of religion or belief).

b) To restore the whole chain of biblical truths: Truth about God as revealed in Scripture, the truth about human beings and their destiny, and the truth about God's purposes for our world as revealed through prophecy.

O3

To proclaim comprehensive good news; an antidote to all human woes, sins, and sorrows; an everlasting gospel.



D. TWOFOLD RESPONSIBILITY

The responsibility of Seventh-day Adventists is most solemn, and it is twofold.

It consists of:

1. Upholding truth.
2. Upholding freedom

As Ellen White writes, the banner of truth and religious liberty has been entrusted to the care of this end-time restoration movement.

“The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God’s witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with the knowledge of His Word. We are to receive this Word as a supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God’s word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be set aside for a ‘Thus saith the church’ or a ‘Thus saith the state.’ The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.”

- Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, 389-90.

At its core, the good news entrusted to the Seventh-day Adventist movement is all about restoration. The world needs a reversal of all bad news. And so, the restorations Adventists are engaged in are multifaceted.

E. TENFOLD RESTORATION MISSION

The tenfold restoration mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is:

1 To restore the blessed hope of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The mandate entrusted to the Church is to prepare the whole world for Christ's Second Coming.

The blessed hope is often veiled through the hope that human progress will better the world and solve the world's challenges. But the Church is called, instead, to prepare the way of the Lord, the coming of the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is about sharing a message of reconciliation with God, the truth of God. It is a message that echoes the message entrusted to the prophet Elijah and John the Baptist.

The whole book of Revelation is meant to prepare the church and the world for the Second Coming, the blessed hope. It is about sharing a message of reconciliation with God, the truth about God, and the truth of God.

2 To restore the comprehensive good news of God. To restore the intended goals of the Reformation (Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, and total devotion to God's glory; *Soli Deo Gloria*).

The Reformation is characterized by an ongoing need for completion. This is fulfilled when a comprehensive gospel is shared with the world, the good news complete in all its facets, one that addresses all the woes and wounds of human existence.

3 To restore the truth about Christ's unique prerogatives, as Heavenly high priest. This aspect of Christ's prerogatives is inseparable from the blessing God intends for all people.

Christ's unsurpassable priesthood was usurped and eclipsed because of the claim of an earthly need for the mediation of priests. The substitution of Christ's heavenly High priestly ministry in place of an earthly priestly ministry that claims representation of a living resurrected Lord has deprived joy and peace to millions.

According to Hebrews 7, Jesus Christ, who is a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, cannot have a successor.

4 To restore the truth about the sufficiency of Christ's righteousness—a truth that has been tarnished by distorted understandings of the nature of faith, the meaning of salvation, and the role of works.

The three angels' messages are all connected to the righteousness of Christ. To be mindful of Him, to give Him glory, and to worship Him are each an expression of gratitude because of the gift of His righteousness.

5 To restore the truth about the need for comprehensive justice, the kind that would vindicate not only those who are deprived of justice in today's world, but also those who have been unjustly accused, abused, and murdered like Jesus himself.

Justice does not get fulfilled without Christ's righteousness. Christ's righteousness cannot be downplayed in the name of the search for a more just world. A more just world cannot erase the need for justice on behalf of those who suffered in the past and died without being vindicated.

6 To restore the truth about grace. The depth and breadth of God's grace are stifled under a concept of justification through merits. It fundamentally deforms the character of a loving God.

7

To restore the truth about the Sabbath as a sign of God's sovereignty, as a symbol of creation, as a seal of His authority, as Independence Day, and as a celebration of God's sanctification. Overall, this piece was not part of the initial Reformation agenda. The restoration of the Sabbath contributes to bringing a complete Reformation. Change of the time and law has been prophesied in Daniel 7. The restoration of the Sabbath reversed the actions of the little horn and the beasts of Daniel and Revelation.

8

To restore the truth about human nature and human dignity closes the door to the deceptions of spiritualism and occultism on the one hand, and it is a sure antidote against the trampling of human dignity in terms of human trafficking and exploitation.

9

To restore confidence in a loving and caring God. How? To engage the world with a comprehensive portfolio of services: education, comprehensive health, humanitarian, human rights, and family, women's, youth, and children's ministries. This portfolio is the reflection of God's love and care for humanity.

10

To restore the fellowship of God's one family consisting of all redeemed human beings of all ethnic backgrounds.





06

HOW DO SEVENTH-
DAYS ADVENTISTS VIEW
OTHER CHRISTIANS?

A. ON THE RIGHT TO MAKE CLAIMS

Each Christian denomination sees itself as the depository of biblical Christian truths. Most denominations after the Reformation claim a mandate to restore an aspect, or aspects, of the biblical Christian faith, which may have been neglected or lost. Seventh-day Adventists are not an exception in making claims.

It is important to remember that the claim to be divinely mandated to share the truth of Jesus Christ is a right that should be enjoyed by every Christian denomination—and for that matter, by every Christian. This right, of course, should be extended to all other religions and to people who deny the existence of God (atheists), or those who postulate that they don't know (agnostics). This is an issue of religious freedom.

B. ADVENTIST RELATIONS WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS

When it comes to Christians of other denominations, there is a special bond or kinship that Seventh-day Adventists acknowledge.

Ellen White's statement regarding leaders in other denominations is meaningful in this context. In reference to temperance, for example, she said:

“In other churches, there are Christians who are standing in defense of the principles of temperance. We should seek to come near to these workers and make a way for them to stand shoulder to shoulder with us. We should call upon great and good men to second our efforts to save that which is lost.”

- Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, 217.

When it comes to Christians of other denominations, there is a special bond or kinship that Seventh-day Adventists acknowledge.

She goes further than mere partnership in reference to temperance, to the subject of a partnership in prayer. Furthermore, she appeals to Seventh-day Adventists to pray for leaders in other Christian denominations.

She is not advocating syncretistic doctrinal ecumenism. She is not asking Seventh-day Adventists to pray to saints alongside Christians who hold this practice. This is where dialogue, the sharing of distinctive beliefs, and the search for common ground are so important.

Ellen White said about prayer:

“Pray for and with ministers of other denominations. -- Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ's messengers, we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock.” Ellen G. White. Testimonies to the Church vol.6, p 78.

In accordance with Ellen White’s statement, the quote above envisions one flock, Adventists recognize other Christians as genuine members of the body of Christ.

Christians guided by the Holy Spirit do not make it a duty to insult, belittle, or disrespect others. They do not create prejudices unnecessarily.

“We should not, upon entering a place, build up unnecessary barriers between us and other denominations, especially the Catholics, so that they think we are their avowed enemies. We should not create a prejudice in their minds unnecessarily, by making a raid upon them. There are many among the Catholics who live up to the light they have far better than many who claim to believe present truth, and God will just as surely test and prove them as He has tested and proved us.”

Ellen G. White, Evangelism, 144.

“Do not denounce other denominations. --When some who lack the Spirit and power of God enter a new field, they commence denouncing other denominations, thinking that they can convince the people of the truth by presenting the inconsistencies of the popular churches. It may seem necessary on some occasions to speak of these things, but in general it only creates prejudice against our work and closes the ears of many who might otherwise have listened to the truth. If these teachers were connected closely with Christ, they would have divine wisdom to know how to approach the people.” Ellen G. White, Testimonies Vol. 4, 535.

Mission-mindedness should never be a cover for violence against other human beings whom Christ deeply loves to the point of dying for their salvation.

C. ADVENTIST'S SELF-DESIGNATION AS A WINDOW INTO IDENTITY, MESSAGE, AND MISSION

The designation “Seventh-day Adventist” can be seen as a sign of self-perception.

Adventists see themselves as a restorationist movement within the body of Christ, entrusted with a unique prophetic identity, a unique end-time mission, and a unique message, which is in full harmony with, and an end-time expression of, the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ. Adventists have, therefore, a distinct voice among Christians, world religions, and philosophies, and a unique destiny.

Similar to the function of self-designations in other world religions and Christian denominations, the name “Seventh-day Adventist” encapsulates what matters most to this faith tradition. It is an expression of the distinctive aspects of the Christian faith that this group highlights before the world.

“Let us take our position as Seventh-day Adventists. [That] name is a true expression of our faith. I am instructed to call upon God’s people to bring their actions into harmony with their name, of which they have no need to be ashamed. The Seventh-day Adventist faith will bless whenever it is brought into the character-building.”

- Ellen G. White, *Battle Creek Letters* (Payson, Ariz.: Leaves of Autumn Books, 1928), p. 52.

Seventh-day Adventists understand their name as having two components: The Sabbath and the Second Coming.

THE SEVENTH DAY

I. The Sabbath as a Reminder of Creation, God's Sovereignty, and Human Dignity

The Sabbath was a gift at the heart of the Torah. It was purposed to point out what really matters to God.

As a sign, the Sabbath signifies a multifaceted gift of God that helps humanity remember who God is, who we are, how to relate to God, and how to relate to one another.

The Sabbath, then, is about relationships based on the awareness of God's character, will, and ultimate values.

The Sabbath is a multifaceted sign with several “signified”:
God’s sovereignty, creation, redemption, sanctification, conformity to God’s ways and thoughts, belongingness, sealing, universal everlasting fellowship, worship, and service.
God's purpose is unveiled through the Sabbath.



For Adventists, remembering the Sabbath in reference to God is an antidote against atheism, polytheism, tritheism, pantheism, monadic monotheism, henotheism, or even open theism. God is distinct from all creation. He cannot be limited to any property in the created order.

Remembering the Sabbath in reference to human being functions is a reminder of the necessity of upholding human dignity grounded on the fact that human beings are created in the image of God. This is a vital aspect of the creation story.

2. The Sabbath as Commemoration of Freedom

The Sabbath is also connected to Salvation or redemption. This aspect of the Sabbath is emphasized both in the introduction to the Decalogue and in the book of Deuteronomy chapter 5. Put simply, no rest without liberation. The Sabbath is a weekly commemoration of freedom. It has a function similar to the celebration of an Independence Day.

The various facets of salvation are celebrated that day: Redemption, deliverance, adoption, justification, and reconciliation.

It is a day of gratitude, when Seventh-day Adventists remember, commemorate, and celebrate deliverance from condemnation, from the power of sin, from Satan, from the forces of darkness, from the world and its anti-kingdom values, from self and its usurpation of God's glory. The Sabbath is, therefore, a day of joy—a day of gratitude that one can enjoy only as one truly, genuinely has an ongoing experience of freedom.

3. Sabbath as a Sign of Sanctification

According to Exodus 31, God gave Israel the Sabbath as a sign that God is the One who sanctifies His redeemed people.

Sanctification is essentially developing a relationship with God through His Holy Spirit who recreates Christ's character in us. It is a life of growth onto Christian maturity. It is a life of surrender to allow the Holy Spirit to strengthen our inner person. It is a life of detachment from the false self and its idolatries. It is a life centered on God.

A life of sanctification is a life of growing awareness of God's presence and sovereignty. It is a life of true worship in which the fruit of the Spirit becomes manifest (love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, and temperance).

4. Sabbath as Prefiguration of Cosmic Restoration

The rest Seventh-day Adventists experience on the Sabbath contributes to the renewal of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual strength. It also predicts a cosmic restoration, when the whole of creation will benefit from the gift of the Sabbath, after having been liberated from slavery to corruption, suffering, groaning, and pain.

Creation is eagerly waiting for our adoption as sons and for the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:18-25). Jesus Christ, the current heavenly High priest is preparing the everlasting Sabbath, the unadulterated rest, unhindered by earthly anxieties, anguishes, and restlessness that characterize life on planet earth now.

5. Sabbath as Seal of Allegiance

As a response to God's call as expressed in the three Angels' messages reported in Revelation 14:6-13, Seventh-day Adventists are committed to living a life of gratitude, fearing God, considering Him in all our ways, warding off all evil, giving God all the glory, and worshipping Him in spirit and truth.

The focus on the Sabbath does not mean that for Adventists the Sabbath saves anyone. Only God can save. Jesus is the only savior. No rite, ritual, no observance, or deed can save. The Sabbath is a gift that signifies a life of fellowship with a God who hosts His covenant people in time. The first part of the name Seventh-day Adventist is therefore a love story, where gift and gratitude, fellowship and worship, sovereignty and dignity are expressed between covenant partners. All this is on God's initiative. A God who owes nothing but who chooses out of pure love, to create, liberate, sanctify, and restore His image in humans and ultimately His creation when He comes again.



THE SECOND COMING

The second component of the name Seventh-day Adventist is an expression of hope and trust in God's promises to create a world of freedom, justice, and peace. The Apostle Paul calls the Second Coming the "blessed hope."

Similar to the case the Apostle Paul made regarding the importance and centrality of the Resurrection of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Peter in his second epistle recorded in the New Testament also made a compelling case about the vital importance of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Peter's strategy to persuade his readers concerning the reliability of the Second Coming is grounded on the fact that if there is no Second Coming, the foundation of the whole edifice of the Christian faith collapses. Because no Second Coming means the following:

- The world will continue, going on as it is. There will be no hope for a renewed creation where righteousness will finally dwell.
- The creation story would be a myth with no historical foundation.
- There will be no judgment, accountability would be meaningless.
- Excellence in our moral life will be but an option, at best for esthetic purposes, but certainly not mandatory.
- The call to a holy living—especially coupled with the rhetoric of living in an end-time setting—would be but an incentive in order to stifle the unrestricted drives of unprincipled people. Some would argue that this would be the minimum necessary for life in society to be possible.
- The partaking of the divine nature thereby escaping the corruption that is in the world by lust would be an illusion.
- The news of Jesus' eternal kingdom would be a deception.

- The stories of the apostles including Peter about being eyewitnesses of Jesus' majesty would be according to Peter, "cleverly devised tales" (1:16).
- The Bible would not be a reliable document.
- Prophecy would be no more than intelligent guesses but certainly not divine pronouncement and prediction.
- The work of the Holy Spirit would be an invention.
- The knowledge of God would be impossible.
- The talk about grace would be cheap talk. We might as well be confined to our guilt or better yet get rid of it. We would not be accountable anyway.
- To each one his or her own interpretation, everything is relative, optional. The philosophical foundation of poststructuralism and postmodernism should have been adopted a long time ago if there is no absolute truth. No center or reference from which to assess and determine what truth is. Carried to its limits this line of thinking would lead to the notion that God is not relevant. It doesn't work. Pragmatism would finally unequivocally triumph.

Peter attempted to persuade his readers that:

- God is reliable. He will fulfill His promises.
- God is fair, He will judge the world.
- God is loving and patient. He gives people time to repent and live.
- God cares about His creation. He purposes to restore it and create a new heaven and a new earth where justice and righteousness dwell.

Expanding beyond Peter, the following biblical picture emerges concerning the Second Coming:

- A prophecy (Dan 2:7).
- A Promise (John 14:1-3). The last promise of the Bible (Rev 22:20).
- A Necessary outcome. The Second Coming is as foundational as the resurrection (1 Co 15:19-28).
- A vindication of victims (1 Pet 2:23).
- A restitution of God's rights (Rev 11:15).
- A manifestation of God's glory and compassion.
- An answer to prayers. The last prayer of the Bible (Rev 22:20).
- An inauguration of the festival of joy, the feast of tabernacles (Rev 7:9).
- An advent of a new world. A new world order, the end of a world marked by evil. At last, the reality of a life in harmony with God's values and principles.
- The triumph of God's love.

Moreover:

- The Second Coming is a key component of the everlasting Gospel.
- It is the fulfillment of grace and peace, justice and righteousness.
- It is both a climax and a beginning. In Revelation 14 it comes right after the proclamation of the three angels' messages at the center of the whole book.
- The Second Coming is a time of gathering of the elect of God and a time of separation of those who have rejected God's grace. It is a time of restoration of universal harmony and a time of the destruction of those who destroy the earth.
- It is a time of the victory of the saints and a time the defeat of the dragon and its allies.
- It is a time of reward for the saints, the greatest reward being to contemplate the face of God, and a time of punishment for all spiritual prostitutes.
- The Second Coming is a time of joy, a time of singing a new song; it is also a time of lament, weeping, and wailing for Babylon.
- The Second Coming is a time of fulfillment. Christ is coming to complete what He came the first time to recapitulate and redeem.
- The Second Coming is a time of separation from a sinful and evil environment, a time of separation from death, and a time of reunion with Christ.
- It will be a time of resurrection of those who sleep and a time of translation of all those who are awake in Christ.
- The Second Coming is a time of transformation of corruptible bodies and a time of reception of the gift of immortality.
- It is a time of the end of exile from God and a time of fellowship with the God of love.

For Seventh-day Adventists, prophecy matters because Jesus is the heart of prophecy. He is the real climax of prophecy. Beyond mere prophecy, all the teachings of Jesus Christ are about the mystery of His person. The Second Coming is no exception. It is foremost the Coming of God who at the first Advent took human nature to save humans He created in his image. Jesus is coming again to restore the whole universe in freedom for covenant fellowship, peace, and universal harmony.

However, although Seventh-day Adventists are a people of hope waiting for the coming of God to right the problems of our world and to bring a kingdom of freedom, justice, and peace, they are also committed and engaged today in bettering the lives of millions. The portfolio of services the church offers is extensive: health, education, humanitarian, human rights, women, youth special needs, and children ministries. Making a difference in peoples' live is high on global and local agendas of Seventh-day Adventists.

07

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS AND RELATIONS WITH OTHER FAITHS



A. INTERSECTION OF VALUES



Seventh-day Adventists are uniquely positioned to relate to people of world faiths. There are intersections of values that can function as platforms for conversations, dialogues, and partnerships to better the living conditions of the whole human family. These areas range from the mundane level, such as diet, to deeper spiritual values cherished by people of various faith or philosophical traditions.

For example, Seventh-day Adventists have adopted abstinence from alcoholic beverages, in common with Muslims. Most Seventh-day Adventists also abstain from eating meat in common with religions that favor vegetarianism such as Hinduism, Buddhism, or Jainism. Most also abstain from coffee or caffeine-based beverages in common with Mormons. Adventists who eat meat abstain from the kinds considered unclean, in common with Jews. There are several other health-related and health-conscious choices that Adventists have in common with a large segment of the human family.

At a deeper level, though nuances in content must be factored in, the belief in creation and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ alluded to in the name “Seventh-day Adventist” are shared by religions that emphasize the eschatological intervention of God to restore justice and peace in the world. Moreover, the hope that characterizes Seventh-day Adventists because of the belief in the goodness of the original creation and the promise of God to create a new world devoid of evil, pain, and suffering is a significant connector in inter-religious or interfaith relations.

B. PHILOSOPHICAL BRIDGES

Beyond these considerations, there are philosophical premises that inform Seventh-day Adventists' commitment to building bridges with people of world faiths. They all converge in the conviction that Jesus Christ is the desire of all ages; that is, He is the God that people are deeply longing to know though they may not be aware of this. Therefore, the need to witness Jesus Christ as He is revealed in Scripture, to introduce him to people of other faiths is a key driver for Adventists' engagements with people of other faiths, or with atheists and agnostics.

However, even with deep conviction, Seventh-day Adventists genuinely seek to better understand the beliefs, worldviews, and values of people of other faiths or convictions, on their own terms, according to their own articulations of their worldviews.

Moreover, with regard to relating to world religions, and religious organizations, several official statements that provide guidelines are easily accessible. Policy No 075 of the General Conference Working policy is among such documents that highlight guidelines that inform Adventists' attitudes towards other faiths. Parameters of such relations are also available on www.Adventist.org. They revolve around a positive approach to other faiths and the need for religious liberty and freedom for all to testify in favor of the tenets of their religious persuasions.

The same approach is adopted when it comes to people of no faith, people of purely secular philosophical allegiances.

While being mindful of its unique mission, consisting in promoting truth and freedom entrusted to its care, deep respect for all members of the human family undergirds Seventh-day encounters with people of all faiths or of no faith.

C. FREEDOM AND MISSION

The history of relations between religions and competing ideologies which have led to countless wars, confrontations, intimidations, abuses, and violence in all its forms, makes it necessary to delineate as clearly as possible our understanding of other religions and the nature and scope of our testimony to them.

A key value promoted in Adventism on the world scene is the religious freedom of choice. In Adventism, this privilege is considered a human right. Therefore, while being characterized by a sense of mission towards all people groups, Adventists insist on the freedom of every person to their convictions. Coercion, intimidation, and manipulation of people's vulnerability or naiveté go fundamentally against our core values. Moreover, honesty as to the content of our beliefs should therefore be clearly articulated and explained to those to whom we proclaim the sovereignty of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and with whom we share the everlasting gospel, so that they may understand the nature and scope of the covenant they are invited to embrace.

Following Jesus' admonition, in the context of the great commission, remains a proactive plan and valuable safeguard against drifting from introducing new believers in Christ into the whole purpose of God. To plan to make disciples that will grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ should be an inseparable component of every evangelistic endeavor.

In essence, Adventists proclaim the foundations of the biblical Gospel to the world. In summary, from the narrative unfolds as follows: The God who is love, everlasting triune deity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, created the world out of love. God has also prepared a plan of redemption to save the world when evil crept in and marred God's creatures and creation. The Son, the everlasting Word of God, who was with God and who was God, became incarnate and lived among us to show us how to live. He taught us how to think. He dealt with people in a way to show us how to relate to one another. He died for our sins but conquered death, the last enemy. He is alive. He now has the keys of death and of Hades (Rev 1:18). After his ascension to heaven, Jesus functions as a high priest interceding, preparing people to live in everlasting fellowship with God. He is coming as King of kings and Lord of lords to usher in a new world of life, freedom, justice, and peace; all themes captured in the expression "the kingdom of God." In order to prepare his followers for the cosmic eschatological reunion, God sent His Spirit to dwell within them, transform them from the inside, and enable them to be his witnesses, worshiping him and serving others.



D. CONCLUSION

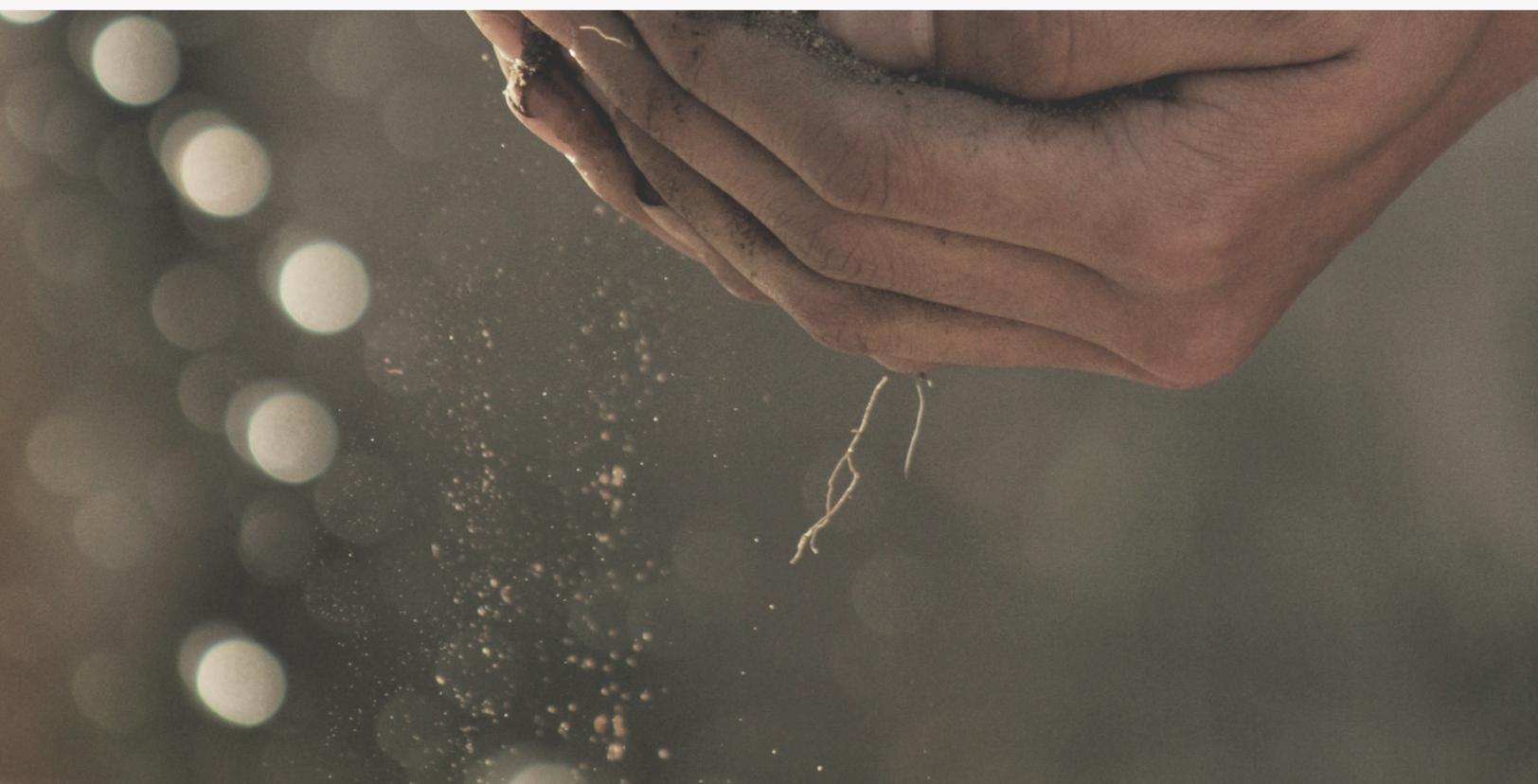
The gospel preached by Adventists is a holistic gospel that focuses on the whole of human existence and experience, whether spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, social, or relational.

Adventism is a providential bridge towards most world religions. It has so much in common with Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and of course more closely with other Christian denominations, that its message can resonate in the heart of various adherents of world religions.

Adventism upholds the dignity of every human being, irrespective of ethnic background, color, gender, or social status. Its relentless commitment and resolve to alleviate suffering and improve people's lives in many parts of the world is a clear signal that hope is at the heart of its message. This of course finds a positive response from many parts of the world where world religions flourish.

08

DIALOGUE + RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY = UNIQUE
WITNESS



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Seventh-day Adventists shower me with questions when they learn that I represent the Adventist Church at meetings of Christian ecumenical organizations. “How exactly do Adventists view Christian unity, interfaith relations, and ecumenism?” they ask. “Why do Adventists choose to accept and maintain only observer status and not membership among Christian ecumenical organizations?”

My answer is simple: It is legitimate for all people of goodwill to unite to save lives, protect lives, and affirm the importance and sacredness of life. It is even urgent for all people to partner to make this world a better place for all human beings, contributing to better health, education, and humanitarian work in all dignity, freedom, justice, peace, and fraternity.

All the services and activities of the Seventh-day Adventist Church seek to promote life, and life in abundance. In the fulfillment of the church’s mission, Adventists mingle with other Christian organizations. In reference to its position in global Christian organizations, the Adventist Church has held observer status at meetings and has been open to cooperation with other churches in areas that do not compromise its identity, mission, and message. The rule of thumb is not to hold membership in any ecumenical body that eradicates or erases the distinctive Adventist voice in reference to the sovereignty of God the Creator, the Sabbath, and the Second Coming.

In principle, Adventists choose not to be involved in doctrinal alliances with other churches because of the Adventist adherence to a wholistic and integrated approach to biblical doctrines and because of that seeks to uphold doctrines that Adventists consider having been sidelined, changed, or forgotten in the course of church history.

That said, “unity” is not a bad word. Adventists value unity just as God does. Unity is grounded in the existence of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Adventists promote unity for the sake of mission, to make Christ known to all people groups, languages, tribes, and nations. Christians can also unite to make the world a better place through the promotion of health, education, humanitarian work, and the promotion and protection of human rights.

But Christians must keep in mind that they will miss their primary calling if they do not unite to uphold and model spiritual values grounded on the everlasting gospel. The theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are paramount in the Christian mandate and gift to the world. These virtues can best flourish when religious liberty is a reality.

Religious liberty for Adventists is the antidote to syncretistic ecumenism. It is a call to embrace the truth with the inalienable freedom of conscience, freedom of religion or belief, freedom to express publicly one’s beliefs, and freedom to invite others to share one’s convictions or to join one’s community of faith.



A. ECUMENISM UP CLOSE

A subtle cluster of interrelated topics in the arena of inter-church and interfaith relations that needs much clarity is the issue of unity, visible unity, and ecumenism. Other words are sometimes brought into the conversation as if they mean the same thing. They are “collaboration,” “partnership,” and “inter-church (or interfaith) dialogue.”

The word “ecumenism” is used differently in various contexts. The word can refer to unity among the world’s Christian churches, but people usually use it to describe a general sense of cordial relations, dialogue, or partnership for a project.

Historically, the first church councils were called ecumenical in the sense that many churches interacted to define orthodoxy. This is not the sense it is given today. Some denominations, such as Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, use it in this sense because they believe they are the guarantors of orthodoxy. But to label any partnership among Christians as doctrinal ecumenism may be uninformed, uneducated, and far-fetched. Spiritual honesty is also needed in identifying and evaluating the real content of inter-church relations.

B. DEFINING UNITY

The concept of unity has a solid biblical and theological foundation. The blessing God intended to spread through Abraham and through his descendants was destined to all the families of the earth. God wants all His people to experience doctrinal unity.

This never materialized among His covenant people, Israel. The belief in the resurrection of the dead, for example, was not shared by all Israelites. The New Testament mentions that the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.



Today unity is understood differently among various Christian churches. For Roman Catholics, for example, unity includes the concept of the communion of saints, meaning both those who are alive and those who are dead.

In the Catholic Encyclopedia, the communion of saints is described as “the spiritual solidarity which binds together the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory, and the saints in heaven in the organic unity of the same mystical body under Christ its head. The participants in that solidarity are called saints by reason of their destination [heaven] and of their partaking of the fruits of the Redemption.”

With this example in mind, global church unity could be a reality only if all Christians adopted the Roman Catholic worldview or understanding of reality or if all Catholics gave up their deeply held beliefs.

Nevertheless, there is much that unites Christians, beginning with the foundation of unity itself. Unity is dear to the heart of God. The whole plan of salvation demonstrates God’s determination to unite His divided and dispersed family, which He created in His image. Unity is grounded in the being of God who is Trinity: unity in Trinity.

Jesus’ death was purposed to gather people into one. In John 17 Jesus prayed for unity for the sake of mission so that the world might believe. The Holy Spirit was given to seal the unity in the mission.

C. ADVENTISTS AND UNITY

Adventists join God in all that God is doing in the world for its salvation. God evangelizes (Gal. 3:8); and so do we. God is committed to uniting the whole world under the lordship of the Savior, Jesus Christ. We join God to fulfill His purpose to lift up God the Son so that the world might be saved.

Adventists are committed to calling all people to fix their eyes on Jesus (Heb. 12:1, 2). They remind all Christians of what constitutes a core belief since apostolic times and is also present in the earliest Christian statement of faith: the Second Coming of Jesus.

The principle that informs Adventists' relations with other Christians has two inseparable aspects: truth and religious freedom. Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White underscored this in *The Acts of the Apostles*, writing: "The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God's witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands.

The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His Word. We are to receive this Word as a supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men." Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), pp. 68, 69.

More fundamentally, Adventists understand their mission as their name intimates—highlighting the truth of the Second Coming as the hope of the world to finally embrace freedom from death and from evil, bringing with it justice and peace. These convictions are the reasons that Adventists emphasize the Second Coming and a message of healing. Adventists understand that the words of Jesus calling His disciples "salt" and "light" (Matt. 5:13-17) apply also to them.

Every aspect of Adventist engagement with any institution, agency, or organization, whether ecclesiastical or political, built primarily upon the reason for the existence of the church: bringing hope to humankind entangled in all kinds of evil. To fulfill this mission, Adventists participate in Jesus' method as articulated by Ellen White: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'?" Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 143.

Jesus served people, healed them, and fed them with no strings attached. He made them know and feel they were free to choose their future with or without Him. Freedom of conscience matters to Him. Without this freedom, no covenant is genuine. This is because love cannot be forced.

D. INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS

Adventists recognize other sincere Christians who confess the truth of Jesus as members of the body of Christ. But Adventists do not hold formal structural membership in ecumenical organizations primarily for freedom of religious purposes. Membership in an ecumenical body would limit the freedom to share one's convictions with everyone else and thereby jeopardize a universal end-time mission as Adventists understand it.

Adventists are not part of the ecumenical organizations that require membership, but they do enjoy guest or observer status at meetings. Cooperation with other Christian denominations is in accordance with the Adventist Church's view of other Christians. Ellen White, writing about temperance, said this about leaders in other denominations: "In other churches there are Christians who are standing in defense of the principles of temperance. We should seek to come near to these workers and make a way for them to stand shoulder to shoulder with us. We should call upon great and good men to second our efforts to save that which is lost." Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 6, p. 110.

In reference to prayer, White said:

"Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ's messengers we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock." *Ibid.*, p. 78.

In accordance with the above counsel, the General Conference, the administrative body of the Adventist world church, has inscribed in the General Conference's Working Policy that church leaders "recognize every agency that lifts up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for the evangelization of the world, and . . . hold in high esteem the Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ."

E. REJECTING ECUMENISM

Unity, though clearly willed by God, is not the supreme value. Loyalty to God's truth takes precedence.

The Adventist Church and several other denominations that have not joined organized ecumenical bodies object to ecumenism as doctrine or as an objective to fuse Christian churches into one world church, leading to the loss of distinctive denominational identity. Also, Adventists and other believers do not adhere to syncretistic alliances that would diminish the importance and weight of truth, especially when beliefs in some churches may not be in harmony with revealed biblical truth.

The main concern of Adventists is that they will be restricted from sharing their convictions with every person regardless of religious or philosophical persuasion. This is fundamentally an issue of religious freedom. How could Christians question the right to freedom of religion or belief while even the secular world has accepted this fundamental human right and value?

F. THE BOTTOM LINE

While considering other Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ, the principle that prevents the Adventist world church from being a member of an organized union of churches such as the World Council of Churches is that of religious freedom. Religious freedom implies the unrestricted right to share one's religious convictions and the right to invite others to join one's own Christian tradition without being accused or labeled as a proselytizer.

Seventh-day Adventists support Christian unity as they join the triune God, who is determined to gather people He created in His image. The purpose of the whole plan of salvation is the restoration of God's image and the gathering of those He saves. Unity is grounded in God. It was for this purpose Jesus Christ came to earth to unite all the families of the earth.

Doctrinal unity among Christian churches is elusive and unreachable unless churches lose their distinctive beliefs and join one of the church traditions, be it Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Reformed, Evangelical, Pentecostal, etc.

Freedom of religion or belief is a nonnegotiable gift of God that should characterize the freedom of every Christian person or community to share his or her convictions with others, and to invite others to join his or her Christian tradition. Obviously, for the sake of mission Christians can join to witness Christ to a world that needs Him most urgently.



09

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM?

A. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

The popular meaning of freedom is freedom as the absence of restrictions, obligations, or responsibilities. This view makes freedom into something arbitrary, subjective, relative, a fluid concept, and impossible to define.

In the following reflection, we will consider freedom as a right, freedom as a divine attribute, and freedom as a gift—an entitlement that makes covenant love and genuine fellowship possible.

FREEDOM AS A RIGHT

From the perspective of social sciences, freedom is conceived as a right—a human right. Freedom thus becomes political freedom, socio-cultural freedom, legal freedom, or economic freedom. It is conceived, for example, as the freedom not to participate in some civic duty that conflicts with one's conscience.

This kind of freedom is the object of most conversations about freedom.

Philosophers of the Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment eras have contributed significantly to the understanding of multifaceted perspectives on freedom. They helped shape, for instance, the language of the Rights of Man and of the Citizens, the Declaration of Independence, and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

One can easily trace the influence of John Lock on the writers of the Declaration of Independence, specifically on Thomas Jefferson. In fact, in tracing the genealogy of freedom, one could go further back to the thoughts of seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

All these contributions have played a major role on the conceptualization and formulation of the UDHR.

The third conceptual “pillar” of the United Nations contains the idea of freedom. It is called “individual liberty.” Specifically, it is designated as freedom from want, freedom from fear, and freedom to live in dignity.

“Religious freedom” or “freedom of religion or belief” has played a key role in helping define the conceptualization of human rights. In the context of fundamental freedoms, for example, it has been considered as central to other freedoms.

Fundamentally, religious liberty is conceived as the right to profess, practice, promote, and propagate one's faith, or lack of faith. It is the right to pass it on to one's children, or to people entrusted to one's care.

It is the right to wear symbols and display them in public spaces.

It is the right to possess or to own property devoted to religious matters.

Religious liberty is the right to build institutions as expressions of one's beliefs.

Religious liberty is the right to construct buildings whose structure, architecture, and decorations are designed to promote one's convictions, worldview, and values.

It is the right to join in an assembly with like-minded people to worship and celebrate what one values. It is the right to perform rites and rituals to signify one's beliefs. It is the right to set apart a time, a day, devoted to expressing exclusive allegiance to God. A day when all is submitted to God's sovereignty: one's time, reflections, and activities.

25 CORE THESES ABOUT RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

1 **THESIS ONE**
Freedom of religion or belief is recognized as one of the fundamental freedoms.

2 **THESIS TWO**
It is a universal human right accepted and ratified as such by the international community. It is part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

3 **THESIS THREE**
It is considered the first freedom in the context of democratic institutions and values.

4 **THESIS FOUR**
Freedom of religion or belief is central to all other freedoms. Without freedom of religion or belief, no other freedom can flourish. The Seventh-day Adventist working policy states that “religious liberty is the primordial freedom which undergirds all the freedom.”

5 **THESIS FIVE**
Religious freedom is the precondition for the relevance of other freedoms.

“Religious freedom is the sine qua non of living freely. You may allow me to vote, own property, and associate freely in the public square in every other way. But if you do not permit me to speak and to act on those beliefs about ultimate reality that define who I am and why I am on this earth, then the other freedoms mean little. In a very real sense, then, all human freedoms depend on the freedom of religion.” As such “Religious Freedom is the prerequisite for and the guardian of all other freedoms.” (Thomas Farr, "Is Religious Freedom Necessary for Other Freedoms to Flourish?" Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, 2012).

6 THESIS SIX

It is in itself a compound freedom. That is, it includes the freedom of thought, conscience, and expression; the freedom to choose or to change religion; the freedom to invite others to join your faith tradition, and to publicize written material through various contemporary means. In other words, other fundamental freedoms are integral elements of religious freedom.

As Nathan Hitchen explains, “The logic is that religious freedom is a compound liberty, that is, there are other liberties bound within it. Allowing the freedom of religion entails allowing the freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly, and the liberty of conscience. If a regime accepts religious freedom, a multiplier effect naturally develops and pressures the regime toward further reforms. As such, religious liberty limits government (it is a “liberty” after all) by protecting society from the state. Social pluralism can develop because religious minorities are protected.” (Cited by Joe Carter, “Religious Liberty as a Moral Center for American Diplomacy” First Things, April 8, 2010.)

7 THESIS SEVEN

Freedom of religion or belief is the expression of what it means to be a human person. It consolidates the fact that every human being is endowed with the ability to think, to make decisions according to the intimate convictions of one’s own conscience.

8 THESIS EIGHT

It is a legal right, enshrined in most constitutions.

9 THESIS NINE

It is a political right, a civil and a cultural right.

10 THESIS TEN

It is a civic responsibility. It is a commitment to respect every person’s freedom of conscience, thought, religion or belief.

THESIS ELEVEN

1 1

Freedom of religion or belief is a spiritual endowment in the sense that it is a gift of God. According to the Judeo-Christian narratives, specifically the first story of the Bible, God created freedom, freedom to choose to fellowship with God, or not to fellowship. This is because love cannot be forced. No one can be forced to love. It is a free choice. Freewill is a vital component of the human experience of life and love.

THESIS TWELVE

1 2

Freedom of religion or belief is in fact the most fundamental expression of human dignity. In other words, human dignity is the foundation and substance of religious freedom. It is a reminder that no human being should be considered as a mere instrument.

THESIS THIRTEEN

1 3

Religious freedom is a core relational value. It is any person's right and prerogative to share one's beliefs and hopes without coercing, deceiving, or manipulating others.

THESIS FOURTEEN

1 4

Religious freedom secures for everyone the prerogatives of what it means to be a human being: a person endowed with the ability to think, decide, choose, join, change, share, and invite others, including the right to transmit to your children your beliefs and values. To promote religious freedom, therefore, is to contribute to a better humanity.

THESIS FIFTEEN

1 5

Without freedom of religion or belief, religion becomes a source of coercion and force, power and intimidation, and a violation of the very idea of rights.

THESIS SIXTEEN

1 6

Without the precondition of freedom of religion or belief, the act of consenting to a relationship, the distinctive human prerogatives of willingly sealing a covenant is not possible. Moreover, a relationship of love itself becomes impossible.

1 7 THESIS SEVENTEEN

Where freedom of religion or belief is secured equality among human beings becomes a reality.

1 8 THESIS EIGHTEEN

Freedom of religion or belief is a precondition for justice. Treating every person with honor is predicated upon respect for that person's individuality, which includes the right to form, adopt, embrace, or reject opinions.

1 9 THESIS NINETEEN

Freedom of religion means freedom from persecution, freedom from being coerced, and freedom from being forced to remain in each religion, ideology, worldview, or cultural allegiance. It is freedom from being intimidated or harmed.

2 0 THESIS TWENTY

Religious freedom is a factor of social cohesion and a contributor to the harmonious coexistence of various religious and non-religious individuals and groups. It contributes to social stability. It is proven that where there is hostility toward religious groups there will be instability, violence, and warfare. Freedom of religion or belief can function as the moral center of international relations.

2 1 THESIS TWENTY-ONE

Religious freedom is necessary for national and international peace. Without religious freedom, the peace and prosperity of any nation are in jeopardy. Restrictions to this freedom sooner or later cause the human spirit, the innate human quest for freedom and self-determination, to rise against any government to claim this right. As such, restrictions to religious freedom are delayed troubles. The human spirit cannot be crushed indefinitely.

THESIS TWENTY-TWO

2 2

Religious freedom is the necessary thread or cement that makes possible the very existence of democratic pluralistic societies. Democracy is not feasible without freedom of religion or belief.

THESIS TWENTY-THREE

2 3

Religious freedom provides a normative basis for coexistence and cooperation. “Freedom of religion or belief, in conjunction with other human rights, provides the normative basis for the coexistence and cooperation of people belonging to most different religions or beliefs and obliges the State to provide an inclusive framework. Furthermore, freedom of religion or belief assures that different communities and subcommunities will receive protection.”

THESIS TWENTY-FOUR

2 4

Freedom of religion or belief limits the power of the state and government over people. It is an antidote to totalitarian regimes, to absolute monarchy. It provides a platform against abuses against minorities or against a majority where a minority group assumes the leadership of a country.

THESIS TWENTY-FIVE

2 5

International organizations have recognized the pivotal position of freedom of religion or belief. The United Nations has factored in the necessity of freedom of religion in its own system and mechanisms. Freedom of religion is necessary to peace and security, justice and development, and all human rights, all pillars of the United Nations. The Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be fulfilled without the enjoyment of the freedom of religion or belief.



B. UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION OF ADVENTISM

Now, more than ever, PARL leaders need to move beyond secular philosophical constructs of religious freedom and explore more deeply its theological foundations. The Adventist Church is not just another non-governmental association or advocacy organization. And so, it follows when we speak about religious freedom, our language should be shaped by our unique perspective.

What is this perspective? Adventists conceive religious freedom as a right that contributes to what it means to be human. It is grounded on human dignity. It is motivated by the love of God. God wants people created in His image to freely enter a covenant of love and fellowship. Love cannot be forced. Coercion cancels love but freedom is a precondition of genuine love. God's whole plan of salvation is to restore His image, His covenant, and His offer of everlasting fellowship in love. This plan is grounded on and inseparable from freedom of religion.

Promoting religious freedom is, therefore, a way of participating in the restoration of what makes us human.

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF FREEDOM

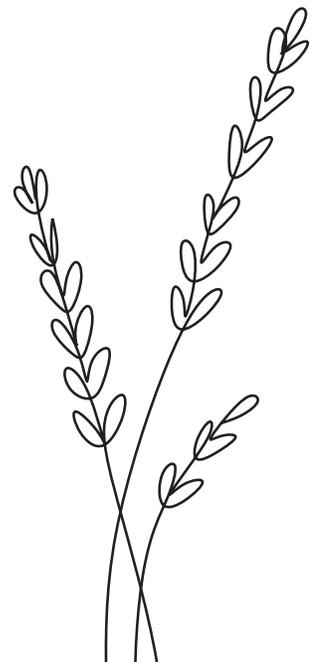
What is needed is a global vision of freedom, a holistic approach to freedom, and freedom informed by the revelation of God in the Scriptures. From biblical Christian perspectives, there can be three fundamental ideas about freedom: freedom as an attribute; freedom as a gift of a life experience that translates into lifestyle; and freedom as deliverance.

1. Freedom as Attribute

Only God is free. He does not have to do anything. He is not obligated to anyone. He is free. God is the only one free from any need. He needs nothing. He needs nobody. We cannot define God. That is, we cannot confine God to our categories. Language itself is inadequate to give an account to the extraordinariness of God. He is totally other.

2. Freedom as a Gift

Freedom as a gift is expressed variously—through the gifts of deliverance, the gift of the law, the gift of the Sabbath, and other festivals—all of which commemorate God’s mighty acts of deliverance, and His desire for His people to maintain their freedom, shunning alienation, or relapse into bondage.



The freedom of every person matters to God.

Old Testament Insights



- The Sabbath is a commemoration of freedom, a weekly Independence Day.
- The Israelite festivals are signs of freedom. They were meant to teach God's people about freedom and fellowship.
 - Passover
 - Feast of Unleavened bread
 - Feast of First fruits
 - Pentecost
 - Feast of Trumpets
 - Yom ha Kippurim (deliverance from judgment)
 - Feast of Tabernacles
 - Sabbatical Year
 - Jubilee
 - Purim

Freedom and Key Moments in Israel's History

The importance that God places on freedom is emphasized several times in His interaction with Israel.

The freedom of every person matters to God.

In Isaiah 58, God pleads with His people. He declares that to seek God and to fast, without freeing people, is to no avail; to observe and celebrate the Sabbath avails nothing if Israel will not liberate people in bondage.

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?”

“Is not this the fast that I choose: to lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?”

“Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; and when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide from our own flesh? Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’”

“If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desired of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.”

These words, which the prophet was sent to proclaim aloud among God’s people, are about the necessity for freedom from persecution, freedom from oppression, freedom from poverty, freedom from domination of a people over another, freedom from violence, and freedom from evil (Isaiah 59:6-7).

God highly values the covenant of liberty

According to this covenant, no one should be a slave among God’s people (Jeremiah 34:8-14).

“Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘I made a covenant with your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, saying,

“At the end of seven years each of you shall set free his Hebrew brother who has been sold to you and has served you six years, you shall send him out free from you; but your forefathers did not obey Me or incline their ear to Me.

“Although recently you had turned and done what is right in My sight, each man proclaiming release to his neighbor, and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name.

“Yet you turned and profaned My name, and each man took back his male servant and each man his female servant whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your male servants and female servants.

“Therefore, thus says the Lord, ‘You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother and each man to his neighbor. Behold, I am proclaiming a release to you,’ declares the Lord, ‘to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

“I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts.”

3. FREEDOM AS AN ACT OF DELIVERANCE

The experience of the children of Israel in the Exodus reflects freedom as an act of deliverance. Similarly, as the Israelites through the centuries continued to celebrate the Passover Festival they were marking and affirming that God had delivered them from bondage and secured their freedom.

To fully understand freedom as an act of deliverance, though, we must turn to Jesus, whose life and ministry reflect God’s preeminent concern with freedom as liberation or release.

C. JESUS AND FREEDOM

Everything about Jesus Christ is connected to the concept and reality of freedom. Freedom seems to be at the core of what he came to offer humanity. It is a prerequisite for what humans were created for: a life of fellowship with God and with one another in love and service.

Consider how the freedom—deliverance—is intertwined with every aspect of Christ’s ministry:

- The name of Jesus a sign of freedom in God: Yahweh saves.
- His discourses (such as the beatitudes).
- His promises are to provide freedom and rest to those in bondage to fear, restlessness, and guilt.
- His actions, when he healed people, as when He liberated people from evil spirits.
- His death was for the liberation of those held in captivity.
- His resurrection, His ascension, His session in heaven, his sending of the Holy Spirit.
- His judgment to those in need of freedom from the penalty, power, and the presence of sin.
- His Second Coming as the deliverance of creation from bondage as stated in Romans 8:18-23. “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the Firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Jesus came to reveal God and to promote the inalienable dignity of every person. This dignity is inseparable from freedom.



Freedom from Evil

Jesus talked about freedom in unique ways. One of His most important statements about freedom is found in His two most famous prayers. He asked His followers to pray about freedom from evil. He prayed that His followers be protected from evil. Both in the Lord's prayer and in His priestly prayer Jesus insisted on this freedom. What stands in the way of God's overarching goal to restore His moral image in humans is evil. Freedom from evil—in all its permutations—is therefore an essential component of God's salvation

Freedom from Poverty

At the United Nations, the first-millennium development goal is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. But it is a goal that remains elusive. Forty to 60 million people starve to death each year. Of these, 29,000 to 40,000 are children.

Freedom from Violence

Violence is a form of evil that pervades society. Consider this: In America today, every 12 seconds a woman is beaten. Half of the women beaten are pregnant. Every eight minutes a woman is raped. Every six hours a woman is murdered. Domestic violence is the number one cause of hospital emergency room visits.

Freedom from Self-Centeredness

The fundamental condition Jesus requires of every person who follows Him is to deny self. Why? Because evil is in every human heart. The heart is desperately wicked, and the only way out is a heart transplant—a new heart. This is the reason why Christianity begins with the death of the self.

Freedom from wickedness is needed, but only God can defeat evil. At the Cross, God absorbed the evil of the world, and thus the restoration of God's image in humans cannot be a reality without the Cross of Christ. Through baptism, Christians join Jesus in dying with Him. His vindication at His resurrection becomes ours. Our freedom necessarily takes this path identification with Christ's experience.

D. BIBLICAL AND THEOCENTRIC PERSPECTIVES ON FREEDOM

Freedom and Jesus' Mission

In Luke 4:18, we see that liberation and deliverance are central themes in Christ's mission.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.

He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,

And recovery of sight to the blind,

To set free those who are oppressed,

To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.”

These concepts of freedom are echoed in the Gospel of Matthew.

- In the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-12) Jesus taught the freedom from addiction to materialism, grudges, violence, and unrighteousness.
- The Antitheses (Matt 5:21-47).
- The Lord's Prayers (Matt 6:9-13) with the prayer to be delivered from evil.
- The disciples' choice is evidence of freedom of conscience: “If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt 16:24). The conjunction “If” gives evidence of freedom of choice, and the value God invests in freewill and human dignity.

Freedom as Access to Fellowship

Jesus came to reveal a God of freedom, the one who cannot be confined and who does not want people to be confined. He gives access to Himself.

He wants to give humanity the grace to fulfill that for which each human being was created.

Jesus and Human Dignity

With reference to freedom and human dignity, Jesus promoted the following:

- Equality (summarized by Paul in Galatians 3:28). There is no slave or free person, nor man or woman because you are all one in Christ.
- The freedom of the individual. Jesus subverts social hierarchy. Jesus abolished the ontological hierarchy. In other words, the hierarchy from Jesus' coming onwards can only be functional, especially seen in the light of the reality of service.
- The emancipation of women
- Social justice
- Separation of powers
- Non-violence and forgiveness
- Love for one's neighbor

In reference to power, popularity, and prestige, Jesus is unambiguously specific.

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mat 20:26-28).

Consider, also, these words from Ellen White:

"Jesus knew the worthlessness of earthly pomp, and he gave no attention to its display. In his dignity of soul, his elevation of character, his nobility of principle, he was far above the vain fashions of the world. Although the prophet describes him as "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief", he might have been esteemed as the highest among the noble of the earth.

The best circles of human society would have courted him, had he condescended to accept their favor, but he desired not the applause of men, but moved independent of all human influence.

Wealth, position, worldly rank in all its varieties and distinctions of human greatness, was all but so many degrees of littleness to him who had left the honor and glory of heaven, and who possessed no earthly splendor, indulged in no luxury, and displayed no adornment but humility.” Ellen White, *That I May Know Him*, 99.

What is at stake in this statement is that Jesus uplifts the unalienable dignity of every human being. He could not compromise any person’s value by indulging in hierarchicalism. A newborn baby, as dependent, helpless, and degreeless as he or she may appear, is as valuable as any other human being. To be consistent with this principle, God’s people are called to recognize the infinite value of every person because all are created in God’s image.

Another revolution in Jesus’ teachings is that there are no people holier than others. There are no more walls of separation. Gender, social status, and ethnic ties don’t matter.

“In Christ Jesus you are all children of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, and there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26-29).

“In the days of Christ, selfishness and pride and prejudice had built strong and high the wall of partition between the appointed guardians of the sacred oracles and every other nation on the globe. But the Savior had come to change all this. The words, which the people were hearing from, His lips were unlike anything to which they had ever listened from priest or rabbi. Christ tears away the wall of partition, the self-love, the dividing prejudice of nationality, and teaches a love for all the human family. He lifts men from the narrow circle that their selfishness prescribes; He abolishes all territorial lines and artificial distinctions of society. He makes no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends, and enemies. He teaches us to look upon every needy soul as our neighbor and the world as our field.”

- Ellen White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, 42.

Freedom as Core Value, Goal, and Expression of Christian Lifestyle

In Galatians 5:1, the Apostle Paul summarizes the central goal of the Christian faith and declares: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”

So, what is this freedom that is the goal of our liberation?

We are set free; the question is: What kind of freedom are we called to experience?

It is possible for Christians to experience genuine deliverance and subsequently be enslaved. Imagine the case of a slave liberated from bondage, human exploitation, and trafficking. Set free but still in the shackles of mental slavery.

But Christ came to bring total freedom: freedom as deliverance and freedom as life experience and lifestyle. This can be called spiritual freedom. It is so precious. You can be in prison like Paul and Silas and still enjoy this kind of freedom.

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

One of the mandates of Adventist mission is to point people to this kind of freedom. This freedom is impossible without the Holy Spirit. As the Apostle Paul writes, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17).

Freedom and Completion of the Reformation

The Protestant Reformation was, in fact, a restoration of truth about freedom.

Seventh-day Adventists take the Reformation to its logical destination: the subversive nature of Jesus' message stripped of all elements foreign to New Testament faith.

The Reformation is purposed to complete this journey of rediscovering the authentic teachings and values of its founder, Jesus Christ.

Among His radical teachings are the following:

- No need for holy places or pilgrimages to holy sites.
- No need for holy objects, sacrifices, holy water, blessed water, or relics.
- No need for the mediation of priests; the priesthood of all believers is part of the New Covenant.
- No need for a holy language. Pentecost did away with that need.
- No need for a holy people separated from other peoples. Individuals from all people groups can now be integrated—grafted—into God's people.
- No need for a holy culture. Cultural distinctions, such as circumcision, do not matter anymore.
- No need for ceremonial laws or circumstantial rituals temporal and time bound.

Insights from Ellen G. White

“It is not God’s purpose that any human being should yield his mind and will to the control of another, becoming a passive instrument in his hands. No one is to merge his individuality in that of another. He is not to look to any human being as the source of healing. His dependence must be in God. In the dignity of his God-given manhood, he is to be controlled by God Himself, not by any human intelligence.” *The Ministry of Healing*, 242.

“No man is to think that he is the owner of the minds and capabilities of his brethren. He is not to think that others must submit to his dictation. He is liable to err, liable to make mistakes, as every man is. He is not to try to control matters in accordance with his ideas.” *This Day With God*, 142.

This insight is consonant with Emmanuel Kant’s famous idea that human beings should not be used as a mere means to an end.

God-given dignity precludes an instrumentalization of subjects who have been created in the image of God.

Freedom and Law

How do we keep this freedom? God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments as a means of preserving their freedom.

The Law was given to provide:

- Freedom from idolatry, freedom from polytheism, freedom from immorality.
- Freedom from addiction and freedom from impurity: impure thoughts, impure acts, and impure habits. That is freedom from defiling one's spiritual capital.
- Freedom from harming others, freedom from humiliating others, freedom from a contentious spirit and mindset. Freedom from violating other peoples' physical, psychological, mental, social, and spiritual integrity.

Conclusion

At both an ecclesial and personal level, therefore, Christ has a special, intimate, and vital connection with us. This intimate connection with God is the reason why when we deal with others, we are dealing with God.

God is our permanent *vis-à-vis*—our ultimate point of reference. He is the only One whose approval matters, the only One whose care matters, the only One whose purpose ultimately matters. The One to whom we are called to pledge our allegiance, our solidarity, and our devotion.



10

MEASURING SUCCESS

As PARL leaders, how do we quantify our success? How do we know when our efforts are, in fact, helping to “position the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its services to a standing of credibility, trust, relevance in the public realm”?

I would like to suggest that we are succeeding in our mandate when:

- All that we do as the Seventh-day Adventist church PARL representatives are part of the mission of the Church.
- The Church recognizes that our PARL work has facilitated the Church’s visibility and credibility among government leaders, world leaders, and international organizations.
- The Church recognizes that we have clearly created platforms for our primary mission of evangelizing the world.
- We become key players in shaping trends when we regularly engage and influence thought leaders and decision-makers.
- We equip our leaders and church members in capacity building for all Adventists to become confident they can relate to all leaders and everyone else.
- Seventh-day Adventist leaders concretely see that we work for them in facilitating to connect them with their regional leaders.
- People in government positions realize Seventh-day Adventists are their allies, partners in working for the common good, in providing their citizens’ services for their health, education, and humanitarian needs when they face disasters, and offering them jobs for their subsistence and economic prosperity.
- Governments and governors solicit our help to improve the condition of living of their citizens.
- Government leaders see that our moral values sustain peaceful coexistence.
- Religious liberty and religious liberty associations flourish all over the globe.
- Discriminated, persecuted, imprisoned, and families of martyred members of the Church express their gratitude because of the care PARL leaders show to them.
- Presidents, governors, senators, and government officials join the Adventist Church as a result of our mingling and encounters with them.

- PARL leaders provide other Adventist leaders with useful information concerning the state of every country in their respective regions: facts, challenges, and opportunities.
- Adventist schools, colleges, and universities develop curricula that integrate courses in international affairs and relations.
- Every church in every region has a PARL coordinator, a person skilled in being the official liaison of the church with leaders in the public space.
- The communication services of PARL fulfill its mandate of providing information and critical insights to interpret reality, trends, developments, and promotion of Christian biblical values and moral standards.
- Other departments benefit from PARL directors' engagements with international leaders.
- Seventh-day Adventists in public office are encouraged to be faithful representatives of Jesus Christ, His kingdom, and righteousness.
- People see that we model our message in bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- The Church fulfills its mission, and Christ comes.



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