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**Gems Present in Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs about Freedom:  
A Unique Voice in the Advocacy of Religious Liberty**

During this religious liberty Sabbath, it is fitting to ask the following key questions:

What kind of advocacy do Adventists' representatives promote?  
What is Seventh-day Adventism a voice for?

If we say, "religious freedom," it would be accurate but incomplete. It would not be specific enough. There are hundreds of organizations that promote and religious freedom. Moreover, can we really settle with the idea that Adventists are just one voice among many and that if we were missing, the cause of religious freedom would still continue and that no one would even notice our absence? Is there something unique among what Seventh-day Adventists share with the world when it comes to freedom.

What is the Seventh-day Adventist specific mandate?

Adventist identity is connected at a deeper level to the issue of freedom, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion or belief, and the so-called fundamental freedoms.

Seventh-day Adventists recognized the value of all fundamental freedoms but more critical is an existential freedom, a freedom for which we were created: freedom of conscience and of choice, and the freedom to respond to God's invitation to fellowship with God. This is the kind of freedom that is grounded on the meaning of life itself. It is a freedom to have access to God unhindered, a freedom from mediations to directly fellowship with God, our creator, provider, protector and sufficiency. Ultimately, God is our supreme value.

Seventh-day Adventists uphold creation in unique ways. The name "seventh day" refers to creation Sabbath, a rest to focus on fellowship with God. But this fellowship or communion is grounded on the fact that humans are created in God's image according to His likeness, to love God, or rather to reciprocate God's love to God and to express it to others. This speaks to the dignity and destiny of all persons. We are created for God.

The latter part of the name Seventh-day Adventist refers to the hope we have to meet God, and to fellowship face to face. Again, it is about fellowship and worship the only worthy one: God. This yearning for God is part of Seventh-day Adventists' spiritual DNA. It is in fact inscribed in every human being. God has put in humans the thought of eternity (Ecclesiastes 3:11). But eternity is inseparable from the God who is the only eternal one. The Apostle Paul has specified that God is "the King of kings, and the Lord

of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Tim 6:16).

The fact that God has planted in every person the thought of eternity means that God has planted the need of God in human heart, mind, and whole being.

The coming of God the Son, Jesus Christ is the consolation/comfort of the ages and the fulfillment of humans most profound yearning, which is fellowship with the author of our lives. Only when we meet God at the renewal of all things after the Second Coming, will unhindered fellowship be a reality. The second Coming is a decisive chapter that illustrates the reason why we were created. We were made for God to worship God and to fellowship with God.

Human dignity is grounded on this unique revelation. Humans are made for God. God graces us with the access to God and with becoming habitations of God.

Every person is therefore sacred. We are habitations of God the Holy Spirit: holy sanctuaries or temples, more valuable than any holy site.

The dignity of any person is not diminished by the degree of degradation. All persons are valuable regardless of debased condition.

- “The coin, though lying among dust and rubbish, is a piece of silver still. Its owner seeks it because it is of value. So every soul, however degraded by sin, is in God’s sight accounted precious. As the coin bears the image and superscription of the reigning power, so man at his creation bore the image and superscription of God; and though now marred and dim through the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul. God desires to recover that soul and to retrace upon it His own image in righteousness and holiness. (COL 194.6)
- None are so vile, none have fallen so low, as to be beyond the working of this power. In all who will submit themselves to the Holy Spirit a new principle of life is to be implanted; the lost image of God is to be restored in humanity. (COL 96.1)

This means that there is no degree in dignity. All are worthy by association with the only one who is worthy: God.

Being created in God’s image and made for God mean being endowed with the capacity and mission to share the life of God.

Beyond a mere promotion of religious freedom, Adventists promote life and share life. Freedom is defined by the flourishing of life, unrestricted. This is the opposite of oppression, coercion, constraint, intimidation or inflicting of pain, suffering or death.

All Adventist works or ministries have this common denominator: The participation in improving the lives of people takes different forms: Health, education, humanitarian, religious liberty, women, youth, and children ministries. They are all antidotes to agents and symptoms of death.

We live in a world steeped in a culture of death. Death and its symptoms are woven into the very fabric of reality. Suffering is one of those symptoms. In our work, in our ministry or service we meet people in crisis, people whose rights are violated, whose dignity is trampled and whose worth are devalued and ignored. Too many people are in pain.

Caring about human beings means first of all recognizing their full humanity and infinite worth by virtue of human conscience God put in every person.

Power is used over human beings as if they were disposable objects. It has become in many instances a tool evil has usurped and has dissociated from unconditional love and respect for all human beings. A genuine respect for every person and the sacredness of every person's life are foundational to any approach to religious liberty.

In the context where Paul develops the Christian understanding of freedom, he ends up highlighting the necessity of the fruit of the Spirit. They are incontrovertible for the celebration of true freedom: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, self-control.

The deeper mandate of sharing life is consonant with what Jesus Christ came for. He came to grant freedom. This freedom is inseparable from knowing Christ and having life, eternal life.

He said he came so that people may have life and have it abundantly (John 10). Moreover, this commitment to life is the foundation for the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus elaborated on in the Sermon on the Mount.

His radical speech on reconciliation is built upon the premise that life matters. Killing is forbidden but anger against the brother, insult, or disdain and rejection of others are also as criminal (see Matthew 5:20-26). They all stem from the same root, the negation of other peoples' life and dignity, their inviolable humanity.

We believe in life, we work to promote life, which is the overarching platform for freedom and fellowship.

Relationships are life's vital characteristics at biological as well as at interpersonal, existential, and moral levels.

- Life is about relationship, circulation, and communication and communion.

- God is the Living one, the relational one.
- Life is the gift from God: In Christ was life and life is the light of the world.
- I have come so that they may have life and have it abundantly.
- Life was manifested and we have seen it glory.

We can wholeheartedly be united in participating in the healing of our world and its people, a restoration to life that Jesus Christ is coming to complete soon. When Jesus comes again, He will heal all the wounds of human existence and human condition. In fact, He will purge the whole reality from evil, sin, and suffering.

Being Christian goes therefore with sharing life in anticipation of Christ Second Coming when He will restore life to its fullest. We do not just promote a freedom or religious freedom as if this is just a matter of sharing information. We promote the hope and anticipation of total freedom.

More is involved. A transforming life is a shared life. Authentic communication happens when the whole person is involved. This opens another incontrovertible dimension of human life.

### **Love is the goal of freedom.**

Life the way God meant it is a life of love. This is because we were created in the image of the one who is love.

The root cause of most human relational problems is a distraction from love. Adventists are convinced that what they share with the world at its core is a message of love:

Those who wait for the bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, "Behold your God." The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character, they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them. {E.G. White, COL 415.5}

The whole creation groans and moans, eagerly waiting for the revelation of the children of God (Rom 8:20). Nature and the whole cosmos are eager to see freedom, holiness pervading all aspects of life, and the most excellent way which is love. In essence, that is a yearning for the kingdom of God. A kingdom of freedom, holiness, peace, and fellowship in love.

The end of the great controversy is significantly described in the following words:

“The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love” (Ellen G. White. *The Great Controversy*, 677, 678).

That was the real issue all along. The love of God doubted, and the love of God demonstrated.

This love is the foundation of freedom: freedom in God, freedom that stems from the being of God and freedom for God to reciprocate God’s love.

This revelation of God’s love is the most profound aspect of the gospel: the good news of God.

Since love cannot be forced, God created freedom for human beings to have the choice to reciprocate God’s love.

### **Total Freedom: God’s Last Appeal**

At the heart of the book of Revelation, stands what is called the everlasting gospel.

Seventh-day Adventists understand the specific mandate entrusted to our care, the proclamation the everlasting gospel. That is the good news of total freedom. The announcement of a final exodus from evil, sin, oppression, suffering and death. The language used in the book of Revelation is reminiscent of the book of Exodus with the revelation of the name of the God of freedom, of liberation and liberty. Redemption by the blood of the lamb.

The plagues to defeat God’s people’s oppressors. The exodus per se, the song of Moses and the song of the lamb. the celebration of the feast of tabernacles post-day of judgment, Yom Ha kippurim. The comforting of those who come from the great tribulation.

### **The Language of the Exodus**

The structure of the book of Exodus is simple yet profound. It is organized in a chiastic fashion around the following themes: liberation, covenant (kingdom, law and atonement) and worship.

The revelation of God’s Name Yahweh

1. Liberation
2. Covenant
3. Worship

The manifestation of God's presence in the Shekinah glory in the Sanctuary.

- I. Liberation announced (1-6:27)  
Oppression in Egypt, Moses' Calling
- II. Liberation delayed (6:28-11)  
Egyptian plagues, Pharaoh's Refusal
- III. Liberation fulfilled (12-16)  
Last Plague  
12-13: laws concerning Passover, unleavened bread, Firstborn.  
Exodus, Miracle of the sea
- IV. Covenant at Sinai (17-24:11)  
Meeting with God  
The Decalogue (20:1-17)  
The Covenant code (20:22-23-33)  
Conclusion of the Covenant
- V. Worship announced (24:12-31) The Sanctuary project revealed to Moses
- VI. Worship delayed (32-34)  
The crisis of the golden Calf: Reconciliation  
Ritual code 34:14-26
- VII. Worship fulfilled (35-40)

### The Language of Revelation: Resonances with the Book of Exodus

- 1. The revelation of God's Name to Moses: *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*, Yahweh
  - 2. The blood of the lamb on the doorposts as a token of faith for the redeemed Israelites.
  - 3. The constitution of God's covenant people into a kingdom of priests.
  - 4. A Worshipping community.  
The reason that God gave for the Exodus is so that the children of Israel may worship him. Israel, therefore formed a worshipping community.
- 1'. The book of Revelation presents God as the **One who is, who was, and who is to come**, echoing the name Yahweh that God revealed to Moses.
  - 2.' Christ set his people free by His blood specifies the text.
  - 3.' Christ has made His followers a kingdom of priests.
  - 4.' Christ intends to give the book of Revelation to His servants, those who worship Him.

There are parallels between the stories of God's dealing with His people at *Sinai*, in *Jerusalem* and on the Island of *Patmos*.

- **At Sinai**, at Passover/Feast of unleavened bread, God made a covenant with His people, after redeeming them. He made them into a kingdom of priests to be His witnesses to all the nations. He gave them the gift of the Law.
- **In Jerusalem**, at Pentecost God expands the border of His kingdom. He included people of non-Israelite origin into His covenant people.
- God once again gave a gift, this time the Holy Spirit, to qualify His people to be His witnesses. They were chosen to proclaim His resurrection and sovereignty.
- **At Patmos**, the gifts God's people needed were grace and peace amid challenges they face as they prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ.

A Common denominator between the story of God's people in the book of Exodus and the book of Revelation is the reality of freedom, liberation.

We could expand on the parallels between the plagues that precede the Exodus of the Israelites and the plagues that precede the final Exodus of the book of Revelation.

In other words, the plagues of the book of Exodus mirror the plagues of the book of Revelation.

### **The Commissioning to Share the Eternal Gospel.**

Following the pattern of the commissioning of God's people in Jerusalem, the book of Revelation focuses on several dimensions of the message to share with the whole world, the whole oikumene.

At Patmos, and as revealed in the series of series of seven, between the sixth and the Seventh trumpet which marks the advent of the kingdom of God (Rev. 11:15), God commissions his people to announce the gospel, with the specification that this is the everlasting gospel.

- From a structural, contextual, thematic, and theological perspectives, the three angels' messages occur between the sixth and the seventh trumpets as God's last attempt to bring the world back to Him before it is too late.
- The Seventh trumpet is the advent of God's kingdom as is clearly stated in Revelation 11:15.
- "Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever. And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying,

- ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the timer to reward Your bondservants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth” (Rev 11:11-18).

Before that, the sixth trumpet ends with a note of regret. Despite the plagues that fall on the third of mankind, there is lack of repentance.

**“The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent** of the work of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; and **they did not repent** of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts” (Rev 9:20-21).

- Twice, the idea of lack of repentance is underlined. Nevertheless, the end of the world does not come without a time of grace, precisely to give humanity an opportunity to repent.
- The Three angels’ messages are in essence a call to repentance and a message of restoration and hope. Even the warning aspects contained in the messages are ultimately driven by the love of God who “wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).
- Despite the lack of repentance, God is still determined to send a last message to the whole world. The proclamation of the everlasting gospel.

### **The Gospel or Good News to be proclaimed before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**

#### **The Importance of the Second Coming in Revelation**

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11**  
 \* \* \* \* \*

**Two kinds of Prophecy/Judgment Establishment of**  
**Coming /Salvation God’s Kingdom**

**12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22**  
 \* \* \* \*

**Harvest/Prophecy/Promise/Victory/Promise/Prayer**

The overarching purpose of the book of Revelation can be articulated as the preparation of the church and of the world for the Second Coming, the blessed hope of the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.



Jesus prophesied that “the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world and then the end shall come.”

### **Focus on the Eternal Gospel**

- Is the gospel in Revelation different from the gospel in the rest of the New Testament?
- More specifically, is the eternal gospel of the first angel’s message in Revelation 14:6 different from what the Apostle Paul fiercely defended as the unchangeable and irreplaceable gospel?
- He said that even if an angel should come with another gospel, let him be anathema.

For Paul, the content of the gospel was non-negotiable.

“I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!” (Gal 1:6-8).

### **The Eternal Gospel in Revelation 14.**

Before delving into the text of Revelation, it may be fitting in a Seventh-day Adventist context to mention what Ellen White says about the everlasting gospel.

It is unmistakably clear and in conformity with what is revealed in the Bible. She is not advocating for a different gospel.

She says the following:

“The gospel of Christ is from beginning to end the gospel of saving grace. It is a distinctive and controlling idea. It will be a help to the needy, light for the eyes that are blind to the truth, and a guide to souls seeking for the true foundation. Full and everlasting salvation is within the reach of every soul (Ev. 552.4).

“The message proclaimed by the angel flying in the midst of heaven is the everlasting gospel, **the same gospel that was declared in Eden** when God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). Here was **the first promise of a Savior** who would stand on the field of battle to contest the power of Satan and prevail against him.

## **A Precursor Before the Final Exodus**

John the Baptist as a precursor for the announcement of the new humanity the Messiah had come to form had a threefold message.

1. A call to repentance
2. An announcement of judgment and its accompanied warning
3. The advent of a Savior, the lamb of that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). This latter was the gospel.

The precondition for the reception of the gospel or the consequences for rejecting the gospel are not the gospel.

The gospel is about the Savior and His offer of freedom.  
This how Jesus defined his ministry.

“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 **liberty** 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” (Luke 4:18-19).

### **1. The gospel is then the promise of Christ who defeats the serpent.**

This was the first good news.

The first advent of Christ, in the birth of the Messiah, the Savior as announced in the gospel of Luke. The savior is born.

“Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a **Savior**, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:10-11)

**That was the good news of the first Advent.**

### **2. The good news is also about the Second Advent of the Savior (John 14:3; Revelation 14:14)**

What the Bible calls the everlasting gospel, and the three angels' messages are inseparable from freedom.

### **3. This final gospel is the good news of total freedom. It is the final exodus and deliverance from all oppressors, evils and evil itself.**

- A deeper and more comprehensive study of the book of Revelation, reveals a compelling connection of the book of Revelation with the themes of the book of Exodus.

- Suffice it here to mention that already in the first chapter of the book of Revelation the following elements show that the experience of God's end time people is patterned after the liberation/Exodus Israel experienced when delivered from oppression in Egypt.
  1. The revelation of God's Name to Moses
  2. The blood of the lamb on the doorposts as a token of faith for the redeemed Israelites
  3. The constitution of God's people into a kingdom of priests
  4. The reason that God gave for the Exodus is so that the children of Israel may worship him. Israel, therefore formed a worshipping community.
- These features at the beginning of the book of Revelation set the stage for the pilgrimage of God's people from oppression, domination, persecution, and martyrdom to total freedom from evil.
- In the first covenant, God created a people who experienced liberation from oppression. They were graced with the exodus, which for the children of Israel marked the existence of a new people of God, a people of priests. They sang the song of Moses.
- In the last proclamation of the everlasting good news, the redeemed are described standing upon the sea of glass mixed with fire.
- "They sang the song of Moses, the bond servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev. 15:3)
- We are invited to experience the final exodus. The everlasting good news of total freedom to have access to God's presence, in gratitude, worship, and eternal fellowship with God. That is the destiny of the new humanity in Christ.
- "I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.
- And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new.' And He said, Write, for these words are faithful and true" (Rev 21:3-5).

A new humanity, a new environment, and a new atmosphere where freedom, holiness, righteousness, peace, and joy will dwell forever.

The Victory of the promised Savior is remarkably and dramatically described in Revelation 5 in the context of a cosmic crisis in need of a cosmic redeemer, a goel who saves his people.

In Revelation 5 the gospel is admirably described.

### **Rhetorical Perspectives**

In the setting of the 7 seals, four questions lead to a better grasp on the issues in this series.

- 1. Who is worthy? (5:2)
- 2. Until when? (6:10)
- 3. Who will be able to stand? (6:17)
- 4. "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?" (7:13)

Other questions are asked in the book

5. Who is able to wage war against him? (13:4)
6. Why are you astounded? (17:7)
7. Who is like the great city? (18:18)

### **Narrative Considerations**

**Every story has a logic, an internal logic. It is about transformation.**

#### **Needs**

In chapter 5 there is crisis, a cosmic one, signaled by two elements in our text.

1. No one is found in heaven, on earth, or under the earth, worthy to open the book not even to look at it.
2. As a result, John weeps a lot.

The twofold problem is stated.

#### **Competence**

The first issue signaled by the question "who is worthy" is that of competence. However, the nature of the competence is subtle. The qualifications of the competent one present several unexpected features and paradoxes.

He is introduced as a Lion who has conquered. However, what John sees, is a lamb as slain but standing.

The Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes (All powerful and all-knowing or Omniscient).

In the hymn of verse 10, several performances are signaled as proof that the Lamb is qualified or worthy.

## **Performances**

1. Victory
2. Redemption (You have purchased for God with your blood some from every tribe and tongue and people and nation)
3. Creation/Recreation (He has made us into the following:
  - a. Kingdom
  - b. Priests to our God.
  - c. Kings (They will reign upon the earth))

## **Resolution and Recognitions**

Revelation 5 presents several reversals. The problems that caused the cosmic crisis are multifaceted. The solutions are also multifaceted. This chapter portrays several aspects as good news.

1. New Song instead of the weeping
2. The prayers of the saints are answered.
3. Discourse and dialogue are again possible
4. Intensification of praises (music and songs of gratitude from many angels, the living creatures, the elders, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands).
5. Acknowledgement of God's attributes
6. Cosmic doxology
7. The "Amen" is uttered as sign and seal of the covenant
8. Worship is accomplished.

## **A key issue**

- The Cosmic Crisis is about the need for salvation.
- Who can bring about salvation?
- What is salvation?
  
- The whole section of the seals shows that salvation involves the following:
  1. Resolution of a cosmic crisis
  2. Reversal of despair
  3. Restoration of God's kingdom
  4. Restitution of priestly dignity and function
  5. Reinstatement of kings
  6. Reunion of the cosmic family
  7. Resumption of worship, praises, songs in celebration and in gratitude for the salvation fulfilled by the blood of the lamb.

## **Images of Salvation in the Immediate Context of the Seals**

The major thematic thrust of the questions asked in the section of the seals of about the good news of salvation.

After having looked at the use of the concept of salvation in the web of words that constitute the text of Revelation 5, the immediate context of the seven seals and in particular the three remaining questions help us broaden our understanding of the concept of salvation.

- 1. Salvation is the grace of being able to stand in the day of the Lord. The Day of Judgment and wrath (Rev 6:17). If the Lamb were not standing, resurrected, no one would be able to stand.
- 2. Salvation incorporates the sealing of God's servants, the 144,000. "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads" (Rev 7:3).
- 3. Salvation is to come out victorious from the great tribulation.
- 4. Salvation includes washing one's robe and making it white in the blood of the Lamb.
- 5. Salvation is to be introduced in the presence of God
- 6. It is to be shepherded by the Lamb and be led by him to the springs of the waters of life.
- 7. Salvation is to be consoled, comforted, and having one's every tear wiped from our eyes.

Freedom is indeed the subject matter of Scripture. And Jesus is the Savior who will fulfill the freedom promised, He came to bring liberty at the first advent. He is coming to bring total freedom from evil, all evil, sin, suffering and death.

This is the everlasting gospel of the good news of total freedom.