

No synod of bishops, ecumenical alliance, or college of cardinals ultimately defines what it means to be an Adventist.

In an age when litigants sue even religious groups to demand inclusion in a group to which they want to belong, Adventists continue to assert the priority of voluntary personal choice to affiliate—or not. Accompanying this, of course, is the inevitable ethical point: Should I morally continue to describe myself as a Seventh-day Adventist or give lip service to beliefs and lifestyle implications that I actually reject or no longer practice?

- [Extracted from *Adventist Review Online*. <http://www.adventistreview.org/1510-19>]

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- Foreign guests are not permitted to speak in churches unless they have a "work permit" from Russian authorities.
- If a friend or relative from outside Russia wishes to share his/her faith in your home the guest will be fined and expelled from Russia.
- Any discussion of God with non-believers is considered missionary activity and will be punishable.
- Missionary activity will be permitted by special government permission. Example: If one traveling on a train shares his faith without written permission the offender will be taken into police custody for the duration of the journey and will be fined 50,000 rubles (\$1,000).

- Offenders from the age of 14-years-old will be subject to prosecution.
- Religious activity is no longer permitted in private homes. Most churches in Russia meet in homes.
- Every citizen is obligated to report religious activity of neighbors to the authorities. Failure to be an informant is punishable by law.
- One may pray and read the Bible at home but not in the presence of a non-believing person. You will be breaking the law and be punished.
- If the church has purchased property it cannot be converted into a place of worship.
- In church buildings, it is not permitted to invite people to turn to God. Worship services are permitted but making a non-believer a follower of Christ is against the law.

In response, thousands of churches across the country have come together in fasting and prayer to cry out to God.

Commentators note that:

"The government has long used the 'fight against terrorism and extremism' to justify repressive laws. As a result, Russia's statutory framework can now be effectively used to target any group perceived as threats by the state". And "Russia is closing down in an awful way. The new law is in total conflict with the purpose and the task given to the church by the Lord. The law will send the church back into Soviet era Communist persecution".

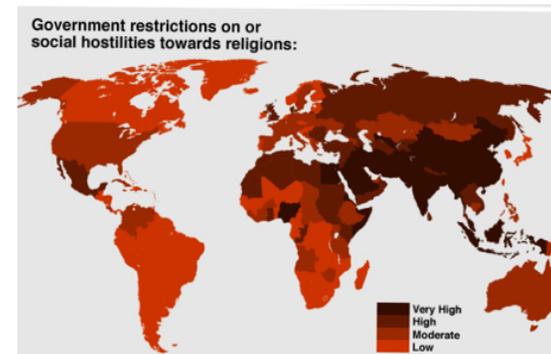
- Pauline Knight

Vol. 4 • Issue 4 **Religious Liberty Newsletter** Dec. 2016

The present edition draws attention to recent news about denial of religious freedoms. It also points to Christ as the true source of freedom and invites SDAs to reflect on their beliefs.

State Persecution in Action

Russia has resurged in the news recently, with its reputed interference in the US elections being the latest headline grabber. Earlier in 2016, global attention was caught by the signing into law of measures that were ostensibly to counter terrorism and extremism but have severely restricted human rights including religious activities in the country.



Following the demise of the communist Soviet Union 25 years ago, Russia's main 'traditional' religious faiths have flourished. These are, in size order, Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. But denominations with a smaller presence in Russia (including SDA's) have long been viewed with hostility from state officials and religious authorities. Nonethe-

less, the SDA Church had appealed to Putin not to sign the law.

Church leaders' concern was that the wording of the legislation was vague and open to the interpretation of law enforcement agencies. Since coming into effect in mid-July, a number of Christians have already been arrested and fined for activities such as holding and advertising religious services at home and performing baptisms in a sanatorium.

The Yarovaya Law – termed after its main author Russian politician, Irina Yarovaya is reported to include the following religious restrictions:

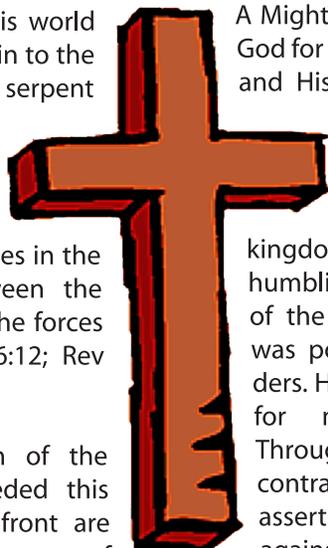
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Salvation – True Religious Liberty

The Great War

In the infancy of this world its inhabitants gave in to the deception of the serpent (Gen 3:1-6; John 8:44). From this point onward this world has been held in endless battles in the ongoing war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness (Eph. 6:12; Rev 12:9,12).

The first indication of the issues which preceded this Great War on our front are found in the first chapters of Genesis. God accomplishes His creative work and as a loving and caring Father He begins to guide and prepare man as king and steward over this newly created world and all its life (Gen 1:27-28; Gen 2:15). Because of the prior entrance of iniquity in heaven, all was not well in the universe. **Man's allegiance, respect and obedience** to God's instructions (Gen 2:16-17) were a prerequisite to his continued relationship with his Maker. The serpent's retort to this instruction directly represents God as a liar and a withholder of good things to man (Gen 3:4-5). Mankind falls. This is where mankind lost freedom, this is where mankind experienced the painful results of sin with no power to overcome the curse ourselves.



The character of a loving God however stands firm amid the onslaught of the mutinous traitor. A Mighty King and Warrior is our God for the cause of His Kingdom and His people. (Ex 15:2-3; Phil 2:5-11). Through the work of the man Christ Jesus, we are redeemed back into God's kingdom. Through His act of humbling Himself to the death of the cross, our chastisement was poured out on His shoulders. He bore the wrath of God for mankind (Isa. 53:4-5). Through Him we see the stark contrast between the false assertions of Satan matched against the mercy, grace and love of a Holy and just God.

Through Christ we have the privilege to choose freedom from bondage to sin and eternal life. A plan implemented from the foundation of the world. Titus 1:2; 1 Peter 1:19-20. The apostle John penned it thus "In him was life; and the life was the light of men.....*That* was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. ... He came unto his own and is own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. ". John 1:4, 9, 11-13.

- Nicholas Reid

Freedom in Christ

We often speak about our freedom in Christ, but without a clear understanding of its true efficacy. Adam's sin brought about an estrangement which not only affected him but his entire offspring, that is, the human race. Isaiah 53:6 says, "for all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way."

The parable of the lost sheep found in Luke 15:1-7, is one that exemplifies man's estrangement and God's reconciling love. Though it was man's choice that caused him to be lost in sin (his estrangement) and consequently separated himself from God, it was divine love that initiated restorative plans to **bring back man to his original state of "perfection"** and set him free from bondage to sin and wages of sin.

"If the son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed", John 8:36. According to this pertinent scripture, Jesus Christ came to offer man genuine freedom (Rom. 8:2; 2Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1). How is this liberality effected in the life? **Through belief coupled with repentance.** Our turning away from sin is a product of our faith in Christ. Rom. 5:5 says, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the UNGODLY, his faith is counted for righteousness."

The judge says you have been acquitted, so you are free to go. Removal from the bondage of

unrighteousness to the joy of righteousness. This righteousness is placed on our account as our own righteousness. Rom. 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." Rom. 8:1-2."

Jesus Christ does not compel us into this grace, rather he offers it to us, maintaining our moral and fundamental human right to choose whom we will serve. It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion, to which free will and not force, should lead us.

Therefore the right to live in accordance with God's will means practically the right to live in accordance with one's own conscience. And that right is called "freedom of conscience."

- Christopher Kassie

Am I an Adventist?

No one is born a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, nor can they be propelled into it simply by heritage, culture, or language. At the heart of what it means to be an Adventist is an unshakable certainty that only the "truth as it is in Jesus"—freely chosen by each individual—"can change the leper's spots, and melt the heart of stone."

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