

Dear all, greetings.

I am writing this Worldview “b” edition in response to what we see around us in the US, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of what is written below has already been shared with our front-line staff, but this is a wider article. There is much to be praying about. So, let’s get underway.....

Prior to the October 1917 Bolshevik revolution, Czarist Russia was in a state of cultural and philosophical flux. The teachings of the gospel were eclipsed as the Russian Orthodox Church struggled to compete with the onslaught of modernity. For a generation, competing philosophers, priests and ex-prisoners promoted Marxism, agrarianism, Leninism, Bolshevism, Menshevism, Orthodox mysticism, nihilism and nationalism. The outcome was the communist dictatorship of Lenin and then Stalin. The Body of Christ was ruthlessly persecuted, and millions perished.

Prior to the election of Adolf Hitler in 1933, Weimar Germany was in a similar state of chaos. Theologians’ higher criticism had undercut the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Reeling from the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, and as the German currency collapsed in value, nationalists, communists and “Freikorps” fighters battled in the streets. The outcome was the fascist dictatorship of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party. The Body of Christ was ruthlessly persecuted, and millions perished.

Prior to the prophesied uniting of church and state and the imposition of national Sunday laws as a means of bringing national unity, the United States is drifting from her Protestant moorings into a bewildering state of social, moral and political chaos. Ideological and street battles are being fought between far-right and far-left partisans, and special-interest groups, activist judges, politicized corporations and media factions are on the warpath. In this rejection of our Judeo-Christian heritage, coercion via economic boycotts, employment purges, media firestorms, physical intimidation and street violence are becoming more common. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the tools available for the persecution of any dissenting minorities.

David Brooks wrote in the August 11 2017 edition of The New York Times, “We all have our theories about why these moral crazes are suddenly so common. I’d say that radical uncertainty about morality, meaning and life in general is producing intense anxiety. Some people embrace moral absolutism in a desperate effort to find solid ground. They feel a rare and comforting sense of moral certainty when they are purging an evil person who has violated one of their sacred taboos.”

As we know from modern history and the prophetic light of Scripture (Rev. 13), such social breakdown as we are beginning to see in the United States today will ultimately result in the rise of a strong regime that imposes order by economic coercion and physical violence. Once again, the Body of Christ will be persecuted, and once again many will be martyred for their faith. Which brings us to COVID-19.

As we survey the impact of COVID-19 on basic civil liberties, constitutional rights and religious freedom in the USA, it is evident that when a state of emergency is declared, possibly in response to ongoing social breakdown, and whether at the state or national level, nothing is sacred. No rights are inalienable, including freedom of conscience.

Despite the best of intentions on the part of legislatures and governors nationwide across the entire political spectrum in their battle against the virus, the lockdowns also caused (to varying degrees) the suspension of supposedly inalienable rights such those contained in the US Bill of Rights, e.g. our 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment rights. Perhaps inadvertently, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fact that many probable tools of oppression of God’s end-time people are already in place and that political leaders across the political spectrum are ready and willing to use them given an opportunity:

- 1) A corrupt national media, from whom truth has departed, pushes a narrative and agenda whereby our civil liberties, constitutional rights and religious freedoms are indefinitely suspended during a state of emergency.
- 2) Social media giants restrict and de-platform any voices that question the dominant narrative.
- 3) Dissenters to the dominant narrative are demonized in the media and online mobs, and are ascribed the worst possible motives by national and state-level political leaders.
- 4) Gatherings for worship and evangelism are banned in the alleged interests of public safety, and deputies are sent by local mayors to fine or arrest those gathered for worship, even in drive-in services.
- 5) Hotlines are established and Americans are encouraged to report on their neighbors if they are suspected of failing to comply with the dominant narrative.
- 6) So-called "Track and Trace" apps are used to monitor the physical location of entire populations (in the interests of public health and safety), giving the authorities unprecedented intrusion into your privacy.
- 7) Smart tools such as Siri, Alexa, Amazon's Echo Dot and Google's Nest Mini, used in millions of homes and phones across the US, have the ability to record every word you ever speak.
- 8) The full force of the administrative state at the state level is threatened to destroy the families and livelihoods of dissenters, including the very real threat of children being removed by Child Protection Services from parents who refuse to comply with the dominant narrative.
- 9) States' Attorneys-General arbitrarily revoke business licenses and registrations, denying individuals their ability to buy, sell, bank, or make a living.
- 10) International travel is brought to a shuddering halt at the stroke of a pen.
- 11) Almost all US colleges and churches have been ordered shut, again in the interests of public safety.
- 12) Truth is declared "hate-speech" and is driven from the public square.

In the COVID-19 pandemic, people have responded to the lockdowns in a wide spectrum of ways. Some are terrified and dare not venture out of their homes. Some enthusiastically endorse the lockdowns and report on their neighbors' violations. Others hunker down with gritted teeth. Others speak up in opposition, and yet others march against it. The only thing that remains is a political excuse to turn these tools on those who are faithful to the Creator God.

Historically, Adventists have rarely responded to persecution with unity. German Adventists split in WW1 over how to respond to conscription and the question of bearing arms for the Kaiser. In response to the totalitarian demands of communist rulers across the USSR, Adventists fractured along different national fault-lines. In many countries, we witnessed a split into an official Body and an underground Body in response to communist oppression, and those often-bitter Adventist fault-lines still exist today.

So, what are the key takeaways? All the tools of oppression of God's end-time people are in place. In the end-time persecution, our civil and religious liberties will be revoked. All of our church buildings, colleges, conferences, unions, divisions and other Adventist entities will be closed down. Our ability to buy, sell, bank and travel will be suspended. We will be demonized across the political spectrum and in all media (As Jesus said, "You will be hated by all men for my name's sake, Mk. 13.13).

Perhaps most tragically, in the coming end-time persecution, and consistent with our historically divided response to persecution, Adventism will probably fracture (we are already polarized to a certain extent along a # of dimensions). Some will excuse and justify the persecution of the "troublers of Israel." Others will accommodate to it. Others yet will reject it, hunker down and await the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. Nothing in our own history indicates there will be a unified response. If you don't believe me, simply look at our history.

The Spirit of Prophecy discusses how we may prepare for the impending persecution.

*"We as a people have not accomplished the work which God has committed to us. We are not ready for the issue to which the enforcement of the Sunday law will bring us. It is our duty, as we see the signs of approaching peril, to arouse to action. Let none sit in calm expectation of the evil, comforting themselves with*

*the belief that this work must go on because prophecy has foretold it, and that the Lord will shelter his people. We are not doing the will of God if we sit in quietude, doing nothing to preserve liberty of conscience. Fervent, effectual prayer should be ascending to heaven that this calamity may be deferred until we can accomplish the work which has so long been neglected. Let there be more earnest prayer; and then let us work in harmony with our prayers."*— *Testimonies for the Church* 5:713, 714. { ChS 162.1 }

*"It is our duty to do all in our power to avert the threatened danger. We should endeavor to disarm prejudice by placing ourselves in a proper light before the people. We should bring before them the real question at issue, thus interposing the most effectual protest against measures to restrict liberty of conscience."* *Testimonies for the Church* 5:452.

I believe that we are being asked to do the following in the Spirit of Prophecy:

- 1) Unite in prayer for freedom of conscience to remain operative, as how can we sow seed if we can't get access to the field?
- 2) Increase our focus on sharing the Gospel, individually and corporately, so as to not waste time. Souls are precious, and you cannot put a price on a soul in human terms.
- 3) Agree to not be diverted by today's debates within the SDA Church, and focus on the matters of eternal consequence.
- 4) Speak and act in a manner as to win respect – even if it is a begrudging respect – from those within our hostile secular world.
- 5) Uphold the principle of freedom of conscience for all peoples, not only ourselves, for the principle is God's gift to all peoples.

COVID-19 is a true wake-up call. There is much to think about here. Are we uniting in prayer? Are we sowing the seed while we can, taking advantage of our liberties while we may? Are we building kingdoms on earth or serving the Kingdom of Glory? Are we laying up treasures on earth, or in heaven above? Is anything holding us to this earth and over-riding our fidelity to our Father?

In Stalin's prison camps, the guards knew that if a prisoner had one personal item, e.g. a comb, the threat of confiscating that one material item would guarantee compliance from the prisoner throughout his / her decades-long sentence. One measly item. A pencil. A comb. A toothbrush. That was all it took to buy a human heart and guarantee compliance.

"Dear Father, I confess that false gods have infiltrated and captivated my heart. My heart, like Lot's wife, is captive to this world. Please remove these false gods from me today, and may my whole being be captive to you and your Word alone. Amen!"

And in this era of debilitating moral uncertainty, how should we respond as a worldwide ministry? In a world that is increasingly rejecting the moral foundation from Scripture, my prayer is that we will all recommit to proclaiming with love and grace to all of God's children the absolute certainty that there is no other foundation for the Body of Christ than Christ alone (1 Cor. 3.10); no other gospel than that of Jesus Christ (Gal. 1.8); no other way to God than through Jesus Christ (John 14.6); no other mediator with God than Jesus Christ (Heb. 6.19); no other power for salvation than through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 1.16); and no other name by which humanity may be saved (Acts 4.12).

We are living in momentous times. Jesus is coming again! The pieces of Revelation 13 are being put into place. Let us be faithful!

Have a blessed Sabbath!