2011 will be a year of significant events for religious liberty, with abundant opportunities for your participation. In September, the nation will commemorate the tenth anniversary of 9/11. With controversies over the building of mosques around the country, it is clear that Americans are rethinking their commitment to religious freedom. How much freedom do we really want, and how inclusive do we really want to be? Do we want to extend freedom to Muslims, especially since their countries deny Christians religious freedom? This brings to mind what every parent has repeated endlessly to their kids: “two wrongs don’t make a right.” In any event, this is a wonderful time to lift the banner of truth and religious freedom! Please join us!

Festival of Religious Freedom – Sunday, September 4, 2011. Sunday afternoon, at the State Capitol in Sacramento, thousands will gather to celebrate religious freedom. Plan now to be part of it. More details will be posted in the near future at www.churchstate.org.

Government Relations Day – Monday, May 16, 2011. Representatives from many Adventist churches will gather in Sacramento for a day of training and visiting legislative offices to discuss significant religious freedom issues. For more information and to register, please call the Church State Council office: 916-446-2552. Please make sure that someone represents your church!

Evangelism – Executive Director Alan J. Reinach, Esq., has developed a three part mini evangelistic series: “The Coming Economic Collapse? A Biblical Perspective.” It is designed to introduce a general audience to Bible prophecy, and to the seriousness of the times we are living in. It is intended to generate interest in further Bible study.

March 4 – 6 – Orangevale Seventh-day Adventist Church [Sacramento area]
April 19–21 – Bronx, New York Seventh-day Adventist Church
June [dates to be announced] Honolulu Central Seventh day Adventist Church

Additional summer and fall dates are available.
Featured Article:
Festival of Religious Freedom to Comemorate Tenth Anniversary of 9/11

by Alan Reinach, Esq.

Sacramento in late summer is sunny and warm. Maybe a bit too warm. On the last Sunday afternoon of the unofficial summer season, Labor Day weekend, that is, the North American Religious Liberty Association will sponsor the first ever Festival of Religious Freedom to be held in the continental United States. It will be on the west steps of the State Capitol. Several thousand people are expected to attend.

Festivals of Religious Freedom were conceived by Dr. John Graz, who wears several distinguished “hats,” including Secretary General of the International Religious Freedom Association, and director of Public Affairs & Religious Liberty for the General Conference. Festivals are designed to bring public officials and faith leaders together with the public to thank God and government for the gift of religious freedom, and to spotlight the need for increasingly eternal vigilance in defense of liberty.

“There couldn’t be a better time for a Festival,” says Alan J. Reinach, Esq., director of the Church State Council, the Adventist Church’s religious liberty arm in the Pacific Union. “One week before the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the news media will be all over the subject of what religious freedom means ten years later, with much public suspicion of Muslims. Americans are unsure whether we want religious freedom to include Muslims or not, or how much religious freedom we are comfortable with.”

Ed Fargusson, Government Relations Director for the Church State Council, sees the Festival as a time to reassert the church’s local leadership on religious freedom issues. “We have built strong bridges to interfaith and government leaders in the past, and this Festival will provide a golden opportunity to strengthen those bridges, not only at the state level, but in each local community.”

The Festival is a tool for pastors and local church leaders to reach out into their own communities, and build coalitionally in support of religious freedom. “We want to include as many churches and communities as possible,” says Alan Reinach, “across both denominational and ethnic lines. We hope the Festival will be seized upon as an opportunity for people of all nationalities and religions to publicly declare their desire to live in peace with others of differing faiths, and share the blessings of liberty together, in one nation, e pluribus unum style. Churches and communities will be able to participate with music, testimonies, short presentations, food or literature booths, etc.”

Elder Ricardo Graham, Pacific Union Conference president, sees the evangelistic potential of the event: “we cannot reap where we do not sow. By extending a hand of friendship in all of our communities, and showing respect for the rights of others, we can model the attitude of Jesus and develop new friendships we hope will last for all eternity.”

IN THE NEWS
Church Taps Leslie as Adventist Point Person in Washington, D.C.

9 Feb 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States Bettina Krause/PARL/ANN Staff Veteran attorney and business leader Dwayne Leslie will serve as the Seventh-
February 26, 2011
Speaker: Fabian Carballo
NARLA-West Board
Sermon: "Patriarchs, Prophets, Brethren and Traitors" - Hebrews 11:2-3
Time: 11:00 AM

Clearlake Seventh-day Adventist Church, 14490 Uhl Ave, Clearlake, CA 95422
February 26, 2011
Speaker: Ed Fargusson
Associate Director, Church State Council
Time: 11:00 am

Orangevale Seventh-day Adventist Church, 5810 Pecan Ave, Orangevale, CA
March 4, 2011 thru March 6, 2011
Speaker: Alan J. Reinach, Esq.
Executive Director, Church State Council
Religious Liberty Weekend Seminar
Seminar: The Coming Economic Collapse? A Biblical Perspective

San Jose Filipino Seventh-Day Adventist Church,
March 12, 2011
Speaker: Ed Fargusson
Associate Director, Church State Council
Time: 11:00 am

Bakersfield Hillerest Seventh-Day Adventist Church, 2600 Kenwood Rd, Bakersfield, CA
March 19, 2011
Speaker: Alan J. Reinach, Esq.
Executive Director, Church State Council
Religious Liberty Campaign

Bakersfield Central SDA Church, 4201 Wilson Road, Bakersfield, CA 93309
March 19, 2011
Speaker: C. Norm Farley,
NARLA-West Board President, Pro Tem
Time: 11:00 a.m.

Bakersfield Central Hispanic Group, 4201 Wilson Road, Bakersfield, CA 93309
March 19, 2011
Speaker: Fabian Carballo
NARLA-West Board
Time: 11:00 a.m.

by the world church’s Executive Committee. As associate director for the world church’s department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) and director of Legislative Affairs, Leslie will represent the world church and its concerns on Capitol Hill, at the White House, and among Washington’s diplomatic community. Leslie replaces attorney James Standish, who served in the department for eight years. One of his first goals, Leslie said, is to “expand the relationships that James has established, and to build on the great job he’s done in representing the church.” During a career spanning both the corporate and legal worlds, Leslie has focused on legislative and healthcare issues and has represented a diverse range of clients, from biotechnology companies to media organizations. Leslie said he will draw inspiration in his new role from the activism of the early Adventist Church which, despite its small size, frequently spoke publically on issues of temperance, freedom of conscience and human rights. READ MORE

Adventist religious liberty advocate recognized with First Freedom Award

John Graz, who directs the Adventist world church’s department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL), will receive the National First Freedom Award. Graz, who since 1995 has helmed the International Religious Liberty Association, was noted for his non-sectarian work, extensive writings and a series of world festivals of religious freedom. READ MORE

Appeal to Indonesia to Protect Religious Freedom

On Tuesday, three churches in Temanggung, Central Java, were attacked by a mob of extremist Islamists after a court judge sentenced a Christian man, Antonius Bawengan, to five years in prison for blaspheming against Islam. The extremists were angry that the sentence was too lenient and went on the rampage, burning two churches and damaging a third, attacking the police outside the courthouse, vandalizing cars, and demanding the death penalty for blasphemy charges READ MORE

Discrimination Charges Soar in Down Economy

Six Hawaii inmates in private prisons in Arizona are suing the state of Hawaii and the prison operator for allegedly violating their constitutional rights by denying them free exercise of their native Hawaiian religious practices. Inmates Richard Kapela Davis, Michael Hughes, Damien Kaahu, Robert A. Holbron, James Kane III and Ellington Keawe say the staffs at Saguaro and Red Rock correctional centers, both in Eloy, Ariz., have consistently denied written requests to practice their religion, to establish a sacred place in the prison yard and to have access to a spiritual adviser and sacred items. READ MORE

Religious Liberty is Not Ecumenical!

This past Monday evening, I gave a lecture on the topic of: “Religious Intolerance in America.” It was part of a local effort to develop a Jewish Adventist congregation, Beth Shalom Seventh-day Adventist. Such congregations are growing around the world, both in number and size.

I observed that underlying all forms of intolerance, especially religious intolerance, is an “us and them” attitude. We tend to identify ourselves according to our ethnic, national and religious backgrounds, and to separate ourselves from others who are different. Such separation is a necessary predicate to intolerance. READ MORE

The western regional office for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, where I work, is conducting its constituency session this year, and in preparation, each department was asked to prepare a descriptive page for our magazine. Last time around our page began with the heading “Religious Liberty Is...” It’s 4:00 a.m. on a Friday morning, and guess what! Tossing and turning in bed, all I could think about was revising our description of religious liberty for this year’s distribution. And then I thought about you, our NARLA members and blog readers. When we post blogs inspired by the
Is Islam an "Enemy" of Christianity?

A lunchtime conversation after church set my mind in gear. Our discussion of the construction of what has become in the popular imagination “the Ground Zero Mosque” led to the question: “Isn’t Islam the enemy of Christianity?  “ My first instinct was to place this in historic context. If it were not for the Sultan, I pointed out, there would be no Protestants today. The Holy Roman Empire would have wiped out the Protestant world. Whenever the armies of the Emperor threatened the Protestant Princes, the Sultan would launch a new assault on the gates of Vienna, or some other European incursion, and the Empire would have to delay punishing the heretical upstart in the midst of Europe to deal with a more important foe – the Turkish Sultan.  

QUOTABLE QUOTES

"Kings and magistrates are to rule temporal affairs by the swords of their temporal kingdoms, and bishops and ministers are to rule spiritual affairs by the Word and Spirit of God, the sword of Christ’s spiritual kingdom, and not to intermeddle one with another’s authority, office, and function. . . . It is not only unmerciful but unnatural and abominable, yes monstrous, for one Christian to vex and destroy another for difference and questions of religion.”  Religious Peace of a Plea for Liberty of Conscience,” a petition to King James I. Anson Phelps Stokes, Church and State in the United States (New York: Harper, 1950), vol. 1, p. 113

"The principle of church-state separation may sometimes be inconvenient or costly to one side or the other. But there is one great thing about the wall: It works for both sides."  Chicago Tribune, Editorial, June 11, 1985
Religious Freedom in Prison?
Attorney Kim Colby, Senior Counsel for the Christian Legal Society, Center for Law and Religious Freedom, discussing the case of Sossamon v. Texas, pending before the U.S. Supreme Court, on whether prisoners can obtain damages when their religious freedom is violated.

Street Preachers Arrested in England
Mike Judge, Christian Institute in London, reporting on cases of discrimination and harassment of street preachers in England. Christian.org.uk
Veteran attorney and business leader Dwayne Leslie will serve as the Seventh-day Adventist Church's voice in Washington, D.C., following a vote taken yesterday by the world church's Executive Committee. As associate director for the world church's department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL) and director of Legislative Affairs, Leslie will represent the world church and its concerns on Capitol Hill, at the White House, and among Washington's diplomatic community. Leslie replaces attorney James Standish, who served in the department for eight years. One of his first goals, Leslie said, is to "expand the relationships that James has established, and to build on the great job he's done in representing the church." During a career spanning both the corporate and legal worlds, Leslie has focused on legislative and healthcare issues and has represented a diverse range of clients, from biotechnology companies to media organizations. Leslie said he will draw inspiration in his new role from the activism of the early Adventist Church which, despite its small size, frequently spoke publically on issues of temperance, freedom of conscience and human rights. "Today, we still have so much to contribute to the public discourse -- on health, education, and issues of justice and conscience," Leslie said. "But how can we speak if we don't have a seat at the table?"

"The story of Adventism will be told -- but the question is: Will we choose to tell it ourselves? Or will we allow others to define our church and its agenda for us?" he said. Leslie brings a broad range of experience and abilities to his new role, said John Graz, PARL director. "But more than this, he brings a strong desire to serve his church and advocate on its behalf," Graz said. After studying economics and political science at Andrews University, Leslie went on to earn a law degree from the University of California at Berkeley. He began his legal career at the international law firm of Jones Day before moving to Mintz Levin, where his practice focused on healthcare, pharmaceutical and biotechnology clients. Most recently, he served as CEO of Phase V Pharmaceuticals. When asked what prompted him to accept the position, Leslie said he believes the Adventist Church has a unique mission "to defend religious freedom, to be an advocate for justice, to be a voice for the voiceless." Delbert Baker, a general vice president of the world church and advisor to PARL, called Leslie's appointment a "decisive step" toward strengthening the church's presence and impact in the public sphere. "This is a key position," Baker said. "Mr. Leslie will have the opportunity to amplify the church's voice on issues that are central to our mission." For more information about the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department of the Adventist Church, visit www.adventistliberty.org and www.irla.org.
Adventist religious liberty advocate recognized with First Freedom Award

Church’s public affairs director Graz is first Adventist recipient

10 Jan 2011, Richmond, Virginia, United States

ANN staff

A Seventh-day Adventist religious liberty advocate is among this year’s recipients of the First Freedom Award for contributions in advancing freedom of belief in the United States and worldwide.

John Graz, who directs the Adventist world church’s department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty (PARL), will receive the National First Freedom Award at a January 13 gala sponsored by the Virginia-based First Freedom Center.

Graz, who since 1995 has helmed the International Religious Liberty Association, was noted for his non-sectarian work, extensive writings and a series of world festivals of religious freedom. In 2009, more than 40,000 Peruvians gathered to celebrate burgeoning freedom of belief in their country. A year later, Peru’s congress voted to guarantee protection of religious liberties.

“I’m very honored by this recognition,” Graz said, citing the center’s “long history” of “defending the heritage of Jefferson, Madison” and other early American champions of freedom of conscience.

Graz also said it was a privilege to be recognized alongside Asma Jahangir, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and J. Brent Walker, director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty. Jahangir and Walker will receive the International First Freedom Award and Virginia First Freedom Award, respectively.

The awards help bolster a commitment to religious liberty that "is at the core of our shared aspirations for stability, peace and the protection of human dignity," said First Freedom Center President Randolph M. Bell.

Graz is the first Adventist to receive a First Freedom Award.

Graz said the award is a testament to the work of the IRLA and the support of the Adventist Church. "I share this honor with the PARL team, and with the worldwide church," Graz said.

Religiously and politically neutral, the First Freedom Center has since 1984 championed the fundamental human rights of freedom of religion and conscience.

ANN World News Bulletin is a review of news issued by the Communication department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters and released as part of the service of Adventist News Network. For reproduction requirements, click here. The opinions expressed by Commentary authors and sources in ANN news stories do not necessarily reflect those of Adventist News Network© and/or the Seventh-day Adventist© Church.
Christian Solidarity Worldwide has called upon Indonesia to take action to protect religious minorities in the wake of attacks on churches and minority Islamic communities.

by Karen Peake
Posted: Monday, February 14, 2011, 1:33 (EST)

On Tuesday, three churches in Temanggung, Central Java, were attacked by a mob of extremist Islamists after a court judge sentenced a Christian man, Antonius Bawengan, to five years in prison for blaspheming against Islam.

The extremists were angry that the sentence was too lenient and went on the rampage, burning two churches and damaging a third, attacking the police outside the courthouse, vandalising cars, and demanding the death penalty for blasphemy charges.

The violence follows the release of a report by the Jakarta-based Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace documenting 91 violations of religious freedom in 2010. CSW said that the number of incidents affecting Christians had jumped from 12 in 2009 to 75 last year.

CSW also expressed its concern for Ahmadiyya Muslims, a religious group that considers itself to be Islamic but is shunned by many other Muslims.

The group has also experienced an upsurge in violent attacks in recent weeks. Two days before the church attacks in Central Java, a crowd of around 1,000 people attacked 20 Ahmadiyya Muslims in Cikeusik, Banten province with machetes and other weapons, killing five and seriously injuring five others.

A source warned CSW that the “inaction” and “blatant negligence” of the Indonesian government was encouraging fundamentalists to resort increasingly to extreme violence.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said there had been a “dramatic” increase in the number of violent attacks against religious minorities in Indonesia in the last two years.

"Indonesia has a long tradition of pluralism, enshrined in its state philosophy, the ‘Pancasila’, and we urge the Indonesian authorities to defend those values,” he said.

Mr Johnston urged the Indonesian government to repeal the blasphemy law and a joint decree which bars the Ahmadiyyas from promoting their beliefs.

He called for an independent investigation into the recent attacks and appealed to the Indonesian government to take action to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

“If extremists are allowed to continue to terrorise religious minorities with impunity, Indonesia’s proud tradition of pluralism and religious freedom will be under threat,” he said.
Discrimination charges soar in down economy

Monday, February 07, 2011

Discrimination charges against employers reached record heights in 2010, according to a recent report by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The EEOC announced it received an all-time high of 99,922 job-bias claims in the fiscal year 2010, a 7 percent increase from 93,277 in 2009, which also surpassed the record of 95,402 claims filed in 2008

One of the major contributing factors to this surge in overall statistics is the prolonged recession. The economic downturn has put pressure on employers forced to scale back workforces and on their employees, who feel their jobs are on the line.

Though widespread layoffs are a major factor in the increase in claims with the EEOC, stress and tension among those still working is also driving discrimination charges. Among the complaints filed with the EEOC, workers listed being overlooked for promotions, being shifted to a job that doesn't match their abilities and not having access to required accommodations they need to perform a job function.

The EEOC has not yet determined how many claims were based on race, disability, or any of the other categories of discrimination.

It's not uncommon for discrimination charges to rise in a recession, but employers must continue to abide by the federal laws that prohibit making any employment decisions based on race, gender, religion, national origin, disability and age. Many state and local laws also cover additional factors, such as sexual orientation. With the added emotional stress of tough economic times, business owners should take extra steps to train all managers and supervisors on how to approach employment decisions.

-- Jane Lewis Volk, Meyer, Unkovic & Scott LLP, jlv@muslaw.com

Business workshop is a weekly feature from local experts offering tidbits on matters affecting business. To contribute, contact Business Editor Brian Hyslop at bhyslop@post-gazette.com.

First published on February 7, 2011 at 12:00 am
Religious Liberty is Not Ecumenical!

By Alan J. Reinach

This past Monday evening, I gave a lecture on the topic of: “Religious Intolerance in America.” It was part of a local effort to develop a Jewish Adventist congregation, Beth Shalom Seventh-day Adventist. Such congregations are growing around the world, both in number and size.

I observed that underlying all forms of intolerance, especially religious intolerance, is an “us and them” attitude. We tend to identify ourselves according to our ethnic, national and religious backgrounds, and to separate ourselves from others who are different. Such separation is a necessary predicate to intolerance. The only way to overcome intolerance is to begin to build bridges across those barriers, with those of other ethnic, national and religious backgrounds, so that we can develop a better understanding and respect.

During the question and answer time, I was asked a pointed question: “how does this fostering of respect for others who are different, square with the Great Commission?” In other words, how can we convert people if we are to respect their right to believe differently?

I would turn the question around: how can we make Jesus attractive to those whom we do not show kindness and respect? If our basic attitude is “holier than thou” or superiority, how effective can we be in witnessing to the love of Christ?

This led to another discussion about the difference between our interfaith religious freedom ministry, and the ecumenical movement. Ecumenism is built on the idea that we come together and leave our deepest differences at the door. Those engaged in the ecumenical endeavor seek to find common ground by minimizing differences that are quite real.

Interfaith religious liberty work is quite different. We come together to defend religious liberty precisely because those differences are so important. We come together, united by little more than the golden rule idea that we should treat others as we would want to be treated. We come together knowing that we disagree profoundly on important points of belief and doctrine, but recognizing that these disagreements are not for government to resolve. The state must remain neutral toward these profound religious differences, and protect each group’s basic right to believe and practice in accordance with their faith.

There is a very popular view of religious liberty, as my associate Ed Fargusson is fond of expressing it: “I believe that everyone ought to have the religious liberty to believe as I do.” If you think about it, the “mark of the beast” prophecy of Revelation 13 describes just such a view of religious liberty. “God and country” will unite to promote a common form of belief - the worship of the beast and its image, and to punish dissenters. This prophecy may well reflect a sort of ecumenical “lowest common denominator” agreement about religion, but one that does not respect the rights of individual conscience.

European Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, was largely developed on the foundational idea of “Christendom.” The state was regarded as Christian, and so were the people, and they were expected to conform to basic religious beliefs, practices and morals. America has developed a different model, based on respect for individual conscience. It has inevitably led to a more pluralistic society, where religious bodies have multiplied, and there is increasingly little consensus on either religious beliefs, practices or morals. This
There is increasingly little consensus on either religious beliefs, practices or morals. This makes for a much messier public policy debate, but also better respects individual freedom.

There are those with a conservative mindset who would prefer a more unified and authoritarian approach: America as a Christian nation with a monolithic approach to religion and morals, upheld by law. Seventh-day Adventists, despite our grasp of the prophetic dangers associated with such an approach, are equally susceptible to the easy attractions of this philosophy.

Meanwhile, NARLA will continue to champion the rights of conscience for all to worship God, or not, according to the dictates of their own conscience. We believe that this models both the character and the gospel of Jesus, and lifts Him up before men, so that He can draw all to Him.
Religious Liberty Is ...

By Alan J. Reinach

Religious Liberty Is ...

The western regional office for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, where I work, is conducting its constituency session this year, and in preparation, each department was asked to prepare a descriptive page for our magazine. Last time around our page began with the heading “Religious Liberty Is...”

It’s 4:00 a.m. on a Friday morning, and guess what! Tossing and turning in bed, all I could think about was revising our description of religious liberty for this year’s distribution. And then I thought about you, our NARLA members and blog readers. When we post blogs inspired by the events of the day, we may give a narrow or distorted view as to what religious liberty really is. Some may conclude that NARLA is very conservative politically, others may be convinced that we are off the reservation liberals. You might both be right, since we tend to call the issues as we see them, and they don’t always line up in neat boxes. But religious liberty cannot be reduced to a political label. What is religious liberty, anyway???

Religious Liberty Is ..... 

1. The gospel. No, it is not simply about protecting our freedom so we have more time and opportunity to preach the gospel. That is a caricature of liberty. Liberty is essential to the character of God, and to the plan of salvation. If human freedom was not indispensable, Christ did not have to die for our sins, he could have simply exercised his omnipotent resources to rewire our brain chemistry. Sometimes I almost pray he would do that for my teenagers.

2. True Liberation. True freedom is found only in Christ. Freedom is first and foremost, spiritual, not political. The soul is set free in Christ, not in the army, to become all that it can be.

3. Respect for the nature of God, the nature of man, and the dignity of man. When governments honor and protect individual religious liberty, they are aligning themselves with the natural moral order of life.

Now, the rest of what we have to say is mostly about what Religious Liberty Does ....

What does Religious Liberty Do???

1. Legal Advocacy. We practice the golden rule in defending the rights of anyone who has experienced religious discrimination, regardless of their faith. For those of us working in a Seventh-day Adventist context, that means mostly serving our own church members with Sabbath employment conflicts. But increasingly, others are discovering who we are, and seeking our help.

2. Legislative Advocacy. We protect and defend the rights of all peaceful people of faith to live according to the dictates of their own conscience, when those rights are compromised either intentionally or inadvertently by legislative proposals.

3. Appellate Advocacy. When the great constitutional principles are at issue in the
higher courts, we raise our voice in support of the vigorous legal protection of liberty.

4. Education. Through our own publications, such as Liberty magazine, our own radio and television programs, Freedom’s Ring, Liberty Insider, Global Faith and Freedom, we proclaim liberty throughout the land to all the inhabitants thereof. We also reach out to the general public through talk radio, and in public meetings in churches everywhere.

Last, but by no means least, what religious liberty is and does is....

Responsibility. Yes, it is your responsibility to be informed and get involved, through the grassroots organization, the North American Religious Liberty Association, publisher of this website. This is your religious liberty organization. Join it. Support it. Read it. Build it. Help us build a more effective ministry to proclaim and defend liberty throughout the land!!!
Is Islam an “enemy” of Christianity?

By Alan J. Reinach

A lunchtime conversation after church set my mind in gear. Our discussion of the construction of what has become in the popular imagination “the Ground Zero Mosque” led to the question: “Isn’t Islam the enemy of Christianity?”

My first instinct was to place this in historic context. If it were not for the Sultan, I pointed out, there would be no Protestants today. The Holy Roman Empire would have wiped out the Protestant world. Whenever the armies of the Emperor threatened the Protestant Princes, the Sultan would launch a new assault on the gates of Vienna, or some other European incursion, and the Empire would have to delay punishing the heretical upstart in the midst of Europe to deal with a more important foe – the Turkish Sultan.

In addition, students of the Bible must remember that prophecy predicts that an apparent benevolent power will go through a metamorphosis to a belligerent, oppressive power described as a dragon. Dragon-like behavior is not limited merely to religious oppression, as in the enforcement of the mark of the beast. It is reflected in the abandonment of the entire spectrum of values and freedoms at the foundation of our national greatness.

Adventists cannot take pride in equating an entire religious community with those few who are violent terrorists. After all, there have been terrorists who claimed to be Christians. Consider the Protestant militias in Northern Ireland.

But there’s more. The foundation of the Adventist message is not just prophecy but the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world. And Jesus taught us to love our enemies. While applying these principles in time of war may be complex – the death of anyone created in the image of God can only be seen as tragic.

So even if there are Muslims who persecute Christians, we are not to return evil for evil. We are not to retaliate or alienate our enemies, but to show them the love of Christ! Whatever one’s view of American foreign policy is, it is important to distinguish between national identity and spiritual allegiance. Our primary loyalty and allegiance, as Christians, belongs to Christ not to the state. If we don’t know this, we’ve learned nothing from German history.

We believe the gospel must be preached to all the world for a witness before the return of Christ. What sort of gospel can we preach to those we regard as enemies: “Christ loves you, but I don’t. I’m afraid of you?” More likely, we treat our enemies as Jonah did Ninevah – we run away, and avoid giving them the gospel.

In the final analysis, the entire gospel enterprise depends on our faithfulness in loving our enemies. In fact, we have no enemies, only alienated brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. Moreover, our national commitment to religious liberty hangs in the balance. If we can deprive Muslims of their freedom, of the right to build places of worship, etc., who will be next? The golden rule has always been basic to religious freedom: what they do to “you” they can and will do to me, its only a matter of time.

Today, Islam is the proverbial canary in the coal mine of religious freedom. How America resolves the question of religious freedom for Muslims will likely determine the shape of our freedom for some time to come.