Living Word Seventh-day Adventist Church Religious Liberty News

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With so many things happening so fast it is hard to know where to begin. The breakdown of moral authority, the disrespect for church buildings, the disrespect for police, the protests and riots, in some cases police disrespect for their badges and their sworn duty, the pandemic, all could have and eventual impact on religious liberty in the United States. And the violence in major cities, which is a horrific problem, gets drowned out with the coronavirus coverage. Over one hundred people were shot in one weekend in Chicago recently. Amidst all the confusion, one thing is certain:

*The agencies of evil are combining their forces and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great crisis. Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones.* ***Testimonies Vol 9, p 11****.*

**Here is a sample of news headlines for the past few weeks:**

St. John’s Episcopal Church (known as the church of the presidents) burned
<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2020/06/26/amid-continued-vandalism-st-johns-church-in-washington-erects-security-fencing/>

CNN Headquarters in Atlanta a police car burned
<https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/27/us/gallery/george-floyd-demonstrations/index.html>

Puerto Rico closes businesses on Sunday
<https://www.dlapiper.com/en/us/insights/publications/2020/04/puerto-rico-governor-extends-lockdown-and-curfew-key-deadlines-and-governmental-measures/>

Quebec stores closed on Sunday
<https://montrealgazette.com/news/quebec/most-quebec-stores-will-be-closed-on-sundays-as-coronavirus-cases-mount>

QUEBEC — With a sudden [upswing in positive COVID-19 cases](https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/coronavirus-live-updates-march-30-quarantines-emergency-funding-as-covid-19-cases-rise/wcm/466dc7a5-9344-4906-ab26-ccf74b367ea9/) and three more deaths, Premier François Legault has announced nearly all stores — including grocery stores — will close on Sundays for the month of April to give workers under intense pressure a break. Pharmacies, gas stations, dépanneurs and restaurant take-out services will remain open Sundays.

Minneapolis police station burned down. Police had to be rescued from the roof
<https://www.jpost.com/american-politics/jewish-mayor-of-minneapolis-takes-center-stage-amid-violent-us-protests-629769>

Minneapolis 3rd precinct police station set on fire
<https://www.foxnews.com/us/minneapolis-third-precinct-police-station-set-on-fire-after-rioters-break-in>

Commentary

There are two things that stand out in these scattered news items: a lack of respect for authority and the natural tendency to close stores on Sunday. There is even a complete lack of respect for a church building which sits in very close proximity to the White House itself. When a police station is evacuated in order to give rioters access to it, well, to me that is a new low.

“Satan is putting forth desperate efforts to ensnare the world. He is devising many plans to occupy minds and to divert attention from the truths essential to salvation. In every city his agencies are busily organizing into parties those who are opposed to the law of God The archdeceiver is at work to introduce elements of confusion and rebellion, and men are being fired with a zeal that is not according to knowledge.” **Acts of the Apostles** **P. 219**

A common thread in all of this is the public’s willing compliance (generally speaking) when it comes to remaining indoors, wearing masks, etc. It is a two-edged sword. To overcome a pandemic, public compliance is necessary. But, what about a willingness by the public to close businesses and rest on Sunday to cut down on carbon footprints to help with global warming? That time may come. We are being conditioned. In the encyclical [***LAUDATO SI***](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html)***,*** it states

“Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the “first day” of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord’s risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality. It also proclaims “man’s eternal rest in God”. Paragraph 237.

Scientists, Protestants, Catholics, and atheists will all agree on giving the earth a rest. It all fits into place. And the moral high ground will be claimed by the pope.

**“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;” 2 Thessalonians 2:3**

To counteract lawlessness, some will say what about a law that says mandatory Sunday worship is the law of the land? Drastic times call for drastic measures, they say. Going to church to hear good preaching might do some good, they say. Who knows what situations may come up? We all need to get back to God! Let’s all go to church next Sunday! That will be the tone of the conversation.

# **Under the Radar**

The Supreme Court struck down a state ban on taxpayer funding for religious schools. In the 5-4 decision, the court actually backed a tax credit for schools, including religious schools. The state of Montana had added wording to a law that would allow a tax credit for schools except those “owned or controlled in whole or in part by any church, religious sect, or denomination”. The Supreme Court struck down that phrase.
<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/supreme-court-strikes-down-state-ban-on-taxpayer-funding-for-religious-schools>

# About a month ago the US Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, in Perrier-Bilbo v. United States, No. 18-2085 (1st Cir. 2020), ruled that no individual rights were violated by the U.S. Government’s citizenship oath, where, at the end, it says, “so help me God”. The First Circuit affirmed, holding that the phrase "so help me God" in the oath does not violate the Establishment Clause, the Free Exercise Clause, the RFRA, Equal Protection, or the Due Process Clause. Also, this person was offered to recite the pledge without saying the words “so help me God”. but had refused.<https://aclj.org/american-heritage/first-circuit-court-of-appeals-shuts-down-atheists-attack-on-god-in-us-citizenship-oath>

A case involving the Little Sisters of the Poor, a case that has dragged on for nine years, the sisters won on a 7-2 vote. This group is an organization that claimed religious exception after the Affordable Care Act was passed because the act mandated that their employees were required to be offered abortion services. They protested, and after nine years in court for one reason or another, they won!
<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/little-sisters-of-the-poor-have-big-win-in-supreme-court-decision-39495>

**Conclusion**

At this point we all want to get back to normal. However, it is almost certain that whatever your normal was will never be seen again. The world has irreversibly changed. No matter how long it takes to get the pandemic under control, the changes the government has made to deal with it will remain to some extent, the acceptance of government control will remain for many, and our way of life as Americans will be affected dramatically until Christ comes.

Think about how easy it was to control 300 plus million people. All the authorities had to say was pandemic, COVID-19, public good, etc., and the vast majority acquiesced without a whimper. Once any government increases its authority and control by trampling on civil rights, it is very reluctant to restore those rights.

And how far will this control go? We have been forbidden to gather in church in large groups, we do social distancing, and don’t pass out offering plates or handle Bibles in the pews. Now, the state of California has outlawed singing in church! Presumably this is because of the breath expelled from the lungs that might contaminate the air. What’s next? A hearty amen might send you to jail?

We, as Seventh-day Adventists, know where to draw the line with obedience to the State. Closing for reasons of health is one thing, and closing to enforce a Sunday law is something else. We are being conditioned to obey. You have heard of herd immunity? How about herd mentality? Big Brother knows best. When the time comes, how many of us will **NOT** obey? As Seventh-day Adventists, we need to be grounded in the Bible and not be diverted from our mission. Admittedly, right now our mission is hampered by not being able to socialize, visit, knock on doors, etc. But we must remember the words of Ellen White and not forget our mission as a church and as individual members of the church.

*In a special sense, Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is shining wonderful light from the Word of God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import-the proclamation of the first, second, and third angel’s messages. There is no other work of so great importance. They are to allow nothing else to absorb their attention.* ***9T 19 (1909) {LDE 45.3}***

I just did a search on “Covid 19 religious liberty” in Google and got an amazing 32 million hits! This subject has engendered an amazing amount of interest. More thoughts on this issue will be forthcoming.