

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Abortion

Abortion is never an act of little moral consequence. The dual responsibility of protecting prenatal human life while also preserving a woman's freedom of choice is not easy.

What position does the Seventh-day Adventist Church take on this issue?

Adventists do not condone abortions for birth control, gender selection or convenience. And we do not believe those with a religious or ethical objection to abortions should have to participate in them.

But when a woman faces exceptional circumstances of serious moral or medical dilemmas, she has the final decision whether to terminate the pregnancy or not. Attitudes of condemnation are inappropriate.

The church does not serve as a conscience for individuals, but it does provide moral guidance. It:

1. Supports women who choose to complete crisis pregnancies
2. Creates a safe climate for ongoing discussion of the moral questions associated with abortion
3. Provides sex education
4. Emphasises responsibility for family planning
5. Encourages fathers to participate responsibly in the parenting of their children
6. Assists in alleviating the social, economic and psychological factors that add to abortion

Adventists encourage people to make decisions about prenatal human life in the context of healthy family relationships.



Abuse

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It has not been easy for Christians to recognise that abuse exists in their churches and in the community. Since Christianity emphasises high moral standards, close fellowship and mutual trust, surely churches should be safe places without exception.

How are Seventh-day Adventists making their church a safe place?

Seventh-day Adventists take reports of abuse seriously. We believe that to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate and potentially extend such behaviour. We cooperate with other professional services to seek justice for sexual abuse victims while showing redemptive mercy to their perpetrators.

- Telling the truth about abuse
- Naming and condemning abuse
- Showing compassion for victims of abuse
- Preventing further abuse
- Confronting the perpetrator and imposing negative consequences
- Recognising the wrongfulness of abuse
- Setting the victims free from suffering caused by the abuse

Adventists will provide a ministry of reconciliation as changed attitudes and behaviour open possibilities for forgiveness and new beginnings. We will address the spiritual questions confronting abused persons, seeking to understand the reasons for abuse and developing better ways of preventing it.



Birth Control

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Birth control raises a number of moral issues. Is it appropriate for us to intervene in the natural, biological processes of human reproduction? If yes, then how do we intervene, with what and when? What is the Seventh-day Adventist position on birth control?

We recognise Adventists have different opinions about birth control, but we offer the following principles based on the biblical teaching of sexuality, marriage, parenthood and the value of children.

1. Responsible stewardship

God created us with the ability to make decisions. Christian stewardship means taking responsibility for human procreation according to God's will.

2. Procreative purpose

God created us with the ability to reproduce, but procreation is not an obligation.

3. Unifying purpose

God designed sex for joy and pleasure, not just conception.

4. Freedom of choice

We should base our God-given freedom of choice on the ability to provide for a child's needs; the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of the mother and other care givers; the social and political circumstances into which children will be born; and quality of life and available resources.

5. Appropriate methods of birth control

The decision about which birth control method we use needs to be based on an understanding of the method's possible effects on our health, the manner in which the method operates and how much it costs. Abortion is not a morally acceptable form of birth control except in exceptional circumstances.

6. Misuse of birth control

The use of birth control methods to protect sex outside of marriage may reduce the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. However, this does not alter our view that sex outside of marriage is harmful and immoral.

7. A redemptive approach

Education about sexuality and morality is a necessity. Our emphasis should be on education not condemnation.



Church-state relations

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Jesus showed the best way of maintaining a relationship between church and state. He defined their separate roles and functions. If anyone had the right to force others to worship a certain way, it was Jesus Christ. But He never did.

Seventh-day Adventists believe governments must guarantee freedom of conscience. But what does this mean?

Adventists define freedom of conscience as the freedom to:

1. Believe and practice religious faith
2. Not believe or practice religious faith
3. Change faiths
4. Establish and operate religious institutions in accordance with religious beliefs.

We recognise this freedom has limits and can exist only as it protects and respects the rights of others.

Adventists recognise the role of organised government, but when the law of the land conflicts with the Bible, we follow God's law.

The church encourages its members to serve as civil leaders, but warns them not to use influence to advance their faith or inhibit the faith of others. It also encourages its members to take civic and public responsibilities seriously, to vote and to share the responsibility of building community.

Adventists defend those persecuted by the state and we continue to support freedom of conscience and belief.



Cigarette Smoking

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Cigarette smoking is the greatest preventable cause of death in the world. The tobacco industry flourishes despite decades of research providing evidence of the hazards of cigarette smoking.

How can we work together towards a cigarette free future?

Seventh-day Adventists advocate a lifestyle free of tobacco products. The church has been warning about the health-destroying nature of this addictive behaviour for more than a century.

Adventists believe the ethics of prevention require:

- Banning all tobacco advertising
- Developing regulations for protecting children and young adults from tobacco industry advertising
- Introducing stricter laws prohibiting smoking in public places
- Promoting aggressive and systematic public education
- Imposing higher taxes on cigarettes
- Introducing regulations requiring the industry to pay for the health costs associated with the use of its products.

The Bible teaches that each human body is a "temple of the living God," which should be cared for intelligently.

One of the church's fundamental beliefs states that, "We are to adopt the most healthful diet possible. . . . Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them."



Domestic Violence

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Domestic violence is damaging. It results in long-term, distorted perceptions of self, family and God. Seventh-day Adventists believe to remain indifferent and unresponsive to reports of domestic violence is to condone, perpetuate and potentially extend such behaviour.

How is the Adventist Church addressing domestic violence?

The Bible says you can identify Christians by the quality of their relationships. It is in the spirit of Christ to love and accept, to seek and affirm.

Adventists are responding to this challenge by:

1. Providing support, counselling and mediation services to victims of domestic violence
2. Addressing the spiritual questions of victims, seeking to understand the reasons for abuse
3. Challenging commonly held religious and cultural beliefs that victims and perpetrators may use to justify or cover up domestic violence
4. Educating church members about how to maintain healthy relationships and about the factors contributing to domestic violence
5. Providing a ministry of reconciliation to perpetrators as changed attitudes and behaviour open new beginnings for them.

The Bible writer Paul refers to the church as “the household of faith” because it should function as an extended family, offering acceptance, understanding and comfort, especially to those who are hurting.



Environment

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

God made “the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:7, NIV). He also made people in His image, placing them within this creation to manage the environment in a faithful way.

Are we taking this responsibility seriously?

The refusal of some to practice good stewardship within the boundaries of God’s creation has led to an ecological crisis. Our air and water are polluted, our forest and wildlife plundered and our natural resources exploited.

Seventh-day Adventists believe the preservation and nurture of the environment relates intimately with the way we serve God.

We advocate a simple, wholesome lifestyle and call for:

- Respect of creation
- Restraint in the use of the world’s resources
- Re-evaluation of our needs
- Reaffirmation of the dignity of created life

God set aside the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath, as a reminder of His creation. Adventists respect the Sabbath. It reinforces our sense of relationship with the Creator and His creation.

Our commitment is to affirm our stewardship of God’s creation, although we believe total restoration will be complete only when God makes all things new.



A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Euthanasia

Euthanasia is difficult to define. Some say it is the intentional taking of a person's life when they see no hope of recovery. This is most commonly known as "mercy killing". Others say it is the withholding of medical care artificially extending someone's life.

Is there a difference between the two?

Seventh-day Adventists believe there is a difference between mercy killing and the withholding of medical care.

Our position is that:

- Mercy killing is biblically, ethically and morally unacceptable.
- Medical care that only preserves bodily functions without potential for restoration of mental awareness may be withheld or withdrawn.
- People who are dying but capable of understanding deserve to know the truth about their condition so they can make intelligent decisions about their treatment.

Adventists lovingly and humanely care for the defenceless, the dependent and the dying. We do this because the Bible advocates we give these people extra care and treat them with respect and dignity. The Bible also encourages us to show patience and endurance rather than despair.

Adventists value and respect life while recognising people are dependent on God for it. God gives us all the freedom of choice but asks we use it wisely.



A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Gambling

Gambling is a curse because the cost of associated crime, victim support and family breakdown damages the quality of life.

Is winning at the expense of others an appropriate form of entertainment and a legitimate means of raising money?

Seventh-day Adventists oppose gambling. We see it as incompatible with Christian principles because:

1. Gambling impacts negatively on society
The cost of associated crime, victim support and family breakdown damages the quality of life.
2. Gambling is addictive
Adventists seek to help, not blame, those suffering from gambling. We recognise they are responsible before God for their resources and lifestyle.
3. Gambling clouds the sense of responsibility
Gambling takes from those who often cannot afford to lose and gives to those who can, including the greatest winner, the gambling operator.
4. Gambling creates false hopes
"Winning big" is statistically improbable. Christians are not to put their hope in wealth.

The Adventist Church rejects all forms of gambling, including raffles and lotteries, and will not solicit or accept funding from it. The church also calls on all authorities to prevent the increasing availability of gambling.

In addition, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific also released the following statement in 2005.

All business investment includes some element of risk ranging from reasonably secure to extremely speculative. A fine line exists between business risk and gambling.

High risk in business is often referred to as gambling and there are compulsive risk takers in business just as there are compulsive gamblers. However, in business, high return on an investment is not necessarily predicated on the losses of other investors.

Thus, while risk-taking in business may be a questionable stewardship of God-given assets and a violation of Biblical principles, it should not be directly equated with gambling.



HIV/AIDS

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

AIDS is spreading so rapidly that Christian churches in many countries of the world will soon include at least one member who has a friend or relative with the disease.

What positive actions is the Seventh-day Adventist church taking?

Seventh-day Adventists believe the Christian response to AIDS must be compassionate, helpful, personal, practical and redemptive. We are to love and care for those with the disease just as Jesus loved and cared for the sick of His day.

Avoiding sexual contact before marriage and maintaining a faithful, monogamous relationship with an unaffected person in marriage is the best way to reduce the risk of contracting the HIV virus. Avoiding the use of needles that have not been sterilised and ensuring the safety of blood products can also help prevent HIV.

Adventists are committed to:

- Providing education that teaches prevention of HIV
- Fighting against the circulation, sale and use of drugs
- Supporting sex education teaching that human sexuality belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman
- Promoting the biblical concept that sexuality intimacy excludes promiscuous and all other sexual relationships that may increase exposure to HIV



The Bible writer, James, advises, "If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"

The Seventh-day Adventist Church released a statement on AIDS in 1990. Statement on Education in Relation to HIV/AIDS

The Seventh-day Adventist Church promotes the biblical model of sexuality, a monogamous marital relationship and sexual abstinence outside of marriage.

Recognising our responsibility to encourage behaviour within this biblical model but also to protect people who make different life choices, the Seventh-day Adventist church will where appropriate educate people about safe sex practices. Because condom use and distribution forms part of the intervention strategy for those who choose not to accept the biblical model, it is important that information be provided about the use, benefits and limitations of condoms. Despite the fact that condom use might be suggested in certain cases as a prevention measure to stop the spread of HIV infection, it should never be inferred that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is promoting sex outside of marriage.

HIV/AIDS education should always include an outline of the physical, social, emotional and spiritual benefits of following the biblical model of sexuality.

Homelessness and poverty

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Homelessness and poverty are serious problems. Thousands of people starve to death or go blind each day because of deficiencies in their diet. Millions of refugees and people who are homeless are without proper shelter. Billions are malnourished. Two-thirds of the world's population remains caught in a cycle of hunger-sickness-death. This leads to feelings of hopelessness, alienation, envy and resentment.

What inspires Seventh-day Adventists to serve the homeless and the poor?

Adventists follow the teaching of the Bible, which commands us to show compassion to the needy.

The Bible says, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8, NIV). Jesus wants us to heal the sick, feed the hungry and raise the downcast before sharing our faith.

Jesus is the Lord of all life. He desires the happiness and wellbeing of His children. Adventists, as followers of Jesus, express their faith holistically through their care and concern for the physical, social, mental and spiritual aspects of human existence.



Homosexuality

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Jesus Christ affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to them. He offered caring ministry and words of solace, while differentiating His love for sinners from His teaching about sinful practice.

Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church able to mirror this attitude?

Seventh-day Adventists believe sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman, as designed by God during Creation.

The Bible declares: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, NIV). It affirms this pattern throughout the rest of the Scriptures.

The Bible also forbids sexual acts that occur outside a heterosexual marriage. It declares that the "sexually immoral" will inherit the kingdom of God only if "washed", "sanctified" and "justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 6:9-12, NIV).

Seventh-day Adventists endeavour to follow the instruction and example of Jesus by seeking to minister to all because we recognise that every human being is valuable. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of a community faith, a person may live in harmony with biblical principles. Our church offers fellowship to any person, regardless of sexual orientation.



Literacy

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Research indicates we face six major challenges in our lives:

- illiteracy
- poverty
- poor health
- long work hours and poor conditions
- lack of opportunities for training and mentoring.

This is especially so for women.

Why do Seventh-day Adventists place such a high value on literacy for women?

The inability to read impacts every aspect of a person's life -- personal dignity, earning power, career opportunities, access to information about health care, and even the ability to raise a child.

Literacy creates endless possibilities for men and women to make informed choices about their careers and about health and parenting and marriage. Teaching literacy skills also offers the teacher opportunities to minister.

Adventists recognise another important reason to share the gift of reading. We believe everyone--men and women, not just the privileged few--should have the ability to read God's word, the Bible.



Marriage and family life

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

The increasing complexity of society and the stress this places on relationships leads to crises within many families. Lives and relationships are broken, dysfunctional or characterised by mistrust, conflict, hostility and estrangement.

What value do Seventh-day Adventists place on marriage and family life?

God instituted the family as the primary provider of the warm and caring relationships for which the human heart yearns. He blesses the family and intends that its members will help each other reach maturity and wholeness.

Seventh-day Adventists believe the closest, most tender and sacred of all family ties is the lifelong marriage of a man and a woman. Marriage mirrors the love, sanctity, closeness and permanence of the bond between Christ and His church.

However, some family relationships fall short of this ideal and recovery from damaging experiences is not always possible. Adventists will assist members of these families and address their spiritual needs. We regularly organise programs to promote healthy marriages, encourage effective parenting and enrich family life. We also offer counselling and mediation services.

Adventists believe where the love of Christ reigns, His Spirit will promote unity and harmony making healthy relationships channels of life giving joy and power in the community.



Peace

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

We are living with a heightened sense of vulnerability and fear because human beings have developed the means to destroy each other. We try to defend ourselves against violence and terror, but it solves nothing.

So, what are the options?

Seventh-day Adventists desire to take an active role in making and sustaining peace. Jesus blessed peacemakers by calling them children of God (see Matthew 5:9).

We believe lasting peace involves seeking:

- Dialogue
- Justice
- Forgiveness
- Reconciliation

The Adventist Church has a responsibility to provide protection for those who are in danger of being violated, exploited and terrorised. We will cooperate with those of other races, faiths and political persuasions in promoting exchanges between different cultures and ideological systems. However, the church recognises that Christians have contributed to acts of violence and need to repent. A ministry of reconciliation will contribute to the restoration of human dignity, equality and unity in which human beings see each other as members of the family of God. The Adventist Church is committed to peacemaking even though it may seem a big task. Ultimately, God promises to send Jesus, His son, to guarantee lasting peace.



Pornography

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Author Norman Cousins says the trouble with pornography “is not that it corrupts but that it desensitises; not that it unleashes the passions but that it cripples the emotions. . . . Prowess is proclaimed but love is denied. What we have is not liberation but dehumanisation.”

As Christians, what should our focus be?

The Bible encourages us to focus on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely and admirable - anything that is excellent or praiseworthy.

Based on this principal, Seventh-day Adventists believe pornography is:

- Demeaning because it defines people not as spiritual, mental, physical beings, but as disposable sex objects, depriving them of their worth and respect as sons and daughters of God
- Destructive to marital relationships, subverting God’s design that husband and wife unite so closely as to become, symbolically, “one flesh”
- Desensitising to the consumer, callusing the conscience and perverting the perception
- Exploitative and abusive, thus contrary to the golden rule that insists one treats others as one wishes to be treated.

Particularly offensive is child pornography. Adventists defend the rights of children to a loving and stable environment, to freedom from discrimination and exploitation and to personhood, respect and development of positive self-esteem.

We encourage those who are addicted to pornography to:

- recognise and admit to the addiction;
- avoid the settings that have led to the addiction;
- eliminate the props supporting the addiction;
- and ask God for forgiveness from the addiction.



Racism

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

One of the world’s worst evils is racism, the belief or practice that treats certain groups as inferior and therefore the object of domination, discrimination and segregation. The consequences of racism are devastating because it easily becomes institutionalised and legalised and can lead to persecution and ethnic cleansing.

How does faith overcome barriers of diversity?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church deplors all forms of racism. As a worldwide community of believers, we aim to show that faith overcomes barriers of diversity; that in the church family the unity found in being sons and daughters of God transcends differences of culture, geography, skin colour and language.

Adventists aim to be faithful to the reconciling ministry of the caring Christian churches. One of our fundamental beliefs states that, “In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.”

Any other approach destroys the core of the Adventist message.



Sexual Abuse of children

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

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Sexual Behaviour

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

God created humans to love each other, but we have perverted this love. People are ignoring the Bible's teaching about relationships between men and women. Their passion for sensual pleasure is unrestrained by moral and religious principle and results in bondage and the breakdown of family.

How do Seventh-day Adventists view sexual behaviour?

Adventists believe sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman, as designed by God during Creation.

The Bible declares: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24, NIV). It affirms this pattern throughout the rest of the Scriptures (see Matthew 19 and Ephesians 5).

The Bible condemns bestiality, incest, obsessive sexual behaviour, sexual abuse and sexual acts that occur outside a heterosexual marriage because they are perversions of God's plan.

Adventists follow the example of Jesus. He seeks to minister to everyone because He recognises how valuable people are. Jesus has re-established our relationship with God, and He forgives those who ask.

Adventists also believe a person can live a chaste and pure lifestyle by the grace of God and through the encouragement of a community of faith in harmony with biblical principles. The Bible writer, Paul, speaks of how God can help us develop discipline to live "self-controlled, upright and godly lives" (Titus 2:11-14, NIV).



Stolen Generation

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

The report of a 1997 national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from their families reminded Australians of regrettable aspects of their history.

The removal of these children--the so-called "stolen generation"--undermined individual identity by destroying language, culture and relationships. This is producing devastating flow-on effects.

The traumatic revelations of the inquiry disturb Seventh-day Adventists in Australia. We apologise to the "stolen generation" and offer our moral, emotional and spiritual support. We also express our regret, concern and sympathy to all who are suffering because of our country's actions.

Adventists aim to be faithful to the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ. One of our fundamental beliefs states that, "In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality . . . must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation." We pray Jesus will bring healing to those who are hurt and are still grieving the loss of family.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia released a statement on the stolen generation in 1998. Below is the full statement. During 1997, Australians have been made aware of forgotten aspects of their country's history. The removal of indigenous people from their land and families produced devastating flow-on effects. The National Inquiry Into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families Report, with its revelations of the trauma suffered by indigenous children, their parents and families, has distressed many. Removal included deliberate attempts to destroy individual identity by the destruction of language, culture and family relationships.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church expresses its sincere concern, sympathy and deep regret to all indigenous people and their families who suffered so much sadness and heartache under the "stolen generation" era. We pray that Jesus, the Great Healer, will bring healing to those who hurt and are still grieving the loss of family. As Christians, we apologise that this happened in our country and communities and offer those thus affected our moral, emotional and spiritual support. This statement was approved and voted by the South Pacific Division Executive Committee at the Annual meetings in Wahroonga, Sydney, Australia, November 18, 1997.



Well-being and value of children

A brief Seventh-day Adventist perspective

Every child should have the right to live in a loving and stable home and to have the freedom and support to grow up to be the person God intended them to be. But not every child enjoys these rights. This concerns Seventh-day Adventists.

Adventists seek to help children who suffer from the destructive influences of -

- poverty
- illiteracy
- poor health care
- exploitation and vulnerability
- violence

We support the following children's rights:

1. The right to a loving and stable home where there is safety and freedom from abuse
2. The right to food, clothing and shelter
3. The right to proper health and medical care
4. The right to an education that values religious and moral teaching
5. The right to freedom from discrimination and exploitation
6. The right to personhood, respect and the development of positive self-esteem

The United Nations General Assembly recognised the fundamental importance of children by voting in 1989 the "Convention on the Rights of the Child".

More importantly, Jesus valued children. The Bible writer, Matthew, records Him saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (19:14, NIV).



Statement

The Role of the Ten Commandments in Public Life

The Decalogue, as given on Mount Sinai, is a reflection of God's character. It contains universal and unchanging principles of morality and describes our relationship to God and our fellow human beings.

For Seventh-day Adventists, obedience to the Ten Commandments represents the foundational expression of love and gratitude to God for His gift of salvation. We obey the law, not as a means of salvation, but as a response to God's grace demonstrated most convincingly through the death of Jesus Christ in our behalf.

The Ten Commandments provide a moral compass in an age of relativism. Through God's law, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and brings us to a sense of utter helplessness. The law of God is the instrument by which the Spirit calls us to repentance. It also has a teaching function, revealing eternal principles of righteousness that contribute to the development of our character in the likeness of our Savior. Consequently, we comprehend more clearly how to serve others and our God. Seventh-day Adventists see the embodiment of God's law in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. They respect, honor and submit to it as God's will for all people. By dealing with our thoughts, desires and motivations the Ten Commandments address more than external behavior. They challenge us to moral, spiritual and ethical purity.

Seventh-day Adventists believe the law of God features prominently in the controversy between Christ and Satan. In Satan's final attack against God just prior to the second coming of Christ, the believer's obedience to God's law provides the best evidence of commitment to Christ.

Governments establish laws to preserve and protect the well being of their citizens. While civil law defines what is legal, God's law defines what is moral. The first four commandments relate to our relationship with God. Any attempt to legislate these commands requires the state to interpret and apply God's will, an act that is beyond its sphere of competence and jurisdiction. The final six commandments pertain to our relationship with one another. Laws in keeping with these principles of human conduct are common in civil societies. It is the duty of Christians to obey these laws, insofar as they are in keeping with God's law, and to actively support efforts to improve them.

Seventh-day Adventists hold the Decalogue in highest esteem and appeal to men and women in all societies to live in harmony with its principles as a foundation for lives of loving service to humanity. At the same time, they recognize the need for tolerance, Christian humility, and respect for the rights of others in making application of these principles. Consequently, Seventh-day Adventists uphold the fundamental principles of religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on April 12, 2006 in Loma Linda, California.

Seventh-day Adventists and Trade Unions

The Seventh-day Adventist position on and relationship to trade unions is complex and has to be seen against not only a broad theological background, but also in the light of historical and social developments within the last centuries.

Theological Background

The biblical history of creation, the origin of sin, Christ's crucifixion on the cross, and the second coming of Jesus forms the background for the Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of all human societies and institutions.

The emphasis on creation is an expression of a deep concern for the realities of human life, not only in its spiritual, but also in its mental, physical, and social aspects. However, because of the fall, humans are born into an imperfect world with a natural selfish tendency. For that reason, human governments are invested with a divinely given authority to help not only in general need, but also to protect their citizens against internal and external oppression and exploitation that is due to the natural egotism of sinful humankind.

This need to govern should, however, be balanced by another central concern, that is, to secure every individual's freedom of conscience and right to choose his/her religious belief and to exercise that belief without the risk of losing their common civil rights. To secure not only this right, but also to provide every human being with the choice of eternal life, God has established the Church as the body of believers to present Jesus Christ to the world.

The Adventist understanding of the gospel and of the final events in the history of this earth highlights this concept of liberty and freedom of conscience. On the cross Christ decided to die rather than use his power because he wanted humans to maintain the freedom of choice. Before his second coming, he has committed his Church to bring the everlasting gospel to the world as a last warning (Rev 14:6-12), inviting all people to worship the Creator, even in the context of oppressive governments and social structures that oppose genuine religious freedom.

Historical Background

The Seventh-day Adventist Church had its beginning in rural, pre industrial, mid 19th century USA. The traditional attitude of the Church toward labour and trade unions reflects this origin. So do the various statements by Ellen G. White, an influential leader in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in its early years. Ellen G. White was well aware of the economic exploitations that in the course of history brought the labour movements into existence.

Seventh-day Adventists and Trade Unions cont.

Statement

Some trade unions of her time did not uphold the democratic political process or the principle of freedom of conscience. In this context, Ellen G. White strongly upheld the principle of liberty and condemned any individual or organisation that devalued or discredited that principle. Her comments must also be read in the light of events that according to prophecy are expected to take place toward the end of history.

Today, Seventh-day Adventists live in all parts of the world. The operation of labour and trade unions vary greatly. In many countries, they have been established as a natural part of the negotiating process. Some unions cater solely for the professional development of workers within the trade, while in other places, controlling and antidemocratic tendencies are very strong.

Statement of Position

The Church recognises

- That exploitation and oppression of workers have been major factors contributing to the development of trade unions in recent centuries.
- The positive impact that some unions have had in creating and securing the social support system for the weak and the poor, “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow” (Deut 24:20) of modern welfare societies. Today, many enjoy the benefits brought about by the trade union movement even though they may not have participated in the process.
- That this positive influence has contributed to far greater freedom for many people.
- That in many countries trade unions form a natural and supporting part of the negotiating process.
- That individual members have the right to choose whether or not they will join a trade union.

Seventh-day Adventists and Trade Unions cont.

Statement

The Church realises

- The complexity of the issue and the great variety of trade unions and professional organisations.
- The threat that major institutions and organisations, national and/or international, may constitute to the liberty of the individual, and the danger that trade unions may also be utilised as forces of control and oppression.
- That the biblical description of events immediately before the second coming of Christ should make us particularly sensitive to any organisational threat against the individual’s right to free choice.
- That as an organisation, the church is called by God to proclaim the gospel of Christ which embraces freedom of choice, and that it must be bound by the Word of God in performing this task.

The Church affirms

- That it understands its work as a divine calling, and commits itself at all levels to fair and equitable treatment of its employees.
- That no individual or organisation should diminish the trust between an employer and the employee.
- That governments should uphold and protect the right of each individual to choose his/her religious belief and to exercise this belief without losing any of the civil or economic rights that society bestows.
- That its members maintain their conscientious right not to join any organisation that they perceive as a threat to their religious freedom or their freedom of individual choice.
- That no member should participate in the work of any organisation that (a) does not uphold and respect the rights and the free choice of the individual (b) does not respect the duly established structures and processes of government (c) uses force or coercion to achieve its ends.
- That in order to fulfil its divine mission it maintains independence from any employee, community or governmental organisation.

This statement is issued by the Religious Liberty Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and was approved by the South Pacific Division Executive Committee on May 22, 2003.