

DECODING THE ADRA GENOME

Brussels, December 2018

He has a firmness in the eyes, unsmiling lips, wrinkles around the eyes, a grey beard and silver hair. Dressed in a white shirt and black frockcoat, this is the only preserved photo of JOHN BYINGTON, a pioneer, who lived in the mid-nineteenth century.

But there is more about Byington than just this a simple picture. As a pioneer of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he stood up for human rights in stark contrast to the majority of people at the time.

Byington was an abolitionist, holding strong views. He frequently both chaired and participated in abolitionist conventions, signing petitions demanding that the US Congress abolish slavery, which he called “an outrage” and “a sin”.

New historical evidence indicates that Byington and his brother Anson actively assisted fugitive slaves escaping to Canada along the famous Underground Railroad which ran near his home in Bucks Bridge, St Lawrence County, in the United States. Hardly surprising then that throughout his life Byington and his family enjoyed a close relationship with African Americans.¹

A significant number of Christian abolitionists actually left their own churches because those churches

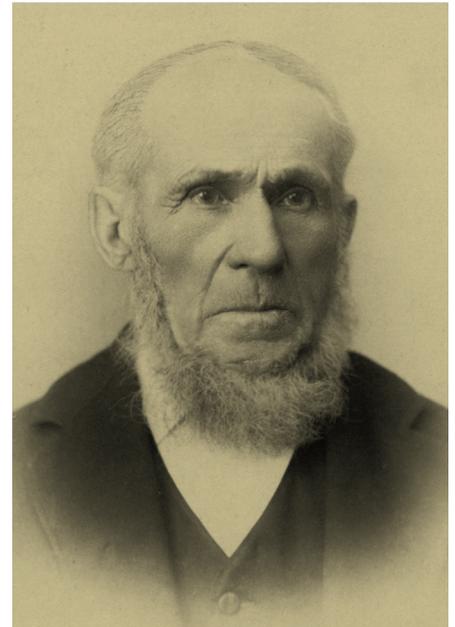
did not actively and loudly oppose slavery. A number of those “rebels” became members of Seventh-day Adventist church. This was true for Byington, a former Methodist, who later in his life became the first General Conference president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Another Adventist pioneer, Ellen White, stated: “Christ came to this earth with a message of mercy and forgiveness. He laid the foundation for a religion by which Jew and Gentile, black and white, free and bond, are linked together in one common brotherhood, recognized as equal in the sight of God.”²

White called slavery “a sin of the darkest dye,”³ demanding that those who publicly defended it should be disfellowshipped. She forcefully wrote, “the law of outland requiring us to deliver a slave to his master, we are not to obey.”⁴

While even some of the abolitionists refused to go so far as breaking the fugitive slave law, White recommended disobeying this Federal statute. She did this on the basis that this law conflicted “with the word and law of God.”

ADRA is the humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist church. As such, ADRA and the church share a common genome. We encourage people to promote justice and human rights for each and every



The only preserved photo of John Byington

individual around the globe. In the same way that Jesus quoted from Isaiah as the basis for His ministry, we hold dear the words that we are “to proclaim good news to the poor... proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour. [Luke 4:18-19 NIV]

On the 70th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights we reemphasise that as Church members and ADRA employees, volunteers, partners and supporters, we believe that all lives matter, have equal value and should have equal access to all human rights.

1 <https://adventistpeace.wordpress.com/2015/01/25/john-byingtons-radical-abolitionism-by-brian-strayer/>

2 Testimonies, vol. 7. P. 225.

3 Testimonies vol 1. P. 359.

4 Testimonies, vol. 1, p. 202

70 years of Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵

70 years ago, on December 10, 1948 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a document to prevent the repetition of the horrific human rights violations that had been committed during the World War II.

Why is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights so important for humanity?

Universal declaration of Human Rights empowers all of us.

It establishes the equal dignity and worth of every person. It confirms that the State has a core duty to promote standards of life that enable us to exercise our dignity and equality, in larger freedom.

Human rights are relevant for all of us, every day.

Human rights include our rights to freedom from fear and from want, freedom to speak up, rights to health and education; and to enjoy the benefits of measures to advance economic and social justice.

Shared humanity is rooted in these universal values.

We are inter-connected. These human rights that we have in common, solidarity with each other and fulfilment of human rights responsibilities are what bind us together on our shared planet.

Equality, justice and freedom prevent violence and sustain peace. Respect for human rights, and sound, impartial rule of law to resolve disputes are at the core of development and peace.

This is the reason why we are called to stand up for human rights. Each of us can stand up. We can take action in our own daily lives to uphold the rights that protect us all and thereby promote the kinship of all human beings. Because whenever and wherever humanity's values are abandoned, we all are at greater risk. We are at a crossroads. Attacks on human rights by people who want to profit from hatred and exploitation erode freedom and equality locally and globally. This can and must be resisted.

MARIO BRITO, President of the Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

- Based on the principle that
- the Bible is the primary source of authority, as far as belief and its practice is concerned, Seventh-day Adventist pioneers realized that they were confronted with several issues, accepted by the contemporary society, that were not in harmony with the Bible teachings. Thus, they become persuaded that they should take a clear stand regarding those subjects and engage themselves in helping to correct them. From among the many different issues with which they were confronted, we will mention one related to social justice – the slavery and the condition in which the black population of America were living at that time.

For them, all human beings were equal, no matter their ethnic, economic or social condition. They should view themselves as brothers and sisters and should take care of each other. Those more affluent, educated and stronger should help the poorer, uninstructed and weaker.

This belief led them to be actively engaged in a vast network to help the African-American slaves to become free citizens. For that to happen, they had to establish schools and other institutions whose main objective was to train and integrate the former slaves.

In fact, as the Adventist pioneers tried to put in practice the teachings of the Bible they were unwittingly promoting and defending “human rights”, almost one century prior to the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. —

5 <http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/>

About Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

- Declaration was designed to prevent the repetition of the horrific human rights violations that had been committed during World War II.
- The Universal Declaration includes civil and political rights (written in 30 articles) like the right to life, liberty, free speech and privacy. It also includes economic, social and cultural rights, like the right to social security, health and education.
- It was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948.
- It was drafted by a diverse group of people from Australia, Canada, Chile, China, France, Lebanon, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States, (including: Eleanor Roosevelt, Chang Peng-Chun, Dr. Charles Malik, Rene Cassin).

RAAFAT KAMAL, President of the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and ADRA Europe President

- In the context of the 70th Anniversary of Universal
- Declaration of Human Rights, my thoughts turn to Micah 6: 8 *to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God*. When speaking of rights in the Bible, God rarely mentions what rights we should demand. Instead, He tells us what we are responsible for. God focuses on human responsibilities. We are responsible to enforce justice and extend mercy. If everyone concentrated on what they are supposed to do, rights wouldn't be an issue. We would receive what we need.

That is not the way human rights were understood seventy years ago when the United Nations approved its Universal Declaration of Human Rights yet many parts of the Declaration reflect biblical truth. It is a monument to God's common grace, in part because some of the men who wrote it—men like Charles Malik and Jacques Maritain—wrote from the standpoint of the Christian world view.

While the preamble affirms “the dignity and worth of the human person.” Christianity, Judaism and Islam jointly confirm the reason is because we are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27). The one who has endowed us with reason and conscience is the Creator.

In keeping with biblical teaching, the U.N. Declaration also takes its stand against injustices such as slavery, torture, and false arrest. It preserves the freedom of religion, including the freedom to change religions. “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance” (Article 18).

The Declaration also values both family and the individual, with particular protection for mothers and children. It identifies the family as the “natural and fundamental group unit of society” (Article 16). This, too, is part of God's plan, that human society is founded upon stable families. It also balances work and leisure, fitting in with the rhythm of work and rest built into the biblical Sabbath.

Lastly, the most surprising thing about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is that it understands that rights are really responsibilities. These days a right has come to mean something everyone else owes me. But Article 29 clearly explains that everyone “has duties to the community,” and that the purpose of the law is to show “respect for the rights and freedoms of others.”

That is something we can fully endorse. —

Things to celebrate:

- 500 languages: UDHR holds the Guinness Book of World Records as the most translated document in the world, with translations ranging from Abkhaz to Zulu.
- 18 treaties and optional protocols advancing human rights have been agreed since 1948.
- 198 countries now allow women the right to vote, compared to 91 countries in 1948.
- 104 countries have now outlawed capital punishment, compared to only 9 in 1948.
- 57% of countries have a national human rights institution today.
- 111 countries have adopted freedom of information laws & policies, at least 15 of them in the past 4 years.

Things still to be changed:

- 880 million people today live in urban slums.
- 1 in 10 children worldwide are still engaged in child labour.
- 65 million men, women and children were forced from their homes by war and persecution in 2015, which is 1 in every 113 people.
- 101 journalists were killed in 2016: 1 death every 4 days.
- Almost 1 in 3 people in detention are held without being tried or sentenced for a crime.
- 59 million children were not in primary school in 2014. 52% of these were girls.
- Women represent only 24% of national parliaments.
- 700 million women today were married before age 18; 250 million were married before age 15.

JONATHAN DUFFY, President of ADRA International

- In the Bible there are 2104 texts
- that call us to reach out to our neighbour who is in distress and speak out against injustice. A central theme throughout scripture is the equal rights of all people and the fact that God desires our good.

Since the beginning of the Adventist Church it has engaged in service to the community. Early church leaders spoke out against slavery and the church has remained an active voice for human rights and is a leading global voice on religious liberty. The church established the Dorcas Society, SAWS which started as Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Service which latter changed its name to Seventh-day Adventist World Service and Adventist Community Services. In 1984 it decided to scale up its community engagement and it formed the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) to carry out long term development and humanitarian work around the world.

Today ADRA is in 141 countries and has a global impact of between 15-20 million lives a year. Last year ADRA responded to over 100 disasters. ADRA has based its work on the Declaration of Human Rights and works with communities to empower women and girls, and vulnerable people groups including people with a disability. It works in a number of fragile states and is a part of peace building activities that helps people rediscover their dignity and discover their voice. —

CURRENT HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES:

- Global multilateral frameworks for peace and human rights are increasingly under threat.
- Rights to privacy, data, and consent are facing new challenges in the internet age.
- Climate change: a threat to right to life, food, water & housing.
- Right to work: emerging problems of automation and challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- Inequality: global, national, and urban inequalities
- Women and gender: issues such as sexual assault, rape, exploitation, violence against women, and pay gaps.
- Freedom of Expression: complications in internet age.
- Migrants and refugees: growing global migrant crises.
- Democracy: under threat around the world.

JOAO MARTINS, Executive Director of ADRA Europe

● All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” This is the first article of one of the most important documents produced in last century. Seventy years ago, in the aftermath of a war that has showed how evil can bring humanity to the lowest imaginable standards, the nations of the world came together with thirty short articles that aim to prevent atrocities from being committed among human beings, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Unfortunately, too many violations still continue.

That is why we cannot restrain our voice from defending the rights of those that are oppressed, marginalized and persecuted. As ADRA, we find our values grounded in the Bible, from where we learn that humanity was created with the sacred dignity “in the image of God” (Gen.1:27), free and with reason and conscience (Gen 2:16 and 2:9). This is exactly what we can read in the article above. Moreover, acting towards one another with a spirit of brotherhood is also the responsibility that is required from all of us in the Bible “And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (1 John 1:16).

As children of God, it is our responsibility to defend the dignity and rights of all humanity “not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth”. (1 John 3:18). ADRA works every day to bring justice to those that are oppressed in their rights, compassion to those that face inequality, and disinterested love for the marginalized. A deep respect for human rights is the reason behind ADRA’s service to humanity, so all may live as God intended. —