

REFORMATION UNENDING

The EU and Church dialogue – presented by Pastor Raafat Kamal at a Reformation 500 celebration at the European Parliament, 17 October 2017

I wish to thank Dr Hannu Takkula and team for organising this important conference to Celebrate the 500 Years of Reformation.

I hope that we all agree with the irrefutable notion that the centre of the Reformation is Jesus Christ – His life, His teachings, His death, His resurrection, and His promised return. Jesus is our Creator, our Redeemer and our ONLY Hope.

The term 'Post-truth' was declared last year as word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries. In 21st century Europe, TRUTH has become a matter of opinion, a matter of feeling and sometimes irrelevant. In this current era of post-truth, it is easy to cherry-pick information to polish one's personal position and come to whatever conclusion one desires. No wonder we live in a world of confusion wrapped by a "crisis of meaning".

And for the last 40 years, this *crisis of meaning* has become viral. Our European societies are producing very many unhappy and unhealthy directionless people. We just need to review the growing statistics on mental health, suicide, anxiety, depression, sleep deprivation – just to list a few.

Jesus is the only answer for our Post-Truth time (John 14:6), he said "... I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

These rediscovered truths are salvific, **yet other vital dimensions of the Reformation message should not be neglected**. If our intention is to move our broken communities to a better and just place ... human dignity, individual freedom of conscience, religious freedom, tolerance, generosity towards the other and duty of care for the poor and needy need to continue to be foundational blocks of our attitudes, laws, and partnerships between the EU, national governments and civil societies.

These essential values are captured well in the book of Micah 6:8 – "He has shown you oh man what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

The words ascribed to Martin Luther as he held fast to the dictates of his transformed conscience to act justly and love mercy have inspired generations of believers and non-religious people alike: "Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason . . . my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me."

Here is a quick application for us today - a person's conscience based on the Word of God should dictate his or her choice to worship and believe—or not.

To embrace religious freedom is to champion and integrate the dignity of human beings in our laws, culture and way of life. It is to adopt a personal attitude of tolerance, whereby

tolerance is an expression of solidarity with every member of the human family. It translates into respect for every human being, after all, we are created in God's image. And this can only be genuine when other peoples' rights are respected.

Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Most people know that Jesus came to bring forgiveness and grace – these are hallmarks of the Reformation. Less well known is the Biblical teaching that a true experience of the grace of Jesus Christ inevitably motivates persons, communities and nations to see and apply biblical justice and mercy in this world.

Some argue that the job of the church or civil societies is not to do justice at all, but to preach the Word and nurture believers. But if it is true that justice and mercy are the inevitable signs of justifying faith in Jesus Christ, it is hard to believe that the church is not to live Jesus Christ and reflect His values corporately to the wider community.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church's portfolio of services in 202 countries confirm remarkable intersections with many of the goals and values of the European Union and the United Nation. I walked these corridors many times and visited offices to dialogue and partner about issues of advocacy, religious freedom, human rights, social justice and support to the poor and needy. I have first hand experience as a war child of suffering, homelessness and intolerance.

I am happy to be part of my church's global network of schools and educational institutions, its hospitals and medical centres, and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) that alleviate suffering in the world with projects in 141 countries confirms our commitment towards biblical justice and mercy.

Furthermore, my church's International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) and Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department (PARL) have defended religious freedom for all people regardless of their religious affiliation for more than 100 years. As one of our leaders recently noted – "If we do not protect religious freedom, promote tolerance and champion human dignity, we do not deserve it". We take these fundamental principles seriously.

My appeal to you is not to shrink or box Jesus to the place where he only "saves our soul". I believe Jesus Christ has and can change the world to make it a better and fairer place.

Our laws and partnerships to respect human dignity need to be non-discriminatory and inalienable; indivisible; interdependent and interrelated. They need to be **non-discriminatory** because everyone is created in God's image and is born with and possesses the same dignity, regardless of where they live, their gender or race, or their religious, cultural or ethnic background. **Inalienable** because people's rights can never be taken away. **Indivisible and interdependent** because all rights – political, religious, civil, social, cultural and economic – are equal in importance and none can be fully enjoyed without the others.

In conclusion, the Protestant Reformation is not a historical event frozen in the 16th Century. On the contrary, the Reformation spirit and message must be rediscovered and relived today if we are to make the most of its core principles.

You and I are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. These biblical convictions threatened the power of the powerful and changed the destiny of Europe.

I hope and pray that we have the same boldness and courage to acknowledge that we are our brother's keeper – that we share common humanity and are responsible for one another. I appeal to you to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God and may that candle never be put out.