
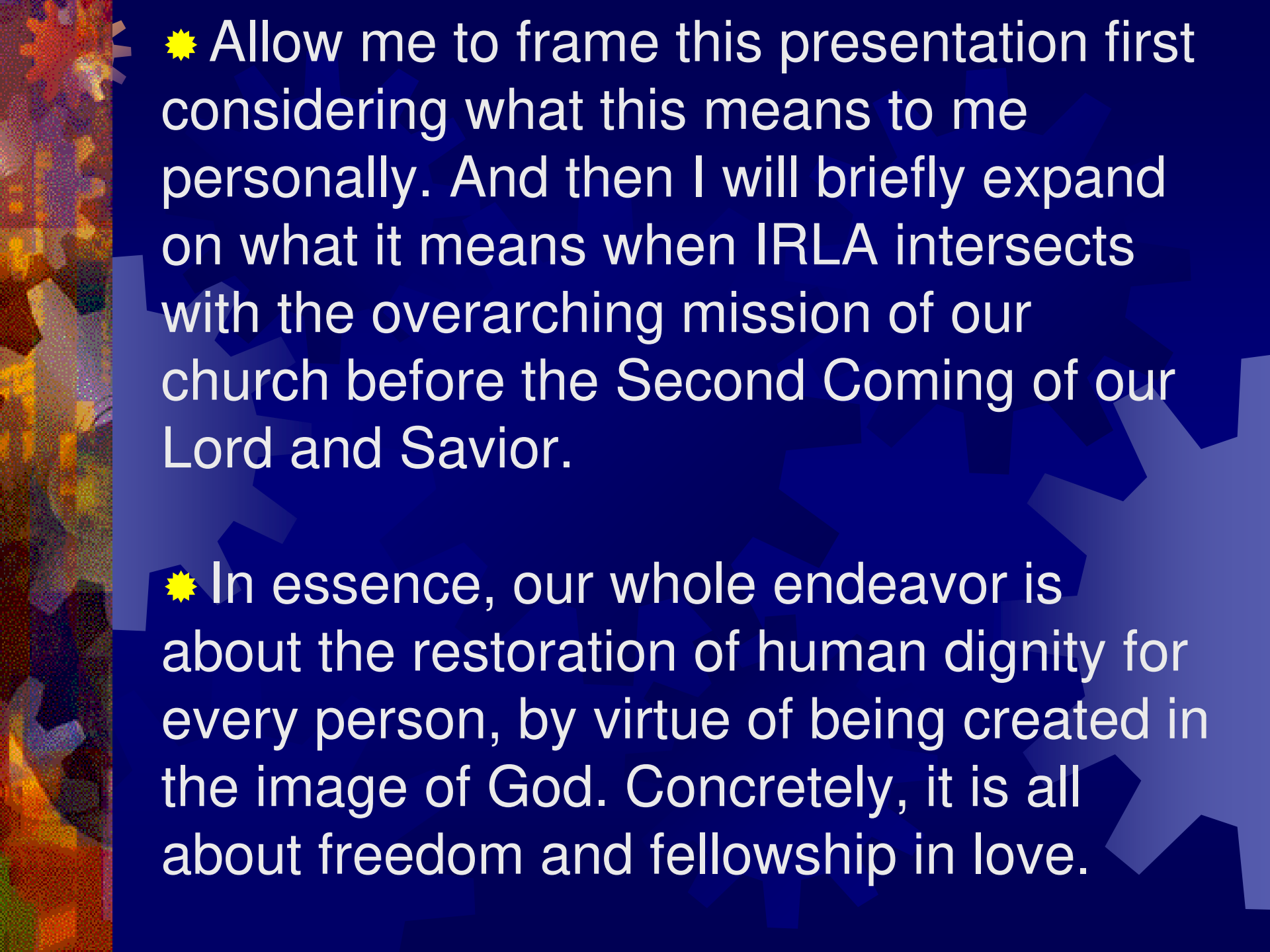




IRLA Constituency Meeting
Key Findings at the IRLA World Congress.
List of IRLA Board Members to vote in


Ganoune Diop, Ph.D.
Secretary General IRLA

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- ★ 2023 is a significant year for the IRLA. From August 21 to 23rd, we celebrated 130 years of advocacy for religious liberty.

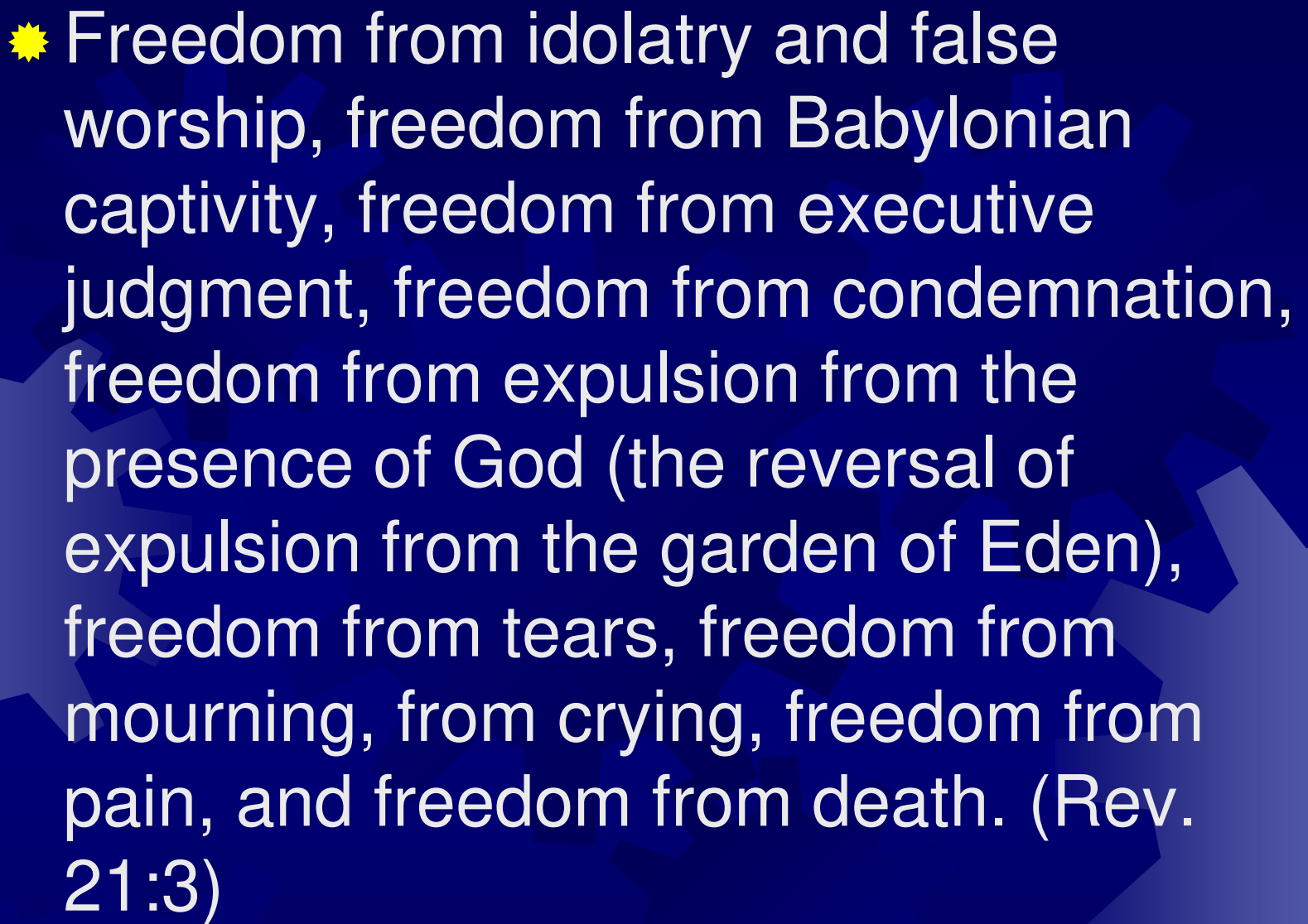
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☀ Allow me to frame this presentation first considering what this means to me personally. And then I will briefly expand on what it means when IRLA intersects with the overarching mission of our church before the Second Coming of our Lord and Savior.

☀ In essence, our whole endeavor is about the restoration of human dignity for every person, by virtue of being created in the image of God. Concretely, it is all about freedom and fellowship in love.

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✦ In fact, in our ecclesiastical or faith-based context, even what we call the three angels' messages is inseparable from the concept of freedom.

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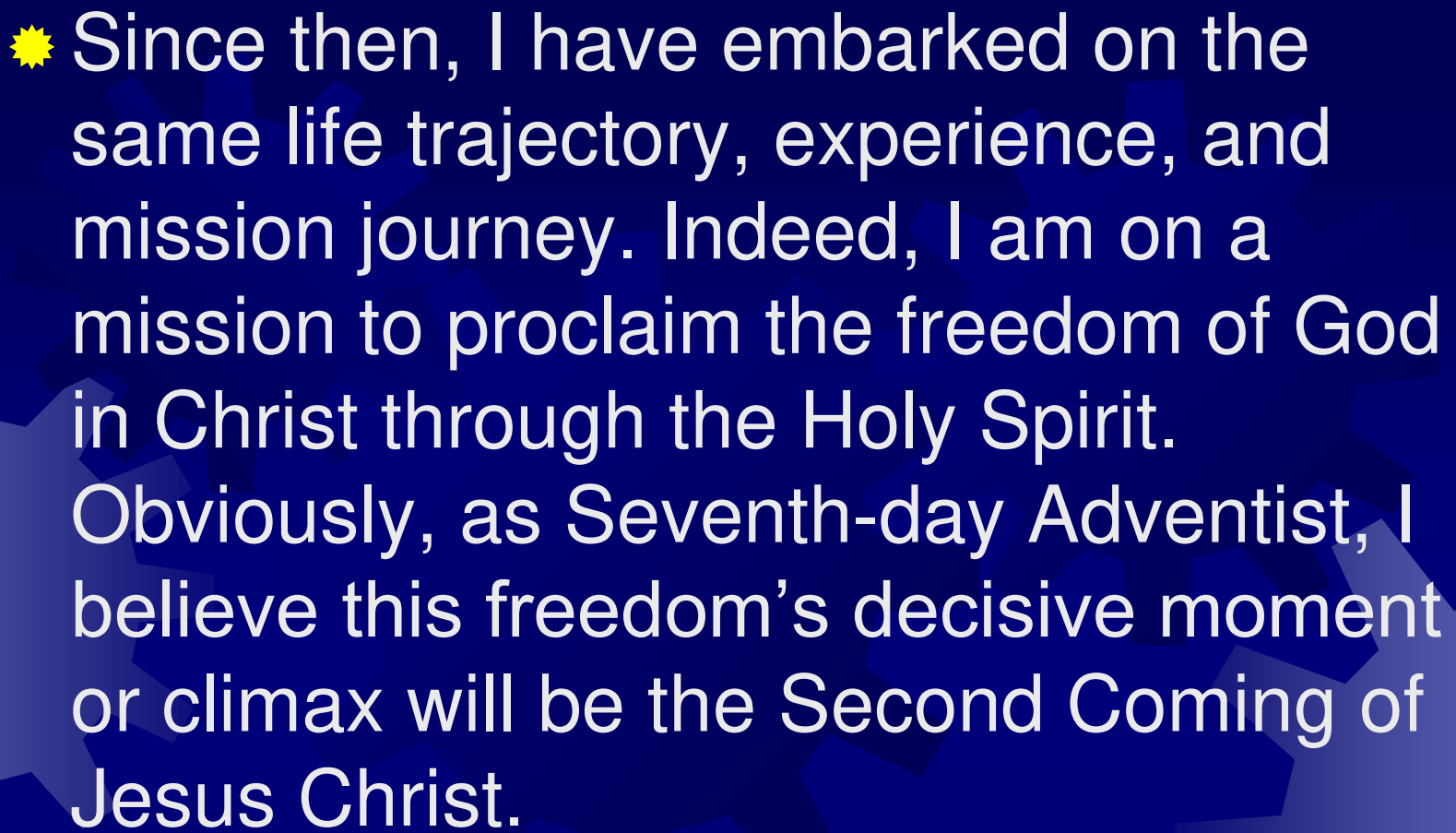
★ Freedom from idolatry and false worship, freedom from Babylonian captivity, freedom from executive judgment, freedom from condemnation, freedom from expulsion from the presence of God (the reversal of expulsion from the garden of Eden), freedom from tears, freedom from mourning, from crying, freedom from pain, and freedom from death. (Rev. 21:3)



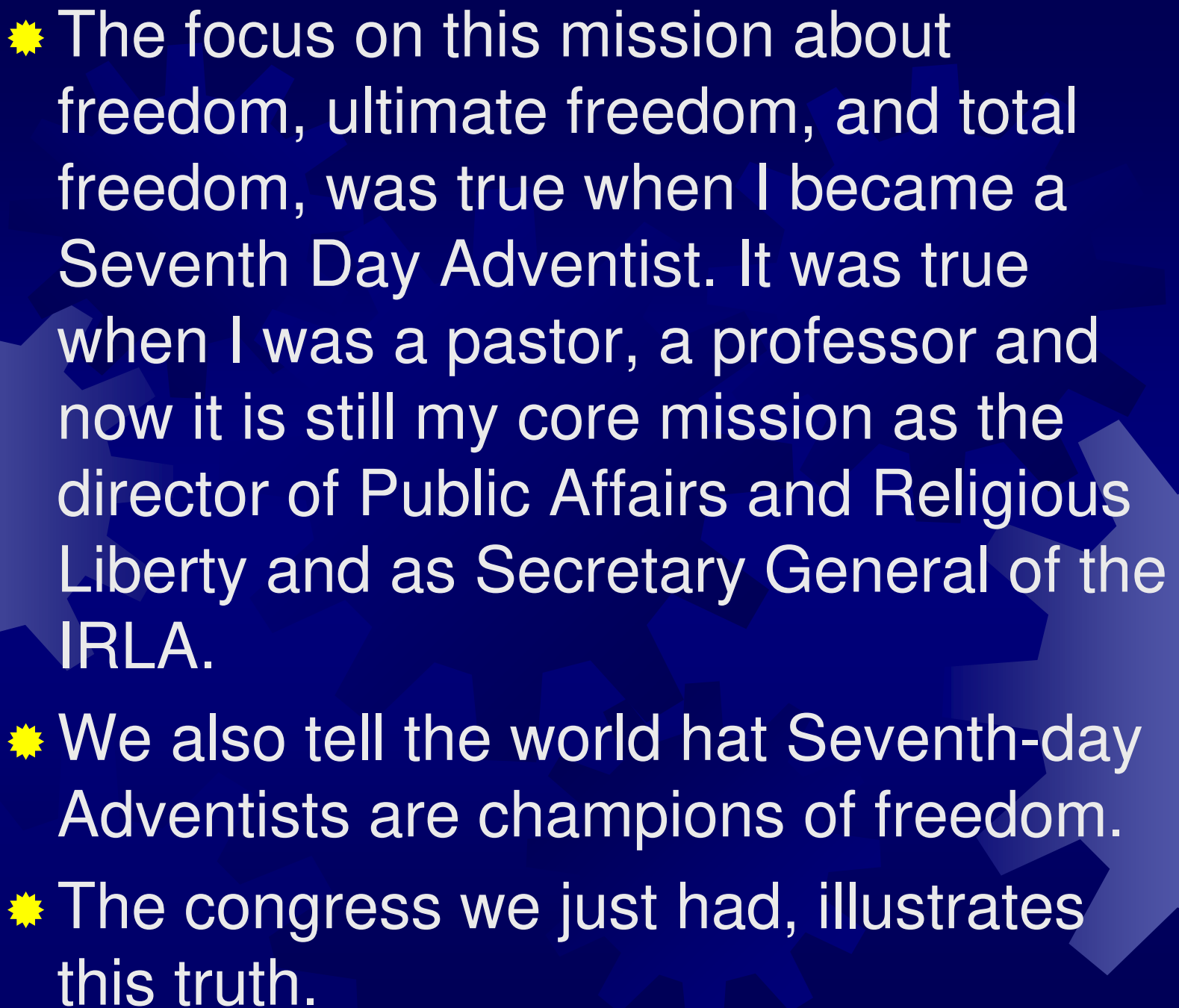
✦ Few words of introduction may be fitting.

Personal testimony.

✦ When I was approached by my flute teacher at the conservatory of music of La Rochelle a city in France, the first spiritual testimony he shared with me was about freedom. He told me “Ganoune, the day you will know Christ and fully embrace Him, you will be truly free.”

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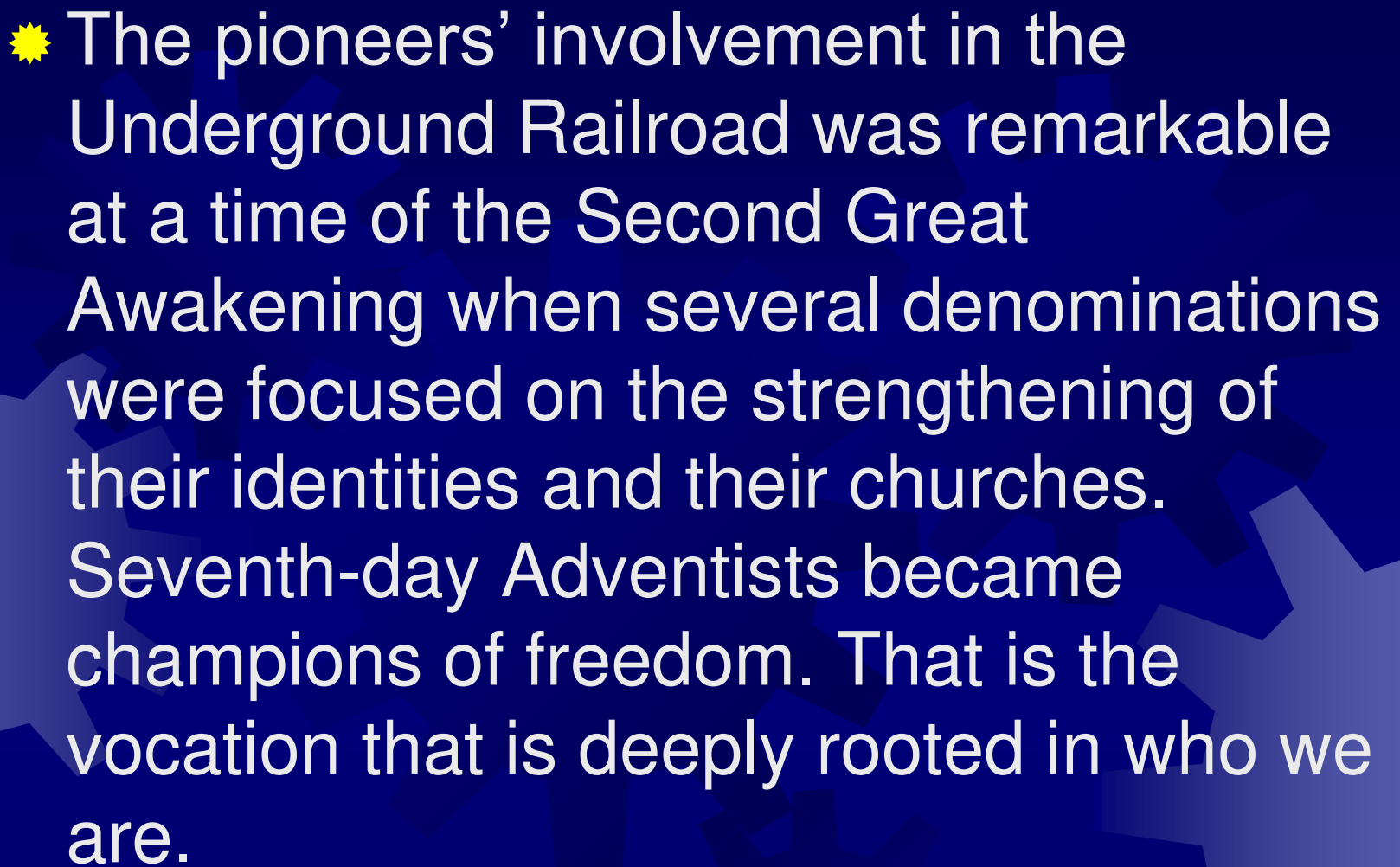
✦ Since then, I have embarked on the same life trajectory, experience, and mission journey. Indeed, I am on a mission to proclaim the freedom of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit. Obviously, as Seventh-day Adventist, I believe this freedom's decisive moment or climax will be the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

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- ★ The focus on this mission about freedom, ultimate freedom, and total freedom, was true when I became a Seventh Day Adventist. It was true when I was a pastor, a professor and now it is still my core mission as the director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty and as Secretary General of the IRLA.
 - ★ We also tell the world that Seventh-day Adventists are champions of freedom.
 - ★ The congress we just had, illustrates this truth.

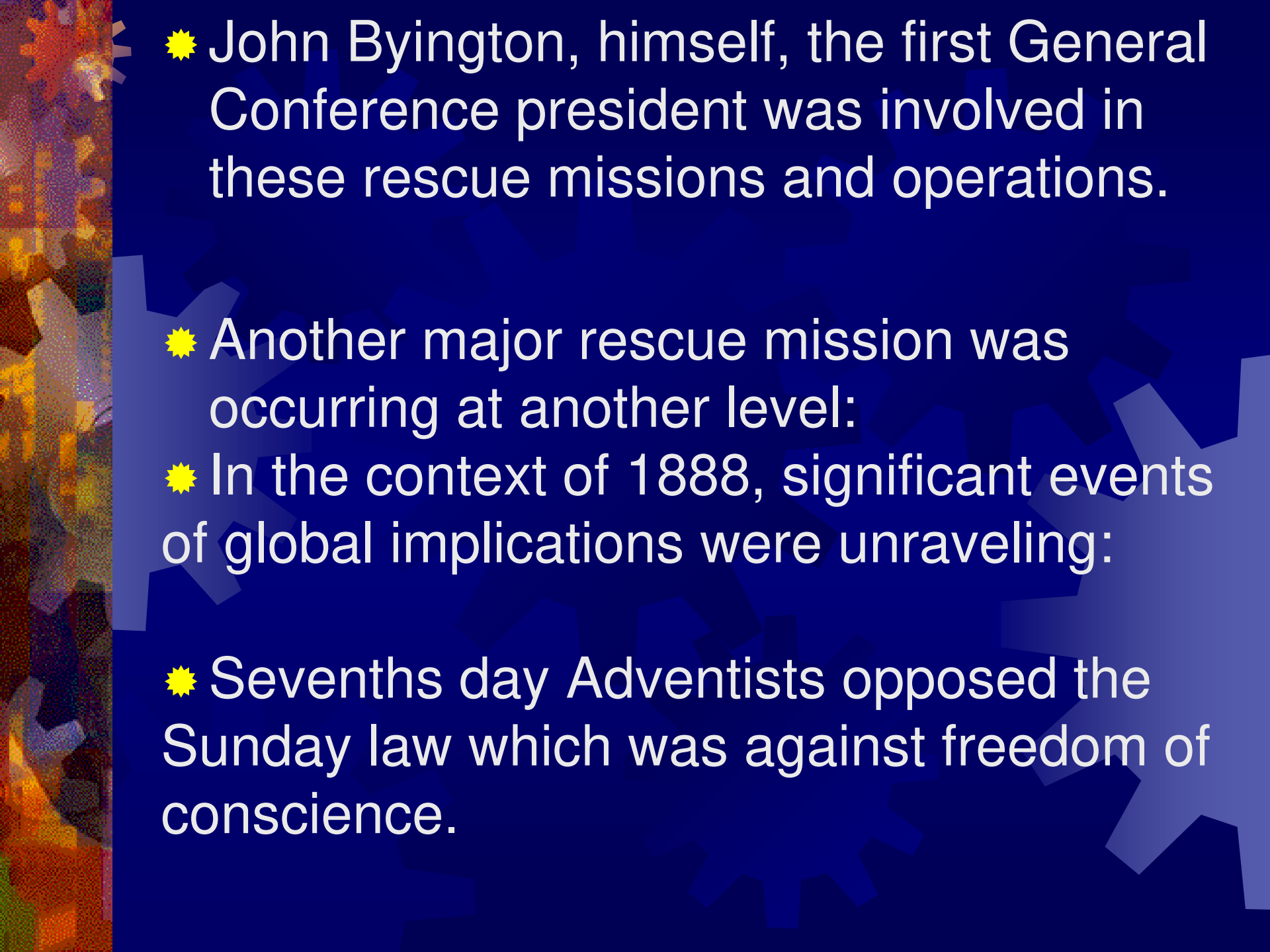
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- ★ During the IRLA world congress, the truth of our deepest need and multifaceted connections to freedom were emphasized in many ways.

- ✦ During the inaugural session of the Congress, our president Elder Ted Wilson, who was the first speaker, welcomed all the participants and reminded us of the deep commitment of early Seventh Day Adventists to religious freedom and to freedom itself. This explained why our pioneers were involved in helping slaves escape to freedom.



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☀ The pioneers' involvement in the Underground Railroad was remarkable at a time of the Second Great Awakening when several denominations were focused on the strengthening of their identities and their churches. Seventh-day Adventists became champions of freedom. That is the vocation that is deeply rooted in who we are.

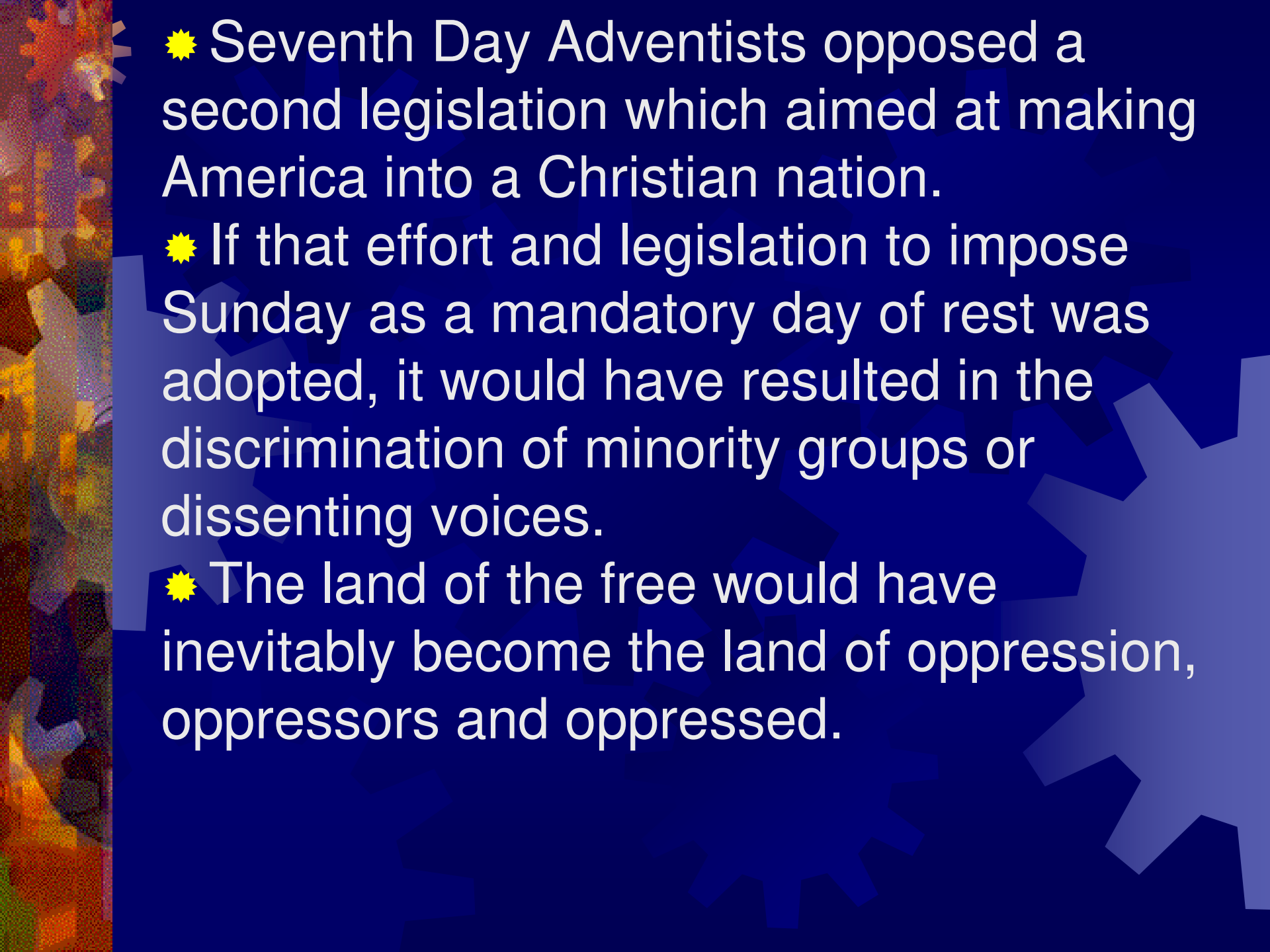
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★ John Byington, himself, the first General Conference president was involved in these rescue missions and operations.

★ Another major rescue mission was occurring at another level:

★ In the context of 1888, significant events of global implications were unraveling:

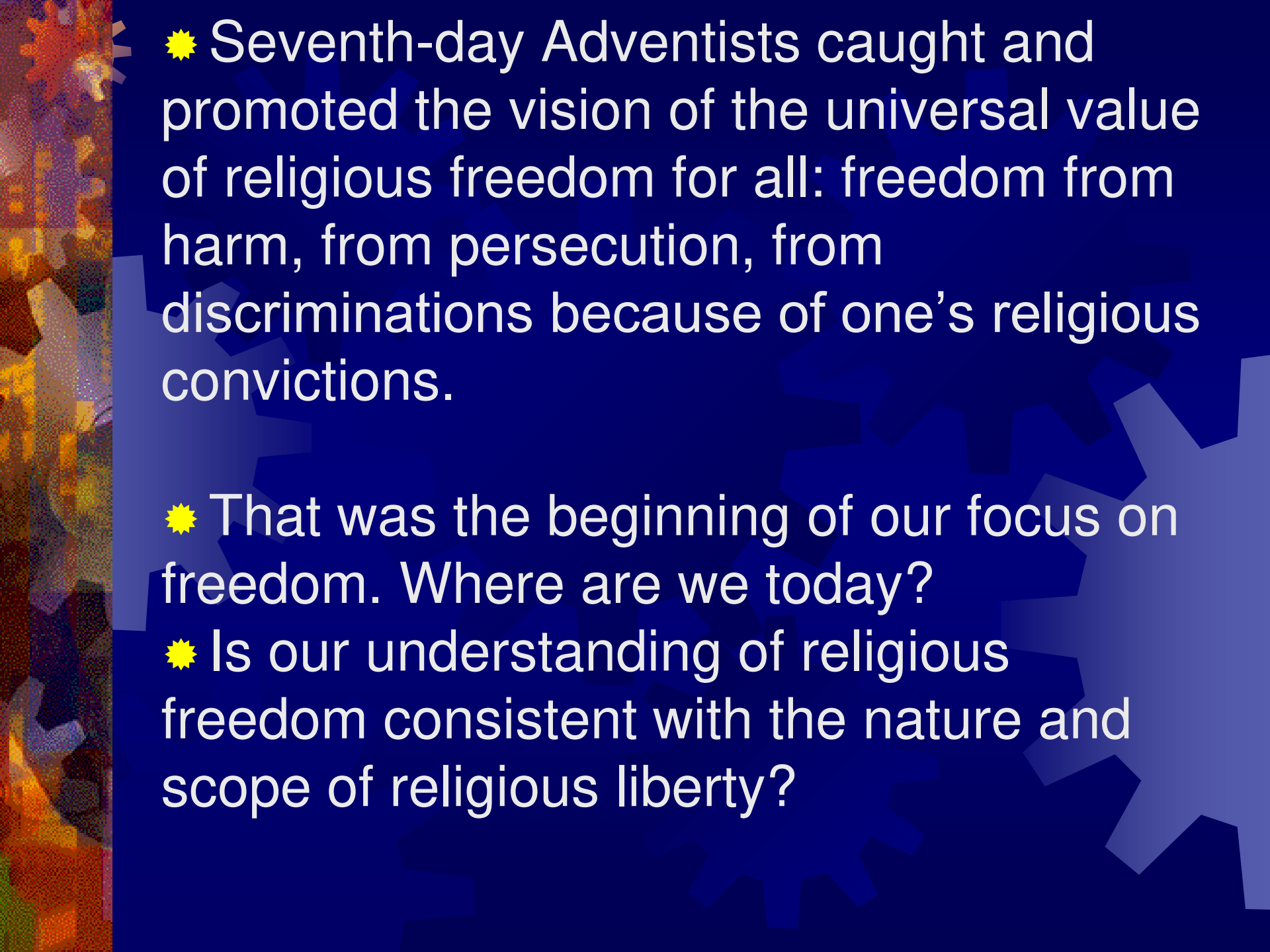
★ Seventh day Adventists opposed the Sunday law which was against freedom of conscience.



★ Seventh Day Adventists opposed a second legislation which aimed at making America into a Christian nation.

★ If that effort and legislation to impose Sunday as a mandatory day of rest was adopted, it would have resulted in the discrimination of minority groups or dissenting voices.

★ The land of the free would have inevitably become the land of oppression, oppressors and oppressed.

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☀ Seventh-day Adventists caught and promoted the vision of the universal value of religious freedom for all: freedom from harm, from persecution, from discriminations because of one's religious convictions.

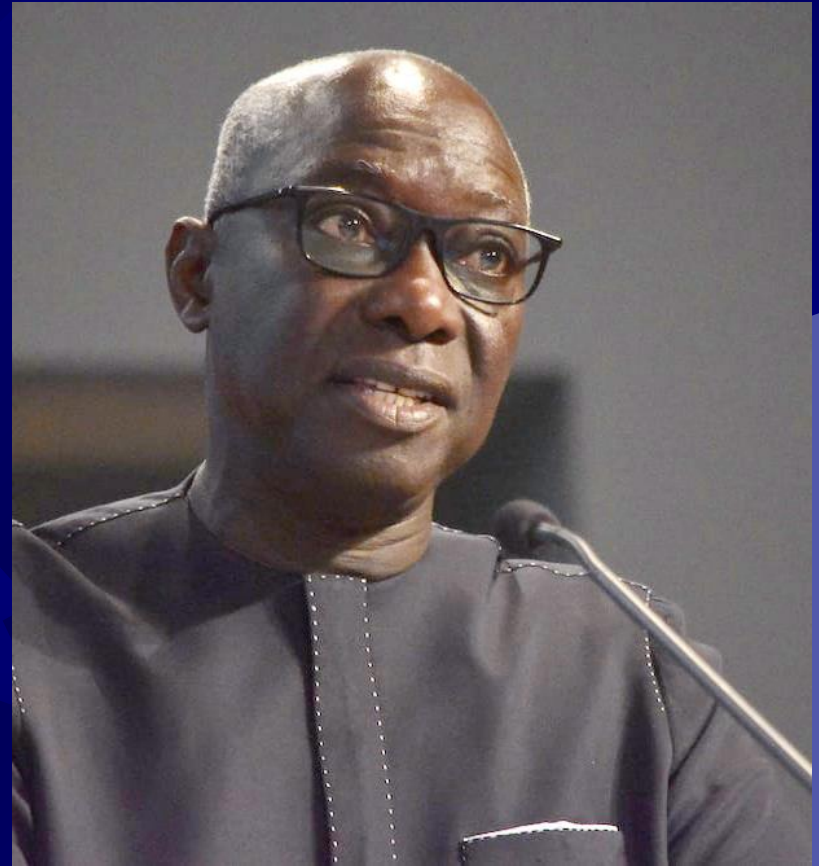
☀ That was the beginning of our focus on freedom. Where are we today?


☀ Is our understanding of religious freedom consistent with the nature and scope of religious liberty?

- ✦ During the Congress, IRLA President, Ambassador John Nay, challenged the participants of the 9th world Congress with a question: “Do we really believe in religious freedom or are we merely concerned about keeping our religious and social privileges just for us?”
- ✦ Is religious liberty for all?”



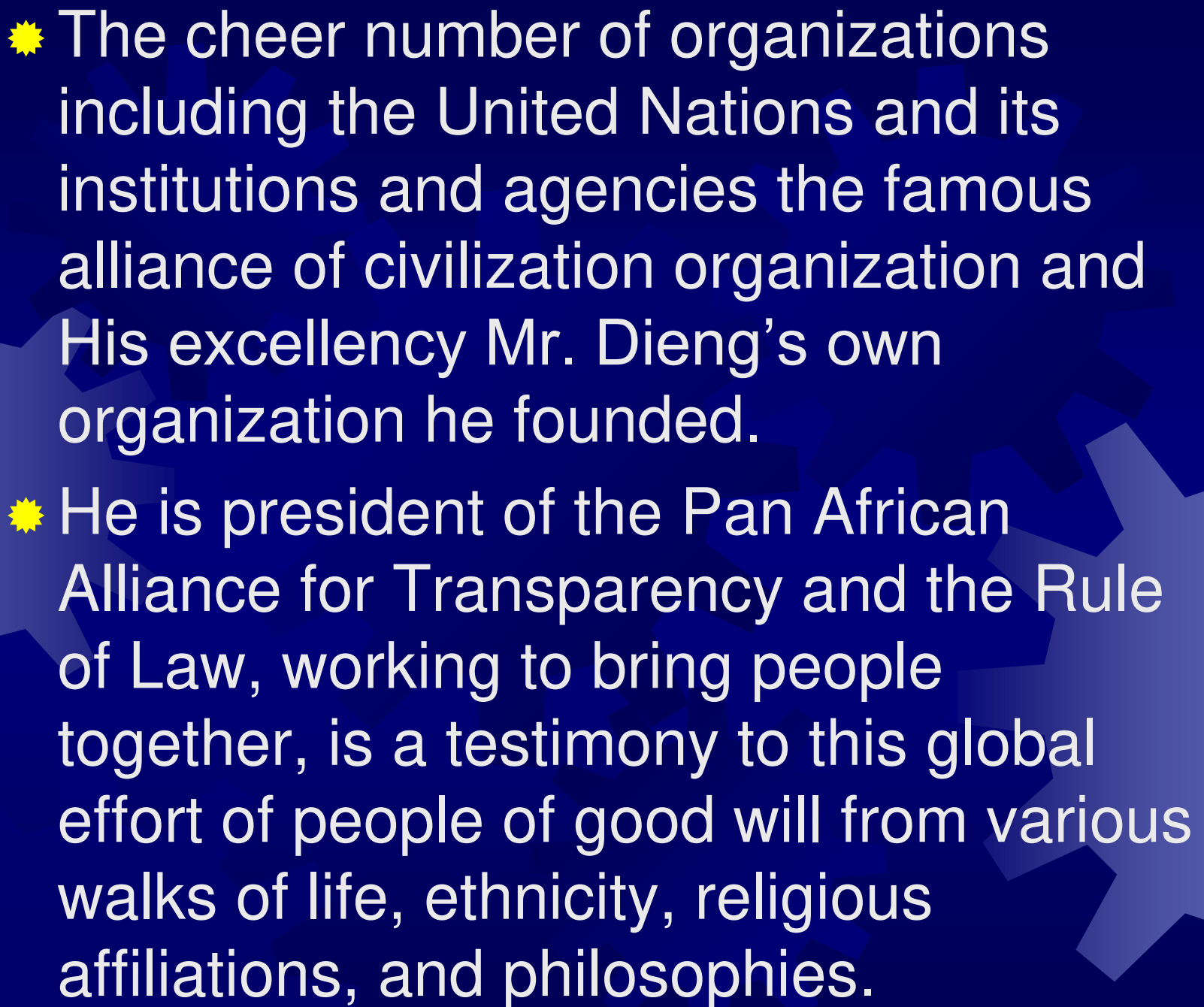
- ✦ His excellency, Mr. Adama Dieng broadened our perspective helping us rise above the polarization of our world into opposing camps and in a constructed framework of clashes of civilizations. He painted current global mobilization for alliances of civilizations instead.

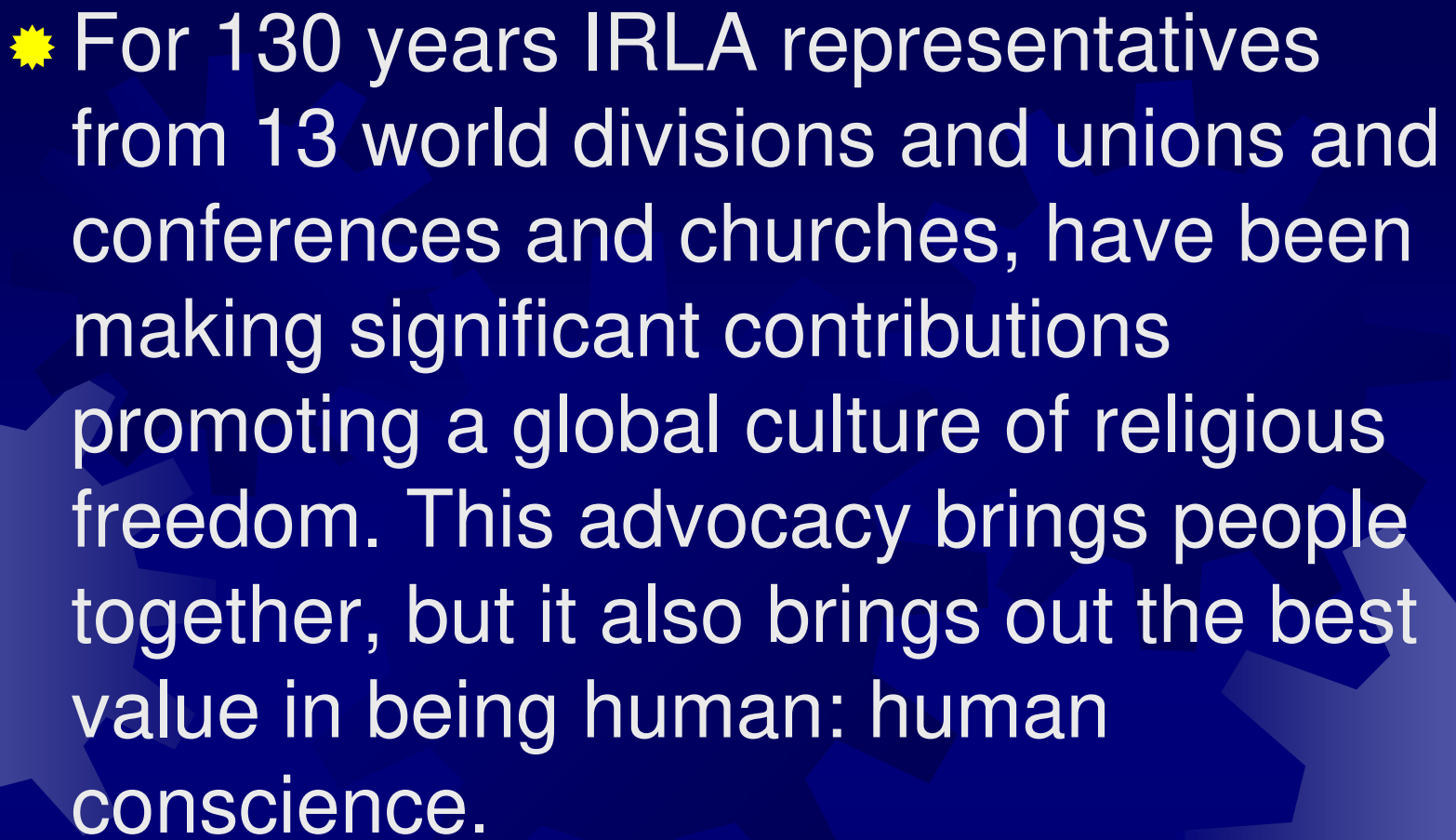


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☀ But we need to be clear about what we are talking about when we mention religious liberty. It is not enough to mention the international documents that mention religious freedom. They usually make reference to religious liberty without defining its nature or its scope.

☀ Regarding the importance of religious liberty, several sources are evoked to justify the legitimacy of promoting religious freedom.

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- ★ The cheer number of organizations including the United Nations and its institutions and agencies the famous alliance of civilization organization and His excellency Mr. Dieng's own organization he founded.
 - ★ He is president of the Pan African Alliance for Transparency and the Rule of Law, working to bring people together, is a testimony to this global effort of people of good will from various walks of life, ethnicity, religious affiliations, and philosophies.



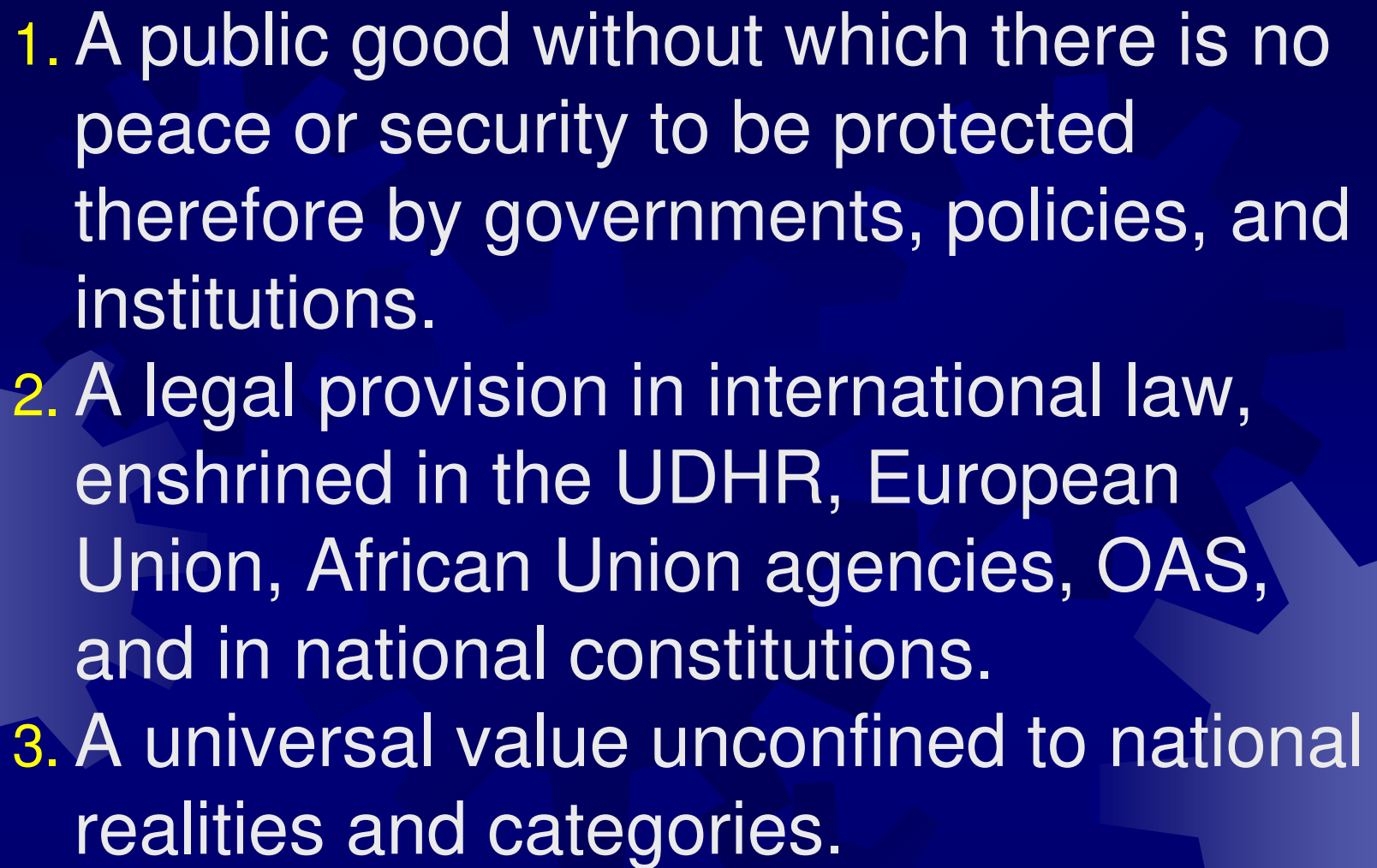
For 130 years IRLA representatives from 13 world divisions and unions and conferences and churches, have been making significant contributions promoting a global culture of religious freedom. This advocacy brings people together, but it also brings out the best value in being human: human conscience.

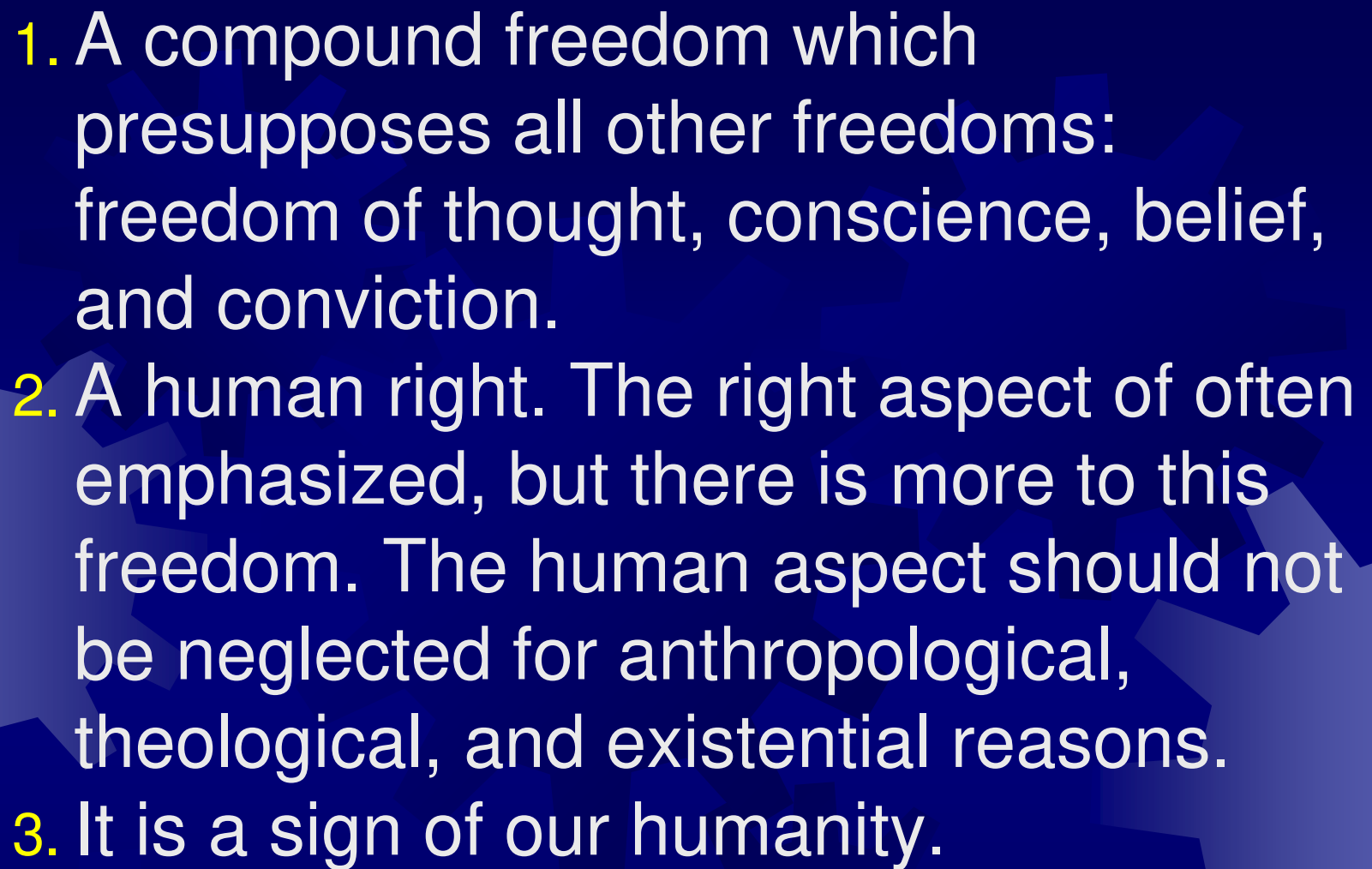


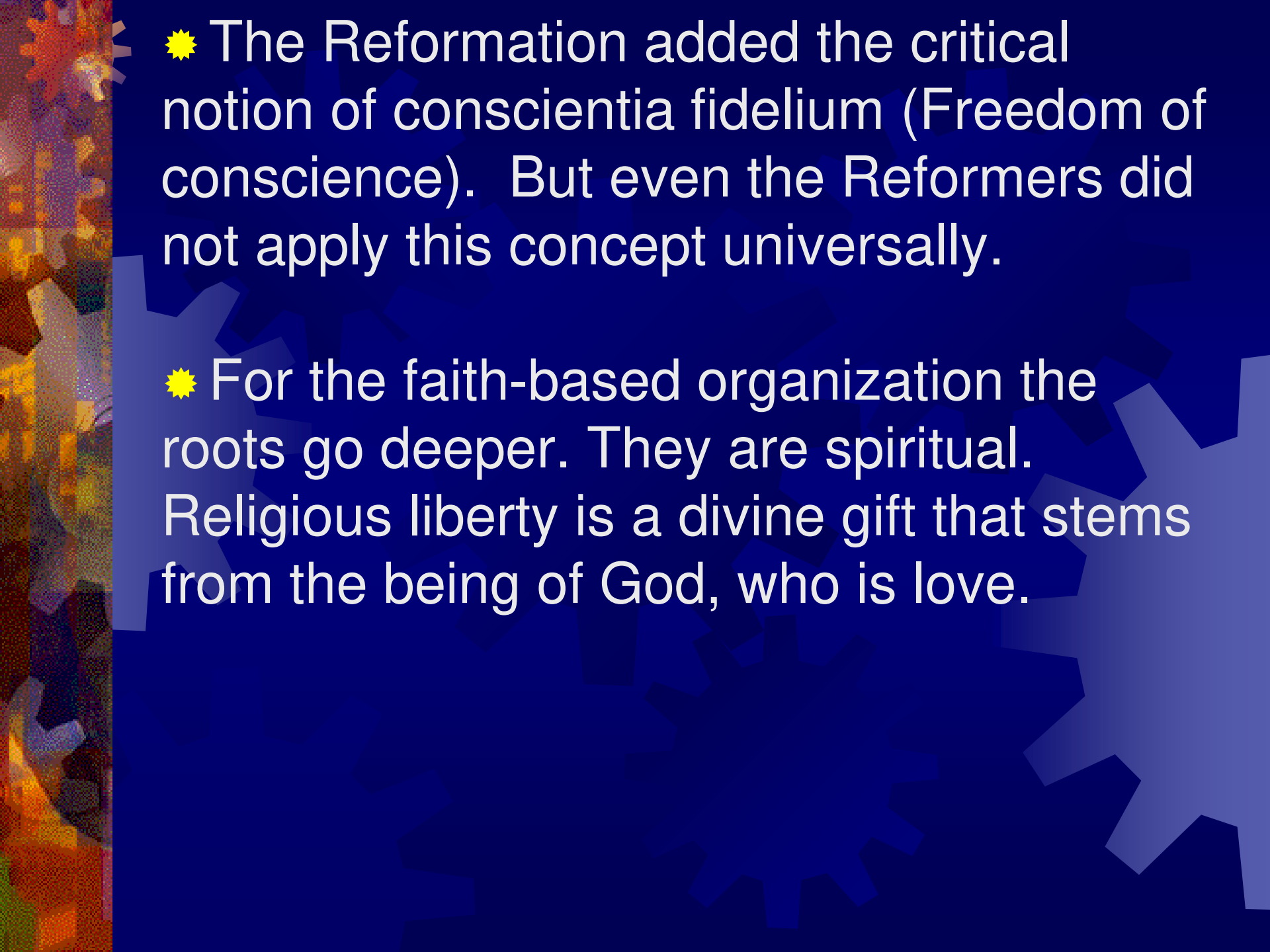
✱ The Enlightenment and its leading philosophers highlighted freedom of religion as follows:



1. A political principle. At a most basic level, freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief undergirds the other political principles such as consent of the governed, limited government, rule of law, democracy and representative government.

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1. A public good without which there is no peace or security to be protected therefore by governments, policies, and institutions.
 2. A legal provision in international law, enshrined in the UDHR, European Union, African Union agencies, OAS, and in national constitutions.
 3. A universal value unconfined to national realities and categories.

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1. A compound freedom which presupposes all other freedoms: freedom of thought, conscience, belief, and conviction.
 2. A human right. The right aspect of often emphasized, but there is more to this freedom. The human aspect should not be neglected for anthropological, theological, and existential reasons.
 3. It is a sign of our humanity.



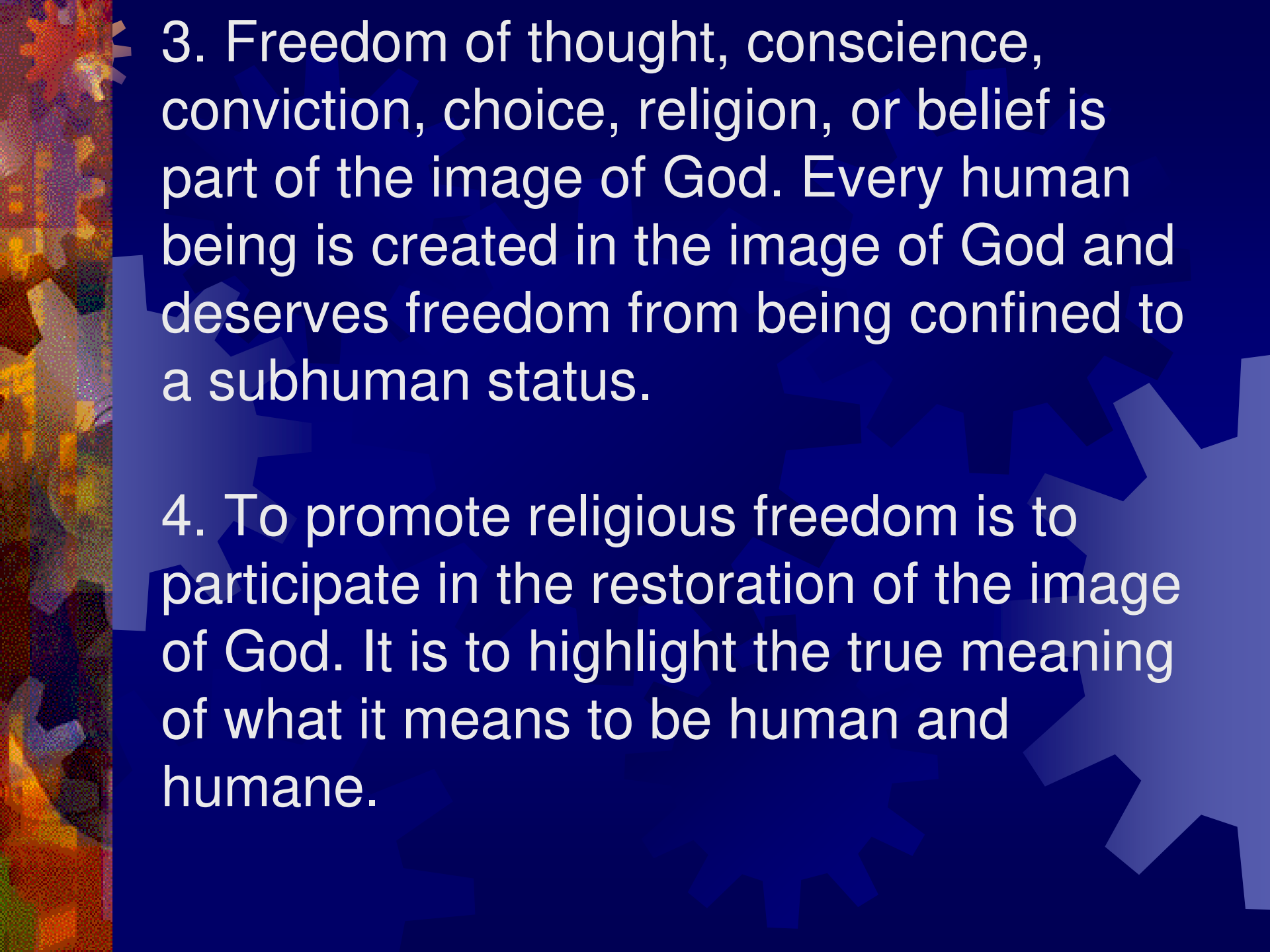
✱ The Reformation added the critical notion of conscientia fidelium (Freedom of conscience). But even the Reformers did not apply this concept universally.

✱ For the faith-based organization the roots go deeper. They are spiritual. Religious liberty is a divine gift that stems from the being of God, who is love.

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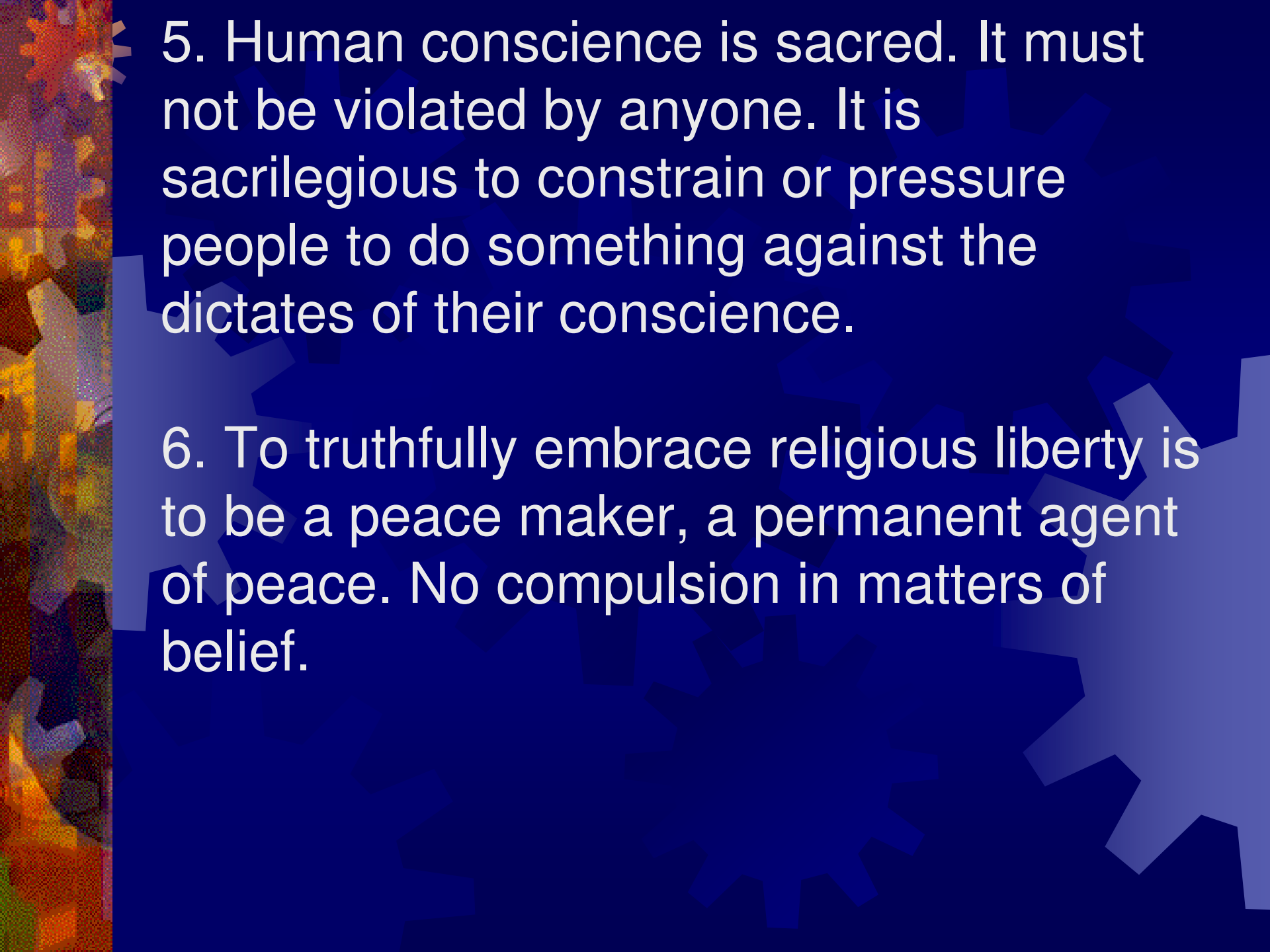
★ **During the IRLA World Congress key overarching findings are as follows.**

1. There is more to religious liberty than meets the eyes.
2. Speakers raised some important issues when it comes to religious liberty. Key among which are the following:
 1. A. One must rise above the current polarized and restrictive understanding of religious liberty to a wholistic more comprehensive grasp of what constitutes the core of what distinguishes us as human beings, characterized by not only consciousness but human conscience, a sacred inner sanctuary in every person.



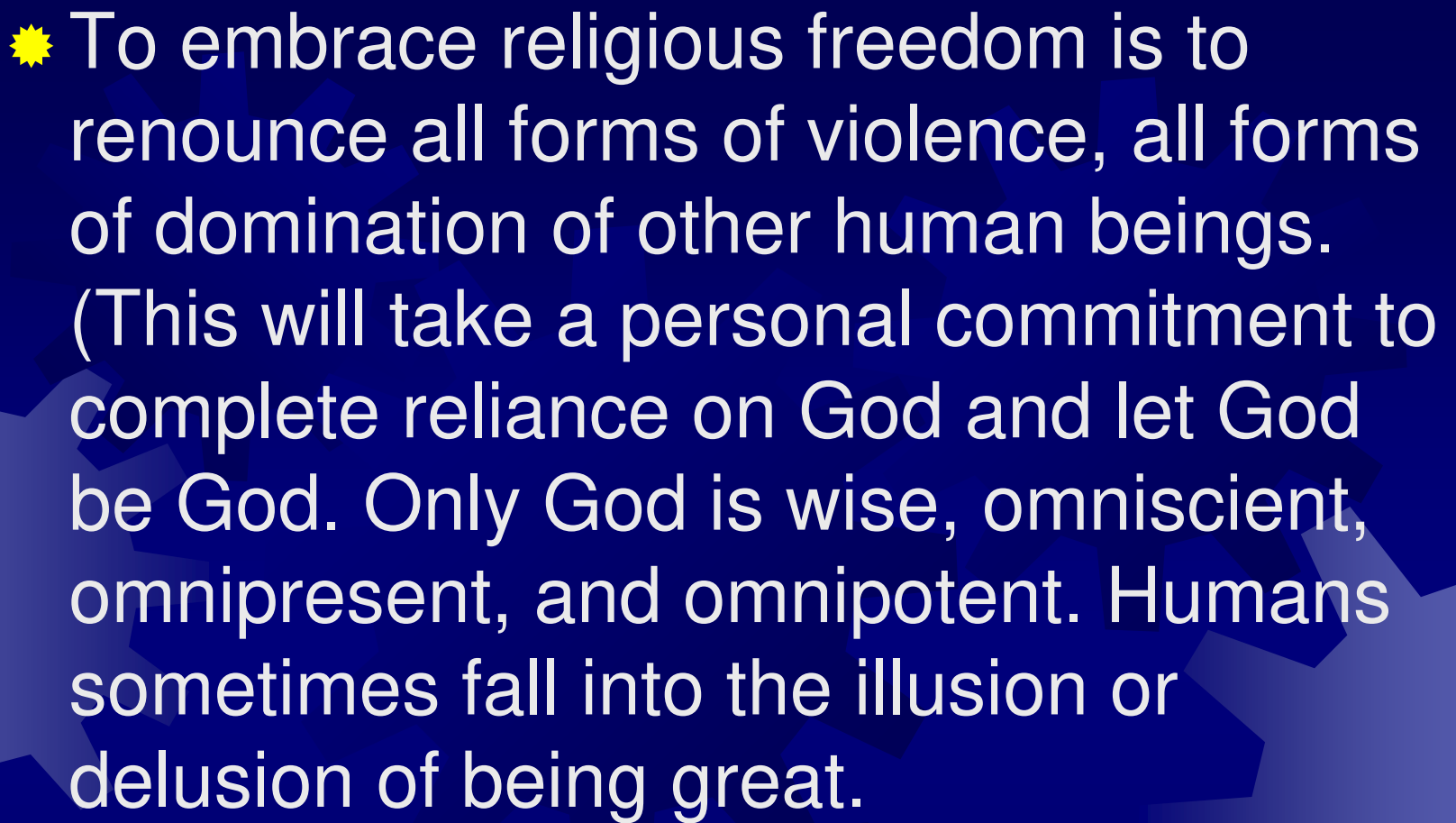
3. Freedom of thought, conscience, conviction, choice, religion, or belief is part of the image of God. Every human being is created in the image of God and deserves freedom from being confined to a subhuman status.

4. To promote religious freedom is to participate in the restoration of the image of God. It is to highlight the true meaning of what it means to be human and humane.

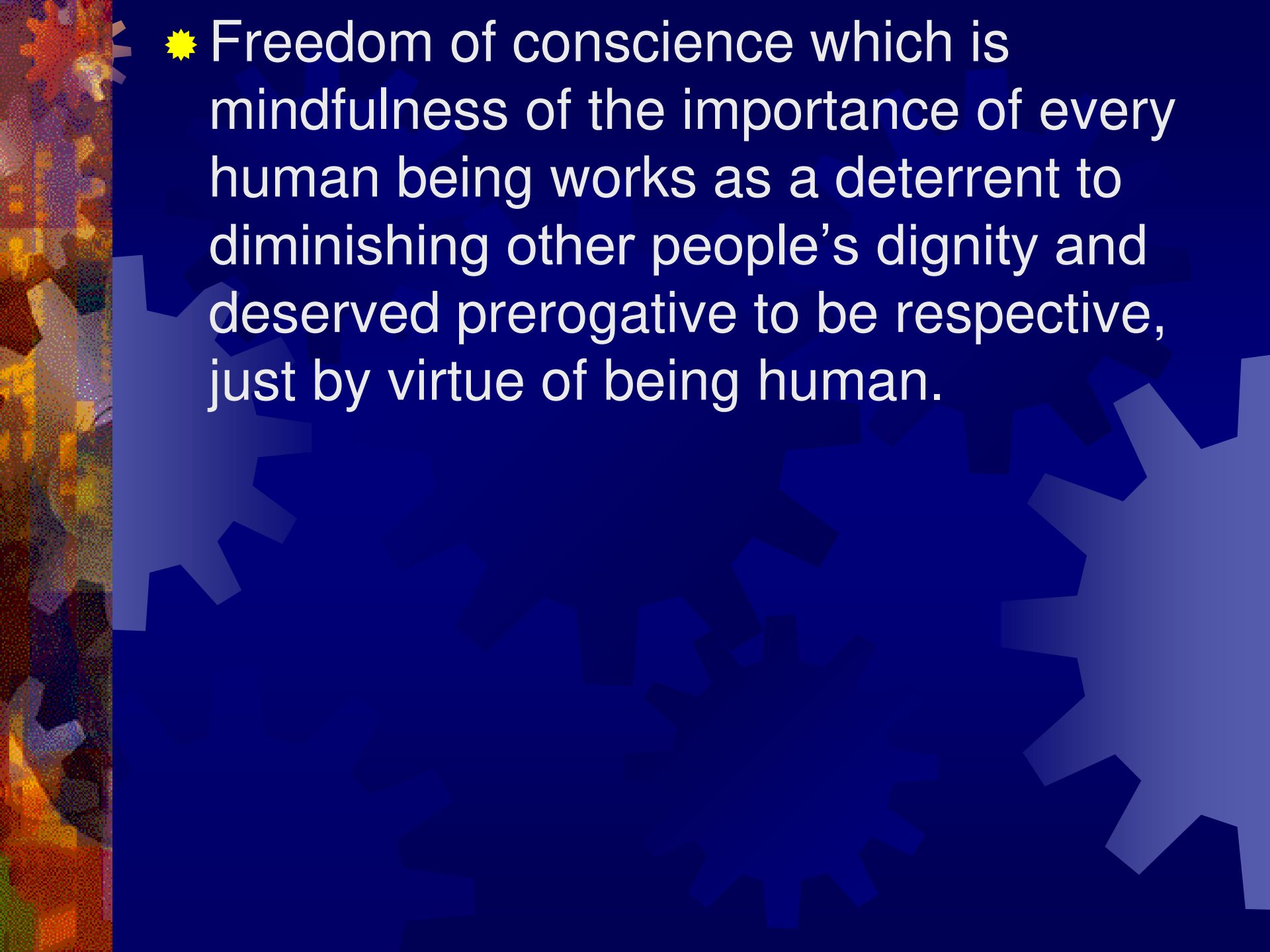


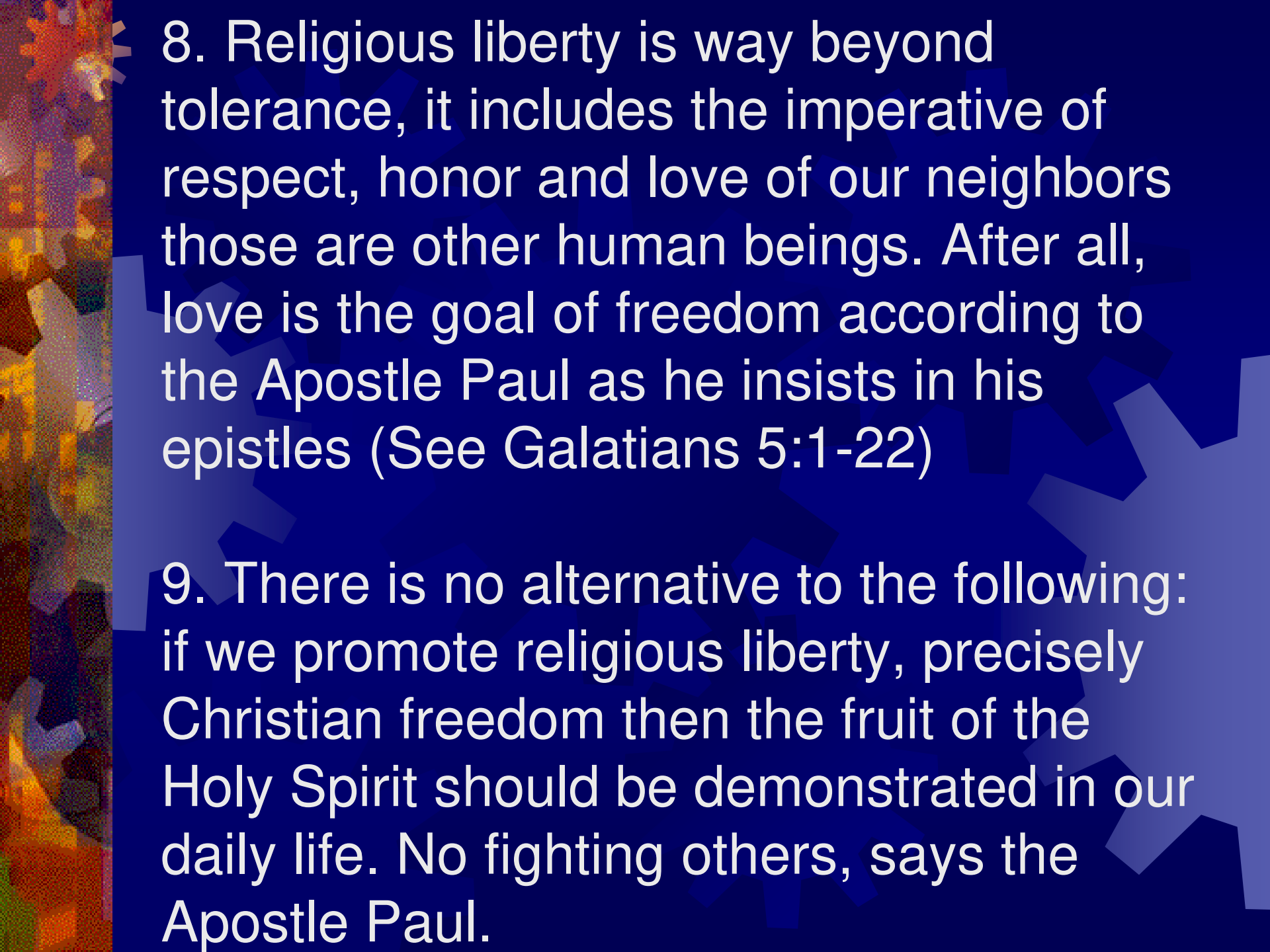
5. Human conscience is sacred. It must not be violated by anyone. It is sacrilegious to constrain or pressure people to do something against the dictates of their conscience.

6. To truthfully embrace religious liberty is to be a peace maker, a permanent agent of peace. No compulsion in matters of belief.

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★ To embrace religious freedom is to renounce all forms of violence, all forms of domination of other human beings. (This will take a personal commitment to complete reliance on God and let God be God. Only God is wise, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. Humans sometimes fall into the illusion or delusion of being great.

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- ★ Freedom of conscience which is mindfulness of the importance of every human being works as a deterrent to diminishing other people's dignity and deserved prerogative to be respectful, just by virtue of being human.

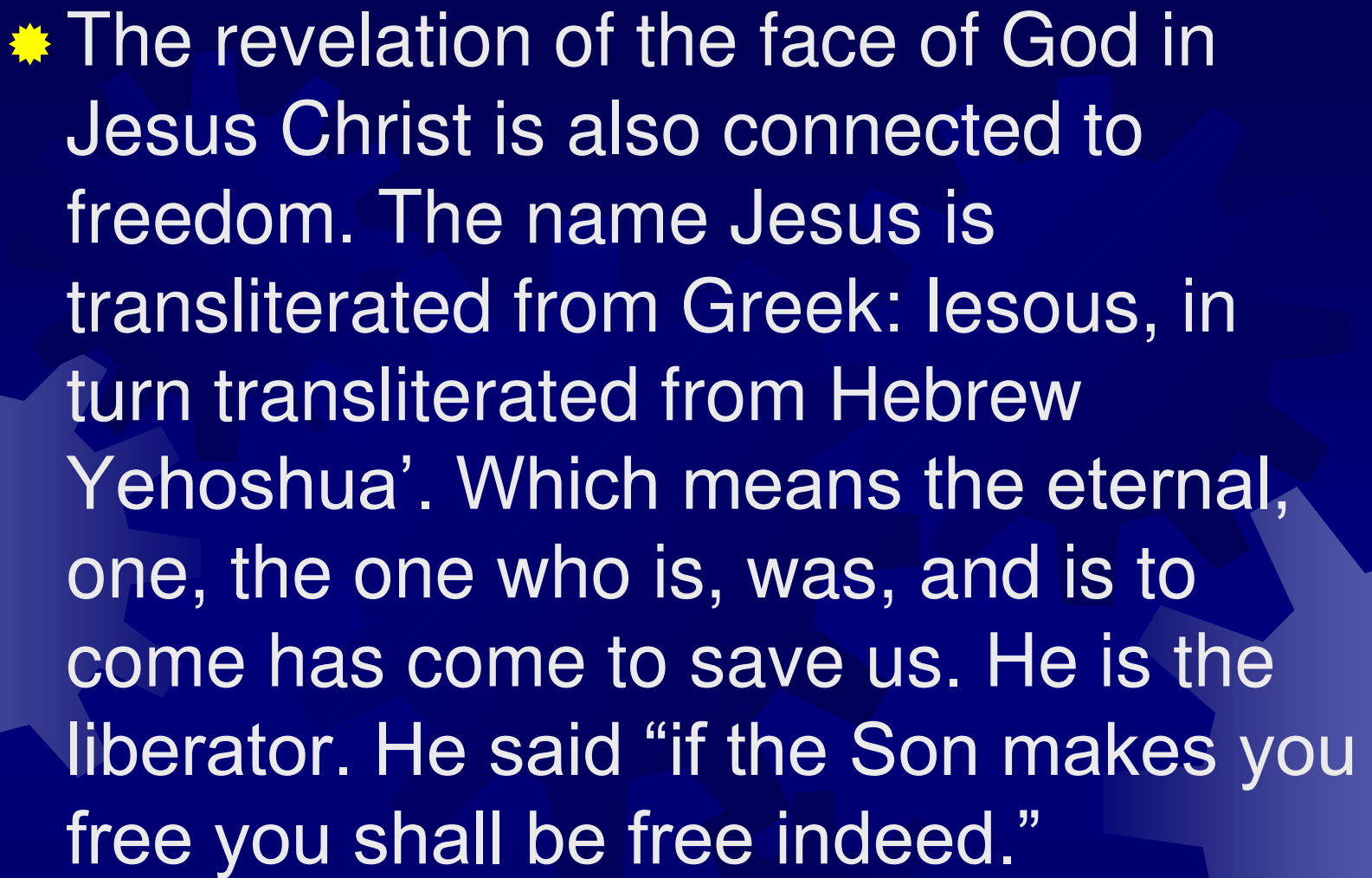


8. Religious liberty is way beyond tolerance, it includes the imperative of respect, honor and love of our neighbors those are other human beings. After all, love is the goal of freedom according to the Apostle Paul as he insists in his epistles (See Galatians 5:1-22)

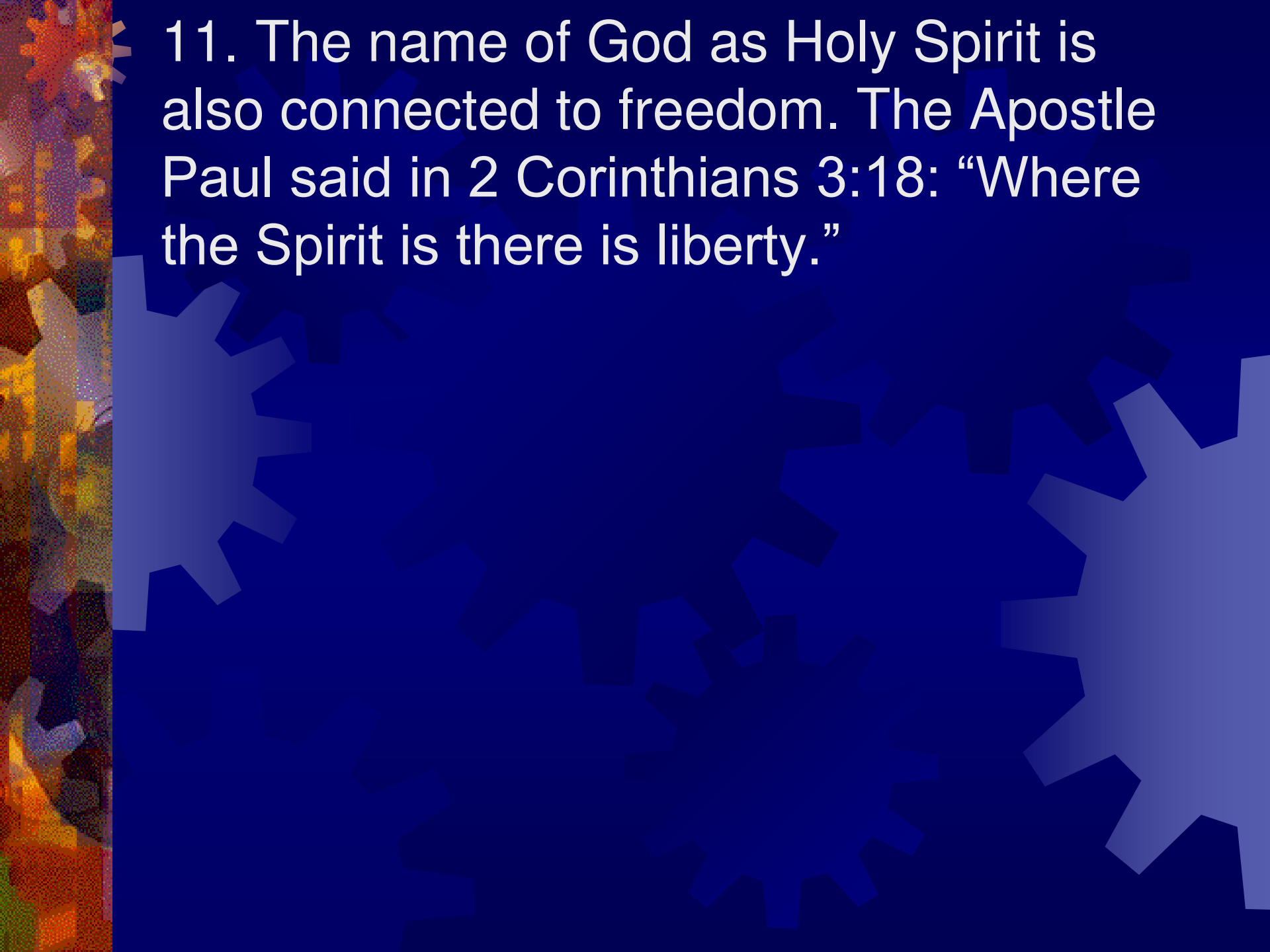
9. There is no alternative to the following: if we promote religious liberty, precisely Christian freedom then the fruit of the Holy Spirit should be demonstrated in our daily life. No fighting others, says the Apostle Paul.

10. The core of my presentation was purposed to show that what motivated IRLA advocates of religious liberty finds its foundation in God. The name of God is connected to freedom. Yahweh. The one who is, the everlasting one, the eternal one, the one dependent on nothing external to God God-self.

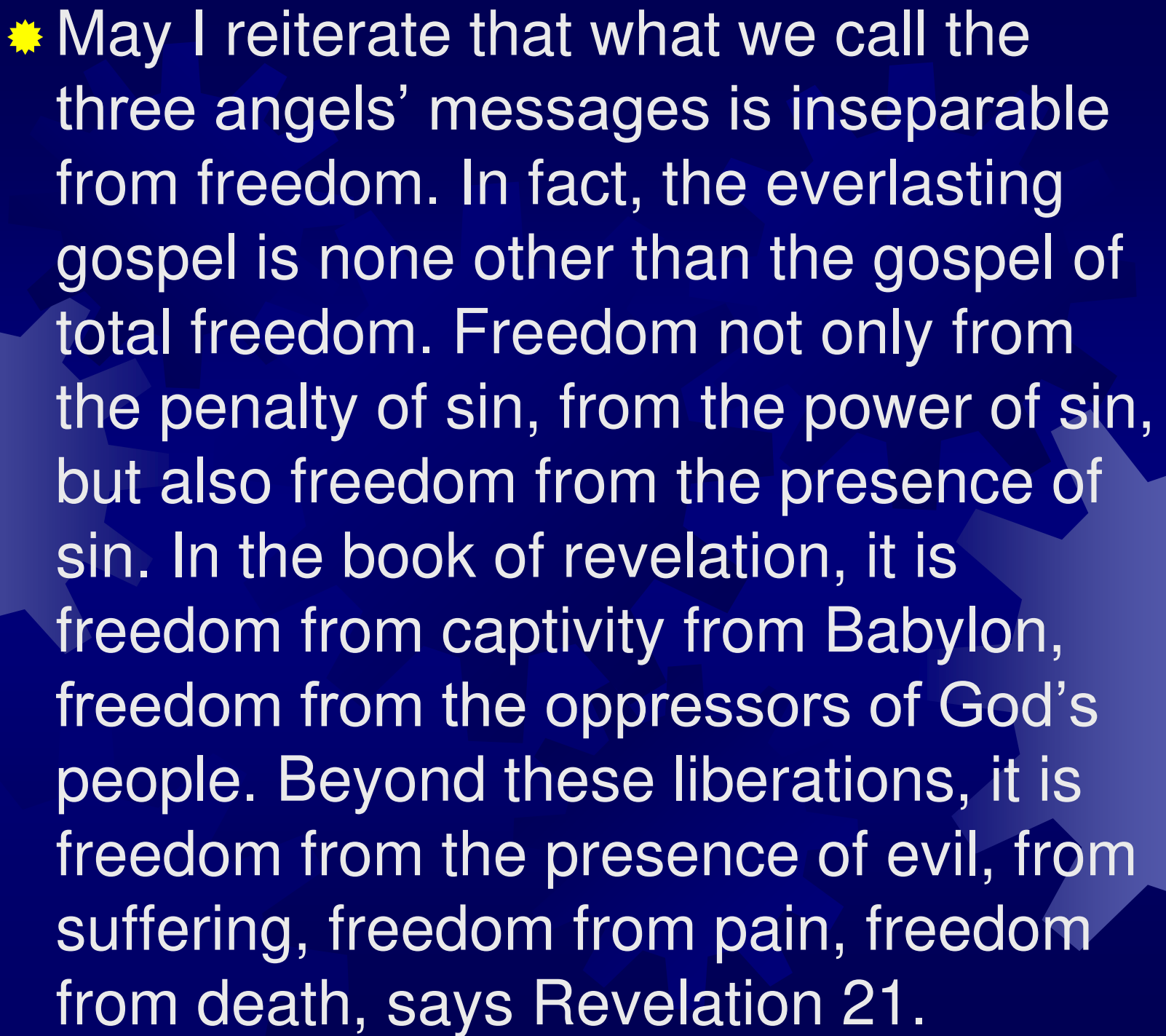




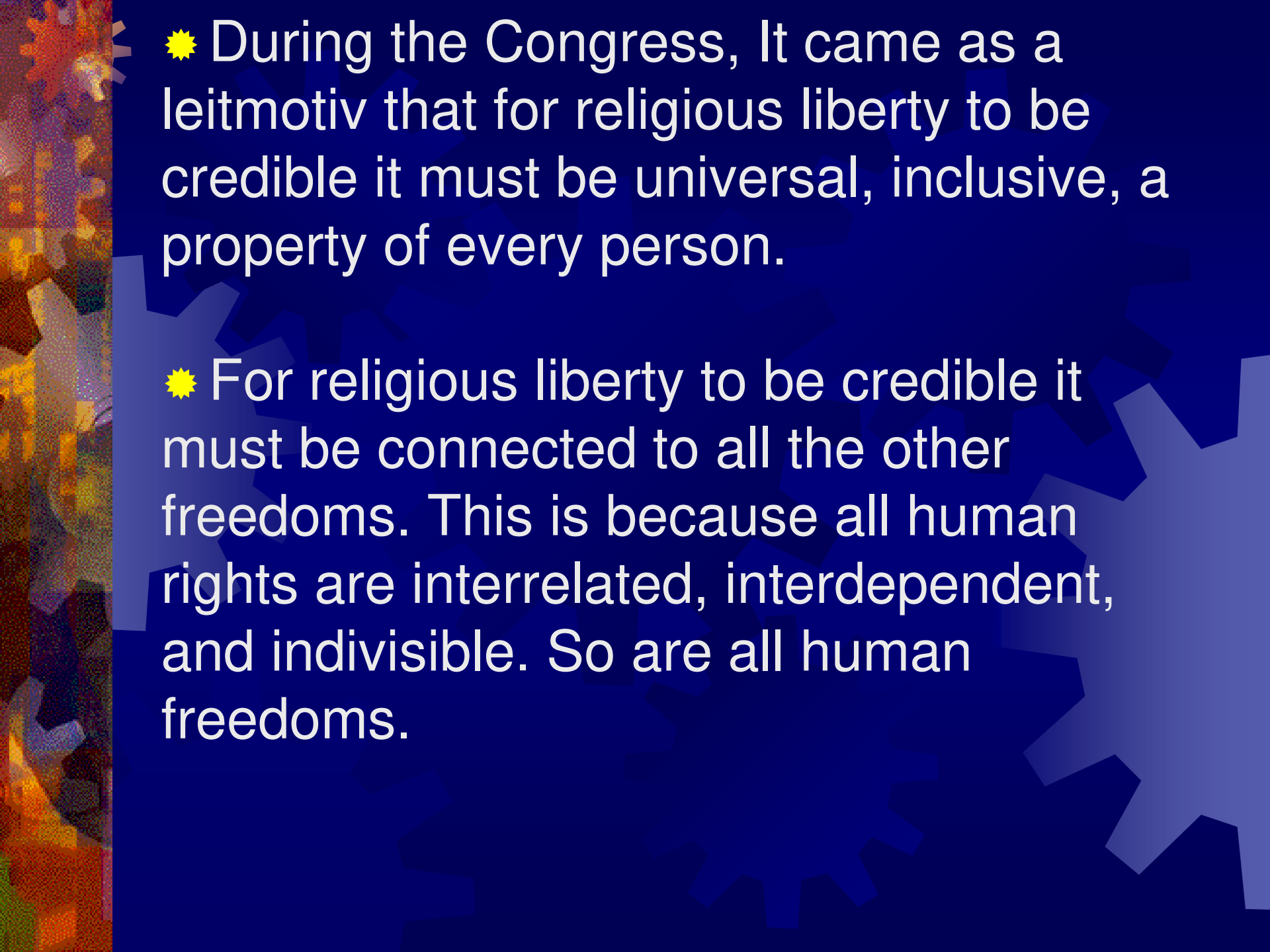
✦ The revelation of the face of God in Jesus Christ is also connected to freedom. The name Jesus is transliterated from Greek: Iesous, in turn transliterated from Hebrew Yehoshua'. Which means the eternal, one, the one who is, was, and is to come has come to save us. He is the liberator. He said "if the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed."



11. The name of God as Holy Spirit is also connected to freedom. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “Where the Spirit is there is liberty.”


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★ May I reiterate that what we call the three angels' messages is inseparable from freedom. In fact, the everlasting gospel is none other than the gospel of total freedom. Freedom not only from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, but also freedom from the presence of sin. In the book of revelation, it is freedom from captivity from Babylon, freedom from the oppressors of God's people. Beyond these liberations, it is freedom from the presence of evil, from suffering, freedom from pain, freedom from death, says Revelation 21.



✱ During the Congress, It came as a leitmotiv that for religious liberty to be credible it must be universal, inclusive, a property of every person.

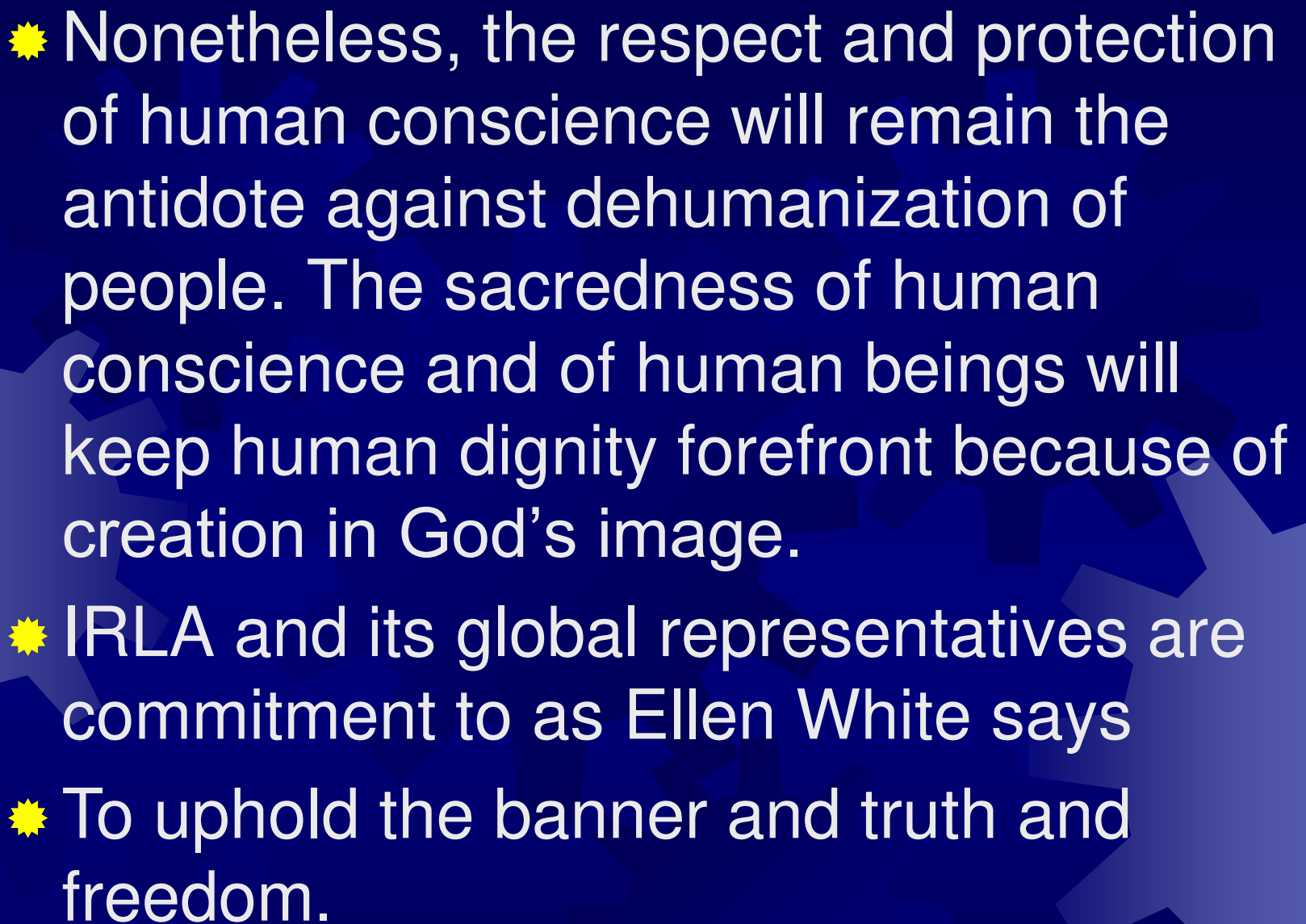
✱ For religious liberty to be credible it must be connected to all the other freedoms. This is because all human rights are interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible. So are all human freedoms.

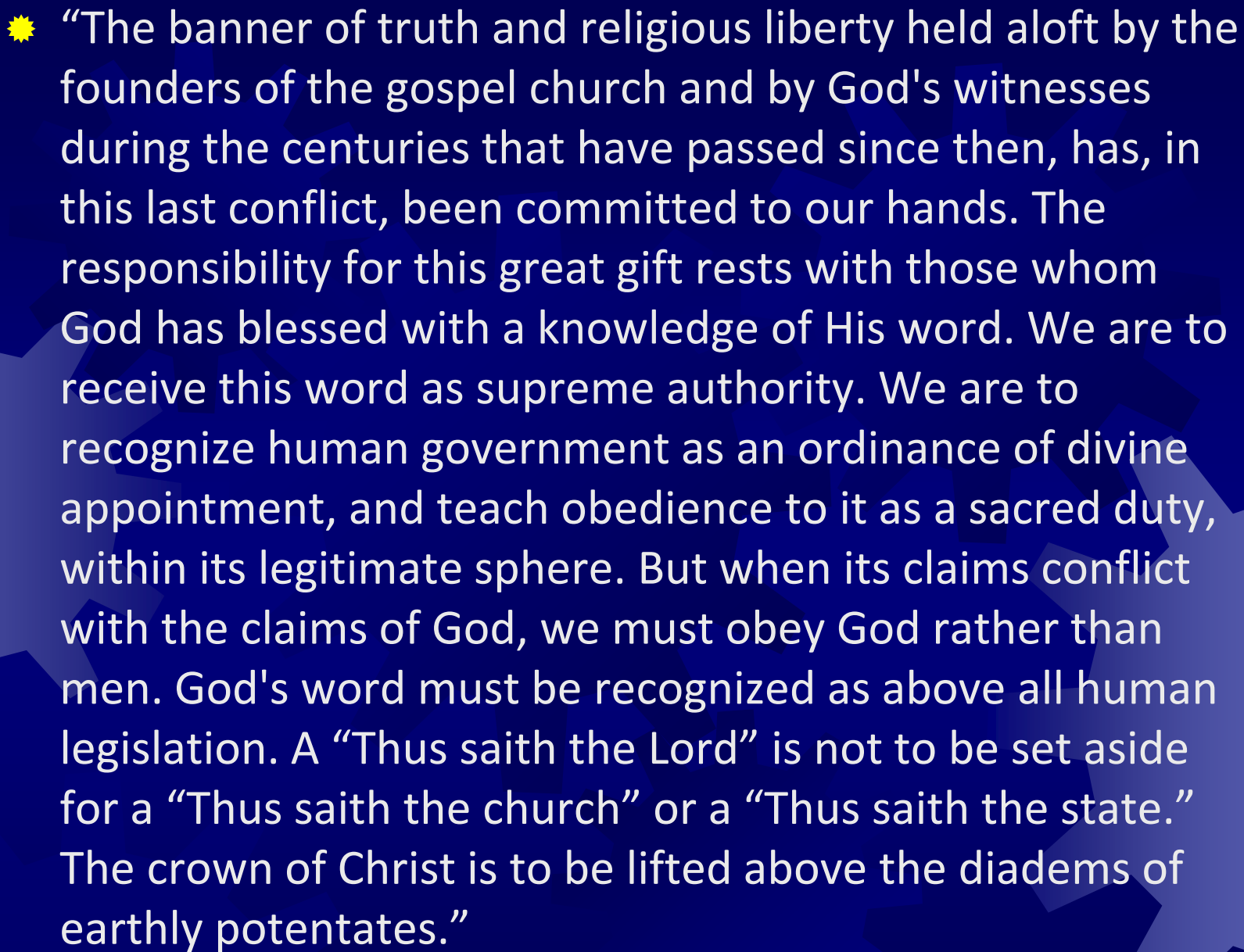


✦ Freedom will ultimately materialize when Jesus the savior comes. Before then God's archenemy and his allies may even oppress and kill some of the saints. But Jesus said that our deliverance approaches when we see signs of the times.



☀ Meanwhile, we have been reminded that the future of religious liberty intersects with emerging technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) and quantum computing. The latter signals a new era in humanity's interactions with increasingly complex decisions.

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- ✦ Nonetheless, the respect and protection of human conscience will remain the antidote against dehumanization of people. The sacredness of human conscience and of human beings will keep human dignity forefront because of creation in God's image.
 - ✦ IRLA and its global representatives are committed to as Ellen White says
 - ✦ To uphold the banner and truth and freedom.

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☀ “The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God's witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His word. We are to receive this word as supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God's word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A “Thus saith the Lord” is not to be set aside for a “Thus saith the church” or a “Thus saith the state.” The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.”

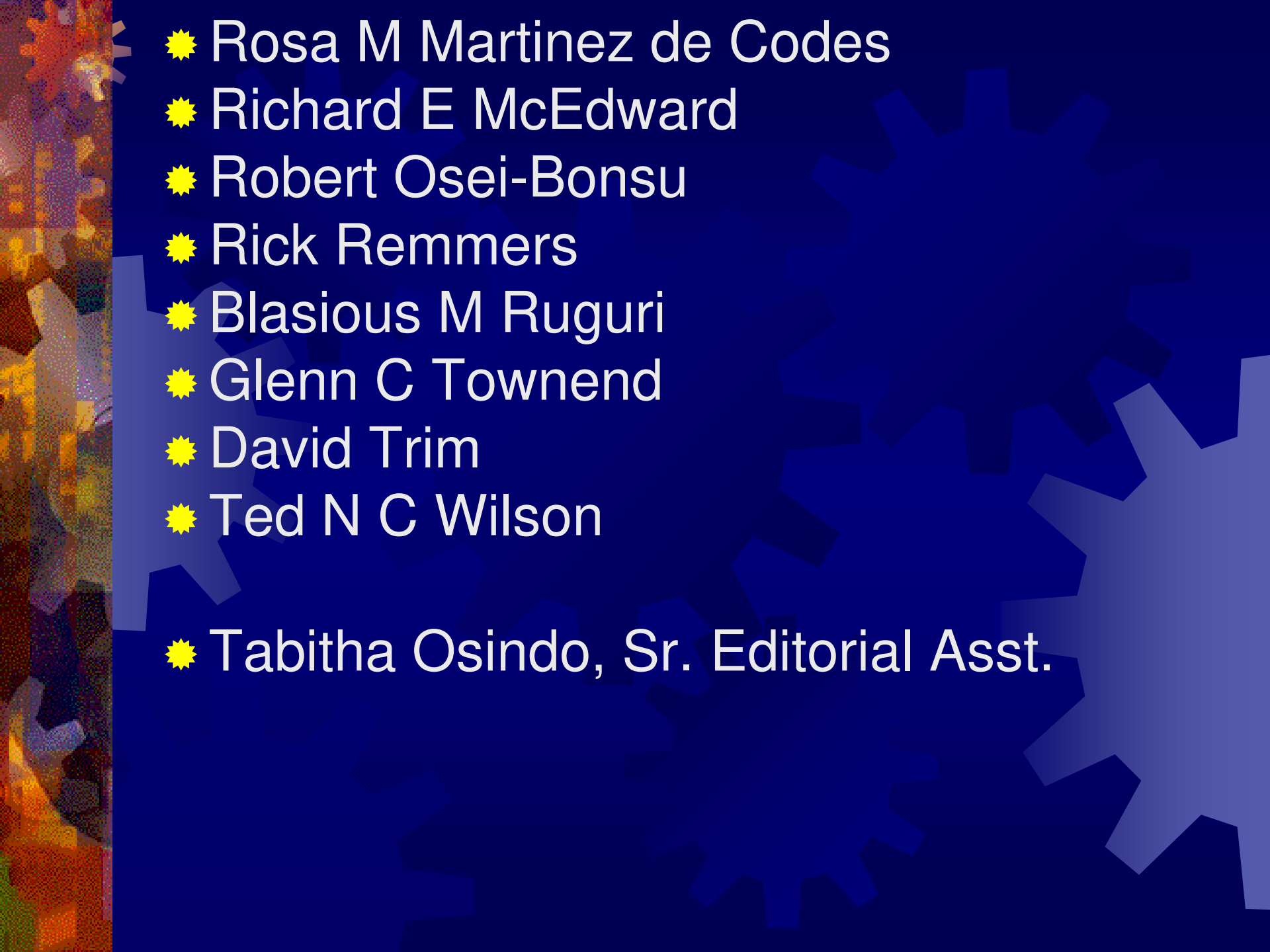
Ellen G. White



IRLA Board members

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- ✦ John R Nay (Ch)
 - ✦ Ganoune H Diop (Sec)
 - ✦ Nelu Burcea (Asst Sec)
 - ✦ William M Knott (Asst Sec)
 - ✦ George O Egwakhe (Tre)
 - ✦ Todd R McFarland (Legal Advisor)
 - ✦ Tabitha Osindo (Rec Sec)
 - ✦ Harrington S Akombwa
 - ✦ Audrey E Andersson
 - ✦ Stanley E Arco
 - ✦ Mario A Brito
 - ✦ G Alexander Bryant
 - ✦ Barry W Bussey
 - ✦ Roger O Caderma
 - ✦ Williams S Costa Jr

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- ✦ Paul H Douglas
 - ✦ Karnik Doukmetzian
 - ✦ Daniel Duda
 - ✦ W Cole Durham Jr
 - ✦ Elie Henry
 - ✦ Eugene Hsu
 - ✦ Orlan Johnson
 - ✦ Mikhail F Kaminskiy
 - ✦ Yo Han Kim
 - ✦ Erton C Kohler
 - ✦ Anatoly Krasikov
 - ✦ Bettina Krause
 - ✦ Ezras Lakra

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- ✦ Rosa M Martinez de Codes
 - ✦ Richard E McEdward
 - ✦ Robert Osei-Bonsu
 - ✦ Rick Remmers
 - ✦ Blasious M Ruguri
 - ✦ Glenn C Townend
 - ✦ David Trim
 - ✦ Ted N C Wilson

 - ✦ Tabitha Osindo, Sr. Editorial Asst.