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### A Restored Identity?

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<sup>13</sup>The Pharisees challenged him, “Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.”

<sup>14</sup>Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. <sup>15</sup>You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. <sup>16</sup>But if I do judge, my decisions are true, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. <sup>17</sup>In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. <sup>18</sup>I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.”

<sup>19</sup>Then they asked him, “Where is your father?”

“You do not know me or my Father,” Jesus replied. “If you knew me, you would know my Father also.”

<sup>20</sup>He spoke these words while teaching in the temple courts near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his hour had not yet come. (NIV)

These assertions of Jesus ring with a certain divine, sanctified authority He has also given to His disciples then and now (Luke 9:1–2 & 10:19–20). Thus, as an Adventist by both biblical conviction and personal choice, I invite readers’ indulgence as I reflect on this passage and ask: What if the Adventist Church, based on our perception of who we are as a Bible believing, gospel preaching denomination, like Jesus proclaimed “I am the Light of the world; she or he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life?” Would we be believed or ignored as seems to be our current condition? What if this same denomination had previously proclaimed (as in John 6:35), “I am the bread of life; she or he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and she or he who believes in Me shall not thirst?” Would that make a difference in your response? And say we were heard on many occasions preaching that “If anyone is thirsty, let him or her come unto Me and drink. She or he who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his/her innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’” On those words alone, would you conclude either this is deluded religion or this is a God-called, spiritually endowed church that has consistently demonstrated a deserving lifestyle, compassion and response to systemic social, racial and religious abuse in human flesh? Jesus could make such bold claims because He lived a life that exemplified His claims!

In search of an authentic response to these many aforementioned questions which are demanding answers as the nation and some parts of our denomination seem to be teetering on the edge of internal division and ultimate external extinction in perception and power, I have come across the following in an article about Adventist Identity.<sup>1</sup> There, Jacques Doukhan, my former professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis noted:

1 Jacques B. Doukhan, “The Tension of Seventh-day Adventist Identity: An Existential and Eschatological Perspective,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 26/1 (2015) 29–37.

2 George R. Knight, “The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism,” *Review & Herald Publishing Association*, Hagerstown, MD. (2008).

Our name is made of a tension between two irreconcilable worlds. This tension hits us already on a primary level: Our name is made of two opposite entities. The phrase “seventh day” is made of a number “7,” which puts us immediately in the concrete realm of figures, the tangible reality of the accountant. It is also made of the word “day” which propels us into time, into our present life. Through this phrase we are precisely connected to the time of the week and to the time of history. Through this phrase we are confronted with existence and we belong to the course of history.

He also asserts that:

The word “Adventist,” on the other hand, is an abstract word whose meaning is not clear immediately. It is a word which is generally not translated in other languages. While we translate the phrase “seventh day” in other languages we normally leave the word “Adventist” intact and loaded with mysterious and intriguing meaning. While the phrase “seventh day” connects us with earthly existence and human history the word “Adventist” takes us to the future of history, what comes after human history and belongs to the prophetic domain, pointing to the heavenly order. While the phrase “seventh day” confronts us with the present reality of the earthly city and makes us breathe with the rhythm of time “under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1), the word “Adventist” takes us away from here and makes us dream and pray and hope for the coming of the kingdom of heaven, and strengthens in our heart the sense of “eternity” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

George R. Knight, a prolific author and also my former professor, wrote that “Part of the problem is that Adventism has to a large extent lost the apocalyptic foundation of its message.” He explains this by saying, “When a church becomes politically correct in all its claims and when it loses a proper amount of sanctified arrogance regarding its message and mission, its managers to neuter itself, even if it continues to brag about its potency.”<sup>2</sup>

Based on what I saw and experienced in the protest march in Berrien Springs, in which Adventists energetically participated, I am not only reinvigorated in my belief that our “sanctified arrogance” is being restored, but I’m proud to belong to a church, if only at the local level, that stands for what is right, demonstrates against evil which is hurting the least of these our brothers and sisters and lives, not just preaches or teaches the Word, even if the heavens fall.



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