

Adventist Identity Education

An Introductory Study in Adventist Personal Significance

Target Groups: Adults and Senior Youth

June/July 2022

Level One

“Passing the torch of faith to the next generation is a continuous challenge for parents. The fear of the present generation is always that the next generation may not cherish the values that they themselves have found important (Dudley, 1986). Wieting (as cited by Dudley, 1986) explains this concern: *“If a society is to continue its existence beyond one generation, the members must transmit what they consider to be necessary knowledge and values. The continuity of a social system by definition requires transmission between generations.”* Ricardo Biscaro, “The Relationship between Student Religiosity, Integration of Faith and Learning, and Selected Congregational and Family Factors” (2006:9.7) (Emphasis supplied)

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1. Introduction

A positive identity consciousness is foundational to meaningful and productive life. It lies at the bedrock of redemptive life and mission in and for this life and for the future life. *Further, for Christians such identity, self-awareness, and purposeful living become redemptive when they are shaped from a countercultural biblical basis and knowledge system.*

Many programmes of human development often limit their work and effect on the provision of theoretical knowledge with limited focus on transformation. They often leave the arenas of self-awareness, identity formation and destiny design to the vagaries of human behaviour outside of a model that gives recognition to man's divine creation and purpose in history. Consequently, these programmes do not provide humanity with models for redemptive living and service. They lack a post-human vision of life.

The programme outlined here commits its goals and processes to goal-driven living and redemptive mission in a world that has gone AWOL (away without official leave) from God. The goal is the production of a community of persons who will be dependable models of genuine Adventist spirituality and witness.

2. Methodology

The methodology of this programme is as follows:

2.1 direct instruction (propositional, declarative and affirmative)

2.2 class activity (individual and group-based)

2.3. oral/scripted personal reflections.

2.4 group reports

2.5 formulations of personal visions

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3. Textual and Electronic Resources

- 3.1 The Christian Bible
- 3.2 Selected themes from Ellen White texts
- 3.3 Other accessory academic texts and reports
- 3.4 Reality events

Notes

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UNIT 1

THE NECESSITY AND SIGNIFICANCE OF IDENTITY EDUCATION

The common question, “Who are you?” is one of the most popular but significant subjects in human life and relations. The question sounds simple but is laden with deep and broad moral and socio-cultural significance for personal and communal identity and purpose.

The question may be asked: “Why should we study the subject “Identity”?”

- 1 We live in a world in which some human systems have undermined the essence and value of human identity. Colonisation in parts of the world and the massification of things have often led to the treatment of persons as non-entities, objects for domination and manipulation. Some in the political world even call citizens “the people out there,” or “the masses of our people,” as though we are things to be manipulated, owned, and dictated to.
- 2 Increasingly, in our time, human life is losing its value in the growing massification of “things” for consumption and use. This massification of human beings has also undermined what Ellen White calls “individuality” - the power to think and -to do.” (*Education*, 1903, 1952:17).
3. Individuality is a human reality that is intricately interwoven with creativity and self-articulation. One’s individuality also feeds into identity formation and personal significance. Ellen Whites speaks strongly on this human quality on her writings on education. She argues that it must be nurtured and strengthened.

4. In a world that has become increasingly coercive and intolerant of difference, God calls on us to be distinct, focused, and purposeful. The biographies of biblical martyrs and many other heroic historical figures in the world provide us with models of committed and redemptive living. In these men and women individuality has been a marked reality.

The Challenge of the Uniqueness of Adventism

In his book, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*, Knight (2008) expresses the following:

- *“People are looking for a church that stands over against culture, one that is arrogant enough to believe that there is truth and error, and that it has the truth.”* (p. 18).

Knight quotes Fink and Stark (1992), as saying,

“People tend to value religion on the basis of how costly it is to belong – the more one sacrifices in order to be in good standing, the more valuable the religion.” (Italics supplied p.238).

Elsewhere Knight says, “Gospel evangelism is to get people maladjusted to a culture that stands judged by the cross and found wanting; maladjusted to a culture that calls violence and illicit sex as entertainment; maladjusted to a culture that pays tens of millions to ballplayers but puts elementary teachers on a starvation wage.” (p.20).

Reflections and Comments

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UNIT 2

IDENTITY: “WHO ARE YOU?”

In his book, *Free at Last*, celebrated Adventist speaker, preacher, evangelist and writer, late Dr Earl E Cleveland, writes,

“During the dark days of slavery, an African stood proudly erect while others bent over their backs. He was lashed repeatedly but refused to bend. Though cursed and threatened, he refused to yield. When he was asked why he answered, “**I am the son of a chief.**” Cleveland then continues, “*The knowledge of his background gave him a sense of identity and security. This had a definite bearing on his behavior.*” (1970: 15, 17), Emphasis supplied).

Cleveland continues, “*Sociologists tell us that much of the root cause of social misbehavior is traceable to broken homes and lack of pride in one’s origins.*” (p. 17)

Think of children and youth in African families in South Africa today.

Positive identity consciousness is a basic ingredient of correct knowledge, self-affirmation and pride in one’s heritage. This is the reason why knowledge of one’s personal and group history is essential.

Today we live in a world that promotes mass thought and mass identity. Personal significance and peculiarity are seen as odd and antisocial. People have submerged their singularity of existence. It has become “sinful” not to be “cool”. This is the reason why youth, in large numbers, represent collectivity and aggregations. Singularity has become a taboo, an oddity.

Consider the questions,

1. What happens when people lose identity?
2. How has identity dilution or loss affected African people in this country or continent?

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Reflections and Notes

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UNIT 3

IDENTITY: Definitions and Appropriations

WEBSTER'S THIRD New International Dictionary (1981) defines identity in the following terms:

a. sameness of essential or generic character in different examples or instances: the limit approached by increasing similarity. b. sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing; 2. unity and persistence of personality; unity or individual comprehensiveness of a life or character (p. 1123),

The **CONCISE OXFORD DICTIONARY** (1992) states

1a the quality of being a specific person or thing; b. individuality, personality; the state of being the same in substance and nature, qualities etc.; absolute sameness (p. 585).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How do these definitions of identity apply in the Christian life?
2. How would you define Christian identity?
3. How would you define an Adventist identity?

Varieties of Identity

1. Personal identity

2. Family identity

3. Social identity

4. Cultural identity

5. Group / Organisational identity

6. Religious identity

7. Political identity

8. Ethnic and racial identity

9. Gender identity

10. Professional identity

Application

- List Bible references to incidents where people's identity was at stake.
- Discuss briefly how their identity was threatened.

Part Two

Biblical Identity Studies

The Bible is abuzz with persons who have been singular examples of positive identity education and resilience. The three famous Hebrew youths who stood inside a fire while many surrendered their consciences to a lifeless dead image created under the instructions of a despotic pagan king, are ready examples of what it means to know who you are and what you stand for in life. **Imagine standing inside a flame that has been heated seven times and escaped with no smell of fire or smoke.** Incidentally, events of this kind will loom large in the immediate future of this world.

Do you recall young Joseph who, while as a captive, ran away from a beautiful queen of an Egyptian monarch? Many today would have graciously relished the rare opportunity to fall into the arms of a gorgeous queen. In the context of today's situational ethics and morality, such an act would be grossly odd and unexpected.

- The common streetwise theory among many contemporary men, even in the Christian community, is simply this: *Uma eziletha, mthathe!* At that moment the devil and consequences disappear. They emerge after the act.

In this cohort the participant will provide the instructor with biographical narratives of two Bible characters who stand out as models of righteousness during a challenging personal crisis. The choices are yours. **[Oral comments]**

1. Joseph in Egypt
2. Daniel in Babylon
3. The Three Hebrew boys
4. Queen Esther
5. Queen Vashti
6. Peter
7. Paul

CONCLUSION

**How has this short study
benefited you, personally?**

END