

Identity

Who Am I?

Ayon L. Baxter Sr.

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Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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Preface

It has been the firm belief of most Christians, philosophers, and even other non-Christian religions that good is in every seemingly damning situation you may find yourself in. The philosophical ideology is that every obstacle one may encounter in life carries with it an opportunity to gain something positive. In Christianity, this is accepted entirely on the basis that God is good and is always working in these challenging circumstances and situations to bring about results that will benefit His trusting people who love Him: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28, American King James Version (AKJV)).

However, sometimes these walls of circumstances are so opaque that it is impossible to see any little beam of positive light seeping through. In circumstances like these, faith is the only path for the child of God.

Of these types of trials, divorce is usually high on the list; admittedly, some divorces seem to go through quite easily. This is especially true when both parties in the union did not take their commitment seriously—easy come, easy go—and find it “no big deal” to drop it, move on, and start afresh. On the other hand, in general, divorce is an awful

experience, and it is no wonder that God said that He hates the “putting away” (Mal. 2:16). It brings painful hurt, separation of innocent loved ones such as children, damage to self-worth, and rejection. But if you think that is bad enough, try adding losing a sense of who you are to the list.

Losing your sense of identity after experiencing a scathing divorce only adds another opaque layer to the thick wall of no positive prospects—nothing good to gain from this experience. This was my personal experience until I began to pay attention to this intriguing yet “loyal” question: Who am I—really? In other words, what makes me *me*? In any case, who has the right to determine who I am? Is identity something I can choose? Who is this person I have become?

If I could just find the answers to these questions, then I could see some light piercing through the opacity of that thick wall of my divorce. Maybe there is something positive to gain from this experience after all.

Having experienced that empty feeling of being an unidentified being, these are the thoughts and questions pondered that have prompted me to think of, search for, and research real answers. After combing through all the resources that were available, the answers were found in one place. The spiritual principles found in the Word of God form the basis for the answers.

It is my intent to offer this book as a guide to the searching mind to discover its true, current, obscured identity and the option to acquire the bequest—true legacy—a new identity that is reserved especially for you (more on this later).

Like me, you may have been impacted negatively by life-changing experiences. It may not be the earth-shattering experience of a divorce or the loss of a loved one that brings depression and grief but the slippery slide of missed opportunities such as failure to continue your education or poor financial decisions. My prayer for you is that as you contemplate the questions raised here, you will find the solutions, as I have, to reclaim a positive identity.

Acknowledgments

God, the Father of all, and Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Saviour, Lord, and King, are acknowledged as my source of existence, life, love, knowledge, wisdom, daily provision, and sustenance. From the promptings of His Spirit—the Spirit of our Lord—and knowledge from His written Word came the inspiration to pen these pages. There should be no credit to me for any achievements or for the blessings anyone receives from reading this book, but to Him are all the honour and glory, which to Him is rightly due.

God has worked in manifold ways to bring about this book. He has used many people, sometimes in some strange ways, to bring this about—too many to be contained herein—for which I am very grateful. However, I want to recognize and express my appreciation and gratitude to some very special people, who willingly and eagerly made priceless contributions to this project.

To my daughter, Jeanique, by helping to find beta readers and for the encouragement you gave, you have contributed to the success of this book—my heart of tender love and gratitude to you always.

To my friend, Chyrial Penn, who has given more than just her unbiased and frank evaluation of the manuscript—and unending friendly encouragement—to you an ever-flowing spring of gratitude and love.

To my friend, brother, pastor, and mentor in Christ, David Clayton, who is always deeply engaged in the activities of Restoration Ministries yet sacrificed time out of his busy schedule to scrutinize the manuscript carefully, giving his professional and spiritual recommendations and encouragement—to him is owed an abundance of love and gratitude.

To my beta readers, you have enriched this edition to its core with your invaluable contributions in the forms of evaluative feedback and positive reinforcements—thank you abundantly.

To my friends and co-workers at my nine-to-five-times-five job, thanks for your support and participation in my surveys and discussions. To my friends at the Grand Cayman Toastmasters (club 2686), who have continually encouraged and supported me, engaged me in conversation about identity and other related branches of psychology, and answered my one-to-one impromptu questions, a heartfelt, humongous thank-you.

To my family members, who are always with me and for me in the rough seas of my life—when the enemy struck his blow and it seemed this ship would go under, you were with me; when lost in the darkness of the storm, some of you kept calling my name in your prayers and kept calling, reaching out to give hope and unswerving support. Your godly love and patience through those trying periods have helped tremendously—an ocean of love and gratitude to you.

Introduction

After fifteen years of trying my best to be the man, husband, and father I should be, my marriage came to a painful end. For the most part of those fifteen years, I was constantly reminded of all my imperfections, my past failures and mistakes, and of the man, husband, and father I should have been but failed to be. As the hardened blade of decision sliced through the last fibres of the matrimonial cords that held a relationship gripped and bound by the perseverance of this man's endeavours to become a person who would be respected, accepted, and loved, the mirage that so clearly identified that perfect man slowly and painfully revealed its illusive face.

By the time we neared the end of our fifteen years of marriage, I had adjusted so much that she could hardly find a fault in me. With her decision set in stone, I had to deal with the inevitable loss of everything, including who I was, had become, and was trying desperately to be.

After accepting the pain, hardship, and reality of my new status—divorced—I suddenly awoke from my stupor to realise I did not know who I now was. “Who am I?” I asked myself repeatedly. “Who have I become? Who is this person?” Although I had tried so hard to become—and came

very close to being—that good and perfect husband, I did not know who that person was supposed to be or who I now was. I felt like I was lost in outer space, a being that was to be tagged with one label or the other but could wear neither.

I truly was not sure who I was and realised I was lost in an identity maze; I sensed an exigency that I had to do something before the crisis became deleterious. The safest path I could think of taking was the little light I saw in the tunnel that led back to the point where I had left off being my old self to become that imaginary perfect person—back to my default identity. Yet questions remained about this old identity.

It was from that juncture and with that experience that I began to ponder the subject of what identity really is—what makes me *me*? The perpetual questions in my mind through all my ponderings about my identity that fuelled my search were, “Who am I really? What is my default identity?” I wanted to know—I *had* to know—who I really was so that I would *never* again be lost or experience that confused feeling of being a nonexistent being.

Chapter 1

Identity

Who am I? And who are you? In what ways are we the same, and in what ways are we different? What links us together, and what separates us to be different, unique individuals? What makes me *me*? What is my identity and purpose in life? Who decides? Is it within my powers and rights to decide who I am?

Have you ever stopped and asked yourself any of these questions? It is highly likely that you have. If you have, you are among many who are searching for real answers to the age-old question, “Who am I?” You might have searched your thoughts thoroughly for answers and then contemplated deeply about the ideas that came to your mind; maybe you might not have even thought about it to this level. However, if you have had this experience at any level, it is quite likely that you will find more questions popping up, leading to multiples of questions—recurring decimals of sub-questions divided by more questions—until you are lost in a deep jungle of questions.

Are you still here?

You may be surprised, but do not despair or be dismayed. If there is any consolation in this, you are not alone.

Like me and many other people, you may have been impacted negatively by various life-changing experiences that have affected your views on your identity—experiences such as skill loss due to physical disability, job loss, significant financial loss or gain, social exile, a broken marriage like the one I had, or the death of a close friend, relative, or loved one.

The question is, seriously, what do these situations have to do with who we really are? Quite a lot, in fact, but not in the ways we normally see them or the perspectives from which people normally view them. The answer to that question holds the key to understanding the relationship between our identities and the way we are affected by these life-changing situations.

In the anthropological history of earth, people have been identified by many factors that have all been construed in direct relation to their influencers in varied ways, either by one's self or by the influence of others or situations. Factors such as social status, ethnicity, race, slavery, wealth, physical and mental abilities, poverty, effects of a disaster and casualty of wars, caste, class, and religion have all been used as the basis for construing and determining identity. Therefore, when these areas of our beings are affected one

way or the other, our construed perceptions of identity are also affected simultaneously.

Nevertheless, knowing and understanding how these factors affect and influence our construed concepts of identity have not in the least given any satisfying answer to the myriad questions leading from this one crucial question in the searching minds of individuals throughout the history of humanity. The silence or lack of satisfactory answers to this insatiate question seems to bring about a famine of identity today more than it has in any segment of history where you may look. Nevertheless, such a famine has always been; there is an ongoing cry for an answer to this core question of, “Who am I?”

The effects caused by a misplaced or unrecognized identity are related to all sorts of psychological and social problems such as low self-worth, confusion and uncertainty of realities, unassertiveness, low ambition and no zest for life, lack of motivation, and even depression.

Identity, or the way people see themselves, affects mental, psychological, social, and spiritual development, which manifests itself in people’s mental, physical, social, and spiritual behaviours. Hence, it is of paramount importance that we find realistic and authentic answers that

will satisfy these multifarious questions by answering one question—what is real identity within humanity?

Everything in life starts with the spiritual and then emanates and finally works its way to develop and manifest in physical reality. Spiritual reality is the genesis of physical reality. In the beginning, God thought of a world, and then through the power of His Spirit He spoke His thoughts into being (Gen. 1:1, Ps. 90:2). In all this matter of life, from the genesis to the regeneration to the degeneration and to the redemption of humanity, what is most important is to know that the spiritual leads the physical regardless of how inconspicuous or obscure this may seem.

Therefore, the focus on identity should be considered in the same order. Knowing and understanding your spiritual identity is the first place to look for a clear path to the understanding of your identity in its entirety—in all its facets—and who you really should be or are becoming. Understanding the spiritual identity, therefore, sets the basis for understanding one's identity in its entirety.

What Is It?

The set of characteristics that somebody recognizes as belonging uniquely to himself or herself and constituting his or her individual personality for life is essentially how the

Encarta Dictionary defines identity (Encarta, 2007). That is a pretty neat way to define it. Identity defined as the sum of essential attributes or characteristics that uniquely define and set one apart from the rest may be a quieting answer to the average person who has never been in a situation that squeezes out of the soul that searching question of, “Who am I?” This does not console the soul that is thinking deeply, whose searching mind will not be satisfied with such superficial answers, though aptly summarized, as he or she understands and relates from experiences the real need to find authentic identity.

Throughout the entire period of writing this book, I would frequently ask several persons at random to tell me who they think they are. “What do you consider your identity?” I would ask, impromptu. Seven out of ten of these people (in and out of my social circles) did not have a ready answer. Of this group, an average of five out of ten people had not even given a thought to their identities. Only about three out of ten had a structured answer to their perceived identities. Of these three out of ten people, about 80 percent saw their identities in the things that structure their lifestyles such as their names, family heritage, nationalities, job positions, possessions, marital status, spouses, houses, cars, social milieus and affiliations, wealth, education, and various

talents. These formed the basis of what they considered their identities.

The renowned psychologist Peter Weinreich defines identity as the totality of one's self-construal, in which how one construes oneself in the present expresses the continuity between how one construes oneself as one was in the past and how one construes oneself as one aspires to be in the future (Weinreich, P., 1986). I know that you, like me, may have found that a little challenging to follow or understand at first. I had to read it several times and analyze it bit by bit in sections before I grasped what he is saying. In my own words, his definition is that identity is how one sees and interprets oneself as it relates to one's present, which is an expression of the continuity from one's past to the way it relates to how one sees one's future. Every perspective—a continuum of the past, present, and future—is construed and subsumed in identity.

If summarized correctly in a simple way, it boils down to this: the world's popular view of identity is how a person sees, conceptualizes, construes, or feels about his or her self, inclusive of past, present, continuous, and future perspectives. Age, gender, religion, ethnicity, sociality, economics, race, and one's past, present, or future perspectives, regardless of whether these factors influence or

not, do not matter because the accepted norm for determining identity is how one esteems his or her self.

“It all boils down to how one perceives and believes one’s self to be.” Is this the truth? We can view truth from many perspectives, but open-mindedness and critical thinking are the 3-D lenses through which we can see it vividly and holistically. It is not about his, her, or your truth or anyone’s perception of truth, but it is about the truth. And the truth does not have clothes or company—it stands alone naked. Can you just identify yourself based on how you feel or how you think yourself to be? Is this really what identifies who you actually are? Sure. That is what we call construed identity. But is that who you really are?

Identity is often confused with identification. While identification is often expressed as the process by which one is identified or the way one portrays identity, it is also perceived and accepted as the processed. This is inclusive of the things that are believed to be part of the process—the end results of that which is identified, the proof of identity. Another form of identification is the act of identifying with someone or something, a strong feeling of affinity with someone or a group of persons.

In other words, identification is also showing, displaying, or being the proof of who we say and think we

are; it is the purporting of the evidence of that which one construes oneself to be, irrespective of whether it is true or false. It may be subjectively true, or it may be false, a mental adaptation of one's admiration, self-esteem, or social affinity. On the other hand, true identity in the basest form is that you are who you really are; you are who you have become, and you are becoming who you really are. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Ophelia said, "Lord we know what we are, but know not what we may be" The truth is that, generally speaking, we do not know what we really are; therefore, we do not know what we may be. What Shakespeare did not realize then, it seems, is that left alone, we all become more of whom we really are.

This may seem confusing on the surface, but if you think about it carefully, you will grasp the understanding that will help you to see that your real identity is not entirely a matter of the choices you make or what you think of yourself. On the contrary, the choices you make are an outworking of something that exists deep in your genesis—what you are made of. It has nothing to do with the place where you were born, the race you descended from, your personal possessions, or your present social status. Not to negate the impact that these factors may or may not have on the way one construes one's identity, but we are not talking about

construed identity here now; we are investigating one's true, none construed identity.

We can view truth from many perspectives, but open-mindedness and critical thinking are the 3-D lenses through which we can see it vividly and holistically.

True identification is a process in which one's real identity is eminently emerging. Age; gender; religion; one's past, present, or future status; ethnicity; and/or socioeconomic affiliations do not necessarily determine it, although some of those could very well be part of the outworking of one's real identity, a display of the by-products of who you are. A true identification is a process of revealing one's real identity, the proof of what one is in personality, character, and nature. It is conversely true that a false identification is the display of a false identity construed, and a false identity will always invariably produce a false identification—the process or the product of the process.

In the philosophy of who we are in humanity, it is clear to see that as the spiritual leads the physical, so does real identity lead and authentic identification lag; otherwise, everything else is bogus.

In the next chapter, we will look at some of the ways people often construe their identities and the things they often construe to be their identities, why these are unreal, and what the reality of our identities is.

Chapter 2

The Real You

Natural Identity

The following, no matter how commonly they appear, must *not* be considered one's real identity:

- What or who anyone thinks he or she is
- What or who others think you are
- What or who anyone hopes or aspires to be naturally
- What or who one thinks he or she is based on what he or she was in the past and hopes to be in the future

One's real identity is, therefore, who and what you are now, spirit and body—your entire soul in essence. At this moment in time, the truth of one's real being is emanating, and that which is emanated is the essence of one's real identity. Character manifests the essence of authentic identity, whether it is false and ostentatious, a true and unpretentious representation of self, or represents itself through a false face, a concealed behaviour, or the most innocent attitude of openness.

All of the above tells the truth of what one is composed of in the naked character and ultimately points to who one really is. The falsehood one portrays is a

representation of an attribute in the character, and even if the true person is concealed by an act, the facts related to that character remain.

In trying to place the identity tag properly, one needs to determine correctly the true nature of who we are individually and even collectively. The most accurate source from which one can extrapolate to infer authentic identity, either for an animate or inanimate object, is the substances that comprise the object.

Why do we call a jar made from plastic a plastic jar? Because it is a container that is shaped in a certain way out of plastic. The things the jar contains or its functions do not determine what it is; it is the material that it is made from that is its unchanging identity. Yet someone may come along and call this jar a sugar jar because it contains sugar. How sweet! Would this construal be the right identity of the jar? “Yes,” you may say, “because it helps in communicating to someone information about the jar.” Would that really be true?

For many decades now, the local Caymanians have been calling the South American agoutis on the island Cayman rabbits, but they are still agoutis. Call a cat a dog, and you will still be able to communicate information to someone if he or she knows which animal you are talking

about, but no matter how many people begin to call the cat a dog, it does not make the cat a dog by nature or change its ways. Calling the agouti a rabbit is just a construed identity; it does not change the looks or the behavioural characteristics of the animal; the animal's nature remains that of an agouti.

Now let's go back to the analogy of the jar. What if we had another jar identical in appearance, made of glass, of the same size and shape, containing sugar, and sitting on the same shelf? How would one differentiate between the two? The glass sugar jar or the plastic sugar jar perhaps?

Moreover, what if, an hour later, someone emptied both jars of the sugar and filled them with earth? What should we call them now—the earthen vessels? Would that change the real identities of the jars? The role, status, purpose, and/or function of the jars may have changed, but their intrinsic identities are unchanged; they remain the plastic jar and the glass jar regardless of their contents.

What the jar contains does not necessarily communicate information about the jar but about the jar's ability to contain things such as sugar or earth.

The glass jar is able to contain substances such as certain petroleum chemicals for a long time, and while the plastic jar may not, it can contain hydrofluoric acid, which the glass jar cannot.

The unique abilities or inabilities of these two jars to contain certain chemical substances are related to the identities of the materials they are made of. So it is with humans. The things we lay claim to—believe to possess or have acquired—do not change or make us who we are or identify us; we are what we are made of.

This factor is not limited to the physical realm only but encapsulates the spiritual as well. Mankind is made up of both physical and the spiritual entities. The physical is tangible, and our ubiquitous awareness of it is most prevalent. The spiritual, which dwells within the physical so long as there is life, operates through the intellect of the mind, and on average, many overlook the implications of this fact, especially some in academia these days. The moment the spirit leaves the body, the body decays into dust.

The physical realm is nothing but evidence of the spiritual; the spiritual determines the physical outcome. However, the physical is most often confused for the realities of life. Therefore, we pay more attention to our physical realities.

The societies in which we live today are so wrapped around the physical realm that the fashions, mannerisms, and displays of attitudes, behaviours, tangible possessions, and all the things that so commonly arouse our senses significantly

distract, detract, and deprive us of the awareness of the intellectual and spiritual realms, wherein lies authentic identity. This setting is a perfect condition for confusion regarding the identity of who we really are. These added confused conditions create huge identity vacuums. These vacuums suck in millions of minds, leading them to construe and define their identities based on stimulations in the entities of the physical realm rather than the spiritual realities.

Mankind is made up of both the physical and the spiritual.

If appearance, physical possessions, social status, ethnicity, nationality, religions, and so on are the only things that form the standard that defines identity in our societies, then humankind is a hopeless species.

With this thinking, is it any wonder that we are faced with the social problems we have? If most people on earth accept the ideology that a person's identity is directly tied to the place he or she was born, the race he or she is of, or the wealth he or she may or may not have, then one does not have to look further for an answer to the reasons for our world's age-old social and civic problems.

Our history books are living testaments of the results of such ideologies. Just consider the periods of the Dark Ages and the Reformation, when millions of defectors and protestants of Roman Catholicism were tortured and killed only because of their religion (Foxe, J., 1800).

Then we had the Holocaust, a genocide where approximately six million Jews were murdered just because they were Jews. Hitler's racial agenda operating through the vice of the Nazis' Third Reich extended this decimation to other races in the destruction of World War II (<http://www.ushmm.org>).

In the Rwanda genocide, in an approximate period of one hundred days, about half a million to a million people were killed just because of their ethnicity (<http://genocidearchiverwanda.org.rw>).

Even as I write this book, the international news media houses are floodlighting the slaughtering and exiling of thousands of Christians by the usurping militants of the International States of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (<http://abcnews.go.com/wn>, <http://en.wikipedia.org/>). Why? It is because ISIS has determined that these victims identified as religious, social, and political dissidents are unworthy to live. Clearly, to determine identity by such ideologies is always a devastating mistake, if not plain madness.

**The physical realm is nothing
but evidence of the spiritual.**

Factors That Affect Our Perceptions of Who We Are

Identity and values have an intrinsic relationship. If people believe that identity is tied to things, race, stratification, physical abilities, social echelons, and religious or political status, then the perception of value in these things is consequently an important determinant factor in defining identity for many. It amounts to where people place their values, and all of the above are factors contributing to the perceived values held by individuals and societies in general.

Self-worth is *not* usually gauged by an individual's own internal standard of values but by external perceptions; it is commonly gauged by the values of the people that the individual respects and considers most important.

We feel valued and important because we believe that somehow we, or some other factors relating to us, have convinced the important people in our lives that we possess the attributes that are normally accepted as values of worth. This belief would then cause us to set our self-worth to match the value we perceive it to be on the social stock market. A

strong feeling of identity would ensue as we feel a sense of being someone of important value. How fickle our value system is if our self-worth and identity are based on such shaky grounds.

What my wife thought of me, what she perceived me to be, the level of respect she had or did not have for me, and the value she placed on me as a man and a husband had, in my mind, largely determined my self-worth. That is why I tried so hard to become the person that I understood she wanted me to be.

If I felt that I did not measure up to her expectations or satisfy her clearly defined model, I would often feel less than the man I ought to be. I would experience a devaluation in the integrity of my character and self-worth, which led to an uncertainty of identity, with all the other dominoes falling behind.

I had to stop and ask myself, “Where did I get that?” How did we learn that our self-worth is chiefly to be determined by the social stock market, by what others think of us, and ultimately by what we in turn think of ourselves?

End of Sample

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About the Author

Ayon Baxter has been a critical freethinker from an early age. This characteristic, complemented by his innate aptitude for natural science, has led him to the path of a career in the science fields of telecommunications electronics and information technology (IT). Having been born and bred in a Christian environment, he has always approached religion and social science in the same critical manner as he does natural science—analysing things logically with an open mind.

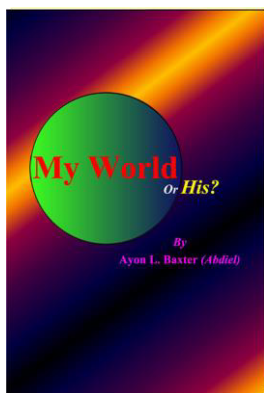
In his first book, *My World of His*, he sought to contrast the inner social behaviours of our personal (sinful) worlds with that of the spiritual world God has created for each of us as told in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In recent years, he has been focusing on the core principles of Christianity and how a better understanding of its central message can impact change to the spiritual, social, and psychological fibres of our lives. His interest in behavioural science and its relationship to the gospel has led him to do research in those areas.

Ayon seeks to minister by sharing his thoughts, findings, and experiences to the world and encourages everyone to think critically with an open mind. He thinks that we can view truth from many perspectives, but open-

mindedness and critical thinking are the 3-D lenses through which we can see it vividly and holistically.

Also by Ayon L. Baxter Sr. (*Abdiel*)



My World or His?

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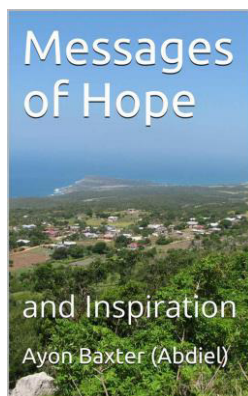
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