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MORE THAN A NAME

by Benjamin D. Schoun

Recently the case of Walter McGill received some exposure in the public press.¹ McGill believes he has a right to use the name Seventh-day Adventist, even though he and his group are not part of the organization. He further believes that the church is wrong to protect its name from being used by others who do not belong to it, and who hold views different from those of the official church.

COMMENT: *I object to the accusation that “McGill believes he has a right to use the name Seventh-day Adventist.” God mandated my use of the name “Creation Seventh Day Adventist” which is “another name” (see Isa. 65:15). The Court has confirmed that our name has not been an impersonation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. We have never “traded on the reputation” of the larger SDA denomination.*

That’s why the name and logo of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are protected by trademark registration. This action asks people who are not part of this organization not to use the name or logo of the church. Why do we have to protect the name of the church?

COMMENT: *Does our logo appear to identify with the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Never!*



What It Means

The business world pays a great deal of attention to the name of a company and its brand. Wrapped up in that name is the identity and reputation of the organization. By the name or brand the public instantly recognizes the quality of a product and how much trust it can place in that business. The word Apple, for example, tells the story of a computer company in one word. It will not tolerate other computer companies using the name Apple for some other product of unknown quality or reputation.²

COMMENT: *The author references the ideals of the “business world,” couching the “Father’s business” in commercial trademark terms. This manner of administration is abominable to the Heavenly Court, marrying the church with the world.*

All the more important is the identity and reputation that the church conveys to those who live in our communities, both local and worldwide. When people hear the name Seventh-day Adventist, we want them to have a positive image of the organization represented by that name. We want people to think of our worldwide healing ministry in our hospitals and clinics. We want people to recognize Adventists as Bible students who are faithful to the Scriptures. And, of course, we want people to associate our name with the fact that we keep the seventh day of the week as God's holy day, or Sabbath; and that we believe in the Second Advent, the soon return of Jesus.

Perhaps more than anything, when people hear the name Seventh-day Adventist we hope they think of good neighbors—kind, helpful, loving people who are an asset to their communities.

COMMENT: *I must assume from what the author is advocating in the above paragraphs the name "Seventh-day Adventist" should not reflect the reputation of a church that employs the state to deal with perceived non-Adventist heretics or fanatics. It is certainly antithetical for the SDA Church to sue other commandment-keeping Adventists in the worldly court system, and then, to coerce them with legal sanctions, including fines and incarcerations.*

It is noted that the author mentioned nothing about cultivating a reputation of religious liberty advocacy. Of course, when the denomination calls for restriction of the liberty of religious practice for others and argues for the narrow application of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), there can be no honest religious liberty reputation sustained.

Ellen White wrote of our church's name, "The name Seventh-day Adventist carries the true features of our faith in front, and will convict the inquiring mind."³

COMMENT: *Ellen White wrote of the name of a faith, not a trademark that is to be protected by civil magistrates.*

- 1) "The Seventh-day Adventist faith will bless whenever it is brought into the character-building." {BCL 52.6}
- 2) "Do not on all occasions present the strongest proofs you know; for this would arouse a suspicion that you were trying merely to convert your hearer to the Seventh-day Adventist faith." {Ev 540.1}
- 3) "They understood, accepted, and communicated the redemption that they had fully and freely received, and distinctly experienced through Jesus Christ.--Ms 27, 1894, pp. 2-4. (To "Dear Brethren in the Seventh-day Adventist Faith," June 7, 1894.) Released Jan. 30, 1958. {2MR 7.3}
- 4) "I stand firm in the Adventist faith; for I have been warned in regard to the seducing sophistries that will seek for entrance among us as a people." {RH, January 26, 1905 par. 19}

While Mrs. White writes of the "Seventh-day Adventist church" and "Seventh-day Adventist churches," she is not implying anything close to the modern "corporate image worship" advocated by the present SDA denomination. The name of the religion predates the legal formation of the church as discovered by the Honorable Judge Mariana Pfaelzer.

"The Court finds, therefore, that Seventh-day Adventism, the religion, pre-existed the Seventh-day Adventist Church."—*General Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists v. Seventh-day Adventist Kinship, International, Inc., CV 87-8113 PRP, Judge Mariana Pfaelzer's*

ruling (decision), October 3, 1991, filed October 7, 1991, U.S. District Court, Central District of California, p. 13.

Obviously, "Seventh-day Adventist" is the name of a person adhering to "Seventh-day Adventism, the religion." "Creation Seventh Day Adventism" is a religion spawned from Seventh-day Adventism, and its adherents are called "Creation Seventh Day Adventists." There is nothing confusing about this.

"God is to be recognized and honored by the people calling themselves Seventh-day Adventists."⁴

COMMENT: *If this truth from the Spirit of Prophecy were "recognized and honored" by the General Conference administration, they would not restrict the name's usage. Instead of denying other commandment-keeping Adventists, they would seek to make that name a "household name"—"recognized and honored" among society at large.*

"[We] must guard . . . against that which would bring a stain upon the name of Seventh-day Adventists, and destroy the confidence of the people in the message of truth which they must bear to the world."⁵

COMMENT: *What was the method Ellen White endorsed as to guarding "against that which would bring a stain upon the name of Seventh-day Adventists?" Was it the employment of the "strong arm of civil government?" Nay, may it never be! Read the testimony in its context.*

I was shown that we must give no encouragement to these demonstrations [of fanaticism], but must guard the people with a decided testimony against that which would bring a stain upon the name of Seventh-day Adventists, and destroy the confidence of the people in the message of truth which they must bear to the world. {3SM 378.3}

The people, not the name, were to be guarded "with a decided testimony." This method has no relation to the initiation of civil lawsuits and trademark protection as applied by the present SDA denomination's administrators. What a misapplication of inspired counsel!

Why It's Important

A few years ago a group wanted to use the name Seventh-day Adventist, although they were not members. The group's practice was to put up negative, accusatory billboards against members of another denomination. The billboards conveyed an explicit message that the billboards' sponsors were hateful extremists. Would you want the public to assume that this was the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

COMMENT: *This was the case of the Eternal Gospel Church, founded by Seventh-day Adventist believers. The Roman Catholic Church was not inclined to bring a lawsuit against those believers, but the General Conference administrators did. The lawsuit won by the General Conference did not stop the proliferation of unpalatable billboards. It was obvious that "Seventh-day Adventist believers" were the source of those public messages. The name of Seventh-day Adventists was neither guarded nor protected by the initiation and litigation of the civil suit against Pastor Raphael Perez and his congregation. Hundreds of thousands of dollars of sacred tithe were spent on the litigation for nothing. The guilty will not escape God's righteous judgment.*

In 1993, when David Koresh and his group in Waco, Texas, made headlines, the news media at first connected him with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After all, Koresh had once been a member of the church, and a number of his followers had once been Adventists. But the church quickly disassociated itself from Koresh, his strange teachings about last-day events, and his twisted immoral practices. Had we not protested, the public could easily have concluded that this was what the Adventist Church was all about.

COMMENT: *The SDA denomination spent a quarter of a million dollars with media consultants in disassociating itself from the Branch Davidian Seventh Day Adventists led by David Koresh. This was also a misappropriation of sacred tithe. Rather than initiate a civil lawsuit in this case, the denomination's administration called in the FBI and other authorities to exterminate the false religion. One vocal Roman Catholic priest declared to the media this fiasco was "the persecution of a church."*

In my occasional conversations with Muslims, they try to assure me that they are not all terrorists. And of course I believe them; most Muslims are not terrorists. But I also ask why they do not do more to disassociate themselves from terrorists and protest their philosophies and violent practices. I think that would help Muslims to be better understood.

COMMENT: *Is it possible the Muslims are more "Christian" in behavior than the modern SDA denomination's administration. Religion's many controversial issues cannot be remedied via "the strong arm of civil government." Pioneer Adventists understood that persuasion is the method of Christ and that compulsion is the work of Satan. Ellen White wrote, "Force is the last resort of every false religion." {ST, May 6, 1897 par. 16}*

Ellen White observed this problem in her day. She wrote about religious fanatics, "I was shown that almost every fanatic who has arisen, who wishes to hide his sentiments that he may lead away others, claims to belong to the church of God."

COMMENT: *This statement from Spirit of Prophecy is misapplied by Mr. Schoun. Ellen White, in the quoted passage, is arguing for acceptance of the name "Seventh-day Adventist" above the use of the term "church of God" that does not present the "true features of our faith in front." When this whole section is taken in its context, Ellen White's argument favors the current stand of Creation Seventh Day Adventists regarding the taking of a name.*

"These persons had no love for union and harmony of action. They delighted in disorder. Confusion, distraction, and diversity of opinion were their choice. They were ungovernable, unsubdued, unregenerated, and unconsecrated, and this element of confusion suited their undisciplined minds. They were a curse to the cause of God and brought the name of Seventh-day Adventists into disrepute."

COMMENT: *Was Ellen White suggesting that those who "were a curse to the cause of God and [who] brought the name of Seventh-day Adventists into disrepute" should be sued in the worldly courts and sanctioned with fines and jail time? Nay, it could never be!*

Is Mr. Schoun suggesting that Creation 7th Day Adventists are of this class? Where is his evidence? In Guys, Tennessee the CSDA Church is positively esteemed by the community. In East Africa, where our free humanitarian services have flourished, Creation Seventh Day Adventists are appreciated among the community, including mainline SDA church members. Government officials highly regard our presence and services. In the legal record of six years' litigation,

there is no indication of wrongdoing by Creation Seventh Day Adventists—other than possessing a name that is “potentially confusingly similar” to the Plaintiffs’ trademark and refusing to cease using their divinely mandated name.

Why We’re Careful

Why would a group of people who are not members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church try to use the name? Perhaps they seek to gain some credibility; or maybe they feel that because they share certain beliefs they should be able to use the name. But they’re not Seventh-day Adventists! They believe and/or practice things that Seventh-day Adventists do not agree with or support. If they believed and practiced all that Seventh-day Adventists believe and practice, they could become members and have the privilege of using that name. But having more than one organization use the same name only creates confusion. Our identity and good reputation are at risk when we don’t protect our name.

COMMENT: *When reading words such as “perhaps” and “maybe” in the author’s damage control efforts, I am led to question his motives. He seeks to cast Creation 7th Day Adventists in the worst possible light without citing examples or evidence. This manner is neither fair nor Christian.*

In fact, we have not claimed to be “Seventh-day Adventists” as the term would apply to Seventh-day Adventist Church members. The Court has sustained this fact, and it is chronicled in the legal record. As to “confusion,” the Plaintiffs were unable to produce a single example of confusion between the two denominations in the course of about 20 years.

Actually, having more than one organization with similar names makes sense to any whom love and support “liberty of conscience.” Those who hold Ellen White and the pioneers in high regard need a place of worship free from the doctrinal errors being perpetrated in the modern SDA organization. While Creation Seventh Day Adventists would not have separated themselves from the mainline denomination over the Trinity error, it has been admitted by leaders in the denomination that most SDA founding pioneers would not be qualified to join the present-day Seventh-day Adventist Church. The following from Dr. George Knight serves to illustrate my point:

Most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would not be able to join the church today if they had to subscribe to the denomination's Fundamental Beliefs.

More specifically, most would not be able to agree to belief number 2, which deals with the doctrine of the Trinity. For Joseph Bates the Trinity was an unscriptural doctrine, for James White it was that ‘old Trinitarian absurdity,’ and for M.E. Cornell it was a fruit of the great apostasy, along with such false doctrines as Sunday keeping and the immortality of the soul.

In like manner, most of the founders of Seventh-day Adventism would have trouble with fundamental belief number 4, which holds that Jesus is both eternal and truly God. For J.N. Andrews ‘the Son of God ... had God for His Father, and did, at some point in the eternity of the past, have beginning of days.’ And E.J. Waggoner, of Minneapolis 1888 fame, penned in 1890 that ‘there was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came from God...but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning.’

Neither could most of the leading Adventists have agreed with fundamental belief number 5, which implies the personhood of the Holy Spirit. Uriah Smith, for example, not only was anti-Trinitarian and semi-Arian, like so many of his colleagues, but also like them pictured the Holy Spirit as 'that divine mysterious emanation through which They [the Father and the Son] carry forward their great and infinite work.' On another occasion, Smith pictured the Holy Spirit as a 'divine influence' and not a 'person like the Father and the Son.' (George Knight, *Ministry*; Oct, 1993, p. 10)

It makes perfect sense to have a Seventh-day Adventist Church of Trinitarians and a Creation Seventh Day Adventist Church of mainly non-Trinitarians. What can be confusing about that?

Indeed, in our society our church may even become legally liable for the actions of a group that holds the same name. While we might finally be exonerated, it would likely require some lengthy and involved legal processes to make the distinction.

COMMENT: *If strict honesty and integrity were maintained by the author, this paragraph would be unnecessary. As the legal record reveals, our conflict between the Seventh-day Adventist Church Plaintiffs and the Creation Seventh Day Adventist Church is not one that could possibly evolve into a case of "legal liability." There has been no instance of impersonation or use of the "same name" by Creation 7th Day Adventists.*

Furthermore, if we didn't trade-mark our name and logo, someone else might do so; meaning that we could no longer use our own name because others had obtained exclusive rights to it.

COMMENT: *This point may become a legitimate reason for registering the legal name of a corporation acting as a holding company for real property in our present society. However, registration alone affords adequate rights in the corporate name without the necessity of employing "the strong arm of civil power" to protect said name in strictly religious applications. In reality, it is God's prerogative to protect His name in religious matters. The term "Christian" has been variously muddied and misrepresented throughout history, but God did not intervene except by raising up those individuals who would rightly represent the cause and bring glory to His name.*

Our name means something. It is an important part of our witness to the world. We protect our name because we value it. It is an important asset of our church.

COMMENT: *The name "Seventh-day Adventist" will never be a "Christian witness to the world" while the denomination employs "the strong arm of civil government" to protect a "corporate image" and "commercial brand" via secular trademark laws. The true church's only real "asset" is the character of Christ, which is borne out in lives of love and implicit obedience to the will of God. "It is not the true church of God that makes war with those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. It is the people who make void the law, who place themselves on the side of the dragon, and persecute those who vindicate God's precepts." {ST, April 22, 1889 par. 7}*

1 <http://redlands.patch.com/articles/detention-hearing-in-riverside-for-tennessee-pastor-arrested-in-loma-linda>.

See also www.pastorwalterchickmcgilllawsuit.net/index3.html.

2 <http://indiatrademarks.blogspot.com/2011/11/why-trademark-your-business-name.html>.

3 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 224.

4 *Ibid.*, vol. 8, p. 155.

5 Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 3, p. 378.

6 *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 224.

7 *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 553, 554.