

# **The Remnant and the Adventist Church**

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## **The Remnant in Contemporary Adventist Thinking**

### **I. Introduction**

The concept of the remnant is very dear to Adventists and has played a significant role in our self-understanding, in our mission and in our message. There is an almost unconscious feeling among us that if we lose the idea of the remnant we would lose, as a church, our purpose, our reason for existence. The conviction that there is a particular divine reason for our presence in the world is an intrinsic part of the Adventist historical and religious heritage. Therefore it is with great concern that some observe a tendency to de-emphasize or ignore this fundamental self-definition. However, we recognize that there is always a need to re-examine what we believe in an attempt to make it relevant to our church and to contemporary society. Theological refinement is always welcomed as long as it does not become a threat to the message entrusted to the church.

Here we will briefly look at the reasons for the discomfort that prevails in some areas with respect to the concept of the remnant as a self-designation for our church. Besides, we will look at the suggestions offered to replace this concept and to their strengths and weaknesses.[1]

### **II. Reasons for the Apparent Crisis**

#### ***A. Contact with Other Christians***

Probably one of the most significant elements in the present discussion of the remnant concept in the Adventist Church has been the negative way other Christians have perceived us. Evangelicals did not consider us part of the evangelical world, or even Christians, because, among other reasons, our emphasis on the remnant gave them the impression that we perceived ourselves as the exclusive children of God, the only true Christians.[2] Under such pressure the natural human tendency would be to try to find ways to change that image and to persuade the accusers to believe that we are part of the Christian community. The risk in this enterprise is the temptation to modify or re-negotiate our identity. It is precisely that accusation that has been raised by some against the authors of the book *Questions on Doctrine*.

However, it is our duty to keep the Christian world properly informed concerning who we are and what our mission is. Any misconception in their minds must be eliminated. If what we claim to be is true, then, we have no choice but to reach out to the Christian world in an effort to share with them, in a winsome way, what we stand for, avoiding as much as possible alienating them. Yet, there is the possibility that some Adventists may have overreacted to the accusations of our evangelical friends modifying our image beyond what would be compatible with the mission assigned to us by the Lord.

#### ***B. The Apparent Delay of the Parousia***

It is probable that the passing of time since 1844 is exerting some influence among Adventists forcing some of them to reconsider the mission and identity of the church. Richard

Rice describes the problem as follows: "Since Adventism arose from the Millerite expectation of Christ's imminent return, its nature and purpose have always been related to its situation at 'the end of time.' Adventists describe themselves as the 'remnant church' entrusted with God's last warning message to the world. Consequently, the continued passage of time without the fulfillment of their hopes challenges the basic self-understanding of Adventists, despite their generally remarkable progress in areas such as institutional size and complexity." [3]

Undoubtedly, our pioneers were persuaded that Christ was about to return and that the final crisis was about to begin. This conviction made the remnant concept as a self designation a very significant one. They had witnessed the signs of the end and were experiencing rejection by other Christians; the dragon was angered against that small remnant. But now, we have grown, become somewhat institutionalized and although we continue to proclaim the return of the Lord the element of urgency does not seem to be what it used to be. The remnant does not seem to be any longer the object of attack by other Christians or by civil powers. People do not seem to be interested in religious matters and religious exclusiveness is not tolerated. In this cultural and religious setting some are questioning the relevance or the meaning of the remnant concept as it applies to the Adventist Church. Undoubtedly, there is a real need to make the concept more relevant for the church today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

### ***C. Theological Training***

During the second half of last century an increasing number of Adventists have been obtaining doctoral degrees in theology in different universities, exposing themselves to a diversity of ideas and methods of biblical interpretation. This has been good for the church in that we have now a group of experts who can be used by the church as consultants on a diversity of doctrinal and theological issues.

However, we have also witnessed a tendency among some of those who have studied in those areas to incorporate into their theological methodology elements that could be damaging to the Adventist identity. Here I will mention only one that is specially relevant for our discussion of the concept of the remnant. Our understanding of the Adventist Church as God's remnant people is determined by our system of prophetic interpretation. We believe that this is the system that Daniel used to interpret his own prophecies, the one used by Jesus, Paul and other biblical writers. If we are wrong, then, there is no basis for our understanding of the remnant mentioned in Rev 12:17.

In modern scholarship historicism is no longer an accepted method of prophetic interpretation. In fact, modern scholarship does not know anything about this methodology. We are probably the only ones using it today; yet, it is the one supported by the biblical text itself, was used by Christ and Paul and by the Christian church for centuries. Under the influence of modern scholarship some Adventists have questioned or rejected this methodology and consequently they have had to redefine the identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the meaning of the concept of the remnant. In some cases the origin of the church is explained using sociological models and the function of the church is also defined in sociological terms.

### ***D. Modern World Views***

Adventists trained in other fields of knowledge have been exposed to a world different from the one they were accustomed to as Adventists. This has made it difficult for them to preserve

intact the Adventist world view and our scenario of the end-time events. Some of them perceive some of our teachings as too sectarian and feel uncomfortable with them.[4] Yet, they find so much good in Adventism that they want to remain Adventists. They tend to argue for a redefinition of our identity and a rejection of any traces of exclusiveness or distinctiveness. Some of those individuals are more open than others to pluralism and post-modernism.

The rejection of any claim to truth by an individual or an institution, be it ecclesiastical or not, is bound to have an impact on religious truth. If post-modernism is right in claiming that truth is by definition relative, then our claim to be God's remnant people, His instruments in the proclamation of a message that is indispensable for every human being in any culture around the world, is foolishness. This concern, if taken seriously, would force us to re-write our mission and redefine our identity. That objection "capitulates to the spirit of the times and abandons a key biblical idea."[5]

### ***E. Spirituality and the Remnant***

In some Adventist circles the crisis over the remnant seems to have been motivated by the perception of some that the leaders of the church as well as pastors and many church members are drifting away from the original message entrusted to the church, allowing an element of apostasy to come into the church.[6] They argue that our standards are being lowered and even rejected by some, and that spiritual commitment of many church members is very superficial. There is too much sin in the church to call itself "the Remnant Church." From that perspective some of the critical questions are: If the church is on its way to apostasy, who then is God's remnant? Where is the remnant to be found? How is it to be defined? The charges are very serious and deserve careful attention but the implications are even more serious.[7]

I am sure that there are several other reasons or causes that have contributed to the confusion that we are witnessing with respect to the concept of the remnant, but the ones we have mentioned serve to illustrate the nature of the crisis. We should now examine the new proposals to redefine the Adventist understanding of the remnant.

## **II. The Remnant: New Proposals**

The diversity of views on this subject is significant and it is the best evidence we can use to demonstrate that there is indeed an erosion of the traditional position among some Adventists. In the spectrum of opinions we find positions on the two extremes and others in between.

### ***A. Traditional Position***

We can summarize the main elements of the traditional position as follows. First, the remnant mentioned in Rev 12:17 describes the faithful ones left after the attacks of the Dragon against the church during the 1260 years (538-1798). Second, they are characterized as those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. Third, the commandments mentioned here are the Ten Commandments, including in a special way the Sabbath. Fourth, the testimony of Jesus, according to Rev 19:10, refers to the manifestation of the Spirit of Prophecy among the remnant. Fifth, since the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the main body proclaiming the perpetuity of the Law of God and the Sabbath and since, in addition, there was a manifestation of

the gift of prophecy in this particular church, we can identify it as God's faithful, end-time remnant.[8] Hence, to the question who is the remnant the answer is given:

Since there is not other religious body today outside of Seventh-day Adventists which uniquely and specifically has the characteristics of the remnant of faith and carries their marks, it follows that Adventists as they meet all the aspects of the remnant are the final remnant of faith of the end-time.

This does not mean that there are no other Christians who live temporarily on the basis of limited light. They too are children of God. But until they join the commandment-keeping, faith-of-Jesus holding remnant, they are not part of the final remnant. In the course of time all children of God, whether in Christian churches or non-Christian religions, who listen to the Spirit of God and follow His wooings will be drawn by the faithful, global proclamation of the 'everlasting gospel' into the visible community of the final remnant of faith, which even now proclaims this message with power and conviction.[9]

This understanding has been questioned on several grounds. It is still considered to be too exclusive in that it does not allow other Christians, who are considered by God to be faithful servants, to be part of God's remnant. In addition, this position does not take into consideration that being part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not automatically make one a member of the faithful remnant. We do have nominal Adventists who are not totally committed to the message and mission of the church. Are we willing to say that they are in fact an expression of the faithful end-time remnant? Did not E. G. White inform us that our church will have to go through an eschatological shaking in order for God to purify it? Any definition of the church as God's remnant will have to provide answers to those questions.

### ***B. God's Remnant Includes Adventists and Non-Adventists***

It is probably right to say that it was during the fifties (1955-56) that Adventists for the first time in their history entered into an unofficial dialogue with a group of Evangelical theologians. This dialogue resulted in the publication of the book called *Questions on Doctrines*. [10] Question number 20 in that book deals with the concept of the remnant. The answer clarifies that Adventists do not "equate their church with the church invisible—'those in every denomination who remain faithful to the Scriptures;'" [11] and acknowledges that "God has a multitude of earnest, faithful, sincere followers in all Christian communions." [12] But it is still maintained that in applying the concept of the remnant found in Rev 12:17 to themselves Adventists are simply accepting "the logical conclusion of our system of prophetic interpretation." [13]

However, the answer given goes beyond what appears to be the traditional expression of the concept of the remnant by broadening it to include other non-Adventists:

But the fact that we thus apply this scripture does not imply in any way that we believe we are the only true Christians in the world, or that we are the only ones who will be saved. While we believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the visible organization through which God is proclaiming this last special message to the world, we remember the principle that Christ enunciated when He said, 'Other

sheep I have, which are not in this fold' (John 10:16). Seventh-day Adventists firmly believe *that God has a precious remnant, a multitude of earnest, sincere believers, in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who are living up to all the light God has given them.* The great Shepherd of the sheep recognizes them as His own, and He is calling them into one great fold and one great fellowship in preparation for His return.[14]

The term remnant is now applied to sincere Christians anywhere else in the world. In fact, the statement comes very close to defining the remnant as an invisible group of God's faithful servants among Christians and non-Christians. It is difficult to know the impact this apparent shift has had on the church in general and on the mission of the church in particular. It is probably under the influence of this position that some are calling the Adventist Church not the remnant church but *the Church of the Remnant*. Since most of the remnant is not in the Adventist Church, we are bearers of light to the remnant.[15] Hence, we can "claim to be the church of the remnant, insofar as we are bearers of the three angels' messages of Rev 14:6-12, God's gathering call to the remnant. . . . When we invite people to become Seventh-day Adventists, we are not necessarily inviting them to *become* part of God's remnant, for some of them are already that, even if they have come from heathen backgrounds. Instead, we are inviting them to become members of the church that bears the remnant message and is the natural home of the remnant." [16]

C. Mervyn Maxwell has criticized the view that the term "remnant" includes some non-Adventists arguing that according to that view Sabbath-keeping is not an indispensable characteristic of the remnant because some are considered already to be members of it without keeping the Sabbath. In addition, he feels that this approach makes it almost irrelevant to call people out of Babylon because Adventists are not the end-time remnant but a privileged part of the end-time remnant.[17] Maxwell finds in this re-definition a threat to the Adventist understanding of the remnant and he himself prefers to apply the concept of the remnant only to the Adventist Church. His concerns are valid and deserve serious consideration.

### ***C. A Remnant Within the Remnant***

This seems to be the position taken by Hope International and Hartland Institute. They are persuaded that the church is not preaching historic Adventism and that it is in apostasy. Yet, they say, there is a group of church members who are loyal to the Lord and they are the only ones who constitute the true remnant of God, the faithful remnant.[18] Those organizations probably consider themselves to be part of God's faithful remnant and spend their time, money and energy promoting their views. They, and others holding similar views, want to be part of the Adventist Church and do not want to become a separate church. However, there are some signs indicating that at least some of them may be interested in forming their own church in total separation from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This would mean that they will consider their organization to be the only true faithful remnant of God.

This understanding of the remnant deals with one of the perceived weaknesses of the traditional view in that it recognizes that not every member of the Church is by definition a member of God's end-time faithful remnant. However, by suggesting or implying that their new organizations are to some extent the embodiment of the true faithful remnant they imply that by being part of their organizations one can become a member of the faithful remnant. They are

becoming exactly what they condemn in the Adventist Church. Besides, there is a very strong element of exclusiveness in this approach to the concept of the remnant. They do not provide a meaningful and biblically sound definition of the remnant.

#### ***D. The Remnant is an Invisible Entity***

While the previous view argues that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a remnant on its way to apostasy, this new view argues that the remnant is by its very nature invisible. The best exponent of this position is Steve Daily. He calls us "to stop thinking of ourselves as 'God's chosen *people*' and start recognizing the existence and ministry of 'God's chosen *peoples*'. It is a call to move from an ethnocentric remnant theology to a spirit of religious affirmation which acknowledges that the 'kingdom of God on earth' transcends every religious movement of humankind, and rejoices that the future 'kingdom' will include 'many mansions.'"[19]

This proposal is in essence a rejection of the Adventist view of the remnant. In fact it is Daily's main purpose in his book to redefine Adventism in terms of main stream Evangelicalism. His call is a radical one because it requires a rejection of our institutional and denominational identity.[20] The level of discontinuity with traditional Adventism is so drastic that it is difficult to incorporate it into any meaningful dialogue.[21]

#### ***E. The Remnant is not yet a Reality***

Jack W. Provonsha has suggested that the remnant of Revelation is yet to appear. He considers it almost perverse for the church to call itself "the remnant church"[22] because the remnant is more than an established institution. The remnant is to be defined in terms of a quality of life and faith and not in terms of membership in an ecclesiastical organization. Recognizing that the concept of the remnant is very important in Adventist theology and self-definition, Provonsha is willing to say that, even though the remnant is still in the future, the Adventist Church may refer to itself as "a proleptic remnant" in the sense that its members will be absorbed, in the eschatological polarization, into the final remnant, the true remnant of God.[23]

This approach to the issue under consideration is at its very root a denial of the idea that the Adventist Church is God's remnant church. It re-interprets Rev 12:17 as a prophecy that is still unfulfilled; God's remnant will come into existence only during the final eschatological polarization of the human race. His suggestion that the church could be called "a proleptic remnant" is an attempt to preserve a vestige of a concept that is so important for the church. The only role Provonsha assigns to the church is that of a prophetic minority. By that he means that it, like a prophet, cries out for reform and change in the world, thus preparing the way of the Lord.[24]

Nevertheless, Provonsha has identified an important issue in the Adventist understanding of the remnant that we have not fully dealt with before. This is the question of the relationship between the present church as God's remnant and the remnant as formed by those who will be actually saved at the second coming of our Lord. In other words, what is the connection between the remnant mentioned in Rev 12:17 and the remnant described in 14:1-5? Yet, his solution does not make room for a meaningful designation of the Adventist Church today as the true remnant of God's people.

#### ***F. Sociological Understanding of the Remnant***

There are a group of Adventists who would like to see the church more actively involved in social and political activities. They have found in the concept of the remnant a significant tool that they can use to promote their views. Charles Scriven has observed that in the Bible the remnant addressed social and political issues and suggests that in order for the church to be loyal to its understanding of the remnant it is necessary for it to be at the fore-front of social and political reform. He does not deny that the remnant should also address individuals with the gospel. But the Adventist understanding of the mission of the remnant as calling people to obedience to the commandments does not, according to him, do full justice to the message of the book of Revelation. The emphasis should be put on social and political reform.[25]

Others, like Charles W. Teel, have gone further than that divesting the remnant concept from almost any religious content and transforming it into a social movement of reform and opposition to social abuse and oppression.[26] Anybody involved in opposing modern Babylon, that is to say, the beasts of racism, sexism, nationalism, consumerism, etc., belongs to the remnant. Underlying such position is the idea that the distinction between the sacred and the secular is a false one; they are of one piece. It is therefore irrelevant to talk about a particular church as the remnant. That would lead to triumphalism. "We do not 'constitute' God's remnant, yet we are indeed called to be a part of God's remnant, called to proclaim the message of John's angels, the liberating news that Babylon has fallen."

This re-definition of the concept of the remnant reminds us that the remnant has in some cases not only a religious responsibility but also a social one. It must condemn evil in all of its forms—ecological destruction, economic exploitation, ethnic oppression, racial prejudice, etc. All of them are expressions of evil which originated in God's arch-enemy, the dragon. But by understanding the remnant in terms of sociology it sets aside the biblical understanding of the remnant as fundamentally a religious entity involved in a cosmic conflict and uproots it from its biblical apocalyptic moorings. This sociological conception of the remnant seems to have accepted modern critical approaches to biblical apocalyptic literature.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

It is obvious that there is quite a diversity of opinion among Adventists on the meaning of the concept of the remnant as it applies to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Different reasons can be identified for the present situation and all of them provide us the opportunity to look again into this meaningful metaphor and explore its significance for the church. There are some unresolved issues that need study. Among them we find the following ones:

1. Can the concept of the remnant be applied to sincere, committed Christians in other churches? If not, on what grounds can we support our position? If we acknowledge that they are children of God, fully committed to Him, would not that entitle them to be called a remnant of God's people? Is the issue here one of semantics? Is not the remnant formed by people totally surrendered to the Lord who are His true children?

2. What is the role of the identifying marks of the remnant? Are they indispensable in defining the remnant? If that is the case, would not that automatically make it impossible for us to refer to sincere Christians in other denominations as part of God's remnant?

3. Is there such a thing as an invisible remnant? Can we equate God's remnant people with the invisible church? If that is the case, what is our role in the Christian world?

4. What is the relationship between being a member of the Adventist Church and being part of God's remnant people? Do we become part of God's remnant people by being accepted as

members into the church? In other words, is everybody in the Adventist Church part of God's true remnant people? Is the remnant to be defined in terms of an ecclesiastical institution or is there more to it than just that?

5. What is the relationship between the Adventist Church as the remnant church and the remnant formed at the very end, shortly before the parousia? On which basis can we use the term "remnant" to designate these two religious entities?

In our search for answers to these questions we must explore the biblical concept of the remnant. This will provide for us the background needed and the different usages of this concept will assist us in refining its application to the Adventist Church. It is only as we allow the biblical text to deepen, refine and even correct our views that we find ourselves on solid ground.

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## **God's Remnant People in the Bible**

### **I. Introduction**

The concept of the remnant runs throughout the Bible and comes to expression in a multiplicity of images and specific terms. The fundamental issue in this concept is the one posed by the confrontation of life and death and the possibility of total extinction. Confronted by a natural or military threat the question of survival is raised. Will someone be left alive after the disaster is over or will all perish?[27] In the Bible this concept is theologically employed as an indispensable element in the history of salvation. In the conflict between God and the forces of evil the enemy is never able to exterminate the people of God because God always preserves a remnant of them in order to carry on His divine intention

### **II. God's Remnant People in the Old Testament**

The Old Testament terminology for remnant is used to designate three types of remnants. The first one is called *a historical remnant* and describes a group of individuals who survived a life-threatening experience; an experience of such a magnitude that it could have resulted in the extinction of the larger group to which they belonged. The second one is designated *a faithful remnant*. With respect to the historical remnant this one distinguishes itself by its faith commitment to the Lord. It is through this remnant that God moves on to accomplish His eternal purpose within history. Finally, there is the *eschatological remnant*, those who will go "through the cleansing judgments and apocalyptic woes of the end time and emerge victoriously after the Day of Yahweh as the recipient of the everlasting kingdom." [28] We shall now proceed to develop a little more those three usages of the concept of the remnant in the Old Testament.

#### ***A. Historical Remnant***

One of the first passages in which the remnant as a historical entity appears in the Bible is in the story of Joseph. As the story reaches its climax and resolution Joseph decides to reveal to his brothers his true identity but in the process he also testifies to his unquestionable faith in God's providential care in his life. Yes, they sold him to Egypt but it was God Himself who sent him to Egypt "to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance"

(Gen 45:7). The themes of the remnant and rescue or deliverance are brought together here by the biblical writer to emphasize God's powerful intervention on behalf of His people. The threat they confronted was so serious that it would have destroyed all of them but God preserved them from that universal catastrophe.[29] The preservation of the family of Jacob is compared to the survival of a small group who "in narrowly escaping destruction is like a remnant which is the bearer of hopes for the future existence." [30] Nothing is stated in the context about faith and commitment to the Lord on the part of Joseph's brothers, suggesting that we are dealing here with a historical expression of the remnant as individuals who escaped a life-threatening situation.

The concept of the remnant is very common in the prophetic books. Amos announces the fall of the Northern Kingdom and says, *"The city that marches out a thousand strong for Israel will have only a hundred left; the town that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left"* (5:3). The implication is that this remnant is insignificant and lacks power to defeat the enemy. This same idea is expressed in 6:9-10: *"If ten men are left in one house, they too will die. And if a relative who is to burn the bodies comes to carry them out of the house and asks anyone still hiding there, 'Is anyone with you?' and he says, 'No,' then he will say, 'Hush! We must not mention the name of the Lord.'" Only one survived the attack of the enemy and he is so scared that he does not dare to mention the name of the Lord "lest Yahweh will break out in anger against him. The single surviving remnant is thus as if he were dead; no hopes for the future can be placed on him. Amos leaves open the possibility of a remnant being left in a house, but he emphasizes the utter ineffectiveness and hopelessness of this remnant."* [31]

In 9:1 the concept of the remnant is used by the prophet as a threat of total destruction. However, the idea that a small historical remnant was going to survive the attack of the Assyrians is also present in the book. While the remnant in Amos consists of those left in their land, in *Micah* the historical remnant that survives the destruction is formed by those who are left alive among the nations: *"The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the Lord. . . . The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the beasts of the forest"* (5:7-8 [MT 6-7]). This historical remnant has the potential of becoming a blessing to the nations ("like dew") and even ruling over them ("like a lion among the beasts").

In *Isaiah* 46:3 the Judeans who survived the attack of the Babylonians and were taken to the exile are identified as the historical remnant. In *Jeremiah* the remnant consists of both, those left in the land and the group taken to exile. Concerning those left in the land, even their existence is going to be threatened with extinction: *"Let them glean the remnant of Israel as thoroughly as a vine; pass your hand over the branches again, like one gathering grapes"* (6:9). The experience of those taken to exile will be so painful that they would rather be dead: *"Wherever I banish them, all the survivors of this evil nation will prefer death to life, declare the Lord Almighty"* (8:3). There is a threat of total extinction for the rebellious remnant left in the land and for those who went to Egypt (24:8-10).

In the book of *Ezekiel* the remnant is formed by the survivors left in Jerusalem after the first attack against the city by Babylon. Their lives were to be preserved as long as they remained loyal to the treaty they made with Babylon (17:13-14). Because of their sins the Lord decided to destroy the city and to scatter the remnant among the nations: *"Therefore in your midst fathers will eat their children and children will eat their fathers. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds"* (5:10-11). A wicked historical remnant will be taken to Babylon in order for God to demonstrate that He was righteous in punishing His people:

*Yet there will be some survivors—sons and daughters who will be brought out of it. They will come to you [those in Babylon], and when you see their conduct and their actions, you will be consoled regarding the disaster I have brought upon it. You will be consoled when you see their conduct and their action, for you will know that I have done nothing in it without cause (14:22-23).*

After the exile the remnant is identified in the books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* as those who accepted the invitation to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the city. They are identified as "the Jewish remnant that survived the exile" or "those who survive the exile and are back in the province" (Neh 1:2-3). This remnant was preserved by God in spite of their evil deeds (Ezra 9:13).

The historical remnant is the one that survived a life-threatening situation that would have put an end to the nation as a whole. In most cases the remnant left was an insignificant one but they were the bearers of the promises of God and the hope for the preservation of the nation. The emphasis in those passages is on the fact that a group of individuals survived the catastrophe and not necessarily on their spiritual quality and commitment. Hence we refer to them as a historical remnant. It is important to observe that the preservation of this remnant was not determined or based on the goodness of its members but on God's gracious love. His plan for the human race was not going to be frustrated by the sin and rebelliousness of His people because He was ready to preserve a remnant through whom His purpose was to be accomplished.

### ***B. Faithful Remnant***

The first explicit biblical reference to a faithful remnant is recorded in Gen 7:23: "*Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.*" This remnant is identified as a faithful one because Noah is described as "*a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God*" (6:10). The Lord said to him, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation" (7:1). During a time of universal wickedness Noah stood up as the only one who was loyal to the Lord and through him God preserved the human race from total destruction.

During the time of Elijah apostasy had reached national dimensions and the prophet concluded that he was the only one left loyal to the Lord: "*The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too*" (1 Kgs 19:14). Elijah feared that no faithful remnant will survive the attacks of Ahab and Jezebel against them and consequently the Lord will be left without a representative among His people. He was overly concerned about the fate of God's faithful remnant and the Lord said to him, "*I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him*" (19:18). The prophet did not know the numerical extent of the faithful remnant preserved by the Lord and not by human power.

According to *Isaiah* the Lord was going to bring destruction on the land leaving behind Him a small number of survivors who were to be destroyed. But this word of judgment was followed by a promise of salvation for a very small faithful remnant: "*But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land*" (6:12-13). There is still a future for those faithful to the Lord. *Jeremiah* identifies God's faithful remnant as those who will return from exile and with whom the Lord will make a new covenant (31:7-9, 31-

34).[32] It is God Himself who will gather His people, His remnant from among the nations and will bring them back to the land (23:3).

It is interesting to notice that it was God's intention to transform the historical remnant into the faithful remnant. This was to take place through a purifying process:

*In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire (Isa 4:2-4).*

This cleansing act is needed because the historical remnant is formed by faithful and unfaithful Israelites:

*This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again. They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts are devoted to their vile images and detestable idols I will bring down on their own heads what they have done (Ezekiel 11:17-21).*

The context makes clear that God scattered the remnant among the nations but did not abandon them (11:16). He went into exile with them, as the following verses indicate (vv. 22, 23). Judgment gives way now to a promise of salvation: The Lord will gather the remnant and bring them back to the land. A spiritual renewal of the remnant is announced resulting in the transformation of their heart through the power of God. They will be unconditionally committed to the Lord, a new covenant will be instituted and God will be their God and they will be His people. However the passage makes clear that some members of the historical remnant will not be willing to enter into a new covenant relationship with God and will continue to practice idolatry. This group will be finally removed from among God's remnant and the historical remnant will become the faithful remnant.

The faithful remnant is formed by those who under life-threatening circumstances remain faithfully committed to the Lord, trusting in His saving power. There seems to be a significant difference between the faithful and the historical remnants in that the historical appears to be formed by faithful and unfaithful people. It was God's plan to purify His remnant people by separating the wicked from the faithful ones.

### ***C. Eschatological Remnant***

The Old Testament often announces the coming of a time when God's rulership will be universal and His people will live in peace in the land. Shortly before that time God will do the

work of cleansing among the end-time remnant that we just mentioned. Let us examine a few more passages.

*'In the whole land,' declares the Lord, 'two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, They are my people, and they will say, The Lord is our God' (Zech13:8-9).*

Describing the future of Jerusalem *Zephaniah* says that the Lord was going to assemble the nations *"to pour out my wrath upon them—all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of my jealous anger"* (3:8). It is at that time that the Lord will act in a powerful way on behalf of His remnant:

*Then will I purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder. . . . The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid (3:9, 13).*

After God's eschatological judgment against Jerusalem He will preserve a remnant whom He will send to the nations *"who have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations"* (Isa 66:19-20). The purified historical and faithful remnant has become a messenger of salvation to the nations.

*Zechariah* 14:16 announces that the remnant of non-Israelites will join the faithful remnant of Israel. *"Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles."* The passage goes on to announce divine judgment against the nations that do not join God's faithful remnant.

The eschatological remnant is formed by the purified historical remnant who remained faithful to the Lord during God's final judgments upon the nations, but it also incorporates the remnant of the nations who have chosen to serve the Lord. This is an important idea because it implies that God's remnant included people who originally were not members of the Israelite historical and faithful remnant.

### **III. God's Remnant People in the New Testament**

In the New Testament the use of terminology designating the remnant is limited but the concept is expressed through the use of different images. A good example is found in the preaching of *John the Baptist* and his call to the people to repent. He strongly reacted against the idea sustained by the Sadducees and Pharisees that they were legitimate sons of Abraham. John indicted them and identified the true sons of Abraham as those *"who produce fruit in keeping with repentance"* (Matt 3:7-10). The implication was that there was within Israel a true faithful Israel, a remnant loyal to the Lord. He went further and announced that the time was coming when God will separate the faithful from the unfaithful from among His people: *"The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire"* (3:10). Through his ministry the Baptist was gathering God's faithful

remnant, characterized by a spirit of repentance.[33]

During his ministry *Jesus* was in fact gathering God's remnant from among the people of Israel. Those who were to form part of the kingdom of God were asked to repent and believe the good news proclaimed by him (Mark 1:15). Not every Israelite was automatically a member of the kingdom of God; a decision had to be made for or against Jesus. We could refer to this group of believers as a faithful remnant but the fact is that those who listened to Jesus and joined him were not all faithful followers. Only the eschatological remnant will be truly faithful to him and to his message and it will be clearly identified through a process of separation, an eschatological sifting. At that time the owner of the field will say to his servants, "*First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn*" (Matt 13:30). The implication is that the remnant that Jesus was gathering was a historical one formed by faithful and unfaithful followers. Only at the end would they be separated.

*Paul* refers to the Jews who believed in Christ as a remnant (Rom 9:27; 11:5), and "develops a sharp distinction between the Israel of the 'flesh' (9:8; cf. 1 Cor 10:18) and the Israel of the 'promise,' . . . the faithful Israel that is not restricted to physical lineage (Rom 9:6-27). The new community of faith (the Church), made up of all who have faith in Christ (10:4, 9-13), includes Gentiles as well as Jews (9:24; 10:12)."[34] The church was then formed by a remnant of the Israelites and of Gentiles who by faith accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The existence of a faithful remnant on the planet indicates that God is still active and very much involved in human affairs. He has not abandoned the human race handing it over to the evil forces active in the world. In His conflict against evil God is overcoming it and granting victories to His people. Throughout history He has always preserved for Himself a true remnant who is faithful to Him under any circumstances. It has always been God's intention to gather a historical remnant that is at the same time a faithful one, but human weakness has not always made that possible. The true faithful remnant will become clearly visible at the end-time after the Lord passes the historical remnant through a sifting and cleansing process that will separate the faithful from the unfaithful within the historical remnant. They, together with those who accepted the call of the historical remnant to join them will become the eschatological remnant.

It is important to notice that the historical remnant is always identifiable. In the Old Testament it was associated with Zion and Jerusalem as the place where the Lord dwelt. In the New Testament it was closely identified with Jesus and his message of salvation. It was not difficult for people to know who were those who stood for God in the world.

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### **The End-Time Remnant Church**

#### **I. Introduction**

In the previous sections we have analyzed the lack of consensus on the concept of the remnant among some Adventists, the solutions suggested by them and the biblical background needed to clarify this issue. As we now attempt to further clarify the topic of the remnant we should keep in mind that we have become who we are today because of our peculiar message and identity. A

radical redefinition of those elements could be extremely damaging to what we are attempting to do in the world. Therefore, if an element of discontinuity is present in our attempt to clarify what we mean by the title "remnant church," this element must retain at the same time a very strong continuity with our past experience and theology. With this in mind we must now look at the remnant in the book of Revelation and its application to the Adventist Church.

## II. Remnant in Revelation

For our purpose the most important passage is Rev 12:17, where we find a significant theological statement concerning the remnant: "*Then the dragon was enraged at the women and went off to make war against the rest of her offsprings [the remnant]--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus*" (NIV).

The remnant in Revelation is fundamentally an end-time entity. It designates the eschatological remnant that, after 1798, is being gathered by the Lord from every nation, tribe and tongue. It is initially formed by those raised by the Lord soon after the religious oppression that took place during the 1260 prophetic years. They are being used by Him to gather the rest of the eschatological remnant (Rev 14:6-12; 18:4). This remnant has several important characteristics.

### A. Historical Entity

First, we should notice that the remnant is a *historical entity*—it is a community of believers that appear after the attack of the dragon against the church, represented by the women clothed with the sun, during 1260 years (538-1798). It was the intention of the dragon to exterminate the people of God, but the Lord preserved for Himself that remnant through whom He is going to fulfill His saving purpose.

There is historical progression in the development of the events narrated in Rev 12. It portrays the attacks of the dragon against God's people throughout the Christian era beginning with its attempt to destroy the Savior, then the Church, and finally the end-time remnant. We are dealing here with historical entities who played a particular role within the flow of history. Christ was the instrument of redemption and because of that he became a target for the dragon. The woman was the instrument of God in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to which the dragon was opposed. At the close of human history there is left on the planet a group of descendants of the woman that is expected to work with the Lord in the preparation of the planet for the return of Christ. They appeared in the flow of history after 1798.

This remnant becomes the focus of interest in Rev 13-14. Revelation 13 introduces the instruments the dragon will use in his attack against it. Two are mentioned under the symbols of a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. The beast from the sea was the instrument used by the dragon to attack the women during the 1260 years. At the end of that period it received a deadly wound. The beast from the earth is a new power, brought into existence by God, which becomes an instrument of the dragon and the beast that was mortally wounded but was healed.

The remnant coexists with these two beasts for a period of time until the first one is fully healed and then, in conjunction with the second beast or the false prophet and the dragon, they go against the remnant. There is a lapse of time during which the dragon works on earth healing the first beast and corrupting the second beast in order to form a coalition against the remnant (16:12-14). During that time the eschatological remnant is being gathered by God from every

nation, tribe, language and people through the messages of the three angels (Rev 14:6-12), proclaimed by those who are already members of the end-time remnant. The implication is that, apart from the remnant, there is a large group of God's people that should join the remnant at the close of human history (18:4).

## **B. Visible Entity**

The second thing we should notice with respect to the end-time *remnant* is that it is *not* an *invisible* entity but rather one that is easily identifiable. John describes it for us in order to assist us to recognize it. This is done by mentioning the key characteristics that define the remnant.[35] In 12:17 two of them are explicitly mentioned: Keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. Revelation is very much interested in the commandments of God, particularly those of the first table, dealing with God and His worship. There are allusions to some of the other commandments but the main emphasis is on the recognition that there is only one God and that He is the only true object of worship, not the dragon. The remnant is a commandment-keeping group of people.

The second mark is defined as having the testimony of Jesus. In Rev 19:10 that expression seems to be explained or even equated with the spirit of prophecy. The implication here is that there is among the historical remnant a manifestation of the gift of prophecy. In a sense it is a prophetic community.

In Rev 13:10c two other characteristics are mentioned, namely patience and faithfulness. While 12:17 puts the stress on objective elements this other passage points to the character of the remnant. Patience means here endurance and this is indispensable in order to resist the attacks of the dragon and its associates. Faithfulness implies commitment to the Savior and to the message and mission he entrusted to the remnant. It is interesting to observe that almost all the characteristics of the remnant listed in those two passages are brought together in 14:12: "*Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus*" (RSV).

"The faith of Jesus" can be interpreted as meaning the faith or teachings that Christ proclaimed to us or the faith that we put in Jesus as our Savior; our commitment and fidelity to him. Both interpretations are possible but, based on 13:10, the second possibility seems to be the most likely. Perhaps both ideas are being expressed here.

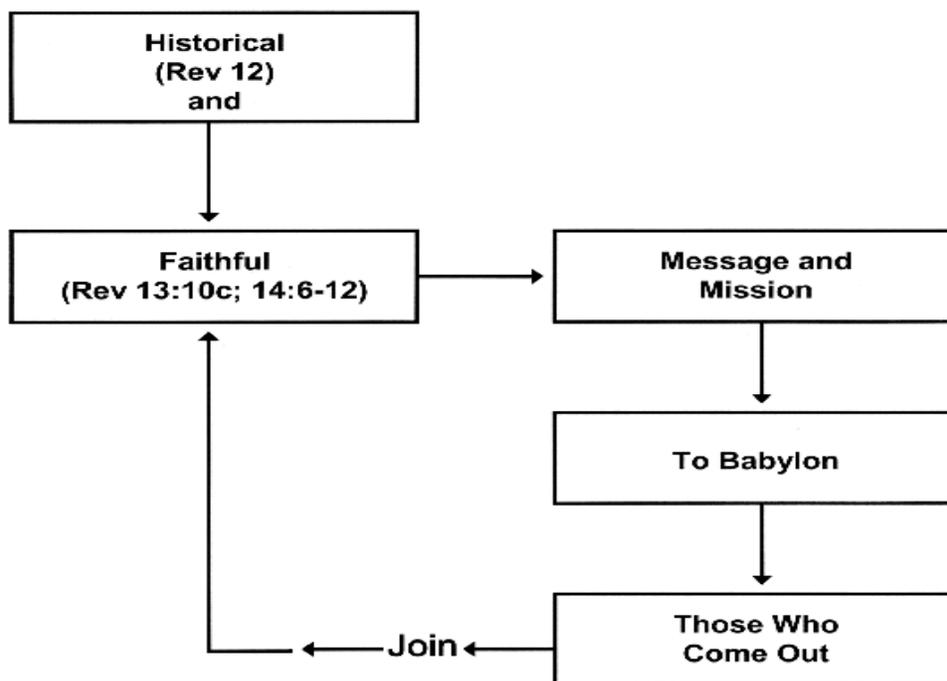
## **C. A Faithful Remnant**

The third thing we should notice concerning the end-time remnant mentioned in Rev 12:17 is that it is also a *faithful remnant*. In the central part of Revelation God describes His people in ideal terms; in terms of His ideal for them and what He expects them to be. This can be illustrated by the description of the woman given in Rev 12:1. It represents the people of God of the Old and New Testaments as perfectly reflecting the righteousness of Christ. Yet, in the real experience of the church on earth it was always trying to reach God's standard for it. The remnant is also described in terms of God's intention for it and no explicit effort is made to establish that there may be unfaithful members in the end-time remnant.

However, in other places in Revelation John describes the church as it actually is here on earth. Although it is true that the cleansing of the remnant is not emphasized in the book, there are some indicators pointing to it. The fact the book was written to encourage its audience to

remain loyal to the Lord in the midst of serious attacks from the dragon, suggests the possibility that some church members are running the risk of being shaken out of the church because their lack of total commitment to the Savior (Rev 2:4-7, 10, 14-16). We also know that the remnant will go through a testing period and the end-result will be a cleansed people. We read in Rev 7:14: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." [36] They came out of the tribulation victorious because they put their trust in the redeeming blood of Christ and it purified them and made them victorious (12:11). Persecution and oppression test the faith of God's people (2:10); there is always the risk of soiling one's clothes (3:4) or losing one's crown of victory (3:11). A time will come when God's cleansing process will come to an end and those who do wrong will continue to do wrong, those who do right will continue to do right, and those who are holy will continue to be holy (22:11). Only those who persevere to the end will be victorious and will form part of God's faithful remnant. If we associate the remnant with the message to Laodicea we would have to acknowledge that even the remnant contains members who are not totally faithful to the Lord. Then we will have to recognize that there seems to be an invisible component in the remnant in the sense that for a time the historical expression of the remnant does not fully correspond to its expression as a faithful remnant. However, this does not mean that the remnant is by nature invisible. The biblical evidence leads to the conclusion that the end-time remnant is not only historical but that it is basically visible. As we indicated above, it has specific identifying marks, and bears the truth and the message of God to the world at a particular historical moment. One could say that as long as that message shines clearly the historical, visible remnant is fulfilling its mission as a faithful remnant. [37]

## Eschatological Remnant in Revelation



The end-time remnant is described in Revelation as having a God-given mission and a particular message to the whole world. They are to call the people of God to come out of Babylon, that is to say, to join the historical, faithful and visible end-time remnant of God. In a more concrete way the eschatological remnant grows as those coming out of Babylon join it. At the final polarization of the human race there will be two clearly identifiable groups: Those who are "called, chosen and faithful followers" of the Lamb (17:14) and the dwellers of the earth who worship the dragon and the beast (13:4). The first group could be called the *eschatological remnant*, also referred to as "saints," that is to say, those who belong to the Lord (13:10; 14:12), and "those who would not worship the image of the beast" (13:15). The eschatological remnant will not only be a historical entity faithful to the Lamb, but also fully visible—that is to say, without an invisible dimension to it.

It is that group that faces in a very special way the wrath of the dragon who will attempt to kill "all who refused to worship the image" (13:15). At such an hour the eschatological remnant finds refuge on Mount Zion, protected by God and the Lamb (14:1-5). It is this group of believers who are able to stand firm before the Lord at the second coming to welcome their Savior (6:17; 7:1-4). The previous chart summarizes the gathering of the eschatological remnant according to the book of Revelation.

### **III. The Adventist Church as God's Remnant**

#### **A. Based on Historicist Methodology**

Adventists have applied the reference to the remnant in Rev 12:17 to themselves based on three main arguments. First, using the historicist method of interpretation we have found in Rev 12 a prophetic description of the history of the Christian church from the first century to the close of the great controversy. The 1260 days have been taken to be a prophetic period that came to an end in 1798. The remnant came into existence after that year.

Second, the remnant is characterized by their loyalty to the commandments of God, understood as the Ten Commandments. This includes in a particular way the fourth commandment that was rejected by the majority of the Christian world. Third, the testimony of Jesus was interpreted, based on Rev 19:10, as a reference to the spirit of prophecy. This gift was manifested among Adventists in the prophetic ministry of E. G. White.[38]

The cumulative effect of those arguments persuaded our pioneers that the Adventist movement was the remnant people of God mentioned in Rev 12:17. They were the only ones in the Christian world that had the distinctive marks of that remnant and had being raised by God after the fulfillment of the prophecy of the 1260 days. For them the remnant was not an invisible entity scattered throughout the different Christian denominations, but a very visible or concrete church, the Adventist Church, whose mission was to call the Christian church to a reformation based on the Scriptures and to prepare the world to meet the Lord coming in glory.

#### **B. Ellen G. White Model of the End-Time Remnant**

E. G. White seems to follow the Old Testament theology of the remnant in the interpretation of the end-time remnant in Revelation. For her it is a historical remnant with some fundamental characteristics that make it fully visible.

*The people of God, symbolized by a holy woman and her children, were represented as greatly in the minority. In the last days only a remnant still existed. Of these John speaks as they "which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus.[39]*

*God's remnant people, standing before the world as reformers, are to show that the law of God is the foundation of all enduring reform and that the Sabbath of the fourth commandment is to stand as a memorial of creation, a constant reminder of the power of God.[40]*

She identifies it with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

*The enemy of the souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as pillars of our faith, and engaging in a new process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church would be discarded.[41]*

Yet, she acknowledges that it is not composed only of faithful members but that it is a mixture of faithful and unfaithful followers of Christ: "There will be, among the remnant of these last days, as there were with ancient Israel, those who wish to move independently, who are not willing to submit to the teachings of the Spirit of God, and who will not listen to advice or counsel." [42]

The message and the marks of the remnant clearly indicate that this concrete expression of the remnant is faithful in spite of the fact that, like the historical remnant of the Old Testament, there are among the historical expression of God's remnant faithful and unfaithful members. E. G. White uses the phrase "faithful remnant" to refer to those who will endure until the end: "The days will come when the righteous will be stirred to zeal for God because of the abounding iniquity. None but divine power can stay the arrogance of Satan united with evil men; but in the hour of the church's greatest danger most fervent prayer will be offered in her behalf by the faithful remnant, and God will hear and answer at the very time when the guilt of the transgressor has reached its height. . . . They will be jealous for the honor of God. They will be zealous in prayer, and their faith will grow strong" [43] Also useful is the following statement: "As the end of all earthly things should approach, there would be faithful ones able to discern the signs of the times. While a large number of professing believers would deny their faith by their works, there will be a remnant who would endure to the end." [44]

Therefore, she looks forward to the time when God will pass the remnant, the Adventist Church, through a cleansing process that will remove the unfaithful leaving in the church only a faithful remnant.

*Satan will work his miracles to deceive; he will set up his power as supreme. The church may appear as about to fall, but it does not fall. It remains, while the sinners in Zion will be sifted out—the chaff separated from the precious wheat. This is a terrible ordeal, but nevertheless it must take place. None but those who have been overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony*

*will be found with the loyal and true, without spot or stain of sin, without guile in their mouths. . . . The remnant that purify their souls by obeying the truth gather strength from the trying process, exhibiting the beauty of holiness amid the surrounding apostasy.[45]*

The need for this cleansing experience is found in the message to the church of Laodicea, the end-time people of God. Then the Lord will separate the weeds from the wheat and the remnant will be fully visible and faithful to the Lord. Those ideas are developed by E. G. White when describing the cleansing of the remnant before the final confrontation with the dragon.

The mission of the remnant to the people of God in Babylon adds a new dimension to the concept of the remnant. The eschatological remnant will not be ready until God's people in Babylon listen to the messages of the three angels and come out of it. Then they will join the eschatological remnant and it will become the target for the eschatological attack of the dragon. According to her we will witness a movement from the church to Babylon and from Babylon to the remnant. That is the work of cleansing that we mentioned above:

*As the storm approaches, a large class who have professed faith in the third angel's message, but have not been sanctified through obedience to the truth, abandon their position and join the ranks of the opposition. By uniting with the world and partaking of its spirit, they have come to view matters in nearly the same light; and when the test is brought, they are prepared to choose the easy, popular life.[46]*

This is what will take place within the church, while a similar situation will be taking place outside the church:

*The message will be carried not so much by argument as by the deep conviction of the Spirit of God. The arguments have been presented. . . . Now the rays of light penetrate everywhere, the truth is seen in its clearness, and the honest children of God sever the bands which held them. Family connections, church relations, are powerless to stay them now. Truth is more precious than all besides. Notwithstanding the agencies combined against the truth, a large number take their stand upon the Lord's side.[47]*

The Lord has gathered His remnant from the nations of the earth and they are now ready for translation. The eschatological remnant is confronting the final crisis but they will come out of it victorious through the blood and power of the Lamb.

### **C. God's People in Babylon**

Adventists have acknowledged that there are genuine Christians in other denominations. E. G. White has some interesting statements on this subject that are worth reading and that will raise the question of whether or not it is appropriate to apply to them the term "remnant."

*According to the Scripture, many of God's people must still be in Babylon. And in what religious bodies are the greater part of the followers Christ now to be found? Without doubt, in the various churches professing the Protestant faith.[48]*

*Our ministers should seek to come near to the ministers of other denominations. Pray for and with these men, for whom Christ is interceding. A solemn responsibility is theirs. As Christ's messengers we should manifest a deep, earnest interest in these shepherds of the flock.[49]*

Perhaps even more daring is the next one:

*Among earth's inhabitants, scattered in every land, there are those who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Like the stars of heaven, which appear only at night, these faithful ones will shine forth when darkness covers the earth and gross darkness the people. In heathen Africa, in the Catholic lands of Europe and of South America, in China, in India, in the islands of the sea, and in all the dark corners of the earth, God has in reserve a firmament of chosen ones that will yet shine forth amidst the darkness, revealing clearly to an apostate world the transforming power of obedience to His law.[50]*

That quote clearly states that Adventists are not the only ones who are loyal to the Lord and neither are they His exclusive instruments. The question is whether it is correct to apply to those individuals the title "remnant." Let me share with you another statement from E. G. White on this subject that I found to be very useful:

*The world is preparing for the last great conflict, nation raising against nation. The vast majority of human beings are taking their stand against God. But in every age the Lord Jesus has had His witnesses,—a remnant who trusted in the Word of God. And today, in every place, there are those who hold communion with God. A vital undercurrent of influence is leading them to the light, and when the question comes to them, "Who is on the Lord's side?" they will take their position for Him. Their characters have been moulded after the divine similitude, because they have read and practiced the teachings of His Word.*

*Many in retired homes are God's hidden ones, serving Him according to the light they have received. These hidden ones greatly delight in the Word of God. His precepts are appreciated and treasured by them, and many are the works of love that they do for Christ's sake.*

*When Elijah complained that he stood alone in his service for God, the answer that came from heaven was, "I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Men are at best poor judges of the advancement made by the Gospel, of the influence that it has on souls who, perhaps, have never heard the preaching of an ordained minister. All through the world the Lord has His chosen ones. We can see plainly the prevailing degeneracy. . . . Yet in the*

*most wicked communities there are homes from which sincere, earnest prayers ascend to Christ.*

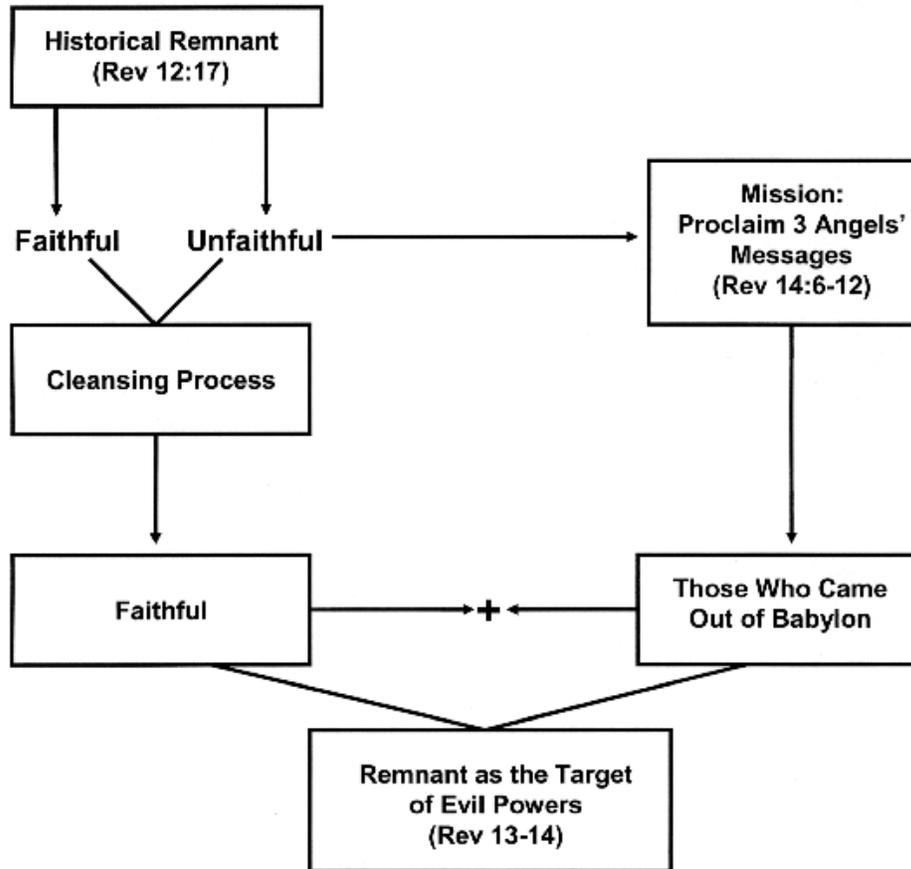
*In the judgment many secret things will be revealed. Then we shall see what a belief in God's Word has done for men and women. It will be seen how small companies, sometimes not more than three or four, have gathered together in secret places to seek the Lord, and how they received light and grace, and rich gems of thought. The Holy Spirit was their teacher, and their lives revealed the blessings that come from a possession of the oracles of God. When Christ shall separate the tares from the wheat, it will be seen that God recognizes and honors these lowly followers. . . . Through trial and opposition they kept their faith untainted. They gathered strength from the Word of God, which told them of the hope of immortal life in the kingdom of God.[51]*

This is the only statement from E. G. White where she uses the term "remnant" to designate believers outside the Adventist Church. She called them "a remnant who trusted in the Word of God," individuals who are holding communion with God. Interestingly, she uses the story of Elijah to illustrate what she means, namely, that God has His instruments everywhere else. Yes, only the Lord knows who they are, but at the end they will be visible as they become part of God's eschatological remnant.[52]

There is indeed an invisible dimension to God's remnant people even though the remnant is not in itself invisible; it is also historical, that is to say, it is a historical entity organized to proclaim God's message to the world. They have to restore the truth that was cast to the ground and unmask the enemy in order to prepare the world for the return of Christ and against Satan's last deception. It is this proclamation that prepares the faithful ones in other religions to meet the Lord in glory.

This end-time remnant will grow and develop as we approach the final polarization of the human race. The *remnant* is heading, in the realization of its mission, to the final confrontation with the powers of darkness. They will be God's instruments in the eschatological polarization of the human race that will force every person to stand for or against Christ. It would be at that moment that the invisible dimension of God's remnant will disappear for ever from the surface of the earth by becoming part of the visible, historical and faithful remnant. It is at this point in human history that the eschatological remnant fully comes into expression. It is already here in its historical expression but it is growing, becoming, and getting ready for the final conflict against the dragon.

## Eschatological Remnant in E G White



### IV. Conclusion

The different uses of the concept of the remnant in the Old Testament are useful in refining what we mean when we call ourselves the remnant church. We are *the historical expression of the eschatological remnant*, raised by the Lord after the fulfillment of the prophecy of the 1260 years recorded in Rev 12. The historical remnant is at the same time the *faithful remnant* in the sense that they are the bearers of God's message to the world. They have been entrusted with a mission and message from God that, if accepted by others, will be a protection against the last great deception of Satan. This is a visible remnant that can be identified through some specific marks. The fulfillment of their mission requires the presence of some type of organization.

This historical and faithful remnant is active during the time when the dragon is forming a coalition with the beast from the sea that was healed and the beast from the earth (Rev 13) in an attempt to unite the world against God's people. During that time the remnant is also active proclaiming the messages of the three angels and gathering the rest of the members of the eschatological remnant. The biblical understanding of the remnant indicates that not every member of the historical remnant is fully committed to the Lord in a permanent faith-

relationship. But it is God's intention to cleanse this remnant separating the weeds from the wheat before the final crisis.

If the term remnant is to be used to refer to the people of God who are still in Babylon, as E. G. White suggests, we must define the term very carefully. They are a faithful remnant in Babylon, but they are not yet part of the historical and visible end-time remnant. They are faithful to the light God entrusted to them and they are also willing to accept more light from the Word of God. They need to hear the message proclaimed by the historical remnant in order to be ready to confront the deceptions of the enemy and to be able to reflect as fully as possible the character of God and the Lamb in their lives. Only then will they be part of God's historical and faithful eschatological remnant.

The *eschatological remnant* will be fully developed when those who came out of Babylon join the historical, visible and faithful remnant. This will take place at the eschatological polarization of the human race shortly before the return of our Lord. During the final confrontation they will find refuge in the providential care and protection of the Lamb.

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[1]. One of the most recent studies on the interpretation of the concept of the remnant in the Adventist church is an unpublished research paper written by Samuel Garbi, "The Seventh-day Adventist Church as the Remnant Church: Various Views over 150 Years of Denominational History," Andrews University Theological Seminary, Dec 1994. It contains a very useful bibliography.

[2]. In one of his articles Robert S. Folkenberg tells of an Adventist pastor who was leaving the ministry because, among other things, we teach, the pastor said, "that salvation can come only within its organization and through adhering to its 'unique' doctrines." Folkenberg comments, "As his words amply prove, the biblical teaching that God has a remnant people is easy to distort. While some well-intended members may have taught the doctrine in the manner this pastor described, any Seventh-day Adventist who has sincerely studied this message knows this depiction is warped" ("The Remnant," *Adventist Review*, August 1998, p. 27). Jon Dybdahl has recently addressed the issue of the misuse and abuse of the concept of the remnant; see his article, "It is God's Call: What it Means to be the Remnant," *Adventist Review*, May 9, 1996, pp. 12-14. Also useful is the article by Dwight K. Nelson, "Return of the Remnant," *Adventist Review*, August 28, 1997, pp. 8-11; and Gordon Bietz, "Birds of a Feather," *Adventist Review*, September 26, 1991, pp. 8-9. For a fuller discussion of misunderstandings and misuses of the concept of the remnant see, Clifford Goldstein, *The Remnant: Biblical Reality or Wishful Thinking?* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1994).

[3]. "Dominant Themes in Adventist Theology," *Spectrum* 10.4 (1980):67.

[4]. William G. Johnsson writes concerning a group of Adventists: "Sheltered by Adventist schools, they had a limited circle of acquaintances. But exposure to graduate study and professional life opened their eyes: with amazement they encountered deeply committed Christians who were not members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Their world, once so neat and ordered, had to be rebuilt—and the first building block to go was the remnant concept" ("In Defense of the Remnant," *Adventist Review*, May 14, 1998, p. 5).

[5]. *Ibid.*

[6]. See, for instance, "Hartland Institute: Response to the General Conference Report Concerning Hope International, Hartland Institute and Remnant Publications," (no date), pp. 10-

16.

[7]. For a good response to those questions see, Clifford Goldstein, *The Remnant: Biblical Reality or Wishful Thinking?* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1994).

[8]. This is well-argued by Gerhard Pfandl, "The Remnant Church," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 8/1, 2 (1997):19-27. For a brief discussion of the concept of the remnant among Adventist pioneers see Alberto Ronald Timm, *The Sanctuary and the Three Angels' Messages 1844-1863: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1995), pp. 415-420.

[9]. Gerhard F. Hasel, "Who are the Remnant?" *Adventists Affirm* Fall 1993, pp. 13, 31. See also Santo Calarco, "God's Universal Remnant," *Ministry*, August 1993, pp. 5-7, 30.

[10]. *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventists Belief* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1957), prepared by a representative group of Seventh-day Adventist leaders, Bible teachers, and editors.

[11]. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

[12]. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

[13]. *Ibid.*, p. 191.

[14]. *Ibid.*, p. 191-92. Italics mine.

[15]. Notice the title in the book written by R. W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979).

[16]. Ross Cole, "The Seventh-day Adventist in relation to Other Christians of Society," unpublished paper (1998?), pp. 11, 13. In another article he changes terminology and speaks not about "the church of the remnant" but about the "remnant church." ("What It is All About. . . It is About the Survivors," *Record: South Pacific Division*, June 2002, p. 29). In that same useful article he refers to the remnant who is not yet part of the Adventist Church as "the remnant that at the present time seems invisible." Cf. Ekkehardt Müller, "The End Time Remnant in Revelation," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11/1, 2 (2000):202, 203, who comments, "Just as Babylon is visible and recognizable as a system of religious and quasi-religious groups, so the contrasting group, the remnant, should at least partially be visible," implying that there are other members of the remnant outside the visible remnant.

[17]. C. Mervyn Maxwell, "The Remnant in SDA Thought," *Adventists Affirm* 2 (Fall 1988):13.

[18]. E.g., "Hartland Institute Response to the General Conference Report Concerning Hope International, Hartland Institute and Remnant Publications," (no date), p. 12, where, after suggesting that the church is in apostasy, it is immediately said, "This should in no wise overlook faithful souls who are in it and comprise the Remnant of Israel."

[19]. Steve G. Daily, *Adventism for a New Generation* (Portland, OR: Better Living Publishers, 1993), p. 315.

[20]. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

[21] Without clearly stating it, Jon Dybdahl ("It is God's Call: What it Means to be the Remnant," *Adventist Review*, May 9, 1996) comes very close to the idea of an invisible remnant. He argues that, "Neither in Scripture nor in the writings of Ellen G. White is the remnant directly equivalent to an institutional structure, church organization, or denominational entity. People inside the church can be lost, and sincere followers outside of it can be saved" (p. 14). According to him, "Remnant people are those who are never satisfied with the status quo but want to examine, learn, grow, and gather those 'scattered gems'" (*ibid.*). By qualifying the connection between the remnant and a church organization Dybdahl appears to be saying that the remnant is

scattered throughout Christianity and that at the present time it is invisible. If that is the case the remnant and the invisible church are implicitly equated.

[22]. Jack W. Provonsha, *A Remnant in Crisis*, p. 35.

[23]. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

[24]. Jack W. Provonsha, "The Church as a Prophetic Minority," *Spectrum* 12.1 (1981):18-23.

[25]. Charles Scriven, "The Real Truth About the Remnant," *Spectrum* 17.1 (1986):6-13.

[26]. Charles W. Teel, Jr., "Growing Up With John's Beasts: A Rite of Passage," *Spectrum* 21.3 (1991):25-34; see also, *Idem.*, "Remnant," in *Remnant & Republic: Adventist Themes for Personal and Social Ethics*, edited by Charles W. Teel, Jr. (Loma Linda, CA: Center for Christian Bioethics, 1995), pp. 1-35. Roy Branson finds the same social and political concerns at the very center of the book of Revelation; see Roy Branson, "The Demand for New Ethical Vision," in *Bioethics Today: A New Ethical Vision*, edited by James W. Walters (Loma Linda, CA:Loma Linda University Press, 1988), pp. 13-27.

[27]. See G. F. Hasel, "Remnant," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 132.

[28]. Hasel, "Remnant," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, p. 130. In this article the author identifies the three expressions of the remnant that we have just mentioned and defined. See also Hans K. LaRondelle, "The Remnant and the Three Angels' Messages," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, edited by Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2002), p. 860, who was also influenced by Hasel.

[29]. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 309.

[30]. Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1975), p. 154 n. 69.

[31]. *Ibid.*, pp. 183-84.

[32]. See Kenneth D. Mulzac, "'The Remnant of My Sheep:' A Study of Jeremiah 23:1-8 in Its Biblical and Theological Contexts," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13/1 (2002):134.

[33]. Hasel, "Remnant," p. 134.

[34]. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

[35]. See Pfandl, "Remnant," pp. 21-25.

[36]. On the connection between the sealing of God's people described in Rev 7 and Ezekiel 9 consult LaRondelle, "Remnant," pp. 870, 871.

[37]. That is the basic definition of the remnant that Clifford Goldstein gives in *The Remnant* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1994), pp. 78-79, where he writes, "Never mind that many members are not following that light (they did not in Israel), or that these truths aren't sanctifying many(they did not in Israel), or that these truths are not appreciated (they weren't in Israel), or that the nasty and unconverted give the message a bad name at every turn (they did in Israel as well). What's crucial is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, like ancient Israel, has been given far more light than any other faith, and that light alone gives it corporate remnant status."

[38]. Interestingly, E. G. White in her writings presents a much broader understanding of the phrase "the testimony of Jesus." In fact she never interprets the manifestation of the gift of prophecy in her life as a fulfillment of Rev 12:17. For her the "testimony of Jesus" is what Jesus revealed to us through the prophets, through his teachings while on earth and through the apostles. Fundamentally it is God's revealed will in His Word. She puts the emphasis on the content of that testimony, the truths that are revealed there, the gospel and on our witnessing to

it. For her the remnant is characterized by faithfulness to the message of the Scriptures (Angel Manuel Rodríguez, "The 'Testimony of Jesus' in the Writings of E. G. White," unpublished paper, 1998). Obviously she did not mean to say that her ministry was not a manifestation of the gift of prophecy. It probably means that out of a sense of humility she did not argue that 12:17 was referring to her prophetic ministry. It is important to observe that neither did she deny that the testimony of Jesus includes the expression of the gift of prophecy in her life.

[39]. "The Seal of God, No. 1," *Signs of the Times*, November 1, 1899, pr. 03.

[40]. *Conflict and Courage*, p. 269.

[41]. *Testimonies for the Church Containing Messages of Warning and Instruction to Seventh-day Adventists*, p. 39.

[42]. *Selected Messages*, vol. 3, p. 23.

[43]. *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 5, p. 524.

[44]. *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 535-36. It could be argued that since the historical remnant is formed by faithful and unfaithful individuals the totality of the Christian world should be referred to as the historical remnant; after all we believe that most of God's people are found in the different Christian communities. The reason why that view is to be rejected is that the remnant in Revelation has some distinctive marks that identify and separate them from other Christian groups.

[45]. *Maranatha*, p. 203.

[46]. *Great Controversy*, p. 608.

[47]. *Ibid.*, p. 612. In *Testimonies*, vol. 8, she describes the conflict as follows: "In vision I saw two armies in terrible conflict. One army was led by banners bearing the world's insignia; the other was led by the bloodstained banner of Prince Immanuel. Standard after standard was left to trail in the dust as company after company from the Lord's army joined the foe and tribe after tribe from the ranks of the enemy united with the commandment-keeping people of God. An angel flying in the midst of heaven put the standard of Immanuel into many hands, while a mighty general cried out with a loud voice: 'Come into line. Let those who are loyal to the commandments of God and the testimony of Christ now take their position. Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters. Let all who will come up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty'" (p. 41).

[48]. *Great Controversy*, p. 383.

[49]. *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6, p. 78.

[50]. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 188-89.

[51]. E. G. White, "'They Shall be Mine, Saith the Lord of Hosts,'" *Signs of the Times* 30 (Nov 23, 1904):1.

[52]. LaRondelle, "Remnant," p. 870, writes, "The apostolic church saw thousands of new believers added to its numbers (Acts 2:47; 4:4). So shall the remnant church witness the predicted influx of 'believing remnants' of many peoples, who want to be instructed and saved on 'Mount Zion' (Isa 2:1-3; Micah 4:1, 2)."

October 2000

Revised October 2002