

**“The Best Is Yet to Come:  
A Vision for the Eschatological Remnant”<sup>1</sup>**

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**Introduction**

One of the central texts for Adventist self-understanding is Rev 12:17. I translate this text from the Greek as follows: “And the dragon was angry with the woman, and he went away to make war with the remnant of her seed, those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.” Seventh-day Adventists through the years have come to identify themselves with the remnant described in this text. They understand themselves to be a people that God has raised up at the end of time who keep His commandments and have the “testimony of Jesus.”

But this traditional position has been losing ground in recent years. Increasing numbers of Seventh-day Adventists are unconvinced that the text can be focused so narrowly on a specific denomination and its beliefs at the end of time.<sup>2</sup> And outreach efforts in the post-modern context

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<sup>1</sup>I want to express considerable debt to an unpublished paper on this subject by Angel Rodriguez: Angel Rodriguez, “The Remnant in Contemporary Adventist Thinking,” a paper distributed to the Biblical Research Institute Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Andrews University, April, 2004. Rodriguez and I came independently upon the concept of a three-fold remnant and its implications for the remnant in Revelation. But his work has been very helpful to mine and I owe him a great deal. At the same time, there are significant differences and he should in no way be blamed for any faults in this article.

<sup>2</sup>I am not aware of specific studies that have demonstrated such a slippage in belief, but I share this impression from decades of teaching at the SDA Theological Seminary and in interaction with pastors and lay people around the world. This slippage has also been a major focus of attention in recent work of the Biblical Research Institute Committee of the General Conferences of Seventh-day Adventists. Rodriguez offers reasons for this slippage on pages 1-6 of the above manuscript. See also Robert S. Folkenberg, “The Remnant,” *Adventist Review*,

have encountered more resistance to the remnant idea than to such traditional Adventist “testing truths” as the Sabbath, the state of the dead and tithing.<sup>3</sup> I find the perception, even among students at the Seminary, that the very phrase “the remnant church” smacks of arrogance and exclusivity. In the evangelistic context, such an impression can become an immediate barrier to acceptance of the church and its teachings.

How should the remnant of Revelation be understood? How can the concept best be expressed in today’s world? It seems to me that questions such as these invite a fresh look at the biblical concept of the remnant, not only in Rev 12:17, but in the rest of Scripture as well. This article can offer only a preliminary and suggestive survey of the evidence, but I believe that if we submit our various preconceptions of the remnant to the testimony of Scripture, we will find that the biblical remnant concept points to a clear and exciting picture of the Adventist identity and mission. I’d like to begin this article with a survey of the evidence in Revelation.

## **The Identity and Message of the Remnant**

### **The Identity of the Remnant**

As we have already seen from Rev 12:17, the concept of an end-time remnant is a central piece of Revelation’s story.<sup>4</sup> A careful examination of the biblical text indicates that the remnant

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August 1998, 27 and Jon Dybdahl, “It Is God’s Call: What it Means to be the Remnant,” *Adventist Review*, May 9, 1996, 12-14.

<sup>3</sup>Again I am speaking out of many encounters in a wide variety of settings.

<sup>4</sup>This is substantiated in great detail by Leslie N. Pollard, “The Function of “*loipos*” in Contexts of Judgment and Salvation in the Book of Revelation,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 2007).

concept is not to be limited to those texts where the actual term “remnant” (*loipos* in Greek) appears. The end-time remnant of Revelation is, in fact, named by many names; the 144,000, the great multitude, the saints, the kings of the east, and the called, chosen and faithful followers of Jesus, among others.<sup>5</sup> This remnant is the central player in the work of God at the end of time (Rev 12:17).<sup>6</sup> It is obedient to all of God’s commandments and possesses a prophetic, visionary gift (Rev 12:17, cf. 1:2).<sup>7</sup> It is a spiritual movement that delivers a message that rallies the faithful of all nations to the true worship of God (Rev 10:11; 14:6-7).

### **The Message of the Remnant**

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<sup>5</sup>I do not have space here to argue the case for a single people of God at the end of time in Revelation, but there are markers in the text that equate the 144,000 with the great multitude (Rev 7:1-17), with the remnant (Rev 14:1, cf. Joel 2:32) and with the saints (Rev 14:12). The one people of God is described in a variety of ways in Revelation, showing its universal character (Rev 7:9; 14:6). While images like the 144,000 may have a more narrow flavor, images like “the great multitude” and “the saints” have a more universal flavor.

<sup>6</sup>Revelation 12:17 comes at the climax of chapter 12. The dragon of chapter 12 is portrayed as acting in successive stages of human history. First, he hurls a third of the stars of heaven to earth, then he attacks the male child of the woman. Then he pursues the woman into the wilderness and finally goes away to make war with the remnant of her seed. This sequential action of the dragon provides powerful textual support for a historicist reading of the chapter. See David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, Bruce M. Metzger, general editor, vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 663-664 and Jon Paulien, “The End of Historicism? Reflections on the Adventist Approach to Biblical Apocalyptic—Part Two,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17/1 (Spring, 2006): 180-208.

<sup>7</sup>The idea that the “testimony of Jesus” represents the prophetic gift is a point that is also becoming controverted among Seventh-day Adventists. But I believe the text of Revelation supports my wording in the main text. Revelation 1:1-3 portrays three stages of revelation. The Greek of Rev 1:2 identifies “the testimony of Jesus” not as the Book of Revelation (called “the words of this prophecy” in verse 3) but as the visionary gift of John himself (“the testimony of Jesus, which he saw” [verse 2—my translation]). A comparison of Rev 19:10 and 22:8-9 indicates that John and his brethren “the prophets” share in “the testimony of Jesus.” So when Rev 12:17 describes the remnant as “having the testimony of Jesus,” the best explanation seems to be that the end-time remnant will have a visionary gift among them that is similar to John’s.

Articulating the message of this end-time remnant in Revelation would require a book-length manuscript. But let me summarize briefly what I have learned about the message of the remnant from my own research into the Book of Revelation.<sup>8</sup> According to Revelation 10, there will be a great spiritual movement at a specific period just before the end.<sup>9</sup> The remnant of Revelation will proclaim the “mystery of God” (Rev 10:7), which is “announced,” utilizing the Greek verbal equivalent of the noun “gospel.” This term “mystery of God” is used frequently in the New Testament for the proclamation of the gospel (see Rom 16:25-27 and Eph 3:2-7, for example). So the final message of Revelation will be a message proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 10 also suggests that the final proclamation of good news to the world will include careful attention to the apocalyptic messages of Daniel and Revelation. The angel of Rev 10:5-6 explicitly recalls the wording of Daniel 12, and John himself is told that he must “prophesy again to many peoples, nations, languages and kings” (Rev 10:11, translation mine).<sup>10</sup> So the end-time gospel revival will be in the context of the eschatological teachings of Daniel

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<sup>8</sup>I hope to elaborate on what follows above in a book-length manuscript fairly soon. Space limitations prevent similar detail here.

<sup>9</sup>The proclamation of the angel of Rev 10:6 is that “time will be no more.” That “time” is related to the time prophecies of Daniel 12, which summarize the apocalyptic message of the last half of the book of Daniel (Daniel 7-12). Toward the end of history there would be a period in which a final message would be proclaimed to the world. Daniel calls that period “the time of the end” (Dan 11:40; 12:9). In Revelation 10 the final period runs from the end of Daniel’s time prophecies to the close of human probation (Rev 10:7). I believe that we are in that period and that the message of Revelation’s remnant is in the process of accomplishing its work.

<sup>10</sup>I see this as an affirmation that the message John placed in writing (in Revelation) would have a greater impact at the Time of the End, the time is elaborated in Rev 10:5-7 (see previous footnote) and 11:7-13 (the events of Rev 11:7-13 are after the 1260 days in verses 2-3).

and Revelation.

The first two verses of Revelation 11 add a further element. The final message of spiritual revival will include a focus on the heavenly sanctuary and the final judgment that is to take place there.<sup>11</sup> “I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, ‘Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months (Rev 11:1-2).’”

Further aspects of the end-time spiritual message are found in Revelation 12-14. There will be a focus on obedience; the keeping of all God’s commandments, not just those which are traditional or convenient (Rev 12:17; 14:12). The powerful allusion to the fourth commandment in Rev 14:7 suggests that there will be a revival of emphasis on the Sabbath as part of that focus on obedience.<sup>12</sup> But this call to obedience will not be some new type of legalism, it will be in the context of intimate relationship with the Lamb (Rev 14:1-5, 12).

Revelation 13 outlines that there will be a great deal of confusion and deception regarding the identity of God and just where He can be found in the final period of earth’s history. The end-time remnant will be warning the world about that end-time deception and providing the keys to

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<sup>11</sup>The relation of 11:1-2 with 10:11 indicates that the focus on the heavenly sanctuary will be part of the role of John’s Apocalypse in the future from John’s perspective. This brief reference combined with the overarching sanctuary theme throughout the book (Jon Paulien, *The Deep Things of God: An Insider’s Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), ????) provides the ground for this assertion, though it may be a bit more tenuous than the others.

<sup>12</sup>See Jon Paulien, “Revisiting the Sabbath in the Book of Revelation,” Jerusalem Bible Conference Issue, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 9 (1-2, 1998): 179-186.

staying on the track outlined by God.<sup>13</sup> The world will be called into judgment regarding its refusal to accept the message of the remnant and repent (Rev 14:7; 13:15-17; 16:8-9). So the message of the end-time remnant as expressed in Revelation can be summarized in the following list.

- Gospel (Rev 10:7; 14:6, 12)
- Daniel and Revelation (Rev 10:5-11)
- Heavenly sanctuary (Rev 11:1-2)
- Keeping all God's commandments (Rev 12:17; 14:12)
- Warning of End-time deception (Revelation 13)
- Relationship with Jesus (Rev 14:1-5, 12)
- Hour of judgment (Rev 14:7)
- Sabbath (Rev 14:7)

Who is this remnant in the book of Revelation? The Book of Revelation is, in many ways, the finale of the biblical symphony, the climax of the Bible, tying together themes from throughout the other 65 books of the Bible.<sup>14</sup> So the best way to understand the remnant of Revelation is to understand its entire context throughout Scripture.<sup>15</sup> We will begin our search for understanding in the Old Testament.

### **The Remnant in the Old Testament**

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<sup>13</sup>Jon Paulien, *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994), 109-119.

<sup>14</sup>Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Allusions and the Interpretation of Rev 8:7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 66-67; idem, *The Deep Things of God: An Insider's Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 153-155, 171.

<sup>15</sup>While this would merit a detailed scholarly elaboration in its own right, that work has been largely done by Hasel (see following footnote) and Pollard (footnote 4). Please see their work, especially Pollard's, for further references and resources. I do not wish to reinvent the wheel regarding the biblical theme of the remnant. The goal of my paper is to take previous work on the remnant to a further level in relation to recent historical research.

The person who, more than any other, dominates discussion on the remnant concept in the Old Testament is Gerhard Hasel.<sup>16</sup> The former Dean of the SDA Theological Seminary, his work on the remnant in the Old Testament is widely cited and his findings are generally accepted. One of his most significant findings was that the remnant concept in the Old Testament comes in three different types. The first type he called a historical remnant, which describes a group which survived some major catastrophe in the past, a catastrophe so severe that the entire group could have been wiped out.

Hasel called the second type of Old Testament remnant the faithful remnant. While the historical remnant could be spiritual, it was often merely the physical survivors of a group, whether faithful or not. In contrast to this is the faithful remnant, which distinguishes itself from the historical remnant by its faith commitment to God.

The third type of remnant in the Old Testament Hasel called the eschatological remnant. The eschatological remnant would emerge victoriously from the judgments and calamities of the end-times. It will be helpful for our purpose to explore these three types of remnant in more detail. We will begin with the beginning, the book of Genesis.

## **The Historical Remnant**

The first mention of “remnant” in the Bible is found in the Flood story. In the worldwide

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<sup>16</sup>Hasel presented his findings in two works in particular. The first was an elaboration and expansion of his doctoral dissertation at Vanderbilt University (*The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1975]). The second was a widely-cited article (“Remnant”) in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, revised and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:130-134. The idea of a three-fold remnant is introduced in the opening paragraph of the five-page article. It is expanded in his discussion of the OT prophets on page 133.

catastrophe of the Flood only Noah and those who were with him “remained alive” (KJV, based on Hebrew: נִשְׁתָּרְפוּ; Greek: κατελείφθη). Noah and his family were the survivors (remnant) saved from the destruction of the Flood in the Ark. A second reference to remnant in Genesis is found in Gen 45:7 (NIV). In the words of Joseph: “God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a *remnant* on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.” God acted through Joseph to deliver the family of Jacob from the famine which might have wiped them out in Canaan.

Both of these accounts are describing events in the past from the perspective of the author of the Pentateuch.<sup>17</sup> Noah and Jacob are, therefore, historical remnants who have become part of the “family tree” of those to whom the Pentateuch was written. In both cases there is a spiritual dimension to the historical remnant. Noah was considered a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time (Gen 6:9). He, therefore, found favor in the eyes of the Lord (Gen 6:8). Jacob was the recipient of the promises to Abraham (Gen 12:1-3, cf. 28:13-15; 35:10-13; 46:2-4) and so God’s preservation of him and his family by Joseph has spiritual implications.

If Noah and Jacob are designated remnants, then Abraham most certainly should also be thought of as a remnant, even though remnant terminology is not used in relation to him. Abraham is chosen out from the seventy nations of Genesis 10 and he is chosen to be a blessing in behalf of those nations. Gen 12:2-3 (NIV): “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*” So

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<sup>17</sup>Conservative Bible scholars generally agree on the traditional designation of Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. In this case the story of Jacob would have occurred several hundred years before the account was written.

while the term “remnant” is not used in the Abraham story of Genesis, it is clearly implied by the context. He is the remnant called out from the nations, and he is the model of the blessing that God intends for all peoples.

The remnant idea, therefore, is not limited to those parts of the Bible where the explicit language of remnant can be found. In Genesis the Abraham story has powerful remnant implications. Abraham and his descendants became a historical remnant that laid the foundation for the whole history of Israel. But in each of these historical instances there is a spiritual dimension. The historical remnant is not just the survivor of a disaster, but the object of God’s spiritual intervention. Through Noah, Abraham and Jacob God was working to keep faith alive in the world and to preserve a people that would be the custodians of that faith. But it is equally clear in the Old Testament that in many instances the concept of a historical remnant has nothing to do with faith.

In Joshua 23:12 there is a remnant of the Canaanite nations who are in opposition to God and who threaten the spiritual vitality of Israel. In 2 Sam 21:2 the Gibeonites are described as the physical remnant of the Amorites, a heathen tribe. 1 Kings 22:46 makes reference to a “remnant of the sodomites,” which Asa removed from the land of Israel. Amos 9:12 speaks of the remnant of Edom. In these and other cases the historical remnant are the physical descendants of non-Israelite peoples, they are not a remnant of faith. And even in the case of Noah, Abraham and Moses, many family members are counted in the historical remnant on the basis of someone else’s faith rather than their own. So, at best, historical remnants are mixed groups, including people of living faith, like Noah, Abraham and Jacob, and people who are descendants of those faithful ones, but not necessarily faithful themselves.

Other historical remnants in the Old Testament include the people of Israel who came up out of Egypt<sup>18</sup> and the Israelites who remained in the land after the conquest by Assyria (2 Chr 30:6; 34:9; Isa 1:9; 37:31). The term is also used in Nehemiah for those who had remained in the land during the Babylonian captivity along with those who had joined them during the Return (Neh 1:2-3; cf. Jer 40:11 and repeated references in the following chapters).

From the standpoint of various biblical writers, therefore, a historical remnant is a group, faithful or unfaithful, that represents the survivors of physical and/or spiritual disaster. The term “historical” is appropriate because there is a past dimension to this type of remnant.

### **Faithful Remnant**

The second of Hasel’s three types of remnant is the faithful remnant. In a spiritual sense, the faithful remnant are that portion of the historical remnant who are faithful to the mission and identity of the original remnant. This type of remnant functions more in the present tense, although faithful remnants can be spoken of in the past or the future tense as well.

As noted above, Noah, Abraham and Joseph/Jacob represent faithful remnants who are saved by God out of literal or spiritual crisis. It is on account of their faithfulness that God acts in their behalf. “Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (Gen 6:9, NIV) It is for this reason that he “found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen

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<sup>18</sup>As with the stories of Abraham, the language of “remnant” is not used anywhere in the Old Testament with reference to the Israel of the Exodus, so it can be disputed to what degree the Israel that settled in Canaan after the Exodus was truly a historical remnant. The Israel of the Exodus, however, has all the earmarks of a historical remnant among the nations; a mixture of faithful and unfaithful people, nevertheless the bearers of God’s purpose to bless all the nations through the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18). The remnant theme is larger than the specific language used.

6:8, NIV). Abraham lived under the blessing of God and became a faithful remnant with the capacity to bless all the nations of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). Joseph was the faithful remnant who, like Noah, became the means of saving his whole family (Gen 45:7), which included the faithful Jacob.

A more striking example of a faithful remnant in the present tense (from the perspective of the text) is found in the Elijah story. It was a time of great spiritual danger for Israel. The faith had been so widely abandoned that Elijah thought he was the only faithful follower of Yahweh left and he was running for his life (1Kings 19:14)! But God assures him that the faithful remnant numbers not one but 7000 (1Kings 19:18). The faith will survive in the faithful remnant.

In this story Israel as a whole represents the historical remnant. It can trace its history back to the Exodus, when God established his people as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). But that promise and that mission was contingent on Israel’s response, “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant” (Exod 19:5). And that past remnant has become in Elijah’s day a present reality in which the vast majority no longer hold to the mission and values that should have changed the world. In that context, God assures Elijah of a faithful remnant who would preserve the original mission. So there is a strong sense of present tense in the concept of a faithful remnant.

To my surprise, however, when the time of the prophets arrives the concept of faithful remnant moves primarily into the future, perhaps because Elijah’s negative premonition has to a large degree been fulfilled. The prophets do not deny that there are faithful ones within Israel and Judah before the Exile, but their emphasis is on a future promise that God will preserve a faithful remnant as the basis for the eschatological remnant that is yet to come. As was the case with

Noah, Abraham and Joseph, the faithful remnant becomes the seed or foundation of a much larger group that God will gather, but now the emphasis shifts from the present to the future.

Isa 4:2-3 (NIV) is a powerful and explicit prediction of a faithful remnant that God will raise up in the future. “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 (“remnant” in both Hebrew and Greek) in Israel. Those who are left (“remnant” in both Hebrew and Greek) in Zion, who remain (“remnant” in both Hebrew and Greek<sup>19</sup>) in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem.” This remnant will not only be faithful, it will be equivalent to the entire population of Jerusalem. In other words, the future faithful remnant will be visible and complete.

In Isa 6:12-13 the present and future senses of the faithful remnant are combined.<sup>20</sup> While “faithful remnant” is a present concept, the tree stump of Israel is also a “holy seed” (ESV– in the Hebrew: **זֶרַע קֹדֶשׁ**) that bears in itself the promise of a bigger and better future. The future element of this faithful remnant seems also to be the focus of Jer 23:3 (): “Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.” The immediate focus of both prophecies is

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<sup>19</sup>An interesting point to note is that three different terms for “remnant” are used in the Hebrew of this text:

**לְגֵאוֹן וּלְתַפְאֻרַת לְפִלִּיטַת יִשְׂרָאֵל: 3 וְהָיָה | תְּנַשְׂאֵר בְּצִיּוֹן וְהָנוּתַר בִּירוּשָׁלַם**

All three were translated into one form or another of the basic Greek root for remnant:

καταλειφθὲν τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἔσται τὸ ὑπολειφθὲν ἐν Σιών καὶ τὸ καταλειφθὲν ἐν Ἱερουσαλὴμ).

<sup>20</sup>The specific language of remnant is missing in the Hebrew, but is found in the LXX. So the Greek translators understood this as a remnant text, even though the Hebrew language for “remnant” is absent.

the exile to Babylon and the return. The faithful remnant preserve the mission and identity of Israel for the time when God will rekindle that mission afresh.

### **The Eschatological Remnant**

That time of renewed mission is the time of the eschatological remnant. The prophets look forward to an end-time remnant that will be bigger, more glorious and more faithful than the remnants of the past and the present. From the immediate perspective of the OT prophets, that end-time remnant would arise in the context of the return from Babylonian exile. Isa 11:10-11 (NIV): “In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant (רְשִׁיט) that is left (רְשִׁיטִי)<sup>21</sup> of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.” In the eyes of the prophet this will be a mighty event, similar in scope to the Exodus from Egypt (Isa 11:16).

This remnant after the exile will be large, visible and faithful. It is gathered from the nations and centered on the land of Israel. It will have abandoned idolatry and will be faithful to the laws of God at the heart level (Ezek 11:17-20). This eschatological remnant will call on the name of the Lord (Joel 2:32) and will no longer speak lies (Zeph 3:9, 13). They will be spiritually refined on the analogy of pure silver and gold and they will be in intimate relationship with God (Zech 13:8-9).

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<sup>21</sup>The LXX uses a cognate accusative to express this phrase: τὸ καταλειφθὲν ὑπόλοιπον τοῦ λαοῦ.

If we limited ourselves to these texts, however, one might get the impression that the eschatological remnant is limited to physical descendants of Israel. In that sense the eschatological remnant would be nothing more than a few faithful descendants of historical Israel. But according to the Old Testament prophets, the return from Babylonian exile is only the beginning of the work God will do to establish the eschatological remnant. The purifying of the remnant of Israel is in order that they might “proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your brothers, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the LORD.” (Isa 66:19-20, **NIV**). While at first this may seem simply an extension of the return of Israelites to their land, further prophecies make it clear that the “brothers from all the nations” are not limited to Israelites.

The remnant of David will come to possess Edom and “all the nations that bear my name” (Amos 9:12). Zechariah 14:16 tells us that: “The survivors (“remnant”—הַנּוֹתָר) 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.” Zechariah 8:22-23 tells us that: “Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD Almighty and to entreat him,” and “In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”

Even more amazing is the prophecy of Isaiah 19. It is so stunning that I will quote it in full (Isa 19:19-25, **NIV**):

In that day there will be *an altar to the LORD in the heart of Egypt*, and a monument to the LORD at its border. It will be a sign and witness to the LORD Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the LORD because of their oppressors, he will

send them a savior and defender, and he will rescue them. So *the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the LORD. They will worship with sacrifices and grain offerings; they will make vows to the LORD and keep them. The LORD will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the LORD, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them. In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt and the Egyptians to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together. In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."*

This text is the capstone of many texts that indicate the eschatological remnant was intended by the prophets to be far bigger than historical and ethnic Israel. It would far more international than most OT Israelites ever grasped. The eschatological remnant would transcend all past experience and move the plans and purposes of God to levels unimaginable before the time of the prophets.

So it is clear, then, that the eschatological remnant in the Old Testament comes in two phases. The first is a purified and faithful remnant of historical Israel. The historical remnant lives on and is reconstituted in an end-time faithful remnant of the larger body. In the second phase of the eschatological remnant, this faithful few go out to the nations and bring in a vast harvest of shocking diversity and massive proportions. One could almost speak of four types of remnant in the Old Testament: The historical remnants of the past, the faithful remnants in the present, the faithful remnant that is yet to come (return from exile) and the final glorious and universal remnant of the end-time. Among Hasel's three types of remnant, then, the faithful remnant is the most ambiguous, functioning either in the present or in the future, depending on the standpoint of the prophet.

I conclude this section with an illustration of the three basic types of remnant, from the standpoint of the Old Testament prophets.

Historical Remnant

Israel of the Exodus

Faithful Remnant

Faithful in Babylon

Future Remnant

1) Return

2) (The Church)

The historical remnant, from the perspective of the OT prophets, was the Israel of the Exodus. While that Israel was a mixture of faithful and unfaithful,<sup>22</sup> as a body it bore witness to God's purpose to develop a kingdom of priests that would bring blessing to the world (Exod 19:5-6; Gen 12:1-3). The faithful remnant, from the perspective of the OT prophets, were those individuals who supported the prophets in their attempts to restore Israel (and/or Judah) to the original purpose of God. They were the faithful ones who served God, even in Babylon. The eschatological remnant were, in the initial case, the returnees from Babylon who were to restore the theocracy that had been derailed by the Exile. But this future, faithful remnant was merely the harbinger of the bigger, more unpredictable, more international end-time remnant that would see the fulfillment of God's purpose for Israel, the blessing of the Gentiles and the ultimate restoration of the Garden of Eden. That ultimate restoration would find a powerful fulfillment in the church of the New Testament.

Purists in studies of the Old Testament will rightly object at a mention of the church as a fulfillment of the eschatological remnant. But it seems to me that some reference is justified here

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<sup>22</sup>As illustrated by the rebellion of the children of Israel and also the presence of a mixed multitude who went along with Israel, no doubt, from mixed motives.

by the remnant pattern throughout the Old Testament. To Abraham was given the promise that he would be a blessing to all the nations (Gen 12:3). This was not fulfilled within his lifetime, rather the opposite (Gen 12:17; 20:3-10). To Israel was given the promise that they would be a “nation of priests” (Exod 19:5-6) to bless the world as Abraham’s seed, but this was not fulfilled within the pages of the Old Testament. The prophecy of a mighty eschatological remnant was not fulfilled within the pages of the Old Testament or the subsequent history of Second Temple Judaism. So the clearest fulfillment of the eschatological remnant was that claimed by Jews within the church (Gal 3:6-16). The blessing of Abraham had truly reached a massive fulfillment in the eschatological events witnessed in the New Testament. It was bigger, more international and truly not fully predictable in terms of what was written in the OT prophets.

### **The Remnant in the New Testament**

As noted above, the national promises made to Israel in Gen 12:3 and Exod 19:6 were never fully fulfilled. At times portions of Israel even took the lead in promoting idolatry and frustrating the plans of God. The promise of blessing to the nations was rarely achieved even in part, most notably in the stories of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-10), the healing of Namaan the Syrian and the apparent conversion to the true God of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon (Dan 4:34-37). On the whole, the history of Israel in the *Torah* and the Prophets was a history of failure to achieve the expansive vision that God had communicated to Abraham and to Israel at Mount Sinai.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>The designation of Old Testament Israel’s history as a history of “failure” is not meant in an anti-Semitic way. If one is truly honest, there is no history that is not a history of failure. One of the special marks of biblical history is its candor about the shortcomings of human efforts, even when those efforts are guided by God. In ancient times people wrote their own

But the vision did not die. Instead, as we have seen, it was re-directed toward the remnant of Israel, a group that was, on the one hand, a faithful subgroup of Israel proper, yet would become the means to a massive, international, end-time fulfillment of the original promise to Abraham. This end-time remnant would not only be made up of the scattered remnants of the Israelite diaspora, it would include large numbers of people from beyond Israel (Zech 8:23; 14:16; Isa 19:19-25). This Old Testament remnant theology speaks of a great, end-time spiritual revival that would transcend the borders of the traditional people of God.

In the New Testament, the explicit and technical language of “remnant” (λείμμα, λοιπός) along Old Testament lines is limited to Romans and the Book of Revelation.<sup>24</sup> We will begin our survey of the New Testament evidence with the book of Romans. Paul argued there that the followers of Jesus of Nazareth constituted a faithful remnant carrying out the original purpose of God for Israel. It was a Jewish movement in response to the Jewish Messiah, but it would expand to include Gentiles. Note the language of Rom 11:1-5, NIV:

I ask then: **Did God reject his people? By no means!** I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don’t you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-- how he appealed to God against Israel: “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”? And what was God’s

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secular histories as stories of grandeur and success, so a mark of the reliability of the Bible is its truthfulness regarding history and also its truthfulness regarding the flaws in even its most heroic characters, such as Moses, David and Paul.

<sup>24</sup>Schrenk, oddly enough, expends six detailed pages on the Romans reference and completely ignores the evidence of Revelation, even though he includes derivatives of λοιπός in his discussion of λείμμα, clearly understanding them as cognate words. Gerhard Schrenk, “λείμμα, etc.” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 4, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), 209-215. Trenchard see λείμμα and λοιπός as grammatically related. See Warren C. Trenchard, *Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament*, revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 65.

answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” So too, **at the present time there is a remnant** (λείμμα) chosen by grace.

The New Testament did not set out to break the bonds with Israel, it saw the fledgling Christian movement as a fulfillment of the Old Testament remnant concept that would eventually fulfill the original promises to Abraham in behalf of the nations (Gal 3:8-16). The followers of Jesus were a faithful remnant of Old Testament Israel, which constituted the historical remnant that safeguarded the revelations of God and kept alive the promise that the Messiah would come and restore all things (Acts 3:22-24). So while the early Christian movement more and more became a Gentile entity, the original core was a faithful remnant of Old Testament Israel. The intention of the New Testament was that there would be more continuity than discontinuity (Rom 11:24-26).

So for Paul the historical remnant (past) was the Israel that was rooted in the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), that was confirmed as a nation at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:5-6) and that passed through several remnant stages during the time of the Old Testament prophets. The faithful remnant, for Paul, was the church of his day, founded as an in-house Jewish movement, but expanded to an international remnant that included both Jews and Gentiles. Paul’s eschatological remnant included an end-time rebirth of messianic Judaism that would unite with the Gentile followers of Jesus in a new totality of Israel (Rom 11:24-26). This eschatological remnant would be the same as that announced in Rev 12:17. So the full, three-fold remnant of Paul’s day could be illustrated as follows:

|                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Historical Remnant | OT Israel          |
| Faithful Remnant   | Followers of Jesus |
| Future Remnant     | End-Time “Israel”  |

In Paul the future remnant is not as clearly defined as it is in the Book of Revelation. But there are a few things that can be said about it. The final remnant will be in continuity with Israel, it is not constituted outside Israel. While the branches of Israel’s tree may be diverse, the root and the trunk are one (Rom 11:17-24). Paul also hints at the “surprise” of the eschatological remnant in that it contains both the “fullness” of the Gentiles and a full restoration of Israel (Rom 11:25-27). Like the Old Testament eschatological remnants, it will be bigger and more international than most Jews and Christian would have thought at that time. But there is an ironic twist on the Old Testament precedents. In Paul’s scenario it is the faithful Gentile remnant that draws the Jews back to the olive tree at the End (Rom 11:23-24, 31). The scenario of Isaiah and Zechariah is reversed in Romans!

Moving on to Revelation, the end-time remnant there, as we have seen, plays a unique role at the end of history. It would arrive at the close of Daniel’s time prophecies. It would have a worldwide mission that would cause it to become the object of worldwide attention (Rev 13:15-17; 17:14). It would have a unique message that would come to have worldwide significance (Rev 10:11; 14:6-7). That message is once again summarized in the following list:

- Gospel (Rev 10:7; 14:6, 12)
- Daniel and Revelation (Rev 10:5-11)
- Heavenly sanctuary (Rev 11:1-2)

Keeping all God's commandments (Rev 12:17; 14:12)  
Warning of End-time deception (Revelation 13)  
Relationship with Jesus (Rev 14:1-5, 12)  
Hour of judgment (Rev 14:7)  
Sabbath (Rev 14:7)

How does the remnant of Revelation relate to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has sought to develop and live out the above teachings of Revelation? Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church the sum total of the remnant, past present and future? After all, Adventists keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus. But is it possible that we have not filtered this conviction through the lens of Scripture? Can we learn something from the Old Testament distinctions between three types of remnant? If we applied that Old Testament data to the book of Revelation, what would the remnant look like? I would like to suggest that we apply the three types of remnant, as found in the Old Testament, to our standpoint in history today. At every stage of Israel's history, the remnant concept had a past, a present and a future dimension. I believe this is also true of Revelation's remnant, for the following reasons.

First of all, the three-fold remnant pattern is so pervasive throughout Scripture that it would be surprising if it had no relevance at the very end. At every standpoint throughout biblical history there has been a past, present and future dimension of the remnant, even where one or the other of the three is not explicitly mentioned. Until we reach the close of probation, past, present and future elements of the last-day remnant will remain relevant. Second, recent research into the remnant of Revelation by Leslie Pollard highlights the fact that there are actually three positive remnants in Revelation, the remnant of Thyatira (Rev 2:24), the remnant that responds to the message of the two witnesses (Rev 11:13) and the remnant of Rev 12:17. So Revelation itself

may well point us in a three-fold direction.<sup>25</sup>

I would like to support the idea, therefore, that the historical remnant of Revelation is the Seventh-day Adventist Church, rooted in the Millerite movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, arising at the time when the time prophecies of Daniel came to a close (Rev 10:5-7). The Church is grounded in the remnant mission and message of Revelation 10-14 (summarized above). Like Old Testament Israel, the Adventist Church has clear roots in the past actions and purposes of God. Yet the current manifestation of this historical remnant is a remnant with a mixed character. This historical remnant is to be equated with all who have elected membership in the worldwide institution known as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, regardless of their level of faithfulness to God or the mission of the remnant.

I would understand the faithful remnant today as those within the Seventh-day Adventist Church who have a clear concept of the message and mission of the Advent movement. They are the bearers of the original identity and are striving to apply that identity in the challenging context of a new millennium. I would not see members of other churches as part of this faithful

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<sup>25</sup>Based on Pollard's research I would see the remnant of Thyatira in terms of a faithful remnant in the midst of apostasy. While this certainly has application to the situation of the faithful few in the Middle Ages, it also has timeless relevance to the faithful remnants through the Christian era (Rev 2:29), which would include the present time (cf. Pollard, chapter 4, pages 273-308 in the defense draft). The remnant of Rev 11:13 is clearly eschatological, occurring just prior to the close of probation (Rev 11:5, cf. 10:7) and in response to the preaching of the historical remnant predicted in Rev 14:7. The two witnesses appear, at this point in the narrative, to reflect the concept of a future faithful remnant which gathers the eschatological remnant out of the "great city" (Rev 11:8; cf. Rev 18:4; cf. Pollard, chapter 4, pages 308-340 in the defense draft). Rev 12:17 would then focus particularly on the historical remnant that arises at the close of Daniel's time prophecies as noted in Rev 10:5-7. The remnant of Rev 12:17 represents what is left of the church after the relentless march of human history from the enthronement of Christ (Rev 12:10) all the way past the persecutions of the 1260 days (Rev 12:6, 14) into the time of the end (cf. Pollard, chapter 4, pages 341-404 in the defense draft).

remnant, even though they may be faithful to God and have the seal of His approval (2 Tim 2:19). Their salvation is not in question, but to be called remnant at this stage of history requires an understanding of the unique message and mission that drives the Advent movement. So the faithful remnant are those rooted in the historic remnant who have a clear conception of the remnant's identity and mission.<sup>26</sup>

Taking my cue from the Old Testament data, the eschatological remnant will be connected to the historical remnant through the mission and ministry of the faithful remnant. But it will be bigger, more international, more unpredictable than we can currently imagine.<sup>27</sup> At the vanguard of that eschatological remnant are those grounded in the historical message and identity of Adventism. But they will include a significant influx of messianic Jews who have not been part of the historical remnant.<sup>28</sup> Experience has also taught me that the remnant message can and

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<sup>26</sup>To avoid all misunderstanding, let me be clear that the “remnant of the remnant” idea that is implicit in the faithful remnant concept does not imply a “coming out” of the faithful from the historical body. The biblical examples all indicate a continuity from historical to faithful to eschatological remnants. The bigger, more unpredictable, more international remnant is always rooted in the historical remnant of each era.

<sup>27</sup>It could be objected that the membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is already the full and final fulfillment of that “bigger, more international, more unpredictable” remnant. The Adventist Church is represented in nearly every country on earth. But the reality is our presence in many parts of the world is limited to a handful of people or a small minority with little influence or impact on the majority culture. The “10/40 Window” still has half the world's population and hardly any Christians, much less Seventh-day Adventists. Even in North America less than 5% of the population has any clear understanding of the mission and message of the Church. For further examples see my book *Present Truth in the Real World* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1993), 31-42. As noted in the title of this article, “the best is yet to come.”

<sup>28</sup>Rom 11:24-26. Note also the elaboration on this text by Ellen White in AA 372-382. Of special interest: “In the closing proclamation of the gospel, . . . God expects His messengers to take particular interest in the Jewish people whom they find in all parts of the earth. . . As [the Jews] see the Christ of the gospel dispensation portrayed in the pages of the Old Testament Scriptures, and perceive how clearly the New Testament explains the Old, their slumbering

will find a home within Islam, and I expect a corresponding group of messianic Muslims to join forces with the faithful remnant and the messianic Jews.<sup>29</sup> I illustrate the three-fold remnant of Revelation as follows.<sup>30</sup> I use the term “universal,” not to express the idea that all will be saved, but to express the massive, international and unpredictable nature of the final remnant people of God, who will come from every language, people and religious tradition:

|                                           |                                  |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Historical Remnant                        | Historic Adventism               |
| Faithful Remnant                          | Bearers of Identity              |
| Eschat. Remnant                           | 1) Faithful SDAs<br>2) Universal |
| Bigger, More International, Unpredictable |                                  |

To many, however, such a thrilling and expansive outcome just doesn’t seem possible in today’s polarized world. While “with God all things are possible” in theory, in practice the differences among religions and cultures just seem too great to bridge in the gathering of an

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faculties will be aroused, and they will recognize Christ as the Saviour of the world. . .

“Among the Jews are some who, like Saul of Tarsus, are mighty in the Scriptures, and these will proclaim with wonderful power the immutability of the law of God.” AA 382

<sup>29</sup>I was first encouraged to think in this direction by a private conversation with Jacques Doukhan, who dropped a hint about the possibility of a “third witness.” See Jacques Doukhan, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002).

<sup>30</sup>Cf. the dissertation work of Leslie Pollard. Rodriguez has found the same three-fold description of the remnant in the writings of Ellen White, reported in his unpublished paper on pages 33-40.

international remnant. Not only this, how would the teachings of Revelation and the distinctives of the Adventist message ever come to be seen as crucial and significant for the entire world? In what way would the remnant message become the object of worldwide attention? What would it take for the new media and the governments of this world to focus that attention on the last-day remnant? I believe that recent research into the early history of Christianity sheds fascinating light on the need for the remnant's message and mission at the end of time. We will explore two or three recent books, whose findings have a bearing on our topic, in my opinion.

### **The Need for an End-Time Remnant**

The first of these books is called *The Partings of the Ways* by James Dunn.<sup>31</sup> The bottom line of Dunn's book is that Christianity emerged out of Judaism at a very early period (as we have seen already in the section on the New Testament remnant above). The earliest Christians considered themselves to be a subset of Judaism and were not perceived by others to be independent of it. Followers of Jesus thought of themselves as Messianic Jews. Jews and Christians served the same God, read and obeyed the same Scriptures, and worshiped in the same temple. They thought of themselves as one people, not two.<sup>32</sup>

But Dunn makes it clear that the parting of the ways between Jews and Christians was strongly advanced already in the first century of our era. As more and more Gentiles became followers of Jesus, ties to the temple and the synagogue loosened. Although they continued to read the same Bible and follow the same God, Jews and Christians largely parted ways during the

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<sup>31</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup>Dunn makes these points in detail throughout the bulk of his book (ibid., 18-229).

period between 70 and 135 AD.<sup>33</sup>

The second book I want to highlight is *Lost Christianities*, by Bart Ehrman.<sup>34</sup> In *Lost Christianities*, Ehrman adds another dimension to this parting of the ways. He asserts that there were five or six different versions of Christianity in the second century.<sup>35</sup> Most of these saw themselves as rooted in the traditions that became our New Testament.<sup>36</sup> Only one of these versions became what we call “orthodox.” All the others were suppressed by the fourth century, although elements of each have lived on in one form or another within orthodox Christianity.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Dunn, 230-259.

<sup>34</sup>Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>35</sup>Although Ehrman does not cite him, a similar point was made by Jaroslav Pelikan in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 68-120. The primary difference between Pelikan and Ehrman is Pelikan’s somewhat more negative assessment of traditions “outside the mainstream.” Pelikan also sees less significance in Jewish Christianity than does either Dunn or Ehrman. What makes Ehrman’s work especially significant is the way in which he draws implications for today’s world out of the early Christian struggle to define itself in the face of numerous options.

Lurking behind the work of both men is that of Walter Bauer: *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, second edition, edited by Georg Strecker (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1964); *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, translated by a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins, edited by Robert A. Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

<sup>36</sup>Based on my reading of Ehrman, I would list the six versions of Christianity in the second century as Emerging Orthodoxy (Ehrman calls it Proto-Orthodoxy), Jewish Christianity, Marcionism, Montanism, Gnosticism, and Monasticism, with the latter being the most questionable as a distinct expression of what Christianity could and should be. While each of the alternatives to Emerging Orthodoxy has been seen as “heretical” from orthodoxy’s perspective, adherents of each of these alternatives could and did argue their case from aspects of the tradition that ultimately produced what we call the New Testament today.

<sup>37</sup>Ehrman, 252-253.

Oddly enough, the family of Jesus itself sided, not with the emerging orthodox branch of Christianity, but with the Jewish Christian branch that became known as the Ebionites.<sup>38</sup>

Jewish Christianity maintained strong ties with Early Judaism.<sup>39</sup> In the words of Ehrman, Jewish Christians believed that “Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent from the Jewish God to the Jewish people in fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures. They also believed that to belong to the people of God, one needed to be Jewish.”<sup>40</sup> Jewish Christians continued to keep the Sabbath, eat Kosher food and circumcize all males. There was a strong emphasis on obedience as a necessary and natural part of being a follower of Jesus, and there was strong adherence to the law as expressed in the Scriptures (Old Testament) inherited from the Jews. Jewish Christianity could truly lay claim to be the earliest form of Christianity. In spite of that reality, however, and in spite of its strong continuity with the Old Testament and the ongoing support from the family of Jesus, Jewish Christianity ultimately did not survive as a viable option for the emerging church.

In many ways the demise of the Ebionites as a candidate to shape the emerging orthodoxy is no surprise. Although the Ebionites could make good use of New Testament books like Matthew and James, their full adherence to Judaism required that the writings of Paul be rejected

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<sup>38</sup>Ehrman, 99-103.

<sup>39</sup>Early Judaism is a term scholars have chosen to designate the emerging Judaism of the rabbis beginning with the third century before the common era through the second century C.E. It refers to the beginnings of modern-day Judaism. This version of Judaism did not accept *Yeshua* as the looked-for Messiah and was involved in the parting of the ways with the Christian branch of Judaism as described in this essay. See J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 54, G. N. Stanton, general editor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 59-62.

<sup>40</sup>Ehrman, 100.

to a large degree.<sup>41</sup> And without Paul, Christianity would not likely have become the major player it has been in the world for more than a millennium.<sup>42</sup>

There were, however, significant consequences resulting from Christianity's ultimate rejection of its Jewish beginnings. According to Ehrman, the Orthodoxy that emerged from the early Christian centuries became free to shape the form that Christianity would take for all subsequent history. There is a sense in which all branches of Christianity; Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant or Charismatic; have been definitively shaped by what took place in the early centuries. Orthodoxy was able to determine the structure of Christendom, to write its creeds, and to compile its revered texts into a sacred canon. Had things turned out otherwise, not only Christianity but all of history would have turned out quite differently.<sup>43</sup> One cannot argue that the course of history has taken the only possible road, or even the best of all possible roads.

The consequences of Christian orthodoxy's victory included a number of "losses" by the fourth century. As noted by Dunn, there was increasing and mutual hostility between Judaism and Christianity which resulted in both sides pulling back from positions that each had held in common at the beginning.<sup>44</sup> As both religions developed respective "orthodoxies," positions hardened against each other. As the two faiths each sought to define themselves, they did so in polemical terms toward the other. The core of each faith's identity is defined in distinction from

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<sup>41</sup>Ehrman, 101.

<sup>42</sup>Ehrman, 110.

<sup>43</sup>Ehrman, 159.

<sup>44</sup>Dunn, 243-258.

the positions of the other.<sup>45</sup>

Christianity, for example, had no serious reason to give up the Sabbath, except to demonstrate that it was distinct from Judaism.<sup>46</sup> And Jews would not have muted their interest in the Messiah had not messianic discussion inevitably led people to consider the claims of Jesus. Identity creation, in a sense, deliberately fences off the “other.” In defining what a faith is not, a community discovers itself. But in defining itself over against the other, the community walls off elements of its own tradition that were a healthy component at an earlier period.

One fascinating outcome of this hardening against each other by Jews and Christians was the rise of Islam. A reading of the earlier *suras* of the Qur’an suggests that the original impetus for islamic faith was the desire to restore the unity that had been lost between the two earlier faiths of Abraham.<sup>47</sup> According to the Qur’an, the prophets of both Judaism and Christianity were to be respected and treated as equals.<sup>48</sup> The Scriptures of both Judaism and Christianity

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<sup>45</sup>I would like to acknowledge my colleague Richard Choi. I first heard these concepts in private conversation with him.

<sup>46</sup>Note the pioneering scholarship of Samuele Bacchiocchi on the role of anti-Judaism in the abandonment of the Sabbath in *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), 169-185. While a later work (*From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, edited by D.A. Carson [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982]) has attempted to show that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday already in New Testament times. Ehrman believes that the Sabbath remained important for at least Jewish Christianity beyond the first Christian century (100).

<sup>47</sup>Consider, for example, the following passages from the Qur’an: *Al Isra’* (17) 77; *Al Nisa’* (4) 136, 150-152; *Al Baqarah* (2) 4, 40-41, 136, 285; *Al Ma’idah* (5) 46-48; *Al ‘Imran* (3) 3-4; *Yunus* (10) 94; *Al An‘am* (6) 154-157.

<sup>48</sup>*Al Baqarah* (2) 136: The Religion of Ibrahim the Hanif (135): Say ye: “We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Ibrahim, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the descendents (children of Jacob) and that given to Moses and Jesus and that given to (all) Prophets from their

were considered valid revelations that were normative for the Muslim.<sup>49</sup> The peoples of the Book (Christian Bible) were to be treated with respect and were not to be forced to convert.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, well before the death of Muhammad hostilities broke out between the new monotheistic faith and its two predecessors.<sup>51</sup> Positions hardened on all three sides. Ideas with which each faith tended to identify were marginalized or even demonized by the other two. The end result of this hardening was a sharp division among the three monotheistic faiths and increasing violence over the centuries, climaxing in the brutality of the Crusades, the Inquisition

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Lord: **We make no difference between one and another of them:** and we bow to Allah.”

*Al Nisa’* (4) 150-152: “Those who deny Allah and His Messengers, and (those who) wish to separate Allah from His Messengers, saying, ‘We believe in some but reject others.’ They are in truth Unbelievers. . . To those who believe in Allah and His Messengers **and make no distinction between any of the messengers**, we shall soon give their (due) rewards: for Allah is Oft- Forgiving, most Merciful.”

All quotations from the Qur’an in this chapter are taken from ‘Abdullah Jusuf ‘Ali, translator and editor, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*, 10<sup>th</sup> revised edition (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1999).

<sup>49</sup>*Al Baqarah* (2) 4: “(Those who fear Allah) believe in the Revelation sent to thee, and sent before thy time. . .”

*Al ‘Imran* (3) 3-4: “It is (Allah) Who sent down to thee (step by step) in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Isa) before this as a guide to mankind.”

*Yunus* (10) 94: “If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading The Book from before thee: the Truth hath indeed come to thee from thy Lord: so be in nowise of those in doubt.”

<sup>50</sup>See, for example, *Al ‘Imran* (3) 20: “Say to the People of the Book and to those who are unlearned: ‘Do ye not also submit yourselves?’ If they do, they are in right guidance, but if they turn back, thy duty is to convey the Message: and in Allah’s sight are (all) His servants.”

<sup>51</sup>For a sympathetic Western account of this tragic development see Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 182-210.

and the Holocaust on the Christian side with corresponding atrocities on the islamic side.<sup>52</sup>

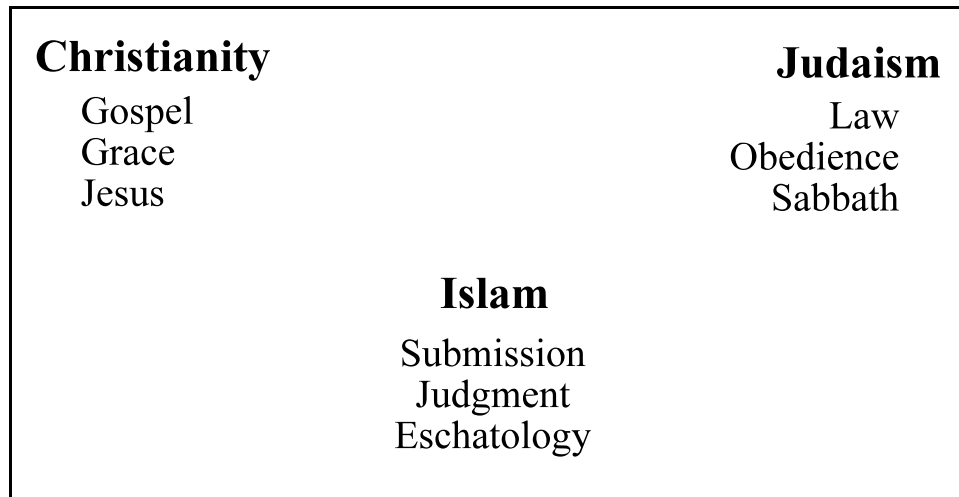
For Christianity, the losses in these separations were considerable.<sup>53</sup> Christian orthodoxy pursued narrow and selective readings of the New Testament in defense of its faith. There was general ignorance of the Old Testament. The Sabbath was lost sight of. The Bible's picture of the End became allegorized and largely faded from view. In the absence of knowledge about the Old Testament character of the Christian gospel, the practice of the Christian faith was increasingly secularized (even paganized). So the triumph of orthodoxy was not an unmitigated blessing in the course of Christian history.

A brief look at the core values of the three monotheistic faiths will illustrate how the separation and hardening against each other diminished all three to some extent. Christianity increasingly focused on the core values of Jesus, grace and the gospel at the expense of such biblical teachings as obedience, the Sabbath and eschatology. Judaism focused on its distinctive values of law, obedience and the Sabbath at the expense of eschatology, grace and the concept of Messiah. Islam increasingly focused on its distinctive values of submission, judgment and eschatology at the expense of grace, Jesus, Old and New Testament Scripture and Sabbath. And so the three faiths no longer offered a common witness to the one true God but rather a truncated and one-sided witness to each faith's unique picture of that God. I summarize this polarization in the diagram that follows.

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<sup>52</sup>The massacre of the Jews in Medina (*Yathrib*) was an example of islamic brutality during the very lifetime of Muhammad. The events of September 11, 2001 are a recent example. While Jews have rarely been in a position to oppress others in the past, the struggle to establish a modern state in the Middle East has demonstrated that Jews are not exempt from the perils of power.

<sup>53</sup>Ehrman, 253-257.



### A Final Restoration

Is there any way for this polarization to be healed? Does God have a plan to truly retrieve His faithful ones from every “nation, tribe, language and people?” And from every religion as well? I believe that another recent book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, helps us see the hand of God in recent events.<sup>54</sup> A major point of Jenkins’ book is the way the heart of the Christian faith has shifted geographically through the centuries.<sup>55</sup> Christianity began as a Middle Eastern faith nurtured under the umbrella of First Century Palestinian Judaism. But within the lifetimes of the apostles, the center of gravity of the Christian faith shifted to Asia Minor and within a century to Rome.<sup>56</sup>

While the ancient churches of the East (in the Middle East, Northern Africa and parts of

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<sup>54</sup>Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>55</sup>Jenkins, 1-3.

<sup>56</sup>Jenkins, 16-17.

Asia) continue in some form to this day,<sup>57</sup> Europe became the dominant center of Christianity for more than a millennium. The Roman Catholic Church has always been dominant in Southern Europe, the Orthodox Church in Eastern Europe and since the Protestant Reformation, Protestant Christianity has dominated Northern and Western Europe. It was from Europe, primarily, that missionaries went all over the world during the great mission movement of the Nineteenth Century.<sup>58</sup>

With the “discovery” of the “New World” and the rise of the United States as a major world power, the center of gravity of Christianity has gradually shifted from Europe to North America within the last century. As the churches of Europe declined in the face of secularism and modernism, the churches of North America retained vitality and provided a strong financial base for emerging churches in the Southern and Eastern hemispheres during the Twentieth Century. But by the turn of the millennium, these emerging “Third World” churches were taking on a life and character of their own. North America and Europe are no longer the mission and theology-shaping force that they once were. The churches in the Southern Hemisphere are growing, spreading and changing theologically on their own.<sup>59</sup> Within a few decades, Jenkins suspects, the overwhelming majority of Christians will be outside the Christian West and Christianity will once again be dominated by an eastern mentality, rather than the western one that has dominated

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<sup>57</sup>Jenkins discusses these “remnants” of non-Western Christianity on pages 18-27.

<sup>58</sup>Jenkins, 39-53.

<sup>59</sup>Jenkins, 141-162.

the religion since the Second Christian Century.<sup>60</sup>

The significance of Jenkins' observations for our thesis is that Christianity is, in a real and vibrant sense, presently returning to its roots in the East. Along with that shift, the impact of European orthodoxy on the way the faith functions is decreasing. More and more, people express their Christian faith in ways that are shaped by eastern modes of thought and action. In a sense, the emerging church in the developing world offers Christians a fresh opportunity to assess the direction the faith has gone over the centuries and make whatever course corrections might be needed. In a sense, the church is coming home.<sup>61</sup>

This golden moment offers the opportunity for Christians to re-examine what was lost in the partings of the ways with both Jews and Muslims. In many ways the orthodoxy of the Christian West has made Christianity a faith that is increasingly distant from its eastern roots. Along with this distance comes increasing distance from its monotheistic cousins. While the new easternization of the Christian faith may seem strange and threatening to Christians raised in the West, it will provide them with an opportunity to read their own sacred texts afresh and to re-discover their essentially eastern character. When this is done, the gulf between Christians, on the one hand, and Jews and Muslims on the other, will not be nearly as great.

### **The Role of the End-Time Remnant**

It seems to me that at this significant juncture in history, the theme of the remnant will

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<sup>60</sup>The last two paragraphs are based on the total flow of Jenkins' book, it is hard to pin the ideas down to specific pages.

<sup>61</sup>"Living Through the Greatest Religious Change in History: An Interview with Philip Jenkins," *Spectrum* 33 (Number 3, Summer 2005), 67.

become especially helpful in restoring what was lost in the partings of the ways. And this topic may also prove to be particularly attractive to those in the western world that have abandoned Christianity in search of a more modern or post-modern expression of spirituality.

Why should this theme become particularly important at this point in history? Because in Scripture, the concept of a remnant is tied to the survival of the human race. The first mention of remnant is in reference to Noah and his family at the time of the Flood. The whole human race would have been destroyed had it not been for the remnant. Today, the survival of the human race is once again at stake. The events of September 11, the War on Terror, and the new threats of weapons of mass destruction have caused many to question whether the human race will long survive.

But rather than increasing hostility toward each other, the events of September 11 have provoked thinking Jews, Christians and Muslims to know more about each other. There is the recognition that the gulf of separation can no longer be ignored, that dangers lurk in our ignorance about each other. There is the wistful longing to discover that there is more in monotheism that binds us together than tears us apart.

Is there a way out of this dilemma? In a recent lecture, reflecting on what he had learned in writing the book *The Next Christendom*, Jenkins offered an interesting proposal. He suggested that the easternization of Christianity would set the table for a restoration of the things that Christian orthodoxy had lost in its march toward the West. The churches of the East (and South!) are thinking wholistically, as the ancient Hebrews did.<sup>62</sup> They are much more at home in the Old Testament than are the churches of the West. And the book of the Bible that is most critical in

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<sup>62</sup>Jenkins, "Living Through the Greatest Religious Change in History," 68.

this new Christendom is the Book of Revelation!<sup>63</sup>

I suspect that this final proclamation of the gospel will be based on a fresh approach, one not bound up in traditional formulations that insult or irritate Jews and Muslims. It will point to the Messiah as one who is not the exclusive domain of Christian groups, but the one who will save all peoples at the end of time. The message will have power in its fresh application of Scripture and its respect for the footprints that God has left in the other monotheistic faiths.

Once more I summarize the primary teachings of the remnant according to the book of Revelation:

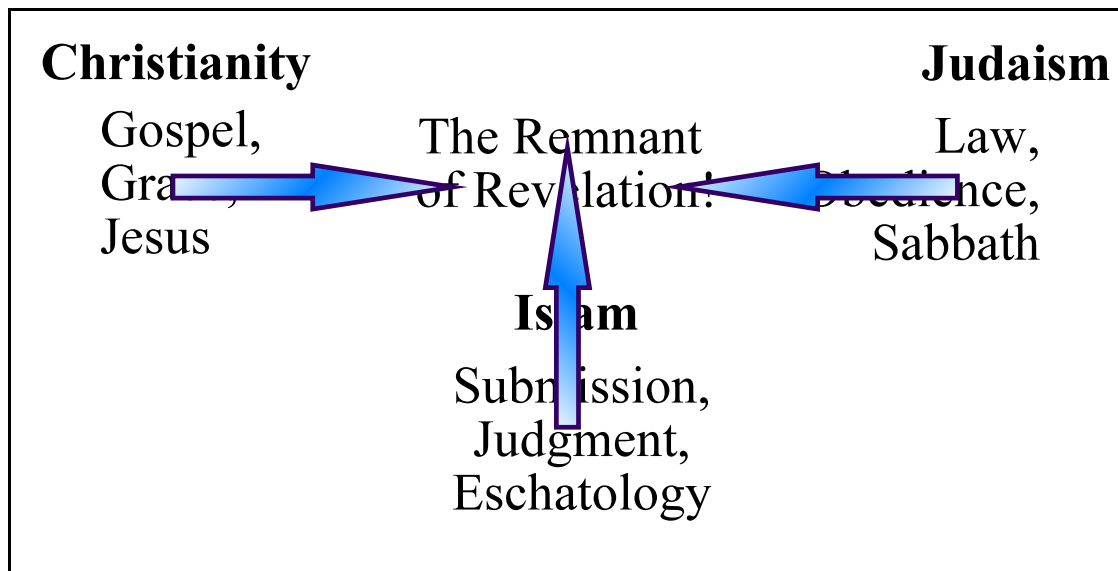
- Gospel (Rev 10:7; 14:6, 12)
- Daniel and Revelation (Rev 10:5-11)
- Heavenly sanctuary (Rev 11:1-2)
- Keeping all God's commandments (Rev 12:17; 14:12)
- Warning of End-time deception (Revelation 13)
- Relationship with Jesus (Rev 14:1-5, 12)
- Hour of judgment (Rev 14:7)
- Sabbath (Rev 14:7)

What fascinates me is the way this list of ideas correlates with the core values of the three monotheistic faiths as outlined above. It is as if the remnant of Revelation were uniquely designed to draw all the followers of the one true God into full faith fellowship with one another in the context of earth's final days (it sounds like something only a God could do). The historical remnant, flawed as it may be, becomes the meeting point where Jews, Christians and Muslims can learn to appreciate the best in the others. It becomes the place where God restores to each what was lost in the separations of the past. The remnant of Revelation becomes the meeting

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 69-70.

point of all followers of the one true God.<sup>64</sup> See the following illustration:



This comparison suggests to me that the best is yet to come for the remnant of Revelation. God's plans for the remnant are bigger and more universal than we had imagined so far. God will use the faithful ones among the historical remnant to do a work whose breathtaking outcome will be as unpredictable as the outcome of the eschatological remnant foretold in the Old Testament

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<sup>64</sup>In an email dated June 30, 2007, Andrews professor Duane Covrig suggested that I expand the trio to include a fourth element that will be reached by the eschatological remnant, the secular. He argued that most secular people today have three central values that are at the heart of SDA faith as well (I am paraphrasing his email in my own words for brevity). 1) The Adventist emphasis on religious liberty connects well with the secular imperative for tolerance and acceptance. 2) The Adventist emphasis on the whole person is shared in secularism's appreciation of the whole body. For the monotheisms, the spiritual trumps the other aspects of life, often marginalizing the full nature of human beings. Adventists and seculars emphasize the importance of body and mind to full humanity. 3) The Adventist view of creation and Sabbath should lead to respect and care for the environment, one of the key emphases of the secular culture today. It has also led Adventists to be more open to scientific tools of investigation than most religious perspectives, a point of contact with secular culture. A reasoned study of Scripture is the best safeguard against end-time deceptions. The monotheistic religions can benefit greatly from a more rigorous and scientific analysis of how sacred texts are used to support beliefs.

prophets. Jew, Muslim,<sup>65</sup> Christian and more will find common cause in the teachings of the remnant as foretold in the Book of Revelation. This is not a call for ecumenism in any institutional sense. I suspect most religious institutions will not abandon their traditions in earth's final hour. But true believers from all backgrounds will recognize the final call of the gospel and discover kindred spirits among the "enemy." This will be a God-ordained and Spirit-driven unity, not one grounded in religious politics or ecumenical dialogues. It will be the ultimate fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **that all of them may be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, **that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity** to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:20-23, NIV

**The eschatological remnant will also be the fulfillment of the original promise to**

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<sup>65</sup>To western minds the concept of affinity between Adventism and Islam may seem like quite a stretch. But it should be no surprise to any Adventist who has spent time among Muslims in the Middle East. I have never spent an hour with a Muslim in the Middle East without the question, "If you are from America, how come you are not a Christian?" When I asked why they thought I was a Muslim rather than a Christian, I made an important discovery. In their minds the defining marks of a Christian are;

- 1) Drinking alcohol,
- 2) Eating pork,
- 3) Dressing immodestly,
- 4) Following the Pope,
- 5) Idolizing America and Hollywood,
- 6) Lax in obedience to God.

I came to realize that on all the practical issues that define a Muslim from his or her Christian counterparts in the Middle East, Adventists track with Muslims rather than Christians. And once I accepted that the label "Christian" was a gross misrepresentation of who I was in the Middle East, I had no further barriers in engaging Muslims on spiritual themes. I believe that the Adventist context is the ideal place where Muslims, Christians and Jews can find common ground as we approach the End.

Abraham. In a sense, the entire remnant theme comes full circle in the final acts foretold in Revelation. According to Genesis 12:1-3, all the nations of the world were to be blessed in Abraham. While the whole human race was blessed in a representative way through Jesus the Messiah (Gal 3:8-16), the eschatological remnant concept sees that spiritual blessing distributed in a more visible and tangible way to every nation, culture and people (Rev 14:6). Since Abraham is the common father of all three monotheistic religions, the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled on a bigger, more unpredictable way than we had imagined up until now.

### **Conclusion**

To be a Seventh-day Adventist, then, is much more than simply being against things that other churches do. It is more than just isolated activities like keeping the Sabbath and avoiding certain foods. Being an Adventist is to have a sense of prophetic destiny, that the lives we live and the doctrines we teach were marked out in advance by Jesus as the appropriate response to the end of the world. Being an Adventist means being the bearer of a unique and vital message that will restore things that have been lost and reconcile people who have been at odds with each other for many centuries.

This remnant identity is, however, no guarantee that I or those I love will be saved. It is no guarantee that the particular community I am a part of will stay faithful. This remnant identity is a calling and a gift from God, it is not a basis for arrogance or boasting. While Ellen White has offered promises that the “ship of Adventism” will somehow make it through, the same author has said, “All the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.”<sup>66</sup> So identification

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<sup>66</sup>Ellen G. White, MS4, 1883; 1SM 67.

with the Adventist Church should not lead to feelings of superiority, but to feelings of responsibility in the face of the great opportunity that lies before the people of God at the very end of history. It is the mission, not the institution, that is glorious.

You see, the sad experience of past historical remnants should warn us that even the best of religious institutions is flawed. If Satan cannot achieve his goals by outright error and deception, he tries to get the people of God to mix truth and error, what has come to be known as syncretism. But where that doesn't work he tries to use truth to hurt people. It is often well-meaning institutions of religion that hurt people even in the way they promulgate the truth. So it should not surprise us if many have been steered away from the path of God by the well-meaning yet mistaken actions of the entities that bear witness to His truth.

All religious institutions are human attempts to respond to God. At their best, religious institutions are designed to promote God's plans in the world. But over time, being part of an institution that we believe is serving God can make us feel superior to outsiders, it can eventually cause us to demonize those who are different from us. As a result, outsiders avoid the message of God on account of His people. And God's people lose the corrective effect of those who think differently. So it should not come as a surprise that the Seventh-day Adventist institution is flawed in its attempts to respond to the initiatives of God.

In light of this, how can one best position oneself to be part of God's great, international, eschatological remnant? Should we avoid an institution like the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of its flaws? Absolutely not! The remnant theology of Scripture informs us that the only safe place as we approach the End is to be a faithful part of the historical remnant available to us. In other words, feeble and defective as the Seventh-day Adventist Church may be, it is the only

institution on this earth that has sought to pattern itself upon the model and the message of the remnant in the Book of Revelation. While the institution and its members are flawed, the eschatological remnant will be a consequence of the efforts of faithful ones within the historical remnant. While the final remnant will be bigger, more international and more unpredictable than we may have thought, there will be a clear thread between the historical remnant and the eschatological one.

As we approach the end of time, Adventists can stand firmly in the present, having a strong sense of who we are. We know where we have come from, seeing the hand of God in our past history. And we have at least some sense of where we are going, in the light of both prophecy and the history of God's dealings in the past. While there are certainly flaws in the historical remnant, the best is yet to come!