

The „remnant“ and „the others“

A Reappraisal of Adventist Remnant Theology

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Seventh-day Adventists have seen in the "rest" of Rev 12:17 a prophetic description of their own movement, denoting themselves as "The Remnant Church". This identification is based on several assumptions, rarely questioned by Adventist interpreters. Among them is the view that the "rest/remnant" of the woman's offspring denotes an end-time faithful minority group standing over against the much larger body of Christians in general. However, an analysis of the Greek term *oi loipoi* and its use in the New Testament shows that it is consistently used in a comparison between two entities, with the "rest/remnant" often representing the majority. A more accurate translation of the term, therefore, is "the others". In Rev 12:17 these denote all (the other) children of the woman beside her firstborn child (Jesus). In other words, the "rest" or "remnant" is made up of all faithful believers who hold fast to the "word of God" and the "testimony of Jesus" as revealed to John and passed on by him to the churches (Rev 1:1-11). Seen in this light, the term "remnant", rather than having an exclusivist meaning by referring only to Seventh-day Adventist Christians, has strong inclusivist connotations inasmuch as it encompasses all faithful believers, which make up the entire body of Christ. Adventists would do well to broaden their view of the true "remnant" in the light of a careful study of the biblical text.

Introduction

Nothing describes the historic self-understanding of Seventh-day Adventists better than the biblical term "remnant" and its derivative "remnant church". From the very beginning, the Sabbath-observing heirs of Millerite Adventism have used these terms to denote themselves and their own denomination. They express in a nutshell what Adventists believe and teach about their church and its mission. Thus, it may be said that these expressions constitute the pulsating heart of Adventist ecclesiology.

While the "remnant" concept is an integral part of Adventist theology, it should be noted that this claim usually presupposes and implies a personal identification by someone with the Seventh-day Adventist Church as "my" church. After all, "church" is something to be believed and confessed, rather than to be debated or proven by conclusive arguments. The attempt to discuss the "remnant" concept (including its biblical foundation) in a purely objective way may conceal the fact that one's view on this issue is closely tied to personal convictions and experiences. These, in turn, may lead to fruitless debates that produce more heat than light. What is needed, therefore, is neither a polemical nor an apologetic approach to the issue but rather a setting where different views can be freely expressed and evaluated, ideally on the basis of mutually agreed criteria. This conference is a welcome opportunity to do just that.

Even in an Adventist context such as this, the acceptance of the traditional identification of the remnant with the Adventist church should not simply be presupposed. What we are dealing with here is a question that belongs to the realm of personal faith decisions. Combined with the fact that the very identity and self-understanding of Adventism is at stake, the remnant concept turns out to be a highly sensitive issue. Still, as with any other truth claim, it deserves to be restudied and re-evaluated from time to time to test its biblical foundation and continuing appeal to people today.

This essay offers some historical, biblical, and theological reflections on the Adventist remnant concept. To begin with, the real and/or perceived problems with this concept are briefly discussed, followed by a survey of traditional and contemporary Adventist views on the remnant. After that, the biblical remnant idea will be summarized and its usage in the book of Revelation studied. Finally, some conclusions are drawn with regard to the usefulness of the notion for today.

1. „The Remnant“ under Scrutiny

All through its history, the remnant concept has been part and parcel of the Adventist self-understanding as God’s end-time movement, called to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ. On the other hand, people outside the church have not adopted this claim—understandably so. In recent years, however, the notion has drawn some criticism even from within and some alternative views have been proposed. Critical remarks have come mainly from three observations.

For one, to label one’s own denomination as the true “remnant church” of Bible prophecy (in distinction to fallen Babylon!) sounds rather arrogant and condemnatory to many ears, creating an impression of sectarian exclusiveness, which posits “us” against all others—including other Christians. Such an attitude—whether real or perceived—is an embarrassment for church members who see other Christians in a positive light and do not want to divide the Christian world in two opposing parties—“us” and “them”.

In addition, in today’s culture any exclusive notion or absolute truth claim is firmly opposed and regarded as an indication of narrow-minded fundamentalism and bigotry. If the Adventist church is perceived as partaking of such a mentality, it will be regarded (and denounced) as a sectarian fringe group. This, however, would be detrimental to the mission of the church. Over the years, Adventists have come to appreciate the benefits of (selective) cooperation, rather than confrontation. Some Adventists fear that the “remnant” idea may be harmful to the image of the church in contemporary society.

Finally, looking at the empirical reality of modern Adventism, the claim to constitute the “(faithful) remnant” does not seem to stand the test of time. Are Seventh-day Adventists really better Christians? Does the Adventist church actually stand out in comparison to other denominations? The answer seems to be No. For example, during the Third Reich, Adventists (including their leaders) were just as fearful and subservient (if not more so) as others when threatened by the State—their alleged preparation for the end-time crisis notwithstanding. Seen in this light, the self-designation of Adventists as “(faithful) remnant” seems rather questionable.

These observations lead to the conclusion that the notion of the “remnant church” deserves a careful review in order to define and, possibly, redefine it in the light of the biblical remnant idea. The need for an honest reappraisal of this time-honoured self-designation was implicitly acknowledged in 1998 by the then editor-in-chief of the *Adventist Review*. “*However poorly we may have understood or conveyed the remnant teaching ...we need to keep thinking about and refining our presentation of the remnant.*”¹ It is to this end, that this paper is written.

2. “The Remnant” in Adventist Theology

Historically speaking, the Adventist self-designation as “remnant church” has its roots in the experience of the Millerite Adventists in the 1840s. The latter saw themselves as faithful “virgins” waiting, and calling the world to prepare, for the coming of the Lord to the eschatological wedding (Mt 25:1ff). When the Bridegroom failed to appear, those who still believed their movement and message to have been led by God’s Spirit searched for, and ultimately found, an explanation for their disappointment and also a new sense of mission and purpose. As the faithful “remnant” of the Millerite movement, they began to form a new group which in the 1860s organized itself as the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The first publications of the Sabbatarian Adventists used the term “remnant” in a quite literal sense for the few dozens of believers living in the northeastern part of the United States. For

¹ William G. Johnsson, “In Defense of the Remnant.” *Adventist Review*, 14 May 1998, 5 (Emphasis supplied).

example, the first Broadside published by James White in 1846 to spread his wife's visions was entitled *To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad*. A year later, in 1847, James White published a small pamphlet with the title *A Word to the "Little Flock"*. From 1849 onward, Sabbath-observing Adventists began to relate the term to themselves as those who live and preach the Sabbath truth.²

Besides pointing to the small size of the new movement, the term "remnant" soon also took on a connotation that would become a characteristic feature of Seventh-day Adventism: the renewed missionary drive. A few hundred believers were firmly convinced that there would be 144,000 Sabbath-keepers when Christ would appear in the clouds of heaven within a few months or, at the most, years! To be part of the "remnant" meant to be part of a movement spreading "the last message of mercy to the world" that would prepare God's end-time church for Christ's Second Advent. This urgent sense of mission, which has driven Adventists to the very ends of the earth, was, and still is, intrinsically connected to the remnant concept.

This fact is succinctly expressed in the baptismal vow: „Do you accept and believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the remnant church of Bible prophecy and that people of every nation, race, and language are invited and accepted into its fellowship?“ (#13)³ Significantly, the German translation of the Church Manual renders this sentence somewhat different: "Do you accept and believe that the Seventh-day Adventist Church *has the marks of the remnant* of Bible Prophecy..." ("die Kennzeichen der Übrigen").⁴ This is an indication of the uneasiness among Adventists in some regions caused by the identification of the church with the biblical "remnant". Instead, they prefer to speak more guardedly about the biblical marks of the (remnant) church.

The traditional view was reaffirmed in 2006 by the Second International Bible Conference in Izmir (Turkey) in its Consensus Statement, which uses phrases like "God's end-time remnant" and "the remnant church" to denote the Adventist church.⁵ In other cases in recent decades, "Remnant Church" is written with capitalized letters, thereby using this phrase like a proper name or title.

In its classical version, the Adventist "remnant" concept denotes a faithful minority group of Christians, standing over against the much larger body of Christians that make up apocalyptic "Babylon", the fallen church(es). On the basis of the historicist method of prophetic interpretation, which looks for specific historical events as the fulfilment of the apocalyptic visions, the "remnant" in Rev 12:17 is understood to be a symbolic description of the Seventh-day Adventist movement.⁶ The three identifying marks of the "remnant church" are said to be its appearance in the end-time after 1798 (the end of the 1260 years), the Sabbath doctrine ("the commandments of God"), and the prophetic gift manifested by Ellen White ("the testimony of Jesus"). For some, its minority status also seems to be an identifying mark.⁷ No one but Seventh-day Adventists have these features.

According to **Clifford Goldstein**, Adventists qualify as the remnant people, not because of their faithfulness to God, but simply on the basis of their privileged position. „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.“⁸ Others are hesitant to identify the

² Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God* (New Bedford, MS: By the Author, 1849), 45f.

³ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 17th ed., rev. 2005, 33.

⁴ *Gemeindeordnung/Gemeindehandbuch 1998*, 56 (Emphasis supplied).

⁵ Newsletter of the ATS, Fall 2006, 3.

⁶ "The Adventist self-designation as God's remnant people is based on a historicist reading of Revelation..." (Rodriguez, in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant*, 226; cf. 203-209).

⁷ See, for example, *Towards a Theology of the Remnant*, 180 ("Almost by necessity..."); and Erhard Biró, "Du sollst ein Segen sein," *Adventist World*, July 2011, 12f.

⁸ Goldstein, 78f. „Can a cold, dead, asleep church be the remnant? Or one filled with legalism, worldliness, divorce, adultery, and sexual misconduct? Or one that doesn't live up to the standards the Lord has given it?... *Of course it can!* ... the Adventist church remains the remnant church, if for no other reason than that it alone possesses the remnant truth. No matter how many child-molesters, libertines, hypocrites, fanatics, or other unconverted degenerates suck the

biblical remnant with any existing church organization. As **Jon Dybdahl** has pointed out, „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.“⁹ On a more personal note, **Bert B. Beach** has expressed the view of those who feel uneasy about the identification of any church with the apocalyptic remnant.

Personally, I do not like to use the expression „remnant church“. I believe it is dangerous to equate our church with the remnant, for I believe that there are many people who belong to the remnant but who are not Seventh-day Adventists. We do have a special message, which we must bring to the world, but we also believe that the church of Christ, the invisible church, is larger than our denomination.¹⁰

Richard Lehmann has presented a well-balanced view of this sensitive matter.

„The conviction of the Seventh-day Adventist church to form the eschatological remnant is not exclusive; rather it is a call to every church to follow the divine plan, which foresees the formation of a faithful remnant at the end of time. The biblical remnant must not be confused with any ecclesiastical institution ... From this it follows that the claim to be the remnant of biblical prophecy is more a challenge than a fact, more a call than a result, more a criterion of faith than the sum of their works. To be the remnant is possible only by unqualified faithfulness to the divine plan.“¹¹

Obviously, then, today there exist several views among Adventist theologians about the identity of the remnant.¹² (1) While to some this symbol denotes sincere Christians in all churches including but not limited to Adventists,¹³ (2) others broaden this view to include even non-Christians, arguing that the “kingdom of God” encompasses more than Christians. (3) A third view limits them to faithful Adventists in contrast to apostate ones. (4) Again others see it as an unfulfilled prophecy, with Adventists being a kind of proleptic remnant. (5) Then there are those who argue in favour of an invisible remnant, (6) while still others see in them a movement of social reform opposing modern ‘Babylon’. In view of this situation, one is tempted to ask: Will the real remnant please stand up? However, this approach will not settle the matter either. Instead, it may be more profitable to take another look at what the Bible—particularly the book of Revelation—says about the remnant. In fact, it appears that a contextual study of the Greek term used in the Apocalypse for the “remnant” provides a clear and convincing answer to this question.

3. „The Remnant“ in Scripture

power and spirit out of the body, we are still corporately the remnant because we alone have the remnant truth.” (Ibid., 77f.98)

⁹ Jon Dybdahl, *Adventist Review*, 9 May 1996, 14.

¹⁰ “Die Wahrheit in Demut sagen.“ Interview mit Bert B. Beach, *AdventEcho*, January 2007, 20.

¹¹ *Die Gemeinde und ihr Auftrag*, 1994, 101.

¹² For a discussion of these alternate views, see Frank Hasel. “The Remnant in Contemporary Adventist Theology,” in *Towards a Theology of the Remnant*, 163-172; and Angel M. Rodriguez, “The Remnant and the Adventist Church,” unpubl. MS (2000, rev. 2002). The development of the Adventist “remnant” theology is traced by Rolf J. Pöhler in *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study on Doctrinal Development*. Friedensauer Schriftenreihe, Series A, Theology, vol. 3. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), 105-109.

¹³ This view was first proposed in the 1950s in the book *Questions of Doctrine*, which presented Adventism to the general public. “Seventh-day Adventists firmly believe that God has a precious remnant, a multitude of earnest, sincere believers, in every church...” (“*Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief*. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1957), 192.

It has frequently been observed that the Bible—from Genesis to Revelation—not only uses the word “remnant” and related terms repeatedly, but that there exists also a biblical theology of the “remnant”. Without claiming to be comprehensive, there are, in the main, four different, but overlapping versions of the remnant idea in the Scriptures. Together, they convey the picture of a historical, faithful, eschatological remnant people of God who resist the temptations to compromise their faith and are saved in the end by their divine Lord.¹⁴

- **The *small remnant***, which—thanks to divine grace—is saved from destruction (Genesis [Noah, Lot, Joseph]; Amos);
- **The *faithful remnant***, which resists the spiritual and moral decline among God’s people (1 & 2 Kings [Elija]);
- **The *holy remnant***, living in the last days (Isaia);
- The remnant, which is considered **the *entire Israel*** (Romans 9-11).

In all of these cases, the “remnant” constitutes the true people of God of any given period. Nowhere is there an indication that it is identifiable with any religious institution or organization. At heart, the “remnant” is people! This agrees fully with the biblical view of the church (*ekklesia*).

Does this also hold true for the book of Revelation or do we find a different picture there? Inasmuch as the Adventist understanding of the “remnant” is based primarily on the Apocalypse—particularly on Rev 12:17—this question seems to be crucial. In fact, a contextual analysis of this verse is foundational to assess the Adventist remnant theology. It may also serve as criterion for evaluating different interpretations among Adventists of the “remnant”. Whatever Adventists believe and teach about the “remnant church” should be based on a sound exegetical study of this verse, read in the context of the Apocalypse, the New Testament, and the biblical canon as a whole.

4. „The Remnant“ in the Apocalypse

A study of the remnant idea in the book of Revelation shows that the “remnant” are the true end-time followers of the Lamb who remain faithful amidst widespread apostasy and persecution. They can be identified by their loyalty to the word and will of God (“the commandments of God”) and to the revelation of Jesus Christ (“the faith/testimony of Jesus” = “the spirit of prophecy”). It is their patient endurance (14:12) which qualifies them as ‘overcomers’ who will enter the golden city.

Like the New Testament as a whole, the Apocalypse has an eschatological perspective that considers the present as “the last days”, which span the time between the first and the second advent of Christ.¹⁵ In this sense, all true followers of Christ through the ages may be considered part of the “remnant” church. As Lehmann has pointed out, “If the theme of the remnant is central to the book of Revelation, it is because the book is addressed to the church. As such, it addresses the remnant of all ages, those who have constituted the true people of God, the church as the body of Christ.”¹⁶ The congruence of the “remnant” in Rev 12:17 with the “great multitude” of the redeemed in Rev 7 confirms this conclusion.

In the book of Revelation, there are only two groups: the followers of the Lamb and the worshippers of the beast. *Tertium non datur*. Consequently, there is only one true church—called the “remnant”—to which all of God’s people belong, even those who are still in “Babylon” (18:4). Nowhere do we find a third group beside apostate “Babylon” and faithful “Jerusalem”. If, on the

¹⁴See *Toward a Theology of the Remnant*; cf. Richard Lehmann, „Die Übrigen und ihr Auftrag,“ in *Die Gemeinde und ihr Auftrag*, Ch. 4.

¹⁵ Acts 2:16f; 1Cor 10:11; 1Tim 4:1ff; 2Tim 3:1ff; 1Pt 1:20; 4,7; Hebr 1:1f; 9:26; Jam 5:1ff; 1John 2:18.

¹⁶ Richard Lehmann, “The Remnant in the Book of Revelation,” in *Towards a Theology of the Remnant*, 97; cf. 91-94.

other hand, one confines the “remnant” to a visible church entity, i.e., the Seventh-day Adventist Church, then one needs to postulate a much larger body of true Christians (“the universal church”), of which Adventists (“the remnant church”) are only a part.¹⁷ To avoid the charge of sectarian exclusivism, Adventists have followed this route. However, in so doing, they have interpreted the “remnant” in a way that seems to conflict with the exegetical meaning of the text.¹⁸

In Revelation 12, the “woman” denotes the people of God, not as individual believers, but rather in a collective sense as in Gal 4:26, where “Jerusalem that is above” is called by Paul “our mother”. According to John the Revelator, the “woman” is the “mother” of the male child (Jesus) as well as of her other children, called „the remnant of her seed” (12:17 KJV) or „the rest of her offspring” (NKJV, RSV, NIV, NEB). Nowhere does the Apocalypse depict the faithful “remnant church” as a minority group among the woman’s many other (unfaithful) children. Rather than standing in contradistinction to a hypothetical multitude of God’s children, the term “remnant” points directly to Jesus, the “firstborn” of the children of God.

This contextual understanding of the “remnant” is confirmed by a simply word study. The Greek term used here is οἱ λοιποί, which literally means „the others“. Without exception, this term is used in the New Testament in a comparison between two groups, whereby “the ones” are set over against “the others” (*hoi loipoi*). Interestingly, the idea of a *small* rest is not an essential part of its meaning. In fact, in nearly all instances, “the remnant” forms the majority!

- the faithful virgins vs. the other (foolish) virgins (Mt 25:10f)
- the two disciples of Emmaus vs. the other disciples of Jesus (Mk 16:12f)
- the disciples of Jesus vs. the other listeners of Jesus (Lk 8:10)
- the pious Pharisees vs. the other (sinful) people (Lk 18:9.11)
- the 12 (11) disciples vs. the other disciples of Jesus (Lk 24:9f)
- the Gentile Christians in Rome vs. the other Gentile believers (Rom 1:13)
- the believing Jews vs. the other (unbelieving) Jews (Rom 11:7)
- the married Christians vs. the other Christians (1 Cor 7:10-12)
- the church in Corinth vs. the other churches (2 Cor 12:13)
- the believers vs. other people (unbelievers) (1 Thess 4:13; 5:6)
- the letters of Paul vs. the other Scriptures (2 Pt 3:16)

Sometimes, a single person stands over against a much larger “remnant”.

- Peter vs. the other apostles (Acts 2:37)
- the sick father of Publius vs. the other sick people of Malta (Acts 28,8f)
- Paul vs. the other apostles (1 Cor 9:5)
- Peter vs. the other Jewish Christians (Gal 2,12f)
- Clemens vs. the other fellow workers of Paul (Phil 4:3)

Something very similar also applies to the book of Revelation. Here the term *hoi loipoi* appears eight times. At least four of these occurrences have a profane meaning, merely denoting “the others” (8:13; 9:20; 19:21; 20:5). In the other four instances, the theological meaning of a small, faithful, holy remnant is possible, even though here, too, the translation “the others” seems

¹⁷ See *Towards a Theology of the Remnant*, 111, 173, and 218-226. Paradoxically, according to this ecclesiological model, the multitude of true believers are now said to be “scattered” or “diffused”, while the “[little] remnant” are visibly gathered in one denomination (ibid., 219).

¹⁸ This may explain the arbitrary distinction between the “remnant” in 12:17 (“undeniably Adventism ...the corporate remnant church”) and the remnant in 14:12 (“undeniably a larger group”), an interpretation that postulates two distinct “remnant” churches (Goldstein, *The Remnant*, 90f.123).

quite sufficient to do justice to the meaning of the text (2:24; 3:2; 11:13; 12:17).

In Revelation 12, the dragon (Satan) persecutes the woman who has given birth to the male child, who was taken up to God and to his throne (12:5). Then he attempts to kill “the other” children of the woman, i.e., the younger brothers and sisters of the “firstborn”, in other words, the faithful followers of Christ (12:17). These “remnant” are identical with the 144.000 saints and the great multitude, respectively, in chapter 7 who will enter the New Jerusalem. In short, the “rest” or “remnant” in the Apocalypse is made up of all faithful believers who “obey God’s commandments and hold on to the testimony [or faith] of Jesus” (12:17; 14:12).

5. „The Remnant“ Today

Those who argue in favor of the traditional view on the „remnant church“ admit that Ellen White herself had a broader, more inclusive understanding of the subject. While she generally argued along the lines of her fellow believers, at times, she expressed a more comprehensive view of the remnant. Thus, she can speak of non-Adventists, and even non-Christians, as “faithful ones,” “chosen ones,” or “hidden ones”, calling them “a remnant”, which existed in every age.¹⁹ Clearly, “Ellen G. White appears to use the term ‘remnant’ to refer to true believers outside the Adventist church.”²⁰ It is the same view that Seventh-day Adventists presented in the 1950s and beyond as their official position. This study has shown that this is in agreement with the “remnant” theology of the book of Revelation. Should this, then, not also be(come) the official teaching of the church?

When the book of Revelation uses the symbols of “Jerusalem” and “Babylon”, bride and prostitute, respectively, it presents two diametrically opposed attitudes toward God and his truth. These find visible expression in two kinds of adoration. While the faithful worship God and the Lamb, the wicked worship the beast and its image. Only in a secondary sense can these characteristics be applied to organizations or institutions that embody these attitudes. Just as “Babylon” encompasses more than any particular church, “Jerusalem” stands for more than any specific denomination. The church is not invisible or hidden, neither is it identical to any institution.

Moreover, the pure and faithful “remnant” cannot be identified with any organized group of believers, which always falls short of the mark. No church is a full representation of the ideal, though it may and should strive for it. Whether it actually belongs to the true “remnant” depends on its faithfulness to the word and will of God. As Kit Watts has put it succinctly: “If we don’t act like the remnant, we aren’t the remnant.”²¹ A church that does not live like the remnant cannot claim to be “the remnant church”. Only those who actually live according to God’s revelation will be counted among the holy and faithful—their self-designation notwithstanding. To the degree in which Adventist Christians actually possess the characteristics of the ‘overcomers’, they may humbly claim to belong to the universal “remnant church” of Christ.²²

This view, however, is not self-serving or exclusive. It applies equally to any other church striving to be holy and faithful to God. In other words, Rev 12:17 and 14:12 contain a call to every Christian church to follow God’s plan and to be part of the universal “remnant church”.²³ Besides, it is not up to us to determine the “remnant status” of other people or groups (cf. John 21:21f).

¹⁹ Angel M. Rodriguez, „The Remnant People of God in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” in *Towards a Theology of the Remnant*, 181-199, esp. 196-198 (cf. 223f); and idem, “The Remnant and the Adventist Church,” unpubl. MS (2000, rev. 2002), 18-22.

²⁰ Rodriguez, in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant*, 223f.

²¹ Kit Watts, “The Remnant Is as the Remnant Does,” *Adventist Review*, 3 September 1992, 5.

²² Richard Lehmann, “Die Übrigen und ihr Auftrag,” in *Die Gemeinde und ihr Auftrag*, 98-101 (cf. idem, „Die ‘Übrigen’ und ihr Auftrag,” in *Glauben heute 2010* [Lüneburg: Advent-Verlag, 2010], 68-69).

²³ “Die Überzeugung der Adventgemeinde, dass sie den eschatologischen Überrest bilde, ist nicht exklusiv; sie stellt vielmehr einen Ruf an alle Kirchen dar, dem göttlichen Plan zu folgen, der die Bildung eines treuen Überrestes am Ende der Zeiten vorsieht.“ (Richard Lehmann, *ibid.*, 101)

According to the ancient Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan creed (381 A.D.), the church of Christ possesses four distinct marks or features: it is one, holy, catholic (universal), and apostolic. If one compares these distinctives with the description of the “remnant” in the book of Revelation, there is a remarkable agreement between them. In fact, it can be argued that, rightly understood, the *notae ecclesiae* and the marks of the “remnant” are virtually the same. After all, the “remnant” are united in Christ (unity), sanctified in the truth (holiness), global in their outreach and perspective (catholicity/universality) and obedient to the authoritative revelation of God & Christ (apostolicity).

This view entails two important conclusions. Firstly, it calls for fuller understanding of what it means to “keep the commandments of God and the testimony/faith of Jesus”. To relate this phrase to the fourth commandment and to the manifestation of the prophetic gift by Ellen G. White, as Adventists have done, may be defended on biblical grounds. Still, it is a rather deficient interpretation. A study of this expression in the Scriptures in general and in the book of Revelation in particular reveals the comprehensive scope of these terms.²⁴ Adventists should, therefore, continue to explore and unfold the deeper implications of what it means to live holy and faithful in today’s world. True “catholicity” includes not only a worldwide missionary perspective but also an attempt to present the truth in all of its theological implications and contemporary applications.

Secondly, this approach enables Adventists to engage in a genuine dialogue with other Christians and churches. While there need to be walls to protect the saints from error and doors that can be shut to keep out unwanted elements, the same doors can also be opened to invite others to come closer and profit from the perspective gained only from within. Instead of locking Adventism into a parochial view of the “remnant church”, this very concept, understood in its biblical setting, may serve to build bridges of understanding to other Christians and people of good faith who also strive to live faithfully according to the light they have.

Conclusion

This study has taken another look at Adventism’s unique self-designation as the “Remnant Church”. It was based on the assumption that such a reappraisal is as needed as profitable.

How exclusive or inclusive should Adventist “remnant” theology be? Some years ago, an article in *Ministry* described the remnant church as open and universal, rather than as exclusive, separatist, parochial, or sectarian.²⁵ It is my conviction that, rightly understood, the concept of the “remnant church” has clear inclusivist connotations inasmuch as it encompasses all the faithful that make up the universal body of Christ in every generation—including the last. In my view, as Seventh-day Adventists we would do well to broaden our understanding and presentation of the end-time “remnant” in the light of Revelation’s encompassing view of “the other” children of God.

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²⁴ The early Sabbatarian Adventists had a quite comprehensive view of these characteristics. To them, they encompassed both the Old Testament (“the commandments of God”) and the New Testament (“the faith/teaching of Jesus”) in their entirety. Interestingly, Ellen White herself never related her prophetic gift to the “testimony of Jesus” in Rev 12:17; see Angel M. Rodriguez, “The ‘Testimony of Jesus’ in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” in *Toward a Theology of the Remnant*, 227-243.

²⁵ Santo Calarco, “God’s Universal Remnant,” *Ministry*, August 1993, 5-7,30.

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