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The mission of the remnant: *To reveal and proclaim God's glory*

As Seventh-day Adventists, we have often said that the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 contain the mission statement of the remnant people of God—those faithful to Him in the last days of earth's history.¹ If that is true, and I believe it is, we must be sure that our ministry is in keeping with that commission. The loud cry of Revelation 14 calls us to true worship—to give glory to God and worship Him (vv. 6, 7). A primary focus of the remnant is just that—to reveal the glory of God by attracting people to truly worship their Creator.

This article will interpret the concept of “God’s glory,” survey briefly the importance the Bible gives to the mission of proclaiming God’s glory, and deal with the practical questions of how our ministry and mission can reflect the mission of the remnant, to “give glory to God.”

Glory to God: The basic meaning

The Hebrew word translated “glory” is *kābôwd*. Figuratively, the word means “heavy” or “weighty,” but in a positive sense it carries the idea of honor, esteem, glory, and majesty. Used in reference to God, the word signifies majesty and esteem innate to

the Person of God. Therefore, “glory” signifies both an attribute of God and our recognition of His worthiness. The Greek word *doxa* in the secular context meant “reputation” or an “opinion.” The New Testament writers used the word differently, taking their cue from the Septuagint’s use of *doxa* as a translation of the Hebrew *kābôwd*.

God’s glory is what God reveals about Himself. This springs from His love, mercy, justice, and wisdom, as well as His power. God’s revelation of Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai shows the biblical significance of this interpretation. He told Moses that He would show him “His glory” as He passed by (Exod. 33:22), and then He came declaring His attributes and character (Exod. 34:6, 7).

When God’s people reveal His glory, they help people to see what He is really like. Strauss correctly states: “To glorify God simply means to bring His innate glory to light, to expose it, manifest it, reveal it, demonstrate it, make it known. It is to put God on display and show Him off for who He is. . . . We make His attributes prominently known.”²

The mission of Israel to proclaim God's glory

The concept of a “remnant” as the faithful people of God is a prominent

theme in the Old Testament, especially in the prophetic books. Although the prophecies warn of judgments, they also speak of a remnant that will finally fulfill the mission God had for Israel. Isaiah says, “He said to Me, ‘You are My Servant, Israel, in Whom I will show My glory’ ” (Isa. 49:3, NASB). Israel was to be the “light to the Gentiles” and a channel for God’s glory to be seen by the nations.

Jeremiah reflects this same understanding: “ ‘Then this city will bring me joy, glory, and honor before all the nations of the earth! The people of the world will see the good I do for my people and will tremble with awe!’ ” (Jer. 33:9, NLT).

Some of the most beautiful expressions of Israel’s mission for God are found in the congregational psalms. One example is Psalm 67:1, 2: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us; ‘Selah’ may your ways be known on earth, your salvation among all nations” (NIV).

Psalm 96 not only indicates that the character of God will be revealed through His people but calls upon the people of God to proclaim the good things about God among the nations. “Sing to the LORD, praise his name; *proclaim* his salvation day after day. *Declare* his glory among the nations,

his marvelous deeds among all peoples. Say among *the nations*, ‘The LORD reigns.’ The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity” (vv. 2, 3, 10, NIV; italics added).

It is hard to miss that this psalm calls for Israel not only to worship and “ascribe” to God the glory that is “due him” (v. 8) but also to “proclaim,” “declare,” and “say among the nations” these glorious attributes of their God.

The mission of the church to proclaim God’s glory

Jesus, of course, was the perfect Reflector of God’s glory. One purpose of the incarnation was to communicate perfectly God’s true character to humankind. “So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father” (John 1:14, NLT).

The New Testament is clear that the disciples and the church are commissioned to fulfill the mission that God had given Israel: “God’s glory must be revealed.” Paul wrote of this mission to the church in Ephesus: “So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10, NASB).

Second Corinthians 8:23 states that not only was this the mission of those who follow Christ but it was being done, constituting “splendid examples of those who bring glory to Christ” (NLT).

From these passages we can see clearly that part of the mission of the church is to proclaim the glory of God. Our understanding of the great controversy should convince us of this. An enemy has smeared God’s name and proclaimed a false picture of His character. God’s desire is to return His glory to this earth, to draw humanity back to Himself as they learn the truth about His character and His law, and to have a people who will join Him in making His glory known.

“Those who wait for the Bridegroom’s coming are to say to the people, ‘Behold your God.’ The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.”³

Practical applications for ministry, evangelism, and missions

If revealing and proclaiming God’s glory is part of the remnant commission, we will want to make sure we are doing it. We have, in many ways, already shared God’s glory with the nations. God has even revealed His glory when we did not do very well at our part of the plan—just as He did through Israel. However, I am convinced that we still have much to do to make the glory of God a priority in our ministry and evangelism. Here are some things we can do.

Lead your church to reflect God’s glory. Your church is not composed of perfect people. I am not suggesting that they must be perfect. One of the most compelling facts concerning the character of God is that He loves sinners; our churches will continue to reveal that truth! However, the remnant is called out to be a people who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus (Rev. 14:12). This shows what God needs, especially in these last days: to reveal the beauty of His character *and* of His ways. This means the world needs to see God’s glory reflected in His people. God has always needed this; as He told Israel, “‘I, the LORD, have called you to demonstrate my righteousness. . . . And you will be a light to guide all nations to me’” (Isa. 42:6, NLT).

As Wilbert Shenk has indicated, “The calling of the church is to glorify the Triune God (1) by faithfully witnessing to the reign of God, and (2) by living as a sign of that reign.”⁴ Ministry in the context of our remnant theology demands that we merge those two

aspects in order to correctly reveal God’s glory.

As Adventists, we have often done better at proclaiming *what* God wants His people to do as citizens of His kingdom than we have at showing what the King is like. James White worried about his church in this regard: “Our positions are fully sustained by an overwhelming amount of direct scriptural testimony; . . . but we, as a people, have evidently rested down upon a theory of truth, and have neglected to seek Bible humility, Bible patience, Bible self-denial, and Bible watchfulness, and sacrifice, Bible holiness, and the power and gifts of the Holy Ghost. . . . Hence it is said, ‘And knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked [Rev. 3:17]. What a condition!’”⁵

We can quote from memory Ellen G. White’s comment that “if we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”⁶—as if it were another device for successful church growth. We are right, of course; however, the important message is that God needs a people who reflect His glory so He can draw more people unto Himself.

Ministry basic number one, then, is revival—Holy Spirit-filled pastors and leaders leading congregations to “passionate spirituality.”⁷ Congregations are needed who so love Jesus that they cannot help but live out His character of love and mercy and unselfishness. Disciples are needed who are praising God among the nations and living like Jesus.

Make the goal of ministry and mission to reflect God’s glory. If God needs disciples who will reveal His glory, the obvious goal of our mission must be to make more of the same. The organized church throughout the centuries has often felt comfortable with the “baptizing” and “teaching them all things” parts of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19, 20). These are only steps to making new “disciples,” but the commission cannot be complete until the disciples live and testify the glory

of God’s character. Success, if we dare use that word for our endeavors, is found in God’s kingdom only as new believers become maturing disciples and disciplers—reaching out to a lost world in the glorious name of our God.

Build your church according to the glory of God model. I am indebted to Pastor Kim Johnson for leading me to see the importance of building a church according to the glory of God model.⁸ Figure 1 shows that there are two possible ways to build a church. The traditional approach has been the informational model, shown on the left side of figure 1, which is based on the philosophy of providing information “to as many people as you can as fast as you can.” We have truth to share, and we have promoted many good ways to what should be next.

The information model says that we should share those truths with the world. This is not bad, of course; but when this is the primary model, we find the church failing to fulfill the mission of every disciple giving God glory. The figure shows how this model results in the emphasis of evangelism centering on a few “professionals” who have the gifts of evangelism, preaching, and teaching. These are good gifts, but they are only a few of the gifts listed in Scripture. The result is that most members become spectators, cheering the professional from the sidelines. “Spectator” is *not* one of the definitions of a disciple!

The glory of God model on the right side of figure 1 emphasizes “building people who live God’s love.” The church working from this model will reach out to people in relationships. This model

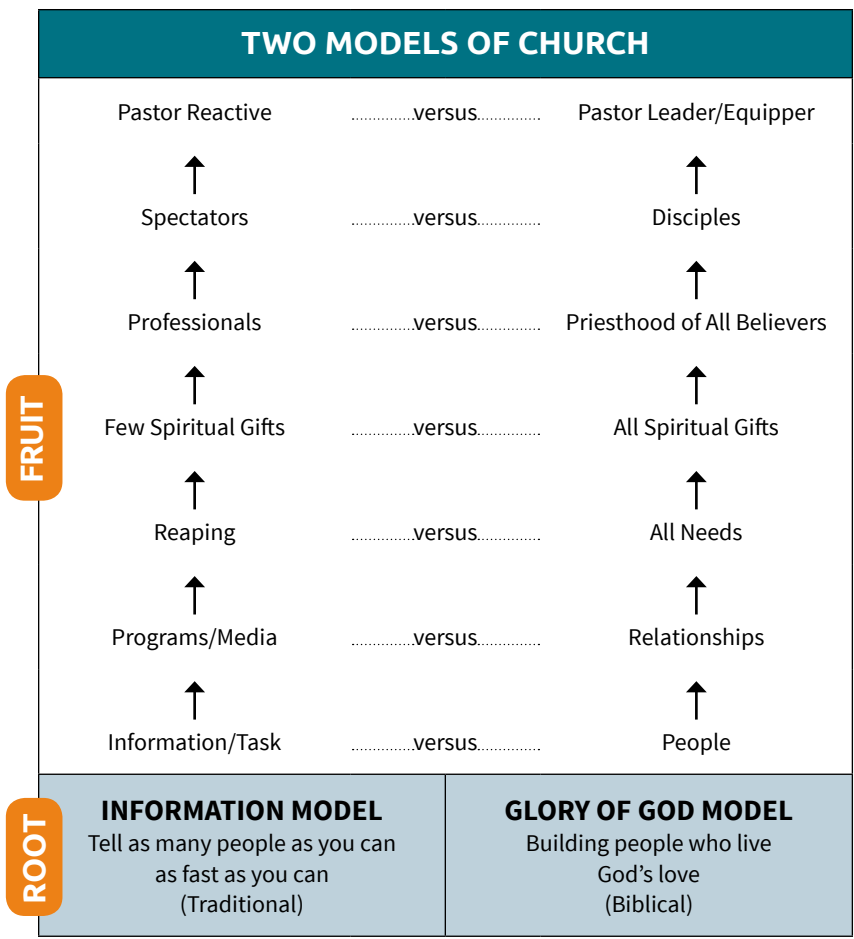
requires the use of every spiritual gift because different people are attracted to God’s glory in different ways. Because no one has every gift but every disciple has at least one of the gifts, everyone in the church is involved in “evangelism” (making relationships for God), which, of course, is the essence of discipleship. Can there be any doubt that God’s glory is being revealed in this church more than in a church that emphasizes programs for information distribution?

The glory of God model does not exclude communicating information. If our mission is to bring glory to God, we will find a need to communicate information about God, His plan, and His ways. But showing God’s glory will be the motivation. We must share truth—by truth, we mean the truth about God and His revealed will—or we will share a false story about God (Babylon). I am not advocating a Baha’i type of manifesting God’s glory—a New Age idea of being little gods manifesting the character of a big God. Truth about God can be communicated only if the truth actually reveals His glory. Information about God given at the proper time in a relationship that results in a person being drawn to worship His Creator is the kind of information sharing that the glory of God model envisions.

Formulate ministry strategies to give God the glory. It should be obvious by now that the so-called standard solution⁹ is not compatible with a church whose motive is to glorify God rather than to just increase membership. The truth about God is eternal and unchanging, but the best way of “telling” that truth is as varied as relationships. A disciple in love with God will be motivated to share his or her Lord in the most favorable way possible, and this will take a Spirit-guided unique plan for each situation, for each prospective disciple and community. Sometimes spoken words might be appropriate. Other “strategies” of witness will be personal and contextual during the daily activities and relationships of church members.

There will, of course, be opportunities for church-planned programs to

Figure 1, Models of building a church



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meet a specific need or opportunity or to help members discover and use their gifts. There will even be circumstances when the public preaching of the Word is the best way to tell of God's glory. The glory of God model, however, should remind us that preaching would be only a small part of the witnessing for God that happens in a church of committed disciples. If we truly are joining God in His mission to bring glory to His name, will the Holy Spirit not guide us in how we do His work?

Could it be that our most challenging task as leaders is not to produce good programs for our churches but to help the church look at what they are now doing and evaluate each aspect as to its place in the mission of the remnant church? Sabbath Schools may have begun a hundred years ago with God's glory in mind, but is your Sabbath School bringing glory to Him today? Pathfinders have become a

great organization for our kids, but does your church operate Pathfinders so as to enhance its glory of God's mission? God has used our schools to bring Him glory, but our schools must continually check to see whether they are doing everything to maintain that mission of God.

Conclusion

As God's remnant people, we must be letting Him use us in His mission to draw all unto Himself. The three angels' messages tell us that a special urgency exists to proclaim God's mission in these last days. We must be the people who are faithful to Jesus, following Him completely and reflecting His character in and out of the church so that His name will be glorified, as redeemed people of all nations worship Him as their Creator and Redeemer. ✓

1 This article is adapted from a presentation given at the *I Will Go*

conference, September 1, 2010, River Plate Adventist University, Argentina.

- 2 Richard L. Strauss, "The King of Glory," chap. 24 in *The Joy of Knowing God* (Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 1997). Accessed August 23, 2004, from www.bible.org/docs/theology/proper/joy/joy-24.htm.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 415, 416.
- 4 Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 15.
- 5 James White, "The Seven Churches," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 16, 1856, 189.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 189.
- 7 One of the "eight characteristics of a healthy church" according to worldwide research done by Christian Schwarz. See Schwarz, *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* (Saint Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 2001).
- 8 I worked with Kim on a small committee that prepared discipling material for the pastors of the Southern New England Conference. The glory of God model was one of his contributions. These materials can be found in his book, *Spiritual Body Building Manual* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2001).
- 9 Standard-solution strategies: "strategies which assume that methods that effectively work in one particular context will effectively work in other world contexts." It is the "one-size-fits-all mentality." See Gailyn Van Rhee, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 142, 143.

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