

THEOLOGY OF THE LAST GENERATION: HISTORY AND EVALUATION¹

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The theology of the last generation has been used by some Adventists to explain the delay of the *parousia* and to define the nature and purpose of Christian perfection. It claims that the character of God, maligned by Satan, will be vindicated through the life of the last generation of believers before the coming of Christ. This theology was very influential among some Adventists during the 1960-1970s and is now returning to the theological agenda of the church, particularly among groups with a tendency to the extreme right within the church. According to them, God expects perfection from each believer and this will contribute to the vindication of His character and to the soon return of Christ. We will look at the roots of this theology, its influence, and its theological deficiencies.

M. L. Andreasen and the Last Generation

M. L. Andreasen has been considered one of the most influential theologians of the church during the 20th century.² It was his intention to develop a theology that would provide theological unity to his theology of the sanctuary. He found it in the theology of the last generation.³ Andreasen argued that the daily and annual services of the sanctuary, Christology, and eschatology are unified through his understanding of an eschatological theodicy. In his theology, the great controversy played a central role.

¹ This is a revised and enlarged version of my paper, "Theology of the Last Generation: A Chapter in Adventist Theological Discussions," in *Al Aire del Espiritu: Festschrift al Dr. Roberto Badenas*, ed. Ramon Gelabert and Víctor Armenteros (Libertador San Matin, Argentina: Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2013), 199-213.

² This is the opinion of George Knight, "Historical and Theological Introduction to the Annotated Edition of *Questions on Doctrine*," in *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: Annotated Edition* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), xvii.

³ For a discussion of the different influences on the thinking and theology of Andreasen see, George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 144-146; and Woodrow Whidden, *E. J. Waggoner: From Physician of Good News to the Agent of Division* (Hagerstown, MA: Review and Herald, 2008), 238.

1. *Need for the Vindication of God*: Andreasen argued that the vindication of God's character was necessary because of the charges raised by Lucifer against His authority, His government, and His law—which was a reflection of His character. Lucifer argued that since no one could obey God's law, God was unjust in requiring obedience to it. This cherub persuaded some angels and planted doubts in the minds of many others. His "accusations . . . constituted an impeachment"⁴ against God. God was now on trial before the universe and it was His responsibility to submit evidence to exonerate Himself from the legal charges.⁵

2. *The Fall and the Vindication of God*: In Andreasen's theology, the fall into sin is of central importance. He gives the impression that the fall was useful to God because it gave Him the opportunity to demonstrate His innocence. The central purpose of the work of Christ, he went on to argue, was not so much the salvation of the human race, but the vindication of God through His people.⁶

3. *Christ and the Vindication of God*: Andreasen argued that Satan required from God to demonstrate that humans should be able to obey Him out love. This led Him to conclude that, "it is necessary for God to produce at least *one* man who has kept the law."⁷ This would exonerate Him from the charges. One would expect him to argue that Christ's obedience provided enough evidence to vindicate God, but this was not what he suggested.⁸ For him Christ was a model for Christians to emulate and not the exclusive

⁴M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Services* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1937; revised in 1947), 315.

⁵Ibid., 316.

⁶He writes, "The matter of greatest importance in the universe is not the salvation of men, important as that may seem. The most important thing is the clearing of God's name from the false accusations made by Satan" (Ibid., 320).

⁷Ibid., 316.

⁸He came close to this idea: "Christ has revealed to men the character and nature of God, and has in His life given a demonstration of what God is like, so that men no longer will need to be ignorant of the fact that 'God is love'" (*The Faith of Jesus* [Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1939], 501). If we take that statement to its logical conclusion we would have to say that in Christ's revelation of God's love He vindicated the Father. But Andreasen moves away from that conclusion arguing that "such demonstration needs to be made to each generation; for men are not acquainted with the Father as they should be" (ibid.), implying that this is done through human beings (cf. 512). See, Georg R. Knight, *The Pharisee's Guide to Perfect Holiness* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), 205-207.

instrument for the vindication of God. In the incarnation, Christ took our fallen human nature and revealed the power of God available to every human being who like Him relies solely on the power of God to obey His law. The last generation will be able perfectly to copy him.⁹ Since Christ's life was only a model for us to follow, it apparently was not intended to exonerate God.

4. Day of Atonement and the Vindication of God: In order to integrate his views around the doctrine of the sanctuary, Andreasen argued that during the daily services repentant sinners were forgiven, but during the Day of Atonement they were cleansed. His soteriology included both forgiveness and cleansing. Forgiveness is received when humans hear the proclamation of the gospel and accept it. This is the ministry of Christ in the holy place. At that moment they are saved and are at peace with God.¹⁰ But salvation includes restoration, cleansing, and sanctification or deliverance from the actual power of sin, leading to victory over it.¹¹ The antitypical Day of Atonement, he suggested, will demonstrate the power of the gospel in the life of God's people and will eventually vindicate God. The main emphasis of the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary is on God's cleansing work in the human heart.¹² He will do in every believer what He did in Christ.

5. Character Perfection and the Vindication of God: Andreasen tried to distinguish his views from sinless perfection. He writes,

When the work is completed, when he has gained the victory over pride, ambition, love of the world—over all evil—he is ready for translation . . . Satan

⁹He writes, "When Christ died on the cross He had demonstrated in His life the possibility of keeping the law" (*Sanctuary*, 309). This seems to suggest that it is now up to believers, with the power of God, to transform that possibility into a reality in their lives.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 300, 301.

¹¹He concluded that one of the important lessons of the Israelite sacrificial system was "to teach priest and people to abhor sin and to shun it" (*Sanctuary*, 73). The repentant sinner left the temple "with a firm determination not to sin again" (74). When discussing the corruption of the priesthood, Andreasen argues that the priest encouraged the people to bring sin offerings instead of encouraging them "to abstain from sin" (77). It would be a calamity if the people would abstain from sinning because they would not bring offerings. Through this attitude they taught the people to sin (81, 84-85). He concluded that many priests did not understand the prophetic message of "victory over sin" (86). It appears that Andreasen overlooked the fact that the sin offering was not of great personal benefit for the priests. More important for the priests were the peace offerings, a freewill offering not associated with any particular sin, from which they obtain a significant amount of meat.

¹²*Ibid.*, 298.

has no more temptations for him. He has overcome them all. . . . God has finished His work in him. The demonstration of what God can do with humanity is complete.¹³

This condition of total victory over sin will be the experience of the last generation of God's people. Therefore, "in the last generation God gives the final demonstration that men can keep the law of God and that they can live without sinning."¹⁴ Their test will be more difficult than the test of Adam and Eve.¹⁵ They will vindicate the character of God. Once this demonstration "has been accomplished, the end will come."¹⁶ Hence, the second coming of Christ was indissolubly linked to the sinless condition of God's people. Although Andreasen did not use this argument to explain the delay of the *parousia*, he opened the door for such a usage.

At the eschaton, the true nature of the kingdom of Satan will be revealed. Then no doubt will remain "in the mind of anyone that, had he the power, Satan would destroy every vestige of goodness, hurl God from the throne, murder the Son of God, and establish a kingdom of violence founded on self-seeking and cruel ambition."¹⁷ In that scenario the death of Christ as a revelation of the true nature of sin and Satan is not central. The movement is away from soteriology to eschatology. It is through the last generation—identified by him as the 144,000—that "God stands fully vindicated. Through them He defeats Satan and wins His case."¹⁸ This is the cosmic theodicy.

Influence of Andreasen's Theology

Even though he never considered the perfection of the last generation to be meritorious, his teaching contributed to the presence of a strong element of legalism in the church. During the 1960s and 70s his ideas were misused, modified or rejected by many. During the 1960s a layman from Australia, Robert David Brinsmead, accepted

¹³ Ibid., 302.

¹⁴ Ibid., 318. "To live without sinning" means for him "to live without sin" (cf. 302).

¹⁵ Ibid., 312.

¹⁶ Ibid., 299. He interprets the Gospel Commission as including overcoming sin: "This command—to observe all things—is parallel to the prophetic message that to obey is better than sacrifice. When this work is done, the end will come" (89).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 319.

and developed some of the ideas of Andreasen. But his most significant influence on Brinsmead was related to his teachings on the last generation. Like Andreasen, he maintained that God's final answer to Satan's charges concerning the impossibility of keeping His law was to be answered through the last generation.

But Brinsmead tended to radicalize Andreasen's views. He believed that the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary was the cleansing of God's name, His vindication.¹⁹ He even concluded that humans were created "to vindicate His [God's] name and exonerate His law, and to help bring to an end the work of Satan."²⁰ The eternal antidote for sin was not simply the cross, but the life of the last generation who will live without sinning and without a mediator. Thus God will demonstrate that there is no reason for the presence of sin in the universe. Brinsmead took Andreasen's ideas to an extreme, teaching that the perfection of the last generation will take place during the judgment, at which time "humanity will be united (married) to divinity" and the individual "will be as sinless in the flesh as Christ was sinless in the flesh."²¹ His emphasis on perfectionism ended when he accepted the Reformers understanding of justification by faith, which finally took him to antinomianism, and that resulted in his permanent separation from the Adventist church.

Interestingly, the influence of Andreasen's views resurfaced in the 1970's. This time it was developed in a more sophisticated form by theologians in leading positions in the church. Two of the most influential were Herbert E. Douglas and C. Mervyn Maxwell. Herbert E. Douglass was one of the editors of the *Review & Herald*, and consequently his views were influential.²² Using statements from Ellen G. White, Douglass established what he called "the harvest principle as an explanation for the

¹⁹Robert Brinsmead, *Man Born to be King* (Australia: Prophetic Research, 1966) 109.

²⁰Ibid., 109-110.

²¹Binsmead, *God's Eternal Purpose*, 199; quoted in *History and Teaching of Robert Brinsmead* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1962), 18.

²²See for instance, Herbert E. Douglass, "Ellen White's Eschatological Principle," *R & H*, May 23, 1974, 12; "A Special Truth and Special Work," *R & H*, June 6, 1974, 14; "Truth Understood Only by Men of Faith," June 20, 1974, 11; "God's Stakes His Honor on a Victorious People," *R & H*, July 4, 1974, 15-16; "Fitness for Heaven, Now," *R & H*, July 18, 1974, 11; "Not Entrapped by Cheap Grace," *R & H*, August 1, 1974, 17-18; "Sanctification not Imputed," *R & H*, August 15, 1974, 13-14; "Heaven Waits for Human Channels," *R & H*, August 29, 1974, 13-14.

delayed of the Second Advent.”²³ The condition of the church “determines when the landlord returns to his faithful servants.”²⁴ Christ is waiting “until His church on earth had vindicated truth—His character—in their lives.”²⁵ Christ is waiting “until the gospel seed has produced a sizable and significant group of mature Christians in the last generation.”²⁶ According to Douglass “Jesus proved that man in sinful flesh could live without sinning.”²⁷

Over against Andreasen, Douglass suggested that Christ’s earthly ministry demonstrated that Satan was a liar; that the Law was just; that God was love, and that justice and mercy can coexist. Christ vindicated God.²⁸ How does the last generation contribute to God’s vindication? Doubts may still linger, says Douglass, particularly among humans, who may doubt that we can overcome like Jesus did. So, in order “to silence that last lingering question. . . Jesus now waits for His church to reproduce what He achieved, thus proving again that man with fallen human nature can live without sinning. This demonstration will complete the vindication of God’s character and government and will settle the question of His justice and mercy forever.”²⁹ Like Andreasen, Douglass does not consider character development to be a contribution to our salvation, but a response of gratitude to the Lord for redeeming us. He also tried to distinguish his views from a sinless perfection that places the individual beyond temptation and the possibility of sinning.³⁰ Douglas influence has diminished but he continues to write on the topic.³¹

²³Herbert E, Douglass, “Men of Faith—The Showcase of God’s Grace,” in *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1975), 20.

²⁴Ibid., 22.

²⁵Ibid., 15. See also his article, “Why God Wait?,” *These Times*, July 1, 1975, 10, where he write, “the evidence that vindicates God’s patience, mercy, and justice rest in the lives of men and women who have proved that God’s ways is best . . .”

²⁶Ibid., 19.

²⁷Ibid., 43.

²⁸Ibid., 52.

²⁹Ibid., 53.

³⁰Ibid., 13.

³¹See his books, *Why Jesus Waits* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976; *The End: Unique Voice of Adventists About the Return of Jesus* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1979),

C. Mervyn Maxwell, a professor at Andrews University Theological Seminary, brought Andreasen's view very close to synergism. He argued that we are not saved by grace alone, but by grace through faith. Faith is a gift but we have to exercise it "before it can avail for our salvation."³² Faith is expressed in different ways including "laborious and taxing" actions.³³ This is not legalism, he said, because legalism is about why we do things and not about what we do.³⁴ Grace is only effective for those who keep their eyes on Jesus and express faith through works.³⁵ He asked the rhetorical question, "Who will say that all this diligent effort of ours has nothing to do with our personal salvation?"³⁶ He connected that work of perfection with the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary arguing that the cleansing takes place first in the hearts of believers through the power of Christ.³⁷ Concerning the last generation, Maxwell commented that "the saints who stand invincible in the sight of a holy God will not *commit* sin, in whatever manner the term is defined."³⁸ They are still sinners, but victorious sinners. He was willing to use the phrase "sinless perfection," but he defined it as "perfection that triumphs over every sinful prompting of human nature and dynamically emulates the virtues of Jesus Christ."³⁹ The vindication of God's character is also involved in the state of perfection of the last generation. They "adequately represent God's love and truth to the fallen in this world and the unfallen in worlds afar. By revealing the true glory of God in their daily lives, they can help God secure the eternal loyalty of the universe and the consent of sinners to be saved."⁴⁰ This implies that the sacrifice of Christ was not enough to vindicate God.⁴¹

132-140; *A Fork in the Road: Questions on Doctrine—The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957* (Coldwater, IL: Remnant Publications, 2008), 108-111.

³²C. Mervyn Maxwell, "Ready for His Appearing," in *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1975), 149.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., 151.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 152.

³⁷Ibid., 159.

³⁸Ibid., 166.

³⁹Ibid., 171.

⁴⁰Ibid., 196.

The theology of the perfection of the last generation was primarily addressed by two Adventist theologians, Edward Heppenstall and Hans K. La Rondelle. They both approached the question of perfection from a biblical perspective. Heppenstall defined sin as a state as well as acts contrary to God's will.⁴² Biblical perfection consists in establishing a personal relationship with God; a total commitment to Him.⁴³ Therefore, biblical perfection is not sinless perfection, but it is a "spiritual maturity and stability that is possible in this life."⁴⁴ Sin has been dethroned, but it still remains. God through the Spirit awakens and develops the desire for sinlessness, for freedom from sin in all its forms," but the full actualization of that desire will occur at the return of the Lord. He adds that in the Christian life "imperfection persists, not in the sense of committing willful sin, but in the sense of coming short of the ideal in Jesus Christ."⁴⁵ Consequently we will always need to ask for forgiveness. Since we are spiritually disabled by sin, "we will always live by the grace of God."⁴⁶ For Heppenstall, a last generation that is morally and spiritually different from previous generations was not theologically defensible.

⁴¹This implication seems also to be present in the following statement by Clifford Goldstein: "Besides the cross, the Lord is using two factors to help clarify issues in the great controversy: the character development of His people, and the investigative judgment" ("The Full and Final Display," *Ministry*, October 1994, 43). This gives the impression that the cross is one factor among others in the resolution of the cosmic conflict, and not the definitive event that makes possible everything else.

⁴²Edward Heppenstall, "Let Us Go On to Perfection," in *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1975), 63.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 77.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 82. Heppenstall's position is very similar to that of Jean R. Zucher, *Christian Perfection: A Bible and Spirit of Prophecy Teaching* (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1967). He argues that in the Bible perfection "seems to be fundamentally a matter of the quality of one's devotion to God, rather than an absolute possession. But as relative as it may be, God sets it up as the goal of a Christian life" (9). He adds that living without sinning is not possible, but that triumph over sin is the final goal of our combat" (22). But that "victory is never more than partial. The Christian's victory lies in believing in Christ's victory and in appropriating the benefits of His triumph. For, in our present situation, 'the victory that overcometh the world,' is 'our faith' (1 John 5:4)" (24). However, he finds in Ellen G. White a call for the last generation to grow into the likeness of Christ. Those individuals who will live through the time of trouble "have reached character perfection and are guarded from all sin by the Lord's all-powerful grace" (59). That victory is not their achievement but the result of God's protection over them.

Hans K. La Rondelle argued that in the OT the human awareness of sinfulness was addressed through divine forgiveness that broke the power of sin.⁴⁷ Therefore, there was not perfection independent of cultic atonement. Christian perfection “is not striving after ethical ideals or even the endeavor to imitate or copy Christ’s life independent of Him, but it is the whole hearted, undivided belonging to Him and living with Him by His saving and sanctifying power.”⁴⁸ In a sense, perfection is a present gift, but at the same time it is a promise that will be fulfilled at the second coming. When we are justified by faith, La Rondelle commented, we are transferred from the dominion of sin to the kingdom of grace and we are commanded not to allow sin to reign over us (Rom 6:12).⁴⁹ The Christian walk is a walk in constant “dependence on God’s forgiving and keeping grace.”⁵⁰ It is only on that basis that we can “attain victory over every sin and reach in this life the standard of Christian perfection of character.”⁵¹ Perfection is not only dependent on Christ’s forgiving grace, but also in constant growth in holiness.

With respect to the last generation, La Rondelle did not say much. Based on Rev 14 he suggested that the last proclamation of the gospel will climax in a manifestation of primitive godliness through the reception of the Spirit. That means that “all Christians will practice the gift of saving and sanctifying grace as perfection in action, visible in all their social relationships so that God will be glorified and praised.”⁵²

The influence of Andreasen’s theology did not end with the theological debate we just summarized. Some of the independent ministries within the church continue to promote perfection of character based on Christ as a model who overcame sin in a fallen human nature. These groups were not only influenced by Andreasen, but also by theologians who continued to promote some of his views. Colin and Russell Standish

⁴⁷Hans K. LaRondelle, “The Biblical Idea of Perfection,” in *Perfection: the Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1975), 105, 108.

⁴⁸Ibid., 119-120.

⁴⁹Ibid., 122.

⁵⁰Ibid., 130. LaRondelle’s views on perfection influenced George R. Knight, who at the turn of the century wrote extensively on the subject; see, for instance, his book, *I Used to be Perfect: A Study of Sin and Salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2001), 72-82; and *Pharisee’s Guide*, 149-166.

⁵¹Ibid., 134.

⁵²Ibid., 136.

have argued that victory over sin is not self-centeredness, and that it has no merits for salvation. But they continue to maintain that good works serve “to vindicate the character of God against the false charge of Satan that God’s law is unjust and impossible for fallen man to keep.”⁵³ This “work of character perfection and sin cleansing will be complete before the close of probation.”⁵⁴ Donald K. Short comments that “the spiritual maturity, or character perfection of the final generation, is inseparably joined to Christ taking the human nature of Adam after the Fall.”⁵⁵ The perfection of the last generation is, as in the case of Andraesen, connected to the Day of Atonement. The cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, the blotting out of the record of our sins from the heavenly books, could not take place “unless first of all the sin itself is blotted out of the human heart.”⁵⁶ The forgiving ministry of Christ should come to an end and a sealing should occur “from which there will never be a turning away. This is equivalent to the blotting out of sins, and is a preparation for the coming of Jesus.”⁵⁷ Others will argue that the perfection of the last generation will make them “safe to save.”⁵⁸

Brief Evaluation of Andraesen’s Theology of the Last Generation

Since Andraesen’s theology has been quite influential in the church it is necessary to evaluate it in order to address its weaknesses and strengths.

⁵³Russell R. Standish and Colin D. Standish, *Adventism Vindicated* (Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 1980), 123. It should be clarified that the Standish believe that “the sacrifice of Jesus removed from the universe all doubt concerning the character of God. At the cross, Satan’s lies were laid bare for all to see. At the cross, the true rightful ownership of the world was determined. At the cross, the depth of the love of God was totally revealed to mankind” (Colin D. Standish and Russell R. Standish, *The Evangelical Dilemma* [Rapidan, VA: Hartland Publications, 1994], 141). It is not clear in what sense the last generation contributes to the vindication of God.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 138.

⁵⁵Donald K. Short, *‘Why the Delay’ Integrity Explains Why Christ Has not Yet Returned* (Paris, OH: Glad Tidings Publishing, 1996), 37.

⁵⁶Robert J. Wieland, *The 1888 Message: An Introduction Revised and Enlarged* (Paris, OH: Glad Tidings, 1997), 159.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 161. See also, Donald K. Short, “*Make Like. . . His Brethren*” (Paris, OH: Glad Tidings, 1991), 131-134.

⁵⁸For instance, Ron Spear, *Adventism in Crisis* (Eatonville, WA: Hope International, 1987), 1. Spear argues that the purpose for their victory over every sin is that God wants “to make the final demonstration of their perfect characters before the world” (*What is the Church?* [Eatonville, WA: Hope International, 1994], 70).

1. *Absent from the Writings of E. G. White*: Although Andreasen heavily relied on Ellen G. White he overlooked the fact that in her writings the vindication of God in the cosmic conflict is effected through Christ.

Only Christ Vindicates the Character and Law of God

According to her there is only one person who could vindicate the character and law of God at a cosmic level: The Son of God. Although most of the time she speaks about Christ's vindication of the law of God, she several times explicitly mentions the vindication of God's character. The difference is not significant because for her the law of God is an expression of His character. She states that Satan "mystifies the character of God. Someone must come to vindicate the character of God, and here is Christ, who stands as the representative of the Father."⁵⁹ He came to earth "to vindicate the character of God before the universe" and this means that His death for the salvation of the human race "would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin."⁶⁰

According to this quote, in the vindication of the character of God several things take place: (1) Humans will have access to heaven/God; (2) the divine involvement in the cosmic conflict, the way the Father and the Son dealt with the problem of sin, will be recognized as just; (3) the perpetuity of the law will be clearly established; and (4) the nature and results of sin will be clearly revealed. And what is it that vindicates God's character? Christ's death on the cross! Therefore no one else can vindicate God. Notice that the vindication of God and the vindication of the law are inseparable and take place at a cosmic level.

When White explicitly speaks about the vindication of the law of God she establishes that Christ "came into the world for the express purpose of vindicating His Father's law."⁶¹ God placed the world into His hands to redeem the human race and to "vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God."⁶² The moral excellence of the

⁵⁹ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 126.

⁶⁰ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 68.

⁶¹ *Acts of the Apostle*, 120; see also *Christ Triumphant*, 291.

⁶² *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 366.

law was to “be maintained and vindicated before the heavenly universe. And that holy law could not be maintained at any smaller price than the death of the Son of God.”⁶³ Notice that this is a cosmic vindication because it takes place before the heavenly universe. “When Christ ascended and laid open before the heavenly intelligences the scene of the conflict and fierce attacks that Lucifer made against Him to prevent Him from accomplishing His work on the earth, all the prevarications and accusations of him who had been an exalted angel were seen in their true light. . . . With one voice they extolled God as righteous, merciful, self-denying, just. His law had been vindicated.”⁶⁴ Only God in human flesh could vindicate the law.⁶⁵ But how did He vindicate the law?

First, Christ vindicated the law by obeying it: “He proved to the inhabitants of the unfallen worlds and to human beings that the law can be kept. While possessing the nature of man, He obeyed the law of God, vindicating God’s justice in demanding that it be obeyed. In the judgment His life will be an unanswerable argument in favor of God’s law.”⁶⁶ God is righteous in demanding obedience to the law! Second, Christ vindicated the law through His substitutionary death on the cross. The “atonement of Calvary vindicated the law of God as holy, just, and true, not only before the fallen world but before heaven and before the worlds unfallen.”⁶⁷ This was indeed a cosmic vindication of the law. This needs some further explanation.

According to the divine law sinners must perish and yet God was willing to save them. Could He save them without changing the law? Could He be righteous while saving rebellious creatures? God did the unimaginable! Ellen White writes:

Christ volunteered to maintain and vindicate the holiness of the divine law. He was not to do away the smallest part of its claims in the work of redemption for man, but, in order to save man and maintain the sacred claims and justice of His

⁶³ *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, 565.

⁶⁴ *Christ Triumphant*, 291.

⁶⁵ She wrote, “Because divinity alone could be efficacious in the restoration of man from the poisonous bruise of the serpent, *God Himself, in His only begotten Son, assumed human nature, and in the weakness of human nature sustained the character of God, vindicated His holy law in every particular*, and accepted the sentence of wrath and death for the sons of men. What a thought is this!” (*Our Father Cares*, 116; italics are mine).

⁶⁶ *In Heavenly Places*, 38.

⁶⁷ *Faith and Works*, 118.

Father's law, He gave Himself a sacrifice for the guilt of man. Christ's life did not, in a single instance, detract from the claims of His Father's law, but, through firm obedience to all its precepts and by dying for the sins of those who had transgressed it, He established its immutability.⁶⁸

The death of the violator was taken over by Jesus who throughout His life perfectly obeyed the law of the Father. He did this "to satisfy justice and to vindicate the honor of God's law."⁶⁹ This "manifestation of the justice of God . . . is in its true essence the love of God."⁷⁰ In other words God and His law were vindicated through the vicarious death of the Son of God as a revelation of divine love. It was a manifestation of love because "he was not compelled to do this; but He chose to bear the results of man's transgression that man might escape eternal death."⁷¹ The vindication of God and His law, as we already indicated, was the exclusive result of the saving work of Christ.

God and His law have already been vindicated before the heavenly intelligences but not yet before Satan and his followers. This will take place at the final judgment. At that moment the wicked and the evil powers will be confronted with their actions and their results and they will confess their evilness and accept God's judgment against them.

They will be convinced of their sin and will be constrained to acknowledge the wickedness of their course and the justice and goodness of God in His dealing with them. . . . Confessions are made that vindicate the honor of God and justify His faithful reprovers, who have been opposed and misrepresented. . . . Every sinner will be brought to see and acknowledge the justice of his condemnation.⁷²

It is at that time that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:10, 11; NIV). "On the largest possible scale will the

⁶⁸ *Confrontation*, 20.

⁶⁹ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, 369.

⁷⁰ ST, March 7, 1895 par.7.

⁷¹ ST, February 20, 1893 par. 4.

⁷² *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 393.

government of God be vindicated and exalted. It is not the judgment of one individual or of one nation, but of the whole world [universe].”⁷³

The Believers’ Involvement in the Vindication of God

Most of the statements of Ellen G. White dealing with our participation in the vindication of God are in fact related to the vindication of His law and a few about the vindication of His honor/character.

Vindicate the Law of God

There are a number of statements from Ellen G. White according to which we have the responsibility of vindicating the law of God: “Our work is to vindicate the honor of God’s law.”⁷⁴ This is necessary because the forces of evil and the world have rejected God’s law. She is very clear with respect to the way in which we vindicate God’s law: “God’s law is to be vindicated, by the obedience of heart and mind, and by strong arguments.”⁷⁵ These two elements—obedience and arguments—are often emphasized by her.

The term “arguments” implies that we are to proclaim the law of God as normative for the human race. “All heaven is waiting to hear us vindicate God’s law, declaring it to be holy, just, and good”⁷⁶ to all the nations.⁷⁷ In proclaiming the validity of God’s law we should use good, strong, and convincing arguments.⁷⁸ Those who will perform this task should first be learners.⁷⁹ White comments that “the time has come when every man should be found doing his duty to the utmost of his ability to hold up and vindicate the law of God before our people and the world, working to the limit of his

⁷³ *This Day with God*, 296.

⁷⁴ *Selected Messages* Book 2, 29; see also *Counsels to the Church*, 240; and *Testimonies*, 5:592. She indicates that we vindicate the truth and the honor of Christ by precept and example—teaching and practicing the truth (*Christian Service*, 84).

⁷⁵ RH, February 16, 1905 par. 5; see also *Gospel Workers*, 467.

⁷⁶ RH, April 16, 1901 par. 16.

⁷⁷ *Counsels in Stewardship*, 39. We will have to vindicate the truth before kings and rulers through persuasive speeches and with the assistance of the Spirit (*Christ Triumphant*, 13).

⁷⁸ RH, July 8, 1884 par. 2; RH, February 6, 1905 par. 5; *Adventist Home*, 327. The Sabbath itself is vindicated when we stand in defense of the truth (ST, March 4, 1886 par. 9). Ellen White also indicates that the vindication of the truth requires “calm nerves, candid reflection, and forcible arguments” (*Manuscript Releases*, 20:135).

⁷⁹ *The Retired Years*, 46.

capacity and entrusted talents.”⁸⁰ This is a call for involvement in the mission of the church.

Preaching the law is not enough to vindicate the law of God at a time when humans are opposed to it. We are to govern our lives by the law of God. Leaders vindicate the law of God when everything they do is based on the principles of the commandments of God.⁸¹ It is also vindicated when we treat others with respect,⁸² when we are loyal to the truth,⁸³ when we keep the commandments in spite of severe attacks from Satan,⁸⁴ and by manifesting the grace of Christ as we work for the salvation of others.⁸⁵ Obedience shapes our character and this contributes to the vindication of the honor of God’s law.⁸⁶ When we keep the law we vindicate both the law and our faith or message.⁸⁷

Perhaps what is surprising in the statements where Ellen G. White speaks about our participation in the vindication of the law of God is that it is not explicitly associated with character perfection. It is explicitly connected to our obedience to the law and to its proclamation to the world at a time when God’s enemies, under the influence of Satan, are trampling His law. The vindication of God’s law means for her to show or demonstrate through our actions and words that God still expects humans to submit to His loving will as manifested in His law. This is not associated by White with a cosmic vindication of the divine law.

Vindication of God’s/Christ’s Character and Honor

There are several places where Ellen G. White speaks about our vindication of God’s honor, but this is closely related to the vindication of His law. She simply states that we vindicate the honor of God by keeping all of His commandments, including the

⁸⁰ *Selected Messages* Book 3, 166.

⁸¹ RH, August 13, 1895 par. 2.

⁸² *Selected Messages* Book 2, 29.

⁸³ *Sons and Daughters of God*, 269.

⁸⁴ ST, November 4, 1895 par. 4.

⁸⁵ *Selected Messages* Book 1, 404.

⁸⁶ Testimonies, 5:592; ST, July 6, 1888 par. 5.

⁸⁷ *Christ Triumphant*, 59.

Sabbath.⁸⁸ There is one place in which she writes, “It is the duty of every Christian to vindicate the honor of God by winning souls to Christ.”⁸⁹ She presses this idea even further when she comments that “the church will be perfect only when its members live the truth, vindicating the honor of God by winning souls to Christ.”⁹⁰ Perfection here consists in appropriating the truth and leading others to Christ. In these statements about the vindication of the honor of God, the idea seems to be that the reputation of God as revealed in the law and in the saving work of Christ is reaffirmed when we obey it and lead others to Christ.

Finally there are a number of statements in which White speaks about vindicating the character of God. She associates it with keeping His law, practicing what we profess to believe,⁹¹ and with a spirit of gratitude that praises God’s sustaining grace.⁹² In other words, our grateful commitment to God and to His will for us shows the goodness of God in our lives. She also indicates that when we testify about the love of God the character and mission of Christ is vindicated⁹³ in the sense that it reveals the saving effectiveness of His person and work.⁹⁴

Our investigation reveals that for Ellen White our participation in the vindication of God’s law and honor is not an end-time cosmic vindication of God. According to her this has always been the responsibility of God’s servants on earth. For instance, Samuel,⁹⁵ Elijah,⁹⁶ Hezekiah,⁹⁷ Ezra and Nehemiah,⁹⁸ and Daniel⁹⁹ vindicated the honor of God

⁸⁸ *Faith and Works*, 42; RH, August 25, 1885 par. 4.

⁸⁹ RH, May 21, 1901 par. 14.

⁹⁰ ST, November 29, 1899 par. 2.

⁹¹ *Counsels for the Church*, 345; *Maranatha*, 111.

⁹² YRP 334.

⁹³ RH, September 10, 1895 par. 10; *Our High Calling*, 168.

⁹⁴ White argues that the health reform contributes to the vindication of the character of God by demonstrating that sickness and suffering is the result of sin and that through the health message God is trying to alleviate human suffering (*Christian Educator*, October 1, 1898 par. 9).

⁹⁵ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 632.

⁹⁶ *Prophets and Kings*, 144.

⁹⁷ *Conflict and Courage*, 239.

⁹⁸ *Prophets and Kings*, 675.

under a diversity of situations. Job¹⁰⁰ and Achan¹⁰¹ vindicated the character of God through their actions. According to her, Paul “vindicated the law of ten commandments, and held it up before the people as a rule of life. He showed that all men are under the most solemn obligation to obey that law, which Christ came to make honorable.”¹⁰² This is exactly what she says about our task at the end of the cosmic conflict.¹⁰³

2. *Based on a Misunderstanding of Christian Perfection*: Andreasen’s concept of perfection was extremely close to sinless perfection, weakening the Christians’ need to depend constantly on the saving grace of Christ.¹⁰⁴ Character perfection is particularly emphasized by Ellen G. White in the context of the close of the great controversy. The following statement is probably the classical one on this subject: “When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”¹⁰⁵ She also connects the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary with the need of

⁹⁹ *Manuscript Releases*, 4:124.

¹⁰⁰ Education 156.

¹⁰¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 2:997.

¹⁰² *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, 161.

¹⁰³ There are some statements from Ellen White indicating that at the close of the conflict on earth God Himself will vindicate His truth, His honor, and His people through judgments against the wicked and by delivering His people (*Maranatha*, 178; *Prophets and Kings*, 442, 605; *Testimonies*, 5:207; RH, August 14, 1900 par. 11). Then at the Second Coming of Christ God’s people will be vindicated, “having put away all evil, and having overcome through the cleansing blood of Christ. Through the intercession of Christ, the image of God is renewed in mind, and heart, and character . . . We are accepted in the Beloved, made like unto Christ in character, receiving His wisdom, His righteousness, His sanctification, His redemption, if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end” (*Manuscript Releases*, 11:366).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Woodrow Whidden, “The Vindication of God and the Harvest Principle,” *Ministry*, October 1994, 45; George Knight, *A Search for Identity* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 151. For a valuable discussion of perfection in Ellen G. White see, Woodrow W. Whidden II, *Ellen White on Salvation: A Chronological Study* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Institute for Theological Advancement, nd.).

¹⁰⁵ *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1941), 69. The statement does not intend to teach that our perfection of character would equal Christ’s. Ellen White wrote, “There are many, especially among those who profess holiness, who compare themselves to Christ, as though they were equal with him in perfection of character. This is blasphemy. Could they obtain a view of Christ’s righteousness, they would have a sense of their own sinfulness and imperfection” (RH, March 15, 1887 par.11). According to her “you cannot equal the Pattern, but you can resemble it” (*Manuscript Releases*, 2:126).

the remnant to grow in grace, cleansing their lives from sin.¹⁰⁶ But, how is this to be accomplished? What kind of perfection is she describing for us?

The perfect reproduction of the character of Christ in our lives is only possible if two elements are present in the Christian experience, namely constant growth in sanctifying grace and a constant spirit of contrition and repentance. The following statement is extremely important, and since it reveals an amazing theological balance it should be used in interpreting her statements on Christian perfection:

As the penitent sinner, *contrite before God*, discerns Christ's atonement in his behalf, and *accepts this atonement* as his only hope in this life and the future life, *his sins are pardoned*. This is justification by faith. Every believing soul is to *conform his will entirely to God's will*, and *keep in a state of repentance and contrition*, exercising faith in the atoning merits of the Redeemer and *advancing from strength to strength, from glory to glory*.¹⁰⁷

This statement is about the order of salvation and the nature of the Christian life. Notice how well structured is the statement:

Justification by Faith

A Contrition before God (seeing Jesus as our atonement)

¹⁰⁶ Probably one of the most controversial statements from Ellen White on the subject of perfection is found in *Great Controversy*, 425: "Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil." This statement should not be interpreted as meaning that we will reach a spiritual condition in which we no longer would have to depend on God's forgiving grace to live the Christian life. Even if we do no sin voluntarily we will always have to find refuge in His grace. Our fallen nature will stay with us until the return of Christ and that means that whatever we do for Him while on this earth is tainted by sin and in need of cleansing (*Selected Messages*, 1:344). This will not change after the close of probation. We will always have to rely on divine grace during our pilgrimage on this land. This grace is available to us through Jesus from wherever He may be. We will always be covered by the mantle of Christ's righteousness. Neither the Bible nor Ellen G. White indicates that we would reach a state of perfection that will make it impossible for us to sin. Human freedom can always be misused. See, Whidden, *Salvation*, 131-142 and Carlos A. Steger, "Qué significa vivir sin intercessor" (Unpublished paper, nd.)

¹⁰⁷ "Ellen G. White Comments—Romans," in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1956), 1070 (written in 1897); italics are mine. See also, Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), 85-86; *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1915), 440.

- B Accepts the atonement
- A' Sins are pardoned
- The Christian Life*
- A Conform to God's will
- B Keep in a state of repentance
- B' Constantly exercising faith in the atonement
- A' Advancing from strength to strength

First she begins with the divine act of justification by faith. The individual experiences *contrition* as the result of finding in Christ the only means of atonement. This is followed by *acceptance* of what Christ has done for humans and it concludes with the divine act of *forgiveness* through faith in Christ. This is called by White “justification by faith,” that is to say the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to penitent, repentant sinners. Second she describes the *human response* to God's saving grace. First, the new believers are *entirely to submit their wills* to the will of God. The second response is *to remain in a state of repentance* and contrition throughout the Christian life, exclusively relying by faith on the atoning work of Christ and not on what they can or cannot accomplish. Third, she emphasizes the submission to God by referring to it as *constant spiritual growth*, or *advancing* from strength to strength in the Christian life.¹⁰⁸ She does emphasize the need for character development, but in doing that she does not weaken the primary and central importance of Christ's objective work for us. The Christian life begins with contrition and repentance, but that humble attitude is not left behind once we are justified by faith. The Christians' awareness of their sinfulness and their constant need for Jesus will accompany them throughout the Christian life and will manifest itself in a daily state of contrition and repentance.¹⁰⁹ That reliance on Christ's forgiving grace is the exclusive source of their peace and of their assurance of salvation.

¹⁰⁸ In fact, for White perfection is not static but dynamic thus ruling out the idea of absolute perfection in our lives: “It should be our lifework to be constantly reaching forward to the perfection of Christian character, ever striving for conformity to the will of God. The efforts begun here will continue through eternity” (RH, September 20, 1881 par. 9).

¹⁰⁹ This explains why, according to Ellen White, those who are constantly growing in grace will never claim to be perfect: “No one who claims holiness is really holy. Those who are registered as holy in the books of Heaven are not aware of the fact, and are the last ones to boast of their own goodness” (RH, February 26, 1885 par. 10). “There can be no self-exaltation, no

The first element—growing in Christ—frees believers from a nominal religion that has very little impact on the daily life of the person. It motivates believers to have a daily walk with Jesus. The second element—a constant state of repentance—keeps them humble, and is a constant recognition of the fact that no matter how obedient they are, they will always have to rely by faith on his forgiving grace in order to find perfection in him. This awareness of our constant need of forgiveness excludes religious pride from the heart of the believer or a sense of spiritual superiority over others and eliminates the uncertainty of our salvation. There is not legalism in this portrait of the Christian life. This same spirit of repentance and contrition will characterize the people of God at the close of the cosmic conflict.¹¹⁰ It is only through spiritual and moral growth and forgiveness that Christ's character can be perfectly ours.

3. *Theological Problem*: According to Andreasen, God's primary intention in the cosmic conflict is to clear His name from the charges of Satan. If that is true, then God is in fact revealing selfishness. Everything He did was done to clear His name because somehow He felt threatened by the accusations of His archenemy. It would even appear that according to Andreasen's theology of the last generation the primary reason for God's decision to save fallen human beings was to *use* them to vindicate Himself. The fall stands as an almost necessary evil in the universe. But according to the Bible, God's decision to save us was a voluntary act of love and divine grace.

Nevertheless, Ellen White does talk about Christ coming to vindicate the character of God through His sacrifice. It is important to understand what she meant and clearly understand how Christ vindicated the character and law of the Father. Let me quote one of her key statements:

The plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be

boastful claim to freedom from sin, on the part of those who walk in the shadow of Calvary's cross. They feel that it was their sin which caused the agony that broke the heart of the Son of God, and this thought will lead them to self-abasement. Those who live nearest to Jesus discern most clearly the frailty and sinfulness of humanity, and their only hope is in the merit of a crucified and risen Saviour" (GC 471).

¹¹⁰This is elaborated by Paul M. Evans, "An Analysis of M. L. Andreasen's View of God's Vindication in Relation to the Writings of Ellen White" (Research Paper, Andrews University, August 2002), 28-29.

regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31, 32.¹¹¹

This statement makes clear that the universal impact of the plan of redemption consists in vindicating the character of God before the universe. How could it be said that the cross vindicated God before the universe and avoid the theological pitfall mentioned above? We should notice that although it is described as a “deeper purpose” it is in fact a *result* of Christ’s sacrifice. This is important in that it distinguishes between the sacrificial death of Christ in itself and the result of that sacrifice. I would suggest to you that the sacrifice was not an act of divine vindication, but it resulted in vindication. It was an act of self-sacrificing love for sinful creatures. I would also suggest that paradoxically what vindicated God was the fact that He was not seeking to vindicate Himself, but to save His creation.

Referring to what will take place at the final judgment Ellen White writes: “God’s wisdom, His justice, and His goodness stand fully vindicated. It is seen that all His dealings in the great controversy have been conducted with respect to the eternal good of His people and the good of the worlds that He has created.”¹¹² The fact that what God accomplished on the cross through Christ was totally and exclusively for the benefit of undeserving sinful human beings and for the good of God’s creatures throughout the cosmos, and that in no way it was done for His own personal benefit, resulted in His vindication before the universe. He was vindicated in His self-forgetfulness, in His self-sacrifice! He did it all for others. He was vindicated by being Himself; a God of love.¹¹³

4. *One-sided Emphasis on Jesus as a Model*: The Bible does not even suggest that Christ is particularly a model for the perfection of the last generation. Jesus has always been considered a model for believers. What is difficult to comprehend is how the

¹¹¹*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 68-69.

¹¹²*Great Controversy*, 670-671.

¹¹³This is clearly indicated in this comment from Ellen G. White: “Through Christ’s redeeming work the government of God stands justified. The Omnipotent One is made known as the God of love. Satan’s charges are refuted, and his character unveiled.” (*Desire of Ages*, 26).

experience of the last generation will vindicate God while not acknowledging at the same time that the life of Jesus, the Model, vindicated God. Should not the perfect character of the Model have a more powerful effect on the vindication of God than the partial reproduction of his character in the life of the last generation?¹¹⁴ Should not the fact that He never succumbed to temptation and sin make His witnessing more effective and persuasive than that of humans who had already sinned, and who after conversion are developing perfection of character? Those influenced by the theology of Andreasen still argue that the revelation of the character of God in Jesus needs to be supplemented by the perfection of character of the last generation in order to vindicate God.

5. *Safety of Heaven is not Dependant on Human Perfection*: Andreasen attempted to justify the need for Christian perfection arguing that God required it from humans in order to preserve the future safety of heaven. Their victory over sin here on earth will contribute to the prevention of any new rebellion in heaven.¹¹⁵ In direct opposition to the idea that perfection could prevent another fall into sin, Ellen G. White states,

Angelic perfection failed in heaven. Human perfection failed in Eden, the paradise of bliss. All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God. The plan of salvation, making manifest the justice and love of God, provides an eternal safeguard against defection in unfallen worlds, as well as among those who shall be redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴See, Eric C. Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 422-428. We should clarify that in those pages Webster is evaluating the position of Herbert Douglass and not the theology of M. L. Andreasen. Nevertheless his comments are useful in the evaluation of the views of Andreasen.

¹¹⁵Ellen G. White provides for him only a partial support. She does recognize that “God grants men a probation in this world, that their principles may become firmly established in the right, thus precluding the possibility of sin in the future life, and so assuring the happiness and security of all” (“What Was Secured by the Death of Christ?” *Signs of the Times*, Dec 30, 1889). She is discussing the danger of taking to heaven individuals who have not surrender their all to the Lord. Doing that would mean that the sin problem would have not been solved and that sin will spring back to life again. The following statement should be read at the light of our previous comments: “Man cannot be saved by his own works. Without Christ it is impossible for him to render perfect obedience to the law of God; and heaven can never be gained by an imperfect obedience; for this would place all heaven in jeopardy, and make possible a second rebellion” (ibid.). As already indicated, perfect obedience is the result of constant Christian growth in a state of repentance. Individuals who are not having that experience are not safe to save because sin is still ruling their lives. To save them would be tantamount to perpetuating the phenomenon of sin in the universe.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

Then, she immediately proceeds to establish that “the atonement will never need to be repeated; and there will be no danger of another rebellion in the universe of God.”¹¹⁷ What is it that could prevent a second rebellion? Would it be the perfection of the character of the redeemed ones? No. It would be the sacrificial death of Christ:

The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded from apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan.¹¹⁸

It is the eternal efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ that will prevent any other act of apostasy in the cosmos. The cross of Christ will never be forgotten and it will continue to be a magnificent display of the love of God. That love will constantly move every intelligent creature in the universe to voluntarily remain loyal to the Lord. The development of a Christian character is very important for Ellen G. White, but when it comes to salvation and the safety of the redeemed universe, Christ is at the very center of her theological thinking, not us.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

The theology of the last generation as conceived by Andraesen opened the door for a strong emphasis on perfectionism within the Adventist church. The discussion on

¹¹⁷Ibid. After describing the redeeming work of Christ she adds, “The efficiency of the cross guards the redeemed race from the danger of a second fall. The life and death of Christ effectually unveils the deceptions of Satan, and refutes his claims. The sacrifice of Christ for a fallen world draws not only men, but angels unto Him [in] bonds of indissoluble union. Through the plan of salvation the justice and mercy of God are fully vindicated, and to all eternity rebellion will never again arise, affliction never again touch the universe of God.—The Messenger, June 7, 1893 (*The Truth about Angels*, 296; see also *Desire of the Ages*, 26).

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹ There is another statement from Ellen G. White that is also useful: “Through the atonement of the Son of God alone could power be given to man to establish him in righteousness, and make him a fit subject for heaven. *The blood of Christ is the eternal antidote for sin*. The offensive character of sin is seen in what it cost the Son of God in humiliation, in suffering and death. All the worlds behold in him a living testimony to the malignity of sin, for in his divine form he bears the marks of the curse. He is in the midst of the throne as a Lamb that hath been slain. The redeemed will ever be vividly impressed with the hateful character of sin, as they behold Him who died for their transgressions. The preciousness of the Offering will be more fully realized as the blood-washed throng more fully comprehend how God has made a new and living way for the salvation of men, through the union of the human and the divine in Christ” (ST, December 30, 1889 par. 3; italics mine).

the topic of perfection will continue among us at the risk of distracting us from the uniqueness of the cross. It is not that Christian perfection is not important but that it is to be understood as constant growth in grace accompanied by a constant spirit of repentance in the life of the believer. We must work together to restore a proper balance between works and faith and their proper place in the Christian experience. The Adventist faith should make us happy and should enrich our lives with knowledge and joy.

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