

CHAPTER 13

THEOLOGY OF THE LAST GENERATION AND THE VINDICATION OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD: OVERVIEW 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 has now returned to the theological agenda of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, particularly among groups with a tendency to the extreme right. 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.

In this paper, we will look at the arguments used by the main proponent of this theology (Milian L. Andreasen), the influence of his theology on others and the debate that followed, and finally evaluate the main arguments he used to support it. In the exposition of the theology of the last generation, great emphasis has been placed on the writings of Ellen G. White. This justifies our extensive use of her writings in the evaluation of this theology. I should also indicate that although the topic of perfection in

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 Espíritu: Festschrift al Dr. Roberto Badenas*, eds. Ramon Gelabert and Víctor Armenteros (Libertador San Matin, Argentina: Universidad Adventista del Plata, 2013), 199–213.

the writings of Ellen G. White is very important, in this paper we will not be able to provide an extensive discussion of it but will limit ourselves to the use of some of her key statements.

Milian L. Andreasen and the Last Generation²

Milian L. Andreasen has been considered one of the most influential theologians of the Church during the twentieth century.³ 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.⁴ 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.

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"⁵ 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.⁶

The Fall and the Vindication of God

In Andreasen's theology, the fall into sin is of central importance. He

² For a much more extensive analysis of Andreasen's theology, see Paul M. Evans, *A Historical-Contextual Analysis of the Final Generation Theology of M. L. Andreasen* (unpublished PhD diss., Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 2010).

³ 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.

⁴ 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, MD: Review and Herald, 2008), 238. For a more complete historical discussion, see Evans, 13–237.

⁵ M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Services* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1937; revised in 1947), 315.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.

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.⁷

Christ and the Vindication of God

Andreasen argued that Satan required God to demonstrate that humans should be able to obey Him out of love. This led Him to conclude that, “it is necessary for God to produce at least *one* man who has kept the law.”⁸ 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.⁹ For him Christ was a model for Christians to emulate and not the exclusive 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 to perfectly copy him.¹⁰ Since Christ’s life was only a model for us to follow, it apparently was not intended to exonerate God.

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 at

⁷ Ibid., 320, Andreasen 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.”

⁸ Ibid., 316.

⁹ M. L. Andreasen, *The Faith of Jesus* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1939), 501, 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.’” 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 George R. Knight, *The Pharisee’s Guide to Perfect Holiness* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1992), 205–207.

¹⁰ Ibid., 309, Andreasen writes: “When Christ died on the cross He had demonstrated in His life the possibility of keeping the law.” 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 (but see Evans, 211).

peace with God.¹¹ But salvation includes restoration, cleansing, and sanctification or deliverance from the actual power of sin, leading to victory over it.¹² 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.¹³ He will do in every believer what He did in Christ.

Character Perfection and the Vindication of God

Andreasen tried to distinguish his views from sinless perfection. He rejected the position of those who teach that "they are without sin," arguing that they do not have a proper conception of either sin or God's holiness and that they are unable to "see their shortcomings, and hence believe themselves perfect."¹⁴ He also separated himself from the skeptics who "deny the power of God to save from sin" and "accept a kind of compromise with sin."¹⁵ He believed in victory over sin; in true biblical holiness.¹⁶ Yet the way he expressed his views is very close to perfectionism. 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 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.¹⁷

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 300–301.

¹² He 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.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 299.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ He argues that God gave humans the possibility of conquering sin after the Fall by placing hatred toward sin in the human heart. This hatred "is a great factor in our struggle with evil and our eventual victory over it" (*Ibid.*, 15).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 302.

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."¹⁸ Their test will be more difficult than the test of Adam and Eve.¹⁹ They will vindicate the character of God. Once this demonstration "has been accomplished, the end will come."²⁰ 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."²¹ 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."²² This is the cosmic theodicy.

Influence of Andreasen's Theology

Even though Andreasen 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 1970s his ideas were misused, modified, or rejected by many. During the 1960s a layman from Australia, Robert David Brinsmead, accepted and developed some of Andreasen's ideas. But he was most influenced by Andreasen's 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

¹⁸ Ibid., 318. For him "to live without sinning" means for him "to live without sin" (cf. 302).

¹⁹ Ibid., 312.

²⁰ 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" (87).

²¹ Ibid., 306.

²² Ibid., 319.

name, His vindication.²³ 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.”²⁴ 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.”²⁵ 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 1970s. 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. Douglass and C. Mervyn Maxwell. Douglass was one of the editors of the *Review & Herald*, and consequently his views were influential.²⁶ Using statements from Ellen G. White, Douglass established what he called “the harvest principle as an explanation for the delayed Second Advent.”²⁷ The condition of the church “determines when the landlord returns to his faithful servants.”²⁸ Christ is waiting “until His church on earth had vindicated truth—His character—in their lives.”²⁹ Christ is waiting “until the

²³ Robert Brinsmead, *Man Born to be King* (Springfield, MO: Prophetic Research, 1966), 109.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 109–110.

²⁵ Robert Daniel Brinsmead, *God’s Eternal Purpose* (Conway, MO: Ministry of Healing Health Centers, 1959), 199; quoted in General Conference of SDAs—Office of the Research and Defense Literature Committee, *History and Teaching of Robert Brinsmead* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1962), 18.

²⁶ See, for instance, Herbert E. Douglass, “Ellen White’s Eschatological Principle,” *Review and Herald*, May 23, 1974, 12; “A Special Truth and Special Work,” *Review and Herald*, June 6, 1974, 14; “Truth Understood Only by Men of Faith,” *Review and Herald*, June 20, 1974, 11; “God’s Stakes His Honor on a Victorious People,” *Review and Herald*, July 4, 1974, 15–16; “Fitness for Heaven, Now,” *Review and Herald*, July 18, 1974, 11; “Not Entrapped by Cheap Grace,” *Review and Herald*, August 1, 1974, 17–18; “Sanctification Not Imputed,” *Review and Herald*, August 15, 1974, 13–14; “Heaven Waits for Human Channels,” *Review and Herald*, August 29, 1974, 13–14.

²⁷ Herbert E. Douglass, “Men of Faith—The Showcase of God’s Grace,” in *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1975), 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15. See also Douglass’ article “Why God Waits,” *These Times*, July 1, 1975, 10, where he wrote, “The evidence that vindicates God’s patience, mercy, and justice rests in the lives of men and women who have proved that God’s way is best.”

gospel seed has produced a sizable and significant group of mature Christians in the last generation.”³⁰ According to Douglass, “Jesus proved that man in sinful flesh could live without sinning.”³¹

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.³² 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.

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.”³³

Like Andreasen, Douglass did 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.³⁴ Douglass’s influence diminished a little but shortly before his death he began to write again on the topic, and at the present time it has again become a topic of discussion among Adventists.³⁵

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.”³⁶ Faith is expressed in different ways, including “laborious and taxing” actions.³⁷

³⁰ Ibid., 19.

³¹ Ibid., 43.

³² Ibid., 52.

³³ Ibid., 53.

³⁴ Ibid., 13.

³⁵ See Douglass’s 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), 132–140; *A Fork in the Road: Questions on Doctrine—The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957* (Coldwater, IL: Remnant Publications, 2008), 108–111.

³⁶ C. Mervyn Maxwell, “Ready for His Appearing,” in *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1975), 149.

³⁷ Ibid.

This is not legalism, he said, because legalism is about why we do things and not about what we do.³⁸ Grace is only effective for those who keep their eyes on Jesus and express faith through works.³⁹ He asked the rhetorical question, “Who will say that all this diligent effort of ours has nothing to do with our personal salvation?”⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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.”⁴² 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.”⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴ This implies that the sacrifice of Christ was not enough to vindicate God.⁴⁵

The theology of the perfection of the last generation was primarily addressed by two Adventist theologians, Edward Heppenstall and Hans K. LaRondelle.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ Biblical perfection consists in establishing a personal

³⁸ Ibid., 151.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 152.

⁴¹ Ibid., 159.

⁴² Ibid., 166.

⁴³ Ibid., 171.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 196.

⁴⁵ This implication seems also to be present in the following statement by Clifford Goldstein, “The Full and Final Display,” *Ministry*, October 1994, 43: “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.” 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.

⁴⁶ See particularly his book, *Perfection and Perfectionism: A Dogmatic-Ethical Study of Biblical Perfection and Phenomenal Perfectionism* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1971).

⁴⁷ Edward Heppenstall, “Let Us Go On to Perfection,” in *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1975), 63.

relationship with God—a total commitment to Him.⁴⁸ Therefore, biblical perfection is not sinless perfection, but a “spiritual maturity and stability that is possible in this life.”⁴⁹ 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 “im-perfection persists, not in the sense of committing willful sin, but in the sense of coming short of the ideal in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹ For Heppenstall, a last generation that is morally and spiritually different from previous generations was not theologically defensible.

Hans K. LaRondelle argued that in the Old Testament the human awareness of sinfulness was addressed through divine forgiveness that broke the power of sin.⁵² 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.”⁵³ 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, LaRondelle 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).⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁵¹ Ibid., 82. Heppenstall’s position is very similar to that of Jean R. Zucher, *Christian Perfection: A Bible and Spirit of Prophecy Teaching* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1967). Zucher 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.

⁵² Hans K. LaRondelle, “The Biblical Idea of Perfection,” in *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1975), 105, 108.

⁵³ Ibid., 119–120.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 122.

The Christian walk is a walk in constant “dependence on God’s forgiving and keeping grace.”⁵⁵ 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.”⁵⁶ Perfection is not only dependent on Christ’s forgiving grace, but also in constant growth in holiness.

With respect to the last generation, LaRondelle did not say much. Based on Revelation 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 “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.”⁵⁷

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 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.”⁵⁸ This “work of character perfection and sin cleansing will be complete before the close of probation.”⁵⁹ 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.”⁶⁰ The perfection of the last generation is, as in the case of Andreasen, connected to the Day of Atonement. The cleansing

⁵⁵ Ibid., 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 Knight, *Pharisee’s Guide*, 149–166.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 136.

⁵⁸ Russell R. Standish and Colin D. Standish, *Adventism Vindicated* (Rapidan, VA: Hartland, 1980), 123. It should be clarified that the Standish brothers believed 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, 1994], 141). It is not clear in their writings in what sense the last generation contributes to the vindication of God.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁰ Donald K. Short, *‘Why the Delay’ Integrity explains why Christ has not yet returned* (Paris, OH: Glad Tidings, 1996), 37.

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.”⁶¹ 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.”⁶² Others will argue that the perfection of the last generation will make them “safe to save.”⁶³

Brief Evaluation of Andreasen’s Theology of the Last Generation

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

Absent from the Writings of Ellen 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 White there is only one person who could vindicate the character and law of God on a cosmic level: the Son of God. Although most of the time she speaks about Christ’s vindication of the law of God, several times she 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.”⁶⁴ 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

⁶¹ Robert J. Wieland, *The 1888 Message: An Introduction Revised and Enlarged* (Paris, OH: Glad Tidings, 1997), 159.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 161. See also Donald K. Short, “*Make Like . . . His Brethren*” (Paris, OH: Glad Tidings, 1991), 131–134.

⁶³ For instance, Ron Spear, *Adventism in Crisis* (Eatonville, WA: Hope International, 1987), 1. Ron Spear, *What is the Church?* (Eatonville, WA: Hope International, 1994), 70, 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.”

⁶⁴ *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1975), 126.

law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.”⁶⁵

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.”⁶⁶ God placed the world into His hands to redeem the human race and to “vindicate the authority and holiness of the law of God.”⁶⁷ The moral excellence of the 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.”⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹

Only God in human flesh could vindicate the law.⁷⁰ But how did

⁶⁵ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 68.

⁶⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostle* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 120; see also Ellen G. White, *Christ Triumphant* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 291.

⁶⁷ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 366.

⁶⁸ Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1977), 2:565.

⁶⁹ White, *Christ Triumphant*, 291.

⁷⁰ Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1991), 116, 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!*” (emphasis added).

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.⁷¹

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."⁷² 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! 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 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.⁷³

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."⁷⁴ This "manifestation of the justice of God . . . is in its true essence the love of God."⁷⁵ In other words God and

⁷¹ Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1967), 38.

⁷² Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1979), 118.

⁷³ Ellen G. White, *Confrontation* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1971), 20.

⁷⁴ Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1923), 369.

⁷⁵ Ellen G. White, "The Cross Incontrovertible Evidence," *Signs of the Times*, March 7, 1895, par. 7, 3.

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.”⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷

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 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].”⁷⁸

The believers’ involvement in the vindication of God

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

According to a number of White’s statements, we have the responsibility of *vindicating the law of God*: “Our work is to vindicate the honor of God’s law.”⁷⁹ This is necessary because the forces of evil and the world

⁷⁶ Ellen G. White, “The Plan of Salvation,” *Signs of the Times*, February 20, 1893, 246.

⁷⁷ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 393.

⁷⁸ Ellen G. White, *This Day with God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1979), 296.

⁷⁹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 2:29; see also Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1991), 240; and Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 5:592. She indicates that we vindicate the truth and the honor of Christ by precept and example—teaching and practicing the

have rejected God's law. She is very clear about 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."⁸⁰ She often emphasizes these two elements—obedience and arguments.

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"⁸¹ to all the nations.⁸² In proclaiming the validity of God's law we should use good, strong, and convincing arguments.⁸³ Those who will perform this task should first be learners.⁸⁴ 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 capacity and entrusted talents."⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶ It is also vindicated when we treat others with respect,⁸⁷ when we are loyal to the truth,⁸⁸ when we keep the commandments in spite of severe attacks from Satan,⁸⁹ and

truth (Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* [Washington, DC: Home Missionary Department of the General Conference of SDA, 1947], 84).

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, "The Call for Active Work," *Review and Herald*, February 16, 1905, 12; see also Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1948), 467.

⁸¹ Ellen G. White, "The Warfare Between Good and Evil," *Review and Herald*, April 16, 1901, 241.

⁸² Ellen G. White, *Counsels in Stewardship* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1940), 39. We will have to vindicate the truth before kings and rulers through persuasive speeches and with the assistance of the Spirit (White, *Christ Triumphant*, 13).

⁸³ Ellen G. White, "Thoroughness in the Christian Ministry," *Review and Herald*, July 8, 1884, 433; Ellen G. White, "A Call for Active Work," *Review and Herald*, February 16, 1905 par. 5; Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing, 1952), 327. The Sabbath itself is vindicated when we stand in defense of the truth (Ellen G. White, "The Sin of Presumption," *Signs of the Times*, March 4, 1886, 129). Ellen G. White also indicates that the vindication of the truth requires "calm nerves, candid reflection, and forcible arguments" (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Washington, DC: E. G. White Estate, 1993), 20:135).

⁸⁴ Ellen G. White, *The Retired Years* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1990), 46.

⁸⁵ White, *Selected Messages*, 3:166.

⁸⁶ Ellen G. White, "Draw Out Thy Soul to the Hungry," *Review and Herald*, August 13, 1895, 513.

⁸⁷ White, *Selected Messages*, 2:29.

⁸⁸ Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1955), 269.

⁸⁹ Ellen G. White, "Fear God, and Keep His Commandments," *Signs of the Times*, November 14, 1895, par. 4.

by manifesting the grace of Christ as we work for the salvation of others.⁹⁰ Obedience shapes our character and this contributes to the vindication of the honor of God's law.⁹¹ When we keep the law we vindicate both the law and our faith or message.⁹²

Perhaps what is surprising in the statements where 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.

There are several places where 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 Sabbath.⁹³ 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."⁹⁴ 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."⁹⁵ 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,⁹⁶ and praising God's sustaining grace with a spirit of gratitude.⁹⁷ In other words, our grateful commitment to

⁹⁰ White, *Selected Messages*, 1:404.

⁹¹ White, *Testimonies*, 5:592; Ellen G. White, "Steps in Conversion," *Signs of the Times*, July 6, 1888, par. 5; 91, 92

⁹² White, *Christ Triumphant*, 59.

⁹³ White, *Faith and Works*, 42; Ellen G. White, "The True Standard of Righteousness," *Review and Herald*, August 25, 1885, 529.

⁹⁴ Ellen G. White, "The Need of a Spiritual Awakening," *Review and Herald*, May 21, 1901, 321.

⁹⁵ Ellen G. White, "Seeking to Save the Lost," *Signs of the Times*, November 29, 1899, 22.

⁹⁶ White, *Counsels for the Church*, 345; Ellen G. White, *Maranatha, The Lord Is Coming* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 111.

⁹⁷ Ellen G. White, *Ye Shall Receive Power* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1995), 334.

God and to His will 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 vindicated⁹⁸ in the sense that it reveals the saving effectiveness of His person and work.⁹⁹

Our investigation reveals that for White our participation in the vindication of God's law and honor is not an end-time cosmic vindication of God.¹⁰⁰ According to her this has always been the responsibility of God's servants on earth. For instance, Samuel,¹⁰¹ Elijah,¹⁰² Hezekiah,¹⁰³ Ezra and Nehemiah,¹⁰⁴ and Daniel¹⁰⁵ vindicated the honor of God under a diversity of situations. Job¹⁰⁶ and Achan¹⁰⁷ 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."¹⁰⁸ This is exactly what she says about our task at the end of the cosmic conflict.¹⁰⁹

⁹⁸ Ellen G. White, "Witnesses for Christ," *Review and Herald*, September 10, 1895, 578; Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1961), 168.

⁹⁹ Ellen G. 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 (Ellen G. White, "Practical Missionary Work, a Branch of True Education," *Christian Educator*, October 1, 1898, par. 9, 39–41).

¹⁰⁰ Evans, 141, writes: "White stresses the need for perfect obedience to the law, not as special condition needed only for those expecting translation, but as a universal requirement for all the saved. An article on obedience unpublished in 1901 makes this clear: 'From Genesis to Revelation the conditions upon which eternal life is promised are made plain. God requires that those who shall enter heaven shall be without spot or wrinkle or any such things' (Ellen G. White, "Obedience the Fruit of Union with Christ—No. 2," 567)."

¹⁰¹ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 632.

¹⁰² Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 144.

¹⁰³ Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1970), 239.

¹⁰⁴ White, *Prophets and Kings*, 675.

¹⁰⁵ Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* (Washington, DC: E. G. White Estate, 1990), 4:124.

¹⁰⁶ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 156.

¹⁰⁷ *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976), 2:997.

¹⁰⁸ Ellen G. White, *Sketches from the Life of Paul* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1974), 161.

¹⁰⁹ There are some statements from Ellen G. 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 (White, *Maranatha*, 178; White, *Prophets and Kings*, 442, 605; White, *Testimonies*, 5:207; Ellen G. White, "The Sin of Presumption," *Review and Herald*, August 14, 1900, 514). 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,

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.¹¹⁰ Character perfection is particularly emphasized by 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."¹¹¹ She also connects the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary with the need of the remnant to grow in grace, cleansing their lives from sin.¹¹² While Andreasen believed that the purpose of Christian perfection is to vindicate the character of God, for White its purpose is to be ready for the coming of the Lord.¹¹³ Her statements on Christian perfec-

His righteousness, His sanctification, His redemption, if we hold the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end" (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases* [Washington, DC: E. G. White Estate, 1993], 11:366).

¹¹⁰ 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, n.d.).

¹¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1941), 69. The statement does not intend to teach that our perfection of character would equal Christ's. Ellen G. 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" ("In What Shall We Glory?" *Review and Herald*, March 15, 1887, 161, 162). According to her "you cannot equal the Pattern, but you can resemble it" (*Manuscript Releases* [Washington, DC: E. G. White Estate, 1990], 2:126).

¹¹² Probably one of the most controversial statements from Ellen G. White on the subject of perfection is found in *Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 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 (White, *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; Carlos A. Steger, "Qué significa vivir sin intercessor" (unpublished paper, n.d.)

¹¹³ See Evans, 241.

tion should be taken seriously by all. But how, according to White, is this to be accomplished? What kind of perfection is she describing for us? Here we can only provide an overview on this topic based on key statements from her writings.

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.¹¹⁴

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

Justification by Faith

- A Contrition before God (seeing Jesus as the only means of atonement)
- 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

She deals first with the divine act of justification by faith. The individual experiences *contrition* as a 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

¹¹⁴ "Ellen G. White, "Comments—Romans," in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1980), 6:1070 (written in 1897), emphasis added. See also White, *Faith and Work*, 85, 86; White, *Gospel Workers*, 440.

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: (a) The new believers are *entirely to submit their wills* to the will of God. (b) 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. (c) She emphasizes the submission to God by referring to it as *constant submission of our will to His will*, or *advancing from strength to strength* in the Christian life.¹¹⁵ She does emphasize the need for character development, but in doing so 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.¹¹⁶ That reliance on Christ’s forgiving grace is the exclusive source of their peace and their assurance of salvation.

The first element—submission of the will/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 or to grow into the likeness of His character. 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 for 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 no legalism in this portrait of the Christian life. This same spirit of repentance and contrition

¹¹⁵ 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” (“The True Vine,” *Review and Herald*, September 20, 1881, 193).

¹¹⁶ This explains why, according to 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” (“Sanctification—The True and the False,” *Signs of the Times*, February 26, 1885, 129). “There can be no self-exaltation, no 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” (*Great Controversy*, 471).

will characterize the people of God at the close of the cosmic conflict. It is only through spiritual and moral growth and constant reliance on forgiveness that Christ's character can be perfectly ours.

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 arch-enemy. 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, 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 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 and 32.¹¹⁷

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

¹¹⁷ White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 68–69.

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 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.”¹¹⁸ 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 it was not 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.¹¹⁹

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. One is tempted to ask, 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?¹²⁰ 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. The implication is that what Christ accomplished was not enough.

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 pre-

¹¹⁸ White, *Great Controversy*, 670–671.

¹¹⁹This is clearly indicated in this comment from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 26: “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.”

¹²⁰ See 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.

vention of any new rebellion in heaven.¹²¹ In direct opposition to the idea that perfection could prevent another fall into sin, 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.¹²²

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.”¹²³ 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.¹²⁴

¹²¹ Ellen G. White, “What Was Secured by the Death of Christ?” *Signs of the Times*, December 30, 1889, 785–786, provides for him only 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.” She is discussing the danger of taking to heaven individuals who have not surrendered 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.

¹²² Ibid., 786.

¹²³ Ibid., 786. Ellen G. White, *The Truth About Angels* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 296, after describing the redeeming work of Christ, 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.” See also White, *The Desire of Ages*, 26).

¹²⁴ White, “What Was Secured,” 786.

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 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.¹²⁵

Conclusion

The theology of the last generation as conceived by Andreasen opened the door for a strong emphasis on perfectionism within the Adventist Church. The discussion on 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 enrich our lives with knowledge and joy.

¹²⁵ There is another statement from 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” (Ibid., emphasis added).