

THEOLOGY OF GOD'S FINAL VINDICATION

Biblical and Adventist Theodicy

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May – June 2023

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At one time, everyone in the Adventist Church accepted that the last generation had the mission of vindicating God's character before the world and the universe. However, a shift in tone began to occur with the evangelical influence that many of our theologians embraced. When studying at Protestant or Evangelical theological centers, or when having to teach subjects related to the topic, these theologians read books that shaped their thinking. At times, some also sought to break free from a rigorous and legalistic lifestyle and swung to the other extreme.

The change in tone regarding the vindication of God can be seen in the fact that we have historically believed in the need to keep God's commandments. However, the new assertion declares that God's law cannot be kept, and therefore, the only one who could keep God's law was Christ. This is what we were told by Evangelicals when we called them to keep the Seventh-day Sabbath of the Lord required by God in the fourth commandment. As a result of this new *evangelicalist-oriented* approach, many worldly concepts have been introduced in our church not only in theology but also in practice, ultimately leading to corruption and apostasy.

[I adapted the term "evangelicalists" from the book *Evangelicalism Divided* by Iain H. Murray. It helps differentiate between those who believe in the Gospels but not necessarily in the approach of those who self-identify as evangelicals].

In the various approaches that have been defended recently, there is often a misinterpretation of opposing positions. For example, some Adventist evangelicals accuse those who believe in the perfection that the last survivors of the holy seed will reach at the end, as believing that the last generation will become super-humans, super-heroes, omnipotent and as having holy flesh. This appears to be a "strawman argument" as I have never actually heard such an extreme idea stated, but I agree that some may have become anthropocentric regarding the last generation which will live after the time of probation, that is, human centered instead of heavenly oriented. This is the reason why I prefer to address the role of the last generation by the term "theology of God's final vindication."

What we are saying begs a question. Is the fact that some are perfectionist a justified reason to throw overboard the need for a final vindication of God to conclude the great controversy between good and evil? There is such a strong obsession with combating what many consider perfectionism on one side that their own approach ends up also becoming one-sided, but at the other extreme. On the other hand, those who exalt the law and its importance in keeping it accuse those who label them as legalists of *antinomian liberals* or *defeated Adventists*, if not *Adventist evangelicals*. Is this so? This is what we will discuss in this study, as we try to understand what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy say.

To avoid distracting from the biblical approach that the Spirit of Prophecy confirms, we have chosen not to cite different Adventist authors who have been writing on the subject. There are different nuances in both currents, so we consider it appropriate not to turn this study into a discussion of what each author thinks. Because while one detail is being addressed, another author may disagree, although agreeing on the main issue. Instead, we will respond to the more general and precise positions that characterize the two basic tendencies.

We will mention some points of the most recent papers written on the matter toward the end and as an excursus after our study, to meet more definitely their specific problems.

Those who want to read a good historical synthesis of the Adventist Church's approach to the theology of the last generation, whether in favor or against, can read the doctoral thesis defended by Armin Kritzinger at the University of Thailand, *The Doctrine of Last Generation Theology for Seventh-day Adventists: A Defense* (2022).

It is worth noting that it is not possible to address all the points of discussion at once. Therefore, we will gradually advance, responding to different interpretations and highlighting the biblical testimony that confirms the Spirit of Prophecy. Since many believe that the *Last Generation Theology* is based on E. G. White and not on the Bible, Kritzinger sought to prove biblically the *Theology of the Last Generation* in his doctoral thesis. Once that was accomplished, he dedicated himself to corroborating our understanding of the topic with the Spirit of Prophecy.

Unfortunately, many people care little or not at all about the testimony of the Spirit of Prophecy. I am not addressing either them or those who use the Bible only to justify their own ideas, rather than what God wants and reveals in the Bible as a whole. Therefore, before we delve into various questions, let us bring to mind some statements from E. G. White that the new approaches openly or implicitly reject.

“If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called *to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world*. Those to whom has been committed a trust so sacred must be spiritualized, elevated, vitalized, by the truths they profess to believe” (5 T 746).

Here we clearly see that the exaltation of the law by the Adventist Church aims to vindicate God's character before the world. God's character cannot be vindicated without vindicating His law, and vice versa.

“The honor of God's law must be vindicated before the unfallen worlds, before the heavenly universe, and before the fallen world. The most cruel persecution will come, but when Zion arises and puts on her beautiful garments, she will shine forth in the beauty of holiness” (*Bible Training School*, December 1, 1903. RP 340).

Again, we see that our mission is to vindicate “the honor of God's law” before the entire universe. That law is a clear testimony of God's character that the world tramples upon. And because this vindication of God's law conflicts with carnal passions, Adventist evangelical theologians give up, claiming that God's law cannot be kept. That is *defeatist antinomianism*.

“Everyone who by faith obeys God's commandments will reach *the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression*” (*ST*, July 23, 1902; *MSV* 232). “*Exact obedience is required, and those who say that it is not possible to live a perfect life throw upon God the imputation of injustice and untruth*” (*RH*, Feb 7, 1957). “I have not found your works perfect before God” (Rev 3:2).

The end is coming. We have before us a tremendous crisis looming in the world. In order to be able to overcome in the last contest, we have to know exactly what the Lord expects of us, and how He intends us to attain it. This is why we decided to study this subject carefully. I hope this study will help many to understand our mission from the perspective of God's character vindication before the universe, needed to overcome the

rebellious angel forever.

I. Can perfection of character be achieved in this life?

Some say *yes*, others say *no*. Let's take a closer look at both approaches.

“God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ's character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance of evil, the Saviour showed that through *co-operation with Divinity*, human beings *may in this life attain to perfection of character*. This is God's assurance to us that we, too, may obtain *complete victory*” (AA 531).

God “holds up before us the highest ideal, even perfection. He asks us to be absolutely and completely for Him in this world as He is for us in the presence of God” (AA 566). “Everyone who confesses Me before people, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt 10:32; Rev 3:5).

“Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own” (COL 69).

The evangelical theologians within our church believe that it is not possible to attain perfection. They are raising the same criticisms that Protestants have been making since the last century. They accuse us of being *legalistic* and *perfectionistic* for affirming what Jesus Himself says through the gift of prophecy. They misinterpret us as claiming justification by works instead of being justified by Christ.

It is evident that in presuming to defend the value of justification by faith, such theologians belittle the value of sanctification by faith. Behind this is the accusation that Protestantism has made against us of belittling the cross of Christ by proclaiming the investigative judgment that judges the works of human beings. Likewise, they pretend that by calling for the vindication of God's character before the world and the universe (by examining our works in the investigative judgment), we are considering that the testimony of Christ in His earthly life was not sufficient to vindicate the divine character. In their defense of an *exclusive* vindication of Christ, some end up *excluding the investigative judgment* as well, deeming it unnecessary. To respond to this, it is appropriate to ask ourselves several questions.

a) *The introduction of evangelicalism within the Seventh-day Adventist Church*

In the mid-20th Century, leaders of the Adventist Church had conversations with the evangelical Walter Martin, which gave them the opportunity to be seen not as a sect, but as truly Christian and evangelical. C. Mervyn Maxwell provides a summary of what happened in “The Sanctuary and the Atonement in SDA Theology. An Historical Survey,” in A. V. Wallenkampf and W. R. Leshner, *The Sanctuary and the Atonement* (1981), 525ff. The result of these conversations with evangelicals was published in 1957 in the book *Questions on Doctrine* (QOD). There, they discussed whether Christ's atonement on the cross was complete and what role Christ's priesthood in heaven should play. A. Kritzinger also refers that historical data in his doctoral thesis already mentioned, and its consequences for the last generation theology.

Under pressure from evangelicals, Leroy Froom and other Adventist leaders accepted that the atonement of the cross was complete and that, thanks to that atonement, Christ can apply it to the lives of believers. And they averted that “when... one hears an Adventist say, or

reads in Adventist literature—even in the writings of Ellen G. White—that Christ is making atonement now, it should be understood that we mean simply that Christ is now making application of the benefits of the sacrificial atonement He made on the cross” (*QOD* 354-355). As a result of this approach—according to C. M. Maxwell—we find also in *QOD* “the first abandonment of the two-apartment concept” of the heavenly sanctuary, in favor of the “two phases” of that ministry (523). That is another way of devaluing Jesus' ministry in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary and the investigative judgment effected there.

However, pioneers like O. R. L. Crosier, especially in the *Day-Star Extra* of 1846, had noted that in the Israelite sanctuary, atonement was not completed during the year with the sacrifice, but rather after the earthly high priest performed the blood ritual in the inner places of the heavenly sanctuary. I confirmed this in my doctoral thesis, *The Day of Atonement and the Heavenly Judgment*, which I defended at the Protestant Faculty of the University of Strasbourg, France, and cited non-Adventist authors who affirmed this same fact. In the inauguration of the earthly sanctuary in Moses' time, atonement was only made on the altar in the courtyard (Lev 8 and 9; see Heb 1:3). But during the year, atonement was completed after the blood was offered inside the sanctuary (Lev 4, 5, 16).

E. G. White also referred to the benefits of Christ's atonement accomplished on the cross, and this fact did not prevent her from expressing correctly and unequivocally that Jesus still performs atonement today in the inner places of the heavenly sanctuary (*EW* 244,253; *GC* 422,433,480, etc). This atonement is related to the expiatory payment required for the forgiveness of sins, which Jesus presents with the testimony of His blood before His Father and the angels of God (Heb 7:25; 9:11-12).

Yes, Christ's atonement on the cross fully paid the debt of humanity. But that expiatory payment would not have value unless it was personally applied to each believer from Christ's first coming to His second coming. So, the problem lies not in correctly affirming that the atonement made on the cross was complete as a sacrifice, but in neglecting to present the priestly ministry as a whole, as forming part of the process of atonement. And that led many to restrict atonement to the cross and downplay the atonement of the priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, including the vindication of God's character that was to be accomplished in the investigative judgment.

More recently, evangelicals pressured the Adventist Church to republish the book *QOD*, and George Knight did so in 2003, becoming the leading exponent of evangelical Adventism in modern times. For evangelical Adventists, the vindication of God's character by the last generation detracts from the complete vindication that Christ made of His Father's character on the cross. But what they overlook is that this vindication of His life and death on the cross, unique in its kind, is not exclusive. On the contrary, it empowers all the other vindications that were to be fulfilled through Christ's ministry on behalf of His people.

Indeed, both Christ's atonement and the vindication of God's character should be seen in the light of the entire plan of salvation, not restricted to the perspective of the cross. That's why E. G. White wrote:

“The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross” (*GC* 489). “A doubt of God's goodness would have remained in their minds [of the angels] as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe. But not so when the great controversy shall be ended. Then, the plan of redemption having been completed, the character of God is revealed to all created intelligences... Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour's cross; for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Christ Himself fully

comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, ‘It is finished’” (DA 764).

b) Wasn't the vindication of God's character accomplished by Christ sufficient?

Yes. The nature of the vindication of God's Name that Christ accomplished in His earthly ministry is unique. After Adam's fall, no one else could have done what He did. He lived a perfect life in a world of sin, demonstrating that man, as he was created, could keep the divine law. God's law was not bad, unjust, or impossible to keep, as the devil had claimed when accusing God after causing our first parents to fall. And throughout the history of this world, Christ was the only one undefeated by sin from birth to Calvary.

“The world's Redeemer passed *over the ground where Adam fell* because of his disobeying the expressed law of Jehovah; and the only begotten Son of God came to our world as a man, to reveal to the world that men could keep the law of God. Satan, the fallen angel, had declared that no man could keep the law of God after the disobedience of Adam” (3 SM 136).

Here we clearly see that Jesus came with the *non-fallen spiritual nature* of Adam to demonstrate that man, as he was created, could keep the law of God. Only He could fully and completely vindicate the character of God since all of us come with the sinful inheritance that Adam bequeathed to us after his fall. We needed a second Adam who would share His spiritual nature with us and make us partakers of His divine nature (1 Cor 15:45; 2 Pet 1:4).

Satan could not defeat Christ even by questioning his divine nature (Matt 4:3-10). In the command of Jesus that the tempter depart, Satan had the proof that Jesus was God in human flesh, something he couldn't contradict (DA 104). That's why Jesus could later say that the prince of this world, the devil, had nothing in him (John 14:30). But Satan believes he can overcome Christ's followers because he knows that they are weaker, possessing a deteriorated spiritual nature that needs to be regenerated.

“The sinful nature of man was weak, and he was prone to the transgression of God's commandments. Man had not the power to do the words of God; that is why Christ came to our world, that He might give him moral power. There was no power in heaven or in earth but the power of Christ that could deliver” (14 MR, 1094, 82). “Because man fallen could not overcome Satan with his human strength, Christ came from the royal courts of heaven to help him with His human and divine strength combined” (1 SM 279).

Knowing that the children of Adam are weaker, the devil seeks to prevent Christ, the second Adam, from imparting His divine nature to them. Without this nature, they could not overcome Satan as Jesus did (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:45; 2 Pet 1:4). Thus, Satan seeks to separate them from their Redeemer just as he had separated them from their Creator. Therefore, it had to be proven before the universe that the fallen beings who inherited Adam's sinful nature could also overcome Satan “by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 12:11), and by receiving the spiritual nature of God through the Holy Spirit, so that they could be called “children of God” (Rom 8:14-16).

“Satan again counseled with his angels, and with bitter hatred against God's government told them that while he retained his power and authority upon earth their efforts must be tenfold stronger against the followers of Jesus. *They had prevailed*

nothing against Christ but must overthrow His followers, if possible” (EW 191).

Let us pay attention to this last statement: “if possible.” This meant that it had to be proven that with their fallen nature, the children of Adam could also overcome as Christ overcame, developing a perfect character like His. By receiving God’s spiritual nature to overcome sin, the human will, clinging to the divine will, becomes omnipotent to conquer Satan. Therefore, those who claim that God’s law cannot be kept are repeating Satan’s lie. We will delve further into this later. For now, let us highlight that Christ came to take the place of the first Adam to overcome Satan and give us a new opportunity.

“Many claim that it was impossible for Christ to be overcome by temptation. Then He could not have been *placed in Adam’s position*; He could not have gained the victory that Adam failed to gain” (DA 117). “*Christ passed over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell... As man’s substitute and surety, Christ redeemed Adam’s disgraceful fall, and kept the way of the Lord*” (RH, May 23, 1899, 8).

“Christ, the propitiation for our sins, declared: ‘*I will stand in Adam’s place. I will take upon myself the penalty of his sin. He shall have another trial... He shall have the privileges and the opportunities of a free man, and be allowed to exercise his God-given power of choice*’ (AU Gleaner 08-19-03). “He was assailed with temptations in the wilderness, even as Adam was assailed with temptations in Eden” (Lt 8 1897; 5 SDABC 1128-1129).

We could not pass “over the ground where Adam... fell,” that is, put ourselves in Adam’s place before the fall, because we find ourselves in Adam’s place after the fall. For further documentation, please refer to my website: <https://adventistdistinctivemessages.com/wp-content/uploads/documents/Humanaturejesuschrist-edit>

c) *If Christ had already vindicated His Father, why didn’t the world end there?*

Why didn’t the world end on the cross at Calvary, and Jesus redeem all His followers at once? Why did the world have to continue if everything had supposedly already been completed and fulfilled on the cross? There was much more to be demonstrated. Otherwise, after vindicating the character of God before the world by keeping His Father’s law, the Son could have gone to heaven and left us forever. That would have meant that He could, but we could not. So, if He wanted to redeem us and bring us to His glory without causing any harm in the universe, He had to prove through His church that this obedience to the divine law is fulfilled in His followers. And He achieves that through the transformation of the gospel brought about by His Spirit.

Could the followers of the Lamb keep God’s law? When people ask us if it is possible to keep the sixth commandment, “You shall not kill,” do we have to tell them no, that God’s law cannot be kept in our fallen nature? And what about the seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery”? Are we promiscuous and therefore have to admit that we cannot keep that commandment either? And so, we could go on with the other commandments.

How would Deity appear before the universe by bringing to glory a deceitful, fraudulent, adulterous, covetous, and disrespectful people? Satan mocks God and His angels when the people of God continuously sin.

“Satan and his angels mark all the mean and covetous acts of these persons, and present them to Jesus and His holy angels, saying reproachfully: ‘*These are Christ’s followers! They are preparing to be translated!*’ Satan compares their course with

passages of Scripture in which it is plainly rebuked, and then taunts the heavenly angels, saying: *‘These are following Christ and His word! These are the fruits of Christ’s sacrifice and redemption!’* Angels turn in disgust from the scene” (CET 174).

The vicarious death of the Redeemer of the world covers the sins of those who repent and confess them. But why must it be demonstrated to the universe that we, sinners by nature, could also keep God’s law? Did the universe have to witness divine impotence to change sinners or rather divine power to put them in harmony with His law?

Thus, the vindication by Christ of His Father and our vindication of God do not nullify each other. Ours could not be accomplished without the unique vindication of the Son of God because we first had to be justified by His blood. But for us the purpose is not to exalt ourselves, but the Name of God so the Lord could be glorified in us. This has nothing to do with self-justification, boasting, perfectionism, or legalism, but with the divine grace that wants to reveal its power in us so that we may praise Him as the angels in heaven do.

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. *The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy.* The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan’s existence must be continued. *Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness.* He must choose whom he will serve” (DA 761). “For the good of the entire universe through ceaseless ages Satan must more fully develop his principles, that his charges against the divine government might be seen in their true light by all created beings, that the justice and mercy of God and the immutability of His law might forever be placed beyond all question” (GC 498).

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Eph 3:10). “Even angels long to look into these things” (1 Pet 1:12).

“A doubt of God’s goodness would have remained in their minds [of the angels] as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe. But not so when the great controversy shall be ended. Then, the plan of redemption having been completed, the character of God is revealed to all created intelligences. The precepts of His law are seen to be perfect and immutable. Then sin has made manifest its nature, Satan his character. Then *the extermination of sin will vindicate God’s love and establish His honor* before a universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law” (DA 764).

“Well, then, might the angels rejoice as they looked upon the Saviour’s cross; for though *they did not then understand all*, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. *Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, ‘It is finished’*” (DA 764).

We have more questions to consider. Does God need to be vindicated before the universe by our good works? How? By preaching alone? Or also by keeping God’s law?

d) Why does the universe need to see our good works? (Matt 5:16)

God does not need to be vindicated by anyone because He can live without His creation.

He is the only one who has life in Himself (1 Tim 6:16). However, He is love and wants to preserve His creation free and sovereign. Therefore, for the well-being of earthly and heavenly creatures, His name and character need to be vindicated.

We have seen that Christ fully and sufficiently vindicated God. He silenced Satan's accusations regarding the alleged human inability to keep the divine law in creation. But we fell, and to redeem us without leaving any doubts in the universe, the Son of God had to not only pay our debt but also prove to the celestial creation that His grace or power was sufficient to transform us into His image and make us worthy of living in His kingdom.

We are saved by the grace of Christ but judged by our works. Those works vindicate God or condemn us. They are works that "God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph 2:10). Thus, our works reveal whom we live for, and the outcome will be inevitable. John sees the redeemed clothed "in fine linen, bright and clean, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev 19:8).

"Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Gal 6:8). "All your good works cannot save you; but it is nevertheless impossible for you to be saved without good works. Every sacrifice made for Christ will be for your eternal gain" (*RH*, March 21, 1878; 3 *SM* 147).

Some say that the only way we can vindicate God's character is by preaching the gospel. No. A true Christian is not only in word but also in deed. No matter how well they preach, those who violate the divine law cannot honor God or His law before the universe that examines the lives of the righteous in the investigative judgment. "Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person" (1 John 2:4).

This is the reason why we will have surprises in the kingdom of heaven when we do not see people we admired for their presumed holiness but who hid a life of sin and unfaithfulness. Hence the need for sanctification. And we will also be surprised to see people we considered unfit for the eternal kingdom because they received divine forgiveness. Hence the need for justification.

e) Faith and Works

What do we do with the words of the apostle James, whose epistle was considered by Luther as an "epistle of straw"? "A man is justified by works, and not by faith alone" (Jas 2:14-26). Do they contradict the words of the apostle Paul, who says that we are justified by faith apart from works of the law? (Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16). No. They are two aspects of the same truth. Our works do not confer merit for salvation because without Christ we were "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). But they prove that our faith is alive and produces fruits of eternal life.

Who is glorified by our works? Is it us? No. We cannot earn merit through our works. "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty'" (Luke 17:10). Only the Deity can be glorified by our good works because He is the one who created us and redeemed us so that we could do those works (Philip 2:13; Eph 2:10). Christ is glorified in us (1 Pet 4:14).

"In this, my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples" (John 15:8). "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16).

f) *We have a heaven to win and a hell to shun*

Yes! After being justified by faith, we still have “a heaven to win, and a hell to shun. And the angelic agencies are all ready to come to the help of the tried and tempted soul” (1 *SM* 96). For this reason, Jesus warns the churches in the book of Revelation, preparing them for the judgment that will be revealed in John’s second vision, that only “he who overcomes shall inherit all things” (Rev 2:7,11,17, etc.; 21:7-8).

When I took a course on *Justification by Faith* shortly after entering the ministry, the professor who came as an extension from Andrews University to Argentina marked my answer to a question as incorrect. He had asked whether faith and works were the two oars of salvation. I remembered reading that example in a quote from E. G. White, but I couldn’t remember where. This Adventist professor, Blincoe, brought us an *evangelicalist* approach on this matter. Here is the complete quotation:

“If we are faithful in doing our part, in cooperating with Him, God will work through us [to do] the good pleasure of His will. But He cannot work through us *if we make no effort*. If we gain eternal life, *we must work, and work earnestly*... Let us not be deceived by the oft-repeated assertion, ‘All you have to do is to believe.’ *Faith and works are two oars which we must use equally if we [would] press our way up the stream against the current of unbelief*. ‘Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.’ The Christian is a man of thought and practice. His faith fixes its roots firmly in Christ. By faith and good works he keeps his spirituality strong and healthy, and his spiritual strength increases as he strives to work the works of God” (*RH*, June 11, 1901; *WM* 315).

This has always been believed by the Adventist Church. And my exhortation is to continue believing what we have received, not the deceitful evangelical deductions that seek to find their way among us. The next topic we will touch on has to do with perfection. Is the honor of God involved in the perfection of the Christian character?

II. The honor of God is at stake in the perfection of His people’s character

Evangelical Adventists believe that only Christ could vindicate God perfectly, and that it is presumptuous to believe that we can also vindicate God perfectly. However, Christ claims to the church at Sardis that their works were not perfect before God (Rev 3:2).

Of course, Christ was the only one undefeated against sin, while we are fallen human beings whom He came to rescue. But God’s character is also tested in those whom God chooses to save, hence the need for an investigative judgment that we have to take into account because it makes us see that God cannot do anything for us that damages his reputation. Hence, too, it requires not only Christ’s vindication of His Father, but also His followers’ vindication of God’s character.

“To disprove Satan’s claim is the work of Christ and of all who bear His name” (*Ed* 154).

Can our failures honor God? Of course not! Can our triumphs vindicate His grace and power to save? Of course they can! An entrepreneur succeeds when his project is successfully fulfilled. If they fail, their name becomes an object of mockery (Luke 14:28-30). In the same way, when planning the salvation of the universe, God organized everything so that His

Name would not be dishonored in the end. For this reason the entire universal creation awaits the triumph of the redeemed because with their victory, the Name of God will be vindicated.

This is evident in the declaration of the apostle Paul: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19). And this great truth that points to the triumph of the last generation was stamped in the ritual of the sanctuary of Israel.

The Name of God was in His sanctuary

The Name of God is inscribed in His Law (Exod 20:7-11). For this reason, “the ark of God” which contained the tablets of the divine Law was the place where “the Name of the Lord” dwelt (2 Sam 6:2). Therefore, the name of the ark became “the ark of the covenant” (Josh 3:6) or “the ark of the testimony” (Exod 25:22; 26:33), because inside it were the two “tablets of the covenant” (Deut 9:11) or “tablets of the testimony” (Exod 31:18; 25:16). And the very tabernacle came to be called “the tabernacle of the testimony” (Num 10:11), which is to say, the Tabernacle of the Ten Commandments.

Since God put His Name, His signature, in the temple He built in the midst of His people (Deut 12:5, 11; 1 Kings 8:21), and those people were sinners, He risked His reputation before the other nations and the universe (Eze 36:23). For this reason, anyone who unlawfully defiled His sanctuary or profaned His Name, had to be put to death (Lev 20:2-5), or in the case of repentance by the sinner, the temple had to be purified in the end to prevent His Name, His character, from being dishonored (Lev 16:16). This implied the vindication of the Name of God, without which He could not continue to dwell in the midst of an unclean people.

The law and the blood were part of the foundation of salvation because if the law was not vindicated by the death of the guilty (Lev 20:3; 23:29-30; Num 35:33-34) or by the vicarious blood of sacrifice (Lev 16:16), the Name of God would be profaned. Through the purification of the sanctuary where He dwelt, the Name of God, the Deity itself, was freed from any responsibility for the sin of His people. He triumphed with His forgiven and cleansed people and could continue to dwell among them, fully vindicating His holiness.

If the church of Christ fails, can God save them anyway and at the same time vindicate His honor before the heavenly intelligences? By no means. Only a church which overcomes may vindicate the honor of God. So, by giving His Son to die for us, the Trinity involved His honor in our salvation. God will not abandon any sincere soul that invokes His Name for salvation. But neither will He declare the guilty innocent (Exod 20:7). Jeremiah cried out:

“Do not spurn us, for your name’s sake; do not dishonor your glorious throne; remember and do not break your covenant with us” (Jer 14:21).

Here the prophet understood that the honor of the throne of God is at stake because He made a covenant of salvation with His people. God cannot break His word. That covenant established the conditions for salvation and was inscribed on “the tablets of the covenant,” the Ten Commandments that God commanded to be placed inside the “ark of the covenant” (Deut 9:9-10; Rev 11:19). But for sinners who had violated the law of God, “the blood of the covenant” remained as the only hope that purified the sinner and vindicated the Name of God (Exod 24:8; Heb 13:20).

The blood covered the sin but did not exempt the sinner from the required obedience. Hence the blessings and curses that weighed upon the people of the covenant (Deut 28-30). These practical truths prove that the honor of God was at stake in the success of His plan of salvation.

“The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people” (DA 671). “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own” (COL 69).

But is it possible to achieve character perfection? Doubt leads many to believe that we cannot perfectly keep God’s law and, consequently, tend to believe that Christ came to save us in our sins, not from our sins.

Excursus: Doctoral Thesis Defending the Theology of the Last Generation

Armin Kritzinger’s doctoral thesis, *The Doctrine of Last Generation Theology for Seventh-day Adventists: A Defense*, defended at the University of Thailand last year (2022), responds to those who claim that it is impossible to keep God’s law (a lie from Satan) and, therefore, that God does not need to be vindicated by our converted lives. The accusations against *Last Generation Theology* (LGT), as well as the responses, are specific, precise, and concise. I will summarize some key points here.

a) It offers a remarkable synthesis of the pioneers’ thinking who, although not using the term *LGT* in some cases, believed in that doctrine, supported by E. G. White. It exposes the unfounded reasons given by anti-*LGT* proponents today, based on a significant number of their books and articles.

b) The rejection of the Spirit of Prophecy as a reliable source of biblical interpretation stands out in this synthesis by anti-*LGT* proponents, who claim that this theology is not based on the Bible.

c) It considers that those who criticize *LGT* misinterpret the beliefs of its defenders, pretending that they believe in justification by works, accusing them of *legalism* and *perfectionism*. This debate proposes an *antinomianism* versus *legalism* dichotomy that should not occur when studying the topic.

e) It analyzes numerous Bible texts that support *LGT*, to prove that this truth is not based on the writings of E. White, but rather she confirmed what is in the Bible. It also proves that the pioneers relied on the Bible. The attempt to reject *LGT* through exegetical analysis is unfounded because the words used should not be based solely on lexicons but on the context in which they were spoken.

f) It shows that the redeemed have a part in vindicating God’s character, and that is what God expects us to do by keeping His law. Not only did Christ vindicate God, but thanks to Christ’s vindication, the last generation can and should do the same. Although this thesis mentions little about the need for that vindication from the perspective of the Great Controversy, I will personally emphasize and highlight that relationship in the final section of this series.

Kritzinger's thesis makes a solid case for *LGT* as the foundation of Adventist faith in a world that lacks that light and despises divine law.

Details I see differently

a) At the end, Kritzinger suggests doing something similar to what the General Conference

did in the Women's Ordination debate: bringing together both positions and offering a synthesis of each perspective to the next congress, so that they make a vote that is not necessarily part of another doctrine but of a document on the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church.

I see merit in this idea but find it somewhat complicated in practice given the current social context because positions have become too dogmatic. I do not believe that the General Conference vote will change the perspective, just as General Conference votes did not stop the supporters of Women's Ordination in the North American Division and Europe from doing whatever they want. Now, everyone does what he wants in many issues, bringing chaos in the leadership of the church.

b) When discussing history, Kritzinger links *LGT* with the supposedly fallen nature of Christ in His incarnation, although he believes that both positions (fallen and unfallen) can nevertheless defend *LGT*. While it is true that many pioneers who defended *LGT* were postlapsarian (believing in Christ's human fallen nature), as are the majority of its defenders today, not all *LGT* defenders are postlapsarian.

c) *An anthropocentric approach*. The association of the postlapsarian interpretation of Christ with *LGT* leads, in my view, to a misinterpretation of *LGT* by its opponents. In practice, some end up believing that we can and should do the same as Christ only through our own efforts since He would have been able to be perfect with our fallen nature. Although many may deny it in words, logic leads some to presume that approach (for example, my uncle Humberto Raúl Treiyer, who fortunately abandoned later that position of striving to hasten Christ's coming by perfecting our character).

The best example of the *anthropocentric* outcome from this *postlapsarian* view is seen in M. L. Andreasen, who affirmed that the last generation will "must fight their battles alone," and that "God is depending upon us" to be vindicated and placing His trust in us for that work (*The Sanctuary Service*, 318,320). So, if the whole universe depended upon the triumph of the Son of God in His presumable sinful nature, it is logical to deduce that the investigative judgment in heaven and God Himself depend also upon us to vindicate God in our sinful nature. No, if the final vindication depended upon us, the end with the final victory of the redeemed would never come. God doesn't trust us (Jer 17:5,9). We must trust God, not man, because only God is faithful to do what He promised (1 Cor 10:13; 1 Thess 5:24).

d) In fact, I do not see an emphasis in Kritzinger's thesis that highlights that our perfection is and will always be "in Christ" on this side of eternity. When we look in his thesis the words "in Christ", we find references to "believe in Christ," and only one quotation of Col 1:28 which affirms that our perfection is "in Christ". See also 1 Cor 1:2 ("sanctified in Christ").

So, Kritzinger does not necessarily deny that our perfection is in Christ. But I would have liked him to insist more on that point. One can understand the reason behind it, as he tries to avoid the anti-*LGT* trend that focuses more on *justification* than on *sanctification*, and eliminate the effort to cooperate with God in obtaining perfection of character. But we don't have to lose sight on the fact that our perfection or sanctification is in Christ.

e) "La logique m'échappe" in some deductions (French expression meaning "the logic escapes me" or "lack of coherence" or "I don't see the logic"). In order to prove that not only Christ but we too can and should vindicate God, Kritzinger argues that the Son of God did not need to prove that God's law could be kept by Adam because the unfallen angels in heaven had already proven it. My response is that this is partly true for two reasons. *First*, there is a difference. Adam and Eve belonged to a different order of beings; they were not

angels. That is why an angel did not come to redeem us but the Son of God, Emmanuel in human flesh, not in the nature of an angel. *Second*, Adam and Eve fell, and it was necessary for someone with the same nature to come and prove that they could have remained faithful by keeping the law.

f) This is also a point where the postlapsarian interpretation fails because if Christ vindicated God in our fallen nature by fulfilling the law, then our vindication of God would not be necessary because Christ already proved it. On the contrary, it must be proven to the universe that God's power is capable of transforming the fallen children of Adam into a perfect reproduction of the character of His Son, who came in the spiritual pre-Fall condition of Adam. We cannot prove it, but Christ in us can, because He proved that, as Adam was created, he could have obeyed God's law.

g) I don't see in Kritzinger a concern for the anthropological approach of *LTG*, which makes God dependent on what we can do. For him, to say what God expects to do through us or saying what we can do is the same. Because everything we can do is by the grace of God. I see, however, a significant difference. We have to be God centered because we depend on Him who is with us at the beginning, today, and in the end. If we put the emphasis on what we can do, we may feel powerless and be discouraged. But if we fix our eyes in God, we will be encouraged knowing that "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Cor 10:13).

In conclusion. I am delighted with a thesis like Kritzinger's, so precise in exposing the problems that have arisen in recent years and in responding to these problems. Such a thesis was needed, destined to break the liberal evangelical dogmatism that has prevailed in many of our theological circles, starting with Andrews University. I congratulate the author for his courage in tackling such a topic and daring to thoroughly expose the problems of the anti-*LGT* camp. Even so, I am not feeling comfortable with the anthropological perspective of *LGT*, reason enough to change the title *LGT* to *LGVT* (*Last God's Vindication Theology*).

However, there is much more to say and develop in this theology, which we will do now. I am excited that someone in Asia (in the Far East, as the Americans used to say) is awakened by God to bring balance. The truth will triumph. And those who give up in their fight against evil could end up realizing too late that the last generation will be led by God to an experience no other generation has had before (Dan 12:1). In that last generation, God will refine His people's character as a metal refiner does, so that the pure gold of His Son's character may shine. That is something we cannot do, but God promised He would do.

III. Perfection according to spiritual postlapsarian and prelapsarian perspectives

The *Last Generation Theology* or, as I prefer to call it, the *Last God's Vindication Theology*, permeates the entire gospel, the entire message of the Bible, the entire plan of salvation. And it must be seen in the light of the great controversy of the ages between good and evil, from the time when evil began in heaven until its final annihilation. Since this vision is not held by the general Christian churches, the great truth contained in this approach is preached only in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church*, where such a vision was discovered by our pioneers and confirmed by the *Spirit of Prophecy*. It is based on the Bible and can be demonstrated through *Sola Scriptura*.

To understand what God requires of us who are in the midst of this conflict and the need for the Deity to triumph in His heavenly judgment in order to preserve the peace and happiness of the universe, we must begin by distinguishing between the role that God

assigned to His Son on earth and the role that He assigns to us in the plan of salvation. This is a branch of what is called *Christology*, the theological science that studies the life and role of Christ in theology. Within Adventism, the human nature of Jesus Christ has been intensively discussed for over half a century, with three prominent positions emerging: *postlapsarians*, *radical prelapsarians*, and *spiritual prelapsarians*.

a) *Postlapsarians*

They believe that Jesus assumed the fallen human nature of Adam and that, in consequence, we can keep the law of God and attain perfection of character just as the Son of God did in His earthly life. According to them, Jesus would have had our same fallen nature, which implies the same tendency to evil that we all have from conception and birth (Gen 25:21-22; Ps 51:5). Therefore, according to *postlapsarians*, we are in the same condition that the Son of God was in, and we can achieve character perfection as Jesus did. They make Christ *equal* to us more than making us *like* Christ.

This leads some to place undue emphasis on the law of God and on the perfection that for many, leans towards *legalism* and *perfectionism*. And although some may want to deny it, under this perspective, Christ is seen more as an *example* than as a needed *substitute* for our natural deficiencies. They do not seem to distinguish clearly between the nature of the vindication of the character of God that His Son accomplished and the nature of the vindication of the divine character that is required of us. And although they emphasize the need to reproduce the character of Christ perfectly, they leave the question open as to whether our vindication of God is necessary at present, and to what extent. Because if Christ already vindicated God by keeping the divine law with our fallen nature, what need is there for us to vindicate that law that has already been vindicated?

We have a remarkable example in the history of our denomination regarding this undue emphasis on God's law by those who wanted to make Christ equal to us with our fallen nature. Our pioneers were mostly *postlapsarian*, and they placed such a great emphasis on the law of God that it led the denomination to the crisis of Minneapolis in 1888. The Spirit of Prophecy warned at that time that the messages they were giving about the law were as dry as the hills of Gilboa and exhorted them to emphasize justification by faith.

“As a people we have preached the law until we are as dry as the hills of Gilboa upon which fell neither dew nor rain. *We are to preach Christ in the law*, and there will be wisdom and food in the preaching that will be as food to the hungry flock of God. *We are not to trust in our own merits but in the merits of Jesus of Nazareth*” (*The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials*, 1888, 560.4)

Since then, E. G. White also sought to bring balance regarding the nature of Christ. She began to warn against presenting Christ as *equal* to us, with the same tendencies or passions to sin that we possess by nature. Christ is *similar* to us, but *not equal* (Heb 2:17; 4:15). He is our elder brother. And unlike us, He was “a holy being” from birth (Luke 1:35), which is different from the way we are born.

“*Christ did not possess the same sinful, corrupt, fallen disloyalty we possess, for then He could not be a perfect offering*” (3 *SM* 131). “We must not think that the liability of Christ to yield to Satan's temptations degraded His humanity and He possessed the same sinful, corrupt propensities as man” (16 *MR* 1211, 182). “*His spiritual nature was free from every taint of sin*” (*ST*, 12-09-97).

“Let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether

human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be... Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that he in any way yielded to corruption. He was tempted in all points like as man is tempted, yet He is called ‘that holy thing’” (5 *SDABC* 1128).

According to the postlapsarian approach, Christ had to be equal to us in order to understand us, and they present as evidence that He came receiving a fallen inheritance after more than 4000 years of sin. But by that criterion, Christ could have understood the people of His time, not us fully because we have inherited more than 6000 years of sin.

We were conceived in sin, in iniquity (Ps 51:5; see Gen 25:22). No one deserved to live after the fall of Adam because all of us—babies and adults—bring the taint of sin in our nature from the beginning and are therefore powerless. A New Adam must come to give us a new inheritance of life, taking away our natural condemnation. Thanks to this new inheritance and new possibility to overcome that we didn’t have before, we don’t need to ask forgiveness for our sinful nature to be saved, but for the faults we commit (Eze 18:20). This new inheritance explains why our sinful nature doesn’t necessarily mean guilt in those who accept Jesus as their Redeemer. But this fact doesn’t allow us to deduce that the Son of God should come in our fallen nature free from our inherited condemnation (Rom 5:18-19).

The fact that we may overcome in our sinful nature thanks to the divine nature imparted by the Son of God in our life, should not lead us to deduce that Jesus could also overcome in our fallen condition. It is not about proving Jesus’ human nature through our victory, but what we can become through His victory. It is not a question of what He could do in a fallen nature that He would have supposedly acquired, but of what He was required to be in order to share His divine nature with us, so that we might overcome like Him. We needed Him to come to us not as a source of corruption as our fallen nature is (Isa 1:6; Matt 15:19-20; Luc 11:13), but as a source of life, to “implant new life and energy” in our sinful nature (*GW92* 469). Christ’s spiritual nature is a source of purity (Jn 7:37-39), while ours, fallen, is a source of filth and wickedness (Is 1:6; Matt 15:19-20; Luke 11:13).

“*At its very source human nature was corrupted*” (*RH*, 04-16-01). But “Jesus is the source of power, the fountain of life” (*AA* 478), the “fountain” “of pure water of life” (2 *SP* 207), “the source of spiritual power” (*AG* 119), “the source of infinite power and purity” (*ST*, April 13, 1888). “The corrupt channels of humanity... are so defiled that unless purified by blood, they can never be of value with God” (*AG* 154).

What kind of blood? That which came from the human body of Christ. This is clean blood, not corrupted as our natural defective blood (Jer 17:9). Yes! We need someone to come in our human likeness, but different from us in purity and power, to take a firm hand like His, to be rescued.

“His spiritual faculties were free from any taint of sin” (*ST* 12-09-97). “He was to take His position at the head of humanity by taking the nature but not the sinfulness of man” (*ST* May 29, 1901). “*Men are contaminated with sin*, and they cannot have an adequate conception of the heinous character of the evil...” (*TMK* 368). But Christ hated “sin with a perfect hatred” (*TMK* 66). “Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation” (*GC* 623).

See A. R. Treiyer, *The Human Nature of Jesus Christ*:
<https://adventistdistinctivemessages.com/wp-content/uploads/documents/Humanaturejesuschrist-edit>

Let us consider another difference between the Son of God and us. We are *God's experiments* of the grace of Christ *in our sinful nature* to transform us to His image. And that kind of experiment must be scrutinized in the investigative judgment, so the Name of God could be vindicated through those spiritual experiments.

“The Lord Jesus is *making experiments on human hearts* through the exhibition of His mercy and abundant grace. He is effecting transformations so amazing that Satan, with all his triumphant boasting, with all his confederacy of evil united against God and the laws of His government, stands viewing them as a fortress impregnable to his sophistries and delusions. They are to him an incomprehensible mystery. *The angels of God...*, the powers commissioned to co-operate with human agencies, *look on with astonishment and joy, that fallen men, once children of wrath, are through the training of Christ developing characters after the divine similitude*, to be sons and daughters of God, to act an important part in the occupations and pleasures of heaven” (CET 208).

“Day by day he is working out before men and angels a vast, *sublime experiment, showing what the gospel can do for fallen human beings*” (HP 148).

There is another difference. We were created at God's image in Eden, and it is through Jesus that the image of God is restored in our life. We were made at God's “image” and “likeness” (Gen 1:26-27). However, the Son of God was “the express image” of His Father (Heb 1:3). He was God in the human flesh: Emmanuel.

Why were our pioneers mostly *postlapsarian*? Because they were semi-Arians. They did not believe in the full divinity of Christ. The denial of His divinity makes it easier to believe that Christ is *equal* to us instead of accepting the biblical message that He came in the “*likeness of sinful flesh*” (Rom 8:3). This mistake also leads to the belief that we can *equalize* Christ in our efforts to obey the law. That is why, after the experience of 1888 in which E. G. White intervened to bring balance and present “Christ in the law,” she emphasized more the divinity of Christ.

b) *Radical prelapsarians*

They believe that Jesus did not take on our sinful nature, but the perfect nature of Adam before the fall. These *radical prelapsarians* have shown an evangelical tendency that emphasizes justification and, although some may deny it, neglect or underestimate sanctification and the importance of keeping the law of God. According to them, Christ has already done everything for us; He is the only one who can vindicate God because we supposedly cannot keep the divine law, and we will continue to sin until the second coming of the Lord. According to this view, there will not be a last generation that perfectly keeps God's law and thus vindicates God's character.

Since the Spirit of Prophecy is specific about the need to vindicate God by keeping His law, they tend to devalue the Spirit of Prophecy and claim to base their beliefs solely on the Bible. However, it has been shown that the *LGT* is based on the Bible and can stand on its own, even without the wonderful confirmation and expansion provided by the Spirit of Prophecy. This is evident in Armin Kritzing's doctoral thesis, *The Doctrine of Last Generation Theology for Seventh-day Adventists: A Defense* (already cited above).

The consequences of this radical *prelapsarian* interpretation are being seen today in the Adventist Church, in a stream of *antinomianism* that relaxes divine standards and leads many to resemble the world. They have inherited this approach from Evangelical and Protestant churches, the result of which can also be seen in the Babylonian corruption that they are

experiencing and that extends worldwide. They do not see the importance of sanctification, which requires keeping the law of God. For them, sanctification is something automatic and secondary. Therefore, the only thing that matters to them is divine justification, which, in practice, serves as a remedy for a life of sin, not as deliverance from sin. Furthermore, they seek to adjust the Bible to the distorted standards of today's society and devalue the testimony of Jesus revealed through the gift of prophecy. Under this context, the Bible is no more regarded as a relevant book for our time, but simply as an antiquate text which has been improved by modern society.

c) Spiritual prelapsarians

They believe that although the Son of God inherited the weakened physical nature of Adam after more than 4,000 years of sin, His spiritual nature was like that of Adam before the fall, free from any tendency toward evil. This nature of Christ was perfect and holy from conception and birth (Luke 1:35). His perfection was related to His mission of being our Savior and fulfilling the role of the suffering Servant who could understand our weaknesses (Heb 2:9-11; cf. Isa 53:10-11).

“The Captain of our salvation was made perfect through suffering. Was he not perfect before?—Yes. But he was made a perfect Savior, learning obedience by the things which he suffered” (*ST*, 5-20-89, 8).

According to this interpretation, is it necessary for God's character to be vindicated by His people, especially by the last generation? Yes. God must also demonstrate to the universe that His power is sufficient to transform the character of His people so that they perfectly reflect the character of His Son, despite carrying the burden of more than 6,000 years of sinful inheritance and a tendency toward evil. The Lord needs to bring His plan of salvation to a successful conclusion with the complete triumph of the last generation. Because if He fails in the final part, would not the honor of God and His character be lost as being powerless to transform His people to His image?

That last generation of redeemed will cease to sin before the Lord's coming. Through the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the crucible of persecution that will burn away all the dross of sin, God will prove to the heavenly intelligences that His power is sufficient to keep upright those who wait for Christ in His coming, free from all sin (Rev 6:17; 14:1-5).

“We need not retain one sinful propensity ... [Eph 2:1-6 quoted.] As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good. Ever learning of the divine Teacher, daily partaking of His nature, we cooperate with God in overcoming Satan's temptations. God works, and man works, that man may be one with Christ as Christ is one with God” (*Mar* 225). It is important for us to consider this in more detail.

IV. The current biblical perfection

Those who deny that the character of God's people can become perfect in the final crisis make an impressive effort to play with the possible meanings of the Greek term in order to maintain their defeatist hypothesis. We do not see this concern in the key texts of the Bible or in the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy. But there is no need to twist the pen to make the text say what it does not say. The kind of perfection God expects of His people is compared to the

character of Christ. Therefore, in order to deny that kind of perfection, those who try to lower that standard of perfection, try to look for possible differences between the character of Christ and that of the last generation.

Let us start by asking ourselves, is it possible for us to achieve perfection of character? The answer is “Yes” and “No.” *No*, not on our own. *Yes*, through the grace of God, but even so, such perfection in Christ is not one-sided. It requires human effort because it involves a “divine-human cooperation.” But it also requires the divine compensation of the grace imparted by Christ.

a) *Let's first look at the “Yes”*

Yes! God does not demand the impossible. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matt 5:48). But each in their sphere. God has absolute perfection because He can view the universe from eternity past to eternity future, both in the macrocosm and the microcosm of the whole cosmos. He can see everything that happens in every corner of infinite space. But our vision is limited, and we can make mistakes by misinterpreting others and not being able to discern the nature of many things.

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa 55:9). “At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God’s purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime” (COL 65). “Glorious is the hope before the believer as he advances by faith toward the heights of Christian perfection!” (AA 533).

What does it mean to be perfect in our sphere, at every stage of development? It means that we must progress from victory to victory, not from defeat to defeat. The Bible places the emphasis on the victory that is achieved even after a fall. “Though *the righteous* fall seven times, they rise again” (Prov 24:16). It doesn’t say that the unrighteous person falls seven times because their journey is downward, from defeat to defeat, but upward, “from grace to grace” (RH, June 10, 1884), “from strength to strength, from glory to glory” (E. G. White, 6 SDABC, 114; 2 Cor 3:18).

Solomon focuses on the positive side. The righteous person recovers from their fall. Their journey goes from victory to victory after seven times they fall, “victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action” (EW 71). Because “the steps of a man are ordered by the Eternal who takes delight in his journey. Though he falls, he will not be overwhelmed, for the Eternal is holding his hand” (Ps 37:23-24).

To be perfect in our sphere means to be faithful to the light we have received, which also brings limitations based on education and the degree of knowledge we have of God’s will. Because “through the law we become conscious of our sin. “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). For example, “I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, ‘thou shalt not covet’” (Rom 7:7). Indeed, “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 4:3), but “where there is no law there is no transgression” (Rom 4:15; 5:13).

How does the Bible define the word “perfect”?

Some have tried to accommodate the passage of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:15, where he says that “we are perfect,” by translating the Greek word *teleiōo* as “mature,” not “perfect.” But they cannot escape the apparent contradiction of verse 12 where the Apostle admits that he has not yet attained the final perfection that will be obtained once the goal is

reached by the church. Does Paul really say that he is not mature yet, only to admit that he is? “Perfect” makes more sense than “mature” in both cases. And that perfection falls within the tensions of the gospel between the *already* and the *not yet*.

In Christ, we are perfect if we accept Him as a permanent guest and are at peace with Him. But we know that we have not yet reached the goal, the goal of “a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). Paul was humble, to the point that he considered himself the chief of sinners in view of his past, and that same fact allowed him to approach the perfection of Christ who said, “I am meek and humble in heart” (Matt 11:29).

Let’s see how the command of Christ sounds by interpreting the term *teleiōo* with the meaning of “mature” in Matt 5:48. “Therefore, be mature as your Father is mature.” What? Is God mature? No. He is perfect from all eternity. The translation of mature doesn’t work. I don’t know of any version that has translated this verse in that way. It cannot be translated as “be mature as your Father is perfect” either.

We agree that *teleiōo* also implies maturity, but it is related to the maximum growth, to something *complete, perfect*. In harmony with this fact, we see several passages from the Spirit of Prophecy that use the term “perfection” within our human limits. Therefore, there is no need to complicate the discussion. It is preferable to express it as she does, in harmony with the Bible, affirming that *our perfection is in Christ* and that we must be perfect *in our sphere*, just as God is in His. Only then can the honor of God be vindicated before the universe.

Some have tried to explain that the word “perfect” was interpreted by Luke as meaning “merciful” (Luke 6:36). In that case we could also say that “merciful” was interpreted by Matthew as meaning “perfect.” That explanation which tries to avoid the meaning of “perfect” in Matt 5:48 is forced. God has many moral attributes and expects us to possess them as well. The most we can deduce is that, of the many things Jesus did and said (John 21:25), Matthew remembered perfection, and Luke remembered mercy. Still, God’s law that reflects the perfection of His character is a law of love, for no one can love another if he does not keep the law (John 14:15; Rom 13:8-10).

We must consider not only the lexicographic possibilities of translating a term but also look at it within the context in which the term *teleiōo* or its equivalents are used in other passages of the Bible, which does not allow us to force the exegesis to give it a different meaning (Eph 4:12-13). Let’s see the context in which this term is used in other passages, which will help us avoid lowering the idea expressed by the term “perfection.”

“That you may stand *perfect and complete* in all the will of God” (Col 4:12). “Let patience have its *perfect work*, that you may *be perfect and complete, lacking nothing*” (Jas 1:4).

Here we see that the word “perfect” is associated with “standing firm,” “completely secure,” “perfect result,” “complete,” without lacking anything. Let’s see other passages where this word and its Hebrew equivalent are linked to words like “righteous,” “walking with God” (Gen 6:9), “upright,” “God-fearing,” “turning away from evil” (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3), not sinning (2:10), “blameless in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord” (Luke 1:6).

Thus, to be perfect means to keep the commandments of God and to have communion with God, being free from sin. Like Jesus when He said to the Pharisees, “Who among you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46). And that is what God expects from us after justifying us by faith and granting us the peace we need and should not give up (Rom 5:1).

Obedience to the commandments of God doesn’t make us automatically righteous. The

pharisees expected to obtain righteousness by keeping the law of God, “blameless” in the form (Philip 3:6). We have to look for the righteousness of God revealed in Christ and see Christ in the law (v. 9; Rom 3:19ff). This is the reason why we must avoid becoming *anthropocentric* in our consideration of the last generation perfection. Otherwise, we can fall in the pharisees’ trap. “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:2-3).

Let’s review how the Spirit of Prophecy quoted above confirms this fact.

“Everyone who *by faith obeys* God’s commandments will reach *the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression*” (ST, July 23, 1902; MSV 232). “*Exact obedience is required, and those who say that it is not possible to live a perfect life* throw upon God the imputation of injustice and untruth” (RH, Feb 7, 1957).

Jesus said to the church in Sardis, “I have not found your works perfect before God” (Rev 3:2). And to those who have “prepared” themselves to participate in the wedding feast of the Lamb, John wrote that they will be granted to be dressed “in fine linen, clean and bright,” which represents “the righteous acts of the saints” (Rev 19:8).

“God calls upon us to reach the standard of perfection and places before us the example of Christ’s character. In His humanity, perfected by a life of constant resistance of evil, the Saviour showed that through *co-operation with Divinity*, human beings *may in this life attain to perfection of character*. This is God’s assurance to us that we, too, may obtain *complete victory*” (AA 531).

But many react against the word “perfect” because they misinterpret it. They resist using that term because they think it refers to someone who has overcome sin forever and, therefore, claims not to sin anymore. No, that is not what biblical perfection means! The sinner who has overcome sin can fall, and in fact, those to whom the Bible attributes the term perfect or its equivalents, “upright,” “blameless,” sinned afterward. Noah, for example, sinned after God referred to him as “perfect” and “righteous” (Gen 6:9; 9:21).

The same can be said of Zechariah and Elizabeth, who were “righteous” and “blameless” in all the commandments of God, and yet Zechariah doubted after the angel’s promise (Luke 1:6,18-20). Regarding David, God said, “I have found David... a man after My own heart, who will do all My will” (Acts 13:22; 1 Sam 13:14). And although he had been “upright in the eyes of the Lord, and had not turned aside from anything that He [God] commanded him all the days of his life,” the biblical account highlights one basic exception: “except in the case of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kgs 15:5).

For this reason, even though we can and should have a conscience approved by God by confessing our sins and remaining faithful to His commandments (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Rom 5:1; 9:1; 2 Tim 1:3; 1 Pet 3:21), we should not boast of being perfect or blameless. “Those who have felt the sanctifying and transforming power of God, must not fall into the dangerous error of thinking that they are sinless, that they have reached the highest state of perfection, and are beyond the reach of temptation” (ST, Feb 4, 1897). “So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! (1 Cor 10:12). Not even the last generation that will go through the final time of trouble and be translated alive into the eternal kingdom can boast of being perfect. Let God declare it in His judgment, for He is the only one who knows our hearts thoroughly.

b) Let’s now examine the “No”

There is a target, a final goal, and it is to reach the standard of character perfection that

Christ had, which surpasses our current condition. That is why we must strive to imitate Him, to be like Him, knowing that we are deficient and that we cannot achieve His perfection on our own. We come with inherent flaws, we are accustomed to sinning, and although we must progress in holiness, no matter how hard we try we cannot be equal to Christ. This is not recognized by *postlapsarians*, for whom being “like” Christ is the same as being “equal” to Him.

For example, Paul, whom we have just seen had a conscience approved by God, admitted that he was not yet perfect in the dimension to which God wants to lead His people. These are his words, whose main meaning we have already analyzed:

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own... Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philip 3:13-14).

“*We can never equal the Pattern*, because it is infinite goodness practiced in His human nature, [yet] *we should make determined efforts* with all the powers of our being *to follow His example*” (16 MR 1213 199). “*We cannot equal the pattern; but we shall not be approved of God if we do not copy it* and, according to the ability which God has given, *resemble it*” (2 T 549).

“*We can never equal the pattern; but we may imitate and resemble it according to our ability*” (RH, Feb 5, 1895). “The Lord can accept of *nothing short of perfection of character, wholeness to God. Any half-hearted service will testify before the heavenly intelligences that you have failed to copy the Pattern*” (YI, Oct 13, 1892).

“Those who expect one day to stand before the throne of the God of gods and Lord of kings, should live each day in such a way that the approval of God can rest upon them. They should seek daily to remove the blemishes in character that lead to sin, and bring into their lives the perfection of character that all must reveal who have a part in the kingdom of heaven” (YI, Oct 29, 1907).

“They must all remember that they have not yet attained unto perfection, that the work of character building is not yet finished. If they will walk in every ray of light that God has given; if they will compare themselves with Christ’s life and character, they will discern where they have failed to meet the requirements of God’s holy law and will seek to make themselves perfect in their sphere, even as God in heaven is perfect in His sphere... During these hours of probation they are to seek for perfection of character. They must learn daily of Christ...” (PM 74).

Our concern should not be to diminish Christ by making Him *equal to us*, but to strive to be *like Him*. If we think we can be perfect through our own efforts, we are mistaken. We need the grace of Christ to progress, to grow in holiness. Therefore, if we look at ourselves, we will see the goal of character perfection, of holiness, as unattainable. But if we look at Christ, everything is possible. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philip 4:13).

But will we never attain character perfection in this life? Yes, but it will always be a perfection “in Christ.” That is the aim of the gospel. The preaching of the apostle Paul had the purpose of “*presenting every man perfect in Christ*” (Col 1:28). Death must find us growing in holiness, for sanctification is a lifelong process.

The apostle John also says, “no one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:6,9; 1 John 5:18). Because “the light shines in the darkness,” and both cannot dwell together (John 1:5; 1 John 1:5).

“The spirit is warring against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit; and one of these must conquer. If the truth sanctifies the soul, sin is hated and shunned, because Christ is accepted as an honored guest. But Christ cannot share a divided heart; sin and Jesus are never in copartnership” (*TM* 160).

But he also says that that “if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Therefore, “if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1).

c) *The vindication of God’s law*

We saw that there is a present perfection that God wants to bestow upon us, and to receive it, we need *to combine our weak human effort with His power*. That perfection is a perfection in Christ, which requires humility and self-denial. It is also related to the vindication of His law in a world that tramples upon it. That vindication must begin now and be completed before the second coming of Christ.

We also saw that we cannot vindicate God’s character by preaching one thing and living another. Vindicating God entails vindicating His law. And how can we vindicate the divine law if we lie, steal, commit crimes, and do not respect the day that God chose for us to acknowledge Him as our Creator? For this reason the Spirit of Prophecy insists on the call to cooperate with God in our pursuit of holiness, to strive to attain eternal life. For God does not ask for anything impossible. When He commands, He empowers to obey Him, to receive His power to be faithful and overcome. Let us consider Paul’s words first:

“Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor 9:25-27). “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philip 2:12-13).

“Here are the conditions upon which every soul will be elected to eternal life. Your obedience to God’s commandments will prove your right to an inheritance with the saints in light. God has elected a certain excellence of character; and every one who, through the grace of Christ, shall *reach the standard of his requirement*, will have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of glory” (*CE* 118).

“All who would reach this standard of character, will have to employ the means that God has provided to this end. If you would inherit the rest that remaineth for the children of God, you must become a co-laborer with God. You are elected to wear the yoke of Christ—to bear His burden, to lift His cross ... Search the Scriptures, and you will see that not a son or a daughter of Adam is elected to be saved in disobedience to God’s law” (*FE* 125).

d) *Humility characterizes those who are closest to perfection in Christ*

It is true that we should strive to fulfill God’s law, and that we should not pretend that all we need is to believe. But that effort must be completely devoid of self-righteousness and boasting. The one who comes closest to representing Christ is the one who humbles himself before God and trusts only in the merits of a loving Savior who gave His life for Him. This is

the reason why we may know that the pope is not close to God, because he boast to be the Holy Father, His Holiness. No one has holy flesh.

“Our only safety is in constant distrust of self, and dependence on Christ” (COL 155). “There are many who... admit that man is fallen..., but they say that Christ has borne all the burden, all the suffering, all the self-denial, and they are willing to let Him bear it. They say that there is nothing for them to do but to believe; but Christ said, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me’ (Matt 16:24)” (1 SM 313-314).

The permanent distrust of ourselves does not mean that we have to go out into the street in fear, but not to expose ourselves presumptuously to situations of risk so as not to fall into the trap of the enemy. It means watching and praying not to fall into temptation, especially when we are amid a dangerous situation (Matt 26:41). Our trust is in God, not in our ability to overcome temptation.

“We are never to rest in a satisfied condition, and cease to make advancement, saying, ‘I am saved.’ When this idea is entertained, the motives for watchfulness, for prayers, for earnest endeavor to press onward to higher attainments, cease to exist... It is not he that putteth on the armor that can boast of the victory; for he has the battle to fight and victory to win. It is he that endureth unto the end that shall be saved” (1 SM 314-315).

“Those who are waiting to behold a magical change in their characters without determined effort on their part to overcome sin, will be disappointed. We have no reason to fear while looking to Jesus...; but we may constantly fear lest our old nature will again obtain the supremacy, that the enemy shall devise some snare whereby we shall again become his captives. We are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure. With our limited powers we are to be as holy in our sphere as God is holy in His sphere” (Mar 227).

The following long statement of the book *The Great Controversy* exposes in a great way the fact that only in humility can we be safe and come near to Jesus in our aspirations to perfection of holiness (see Matt 16:24; 2 Cor 12:9-10).

“Those who experience the sanctification of the Bible will manifest a spirit of humility. Like Moses, they have had a view of the awful majesty of holiness, and they see their own unworthiness in contrast with the purity and exalted perfection of the Infinite One.

“The prophet Daniel was an example of true sanctification. His long life was filled up with noble service for his Master. He was a man ‘greatly beloved’ (Dan 10:11) of Heaven. Yet instead of claiming to be pure and holy, this honored prophet identified himself with the really sinful of Israel as he pleaded before God in behalf of his people: ‘We do not present our supplications before Thee for our righteousness, but for Thy great mercies.’ ‘We have sinned, we have done wickedly.’ He declares: ‘I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people.’ And when at a later time the Son of God appeared, to give him instruction, Daniel says: ‘My comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength’ (Dan 9:18,15,20; 10:8).

“When Job heard the voice of the Lord out of the whirlwind, he exclaimed: ‘I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes’ (Job 42:6). It was when Isaiah saw the glory of

the Lord, and heard the cherubim crying, ‘Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts,’ that he cried out, ‘Woe is me! for I am undone’ (Isa 6:3,5). Paul, after he was caught up into the third heaven and heard things which it was not possible for a man to utter, speaks of himself as ‘less than the least of all saints’ (2 Cor 12:2-4; Eph 3:8). It was the beloved John, who leaned on Jesus’ breast and beheld His glory, that fell as one dead before the feet of the angel (Rev 1:17).

“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” (GC 470-471).

e) *Call to Vindicate God’s Law*

There are many Bible and Spirit of Prophecy quotations that exhort us to vindicate the law of God. Should we accuse those statements of believing in “holy flesh”? Are we thinking that we have holy flesh by insisting on the need to keep the Sabbath? Noah was a *just and upright* man who vindicated God’s law amidst the greatest degradation of the world in his days before the flood. “*Righteous Lot*” did the same, as he vexed his soul in Sodom by witnessing all that was done around him (2 Pet 2:7-8). And in the midst of apostasy and rebellion in Israel, “It pleased the Eternal for the sake of his righteousness *to make his law great and glorious*” (Isa 42:21).

As we read the following statements from the Spirit of Prophecy, which exhort us to vindicate the divine law, let us question whether God’s plan for the Adventist Church is fulfilled by affirming—as many are doing now—that it is impossible to keep the law of God.

“God has a distinct people, a church on earth, second to none, but superior to all in their facilities to teach the truth, to vindicate the law of God. God has divinely appointed agencies—men whom He is leading, who have borne the heat and burden of the day, who are cooperating with heavenly instrumentalities to advance the kingdom of Christ in our world. Let all unite with these chosen agents, and be found at last among those who have the patience of the saints, who keep the commandments of God, and have the faith of Jesus” (CCh 240).

“We must as workers be united in frowning down and condemning anything that bears the least approach to evil, in our associations with one another. Our faith is holy; *our work is to vindicate the honor of God’s law*, and is not of a character to bring anyone down to a low level in thought or in deportment” (2 SM 29).

“Every soul of us living upon the face of the earth must have our test and trials. Circumstances will occur in the providence of God when *we will be called to vindicate our faith*. We shall give decided evidence which side we are on. *We shall either be decidedly the vindicators of God’s holy law, or on the side of the transgressors*. We shall be tested as Noah was tested. Because the corruption was nearly universal in his age, did he then argue that it would not pay for him to stand separate and alone for God’s law? He took his position as God’s nobleman on the side of right because it was right” (Manuscript 86, 1886; CTr 59).

f) *The Tension between the “Already” and the “Not Yet”*

We have seen that in Christian perfection, there is a “yes” and a “no.” It is related to the

tension known in theology as the “already” and the “not yet,” which we find in the Bible. The apostles proclaimed the arrival of the final era because with Christ’s first coming, the era of shadows and prefigurations had ended, and the era of fulfillment had begun (Acts 2:17; Eph 1:10; Heb 1:2; 1 John 2:18, etc). But this new era of fulfillments would also have a “time of the end” announced especially by the book of Daniel, which would bring the plan of salvation to its consummation (Dan 8:17-19; 11:40; 12:1; Acts 3:19-21, etc).

This tension is seen again in that we have already been adopted as spiritual children (Rom 8:15), but not completely because we await a future bodily adoption (Rom 8:23). We are already redeemed in Christ (Eph 1:7), but not fully redeemed yet (Eph 4:30); we are already sanctified in Christ (1 Cor 1:2), but we are not yet fully sanctified (1 Thess 5:23–24); we are already saved in Christ (Eph 2:8), but not completely saved yet (Rom 5:9); we have already been spiritually resurrected with Christ (Eph 2:6), but we await the final physical resurrection (1 Cor 15:52). Paul said that we are already made perfect in Christ (Philip 3:15), but we have not yet attained the perfection that God desires us to have in the future (Philip 3:12-14).

Many of these “tensions” can be explained by the fact that there is a current spiritual fulfillment and another that must be literally consummated in the end. In that final consummation, we must never forget the need to vindicate the Name of God challenged by the rebellious angel and sinners on earth (Dan 8:14; see Lev 16:16-19; 20:3; Deut 12:5,11). This vindication takes place now through the church but must be consummated in the last generation in conjunction with the investigative judgment in heaven.

Now it is appropriate to closely consider God’s ultimate goal for His church. Will there be a faithful last generation that keeps God’s commandments? Can God bring His church to an experience where, in the end, it perfectly reflects the character of His Son?

V. The last generation differs from previous generations.

The introduction of evangelical Adventism into our church, with its exclusive emphasis on the atonement and vindication of Christ on Calvary—as seen above—opens the door to denying other basic truths of our faith that were passed down to us by our pioneers, confirmed by the prophetic ministry of E.G. White. There are those like Desmond Ford who end up denying the very need for the investigative judgment before Christ comes to give each one according to their works. They believe that the faithful who have been forgiven do not need to be judged by the heavenly court, despite numerous passages that state that both the righteous and the wicked will be judged (Eccl 12:14; Dan 7:9-10, 22, 26-27; Matt 12:36-37). With this criteria, other theologians and pastors have gone even further by denying that the mission of the last generation will differ from that of previous generations. And in order to do so, they even have to deny the distinction between the 144,000 and the great multitude in Revelation 7.

No one doubts that there will be a last generation. But what will be the condition of God's people at that time? Will they continue sinning until the coming of the Lord, or will they overcome sin forever? Will the wheat be like the tares, or will there be a clear distinction between the two? What is the purpose of God’s people having to go through a time of trouble that no previous generation has experienced? Since the end of the world will be preceded by a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation” (Dan 12:1).

We have to answer these questions because, as already seen, there are theologians who are denying that the last generation will be different from previous ones. However, some of the quotes we have seen from E. G. White regarding the divine calling of the Adventist people to vindicate God’s law point to the final act of the drama in which God wants to be vindicated by the last generation like never before. The quote that says Jesus will not come before “the character of Christ is perfectly reproduced in His people” (Ev 36) reveals that the perfect

character of Christ has not yet been fully reproduced today. And although in the past there were individuals who largely revealed that character, the development of the Christian faith was meant to grow until the end when that longed-for fullness of Christ's character would be revealed in the last survivors of His faithful believers before the Lord comes.

Does this have biblical foundation, or is it based solely on the statements of the Spirit of Prophecy? It does indeed have biblical foundation! That tension between the "already" and the "not yet" that we observed can be found in the sanctuary ritual, which had an initial purification of the altar and the people in the first month (the "already": Leviticus 8:15; 9:3,15), and a final purification of the sanctuary and the people in the seventh and last ecclesiastical month, in its inner places (Lev 16:16-19, 33). Likewise, Jesus inaugurated the heavenly sanctuary with His blood and grants us entry into His kingdom through His blood as well (Heb 1:3). But we must wait for the consummation when the Name of God will be vindicated in its final stage (Dan 8:14; Heb 9:23).

a) *The failure of Israel in its final stage as a nation*

The apostle Paul concludes that the Jewish nation failed in its final stage when the expected Messiah arrived.

"Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because their pursuit was not by faith, but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone... Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom 9:31-32; 10:3). "Because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord" (Heb 8:9).

In other words, literal Israel according to the flesh rejected the righteousness of Christ and instead believed that they could be saved by their works alone. And this belief was not in harmony with the covenant that required the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who took away the sins of the world" (John 1:29), and which the Jews rejected, and therefore they did not achieve their goal. However, even though "Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened" (Rom 11:7). "For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Heb 4:2).

God then raised up His church composed of converted Jews and Gentiles who achieve the "already" of that goal which literal Israel did not attain. Nonetheless, this church must await the consummation of God's final purpose to be fully represented by His people. Let's put it another way. The militant church unites faith and works as it reaches the first "already" of perfection in Christ (Rom 11:7). However, it must wait for the end to attain complete perfection (Philip 3:13-14), an experience to which God wants to lead it in order to transform it into the triumphant church. *Will the church of Christ truly triumph, or will it fail to achieve this objective in its final stage, just as the Jewish nation failed?*

In order to affirm our faith and confidence in God's power to bring His church to triumph in the end, God has given us the apocalyptic prophecies that are not conditional and, therefore, do not depend on our personal response to be fulfilled. They depend on the divine plan or purpose to lead His people to complete victory. If God believes that our triumph is possible, then let us believe Him and enter into that heavenly plan for the redemption of His church.

“Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). “God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” 1 Cor 1:9). “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor 10:13). “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thess 5:24). “By faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise” (Heb 11:11).

God will fulfill “which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began” (Titus 1:2). “God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged” (Heb 6:18). “If God is for us, who can be against us? 32He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Rom 8:31-34).

Individually we can become lost. But as a church, we are assured that the last remnant will triumph. There will be a people at the end who will keep “the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (Rev 14:12). That is the last remnant of spiritual Israel spoken of in the Bible, which will not be succeeded by any other remnant (Rev. 12:17). And let’s trust in God’s guidance that we will remain in that remnant.

b) *The last generation enters the Most Holy Place*

Another difference between the last generation and previous generations is that only the last generation will enter by faith into the Most Holy Place, according to the typological projection of the ancient sanctuary of Israel. This projection is fulfilled in the new Israel because the door to the Most Holy Place opens only at the end, during the judgment of the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15-19). Previous generations are encompassed within the Holy Place, as seen in the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:13), while the last generation living in the time of the seventh trumpet is connected to the Most Holy Place (Rev 11:19).

We see the same in the prophecy of Daniel 8. There is a *tamid* or “continual intercession” that takes place in the Holy Place until the time comes to cleanse the sanctuary at the end of the 2,300 days/years in 1844. The *tamid* performed by the “Prince of the host” (a heavenly being: Dan 8:11; cf. Josh 5:13-15) did not take place in the Most Holy Place but in the Holy Place. The purifying or vindicating event that occurs “in the time of the end” (Dan 8:14, 17, 19) corresponds to the final intercession in the Most Holy Place.

We also see this in the book of Revelation where Jesus is seen ministering to the churches connected to the candlesticks of the heavenly sanctuary (Rev 1-3). As we move to the second vision, we see the throne of God in the Most Holy Place with the four living creatures and the sealed book kept in the symbolic temple beside the ark or throne of God in the Most Holy Place (Rev 4-5; cf. Deut 31:26).

The first part of the prophecy of the 2,300 days/years, according to the prophetic calculation, was “cut off” and “determined” for Daniel’s people, the Jewish people (9:24). God gave the Jewish nation 70 annual weeks of opportunity to build a just society that would receive the Messiah at His first coming. But that nation rejected the Messiah, and God destroyed both their temple and city (Matt 22:7). Jesus foretold this to the Jewish leaders of

that time. He said to them, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing its fruit” (Matt 21:43).

“Individuals among the Jews will be converted; but as a nation they are forever forsaken of God” (1 SG 107). Why? The Spirit of Prophecy explains it:

“The Jews who rejected the light given at Christ's first advent, and refused to believe on Him as the Saviour of the world, could not receive pardon through Him. When Jesus at His ascension entered by His own blood into the heavenly sanctuary to shed upon His disciples the blessings of His mediation, the Jews were left in total darkness to continue their useless sacrifices and offerings. The ministration of types and shadows had ceased. That door by which men had formerly found access to God was no longer open. The Jews had refused to seek Him in the only way whereby He could then be found, through the ministration in the sanctuary in heaven... To them the door was shut...; hence they could not receive the benefits of His mediation” (GC 430).

The kingdom of God was then offered to the church of Christ, and God placed His Son as His mediator in the heavenly temple. He opened to the Christian church the door of the holy place for 1810 years (until 1844: Dan 8:14), in preparation for entering its culmination in the Most Holy Place. But when the time came to stand by faith before the ark with the Ten Commandments, the Christian churches refused to enter with Christ there by faith, because they knew that it meant acknowledging all of God's commandments, including that of the true Sabbath, the seventh-day Sabbath.

“Here was the secret of the bitter and determined opposition to the harmonious exposition of the Scriptures that revealed the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. Men sought to close the door which God had opened, and to open the door which He had closed” (Rev 3:7-8; GC 435).

That rejection still deprives Christian churches of keeping *all* the commandments, and being part of the final generation “who keep the commandments of God and have the faith of Jesus” (Rev 14:12; 12:17). This is the reason why we must extend to them the call to leave Babylon, explaining that the hour of God's judgment has come (Rev 14:6-8; 18:1-5).

In 1844 the “door of hope and mercy by which men had for eighteen hundred years found access to God, was closed, another door was opened, and forgiveness of sins was offered to men through the intercession of Christ in the most holy. One part of His ministration had closed, only to give place to another...” (GC 429). “The condition of the unbelieving Jews illustrates the condition of the careless and unbelieving among professed Christians, who are *willingly* ignorant of the work of our merciful High Priest” (GC 430).

The *Jewish generation* ended badly because they refused to enter the heavenly sanctuary. The Christian churches in general came only as far as the Holy Place, and they will do badly also because they refuse to enter the Most Holy Place. God then aroused a prophetic movement that accepts his call to enter the Most Holy Place, to form the last generation that God calls to keep His law. That's the last generation. And the characteristic God expects of her is unique, that she keeps the faith of Jesus and all of His commandments (Rev 14:12). This characteristic *was not part of the preceding generations*, although individually there are

those who had kept the law of God fully. Even so, after the apostolic age they did not have the gift of prophecy in their midst (Rev 12:17; 19:10).

“I was shown that the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ relating to the shut door could not be separated, and that *the time for the commandments of God to shine out with all their importance*, and for God's people to be tried on the Sabbath truth, *was when the door was opened in the most holy place in the heavenly sanctuary*, where the ark is, *in which are contained the ten commandments*. This door was not opened until the mediation of Jesus was finished in the holy place of the sanctuary in 1844” (EW 42).

“*The people were not yet ready to meet their Lord. There was still a work of preparation to be accomplished for them.* Light was to be given, directing their minds to the temple of God in heaven; and as they should by faith follow their High Priest in His ministrations there, new duties would be revealed. Another message of warning and instruction was to be given to the church” (GC 424-425).

c) The tendency to avoid entering the Most Holy Place

What we are doing is responding to the erroneous claim that the last generation will be like all the others. But in highlighting the differences between previous generations and ours, we must be careful not to fall into the trap of boasting or setting ourselves as an example to others. It is Christ who should be glorified by us, not ourselves. The greater light that we have compared to other churches that remain at the level of the reformers who founded them and do not progress should lead us to feel a greater responsibility that surpasses our capacity and requires the grace of God to fulfill it.

Some Adventists are trying to place the sixth trumpet in our time. But the sixth trumpet is focused on the Holy Place (Rev 9:13), and that intercession ended there in 1844 (Dan 8:14), to make way for Christ's final intercession in the Most Holy Place (Lev 16:16; Rev 10:7; 11:15,19). Only when the high priest finished his intercession and judgment in the Most Holy Place would he go out to purify the rest of the sanctuary. In that final act, the movement of the ritual went from the Most Holy Place outward, not from the holy place to the most holy place (Lev 16:15-19; Rev 10:1).

The same authors who are currently denying or relativizing the literalness of the heavenly sanctuary also confuse the last generation that will be sealed by God's law with the great multitude that gathers the redeemed from all ages (Rev 7). For this reason they insist that the last generation is not different from previous generations. They even deny the spatial and material nature of the heavenly sanctuary, mocking what they call the “geography” of that temple. Thus, they fail to see that only those who enter with Christ before the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place can grasp the real importance of keeping the divine law. And that is why many of them claim that the commandments of God cannot be kept.

No! The last generation will also be with the great multitude before the throne of God, and their final victory will involve all faithful generations that came before them (Rev 7:9-17). But they will have their own characteristics. This final generation will have been sealed while still alive (v. 4-8) and will keep all of God's commandments. They will stand before the coming of the Son of Man in full vindication of their lives, not hiding behind rocks and mountains like those who will be lost (Rev 6:15-17; 14:1).

These distorted trends that distract and confuse people about the importance of entering with Christ into the Most Holy Place lead to a loss of identity in the Adventist Church. They open the door to an *antinomian universalism* that is now seen in the

introduction of all kinds of corruption. In extreme cases, they fall into the presumption of believing that everyone will ultimately be saved. Those who fall into that trap alter the order of God's creation and believe that they can be saved in any way with their own rules or even by living depraved lives.

The consequence of diminishing the work of Christ in the Most Holy Place in this era is leading many to want to imitate evangelicals who do not pay attention to God's law. They preach only about God's love and faith in Christ, failing to realize that one cannot truly know Christ without taking into account His doctrine, His law. This makes them irresponsible and prevents them from extending the call to come out of Babylon, out of the confusion and corruption prevailing in the world. Because it is the law that condemns us and makes us feel the need for Christ.

Just as the Jews thought they could be saved by the fulfillment of the law without faith in the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, so too many today go to the opposite extreme. They think and preach only about God's love manifested on the cross and fail to see Christ in the law. But God raised up a last generation to show the world the need to unite the cross and the law (grace and justice), without which there will be no salvation.

d) As we enter the Holy of Holies, we behold not only the law but also the glory

To grasp the importance of keeping the law of God it is necessary to have a vision of the glory and holiness of God, as it was seen though attenuated in the Most Holy Place covered by a cloud (Lev 16:2). While the glory is seen, the holiness is perceived. When the people of Israel beheld the glory of God, they were terrified. They then felt the need for a mediator who, at that time, was Moses, the figure of the one who was to come (Exod 20:19; Deut 18:15). The solemnity produced by contemplating the glory of God was also perceived by Isaiah when he appeared in the most holy place of the heavenly temple, who likewise felt himself dying (Isa 6).

No previous generation in Christianity was confronted in life with the glory of God as the last one will be. It is striking that, after the apostles, no prophets appeared for almost two millennia, excepting the generation that lives in the time of the end. In order for that generation to behold the divine glory without any veil, without a cloud to cover it at the second coming of Christ who will come in the glory of his Father (Matt 16:27; 24:30; Rev 1:7), they were to first appear by faith in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly temple. Hence, the *Day of Atonement* was so solemn that it required the humiliation of the people on pain of being consumed by the glory of God (Lev 23:27–32; see 10:1–3; 16:1–2).

“The vision given to Isaiah *represents the condition of God's people in the last days.* They are privileged to see by faith the work that is going forward in the heavenly sanctuary. ‘And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament.’ As *they look by faith into the holy of holies,* and see the work of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, they perceive that *they are a people of unclean lips*—a people whose lips have often spoken vanity, and whose talents have not been sanctified and employed to the glory of God. Well may they despair as they contrast their own weakness and unworthiness with the purity and loveliness of the glorious character of Christ. But if they, like Isaiah, will receive the impression the Lord designs shall be made upon the heart, if they will humble their souls before God, there is hope for them. *The bow of promise is above the throne, and the work done for Isaiah will be performed in them.* God will respond to the petitions coming from the contrite heart” (RH, Dec 22, 1896 par. 12).

What is the target, the divine goal for the last generation? The apostle Paul says it: to bring it to a “complete” sanctification, to keep it blameless for the coming of Christ.

“Abstain from every form of evil. May the God of peace himself *sanctify you completely*, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be *kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Tess 5:22-23).

e) *The mystery of God is completed in the Most Holy Place*

Another difference between the last generation and previous generations is that the people living in the last days will have the greatest accumulation of knowledge of divine revelation. This knowledge will be indispensable to successfully pass through the final tribulation. While the apostasy of the church, which would allow the rise of the Antichrist in its midst predicted by Daniel and Paul, would despise the truth, the last generation that would be standing when Christ returns would, in contrast, have “love for the truth” (2 Thess 2:10,12).

Instead of looking up to where Jesus interceded for His people (Col 3:1-2), the Antichrist made the church look down, to an impostor priesthood that claimed to forgive sins, and to an Antichrist who would pretend to take the place of God on earth. God raised the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century to bring to light great truths that had been hidden from the people by burying the Bible in convents and in an unfamiliar language for the majority. The Protestants translated it into different languages, and the knowledge of God’s Word spread throughout the earth.

But instead of continuing to advance in the light of God’s Word, the churches stagnated in the truths discovered by the reformers. God then raised the Adventist movement in the 19th Century, to which He granted the gift of prophecy and entrusted the greatest accumulation of truths for this time. Those truths are necessary to endure the final test.

“But you, Daniel, keep these words secret and seal the book until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge” (Dan 12:4).

What words were to be kept secret until the time of the end? Those that Daniel could not understand about that final time, relating to the purification of the heavenly sanctuary, the time of distress, and the final judgment (Daniel 8:14,17,19,26-27; 11:40-12:4). The same angel who ordered Daniel to seal his book regarding the events of the end was the one who appeared to John to open that knowledge to the last generation. The angel then said to him:

“In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets” (Rev 10:7).

John is taken to that final era to experience what that generation would experience. Because the experience mentioned by John is not related to the first trumpet of the book of Revelation, but to the last one. It would be then, and not before, that the knowledge of that mystery of God about the “time of the end” would be “completed”. And the command that John receives, representing that final generation, is to proclaim “the everlasting gospel” to the whole world again.

The hastening of that last generation to obtain that knowledge and share it with the world, which Daniel described as running here and there, John depicts as being brought by an angel flying through the heavens.

“You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages, and kings” (Rev 10:11). “Then I saw another angel flying in heaven, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water’” (Rev 14:6-7).

That is the second universal mission that God gives to His people. The first was given in the days of the apostles when He told them that the gospel must be preached throughout the world before the end comes (Matt 24:14; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). The last generation receives the second universal mission, which has to do with everything involved in the time of the end announced by Daniel. It is the final proclamation summarized in the message of the three angels of Rev 14, and in the fourth angel of Rev 18, which fills the whole earth with its glory.

The *mystery* of the “everlasting gospel” does not necessarily mean that nothing of that mystery can be known. While God gradually reveals His plan of salvation, part of that mystery remains hidden until the time comes to reveal it. In the days of the apostles, God revealed part of that mystery of the gospel of Christ (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:3-4,9; Col 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3). That part had to do with the truths that needed to be established in their days. But the final part of that mystery, which had to do with the sealed portion of the book of Daniel concerning the time of the end, had to be fulfilled or completed before the coming of the Lord.

The prominent point of the “everlasting gospel” that had to be proclaimed to the whole world at the end would have to do with the judgment at the time when such judgment would have begun because it would say, “the hour of judgment has come,” meaning that God’s judgment would have already begun in heaven. It is the gospel of the consummation of Christ’s ministry in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, the place where the final court of judgment would be established (Dan 7:9-10; Rev 4-5; 11:15-19).

There is a progression in the Christian life that is fulfilled in each individual and in the church. This progression must increase until it reaches its consummation. For “the path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day” (Prov 4:18). Therefore, God will judge each person and each church in all generations according to the light that was available to them (Luke 12:48). But the last generation would have the greatest amount of light necessary to fight the final battle, which would allow them to complete their preparation to survive on the day of the Lord.

“By the increase of knowledge a people is to be prepared to stand in the latter days” (2 *SM* 105). “None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict” (*GC* 593). “If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people that, in this time of peril, God has called *to be the depositaries of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world*” (5 *T* 746).

“Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive” (*GC* 625). “God has a distinct people, a church on earth, second to none, but superior to all in their facilities to teach the truth, to vindicate the law of God” (*TM* 58).

This is seen in the book of Revelation. Christ prepares all the churches with His messages so that they may overcome. But He exhorts only the last one to overcome as He overcame:

“To him who overcomes... as I also overcame” (Rev 3:21). And it is in the time of the end when the seventh trumpet begins to sound, announcing the final judgment. And it is in that time that the understanding of the mystery of the everlasting gospel must be completed (Rev 10:7; 11:18-19; 14:7).

God raised up the Adventist Church to proclaim that final message to the world, which no other generation proclaimed in the terms it was meant to be given (Rev 14:6-12; 18:1-5). And for this purpose, God endowed the Adventist movement with a knowledge of the gospel of the end that no other church has. It is our responsibility to be interested in knowing especially that final part of the everlasting gospel, not only to make it known to others but also for our own salvation. May we not experience what happened to the northern kingdom of Israel, which, in its final crisis, rejected the message of the last prophet that God sent to them, the prophet Hosea. The Assyrians came and destroyed them.

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children” (Hos 4:6).

VI. The Condition of the Last Generation

I just read an evangelical Adventist pastor from Melbourne, Australia. He declares the time has come to put an end to Adventist preaching which claims salvation does not require justification by faith. He considers it a Catholic influence in Adventism. However, I have never heard a Seventh-day Adventist preacher make that claim. This Australian pastor also condemns the investigative judgment.

It is evident that this unabashed *evangelicalist* pastor wants to keep justification and neglect sanctification. By doing so he underscores a sad reality. Those who claim that belief in the vindication of God’s character by the final generation makes the vindication of God by Christ unnecessary, do not realize that belief in an *exclusive* vindication of Christ makes the investigative judgment unnecessary as well. Because if Christ is the one who has already vindicated God’s character and no vindication of His followers is required, then why should the records of sins in heaven be investigated if God has already been vindicated? Is it only to verify the requested forgiveness? No, it is also to vindicate God’s character, which is judged by the heavenly court.

“Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment” (Ps 51:4). “Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, ‘That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged’” (Rom 3:4).

The Bible is clear. The judgment considers not only the forgiveness granted to the sinner, but also the good and evil deeds of those who invoke the name of Christ.

“When I tell the righteous person that they will surely live, but then they trust in their righteousness and do evil, none of the righteous things they have done will be remembered; they will die for the evil they have done” (Eze 33:13). “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words, you will be condemned” (Matt 12:36-37). “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all man. For God

will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl 12:13-14).

That Melbourne pastor made his comment on a social network that claims to be for “Adventist professionals,” but where it is also stated that discussing *Last Generation Theology*—which in that social network means defending it—will not be allowed. What a way to misinterpret what our church has always believed. We can’t deny that imbalances have occurred here and there in the emphasis placed on one side or the other! In any case, the problem lies not with the theology of the last generation but in the way some have defended it.

Except for cases like the thief at the cross, it is not a matter of justification without sanctification, nor is it sanctification without justification. Although it could be argued that in the case of the thief at the cross, there was a process of justification and sanctification that led to that pinnacle moment in his life. But let’s insist that it is not the cross without the law, nor is it the law without the cross that is involved in our salvation. It is not the unique vindication of Christ without our vindication, much less our vindication without the unique vindication of Christ. And this does not deny that justification by faith comes first as a condition for being sanctified later. And it does not deny that the vindication of Christ is unique because without His vindication, no other vindication is possible.

I am impressed to see the excessive dogmatism against and in favor of the theology of the last generation. Some are so obsessed with avoiding *legalism* that in their articles they cannot completely detach themselves from *antinomian* concepts. By not quoting these authors, I hope to avoid distracting from the biblical focus confirmed by E. G. White because different nuances are found among those who promote one position or the other. As advised at the beginning, those who wish to see these two tendencies cited in the books or articles of such authors can read the aforementioned thesis by Armin Kritzing. And they will see that by referring to the two general tendencies, I am not misinterpreting either of them.

We all know that we are imperfect and in need of Christ for our salvation. But while some appeal to their present deficiencies to claim that we will never cease to be imperfect before translation, others believe that those who pass the final test will have a character as perfect as Christ’s before His coming. Furthermore, those who deny that we will ever fully reflect perfectly the character of Christ, consequently deny likewise that the condition of the last faithful generation will be different from previous faithful generations. For this reason, we have been looking at the difference shown in the Bible between previous generations and the last one, a difference confirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy.

While it cannot be denied that the goal is a degree of holiness that yields a final and total victory over sin, we must never forget that our current and future perfection required by Christ (Matt 5:48) is and will always be a perfection “in Christ” (Col 1:28). He is the center of our justification and the center of our sanctification. It is He who supplies with His divine nature our deficiencies caused by our sinful nature, our limited knowledge, and the circumstances in which we live.

Why is the vindication of the character of God by the last generation necessary? Because it leads us to think not only about our salvation but also about the fact that God cannot do anything for us that damages His reputation before the universe. This understanding will make us more accountable to God after we have been justified or forgiven by Him. No matter how much we say in the name of Christ, how much we prophesied and performed miracles, we will be surprised to hear the Lord say, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” Why? Because you did not do “the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21-23). God was clear in His law: He will not “hold guiltless” the wicked who “take his name in vain” (Exod 20:7).

We have been considering some basic and defined characteristics that distinguish the last generation from all the previous ones and which cannot be denied. But now it is necessary to bring up the distinctive characteristics that more clearly reveal *the condition* in which that final generation must find itself for its translation. Let us not depart from the Most Holy Place as the evangelicals do, nor despise the greater knowledge that God has given us. There is a process of sanctification, which must advance until it reaches its consummation. Those who presume to deny this will not receive eternal life because it renders them incapable of enduring the final crisis.

a) *The grain ripens before the final harvest*

The current detractors of Adventism say that we will reach the end of the world continuing to sin as we do now. They also maintain that the character of the last generation will not differ from the character of the previous generations of those who will be saved. In other words, the faithful who are alive when the Lord comes may have grown somewhat, but only partially, because according to them, it is impossible to fully keep God's law. This anticipated *defeatism* contradicts the Bible, which announces the final harvest where the pure grain will be gathered into the heavenly barn, and the weeds will be burned.

The above-mentioned doctoral thesis from Thailand, defended by Armin Kritzinger, refers to the theme of the harvest to show the condition in which God's people must be at the end of their earthly stage. That author further developed this theme of those who believe in the theology of the last generation, and I will further expand on that focus. No one can deny that both the wheat and the weeds must reach a level of maturity that surpasses previous generations, both in good and in evil (Matt 13:24-30, 36-43).

The parable of the wheat and the weeds shows that there will be two generations at the end of the world: the faithful and the rebellious. None will be half weed and half wheat. It will be either wheat or weeds. When the wheat ripens, the separation will take place. And that ripening must occur first, before the harvest.

Let's start with the figure of the harvest, which in Israel began with the "firstfruits" in the first and third months and ended in the seventh and last month. At each stage of the harvest, the grain had to ripen before it could be presented as firstfruits or gathered at the end into the barn. In the seventh and final month of celebrations, the harvest was completed. The harvest could not be completed before the grain ripened, nor was it appropriate for it to ripen after the harvest. No one could be satisfied with the "firstfruits." Everyone had to wait for the final harvest to achieve complete success.

Jesus said, "the harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels" (Matt 13:39). He also said that the ear must ripen before the harvest. When the seed is sown, it is born and gradually develops until the grain appears and ripens. Then the harvest begins. This is what Jesus said in parables, and John projected it in the book of Revelation for when the heavenly intercession would end.

"First the leaf, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come" (Mark 4:28-29). "And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, 'take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe'" (Rev 14:15-16).

What Jesus said about the harvest was not just an illustrative parable. It was related to the agricultural custom of ancient Israel, which served as a "type" or figure for the new

dispensation. It is a representation of a design illustrated by nature and applies to the spiritual life of the church.

To bring His church or His “remnant” to perfection in Christ, God promises to pour out His Spirit (Joel 2:28). This outpouring of the Spirit was represented by the rains that preceded the Spring and Autumn harvests. God sent these rains to Israel as a blessing to germinate the seeds and then later to bring the harvest to maturity. (vv. 23-24).

The early rain of the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles in the Spring, in connection with Pentecost, and there was a great *spiritual harvest of firstfruits*, where leaven was accepted (Lev 23:17; Acts 2). The latter rain as it appears apocalyptically must fall later to ripen *the final and complete autumn harvest*, which will include “the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23).

“Under the figure of the early and the latter rain, that falls in Eastern lands at seedtime and harvest, the Hebrew prophets foretold the bestowal of spiritual grace in extraordinary measure upon God’s church. The outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the apostles was the beginning of *the early, or former, rain*, and glorious was the result. To the end of time the presence of the Spirit is to abide with the true church.

“But near the close of earth’s harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest ‘in the time of *the latter rain*.’ In response, ‘the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain.’ ‘He will cause to come down... the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain,’ Zech 10:1; Joel 2:23” (AA 54-55).

Spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, “*till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*” (Eph 4:12-13).

There is a projection, a component of the divine plan of salvation that must be completed in the end, according to the perfect stature of Christ. And what kind of body is Christ’s? What are you going to include there? That must be settled by the investigative judgment. The Apostle James wrote:

“*Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand*” (Jas 5:7-8).

There is a delay in the end because the four mighty angels of God must restrain the winds of human passions until the last generation is sealed (Rev 7:1-3). But the sealing will take place, and the final harvest will be completed. The book of Revelation confirms this, as we have already seen (Rev 14:14-16).

What is the *difference between the last generation and previous generations*? The difference is that neither the plant nor the ear is the grain, but part of the process that culminates in the grain. At each stage of that process, there must be a perfection defined according to the light that each generation may have had, their opportunities, and the circumstances surrounding them (Luke 12:48; Acts 17:30; Jas 4:17). The final stage is decisive because it completes God’s plan for His people. The plant is not harvested when the

stem has arisen, nor when the ear appears, no matter how perfect it may seem in its development. *The grain must mature in order to be harvested.*

If the church does not reach that final stage as mature grain, it will have to say like the prophet Jeremiah: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” (Jer 8:20).

b) *A perfect character like that of Christ before His coming*

In his doctoral thesis, *The Doctrine of Last Generation Theology for Seventh-day Adventists: A Defense* (2022), Armin Kritzingler analyzes various passages from the New Testament, some of which we will consider here, along with others that I will add. I presented all these passages a few years ago in a dialogue with our son Roy, which is available in Spanish. The title of that Spanish conference was “La Vindicación del Carácter de Dios”.

Kritzingler connects these passages with the characteristics of the last generation. He seeks to answer the question of what we need to do today while awaiting the final harvest. John responds: “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). But “what we will be has not yet been revealed.” What will we be? “We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (v. 2).

No one will be able to see Christ unless they purify themselves first, which implies having a clean heart. “Blessed are *the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” (Matt 5:8). The purification must take place before Jesus returns, when the believer maintains his hope. For no impure eye will be able to behold the glory of God without seeking to hide from His presence (Matt 24:30; Rev 6:15-17). And John does not refer to a simple purification, but to a process that must culminate before the second coming of Jesus. To what degree? The Bible is clear regarding the condition of the last remnant for Christ to come.

“The remnant of Israel *shall do no injustice and speak no lies, nor shall deceitful tongue be found in their mouth*” (Zeph 3:13). “In their mouth *no lie was found, for they are blameless* (Greek: *amōmoi*) before the throne of God” (Rev 14:5). ““In those days and at that time,’ declares the Eternal, ‘the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, but there shall be none, and the sins of Judah, but *none shall be found*, for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant”” (Jer 50:20).

When the investigative judgment ends, the angels will be able to declare that “no lie was found” in the last remnant, and that “they are blameless.” What is the definition of a lie according to the apostle John? Claiming to know the Lord without keeping His commandments. For *the commandments of God are truth.*

“Whoever says, ‘I know him,’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and *the truth is not in him*, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:4-6).

At first, the apostles believed that Jesus would come in their day. Jesus had told them that it was not for them to know the exact time of the Lord’s coming (Acts 1:7). But as they traveled throughout the known world preaching the gospel, they trusted that the Lord would come in their time. We see this in the first *Epistle to the Thessalonians*, where Paul says that “we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep” (1 Thess 4:15). And before writing his second letter, he was led by the Spirit of God to study the prophecies of Daniel concerning the Antichrist who was to come, and he

realized that it would take longer for the Lord to return. Therefore, he warned that the coming of the Lord was not “near” at that time, because first there would be apostasy in the church, in the midst of which the Antichrist would arise (2 Thess 2:2-4).

For this reason, the apostles tried to prepare the churches for the Lord’s coming as something imminent and emphasized the need for sanctification so that the Lord would not find them unprepared in life. Paul said, “for God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness” (1 Thess 4:7). And upon learning later that apostasy and the “lawless one” (*anomos*) would come first, he warned that this Antichrist would establish himself in the midst of the church although not keeping the commandments of God (2 Thess 2:3-4). The final hypocrites who claim to know God without keeping His commandments are deceived:

“Because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:10-12). Then the Lord will destroy them “with the splendor of his coming” (v. 8).

This implies that those who are not deceived by the Antichrist before the Lord destroys the wicked at His coming, will keep the truth, namely, all of God’s commandments. David said, “All your commandments are true” (Ps 119:86, 151). Unlike those who will be lost because they do not love the truth or love God’s commandments, *the last generation will be saved because they love the truth* and are fully converted. For one cannot keep the commandments without loving them. That is why David also said, in his role as a converted man, “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long” (Ps 119:97). And Jesus also said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

The last generation must walk as Jesus walked. And that implies having His same character before His coming. Peter says that those who expect to receive the Lord must be like Christ, who was “like a lamb *without blemish* (Gr.: *amomou*) or *spot*” (1 Pet 1:19). Peter himself uses similar words to refer to the last generation because he affirms that this generation must be found by Christ at His coming, walking:

“In *holy conduct* and *godliness*... Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these things, be diligent to be found by him *without spot* (Gr. *áspiloi*) or *blemish* (Gr. *amómetoi*) and at peace” (2 Pet 3:14). “A people are to be prepared to stand before Him at His coming, “without spot, and blameless (2 Pet 3:14)” (GC ix).

“Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 John 2:6).

Several times in the New Testament, we are warned that in the investigative judgment, and definitively when Jesus comes, we must be “found” not only *without blemish* but also “*blameless*,” *without deceit* in our words (Rev 14:5). Again, we see that the apostles speak of a time span that extends from their days until the end of the world when Christ appears to receive His people. Paul tells his listeners in the churches that they should continue:

“Waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you *firm to the end*, so that you will be *blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Cor 1:7-8). “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, *perfecting holiness* in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1), “warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may *present everyone perfect in Christ Jesus*” (Col 1:28).

In all these passages, the apostles are preparing the church to receive the Lord at His coming in such a way that He can recognize them as His own because they perfectly reflect His character. While this preparation should have started in their days, they had to patiently wait until that final day arrived and the generation that was alive at His coming triumphed.

c) Confirmation of the Spirit of Prophecy

Thus, we see that what E. G. White wrote about the condition of the people of God in their final stage is based on the Bible. We also saw that Jesus will not come before “*the character of Christ is perfectly reproduced in His people*” (EUD 36). Let’s read a few more quotes.

“Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, *we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation...* Christ declared of Himself: ‘The prince of this world cometh, and *hath nothing in Me*’ (John 14:30). Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. *He had kept His Father’s commandments*, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. *This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble...*” (GC 623).

“The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. *The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people*” (DA 671). “There is nothing that Christ desires so much as agents *who will represent to the world His Spirit and character*” (COL 419).

“Christ came to our world to reshape the deformed character of humanity. It was a very crooked character. God wants us to be His sons and His daughters. He wants us, during the hours of probation here, to be fitted up with all these graces that He has presented... This means everything to us, to be a partaker of the divine nature” (CTr 206).

In his research of E. G. White writings, Kritzingler concludes: “There are no statements in all of the writings of Ellen G. White that state that sin is an inevitable part of the Christian’s life, and using her writings to show that sinless living is not possible will be futile” (79).

d) God assumes the responsibility of completing our sanctification.

It is God Himself who takes on the responsibility of making us grow individually and as a church. However, He does so only if we allow Him, as He does not force His will upon us. *The growth in holiness must be completed in the last generation.* Let’s examine various passages and pay attention to the context of Christ’s coming and the *fullness* to which God aspires to bring His people.

1 Thess 3:13: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that He may establish your hearts *blameless in holiness* before our God and Father, *at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*”

1 Thess 5:23: “Now may the God of peace Himself *sanctify you completely*, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be *kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Jude 24: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you *blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.*”

Eph 4:12-13: “To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for *building up the body of Christ, until we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*”

What kind of body does the Lord build? A spiritual body. What are you going to include there? That had to be seen in history, and especially at the end, and scrutinized in the investigative judgment. We have seen that the perfection of the last generation is connected to obedience to God’s commandments and, therefore, to avoiding iniquity (Ps 119:1-3). All the apostles taught that those who are alive when Jesus returns will be “blameless,” “without blemish,” and “above reproach” (2 Pet 3:14; Rev 14:5), sanctified “completely” (1 Thess 5:23), “perfect in conscience” (Heb 9:9), and “in holiness” (2 Cor 7:1). They will be like Him because they have overcome as He overcame (Rev 3:21). This is a biblical teaching remarkably supported by the Spirit of Prophecy.

e) Our will and perfection in Christ

It is important to emphasize that to reach the level of perfection in Christ that God requires from His people before His return, the human will must be exercised for good. God does not nullify human will but strengthens it to align with His divine will. Humans are not automatons or robots. They must respond to God’s will with a resounding “yes and amen.”

“But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ ... For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Cor 1:19-20).

There is a divine-human cooperation in the growth we discussed earlier, not isolated and fruitless human effort. It requires self-denial and humility, not self-display or defeatism. It necessitates subjecting the carnal will to the spiritual will, the divine will. That is why Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24). And the apostle Paul wrote what the Lord told him: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9).

“The work of gaining salvation is one of copartnership, a joint operation. There is to be co-operation between God and the repentant sinner. This is necessary for the formation of right principles in the character. Man is to make earnest efforts to overcome that which hinders him from attaining to perfection. But he is wholly dependent upon God for success. Human effort of itself is not sufficient. Without the aid of divine power it avails nothing. God works and man works. Resistance of temptation must come from man, who must draw his power from God. On the one side there is infinite wisdom, compassion, and power; on the other, weakness, sinfulness, absolute helplessness...

“God wishes us to have the mastery over ourselves. But He cannot help us without our consent and co-operation. The divine Spirit works through the powers and faculties given to man. Of ourselves, we are not able to bring the purposes and desires and inclinations into harmony with the will of God; but if we are “willing to be made willing,” the Saviour will accomplish this for us..., ‘bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor 10:5). He who would build up a strong, symmetrical character, he who would be a well-balanced Christian, must give all and do all for Christ; for the Redeemer will not accept divided service” (AA 482-483).

Some claim that the *effort* to resemble Christ by using personal willpower in various circumstances is *perfectionism*. However, this is a misinterpretation. Our perfection is “in Christ.” God educates us through His providences, which tests our faith, and if we overcome those tests, we grow from victory to victory. The final test, which begins in the closing moments before the close of probation, will be the most severe, and its purpose will be to demonstrate to the universe that, even in the worst circumstances, the last survivors of the holy seed have attained a character as perfect as that shown by His Son when He lived among us, even unto death.

f) *The last generation is sealed so as not to sin anymore*

There are those who believe that it is impossible to keep the law of God, and they deduce from there that the last generation will continue to sin until the coming of the Lord. They don't seem to realize that when we say that we cannot keep the law of God, we emphasize the power of sin and believe that the power of the Spirit of God to make us overcome is powerless. In this way, we give reason to the devil. But the Bible says that only those who overcome sin will inherit all the promises of God (Rev 21:7). Therefore, no one can overcome if they are a slave to sin. For “by whatever a person is overcome, to that he is enslaved” (2 Pet 2:19).

The day will come, and it is near, when God will seal His people so that they will not sin anymore. With what seal will He seal them? With the seal of His law, which must be seen as a compact whole, because whoever violates one commandment becomes guilty of all (Jas 2:10-12). “Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples” (Isa 8:16). That law bears the Name of its Author (Exod 20:11). And that Name is placed upon His children to protect them from the final plagues (Rev 7:1-8; 14:1). Those who are thus sealed become living temples of the Holy Spirit because God has placed His Name and His law in their temple (Deut 10:4-5; 12:5,11). This is why the sanctuary was called “the tabernacle of the testimony” (Exod 25:16), and the ark that contained the law was called “the ark of the testimony” (Exod 30:26), because there were the two “tablets of the testimony” (Exod 31:18).

The last surviving saints “are without fault [and without deceit] before the throne of God” because they keep His commandments (Rev 14:5). The sealing agent is the Holy Spirit who writes that law in the human heart, and in the end, it will be permanently fixed in the mind, in the convictions, for all eternity.

“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). “Not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Cor 3:3).

Once the last generation is sealed, the sealed ones will no longer sin. It is to that moment that the last chapter of Revelation points when it says:

“Let the evildoer still do evil, and the filthy still be filthy, and the righteous still do right, and the holy still be holy. Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done” (Rev 22:11-12).

There will be a moment of separation between the righteous and the wicked before the coming of the Lord, and in that moment, the destiny of each one of them will be fixed forever. It has to do with the moment when Jesus ceases to intercede for His people in the

heavenly sanctuary, is crowned as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev 14:14; 17:14; 19:12,16), and sits on a cloud of glory to come and harvest the earth.

“Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, ‘put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe’” (Rev 14:14-15).

The angels *come out* of the temple and also gather the clusters of grapes from the earth to tread them in the winepress of the wrath of God (Rev 14:15,17-20; 19:15). The seven angels who pour out the seven plagues upon the earth also *come out* of the temple. One of the four living creatures surrounding the throne of God in the Most Holy Place gives them the bowls filled with the wrath of God (Rev 15:5-7; cf. 4:6). There is no more intercession, for the temple is filled with the smoke “from the glory of God,” in such a way that “no one could enter” until the seven plagues are poured out (Rev 15:8; see 2 Chr 5:14; 7:2; Eze 10:4).

When the seventh angel pours out his bowl, “a loud voice” comes “from the temple, from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’” (Rev 16:17). Just as Jesus said “It is finished” when He completed His earthly work (John 19:30), now it is confirmed that His heavenly intercession is finished, and the pouring out of the plagues is complete.

“When the third angel’s message closes, mercy no longer pleads for the guilty inhabitants of the earth. The people of God have accomplished their work. *They have received ‘the latter rain,’ ‘the refreshing from the presence of the Lord,’ and they are prepared for the trying hour before them...* An angel returning from the earth announces that his work is done; the final test has been brought upon the world, and all who have proved themselves loyal to the divine precepts have received ‘the seal of the living God.’ Then Jesus ceases His intercession in the sanctuary above. He lifts His hands and with a loud voice says, ‘It is done;’ and all the angelic host lay off their crowns as He makes the solemn announcement: ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still’ (Rev 22:11). Every case has been decided for life or death. Christ has made the atonement for His people and blotted out their sins. The number of His subjects is made up” (GC 613-614).

Notice that the latter rain is intended not only to enable the church to give the final message to the world, but also to prepare her to be able to endure the final hour of trial in the time of trouble.

g) God Refines the Last Generation Character as a Metal Smelter

Some Adventist evangelicals claim that, according to E. G. White, those who are alive during the time of final trouble will continue to sin or have sin, in reference to their sinful nature. They are based on the statement that the final crisis will strip them of all affection to the world. But they don’t say that this natural affection to the world will be completely uprooted and therefore, their character will perfectly reflect the character of Christ.

“The Refiner will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. God’s love for His children during the period of their severest trial is as strong and tender as in the days of their sunniest prosperity; but it is needful for them to be placed in the furnace of fire;

their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected” (GC 621).

“In these precious closing hours of probation, we have a deep and living experience to gain. We shall thus form characters that will ensure our deliverance in the time of trouble. The time of trouble is *the crucible that is to bring out Christlike characters*. It is designed to lead the people of God *to renounce Satan and his temptations*. The last conflict will reveal Satan to them in his true character, that of a cruel tyrant, and it will do for them what nothing else could do, *uproot him entirely from their affections*. For to love and cherish sin, is to love and cherish its author, that deadly foe of Christ. When they excuse sin and cling to perversity of character, they give Satan a place in their affections, and pay him homage” (OHC 321).

“Their affliction is great, the flames of the furnace seem about to consume them; but Jesus will bring them forth as gold tried in the fire. Their earthliness must be removed that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected; unbelief must be overcome; faith, hope, and patience are to be developed” (5 T 474).

It is evident that E. G. White is speaking here about the fallen human nature of the last generation. The last faithful survivors will completely crucify their “earthly nature” which tends to corruption (Col 3:5). “Earthliness” does not necessarily mean sin, but affection to earthly life (Col 3:2), like the wife of Lot who turned her head toward Sodom’s life, in her case, yielding to her earthly affections. The heavenly affections will overcome any earthly attraction. E. G. White clearly explains what she means for uprooting earthliness. It has to do with unbelief and affection for our earthly life.

Even today we don’t ask forgiveness for the sin of Adam and for our sinful nature, because—as already seen in our study—we are heirs of the new spiritual nature imparted to us by the Second Adam. But the natural trend to earthliness of our sinful nature is to be consumed at the end by the fire of trial, no more by the blood of Jesus which had already cleansed the last generation from all their sins during the time of probation. In this way, the character of Jesus will have been “perfectly reproduced in His people” (COL 69).

But E. G. White is sufficiently clear to say that the last generation will not have hidden sins to confess, otherwise they would not bear that dramatic time of trouble.

“In the time of trouble, if the people of God had unconfessed sins to appear before them while tortured with fear and anguish, they would be overwhelmed; despair would cut off their faith, and they could not have confidence to plead with God for deliverance. But while they have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins have gone beforehand to judgment and have been blotted out, and they cannot bring them to remembrance” (GC 620).

So, what will be God’s purpose for testing His people in the time of their severest trouble? “*To bring out Christlike characters*,” without falling in sin, because Jesus finished His heavenly intercession, and comes to punish the world and rescue His people. They were completely forgiven, but their *earthliness* and *affection* to the world, once they see the true character of Satan in his highest manifestation, should be completely *uprooted* from them before the coming of the Lord.

Let us ask ourselves again. Why should the last generation go through the most intense test ever, before facing the very glory of God? Because we are told that they will pass for “a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then” (Dan 12:1). The answer is clear. Because God wants to finish the story of His people in the best

way, refining them so that they reflect in a pure and perfect manner the character of His Son. The greater the trial, the greater the reward they will receive (Matt 16:17; Rev 22:12).

It is a fact that we will never be able to achieve the goal set by God for His church unless God intervenes by pouring out His Spirit in fullness and testing our hearts through His providences. The more intense the fire that refines the metal, the purer and cleaner it will shine afterward.

During the outpouring of the plagues, those who have been sealed go through a time of trouble “such as never was” (Dan 12:1). This distress is compared to what Jacob experienced when his brother came to kill him, a distress that, in the end, would not be equaled by any other. But deliverance is promised to them (Jer 30:7). It is not the anguish that could result in many being exterminated by their enemies. It is the fear of not knowing if there is any unconfessed sin that would deprive them of eternal life, as they know that the time of grace has ended.

This affliction that begins shortly before the close of probation but is consummated after the sealing of the 144,000 is intended to burn away any remaining dross or attachment to this world. The great Refiner of metals completes the work of purifying His people. The first time it was done by blood, this time it is done by fire, so that the pure gold of Christ’s character within them may shine forth.

“He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and... he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver” (Mal 3:3). “I will refine them like silver and test them like gold” (Zech 13:9). “It is needful for them to be placed in the furnace of fire; *their earthliness must be consumed, that the image of Christ may be perfectly reflected*” (GC 621; see Col 3:2).

“When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing... Then the church which our Lord at His coming is to receive to Himself will be a ‘glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing’ (Eph 5:27)” (GC 425).

“The Christian life is constantly an onward march. *Jesus sits as a refiner and purifier of His people; and when His image is perfectly reflected in them, they are perfect and holy, and prepared for translation*” (1 T 340). “

But the Spirit of God does not abandon them, and sustains them in that time of trial. As seen above, they have no more sins to confess. As they look back on their lives they cannot remember any unconfessed sins, none for which they have not been forgiven.

“God’s providence is the school in which we are to learn the meekness and lowliness of Jesus... It rests with us *to co-operate with the agencies which Heaven employs in the work of conforming our characters to the divine model*. None can neglect or defer this work but at the most fearful peril to their souls” (GC 623).

“I also saw that many do not realize what they must be in order to live *in the sight of the Lord without a high priest in the sanctuary through the time of trouble*. Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected *in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully*... I saw that none could share the ‘refreshing’ unless they obtain the *victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action*” (EW 70-71).

“Those who refuse to be hewed by the prophets and fail to purify their souls in *obeying the whole truth*..., will come up to the time of the falling of the plagues..., but *there will be no time then to do it and no Mediator to plead their cause* before the Father. Before this time the awfully solemn declaration has gone forth, ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is

righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still” (EW 71: Rev 22:11).

“In the day of judgment, the course of the man who has retained *the frailty and imperfection of humanity* will not be vindicated. For him there will be no place in heaven. *He could not enjoy the perfection of the saints in light. He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God*” (Manuscript 161, 1897; 3 SM 360).

All these statements show us that those who will perfectly reflect the image of Christ will not boast perfection or pretend that they are impeccable in the sense of not being potentially able to fall. Even Jesus could eventually fall. But He didn't, and the 144,000 will not fall either.

The Lord will be the one who will declare them perfect, not they themselves. They are faultless in the sense that they are free from sin, and Christ fully abides in them through His Spirit. Their sinful nature is completely crucified in the time of trouble, so that the perfect image of Christ may shine in them like a pure gold. In that way, they are ready to behold the glory of the Lord at His coming.

What eloquence! What an extraordinary way to express these truths in so many different ways! One is amazed by the ease with which E. G. White expresses herself on these topics, a woman who has been educated under divine guidance throughout her 70 years of public ministry. She could not express herself so consistently and in such varied ways if she were not assisted from above during her entire life.

On the other hand, I cannot understand how there can be those who disdain such a spiritual and secure way of expressing herself! But I know that only the mind that humbles itself before God and accepts His revelation can fully appreciate her writings and be filled with wonder. For me, there is no doubt. There is an unsanctified will in those who want to impose their ideas contrary to God's revelation. Because no one can argue that these quotes are not clear unless they try to force them to fit their own particular views.

If our faith is incapable of making us believe that God can keep us from sinning, that faith will not grant us entry into the kingdom of God. For “we know that whoever is born of God does not sin, but the one who is born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18). We prefer to believe God regarding what He can do to transform us rather than the unbelieving speculations of those who cannot see much beyond their present situation.

VII. The Final Vindication in the Context of the Great Controversy

We have seen that in recent times, some evangelical Adventists have been, to varying degrees, rejecting the need for the last generation to vindicate the character of God. They consider that this theology nullifies or renders unnecessary the unique vindication that Christ made of that divine character 2000 years ago. And they fail to realize that, in doing so, they end up agreeing with those who believe that an exclusive vindication by Christ makes the investigative judgment unnecessary as well.

Those who believe that Christ's vindication is sufficient but deny that God needs any further vindication are only thinking about their own salvation, without considering how the moral and spiritual ruin of this world affects God before the universe. Is God's love divorced from His justice? Where is the divine wisdom that cannot efficiently solve the problem of sin in this world? Because even if Christ proved that God's law could be kept and that His vicarious death can forgive sinners, what kind of people accept His forgiveness? Should the

final judgment prove the divine impotence to transform sinners into the likeness of Christ, or His omnipotent power to bring them to an experience that perfectly reproduces the character of His Son?

a) *The need for God to be vindicated by the last generation*

Some within our church are so obsessed with fighting what they presume to be *legalism* or *perfectionism* that they fail to see the need for God to be vindicated by the last generation. What? Does God need to be vindicated? No, of course not! He created the universe and has enough power to destroy it if He wishes, without needing anyone to vindicate Him. But that goes against His nature, against His attributes of love and justice, and for the well-being of His earthly and heavenly creatures, to maintain the peace and security of the universe, so that all may praise Him without fear, He needs to be vindicated in His judgment. Unless all heavenly intelligences can see that God is wisdom, love, and justice, they would not be able to praise Him freely as they do in the end in the book of Revelation (Rev 4-5; 7:9-12; 14:7; 15:3-4; 16:5-7; 19:1-8).

Therefore, Christ's great longing is to see His own character reflected in His people so that all may see that His sacrifice was not in vain, and that those who follow Him do so not only in word but also in heart (Matt 15:8). Thus, what is at stake in the end is not whether humans, as they were created, could keep God's law. His Son demonstrated that 2000 years ago. It must be judged whether God is powerless to transform His church and fully prepare it for translation into His eternal kingdom or whether, on the contrary, He has enough power to lead her in life to a complete victory.

If we were to think more about the need to vindicate the character of God, we would better understand the value of the cross, and we would become more responsible in our obedience to God and in the need we all have to exalt His law, to "magnify it and make it honorable" (Isa 42:21). We would also strive to be more just and merciful in our treatment of others. David understood this dual need of his and of God, as did Paul when he wrote to the believers in Rome. By confessing his sin, David allowed God to forgive him without diminishing His image before His heavenly creation.

"Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment" (Ps 51:4). "Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, 'That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged'" (Rom 3:4).

In his confession, the sinner acknowledges that God had nothing to do with his sin, and that the only guilty party is the one who committed it (Lev 5:5-6). The sinner vindicates God from any accusation of involvement in the sin He forgives, declaring Him "just," "pure," and "true" because He also provided the means to pay the debt through the sacrifice of an innocent lamb. Only in this way can God take responsibility for that offense in His sanctuary until the day of judgment.

In the final judgment represented by the Day of Atonement, when God purifies His sanctuary from the sins recorded in the books of heaven (Dan 7:9-10), the only ones approved are those who confessed their sins. In their confession, they vindicate God by not complaining against Him for such sins and by accepting the sacrifice offered in their place (Lev 16:16). The rebellious and unconfessing individuals, on the other hand, implicitly or openly blame God for their sins, and divine justice must be vindicated through the death penalty (Lev 20:2-5; 23:29-30, etc).

This is the background of what the apostles say that "the manifold wisdom of God should

be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10), “things which angels desire to look into” (1 Pet 1:12; 1 Cor 4:9). *Vindicating the character of God* means proving that *God is who He claims to be*, against the challenges to His character and works made by others. And we have dishonored His name among the nations and defiled His sanctuary, which is why at the end His name must be vindicated and the seat of His government cleared (Lev 16:16; Heb 9:23).

While the rebellious world ends up honoring a deformed creature (Rev 13:3-4) and denying that this world was made by God (2 Pet 3:3-5), the heavenly creatures praise Him in the judgment, recognizing Him as the Creator and His Son as the Redeemer (Rev 4-5). And on earth, the last faithful remnant echoes that celestial recognition of God as Creator. This happens during the time when the heavenly court begins its process of investigative judgment (Rev 14:7), to vindicate the character of God which has been injured by humanity.

God risked His reputation by deciding to dwell in this world, among a sinful people whom He purposed to purify. The ultimate purpose is that, through Christ, He can present “Himself” with not a failed and filthy church, but “a glorious church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:27). So that when He returns to earth, the devil cannot tell Him to leave, arguing that His sacrifice was in vain since no one worships Him on earth, and all of creation acknowledges him as the prince of this world.

“If the righteous were now left to fall a prey to their enemies, it would be a triumph for the prince of darkness” (GC 634). “If he could blot them from the earth, his triumph would be complete” (GC 618). “Satan and his evil angels exulted, and told the angels who administered to, and strengthened those suffering saints, that *they would kill them, so that there would not be left a true Christian upon the earth*” (1 SG 118).

How much these words contain about the nature of the conflict between God and the rebellious angel, in which we are at the center of what is in dispute! If the last generation fails, the triumph of the devil would be complete. Because along with that final generation, the Deity would also fail, who committed His honor “in the perfection of the character of His people” (DA 671). And the fury of the enemy of God against that last generation is because he cannot prevail against it, because the Holy Spirit guards them in their faithfulness (Rev 12:17). And in order to destroy them, the devil tries to lead astray the last generation because he knows that only in this way can he “bring them under the dominion of death” (RH, March 3, 1874; 3 SM 146-7).

The devil cannot change because the Spirit of God has completely withdrawn from him. But he thinks that the only chance he has is to cause the failure of God’s plan to vindicate His name through the last generation. He knows that if he achieves it, “his triumph would be complete.” He believes that if he can denigrate God, heaven will not be able to rid itself of him, because doubt about the true character of God cannot be completely eliminated from the universe. This is the reason why he strives so hard to deceive the world and the children of God and finally destroy them.

b) *What would happen if the last generation fails.*

What would happen if the last generation does not achieve God's desired purpose for it? The devil would mock God and us as well because God would not have been able to lead His church to complete triumph. But we also do not know what God would do in such a case, nor is it appropriate for us to speculate about a possible plan B because God has not revealed it. We believe in God who, in the apocalyptic fulfillment that He revealed to us, assured us that there will be a victorious generation in the end. Let us keep in mind that the Apocalyptic

visions are not conditional.

We also cannot know what would have happened if Christ had failed in His earthly life. Yes, of course, we know something. The world would have been lost. But would God also have destroyed Enoch, Moses, and Elijah, casting them out of heaven? What would have happened to the entire heavenly creation? Everything would have been lost.

Another thought about this hypothetical question. If the Son of God sinned in His earthly life, the devil would have mocked God and His Son.

“Christ risked all. For our redemption, heaven itself was imperiled” (*COL* 196). “He took the risk of failure and eternal loss” (*From Heaven with Love*, 80). “The world would have been lost” (“Christ Glorified”, par. 6), “*the enemy of God and man would have triumphed*” (*DA* 761). The same is said of the last remnant. If the devil could overcome them, “*his triumph would be complete*” (*GC* 618).

But when Jesus died, “*humanity died: divinity did not die*” (1 *SM* 301). “When Christ was crucified, it was His human nature that died. *Deity did not sink and die; that would have been impossible*” (5 *BC* 1113). “Only he who alone hath immortality, dwelling in light and life, should say, ‘I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again’” (*YL*, Jan 3, 1905; John 10:18).

So, what would God have done then with the universe? We do not know for certain, and it is not appropriate for us to speculate too much about it because it did not happen, nor was any other alternative revealed to us. The prophecies of the Old Testament anticipated only His victory.

Even the angels could not see what could be done to save Adam and Eve when they fell. They could not imagine that God had another alternative because they were deceived, and what an alternative it was! But nothing was revealed to us about yet another alternative if the Son were to fall, and what would have happened to God and the universe.

Just as when Christ died, His humanity died, but not His divinity because God cannot die (John 5:26; 10:18); neither are we told anything about what would happen if the devil were to triumph over the last generation. But we are told that his triumph would be complete, and with that, it is implied that doubts would persist in the universe, and no one would be incapable of starting a new rebellion in the future.

But Satan will fail. In the midst of an idolatrous and rebellious world, God will have a faithful people who will not bow down to his pretensions. God will protect this faithful remnant. Jesus said:

“He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all of them that believe...” (2 Thess 1:10,12). “Give unto the Eternal, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Eternal glory and strength. Give unto the Eternal the glory due unto his name” (Ps 96:7-8). “Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come” (Rev 14:7).

c) An entire generation of the faithful will triumph over sin

Just as the devil wants to achieve *a complete triumph* over God in the end by eliminating the faithful generation (*CS* 676), so too does God want to *fully expose him* when the conflict ends (*CS* 728). The Lord will be able to do this if, at the same time, He fully sanctifies the last generation, proving to the world and the universe that not only Jesus, but also that final generation, can through Him keep the commandments of God (1 Thess 5:23; Rev 12:17;

14:12). Only at the end can that part of the conflict be definitively resolved, which shows how dramatic that contention is in its conclusion.

Let's consider another difference between previous generations and the last one. In the past, none of them gave a complete testimony of faithfulness to God by keeping all His commandments. They also did not have all the light that God would reveal to the last generation (Isa 60:1-2; Rev 18:1), nor would they have experienced what the victorious final generation will experience. We have already seen the failure of literal Israel. But spiritual Israel (the 144,000) will not fail, for they will be sealed alive to endure in the day of the Lord. That final generation will overcome just as Jacob did in his time of distress, for which his name was changed to Israel, "he who struggles with God and prevails" (Gen 32:26-30).

Although in past times *a few heroes* of faith revealed that it was possible to keep the law of God completely, only the last generation as a whole would give that testimony. Christ surpassed even the most faithful of the faithful from the past because He obeyed His Father from His birth until His death on the cross. On the other hand, those faithful individuals of the past gradually became so from their conversion, thanks to the Spirit of Christ that was in them. Enoch and Elijah stand out among them as figures of those who will be translated to heaven while still alive. Their testimony revealed a total transformation that did not yield to Satan.

"Enoch was a marked character. Many look upon his life as something above what the generality of mortals can ever reach. But Enoch's life and character ... represent what the lives and characters of all must be, if like Enoch, they are subjects to be translated when Christ shall come" (CC 29).

"*Some few in every generation from Adam resisted his every artifice and stood forth as noble representatives of what it was in the power of man to do and to be—Christ working with human efforts, helping man in overcoming the power of Satan. Enoch and Elijah are the correct representatives of what the race might be through faith in Jesus Christ if they chose to be.*

"*Satan was greatly disturbed because these noble, holy men stood untainted amid the moral pollution surrounding them, perfected righteous characters, and were accounted worthy for translation to Heaven. As they had stood forth in moral power in noble uprightness, overcoming Satan's temptations, he could not bring them under the dominion of death*" (RH, March 3, 1874; 3 SM 146-7).

"The weak moral powers of men and women in this age who claim to be commandment keepers alarm me. Everyone needs to arouse and lift up the standard of purity" (HP 199).

d) "Worthy fruits"

Many are interested only in forgiveness. But God is not satisfied with merely forgiving us. He expects us to bear "fruits worthy of repentance" (Matt 3:8-10), for "every tree that bears no good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire" (Matt 7:19). And so, God expects much more from the last generation. We are to implore:

"Divine instruction and zealous *to perfect a character that will bear the close inspection of the judgment* (CC 8). "Christians should strive to reach the high ideal set before them in the gospel. They should be content with nothing less than perfection; for Christ says, 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect'" (MYP 73).

"*As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His*

biddings are enablings” (COL 333).

Those Christian virtues of perfection and holiness must be developed with God’s help in His children. And that development is gradual. “At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God’s purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement. Sanctification is the work of a lifetime” (COL 65). At every stage of growth we can see the holiness and perfection of Christ applied to the believer. Only a Christlike character can “bear the close inspection of the judgment” (CC 8).

God *will complete* that work in the last generation by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the fullest, and by the final litmus test that reveals the polished metal. And that complete work will not mean that our character will not continue to develop throughout eternity after the Second Coming. Just as Christ’s “perfecting” through suffering to become a perfect Savior (Heb 2:10) did not mean a change from imperfection to perfection, but from perfection to perfection, or from holiness to holiness.

“A character formed according to the divine likeness is *the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next*. Those who are under the instruction of Christ in this world will take every divine attainment with them to the heavenly mansions. And in heaven we are continually to improve. How important, then, is the development of character in this life” (COL 332).

e) *The Vindication of God in the Old Testament*

We have already seen some passages in the Old Testament that require God’s people to recognize their guilt and vindicate God’s justice through a substitutionary sacrifice. And then, to walk blamelessly before the Lord in the midst of a pagan world. “You shall be blameless before the Lord your God” (Deut 18:13). Let us now look at other passages that relate to the testimony of a people who made a covenant with God. At a critical moment, Moses argues with God about the need to act in a way that can be understood by others, not in a way that no one can understand. He asks God for consistency based on His promises and His power to save.

“If you kill these people as one man, then the nations who have heard of your fame will say, ‘*Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land He swore to give them, He slaughtered them in the wilderness.*’ But now, I pray, *let the power of the Lord be great*, just as You have declared, saying, ‘The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but He will by no means clear the guilty’” (Num 14:15-18).

Likewise, the universe longs for the vindication of an almighty God, not the confirmation of a defeated God who, in the end, “*was not able to bring*” the last living generation into the heavenly Canaan. That is why God says through Ezekiel:

“I am not doing this for your sake, O house of Israel, but *for the sake of My holy name*, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. And I will vindicate the holiness of *My great name, which has been profaned among the nations*, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord... *when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes*” (Eze 36:22-23).

“I will be exalted among the nations, I will be lifted up in the earth” (Ps 46:10). “I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord” (Eze 38:23).

For the nations to know and understand God, He must be sanctified through us, vindicated from the profanation endured by those who have taken His name. Not only His people on earth, but also the angels in heaven plead with God to exalt His name and His law, because they know how necessary it is for the peace and stability of the universe.

“Be exalted, O Lord, in your strength! We will sing and praise your power” (Ps 21:13). *“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth”* (Ps 57:5). *“The Lord was pleased, for his righteousness’ sake, to magnify His law and make it glorious”* (Isa 42:21). *“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty”* (1 Chr 29:11). *“Do not spurn us, for your name’s sake; do not dishonor your glorious throne; remember and do not break your covenant with us!”* (Jer 14:21).

f) *The Vindication of God in the New Testament*

Christ came into the world to vindicate the character of God, which had been misrepresented by human traditions. He came not only to save us but also to show the universe what God is like in a sinful world and to justify both God and His Son in their actions against evil.

“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 12:31,32). *The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man 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”* (PP 68-69).

This same purpose of vindicating God before the universe is what heaven longs to see in those who turn to Christ, not only in individuals but in His church as a body of believers.

“From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God (Eph 3:10)” (AA 9).

In the New Testament, the need to exalt the character of God in a world that belittles Him is particularly highlighted in the *Book of Revelation*. As we have seen, it is through the church, or rather its “remnant,” that God vindicates His name, which has been dishonored on Earth. On one hand, we see the attempts of the “dragon” and the “beast” to usurp the worship that belongs to God, blaspheming against Him even with titles of blasphemy, degrading Him before all earthly and celestial creation (Rev 13:1, 3-4, 5-7; 17:3). On the other hand, we see

the angels and the “remnant” that God raises up on Earth, vindicating Him as the Creator and deserving of all recognition for His work of creation and redemption (Rev 4-5; 14:7).

The cry of the martyrs demands justice because the inhabitants of the Earth have shed the innocent blood of the righteous, and the rebellious executioners who sacrificed them have not received their deserved punishment. In heaven, the martyrs are first vindicated by being given white robes in the judgment, which they will wear when they receive the prize of eternal life (Rev 6:9-11; see 3:4). But the corresponding payment will fall upon the “inhabitants of the Earth” during the seven final plagues. Why? Because they “did not repent to give Him glory,” but rather blaspheme against God because of the plagues (Rev 16:9, 11). This proves that these people do not change their behavior, neither for the good nor for the bad—neither in response to the final calls to honor God (Rev 14:7) nor to the punishment (Rev 16:9, 11). However, the angels vindicate God by acknowledging His justice in punishing them.

“‘You are righteous, O Lord, the One who is and who was and who is to be, because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. For it is their just due.’ And I heard another from the altar saying, ‘Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments’” (Rev 16:5-7). “Because it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Thess 2:6-12).

What do the angels and the redeemed who stood on God’s side in the great conflict do when the whole world blasphemes against God and worships the impostor antichrist? They call for honoring the Creator and keeping His commandments, and they refuse to accept the mark of the antichrist (Rev 14:6-12). The heavenly court is not intimidated by earthly rebellion and proclaims:

“You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created” (Rev 4:11). *“You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the Earth... To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise, honor, glory, and power forever and ever!”* (Rev 5:9,10,13).

Finally, all the redeemed creation, together with the celestial beings, praises God, saying:

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!” (Rev 15:3-4). *“Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”* (Rev 7:10). *“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready”* (Rev 19:1-2).

g) The vindication that silences Satan’s accusations

There is a notable parallel that Kritzinger highlights between the vindication of Job and that of the final remnant. Behind the scenes, there is a confrontation between God and the rebellious angel. God asks Satan:

“‘Have you considered my servant Job, that *there is none like him* on the earth, a

blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? So, Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!’” (Job 1:8-11).

God allows the devil to oppress Job, bringing upon him terrible calamities, even at the risk of compromising His character as a just God by allowing His faithful servant to be mistreated “without cause.” Yet, Job “holds fast to his integrity” (Job 2:3), not giving in to the devil’s reasoning. In this way, Job vindicates God against Satan’s veiled accusations.

“According to his faith, so was it unto Job. ‘When He hath tried me,’ he said, ‘I shall come forth as gold’ (Job 23:10). So it came to pass. By his patient endurance *he vindicated his own character, and thus the character of Him whose representative he was.* And ‘the Lord turned the captivity of Job: ... also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before ... So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning (Job 42:10-12)” (Ed 156).

By vindicating his own character without cursing God in adversity, *Job also vindicated the character of God.* The same will happen with the final generation that God is preparing to be vindicated by it even in the worst trial in history. Instead of cursing God, that generation will glorify His name in the worst adversity that has ever existed and will remain faithful without rebelling against Him. If Job could vindicate the character of God represented in his behavior, why wouldn’t the final generation be able to vindicate the name of God even in the face of the greatest adversity? And the blessing of God upon that end-time people will be even greater than what they could have had before: eternal life.

In the Book of Revelation, we find a picture equivalent to that of Job. Satan is the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev 12:10), but more than that, his accusations hide a bitter complaint against God. His argument is that God is not just to condemn him if He saves His people from all the sins they have committed (see Zech 3:1-2).

“He has an accurate knowledge of the sins which he has tempted them to commit, and he presents these before God in the most exaggerated light, representing this people to be just as deserving as himself of exclusion from the favor of God. He declares that the Lord cannot in justice forgive their sins and yet destroy him and his angels. He claims them as his prey and demands that they be given into his hands to destroy” (GC 618).

But it is emphasized that “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 12:11), and God can say of them at the conclusion of the judgment:

“They come! they come! *holy, harmless, and undefiled.* They have kept the word of my patience; they shall walk among the angels” (GC 636). “For you have kept the word of my patience, *I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth*” (Rev 3:10).

Jesus places the sixth church on the threshold of the open door to the investigative judgment that will be revealed in the next vision. It is in that time of judgment that the trial will come upon the whole world. And by triumphing over the devil through God’s grace, his

accusations are silenced. All the sins he caused God's people to commit will then turn against their original instigator (see Gen 3:15). This was represented in the cleansing ritual of the temple in Israel at the end of the year, when, after the completion of the sanctuary's purification, the scapegoat representing Satan was charged with all the sins he caused God's people to commit and is finally expelled from the camp (Lev 16:20-22). Similarly, the devil will be left abandoned in this destroyed world without inhabitants during the millennium until God's judgment destroys him (Rev 20).

h) The final vindication of evil and good

When one studies the appearance of peoples, nations, and empires in human history, it is evident that they all reach a zenith or climax and then decline until they eventually extinguish. Will there be any people who will ultimately break free from this cycle of growth and subsequent senility? Will that people be able to grow and mature without withering away? This is what the Bible speaks about.

There is a great conflict between two opposing beings: God and the devil—good and evil. Both have had followers throughout history on this conflicted planet since our first parents, Adam and Eve, were deceived by the rebellious angel (Gen 3). But that story, with its two sides, is coming to an end. We are promised: “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20).

No matter how powerful evil may often seem with so many people embodying rebellion, evil will not triumph. Those who stand on God's side will survive and vindicate God's character before the watching world and universe as this conflict reaches its decisive and final point. What will these two opposing sides do or seek to do to bring this cosmic conflict to its ultimate and final resolution?

(a) The vindication of inherited evil

The final rebellious generation must also mature and bear its nefarious fruit in all its dimensions (Jer 51:33). “When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever” (Ps 92:7). This malevolent generation will seek to vindicate the spirit that motivated previous generations to corrupt the world and destroy God's people. We already see this represented in the warning Jesus gave to the Jewish nation before its destruction. That apostate generation was going to be condemned for assuming the murderous spirit of the entire preceding history, from Cain, the first murderer, to the most recent murder committed by the leaders of that nation. This is what Jesus said to them:

“Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar” (Matt 23:34-36); “that the blood of all the prophets which was shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation” (Luke 11:50).

What happened in the microcosm of peoples and nations that were destroyed due to their rebellion against God (Jer 51-52; Amos 1-2; Isa 13-23, etc.), will happen again on a macrocosmic scale at the end, when that same spirit will be incarnated in the whole world (Isa 24-27). The final rebellious generation is symbolized in Revelation by the image of a

corrupt and murderous woman called Babylon. The symbol of the woman represents the church of Christ in the Bible (Eph 5:22-32). However, in this case, it is a bloodthirsty church that, to carry out its apostate and blasphemous agenda, illicitly joins forces with the rulers of the earth.

The seat of Babylon's government is clearly seen in the characteristics attributed to the city of Rome in the book of Revelation, with its seven mountains or hills (Rev 17:9), but its projection is universal (v. 15). This geographical characteristic also serves as a model for all the rebellious empires of the world that preceded it. Because Babylonian Rome embodies the spirit of deception and rebellion against God that those kingdoms had.

See *Identifying the Babylon of Revelation* for more information.

<https://adventistdistinctivemessages.com/wp-content/uploads/documents/Identifyingbabylon.pdf>

The bloodthirsty Babylon of the Apocalypse corrupts the world, so God finally destroys it. Why? Because "in her was found the blood of prophets and of all who have been slain on the earth" (Rev 18:24). The last rebellious generation bears responsibility for all the sins that preceded it, from the spilled blood of righteous Abel to the moment of punishment (Matt 23:35; Rev 16:6; 18:24). By assuming the rebellion of previous generations and seeking to vindicate their spirit of insubordination against divine governance, they embody that rebellious character, and God destroys them forever.

This principle of accumulated responsibility seems to be implied in the messages of the prophets to Israel before its destruction by enemy nations. They review the history of God's people from its origin until that moment. However, instead of identifying the nation with the most glorious moments of conversion and heavenly blessing, they associate it with times of rebellion and apostasy (Ezek 16; 23; Am 2:4; Acts 7). And by reclaiming the negative aspects of that history, they contribute to filling up the measure of the iniquity of their predecessors (Matt 23:29-33; Acts 7:43, 51-53).

"God keeps a reckoning with the nations. Through every century of this world's history evil workers have been treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath; and when the time fully comes that iniquity shall have reached the stated boundary of God's mercy, His forbearance will cease. *When the accumulated figures* in heaven's record books *shall mark the sum of transgression complete*, wrath will come, unmixed with mercy, and then it will be seen what a tremendous thing it is to have worn out the divine patience. This crisis will be reached when the nations shall unite in making void God's law" (5 T 523).

(b) The Vindication of the Inherited Good

Will there be a final generation of faithful who will stand on God's side when the last rebellious generation seeks to impose itself on the whole world? Yes, there will be a final generation of faithful that will triumph! We have already seen it. God will not be without representatives. No enterprise can succeed if its last representatives fail in its final endeavor. *That last generation of faithful will vindicate God and all the generations of God's children that came before*, for taking on the spirit of loyalty to God that characterized His Son and all the faithful of the past.

It is like in *relay races*, where one runner covers a certain distance, then passes the torch to the next runner, and so on until the race is completed. Similarly, in the stadium of faith, all the previous generations that ran do not achieve complete victory until the final generation

triumphs (see 1 Cor 9:24-27). That is why *Paul ran first*, but while he ran, he cared for the spiritual health of the next generation. Because if the next generation did not run well, he would have run in vain. Anyway, Paul expected that others would run and finally get to the finish line. He exhorted them to be faithful, saying:

“Hold firmly to the word of life *so that I may rejoice on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain*” (Philipp 2:16). “I fear for you, that *perhaps I have labored over you in vain*” (Gal 4:11). “For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that *our labors might have been in vain*” (1 Thess 3:1-5).

Paul was able to finish the first stage of the race as an apostle of Christ. That is why he said at the end of his life, “I have fought the good fight, *I have finished the race*, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7). But he also knew that the final goal of Christianity would be completed “on that day” when, together with him, all who longed for Christ’s appearing would receive “the crown of life” (v. 8).

The history of Christianity shows that the quality of the testimony of the generations that followed the apostles decreased. This is also seen in the book of Revelation when the seals of those who pledge allegiance to the book of God are opened. The Roman Antichrist persecuted the generation of faithful who lived during the Middle Ages until he overcame them (Rev 6:9-10; 13:7). But their torch was taken up by subsequent generations that vindicated their faith before the world, leading to the triumph of the final generation that is sealed with the approval of judgment (Rev 7:1-8). The torch of faith has been entrusted to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which, despite all the obstacles in the race, will reach the end in triumph. Will we be in that church when the whole unbelieving world rushes upon it? (Rev 12:17).

What is demonstrated in the end? What do the celestial intelligences see in the judgment? That if God has been able to keep alive without sinning that final generation, which bears the accumulated traits of the sinful inheritance of the human race in its 6000 years of sin, then He could have done the same with the former generations of faithful if they had also had the privilege to remain alive until the coming of the Lord. This would happen if they would have had the same light as the last one, as well as the same opportunities. And this in no way changes the fact that it is only through Christ and His power that such a generation can appear. Because without the vindication of Christ of God’s character, no other vindication of that character could occur in any human generation, either prior nor subsequent.

“Man came from the hand of his Creator perfect in organization, and beautiful in form. The fact that he has for six thousand years withstood *the ever-increasing weight* of disease and crime, is conclusive proof of the power of endurance with which he was first endowed... Had Adam originally possessed no greater physical power than men now have, the race would ere this have become extinct” (*RH*, Dec 13, 1881).

“The race is groaning under *a weight of accumulated woe because of the sins of former generations*. And yet with scarcely a thought or care, men and women of the present generation indulge intemperance by surfeiting and drunkenness and thereby leave, as *a legacy for the next generation*, disease, enfeebled intellects, and polluted morals” (4 T 30).

“There was *a continual decrease through successive generations, down to the last* that lived upon the earth. The contrast between the first wicked men who lived upon the earth, and those of the last generation, was very great. The first were of lofty height and well proportioned—the last came up as they went down, a dwarfed, feeble, deformed

race” (3 SG 84).

“The present generation are *feeble in mental, moral, and physical power*. All this misery has *accumulated from generation to generation* because fallen man will break the law of God” (CD 43). “Had men always been obedient to the law of the Ten Commandments, carrying out in their lives the principles of those precepts, the curse of disease now flooding the world would not exist” (CH 19).

The illustration of the *relay race* shows that if there were no final generation that glorified God by obeying His commandments, the true church of Christ, which has been sustained throughout the centuries, would not have reached the finish line. If that were to happen, why wouldn't God have ended the world earlier? Would His plans to reveal the final triumph of the gospel to the universe have failed? We see in the vision of the seals that the last generation succeeds alive with the seal of God (Rev 6:12-7:8).

Let us emphasize once again this great reality. The universe was not meant to witness the divine impotence in allowing His people to end in failure. On the contrary, God will empower that final generation to completely overcome sin and all the hosts of evil. Because both the Father and the Son have invested their honor and reputation in the plan of salvation.

“The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. *The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people*” (DA 671; Jer 14:21). “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it *on to completion* until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philipp 1:6).

Therefore, from a positive perspective, that generation brings to a successful conclusion the testimony of all the preceding generations of saints and vindicates that previous testimony. This is what the apostle Paul understood when he wrote to the Philippians: “Hold firmly to the word of life, *so that on the day of Christ I will have a reason to rejoice because I did not run in vain or labor in vain*” (Philipp 2:16). The last ones who triumph in the final and most dramatic trial of world history vindicate, through their example of faithfulness, those who ran before them, because they do not leave their earthly story unfinished (2 Thess 1:10,12; Eph 4:13; 5:25-27, etc).

God will not have stopped halfway. There will still be survivors from the holy seed at the end of the race. With their testimony, that last generation will reveal that they are on God's side and will complete the spiritual building of His church on the solid foundation laid by Christ and the apostles (1 Cor 3:10).

“So then, you are... members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him *the whole building is joined together and rises* to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph 2:19-22). “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and *someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care*” (1 Cor 3:10).

Through the three figures we have been considering, the Bible teaches us that the last generation that reaches the end of the race alive brings victory to all those who ran before. For those who will be alive when the Lord comes will not precede those who have fallen asleep in past generations (1 Thess 4:17). And if that last generation does not reach the finish line, will those who passed on the torch to us have run in vain? Thank God that in His plan of salvation, He determined that all faithful generations will overcome, because their victory is guaranteed in His Son! The only thing we know about the final generation is that it will reach

the final goal alive. We know this because the apocalyptic prophecies are not conditional (Rev 12:17; 14:12).

Through the representation of the spiritual building of the Christian church, whose foundation was laid by the New Testament, it is also shown that this building will not be completed before the last generation (Eph 2:19-22; 1 Cor 3:10). And through the illustration of the harvest that does not take place until the wheat ripens, once again the value of the testimony of the last generation is affirmed, which distinguishes it from previous generations (Mark 4:28-29; Rev 14:15-16).

There is no harvest if the grain does not ripen. There is no complete victory if the last runner does not reach the finish line. The spiritual building of the church remains unfinished if it is not completed in its final stage, remaining incomplete, an unfinished monument to failure. The last generation appreciates and vindicates the testimony of the preceding generations that this world has challenged, and in their final triumph, all those faithful previous generations are included.

“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish!’” (Luke 14:28-30).

Let us pay attention to how the devil mocks God and His angels when he manages to make the followers of Christ, (who are preparing to be translated into the eternal kingdom), fall into sin, and let us observe how the angels are displeased by Satan’s mockery.

“Satan and his angels mark all the mean and covetous acts of these persons, and present them to Jesus and His holy angels, saying reproachfully: ‘*These are Christ’s followers! They are preparing to be translated!*’ Satan compares their course with passages of Scripture in which it is plainly rebuked, and then taunts the heavenly angels, saying: ‘*These are following Christ and His word! These are the fruits of Christ’s sacrifice and redemption!*’ Angels turn in disgust from the scene” (CET 174).

The main cornerstone of the building’s foundation is Christ; otherwise, no building could have been constructed (Eph 2:19-22). And it is Christ who encourages the laborers throughout the construction process; without Him, there can be no construction (Ps 127:1). The plant was able to germinate and mature into grain because Christ first planted it and cared for it (Matt 13:3, 24, 31; 1 Cor 3:7); otherwise, there would have been no plant, mature grain, or final harvest (Mark 4:29). Christ also initiated the race; otherwise, there would have been no race (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; Philipp 2:16: “I have not run in vain”). He is the one who accompanies His church throughout the Christian race, “until the end of the world” (Matt 28:20).

i) *Will the last generation match the pattern of Christ?*

As we have seen, in one sense, “no.” Not even the angels of God will be able to match the glory of Christ because they depend on Him for their eternal security (Col 1:19). The angels had companions who failed, so an angel could not come to redeem this world either. Absolute perfection belongs only to the Deity. Therefore, we will continue to grow in holiness throughout eternity, but this does not imply transitioning from imperfection to perfection or from corruption to holiness in heaven. While we will experience constant growth in our knowledge of God and in our holiness, we will never attain the absolute perfection that only

Christ and God Himself possess. He will remain our model and guide throughout the Christian race, accompanying us until the end of the world.

“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” (*ST*, 12-30-89, 4). “The fallen race could be restored only through the merit of Him who was equal with God” (*The Messenger*, 04-26-93, 5).

“No man of earth or angel of heaven could have paid the penalty for sin. Jesus was the only one who could save rebellious man. In Him divinity and humanity were combined, and this was what gave efficiency to the offering on Calvary’s cross” (1 *SM* 322-323). “The angels prostrated themselves at the feet of their Commander and offered to become a sacrifice for lost humans. But *an angel’s life could not pay the debt; only He who created them had power to redeem them*” (*CTr* 31).

This must be made clear. We will never be “equal with God” as Christ was with His Father, nor can angels obtain that equality because their knowledge is limited (Matt 24:36; 1 Pet 1:12). We will never be *equal* to Christ even in heaven, any more than angels can match Him. They will praise him for all eternity together with the redeemed, for only in him will we all be secure forever, and he will be exalted above everyone and everything in heaven and on earth, and every earthly and heavenly creature will prostrate himself before him (Phillipp 2:9-11). It is only “through” his Son that God willed to “reconcile all things to himself, both those that are on earth and those that are in heaven, making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19). “All who wish for security in earth or heaven must look to the Lamb of God” (*ST*, 12-30-89, 4).

But the fact that no one can *match* Christ’s pattern does not mean that the image of Christ’s character cannot be perfectly reproduced in His people. “The light shines in the darkness,” and both of them cannot dwell together (John 1:5; 1 John 1:5).

“The spirit is warring against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit; and one of these must conquer. If the truth sanctifies the soul, sin is hated and shunned, because Christ is accepted as an honored guest. But *Christ cannot share a divided heart; sin and Jesus are never in copartnership*” (*TM* 160).

Adam was made in God’s image, *not equal*, but *in His likeness* (Gen 1:26-27). And that didn’t mean he was imperfect. On the contrary, “God made man righteous” (Eccl 7:29), “perfect” (*RH*, Dec 13, 1881), but not in the divine sphere. God did not make another God in Adam. The same perfection was also seen in the angels when they were created, nor did they have the absolute perfection of God. Let’s read again the two quotes we shared at the beginning of this document, and three more that I add below.

“We can never *equal* the Pattern, because it is infinite goodness practiced in His human nature” (16 *MR* 1213, 199). “We can never *equal* the pattern; but we may imitate and resemble it according to our ability” (*RH*, Feb 5, 1895). “*The Lord can accept of nothing short of perfection of character, wholeness to God. Any half-hearted service will testify before the heavenly intelligences that you have failed to copy the Pattern*” (*YI*, Oct 13, 1892).

“It rests with us to co-operate with the agencies which Heaven employs in the work of *conforming our characters to the divine model*. None can neglect or defer this work but at the most fearful peril to their souls” (*GC* 623). “We are to look at His life, study His character, and *copy the pattern. What Christ was in His perfect humanity, we must*

be; for we must form characters for eternity” (TM 173).

“We are to grow daily in spiritual loveliness. *We shall fail often in our efforts to copy the divine pattern.* We shall often have to bow down to weep at the feet of Jesus, because of our shortcomings and mistakes; but we are not to be discouraged; we are to pray more fervently, believe more fully, and *try again with more steadfastness to grow into the likeness of our Lord*” (Mar 227). “*At every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God’s purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement*” (COL 65).

“A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again” (Prov 24:16). It doesn’t say that the wicked fall seven times. The journey of the righteous is not downward, from defeat to defeat, but upward, “from grace to grace, from glory to glory” (RH, June 10, 1884; 2 Cor 3:18). Solomon focuses on the positive side. The righteous person recovers from their fall. Their journey is from victory to victory until they ultimately overcome their shortcomings. “The steps of a man are established by the Lord, when he delights in his way; though he falls, he shall not be cast headlong, for the Lord upholds his hand” (Ps 37:23-24).

Therefore, no one will ever look at us as a model, nor will anyone look at the last generation as a model. Neither will anyone look at a created angel as a model. That’s why the angel who spoke to John identified himself with us, the created earthly beings, and told John not to worship him because he was a fellow servant of God, just like John and the prophets (Rev 19:10). Only before God and His Son should we bow down (Philipp 2:9-11). Christ was the only one who remained undefeated from birth to Calvary. That’s why *Christ will always be the model.* But in the end, everyone will be able to see how His character has been perfectly reproduced in those who have been molded by Him. Looking towards the final goal, E. G. White wrote:

“They must all remember that *they have not yet attained unto perfection,* that the work of character building is *not yet finished.* If they will walk in every ray of light that God has given; if they will compare themselves with Christ’s life and character, they will discern where they have failed to meet the requirements of God’s holy law and will *seek to make themselves perfect in their sphere, even as God in heaven is perfect in His sphere... During these hours of probation they are to seek for perfection of character. They must learn daily of Christ...*” (PM 74).

“He made an offering so complete that *through His grace everyone may reach the standard of perfection.* Of those who receive His grace and follow His example it will be written in the book of life, ‘*Complete in Him—without spot or stain*’” (HP 7). “The Christian life is constantly an onward march. Jesus *sits as a refiner and purifier of His people; and when His image is perfectly reflected in them, they are perfect and holy, and prepared for translation*” (1 T 340).

As we have seen, even though we are perfect in Christ who makes up for our deficiencies, we must not boast that we are sinless. Not even the last generation will do so after they have received God’s seal. Although we are assured that we will reach “the state of sinlessness in which Adam lived before the fall” by fulfilling “by faith the commandments of God” (ST, July 21, 1902; MSV 232), and that by God’s grace it is “possible to lead a perfect life” (6 RH 519; Rev 3:2), we will never go out to preach ourselves before others as having reached the pinnacle of holiness (2 Cor 4:5). Only when the conflict ends:

“And then only will it be safe to claim that we are saved and sinless. True sanctification will not lead any human being to pronounce himself holy, sinless, and

perfect. Let the Lord proclaim the truth of your character” (*ST*, May 16, 1895).

“Those who are indeed purifying their souls by obeying the truth will have a most humble opinion of themselves. The more closely they view the spotless character of Christ, the stronger will be their desire to be conformed to His image, and the less will they see of purity or holiness in themselves” (5 *T* 471).

“The attitude of Paul is the attitude to be taken by every one of the followers of Christ... Not one may claim to be perfect. Let the recording angels write the history of the holy struggles and conflicts of the people of God, let them record their prayers and tears; but let not God be dishonored by the proclamation from human lips, declaring, ‘I am sinless. I am holy.’ Sanctified lips will never give utterance to such presumptuous words. Paul had been caught up to the third heaven... Let the angels of heaven write of Paul’s victories in fighting the good fight of faith. Let heaven rejoice in his steadfast tread heavenward, keeping the prize in view for which he counts every other consideration as dross. Let the angels of heaven rejoice to tell his triumphs, but let Paul utter no vain praise of himself in making a boast of his attainments” (*ST*, May 23, 1895).

“Let the angels of heaven write of Paul's victories in fighting the good fight of faith. Let heaven rejoice in his steadfast tread heavenward, and that, keeping the prize in view, he counts every other consideration dross. Angels rejoice to tell his triumphs, but Paul makes no boast of his attainments. The attitude of Paul is the attitude that every follower of Christ should take as he urges his way onward in the strife for the immortal crown” (*AA* 562).

“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. None of the prophets and apostles ever professed holiness, not even Daniel, Paul, or John. The righteous never make such a claim. The more nearly they resemble Christ, the more they lament their unlikeness to Him; for their consciences are sensitive, and they regard sin more as God regards it. They have exalted views of God and of the great plan of salvation; and their hearts, humbled under a sense of their own unworthiness, are alive to the honor of being accounted members of the royal family, sons and daughters of the King Eternal” (*TR* 62).

It is the awareness of our fragility that does not allow us to boast of perfection or holiness. Therefore, the last generation will not endure the test based on their achievements, but on a recognition of the power and grace of God that worked in them. And although we are not presumptuous, the divine command is: “For I am the Lord your God; therefore, you shall consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44-45). So, even though we do not boast of holiness or perfection because we know that we are weak by nature, we can and should be constantly aware of the approval and divine presence in our lives, for the power of God operates in us.

Paul knew that Christ dwelled in him to such an extent that he could say, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). He could say at the end of his race, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim 4:7-8). He was aware that he dwelt in the presence of God, and we must also be aware of that if we want to be included in His perfection.

“*You are to be conscious of an abiding Christ, that you are continually with Christ, where your mind is encouraged and strengthened*” (*HP* 55). “Christ has provided means

whereby our whole life may be *an unbroken communion with Himself*; but *the sense of Christ's abiding presence can come only through living faith*" (HP 56). "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1).

j) *The only generation that will be alive when Jesus comes.*

Unlike all the other faithful generations, the last one will be the only one to arrive alive and witness the glory of God before the transformation of their mortal bodies at the second coming of Christ. To better understand the importance of this difference, it is helpful to briefly summarize what we have already seen about the divine necessity of having a generation that, in the end, reflects the character of Christ perfectly.

We saw that the fallen nature of Adam was weak and powerless to overcome the rebellious angel. That is why Christ came, to impart His divine nature in such a way that we could overcome the devil as He did. However, unlike Christ, who came with a perfect spiritual nature, we are naturally imperfect. It remained to be seen whether the spiritual power of Christ would achieve in His followers a character like His. That is why the devil tries to make them fall and then destroy them.

By imparting His divine nature to us, Christ conducts "experiments" in human hearts that transform them to such an extent that the devil himself is confused, and the angels rejoice in heaven over such a change. We also saw that sanctification is a gradual process that lasts a lifetime. But in all previous generations, death interrupted this process of Christian perfection. Nonetheless, the merits of Christ cover what has not been achieved, hence our perfection is in Christ, not in merits we presumptuously could attempt to achieve. Death prevented the grain from ripening, prevented those who ran from reaching the final goal, and prevented the building of the church, which is "the [spiritual] body of Christ," from being completed. But when those previous generations of faithful believers resurrect at the second coming of Christ, they will behold the glory of God with already transformed bodies resembling the glorious body of Christ (Philipp 3:21).

However, the last generation must reach the goal set by God in their lifetime, "to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13), "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but... holy and blameless" (Eph 5:27). And this must happen without death interrupting the process of spiritual growth that occurred in all previous generations. It is necessary for this final generation to achieve the perfection of Christ's character because they will be the only ones alive to behold Christ in His glory before their mortal bodies are transformed into immortal and glorious ones (1 Cor 15:52-54).

This is the reason why the devil tries to eliminate the last generation. By causing those who are awaiting translation into eternal life to fall into sin, he mocks Christ and the angels, arguing that God cannot take them to heaven and exclude him and his rebellious angels from the kingdom of God. If he were to succeed, "his triumph would be complete." Christ would come to earth and find no one alive to represent Him and glorify Him. But that last generation will triumph by the power of God through a total spiritual transformation, thanks to the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the fiery test they will have to endure during the time of trouble that no other generation has experienced.

When God manifested His glory on Mount Sinai while pronouncing the Ten Commandments, He commanded the people to prepare themselves. Yet, when the voice of God and the thunderous lightning resounded on the mountain, the people fled and kept their distance (Exod 20). But at the end of the world, it will not only be the earth, not only a mountain that will shake, but also the heavens because God Himself will speak (Heb 12:25-26), and it will be like a "consuming fire" (v. 29). On that day, only the wicked will flee,

crying out for the mountains and rocks to fall on them, because God will have prepared His faithful ones to behold Him. Those who wait for Jesus in life will be standing and joyfully beholding Him, saying, “This is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Eternal; we have waited for Him; we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation” (Isa 25:9; Matt 24:30-31).

If not, why would the Lord have made them undergo such a refining process that only the most terrible time of trouble in history could produce? (Dan 12:1). In that fiery trial, they will completely crucify whatever remains of the carnal nature they inherited from Adam (Rom 6:6), their natural attachment to earthly things will be consumed (Col 3:2), so they can endure the day of the Lord (Rev 6:15-17) and be transformed “in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet” into His likeness (1 Cor 15:52-54).

We also saw that the honor of God and His Son are involved in perfecting the character of His people. That is why Christ will not come before His character is perfectly reproduced in His people. As a good Artisan, Creator, and Redeemer, the Lord will have completed the spiritual building of His church, His own body (Eph 5:23; Col 1:24), in such a way that the devil cannot mock Him for having begun a work that He could not finish (Luke 14:28-30). At the conclusion of that hour of trial, the Lord will be able to present them with great joy, saying:

“They come! they come! holy, harmless, and undefiled. They have kept the word of My patience; they shall walk among the angels; and the pale, quivering lips of those who have held fast their faith utter a shout of victory” (GC 636). “Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth” (Rev 3:10).

VIII. What method solves the discussion about God’s vindication?

For a few years now, some authors specializing in biblical theology have placed *excessive emphasis on biblical exegesis*. I obtained my doctorate in biblical theology at the University of Strasbourg, France, and I witnessed the occasional confrontation between biblical theologians and systematic theologians at the Protestant faculty of theology. The same thing is happening in our church, and it can also be seen in the study of the vindication of the last generation.

Exegesis has its value. It is the first step in trying to understand the interpretive possibilities provided by the biblical text. However, it is not a cure-all. If one is not immersed in the line of thought that runs throughout the Bible, interpretations of the text will be chosen or forced to align with the particular idea of the exegete, rather than necessarily aligning with the divine revelation. For this reason, it is not a matter of freely choosing among the different possibilities given by lexicons to understand the meaning of a word. Its immediate and mediated context is crucial in that choice.

Catholic exegesis and the exegesis found in homosexual Bibles show how easily a certain context can be created for a specific text to diminish its true meaning or even make it say the exact opposite of what it means. The same is done by some with the writings of E. G. White. There are those who oppose making compilations of her writings, arguing that her immediate context must be analyzed, and in doing so, they neglect the broader context that can only be seen in light of all her writings. It is good to try to understand a passage in its immediate context, but if we stop there, we run the risk of isolating and limiting the fuller understanding of revelation.

At the beginning, I planned not to mention authors in this study, except for Armin Kritzinger and his thesis defended in Thailand, as it represents the latest writing up to this

moment and, especially, due to his analysis of other authors. Furthermore, I agree with most of his approaches. However, I find it necessary to make one more exception to illustrate the methodological problem we are discussing. I am referring to Angel Manuel Rodríguez, who in his latest research studied more deeply what E. G. White wrote on the subject and made further progress towards understanding what will happen when Christ ceases to intercede in the heavenly sanctuary. But at a certain point, he emphasizes what he believes E. G. White *did not say* more than *what she actually said* in a paragraph, in order to diminish the precision of her testimony regarding the last generation.

Why does he do that? Because he cannot completely free himself from his obsession with combating the legalistic tendency he perceived in other authors such as Mirian Lauritz Andreassen, whom he considered the greatest exponent of perfectionism in the Adventist Church in another study. By combating it, A. M. Rodríguez succumbs to the evangelical pressure from other authors in our church. I am not motivated to provide a more precise critique of all his work here. I will simply highlight how he interprets a passage from the book *The Great Controversy* in his latest study, “Living Without an Intercessor in the Writings of Ellen G. White,” to illustrate the problem. Let us first read the quote from E. G. White:

“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.* While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be *a special work of purification, of putting away of sin,* among God’s people upon earth... *When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing*” (GC 425).

Now let us see how our author tries to limit the final part of E. G. White’s statement in order to draw a conclusion contrary to what she states. Ángel Manuel wrote the following: “E. G. White states that when ‘this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing.’ This is a very important statement *not only for what it says but also for what it does not say.* It does not say that when the work is done, then Christ will come, but that they will be ready for His coming, whenever this it may happen” (17).

This conjecture is forced, an attempt to relativize what she wrote. Because the context involves the cessation of Christ’s intercession in the heavenly sanctuary. This tendency to relativize the meaning of a text is very common in theology today. To do this, *they rely more on what they presume the passage in question does not say, rather than what it actually says.* And in order to compensate for what they presume it does not say, our author does not think of turning to other statements from the Spirit of Prophecy that are equally or even more emphatic in what she said in the quoted paragraph.

Rodríguez’s intention is to make that passage say that the experience of those who are alive when Christ’s intercession in the heavenly sanctuary ends is the same as what others have had before. Individually and in some points, more than one person may have previously achieved a similar experience in Christ. But this will not happen *as a people* until Christ’s intercession in the heavenly sanctuary is completed.

Did our author forget, while studying that passage, the entire immediate context of that quotation? It had to do not only with a mission that God did not give to any previous generation—the preaching of the three angels’ messages—but also definitively with the crucible of the final persecution through which God will put His “people” to prepare them to

meet Him. Before the paragraph Ángel Manuel considers, E. G. White wrote:

“The people were not yet ready to meet their Lord. There was still a work of preparation to be accomplished for them. Light was to be given, directing their minds to the temple of God in heaven; and as they should by faith follow their High Priest in His ministration there, new duties would be revealed. Another message of warning and instruction was to be given to the church... Says the prophet: ‘Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness’ (Mal 3:2-3). 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” (GC 424-425).

Did our friend also forget the statement by the Spirit of Prophecy that we have considered more than once in our study, which says, *“When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own”?* (COL 69). And what about the other statement that speaks of the condition of the final remnant, which will be like that of Christ when He said that Satan had nothing in Him? (GC 623). Although it is ideal to have such an experience today, it is clear that this experience has not yet occurred in the people of God; otherwise, Christ would have already come. And in the previous quote, we see that the work of purifying God’s people on earth will not be completed before the investigative judgment concludes. *Let us not make E. G. White say what she does not say, reducing her thoughts to just a part of a single paragraph.*

Furthermore, our author assumes that the experience of those who go through the time of trouble “is not a matter of sinning or not sinning—whether they have become impeccable or sinless” (34). In doing so, he tries to downplay other statements by the Spirit of Prophecy that we have seen, where she uses those words as something essential. His purpose is to conclude that the final experience of the last remnant will be the same as that of others in different eras.

This is another attempt to avoid distinguishing between the final experience of God’s people and the experiences of previous generations. Because no other generation has gone through a time when they could not rely on the intercession of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. The martyrs of the past could appeal to God for forgiveness when they died (see Acts 7:56), but those who go through the time of trouble will not be able to do so.

Ángel Manuel also concludes that “the call to develop a character like Christ... is not an end in itself,” but rather, “the ultimate goal of Christian perfection is to make us more efficient servants of God and others by revealing the love of Christ in our lives” (35). If his intention is to counter certain perfectionist tendencies as he sees in Andreasen’s book, I don’t think he achieves it in that way. Why divert attention from the “ideal” and “goal of perfection” that God sets before us (AA 315) with a statement that seeks to avoid the precise words given by E. G. White? In any case, he could have said that we will not achieve perfection by seeking perfection in an abstract sense, but by seeking Christ as the model who embodied perfection. Instead, he speaks of obtaining a character like that of Christ as not being an end in itself.

Mirian Lauritz Andreasen said some very good things about the last generation in the mid-20th Century. But there are three statements that he adds at the end of his book *The Sanctuary Service* which, no matter how well-intentioned our interpretation is, leave us perplexed. Because they establish a perfectionist foundation that *makes God and the investigative judgment dependent on what the last generation does*. According to him, the last generation “must fight their battles alone” (318). No, the Spirit of God and the angels will not forsake

them. In addition, it is God and the heavenly tribunal who put their trust in us, rather than us placing our trust in God to overcome. That is the logical failed outcome of his *post-lapsarian* interpretation of the nature of Christ that we have already considered. No! What is at stake is not our ability to overcome, but God's ability to lead the last generation to complete victory.

Of course, we participate in that victory, but we depend on God to triumph. Neither God nor we believe in our own ability to overcome the devil and his hosts. If the conclusion of the work depended on us, this world of misery would never end. Our faith must focus on divine omnipotence and submit to it to do His will, for "it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Philipp 2:13). Please do not discourage me by requiring me to do what I cannot do by myself!

IX. The Final Vindication of God through the Destruction of the Devil and the Wicked

The vindication of God's authority to destroy evil was already represented in the laws of the Pentateuch. Those who illegally defiled the sanctuary by rejecting the expiatory sacrifice were to be put to death (Lev 15:31; Num 19:13,20). The sanctuary where the Name of God dwelled (Deut 12:5,11) was meant to sanctify the entire land of Israel and its inhabitants (Num 35:33-34). Therefore, this unacceptable contamination of open rebellion harmed the Name of God, and such contamination had to be resolved not by the sacrifice of an innocent lamb, but by the death of the hardened offender. The death of the guilty had a purifying value, we could also say a vindicating value, because it was the way to remove evil from the midst of the people of God, where His sanctuary resided (Num 35:33-34; Deut 17:6-7; 19:13, etc.). God did not accept in His sanctuary responsibility for any unconfessed sin, so the guilt had to fall upon the unrepentant sinners.

Unconfessed sin was to fall upon the heads of the guilty (Judg 9:57), not upon an innocent animal that would die for the sinner whom God forgave. Likewise, the originator of sin, represented by a scapegoat that was not sacrificed, had to bear all the sins he had caused the people of God to commit, once the divine sanctuary had been purified from the confessed sins of the people throughout the year. In this way, the character of God, who had been slandered by the "accuser of the brethren," was vindicated. In the symbol of a scapegoat, the devil was accused and expelled from the camp of Israel (Lev 16:20-22). The unconfessed rebels were to be put to death on that final day of judgment (Lev 23:29-30).

The vindication of divine holiness is clearly expressed in the death of Aaron's two sons, who improperly entered the Most Holy Place of the temple, disobeying divine prescriptions (Lev 10).

"By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified" (Lev 10:3)

The reason for such a severe measure establishes a principle that with greater light comes greater responsibility. If divine judgments were so severe in the Israelite community in the wilderness, it was because they had the privilege of witnessing the glory of God dwelling among them. Similarly, Lucifer's punishment will be greater because he turned away from God while living in the very presence of the Deity and without anyone deceiving him (Isa 14:12-14; Eze 28:14-17). On the other hand, our first parents sinned while being deceived, and that is why God, in His compassion, gave them another chance.

"Some can see only the destruction of God's enemies, which looks to them unmerciful and severe. They do not look upon the other side. But let everlasting thanks

be given, that impulsive, changeable man, with all his boasted benevolence, is not the disposer and controller of events. ‘The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel’ (Prov 12:10)” (2 SM 334).

Why didn’t God destroy the devil right away?

If Christ’s vindication of God’s character was sufficient to unmask the devil before the universe, why didn’t God destroy him at that time? And why didn’t God destroy the wicked when Christ died on the cross?

“Yet Satan was not then destroyed. *The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed.* And for the sake of man, Satan’s existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve” (DA 761).

It is obvious that if not even the angels understood everything that was involved in the conflict of the ages, it was necessary to allow the devil to further develop the principles of his kingdom in order to expose him before the universe. But how long should the conflict last? Once the redemption of God’s people is completed and this world is destroyed at the second coming of Christ, why wouldn’t God destroy the devil and his angels then, and why would the wicked have to be resurrected at the end of the millennium? (Rev 20).

Indeed, the righteous will sit in judgment against the wicked and even judge Satan himself and his rebellious hosts (1 Cor 6:2-3; Rev 20:4). But once condemned, why wouldn’t God leave them dead forever? What sense does it make to resurrect them only to destroy them again in the “second death”? (Rev 2:11; 20:5-7,14; 21:8). Wouldn’t that be sadistic on God’s part? No! The character of God had to be fully vindicated, this time through the destruction of the wicked and their rebellious leader.

There are several reasons that explain why a final confrontation had to take place at the end of the millennium. In all of them, the unmasking of Satan’s character and his followers is evident, as well as the vindication of God’s righteous character. Let us enumerate them.

1. It must be demonstrated that the resurrection of the wicked does not change their lives

There is no posthumous response of gratitude to God from the rebels who are resurrected after the millennium, nor from the devil and his angels when they are released from their bonds during that entire time in a desolate land (Rev 20:1-3). On the contrary, led by the devil, they join together to try to overthrow God’s government and destroy the saints in the holy city (Rev 20:7-10). Just as the antediluvian “race were constantly devising how they might contend with the universe of heaven and gain possession of Eden” (20 MR 195), likewise the entire rebellious host has not changed at all and seeks ways to assault the city of God that descended from heaven (Rev 21).

Neither does the devil, after enduring his soul’s torment, alone in a world he brought to destruction, show any genuine change of attitude. This demonstrates that without the Spirit of God, there can be no change, no transformation, no conversion to God.

“Since his fall his life of unceasing activity has banished reflection; but he is now deprived of his power and left to contemplate the part which he has acted since first he rebelled against the government of heaven, and to look forward with trembling and

terror to the dreadful future when *he must suffer for all the evil that he has done and be punished for the sins that he has caused to be committed*” (GC 660).

“In his last great effort to dethrone Christ, destroy His people, and take possession of the City of God, the archdeceiver has been *fully unmasked*. Those who have united with him see the total failure of his cause... He is the object of universal abhorrence” (GC 670).

2. Each rebel must pay for what he did.

The justice of God must be vindicated by giving “each one according to his works” (Rom 2:6). Many evildoers died vindicated by the corrupt courts of the world, and it is fitting that they receive just retribution for their deeds. The redeemed, who know from their own experience that the Son of God paid for their sins with his vicarious death, now see in all its magnitude that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom 3:23), and that God also fulfills His warnings. The Lord will come “to reward each one according to his works” (Rev 22:12).

“For it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:6-9).

“His punishment is to be far greater than that of those whom he has deceived. After all have perished who fell by his deceptions, he is still to live and suffer on. In the cleansing flames the wicked are at last destroyed, root and branch—Satan the root, his followers the branches. The full penalty of the law has been visited; the demands of justice have been met; and heaven and earth, beholding, declare the righteousness of Jehovah” (GC 673).

3. An acknowledgment of the guilty party is required for a trial to be perfect.

There are many judgments that have been issued in this world that leave doubts about the justice of the sentence dictated. In other cases, new evidence surfaced after the execution of those who pleaded not guilty which proved their innocence. Therefore, for a trial to be perfect, it is required that after the guilty has been unmasked, he admits his fault. So it will be with the devil and his minions when all the cards are put on the table. God will tear from their lips the recognition of their sins, which implies the admission of having become unfit for heaven.

“The aim of the great rebel has ever been to justify himself and to prove the divine government responsible for the rebellion... He has worked deliberately and systematically, and with marvelous success, leading vast multitudes to accept his version of the great controversy which has been so long in progress. For thousands of years this chief of conspiracy has palmed off falsehood for truth. But the time has now come when the rebellion is to be finally defeated and the history and character of Satan disclosed. In his last great effort to dethrone Christ, destroy His people, and take possession of the City of God, *the archdeceiver has been fully unmasked*. Those who have united with him see the total failure of his cause. Christ’s followers and the loyal angels behold the full extent of his machinations against the government of God. He is the object of universal abhorrence” (GC 670).

“In the final execution of the judgment it will be seen that no cause for sin exists. When the Judge of all the earth shall demand of Satan, ‘Why hast thou rebelled against Me, and robbed Me of the subjects of My kingdom?’ the originator of evil can render no excuse. Every mouth will be stopped, and all the hosts of rebellion will be speechless” (GC 503). “So that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God” (Rom 3:19).

“And now Satan bows down and confesses the justice of his sentence” (GC 670). “Who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed” (Rev 15:4).

This recognition, which vindicates God for His justice in dealing with sin and sinners, even with the rebellious angel of heaven, will be given not only by the redeemed and the angels of God but also by the rebels who are symbolically “under the earth,” and whom theologians call the “underworlds.” Seeing the exaltation of Christ and His character of love that they despised, they cannot help but acknowledge His justice, as well as the justice of His judgment.

“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus *every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,* and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11).

“I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, ‘Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him. In the Lord all the descendants of Israel *shall be justified,* and shall glory’” (Isa 45:23-25).

4. *The authority of God must be reestablished to ensure peace.*

Once everything is clarified, the rebellion must be suppressed, and divine justice must be affirmed. This is what the prophet Isaiah emphasizes in a context of the overflowing of evil in the kingdom of Judah. But the prophet goes further and sees that God will impose His justice on a world that despised it. This can be seen in the following statement that the prophet repeats twice in that chapter.

“The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day” (Isa 2:11,17). “All are punished ‘according to their deeds.’ The sins of the righteous having been transferred to Satan, he is made to suffer not only for his own rebellion, but for all the sins which he has caused God’s people to commit” (GC 673).

“Christ’s followers and the loyal angels behold the full extent of his machinations against the government of God. He is the object of universal abhorrence... *His accusations against the mercy and justice of God are now silenced*” (GC 670). “By terrible things in righteousness *He will vindicate the authority of His downtrodden law...* Terrible as these inflictions are, *God’s justice stands fully vindicated*” (GC 627: Rev 16:5-7).

“The whole wicked world stand arraigned at the bar of God on the charge of high treason against the government of heaven. *They have none to plead their cause; they are without excuse;* and the sentence of eternal death is pronounced against them” (GC

668).

In a second cantata for men's choir, *Eternity*, which I composed at age 21 and which is available in Spanish on my website, I expressed the terror of the wicked in the face of infinite loss by singing:

“The wicked cry without a consolation.
Their sin has led them to eternal death.
No more forgiveness; no more redemption.
No mercy is offered for those who are dying.
The doors will not be opened anymore.
They mourn their awful death, not their depravity.
Sadly, resounds the echo of their pain.”

“His own work must condemn him... The whole universe must see the deceiver unmasked” (GC 498). “Every question of truth and error in the long-standing controversy has now been made plain... *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 all the worlds that He has created” (Ps 145:10; Rev 15:4; GC 670-671).

From the following statement it can be clearly seen that the purpose of the divine judgment preceding the punishment is to vindicate the justice and love of God that the rebels outraged.

“Nothing is more plainly taught in Scripture than that God was in no wise responsible for the entrance of sin; that there was no arbitrary withdrawal of divine grace, no deficiency in the divine government, that gave occasion for the uprising of rebellion. *Sin is an intruder, for whose presence no reason can be given. It is mysterious, unaccountable; to excuse it is to defend it*. Could excuse for it be found, or cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin... It is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government” (GC 492).

“The whole universe will have become witnesses to the nature and results of sin. And its utter extermination, which in the beginning would have brought fear to angels and dishonor to God, will now *vindicate His love and establish His honor before the universe* of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law. Never will evil again be manifest. Says the word of God: ‘Affliction shall not rise up the second time’ (Nahum 1:9). The law of God, which Satan has reproached as the yoke of bondage, will be honored as the law of liberty. A tested and proved creation will never again be turned from allegiance to Him whose character has been fully manifested before them as fathomless love and infinite wisdom” (GC 504).

CONCLUSION

The influence of the *evangelical* and *Protestant* world on those who have studied in their universities or read their books then proceeded to teach in Adventist theological centers is leading many to misinterpret *biblical and Adventist theodicy* in relation to *the vindication of God's character*. This stems from the mid-20th Century when our leaders yielded to the demands of the evangelicals to exclude atonement from beyond the cross and be accepted as

an authentically Christian church. The concessions they made were not entirely incorrect, but by not emphasizing the full biblical dimension of atonement, they opened the door for many in the Adventist Church to not perceive the broader projection of atonement that encompasses the entire plan of salvation from beginning to end.

By not telling the whole truth on this matter, they also opened the door to devalue the significance and necessity of the vindication of the last generation, as well as the investigative judgment. So much so that the term *Last Generation Theology*, along with the word “effort,” is sadly considered in some places today as *a bad word* that needs to be eradicated, as *a danger* to the Adventist Church. They also misinterpret the term *divine-human cooperation* as meaning that God needs our help to make us holy, something that would bring us closer to the Catholic Church. No, a thousand times no! It is us who need divine help, His power to overcome, which does not earn us any merit for salvation.

Evangelicals masked within our ranks fail to grasp that the extreme opposite they assume is as dangerous (if not more so) for our church than what they seek to combat. They weaken the very foundation of the mission of the last remnant that warns that “the hour of His judgment has come” and therefore we must give glory to Him by keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (Rev 14:7,12). Because our mission is to warn that we are saved solely by faith in Christ but judged in the heavenly court by the works we do. And while we will receive blessing and recognition in heaven for the good works we do (Rom 2:6-11; Matt 25:34-40), those works will not earn us any merits for salvation (Luke 17:10).

Why are these new *liberal* and supposedly *progressive* interpretations arising in our church? Because as is generally the case with Protestants, it seems for them presumptuous and pretentious to say that we keep God’s law. They see human frailty, and since the observance of God’s commandments is linked to perfection and holiness, they believe that insisting on keeping God’s commandments is a typically Jewish and Catholic boast that leads to the belief that we can save ourselves by our own means.

They also think that this is *legalism* or *perfectionism*, an attempt to achieve a perfection and fulfillment of the law allegedly unattainable for our sinful nature. And they fail to realize that, with this misinterpretation, they are leading many to a *defeatist antinomianism* that dismisses *the investigative judgment* and, in the most extreme case, to *universalism* that claims that in the end, everyone will be saved. Thus, they open the doors for the same *moral corruption* present in the world and in apostate churches to penetrate our church as well. It is not surprising that there is so little moral strength in our ranks to raise our voices against the most unprecedented overflow of social disorder and upheaval in the world since the days preceding Noah's flood (Matt 24:37-39).

The current trend in the world that comes from the Roman Catholic Church and the evangelical churches which follow it, is an *inclusive* church, where everyone may be accepted and form part of it, even the *LGBTQ* community. This is the best way to build the Great Babylon of the latter days. And to build that apostate “religio-political system,” it is necessary to eliminate everything that marks a difference between the last biblical remnant and the rest of the world. This is the background of the current trend to affirm that the last faithful generation will not be different from other generations, and that no one can completely overcome sin. That is to minimize the relevance of the role and mission of the last remnant. But God’s distinctive call today is to come out of Babylon, not to be *inclusive* (Isa 52:11; Rev 18:2-5; 2 Cor 6:16-18). It is a call to be holy, blameless, a necessary living condition to behold the glory of the Lord at His coming (Lev 19:2; 20:7; Eph 1:4; 5:27; Col 1:22; etc). The human will must be ennobled, sanctified, and strengthened by its connection with the will of God.

On the other hand, the *exclusive focus* on one’s own salvation causes a loss of understanding of the holiness of God because it fails to recognize the importance that heaven

places on safeguarding the integrity of the character of the Deity, with its attributes of love, wisdom, and justice. By disregarding the holiness of God in favor of *imputed justification*, one loses sight of the true significance of the cross. Some even think they can behave like Catholics who confess to a priest without changing their lives. They turn to Christ to be forgiven *in sin, not from sin*. At the same time, this *defeatist approach* that claims we cannot keep God's law tends to make us *lose our identity as the last remnant* that God has raised up to give the final message of judgment to the world (Rev 12:17; 14:7, 12).

There is no doubt that there have been extremes and that such extremes can continue to exist among people who need to grow in their understanding of our faith. But are we going to stop keeping the Sabbath because some people keep it poorly? Are we going to stop praising God because some sing off-key? Do we have to tell people that they can't stop committing adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting because some pretend to keep the law and violate it? Let us distance ourselves from those who do not have an ear for singing and let us sing well. Let us not construct theologies that are only intended to counter extreme positions because we may be projecting an approach that confronts ghosts, not the reality of the gospel.

It is important to understand the true human nature of Jesus Christ and how it differs from ours. It depends on whether we lower Him to our fallen image or seek to elevate ourselves to His perfect image. He came in a physical fallen nature but in an unfallen spiritual nature like that of Adam before the fall. Even so, He was never sick, but he was a source of health. He was not born in sin as we are, and by His death He freed us of the natural consequence of sin that is death.

The spiritual nature of Christ is a source of purity (John 7:37-39), while ours, fallen, is a source of filthiness and wickedness (Isa 1:6; Matt 15:19-20; Luke 11:13). If we mistakenly conclude that Christ was able to overcome with a spiritual fallen nature like ours, without depending on a Savior Himself, then we too could overcome sin without the need for His intervention. And although some *postlapsarians* may not say it that way, in such a context, Christ would serve more as a justification for past sins than as a necessity for us to be sanctified in the present.

The extreme consequence of the *postlapsarian* approach is that it leads to the belief that God and His tribunal depend on us to vindicate the character of heaven and that they rely on us to save their honor. No! "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength" (Jer 17:5). We cannot even trust our own heart because we know that it is "deceitful and desperately wicked" by nature, "more than all things" (Jer 17:9). God knows us very well. Is He to trust us to vindicate Him?

If there is a judgment, it is because the heavenly tribunal does not trust us but trusts in God, and it is convened to see what God has done with us, how He has transformed our hearts. How much less will God depend on us to vindicate Him! We are the ones who depend on God to triumph! We are the ones who have to trust in God to overcome! We can trust in His power because God has given His word by giving His Son to pay with His blood the price of our failure (Rom 8:32). No wonder radical *prelapsarians* accuse *postlapsarians* of *perfectionism* and *legalism*!

The reason given by many *prelapsarian radicals* to reject the idea that we can be perfect in this life is that it is not seen that Christians perfectly keep God's law. But the fact that the perfection of Christ has not been perfectly reproduced in His people yet does not mean that it will never happen. To *postlapsarians* we say that we need the justification of Christ not only to resolve the guilt of our past sins but also throughout the entire process of our sanctification that lasts a lifetime. They believe that, but there is a certain inconsistency in their theology that is reflected in the way some aim at the goal in the Christian race. And to *radical prelapsarians*, we tell them that, due to their careless and indifferent way of living, they give credence to those who accuse them of *libertinism* and *antinomianism* (faith without law).

Perfection and holiness in this life will always be a perfection and holiness “in Christ.” As a consequence, those who are closer to perfection are the humblest people who follow Jesus in what He did and require us to do: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24; see 2 Cor 12:9-10). So, Christian perfection is obtained first by receiving His *imputed righteousness*, *His forgiveness*, and then by denying ourselves and taking up our cross to receive His *imparted righteousness* (Luke 9:23). Only with the help of Christ can we sacrifice our degraded carnal will so that the spiritual will takes possession of our lives. And *the effort* to attain the perfection of Christ after being forgiven by Him *is not perfectionism*, but faith in God and His power. Because to triumph, it requires *combining weak human effort with the omnipotent power of God*. The human will is empowered, ennobled, and sanctified in connection with the will of God. Where is boasting? Where is self-justification? Nowhere.

The perfection of character, like sanctification in us, is progressive, “from grace to grace,” and “from glory to glory.” The perfection of Christ is imparted to us so that we can be perfect in our human sphere, as God is in His. But such perfection is not completed in the people of God until the last generation *through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the refining of the final crisis*. And *through the shaking, it removes what is not useful*. In this way, God prepares the final remnant to stand firm at His coming. I prefer to believe God, who assures me that He will seal His chosen ones in life so that they will sin no more in the end, rather than incredulously despising divine power as incapable of taking me much further than I am now. God cannot be fully vindicated before the universe unless He proves His power to bring the last generation to fully keep His law. And that fulfillment is not Pharisaic to acquire merit or earn the kingdom of God by one’s own means, but *an obedience in Christ, by virtue of His merits*.

Who could praise God if His power to represent His Son’s character perfectly and completely in the final remnant were proven to be impotent? For if Christ fails in His intention to complete the spiritual building of His church, He cannot demonstrate His power to fully transform His people either. The devil will be able to mock God, arguing that He began to build a spiritual edifice that He could not finish or did not finish well.

Salvation is the work of Christ and will remain so until the end. That is why we can never match His model. His vindication of the character of God is unique in its kind, as no one kept God’s commandments from birth to Calvary as He did. But this does not mean that His vindication is exclusive. On the contrary, it is indispensable for the entire universe, including the redeemed, to vindicate the good Name of God in the face of the accusations of the devil and his followers. *Our vindication of the character of God is based on the vindication that Christ made of His Father* because outside of Him, there is no other possible vindication, no available inheritance, nor any victory within human reach on earth or in heaven (Rev 5). In the contemplation of the marks of His crucifixion that the Son of God will bear throughout eternity, every creature in heaven and on earth will feel secure (GC 674; Zech 13:6-8).

Seeking perfection does not mean possessing it, except in Christ. Striving to attain the perfection of Christ does not mean that we can achieve it. But God can achieve it in us, and He will do it with our consent to submit to His discipline in the final crisis, which implies the full reception of the Holy Spirit. What will we do when that happens? Will we tell the Lord that it is not necessary to receive His Spirit or go through the time of trouble because we cannot keep His law or be perfect anyway? Will we tell Him that we prefer only His justification and that, for us, it is enough? And will we not care about how we leave God’s reputation before the universe?

The claim that we will continue sinning until the Lord’s coming seems to assume a humble position that equates the last remnant with past generations. But this *tends towards universalism* with the idea that the last remnant will be composed of people from all churches

and religions who will remain within their own religious communities (see Rev 12:17). And it leads to not feeling the need to call them out of Babylon (Rev 18:1-5). It is also not surprising that many do not distinguish between the last generation that will be sealed (the 144,000: Rev 7:4-8; 14:1-5) and the great multitude of redeemed composed of the remnant from all ages (Rev 7:9ff).

But we saw that there are clear differences between the last remnant and the previous ones. The last generation possesses a greater knowledge that is indispensable to endure the most dramatic crisis in human history (Dan 12:1-4). This remnant enters by faith into the final phase of Christ's priestly ministry in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, which leads them to fear God and give Him glory by keeping all His commandments (Rev 11:19; 14:7,12; cf. Eccl 12:13-14).

The test of keeping *all* the commandments was not given by the Lord to past generations who did not have the light of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Neither did previous generations, at the pinnacle of their lives, have to stand without the intercession of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. While those who suffered previously could ask for forgiveness before death, the last generation will have to be completely free from sin because their heavenly intercessor will have left the temple of heaven, and they will fear having left any sin unconfessed. However, the Holy Spirit will not abandon them to struggle alone to avoid falling into sin. Even the angels will encourage and strengthen them in that final hour of testing.

By following Christ into the Most Holy Place, the last generation appears by faith in the very glory of God that was in that place. That is the prerequisite that God requires for those last survivors of the holy seed to be able to behold Christ when He returns in His glory and the glory of His Father. That is why the final generation must live a *blameless* life that only a few children of God lived in the past, before and after the flood. And for this, God will give the latter rain to His people and purify them through the crucible of the final test.

The last generation was represented by the maturing of the grain of wheat that first had to occur before it could be harvested. They were also represented by those who reach the finish line in the race of faith, vindicating the testimony of those who preceded them in previous centuries. That generation completes the spiritual building of the church, without which the divine architect would become an object of mockery (Luke 14:28-30).

The entire universe needs to see not only how the Son of God vindicated the character of His Father but also how, by His grace, His followers, especially the last generation, vindicated Him. Everyone should be able to agree that *the righteousness imparted* by Christ to sinners makes them like Him. The honor of God and His Son is at stake in this verification. Should the investigative judgment prove the divine inability to transform sinners into the image of Christ, or should it demonstrate His immeasurable power to achieve a complete triumph of His followers?

God finally vindicates His authority by the eternal destruction of the unconfessed wicked, including the devil and his angels, at the conclusion of the millennial judgment. This destruction takes place after proving to the entire universe that there is no cure for those who rejected God's love. With the destruction of the wicked, God will forever extinguish evil, and the universe will be eternally safe thanks to the redemption of the Son of God.

The *theology of the final vindication of God's character* is not an invention of E. G. White; it is based on the Bible and can be upheld through *Sola Scriptura*. The entire message of salvation is involved in this theology. While we can limit ourselves to the Bible, it is a great loss if we neglect the wonderful and defined expansion that God has given us through the *Spirit of Prophecy*. How can we despise such a great and marvelous gift that God has given us as the people of the end time, so necessary for this age, clarifying for us step by step the grand truths we find in the revelation?

APPENDIX

Félix Cortez's study, *Perfection is a process of constant growth in Christ* (2023) Critical analysis by Alberto R. Treiyer

Dr. Félix Cortez, who teaches New Testament at Andrews University, has been participating in some church panels whose consistent purpose is to destroy the *Last Generation Theology* (LGT). He has just written an article entitled *Perfection is a constant growth in Christ*. Unfortunately, in this article, he clearly states that he will not consider the role of the last generation. As a result, he falls short, trapped in an *evangelicalistic* approach. From the introduction of his article, he expresses his intention to attack the perfectionism of many, especially Andreasen's, and this fact prevents him from considering the topic from a more objective and comprehensive perspective that would help him correct several statements he makes.

His study is a good example of how Adventist evangelicals seek to evade, in one way or another, the role of the *last generation* in the conflict of the ages, ignoring or distorting what E. G. White wrote about the matter. This is because the experience of those who are alive in that final era, according to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, breaks the *evangelicalistic* framework that focuses on the cross and neglects its effectiveness in those who follow the Lamb. This is something so important that the universe needs to see in the investigative judgment. *Evangelical Adventists* do not pay attention to what E. G. White wrote: "The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross" (GC 489).

I agree with Félix Cortez's criticism of *LGT* from the perspective of E. J. Waggoner and M. L. Andreasen, except for certain exaggerations and statements made by Félix regarding the focus of *LGT*, which may again upset its defenders due to misinterpretation. It is true that Andreasen's *LGT* and those who follow him leave God at the mercy of vindication by the believers of the Last Generation. They claim that God and the heavenly tribunal depend on us to be vindicated and trust us to, through our efforts to overcome sin, achieve the perfection of Christ that He accomplished with our supposed sinful nature to vindicate His Father. But why does Félix deny that God risked His character's reputation with human beings? Did God not risk His reputation when He chose to dwell among a dirty and sinful people in the ancient microcosm of ancient Israel?

If God failed to resolve the problem of sin at the end of the year on the Day of Atonement—which represented the investigative judgment in the macrocosm of the end of the world—His attempt to purify His people would have failed. So, there is a risk in the plan of salvation that also implied the possibility of His Son falling. And there is also a risk that the last generation may fail. This is confirmed by the Spirit of Prophecy when it says, "the honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people" (DA 671). Fortunately, the unconditional apocalyptic prophecies affirm that both Christ and the last generation will triumph.

Therefore, Félix's criticism of the presumable "double standard" in God's judgment of previous generations and the last generation would be correct if viewed from an *anthropocentric* perspective that centers success on what the last generation can do. However, it is incorrect if we consider that we are all saved by grace in all ages, including the last one, and not by works. This has nothing to do with the triumph of the last generation in relation to the transformation of character that God expects to accomplish in them perfectly, which differentiates them, among other things, from previous generations.

Félix's interpretation of Matthew 5:48 forces the context and lacks confirmation from the Spirit of Prophecy. "The apparent contradiction" that he finds in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy is not resolved in the way he proposes. In fact, I am not aware of any version that translates Matthew 5:48 as "mature," because if we understand that Jesus requires us to be "mature," does it mean that Jesus also meant that God is mature, implying that He went through a process of growth and maturity?

Another problem in Félix's study is that he presumes there are two standards of perfection in the writings of E. G. White. No, sir! The standard of perfection is always the same, which implies the perfection of Christ imparted to all generations, including the last one, and it means that salvation is by grace for all who accept it in every era. Félix translates *teleiōo*, "perfection," as "flawless," to say that according to E. G. White, the last generation "will be faithful and victorious, but not flawless." With this play on words in the translation, he thinks he can ignore E. G. White's statement that Christ will not come until "the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people" (COL 69). If what she said about the perfect reproduction of Christ's character referred to an "impeccable" reproduction according to Félix's concept of perfection, then she did not deny, as our friend claims, that the last generation will have the same impeccable character as Christ. Let us not camouflage the truth by playing with different definitions of terms.

Felix discusses the different types of sin found in the Bible to conclude that some sins can be overcome, but not all, simply because we have a fallen nature. According to him, this "makes it impossible for human beings to reach God's standard." But why then did God give us Christ and His Spirit? Isn't it to prevent us from being powerless in our attempt to reach God's standard? This reminds me of a tango (an Argentinian song), that says, "if I am like this, what can I do? While we haven't fully achieved it in the present moment, God intends to achieve it in the final generation through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit without measure and the crucible of the final test that will burn away all attachment to the world.

It is correct to say, with E. G. White, that the "channels of corruption in humanity" require the purifying blood of Christ. However, she also says that once the last generation of fallen beings is sealed, they will not sin, not even "in thought" like Christ, as the devil will have nothing in them as he did not have in Christ (GC 623). This means that the channels of corruption in humanity will have been purified by blood before the time of grace and by fire during the time of trouble, before the glorification at the second coming of Christ.

Another problem in our friend's study is considering the fallen human nature as sin. I agree with him. Even before Jacob and Esau were born, they fought within Rebecca's womb, which proves what we are made of. We are born in sin, not only with propensities to sin, and that is why Jesus needed to come free from the stain of sin inherited from the fallen children of Adam, to recreate us in His image, to transform us into "a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Therefore, we cannot assume that the 144,000 will retain some element of sin after being sealed, nor do they have to ask for forgiveness for their old nature.

Did any of you ask for forgiveness for Adam's sin? (Eze 18:20). Likewise, the last survivors of Christ's spiritual holy lineage will not have to ask God for forgiveness after the time of grace, for they have inherited a sinful nature prone to evil. That sinful nature will be refined as it passes through the furnace of affliction so that when Christ appears in the glory of His Father, it will perfectly reflect His image, and the sealed ones will be able to behold Him without incense or an intercessor to shield them. This must happen before the transformation of our bodies into the image of Christ's glorious body. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8).

Felix also refers to the Israelite worship, particularly the daily burnt offering, where an "atonement" was made (Lev 1:4). The atonement he understands from the burnt offering implies the human sinful nature. That is why the burnt offering was offered until the sinner

could resolve their specific sin through the sin and guilt offering. I agree with this interpretation. However, Felix wants to imply with this that it is impossible to overcome sin before the glorification in Christ's Second Coming, because of our sinful nature. He uses the fact that a burnt offering was still offered on the Day of Atonement even after the purification of the sanctuary was complete (Lev 16:24).

Felix fails to consider that the Israelite sacrificial system was repetitive year after year (Heb 10), unlike the priesthood of Christ. The burnt offering at the end of the Day of Atonement, as well as the purification of the outer altar on that day at the conclusion of the sanctuary purification ritual, is equivalent to the purification of that altar at its inauguration (Lev 8 and 9), which involved a new year of services. This does not occur in Christ's unique and non-repeatable service that concludes on the antitypical Day of Atonement, without starting another annual period of purifying services. He will come "without sin" or "apart from sin" to save those who eagerly await Him (Heb 9:28).

Felix quotes E. G. White, where she states that incense and blood were required to purify the sinner from human corruption, and that is why we need the only Intercessor we have to be accepted by God. But after the last generation is sealed and Christ ceases His intercession with blood and incense to come and gather His people, they must remain without being able to resort to incense, blood, or intercession to cleanse themselves of unconfessed sins. By openly disregarding the experience of the last generation, our friend concludes that "it is impossible for them to produce" complete perfection, a flawless righteousness "in our sinful state."

Felix's concept of perfection, that "perfect people in the biblical sense are still dependent on God's forgiveness," is a half-truth for two reasons. One is that once we have been forgiven, we are "at peace with God" (Rom 5:1), and we do not need to ask for forgiveness again for the forgiven sin because that implies a lack of faith in God's forgiveness (Heb 11:6). The other reason is that the final generation cannot be dependent on divine forgiveness since they will not have an intercessor after being sealed.

Another important aspect in Felix Cortez's study is the quote he uses from E. G. White to affirm that the sealed final generation will not have complete perfection. She states that "We cannot say, 'I am sinless,' till this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body" (*ST*, March 23, 1888). She also affirms that claiming to be equally perfect in character as Christ "is blasphemy."

That is correct. Even the last generation cannot boast of perfection until the translation. But Felix fails to mention other statements from E. G. White that I cited in my study about the vindication of God, where she says that we have to leave the assertion of our perfection with God. This means that we will never go out proclaiming ourselves to others as having reached the pinnacle of holiness (2 Cor 4:5). Only when the conflict ends "and then only will it be safe to claim that we are saved and sinless... Let the Lord proclaim the truth of your character" (*ST*, May 16, 1895).

It is evident that Felix Cortez is an Adventist evangelical, as he completely ignores the words "effort" and "divine-human cooperation" in the pursuit of perfection and holiness. This *evangelicalism* has infected all centers of Adventist theology in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and beyond, of course. The only time Felix uses the word "effort" is to warn that it can become a trap. But he never cites the many quotes from E. G. White that speak of the need for divine-human cooperation. Nor does he mention the need to row in unison with the oar of faith and the oar of works, which I cited in my study on the final vindication of God's character. For these people, the struggle between the flesh and the spirit seems not to be important in Christian experience. They believe that holiness and perfection automatically come as a magical result of forgiveness and that any effort implies perfectionism.

“Let us not be deceived by the oft-repeated assertion, ‘all you have to do is to believe.’ *Faith and works are two oars which we must use equally if we [would] press our way up the stream against the current of unbelief.* ‘Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone’ ... *By faith and good works* he keeps his spirituality strong and healthy, and his spiritual strength increases as he strives to work the works of God” (RH, June 11, 1901; WM 315).

In conclusion, let us say that Félix Cortez warns about the trap of perfectionism, but by not addressing the final vindication that God requires from the last generation, he falls in some way into the typical *defeatism trap* of evangelical Adventists or *evangelicalists*. The problem is that we cannot approach the topic of perfection by judging the final experience of the last generation based on the current condition of the people of God, which is the same or equivalent to what has been observed in previous generations from Adam until today. Hence, the need to distinguish between previous generations and the last generation without equating them, and without implying that God has two ways of saving human beings.