



THE DOCTRINE OF LAST GENERATION THEOLOGY FOR  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS: A DEFENSE

Armin Kritzinger

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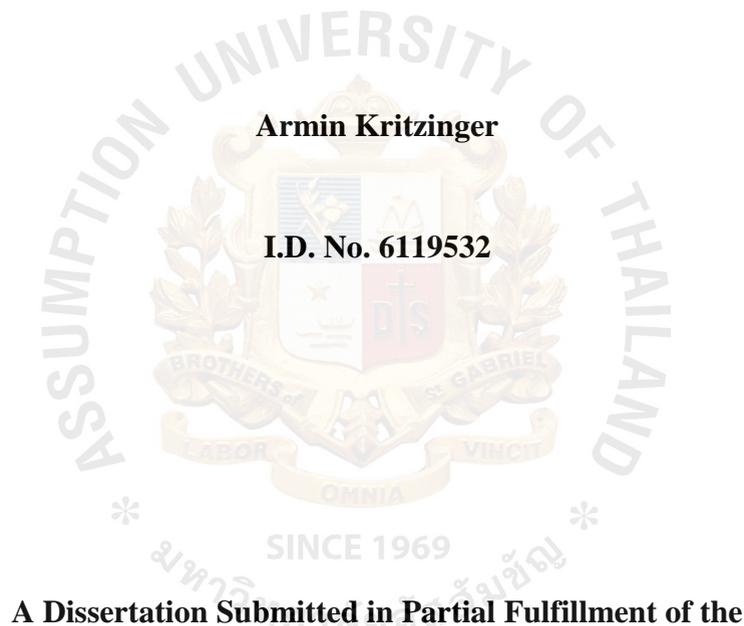
A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
In Philosophy & Religion  
Graduate School of Human Sciences  
ASSUMPTION UNIVERSITY OF THAILAND

2022

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**By:** ARMIN KRITZINGER

**Dissertation Advisor:** DR. MOHAMMAD MANZOOR MALIK

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**Accepted by the Graduate School of Human Sciences, Assumption University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy and Religion**

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## ABSTRACT

**I.D. No.: 6119532**

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This research has as its overall objective and purpose the goal of defending Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists. Since Last Generation Theology is a doctrine that is accepted by some Seventh-day Adventists and rejected by other Seventh-day Adventists, this research attempts to make new contributions in refuting arguments against Last Generation Theology.

In accordance with this plan, the research starts with a historical overview of understanding Last Generation Theology in the context of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church denomination. This historical overview covers the time from the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to the present time. It is shown in this research that many prominent Seventh-day Adventists throughout the history of the denomination believed that the last generation of Christians who will be alive when Christ returns will be perfectly obedient to all God's commandments. This means that they will be free from any sin and will reflect Christ's character fully to the world. Significant deviations from this theological thought inside the Seventh-day Adventist Church only started occurring in the 1950s and are more prominent in the 2010s.

The research then continues by looking at the major objections by Seventh-day Adventists to Last Generation Theology. Critics of Last Generation Theology, especially since 2018, are

united in arguing (1) that Last Generation Theology is not Bible-based but instead relies on a non-biblical source, (2) that Last Generation Theology teaches a form of legalism contrary to Seventh-day Adventist soteriology, (3) that humans are not necessary to vindicate God before the universe, and (4) that living a life completely free from sin is not possible before the second coming of Jesus.

This research relies on the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method to refute the objections of Last Generation Theology critics by using the Bible as a primary source and the writings of the Seventh-day Adventist co-founder, Ellen G. White, as a secondary source. It is shown through a historical-grammatical hermeneutical study of the Bible that the main concepts of Last Generation Theology is Bible-based and that other sources, such as the writings of Ellen G. White which have prophetic authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, serve as secondary sources. A study of Last Generation Theology's soteriology shows salvation by grace through faith in line with the official teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The example of Job in the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White point to God working through willing humans that will ultimately vindicate Him before the universe. Lastly, a historical-grammatical hermeneutical study of the Bible reveals that a life completely free from sin has always been possible to God's people. This will be their experience before Christ returns.

In the conclusion of this research a brief overview of the study is presented with special emphasis on the unique contributions of this thesis to the debate surrounding Last Generation Theology and how the thesis statement has been defended. Suggestions are made for further study and how the doctrine of Last Generation Theology should be dealt with in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Above all and everything else, I want to express my gratitude for my Heavenly Father who has given me this opportunity and equipped me with the necessary skills to make this dream a reality. I am thankful for the countless miracles that He has performed to help me overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties to achieve this goal. He has surrounded me with family, friends and teachers that have supported me more than I could ever have hoped for. I am forever indebted to His love and His grace in my life. I look forward to the rest of my life journey with Him.

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to my teachers, Dr. Warayuth Sriwarakuel, Dr. Kajornpat Tangyin, Dr. John T. Giordano, Dr. Shang-Wen Wang and especially Dr. Mohammad Manzoor Malik, who served as my advisor. They all provided me with constructive suggestions, patient guidance, valuable feedback and encouragement throughout this journey of writing this dissertation. I feel blessed that our paths have crossed in this world and thankful for the countless valuable conversations we have had.

I am thankful for my family who have encouraged me every step of the way. My parents have played a big role in who and what I am today because of the faith and principles that they have taught me since a child.

Lastly, I am thankful for the friends and staff at Assumption University in Thailand for a friendly community and all the guidance throughout the administrative process.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This research provides a defense of Last Generation Theology for Seventh-day Adventists in the light of the Bible and the writings of other Seventh-day Adventist pioneers. It is the view of this dissertation that Last Generation Theology is Bible-based and that Seventh-day Adventists can accept Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine. To accept Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine, a careful understanding and interpretation of what the Bible says about Last Generation Theology is necessary. The intention of this research is therefore to initiate a movement through multiple methodological checkpoints to secure a consistent understanding of what both the Bible and Seventh-day Adventist pioneers teach about Last Generation Theology. The major part of this process will be to refute the major objections to Last Generation Theology that exists within the Seventh-day Adventist Church denomination. The researcher attempts to show these arguments can be refuted, that Last Generation Theology is Bible-based and that this was the understanding of many Seventh-day Adventist pioneers.

#### **1.1. Background and Significance of the Study**

The recurrent theme for this research is the fundamental question of whether Last Generation Theology can be accepted by Seventh-day Adventists as a Bible-based doctrine. The word “Adventist” in the name “Seventh-day Adventist Church” refers to the second coming of

Jesus. It is a central pillar of the Seventh-day Adventist faith and thus forms part of the name. Those in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who support Last Generation Theology and those who are against it have different answers to the following question about the second coming of Jesus: “What will the characters of those faithful Christians be like who are alive at the second coming of Jesus Christ?” Two main answers have been given to answer this question. Some believe that the characters of faithful Christians will reach moral perfection, or sinless perfection, shortly before the second coming of Jesus Christ and that they will no longer sin. Others believe that faithful Christians at the second coming of Jesus Christ do not need to be morally perfect, or sinless, and that they can keep on sinning until the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Books have been written both for and against Last Generation Theology by Seventh-day Adventist scholars. Symposiums have been held both for and against Last Generation Theology. All of this shows that Seventh-day Adventists, on both sides of this issue, seem to take their ideas about Last Generation Theology very seriously. Last Generation Theology, even though lesser-known by those who are not familiar with the Seventh-day Adventist faith, is a very relevant discussion for the more than 21 million Seventh-day Adventist members worldwide (“Statistics”, 2021).

It is the view of this research that previous discussions on Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church have fallen short in the following four main ways:

(1) Due to little communication between those with opposing viewpoints, the arguments of the other side are often misunderstood or misrepresented.

(2) Discussions have focused a lot on the writings of Adventist pioneers and scholars, but not much on the Bible only. Since uninspired men are not seen as authoritative in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it becomes a case of “their word against my word”, instead of a “thus says the Lord”.

(3) Debates have centered around topics that are not necessarily central or key to reaching the conclusions of Last Generation Theology, like the nature of sin, the definition of justification and sanctification, and the nature of Christ. Some people who have had different views on these topics, but still came to the same conclusions about Last Generation Theology. Debates, therefore, need to be centered around the central ideas of Last Generation Theology that lead people to different conclusions.

(4) Not much has been written on the means to accomplish the goal of Last Generation Theology, which is sinless perfection in the lives of those faithful Christians alive at the second coming of Jesus Christ. Since the means to the goal are unclear for many, they start to wonder if the goal is even possible to be reached, especially if they try the wrong means and fail time after time.

After reading and researching both sides of the argument to understand both sides, and interpreting relevant Bible passages, this research plans to make the following contribution to the academic discussion of Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church:

(1) Focus on the Bible as the primary source to show the reality of sinless perfection as taught in Last Generation Theology with special emphasis on Biblical themes like the harvest theme found in Revelation 14.

(2) Avoid debate about topics that are not key to reaching the conclusions of Last Generation Theology and focus on the main differences that lead people to different conclusions about the

ultimate goal of Last Generation Theology, which is sinless perfection in the last generation when Christ returns.

(3) Place a greater focus on the means to accomplish sinless perfection as taught through the Scriptures, instead of just focusing on what should be accomplished.

## **1.2. Thesis Statement**

Last Generation Theology, with a strong emphasis on overcoming all sin through faith in the creative power of God's Word, is a doctrine that has its origins in the Bible, was supported by prominent Seventh-day Adventist pioneers and leaders, and should therefore be accepted by Seventh-day Adventist Christians as a Bible-based doctrine.

## **1.3. Research Questions**

It follows that the three main questions that this research will try to answer are the following:

1. How can Last Generation Theology be defined and understood in the context of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
2. What are the main arguments against Last Generation Theology that are used in an attempt to show why Last Generation Theology should not be accepted as a Bible-based doctrine by Seventh-day Adventist Christians?

3. How can the main arguments against Last Generation Theology be refuted so as to defend Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine that should be accepted by Seventh-day Adventist Christians?

#### **1.4. Research Objectives**

The following three general research objectives have been selected:

1. To define and understand Last Generation Theology in the context of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
2. To facilitate an understanding of the main arguments that are used against Last Generation Theology by scholars inside the Seventh-day Adventist Church that attempt to show why Last Generation Theology should not be accepted as a Bible-based doctrine by Seventh-day Adventist Christians.
3. To refute the main arguments against Last Generation Theology so to defend Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine that should be accepted by Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

#### **1.5. Preceding Relevant Research**

The preceding relevant research done on the topic of Last Generation Theology is important in the context of understanding the background and significance of this dissertation.

R. Adams (1994) wrote a book entitled *The Nature of Christ: Help for a church divided over perfection*. Since the nature of Christ is one of the topics that divide those who are for and those who are against Last Generation Theology, this book became popular in the

Seventh-day Adventist Church amongst those studying Last Generation Theology. It goes into a great amount of detail about minor aspects of Christ's nature, but with very little Biblical support for the arguments presented. Some Biblical texts about the topic are not even mentioned at all in the book. It falls short in showing how ~~people with different views on Christ's nature can still agree on sinless perfection in the last generation.~~

A. Alexe (2019) wrote an excellent article in The Compass Magazine called *Last Generation Theology: Historical Development*. It does an excellent job at highlighting the different Adventist pioneers that wrote on the topic of Last Generation Theology throughout the church's history. It does fall short in that the article is unable to go into more depth on what those different pioneers actually wrote about the major themes of Last Generation Theology. The scope of the article is also not to present Biblical arguments for Last Generation Theology.

Theologian, Renier Bruinsma (2018), wrote the book *In All Humility*, which is aimed at showing the flaws in Last Generation Theology. It is well loved by those who oppose Last Generation Theology. ~~He brings some good points about the definition of sin to the table,~~ but misrepresents Last Generation Theology authors when it comes to perfection and sinlessness.

Adventist historian, Herbert Douglass (2008) wrote *A Fork in the Road: Questions on Doctrine: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957* which is one of the best historical expositions of the background behind the book *Questions on Doctrine* that had a major impact on how Adventists started seeing certain key doctrine after 1957 and how that impacted what people in the church believed about Last Generation Theology. This book does not deal with Last Generation Theology directly, but with the underlying themes.

*God's Character and the Last Generation* (2018) was written by multiple Adventist scholars and edited by J. Moskala, the dean of the Adventist theological seminary, and J.C. Peckham. This book must be the most popular book in the Adventist Church against Last Generation Theology. Each other deals with a separate aspect of Last Generation Theology in their own chapters. There are ~~good points made about sin, and about Christ's nature~~, but unfortunately those who support Last Generation Theology are often misrepresented in this book and some of their main arguments are not dealt with in this book. The misrepresentations lead to strawman arguments about topics where the two opposing sides actually agree with each other.

Adventist preacher A.T. Jones (1905) wrote *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection* that deals specifically with how Christian perfection, especially in the last generation, fits perfectly into the sanctuary message that is found throughout Scripture. He provides very good Biblical arguments that perfection is possible, if not necessary, but does not provide Biblical arguments for the means to accomplish this character perfection.

Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick (2019) released his book *Cleanse and Close* which is a step-by-step explanation of all the key elements of Last Generation Theology. This is definitely the go-to book for newbies who want to gain the basic understanding of what Last Generation Theology is about. It is concise and clearly written. Unfortunately, it does not deal with common objections to Last Generation Theology and, like Jones' book, does not provide strong Scriptural arguments on how character perfection can be achieved by the Last Generation. He puts too strong an emphasis on his specific understanding of the nature of sin and the nature of Christ, and delves too deep into the specifics of justifications and sanctification.

Popular Adventist author **George Knight (2018)** released his book *End-Time Events and the Last Generation* which is also one of the top 21<sup>st</sup> century books in Adventism on why the last generation cannot reach sinless perfection. The book fails to explain the difference between mistakes, like a calculation mistake, and a character flaw, or sin. The reader can get the idea that temptation is also a sin, and that all mistakes are just grouped together instead of drawing the line between what is a moral issue and what is not. Knight's book, just like his other books, are easy to read and understand, but perhaps better suited for a surface reader and not for a theologian who wants to dig a bit deeper into these topics. Knight fails to deal directly with the main arguments of those who support Last Generation Theology and like other books against Last Generation Theology often misrepresents authors who support Last Generation Theology by arguing against positions that they do not hold.

Pastor **Kevin Paulson (2019)** wrote a series of articles in The Compass Magazine entitled *The Case for Last Generation Theology*. This series of articles are most likely the most in-depth, direct explanations of Last Generation Theology concepts. The articles provide excellent historical evidences for Last Generation Theology in the Adventist Church, but perhaps relies a bit too much on Ellen G. White quotations for support in certain concepts. The articles are also very detailed in explaining ~~sin, justification, sanctification and the nature of Christ, which is not really as crucial to a correct understanding of Last Generation Theology as many believe they are.~~ The articles, like other books that support Last Generation Theology, fail to explain the details on how sinless perfection is possible or can be accomplished by the last generation.

**Dennis Priebe (2011)** has a similar problem with his book *Real Gospel*. Although it is not as detailed in the historical aspects as the articles written by Paulson, the book is still

very detailed in explaining the exact definition of sin, justification, sanctification, nature of Christ, etc., but does not provide a clear, simple explanation on how sinless perfection is possible. It fails to explain the means to accomplish the goal, and this leads many to doubt whether the goal can actually be accomplished.

Former Biblical Research Director, **Angel Rodriguez** (2013) published his article entitled *Theology of the Last Generation* where he argues that Last Generation Theology is not a biblical concept but based on the writings of authors outside of the Scriptures. He actually provides some good historical evidence for the existence of Last Generation Theology in early Adventist circles, but fails to mention or answer the Biblical arguments that those make who support Last Generation Theology. There is a very strong focus on Christ throughout his article, which is very good, but it becomes unclear what the human's duty is in the process of salvation and more specifically sanctification.

There is an abundance of materials available on the topic of Last Generation Theology dating from very early 1800s to 2020s. The materials are almost equally divided between those who support Last Generation Theology and those who are against Last Generation Theology. A gap in the literature that needs to be filled is to (1) provide strong Biblical arguments for Last Generation Theology without relying heavily on authors outside of the Bible, (2) put a stronger emphasis on the means according to the Scripture to accomplish sinless perfection, and (3) answer common objections to Last Generation Theology and differentiate clearly between negotiable and non-negotiable aspects of Last Generation Theology that separate the two groups but that might not be necessary to agree upon.

## 1.6. Scope of the Research

Due to the specific religious nature of this research, the following scope will be implemented in this study:

1. Since this dissertation is a defense of Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine for Seventh-day Adventist Christians, this research will only consider Last Generation Theology concepts from the Bible and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Last Generation Theology concepts that might exist in other religious groups, denominations and/or material(s) are therefore outside the scope of this paper.
2. Even though Last Generation Theology includes many interesting aspects, such as the Bible-based understanding of when exactly justification and sanctification takes place in the salvation process, this research will focus on the main concept of Last Generation Theology, which is that a group of faithful believers can reach moral perfection, or sinless perfection, before the Second Advent of Christ. ~~Minor aspects~~ of Last Generation Theology that does not directly affect the main concept of Last Generation Theology will be left out of this study.
3. This research will focus on a Bible-based understanding of morality, sin, moral accountability, sinlessness, perfection, faith and God. It is outside the scope of this paper to include other religious, philosophical and secular understandings of these concepts, because this research is specifically interested in Bible-based definitions of these concepts.

## 1.7. Definitions of Terms

**God's law:** God's law is the standard of morality and also a revelation of God's character (Romans 2). God's law is not limited to the very words of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), but actually embraces the underlying principle behind the Ten Commandments, which is selfless love. Any indulged thought, any word and any action based only on selfless love is within the realm of obeying God's law, whereas any indulged thought, any word and any action based on any selfishness is lawlessness (Matthew 5). Since humans are not all-knowing, and God is believed to be all-knowing, it is necessary for God to teach humans what His law of selfless love is and looks like (Psalm 86:11).

**Sin:** The Bible gives only one definition of sin and that is that "sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Any indulged thought, any word and any action based on selfishness (a transgression of God's law) is a sin (Matthew 5). When a person knows what is right according to God's law and *willfully chooses* to disobey, or *willfully chooses* to remain ignorant about God's law, only then do they become personally guilty before God for sin (John 3:19-21). Personal choice and personal guilt go hand in hand when it comes to sin.

**Sins of Ignorance:** When a person indulges a thought, or speaks a word, or commits an action based on selfishness (which is a transgression of God's law), and they were *unwillingly ignorant* that this was sin, due to their *lack of knowledge*, then it is a sin of ignorance (Leviticus 5). Since God is all-knowing, only God will truly know when a sin is a sin of ignorance.

**Sinlessness:** When a person's indulged thoughts, words and actions are completely free of any sin (including sins of ignorance), then they have reached sinlessness. In order for a person to be sinless, it would require a complete knowledge of God's moral standard and a complete acceptance of that moral standard that will lead to complete obedience to that moral standard (Fortin, 2018, "Character development and perfection", par. 1).

**Perfection:** This is specifically talking about *moral perfection*. Moral perfection is understood to be a complete acceptance of God's moral standard *as the person has had access to it and understands it*, and this will lead to complete obedience of that moral standard (LaRondelle, 1971, p. 127). Although a sinless person is morally perfect, a morally perfect person is not necessarily sinless. A person might be morally perfect while still committing sins of ignorance. Only when all sins of ignorance have been revealed, and repented of, will a morally perfect person also be sinless.

**Repentance:** "Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it" (White, 1892, p.23). Repentance is more than confession in that it does not only acknowledge the sin, but also makes a decision to abandon that sin which will lead to a change of indulged thoughts, words and actions.

**Fallen/Sinful Human Nature:** This refers to a natural bent, or inclination, towards sin that exists in the passions, desires, and appetites of human nature since the fall of Adam and Eve, whom is believed to be the ancestors of the whole human race (Kirkpatrick, 2019, p. 142). All their descendants inherited from them, since conception, these same sinful inclinations.

**Last Generation:** A final group of faithful Christians who will be alive when Christ returns and will go through "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation" (Daniel 12:1). This group is also called the "hundred and forty and four thousand" (Revelation 7:4).

**Faith:** "Faith is the expecting the word of God itself to do what that word says, and depending upon that word itself to do what the word says" (Jones, 1899, p. 8). This is based on the Christian teaching that God's Word has creative power in itself to make itself true (Psalm 33:6, 9).

**Vindication:** To prove that someone or something is right, reasonable, or justified.

## 1.8. Research Methodology

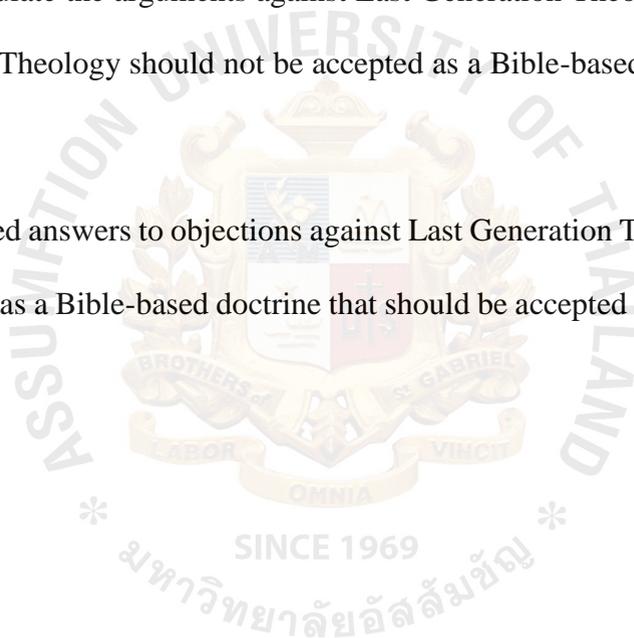
The research falls within the systematic area of religious studies and will follow a modified version of Osborne's comprehensive theory-to-practice model (Smith, 2013, p. 49). Osborne is comprehensive in his study of the doctrine as he takes the Scripture, individual, church and denomination into account. His method is based on a reconstruction of the exegete's pre-understanding of the doctrine and texts. He then gathers and exegetes all passages in their context that are relevant to the doctrine being studied. He then collates all passages into a biblical theology and traces the contextualization of the topic through the history of the church while studying competing models of the doctrine. Osborne, through his method, then allows for revising theological systems and working out implications for churches and individual Christians. This method is most appropriate for the research objectives of this research.

The amount of Biblical texts are limited to those who deal directly with the main concept of Last Generation Theology. For the textual study of these passages in the Scripture, the hermeneutical method that will be followed is the historical-grammatical method. "The **historical-grammatical hermeneutical method** is the only method accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church" (Hannon, 2021) and therefore it is essential to use this method as the study specifically relates to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Hannon (2021) defines the historical-grammatical method as follows: "Discover the biblical authors' original intended meaning in the text . . . based on an analysis of the grammatical style of a passage (with consideration to its cultural, historical, and literary context), [If] the author intended to convey an account of events that actually happened, then the text should be taken as representing history; passages should only be interpreted symbolically, poetically, or allegorically if to the best of our understanding, that is what the writer intended to convey to the original audience."

## 1.9. Expected Results

It is the intention of this study to contribute to research about Last Generation Theology by showing that it is a Bible-based doctrine that should be accepted by Seventh-day Adventist Christians. More specifically:

1. To provide an accurate definition and understanding of Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine that was taught in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
2. To accurately articulate the arguments against Last Generation Theology that attempt to show why Last Generation Theology should not be accepted as a Bible-based doctrine by Seventh-day Adventist Christians.
3. To provide improved answers to objections against Last Generation Theology so to defend Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine that should be accepted by Seventh-day Adventist Christians.



## CHAPTER II

### UNDERSTANDING LAST GENERATION THEOLOGY IN THE HISTORY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

#### 2.1. Introduction

A doctrine that is now known as Last Generation Theology has become a major theme of controversy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it continues its quest to define its mission and message to the world. This chapter will provide a general overview of the history of Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and also attempts to achieve an understanding of the key concepts of Last Generation Theology. The purpose of this chapter is not to show whether Last Generation Theology is biblical or not, but instead to point to the historical data concerning the existence of this doctrine inside the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Contrary to what some have taught (Adams, 1994, pp. 29-51), the doctrine that is now known as Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist church is not primarily due to the beliefs and teachings of M.L. Andreasen, A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner. These three men have made enormous contributions to both the development and expression of Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but this chapter will show that these three individuals cannot take the main credit for the presence of Last Generation Theology in Seventh-day Adventist thought. Further research shows that what is now known in modern times as Last Generation Theology is a doctrine that is deeply engrained in both the doctrinal and spiritual heritage of the Seventh-day Adventist church from its inception. This chapter will show that important aspects of

Last Generation Theology are present in the writings and teachings of other early Seventh-day Adventist pioneers such as Ellen White (White, 1900, p. 69), James White (White, 1857), Stephen Haskell (Haskell, 1856, p. 6), William Warren Prescott (Prescott, 1903, pp. 53-54) and Joseph Bates (Bates, 1858, p. 21). Adventist historian, Herbert Douglas, has well documented all the Adventist pioneers who taught Last Generation Theology through preaching and writing (Douglass, 2008, p. 19).

## **2.2. The Origin of the Seventh-day Adventist Church denomination**

It was during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Second Great Awakening took place in the United States. This was a revival movement in Christianity in North America (Ahlstrom, 1972, pp. 415-419). During that time, many believed that Bibles were not affordable for the average person and this led to the formation of many Bible Societies to try to solve this problem. With the Bible available to more people, it led to more people studying the Bible for themselves instead of just relying on what they heard being preached at their churches. This led to an interest in studying what the Bible had to say about prophecy and the second coming of Jesus Christ (Smith, 1957, pp 10-23). Many religious minority movements formed out of the mainstream Protestant churches of that time.

Some Protestant groups saw the arrest of Pope Pius VI in 1798 as a fulfillment of the 1260-year prophecy found in the book of Daniel chapter 9 (Ahlstrom, 1972, pp. 555-560). This kindled an interest in the 2300-year prophecy found in the previous chapter (Schwarz, 1979, “The Great Adventist Awakening”).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has its roots in the Millerite movement. Based on a specific interpretation of Daniel 8:14, William Miller preached that the second coming of Jesus would take place somewhere in 1843 or 1844. Some of his followers set the date on October 22, 1844, and faced bitter disappointment when Jesus did not return as they had hoped. This event is today known as The Great Disappointment. Some who formed a small group of the Millerite movement believed that the prophecy was misunderstood and had to be restudied (White, 1911, pp. 423-431). It was this group who later on formed the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with co-founder Joseph Bates the only one who had prominence in the Millerite movement. Those who later formed the Seventh-day Adventist Church are seen by some as an offshoot group of the Millerite movement (Bull, 2006, pp. 12-27). It was on May 21, 1863, that the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was formed and the Seventh-day Adventist Church became an official organization. The three co-founders were Joseph Bates, Ellen G. White and James White.

It is not correct to use the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Millerite movement interchangeably. Even though those who later formed the Seventh-day Adventist Church came out of the Millerite movement, these two religious movements are distinct, especially in doctrine. The doctrine about the seventh-day Sabbath, which is a fundamental teaching in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, was not widely accepted in the Millerite movement and only accepted by most Adventist believers after The Great Disappointment in 1844. Unlike the Millerite movement, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has also never placed a date for the second coming of Christ. Even though the Millerite movement did place a lot of emphasis on the second coming of Christ and being the last generation of people alive who will see Jesus return, Last Generation Theology, as it is taught by Seventh-day Adventist Church members, was not

part of the Millerite movement. The second coming of Christ, according to the Millerites, was because of the prophecy in Daniel 8:14 that was about to come to fulfillment and not because of character perfection in God's people.

### 2.3. The Origin of Last Generation Theology

Last Generation Theology is a theological doctrine, not a religious movement. In tracing the origin of Last Generation Theology, it is tracing the origin of a theological doctrine, and not tracing the origin of a religious movement. Two main factors make tracing the origin of Last Generation Theology a difficult task.

The first factor is that the term "Last Generation Theology" assigned to this theological doctrine is not found in the Bible. The reality that a theological term for a specific doctrine is not found in the Bible is not uncommon in Christian doctrine. The theological terms for other Christian doctrine, for example, the Incarnation, the Millennium, and the Trinity, can also not be found in the Bible. It is therefore necessary to investigate the concepts and ideas that are taught by these theological terms and try to find those concepts and ideas in the Bible. If the term "Last Generation Theology" was used in the Bible or by early church authors then perhaps it would be easier to trace the origins of this Christian doctrine. Since this term is in neither, the more complicated task is given of understanding the concepts and ideas of Last Generation Theology and comparing it to what we find in the Bible.

The second factor that makes tracing the origin of Last Generation Theology a difficult task is the opposing views about Last Generation Theology. Those who support the belief that Last Generation is a Bible-based doctrine believe that Last Generation Theology has its origins

in the Bible since it is Bible-based. If a doctrine is Bible-based then it has its basis, or its origins, in the Bible. On the other hand, those who oppose Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine obviously oppose the idea that Last Generation Theology has its origins in the Bible. Instead, amongst those who oppose Last Generation Theology it is the consensus that Last Generation Theology has its origins in the beliefs and teachings of Seventh-day Adventist Church pioneers, mainly M.L. Andreasen, A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner (Adams, 1994, pp. 29-51).

What a person therefore believes about the origin of Last Generation Theology will be determined by whether they believe Last Generation Theology is Bible-based or not. Either it is a Bible-based doctrine with its origin firmly rooted in the Bible, or it is a man-made doctrine with its origin in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Seventh-day Adventist Church movement.

#### **2.4. Ellen G. White**

Ellen White (1827-1915), one of the “100 Most Significant Americans of All Time”, was a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church along with James White and Joseph Bates (Frail, 2014). She claimed to have received more than 2,000 visions and dreams from God, and she also wrote more than 100,000 pages on topics with special significance to the Seventh-day Adventist Church (“Ellen G. White Biography”, 2022).

A great injustice would be done by failing to explain the proper role of Ellen White in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that unlike other human authors, the writings of Ellen White were inspired by God and those writings

“speak with prophetic authority since Ellen White met the criteria of the biblical tests of a prophet” (“What Adventists Believe about the Prophetic Gift”, 2022):

“The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested”

In her own words, Ellen White explained that the truths that God revealed to her did not contradict the Bible or add new truth, but that it served to simplify the great truths that God already gave in the Bible (White, 1882, p. 605). Her role was to point people back to the Bible, never to replace the Bible (“What Adventists Believe about the Prophetic Gift”, 2022). Even outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church her influence in Christianity was recognized by Walter Martin of the counter-cult Christian Research Institute and Kenneth Samples who considered Ellen White to be “a genuine Christian believer”, unlike her contemporaries Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, and Charles Taze Russel (Samples, 2011). This shows the important role that Ellen White played in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and the important role that her writings continue to play until this very day. It can, therefore, easily be argued that no one person has had so much influence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as Ellen White. If Last Generation Theology themes were truly prominent during the early years of the Seventh-day Adventist Church then one would expect to find such themes throughout the writings of Ellen White. It is important to understand that both those who support Last Generation Theology and those who oppose Last Generation Theology will claim that Ellen White’s theology aligns with their theological position

on these issues. It is therefore necessary to investigate her writings and examine the weight of the evidence.

Even though the term “Last Generation Theology” does not appear in the writings of Ellen White, it is claimed that the theological concepts of Last Generation Theology do in fact appear in the writings of Ellen White. It is chapter 3 of her book *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900) that contain statements that are most clearly linked to Last Generation Theology. The statement most often quoted by proponents of Last Generation reads, “When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own” (White, 1900, p. 69). This sounds exactly the same as the core theological concept that we find in Last Generation Theology. The core principle of Last Generation Theology is that “The final generation of Christians in sacred history will demonstrate what Jesus proved by standing without a Mediator following the end of human probation, living through God’s power the same sinless life Jesus lived, in the darkest and most difficult hour of the great controversy” (Paulson, 2019, “What is Last Generation Theology?”, par. 10). White continues to write in the very next paragraph that if every person who professed to be a Christian would actually live the life of Christ then “the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain” (White, 1900, p. 69). Similar to ideas held by A.T. Jones (Jones, 1905, p. 84), White wrote that the very object the Christian life is “the reproduction of Christ’s character in the believer” (White, 1900, p. 67). She also briefly mentions in that chapter that the means to accomplish this is by “constantly relying upon Christ as our personal Saviour” (White, 1900, p. 66). The majority of the Christian world agrees that the Bible teaches that Christ “committed no sin” (1 Peter 2:22, KJV). For those who support Last Generation Theology, the logical conclusion therefore is then that if the object of the

Christian life is to reproduce Christ's character in the believer, then the object of the Christian life must be to transform believers in such a way that they will no longer commit sin.

Last Generation Theology proponents claim that Ellen White shares their view on the nature of sin and guilt. Ellen White wrote that thoughts and feelings that are suggested by Satan only make us guilty of sin when we cherish them (White, 1964, p. 140). It is only when we tolerate an impure thought or cherish an unholy desire, that we commit sin (White, 1882, p. 177). This is the same idea that we find in James 1:14-15. This seems to agree with the theological position of Last Generation Theology that humans become guilty, lost and condemned through their sin by their own personal choices. Ellen White explained it plainly when she wrote, "Sin is the sinner's individual act. Before sin exists in the heart, the consent of the will must be given" (White, 1893, par. 10). How do sinners become sinners? White wrote, "Sinners are such by their own deliberate choice" (White, 2010, p. 151). This is a fundamental theological theme of Last Generation Theology – that we are not forced to be guilty, lost, condemned sinners, but that we are such by our own deliberate choices. It can then be argued that if God can enable us to make the right choices, then we do not need to remain as sinners. According to Ellen White, the only definition that we find in the Bible for sin is found in 1 John 3:4 which says that "sin is the transgression of the law" (White, 1911, p. 493). She also believed that it was our own sin that causes separation between us and God, and not the sin of someone else (White, 1958, p. 235).

Another Last Generation Theology theme that we find in the writings of Ellen White is that of the human nature of Christ. Those who support Last Generation Theology usually prescribe to a post-fall human nature of Christ. That means that when Jesus was born on our planet as a human, He took upon Himself human nature as it was after Adam and Eve chose to sin. Those who reject Last Generation Theology usually prescribe to a pre-fall view of the human nature of

Christ. That means that when Jesus was born on our planet as a human, He took upon Himself the perfect, sinless human nature that Adam and Eve possessed before they chose to sin. This theme seems to show up more during the later years of the ministry of Ellen White. She wrote that “Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity... He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life” (White, 1898, p. 112). The reason that she gives for Christ taking a fallen heredity was to share the same type of temptations and sorrows that we share, and also to set the example of a sinless life for us to follow. If Christ received the same human nature that we receive, and we are tempted from within by our human nature, then that would mean that Christ would also have been tempted from within by His own human nature that He took upon Himself during the incarnation. Ellen White is also very careful to point out that Jesus was always without sin, even though “He took upon Him our sinful nature” (White, 2010, p. 38). The fallen human nature is a source of temptation, but the temptation itself is not sin. It seems to be a prominent theme in the writings of Ellen White that the main reason why she stresses the fallen human nature of Christ, is to show that Christ experienced what we experience in our battle with sin, and therefore He can help us. White wrote that “Jesus is acquainted with all the weaknesses of human nature, and if entreated, will give strength to overcome the most powerful temptations” (White, 1870, p. 78). How is Jesus acquainted with all the weaknesses of human nature? White wrote, “He knows by experience what are the weaknesses of humanity, what are our wants, and where lies the strength of our temptations, for He was ‘in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin’ (Hebrews 4:15)” (White, 1905, p. 71). If Christ knew by experience where lies the strength of our temptations, and our “strongest temptations will come from within” (White, 1892, par. 4), then

Last Generation Theology proponents argue that Christ must then also have had temptations from within. It is crucial to note that even though Last Generation Theology teaches that Christ was tempted from within like us, He never sinned and was always victorious over every temptation. If Christ sinned in any way then He could not have been the example in living a sinless life. Ellen White believed that Jesus was the perfect example with no advantage over us in the battle over sin and explained it by writing, “Jesus, the world’s Redeemer, could only keep the commandments of God in the same way that humanity can keep them” (White, 1957, p. 929).

Another area of controversy in the writings of Ellen White is what she had to say about perfection and obedience, as this is also an important concept in Last Generation Theology. Ellen G. White wrote that “The law of God is the only true standard of moral perfection” (White, 1889, p. 80). Here it is important to point out the type of perfection that Last Generation Theology is talking about. Dennis Priebe, in his book *Real Gospel* (2011), discusses the different types of perfection and which type is referred to in Last Generation Theology. Last Generation Theology does not teach that absolute perfection is required of humans where they are expected to know everything about everything. Last Generation Theology also does not teach that nature perfection is required of humans where humans are expected to have a perfect human nature that is free from temptation and decay. Instead, Last Generation Theology places the emphasis on character perfection, also called moral perfection, that has specifically to do with our characters and sin. Ellen White believed that “The law of God is the only true standard of moral perfection” (White, 1889, p. 80) and Last Generation Theology teaches about God’s ability to make humans perfectly obedient to His law. Ellen White also believed that moral perfection is not something that is optional for the Christian believer, but that “Moral perfection is required of all” (White, 1900, p. 330). This leaves no place for sin in the life of the Christian believer. Eternal life is given to those

who obey the commandments of God (White, 1900, par. 4), and they must obey God's law in every particular (White, 1899, par. 8). Those who refuse "entire obedience to the law of God... will become embittered against God" (White, 1897, par 14). This clearly does not leave any place for sin in the life of the Christian believer. White argues that if anyone who practiced anything less than perfect obedience to God's law was given eternal life in heaven, then it would open the way for sin again and the whole happiness of the universe would be at stake (White, 1892, pp. 62-63). It might be very discouraging when one becomes aware of this incredibly high standard that God has in terms of obedience, but the good news is that Christ's grace can purify the sinner to such an extent that he or she will be fit for a holy heaven (White, 1964, p. 336). Ellen White believed that God's grace can make "it possible for man to keep God's holy law" (White, 1956, p. 1092). She taught that, "Men and women frame many excuses for their proneness to sin. Sin is represented as a necessity, an evil that cannot be overcome. But sin is not a necessity" (White, 1958, p. 219). Constantly throughout the writings of Ellen White she draws our attention away from our own inability to perfectly keep God's law and explains how through Christ's enabling power we can "remedy every defect of character" (White, 1955, p. 227). To put it beyond any doubt what she believed about perfection, she wrote "As the Son of Man was perfect in His life, so His followers are to be perfect in their life" (White, 1898, p. 311). This does not deal with mathematical ability or athletic performance, but with the moral character of the individual. It does not mean that individuals can make no errors in judgement or miscalculations, but it deals specifically with sin (Paulson, 2019, par. 5). According to Ellen White, Christ will remove the sins and corruption of His people during the final hours before He returns (White, 1868, p. 355).

Phrases like "character perfection" and "sinless living" are held by Last Generation Theology to mean the same thing (Paulson, 2019, par. 1). These words do not however imply that

people who have this experience have never sinned before (Paulson, 2019, par. 3). But because someone sinned in the past does not mean that they have to sin again in the future. White wrote, “There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God” (White, 1898, p. 311). She believed that complete obedience to God’s law is a standard that everyone can attain (White, 1896, p. 76) and nobody should say that they cannot attain it (White, 1901, par. 1). Throughout the writings of Ellen White it can be seen that she believed and taught that humans can attain sinless obedience through the power that God makes available to them. She wrote that one of the main reasons Christ came to our world was to show humans how they can “live sinless lives” (White, 1946, p. 385) and that believers in Christ can reach a position where their actions are “pure and sinless” (White, 1872, p. 82). A few years before her death she still believed that anyone who fully surrenders to God can experience “living without sin” (White, 1906, par. 4). Some might think that Ellen White believed that this experience of living without sin will only be achieved once God’s people are saved and living with Him in heaven where there is no sin, but she wrote that the “holiness that God’s word declares he must have before he can be saved” (White, 1911, p. 532). This perfect obedience is thus a part of salvation, and nothing something that comes afterwards as an appendix to salvation. Since God alone knows the heart (1 Kings 8:39, KJV), Ellen White repeatedly said that we cannot say “I am sinless” (White, 1980, p. 355) and that we should only say that once we meet Jesus face to face (White, 1980, p. 356). These two statements might cause some to think that we cannot have sinless obedience before Jesus returns, but looking at the other statements by Ellen White regarding this topic, it can be seen that this is not the case. She is simply warning God’s people not to boast of their holiness (White, 1980, p. 355). It is not *being* sinless that is forbidden by those statements, but *saying* we are sinless that is forbidden. Even though it can be seen by the numerous statements

from Ellen White that she believed in sinless living through the power of God, she avoided using the word “perfectionism”, as it described during her time a group of people who claimed themselves to be sinless, trusted their own abilities to overcome sin, and denied obedience as a condition for salvation (White, 1915, pp. 83-84).

What did Ellen White believe about the last generation before the second coming of Christ? She said that it was their sin that was keeping them in this world so long (White, 1958, p. 69). There was a “special work of purification” for those living on earth just before Christ returns where all their sin must be put away and “their characters must be purified from sin” (White, 1911, p. 425). Just like there was no sin in Jesus, that is the same condition those must be in shortly before the second coming of Christ (White, 1911, p. 623). Those who live in the time of trouble shortly before the second coming of Christ must obtain the victory “over every wrong word and action” (White, 1882, p. 71). When all sin has been overcome, and all iniquity has been put away, then God’s people are “in a condition to receive the finishing touch of immortality” (White, 2010, p. 44). The last generation of Christians will have an abundance of truth shining upon their pathway that other generations did not have before, and it calls for more accountability in following that truth (White, 1868, pp. 692-693). God has always demanded that His people have pure characters, but the final generation of people alive when Christ returns will have a special work of cleansing from sin that has not been ~~sin~~ in general until that time.



The historical data shows that Ellen White believed that the Bible teaches sinless obedience is possible for Christian believers through divine strength given by God. The same data also shows that Ellen White taught a special work of purification from sin for those who will be alive when Christ returns at the end of the world.

## 2.5. James White and Joseph Bates

It will also be interesting to note that apart from co-founder Ellen G. White, we also find Last Generation Theology concepts in both the teaching and literature of the other two co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, namely James White (White, 1857, par. 7) and Joseph Bates (Bates, 1858, p. 21). Even though they did not nearly write as much as Ellen White, Last Generation Theology themes can still be found scattered throughout their writings that we have. James White, who was also the husband of Ellen White, wrote that the believer in Christ has “the great Redeemer to help him in the work of forming a perfect character” (White, 1890, p. 187). James White saw the special work of the three angels that we find in the fourteenth chapter of Revelation “to perfect the church of Christ, preparatory to his second coming” (White, 1885, p. 4). This shows us that James White clearly believed that there is a special work that will take place amongst God’s faithful people before Christ will return. This perfecting of the church is the common theme that is shared with Last Generation Theology. James White also wrote that it was by following God’s counsels that He has given us in His Word, the Bible, that we will be able to develop perfect characters (White, 1868, p. 327). The third co-founder, Joseph Bates wrote that God requires “perfect obedience” of His divine law (Bates, 1846, p. 18).

Last Generation Theology themes are also found in the writings of other influential pioneers who lived during the same time, such as Stephen Haskell (Haskell, 1856, p. 6) and William Warren Prescott (Prescott, 1903, pp. 53-54). Prescott shared the same sentiments as E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones that Jesus had the post-fall nature of humanity with temptations from within, which is used to argue that we can then overcome just as Christ overcame (Whidden, 2018, “What is Last Generation Theology”). Even those who oppose Last Generation Theology are honest enough to admit that in the “writings of some of the early Adventist leaders – for example,

Joseph Bates, James White, Stephen Haskell, and D.T. Bourdeau – we find references to the main elements of Last Generation Theology” (Bruinsma, 2018, “Last Generation Theology: What it is and Where it Came From”).

The historical record shows that all three co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have Last Generation Theology themes scattered throughout their writings. Most notable, and arguable most important, is what can be found in the writings of Ellen White. Not only does the amount she wrote dwarf the writings of the other two co-founders in comparison, but also the special emphasis that the Seventh-day Adventist Church places on her role and authority in the church denomination.

## 2.6. Ellet Joseph Waggoner

Ellet Joseph Waggoner (1855-1916) was a friend and associate of Alonzo T. Jones who were both known as influencing the theological understandings in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, especially through their writings in church magazines and periodicals. Waggoner worked as a physician until 1883 when he became the assistant editor of one of the church’s official papers.

It was in 1884 when Waggoner met A.T. Jones, and Waggoner agreed with Jones on the humanity of Christ – a post-fall view. Waggoner believed that “Christ’s human nature inherited all the tendencies of sin and sinful passions common to all men” (McMahon, 1979, p. 104). Because Christ was able to overcome all sin, despite these tendencies to sin that we all have, Waggoner believed that Christian believers could reach a state of sinless perfection before the second coming of Christ (Whidden, 2008, pp. 207-208). E.J. Waggoner explained it rather clearly and simply in his article in *Present Truth* when he wrote:

Before the end comes, and at the time of the coming of Christ, there must be a people on earth, not necessarily large in proportion to the number of inhabitants of earth, but large enough to be known in all the earth, in whom “all the fullness of God” will be manifest even as it was in Jesus of Nazareth. God will demonstrate to the World that what He did with Jesus of Nazareth He can do with anyone who will yield to Him. (Waggoner, 1898, p. 774)

Waggoner was one of the first who added the concept of the vindication of God’s character that became central to Last Generation Theology. He said that “God has left the vindication of His character to His children” (Waggoner, 1897, p. 55). He did not say, however, that God becomes dependent upon human beings to vindicate Himself. Waggoner even wrote a whole book, *Christ and His Righteousness* (Waggoner, 1890), explaining how humans cannot be righteous on their own and they are the ones who depend on God for their righteousness. In Revelation 14 we find the 144,000 alive at the second coming of Christ. They are a special group of believers who “are without fault before the throne of God” (Revelation 14:5, KJV). Waggoner believed that the Bible teaches that the 144,000 are the living proof of God’s saving power and that they are God’s perfect representatives (Waggoner, 1898, p. 770). Waggoner saw that the problem was that Satan charged God that God is not able to take a human born in sin and bring them to perfection. To solve this problem, “The Lord wants all to understand that the new birth puts men in the same position that Christ occupied on this earth, and He will demonstrate this before all the world. The life of Jesus is to be perfectly reproduced in His followers, not for a day merely, but for all time and for eternity” (Waggoner, 1898, p. 774). Up until this time nobody really articulated the logical conclusion of Last Generation Theology as well as Waggoner did. In the early 1900s he made statements that made it clear how he understood the logical conclusion of Last Generation Theology. He wrote,

“But before probation ends, there will be a people so complete in him [God] that in spite of their sinful flesh, they will live sinless lives. They will live sinless lives in mortal flesh... Then the end will come” (Waggoner, 1901, p. 147).

An important aspect of Waggoner’s theology that is often overlooked is what he believed about God’s power and how God’s power can give people complete victory over sin. As a close friend of A.T. Jones, Waggoner also believed in the “creative power of God’s Word” (Waggoner, 1899, p. 132). Just like God’s creative power in His Word can bring the dead back to life, Waggoner believed that it can give spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead (Waggoner, 1891, p. 12). Nobody needs to wonder what Waggoner believed about where a sinner must get the power to live a life without sin. He explained that salvation only comes from the creative power that is found in God’s Word because God is the Creator of all things. Just like God created the world from nothing and upholds it by His Word, so He can create righteousness in the life of the person, where there is no righteousness, and uphold them by His Word (Waggoner, 1891, p. 266). When Waggoner says that it is God’s power that enables the sinner to overcome all sin, he means God’s creative power, because God’s “power is creative power” (Waggoner, 1893, p. 202). And where did Waggoner believe is that creative power of God found? He believed that it was found inside the very Word of God and that God’s Word is in fact a living thing (Waggoner, 1893, p. 202).

The historical data from the writings of E.J. Waggoner show that he supported the main theological themes of Last Generation Theology and influenced many contemporaries. He supported a post-fall view of Christ’s human nature, he supported the ability of the believers to live lives without sin, and he emphasized the role that the last generation will play in vindicating God’s character and law. This is why some given him the main credit for what is today known as Last Generation Theology even though he never used that term himself (Adams, 1994, pp. 29-51).

## 2.7. Alonzo Trevier Jones

Alonzo Trevier Jones (1850 – 1923) was a friend and associate of E.J. Waggoner who had a great impact on the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While Jones was serving in the United States Army, he spent his spare time exploring historical works. Comparing ancient history to prophecies he found in the Bible, Jones became a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1874 and wrote four lengthy books on Bible prophecy, namely *The Two Republics* (Jones, 1891), *The Great Empires of Prophecy* (Jones, 1898), *Ecclesiastical Empire* (Jones, 1901) and *The Empires of the Bible* (Jones, 1897). The name of A.T. Jones, along with E.J. Waggoner, could very well be among the ten best known theologians in Seventh-day Adventist history (Bruinsma, 2018).

One reason why Jones had so much influence in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is because his proclivity for writing led him to become the editor of an evangelistic magazine published by the church, called *Signs of the Times*. In fact, he was a co-editor with E.J. Waggoner and held this position until 1889. Undoubtedly, Jones' most significant contribution to the theology of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was his sermons on righteousness by faith during the Seventh-day Adventist General Conference session that took place in 1888 in Minneapolis, United States of America. Even though we have no written record of his sermons, we have his later writings, especially during the 1890s and 1900s.

There really exists no debate on whether A.T. Jones believed in the theological concepts that later became known as Last Generation Theology. In fact, even those who oppose Last Generation Theology will admit that M.L. Andreasen, who really coined the phrase “Last

**Generation Theology**”, was heavily influenced by A.T. Jones (Bruinsma, 2018). Another Adventist historian who opposes Last Generation Theology writes that A.T. Jones, together with E.J. Waggoner, were at the forefront of a new theological emphasis (Knight, 2018, p. 23).

This new theological emphasis was a renewed focus on righteousness by faith (Bruinsma, 2018). “Righteousness is right doing” (White, 1900, p. 312) and A.T. Jones taught that “Faith is the expecting the word of God itself to do what that word says, and depending upon that word itself to do what the word says” (Jones, 1899, p. 8). In other words, Jones believed that Christian believers can do what is right, can overcome sin, by depending on God’s Word itself to do the work that it said it will do. Jones believed that inside God’s Word there is creative power that will make true whatever those words said (Jones, 1893, p. 152). The Bible teaches that Christ is the Word of God (John 1:1-2, KJV), and since the creative power is inside God’s Word, the Christian believer thus finds “in Christ creative power to make him new” (Jones, 1901, p. 210). It is this creative power that is inside God’s word that is the means to “make men holy and to sanctify them” (Jones, 1893, p. 167). It can thus be argued that **more than any other proponent of Last Generation Theology, it was A.T. Jones who most clearly explained the means to accomplish what is expected of the Christian believer in perfecting Christian character.**

A.T. Jones wrote a whole book, *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection* (1905), which went into the very details found in Scripture on God’s plan to perfect the moral character of His people. He believed that in the Bible “it is perfectly plain that the perfection of the worshiper is that which is offered and which is attained in the priesthood and ministry of Christ” (Jones, 1905, p. 77). In fact, perfection of character is the very goal of the Christian and Christ works to enable the Christian to attain that goal. Jones explained, “Perfection, perfection of character, is the Christian goal-- perfection attained in human flesh in this world. Christ attained it in human flesh

in this world and thus made and consecrated a way by which, in Him, every believer can attain it. He, having attained it, has become our great High Priest, by His priestly ministry in the true sanctuary to enable us to attain (Jones, 1905, p. 84). In that same book, Jones emphasized his views on the human nature of Christ – that Christ had to deal with and overcome temptations just like us (Jones, 1906, pp. 45-48). Jones wrote about Christ that, “He was "made to be sin." And from the standpoint of the weakness and infirmity of the lost, He trusted in God, that He would deliver Him and save Him. Laden with the sins of the world; and tempted in all points like as we are, He hoped in God and trusted in God to save Him from all those sins and to keep Him from sinning” (Jones, 1905, p. 49). If humans have more trying temptations to endure than Christ had to endure, then Christ would in no way be able to help those who are tempted.

It is interesting to note, however, that Jones did not emphasize the last generation’s role in vindicating the character of God as much as did Waggoner and Andreasen (Evans, 2018, p. 158). Andreasen was exposed to Jones theology while Jones was Andreasen’s teacher at Battle Creek College in 1899 (Steinweg, 1979, pp. 50-52).

The historical data from the writings of A.T. Jones shows that he did support the major theological themes that today form Last Generation Theology, such as the post-fall nature of Christ and the “end time saints gaining the victory over sin” (Whidden, 2018, “What is Last Generation Theology”).

## 2.8. Milian Lauritz Andreasen

Milian Lauritz Andreasen (1876-1962) was originally from Denmark, but moved to the United States where he learned about the Seventh-day Adventist faith and decided to be baptized to

become a member of the denomination (Steinweg, 1979). Soon he was very active in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and later became a church worker, an administrator at various levels, a teacher at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary who wrote 15 books and his “theology dominated Adventism from the 1940s to the late 1950s” (Knight, 2000, p. 149).

Andreasen’s name is linked with Last Generation Theology perhaps more than any other Bible scholar to date. The influence of M.L. Andreasen on 20<sup>th</sup> century Seventh-day Adventist theology cannot be overestimated. He was very interested in Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (a key doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church) and this led to arguably the most important book by Andreasen called *The Sanctuary Service* (Andreasen, 1947). The final chapter, entitled “The Last Generation”, became his most notable contribution to Seventh-day Adventist theology. He basically coined the term by bringing together in one all the theological concepts that already existed in the theology of others mentioned before. A brief summary of the basic concepts underlying Andreasen’s thinking about the Last Generation has been explained by Adventist historian, George Knight, in the following way (Knight, 2000, pp. 144-147):

- (1) There is a parallel between the cleansing of the heavenly temple and the “soul temple”. This theology extended back to O.R.L Crosier and Joseph Bates in the 1840s, which teaches that we have a duty to cleanse the soul temple of sin while Christ is cleansing the heavenly temple of sin.
- (2) The last generation will live just before Christ’s second coming without a Mediator in the heavenly sanctuary to forgive sin.
- (3) He quotes the statement by Ellen White (White, 1900, p. 69): “Christ is waiting with a 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.”

- (4) The last generation of faithful Christians will vindicate God’s character before the universe. This is similar to the line of thought held by Waggoner and Jones.

Andreasen saw the final demonstration of what God can do in humanity as a future event. God would replicate what He did in the life of Christ in the life of every human who is willing, and that would usher in the end of the world as God’s ways have then been vindicated and Satan has been shown to be a liar. He used Romans 8:19 as scriptural support that the world is waiting for this magnificent demonstration of what God can do through humans (Andreasen, 1947, p. 299). According to Andreasen, moral perfection is non-negotiable when it comes to salvation because the Bible promises “a restoration of power for complete victory” over sin (Andreasen, 1947, p. 300). Complete victory over sin will be reality in the last generation of faithful Christians who are alive when Christ returns. Every temptation will come the way of the last generation but there will be nothing that can make them sin (Andreasen, 1947, pp. 302-303).

An important emphasis in the writings of Andreasen was focusing on the great controversy theme – the great battle between good and evil. Last Generation Theology is not so much about the individuals, but about the battle between God and Satan. Since the beginning of the war in heaven, Satan has accused God of being unjust in requiring obedience to a law that cannot be kept. Since Adam and Eve in paradise disobeyed God’s holy law, Satan won the trust of sinners. God has allowed Satan to demonstrate the fruits of his character for thousands of years for the universe to see, but finally God will demonstrate the truthfulness of His Word

and His ways to win back the trust of the universe and bring the great battle to an end (Andreasen, 1947, pp. 305-306). God will take the weakest of the weak of humans who are willing to be transformed, and will replicate in their lives the sinless life of Christ to show the whole universe that it is in fact possible to keep God's commandments which is the only way to have a peaceful, happy universe (Andreasen, 1947, pp. 303-306). Andreasen wrote that God's people "will reflect the image of God fully. They will have disproved Satan's accusation against the government of heaven" (Andreasen, 1947, p. 315). Reflecting God's image fully does not refer to outward resemblance, but to moral perfection of character. The last generation will stand "without fault before the throne of God... They will demonstrate that it is possible to live without sin" (Andreasen, 1947, p. 302).

Although Andreasen makes it very clear in that final chapter of his book that it is God that will do the work through His people, and he constantly warns against people relying on their own good works, he never goes into much detail on how exactly God will go about accomplishing this wonderful work in the lives of His people (Andreasen, 1947, 299). Perhaps it could be said that Andreasen goes into much detail about what God wants to do, but very little detail on how God wants to do it. This may play a role in the critique that his book has received.

Adventist historian, George Knight, admits that Andreasen's theology became the denomination's dominant (but not exclusive) theology of the 1940s and 1950s (Knight, 2018, p. 29). However, from the mid-1950s onward his theology would face continuous challenge.

During the lifetime of M.L. Andreasen, his two most foremost opponents inside the Seventh-day Adventist Church were Francis D. Nichol, who was the editor of the *Review and Herald* at the time, and also Le Roy E. Froom, who worked for the Ministerial Department of the General

Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. They believed that the atonement was finished at the cross, but Andreasen differed with them regarding the atonement. He believed that there were three phases of the atonement: (1) the perfect life of Christ, (2) the death of Christ on the cross, and (3) the cleansing of the sanctuary and perfecting of the Christian believers on earth before the second coming of Christ (Andreasen, 1948, p. 59). Froom and Nichol rejected the third part as explained by Andreasen, and this could clearly be seen in their book *Questions on Doctrine*, and Andreasen's dislike of the book following its publication (Froom, 1957). It was on topics such as the atonement, the nature of sin, and the human nature of Christ where *Questions on Doctrine* taught differently than Andreasen and undermined what he taught about Last Generation Theology.

From the writings of M.L. Andreasen it can clearly be seen that he taught and believed in Last Generation Theology. During the 1940s and 1950s his theology was the dominant theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These facts are well known and shared by both those who support Last Generation Theology and those who oppose it (Knight, 2018, p. 29).

## 2.9. The 1950s onwards

*Questions on Doctrine* (1957), that gave different views on the nature of Christ and the atonement as was taught by those who believed in Last Generation Theology, was seen by many as a “sellout by the Adventist leadership to the evangelicals and as a betrayal of historic Adventism” (Knight, 2000, p. 167). But Last Generation Theology did not die after the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*.

**Robert Pierson** (1911-1989), who served as president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for 12 years, **was a strong advocate of Last Generation Theology** and wrote, “God’s last-generation people are to reveal the character of Jesus to the world” (Pierson, 1975, p. 243). He believed that the previous administration of the church allowed error to creep in and called members back to live victorious lives for God (Bruinsma, 2016, pp. 48-50). Another Seventh-day Adventist General Conference president also made Last Generation Theology one of the main themes of his Christian ministry (Branson, 1950, pp.155-161). Seventh-day Adventist scholar, Renier Bruinsma, argues that there “is reason to think that the current president of the Adventist denomination also leans in this direction” (Bruinsma, 2018, “Last Generation Theology: What it is and Where it Came From”).

**Herbert Douglass** (1927-2014) **freely defended Last Generation Theology** when he was the associate editor of what later became known as the *Adventist Review*. It was interesting that Douglass’ views were very similar to that of M.L. Andreasen even though he did not read any of Andreasen’s work at that time (Bruinsma, 2018, “Last Generation Theology: What it is and Where it Came From”). Apart from being a prolific author, he was also an educational leader. In fact, Herbert Douglass has well documented all the Adventist pioneers who taught Last Generation Theology through preaching and writing (Douglass, 2008, p. 19). Some of his other books that focused on Last Generation Theology themes were *Why Jesus Waits: How the Sanctuary Message Explains the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (1987), *Opportunity of the Century and How Seventh-day Adventists Missed It* (2006), and *A Fork in the Road: Questions on Doctrine: The Historic Adventist Divide of 1957* (2008).

**C. Mervyn Maxwell** worked together with Herbert Douglass on the book *Perfection: The Impossible Possibility* (1975) which showed that Maxwell **shared the same Last Generation**

Theology sentiments as Douglass although he would often take a different approach to the topic. (Douglass, 1975, p. 149-196). Maxwell was not on the outskirts of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but he was a professor at Andrews University Theological Seminary.

The two Standish brothers, Russel R. Standish and Colin D. Standish, both preached victory over sin and that God's people will vindicate God's character by showing that it is possible for fallen man to obey God's law when God provides the power (Standish & Standish, 1980, p. 123).

Adventist scholar, Renier Bruinsma, also links a number of ministries with Last Generation Theology that have connections with the Adventist Church, including "ASI... GYC... Amazing Facts, and the radio and television organization 3ABN" (Bruinsma, 2018, "Last Generation Theology: What it is and Where it Came From").

Pastor Dennis Priebe, who was a teacher himself before in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote a book called *Real Gospel* (2011) where Last Generation Theology is explained according to his understanding. Priebe is also a good friend of Pastor Kevin Paulson, who is employed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and has written a book himself on Last Generation Theology called *What is Last Generation Theology* (2011). Priebe and Paulson, together with Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick, who wrote *Cleanse and Close: Last Generation Theology in 14 Points* (2005), are listed by those who reject Last Generation Theology as the most "recent influential advocates of Last Generation Theology" (Bruinsma, 2018, "Last Generation Theology: What it is and Where it Came From").

The historical data shows that even after the 1950s, when great opposition to Last Generation Theology started to gain appeal, there are still many influential Seventh-day

Adventist leaders and employees who hold fast to the theological themes of Last Generation Theology. It is not a doctrine that exists on the fringe of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as some might believe.

## 2.10. Conclusion

When taking all of the above mentioned history into account, it should come as no surprise that when Anglican scholar, Geoffrey Paxton, surveyed more than one hundred years of Seventh-day Adventist materials, he came to the following conclusion in his book *The Shaking of Adventism* (Paxton, 1977, p. 114): “The doctrine of the perfecting of the final generation stands near the heart of Adventist theology”.

This chapter has shown the amount of prominent Seventh-day Adventist pioneers that have based their understanding of Last Generation Theology on their understanding of the Bible. These pioneers thus understood Last Generation Theology to be a Bible-based doctrine. It is, however, important to understand that Last Generation Theology is neither biblical nor unbiblical because of the number of adherents that it has at any point in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ellen White wrote, “We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves” (White, 1892, p. 89). What can however be shown from the evidence that has been presented is that Last Generation Theology cannot be pushed to the side of Seventh-day Adventist historical thought, as if it belonged on the margins of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by only a few people. The historical evidence shown in this chapter should be sufficient to prove not only the presence but perhaps even the dominance of Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to the 1950s.

By looking at what the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers mentioned in this chapter wrote and taught about the doctrine of Last Generation Theology, it is possible to understand what is meant with this theological construct. Last Generation Theology can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Humans are guilty sinners, lost and condemned, when they choose to sin. Sin, or immorality, is transgression of God's laws and unbelief in His Words.
- (2) Christians can follow Christ's example to live lives free from sin by relying on the same power that enabled Christ to live a life free of sin.
- (3) When a Christian is fully committed to all of God's Words that they know, then they are morally perfect, and this is required of every Christian believer. When all sin has been revealed and overcome in the life of a Christian, then they are not only morally perfect, but also sinless.
- (4) The central issue in the great battle between God and Satan is the accusation made by Satan that God's law cannot be kept - that humans cannot be sinless.
- (5) The final generation of Christians, during the most difficult time of human history, will live the same sinless life that Jesus lived, so vindicate God's character from the charges of Satan, and thus bring the battle between good and evil to an end.

After understanding the place of Last Generation Theology in the literature of Seventh-day Adventist pioneers and understanding the main theological aspects of Last Generation Theology, it is necessary to investigate the main arguments against Last Generation Theology that are used to deny it as a Bible-based doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists.

## CHAPTER III

### THE MAJOR OBJECTIONS AGAINST LAST GENERATION THEOLOGY IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

#### 3.1 Introduction

A doctrine that is now known as Last Generation Theology has become a major theme of controversy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it continues its quest to define its mission and message to the world. After understanding Last Generation Theology in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is also necessary to correctly understand the major objections against Last Generation Theology. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a general overview of the major objections against Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Significant time and resources have spent by those who object to Last Generation Theology to point out “why LGT should not be accepted by Seventh-day Adventists” (Alexe, 2019, par. 5). This shows that it is believed by some that the “logical implications” of Last Generation Theology is not helpful in teaching people about Christianity and salvation, and might in fact be harmful (Alexe, 2019, par. 5). One Seventh-day Adventist pastor claims that “LGT has distorted” people’s understanding of the vindication of God and the perfection of Christian character (Torres, 2019, par. 16). The Adventist theologian, Renier Bruinsma, claims that Last Generation Theology “has a direct bearing on how we understand and experience our salvation” (Bruinsma, 2018, “It

matters”). It can definitely be argued that **the three most important books in the last 50 years against Last Generation Theology** are:

1. ***In All Humility: Saying NO to Last Generation Theology*** (2018) by Renier Bruinsma.
2. ***End-Time Events and the Last Generation*** (2018) by George Knight
3. ***God’s Character and the Last Generation*** (2018) by Andrew University

Interestingly, **all three of these academic books were published in 2018**. Before 2018, there were no major, well-known books citing or presenting arguments against Last Generation Theology, even though there were some short articles that already existed, like *Theology of the Last Generation* (Rodriguez, 2013) in the *Adventist Review*. Seventh-day Adventist pastors who reject Last Generation Theology have called these three books excellent resources for “exposing and rejecting the tenets” of Last Generation Theology (Torries, 2019, par. 1). This chapter will therefore look at some of the major objections to Last Generation Theology that we find in these three academic books by Seventh-day Adventist scholars, and also other published articles.

### **3.2 Objections to Last Generation Theology in relation to the Bible and the writings of**

#### **Ellen G. White**

R.C. Sproul explains in his book, *Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Position on the Bible* (2009), that the formal principle of the Protestant Reformation is known as *Sola Scriptura*, which means “by scripture alone”. This Christian theological concept places the Bible as the only infallible source of authority for Christians in regards to their faith and practice. This does not mean that every truth of every kind can be found in the Bible, but it means that the truth that is

necessary for the spiritual life is taught in the Bible. Above the words of men, the Bible is called “a more sure word” (2 Peter 1:19, KJV). This concept found in many Protestant Christian denominations stand in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church’s teachings that also rely on “the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils” (White, 1911, p. 595). Part of the Protestant Reformation was the protesting against the Roman Catholic use of tradition in establishing doctrine (Flinn, 2007, pp. 431-433). The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Protestant Christian denomination that “maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines” (White, 1911, p. 595). According to the *Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2022), they “accept the Bible as their only creed” and uphold “the protestant conviction of *Sola Scriptura*”. This would explain why Seventh-day Adventists reject doctrines that they believe from their personal study are not based on the Bible. It is well known in Christian circles that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has rejected some popular Christian doctrines that are held by many, if not most, Christian denominations. These include doctrines such as Sunday sacredness, the immortality of the soul, a forever-burning hell, a millennium of Christ’s reign on earth and a secret rapture. In short, any doctrine that is either (1) not Bible-based, or (2) based purely on the writings of a non-biblical author, cannot be accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an official doctrine.

### **3.2.1 Last Generation Theology is not Bible-based**

A major objection to Last Generation Theology is that the doctrine is not Bible-based. If this can be shown to be true, then it is indeed understandable why Seventh-day Adventists would not accept Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine. The Adventist theologian, Renier Bruinsma, writes that Last Generation Theology is based on a selective reading of some Bible

texts (Bruinsma, 2018, “Caution”) He therefore acknowledges that Last Generation Theology supporters do use Bible verses to try to support their theological theories, but Bruinsma argues that looking at all the theological material in the Bible as a whole will lead to a different conclusion than the one presented by Last Generation Theology teachers. Bruinsma also acknowledges that even though the Seventh-day Adventist church claims that their beliefs are based on the Bible, most doctrinal discussions rely heavily on statements that were written by other authors, such as by Seventh-day Adventist co-founder Ellen White. This is not because the church’s doctrines are not Bible-based, in his opinion, but because people resort to other authors when they are unable to prove their idea from the Bible only. Bruinsma argues that the Bible is not the basis of Last Generation Theology, and that the teachers of this doctrine would not be able to defend their theological ideas from the Bible only (Bruinsma, 2018, “Caution”). Bruinsma continues to argue this point in that same chapter by stating that it is worrying that Last Generation Theology supporters rely on so much support from a non-biblical source, and that the supports of Last Generation Theology “find it difficult to make a convincing case by just relying in the Bible” (Bruinsma, 2018, “Caution”). A main objection of Bruinsma to Last Generation Theology can thus be summarized as follows: When looking at all the relevant material in the Bible, Last Generation Theology lacks Biblical support.

The Adventist historian, George Knight, makes a very similar argument to that of Bruinsma in his book *End-Time Events and the Last Generation* (2018). He believes that the problem is that many theological theories rely on the ideas of theologians when it is the Bible that must be the ultimate authority (Knight, 2018, “Closing Thoughts”). Seventh-day Adventists should not be formulating doctrines based on the theological theories of sources outside the Biblical canon. Knight makes the argument that we should not try to interpret and understand

Bible passages by following non-biblical authors' explanations, but we should allow the Bible to explain itself by using appropriate hermeneutical methods (Knight, 2019, p. 15). George Knight, who claimed to at first support Last Generation Theology, later abandoned Last Generation Theology as he believes it does not align with the teachings of the Bible (Knight, 2018, "Guidelines for Reading"). Knight believes that the Bible explains certain concepts, like "perfection" and "sinlessness", in a different way than the way it is portrayed by those who support Last Generation Theology (Knight, 2018, "Perfection and sinlessness"). This indicates that Knight believes that Last Generation Theology is not true to the Biblical text and is most likely based on a series of misunderstandings of the Biblical teaching about certain key terms and phrases found in Last Generation Theology. A main objection of George Knight to Last Generation Theology can thus be summarized as follows: Last Generation Theology concepts cannot be found in the Bible.

It is important to note that a word search in the Bible (KJV) of important Last Generation Theology words and phrases, such as "sinless perfection", "last generation", "sinless", "sinful human nature" and "sinlessness" returns no results. It means that these words and phrases do not appear in the Bible at all. Instead, these words and phrases are used by authors outside of the Bible to explain certain concepts that those authors believe exist in the Bible. That does not necessary mean that these ideas are wrong, but it does mean that we need to understand what the authors mean with these words and those meanings should be compared with the Bible in order to know whether the concepts behind those words and phrases are Bible-based. Those who argue that Last Generation Theology is not Bible-based, may therefore claim that certain prominent words and phrases used by Last Generation Theology supporters are not find in the Bible, and this would be factually correct. It is argued that it is reasonable for a person to expect that if Last Generation

Theology is a Bible-based doctrine of great importance, as its supporters make it out to be, then the most important phrases and words that are used in Last Generation Theology should be found in the Bible. It is much easier to search for a word in the Bible, than to search for an idea, since theological ideas and concepts also depend on interpretation and hermeneutics.

Perhaps the book that goes into the most detail to argue point-by-point against Last Generation Theology is *God's Character and the Last Generation* (2018) produced by Andrews University. Andrews University, located in Michigan, United States of America, is the flagship university and theological training institute of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In chapter 2 of *God's Character and the Last Generation* (2018), which is entitled "What Is Last Generation Theology?", Woodrow Whidden explains that the book will look at the arguments of those who support Last Generation Theology, and also the arguments of those who oppose Last Generation Theology, and will then establish who has the best evidence from (1) the Bible, (2) the longer Christian tradition, and (3) the writings of Ellen G. White. Since the entire book then continues to take a clear stance against Last Generation Theology, it can clearly be seen that the theological scholars who contributed to the material of the book believe that the best evidence from the Bible, Christian tradition and the writings of Ellen G. White favor the position that opposes Last Generation Theology and not the other position that supports Last Generation Theology.

**Adelina Alexe**, a systematic theology scholar, wrote a 13-part series on Last Generation Theology in *The Compass Magazine* (2019) where she **argues that this doctrine cannot be founded in or supported by the Bible** (Alexe, 2019, par. 27). She specifically highlights her issue with the Last Generation Theology idea that humans can vindicate the character of God during the end times. She argues that the Biblical teaching is that God vindicates Himself through what He does.

Ranko Stefanovic, who specializes in the book of Revelation at Andrews University, comments on the passage in Revelation that describes the final generation as “without fault” (Revelation 14:5, KJV) by writing that “the blamelessness of the 144,000 does not refer to an absolute, sinless perfection, but rather it refers to their fidelity and total commitment to Christ” (Stefanovic, 2018, “The characteristics of the 144,000”). He notes in the same chapter that the Greek word (*amōmos*) used in Revelation 14:5 can be translated as “blameless”, which does describe Christ (Hebrews 9:14, KJV), but it is important to note that this is a standard word used to describe faithful people in the Bible, like Abraham (Genesis 17:1) and Job (Job 1:1), who already died and were not part of the Last Generation at Christ’s second coming. In the next paragraph of that same chapter Stefanovic notes that Bible verses that are used to teach sinless perfection in the Last Generation, such as 2 Peter 3:14 that mentions being “without spot, and blameless”, actually show that this characteristic even applied to people two thousand years ago and not just to the so called Last Generation. He further clarifies this point that there are not two different standards for salvation. He specifically writes that from the Biblical point of view the “last generation is not a group of “super saints” who will reach a level of holiness that was not attainable by other people of God” (Stefanovic, 2018, “The characteristics of the 144,000”). Stefanovic thus calls on Last Generation Theology proponents to take another look at their understanding about “perfection”, “being without fault” and “sinlessness” from a Biblical point of view.

The arguments by these scholars show that opponents of Last Generation Theology believe that there is a lack of Biblical support for the main theological concepts of Last Generation Theology, and calls on proponents of Last Generation Theology to clearly explain the main theological concepts of Last Generation Theology by using relevant Bible passages.

### 3.2.2 Last Generation Theology is based on the writings of Ellen G. White

If Last Generation Theology is truly not Bible-based, then one might wonder where this doctrine finds its origins. Those who argue that it is not Bible-based, teach that this doctrine heavily relies on the writings of the Seventh-day Adventist co-founder Ellen G. White. If this can be shown to be true, then it is indeed understandable why Seventh-day Adventists would not accept Last Generation Theology, especially not as a Bible-based doctrine.

The Adventist theologian, Renier Bruinsma, writes that he has observed that “any Adventist discussion about Last Generation Theology cannot avoid mentioning some Ellen White statements” (Bruinsma, 2018, “Caution”). An example of this would be the articles written by the prominent modern day supporter of Last Generation Theology, Pastor Kevin Paulson, entitled *The Case for Last Generation Theology* (2019). In the same chapter of Bruinsma’s book, he argues that Last Generation Theology is based on a selective reading of statements by Ellen White. Bruinsma also mentions that even though the Seventh-day Adventist church claims that their beliefs are based on the Bible, most doctrinal discussions rely heavily on statements that were written by Ellen White. This is not because the church’s doctrines are not Bible-based, in his opinion, but because of a misuse of the writings of Ellen G. White when people are unable to prove their idea from the Bible only. In fact, in regards to Last Generation Theology, Bruinsma argues that many of Ellen White’s statements are “at the very basis of Last Generation Theology” (Bruinsma, 2018, “Caution”). This points to the idea that without the writings of Ellen White, Last Generation Theology teachers would not be able to defend their theological ideas from the Bible only. Bruinsma continues to argue in that same chapter that it is worrying that Last Generation Theology supporters rely on so much support from a non-biblical source (Bruinsma, 2018,

“Caution”). A main objection by Bruinsma to Last Generation Theology can thus be summarized as follow: Last Generation Theology relies heavily on the writings of a non-Biblical source – the writings of Ellen G. White – and this is inconsistent with how Seventh-day Adventists formulate their doctrines.

It is also important to note that this does not mean that Bruinsma supports the idea that Ellen G. White’s writings do support Last Generation Theology, but he simply argues that her writings are used by the supports of Last Generation Theology to support the doctrine. He even provides arguments where he believes that Ellen G. White’s writings do not in fact support Last Generation Theology. When studying the writings of Ellen G. White, Bruinsma is of the opinion that we “may find some contradictions and may simply have to conclude that Ellen White was not always totally consistent in what she said and wrote” (Bruinsma, 2018, “Caution”). From this statement one may conclude that Bruinsma believes that Ellen White has some statements that seem to support Last Generation Theology and some statements that seem to contradict Last Generation Theology.

The Adventist historian, George Knight, makes a very similar argument to that of Bruinsma in his book *End-Time Events and the Last Generation* (2018). He believes that the problem is that many theological theories rely on the ideas of non-biblical authors (Knight, 2018, “Closing Thoughts”). Seventh-day Adventists should not be formulating doctrines based on the theological theories of sources outside the Biblical canon. Regarding M.L. Andreasen’s chapter on the Last Generation in his book *The Sanctuary Service* (1947), George Knights writes that “Andreasen’s chapter indicates an extremely heavy reliance upon his understanding of the thought of Ellen White even though he usually does not directly quote her” (Knight, 2018, “The Rise of M.L. Andreasen and Last Generation Theology”). Knight’s understanding and Andreasen’s

understanding of Ellen White's theological thoughts are different and that is also one reason why they arrive at different conclusions about what Ellen White believed about concepts we find in Last Generation Theology. Knight makes the argument that we should not try to interpret and understand Bible passages by only looking at what Ellen White wrote about that passage, but we should allow the Bible to explain itself by using appropriate hermeneutical methods (Knight, 2019, p. 15). Knight believes that this view is consistent with the view that was held even by Ellen White herself. Knight's study of the writings of Ellen White has led him to believe that "Ellen White disapproved the usage of her writings to settle theological issues" (Knight, 2018, p. 105). George Knight claims to be an ex-supporter of Last Generation Theology, especially as it relates to his early Adventist years, but later abandoned Last Generation Theology as he believes it does not align with the teachings of the Bible or the writings of Ellen G. White (Knight, 2018, "Guidelines for Reading"). A major objection to Last Generation Theology by George Knight can thus be summarized as follows: Last Generation Theology supporters, like Andreasen, rely heavily on the writings of Ellen G. White.

In chapter 2 of the book *God's Character and the Last Generation* (2018), produced by Andrews University, Woodrow Whidden explains that the book will look at the arguments of those who support Last Generation Theology, including the writings of Ellen G. White. Since the entire book then continues to take a clear stance against Last Generation Theology, it can clearly be seen that the theological scholars who contributed to the material of the book believe that the best evidence from the writings of Ellen G. White favor the position that opposes Last Generation Theology, even though those who support Last Generation Theology heavily rely on the writings of Ellen G. White.

Seventh-day Adventist pastor, Marcos Torres, also argues that Last Generation Theology proponents rely too heavily on their interpretations of Ellen White's writings and this even leads to a judgmental picture of her writings where many start to completely abandon her writings (Torres, 2019, par. 9). Adelina Alexe, a systematic theology scholar, wrote a 13-part series on Last Generation Theology in *The Compass Magazine* (2019) where she also notes the heavy reliance of Last Generation Theology supporters on the writings of Ellen White. Alexe mentions that these passages in Ellen White's writings might appear to support Last Generation Theology, but these statements, in their correct context, actually harmonize with the position of those who oppose Last Generation Theology (Alexe, 2019, par. 27). In the same series of articles, Alexe states that Ellen White's views of the plan of salvation could be erroneous since her specific role makes her writings "highly valuable, but not infallible."

This argument does not mean that those who are worried about the amount of Ellen White writings used to support Last Generation Theology do not value her writings. Instead, it shows that they do not believe that her writings should be used as a basis to teach a specific doctrine, since she is a non-biblical source. It can be argued that they disagree with Last Generation Theology supporters on the role of the writings of Ellen G. White in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Ellen White's role and authority is a continuing discussion in the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church (Paulson, 2019, par. 16). Ellen White herself wrote that the "Bible is its own expositor" instead of thinking that we "must consult commentaries on the Scriptures in order to understand the meaning" (White, 1923, pp. 187-188). She also said that the Bible is the great light of truth and that her writings are only a lesser light (White, 1980, p. 30). In regards to the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White, Roy F. Graham wrote an article called *How the Gift of Prophecy Relates to God's Word* (1982) where he noted that it "is important to discern the

distinctive function of both” (Graham, 1982, pp. 16-18). Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholar, Pastor Dennis Priebe asked an important question, “How, then, should we approach our study of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy?” and then followed up with the answer, “The Bible must remain first in our study” (Priebe, 2022, par. 34).

The arguments by these scholars show that opponents of Last Generation Theology believe that the supporters of Last Generation Theology rely too heavily on the writings of a non-biblical source, Ellen G. White, for the main theological concepts of Last Generation Theology, and calls on proponents of Last Generation Theology to avoid using non-biblical sources and rely on the Bible only to support their theology.

### 3.3 Last Generation Theology teaches a form of legalism

The *Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2022) makes it clear that a central doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that we are not saved by our own works, but by a “saving faith”, that “is the gift of God’s grace”. One Christian author explains that “grace is unmerited favor” (White, 1893, par. 6). That means that a gift of grace cannot be earned through anything that we can do. That same author continues and writes the Christian believer is saved “without any merit of his own, without any claim to offer to God” (White, 1893, par. 6). Grace is the offering of the free gift of salvation and faith is how we accept that free gift. That is why it is called *salvation by grace through faith*. The opposite of believing in salvation by grace through faith in what God provides for us, is believing in salvation by our own works. This is when we believe that we have merit of our own to offer to God for our salvation. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a Protestant denomination, falls into the group that believes in salvation by grace

through faith, and not by works or personal merit. Any doctrine or theological belief system that teaches salvation by works and denies salvation by grace through faith will therefore be outside the scope of acceptable Seventh-day Adventist doctrine. If Last Generation Theology teaches salvation by works, then it should not be accepted as a Bible-based doctrine by Seventh-day Adventists because it will conflict with an already held Bible-based doctrine on salvation.

A Seventh-day Adventist New Testament scholar, Ranko Stefanovic, has a concern with the soteriology of Last Generation Theology and writes that “salvation is a result of the saving grace of God rather than one’s own holiness and works” (Stefanovic, 2018, “Second Conclusion”). In that same paragraph he then quotes a popular Bible text on soteriology found in Ephesians 2:8-9 (NKJV) that reads “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast”. The reason why he has this concern with the advocates of Last Generation Theology is because a statement in the writings of Ellen White that the last generation of believers will have to stand without a mediator and intercessor during the final time of trouble is “one of the strongholds of their position” (Whidden, 1995, p. 131). This can lead people to believe that being without a mediator and intercessor means that they need to rely on their own works to achieve sinless perfection and righteousness. Stefanovic explains how he believe it should be understood by writing that “During that perilous time, God’s people will have to “live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor,” which means that they will have to trust God and that His presence is with them. But one may note that nowhere does Ellen G. White indicate that they will have to go through that time without their Savior” (Stefanovic, 2018, “Ellen G. White on the state of the last generation”). From this statement it seems that he believes that the advocates of Last Generation Theology make it sound like the Last Generation who achieve sinless perfection will have to live without a Savior and that

that is not the case. He believes that in contrast to what Last Generation Theology teaches, there is no inspired counsel from God that the last generation of Christians will not “have the need of Christ’s atoning grace” (Stefanovic, 2018, “Final Conclusion”). In summary, Stefanovic believes that Last Generation Theology teaches a type of legalism where believers are saved by grace up to a certain point where they are then left to continue to walk by themselves in their own power.

The same type of argument is made against Last Generation Theology by Bible scholar Adelina Alexe in her 13-part article series against Last Generation Theology. She writes that if the last generation of believers can achieve sinlessness, then “the acquittal of our sins through Christ becomes meaningless and unnecessary” (Alexe, 2019, par. 4). In other words, if Last Generation Theology is true, then Christ’s gift of grace becomes meaningless. This is clearly an argument that Last Generation Theology teaches salvation that is achieved by the believers themselves and not by Christ’s gift of grace. To put it beyond doubt that she believes that Last Generation Theology teaches salvation by works, she writes that “some implications of the LGT ideology are” that it “results in a focus on behavior and appearance” (Alexe, 2019, par. 4). Alexe writes that some reasons “why LGT should not be accepted by Seventh-day Adventists” are that we “are not saved through our own merits” and that “the Holy Spirit does not withdraw from the sealed” (Alexe, 2019, par. 5). In summary, Adelina Alexe argues that Last Generation Theology teaches a form of legalism where we have merit that contribute to our salvation.

Seventh-day Adventist pastor, Marcos Torres, argues that Last Generation Theology proponents teach salvation that “is rooted in a legal compliance model of the law” and that an emphasis is placed on perfect obedience to the law for salvation (Torres, 2019, par. 10). This leads people to have checklists of what to do and what not to do, and it even makes people

fear whether they are good enough at a certain point in their life to be saved (Torres, 2019, par. 10).

A Seventh-day Adventist historian, George Knight, tells how he accepted Last Generation Theology and it led him to almost give up on Christianity completely. The problem for him with Last Generation Theology that led to this discouragement was that he understood Last Generation Theology makes Christ an example that we must follow in our own strength whereas the Biblical understanding of salvation emphasizes Christ as a Savior where we do not trust our own strength (Galusha, 2018, par. 2). He makes the same argument in his book *End-Time Events and The Last Generation* (“The Central Role of M.L. Andreasen and His “last Generation Theology””) where he writes that those who are part of the last generation “seemingly they must fight their battles alone”. Last Generation Theology has a legalistic, “human-oriented theology” that has a step-by-step approach to be obedient where “humans must get to the place where they don’t need Christ” because they can stand “on the basis of their own achievements” (Knight, 2018, “The Central Role of M.L. Andreasen and His “last Generation Theology””). In summary, George Knight’s own experience with Last Generation Theology was a legalistic view of salvation that is human-oriented.

The Seventh-day Adventist theologian, Renier Bruinsma, notes in his book that Last Generation Theology places too much emphasis on what Christ must do *in us*, instead of what Christ has done *for us*. This has caught many “in the deadly net of legalism” (Bruinsma, 2018, “Legalism”). He defines this as never-ending list of do’s and don’ts, similar to the laws of Moses that were followed by the Israelites that gave them a false sense of security in terms of their relationship with God (Bruinsma, 2018, “Legalism”). Bruinsma also quotes the words of Jesus in Matthew 23:23 that condemned the Pharisees for their pretense of perfection while neglecting

certain aspects of the law, such as justice and mercy. According to Bruinsma, Last Generation Theology proponents should be seen as legalists in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who “want to be obedient to all His commandments – to all the rules they find in the Bible” (Bruinsma, 2018, “Legalism”). From all the scholars who accuse Last Generation Theology of legalism, it can definitely be argued that Bruinsma is the most direct and critical. He mentions some of the dangers that the legalistic theology of Last Generation Theology proponents bring forth (Bruinsma, 2018, “Legalism”):

1. Legalists tend to have an inadequate view of sin
2. Jesus warned His followers not to imitate the Pharisees
3. Legalists are selective in their lists of do’s and don’ts
4. Legalism makes one judgmental
5. Legalism brings endless frustration

Bruinsma even mentions that one of the main questions that he tries to answer in his book is “To what extent do we face the dangers of legalism and perfectionism as a result of Last Generation Theology?” (Bruinsma, 2018, “An Exercise in Humility”). Bruinsma argues that it is the desire to be perfect by Last Generation Theology proponents that leads to legalism where salvation is a reward for our human obedience to the laws of the Bible (Bruinsma, 2018, “Some relevant Adventist experiences”). He believes that the striving for perfection will inevitably lead to legalism, and striving for perfection is definitely a key point of Last Generation Theology (Bruinsma, 2018, “Once again: An exercise in humility”). In summary, Renier Bruinsma teaches that Last Generation Theology’s strive for perfection will lead its followers to legalism where they believe salvation is a reward for their obedience to God’s law.

Without directly quoting from Last Generation Theology proponents, these scholars who oppose Last Generation Theology have explained why they believe that the natural outcome of Last Generation Theology will be a form of legalism that is more human-centered than it is Christ-centered. Even though you might not find a direct quote from a Last Generation Theology teacher who says something legalistic, it is taking the theological ideas of Last Generation Theology to its natural and/or logical conclusion that is argued to result in a form of legalism.

### 3.4 Humans cannot vindicate God's character

The Bible scholar, John C. Peckham, notes that “how God's character is vindicated over and against the claims of the devil is an important matter in Adventist theology” (Peckham, 2018, “Great Controversy Issues”). It was the Seventh-day Adventist scholar, Paul Evans, who first compared the vindication of God in the writings of Last Generation Theology proponent, M. L. Andreasen, and in the writings of Seventh-day Adventist co-founder, Ellen G. White (Evans, 2002). Evans found that the vindication of God's character in the great controversy was central to both Andreasen and White's theologies. The difference however was that for Ellen White the vindication takes place through Christ, and for Andreasen the vindication takes place through the last generation (Knight, 2018, “The central role of M.L. Andreasen”). A major argument against Last Generation Theology is that a last generation is not necessary to vindicate God's character before the universe and that Christ has already vindicated God's character through His life and His death about 2,000 years ago. It is argued that Last Generation Theology's view of the vindication of God makes God's victory in the battle over Satan dependent on humans and that God's actions need to be “supplemented by human action” (Peckham, 2018, “Issues and questions pertinent to LGT”).

Renier Bruinsma is a Seventh-day Adventist scholar that finds major issue with how Last Generation Theology explains the vindication of God's character. Although he spends more pages in his book addressing the other issues he has with Last Generation Theology, there is still an entire section dedicated to this theological topic in his book. He correctly explains in his book that one of the main theological ideas of Last Generation Theology is that those people who are part of the last generation with perfected characters "will vindicate God's character before the universe" (Bruinsma, 2018, "The Last Generation"). And then he asks, "Where is the Biblical evidence for this view?", and follows up with the answer "I cannot find any" (Bruinsma, 2018, "God's vindication"). Bruinsma states that he agrees with Marvin Moore than even in the writings of Ellen White there is not the "faintest suggestion" that this is true and that Jesus is the "only One who could have accomplished that" (Moore, 2001, p. 188). It is not humans, but only Jesus who vindicates God, and Jesus did that already 2,000 years ago when He lived and died on the cross (Bruinsma, 2018, "God's vindication"). In summary, Renier Bruinsma believes that the vindication of God's character by the last generation does not have support from the Bible, and that instead it is Jesus who has done the vindication already about 2,000 years ago.

In the book God's Character and the Last Generation, Seventh-day Adventist scholar John Peckham asks "Who vindicates God's character?" (Peckham, 2018, "The Triumph of God's Love"). He continues to explain in the rest of the chapter that it was Christ's death on the cross that provided the grounds for the full vindication of God's character before the universe (Peckham, 2018, "Revisiting the issues and questions pertinent to last generation theology"). He argues that another demonstration over and above what Christ did on the cross is not necessary and that "any activity of humans does not provide any grounds for the vindication of God's character" (Peckham, 2018, "Revisiting the issues and questions pertinent to last generation theology"). If

the vindication of God required showing that God's law can be perfectly kept, then Christ fully accomplished that by living a sinless life of obedience to God's law about 2,000 years ago. In summary, Peckham sees the perfectly sinless life of Jesus as the vindication of God's character and more perfectly sinless humans are therefore not necessary to accomplish the vindication of God.

Seventh-day Adventist scholar, **Adelina Alexe**, comes to similar conclusions as Peckham, **Bruinsma, Moore and Knight** in her 13-part series on Last Generation Theology. She writes that the logical conclusion of Last Generation Theology is that "Jesus' sacrifice is necessary, but not sufficient for vindicating God's character" (Alexe, 2019, par. 4). She writes that it seems presumptuous to think that God is in need of humans to vindicate Him before the universe. She agrees with Last Generation Theology that the vindication of God is part of the great controversy, but she writes that "God's actions vindicate God, not ours" (Alexe, 2019, par. 22). In summary, Alexe believes that Last Generation Theology teaches that Christ's perfectly sinless life is part of the vindication of God's character, but incomplete without the perfectly sinless lives of the Last Generation believers.

In conclusion, if the vindication of God's character requires perfect obedience to God's law to show that it is possible to keep His law and that His requirements are not unreasonable, then Jesus completely vindicated God's character before the universe by living a sinless life about 2,000 years ago when He was obedient to all of God's commandments. It is not necessary of a last generation of believers to do what Christ has already done.

### **3.5 Sinless perfection is not possible before the second coming of Christ**

The ultimate conclusion of Last Generation Theology is that there will be a generation of Christians living shortly before Christ's return that will live sinless lives (Paulson, 2019, par. 55). If someone disagrees with all the other ideas of Last Generation Theology, but agree with this one point then they essentially accept the conclusion of Last Generation Theology about the last generation. It should therefore come as no surprise that those who disagree with many of the theological concepts of Last Generation Theology also disagree with sinless perfection as taught by Last Generation Theology proponents.

Romans 3:10, 23 teach that there "is none righteous, no, not one" and we "all have sinned" (KJV). The Old Testament also says that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Ecclesiastes 7:20, KJV). And perhaps the clearest of all is 1 John 1:8 that reads "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (KJV). These are the four Bible verses that are most commonly used to argue that sinless perfection is not possible in this life. Renier Bruinsma argues that when we look at the Biblical data, then "we must strongly deny that in our present condition any of us can reach a state of sinlessness" (Bruinsma, 2018, "The reality of sin"). He argues that the reason why Last Generation Theology proponents think that they can reach sinless perfection is because they have an incorrect understanding of sin (Bruinsma, 2018, "What is Sin?"). Even though he believes that sinlessness is not possible for us, he does agree that Christ was "absolutely sinless" (Bruinsma, 2018, "The sublime uniqueness of Christ"). Bruinsma likes John Wesley's idea that perfect people are never so perfect that they are sinless (Bruinsma, 2018, "Perfection and perfectionism in the past"). He also notes that language experts agree that the Greek word for perfection in the New Testament does not refer to absolute sinlessness (Bruinsma, 2018, "The Bible on perfection"). Bruinsma says that from Paul's experience in Romans 7 we can see that we will continue to sin even when we try not to (Bruinsma, 2018, "Sinlessness"). In

summary, Bruinsma believes that sinlessness is not possible for us in this life and that we will continue to sin, even if we do not want to, until Jesus returns.

Seventh-day Adventist scholar, Adelina Alexe, argues that humans cannot achieve sinlessness in this life. If they could become sinless, then what Christ done for us becomes meaningless (Alexe, 2019, par. 4). She plainly states that “no human will reach sinlessness before glorification” and that she believes Ellen White taught the same idea (Alexe, 2019, par. 8). Alexe is perhaps referring to the statement written by Ellen White that teaches that “We cannot say, “I am sinless,” till this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body” (White, 1888, par. 13). Another argument that she makes is that since only the last generation is required to be sinless, and not other generations before, that would seem like a double-standard and would portray God as unjust (Alexe, 2019, par. 13). In summary, humans cannot be sinless before Christ’s returns and there are not different requirements in terms of sanctification for different generations.

Woodrow Whidden wrote that there is nothing in Ellen White’s writings that teaches that God’s people will reach the state of sinless perfection before Christ’s return (Whidden, 2018, “Ellen G. White on the state of the last generation”). The same belief is held by Esther Louw, who writes that Ellen White did not teach the doctrine of sinlessness (Louw, 2021, par. 27). Ellen White wrote for example that the believers must have their “earthliness” consumed even after the close of probation and directly before the second coming of Christ (White, 1911, p. 621). This “earthliness” is understood to be sin and defects of characters that need to be remedied. Ranko Stefanovic, New Testament scholar, writes that nowhere does God’s prophets “teach that God’s people will reach a particular state of absolute sinlessness before the close of probation” (Stefanovic, 2018, “Final Conclusion”). He continues in the same paragraph by writing that

perfection is never equated with sinlessness in the Bible, and the writings of Ellen G. White agrees with the Bible regarding this specific topic.

### 3.6 Conclusion

There are four main arguments against accepting Last Generation Theology that has been presented in this chapter. The first is objections to Last Generation Theology in relation to the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. This argument stresses the idea that Last Generation Theology does not have Biblical support for its key theological ideas and instead it relies on the writings of Ellen G. White, which is a non-biblical source. Key theological concepts found in Last Generation Theology seem to be completely missing in the Bible, especially when looking at the key words and vocabulary. The second argument against Last Generation Theology is that it teaches a form of legalism whereas the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes in salvation by grace through faith. It is argued that Last Generation Theology places the focus on behavior and teaches that believers will live sinless lives without a Savior shortly before the second coming of Christ and this renders the sacrifice of Jesus as meaningless. The third argument against Last Generation Theology is that human cannot vindicate the character of God, but that it is Christ that vindicated God's character about 2,000 years ago. It is argued that the vindication of God's character cannot be up to mere humans for that makes God dependent on us. Christ sinless live proved to the universe that God's law can be perfectly obeyed and it is not necessary for humans to prove what has already been shown to be possible. The fourth and final argument against Last Generation Theology is that sinlessness is not possible in this life before the second coming of Christ. It is argued that inspiration tells us that we should not claim sinlessness until then and that we will continue to sin until Jesus comes.

## CHAPTER IV

### REFUTING THE MAJOR OBJECTIONS AGAINST LAST GENERATION THEOLOGY IN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

#### 4.1 Introduction

A doctrine that is now known as Last Generation Theology has become a major theme of controversy in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it continues its quest to define its mission and message to the world. After understanding the major objections against Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is also necessary to take a look at the refuting of those major objections against Last Generation Theology. The purpose of this chapter is to refute the major objections against Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Just like significant time and resources have been spent by those who object to Last Generation Theology to point out “why LGT should not be accepted by Seventh-day Adventists” (Alexe, 2019, par. 5), significant time and resources have also been spent by those who support Last Generation Theology and who strive to refute the arguments of those who object to Last Generation Theology. The three Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholars who are most active and prominent in striving to refute the arguments against Last Generation Theology are **Dennis Priebe** (2011), **Larry Kirkpatrick** (2019) and **Kevin Paulson** (2021). These Bible scholars, with many years of services for the Seventh-day Adventist denomination in various positions, are convicted that Last Generation Theology does in fact “reflect the consensus of both the Bible and the writings

of Ellen G. White” (Paulson, 2019, par. 2). This chapter in this paper will add to the academic scholarship on this debate by providing arguments to refute objections against Last Generation Theology that have not been refuted, and also by providing new arguments to refute objections against Last Generation Theology that have seen attempts to be refuted in the past.

#### **4.2 Last Generation Theology in relation to the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White**

According to the *Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2022), Seventh-day Adventists “accept the Bible as their only creed” and uphold “the protestant conviction of *Sola Scriptura*”. This would explain why Seventh-day Adventists reject doctrines that they believe from their personal study are not based on the Bible. It is therefore necessary to compare Last Generation Theology to the Biblical writings.

For the textual study of Biblical passages in this chapter, the hermeneutical method that will be followed is the historical-grammatical method. “The historical-grammatical hermeneutical method is the only method accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (Hannon, 2021) and therefore it is essential to use this method as the study specifically relates to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Hannon (2021) defines the historical-grammatical method as follows:

"Discover the biblical authors' original intended meaning in the text . . . based on an analysis of the grammatical style of a passage (with consideration to its cultural, historical, and literary context), [If] the author intended to convey an account of events that actually happened, then the text should be taken as representing history; passages should only be interpreted symbolically, poetically, or allegorically if to the best of our understanding, that is what the writer intended to convey to the original audience."

The first section will investigate the Biblical basis for Last Generation Theology in order to refute the argument that Last Generation Theology is not Bible-based. The second section will investigate how the writings of Ellen G. White are used by Last Generation Theology proponents and the authority of her writings in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

#### **4.2.1 The Biblical basis for Last Generation Theology**

The central theme of Last Generation Theology is the special character development of those believers who form part of the last generation. The “last generation” simply refers to those who will be alive when Christ returns, which literally makes them the last generation of believers on earth. It is important to notice that those who oppose Last Generation Theology do not oppose the idea of there being a last generation. Almost all are in agreement that there will eventually be a last generation. The disagreement between the proponents and critics of Last Generation Theology is surrounding the character of the last generation. Since it is primarily the New Testament that deals with the second coming of Jesus, and therefore the last generation of Christians who will experience that event, this paper will look specifically at the character-development and character requirement of those who will be alive when Christ returns as described in the New Testament of the Bible.

Even though Last Generation Theology proponents, like Bible scholar Kevin Paulson (Paulson, 2019, par. 4), have used the harvest principle in a very limited sense to argue for the Biblical basis for Last Generation Theology, this section of this paper will make a further contribution by going into more depth regarding the harvest principle and bring out new principles from the harvest principle that supports the character development concept of the last generation.

The feasts of Israel marked out two times for harvest in the Jewish calendar. The first harvest of the year took place during the festival of Pentecost and took place during the second month of the Jewish year. The Feast of Tabernacles brought the second harvest of the year. These two festivals with their accompanying physical harvests represents spiritual harvests of believers for God's kingdom. During Pentecost when Jesus was crucified and resurrected, there were first fruits that were resurrected with Him that make out the first harvest of believers (Matthew 27:53). Regarding the timing of the second harvest we need not wonder because Jesus Himself said that that "harvest is the end of the world" (Matthew 13:39, KJV). If a person can find the timing of that harvest, then he/she will also find the timing of the end of the world since they occur at the same time. The Bible tells us in at least two places that that harvest will only take place once the harvest is ripe (Mark 4:29; Revelation 14:15). Since the gathering of a harvest takes place when the fruit of the harvest is ripe, so it will also be with the harvest at the second coming of Christ. In Mark 4:28 (KJV) Jesus explained when His followers would be considered "ripe" for the harvest that takes place at His second coming, "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." It is true, as critics of Last Generation Theology argue, that the fruit of a plant may be perfect at every stage of its development. There can be perfect buds, and perfect blades and perfect ears. The harvest of the fruit, however, is not determined by perfects buds, perfect blades and perfect ears, but by the perfect "full corn in the ear" (Mark 4:28, KJV). It is the finishing of the growing process of the plant that indicates that it is time for reaping the harvest. There is a process. The produce is not harvested until it is ripe. Even though Christians strive to have the same sinless character that Jesus had, it is Biblical that only "when he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2-3, KJV). The apostle John continues in the next sentence and writes that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even

as he is pure” (1 John 3:3, KJV). This purification takes place while the believer still has the hope of seeing Jesus and thus indicates that it must take place before Jesus returns, and not after Jesus has already returned. The whole purpose of this purification process is to be pure “even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3, KJV). Notice that is not a lesser level of purity. To what extent will the last generation who sees Christ coming on the clouds be ripened before His coming for the harvest? The Bible teaches that there is indeed a special work of purification to prepare the last generation for this event. We first find it in the Old Testament saying that the “remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth” (Zephaniah 3:13, KJV) and then similar language is repeated in Revelation 14:3-5 (KJV), “in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God”. The immediate context of both of these passages is the second coming of Christ. The phrase “without fault”, and others like it, are repeatedly used to describe the last generation of believers that are alive when Christ returns.

The apostle James also writes how the second coming of Jesus can be compared to a person who is waiting for his harvest to be ripe: “Be patient... unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it... Be ye also patient... for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:7-8, KJV). The apostle John mentions in Revelation chapter 7 that the sealing, and thus return of Jesus, is being delayed by the spiritual unpreparedness of the believers (Revelation 7:1-3).

The context of 2 Peter 3 (KJV), mentioning the “promise of his coming”, is referencing the second coming of Christ. That generation, which is then the last generation, is not only described as “blameless” but also “without spot” (2 Peter 3:14, KJV). That the Bible uses these words to describe the last generation cannot easily be disputed. Instead, it is what is meant by those words that may be disputed. By using the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method, we

find that it is the same author that uses the same language used in 2 Peter 3:14 to describe the life of Jesus in 1 Peter 1:19 (KJV) when he writes “a Lamb... without spot”. The type of character that is thus expected from the last generation at the second coming of Christ is the same character that Christ had – and that was a sinless character. It is not a relative type of sinless or relative type of perfection, since the same author makes it clear that Jesus was without any sin whatsoever (1 Peter 2:22). Peter further brings out this point by indicating that the day when Christ will return is waiting for a specific “manner of persons” that have “holy conversations and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11, KJV). Peter adds that believers should “be found... without spot, and blameless” (2 Peter 3:14, KJV). The word “found” implies that the character development has already taken place before the second coming, and not at or after the second coming. In the very next verse Peter then refers us to Paul writing that “also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things” (2 Peter 3:15, KJV). What are “these things” that Peter says Paul speaks about also? It must be the truth about the character development and sinless lives of the last generation at Christ’s return.

Paul, who is responsible for most of the New Testament writings, introduces the subject of “the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25, KJV) in the final chapter of the book of Romans. This work of “the mystery” is to be completed by the time when Christ returns (Revelation 10:7, KJV) because the context points to that time being the time when the world will become Christ’s kingdom (Revelation 11:15). What is the nature of this mystery that Paul talks about that is experienced by that last generation when Christ returns? Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:4-7 (KJV) that we are invited to share an experience with Jesus “in the day of our Lord Jesus” and that the experience consists of being “blameless” during that time. Paul further explained this experience in his second letter to the church in Corinth stating that this group has removed “all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness” (2 Corinthians 7:1, KJV). Paul

explains most clearly in Colossians 1:27-28 (KJV) that this mystery that will be finished “is Christ in you... that we may present every man perfect in Christ”. In other words, the mystery of Christ being fully reflected in the lives of His followers will be completed shortly before the second coming of Christ. This does not mean that other generations of believers were not called to have this experience, but the last generation will be the first to actually experience it. It is this experience that makes them the last generation and not just another generation before the last. All of the promises that are given to the seven churches that we find in Revelation are given to the believers who overcome sin (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:21), but it is only the last church that is promised a victory over sin that is the same victory over sin experience that Jesus had (Revelation 3:21).

Joel 2 promised the outpouring of God’s Spirit shortly before Christ return and Paul comments that the purpose of the spiritual gifts received from the Spirit is “for the perfecting of the saints... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-13, KJV). Paul also makes it clear that it is God who will do the work in making His people “unblameable in holiness” to be ready for “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 3:13, KJV). Paul says that God takes up the responsibility to “sanctify you wholly” so that His followers can be “preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, KJV). God is the one who takes the responsibility for the ripening of the harvest, for the character development of the last generation. God is the one, according to the Bible, who can “keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory” (Jude 24, KJV). Being “sanctified... wholly” is also a special phrase. From the Bible we know that the holiness and perfection that God requires is always proportionate to the light given (Proverbs 4:18; Matthew 13:8; Luke 12:48; Acts 17:30; James 4:17), but being wholly sanctified (1 Thessalonians 5:23) points to the completeness of the sanctification experience where all

possible light that can be given has been given. Being “sanctified... wholly” is the ripening of the harvest – not perfect buds, perfect blades or perfect ears, but the perfect “full corn in the ear” (Mark 4:28, KJV) that will be harvested.

A theme of the book of Hebrews is also perfection. The author of Hebrews complains that the ceremonial rules and regulations of the Old Testament were not effective in making people’s conscience perfect regards to moral matters (Hebrews 9:9). But then the author explains that these ceremonial rules and regulations were symbols that pointed to the true remedy that could in fact “purge your conscience” (Hebrews 9:14, KJV).

In summary, there is an abundance of biblical evidence that the last generation of believers who are alive when Christ returns will reach a condition of character development that is compared to the ripening of a harvest. The ripening of the believer’s character for the harvest is a process that has a beginning, a continuation, and also a completion. From all the passages that discuss this topic, it is possible to confidently draw the following conclusion: New Testament authors such as Peter, James, Jude and Paul taught that those believers who are alive when Christ returns would be like Christ in a way that no other group of believers in previous generations had been. The character of those believers who are alive when Christ returns are described by the Biblical authors as “without spot” (2 Peter 3:14, KJV), sanctified “wholly” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, KJV), “blameless” (2 Peter 3:14, KJV), “without fault” (Revelation 14:5, KJV), “perfect as pertaining to the conscience” (Hebrews 9:9, KJV), “perfecting holiness” (2 Corinthians 7:1, KJV), “do no iniquity” (Psalm 119:3, KJV), “shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2, KJV) and Christ says they will overcome sin “even as I have overcome” (Revelation 3:21, KJV). These words and terms are all specifically used in connection with the second coming of Christ.

#### 4.2.2 Last Generation Theology and the writings of Ellen G. White

A main argument against Last Generation Theology is its relationship with the writings of Ellen G. White, a co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is argued that many of Ellen White's statements are "at the very basis of Last Generation Theology" (Bruinsma, 2018, "Caution"). This means that the theological ideas found in Last Generation Theology are based on the writings of a non-biblical source. If this is true, then Seventh-day Adventists cannot accept Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine since it is based on a source outside of the Bible. To refute this part of the argument it is not necessary to show whether Ellen G. White did or didn't support Last Generation Theology concepts. It is only necessary to show that the main theological concepts of Last Generation Theology can be supported by using the Bible only as the primary source. This has already been shown in the previous section of this chapter entitled "*The Biblical basis for Last Generation Theology*". It is important to note that that section did not rely on any non-biblical sources to support Last Generation Theology but used the Bible only as primary source. Other Last Generation Theology proponents and Bible scholars such as Dennis Priebe (2011), Larry Kirkpatrick (2019) and Kevin Paulson (2021) also use the Bible as their primary source to support their arguments for Last Generation Theology as can be seen in their literature. The use of Ellen G. White's writings in their literature is as a secondary source to provide further explanation and clarity, but never as a primary source to invent a new theological concept. It is also worth mentioning that according to the Ellen G. White Estate's *Ellen G. White Biography* (2022), Ellen G. White is responsible for writing more than 40 books and more than 100,000 pages on theological topics. Since the Bible only contains about 1200 pages compared to her more than 100,000 pages, it is reasonable to expect that Ellen G. White would have a lot more to say about certain topics found in the Bible than even the Bible itself. Poorly written articles or

books by Last Generation Theology proponents that rely heavily on Ellen G. White quotations and/or very few to no Biblical texts are misrepresenting the theological basis for Last Generation Theology. This should not be seen as the norm as it does not reflect the majority of Last Generation Theology materials available to the public and does not automatically prove that Last Generation Theology is not Bible-based. **In summary, this paper has shown that the main theological concepts of Last Generation Theology can be taught using the Bible only as primary source and thus refuted the argument that Last Generation Theology relies on a non-biblical source to teach its doctrine.**

The second part of the argument against Last Generation Theology's use of Ellen G. White materials claims that "Ellen White disapproved the usage of her writings to settle theological issues" (Knight, 2018, p. 105). It is important to notice that this truly is more an argument about the authority of Ellen G. White's writings in the Seventh-day Adventist Church than it is about Last Generation Theology. But since both proponents and critics of Last Generation Theology both make use of her writings, especially when there is disagreement about the interpretation of certain key Biblical passages, it is important to address this argument. What is the proper function of the writings of Ellen G. White in the Seventh-day Adventist Church when it comes to theological issues?

According to the *Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2022), Seventh-day Adventists believe that the divine inspiration of the gift of prophecy "was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings speak with prophetic authority". The statement does not say that only *some* of Ellen G. White's writings speak with prophetic authority, but the statement includes all of her writings. God does not speak truth and error through the same person, because this would cause confusion. If God's prophets spoke a mixture of truth and error, then how would we be able to know what is truth from God and what is error from Satan? It is essential to take a

look at what Ellen G. White claimed about her own writings. She wrote that “This work is of God, or it is not... There is no hallway work in the matter. The Testimonies are of the Spirit of God, or of the devil” (White, 1876, p. 229). When evaluating her own claims, it is clear that either God inspired her writings or He did not. Her writings is either true, or they are not. She also wrote how there are some people who acknowledge that some of what she wrote came from God, and then take a position that certain matters with her own words. This was especially done by those who do not like correction and reproof, since they choose to accept the words they like and reject the words that point out their errors (White, 1980, p. 68). A similar position is held by a modern day critic of Last Generation Theology who values the writings of Ellen G. White but does not agree that it is all true (Alexe, 2019, par. 27). This seems to be at odds with the official Seventh-day Adventist position that says that Ellen G. White’s writings speak with prophetic authority. When scholars try to determine which parts of Ellen White’s writings come from God as truth and which parts of her writings are her own opinions, then they are exactly doing what she wrote they should not do. To be clear, this is not talking about people who reject the inspiration of the writings of Ellen G. White, but this is referring to people who claim to accept the inspiration of her writings, but reject certain parts as not inspired by God. She warned again, “Do not feel that you can dissect them to suit your own ideas, claiming that God has given you ability to discern what is light from heaven and what is the expression of mere human wisdom. If the Testimonies speak not according to the Word of God, reject them” (White, 1980, p. 46). This paper defends Last Generation Theology as a doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists, and not for Christians in general. Even though many Christian denominations reject the prophetic authority of the writings of Ellen G. White, the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that it accepts the prophetic authority of the writings of Ellen G. White. This includes all of her writings that deal with religious themes.

Criticism for using Ellen G. White's writings to support Last Generation Theology should therefore be expected from other Christian denominations outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but not from Seventh-day Adventist scholars who support the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Supporters of Last Generation Theology agree with critics of Last Generation Theology that the Bible must remain first in our study and that we must go to the Bible first to understand any doctrine. Only after studying the Bible do we go to the writings of Ellen G. White to receive further clarification on the topic under investigation. The order of authority will be first the Bible, then the writings of Ellen G. White, and then our judgements, not the other way around. The position that Ellen G. White writings can be used to clarify and explain certain doctrines does not deny the Protestant principle of Sola Scriptura – the Bible and the Bible only. The reason for this is that **it is the Bible itself that teaches that there will be a continuance of the prophetic gift in the church until the end of time (Joel 2:28-29; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 14; Revelation 12:17; 19:10). Nowhere does the Bible teach that the gift of prophecy will be removed from the church after the Biblical canon.** Since the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that it is the same God who spoke through both the Bible canon prophets and Ellen G. White, they carry the same type of authority - doctrinal authority. Ellen G. White explains some experiences from early Adventist history regarding the formation of doctrines, “When they came to the point in their study where they said, 'We can do nothing more,' the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me... Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood” (White, 1958, pp. 206-207). When the early Seventh-day Adventist pioneers held contradictory opinions about passages that they studied in the Scriptures, then God would

provide the correct understanding through Ellen G. White. From what she wrote, it can be seen that the clarifications she received included instruction on doctrinal matters. A function of her prophetic ministry was thus to establish which Biblical interpretations were correct. One example is where God showed her in a vision that it was Crosier who had the correct understanding of the cleansing of the sanctuary as mentioned in Daniel chapter 8 (White, 1969, p. 9). Another example is where she agrees with another person's doctrinal understanding of the two resurrections at the end of time that are separated by 1000 years after she received a vision about that topic (White, 1847, p. 11). The following is one of her clearest explanations of her doctrinal authority, "ministers and doctors brought in new doctrines. We would search the Scriptures with much prayer, and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds... The power of God would come upon me, and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error. As the points of our faith were thus established... We accepted the truth point by point... I would be taken off in vision, and explanations would be given me" (White, 1980, pp. 31-32). The evidence shows that Ellen G. White understood her writings to have full doctrinal authority.

In summary, the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that it accepts the writings of Ellen G. White as speaking with prophetic authority. This includes all of her writings on religious topics, not only some. Prophetic writings often comment on and clarify Christian doctrine. The writings of Ellen G. White comment on and clarify doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and she wrote that her writings should not be used to settle theological controversies if she did not receive any counsel from God on the issue. Last Generation Theology proponents who use the writings of Ellen G. White to speak with prophetic authority on topics that are included in Last Generation Theology are therefore in line with the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The third part of the argument against the use of Ellen G. White writings to support Last Generation Theology is that Last Generation Theology critics argue that these passages in Ellen White's writings might appear to support Last Generation Theology, but these statements, in their correct context, actually harmonize with the position of those who oppose Last Generation Theology (Alexe, 2019, par. 27). In order to refute this argument it needs to be shown that Ellen G. White's writings in context can be used to support Last Generation Theology.

The most well-known Last Generation Theology quote outside of the Bible is made by Ellen G. White, "When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (White, 1900, p. 69). This quote perfectly sums up the crux of Last Generation Theology that when Christ's followers perfectly reflect His character, then He will return. But this statement does not stand alone in her writings as if it does not agree with everything else she wrote. This short, but powerful quote is simply a short and clear quotation that summarizes her writings' overall position on this topic. In *Acts of the Apostles* she wrote a few years before her death that there is nothing that Jesus wants us much as for His people to represent His character and His power to the world so that He can return as He has promised (White, 1911, pp. 600-601). One of the most striking illustrations that she makes is how she compares the Israelites being shut out from Canaan in the Old Testament because of their sins to how God's people's sins today are keeping them in this world for so long (White, 1958, pp. 67-69). This comparison is found multiple times in her writings (White, 1946, p. 696), but Seventh-day Adventist critics of Last Generation Theology mock this idea in their book *God's Character and the Last Generation* (2018, p. 202). Contrary to what the critics' argument claims, the context of the writings of Ellen G. White frequently place "spotless", sinless characters of the believers together with being "ready for His appearing" (White, 1911, p. 425). Ellen G. White writes that

the condition of the characters of those who will be alive when Christ returns will be as obedient as that of Jesus' – "there was no sin in Him" (White, 1911, p. 623). Those who are alive at the second coming of Jesus will "reflect the image of Jesus fully", "obtain the victory over every besetment... and over every wrong word and action" (White, 1882, p. 71) and will have cleansed the "soul temple of every defilement" (White, 1882, p. 214).

Other places where she wrote specifically on the idea of God making it possible for us to live without sin, and requiring us to do so, can be found in Signs of the Times (White, 1903, par 10), Review and Herald (White, 1902, par. 8), Selected Messages Volume 3 (White, 1980, p. 360), Steps to Christ (White, 1892, p. 34) and Christ's Object Lessons (White, 1900, pp. 419-420). In summary, like another author concluded: 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 (Hokama, 1983, p.14). It can also be shown that her writings are filled with Last Generation Theology themes as has been showed in this section of this chapter, and will be further proven under the section "*Sinless perfection before the second coming of Christ*" in this same chapter.

This section has refuted the argument made by critics of Last Generation Theology that state that (1) Last Generation Theology is based primarily on the writings of Ellen G. White by showing that this study has made the argument for Last Generation Theology by using the Bible only, that (2) Ellen G. White writings should not be used to settle theological controversies by showing that the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that it accepts her writings as having prophetic authority and having settled doctrinal issues in the past, and that (3) Ellen G. White writings in their context do not support Last Generation Theology by showing that the overall message of her writings in their context do in fact support Last Generation Theology.

### 4.3 Soteriology in Last Generation Theology

A major argument against Last Generation Theology is that the sinless living of the last generation when Christ returns makes “the acquittal of our sins through Christ becomes meaningless and unnecessary” (Alexe, 2019, par. 4) and that they do not “have the need of Christ’s atoning grace” (Stefanovic, 2018, “Final Conclusion”). If Last Generation Theology teaches salvation by human works or human merits, then it should not be accepted as a Bible-based doctrine by Seventh-day Adventists because it will conflict with the officially held Bible-based doctrine on salvation.

One way to refute this argument is to look at what Last Generation Theology proponents actually teach about the means to accomplish sinless perfection. One of the most prominent modern day Last Generation Theology proponents and Adventist Bible scholar, Kevin Paulson, wrote that all “who have ceased from sinning, can only do this through heaven’s saving power” (Paulson, 2019, par. 4). He does not credit human effort or human merit, but gives the credit the heaven’s power. The co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ellen G. White, whose writings are regularly used by Last Generation Theology proponents, wrote that the very object of the Christian life is “the reproduction of Christ’s character in the believer” (White, 1900, p. 67), and then mentions in that same chapter that the means to accomplish this is by “constantly relying upon Christ as our personal Saviour” (White, 1900, p. 66). She does not praise human works or human merit, but Christ is seen as the Savior that provides the enabling power. She wrote that Christ is the One who gives power to overcome even “the most powerful temptations” (White, 1870, p. 78). E.J. Waggoner, who Last Generation Theology critics label as one of the founders of Last Generation Theology, even wrote a whole book, *Christ and His Righteousness* (Waggoner,

1890), explaining how humans cannot live sinless lives through their own merit and power, but that they can only depend on God's power to make them righteous and sinless. Even Last Generation Theology critics admit that Ellen White, A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner was at the forefront of putting the Seventh-day Adventist Church's focus on the saving power of Jesus and righteousness by faith (Knight, 2018, "Adventist theology's ongoing tension"). This might be rather confusing that the same men who are credited for the main ideas of Last Generation Theology, that is criticized for supposedly teaching salvation by works, (Knight, 2018, "Shared theological concerns"), are credited by the same scholars for putting the Seventh-day Adventist Church's focus on the saving power of Jesus and righteousness by faith (Knight, 2018, "Adventist theology's ongoing tension").

To further refute the argument that Last Generation Theology proponents teach a type of legalism or salvation by works, it can be shown that Last Generation Theology proponents did not only write that they believe in salvation by grace through faith, but they also went into the details to explain their belief. This was, and still is, something very important to them. In Last Generation Theology, faith is how we accept salvation by grace. It is therefore necessary to understand what Last Generation Theology proponents teach about faith. A.T. Jones gave a very specific definition of faith: "Faith is the expecting the word of God itself to do what that word says, and depending upon that word itself to do what the word says" (Jones, 1899, p. 8). This understanding of faith Jones based on the Christian teaching that God's Word has creative power in itself to make itself true (Psalm 33:6, 9). Jones' definition says that God's word performs the work, not the person. When the person depends on God's word for power, that word that is being depended on has the power to perform the work that the word said. Jones believed that inside God's Word there is creative power that will make true whatever those words said (Jones, 1893, p. 152). The Bible

teaches that Christ is the Word of God (John 1:1-2, KJV), and since the creative power is inside God's Word, the Christian believer thus finds "in Christ creative power to make him new" (Jones, 1901, p. 210). It is this creative power that is inside God's word that is the means to "make men holy and to sanctify them" (Jones, 1893, p. 167). The man who thus chooses to have faith in God's Word does not have any merit for exercising that faith, but the exercising of that faith is what allows God's Word to work in the life of that man. There is no evidence to support the idea that the writings of A.T. Jones teach that humans do not need God's grace, God's forgiveness and/or God's sacrifice. The same can be said about E.J. Waggoner, the other Adventist pioneer credited for the main ideas of Last Generation Theology. Waggoner, just like Jones, also believed in the "creative power of God's Word" (Waggoner, 1899, p. 132). Just like God's creative power in His Word can bring the dead back to life, Waggoner believed that it can give spiritual life to those who are spiritually dead (Waggoner, 1891, p. 12). Without God, humans are described as spiritually dead and thus not capable of performing any good works. Waggoner continued to argue that just like God created the world from nothing and upholds it by His Word, so God can create righteousness in the life of the person, where there is no righteousness, and uphold them by His Word (Waggoner, 1891, p. 266). It is important to note that Waggoner does not say that humans have *some* righteousness without God, but that there is *no* righteousness without God. All human good works is thus attributed to what God does in the believer. When Waggoner says that it is God's power that enables the sinner to overcome all sin, he means God's creative power, because God's "power is creative power" (Waggoner, 1893, p. 202). Where did Waggoner believe is that creative power of God found that gives the believer victory over all sin in their life? Just like A.T. Jones, he believed that it was found inside the very Word of God and that God's Word is in fact a living thing (Waggoner, 1893, p. 202).

It seems that understanding terms and definitions might be key in solving some of the disagreements in this specific area. It seems that Last Generation Theology proponents, like A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner, gave very specific definitions to words and terms whereas critics of Last Generation Theology do not provide such specific definitions. Two examples are “faith” and “God’s power”. The writings of Last Generation Theology critics do not provide as specific definitions for these two terms as we find in the writings of Last Generation Theology proponents’ writings.

Last Generation Theology, which accepts the Bible as God’s inspired Word, agrees that the Biblical consensus is that we cannot and will not be saved by our own works or merits (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8-9). The Bible, in these texts, is specifically speaking about what humans try to accomplish to merit acceptance with God by relying on their power and strength. Legalism in the Bible is not a reference to believers who place their trust in God’s power to gain victory over sin in their lives. In fact, this is something that the Bible speaks positively about (2 Thessalonians 2:13; Titus 3:5). In the New Testament the apostle Paul writes that God makes people holy without works (Romans 4:6). He supports his argument with an Old Testament verse in Psalm 32:3 that says that God does this for those who are without guile and guilt. “Without works” is a reference to the works of people in their own strength, and not a reference to the works that God does through people when they have faith in His word and are renewed by the Holy Spirit. Ellen G. White used terms such as “legal obedience” (White, 1898, p. 523) and “legal religion” (White, 1898, p. 172) to refer to people who believe that they can fulfill God’s law by relying on their own power and strength, and not to refer to people who place their confidence in the power of God’s Word to transform them and empower them to live holy lives.

Last Generation Theology critics are correct when they say that Last Generation Theology teaches that the final generation will have to live for a time without Christ as mediator in the heavenly sanctuary. Last Generation Theology proponents use Revelation chapters fifteen and sixteen as their primary source *Great Controversy* by Ellen G. White as their secondary source (White, 1911, p. 648). But it is not correct to assume that living without a Mediator in the heavenly temple robs the believers of enabling grace to overcome sin. God promised to be with His people until the very end (Matthew 28:20). There are two parts of God's grace that need to be understood: (1) God's forgiving grace for past sins, and (2) God's enabling grace to overcome sin in the present and future. When the Mediator finishes His work in the heavenly sanctuary, God's people are no longer in need of forgiving grace since all past sins have been confessed and repented of (Revelation 22:11). It is this aspect of the work of Christ only that Last Generation Theology teaches will no longer be necessary since God has totally cleansed His people from sin. During that time, however, God's people are still in need of enabling grace to continue to overcome sin since they still have a fallen human nature and are still powerless to overcome sin through their own strength. There is no evidence that Last Generation Theology proponents teach that God's people will ever have to overcome sin through their own strength before the second coming of Christ and/or that they will have to live without the Holy Spirit before the second coming of Christ.

In summary, the soteriology of Last Generation Theology is in line with the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on salvation. Last Generation Theology sees salvation as a free gift from God that believers accept by faith. This faith is defined as trusting God's Word to provide power to experience the salvation from sin that has been provided by the gift from God. Last Generation Theology does not teach that God's people will ever have to rely on their own strength to live lives of sinlessness before the second coming of Christ or that

anything that they do will contribute any merit towards their salvation. Instead, the power to live sinless lives before the second coming of Christ is provided by God through His Word to those who choose to believe His Word and live by His Word.

#### 4.4 The vindication of God's character

A major argument against Last Generation Theology is that a last generation is not necessary to vindicate God's character before the universe and that Christ has already vindicated God's character through His life and His death about 2,000 years ago. It is argued that Last Generation Theology's view of the vindication of God makes God's victory in the battle over Satan dependent on humans and that God's actions need to be "supplemented by human action" (Peckham, 2018, "Issues and questions pertinent to LGT). This section of this chapter will refute this argument by using both the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White to explain the role that is played by Jesus and by His people in the vindication of God's character. It is important to keep in mind that the argument here against Last Generation Theology is not that the vindication of God's character is not necessary, because both groups agree that it is necessary, but the argument is that humans are not need to do this work since Christ already accomplished this.

It can be argued that the best summary of the great battle between God and Satan is found in Revelation 12. The few verses of this chapter starts with the battle between God and Satan in heaven (Revelation 12:7-10) and traces the battle all the way down to Satan's final attack on God's people who "keep the commandments of God" (Revelation 12:17, KJV). It is a common theme in the Bible that Satan is called the accuser of God's people (Revelation 12:10-11; Zechariah 3:1-4). A well-known example of this is found in the story of Job, a man who remained faithful to God

while facing the accusations of Satan. The Bible says that Job was a man who “was perfect and upright” (Job 1:1, KJV), but Satan was accusing Job of being obedient to God for selfish reasons only (Job 1:9-11). God allowed Satan to cause a lot of pain and suffering in the life of Job. The Bible assures us that Job passed these tests of his faith in God and did not sin (Job 1:22; 2:10). Job proclaimed that he would remain faithful to God even to death (Job 13:15).

Both in the Old Testament story of Job, and the New Testament example in Revelation 12, we find that God’s people’s faithfulness to Him are brought into question by Satan. In both of these examples we find that these two groups of people were obedient to God (Revelation 12:17; Job 1:22). From these two examples, it can be seen that Satan’s accusations have to do with God’s people’s obedience to His commandments, especially under challenging circumstances. Satan knows very well that if someone is disobedient in only one point of God’s commandments, then they are unfaithful to God and a risk to the universe (James 2:10).

The vindication of God is a Bible-based teaching. David taught it (Psalm 51:4) and also the apostle Paul (Romans 3:4). It can even be argued from a hermeneutical perspective that “His judgement” in Revelation 14:7 (KJV) refers not only to God judging people, but that God is also on trial. Both the Old and the New Testament teach that God’s glory and His character will be revealed to the whole world through His believers (Isaiah 60:1-3; Philippians 1:11; Revelation 10:7; 14:7). The Bible goes as far as saying that humans were created for the very purpose of revealing God’s glory and character (Isaiah 43:7). This is what is meant with the term “vindication of God” – revealing that God is who He claims to be. Since God is love (1 John 3:16) and His law is love (Romans 13:10), the vindication of God is closely connected with the vindication of His law. The Bible promises that the whole world will see the vindication of God (Numbers 14:21; Isaiah 40:5).

The vindication of God is also found in the teachings of Ellen G. White. She taught that the plan of God was more than just saving humans from sin, but also to “vindicate the character of God before the universe” (White, 1890, 68-69). She wrote that it was God’s plan from the very beginning that His followers will reveal Him to the world and that it is through the church that “the final and full display of the love of God” will be made to the world (White, 1911, p. 9).

The co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Ellen G. White, agrees with the Bible that the main issue in the battle between God and Satan is whether it is truly possible to obey God’s law perfectly. She wrote that it was first in heaven where Satan claimed that God’s law could not be obeyed (White, 1898, p. 761), and then Satan continued that argument here on earth by declaring that humans also cannot obey God’s law (White, 1902, par. 9). And just as should be expected, after Adam and Eve sinned Satan pointed to that as proof of his claim that it is impossible to keep the law of God (White, 1898, p. 117). Some who oppose Last Generation Theology actually agree with Satan that it is impossible to live a perfectly obedient life and they even claim that God also knows this (Marshall, 1979, p. 12). This view teaches that only for Adam before the fall was it possible to obey so the obedient life of Christ only serves to show that Adam need not have sinned. But Ellen G. White argued that Christ’s perfectly obedient life did not only show that Adam need not have sinned, but it also shows us that it is possible for those of us who are alive today to obey God’s law (White, 1898, p. 24). She continued to argue that even though it is true that we cannot obey in our strength, when we take hold of God’s power then it is possible for us to perfectly obey God’s law (White, 1900, p. 314). There are multiple statements found throughout her writings that teach that Christ’s obedient life shows that humans who are alive today with a fallen human nature can obey God’s law in the same way that Christ did it when He walked the earth (White, 1898, p. 664; White, 1905, p. 25; White, 1896, p. 49). These statements made by her

are not her own original ideas, but are based on Bible texts where fallen humans are called to obedience to God law (Matthew 7:21; Luke 11:28; John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:14; 1 John 2:3-6; 5:2-3; 2 John 1:6; Revelation 12:17; 14:12). All this shows us that at the heart of the controversy between Christ and Satan is the ability of fallen people to obey God's law.

If Jesus only came to show that unfallen Adam never had to fall into sin, then He did not prove anything new. Why? Because all the angels who are still in heaven with God have already succeeded in remaining unfallen. The universe did not need more demonstrations that unfallen beings did not have to sin. All the unfallen angels in heaven already demonstrated that. But if Jesus also came to show that fallen humans, like all humans alive today, are able to stay completely away from sin, then He did show something new because unfallen angels cannot prove that since they are unfallen. It was fallen humans who needed to see that sinless living is possible even though they are fallen. Even though certain Bible characters before the birth of Jesus proved that fallen humans can keep God's law perfectly, like Abel and Enoch (White, 1890, p. 77), they were not perfectly obedient all the time from birth to death and that is something extra that Christ could show the universe.

Contrary to the belief of some critics of Last Generation Theology, the proponents of Last Generation Theology agree that Satan was defeated when Christ died on the cross (White, 1898, p. 762). So then why is the battle between Christ and Satan still continuing two thousand years later? This is where critics and proponents of Last Generation Theology give different answers. The critics say it is because the universe needs to see a full revelation of God's character and Satan's character (White, 1898, p. 761), whereas the proponents say it is exactly that and more – there is still a warfare against God's law and the law and its Lawgiver must be vindicated (White, 1898, p. 763). This means that the death of Christ gave a guarantee that the battle is won, but the

principles of that battle must be more clearly understood in the minds of the onlookers. But the critics claim in their book *God's Character and the Last Generation* (2018, pp. 24, 178, 179, 182-183, 285) that Jesus completely answered the question whether it is possible to perfectly obey God's law, and therefore it is not necessary for the last generation to show that same type of perfect obedience. But Satan's accusations about perfect obedience to God's law still take place today and to refute these accusations is still a work that needs to be done (White, 1898, p. 309; White, 1911, p. 489). It should not just be one person here and another person there that are perfectly obedient to God's law, but a whole generation of faithful believers who choose that God's way is the best way. It is a misunderstanding to think that it is only Christ's work to disprove Satan's claim when God has revealed through inspiration that it is both the work of Christ and the work of His followers to disprove Satan's claim (White, 1903, p. 154).

It seems inconsistent for Last Generation Theology proponents to believe that Satan was defeated at the cross but not fully defeated yet. How can these two ideas be reconciled? Satan did not immediately stop his evil doings at that moment when Jesus died on the cross, but that moment when Jesus died on the cross made the final defeat of Satan inevitable (Hebrews 2:14). Zechariah 3:1-4 also mentions how these accusations of Satan carry on until the very end. Revelation 12:11 (KJV) explains how God's people defeated Satan "by the blood of the Lamb", which is a reference to the death of Jesus. In other words, what Jesus did on the cross opened the door so that the last generation can accomplish what they will accomplish. Jesus's death on the cross made it inevitable that His people could live the sinless lives that would answer the accusations made by Satan. What happened on the cross provided the enabling power for what will take place in the last generation before Christ returns. It is in that sense that the battle was won on the cross, even though it was not over yet. Christ's death on the cross enabled the last generation to overcome sin to such an

extent that they can live perfectly obedient lives and show that obedience to God's law is possible. There is therefore no competition between what Christ did on the cross and what the last generation will do before Jesus returns. **Because of the cross, believers have access to the power that will guarantee victory.** It is just a matter of when they will claim that power to experience that final victory. It is even possible to compare this to a football match where the one team has an unassailable lead even though the time is not up yet. They continue to play for the last few minutes or seconds, but everyone already knows that defeat is certain for the one time. It is therefore inaccurate to accuse Last Generation Theology of teaching that Satan's defeat did not come at the cross. **Last Generation Theology does teach that what Christ accomplished at the cross provided everything that is necessary to completely defeat Satan. Satan's war continues until God's believers apply what happened at the cross to their own lives (Revelation 12:17).**

The argument that says that it is Jesus, and not the last generation, who vindicates God, misses an important biblical promise about a task that God has given to His church. It might seem from Genesis 3:15 that it would be only Christ that would defeat Satan, but **the apostle Paul writes that God will allow Satan to be defeated by the church (Romans 16:20).** This would be completely unnecessary if Satan was completely defeated by Christ only. **Ellen G. White supports this Biblical idea that God helps His people to defeat Satan** (White, 1876, p. 594).

In the critics' book *God's Character and the Last Generation* (2018, p. 195) they write that it is very disturbing to think that God needs a last generation to finally defeat Satan and that this idea is completely contrary to the messages of the Bible and Ellen G. White. But from the story of **Job** in the Bible we learn exactly that – that **God does choose to work through people and risks His character to be compromised.** Satan said that Job only obeys God because of selfish reasons since everything in his life seems to be going fine. God put His own character on the line by

allowing Satan to cause terrible things to happen to Job and see if Job will still remain faithful to God or not. If Job did turn His back on God during the bad times then that would prove that Satan's accusations are true. But since Job did not turn His back on God during the bad times, that showed that Satan's accusations are false. Just like God provided the power to Job to live a faithful life and prove that Satan's accusation was false, so God can provide the power to the last generation to live lives of perfect obedience to every commandment of God and prove that Satan's accusations against God's law are false. Ellen White agrees that Job did vindicate God's character. Speaking of Job she wrote that by "his patient endurance he vindicated his own character, and thus the character of Him whose representative he was" (White, 1903, p. 156). If it was possible for Job to play a part in vindicating God's character, then why not the last generation? Ellen G. White wrote that every believer can vindicate God's character (White, 1882, p. 317) and that God has called every believer to vindicate His character before the world (White, 1882, p. 746). This idea of humans, not Christ, vindicating God's character is found multiple times in the writings of Ellen G. White contrary to the writings of Last Generation Theology critics (White, 1961, p. 168; White, 1898, par. 9; White, 1898, p. 671).

In summary, both the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White have a lot to say about the vindication of God before the universe. The Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White do not make it a question of whether it is God that does the vindication, or whether it is the final generation of believers that do the vindication. From the story of Job, and other Bible passages (Ezekiel 36:21-23, 25-27) we learn that it is God who works through His people to accomplish this vindication. Both are needed. The perfect obedience of the last generation is because of what Christ did on the cross. If Christ did not die on the cross, there would be no perfectly obedient last generation. When Jesus says in John 14:12 that His followers will do even greater works than Him, this can be

understood hermeneutically to refer to the final generation who will fully reflect God's character and bring the actual closing of the battle between God and Satan.

#### **4.5 Sinless perfection before the second coming of Christ**

The ultimate conclusion of Last Generation Theology is that there will be a generation of Christians living shortly before Christ's return that will live sinless lives (Paulson, 2019, par. 55). If someone disagrees with all the other ideas of Last Generation Theology, but agree with this one point then they essentially accept the conclusion of Last Generation Theology about the characters of the last generation.

It has been shown that Seventh-day Adventist Bible scholars such as Renier Bruinsma (Bruinsma, 2018, "The reality of sin"), Ranko Stefanovic (Stefanovic, 2018, "Final Conclusion") and Adelina Alexe (Alexe, 2019, par. 8) argue that Last Generation Theology's teaching about the last generation being sinless cannot be correct since nowhere in the Bible or in the writings of Ellen G. White do we find support for the idea that we can reach a state of sinlessness in our present condition before the second coming of Christ. In order to successfully refute their argument, it must therefore be shown that both the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White do support the idea that those who are alive when Christ returns will reach a state of sinlessness before He returns.

There are four points of clarification that need to be made to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings regarding what Last Generation Theology teaches about sinless living. Firstly, as was noted by those who oppose Last Generation Theology, the Bible clearly says in Romans 3:23 (KJV) that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God". Last Generation Theology

does not teach that those who experience sinless living before the second coming of Christ have never committed any sin at any point in their lives. It must therefore be understood **living a sinless life does not mean that the individual has never sinned in their life**. Before they experienced sinless living, there was sin in their life as is spoken of in Romans 3:23. It must also be noted that **Romans 3:23 (KJV) reads “all have sinned” and not “all sin” or “all continue to sin”**. Secondly, **sinless living does not mean that a Christian no longer has a fallen human nature**. Both those who promote and those who oppose Last Generation Theology agree that the fallen human nature will still be present until the second coming of Christ. **This fallen human nature, however, does not make one guilty of sin unless a person chooses to succumb to the temptations of that fallen human nature** (White, 1964, p. 140). Thirdly, sinless living does not mean that a person will make no judgement mistakes or miscalculations. Sin specifically deals with morality only, and not with other fields such as mathematics. Just because a person makes a mistake does not mean that the person sinned. **Only moral mistakes are sin**. Fourthly, and lastly, Christians might know when they are making progress in overcoming sin in their lives, but **it is only God who will know when all sin has been completely removed from the life**. Since humans are not all-knowing, they will not know when all sin has been revealed to them or how much they still need to learn. **This means that a person who experiences sinless living will not know when it happens, and therefore it is also not possible for them to claim that they are experiencing it (even if they are experiencing it)**. **Sinless perfection is therefore God removing all sin in the life of the believer – whether it is sinful thoughts, sinful words, or sinful deeds**.

Those who oppose Last Generation Theology argue that the Greek word for perfection (*teleios*) and the Hebrew words for perfection (*tāmîn* and *salêm*) does not mean sinlessness (Bruinsma, 2018, “The Bible on perfection”). This might be true from a dictionary or lexicon point

of view, but when we look at how the words are used in Scripture, then clearly there are times when it does refer to sinlessness. About Job the Bible says “a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8, KJV). To make it even clearer that this is referring to sinless perfection the Bible declares again about Job in that context that he “sinned not” (Job 2:10, KJV). Genesis 6:9 (KJV) also declares that Noah was “perfect”. But in a few chapters later, we read how Noah sinned (Genesis 9). The problem with Bruinsma’s argument here is that his argument fails to acknowledge the moment-by-moment standing of the believer before God. Experiencing sinless living today does not guarantee experiencing it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. The same argument used with the word “blameless” can be refuted in the same way. Just because a character in the Bible was called “blameless” and experienced sinless living in one chapter does not guarantee that they will continue to have that experience. They can choose to sin and forsake that experience, and we see examples of that in the Bible (Luke 1:6, 18-20). Last Generation Theology does not teach that those who experience sinless living have never committed any sin at any point in their lives. It must therefore be understood living a sinless life does not mean that the individual has never sinned in their past life or that it is impossible for them to sin in the future. Living a sinless life simply means that at that specific point in their life they have confessed and repented of all sin. A person is seen as holy by God when sins are confessed and repented of (1 Peter 3).

Matthew 5:48 (KJV) is most famous when it comes to understanding what “perfect” means and it reads, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”. Renier Bruinsma argued that this does not refer to sinlessness, but instead calls us to be perfect in love (Bruinsma, 2018, “Love: the center of biblical perfection”). By using the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method, and comparing Matthew 5:48 with verses such as Luke 6:36, which is the

parallel verse in another gospel, and also 1 John 4:18, it can be seen that Bruinsma's analysis is correct in stating that Matthew 5:48 does call us to be perfect in love. Unfortunately, Bruinsma fails to mention the link that Scripture places between love and obedience to God's commandments. Jesus, who spoke the words in Matthew 5:48, also said "If you love Me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15, KJV). Jesus repeated the same idea again in John 14:21 and also John 14:23-24 that love means to be obedient to God's words. Jesus' disciple John also explained that "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3, KJV). The same disciple makes a strong statement a few chapters earlier that those who say they love God, but do not obey His words, are liars (1 John 2:4). Being perfect in love therefore means to be perfect in obeying God's words. This principle becomes much easier to grasp when one understands that Jesus taught that the whole purpose of His law was so that people could love God and love each other (Matthew 22:36-40). The more sin we have, the less we love. The less sin we have, the more we love. When the Bible tells us in Matthew 5:48 to be perfect, to be perfect in love, it is thus a call to perfect obedience of God's law of love. Since sin is defined by the Bible to be the transgression of this law (1 John 3:4), it means that those who are perfectly obedient to this law will be experiencing sinless perfection. By using the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method, sinless perfection is how Matthew 5:48 should be understood. Ellen G. White also understood it this way and that is why in the context of Matthew 5:48 she writes, "There is no excuse for sinning... a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God" (White, 1898, p. 311). The apostle Paul, who is responsible for the bulk of the New Testament writings, understood perfection to be the complete and total eradication of sin from the life. He wrote that we should "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness" (2 Corinthians 7:1, KJV).

One problem with the argument of those opposing sinless living in the last generation is that too much effort is spent pulling one word (like the word “perfect” or “blameless”) apart, while it is well established that the same word can have different meanings and that each idea does not only have one word (White, 1958, p. 20). It is more fruitful to look at all the verses in Scripture that deal directly with what God expects from His people. For example, the context of 2 Peter 3 (KJV), mentioning the “promise of his coming”, is the second coming of Christ. That generation, which is then the last generation, is not only described as “blameless” but also “without spot” (2 Peter 3:14, KJV). By using the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method, we find that it is the same author that uses the same language used here to describe the life of Jesus in 1 Peter 1:19 (KJV) when he writes “a Lamb... without spot”. The type of character that is thus expected from the last generation at the second coming of Christ is the same character that Christ had – a sinless character. Other verses that do not focus on specific words, but focus on the specific idea of God requiring lives without sin from His people can be found in the Old Testament in Psalm 4:4; Psalm 34:13-14; Psalm 37:27; Psalm 119:1-3 and Zephaniah 3:13, and in the New Testament in John 8:11; Romans 6:14; Romans 8:3-4; 1 Corinthians 15:34; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Ephesians 5:25-27; Philippians 4:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Timothy 2:19; 1 Peter 2:21-22; 1 Peter 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10-12; 1 John 1:7-9; 1 John 3:2-3; Jude 24; Revelation 3:21 and Revelation 14:5. The Biblical data thus provides more evidence for the possibility to live without sin than it speaks about certain commandments found in the Ten Commandments, like the Sabbath commandments, which is a major doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

It has been shown that the argument that says that sinless perfection is not a Biblical idea can be refuted by looking at the Biblical data alone. The same argument also includes that the doctrine of sinless perfection cannot be supported by the writings of the Seventh-day Adventist

co-founder, Ellen G. White. To refute this part of the argument it is therefore necessary to take a brief look at some clear, direct statements that Ellen White penned on this specific topic. She wrote that Jesus came to our “world to show its inhabitants how to live sinless lives” (White, 1946, p. 385). She makes a very similar statement in *The Youth’s Instructor* (White, 1903, par. 2). If Jesus chose to show the world how to do something, then it means He believed that it was possible for them to do it if they follow the way He shows them. White also wrote that those who fully surrender to God receive “the privilege of living without sin” (White, 1906, “Behold, What Manner of Love!”). The immediate context of this statement is not something that can be experienced in the distant future, but something that can be experienced by anyone who chooses to surrender today. Other places where she wrote specifically on the idea of God making it possible for us to live without sin and requiring us to do so can be found in *Signs of the Times* (White, 1903, par 10), *Review and Herald* (White, 1902, par. 8), *Selected Messages Volume 3* (White, 1980, p. 360), *Steps to Christ* (White, 1892, p. 34) and *Christ’s Object Lessons* (White, 1900, pp. 419-420). There does not need to be any argument over what Ellen G. White wrote about sinless living. Statements can be provided where she writes that believers will need to battle with temptation until Christ comes, but battling does not automatically mean losing. Fighting does not mean failing. Believers can battle with temptation and they can overcome temptation every time, just like Christ did during His life. 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 (Hokama, 1983, p. 14).

Since the Bible and Ellen G. White thus undeniably teach the concepts of living without sin, it is thus further argued by some that these statements about sinless living refer to a future time after the coming of Christ and not to before the coming of Christ. To refute this argument we

need to establish whether the Bible and Ellen G. White describe this experience as something that is possible here on earth while we still have our fallen human bodies. The Bible verse referred to earlier in 2 Peter 3:14 (KJV) mentions that when Christ comes His people will be “found... without spot, and blameless”. Finding them in such a condition indicates that they are already like that, not that they need to be changed to be like that. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 also teach that God’s people will be wholly sanctified before the coming of Jesus Christ. Ellen White supports this Biblical concept by writing “When He comes, He is not to cleanse us of our sins... this work will be accomplished before that time” (White, 1868, p. 355). But when Adelina Alexe makes this objection against Last Generation Theology that believers cannot be without sin before the second coming of Christ Adelina Alexe (Alexe, 2019, par. 8), she does actually quote Ellen G. White where she wrote that “We cannot say, “I am sinless,” till this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body” (White, 1888, par. 13). On the surface there seems to be a contradiction in what Ellen G. White writes regarding this topic. This seeming contradiction can be cleared up by understanding the distinction that Ellen G. White makes been *claiming to be sinless and experiencing it*. In fact, the Bible makes this same distinction. Those who argue against Last Generation Theology quote the following Bible verse that says “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8, KJV). The fallacy here is assuming that because both the Bible and Ellen G. White do not allow believers to claim being sinless in this life, that this must also mean that this experience is an impossibility this side of heaven. From the abundance of Biblical data and Ellen G. White quotes, it can be seen that this is not the case. Believers can experience sinless living, but should not claim it. Job, who “sinned not” (Job 2:10, KJV), said that “Thought I were perfect, yet I would not know my soul” (Job 9:21, KJV). God alone will

know when all sin has been completely eradicated from our lives. God's saints will not boast in their holiness.

It is true that Ellen G. White condemned a system of beliefs that was labeled as "perfectionism" in her day, but carefully noting how she describes what that system of beliefs taught shows that it is very different from what Last Generation Theology proponents teach about sinless perfection (White, 1882, pp. 101-102). The "perfectionism" that she objected to was a system of beliefs where people claimed they were sinless and where they taught that our fallen human natures are removed when we accept Christ into our lives. These two teachings are not part of Last Generation Theology. Unfortunately, because "perfectionism" contains the word "perfect", it has often been associated with Last Generation Theology and so closed down conversations to what Last Generation Theology teaches about perfection and sinless living.

Though some who oppose Last Generation Theology have described Ellen G. White's views on sinless living as "puzzling" (Alexe, 2019, par. 19), by using the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method this chapter has allowed her to explain her own statements and ideas to see that her views are just as clear as that of the Bible regarding this specific topic. This is why one Bible scholar noted that Ellen White statements used to show that we cannot live sinless lives are not convincing, especially when those statements are read in their literary context (Hokama, 1983, p. 14). While it has been shown, contrary to the argument made by Last Generation Theology critics, that Ellen G. White's writings do support sinless perfection before the second coming of Jesus, it has also been shown that there is substantial evidence from the Bible, in both the New and Old Testaments, that sinless living is a possibility before the second coming of Christ.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

There are four main arguments by Seventh-day Adventist scholars against accepting Last Generation Theology as a doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists that need to be refuted. This chapter made a contribution to the academic scholarship by providing new ways to refute the arguments and adding more to the older ways on how to refute the arguments against Last Generation Theology.

The first is objections to Last Generation Theology in relation to the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White. This argument stresses the idea that Last Generation Theology does not have Biblical support for its key theological ideas and instead it relies on the writings of Ellen G. White, which is a non-biblical source. This argument can be refuted by using the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method of Bible study to show that the main theological concepts of Last Generation Theology are indeed Bible-based. Primary examples of these are the harvest principle that we found in both the Old and New Testaments, and also the way that the New Testament authors describe the characters of those who will be alive in the context of the second coming of Jesus. Without using non-biblical sources it can be shown that the Bible authors saw special character development in the generation alive when Christ returns that results in a special cleansing from sin and prepares the harvest of souls for Christ's return. As a secondary source, it can be shown that Ellen G. White's writings are filled with Last Generation Theology concepts, such as living completely free from sin before the second coming of Christ. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also officially accepts her writings as having prophetic authority and is thus useful for clarifying doctrine or theological disagreements.

The second argument against Last Generation Theology is that it teaches a form of legalism whereas the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes in salvation by grace through faith. It is

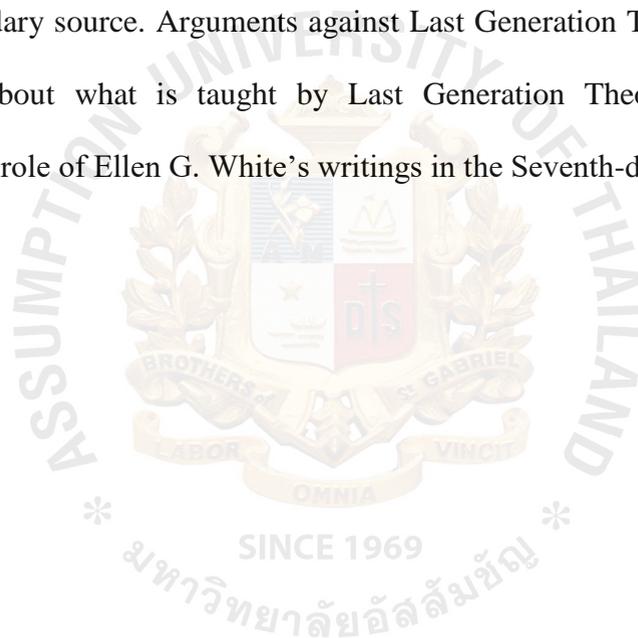
argued that Last Generation Theology places the focus on behavior and teaches that believers will live sinless lives without a Savior shortly before the second coming of Christ and this renders the sacrifice of Jesus as meaningless. This argument is refuted by showing how the writings of Last Generation Theology proponents teach salvation by grace and not salvation by works, and then further explaining the biblical basis and means to accomplish sinless living as taught by Last Generation Theology. It can be seen that this argument must be based on a complete misunderstanding of the soteriology of Last Generation Theology.

The third argument against Last Generation Theology is that humans cannot vindicate the character of God, but that it is Christ that vindicated God's character about 2,000 years ago. It is argued that the vindication of God's character cannot be up to mere humans for that makes God dependent on us. Christ's sinless life proved to the universe that God's law can be perfectly obeyed and it is not necessary for humans to prove what has already been shown to be possible. This argument is refuted biblically by using the example of Job that showed that Job would not sin even during difficult circumstances. **Job vindicated God before Satan and the universe.** The argument is also refuted by showing quotations from **Ellen G. White that mention God's people vindicating God and His law.** God is vindicated through people who are willing to be used by Him to live lives without sin. The Bible teaches that the last generation will live during a time of trouble like there has never been in the history of this world. Perfect obedience and sinless living during that time will vindicate God before the universe in the battle between God and Satan.

The fourth and final argument against Last Generation Theology is that sinlessness is not possible in this life before the second coming of Christ. It is argued that inspiration tells us that we should not claim sinlessness until then and that we will continue to sin until Jesus comes. This argument is refuted firstly by showing the biblical basis for living without sin. **Living without sin**

has been the call for all believers throughout the ages, and will be the experience of those who will be alive when Christ returns. This argument is refuted secondly by showing how the writings of Ellen G. White further supports the biblical teaching of living sinless lives, especially pointing to Jesus as our example. Inspiration does not warn against being sinless, but warns against claiming to be sinless, since this is something that is determined by God only.

This chapter of the research shows that it is possible to refute the main arguments against Last Generation Theology by using the Bible as a primary source, and using the writings of Ellen G. White as a secondary source. Arguments against Last Generation Theology can be based on misunderstandings about what is taught by Last Generation Theology proponents and/or differences about the role of Ellen G. White's writings in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This final chapter will firstly provide a summary of the three main points found in this research: the history of Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the main arguments against Last Generation Theology and the refuting of those arguments in order to defend Last Generation Theology. Next, this final chapter will look at whether the thesis statement has been shown to be true through this research and also evaluate the contributions that this research makes to the existing scholarship related to Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Lastly, this final chapter will make recommendations on possible further research and also how the Seventh-day Adventist Church can deal with the doctrine of Last Generation Theology.

#### 5.1 Summary

This research has as its overall objective and purpose the goal of defending Last Generation Theology as a doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists. Since Last Generation Theology is a doctrine that is accepted by some Seventh-day Adventists and rejected by other Seventh-day Adventists, this research attempts to make new contributions in refuting arguments against Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists.

In accordance with this plan, the research starts with a historical overview of understanding Last Generation Theology in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church denomination. The

research objection of this second chapter was to provide an accurate definition and understanding of Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine that was taught in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This historical overview covers the time from the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church up to the present time. It is shown in this research that many prominent Seventh-day Adventists throughout the history of the denomination believed that the last generation of Christians who will be alive when Christ returns will be perfectly obedient to all God's commandments, will be free from any sin, and will reflect Christ's character fully to the world. Satan claims that it is impossible for humans who have experienced sin in their life to perfectly obey God's commandments and live lives free from sin. **The last generation of Christians who are alive when Christ returns will prove that Satan's claim is false and that it is indeed possible to obey God's law perfectly and thus vindicated God before the universe. Significant deviations from this theological thought only started occurring in the 1950s.** The major historical figures in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who are credited for teaching Last Generation Theology themes in their writings are Ellen G. White, James White, Joseph Bates, Ellet Joseph Waggoner, Alonzo Trevier Jones and Milian Lauritz Andreassen. Current scholarship that supports Last Generation Theology would be Kevin Paulson, Larry Kirkpatrick and Dennis Priebe.

The research then continues by looking at the major objections by Seventh-day Adventists to Last Generation Theology. The research objection of this third chapter was to facilitate an understanding of the arguments that are used against Last Generation Theology that attempt to show why Last Generation Theology should not be accepted as a Bible-based doctrine by Seventh-day Adventist Christians. It can definitely be argued that the three most important books in the last 50 years **against Last Generation Theology are:**

1. *In All Humility: Saying NO to Last Generation Theology* (2018) by Renier Bruinsma.
2. *End-Time Events and the Last Generation* (2018) by George Knight
3. *God's Character and the Last Generation* (2018) by Andrew University

These three books represent about a dozen western scholars in the Seventh-day Adventist Church who oppose Last Generation Theology, mainly in North America. Major literature against Last Generation Theology from other parts of the world church, like Africa and Asia, is missing. Critics of Last Generation Theology, especially since 2018, are united in arguing (1) that Last Generation Theology is not Bible-based but instead relies on non-biblical source, (2) that Last Generation Theology teaches a form of legalism contrary to Seventh-day Adventist soteriology, (3) that humans are not necessary to vindicate God before the universe, and (4) that living a life completely free from sin is not possible before the second coming of Jesus.

The fourth chapter of this research relies on the historical-grammatical hermeneutical method to refute the objections by Last Generation Theology critics by using the Bible as a primary source and the writings of the Seventh-day Adventist co-founder, Ellen G. White, as a secondary source. The research objective of the fourth chapter is to provide improved answers to objections against Last Generation Theology so to defend Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine that should be accepted by Seventh-day Adventist Christians. It is shown through a historical-grammatical hermeneutical study of the Bible that the main concepts of Last Generation Theology is Bible-based and that other sources, such as the writings of Ellen G. White which have prophetic authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, serve as secondary sources. A study of Last Generation Theology's soteriology shows salvation by grace through faith in line with the official teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The example of Job in the Bible and the

writings of Ellen G. White point to God working through willing humans that will vindicate Him. Lastly, a historical-grammatical hermeneutical study of the Bible reveals that a life completely free from sin has always been possible to God's people and that this will be their experience before Christ returns.

## 5.2 Defense of Thesis and Contribution

At the start of this paper, a thesis statement was formulated for this research:

Last Generation Theology, with a strong emphasis on overcoming all sin through faith in the creative power of God's Word, is a doctrine that has its origins in the Bible, was supported by prominent Seventh-day Adventist pioneers and leaders, and should therefore be accepted by Seventh-day Adventist Christians as a Bible-based doctrine.

This thesis statement can be broken down into four parts which will help in comparing the thesis statement with the outcome of this research. If all four parts of the thesis statement can be shown to have been proven true in this research, then it provides the defense of the thesis statement as a whole.

### 5.2.1 Last Generation Theology's strong emphasis on overcoming all sin

The first part is that Last Generation Theology has a strong emphasis on overcoming all sin. This has been proven in two parts of this research: (1) in showing in chapter two that historically Last Generation Theology has placed a lot of emphasis on overcoming all sin, and (2) in showing in chapters three and four how the argument of Last Generation Theology critics against overcoming all sin can be refuted through a study of the Bible.

### **5.2.2 Overcoming all sin through faith in the creative power of God's Word**

The second part of the thesis statement is that the means to accomplish overcoming all sin is faith in the creative power of God's Word. This has been proven in two parts of this research paper: (1) in showing in chapter two that historically Last Generation Theology proponents, especially E.J. Waggoner and A.T. Jones, placed a lot of emphasis on the creative power in God's Word that is accessed through faith, and (2) in showing in chapters three and four how the argument of Last Generation Theology critics against its soteriology can be refuted through a study of the Bible.

### **5.2.3 Last Generation Theology has its origins in the Bible**

The third part of the thesis statement is that Last Generation Theology has its origins in the Bible. This has been proven in two parts of this research: (1) in showing in chapter two that historically the proponents of Last Generation Theology used the Bible as their primary source to teach Last Generation Theology, and (2) showing in chapters three and four how the argument of Last Generation Theology critics against the Biblical bases for Last Generation Theology can be refuted.

### **5.2.4 Last Generation Theology was supported by prominent Seventh-day Adventist pioneers and leaders**

The fourth part of the thesis statement is that Last Generation Theology was supported by prominent Seventh-day Adventist pioneers and leaders. This has been proven in chapter two

where it has been shown which Seventh-day Adventist pioneers and leaders supported Last Generation Theology concepts in their writings from the 1800s until the present time.

### **5.2.5 Defense of Thesis Statement**

This research has shown that it is possible to defend the four parts of the thesis statement, and thus possible to defend the thesis statement of this research as a whole. It is therefore possible to defend Last Generation Theology as a Bible-based doctrine that should be accepted by Seventh-day Adventists. In order to achieve this it is important to adhere to the limitations of this research that has been outlined in chapter one of this research. Relying on other hermeneutical methods or definitions of key words, for example, can lead to different results.

### **5.2.6 Contribution**

An important part of this research is to contribute towards the academic scholarship and literature as it relates to the specific topic of Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. There are three main points of contributions that have been made by this research.

The first contribution is providing a comprehensive history of the development of Last Generation Theology in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and using that as a framework to understand the main teachings of the doctrine of Last Generation Theology. Instead of using only modern day proponents of Last Generation Theology and instead of focusing on some ideas inside Last Generation Theology that is not central to the main theological concepts, this contribution helps to identify the key element that can be traced throughout the writings of Last Generation

Theology proponents' literary works. The research showed that this **key element is the ability to live lives completely free from sin through God's enabling power and that this element has been present in the Seventh-day Adventist Church from the very beginning up to the present time.** There are some minor theological points that are held by many who teach Last Generation Theology in more modern times that were not held by those who taught it at the beginning of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Examples of these are the exact differences between justification and sanctification, and also whether we are born as sinners or not. This contribution fulfilled the research plan which was to avoid debate about ~~topics that are not key to reaching the conclusions of Last Generation Theology~~ and focus on the main differences that lead people to different conclusions about the ultimate goal of Last Generation Theology, which is sinless perfection in the last generation when Christ returns.

The second contribution is using the literature of the main critics of Last Generation Theology and providing a comprehensive explanation of the main arguments against Last Generation Theology that are held in common by these critics. Since these arguments are all shared concerns by the major critics, it can be argued that there is academic consensus amongst the critics that those arguments are the best arguments against Last Generation Theology.

The third contribution of this research is providing support from the Bible for sinless living with the Bible being the primary source without the need to rely on non-biblical authors. This method thus also contributes to the academic literature by providing new elements from the inspired writings in refuting the most common arguments against Last Generation Theology. A crucial part of this is also refuting the argument that Last Generation Theology teaches a form of legalism through a Biblical emphasis on the means to live completely without sin. This contribution fulfilled the research plan which was to focus on the Bible as the primary source to

show the reality of sinless perfection as taught in Last Generation Theology with special emphasis on Biblical themes like the harvest theme found in Revelation 14, and also to place a greater focus on the means to accomplish sinless perfection as taught through the Scriptures, instead of just focusing on what should be accomplished.

### 5.3 Recommendations

There are two points that arises from the results of this research that this thesis would like to recommend for further study regarding Last Generation Theology and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The first point of recommendation is to compare the results of this study with Fundamental Belief #13 of the *Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2022), entitled “The Remnant and Its Mission”, that reads as follows:

The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. The remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness (Dan. 7:9-14; Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Micah 2:12; II Cor. 5:10; I Peter 1:16-19; 4:17; II Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3,14; Rev. 12:17; 14:6-12; 18:1-4).

Parts of this statement that refers to the last day call to church members to be obedient to God's commandments and take part in the worldwide witness have similarities to the main theological ideas of Last Generation Theology. This research recommends that the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists set up a Bible research committee that is especially dedicated to provide papers both for and against Last Generation Theology to the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After this has been made available to everyone, this matter should be placed on the next General Conference Session's agenda, and then a vote should be taken by the delegates at that General Conference Session on whether they would like to include Last Generation Theology into Fundamental Belief #13. Since there are already some similarities, this research suggests that it is not necessary to add a completely new Fundamental Belief, but to instead edit Fundamental Belief #13.

The second recommendation from this research is a Biblical symposium on Last Generation Theology where supporters and critics meet to discuss their views with each other, especially how they understand and define certain phrases and words. This research has shown that there are misunderstandings that arise when the two groups understand and define phrases and words differently, especially if they are not aware that the other group has a different understanding and definition. This also provides opportunity for research to be done about the different usages of the same phrases and words in these two groups. Even if an agreement about the definition of words cannot be reached, which might likely be the case, such a symposium will benefit both groups in understanding the concepts that the other group has in mind when using certain phrases and words. A focus of such a symposium should be to find common ground and determine differences that are truly essential in the overall outcome of the understanding of the gospel message of the Bible.

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