

A Critical Evaluation of The Last Generation Theology (LGT) of (L) ML Andreassen Through the Lens of The Scriptures and The Writings of Ellen G. White

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Abstract

Milian Lauritz Andreassen (1876-1962) was the leading and most influential Adventist theologian in the 1930s and 1940s. His foremost contribution to Adventist theology is the Last Generation Theology (LGT), according to which there will be a group of faithful last-generation believers just before the Second Coming of Jesus who will live a perfectly sinless life and vindicate the character of God. Andreassen died in 1962, but his theology is well and alive. It has been a point of controversy and debate among Adventist theologians. The main purpose of the study is to review whether Andreassen's LGT is in accordance with the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White. The study reveals that Andreassen's theology has many grains of truth thus, cannot be dismissed as completely incorrect and irrelevant. However, it fails in some major aspects, such as its insistence on the sinless perfection of the saints and their role in vindicating God's character. Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy portray relative perfection in the earthly life of a believer until glorification rather than absolute perfection. Thus, Andreassen's LGT cannot be accepted in its entirety.

Keywords: Last Generation Theology, Atonement, Saints, Sanctuary, Time of Trouble, Spirit of Prophecy, Second Coming, Sinlessness, Great Controversy, Christian perfection

Introduction

Milian Lauritz Andreassen (1876-1962) was the leading and most influential Adventist theologian in the 1930s and 1940s. His foremost contribution to Adventist theology is the Last Generation Theology (LGT), according to which there will be a group of faithful last-generation believers just before the Second Advent of Jesus who will live a perfectly sinless life. Through these people, God will demonstrate the truth that His law can be perfectly kept and that one can live without sin. It is also through these saints that God will stand vindicated, and Satan defeated. This theology "took Adventism by storm. It became the denomination's dominant (but not exclusive) theology of the 1940s and 1950s" (Knight 2000, 149).

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Andreasen died in 1962, but his theology is well and alive. As a matter of fact, it has been a point of controversy and debate among Adventist theologians to this day. While some prominent Adventist scholars and organizations support and propagate his views, many have expressed their disagreement.¹ In September 1956, Donald Grey Barnhouse published an article in *Eternity* magazine entitled “Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?” in which he “publicly relegated” Andreasen and his theology to the “lunatic fringe” of Adventism (Knight 2000, 169). On the other hand, Andreasen severely criticized the church leadership for the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* (QOD, 1957). He felt that QOD was a “sellout by the Adventist leadership to the evangelicals and a betrayal of historic Adventism.”² (Knight 2000, 167).

According to George Knight, one is compelled to react to Andreasen’s theology in two contrasting ways (2000, 144). There can be no neutrality. One either agrees or disagrees with him. The main purpose of the study is to review whether Andreasen’s Last Generation Theology is in accordance with the Scriptures and the writings of Ellen White.³ It focuses on the main or critical issues of Andreasen’s theology with special emphasis on Christian perfection.

Andreasen’s Last Generation Theology

Andreasen had fully developed his LGT by the time he published the first edition of his book *The Sanctuary Service* in 1937. Interrelated doctrines include the Great Controversy, Christ’s human nature, sanctuary, atonement, sanctification, and the saints in time of trouble. In order to have a better understanding of his theology, it is necessary to briefly discuss these doctrines.

The Great Controversy

Andreasen’s LGT is centered on the Great Controversy theme of Ellen White. Satan has accused God of injustice, saying that He expects His creatures to keep the law, an impossible task, and then punishes them. God is on trial. Satan is the accuser, and God is the accused. God will use the last generation of faithful believers to show the universe that His actions are just. The centrality of the controversial theme can be clearly seen in his words. He writes,

The matter of greatest importance in the universe is not the salvation of men, important as that may seem. The most important thing is the clearing of God’s name from the false accusations made by Satan. The controversy is drawing to a close. God is preparing His people for the last great conflict. Satan is also getting ready. The issue is before us and will be decided in the lives of God’s people. God is depending upon us as He did upon Job (1947, 320).

Just as Satan challenged God regarding Job, he is once again throwing that same challenge to God, saying that the saints are being faithful because of “mercenary motives.” If God gives him free access to tempt them, he could easily prove their false faithfulness. In order to refute Satan’s charges and to show that their service stems from loyalty and gratitude, God grants Satan the freedom to test them to the “utmost.” Further, God wants to use the saints to refute Satan’s charges that He is unjust and arbitrary in requiring His people to keep His law when it cannot be kept (Andreasen 1947, 317). Andreasen points out that this will be Satan’s last chance

against God. He will think that “it is now or never” (317).

Atonement

Andreasen believes that the atonement of Jesus Christ was not completed at the cross. However, he does not mean to propose that Christ’s work on the cross was not completed. He asserts that Christ will never die again. He writes, “The cross is vital, the cross is central. Christ finished His earthly work there. But then He ascended to heaven to continue His work of redemption in the sanctuary above. This work is now going on and will continue until the end. Whoever limits Christ’s work to the cross limits the atonement” (Anderson 1948, 437).

Andreasen divides the atonement into three phases. In the first phase, Christ met sin and conquered it by living a perfectly sinless life as a man. The second phase began in Gethsemane and climaxed in Golgotha, where Jesus bore the sins of human beings and annulled them. In the third phase, Christ demonstrated that man could live the same life He lived through divine aid. This phase also “includes His session at the right hand of God, His high priestly ministry, and the final exhibition of His saints in their last struggle with Satan, and their glorious victory” (1948, 59-60). He claims that the third phase is “now in progress in the sanctuary above and in the church below” and that Christ is “now eliminating and destroying sin in His saints on earth. This is part of the cleansing of the true sanctuary” (Andreasen 1948, 59-60).

Sanctuary

Andreasen connects the eliminating and destroying of sin in the lives of saints on earth with the work on the Day of Atonement. On that day, every Israelite was expected to confess his sins. In the process, the entire camp of Israel was cleansed from all sins. Andreasen asserts that the world is living in the great antitypical day of cleansing the sanctuary when every believer must confess his sins and be cleansed of all iniquities. To him, “the cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven is dependent upon the cleansing of God’s people on earth” (1947, 321). Thus, he believes in a “dual or parallel cleansing of the sanctuary on the antitypical Day of Atonement” (Knight 2000, 145). While Christ cleanses the sanctuary in heaven, saints on earth should cleanse their soul temple.

Sanctification: Sinless Perfection

The cleansing of the saints is theologically called sanctification, which Andreasen defines as a “separation from sin” and “deliverance from its power and victory over it” (1947, 300). Forgiveness is “a means to neutralize the effect of sin” while sanctification is a “restoration of power for complete victory” (1947, 300). When the work of sanctification is completed in a person, he or she will be righteous with the original image of God restored in him. According to him, “to make an end of sins,” in Daniel 9:24, “means more than merely to forgive sins. It means the complete eradication of sin from life. It means sanctification, the uprooting of every evil, a life completely controlled by the Holy Spirit” (1947, 300). He believes that to be sanctified day after day meant that an individual will become victorious over one sin after another and when he has been able to overcome “pride, ambition, love of the world-over all evil,” he is ready to be translated to heaven. He is now a finished product, a perfectly sinless being. Through such a person, God demonstrates the

work He can do with human beings⁴ (1947, 302). Thus, to Andreasen, sanctification is an absolute, not relative, perfection.

The Humanity of Christ as our Example

Andreasen believes that Christ's successful spiritual life is an example for human beings. "Christ on earth gave a demonstration of what God can do when humanity is fully yielded to Him" (1948, 54). Through His victory, He showed to the world that man could "resist sin" and overcome every temptation of Satan (1948, 55). And it is in the last generation, the 1,44,000, that the final demonstration will be made. He feels that if Christ had not made it possible for a man to attain perfection, he would have failed. He further says that on the cross, Christ "had demonstrated in His life the possibility of keeping the law" (1947, 309-310).

The Saints in the Time of Trouble

Andreasen teaches that the saints of God will go through a time of trouble⁵, which he compares to the time of Jacob's trouble. During this time, Satan will do his utmost to tempt them so as to make them sin, and "if he should succeed, he would gain an important point," and God would have lost the great conflict (1947, 315). Now, just as Job was tried, God's last generation will be tried. Neither God nor Satan was satisfied with the trial of Job because it involved only one man, Job. So, the test will involve a much larger group of believers in the last days. Instead of choosing a few men of outstanding character and ability to prove his point, He is going to choose the weakest of the weak. "It is for this reason that God has reserved His greatest demonstration for the last generation. This generation bears the results of accumulated sins. If any are weak, they are. If any suffer from inherited tendencies, they do. If any have an excuse because of a weakness of any kind, they have. If these can keep the commandments, there is no excuse for anyone in any other generation not doing so also" (1947, 312).

During this time, God will permit Satan to tempt His people to the utmost. There will be a withdrawal of the Spirit of God from the earth and the removal of the protection of earthly governments. Worst still, "to make the demonstration complete" God "hides himself" (1947, 317). The sanctuary will be closed, and its services terminated. They will be severely tortured and persecuted. They are given a little taste of the experiences of Christ as they "seemingly" fight their battles alone against Satan. However, just as He did not permit Satan to take Job's life, He will not permit him to take their lives, although they would be ready to die for their faith instead of sinning (1947, 317-318).

Andreasen does not imply that God has abandoned His people completely. He will send His angels to watch over them and protect them from their enemies. He will also provide them food and "grace and power for holy living" (1947, 317-318). Finally, the saints will come out of the great tribulation that has passed the test, blameless and holy. Thus, Satan will be utterly defeated through their righteous lives, and God will be vindicated. "When Satan issues his challenge, 'where are they that keep the commandments of God? No one can keep them,' God will quietly answer, 'Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus'" (Andreasen 1951, 190-191).

Thus, through these saints, "God gives the final demonstration that men can keep the law of God and that they can live without sinning;" "under the most adverse circumstances. He has disproved Satan's assertion that He is unjust in demanding

that men—keep His law. God is vindicated. Satan is defeated. The controversy is ended” (Andreasen 1943, 312-313). God’s people will not realize Satan’s challenge and how much God depends on them. It could be said that “if they fail, Satan wins and God loses... It is the final and decisive battle between Christ and Satan. Christ has already overcome Satan, but now He overcomes through His saints” (Andreasen 1951, 191).

Examining Andreasen’s LGT

Andreasen’s LGT created “a major split among the denomination’s members and thought leaders” beginning in the 1940s. Andreasen’s LGT is a distinct theological package, which is either sound or unsound (Knight 2000). The evaluation of his theology needs to be done according to the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy as it is based on these two sources.

The Role of the Saints in the Great Controversy

Andreasen’s great controversy concept is similar to that of the Spirit of Prophecy. Ellen White points out that at the very beginning of the Great Controversy, Satan had declared that God’s Law cannot be obeyed. That it was not right on the part of God to ask human beings to keep the law when it could not be kept. When man broke God’s law, Satan rejoiced and pointed out that man could not keep God’s law and thus would not be saved (White 2006: 136).

Andreasen believes that in the Great Controversy, God, in order to show His justice, will use the faithful as a kind of demonstration to Satan and the universe. Now, the Bible does not explicitly state such a teaching. Though it may not be the sole purpose of God, there are some evidences that it is a part of God’s plan. For instance, Paul says, “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19, NASB); and that the kingdom of Satan will be crushed by Christ through the church (Rom 16:20). He again writes, “For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men” (1 Cor. 4:9, NIV). Through the church, God desires to manifest to the rulers and the authorities in heavenly places of the wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10). John in Revelation points out that God has a group of faithful people who “keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev 14:12).

According to Ellen White, Satan has accused God, saying that He cannot forgive the saints because they have committed many sins. And if He forgives them and yet destroys him and his angels, it would be an injustice on His part. To prove Satan wrong and to show that the saints have confessed their sins and have been forgiven, God “permits him to try them to the uttermost” (White 1939, 618). She also points out that God has His people who are “to be the depositories of His holy law and to vindicate His character before the world,” a “distinct people, a church on earth, second to none, but superior to all in their facilities to teach the truth, to vindicate the law of God” (White 1962, 58). They are to manifest His glory through their lives and character. She teaches that the saints will play a part in vindicating God’s character. However, we do not find any statement where she claims that the vindication of God’s character depends on the faithfulness of the saints.

The Sanctuary and Dual Cleansing

Leviticus 16:29-31 describes the ceremonial service to be carried out on the Day of Atonement. On this day, while the High Priest cleansed the sanctuary from all the sins of the people, the people themselves were to be cleansed from all their sins. So, there clearly existed a dual cleansing—of the sanctuary and the people. Andreasen's point is that today we are living in the antitypical Day of Atonement, where there is a cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven by Christ with a corresponding cleansing of God's faithful people from their sins on earth.

Apart from the cleansing process mentioned in connection with the sanctuary service, the Bible talks of the spiritual cleansing of God's people. In Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul writes, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she could be holy and blameless" (NASB). John calls God's faithful people as a bride clothed in "fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev 19:7-8).

The dual cleansing idea of Andreasen is also reflected in the writings of Ellen White. She says that the cleansing work on earth corresponds with the cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven by Jesus. She expresses this idea by saying, "There must be a purifying of the soul here upon the earth in harmony with Christ's cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven" (White 1982, 344). Further, she asserts, "Christ is cleansing the heavenly sanctuary from the sins of the people, and it is the work of all who are laborers together with God to be cleansing the sanctuary of the soul from everything that is offensive to Him" (White 1976, 249).

Sinless Perfection

Andreasen believes in the possibility of a sinless perfection of God's people during times of trouble. However, it is not clear whether he also believes that the same perfection is possible for humanity through all generations. Whatever the case, it is not possible to dichotomize the perfection of the last generation from the rest of the generations of humanity. God cannot have two standards. He judges everyone with the same standard (John 5:29; 2 Cor. 5:10). The same spiritual blessing and empowerment are available to all generations of people, for it is the same Spirit who empowers (1 Cor. 12:4-11). So, God's people of all times, from Adam to the living at Christ's second coming can exhibit the same perfection made possible through Christ. Now, to Andreasen, perfection is absolute.⁶

The Bible on Christian Perfection

There are numerous texts which appear absolute in regard to perfection. In Matt 5:48, considered the most controversial and difficult text, Jesus said, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13); "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 2:3); "And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Jam 1:4); God desires that we be holy as He is (1 Pet

1:16). When the Bible calls for perfection is that a call for sinless perfection?

Word Meanings

The Hebrew word for perfect or perfection is *tam* or *tamim* which means “complete,” “right,” “peaceful,” “sound,” “wholesome,” “blameless,” and signifies “wholeness and perfect peace;” but always in a relative sense when used of man” (Horn 1979). The Greek *teleios* means “obedience, wholeness, and maturity,” “complete,” “perfect,” “full grown,” “fully developed,” “having attained its purpose” (Horn 1979). Thus, “a victim which is fit for a sacrifice to God, that is a victim which is without blemish, is *teleios*. A man who has reached his full-grown stature is *teleios* in contradistinction to a half-grown lad”⁷ (Barclay 1975, 177).

Thus, the word used in Matthew 5:48 is *teleios* and does not mean an “absolute perfection identical to that of God” (Shelton 2001, 902-906). Literally, it means “one who has reached the goal,” or “complete” (Nichol 1980, 341). Here, it means that man should strive to be like God as he was created in God’s image (Gen 1:26). And if he can fulfill that goal by loving others just as God loves mankind, he is *teleios*. Barclay comments, “The one thing which makes us like God is the love which never ceases to care for men, no matter what men do to it. We realize our manhood, we enter upon Christian perfection when we learn to forgive as God forgives and to love as God loves” (1975, 178).

No Sinless Human Being

The Bible clearly points out that there is none who does not sin (1 Kgs 8:46). Solomon echoes this sentiment, “Who can say, ‘I have cleansed my heart, I am pure from my sin?’” (Pro 20:9); “Indeed, there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins” (Eccl 7:20). Isaiah agrees, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). Apostle Paul shares the same view. He writes, “There is none righteous, not even one” (Rom 3:10), and cries out, “I am carnal, sold under sin... O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:14, 24). John makes a similar statement. “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us... we make Him a liar and His word is not in us” (1 John 1:8-10).

Paul speaks of a constant spiritual struggle within a person as long as he lives. He says, “For I know that nothing good dwells in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want” (Rom 7:18-19).⁸ Jesus points out that the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matt 26:41).

Even Saints constantly need confession and forgiveness of their sins. Job confessed his sins (Job 9:20). So did David (Ps 32:5) and Daniel (Dan 9:16). John particularly said that if a believer sins, we have an “Advocate with the ‘Father, Jesus Christ the righteous’” (1John 2:1). One cannot but agree with Millard Erickson who points out that until Christ comes, it will be necessary for us to pray the Lord’s Prayer “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” (Erickson 1998, 986). The fact that even saints need to continually confess their sins throughout their lifetime clearly indicates that sinless perfection is untenable in this lifetime.

The saints in the Bible, who were men and women of faith, had no absolute perfection. The Bible says that Noah was perfect and blameless. However, he became drunk and cursed his own son (Gen 9:21, 24, 25). King “Asa’s heart was perfect with the Lord all his days.” But in the later part of his life, he committed evil against God

(2 Chr 16:7-10). Job, whom the Bible says was perfect and blameless, confessed, “If I say, I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse” (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; 9:20). His weakness was revealed by adversity (Job 40:2-5; 42:2-6).

Perfection is Dynamic and Progressive

Paul expressed that he had not attained perfection yet but that it was his goal. He said, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12). In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul encouraged the believers to “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). It is clear that Paul’s desire was for the believers in Ephesus to strive for spiritual maturity as Christ was. This conveys the idea of constant spiritual progress. About the issue, LaRondelle (1998) comments, “The Apostolic concept of Christian sanctification is dynamic and progressive, constantly growing in the knowledge of God, and ‘in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’” (74). So, clearly, biblical perfection is dynamic and progressive.

Sinless Perfection only at Second Advent of Christ

Sinless perfection can be attained only at the coming of Jesus when the mortal body of man will be changed into an immortal body, and the image of God will be fully restored in man (1 Cor 15:51-55; 1 Cor 13:9-10). Until then, a person who is considered perfect before glorification is “one who has reached the degree of development expected of him at any given time. He is a mature Christian fully dedicated to the Lord, who, though he still has weaknesses to overcome, presses onward toward the mark of God’s high calling in Christ Jesus” (Horn 1979). Thus, sinless perfection is possible only post-Second Advent of Christ.

The Spirit of Prophecy on Christian Perfection

Ellen White considers perfection synonymous with sanctification. She mentions “perfection” at least 2,023 times and “sanctification,” 1,695 times. There are statements in the Spirit of Prophecy that seem to point to absolute perfection. “We can overcome. Yes; fully, entirely. Jesus died to make a way of escape for us, that we might overcome every evil temper, every sin, every temptation” (1948, 144); “The Son of God was faultless. Jesus died to make a way to escape for us, that we might overcome every evil temper, sin, and temptation” (1948, 144); “The Son of God was faultless. We must aim at this perfection and overcome as He overcame” (1948, 336). The latter rain in the last days will prepare the saints for the time of trouble, bring about a “revival of primitive godliness” (1939, 464), and cause a complete transformation into the likeness of Christ so that they may fully reflect the image of Jesus and be fitted for translation (1962, 506; 1945, 71; 1948, 1:187-188). Again, Ellen White warns that “not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them” (1948, 5: 214). She further says that God’s people during times of trouble will be in the same spiritual condition as Jesus was (1939, 623).

Again, there are statements by Ellen White that support relative perfection. She says that man can reach “a perfection of intelligence and a purity of character but little lower than the perfection and purity of angels” (1948, 4:93); one can never equal the “pattern” of Christ but only “resembles it” (1948, 2:549) “As God, Himself is

perfect in His exalted sphere, so should His children be perfect in the humble sphere they occupy” (1969, 2:225). It appears as though Ellen White contradicts herself. One must find a balance between her statements to understand her real thought.

Christian Perfection is Dynamic and Progressive

It had been established that biblical perfection is dynamic and progressive. Ellen White (1951) expresses a similar concept. She pens,

We do not expect to find men who are perfect in every respect. They may be seeking for perfection of character, but they are finite and liable to err. True sanctification means perfect love, perfect obedience, perfect conformity to the will of God... The Scriptures plainly show that the work of sanctification is progressive. When in conversion the sinner finds peace with God through the blood of the atonement, the Christian life has but just begun. Now he is to ‘go on unto perfection’ (291).

Explaining the words of Jesus, “Be ye, therefore, perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,” she says we should consistently strive toward character perfection, to be conformed to God’s will. Such noble efforts “begun here will continue through eternity” (1881, 193). Erickson’s comment on this issue is enlightening. He writes, “While complete freedom from and victory over sin are the standard to be aimed at and are theoretically possible, it is doubtful whether any believer will attain this goal within this life. Although we may never be perfectly sanctified within this life, we shall be in the eternity beyond and hence should presently aim to arrive as close to complete sanctification as we can” (1998, 986). Then, if perfection is progressive, it can hardly be absolute.

Sanctification and the Image of God

Andreasen believed that God’s original image will be restored in the lives of the saints. Ellen White also says that they will fully reflect the image of Jesus. She writes, “the very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity” (2005, 671). It must be mentioned that God’s image is indivisible—a unity of the mind, body, and spirit (Gen 2:7). If there is to be a restoration, it has to happen in all three. The Bible also clearly states that the body will be restored only at the return of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:51-55). It would then be illogical to claim that the saints will perfectly reflect the image of God.

Helmut Ott (1987) makes a correct observation. He says, “the whole image of God is to be reflected in the believer, not just some of its parts. Therefore, if God’s image is to be restored during the present life at all, then the process must include both man’s character and his body. To leave the body out of the restorative process splits the image of God, and hence destroys the whole argument” (174). Since the body will be restored only at the Second Coming, the restoration of the image of God in the saints cannot be absolute.

Saints do not claim Sinless Perfection

Ellen White (1911) writes about God’s saints, “None of the apostles and prophets ever claimed to be without sin. Men who have lived the nearest to God, men who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit a wrong act, men whom God

has honored with divine light and power have confessed the sinfulness of their nature. They have put no confidence in the flesh, have claimed no righteousness of their own, but have trusted wholly in the righteousness of Christ” (561). In another statement, she says that through the law, the sinner is convicted and is reconciled through the blood of Jesus. The more such a repentant sinner walks with Jesus, the more he will realize his sins and his need for a “continual repentance, and faith in the blood of Christ” (562).

She herself never claimed sinlessness. Rather she said, “Why is it that so many claim to be holy and sinless? It is because they are so far from Christ. I have never dared to claim any such a thing...You never have heard me say, ‘I am sinless.’ Those that get sight of the loveliness and exalted character of Jesus Christ, who was holy... will never say it” (1958, 3:354).

However, during times of trouble, the saints will not know that they have been sealed by God and will keep striving to be perfect. They will keep reviewing their lives and ask for forgiveness for their sins. They will afflict their souls and point to the days of their repentance. Although they would “have a deep sense of their unworthiness, they” would “have no concealed wrongs to reveal. Their sins have gone beforehand to judgment and have been blotted out, and they cannot bring them to remembrance” (1939, 619-620).

The “Earthliness” of the Saints

Ellen White points out that during the time of trouble, the saints will still be subjected to temptation. Even though the Holy Spirit will seal God’s people, their sinful nature will still exist until glorification. They will continue to sin after the close of probation until Christ returns “not willingly but unwittingly” because of the presence of their sinful nature (Rice 1990, 125). Commenting on Ellen White’s writings, Woodrow W. Whidden (1990), an authority on Ellen White’s soteriology, asserts that according to Ellen White, a believer’s perfection is never absolute and that the saints will still have sinful nature but will not commit any premeditated and willful sins (413).

Ellen White herself clearly points out that the saints will be “far from being sinlessly perfect” (1948, 5:618-619). She even goes as far as warning those who claim perfection of character like Jesus as committing “blasphemy” (White 1887, 162). To her, rather than being absolute, perfection is relative because it is God’s perfection and Christlikeness. It means being in and belonging to Christ.

The Meaning of “Without a Mediator”

It is obvious that Andreasen’s concept of the absence of a mediator during the time of trouble is based on Ellen White’s writings who wrote, “When He leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor” (1939, 614). She also said that there will be no mediator and no priest in the sanctuary in heaven. Andreasen does not explain what it means by the absence of a mediator. However, it is apparent that he meant that there is no provision for the forgiveness of sins, implying that the saints will be sinless.

Ellen White clearly explains what it means to have no mediator during a time of trouble. Rather than focusing on the saints, she focuses on the unrepentant sinners, the wicked. She explains that probation for the wicked is ended. The Spirit and the

protection of God have been withdrawn, and Satan is given full power over the wicked. There is “no mediator between guilty man and an offended God” (1945, 280). This is the condition that John describes in Revelation, “Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy. Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done” (Rev 22: 11-12, NASB). The destiny of every individual on earth would have been decided either for life or for death. There will be no time to change sides.

There is no doubt that the saints will not sin deliberately during the time of trouble. But does it mean they will not sin, even unknowingly or “unwittingly”? For that to happen, they need to be perfectly sinless. This can be possible only if their sinful human nature is changed into glorified sinless nature. But it had been established that according to the Bible, the change will happen only during the Second Advent (1 Cor 15:51-55). That leaves one with no choice but to reject Andreasen’s concept of sinless perfection or absolute perfection.

Whidden says that if we are proposing that the saints would not need Christ’s mediation because they have stored up a reservoir of grace within themselves, “the entire thrust of Ellen White’s understanding of salvation would be severely distorted—even on its head” (1995, 135). He then explains what the perfection of the saints means.

God’s sealed and faithful people are regarded as perfect in the sense that they are no longer cherishing sin or committing overt sins—sins that are deliberately or willfully performed. They will be imperfect in the sense that they still have sinful natures, so all that they do is less than the best... Jesus is still making up for their ‘unavoidable deficiencies,’ ‘defects,’ ‘shortcomings,’ ‘mistakes,’ or ‘errors,’ but He is no longer mediating for the unsealed—the rebellious, willful, high-handed, sin-excusing sinners... saints will have become so accustomed to trusting Jesus, loving the right, and cherishing obedience that they will no longer commit sins that need a mediator. Jesus will still be their mediator, in the sense of sustaining them in their weakness, but He will no longer intercede for those involved in the rebellion and willful transgression (1995:136-138).

“Without a Mediator” would also mean, as Ellen White explains, that Satan will exercise total control of the wicked and the world as God approves. Satan will tempt, persecute, and afflict the saints to the uttermost. Due to severe persecution, they will escape from the cities and villages and hide in the “most desolate and solitary places” (1939:626). It may seem God has forsaken them, but it would not. She says that though they may be thrown into prisons and dungeons, communication between their souls and Christ will not be cut off. Jesus and His angels “will come to them in lonely cells, bringing light and peace from heaven” (1939:627). Moreover, even though they would go through intense suffering and agony just as Jacob did, God would not allow Satan to harm them. His angels will protect them until they are finally delivered. Andreasen vividly shares this description of the condition of the time of trouble and of the saints.

Sinless Perfection only at the Second Advent of Jesus

Ellen White emphatically states, “All blemishes and deformities are left in the grave...the last lingering traces of the curse of sin will be removed, and Christ’s faithfulness will appear ‘in the beauty of the Lord our God,’ in mind and soul and body reflecting the perfect image of their Lord... the living righteous are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.’ At the voice of God, they were glorified” (1939, 645). She also said, “We cannot say, ‘I am sinless,’ till this vile body is changed and fashioned like unto His glorious body” (1888, 178).⁹ Clearly, according to Ellen White, sinless perfection is possible only after His return. Seventh-day Adventists Believe echoes this same idea: “Perfection now is ours only in Christ, but the ultimate, all-comprehensive transformation of our lives into the image of God will take place at the Second Advent” (2018, 148).

Conclusion

There are always some grains of truth in every professed theology. The same can definitely be said of Andreasen’s Last Generation Theology. In fact, there is much truth in his teachings. It would be incorrect to dismiss his theology as completely incorrect and unbiblical. However, he has erred on some fine points that matter.

Andreasen’s Great Controversy theme does not differ much from Ellen White’s. In fact, his beliefs were based on White’s concept. The slight difference is in the purpose of the saints and their righteous lives. According to the Spirit of Prophecy, the saints, through their lives, will help vindicate the character of God, while Andreasen went further by teaching that the vindication of God’s character depends on the saints. If they fail, God fails. Satan can still claim victory over God if the saints fail. However, the Spirit of Prophecy teaches that victory over Satan had already been accomplished on Calvary when Jesus cried, “It is finished.”

One of Andreasen’s most controversial concepts is his emphasis on sinless perfection. His focus is on perfection during time of trouble. He does not mention whether the same perfection is possible during other times of Christianity. However, whether he differentiates that or not, one thing is clear—the issue of perfection cannot be dichotomized. If sinless perfection will be possible for the saints during the time of trouble, it should also be possible for Christians of any generation. This is because the same Spirit empowers a believer, and there is only one standard of judgment for humanity.

It has been observed that there are numerous statements in the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy that seem to highlight absolute perfection. Under such circumstances, one should be able to sympathize with Andreasen and others who exhibit a different understanding of perfection. However, the principle of biblical interpretation demands that the entire Bible be combed to arrive at a correct doctrine. The same principle applies to the Spirit of Prophecy. Having applied this principle in the study of Christian perfection, it is to be concluded with compelling evidences that both the Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy overwhelmingly portray a relative perfection in the earthly life of a believer until glorification rather than absolute perfection. Thus, the stack is very much against Andreasen’s sinless perfection.

Endnote

¹ Advocates of LGT include Robert Brinsmead, Herbert Edgar Douglass, C. Mervyn Maxwell, Dennis Priebe, Larry Kirkpatrick, and Joe Crews. Edward Heppenstall was the most influential theologian to come out against Andreasen's final-generation theology.

² There were two points in QOD that Andreasen took issue with: "a complete atonement on the cross ... and that Christ was born with a sinless human nature" (Knight 2000:167). Due to his repeated criticism, his books were withdrawn from Adventist publishing houses. On April 6, 1961, the General Conference reluctantly suspended his ministerial credentials. During his illness, he reconciled with the church leadership. On March 1, 1962, the General Conference restored his ministerial credentials. Unfortunately, he never learned of this action, for he had already gone to his rest on February 19, 1962.

³ The Writings of Ellen White and the Spirit of Prophecy are synonymously used in the paper.

⁴ Andreasen believed in the Adventist teaching that sanctification is a lifetime's work.

⁵ The Time of Trouble is "a brief period of extreme tribulation through which the church is to pass immediately prior to the Second Advent" (SDAE 1976).

⁶ Absolute or sinless perfection is advocated in different forms by Pelagians, Roman Catholics or Semi-Pelagians, Arminians, Wesleyans, Labadists, Quietists, Quakers, and others. All Arminians are not perfectionists.

⁷ Barclay also says that "the Greek idea of perfection is functional. A thing is perfect if it fully realizes the purpose for which it was planned, and designed, and made... a man is perfect if he realizes the purpose for which he was created and sent into the world" (1975:177).

⁸ There is a debate as to whether Paul made this statement before or after his regenerate state.

⁹SDA Believe also comments, "Perfection now is ours only in Christ, but the ultimate, all-comprehensive transformation of our lives into the image of God will take place at the Second Advent" (2018:148).

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