

# “Watchman, what of the night ?”



“The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!” Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

## ► THIS ISSUE'S READING

### “GOD'S CHARACTER AND THE LAST GENERATION”

- 2 -

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pg. 6

### *Editor's Preface*

With this issue of WWN, we continue with the second installment of our ongoing critique of the book *God's Character and the Last Generation*. Because this subject is so closely related to the biblical doctrine of the sanctuary, as uniquely held by Seventh-day Adventists within the context of the great controversy, it is of utmost importance that we maintain a scripturally sound understanding of it. Sadly, a growing number 'among us' are either continuing to promote erroneous views of L.G.T. or are abandoning it altogether (the scholars who produced this book are in the latter class).

The final article is an invitation for our readers to access a couple of PDF downloads on A.L.F. of Iowa's website.

Due to space limitations, our ongoing presentation of *The Sanctuary Truth* was not able to be continued in the present thought paper as originally planned. It will be resumed, however, in an upcoming issue of WWN.

### **GOD'S CHARACTER AND THE LAST GENERATION - 2 -**

**Critique: Chapters 1 and 14 —**

John C. Peckham, one of the two editors of the book, pens both the 1st and the 14th expositions in this series of 14 chapters/essays. Chapter 1, entitled *Great Controversy Issues*, begins the opening



sentence in the first paragraph on page 15 with the phrase, "God is love." Likewise, chapter 14, entitled *The Triumph of God's Love*, ends the closing sentence in the last paragraph on page 282 with the same phrase, which is a verbatim quotation taken from 1 John 4: 8, 16. As this final paragraph (subtitled "Conclusion") states:

**"God is love.** Those are the first and the last three words of Ellen G. White's epic Conflict of the Ages series, beginning with *Patriarchs and Prophets* and ending with *The Great Controversy*, and everything in between testifies that God's character is love. It is not what we do as humans that provides the grounds to vindicate God's character. It is God's work in the plan of salvation that manifests His righteousness and love, finally eradicating every doubt in the universe that God is indeed love and that His moral government is entirely just and above reproach. Although we have a missional role in this controversy to proclaim and reflect God's love to others, the story is about God's own manifestation of His character as the One who gives everything, even His own life, to reconcile the world unto Himself." (pg. 281).

The fact that this book begins and ends with the same biblical phrase as does the first and last volume in the Conflict of the Ages book set appears to imply that this identical structure **"and everything in between** testifies that God's character is love" (emphasis added). Therefore, inadvertently or not, the conclusion that can clearly be drawn by this parallelism is that "Last Generation Theology" (L.G.T.) is not biblical because this book (representing some of the best of current Seventh-day Adventist scholarship), **and** The Writings (particularly the 'Conflict' series), **agree** that "everything in between" the structures of **both** books repudiates L.G.T. because

it does not, at least in some degree, testify that "God is love." This is a serious allegation and in all fairness the "degree" that the 12 different authors engage in this refutation through their individual essays differs - an allusion we noted in the last issue of WWN.<sup>1</sup>

As one approaches the subject of L.G.T., how we define it becomes (obviously) the way we understand it. Chapter 1 continues its introductory first paragraph with an outline of the "great-controversy motif, which is itself a crucial component of Adventist theology." Since the entire focus of the book concentrates primarily on the "conflict between God and Satan regarding the character of God and God's moral government," the key issue to be determined is **"just how God's character is vindicated over and against the claims of the devil"** (emph. added). Though this cosmic conflict overview is not confined to Seventh-day Adventist thought alone, it is Adventism's broader, more progressive comprehension of it that brings a uniqueness to Christian theology not found outside of Adventist circles. And while much of what we doctrinally consider distinct with us can be found scattered in some measure throughout other faith communities, it is the "subject of the sanctuary" which scripturally "opened to view a complete system of truth, connected and harmonious, showing that God's hand had directed the great advent movement and revealing present duty as it brought to light the position and work of His people ... Light from the sanctuary (which) illumined the past, the present, and the future" (see GC, pg. 423, compare with Psalm 77: 13),<sup>2</sup> that is of utmost significance to the topic under discussion. It is this "complete system of truth," revealed in the sanctuary teaching, that especially sets the Adventist understanding of the great controversy apart from all others as a

truly biblical "connected and harmonious" body of theological revelation. This must be ever kept in the forefront with any of our evaluations regarding "present" truth. L.G.T. developed among Adventists within this specific context of the great controversy theme.

The Seventh-day Adventist movement was originally raised up by God as an end time remnant people, in fulfillment of Bible prophecy (Revelation 10: 7-11; 12: 13-17; 14: 1-12), to prepare themselves and the world for the second coming of Christ. Though "the issues raised relative to God's character" are certainly of paramount importance, the central question is whether God *solely* vindicates Himself through Christ apart from any share of His people in it and exactly what all this entails (a monergistic position),<sup>3</sup> or does He vindicate Himself *cooperatively* in some measure through Christ with His people sharing to some degree in it and exactly all this entails (a synergistic position).<sup>3</sup>

Following the first chapter's introductory paragraph, the essay is divided into sections under four different subtitles. Starting with "The cosmic conflict over God's character," the author proceeds to elaborate and enlarge on the basic principles which led to the devil's "slandering God's character in heaven as a means to usurp God's rule" and subsequently to his "[appearing] as a serpent in the Garden of Eden [to question] and [slander] God's character ... [leading] Eve and Adam into distrusting and disobeying God and ... introducing sin and evil into this world." The gospel promise found in Genesis 3: 15 is then presented and Christ's sinless life and substitutionary death is cited as "upholding God's law and definitively demonstrating God's completely righteous character of love." Accordingly, "this concept of a cosmic conflict ... is uniquely essential to Adventist the-

ology" as it provides much "of the framework within which many doctrines of Adventist theology make sense," naming "(eschatology) and the nature of God's judgment and the sanctuary doctrine" as examples.

The next section, entitled "Differing understandings of the great controversy," begins with the affirmation that what was expressed in the preceding section is "generally accepted by most Adventists," but continues to state that "there are significant departures among *some* regarding just how the controversy over God's character is settled and the part that humans are to play in this cosmic drama of the great controversy." It is specifically the differences that have arisen concerning "the part that humans are to play" in all of this, which is the chief cause of the "significant departures among some," that is the main topic this book is purporting to address. Next, interestingly, the Apostle Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 4: 9 (NASB)<sup>4</sup> - "'we have become a spectacle [or theater] to the world, both to angels and to men'" - is quoted (and footnoted) within this context. As the *Endnotes* (# 8) rightfully states: "By 'we' Paul refers specifically to the apostles, but the idea that this world is a 'theater' to both angels and men applies more broadly in the context of the great controversy." Simply put, this text also includes all believers, along with the apostles, as players in the "theater" of the "cosmic drama." The actions of God's people in "the world" are being watched (observed) by "both angels and men." This proves, at least to some extent, that the people of God on earth play some part, in some way, in the vindication of God in the great controversy which, as the author aptly sets forth previously, is God's principal goal in the settlement of the conflict.

The next two paragraphs in this section

sketch out a synopsis of two views of the great controversy theme which represent "significant departures" within Adventism over God's vindication. They can be roughly characterized as the anti-L.G.T. position and the pro-L.G.T. position. To summarize, the anti-L.G.T. position as presented has God providing for Himself, through Christ and His victory on the cross, the grounds (basis) necessary for refuting all the charges of Satan thereby "fully [vindicating] God's character before the onlooking universe." The role that humans (including the last generation) play in the vindicating of God is understood as strictly "missional," meaning that of "proclamation and witnessing ... spreading the good news, and reflecting God's character ... (which) activity of humans does not provide any *grounds* for the vindication of God's character or God's victory in the great controversy." It appears that this stance views the role of God's people (the church) - even its entire "missional" activity as stated (including the reflection of God's character) - as completely passive regarding the vindicating of God in any way. In other words, this missional role (activity) provides *no grounds* in the vindication of God at all. In this sense, the vindication of God is essentially monergistic.

In contrast, the pro-L.G.T. position as presented has the last generation of humans providing for God, "by completely overcoming sin" (assumably through Christ?) "the grounds to vindicate God's character and win the great controversy." The role that Christ plays in vindicating God is (apparently) only partial/minimal because "generally speaking, LGT affirms that an additional phase of atonement is necessary, beyond the ministry of Christ, in order to finally defeat Satan." Accordingly, this stance seems to view the

role of the church as predominately active - "Satan was not defeated at the cross; some group of humans must become perfectly sinless in order for Satan to be defeated." If, as noted, it is the last generation that defeats Satan and wins the controversy, then the vindication of God is at best semi-synergistic; with God in this sense playing, through Christ, the lesser role!

At this point we need to pause and briefly evaluate both of these assessments before continuing further. The anti-L.G.T. viewpoint, though definitely the more balanced of the two, overstates its position when it claims that human activity "does not provide any grounds for the vindication of God's character or God's victory" in the conflict. While it is correct that we do not contribute "in any way to actually making it true that God's character is perfect," His vindication through Christ does not "actually [make] it true" either. "That God's character is perfect" has always been true, being unchangeable from all eternity (see Malachi 3: 6). Vindication however, in light of the devil's accusations, certainly confirms it and Jesus, "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12: 2, RSV) <sup>5</sup> has led the way in vindicating God by utterly defeating Satan through His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection (Matthew 28: 18; Ephesians 1: 19-22; Philippians 2: 8-11; 1 Peter 3: 21-22; etc.). The fact that *after* Christ's victory all the created intelligences are watching the church "theater" clearly demonstrates that the active role that God's people are playing before the "onlooking universe" is also contributing, in some manner and in some degree, to the vindication of God (see Ephesians 3: 9-10; and 1 Peter 1: 11-12 for further confirmation). Anti-L.G.T. as presented is an extreme view not supported by Scripture. Though the greater, decisive

role in God's vindication has been pioneered by Christ, the church follows Him by vindicating God in a lesser, contributing role. All that remains to be determined is exactly what manner and to what degree.

The pro-L.G.T. position, as presented, is about as unbalanced as one can get - short of viewing God's/Christ's role as being totally passive in vindication of Satan's accusations! By so completely overstating its viewpoint - in claiming that the human activity of the last generation "who become absolutely sinless and 'perfect' in order to provide the grounds to vindicate God's character and win the great controversy" thereby "playing a crucial (decisive) role in deciding the victor in the great controversy" - the impression is given that God plays little if any role in His own vindication. Pro-L.G.T. as stated is an ultra-extreme view not supported by Scripture. In fact, the minimalist role that God/Christ plays in vindication against the devil, along with the exaggerated role that the last generation purportedly play, is so biblically unsound that it borders on the absurd!

Both of these initial 'con and pro' perspectives on L.G.T. illustrate how biased an analysis on this subject can get. The anti-L.G.T. stance (# 1) sets the tone for the rest of the book by leaving the impression that God, through Christ, vindicates Himself without any 'help' from us. All of our mere "missional" activities are, "grounds"-wise, inconsequential in the matter. In marked contrast, the pro-L.G.T. stance (# 2) leaves the impression that the vindication of God is ultimately left up to us. The last generation completes and finishes what Christ merely started at the cross. All of 'our activities' are "crucial" in the matter. As we can see, and as noted earlier, # 1, by being the more balanced of the two, will have the effect of mag-

nifying the much more unbalanced nature of # 2 in comparison. This will have the tendency to view # 1 as unvarnished truth and # 2 as blatant error whether this is intended or not. Of course, the hyperbole expressed in both of these positions is not completely groundless or unwarranted. At varying levels, extreme elements of both positions has found expression in the lives of the proponents of one or the other. Those who champion # 1 have been led to believe that nothing they do has any effectual bearing on God's vindication - thus producing a passive attitude toward the issue. Those who favor # 2 have been led to believe that the vindication of God, through the last generation of believers, is completely (or near completely) up to them - thus causing an urgent striving toward sinless perfection which produces an active attitude that the issue is their responsibility to resolve. Objectively, the detrimental effects of position # 2 is what this book almost exclusively concentrates on. Only a truly biblical presentation of L.G.T. will dispel most of the misconceptions of this teaching that its opponents claim to be so concerned about.<sup>6</sup>

The third section, entitled "Issues and questions pertinent to LGT," continues the discussion of the last section's outline of L.G.T. by primarily expounding upon the "theological implications" that this view, as presented, has on other doctrinal topics. One does not have to detail in much depth the skewered effect that this particular view of L.G.T. will have on the doctrines of sin, justification, sanctification, perfection, Christology, and sacrificial atonement. And while the author overall gives a fair exposition of most of these subjects, it is one thing to expose and oppose false teachings claiming association with a theological system, it is quite another to pre-

sent these falsehoods as an integral part of the entire system and then rationalize that the whole structure is false. This is nothing more than the proverbial 'setting up of the straw man' in order to 'knock him over' with the intent to subjectively bolster one's own argument.

The final section, entitled "*Addressing the issues: The remainder of this book*," represents the topics and essay contributors listed in the *Table of Contents* from chapter 2 thru chapter 14. The reader is assured that what was briefly touched on in the previous section, and more, is presented in greater detail by these writers who apparently specialize in each area introduced by the chapter title listed over their name. The author gives an additional short survey of each chapter, summarizing each topic the writer is expounding upon. All the subjects, in one way or another, are related to each other as they all were written with the purpose of refuting L.G.T. This section ends and closes out the first chapter with a summary of the last chapter of the book, which the author himself had also written. As he states, "chapter 14 will conclude the discussion by briefly revisiting the issues and questions raised and addressed throughout the book, emphasizing the final triumph of God's love."

Besides the structural parallelism delineated at the beginning of this critique, the purpose that these two chapters appear to serve in this volume are the following:

[Chapter 1.] An introductory basis to present the reader with a brief definition of L.G.T. along with a list of doctrinal topics with short descriptions related to L.G.T. in a preparatory manner for the more detailed presentations of these same or similar topics to follow in the proceeding chapters.

[Chapter 14.] A summation of all the doctri-

nal topics presented in the preceding chapters, with special attention given to the high points that pertain to L.G.T. upon this revisit-ation of "the issues and questions."

The chapter closes the final section by repeating the idea that "It is not what we do as humans that provides the grounds to vindicate God's character ... Although we have a missional role in this controversy to proclaim and reflect God's love to others." Considering that a rebuttal of L.G.T. is the foremost reason this book was published, the context of this quotation seems to suggest that *The Triumph of God's Love* has nothing to do with any L.G.T. concept of vindication of God as all such notions of the great controversy are not being viewed in that manner by the on-looking universe. Be that as it may, we have mainly concentrated the evaluation of both these chapters on chapter 1; as it contains the preliminary definition of L.G.T. which, because of the importance that this initial understanding of it has on the content that follows, needed a detailed analysis at the outset. Chapter 14, as it is mostly a recapitulation of the essays preceding it, will be covered essentially by the time we are through critiquing the rest of the book. So far, two major things stand out that this book will continue to focus on: 1.) The teaching of the sinlessness of the last generation and 2.) The teaching that the last generation participates in any active role toward the vindication of God.

» *To be Continued.*

### 👉 **Prophecy Booklet in EZ Read Digital Download Format**

The editors would like to thank all who asked for the free paper copy of the Foundation's revised and retitled booklet, "THE ANTICHRIST – He's Already Here! Prepare! The

Final Deception is Coming!!" in WWN's last issue. You can still request one if you haven't done so yet.

Since then, due to a few requests that have been received, we have now posted on our website ([alfiowa.com](http://alfiowa.com)) a free digital version of the booklet in an easy read format through a PDF download. If you have access to the internet, here are the steps to get there: on the home page menu, hover over "LITERATURE" and on the dropdown menu click on "Pamphlets/Tracts/Misc."; look for "The Antichrist ..." title and below the "Add to Cart" button, click on "Free PDF Digital Version." The entire booklet is featured, comprising of 20 pages. Check it out and then share it with your email contact group, encouraging each one of them to do the same.

While there, another "FREE" PDF is available in the colored area above, "FRANCIS – THE FIRST JESUIT POPE." When this six paneled write-up is printed out on each side of a sheet of paper, it can be made into a tri-fold handout. Print out as many copies as you need for your personal evangelism. Scores of people do not know that the current pope is a Jesuit. The significance of that Roman

Catholic order is covered within the confines of this informative brochure. ❖

1. Gary L. Patrick, *"Watchman, what of the night?"* (Nora Springs, IA: Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Iowa, Inc., Issue # 32 - Dec. 2018 / Jan. 2019, "God's Character and the Last Generation -1-"), 5. [https://www.alfiowa.com/IOWA-BACK-ISSUES/WWN\\_Issue\\_32.pdf](https://www.alfiowa.com/IOWA-BACK-ISSUES/WWN_Issue_32.pdf)

2. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy, Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1950), 423.

3. While the words *Monergistic* ("the work of one") and *Synergistic* ("working together") are soteriological ("the study of salvation") terms, they are being employed in this study of last generation theology due to the close relational association this doctrine has to salvation.

4. *The New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1975, 1995).

5. *The Revised Standard Version Bible* (New York, NY: American Bible Society, 1952, 1971), 1052.

6. (Again, for a concise, biblical introduction to L.G.T. see): Gary L. Patrick, *"Watchman, what of the night?"* (Nora Springs, IA: Adventist Laymen's Foundation of Iowa, Inc., Issue # 22 - April / May 2017, "The Basis For Last Generation Theology From The Biblical Text."), 2-7. [https://www.alfiowa.com/IOWA-BACK-ISSUES/WWN%20IOWA\\_4\(17\)\\_5\(17\).pdf](https://www.alfiowa.com/IOWA-BACK-ISSUES/WWN%20IOWA_4(17)_5(17).pdf)

\* All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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