

A DEEPLY FLAWED CASE

Roy Adams, *The Nature of Christ: Help for a church divided over perfection*
(Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Assn, 1994)

reviewed by
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More than two decades have passed since this book was published and its impact felt within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And as the author himself predicted (p. 13), the controversy over the issues addressed in the book has not gone away, nor does it show any signs of abating.

Why is this? Is it because some Adventists love argument so much they would rather fight than eat? Is it because the salvation and Christology issues are so unclear in the inspired writings that no resolution of the dispute is realistically possible? Is this perhaps one of those issues—or cluster of issues—where the Rodney King query, “Can’t we all just get along?” might best be applied?

Or is it possible the real explanation for the longevity of this conflict is that it truly involves a division between right and wrong, truth and error, with major historical, doctrinal, and spiritual implications for the integrity and mission of the Advent movement?

Roy Adams’ book attempts to provide what the author believes to be a solution. The purpose of the review to follow is to measure his case by the yardstick of Scripture, the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy, and the record of denominational history.

The Evangelistic Approach

Many of us have studied the Bible with other Christians regarding such issues as the Sabbath, the perpetuity of the Ten Commandment law, the state of man in death, the punishment of the wicked, and numerous other topics. And any who have engaged in these studies recognize there is no hope of persuading a Sunday-keeper of the truth of the Sabbath, or a believer in natural immortality of the truth that the dead are unconscious, unless one can show how passages which seem to support Sunday-sacredness, natural immortality, or other unscriptural teachings do not in fact do so when read in context or placed alongside the Biblical consensus. This is why such books as F.D. Nichol’s *Answers to Objections* (1), Mark Finley’s *Studying Together* (2) and similar works have such value for Adventist Bible instructors and evangelists.

The same approach is needed when considering Bible verses and Ellen White statements which seem on the surface to contradict each other regarding such issues as the nature of human sin, the human nature of Christ, the ground of our salvation, and the perfectibility of Christian

character by earthly believers. Unless a way is found whereby harmony is demonstrated between these apparently conflicting passages, there is no more hope of resolving these controversies than there is of convincing a Sunday worshiper to accept the Sabbath without demonstrating that such verses as Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16 do not—as many allege—teach the abolition of the seventh-day Sabbath so far as Christian obligation is concerned.

Only if we find the fundamental harmony in all the inspired statements which address such issues as Jesus' human nature and the possibility of sinless living prior to Jesus' return, can we hope to reconcile the differences on these topics in contemporary Adventism.

Lowering Expectations

The preface and introduction to Adams' book are replete with what many might regard as efforts to lower expectations so far as the book's effectiveness is concerned. The author writes at the beginning, concerning the subject at hand, that "it is a matter to which I do not warm up naturally and, frankly, would rather leave alone" (p. 9). (One wonders how he relates to Ellen White's declaration—to which his own book makes reference (pp. 59-60)—that "the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us" (3).) He goes on to describe his book as a "modest effort" (p. 9), "not complete, not by any means" (p. 9), openly acknowledging the presence of "omissions and blunders" (p. 9). Later he claims "it is beyond the scope of this study . . . to give a detailed, line-by-line critique" of his opponents' position, "nor do I feel inclined to point out the shortcomings of their arguments at every turn" (p. 25).

Some may find such comments as reflective of a humble spirit. None but God can judge the heart, of course (I Kings 8:39). But when the effort that follows leaves vast reaches of relevant inspired evidence unaccounted for, one might wonder if the initial lowering of expectations is as much a strategy to avert embarrassment as a frank acknowledgment of any limitations inherent in the study of salvation-related topics. One thing is sure: Adams' discomfort with the subject of the book borders on the visceral, particularly when he writes that for him and others, the controversy in question has moved "beyond fatigue," and that when this occurs, "our minds shut down, and we feel that we cannot stomach it anymore" (p. 13).

Whether this is the reason for the egregious lack of attention in the book to both historical and theological evidence pointing in the direction opposite of the author's views, none can know for certain. But what follows in the present review will offer what many might consider ample evidence that the reason the author's theological opponents remain significantly unpersuaded by his and his theological allies' arguments, cannot be fairly ascribed to the stubbornness of what the author calls "seasoned controversialists" who presumably "do not generally concede anything" (p. 17). The book's author, along with readers of this review, should be aware that the present writer once held the opposite position from the one he presently holds on the subject of Christ's human nature, a position he was constrained to abandon due to the decisive weight of Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy evidence not previously considered.

Concern is equally compounded by the book's frequent reference to scholarly opinions regarding the issues being addressed (pp. 25,31-35,40,58-59,63,68-69,85,89,102-104,113,116,119,124), often as a means of clarifying the meaning of inspired statements. At one point, speaking of the doctrine of original sin, the author writes that "whether it is correct or in error, [it] was nevertheless articulated by some of the keenest theological minds of the Christian church" (p. 26). (Why that should affect our convictions regarding this doctrine is mystifying indeed, as keen theological minds have crafted some of the most damning heresies in Christian history, such as transubstantiation, predestination, apologies for slavery, and a host of others.) There is nothing wrong with quoting scholars, of course, but we had best remember that when so many Biblical and Ellen White statements are omitted from a discussion such as this, the observations of uninspired commentators—regardless of their sincerity or the degrees after their names—cannot be expected to build bridges to sound conclusions.

Terminology

At the start of the book, the author seeks to make a distinction between persons he calls "concerned brethren" and others whom he calls "disaffected brethren" (p. 11). Sadly, his use of these terms is very broad and not a little confusing. For example, he speaks of the "concerned brethren" as standing in "sharp disagreement with church leadership and with the church in general" (p. 11). Yet he gives no examples as to those issues of doctrine or policy on which these brethren differ either from church leadership or the church in general.

What is more, he doesn't even define the phrases "church leadership" or the "church in general." Who is he talking about here? Leaders at what levels? Who has polled these leaders so as to determine their stand on the issues addressed in this book? And so far as the "church in general" is concerned, he is again very imprecise. Is he speaking of any votes taken at a General Conference session—the only body authorized to officially speak for the worldwide Adventist organization? If so, when did such a vote—or votes—take place? If he is speaking of votes taken at Annual Council—the General Conference executive committee meetings held each fall—when in fact did these decisions occur? Is he perhaps speaking of some surveys indicating where the global Adventist membership stands on the issues his book addresses? If so, where and when were these surveys taken, and what were the results?

To be fair in this regard, there are conservative Adventists who have spoken in similarly broad, sweeping terms of "the leadership," "the Conference," etc, often as a means of assigning general blame for negative conditions in the church. Such generalized criticism is no more helpful than the language used by the book in question. The fact is that persons can be found on both sides of the issues addressed in Adams' book throughout the structure of organized Adventism, among laity and leadership at every level. No one, on either side of this debate, has factual justification for framing this controversy in terms of loyalty or disloyalty to church leadership or the denominational organization.

Describing the so-called "disaffected brethren," the author speaks of those who "in varying degrees" stand "in serious disagreement with church leadership or with the church at

large” (p. 11). Again, no specifics are given as to what is meant by church leadership or the church at large, and no specifics are given regarding doctrinal or policy issues and how the church at any particular level has defined what is and is not acceptable in these matters. The author continues, speaking of those who “in some cases, are developing their own congregations, collecting their own tithes, holding their own camp meetings, publishing their own journals, and even conducting their own ordinations to the gospel ministry” (p. 11).

Just as an aside, one is curious as to how the author of this book views those territories in contemporary Adventism who are presently conducting “their own ordinations” to the gospel ministry—of a gender-inclusive nature—in defiance of three consecutive votes by the General Conference at its highest level of authority. But on what basis, we must ask, are self-supporting camp meetings and journals to be viewed as “open opposition to church leadership” (p. 11), as this author claims? The formation of independent churches and the unauthorized collection of tithes, in the present writer’s view, belong in a completely different category. But one is constrained to ask what church policy any self-supporting ministry has violated by holding its own camp meetings or publishing its own journals? And when was this policy voted?

In short, the author’s terms have added more confusion than clarity to denominational discussions, both when the book was written and more recently. He invokes church authority and leadership in a fashion that can only be described as careless and misleading.

Theological Opponents Named

Almost never, in books or articles published by mainline denominational presses or magazines, do authors name the espousers of theological or other beliefs with which they differ, provided those espousers are members or employees of the church in good standing. Strictly scholarly documents often do this, of course, but mainline denominational journals and books have nearly always made a practice of avoiding the use of names when addressing theological opponents inside the church. (Naming opponents in such settings who have experienced formal church discipline, or who have left the church, is a different matter.) The book in question was and is significantly controversial because it breaks with this standard practice by naming in its text several prominent Adventist figures in good standing with whom the author doesn’t agree.

Joe Crews, founder of the Amazing Facts evangelistic organization, is publicly taken to task for his theology in Adams’ book (pp. 19-24,26). While the author is careful to note that Crews (now deceased) was a “team player” so far as the church organization was concerned (p. 19), and that Amazing Facts was not one of the organizations negatively named in the North American Division book *Issues*, which spoke critically of several independent ministries (p. 19) (4), the very mention of his name in a critique of his theology is irregular, for the reasons noted above.

This is not to say that the public mention of a theological opponent’s name when differing with his or her beliefs is necessarily rude, unkind, or un-Christlike. But Adams’ book was written for the Adventist public and published on a denominational press, where the

pejorative naming of persons in good and regular standing with the church is well-nigh unheard of.

The names of Robert J. Wieland and Donald K. Short, famous for their interest in both the history and the message of the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session, are mentioned by name in Adams' book even more repeatedly—and pejoratively—than Joe Crews (see index, pp. 142,143). (Like Crews, Wieland and Short are now deceased, but like Crews were both still living—and in good denominational standing—when the book in question was released.) Other names, such as that of Ralph Larson and Colin and Russell Standish, are also mentioned in Adams' book (see index, pp. 140,142), but as each of these experienced more direct conflict with church authorities—withdrawal of honorary credentials (Larson), defrocking, (Russell Standish), and negative mention by name in denominational journals in connection with Hartland Institute (Colin Standish)—they might perhaps be placed in a different category from Crews, Wieland, or Short.

This pejorative mention of names by Adams was a principal cause of the controversy attending Adams' book in the wake of its publication. The editorial vice-president at the Review and Herald Publishing Association noted this controversy in a private letter to the present writer in response to an inquiry about a proposed book manuscript. His counsel to me, in preparing my manuscript, was as follows:

I would suggest that you can handle theological topics without getting personal. We probably won't want to again get into the personal confrontations that THE NATURE OF CHRIST (Adams' book) presented (5).

Even more disturbing was Adams' comparison of his theological opponents within Adventism to Peoples Temple founder Jim Jones and Branch Davidian leader David Koresh (pp. 110,135). Perhaps no incident in modern Adventist history has been more subject to demagoguery from numerous positions on the Adventist spectrum than the Waco/Branch Davidian tragedy involving David Koresh and his followers. This demagoguery extends from theological liberals who have used this incident to denigrate Adventist interest in the apocalyptic portions of Scripture, to persons in various denominational circles who have drawn incendiary (though quite irrelevant) comparisons between the Koresh contingent and various self-supporting ministries, to extremists in the conservative camp who have cited this episode as "proof" the federal government is out to persecute gun owners, homeschoolers, and students of Bible prophecy.

Unity and reconciliation aren't likely to result when one's theological adversaries are compared to maniacal figures obsessed with guns, mind control, sex, and violence. Such extreme analogies lend credence to the assumption that the one using them lacks substantive evidence for the theological case he or she wishes to make. Intemperate rhetoric, to be sure, can be found on both sides of this controversy, but when a book positions itself as seeking to offer help to a divided church, the inclusion of such comparisons isn't likely to exert a healing influence.

Truncated History

A key premise of Adams' book concerns what he believes to be the historical roots of the Christology/perfection debate in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Two chapters of the book—one dealing with Jones and Waggoner and the 1888 controversy (pp. 29-36), the other dealing with M.L. Andreasen (pp. 37-54)—address this point in depth. At the start of the former chapter Adams summarizes his view in this regard:

My thesis throughout is that the theology of these three men (Jones, Waggoner, and Andreasen) has provided the spawning ground for the position on righteousness by faith and perfection held by certain Adventists today (p. 29).

I don't wish to dwell much in this review on the 1888 crisis, pivotal though I consider it to be in the history of the Advent movement. This is because, whatever the larger significance of this chapter in the Adventist experience, whatever the similarities between the church's spiritual dilemma then and the crisis she presently confronts, the issues of sin, righteousness by faith, Christology, and perfection that have divided the church in the past half-century and more were not the issues dividing the church during the 1888 era.

No one has produced evidence that anyone in the 1888 controversy, for example, believed in original sin—that babies are born into this world already condemned because of Adam's transgression. From all the evidence I have seen in the historical record, no one prominent in the 1888 controversy believed Jesus came to this earth with a pre-Fall human nature. No evidence has been shown that anyone involved in the 1888 dispute believed in salvation by justification alone, nor that justifying righteousness is solely declarative and not at all transformative. And certainly no evidence has been found—at least to my knowledge—that anyone, on either side of the 1888 conflict, considered it impossible for Christians to live sinless lives here on earth, even through God's power.

The only substantive, demonstrable theological difference between the 1888 combatants was over the scope of the law in Galatians—whether that law was exclusively the ceremonial law, or whether it also included the moral law of Ten Commandments. That controversy has been permanently settled in the Seventh-day Adventist Church on account of Ellen White's clear declaration that the law as described in the book of Galatians includes both the ceremonial law and the law of Ten Commandments (6). To the present writer's knowledge, this issue has never again risen to vex the church in the hundred-plus years that have elapsed since that time. Aside from the common challenges posed by pride of opinion and resistance to inspired correction, one is hard pressed to find any substantive parallel between the righteousness by faith discussions of today and those that took place during the 1888 period.

Adams quotes a prominent contemporary Adventist historian who writes: "None of these records (from the Minneapolis General Conference) that the divinity of Christ, the human nature of Christ, or 'sinless living' were topics of emphasis or discussion at the 1888 meetings" (7). Considering the strong emphasis by Jones and Waggoner in the years that followed on such topics as the humanity of Christ and sinless obedience, it would seem most difficult to make a

case that these points were not emphasized at Minneapolis, irrespective of what the official records say. But there is certainly no doubt that these doctrinal issues were not points of “discussion” at the 1888 meetings, as those on both sides of the controversy were likely in full agreement on those issues.

Adams’ complaint that his theological opponents spend too much time focusing on the events and personalities of the 1888 era (p. 29) is really most ironic, as in the very context of making this observation he does exactly the same thing. We have already noted the following statement by Adams on the alleged roots of current Adventist controversies regarding the humanity of Christ and character perfection:

My thesis throughout is that the theology of these three men (Jones, Waggoner, and Andreasen) has provided the spawning ground for the position on righteousness by faith and perfection held by certain Adventists today (p. 29).

On the same page, after protesting the volume of emphasis placed by the “Adventist right” on the 1888 message and messengers, Adams reiterates his earlier point even more strongly:

Without a doubt, the roots of the present agitation go all the way back to Jones and Waggoner (p. 29).

Regarding the influence of M.L. Andreasen on this controversy, he writes:

In my judgment, the perception of a delay of the Parousia (second coming) lies at the heart of the controversy over righteousness by faith and perfection in our church at the present time. And my thesis is that the single most important spark for the continuing agitation on this question has sprung from the theology of M.L. Andreasen (p. 39).

But while none can deny the prominent role in Adventist theology played by Jones, Waggoner, and Andreasen, the convictions of these men regarding Christ’s humanity, the perfectibility of Christian character, and the role of such perfection in the hastening of Christ’s return are neither original nor unique in the Adventist experience. Indeed, a careful study of Adventist thought since the beginning gives clear evidence that the Christology/perfection emphasis of these individuals—what many today call Last Generation Theology—is one of the most deeply embedded, oft-repeated themes in Adventist history. Such early Adventist luminaries as Joseph Bates (8), James White (9), Stephen Haskell (10), D.T. Bordeaux (11), and W.W. Prescott (12) all presented key aspects of this theology in their preaching and writing. Much of this has been documented by the late Herbert Douglass in his book *Why Jesus Waits* (13). An even longer list of Adventist notables in support of this theology is documented by Douglass in his later book *A Fork in the Road* (14).

In later years, such prominent Adventist thinkers as W.H. Branson (15), who served as president of the General Conference from 1950 to 1954; Herbert E. Douglass (16), C. Mervyn Maxwell (17), and Dennis E. Priebe (18) have made these teachings a centerpiece of their

ministry. Ralph Larson's *The Word Was Made Flesh* (19) and J.R. Zurcher's *Touched With Our Feelings* (20)—the one published independently, the other published by the denomination—have documented just how thoroughly the post-Fall view of Christ's human nature pervaded Adventist teachings until the publishing of *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* in 1957 (21). (Zurcher, by the way, served for many years as dean of the Adventist seminary in Collonges, France.)

The late General Conference President Robert H. Pierson, who served in that position from 1966 to 1978, was likewise a strong advocate of final-generation perfection theology, writing at one point:

God's last-generation people are to reveal the character of Jesus to the world. They will overcome as He overcame. They will be victorious, living representatives of the Master. The enabling power to live this life, to achieve this character, comes from Jesus. Only through His imputed and imparted righteousness can we prevail (22).

More recently, Elder Ted N.C. Wilson, elected as General Conference President in June 2010, gave prominent attention in his inaugural sermon to the Ellen White statement in *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69, and to another statement in *Steps to Christ*, p. 63, which declares—in contravention of much that is presently taught concerning the gospel in some circles of contemporary Adventism—that the ground of the Christian's salvation includes both justification and sanctification (23). In a follow-up message to General Conference workers following the Atlanta session, Wilson declared: "The belief that Christians cannot 'hasten or delay' the Second Coming is a misconception" (24). Later, at the 2014 Annual Council session, Wilson again stressed a key theme of Last Generation Theology by underscoring the need to confess and forsake sin in preparation for standing without a Mediator after the close of probation (25).

In light of this, it is easy to understand how, after surveying over a century's worth of Adventist literature, Anglican scholar Geoffrey Paxton could write in 1977: "The doctrine of the perfecting of the final generation stands near the heart of Adventist theology" (26). The collective weight of Adventist theological history appears very much to sustain this observation.

In another statement, Adams continues his inordinate focus on the three in Adventism whom he considers most responsible for the theological emphasis he disdains so strongly: "The perfectionist agitation within the Seventh-day Adventist Church today had its genesis in the post-1888 teachings of A.T. Jones and E.J. Waggoner" (p. 37). Two pages earlier he writes:

Why M.L. Andreasen did not more openly flaunt his connection with these two luminaries (Jones and Waggoner) is not quite clear to me. Perhaps it had something to do with their pariah status toward the end of their lives—the very time when Andreasen was beginning to rise in the church (pp. 35-36).

But not only does Adams fail to demonstrate a connection between the ministry of Jones and/or Waggoner and that of Andreasen; he also fails to consider the saturation within classic

Adventist thought of the convictions regarding Christ's human nature and the perfecting of Christian character as held by these three men. Andreasen had no need to "flaunt" his "connection" to the teachings of Jones and Waggoner regarding Christology or the final generation, for the simple reason that these teachings were held by numerous and prominent Adventist thought leaders who lacked the "pariah" status of Jones and Waggoner.

The Nature of Sin—and an Unnoticed Contradiction

In spite of his acknowledged discomfort with certain aspects of what many theologians—particularly Augustine—have called original sin (pp. 25-26,69), it is clear Adams accepts the teaching—regardless of what it is called—that sin is received by humans at birth apart from any choice of their own:

Admittedly, original sin is not an altogether happy expression. However, some Adventists have denigrated it without careful analysis of its meaning. Fundamentally, the concept of original sin insists that on account of Adam's fall the entire human race has been *infected* by sin and that therefore the entire world (including infants) stands in need of a Saviour (p. 69, italics original).

On the issue of whether humans inherit guilt from Adam, Adams appears downright contradictory. At one point he writes as follows

I have no inclination to defend the classical doctrine of original sin. Augustine suggested, for example, that original sin is transmitted biologically—through sexual procreation—and that we are born guilty (see Alan Richardson, ed, *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, p. 204). We should note, however—notwithstanding the continued misrepresentation of certain Adventist authors—that this is not the position of Adventist theologians today nor of theologians on a whole (p. 25).

Yet Adams writes at a later point of "the inheritance of sin and guilt we all received from Adam" (p. 71). Which is it? Do we inherit guilt as a result of Adam's sin, or don't we? The issue of whether this inheritance is biological or spiritual is really beside the point. Either way, people become sinners just by being born—a belief our study will measure against the testimony of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White.

Like other adherents of this belief, Adams cites verses from Romans chapter 5 as supporting evidence. "By the transgression of the one death [has] reigned," and "through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (Rom. 5:17,19, NASB) (p. 69)/ But like so many others, Adams fails to consider the full passage in which this parallel between Adam and Christ is drawn. Verse 12 states that "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Death in this context refers primarily to eternal rather than temporal death, just as life in verses 10 and 17 is a reference to eternal rather than this present life.) What is more, verse 19 not only states that "by one man's disobedience many were made sinners," it goes on to say, "so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." This is obviously referring to a future

experience resulting from the choice of believers to follow the ways of Christ, not some involuntary declaring or making righteous apart from an act of the will. Just as Adam's sin and the resulting sentence of eternal death have passed to all humanity because each of them have sinned (verse 12), so the result of Christ's death is experienced by those choosing to follow Christ's plan for their salvation.

In short, those made sinners on account of Adam's disobedience are made thus by choice, just as those made righteous on account of Jesus' sacrifice are made thus by choice. The theme of Romans 5 is breathtakingly simple: Adam led the world into sin, and Christ has come to earth to make possible our escape from sin. But it is choice by which individuals partake either of sin or righteousness.

Prior to his deeper discussion of the nature of sin in Chapter 6, Adams cites another verse commonly used to support the theory that all humans after the fall are born sinners. Psalm 51:5 is the verse in question, in which David—in the midst of confessing his sin with Bathsheba—declares, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Adams describes a Sabbath School class he attended in which someone applied this verse to Jesus, thereby provoking a major discussion. Describing the reaction of the other class members, Adams observed, “They seem to know that everyone born that way needs a Saviour” (p. 55).

But the question arises as to exactly what David means by this statement. What is interesting is that neither in context nor elsewhere does the psalmist apply this statement—or any comparable statement—to the whole world. He gives every evidence of speaking only of himself. In another passage, also used to support the theory of involuntary sin received at birth, the same author writes: “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psalm 58:3). Notice how this verse speaks only of the wicked, not all humanity. It reminds us of those Ellen White statements which speak of children at a very early age developing sinful traits because of their parents' neglect and evil doings (27).

What in fact does “shapen in iniquity” mean? Does it mean the person in question is born a sinner, or simply that one has been born into a sinful world? Could it refer to someone born as the result of a sinful, lustful relationship? Since the psalmist doesn't apply this verse to all humanity, I am reluctant to join the Sabbath School participant quoted by Adams and apply this verse to Jesus. But we can be sure of one thing: this verse does not prove that all men and women since the fall have been born involuntary sinners.

Another question arising from Adams' comment about this verse is, What does it mean to need a Savior? What does the work of a Savior involve? The first reference to salvation in the New Testament states, “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). According to other verses, being saved from sin includes forgiveness for sin (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7)—often called justification—as well as practical empowerment over sin (II Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5)—often called regeneration and sanctification.

Quite obviously, Jesus never needed the forgiving aspect of a Savior's work, because He never sinned. But did Jesus need the practical, supernatural empowerment which fallen humans need to overcome sin? The answer is yes, for Jesus declared, "I can of Mine own self do nothing" (John 5:30). Ellen White speaks of how, like the sanctified Christian, Jesus "was fitted for the conflict (with sin) by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit" (28). She writes in the following statement that Jesus' overcoming is to be experienced in our present human nature, and that Jesus could overcome only in the way that we can:

The Lord now demands that every son and daughter of Adam, through faith in Jesus Christ, serve Him in human nature which we now have. The Lord Jesus has bridged the gulf that sin has made. He has connected earth with heaven, and finite man with the infinite God. Jesus, the world's Redeemer, could only keep the commandments of God in the same way that humanity can keep them (29).

What is significant, in light of these passages, is the fact that elsewhere Ellen White is clear that unfallen beings don't need the divine power bestowed through conversion and sanctification in order to live righteous lives. In the following statement, she is clear Adam before the Fall didn't need such power, but that because we have sinned and our natures are fallen, we do:

It was possible for Adam, before the fall, to form a righteous character by obedience to God's law. But he failed to do this, and because of his sin our natures are fallen and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. But Christ has made a way of escape for us. He lived on earth amid trials and temptations such as we have to meet. He lived a sinless life. He died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him, and accept Him as your Saviour, then, sinful as your life may have been, for His sake you are accounted righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted of God just as if you had not sinned.

More than this, Christ changes the heart. He abides in your heart by faith. You are to maintain this connection with Christ by faith and the continual surrender of your will to Him, and so long as you do this, He will work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. So you may say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved Me, and gave Himself for Me." Galatians 2:20. So Jesus said to His disciples, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." Matthew 10:20. Then with Christ working in you, you will manifest the same spirit and do the same good works—works of righteousness, obedience.

So we have nothing in ourselves of which to boast. We have no ground for self-exaltation. Our only ground of hope is found in the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and in that wrought by His Spirit working in and through us (30).

In summary, this statement is telling us:

1. That Adam before the Fall could form a righteous character through simple obedience.
2. That you and I, because our natures are fallen, cannot do this.
3. That Christ has made a way of escape from this predicament by offering both forgiveness for our past sins and imparted power to perform the works of righteousness we otherwise could not perform.

Let's consider another statement:

We should never have learned the meaning of the word 'grace' had we not fallen. God loves the sinless angels, who do His service and are obedient to all His commands, but He does not give them grace. These heavenly beings know nought of grace; they have never needed it, for they have never sinned (31).

Jesus never sinned, of course. But did Jesus need grace to live a holy life? The servant of the Lord answers this question also:

Jesus, considered as a man, was perfect, yet He grew in grace. "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (32).

Putting all these statements together, it becomes clear that unfallen beings don't need grace. Only fallen beings with fallen natures need imparted divine strength—which is what grace includes (II Cor. 12:9; II Tim. 2:1; Titus 2:11-12; Heb. 12:28)—in order to live holy lives. Adam before the Fall didn't need this extra divine power. But you and I do, because of our fallen natures. And according to Ellen White, Jesus needed this power also, which is why the above statement speaks of how He "grew in grace."

As much as any piece of evidence we can summon from Inspiration, this fact demonstrates how Jesus had to take our fallen human nature in order to show fallen human beings how to depend on imparted divine power for victory. We will address the issue of Jesus' overcoming experience in greater depth in the following section.

Like others who hold the view he advocates, Adams doesn't explore or explain the implications of the belief that "the entire world (including infants) stands in need of a Saviour" (p. 69). If all infants are infected by sin at birth, eternally condemned because of their inborn fallenness, what happens to such an infant if it dies before receiving the opportunity to accept Christ? Other Christians have crafted a solution to this dilemma in the rite of infant baptism. Adventist supporters of original sin have yet to develop a coherent solution of their own to this dilemma.

Regarding the definition of sin, Adams appears to dispute Ellen White's contention that "the only definition of sin" (33) is found in First John 3, verse 4, which declares that "sin is the

transgression of the law.” After citing the words of one self-supporting ministry leader on this subject (p. 87) (34), Adams writes:

So, based on this one definition alone, some of our brethren have come to understand sin primarily in terms of *behavior*, in terms of *acts* that we commit.

Other Adventists, however, while accepting the Johannine definition of sin just given, also see the phenomenon as something deeper, more comprehensive than that simple definition would lead us to conclude (p. 87, *italics original*).

Actually, in this case, Adams understates the position of the theology he criticizes. Those who hold sin to be a matter of choice rather than birth do not believe sin is *primarily* a matter of behavior. Rather, they hold it to be *exclusively* a matter of behavior and of acts that we commit, provided we include cherished thoughts and desires not expressed in outward conduct within the genre of action here described. For the Christian, behavior is not solely a matter of outward deeds, as Christ made plain when He spoke of hatred being synonymous with murder (Matt. 5:22) and lust being synonymous with adultery (verse 28).

Adams then proceeds to list a number of other words in Scripture which, according to him and other scholars whose writings he has consulted, purportedly imply a much broader definition of sin than the one found in First John 3:4 (pp. 89-90). At one point he quotes a letter from a fellow minister, who asks, “What would have happened to Adventism had our pioneers latched onto Paul’s definition of sin (Rom. 14:23) instead of John’s? Would we have been so easily influenced by legalism?” (p. 89).

Romans 14:23, of course, is the verse that states, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” But as the same author writes elsewhere that “without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (Heb. 11:6), it is clear that without the faith that makes true lawkeeping possible, we will in fact transgress the law. Romans 14:23, therefore, is just another way of saying that sin is the transgression of the divine law, as stated in First John 3:4.

All the words from the original Biblical languages cited by Adams—referring to rebellion, missing the mark, disloyalty, deceit, etc.—likewise repeat the message of First John 3:4 in varying terminology. None of these words contradict or render too narrow the position of the following Ellen White statements, in addition to the one cited above (35), which state unequivocally that what is found in First John 3:4 is the exclusive definition of sin so far as God’s Word is concerned:

The only definition we find in the Bible for sin is that “sin is the transgression of the law” (I John 3:4) (36).

Our only definition of sin is that given in the word of God: it is “the transgression of the law;” it is the outworking of a principle at war with the great law of love which is the foundation of the divine government (37).

Now we want to understand what sin is, that it is the transgression of God's law. This is the only definition given in the Scriptures (38).

What is to bring the sinner to the knowledge of his sins, unless he knows what sin is? The only definition of sin in the Word of God is given us in I John 3:4: "Sin is the transgression of the law" (39).

"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law." This is the only definition of sin given in the Holy Scriptures, and we should seek to understand what sin is, lest any of us be found in opposition to the God of heaven (40).

The only definition of sin, given in God's Word, is the transgression of the law. It is not excusable, and has no defense or justification (41).

It is the privilege of every sinner to ask his teacher what sin really is. Give me a definition of sin. We have one in I John 3. "Sin is the transgression of the law." Now this is the only definition of sin in the whole Bible (42).

If we have not the faith that works by love, and purifies the soul from every stain of sin, then we have a spurious faith. Christ is not the minister of sin. And what is sin? The only definition given in God's word is, "Sin is the transgression of the law" (43).

In order to let Jesus into our hearts, we must stop sinning. The only definition for sin that we have in the Bible is that it is the transgression of the law (44).

Adams appeals at one point to the *Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible* as evidence for the complex definition of sin he seeks to establish (pp. 89-90). But in the end, no definition offered by this or any other source establishes any Biblical definition of sin beyond the one given in First John 3:4. Nor do any Biblical terms discussed by Adams or the scholars he references define sin as something existing in the human experience apart from an act of the sinner's will. Whether Scripture speaks of rebellion, revolt against God, missing the mark, moral distortion, deceit, falsehood, or any comparable expression, all of these are covered by the Ten Commandments, which the New Testament establishes as the standard of God's final judgment (James 2:10-12). The definition of sin found in First John 3:4 thus includes all the terms and expressions noted by Adams and his sources.

Other Bible passages are equally clear that sin is a choice, not an involuntary condition received at birth or any other time. Ezekiel 18:20 is one such passage: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son." This verse is particularly significant, as it quite decidedly contradicts the notion that all humans bear the iniquity of their father Adam on account of his transgression in Eden. The apostle James is also clear that the mere possession of sinful urges within one's being does not constitute sin itself unless the will gives consent:

But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin (James 1:14-15).

Ellen White says the same thing:

There are thoughts and feelings suggested and aroused by Satan that annoy even the best of men; but if they are not cherished, if they are repulsed as hateful, the soul is not contaminated with guilt and no other is defiled by their influence (45).

Other statements likewise affirm the fully voluntary nature of human sin:

No man can be forced to transgress. His own consent must be first gained, the soul must purpose the sinful act, before passion can dominate over reason, or iniquity triumph over conscience (46).

It is not in the power of Satan to force anyone to sin. Sin is the sinner's individual act. Before sin exists in the heart, the consent of the will must be given, and as soon as it is given, sin is triumphant, and hell rejoices. But there is no excuse for sin, either big or little (47).

The light of life is freely proffered to all. Every one who will may be guided by the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Christ is the great remedy for sin. None can plead their circumstances, their education, or their temperament as an excuse for living in rebellion against God. Sinners are such by their own deliberate choice (48).

And as we prepare to move into a discussion of Christ's human nature as addressed in the book under review, the following Ellen White statement is especially significant:

As we see the condition of mankind today, the question arises in the minds of some, "Is man by nature totally and wholly depraved?" Is he hopelessly ruined? No, he is not. The Lord Jesus left the royal courts and, taking our human nature, lived such a life as everyone may live in humanity, through following His example. We may perfect a life in this world which is an example of righteousness, and overcome as Christ has given us an example in His life, revealing that humanity may conquer as He, the great Pattern conquered (49).

Notice how this statement doesn't deny humanity's total depravity on the basis of the fact that he can be converted and born again. Rather, humanity is described as not totally depraved "by nature" because Jesus came in "our human nature" and overcame exactly as we can overcome. What greater clarity is needed to establish that the human nature Jesus assumed at birth is identical to the human nature all other sons and daughters of Adam receive at birth?

But before we leave our discussion of the doctrine of sin, it behooves us to note a most glaring contradiction between Adams' understanding of the nature of sin and his disagreement with the concept of corporate repentance, advocated by certain modern Adventist promoters of

the 1888 message. Frankly, speaking as one who has both read the writings and interacted in person with leading promoters of what some call corporate repentance, it has never been fully clear to the present writer exactly what is meant by this idea. The extent to which such an experience would involve initiatives from denominational leadership, or simply a universal heart-based repudiation of both corporate and individual shortcomings by a church fully purified by the end-time shaking—or some combination of the above, perhaps—has never been fully defined by supporters of this theory, at least to my satisfaction.

But this is not the place for an in-depth assessment of what some have been pleased to call corporate repentance. For the purposes of the present review, what is most significant is the fact that while Adams believes the whole world (including infants) has been involuntarily “infected” by sin as a result of Adam’s transgression (p. 69), Adams at the same time registers vigorous protest against the idea that today’s corporate church unwillingly shares the guilt of the original rejecters of the 1888 message, thus presumably necessitating corporate repentance. At one point Adams quotes favorably the following statement from the late Adventist scholar Arnold Wallenkampf:

The notion of corporate sin and consequent corporate guilt is foreign to God’s dealings with man. Sin, with resultant guilt, stems from the exercise of free moral choice and rests on personal accountability before God (p. 103) (50).

On the following page (p. 104), Adams quotes Ezekiel 18:20 (“The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.”)—which we have cited earlier in this review as evidence that sin is a choice, not an involuntary state—as proof that today’s Adventists can’t be considered guilty for the sins of Adventists a century before. But if this verse disallows the ascribing of involuntary guilt to contemporary Adventists on account of an experience they had nothing to do with, how can this verse not also disallow the doctrine that all human beings stand guilty before God because of Adam’s sin?

The Human Nature of Christ

Many readers will be confused by the following statement by Adams regarding Jesus’ incarnation:

We believe—and have always believed—that Christ did take upon Himself the form and nature of fallen human beings! (p. 27, italics original).

This affirmation, to be sure, follows almost word-for-word a statement of Ellen White, where she says, “It was in the order of God that Christ should take upon Himself the form and nature of fallen man” (51). But while none in contemporary Adventism would deny that Jesus took the *form* of fallen humanity—no one in the present controversy thinks Jesus was as physically strong or as mentally acute as the sinless Adam in Eden—the heart of the modern Adventist Christology debate concerns whether or not He took the *nature* of fallen man. More

specifically, the moral nature. The following Ellen White statement is pivotal in establishing this point:

For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity (52).

All in the current discussion agree Jesus took human degradation at the first two levels—physical and mental. The great divide in contemporary Adventism on this subject is whether or not He took human degradation at the third level—moral.

Adams is quite correct, to be sure, when he states that “so far as Ellen G. White was concerned, Christ was *neither exactly like Adam before the Fall nor exactly like us*” (p. 69, italics original). The truth is that neither camp in the present controversy holds that Jesus was either exactly like the sinless Adam in Eden or exactly like us. Like all labels, the terms “pre-Fall” and “post-Fall” as used by the two camps in this dispute are used for convenience, not adequacy. But as the late U.S. Senator Eugene McCarthy once said about the liberal and conservative labels in the secular political arena: “There is not enough time to change the flags” (53). Despite their merely partial accuracy, the Adventist Christology debate is probably stuck with these markers.

When Adams speaks of a “third option” somewhere between the pre- and post-Fall views of Christ’s humanity (p. 28), he is never quite clear what he means. All in the discussion agree Jesus was neither completely like the sinless Adam nor completely like human beings after the Fall. No one—as we noted above—is arguing that Jesus was as physically or mentally strong as the unfallen Adam, nor is anyone arguing that Jesus wrestled with that particular weakness which comes from a life of sin (what Ellen White calls “cultivated” tendencies to wrong), for the obvious reason that He never sinned.

Where the issue lies in the ongoing Adventist debate over Jesus’ humanity is whether or not His *inherited* humanity included fallen fleshly urges which tempted Him to do wrong. All, of course, are in agreement that Jesus was tempted in ways far beyond the capacity of an ordinary human nature, such as the temptation to use His divinity to lighten His earthly burdens or free Himself from His enemies during His trial and crucifixion. Adams’ lengthy recounting from inspired sources of Jesus’ struggle not to alter or abort His saving mission to the world (pp. 79-82) affirms a reality embraced by all in the present controversy. All agree Jesus was tempted—terribly, as an Ellen White statement quoted by Adams makes clear (p. 81) (54)—to employ His divine nature in His own behalf. Where the present dispute lies, however, is whether or not He was also tempted to indulge a fallen *human* nature, like the rest of us.

Adams states emphatically—in italics—at one point:

For any of us to think, even for a moment, that the temptations we face can be compared, in intensity, to those that Christ endured is patently ludicrous (p. 82, italics original).

True enough. But whenever I hear this observation, I think of the West Virginia coal miner who met John F. Kennedy at a campaign stop during that state's presidential primary in 1960. The story is told that this miner asked the Senator, "Is it true that you've never had to work a day in your entire life?" As the smile of wordless embarrassment crossed Kennedy's face, the miner leaned over the railing and whispered in the candidate's ear: "You haven't missed much."

I've often wondered what the media or others might have said if Kennedy had responded by assuring the man that "we rich folks have financial headaches too." He wouldn't have been lying, to be sure; wealthy people face financial challenges far greater than those confronted by poor or middle-income wage-earners. But who among the latter, we are forced to ask, wouldn't gladly exchange their financial burdens for those of a Kennedy, a Rockefeller, a Michael Bloomberg, or a Donald Trump?

When I was a child I learned to love that beautiful song by Del Delker, recalling our Lord's struggle not to annihilate His tormentors, break up the plan of salvation, and return to His Father:

He could have called ten thousand angels
To destroy the world and set Him free
He could have called ten thousand angels
But He died alone, for you and me.

But, as inspiring as these lyrics will always be, you and I can no more relate to this temptation than could the West Virginia coal miner noted above have empathized with the vexations of the Kennedy family's stock portfolio. The inspired testimony is clear that Christ not only endured the unimaginable test of resisting the use of divinity to end His suffering and leave fallen man to perish, but that He also endured those tests presented each day by the inner demands of fallen, sinful human nature.

At one point Adams addresses two Bible passages fundamental to the Adventist Christology debate—Romans 8:3 and Philippians 2:7 (pp. 62-63). The first of these, of course, speaks of Christ being sent "in the likeness of sinful flesh," while the second speaks of His being "made in the likeness of men." Adams consults a well-known Greek-English lexicon which appears to render the meaning of the word "likeness" in a very ambiguous fashion (p. 63). But the Greek word translated "likeness" (*homoiomati*) is really not ambiguous at all, certainly not in these two verses. In the first place, the word *homoiomati* contains the prefix "homo," which clearly means "same," as distinct from "hetero" which means "different." And certainly none in contemporary Adventism would argue that the "likeness of men" in Philippians 2:7 refers to mere simulation rather than actual reality.

The context of Romans 8:3 doesn't allow an ambiguous meaning for this word either. In fact, one need not even consult the Greek in order to understand what Paul means when he speaks in this context of the mission of Christ. A careful review of the larger passage in which

this verse is found makes it clear what is meant by the word “flesh” relative both to the human Christ and to what His earthly followers are empowered by His grace to overcome:

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. . . .

So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. . .

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live (Rom. 8:3-5,8-9,11-12).

Quite clearly, the “flesh” in these verses isn’t talking about what covers our bones. It’s talking about a human nature which prompts us to disobey God. And it is in this human nature that Jesus condemned sin, according to verse 3. He “condemned sin in the flesh.”

Adams spends considerable time focusing on Hebrews 2:17, which declares that “in all things it behooved Him (Christ) to be made like unto His brethren.” Adams attempts through various illustrations—Biblical and otherwise—to prove that “all things” in this verse doesn’t necessarily mean Jesus took in His human nature the same fallen urges everyone else inherits (pp. 64-66). Yet Adams fails to consider two previous verses in this chapter which further clarify the type of human nature Jesus took in His incarnation:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same. . . .

For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels, but took on Him the seed of Abraham (Heb. 2:14,16).

Verse 14 bring to mind another passage, also from Paul’s writings:

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (I Cor. 15:50).

What in fact does Paul mean by this last statement? Is he saying physical tissue can’t go to heaven? Is he saying those with resurrected bodies won’t have physical flesh and blood? Obviously not, since Jesus said something very different to His disciples after His resurrection:

Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; handle Me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have (Luke 24:39).

So it isn't physical tissue which Paul says won't inherit the kingdom of God. Rather, it is our fallen fleshly nature that won't inherit God's kingdom. It is this fallen human nature of which Paul says Jesus partook, just like those He came to save (Heb. 2:14).

Paul's declaration in Hebrews 2:16 that Christ "took on Him the seed of Abraham" is one of a number of New Testament passages identifying Jesus with fallen human nature. Indeed, the very first verse in the New Testament declares Jesus to be "the Son of David" and "the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1:1). Elsewhere Jesus is described as being "made of the seed of David, according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3). (Few likely need clarification as to what the "seed of David, according to the flesh" might mean!) The two lists of Jesus' human ancestors found in the Gospels underscore this point even further, as both include a veritable rogues' gallery featuring idolatry, human sacrifice, sexual immorality, social injustice, and spiritual rebellion of every type (Matt. 1:2-16; Luke 3:23-38). When the apostle John writes that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14), it is this variety of human fallenness that the word "flesh" encompasses.

Adams correctly affirms that in fact it was possible for Jesus to sin (p. 74)—a point, once again, on which all in the present discussion agree—yet when he writes that our Lord's temptations in the wilderness "were only the first round in what was to be a constant hounding of Jesus by the forces of hell" (p. 79), he leaves the reader confused again. Is Adams unaware of Ellen White's recounting of Jesus' temptation experiences during His childhood and youth, prior to His baptism? (55). The inspired testimony is very clear Satan had been buffeting Jesus with temptation long before His ordeal in the wilderness.

At one point Adams insists that Jesus "was exempt from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam" (p. 47). Later he asks, "Without sinful passions or propensities, did He have an advantage that we don't insofar as the power of temptation is concerned?" (p. 73). Yet he goes on to describe how, in the wilderness and elsewhere, Jesus was constrained to address the three principal areas of temptation confronted by humans—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (pp. 76). If Jesus didn't have to wrestle with internal sinful passions, how could any of the above areas of temptation have possibly been a struggle for Him? (We will address the issue of passions and propensities to sin in greater depth as our study proceeds.) People aren't tempted by suggestions they don't personally find attractive.

In addressing the Biblical assurance that Christ was "in all points tempted like as we are" (Heb. 4:15), Adams says we shouldn't think this verse refers to "a multitude of points," but rather, simply the three general categories noted above—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—as described in First John 2:15-16 (p. 76). But ironically, it is those who generally hold to the view promoted by Adams who give every evidence of having trouble accepting the idea that Jesus was tempted with inward "lust" of any kind. By contrast, a number of Ellen White statements offer considerable evidence as to the wide variety of fallen urges Jesus was required to resist in His human experience.

The following statement, for example, speaks of how Jesus had to struggle with sinful thoughts, as we do:

Some realize their great weakness and sin, and become discouraged. Satan casts his dark shadow between them and the Lord Jesus, their atoning sacrifice. They say, It is useless for me to pray. My prayers are so mingled with evil thoughts that the Lord will not hear them.

These suggestions are from Satan. In His humanity Christ met and resisted this temptation, and He knows how to succor those who are thus tempted (56).

Obviously this statement isn't saying Jesus *cherished* sinful thoughts. It only says such thoughts *occurred* to Him, just as they occur to us. The temptation Jesus is described here as resisting is the temptation to assume that because evil thoughts intrude in our minds as we pray, God won't hear our prayers. This assumption, the inspired pen assures us, comes from Satan. But this is clearly the struggle one experiences with a fallen nature, from which the promptings to sin arise.

Regarding the location and circumstances of Jesus' early upbringing, and their significance for His example in victorious living, she writes:

In the providence of God, His early life was passed in Nazareth, where the inhabitants were of that character that He was continually exposed to temptations, and it was necessary for Him to be guarded in order to remain pure and spotless amid so much sin and wickedness. Christ did not select this place Himself. His heavenly Father chose this place for Him, where His character would be tested and tried in a variety of ways. The early life of Christ was subjected to severe trials, hardships, and conflicts, that He might develop the perfect character which makes Him a perfect example for children, youth, and manhood (57).

Two points stand out in this statement relative to the present discussion. First, we see again that a variety of temptation experiences were present in the life of Jesus, made possible by the proverbial wickedness of Nazareth and its residents (John 1:46). Secondly, the above statement declares that because of the rampant evil of His early surroundings, "it was necessary for Him to be guarded in order to remain pure and spotless" (58). Why, may we ask, would He need to be on guard against impurity if His human nature wasn't lured by it? None need be on guard against suggestions or practices which they naturally despise. (No perseverance or watchfulness on my part is needed, for example, to prevent overindulgence on cooked spinach, which I can't stand!)

The following statement identifies both the nature of Jesus' inherited humanity and the nature of the trials He confronted:

But many say that Jesus was not like us, that He was not as we are in the world; that He was divine, and therefore we cannot overcome as He overcame. But this is not true; "for verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of

Abraham. . . . For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted” (Heb. 2:16-18). Christ knows the sinner’s trials; He knows his temptations. He took upon Himself our nature; He was tempted in all points like as we are. He has wept. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (59).

Notice how the human nature Jesus is described as taking, and the temptations He is described as undergoing, are represented by the seed of Abraham—which of course is fallen human nature. Even more pointedly, the above statement says that “Christ knows the *sinner’s* trials; He knows *his* temptations” (60). The temptations of the sinless Adam in Eden are clearly not in focus here. It is the sinner’s trials, the sinner’s temptations, that Jesus is described in this statement as having experienced. Sinners are tempted from within, from the urges of a fallen, fleshly nature. This is how, according to the above statement, our Lord proved it is possible for us to overcome.

Regarding our children, Ellen White assures us:

Let children bear in mind that the child Jesus had taken upon Himself human nature, and was in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was tempted of Satan as all children are tempted (61).

He (Christ) was made a child that He might understand the temptations of childhood, and know its weaknesses and be able to help the children to be overcomers (62).

Writing to an eighteen-year-old youth, Ellen White encouraged him as follows:

Jesus once stood in age just where you now stand. Your circumstances, your cogitations at this period of your life, Jesus has had. He cannot overlook you at this critical period. He sees your dangers. He is acquainted with your temptations. He invites you to follow His example (63).

It helps to remember, in light of the above statements, that the sinless Adam was never a child or a youth, nor was he exposed to the peculiar temptations these periods of life bring.

Writing to an orphan boy inclined to self-centeredness and provocation, she likewise observed:

You should not be easily provoked. Let not your heart become selfish; but let it expand with love. You have a work to do, which you must not neglect. Endure hardship as a good soldier. Jesus is acquainted with every conflict, every trial, and every pang of anguish. He will help you; for He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet He sinned not (64).

In context, “every conflict” and “every trial” obviously include conflicts with selfishness and an easily provoked spirit. Without question these are the struggles one experiences with a fallen nature.

Further exploring the specifics of Jesus' temptations, Ellen White observes:

There were those who tried to cast contempt upon Him because of His birth, and even in His childhood He had to meet their scornful looks and evil whisperings. If He had responded by an impatient word or look, if He had conceded to His brothers by even one wrong act, He would have failed of being a perfect example (65).

Through the help that Christ can give, we shall be able to learn to bridle the tongue. Sorely as He was tried on the point of hasty and angry speech, He never once sinned with His lips. With patient calmness He met the sneers, the taunts, and the ridicule of His fellow workers at the carpenter's bench. Instead of retorting angrily, He would begin to sing one of David's beautiful psalms, and His companions, before realizing what they were doing, would unite with Him in the hymn (66).

The trials and privations of which so many youth complain, Christ endured without murmuring. And this discipline is the very experience the youth need, which will give firmness to their character and make them like Christ, strong in spirit to resist temptation (67).

Recounting the Savior's experience during His passion and trial, she writes:

Christ's agony did not cease, but His depression and discouragement left Him (68).

Satan led the cruel mob in its abuse of the Saviour. It was his purpose to provoke Him to retaliation if possible, or to drive Him to perform a miracle to release Himself, and thus break up the plan of salvation. One stain upon His human life, one failure of His humanity to endure the terrible test, and the Lamb of God would have been an imperfect offering, and the redemption of man a failure. . . .

Satan's rage was great as he saw that all the abuse inflicted upon the Saviour had not forced the least murmur from His lips (69).

What kind of human nature is tempted to indulge impatience, provocation, hasty and angry speech, discouragement, murmuring, and retaliation? The struggles depicted in the above statements are obviously those in which a fallen, lower nature would have been gratified by yielding.

Notice also the distinction drawn in one of the above statements between the temptation to retaliate and murmur on the one hand, and the temptation to perform a miracle to free Himself on the other. This helps us understand how Jesus experienced conflict at *both* levels—to use His divinity as well as to indulge His humanity. This is not a matter of either/or, but of both/and. Most assuredly our Lord was tempted to use His deity to vanquish His adversaries, to abandon humankind to the fate of the disobedient. But He was also tempted to indulge the urges of the flesh common to us all. And it is through the latter struggles that we can identify with Him.

Many fiercely recoil from the thought of the human Christ experiencing sexual temptation. Yet when Scripture declares our Savior to have been “in all points tempted like as we are” (Heb. 4:15), one is baffled at efforts to exclude such a key issue of personal integrity from the struggles faced by our Lord. It is truly fascinating how people seem not to be troubled by Jesus being tempted to bow down and worship Satan (Matt. 4:9)—something very few humans are directly tempted to do—yet recoil with disgust at our Lord being assailed by the universal human drive to sexual fulfillment. Particularly in our day, in which the pornography addiction has received so much attention, it behooves us to remember this is no uniquely modern allurements, as any visitor to the ruins of Pompeii can attest. It is difficult to imagine such indulgences not being familiar to the environment in which Jesus grew up, especially when we consider the reputation of Nazareth.

In a pamphlet devoted specifically to sexual indulgence, Ellen White offers hope to the tempted with these words:

All are accountable for their actions while upon probation in this world. All have power to control their actions. If they are weak in virtue and purity of thoughts and acts, they can obtain help from the Friend of the helpless. Jesus is acquainted with all the weaknesses of human nature, and if entreated, will give strength to overcome the most powerful temptations (70).

Elsewhere we read:

His (the Christian’s) strongest temptations will come from within, for he must battle against the inclinations of the natural heart. The Lord knows our weaknesses (71).

And how does He know our weaknesses?

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) (72).

Needless to say, the above statements are clear as to the internal nature of Jesus’ struggle with temptation, and establish beyond question the fact that according to Ellen White’s Christology, Jesus was tempted through fleshly urges common to all humanity.

Adams seems not to consider the contradictions likely to be instilled in many minds through his use of Ellen White. On the one hand, he quotes the following signature statement by Ellen White regarding Jesus’ taking of fallen human heredity, in contrast with the nature of the sinless Adam in Eden (p. 61):

It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man’s nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But 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. What these

results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life (73).

Then, on a later page (p. 69), he quotes the following statement:

By inheritance and example the sons become partakers of the father's sins. Wrong tendencies, perverted appetites, and debased morals . . . are transmitted as a legacy from father to son, to the third and fourth generation (74).

Adams cites the above statement in an effort to show how Jesus couldn't possibly have partaken of such an inheritance, going on to quote another statement where Ellen White—speaking of Adam and Eve (p. 69)—writes that “should they once yield to temptation, their natures would become . . . depraved” (75). Indeed they would, and did. And in another statement Ellen White is clear this is precisely the sort of human nature Jesus took in His incarnation: “He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin” (76). What, perhaps, could be the difference between “depraved” and “degraded and defiled”?

Ellen White's earlier statement regarding the inheritance by men and women of “debased morals” (77) must be read alongside another statement we cited earlier in our study, which speaks of how “for four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity” (78). Again we are constrained to see how, according to the inspired pen, Jesus' inherited humanity was degenerate (or debased) at all three levels—physical, mental, and moral.

Yet another statement is cited by Adams (pp. 69-70) as alleged proof that Jesus couldn't have accepted a fallen moral nature as an inheritance. This one describes sin as “leprosy . . . deep-rooted, deadly, and impossible to be cleansed by human power. . . . But Jesus, coming to dwell in humanity, receives no pollution” (79). Commenting on this statement, Adams writes, “Everyone has been infected, she says” (p. 70). But Ellen White doesn't say, here or anywhere else, that this infection (or pollution) is synonymous with the fallen nature humans involuntarily receive at birth. This is what Adams believes, but the statements he cites do not say this. Universal pollution, yes. Involuntary pollution, no.

Let us return, for a moment, to the statement quoted above which speaks of Christ accepting the results of four thousand years of human heredity. First, Ellen White is clear that it would have been humiliating enough had Jesus in fact taken the unfallen nature of Adam. The statement says this would have been “an *almost* infinite humiliation.” But Jesus obviously wasn't content for His condescension to be “almost infinite.” The above statement declares that He went far beyond this, taking humanity as it existed after four thousand years of degeneracy. Secondly, Ellen White specifies the reason why Christ took fallen heredity—not merely to look like the ordinary human being of His day, with less physical and mental strength than the sinless Adam, but in order to “share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a

sinless life” (80). In other words, His heredity would be a source of temptation to Himself, as it is to us.

But perhaps in no portion of his discussion of Jesus’ humanity does Adams neglect the full complement of inspired evidence than when dealing with the famous Baker letter of 1895 (pp. 68,70-71) (81), and with Ellen White’s statements denying that Jesus possessed like passions as we (p. 67) (82). Because he refrains from mentioning those Ellen White statements which affirm very strongly our Lord’s possession of fallen human passions (83), he is spared the necessity of having to reconcile the two sets of statements—which we will find is easy to do once we consider the totality of inspired insight on this subject.

On page 67 of his book, Adams quotes two of the following Ellen White statements referenced above, which speak of Christ not having the same passions as we:

He is a brother in our infirmities, *but not in possessing like passions*. As the sinless One, His nature recoiled from evil (84).

He was a mighty petitioner, *not possessing the passions of our human, fallen natures*, but compassed with like infirmities, tempted in all points like as we are (85).

Adams then proceeds to quote from M.L. Andreasen, where he states: “The Spirit of Prophecy makes clear that Christ was *not exempt* from the temptations and passions that afflict men” (p. 67) (86). Then, after comparing this statement of Andreasen’s to the Ellen White statements noted just above, Adams exclaims with incredulity:

Can we believe our eyes or not? Is the emperor fully clothed, or is he naked? Here is Ellen White telling us one thing, and Andreasen (who claims to be an authority on her writings) telling us that she taught differently. If I have found this phenomenon once, I have found it a hundred times in the writings of today’s Adventist right-wing spokespersons. I am deeply troubled by this irresponsible (one might almost say dishonest) way of handling evidence (pp. 67-68).

I say this with all due respect to a colleague in ministry, but if Adams were trying a legal case with the partial evidence he uses, especially with the dogmatic tone he takes, he would come off seriously embarrassed. For indeed, Andreasen is quite correct when declaring that “the Spirit of Prophecy makes clear that Christ was not exempt from the temptations and passions that afflict men.” The following Ellen White statements, referenced earlier but not quoted, are indeed very clear on this point:

Though He (Christ) had all the strength of passion of humanity, never did He yield to temptation to do one single act which was not pure and elevating and ennobling (87).

The words of Christ encourage parents to bring their little ones to Jesus. They may be wayward, and possess passions like those of humanity, but this should not deter us from bringing them to Christ. He blessed children that were possessed of passions like His own (88).

By a word Christ could have mastered the powers of Satan. But He came into the world that He might endure every test, every provocation, that it is possible for human beings to bear and yet not be provoked or impassioned, or retaliate in word, in spirit, or in action (89).

Adams—though leaving unmentioned the above Ellen White statements affirming our Lord’s possession of fallen passions—nevertheless acknowledges one might find the two sets of Ellen White statements on this subject paradoxical. However, his solution to the dilemma—endorsed by others of like mind in contemporary Adventism (90)—is problematic for some very fundamental reasons. Adams suggests that Ellen White may have been using terminology regarding Jesus’ humanity in a manner similar to one Henry Melvill, whose language she appears to have utilized to some degree in a portion of her writings (pp. 68-69). Melvill’s distinction between what he calls “innocent infirmities” and “sinful propensities” regarding Christ’s human nature is believed by Adams to be reflected in Ellen White’s own statements regarding what Jesus partook of so far as fallen humanity is concerned, and what He did not presumably partake of (p. 68).

Another contemporary Adventist author, with views similar to Adams, writes as follows regarding this possible explanation of Ellen White’s Christology:

While Ellen White did not quote the words (of Melvill, such as “innocent infirmities,” “sinful propensities,” and “prone to offend”) the sentiments of Melvill could very well reflect Ellen White’s own convictions (91).

This method of explaining inspired materials can only be described as speculative and dangerous. In the first place, the above author admits Ellen White didn’t actually use the phrases used by Melvill regarding Jesus’ humanity, and thus claim “the sentiments of Melvill *could very well* reflect Ellen White’s own convictions” (92). Speculation, in other words. But even if one could prove conclusively that Ellen White was borrowing some of Melvill’s language in articulating her view of Jesus’ humanity, this wouldn’t be proof she was borrowing his theology. While it is true that Ellen White, like many Bible writers, made occasional use of uninspired sources, to allow such sources to interpret the inspired writings themselves is perilous in the extreme. For example, it has been demonstrated that the apostle Paul used language from the apocryphal book The Wisdom of Solomon in writing some of his epistles (93). Should we therefore go to this uninspired book to find what Paul really meant?

Other evidence indicates that Christ may have borrowed the words of the Golden Rule from the famed Rabbi Hillel (94). Should we then go to Rabbi Hillel’s writings to learn the true meaning of what Christ taught, on this or any subject?

Whenever an inspired writer uses the words of an uninspired writer, the words used cannot be understood except in the setting where the inspired writer places them. Such language then assumes whatever meaning the inspired consensus imposes upon it. No hint can be found, either in Scripture or Ellen White, that uninspired sources ever provide the key to understanding inspired passages. In Ellen White's words:

The testimonies themselves will be the key that will explain the messages given, as scripture is explained by scripture (95).

Indeed, permitting Ellen White's writings to explain themselves is the only viable solution to the seemingly contradictory statements in her writings on this or any other subject. Adams is quite right, by the way, to dispute the usefulness in this controversy of dictionary definitions by at least one prominent post-Fall advocate (p. 69), as that too is a compromise of the principle that inspired counsel is its own interpreter. Much as the present writer values the contributions and endorses the conclusions of this particular scholar regarding the issue in question, Adams is correct to note this particular shortcoming. The principle that Inspiration defines its own vocabulary is a key cornerstone of Seventh-day Adventist theology, and regardless of how correct one's conclusions might otherwise be, this principle must remain inviolate.

Like others of similar conviction, Adams makes a great deal of Ellen White's statement in the famous Baker letter regarding Jesus not having sinful propensities (pp. 68,70-71):

Be careful, exceedingly careful, as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. . . . He could have sinned, He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity (96).

But no inspired statement stands alone, either in Scripture or the writings of Ellen White. Reading inspired statements apart from the inspired consensus is how so many conservative Christians can read Revelation 20, verse 10—which states that the wicked will be “tormented day and night for ever and ever”—and conclude that the unrighteous will be tortured in hell throughout eternity. Only when we permit all the inspired evidence to be brought to bear on a particular subject can we obtain a consistent picture of inspired truth, and thus iron out what appear on the surface to be contradictions.

Consider, for example, the following Ellen White statement which uses language similar to what we find in the Baker letter, regarding Jesus not having the same sinful propensities as man:

We must not become in our ideas common and earthly, and in our perverted ideas we must not think that the liability of Christ to Satan's temptations degraded His humanity and that He possessed the same sinful, corrupt propensities as man (97).

We might reach the wrong conclusion if we stopped there. But in the very next paragraph she explains what she means:

Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupted, *and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in place of the words of God* (98).

So what does she mean when she says Jesus never had the same corrupt propensities we have? Simple. She means He never chose to sin, and thus never acquired a taste for sin. Notice she doesn't say His nature wouldn't be corrupted unless He was born with the same fallen nature other humans are born with. Rather, the corruption here described would occur only if He received the words of Satan in place of the words of God. Choice, not birth, is the source of the corruption here described.

So what is, in fact, the solution to this apparent paradox on this issue in the writings of Ellen White? How can she write in one set of statements that Jesus did not have the same passions as we (99), yet in another set of statements say He did (100)? How can she write in one statement that "not for one moment was there in Him (Christ) an evil propensity" (101), yet in another write: "Our natural propensities must be controlled, or we can never overcome as Christ overcame" (102)?

The solution is to be found, I believe, in the distinction made by inspired writings between lower and higher forces within human nature. Jesus acknowledged the existence of these forces when He declared to His disciples, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41). Paul said the same thing when he wrote, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection" (I Cor. 9:27).

Ellen White speaks along similar lines when she writes: "The will is not the taste or the inclination, but it is the deciding power" (103). Other passages spell out this clear distinction:

The body is to be brought into subjection. The higher powers of the being are to rule. The passions are to be controlled by the will, which is itself under the control of God (104).

If enlightened intellect holds the reins, controlling the animal propensities, keeping them in subjection to the moral powers, Satan well knows that his power to overcome with his temptations is very small (105).

Intemperance of any kind benumbs the perceptive organs, and so weakens the brain nerve power that eternal things are not appreciated, but are placed upon a level with common things. The higher powers of the mind, developed for elevated purposes, are brought into slavery to the baser passions (106).

Another statement makes it clear that the flesh of itself is incapable of sin.

The lower passions have their seat in the body and work through it. The words "flesh" or "fleshly" or "carnal lusts" embrace the lower, corrupt nature; the flesh of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God (107).

Remember, it is through the higher powers of our being that moral and spiritual choices are made. Neither sin nor righteousness is possible unless the higher nature is exercised. Evil passions and sinful propensities can only be contained in the lower nature, which the above statement declares to be incapable of sin. But such passions and propensities can be cast out of the higher nature, which involves the will and character. The following statements make this clear:

The only power that can create or perpetuate true peace is the grace of Christ. When this is implanted in the heart, it will cast out the evil passions that cause strife and dissension (108).

We must realize that through belief in Him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity (109).

Clearly, when Ellen White speaks of evil passions cast out and sinful propensities not retained, she is not teaching holy flesh, for in another statement we read that "appetite and passion must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. There is no end to the warfare this side of eternity" (110). The difference is between an urge resisted and an urge exhibited. Here we find the resolution of what appears to be conflict between those Ellen White statements which say, on the one hand, that Jesus did not have evil propensities or like passions as we (111), and others which clearly say He did (112). The one set of statements refer to His higher nature, where the will and character choices reside. The other set of statements refer to His lower, fleshly nature, which "of itself cannot act contrary to the will of God" (113).

This distinction also helps us understand two different definitions Ellen White uses in her writings for human nature. One set of statements speak of human nature in terms of natural, inherited equipment, otherwise called the lower nature:

The result of the eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is manifest in every man's experience. There is in his nature a bent to evil, a force which, unaided, he cannot resist (114).

In our own strength it is impossible for us to deny the clamors of our fallen nature. Through this channel Satan will bring temptations upon us. Christ knew that the enemy would come to every human being, to take advantage of hereditary weakness, and by his false insinuations to ensnare all whose trust is not in God (115).

Only through the blood of the Crucified One is there cleansing from sin. His grace alone can enable us to resist and subdue the tendencies of our fallen nature (116).

You cannot bring up your children as you should without divine help; for the fallen nature of Adam always strives for the mastery. The heart must be prepared for the principles of truth, that they may root in the soul and find nourishment in the life (117).

The second set of statements speak of human nature as synonymous with the will and character, or the higher nature:

Connected with Christ, human nature becomes pure and true. Christ supplies the efficiency, and man becomes a power for good (118).

A Christlike nature is not selfish, unsympathetic, cold. It enters into the feelings of those who are tempted and helps the one who has fallen to make the trial a steppingstone to higher things (119).

If your nature is not transformed, if you are not refined and elevated by the sanctifying truth for these last days, you will be found unworthy of a place among the good and holy angels (120).

The word destroys the natural, earthly nature, and imparts a new life in Christ Jesus (121).

When Christ shall come, our vile bodies are to be changed, and made like His glorious body; but the vile character will not be made holy then. The transformation of character must take place before His coming. Our natures must be pure and holy; we must have the mind of Christ, that He may behold with pleasure His image reflected upon our souls (122).

Let us again bear in mind those Ellen White statements which speak of the struggle with our fallen natures as continuing till the coming of Jesus:

So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained (123).

Appetite and passion must be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit. There is no end to the warfare this side of eternity (124).

Just as long as Satan urges his temptations upon us, the battle for self-conquest will have to be fought over and over again; but by obedience, the truth will sanctify the soul (125).

Adams protests at one point a statement by A.T. Jones which distinguishes the “sinful flesh” from the “sinful mind,” asking in reply, “But isn’t my mind part of my sinful, fallen nature? And isn’t it the mind that controls my whole body?” (p. 35). Unfortunately, Adams fails to consider the weight of Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy evidence considered above, which

demonstrates the distinction between fleshly urges and the power of the will, and how this distinction helps resolve the modern Adventist Christology debate.

All who embrace the post-Fall view of Jesus' humanity heartily endorse Ellen White's admonition from the Baker letter, quoted in italics by Adams (p. 71): "*Let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such a one as ourselves, for it cannot be*" (126). Ellen White's meaning becomes clearer as we read more of this letter, which warns elsewhere: "Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption, rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption" (127). The key words here are "rested upon" and "yielded." Choice, not heredity, is the decisive issue here. Jesus was not altogether such a one as ourselves, did not have any evil propensity, did not have any taint or inclination to corruption resting upon Him, because He never sinned.

Adams quotes Ellen White's citation of Luke 1:31-35 (p. 71), the passage which refers to Jesus as "that holy thing" (verse 35). Adams then quotes again from the Baker letter, where Ellen White states regarding this passage from Luke: "These words do not refer to any human being, except to the Son of the infinite God" (128). Again, all would agree here. No one but Christ was born of the Holy Spirit in the manner described in the Gospels. But does this mean His inherited humanity was supernaturally altered and therefore different from ours? Neither Scripture nor Ellen White teach this. In fact, the very next chapter of the Gospel of Luke cites an Old Testament passage which reads, "Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord" (Luke 2:23). These were all human beings born with fallen natures. Yet they are called holy.

For additional discussion from Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy writings on the distinction between lower and higher powers in human nature, and the relationship of this construct to the Adventist Christology debate, see accompanying article "The Lower and Higher Natures" at www.ourfirmplatform.com, written articles, Paulson, Kevin.

God's Character Requirement

The following statement by Adams gives us a place to start in our review of his book's perspective on salvation, sanctification, and victory over sin:

And yet we must ever keep in mind that *His victory is our victory*. That is to say, *we are saved by His victory*. We are saved as we participate in His victory—as we, in other words, accept His victory as our own. We are not saved by trying to duplicate His victory. Instead, *we are saved by accepting His victory as our own*. We cannot emphasize this too strongly.

"He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified

by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7, NASB).

We seek personal victory *not in order to be saved*, but because of an insatiable desire, born of profound gratitude, *to be like Him who has saved us* (p. 85, italics original).

To say the least, the above statement needs clarifying. All in the present discussion agree we are saved by Christ’s victory and not by any self-generated victory attempted apart from God’s power. But what exactly does Adams mean by the phrase “participate in His victory,” as distinct from the phrase “accepting His victory”? Does he see these phrases as synonymous? The former could easily be understood—as indeed it should be—as Spirit-empowered victory made possible through practical Christian living, while the latter might be understood as a mere legal declaration supposedly covering one’s past, present, and future lack of victory. The inspired writings are clear, of course, that justifying (or forensic) righteousness is indeed a covering for the believer’s past sins and sins of ignorance (129), but no inspired support exists for the theory—very popular in mainstream evangelical circles, and in some quarters of contemporary Adventism—that God’s forgiveness functions as an “umbrella” supposedly covering present and future sins as well as those of one’s past.

True participation in Jesus’ victory, at the bottom line, is what sanctified obedience is all about. But Adams confuses the issue when he writes, “We are not saved by trying to duplicate His victory” (p. 85). If he is referring to “trying” in our own strength, apart from God’s transforming grace, we can agree. But if he is saying that the cooperative endeavor of divine and human power in the regenerative, sanctifying process is not a part of salvation, he is quite mistaken. The very passage Adam quotes from Titus 3:5 is clear that the Christian is saved “by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (KJV), as distinct from “works of righteousness which we have done.” This verse helps to clearly establish a contrast between what humans attempt in their own strength and what the Holy Spirit makes possible through its transformative power.

Another passage which clearly places Spirit-empowered sanctification within the Biblical salvation process is Second Thessalonians 2:13, which declares:

God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

The widespread theory, promoted by many mainstream evangelicals and some contemporary Adventists, that Christians are saved solely by Christ’s work for us and not at all by His work in us, is flatly contradicted both by Titus 3:5 and by Second Thessalonians 2:13. Without question, justifying righteousness is a part of the righteousness which saves the believer (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7). But so, according to the passages cited above, is the righteousness of regeneration and sanctification.

We have to keep in mind that Biblical salvation is all about being saved from sin (Matt. 1:21), a process which includes both forgiveness and transformation, both pardon and power. The New Testament is clear that obedience to God's commandments is the condition of our salvation (Matt. 19:16-26; Luke 10:25-28; Rom. 2:6-10; 8:13; Heb. 5:9) and the standard of divine judgment (Matt. 25:31-46; James 2:10-12). But in our own strength we cannot fulfill these conditions, and any such effort falls under the New Testament condemnation of what is termed righteousness by works (Rom. 3:20,28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9). But sanctification, with its divine-human component and the ultimate triumph over sin it accomplishes, is very much a part of the saving process. The Bible never exalts the purity of justification over that of sanctification, nor is either ever depicted in Scripture as any more or less the spotless righteousness of Christ than the other.

In addressing the topic of sinless obedience and God's character requirement, Adams again makes a statement all in the present controversy will endorse:

We need to understand clearly that whatever Ellen White says on perfection, sinless living, or any other topic, it is to be understood, according to her own insistence, against the background of Scripture. This means that every fundamental truth in her writings must be demonstrable on the basis of the Bible (p. 124).

And this is a challenge easily and decisively answered by those holding to the belief that through divine strength, sinless living is both possible and necessary for the converted, striving Christian. Consider the following Bible verses, from both Testaments:

Stand in awe, and sin not; commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still (Psalm 4:4).

Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it (Psalm 34:13-14).

Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell forevermore (Psalm 37:27).

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity; they walk in His ways (Psalm 119:1-3).

The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid (Zeph. 3:13).

Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more (John 8:11).

For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14).

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-4).

Awake to righteousness, and sin not (I Cor. 15:34).

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Cor. 7:1).

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds. Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:4-5).

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it. That He might sanctify and cleanse it through the washing of water by the Word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:13).

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Thess. 5:23).

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity (II Tim. 2:19).

For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in His steps.

Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth (I Peter 2:21-22).

Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin (I Peter 4:1).

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, in the which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? . . . Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless (II Peter 3:10-12,14).

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. . . . If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:7,9).

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure. . . Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous (I John 3:2-3,7).

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne (Rev. 3:21).

And in their (the saints') mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God (Rev. 14:5).

Indeed, many more Bible verses exist promoting the possibility of earthly beings living sinless lives through God's power than can be found promoting the necessity of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. The following Ellen White statements confirm what the above Bible passages teach:

In our world, we are to remember the way in which Christ worked. He made the world. He made man. Then He came in person to the world to show its inhabitants how to live sinless lives (130).

Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Casting down imaginations, and every high think that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." When you come into this position, the work of consecration will be better understood by you both. Your thoughts will be pure, chaste, and elevated, your actions pure and sinless (131).

To everyone who surrenders fully to God is given the privilege of living without sin, in obedience to the law of heaven (132).

But it is God's purpose that man shall stand before Him upright and noble; and God will not be defeated by Satan. He sent His Son to this world to bear the death penalty of man's transgression, and to show man how to live a sinless life. There is no other way in which man can be saved. "Without Me," Christ says, "ye can do nothing." Through Him, and Him alone, can the natural heart be changed, the affections transformed, the affections set flowing heavenward. Christ alone can give life to the soul dead in trespasses and sins (133).

Thus He (Christ) placed us on vantage ground, where we could live pure, sinless lives. Repentant sinners stand before God justified and accepted, because the Innocent One has borne their guilt. The undeserving are made deserving, because in their behalf the Deserving became the undeserving (134).

Christ bore the sins of the whole world. He was the second Adam. Taking upon Himself human nature, He passed over the ground where Adam stumbled and fell. Having taken humanity, He has an intense interest in human beings. He felt keenly the sinfulness, the shame, of sin. He is our Elder Brother. He came to prove that human beings can, through the power of God, live sinless lives (135).

The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no heed to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness (136).

In the day of judgment the course of the man who has retained the frailty and imperfection of humanity will not be vindicated. For him there will be no place in heaven. He could not enjoy the perfection of the saints in light. He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God (137).

In His life He (Christ) has given us a representation of what repentant sinners may become. He was pure and undefiled. From His lips escaped no word that could leave a stain upon His character. All through the Scriptures He has given us assurances that through His grace we may attain the same perfection of character that He attained (138).

Notice how the last of the above statements speaks of this perfection-of-character teaching being taught by Jesus “all through the Scriptures.” We have seen much of this Scriptural evidence already.

In light of the above, it truly is amazing why there is still controversy over what exactly Ellen White teaches on this subject. One recalls the statement made by North Carolina Senator Sam Ervin during the Watergate hearings of 1973. When John Ehrlichmann, aide to then-President Richard Nixon, asked why the Senator was so dogmatic in his interpretation of a certain federal statute, Ervin replied, “Because I can understand the English language; it’s my mother tongue” (139).

It is probably fair to say that for the great majority of those involved in the Adventist perfection debate for the past half-century, English is their mother tongue as well. Which helps explain why so many Adventists who deny the earthly possibility of sinless obedience have long since relinquished faith in Ellen White’s doctrinal authority. Anglican scholar Geoffrey Paxton, in his 1977 book *The Shaking of Adventism*, described Ellen White as having a “wax nose” in the Adventist salvation controversy (140), presumably because her writings were being used by individuals on both sides of the dispute. In the years that followed, it would seem, quite a

number of Adventist adherents to Paxton's theology thought the "wax" had turned to granite—and in a way decidedly contrary to their own convictions.

Sadly, Adams endorses a popular urban legend in contemporary Adventism—and cites a prominent Adventist historian of similar thinking as support (141)—that the doctrine of sinless obedience here on earth is based primarily on Ellen White and not the Bible, and that Ellen White doesn't support this doctrine either (p. 124). At one point he writes:

As most of us know, the approach of those who espouse absolute perfection and sinlessness is based almost solely on the writings of Ellen G. White (p. 115).

The present writer invites readers of Adams' book and of the present review to consider both the evidence offered by Adams and that offered in this review—in particular the Biblical and Ellen White statements noted above—and then decide for themselves.

In addressing the Biblical definition of sin, which we considered earlier, Adams seeks to apply this definition to the question of whether all sin can in fact be expelled from Christian lives:

Once one understands this (the allegedly complex definition of sin), one does not issue—as did Andreasen—facile admonitions to "get rid of every sin" and "do it now, today." Such simplistic pietism, well-meaning though it may be, is irresponsible and can actually have the unintended result of seriously discouraging those who are struggling with powerful inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil.

If we are talking about sin as *pesha* (departure from God, rebellion, defiance, willful transgression), then it is quite obvious that true Christians should have put such practices and attitudes behind them. While this does not mean that we will never know times of relapse into *pesha*, it does mean to say that a true follower of the Lord has set a course that runs in the direction of God's will (p. 90).

Imagine a couple standing at the wedding altar and vowing simply to "set a course that runs in the direction" of keeping oneself to "thee only"!

Unfortunately, Adams again becomes inconsistent in his argument, as he says on the very next page that with the "mature Christian," "all transgressions, all revolt against God, all willful defiance of His rule have ceased" (p. 91). How then can he say on the previous page that "this does not mean that we will never know times of relapse" (p. 90) into sins of this very nature?

Adams further insists that the ultimate issue in the final conflict is between "rebellion and loyalty" (p. 97), not—according to him—the total absence of sin from Christian lives. He then quotes—surprisingly—Revelation 14:5, which describes the translated saints as follows: "And in their mouth was found no guile, for they are without fault before the throne of God." Then he writes the following:

The lesson to be drawn, then, from David's prayer in Psalm 32 is that in Jesus victory is possible, that in Jesus *pesha* (rebellion) and *remiyyah* (guile, hypocrisy, deceit) will cease. Victory in these areas of the Christian life will be complete in Jesus, for these aspects of sin *are literally and intrinsically intertwined with character*. In regard, however, to *chatta'ah* ("missing the mark") and *awon* ("crookedness"—in the sense of natural moral deformity), God bears with completely surrendered Christians until the end. These aspects of sin do not intrinsically impinge on characters and *thus do not determine our fitness or unfitness for heaven*.

And while the life of surrendered Christians will demonstrate continued growth, we will never come to the place in this life where we move beyond the reach of these infirmities (p. 97, *italics original*).

Most will likely find the above to be a curious elaboration of the phrase "without fault" (Rev. 14:5)—one which, according to Adams, seems to allow for "crookedness" and other presumably unavoidable sins. Again we recall the numerous Bible and Spirit of Prophecy statements considered earlier, which speak quite unequivocally of an obedience where sin—through divine grace and attendant human effort—has been extinguished.

This attempt by some to distinguish perfect loyalty from perfect obedience is quite thoroughly demolished by the following Ellen White statement:

The law demands perfect obedience. "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Not one of those ten precepts can be broken without disloyalty to the God of heaven. The least deviation from its requirements, by neglect or willful transgression, is sin, and every sin exposes the sinner to the wrath of God (142).

At one point Adams cites an Ellen White statement often used to support the theory that God's character requirement only concerns the direction of one's experience, rather than occasional missteps. This is the statement where she writes that "the character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts" (143) (p. 119).

Let us consider this statement in its context:

A person may not be able to tell the exact time or place, or trace all the chain of circumstances in the process of conversion, but this does not prove him to be unconverted. . . . While the work of the Spirit is silent and imperceptible, its effects are manifest. If the heart has been renewed by the Spirit of God, the life will bear witness to the fact. While we cannot do anything to change our hearts or to bring ourselves into harmony with God; while we must not trust at all to ourselves or to our good works, our lives will reveal whether the grace of God is dwelling within us. A change will be seen in the character, the habits, the pursuits. The contrast will be clear and decided between

what they have been and what they are. The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts (144).

In other words, the subject here is the reality of one's initial conversion, not what God ultimately requires of the converted believer. In other statements Ellen White is clear what the latter requirements are:

Christ has promised to make them [His people] harmonious on every point, not pleasant and agreeable and kind today, and tomorrow harsh and disagreeable and unkind, falsifying their profession of faith (145).

Are there those here who have been sinning and repenting, sinning and repenting, and will they continue to do so till Christ shall come? May God help us that we may be truly united to Christ, the living Vine, and bear fruit to the glory of God (146).

Like others of his persuasion, Adams also cites several Ellen White statements which state that Christians cannot equal the pattern set by Jesus, but should nevertheless try to copy and resemble it as best they can. The Ellen White CD-ROM lists about eight statements which use this language. The two quoted by Adams (pp. 116-117) read as follows:

He is a perfect and holy example, given for us to imitate. We cannot equal the pattern; but we shall not be approved of God if we do not copy it, and, according to the ability which God has given, resemble it (147).

Christ is our pattern, the perfect and holy example that has been given us to follow. We can never equal the pattern; but we may imitate it and resemble it according to our ability (148).

But the context of the above statements helps us understand exactly what pattern Ellen White has in view, which she claims we cannot equal. Here is what is stated just prior to the first of the above statements:

He [Christ] laid aside His glory, His dominion, His riches, and sought after those who were perishing in sin. He humbled Himself to our necessities, that He might exalt us to heaven. Sacrifice, self-denial, and disinterested benevolence characterized His life. He is our pattern (149).

Here is what we read just prior to the second of the above statements:

We shall never be called upon to suffer as Christ suffered; for the sins not of one, but the sins of the whole world were laid upon Christ. He endured humiliation, reproach, suffering, and death, that we by following His example might inherit all things (150).

Other such statements convey the same thought:

Our Lord and Saviour laid aside His dominion, His riches and glory, and sought after us, that He might save us from misery, and make us like Himself. He humbled Himself and took our nature that we might be able to learn of Him, and, imitating His life of benevolence and self-denial, follow Him step by step to heaven. You cannot equal the copy, but you can resemble it, and according to your ability do likewise (151).

He laid aside His glory, His high command, His honor, and His riches, and humbled Himself to our necessities. We cannot equal the example, but we should copy it (152).

In each of these statements, and in similar ones, the pattern we are told we can't equal is that of Christ's infinite humiliation, suffering, and sacrifice for our sins, not the pattern of sinless obedience. We can't equal the pattern in question because we don't have the throne of God to give up. Nor have the sins of all mankind been laid upon us. The sinless angels can't equal this pattern either.

Another such statement speaks of Christ's infinite goodness as the pattern we cannot equal but must strive to follow:

What efforts are we putting forth as the believers of unpopular truth, in self-denial, in self-sacrifice? We can never equal the Pattern, because it is infinite goodness practiced in His human nature, yet we should make determined efforts with all the powers of our being to follow His example (153).

What is the pattern we can't equal? Christ's "infinite goodness." Again, even the sinless angels can't equal that. Only God is capable of infinite goodness, and Jesus demonstrated that goodness by coming to earth as the sacrifice for our sins. But in no way is this or any comparable passage saying our Lord's sinless obedience is a pattern fallen beings cannot equal, even through heaven's power.

Another Ellen White statement quoted by Adams says, "No one is perfect but Jesus" (p. 117) (154). Adams implies that this statement means no one *can* be perfect except Jesus. But in light of all the statements from both Scripture and Ellen White which we have considered, the above statement cannot fairly be read as saying anything other than what Paul writes in such passages as Romans 3:23, where he states that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Paul isn't saying sin is inevitable for the one who accepts Christ and claims His power for victory, only that all humanity stands in need of the forgiveness and victory Christ offers. In this selfsame epistle he goes on to declare that "the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4). Elsewhere he writes, as we noted earlier: "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (II Cor. 7:1).

Ellen White is equally emphatic that no sin of any kind is inevitable or excusable for the consecrated Christian:

The tempter's agency is not to be accounted an excuse for one wrong act. Satan is jubilant when he hears the professed followers of Christ making excuses for their deformity of character. It is these excuses that lead to sin. There is no excuse for sinning. A holy temper, a Christlike life, is accessible to every repenting, believing child of God (155).

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. Christ lived in this world from infancy to manhood, and during that time He met and resisted all the temptations by which man is beset. He is a perfect pattern of childhood, of youth, of manhood (156).

Adams devotes some time to a question often raised in discussions about perfection and the final generation, which he phrases as follows:

Does God require of the final generation a certain standard or quality of righteousness not expected of previous generations of believers? (p. 113; see also pp. 115-116).

Later in this same chapter, he gives the following answer to the above question:

So what does God require of us? The same as He requires of His people in previous generations. It is quite possible, of course, that we'll be judged more severely than they, for we have been exposed to much greater light than they. But that is all (p. 130).

"That is all" indeed! What Adams appears not to realize is that he has just endorsed a key feature of Last Generation Theology—the fact that during the antitypical Day of Atonement starting in 1844, God has granted His end-time church a sufficiently massive volume of light and truth so that their Spirit-empowered character attainment will be the grandest and most glorious in the history of the great controversy.

This is a key point for our discussion to establish. First of all, it is a fact of sacred history that succeeding generations receive greater divine light than former ones, and thus greater spiritual responsibility. Proverbs 4:18 observes that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." In the parable of the sower Jesus describes the seed falling on good ground as achieving different levels of growth, "some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold" (Matt. 13:8)—all among the saved. Elsewhere Jesus declared:

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask for more (Luke 12:48).

Ellen White is clear, of course, that the condition of eternal life in every age has always been what it first was in Eden—perfect obedience to the law of God (157). But since our loving God winks at the times of our ignorance (Acts 17:30), and says that "to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17), we must conclude that the perfect obedience God requires is in proportion to the volume of light and truth revealed. Ellen White is

clear that God makes allowance for sins of ignorance (158). This, in fact, is the only kind of “relative perfection” Inspiration teaches—perfection relative to knowledge, not human weakness. For those who sin ignorantly, God has provided a remedy through the atonement of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary. In Ellen White’s words:

The minds of all who embrace this message are directed to the most holy place, where Jesus stands before the ark, making His final intercession for all those for whom mercy still lingers and for those who have ignorantly broken the law of God. This atonement is made for the righteous dead as well as for the righteous living. It includes all who died trusting in Christ, but who, not having received the light upon God’s commandments, had sinned ignorantly in transgressing its precepts (159).

Ellen White is clear that different generations throughout history have been accountable for different levels of light and truth, in contrast with history’s final generation:

We are accountable for the privileges that we enjoy, and for the light that shines upon our pathway. Those who lived in past generations were accountable for the light which was permitted to shine upon them. Their minds were exercised in regard to different points of Scripture which tested them. But they did not understand the truths which we do. They were not responsible for the light which they did not have. They had the Bible, as we have, but the time for the unfolding of special truth in relation to the closing scenes of this earth’s history, is during the last generations that shall live upon the earth.

Special truths have been adapted to the conditions of the generations as they have existed. The present truth, which is a test to the people of this generation, was not a test to the people of generations far back. . . .

We are accountable only for the light that shines upon us (160).

History’s final generation, which will pass through the great time of trouble following probation’s close, will have a unique experience. “In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor” (161). Fully aware of the whole counsel of God—or at least what is essential for the total conquest of sin—by His grace they will now live accordingly. All ignorant sin in their lives will before that time have been revealed and conquered, for the Mediator will no longer be available to make atonement for sin—whether ignorant or otherwise. For this reason Ellen White declares that at the second coming, “the Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation” (162).

Let us remember that Scripture identifies the last-day experience of God’s people as “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time” (Dan. 12:1). And according to the book of Revelation, this time is not permitted to come upon the earth until God’s servants are sealed (Rev. 7:1-3). Ellen White is therefore in harmony both with Scripture and common sense when she writes that the coming crisis will require of God’s people a deeper and greater experience than their present one if they are to successfully endure this test:

The “time of trouble, such as never was” is soon to open upon us, and we shall need an experience which we do not now possess and which many are too indolent to obtain. It is often the case that trouble is greater in anticipation than in reality; but this is not true of the crisis before us (163).

The following Ellen White statement underscores this point even more strongly:

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God’s people upon the earth. . . .

When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing (164).

Notice how she describes the work needed at this time as “a *special* work of purification.” God has always demanded purity of character, but the final moments of history necessitate a purifying work not generally seen till then. In past ages God could use someone like Martin Luther, a beer-drinking anti-Semite whose hatred of Jews would later be celebrated by the Nazis (165). But in the final hours of the controversy with evil, God seeks a higher attainment from those who would serve Him. Few in the present discussion would likely disagree here. (Some of our more liberal members might not see a problem with beer-drinking, but I doubt even they would want an anti-Semite teaching religion at one of our colleges or universities!).

Sometime ago an online blog discussion featured an article titled, “The Problem With Purity,” in which it was alleged that today’s conservative Christian notions of sexual morality represent a “new and improved” standard, beyond what was expected of Old Testament society in which multiple wives, concubines, and child-bearing slaves seem ubiquitous (166). Aside from the confusion often created when what the Bible narrative recounts is mistaken for what the Bible approves, the Biblical passages we have seen give us ample cause to expect higher standards of conduct in successive ages of the church’s experience (e.g Prov. 4:18; Acts 17:30; James 4:17). One would certainly hope for “new and improved” understandings of God’s requirements as time advances. David’s polygamy, Philemon’s slaveowning, and Martin Luther’s anti-Semitism may have been permissible in former periods of the sacred past, but history’s final generation cannot fail to recognize what many in previous times clearly missed—that a deeper consideration of God’s Word and its commands leaves no room among the faithful for such aberrations.

This is the reason God gave His end-time church all the detailed, divinely-inspired counsel on faith, lifestyle, and institutional governance found in the writings of the Spirit of

Prophecy. This explains why, based on this inspired instruction, Seventh-day Adventists insist on higher standards of diet, dress, relationships, worship, and entertainment than are found in any other Christian community. This isn't because we consider ourselves superior to fellow Christians (or non-Christians) who order their lives differently. Rather, it is because we recognize that the last generation of believers must—through divine-human cooperation—develop an experience capable of triumph in an all-out death struggle with the most deeply-rooted, subtle, and pervasive sin in the history of the great controversy. Thus will the greatest measure of light shine on their pathway, and thus—in harmony with the Biblical principles noted earlier (Prov. 4:18; Matt. 13:8; Luke 12:48)—a higher achievement will be expected of them. But they can praise God that, as with every previous command of their Lord, “all His biddings are enablings” (167).

An entire section in Adams' chapter, “What Does God Require?” (pp. 113-131), focuses on Ellen White's renowned statement on the hastening of Jesus' coming through the reproduction of Christ's character in His people (pp. 120-124). The statement is quoted by Adams as follows (pp. 120-121):

Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own (168).

Like others who seek to twist this statement into meaning something other than sinless obedience (169), Adams—quoting an editorial he once published on this topic (170)—writes at length as to how this passage simply enjoins on the church the necessity of an incarnational ministry, “a ministry that is loving, compassionate, unselfish” (pp. 122-123). Further describing what this experience will entail, he writes: “We will then reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely” (p. 122).

No argument there, to be sure. But then he goes on to say, “No focus here on sinless perfection” (p. 123). But how, may we ask, does one “reflect the likeness of Christ in all that is pure, noble, and lovely” (p. 122) and still lapse into occasional sin? How does “all that is pure, noble, and lovely” leave room for occasional bursts of impatience, temper, irritation, lust, or any other sinful indulgence? Adams seem not to consider how contradictory his argument can be at times. At one point he writes, “Nor can we humanly manipulate the time of the harvest” (p. 123), then states immediately thereafter, “The only way to ‘hasten the coming of our Lord’ is through incarnational ministry” (p. 123). Which is it? Can we, or can we not, hasten the coming of Jesus through godly behavior, be it “incarnational ministry” or anything else? Granted, the word “manipulate” isn't one I would choose to describe the process, but how Adams can draw a distinction between selfless ministry, Christlike love, purity and nobility on the one hand, and sinless obedience on the other, is more than slightly baffling.

Even more puzzling to many students of this issue is the inordinate focus so many critics of Last Generation Theology have placed on the use of this statement from *Christ's Object Lessons* by advocates of this theology—as if this theological construct depends primarily if not exclusively on this one passage. In the first place, as we have seen already, any number of Bible

verses point to the purification of Christian character as an essential prerequisite for the coming of Jesus (e.g. Zeph. 3:13; I Thess. 5:23; II Peter 3:10-14; I John 3:2-3; Rev. 3:21; 14:5). Adams spends considerable time addressing the issue of guilelessness, blamelessness, and faultlessness relative to God's people, particularly in the light of Revelation 14:5 (pp. 113,124-126). Yet he bypasses one of the most decisive passages in the New Testament about Christians being commanded to duplicate, by God's grace, the sinless example of their Lord:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in His steps. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth (I Peter 2:21-22).

In other words, the same language used to describe Jesus (no sin, no guile) is used to describe the faithful remnant who meet Jesus at His return (Zeph. 3:13; Rev. 14:5). Just as Jesus is described as "a lamb without blemish and without spot" (II Peter 1:19), so the saints who meet Christ at His return are to "found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (II Peter 3:14). Those who scoff at Last Generation Theology as teaching that Christians will become "little christs" are really scoffing at the Word of God.

It is most interesting that while all promises to the seven churches of Revelation are given to the overcomers (Rev. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21), only the church of Laodicea—the last of the seven, and thus the church that faces Christ when He comes—is promised an overcoming experience identical to that of Jesus. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne" (Rev. 3:21).

The unique perfecting of the final generation is hardly an infrequent or obscure theme in the writings of Ellen White. The statement noted above from *Christ's Object Lessons* is but one of a multitude of such statements from her pen. We have already considered the following statement:

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their characters must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort they must be conquerors in the battle with evil. While the investigative judgment is going forward in heaven, while the sins of penitent believers are being removed from the sanctuary, there is to be a special work of purification, of putting away of sin, among God's people upon the earth. . . .

When this work shall have been accomplished, the followers of Christ will be ready for His appearing (171).

And what follows are but a small sample of what could be produced here:

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Saviour be brought to yield to the power of temptation. . . . He had kept His Father's commandments, and there was no

sin in Him that Satan could use to His advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble (172).

I also saw that many do not realize what they must be in order to live in the sight of the Lord without a high priest in the sanctuary through the time of trouble. Those who receive the seal of the living God and are protected in the time of trouble must reflect the image of Jesus fully. . . . I saw that none could share the ‘refreshing’ (latter rain) unless they obtain the victory over every besetment, over pride, selfishness, love of the world, and over every wrong word and action (173).

Those who come up to every point and stand every test, and overcome, be the price what it may, have heeded the counsel of the True Witness, and they will receive the latter rain, and thus be fitted for translation (174).

[From a chapter titled, “Pray for the Latter Rain”] By the power of the Holy Spirit the moral image of God is to be perfected in the character. We are to be wholly transformed into the likeness of Christ . . . Every individual must realize his own necessity. The heart must be emptied of every defilement, and cleansed for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (175).

Only those who have withstood temptation in the strength of the Mighty One will be permitted to act a part in proclaiming it (the third angel’s message) when it shall have swelled into the loud cry (176).

Not one of us will ever receive the seal of God while our characters have one spot or stain upon them. It is left with us to remedy the defects in our characters, to cleanse the soul temple of every defilement. Then the latter rain will fall upon us, as the early rain fell upon the disciples upon the day of Pentecost (177).

Now is the time to prepare. The seal of God will never be placed upon the forehead of an impure man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of the ambitious, world-loving man or woman. It will never be placed upon the forehead of men or women of false tongues or deceitful hearts. All who receive the seal must be without spot before God—candidates for heaven (178).

The latter rain will come, and the blessing of God will fill every soul that is purified from every defilement. It is our work today to yield our souls to Christ, that we may be fitted for the time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord—fitted for the baptism of the Holy Spirit (179).

May the Lord help His people to cleanse the soul temple from every defilement, and to maintain such a close connection with Him that they may be partakers of the latter rain when it shall be poured out (180).

The refreshing or power of God comes only on those who have prepared themselves for it by doing the work which God bids them, namely, cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (181).

Are we seeking for His fullness, ever pressing toward the mark set before us—the perfection of His character? When the Lord’s people reach this mark, they will be sealed in their foreheads. Filled with His Spirit, they will be complete in Christ, and the recording angel will declare, “It is finished” (182).

No impurity can enter the pearly gates of the golden city of God. And the question for us to settle is whether we will turn from all sin and comply with the conditions God has given us, that we may become His sons and daughters. . . . When you are all ready, having overcome your sins, having put away all your iniquity from you, you are in a condition to receive the finishing touch of immortality (183).

Every living Christian will advance daily in the divine life. As he advances toward perfection, he experiences a conversion to God every day; and this conversion is not complete until he attains to perfection of Christian character, a full preparation for the finishing touch of immortality (184).

Jesus sits as a refiner and purifier of His people; and when His image is perfectly reflected in them, they are perfect and holy, and prepared for translation. A great work is required of the Christian. We are exhorted to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (185).

When He comes, He is not to cleanse us of our sins, to remove from us the defects in our characters, or to cure us of the infirmities of our tempers and dispositions. If wrought for us at all, this work will be accomplished before that time. When the Lord comes, those who are holy will be holy still. . . . The Refiner does not then sit to pursue His refining process and remove their sins and their corruption. This is all to be done in these hours of probation (186).

Little wonder that some years ago, a liberal Adventist author who openly admitted to having rejected Ellen White’s doctrinal authority, wrote as follows regarding the Christology/perfection debate in the church. Now free from the necessity of having to force Ellen White into his mold of thinking, he could perhaps write about her teachings with more objectivity:

Does it follow, then, that Ellen White did not really have a consistent viewpoint concerning the nature of Christ and the issue of perfection? Probably not, because her entire theology was perfection-oriented. The Sabbath and health reform, two of her great concerns, have their rationale in perfectionism in preparation for translation.... Using some of Ellen White’s statements to prove that perfection is unattainable would seem as futile as using some of her statements to establish that she repudiated the significance of 1844 (187).

The same author states earlier in this article that a series of “antiperfectionistic” Ellen White statements quoted by another author “are generally not very convincing when read in context” (188). He goes on, writing of the end-time-perfection theology: “To repudiate it would be to repudiate the very nature of Adventism” (189).

Well said!

As we have seen, Adams is notably uncomfortable with the heavy use of Ellen White’s writings by his theological opponents (pp. 115,124), so he and others of similar conviction might well protest the repetitive use of those writings in the present review. However, not only have we demonstrated the substantial presence in Scripture of passages teaching sinless obedience through God’s power here on earth (e.g. Psalm 4:4; 34:13-14; 37:27; 119:1-3,11; Rom. 8:4; I Cor. 15:34; II Cor. 7:1; 10:4-5; Eph. 5:27; Phil. 4:13; I Peter 2:21-22; 4:1; I John 1:7,9), in particular for history’s last generation (Zeph. 3:13; I Thess. 5:23; II Peter 3:10-14; I John 3:2-3; Rev. 3:21; 14:5), it was clearly Adams’ choice to engage or not engage with his opponents regarding Ellen White’s writings relevant to this controversy. He certainly could have left all references to Ellen White out of his book, in an effort to restore Biblical primacy in a debate which—in his view—has been disproportionately dominated by Ellen White quotes. However, he chose not to do this, and thus made fully legitimate the in-depth assessment of his use of Ellen White which this review has undertaken.

Though he spends little time on the issue of God’s vindication through the perfecting of Christian character by the final generation (p. 113), it is important for us to consider the Biblical and Spirit of Prophecy evidence on which persons such as M.L. Andreasen have based this emphasis in their ministry. Thus we will reproduce below, first from Scripture and then from Ellen White, what is stated regarding God’s vindication through the conduct and witness of His people:

Echoing the words of the penitent David following his sin with Bathsheba, the apostle Paul writes:

God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That Thou mightest be justified in Thy sayings, and mightest overcome when Thou art judged (Rom. 3:4).

The first angel’s message declares: “Fear God, and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come” (Rev. 14:7). Not only are the people of God being judged, but in their judgment, God Himself is on trial.

Scripture maintains that God’s glory is His character (Ex. 33:18-19; 34:6-7; Rom. 3:23), and that His glory is destined to be revealed before all the world (Num. 14:21; Isa. 40:5). Equally clear in both Old and New Testaments is the fact that this glory will be revealed through God’s people (Isa. 60:1-3; Eph. 3:21; Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:26-27; Rev. 10:7; 14:7). The Bible even says this was the reason mankind was created in the first place:

I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth;
Even every one that is called by My name; for I have created him for My glory (Isa. 45:6-7).

The Bible is clear that the character of God, revealed in His people, answers the charges of Satan against both God and His people:

And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him.
And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?
Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel.
And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment (Zech. 3:1-4).

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.
And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death (Rev. 12:10-11).

The following passage is clear that in the victory of God's saints over evil, God Himself is vindicated:

I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel caused to be profaned . . .
Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came.
And I will vindicate the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I vindicate My holiness before their eyes (Eze. 36:21-23, RSV).

And how will this vindication of God through His people be accomplished?

You shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.
A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.
And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to observe My ordinances (verses 25-27, RSV).

It is safe to say this vindication never happened in the experience of God's ancient people, else the plan of salvation would have turned out much differently. This prophecy,

therefore, remains to be fulfilled, in the experience of final victory by the last generation described in the other passages we have considered.

Now we turn to Ellen White's confirmation, and elaboration upon, the above Bible verses. Notice what she says about the purpose of the plan of salvation:

The plan of redemption had yet a broader and a deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe (190).

One contemporary Adventist theologian, a faithful scholar of no mean skill, articulates the theory widely popular in some circles that Jesus did all the vindicating necessary so far as God's character and the great controversy are concerned. In his words:

In the Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White the cosmic vindication of God is the exclusive result of the sacrificial death of Christ. He was the only one who could reveal who God is and therefore vindicate Him in the cosmic conflict (John 1:18) (191).

But the above author produces no inspired statement which declares Jesus to be the only One who could possibly vindicate God's character. John 1:18 simply states, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." Nothing in this verse disallows or precludes a future revelation or vindication of God's character by the followers of Christ. The above author quotes the following Ellen White statement which speaks of Jesus refuting the charges of Satan against God:

By His life and death, Christ proved that God's justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan's charges were refuted. God had given man unmistakable evidence of His love (192).

The author in question then observes: "What Christ accomplished does not need to be supplemented; it is more than enough" (193).

But like John 1:18, the above Ellen White statement does not say what Jesus accomplished in vindicating God was all that would ever be needed. In the original promise of salvation recorded in Scripture, God declared to Satan: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed; It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15). But according to the apostle Paul, Christ isn't the only One who is expected to bruise Satan. Writing to the church, Paul declares: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20). If Jesus had done all the bruising necessary, this promise by the apostle would be quite unnecessary.

Ellen White is clear that the controversy over whether God's law can be perfectly kept is still continuing, long after Calvary, and how the people of God are to put the lie to Satan's claim that perfect obedience is impossible:

Those who live the life of a Christian are battling against the devil's lie that man cannot keep God's law (194).

Exact obedience is required, and those who say that it is not possible to live a perfect life, throw upon God the imputation of injustice and untruth (195).

Therefore he (Satan) is constantly seeking to deceive the followers of Christ with his fatal sophistry that it is impossible for them to overcome (196).

And she states elsewhere that "all who break God's commandments are sustaining Satan's claim that the law is unjust, and cannot be obeyed" (197). This would hardly make sense if Satan's charge about obedience to the law had already been refuted for all time. Most assuredly Jesus refuted this charge. But if the above statements mean anything at all, Satan's charge still needs refutation.

Interestingly, Jesus Himself declared that His followers would do greater things than He:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall He do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto My Father (John 14:12).

It would be hard to imagine anyone performing greater miracles than those done by Jesus, and certainly not exceeding the magnitude of sacrifice or suffering which He experienced. But the totality of inspired evidence is clear, as we will see, that God's people—by His grace—will produce a demonstration of righteousness which will bring to an actual close the controversy whose victorious climax Jesus made certain. In this sense, we can see how Jesus' followers will do greater works than He.

The whole world, after all, did not witness the works of Christ while He was on earth. But the whole world will indeed witness the glory of God as revealed through His final generation. We have seen how the Bible affirms this with such predictions as the following:

As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord (Num. 14:21).

And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (Isa. 40:5).

Both Scripture and Ellen White tell how this glory is to be revealed, and through whom:

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people, but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee (Isa. 60:1-2).

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom. 8:18-19).

From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places," the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10 (198).

The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.

The light of the Sun of Righteousness is to shine forth in good works—in words of truth and deeds of holiness (199).

Both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White are clear that God specifically created men and women for His glory (Isa. 45:6-7). Consider the following, very remarkable Ellen White statement regarding the purpose of our creation:

We were brought into existence because we were needed. How sad the thought that if we stand on the wrong side, in the ranks of the enemy, we are lost to the design of our Creator (200).

The following passage is even more amazing:

All heaven is represented to me as watching the unfolding of events. A crisis is to be revealed in the great and prolonged controversy in the government of God on earth. Something great and decisive is to take place, and that right early. If any delay, the character of God and His throne will be compromised (201).

Elsewhere Ellen White declares: "Satan represents God's law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts" (202). In light of this, we note the following statement from her writings that the work of refuting Satan's lies about God's requirements is not the work of Christ alone, but of both Christ and all His followers:

Unselfishness, the principle of God's kingdom, is the principle that Satan hates; its very existence he denies. From the beginning of the great controversy he has endeavored to prove God's principles of action to be selfish, and he deals in the same way with all who serve God. To disprove Satan's claim is the work of Christ and of all who bear His name (203).

Consider what Ellen White says about how Job vindicated God's character:

According to his faith, so it was unto Job. "When He hath tried me," he said, "I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10. So it came to pass. By his patient endurance he vindicated his own character, and thus the character of Him whose representative he was (204).

Now God waits for vindication through His end-time church:

Pray, pray earnestly and without ceasing, but do not forget to praise. It becomes every child of God to vindicate His character. You can magnify the Lord; you can show the power of sustaining grace. There are multitudes who do not appreciate the great love of God nor the divine compassion of Jesus (205).

If there was ever a people in need of constantly increasing light from heaven, it is the people of God that, in this time of peril, God has called to be the depositories of His holy law, and to vindicate His character before the world (206).

Let all remember that . . . angels are recording in the book of remembrance every word that vindicates the character and mission of Christ. Of those who testify of the love of God, the Lord says, "They shall be Mine . . . in that day when I make up My jewels." Malachi 3:17 (207).

His heart of sympathy goes out to all earth's sufferers, and with every one who works for their relief, He co-operates. As with His blessing health returns, the character of God will be vindicated, and the lie thrown back upon Satan, its originator (208).

The very image of God is to be reproduced in humanity. The honor of God, the honor of Christ, is involved in the perfection of the character of His people (209).

There are those who say the idea of God's vindication through the sanctified victory of earthly saints is a detraction from the primacy of the cross of Christ in our salvation. Some have quoted such Ellen White statements as the following, which they claim prove conclusively that the universe is secure against the recurrence of sin only because of what happened on Calvary:

The angels ascribe honor and glory to Christ, for even they are not secure except by looking to the sufferings of the Son of God. It is through the efficacy of the cross that the angels of heaven are guarded against apostasy. Without the cross they would be no more secure against evil than were the angels before the fall of Satan (210).

Very true. But what some seem to forget is that the efficacy of the cross goes beyond the historical events of two thousand years ago. This efficacy includes the application of Jesus' blood in the heavenly sanctuary, not only for the forgiveness of sins but for victory over sin. Our study has shown that the blood of Jesus is as much the agent in achieving sanctified holiness as it is the means of pardoning our transgressions (Eph. 1:7; Heb. 13:12,20-21; I John 1:7,9). The vindication of God by history's final generation poses no threat to Calvary's all-sufficiency, as Calvary is the only means whereby this vindication is possible.

Hopefully the objective reader will recognize that the concept of God being vindicated through His people demonstrating His character before men and angels is not some marginal theory fabricated from one or two Ellen White statements, but rather, a theme embedded quite deeply throughout both the Bible and the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy.

At one point Adams asks, as many do in addressing this controversy:

And what if we die before Jesus comes, or before the process ends (which, inevitably, must happen—since the process never ends this side of heaven)? (p. 95).

First of all, we have quoted a host of inspired statements which teach exactly the opposite of the above declaration by Adams. The reader will have to decide whether or not to believe what these inspired statements say, or whether to take the word of one who is not inspired as authoritative in their stead.

Secondly, the inspired pen offers two very concise answers to the question posed by Adams. One such answer is given by the apostle Peter, when he writes that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). And Ellen White, echoing this same thought, writes as follows:

The angels never leave the tempted one a prey to the enemy who would destroy the souls of men if permitted to do so. As long as there is hope, until they resist the Holy Spirit to their eternal ruin, men are guarded by heavenly intelligences (211).

There need be no fear, in other words, that one’s life will be prematurely cut short before one has the chance to sincerely repent and conform either to known truth or to what God plans to reveal in one’s future. There is no need for some celestial “insurance policy” of forensic righteousness to “cover” us in case of accidents. God is never surprised by events. He wants us fitted for heaven more earnestly than we want to be, and so long as the chance remains for a genuine turning from disobedience in anyone’s experience, that person’s probation will not cease.

Raising an issue that invariably arises in most any discussion of this topic, Adams states:

Talk to any of those who believe and preach the doctrine of absolute perfection and sinlessness, and ask them whether they have already reached that stage. The answer you receive will not be yes—whether these persons are 16 years old or 60 or 90. Usually they fudge. And why? Because they find it difficult to lie (p. 98).

Actually, there’s a far more fundamental reason why—because only God knows the heart (I Kings 8:39), and thus only He has the right to declare, as He will declare of the final generation: “Here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). Adams quotes the apostle John’s statement: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (I John 1:8) (p. 98). But this is not because the total expulsion of sin from Christian lives is impossible this side of heaven; the same author is

abundantly clear in this selfsame epistle that all sin may indeed be removed from the life of the sanctified here on earth (I John 1:7,9; 2:1,13; 3:2-3,6-9). But the fact remains that no fallible mortal can declare himself or herself to be without sin because God alone knows how much sin persists in anyone's experience.

Job understood this fact during his ordeal. God had declared him a perfect and upright man, one that feared Him and eschewed evil (Job 1:1,8). Despite horrific loss, tragedy, and grueling physical pain, the inspired record declares that "in all this Job sinned not" (Job 1:22; see also 2:10). Yet when speaking of himself, Job declared:

If I justify myself, mine own mouth shall condemn me; if I say I am perfect, it shall also prove me perverse. Though I were perfect, yet I would not know my soul; I would despise my life (Job 9:20-21).

One thinks of Daniel Hernandez, the youthful aide who rushed to the side of Arizona Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords during the Tucson shootings of January 2011, who soon thereafter was honored at a memorial service for the victims. While Hernandez humbly rejected the characterization of himself as a hero, none who observed or knew of his actions could describe him as anything less. Similarly, God's victorious people will not boast of their triumph, despite the accolade accorded them by heaven and the watching universe.

Conclusion—A Deeply Flawed Case

In one of his many disclaimers as to the thoroughness of his study, Adams writes:

Obviously we cannot present every text or quotation on the subject. But nothing essential to the issue will be dodged or swept under the rug. And we will draw our conclusion in the light of the full evidence (p. 58).

But Adams' acknowledged discomfort with the subject of this book (pp. 9,25) gives every indication of having affected his treatment of the key issues considered. Readers can compare for themselves the evidence offered by Adams to the volume of contrary evidence presented in this review. His is a deeply flawed case—flawed in spirit as well as substance, compensating for its lack of inspired support with intemperate accusations, even comparing theological opponents to insane cult leaders (pp. 110,135). Were I a supporter of his theological position, I would find Adams' approach both disturbing in tone as well as woefully inadequate to meet the arguments and evidence of the opposing side. Honest readers of his book, and of this review, will find ample reason why Adams' theological opponents "remain unmoved" (p. 34), much to his frustration. Rather than offering "help for a church divided over perfection," his book has merely succeeded in adding fuel to the controversy's flame.

Adams is most unfair when he writes, regarding the belief that Christians will one day stand without a mediator in the heavenly sanctuary: "*Again and again I have noticed what seems to be a diminishing need for Christ in this strain of theology*" (p. 23, italics original). But to

stand without a mediator, or substitute, is not the same as standing without a Savior. As we have seen from the Bible, salvation is not just about forgiveness; it includes sanctification also (II Thess. 2:13), which Ellen White declares to be “the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (212). The only thing the saints will stand without following probation’s close is the continuous availability of forgiveness. But the Savior’s and the Spirit’s power will still be necessary to keep them from falling. To not need forgiveness is in no way the same as not needing Jesus.

Near the close of his book, Adams offers a most telling statement about the present condition of the church:

Our concerned brethren as well as our disaffected brethren do not thrive on nothing. The grist for their mill is the growing worldliness, the materialism, and—yes, let’s say it—the liberalism in some sectors of the church. They are not completely off the beam when they charge that some of our pastors are “not preaching the message” anymore. You can visit a growing number of our churches for a long time without recognizing from the sermons that you were in a Seventh-day Adventist worship service (pp. 130-131).

Adams’ candor and concern for the integrity and witness of the church is commendable. What he seems not to understand is the extent to which the very theology he and others espouse bears significant responsibility for these conditions. A doctrine of salvation which teaches that humanity’s sinful nature is so strong that even God’s power cannot fully subdue it will inevitably cause Christians to make peace with their more persistent shortcomings. Regardless of the issue—be it materialism, racial injustice, dietary indulgence, sexual immorality, a peevish temper, or just old-fashioned pride—if some measure of sin is believed to be unavoidable for even the most consecrated believers, it is inevitable that increasing numbers will find themselves living accordingly.

It is not without just cause that these issues have produced what Adams calls “a virtual civil war in some churches among us” (p. 130). Not every issue that has divided Adventists through the years has exerted a decisive effect on the church’s spiritual and moral seriousness, but the issues addressed in Adams’ book most assuredly have. It is difficult if not impossible—in the present writer’s view—to deny the connection between the salvation/Christology debate on the one hand and the debate over lifestyle and worship standards on the other. Anomalies can always be noted, of course, but the evidence from grassroots Adventism regarding the effect on standards exerted by the debate over salvation and Christology is nothing short of decisive. Visit your average church board convulsed by the broken marriage of a popular local elder, and see how quickly someone plays the “grace card” in seeking to forestall the disciplinary process. (“We’re all sinners, nobody’s perfect, and salvation doesn’t depend on how well we keep the law anyway. So let’s not be so rigid.”) Attend a church business meeting divided over contemporary worship forms, and see if members’ (and the pastor’s) stances on the salvation and Christology issues aren’t a fairly accurate predictor of their stances in the worship debate. Join a group of Adventists dining leisurely at a restaurant after church on Sabbath, and ask how many hold to post-Fall Christology and the perfectibility

of Christian character. (Chances are, you won't find many who do!) Come to a youth conference where intelligent, educated young people seek the recovery of fundamental Adventism, where the vast majority hold to the Last Generation Theology taught by such as M.L. Andreasen, and note the near-total absence of jewelry—even wedding rings—among those present.

In his book *Lifestyles of the Remnant*, published in 2001 (213), author Keavin Hayden—who has since left the church and subsequently appeared on the lecture circuit with ex-Adventist minister Dale Ratzlaff (214)—frankly acknowledges the connection many had recognized for some time between the salvation/Christology debate in modern Adventism and the ongoing debate over lifestyle and worship issues. In Hayden's view, the irksome rigidity seen among conservative Adventists regarding lifestyle and worship standards is primarily traceable to their views on salvation, Christology, and character perfection. If only this particular theology could be set aside, Hayden believes, the church could achieve greater flexibility in addressing such issues as diet, dress, adornment, dancing, worship, and countless others (215).

The point here is not to discuss at length the merits or lack thereof in the lifestyle and worship trends here noted. Rather, the point is to ask whether the beliefs of pastors and laity concerning salvation and the humanity of Christ exert any noteworthy impact on the choices Adventists are presently making in matters of worship or lifestyle. The record of recent decades and the impact of dominant thought patterns among us suggest a decided correlation.

Often it is asked, in the midst of various denominational controversies, "Is this a salvation issue?" What this usually means is, Will my conclusions regarding this issue of doctrine or lifestyle affect my entrance into heaven? We had best permit an inspired voice to answer such questions. Consider the following statements from the modern prophet:

In the day of judgment the course of the man who has retained the frailty and imperfection of humanity will not be vindicated. For him there will be no place in heaven. He could not enjoy the perfection of the saints in light. He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God (216).

Christ came to this world and lived a life of perfect obedience, that men and women, through His grace, might also live lives of perfect obedience. This is necessary to their salvation (217).

And finally, from the same inspired pen:

The church, being endowed with the righteousness of Christ, is His depository, in which the wealth of His mercy, His love, His grace, is to appear in full and final display. . . . The gift of His Holy Spirit, rich, full, and abundant, is to be to His church as an encompassing wall of fire, which the powers of hell shall not prevail against. In their

untainted purity and spotless perfection, Christ looks upon His people as the reward of all His suffering, His humiliation, and His love, and the supplement of His glory (218).

The Saviour is wounded afresh and put to open shame when His people pay no heed to His word. He came to this world and lived a sinless life, that in His power His people might also live lives of sinlessness. He desires them by practicing the principles of truth to show to the world that God's grace has power to sanctify the heart (219).

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