Book Review


The editors of the volume at hand – a professor of Old Testament exegesis and theology and a professor of theology and Christian philosophy both at Andrews University – undertook the job of editing fourteen papers written by twelve educators of the Theological Seminary of Andrews University into one volume as an answer to the challenge of Last Generation Theology. The book, however, is not a polemic against Last Generation Theology but a constructive analysis of the issues raised by this theological perspective.

According to the followers of Last Generation Theology, the last generation of Christians are justifying God by overcoming all sins and thus reproducing the character of Christ. Ever since M.L. Andreasen developed a framework for this theology, many Seventh-day Adventists have attempted to make this dream a reality. To be honest, the desired goal has not yet been achieved clearly. Anyone who has taken it seriously, has usually become frustrated, anxious, or fled into hypocrisy. Many of the authors of this volume have experienced this trauma or have experienced the negative effects of Last Generation Theology among their loved ones. This is what motivated them to investigate the Bible and consider the writings of Ellen G. White within the framework of the Adventist view of the great controversy, in order to see what these documents reveal about the settling of sin. Along with that they also investigate the correlations between eschatology and ethics.

The differences between the authors of the essays in this volume and the followers of Last Generation Theology are obvious from their premises. While Last Generation Theology emphasizes how God uses the last generation of Christians to justify Himself before the created world, the authors of this book, on the other hand, emphasize what God does for those who devote themselves to their Redeemer in order to reach the desired goal (Phil. 1:6). The former puts the individual into an impossible situation, and the latter strengthens the spirit of a sober mind and love (1Jn. 4:17–18).
The authors of this well-structured and well-edited volume outline the conceptual framework: What is the great controversy? (John C. Peckham) What is Last Generation Theology and its historical roots? (Woodrow Whidden) What is sin: the corruption of the tree, or the immaturity of the fruit? (Martin Hanna) With the exception of Christ, we are all sinners, and that means three things: humanity is under God’s condemnation; human will leans against evil; and humanity is enslaved in depravity against God’s will. Humans can emerge from this state as a result of a process that comes to fulfilment at the time of the glorification of Christ at His second coming.

From the following chapters, we learn that God begins the work of restoration by settling His own relationship with man. This is what justification by faith is about, which the author of the chapter (Richard M. Davidson) has thoroughly explored both historically and biblically. This is followed by chapters such as justification and sanctification, which is a gift and a task for life at the same time (Denis Fortin) or how and when will we be suitable to be citizens of the kingdom of God? What kind of lifestyle should be pursued by those who will be members of the last generation (Ante Jerončić)? There are several components of apocalyptic identity but each one of these focuses on the person of Jesus Christ. He is the measure, the example, therefore by following him, obeying him, we can experience our apocalyptic identity. It is safer to place ourselves in the arms of the Almighty God than to worry about whether one can achieve the desired goal, whether one is able to meet the requirements of perfection.

Subsequent chapters concentrate on the person and saving work of Jesus Christ. Jesus’s role is twofold in our life. He is our saviour first and then our role model (Darius W. Jankiewicz). Consequently, He became similar to us in everything, yet there was a fundamental difference between His human nature and our human nature: and that is we needed a saviour but he did not need to be saved because, unlike us, there was no sin in Him. What did Jesus accomplish on the cross (Felix H. Cortez)? Some Christians and believers of non-Christian religions, as well as non-believers see the cross as weakness, therefore they reject it. And yet! The cross is the highest revelation of God’s wisdom and power. The essay of Jirí Moskala concerns the role and meaning of Christ’s atoning ministry. According to Last Generation Theology, God was not sufficiently justified in the atoning ministry of Jesus Christ. God obtains
full justification by calling a remnant of the fallen and deepest-sunk generation in sin out, by whom the beauty of His character is most perfectly reflected. By doing so, however, Last Generation Theology devalues the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ to emphasise unduly the importance of the last generation’s role in the great controversy. On the contrary, the perfection of Christians is realised “in Christ”, not apart from Him. Christians deny worldly desires to live soberly, justly, and graciously in this world as the outcome of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11–15). If we have a reconciled relationship with God in Christ, we are ready for His second coming.

The last group of essays discuss Last Generation Theology in the context of final events. Ranko Stefanović argues from the perspective of Revelation’s teaching on the 144,000, and concludes that perfection does not mean that one lives sinlessly in a sinful body. Ellen G. White did not teach that we can stand without a mediator in the final test, having developed a sinless character. If we live in close fellowship with God through Jesus Christ daily, there is no reason to doubt what will happen to us in the last days. In his second essay, Jiří Moskala investigates five myths that occupy the views of some Adventists. Regarding this, he speaks of sealing God’s people and he points out that the seal is a sign of protection. In fact, the New Testament speaks about not one but two seals: (1) when we accepted Jesus Christ, God placed the seal of the Holy Spirit on our hearts (Eph. 1:13–14), (2) at the time of the final trial, when the Spirit of God withdraws from the earth, all who have taken the pledge of the Holy Spirit will continue to enjoy the protection of God.

Is the second coming of Jesus Christ delayed? (Jo Ann Davidson) Does it make sense to talk about this, if God has not revealed the time of the Second Coming? Can we say that the time of Jesus’ coming depends on the last generation reaching the desired degree of perfection? Instead of speculative reflections on times and occasions, should we not shout with the apostle, “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20)? The volume concludes with a second paper by John C. Peckham that introduces the reader to the victory of God’s love. God is love. These are Ellen G. White’s first and last three words in the book series on the great controversy. God Himself declares His love through the redemptive ministry of Jesus Christ, He does not expect us, fallen people, to justify Him.
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The volume provides a comprehensive picture of the challenges facing Seventh-day Adventism as it encounters Last Generation Theology. The extraordinary value of the volume is that the individual contributors address these issues eirenically, as they interact with theological positions and presuppositions which differ from their own.

Prof. Dr. József Szilvási is the head of the Systematic Theology Department of the Adventist Theology College in Hungary. E-mail: szilvasij@hotmail.com