



2. The purpose of the judgment in recent Adventist theology: Does holiness really matter?

El propósito del juicio en la teología adventista reciente: ¿realmente importa la santidad?

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Abstract

The doctrine of the judgment, specifically the pre-advent judgment, is undoubtedly a key doctrine of Adventism. However, some Adventist scholars have pointed out that this doctrine has not remained invariable through time (Rolf J. Pohler, Friz Guy). An important aspect in which the understanding of that doctrine has varied is in connection with the purpose of the judgment. For the Adventist pioneers the so-called investigative judgment implied a decision-making process regarding the salvation of those who are judged. This implied an evaluation of the lives of believers, of their growth in a life of holiness. On the other hand, for several recent Adventist scholars, the judgment seems to be basically focused on the vindication of God's character. This paper explores the connection between this change and the (implicit) growing influence in Adventist theology of a monergistic interpretation of justification by faith, more in harmony with Protestant theology, which understands justification as a punctiliar fact, once and forever. In the Adventist context, this implies that the understanding of the pre-advent judgment focuses on the exhibition of evidence that vindicates God's character while minimizing or eliminating the need for a decision-making process during the judgment itself. The paper briefly assesses this shift in the understanding of the judgment in Adventism in terms of its consistency with the rest of the Adventist theological system and suggests some implications regarding the importance of holiness in the context of Adventist soteriology.



Keywords

Adventist theology – Investigative judgment – Salvation – Justification – Protestant theology

Resumen

La doctrina del juicio, específicamente el juicio preadvenimiento, es sin duda una doctrina clave del adventismo. Sin embargo, algunos eruditos adventistas han señalado que esta doctrina no ha permanecido invariable a través del tiempo (Rolf J. Pehler, Friz Guy). Un aspecto importante en el que ha variado la comprensión de esa doctrina es en relación con el objeto de la sentencia. Para los pioneros adventistas, el llamado juicio investigador implicaba un proceso de toma de decisiones con respecto a la salvación de los que son juzgados. Esto implicaba una evaluación de la vida de los creyentes, de su crecimiento en una vida de santidad. Por otro lado, para varios eruditos adventistas recientes, el juicio parece estar básicamente enfocado en la vindicación del carácter de Dios. Este artículo explora la conexión entre este cambio y la (implícita) influencia creciente en la teología adventista de una interpretación monergista de la justificación por la fe, más en armonía con la teología protestante, que entiende la justificación como un hecho puntual, de una vez y para siempre. En el contexto adventista, esto implica que la comprensión del juicio previo al advenimiento se enfoca en la exhibición de evidencia que vindica el carácter de Dios, mientras minimiza o elimina la necesidad de un proceso de toma de decisiones durante el juicio mismo. El artículo evalúa brevemente este cambio en la comprensión del juicio en el adventismo en términos de su coherencia con el resto del sistema teológico adventista y sugiere algunas implicaciones con respecto a la importancia de la santidad en el contexto de la soteriología adventista.

Palabras claves

Teología adventista – Juicio investigador – Salvación – Justificación – Teología protestante

Introduction

The doctrine of judgment, specifically the pre-advent judgment, is undoubtedly a key doctrine of Adventism. It is part of its theological DNA.¹

¹ The term “investigative judgment” was apparently coined by Elon Verts in 1856 and used by James White since 1857. However, the concept is clearly previous to those dates. See Paul A. Gordon, *The sanctuary, 1844, and the pioneers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1983), 118; Roy Adams, *The sanctuary doctrine: Three approaches in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church*, AUSDDS 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 81, and references there. For a discussion of the early development of the doctrine of the investigative judgment, see C. Mervyn Maxwell, “The investigative judgment: Its early development,” in *The sanctuary and the atonement: Biblical, historical, and theological studies*, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkamp and W. Richard Leshar (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1981), 545-577.

However, some Adventist scholars have pointed out that this doctrine has not remained invariable through time. Rolf J. Pöhler, for example, has pointed out that Adventism has “experienced several significant doctrinal revisions with regard to both its fundamental and its distinctive beliefs.”² For him, these changes involve the investigative judgment.³ An essential aspect in which the understanding of this judgment seems to have changed relates to its purpose. Fritz Guy, for example, suggests that, in contrast with the historical Adventist understanding of the investigative judgment, to his “knowledge, no current Adventist interpretation maintains that an examination of records is necessary for ‘determining who are prepared for the kingdom of God.’”⁴ We may ask, then, why a change so significant would take place in Adventist theology. The purpose of this paper is to explore the reasons for this change. To achieve that goal, this paper (1) briefly highlights the historical view of Adventist pioneers’ regarding the purpose of the investigative judgment, (2) contrasts this view with the recent Adventist view of the purpose of that judgment, (3) identifies a possible cause of the change regarding the understanding of the nature of the investigative judgment, and (4) offers a brief evaluation of the inadequacy of this change in the light of the Adventist theological system as well as suggests some implications regarding the importance of holiness and Christian lifestyle in connection with the investigative judgment.

The purpose of the investigative judgment according to Adventist pioneers

As mentioned, an essential aspect in which the understanding of this doctrine has varied, relates to the purpose of the judgment. For

² Rolf J. Pöhler, “Change in Seventh-day Adventist theology: A study of the problem of doctrinal development” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1995), 304.

³ Ibid., 197n.3.

⁴ Fritz Guy, *Thinking theologically: Adventist Christianity and the interpretation of faith* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1999), 91. The inner quote comes from Ellen G. White, *The great controversy between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 428.

Adventist pioneers, the so-called investigative judgment implied a decision-making process regarding the salvation of those who are judged. Of course, this was not the only purpose.⁵ They also considered that the investigative judgment purported to vindicate God's character. After all, the plan of redemption—of which the judgment in general and the investigative judgment in particular is an integral part—“had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. [...] It was to vindicate the character of God before the universe.”⁶ However, it is also true that pioneers' usual statements regarding the nature of the investigative judgment strongly focused on the decision-making process aspect of that judgment. This process, according to them, determines those who are saved and those who are damned. John N. Andrews, for example, considered that the investigative judgment involved

an examination of the books of God's record to determine (1) whose record of repentance and of overcoming is such that their sins shall be blotted out, and (2) to ascertain from this book who have failed in the attempt to overcome, and to strike the names of all such from the book of life.⁷

In a similar way, Uriah Smith, commenting on Daniel 7, states:

It is an investigative judgment. The books are opened, and the cases of all come up for examination before the great tribunal, that it may be determined beforehand who are to receive eternal life when the Lord shall come to confer it upon his people.⁸

⁵ Jairyong Lee poses that for Ellen G. White the last judgment in general involves four purposes: (1) “Salvation of believers,” (2) “eradication of sin,” (3) “satisfaction of the created beings,” and (4) “vindication of God's character” (“Faith and works in Ellen G. White's doctrine of the last judgment” [PhD diss., Andrews University, 1985], 118-123). However, these four purposes relate to the three phases of the judgment, including (1) the pre-Advent investigative judgment; (2) millennial judgment, and (3) the executive judgment at the end of the millennium. This paper focuses only on pre-Advent investigative judgment.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and prophets* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1958), 68.

⁷ J. N. Andrews, *The judgment: Its events and their order* (Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890), 17.

⁸ Uriah Smith, *Daniel and the Revelation: Thoughts, critical and practical, on the book of Daniel and the Revelation; Being an exposition, text by text, of these important portions of the Holy Scriptures* (Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1897), 135.

Similar statements can be found in 1872 and 1889 Adventist statements of beliefs. The last one, for example, affirmed

that the time of the cleansing of the sanctuary [...] is a time of investigative judgment [...] to determine who of the myriads now sleeping in the dust of the earth are worthy of a part in the first resurrection, and who of its living multitudes are worthy of translation—points which must be determined before the Lord appears.⁹

Ellen G. White also suggested a similar understanding of the purpose of the investigative judgment. According to her,

It is while men are still dwelling upon the earth that the work of investigative judgment takes place in the courts of heaven. The lives of all His professed followers pass in review before God. All are examined according to the record of the books of heaven, and according to his deeds the destiny of each is forever fixed.¹⁰

In a similar line, she says that “God is at work investigating character, weighing moral worth, and pronouncing decisions on individual cases.”¹¹ As Pöhler summarizes, the pioneers’ understanding of the investigative judgment involved a “threefold task of investigation, determination, and final decision meant the settling of a question that had not yet been decided up to this particular point of time.”¹² It is clear, then, that for Adventist pioneers the investigative judgment implied an evaluation of the lives of believers, of their growth in a life of holiness, during the judgment itself.

⁹ “Fundamental principles of Seventh-day Adventists statement,” in *Year Book of Statistics for 1889* (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1889), 151 (statement XXI). Cf. also the statement of beliefs of 1872 (statement XVIII) in *A declaration of the fundamental principles taught and practiced by the Seventh-Day Adventists* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the SDA Pub. Assn., 1872), 12.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White, *Christ’s object lessons* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1941), 310.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to ministers and gospel workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1923), 448. See also E. G. White, *The great controversy*, 428, where she says: “This work of examination of character, of determining who are prepared for the kingdom of God, is that of the investigative judgment, the closing of work in the sanctuary above.” In *ibid.*, 483, she says: “Every name is mentioned, every case closely investigated. Names are accepted, names rejected.”

¹² Pöhler, “Change in Seventh-day Adventist theology,” 242.

The recent Adventist view of the purpose of the investigative judgment

In contrast to the historical view of the Adventist pioneers, more recent Adventist expositors started to present the investigative judgment in a different light. In 1980, for example, the consensus document produced in reaction to Ford's position regarding the sanctuary and the investigative judgment emphasized that

this end-time judgment at the close of the 2300-day period *reveals* our relationship to Christ, disclosed in the totality of our decisions. It *indicates* the outworking of grace in our lives as we have responded to His gift of salvation; it *shows* that we belong to Him.¹³

In 1981 Arnold V. Wallenkampf, in an emblematic statement, suggested that the investigative judgment could be understood as just an audit with only a confirmatory purpose. He also proposed to avoid the term "judgment." In his own words,

Possibly the term investigative judgment is infelicitous since it may connote that decisions as to a person's destiny are being made during it. But such is not the case. Probably it might more correctly be called an audit. An audit of paid financial bills just verifies that the debts have been liquidated. No decisions are made in an audit. The audit is just confirmatory. The investigative judgment might therefore more appropriately be called the pre-advent heavenly audit.¹⁴

¹³ Sanctuary Review Committee, "Consensus document: Christ in the heavenly sanctuary," *Ministry* (October 1980): 18, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Arnold V. Wallenkampf, "A brief review of some of the internal and external challengers to the Seventh-day Adventist teachings on the sanctuary and the atonement," in *The sanctuary and the atonement: Biblical, historical, and theological studies*, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and Richard Leshner (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1981), 597, emphasis added. This paper was adapted and republished as Arnold V. Wallenkampf, "Challengers to the doctrine of the sanctuary," in *Doctrine of the sanctuary: A historical survey (1845–1863)*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1989), 197-216. The referred statement can be found in p. 214. In a similar statement, Richard Davidson suggests that "in a sense the investigative judgment may also be viewed as an accountant's *final audit* at the end of the year. The records are faithfully kept throughout the year, and the auditor verifies the completeness and accuracy of the accounts. The audit is a public vindication of the one being audited, that he has conducted his affairs with integrity, in accordance with accepted business practices. At the end of history, God opens the books, as it were, for a public audit of His business practices.

Reacting to Antony Hoekema's criticism of the Adventist doctrine of the investigative judgment, Wallenkampf points out that "the purpose of this pre-advent judgment is not, as our challengers erroneously assume, to determine 'whether a person shall be saved or not,' as Hoekema puts it."¹⁵

The notion that the judgment does not make real decisions has found significant support. In 1992, for example, Clifford Goldstein, following Wallenkampf, said that "the investigative judgment is not when God finally decides to accept or reject us."¹⁶ The idea seems to be that the judgment is a showing-of-evidence occasion where God exhibits evidence regarding decisions already made by Him in the past. According to Goldstein, the purpose of the investigative judgment is to show before heavenly intelligences "which sinners will be allowed to live in their presence for eternity."¹⁷ Or, as another scholar put it, this is an "affirmative judgment" where "God is also vindicated, as it is demonstrated that His previous approval of a believer was correct."¹⁸ What is actually happening during this judgment is "that God allows His created beings to investigate what He already knows. From His perspective, it is a 'demonstrative judgment.'¹⁹ In Ivan T. Blazen's words, "the purpose of the investigative

The auditors testify to His *impeccable integrity*" ("The good news of Yom Kippur," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society [JATS]* 2, no. 2 [1991]: 27n60. Emphasis in original).

¹⁵ Wallenkampf, "A brief review," 597.

¹⁶ Clifford Goldstein, "Investigating the investigative judgment," *Ministry* (February 1992): 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁸ Jiří Moskala, "Toward a biblical theology of God's judgment: A celebration of the cross in seven phases of divine universal judgment (an overview of a theocentric-christocentric approach)," *JATS* 15, no. 1 (2004): 154. The same statement can be found in Jiří Moskala, "A theology of judgment in Scripture," in Richard M. Davidson, *A song for the sanctuary: Experiencing God's presence in shadow and reality* (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2022), 457.

¹⁹ Roy Gane, *Who's afraid of the judgment? The good news about Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2006), 21. It is fair to say that more recently, Roy Gane has nuanced this statement by saying, "I would modify what I wrote in my *Who's Afraid of the Judgment?* 20-22, to include the participation of God's created beings in the process of making decisions, based on the facts of each case that God provides" ("Pre-advent judgment in the context of God's salvation sanctuary," in *Theological issues facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, ed. Joel Iparraguire and Dan-Adrian Petre [Madrid: Safeliz, forthcoming], n.49). It is clear that

judgment on God's part is not to discover reality but to unmask it, not to find out the truth but to reveal it."²⁰

While it is true that the investigative judgment deals with facts already in the past (human decisions and actions), some scholars seem to suggest that the final decision regarding the salvation of believers is also something in the past, presumably on the cross or at the moment of justification. William H. Shea, for example, has suggested that the investigative judgment "doesn't change any of the decisions that Christ has made about individuals through the course of time."²¹ More recently it has been suggested that "no subsequent judgment calls into question the judgment of Calvary; it neither differs from nor adds to Calvary but only reveals and applies what was completed then. In other words, judgment day primarily took place at Calvary."²² In harmony with this then it is affirmed that "the status of Christians as forgiven sinners, experiencing life in Christ (John 3:15, 36; 6:47) is unchanged by the pre-advent judgment."²³ Once again, this is in agreement with the view that "the purpose of the [investigative] judgment is to demonstrate God's fairness prior to taking humans to heaven."²⁴ But this purpose does not necessarily involve a real decision-making process. It seems that God's fairness is demonstrated through analyzing of his previous decisions regarding who are saved and who are lost, without involving real decisions during the judgment (audit) itself. The role of intelligent creatures in the judgment is relatively passive. Even the statement of "Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists" clearly

Gane understands that the investigative judgment involves a decision-making process with the participation of intelligent creatures.

²⁰ Ivan T. Blazen, "Justification and judgment," in *The seventy weeks, Leviticus, and the nature of prophecy*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 3 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, 1986), 383.

²¹ William H. Shea, "Foreword," in Marvin Moore, *The case for the investigative judgment: Its biblical foundation* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010), 7-8.

²² Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic theology*, vol. 4: *The Church and the last things* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2016), 649.

²³ Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic theology*, vol. 3: *Creation, Christ, salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 501.

²⁴ Ibid.

contrasts with those of 1872 and 1889. According to the 2015 version of this statement, for example, “the investigative judgment *reveals* to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ,” “*makes manifest* who among the living are abiding in Christ,” “*vindicates* the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus,” and “*declares* that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom.”²⁵ The judgment is more like a showing of evidence, a demonstrative event. As I summarized in another place, “the judgment is described as demonstrative, revelatory, vindicatory, affirmative, or confirmatory of God’s justice or fairness.”²⁶

Exploring the cause of the change

What is the cause of this change in the understanding of the investigative judgment in recent Adventist theology? The reason seems to be an (implicit) progressive adoption of the Protestant understanding of justification by faith. Although this is not the place for an extensive historical explanation, some remarks can illustrate this point.

²⁵ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Church manual*, 19th ed. (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2016), 171, emphasis added. In this sense, there is no difference with the original version of this statement of beliefs published in 1981. See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church manual* (Takoma Park, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981), 44. Both statements say nothing regarding a real participation of heavenly intelligences in a decision-making process. A notable exception admitting that the judgment involves a real evaluation of the life of professed Christians is Gerhard F. Hasel: “The pre-advent judgment is both investigative and evaluative in regard to all who have made a profession to be believers. One of the accomplishments of the pre-advent judgment is the determination of those among the professed people who will inherit the kingdom” (“Divine judgment,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen [Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000], 844; see also Woodrow W. Whidden II, *The judgment and assurance: The Dynamics of personal salvation* [Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2011]). While Woodrow W. Whidden strongly emphasizes the vindicatory aspect of the investigative judgment (see pp. 40, 197), he also admits that “Daniel 7 strongly suggests that it [the investigative judgment] will involve the deciding of individual cases” (ibid., 31-32). According to Whidden, God will “provide [during the judgment] public evidence in support of the ultimate decisions that He will render in the great day when the cases of every human being will be finally settled for eternal life or eternal death” (ibid., 41).

²⁶ Roy E. Graf, *The principle of articulation in Adventist theology: An evaluation of current interpretations and a proposal*, Adventist Theological Society Dissertation Series 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2019), 239.

It is not a secret that since the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference Session, and even before, the denomination has faced significant discussion regarding this issue. However, if we need to find a representative voice of an Adventist position regarding this topic, that voice should be found in Ellen G. White, a key protagonist of the events around 1888 and probably the most representative Adventist writer. She understood justification in the light of her view of the sanctuary and the belief that human beings are free to accept or reject salvation. As a result, she didn't understand justification as a punctiliar and unrepeatable fact at the beginning of the Christian experience. While there is an initial justification when Christian experience begins, justification is not a once-and-for-all fact that does not need to be repeated. Justification is essentially *forgiveness*, which needs to be bestowed every time the sinner commits sin and sincerely confesses it.²⁷ This forgiveness is possible based on Christ's continuous intercession in the heavenly sanctuary.²⁸ Actually, Ellen G. White understands that justification can be retained or forfeited. According to her, "in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul."²⁹ Justification and sanctification are not then so much successive events, where the first precedes the second, but concomitant ones. As expressed by Woodrow W. Whidden, in Ellen G. White "justification is always concurrent with sanctification."³⁰

A consequence of Ellen G. White's view of justification is that justification does not operate as a final verdict regarding the ultimate destiny of believers. Given human free will, a believer can reject his/her salvation.

²⁷ Ellen G. White considers that "pardon and justification are one and the same thing" Ellen G. White, *Faith and works* ([Nashville, TN: Southern Pub. Assn., 1979], 103).

²⁸ In Ellen G. White's words, "the atoning sacrifice through a mediator is essential because of the constant commission of sin. Jesus is officiating in the presence of God, offering up His shed blood, as it had been a lamb slain. Jesus presents the oblation offered for every offense and every shortcoming of the sinner" (*Selected messages*, vol. 1 [Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1958], 344).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:366.

³⁰ Woodrow W. Whidden, *Ellen White on salvation* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1995), 151.

Final justification would be bestowed on believers by the (investigative) judgment.³¹ That is why the investigative judgment is more than a mere showing of evidence. This judgment will issue a real “verdict... when the judgment shall sit and the books shall be opened, and every man shall be judged according to the things written in the books.”³²

However, during the first part of the twentieth century, the denomination witnessed of a growing discussion regarding the issue of salvation and justification by faith.³³ Several Adventist authors increasingly emphasized the topic of justification by faith and eventually contributed to placing this topic at the center of the theological Adventist scenario. These authors include, among others, Arthur G. Daniells, Meade MacGuire, F. M. Wilcox, and Bruno William Steinweg.³⁴ In that context, some Adventist authors seem to have borrowed material from Protestant sources about the topic or started to explain the concept in ways more in tune with Protestant authors. W. W. Prescott, for example, one of the most important Adventist scholars of his time, in his book *The doctrine of Christ*, quotes approvingly (without bibliographical reference) Adoniram Judson Gordon, a Baptist Calvinist minister, when he affirms that “justification, in the evangelical sense, is but another name for judgment prejudged and condemnation ended.”³⁵ Few years later, MacGuire suggested that

³¹ For the notion of justification as a present but also an eschatological reality, see Raoul Dederen, “Sanctification and the final judgment,” *Ministry* (May 1978), 12-13. Regarding the terminology of “final justification,” used by John Weley, see Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s teachings*, vol. 2, *Christ and salvation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 55-56.

³² White, *Selected messages*, 1:304.

³³ For a list of publications about the topic at that time, see Gary Land, ed., “Shaping the modern Church: 1906-1930,” in *Adventism in America: A history*, rev. ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1998), 134; Norval F. Pease, *By faith alone* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 200-210; Bruno William Steinweg, “Developments in the teaching of justification and righteousness by faith in the Seventh-day Adventist Church after 1900” (MA thesis, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, 1948), 54-61; 65-70; 72-86. Steinweg’s thesis includes not only books but also articles and other sources in his review. See also Geoffrey J. Paxton, *The shaking of Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1978), 69-76.

³⁴ For discussion and references, see Roy E. Graf, “Cambios en la articulación de la teología adventista: del santuario a la justificación por la fe,” *TeoBiblica* 3, nos. 1-2 (2017): 205-208.

³⁵ A. J. Gordon, *The ministry of the Spirit* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1894), 198. See W. W. Prescott, *The doctrine of Christ: A series of Bible studies for use in colleges*

“justification necessarily precedes sanctification”³⁶ in a way that seems to assume that those elements are successive, and not concurrent.³⁷

While these could be isolated examples, and generally speaking Adventist authors wrote about justification dealing with the topic in “Adventist way,”³⁸ it is clear that they contributed to making the issue of justification central to Adventist theology. Norval Pease evaluated in 1962 that Adventists became “more evangelical with the passing years.”³⁹ As a consequence, Adventists began to understand distinctive and key doctrines such as the second coming, the Sabbath and the investigative judgment from the perspective of the gospel or justification by faith.⁴⁰ Pease explains that “the entire idea of investigative judgment [...] rests on the premise that man is saved by faith alone. [...] *Figuratively*, God is described as ‘investigating’ to determine whether each man is saved or lost.”⁴¹ The purpose of the judgment, however, is vindicatory and demonstrative. In Pease’s words, “God must ‘certify’—the word is used for want of a better one—that every saved person is saved by faith alone. This *demonstration*

and seminaries (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1920), 117. Prescott clarifies in the introduction that the only sources credited in his book are those coming from Ellen G. White. Those coming from other authors “are used merely for the expression of the thought, [but] no credit has been given” (*ibid.*, 3).

³⁶ Meade MacGuire, *The life of victory* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1924), 15.

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 91. Interestingly, MacGuire does not connect justification with Christ’s intercession in the heavenly sanctuary but with the cross only. According to him, “through the death and shed blood of Christ we are justified; through the agency of the Spirit sent forth from heaven by the ministry of our Lord, we are sanctified. We could never be justified without His death and resurrection, nor could we be sanctified without His life and intercession resulting in the descent of the Spirit” (*ibid.*, 73-74).

³⁸ By “Adventist way” I mean in a way that doesn’t conflict with the Adventist theological system, particularly as this is articulated by the doctrine of the sanctuary. See Graf, *The principle of articulation*, 135-137.

³⁹ Pease, *By faith alone*, 227.

⁴⁰ See the last chapter of *ibid.* Walter F. Specht, reviewing Pease’s book *By faith alone* evaluated that “our author feels that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is actually becoming more evangelical with the passing years. He endeavors to show the connection between such doctrines as the second advent, the Sabbath, and the judgment with salvation by faith. Salvation by faith is the solution to the problems of the church” (Walter F. Specht, review of *By faith alone* by Norval F. Pease, *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, January 20, 1964, 5).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 231, emphasis added.

of the integrity of His plan He submits to all intelligent beings in the universe He has created.”⁴²

During the 1950s and subsequent decades, the emphasis on the judgment as a showing of evidence became more evident. Pöhler observes that “since the 1950s, there has been a gradual but marked change in the way Seventh-day Adventists have described the nature and function of the investigative judgment.”⁴³ It is probably not casual that this happened in the context of the dialogues between Evangelicals and Adventists that led to the publication of *Questions on Doctrines*.⁴⁴ Since the 1960s, Edward Heppenstall became an important participant in this discussion. His theology has been considered as a “cross-center, Christ-center, evangelical form of theology.”⁴⁵ Heppenstall was also described as somebody who produced a “breakthrough [...] into a fuller Reformation position”⁴⁶ in Adventism regarding the issue of Christian perfection. While he believed that justification “does not mean once justified always justified, nor once saved always saved,” he also considered that “justification has been satisfied and completed by Christ,”⁴⁷ in line with his view of a complete atonement on the cross.⁴⁸ Regarding the investigative judgment, Heppenstall did not deny that this involves real decisions,⁴⁹ but he strongly emphasized its vindictory aspect. According to him, the central issue in “the work of judgment is the justification and vindication of God, not of man. The great concern is that God is declared righteous. Only as

⁴² Ibid., 232, emphasis added.

⁴³ Pöhler, “Change in Seventh-day Adventist theology,” 243.

⁴⁴ Leaders, Bible teachers, and editors, *Seventh-day Adventist Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1957).

⁴⁵ George R. Knight, *A search for identity: The development of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 172.

⁴⁶ Paxton, *The shaking of Adventism*, 114.

⁴⁷ Edward Heppenstall, *Salvation unlimited* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1974), 58.

⁴⁸ Edward Heppenstall, *Our High Priest: Jesus Christ in the heavenly sanctuary* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1972), 171.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 136-137.

this becomes true can the saints be proclaimed righteous.”⁵⁰ Heppenstall held that during the judgment “are the decisions of God revealed.”⁵¹ As Armando Juárez evaluates, Heppenstall “placed the stress on the vindication of God and His people. [...] For him the judgment of the saints is merely an implication rather than the main thrust of the doctrine.”⁵²

However, the main protagonist of the change of understanding regarding the purpose of the investigative judgment is probably Desmond Ford. He has been defined as “one Heppenstall protégé.”⁵³ Another author referred to him as somebody who “showed a praiseworthy consistency in Reformation theology” and who “maintained the Protestant view of forensic justification.”⁵⁴ Ford is important because he crystallized in Adventism an understanding of justification by faith that would become what is probably the most common (implicit) understanding of that topic in Adventism today.

Ford’s massive manuscript “Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment,” presented at Glacier View, in 1980, allows us to see how his Protestant view of justification by faith impacted on the understanding of the investigative judgment. According to Ford, atonement took place on the cross. As a result, there is no reason to believe there is a process of atonement since 1844.⁵⁵ In line with this view, “justification

⁵⁰ Edward Heppenstall, “The hour of God’s judgment is come (continued),” in *Doctrinal discussions: A compilation of articles originally appearing in “The Ministry”, June, 1960—July, 1961, in answer to Walter R. Martin’s book “The truth about Seventh-day Adventism”* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, [1961?]), 172.

⁵¹ Heppenstall, *Our High Priest*, 212.

⁵² Armando Juárez, “An evaluation of Edward Heppenstall’s doctrine of redemption” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 1991), 221. Pöhler also admits that “Heppenstall offered a non-traditional interpretation of the pre-advent judgment, defining it as the final vindication before the entire universe of God as well as of his government, character, and people” (“Change in Seventh-day Adventist theology,” 243).

⁵³ Knight, *A search for identity*, 173.

⁵⁴ Paxton, *The shaking of Adventism*, 116-117.

⁵⁵ Ford would explain later “that the 2,300 days end with the beginning of the antitypical Day of Atonement... is blasphemous. The theology of the Christian church for two thousand years has rightly taught that the Atonement took place at Calvary” (Desmond Ford and Gillian Ford, *For*

is both instantaneous and one hundred per cent.”⁵⁶ Naturally, then, “justification is God’s ultimate verdict for all who abide in Christ.”⁵⁷ Ford considers that justification comes first, and then sanctification.⁵⁸ But justification never disappears. He says that “we have often erred by reducing justification to merely an initial blessing of forgiveness of past sins instead of a continued status up to and through judgment day.”⁵⁹ Ford’s viewpoint means that justification covers past, present, and future sins of the believer through God’s forgiveness. It seems that Ford holds that justification is something that cannot be forfeited. “Justification is over us all the time until we died, until Jesus comes.”⁶⁰ Ford explains this additionally when he says, “The justification that I have received covers *my past, present, and future*.”⁶¹

Given Ford’s view of justification, there is no need for an end-time judicial process determining the final destiny of believers because that

the sake of the gospel: Throw out the bathwater, but keep the baby ([Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2008], 46).

⁵⁶ Desmond Ford, “Daniel 8:14, the day of atonement, and the investigative judgment,” paper presented at the Sanctuary Review Committee, Glacier View, CO, August 10-15, 1980, A-182.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 583.

⁵⁸ Desmond Ford, *Right with God right now: People as shown in the Bible’s book of Romans* (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford, 1999), 58.

⁵⁹ Ford, “Daniel 8:14,” 583.

⁶⁰ Ford, *Right with God right now*, 156.

⁶¹ Desmond Ford, *The coming worldwide Calvary: Christ versus Antichrist* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009), 77; see also *ibid.*, 123, emphasis added. Ford virtually holds a monergistic view of salvation (similar to the one of Luther), with justification covering sins that the believers has not committed yet. Monergism implies that human beings cannot be lost (see the next section for the distinction between monergism and synergism). However, he still believes that human beings have free will (see Ford, *Right with God right now*, 202). Obviously, both concepts are incompatible, but he seems to be unaware of that. Anthony MacPherson evaluates this incompatibility by saying: “Ford was not a Calvinist but an Arminian, nor did he explicitly affirm ‘once saved always saved,’ but his rhetoric and explanations were sometimes indistinguishable from those views. The resulting ambiguity has led more recent scholars to question the consistency and coherence of his theology and rhetoric concerning faith, freedom, judgment, and the possibility of apostasy” (“Investigative judgment [Judgement],” *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, September 26, 2022, under “Paradigms,” accessed November 11, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=7FOL#fnref100>). For additional discussion and references, see also Roy E. Graf, “La articulación de la teología adventista, Desmond Ford y la doctrina del santuario,” *Theologika* 33, no. 2 (2018): 202-210.

would contradict the concept that justification is the “ultimate verdict for all who abide in Christ.” If the final verdict was given in justification, a final judicial process is unnecessary. In this context, the judgment depicted in the Bible is only an objective manifestation of a previous decision made by God. In Ford’s words,

Judgment is a term applicable to an objective point in the past (Calvary); a process in the present (Christ’s mediatorial rule as priest-king) which marks the relationship of men to the cross and seals each at the close of his personal probation; and to yet another objective point in the future, when the destinies already sealed and adjudged will be *objectively manifested*.⁶²

It is not difficult to see the similarity of this position with the idea of the investigative judgment as an exclusively vindicatory manifestation of evidence where there are no real decisions. Ford himself said that the expression of Revelation 14,6, “‘the hour of His Judgment has come’ [or ‘is come’ KJV] points to the manifestation of what is already decided.”⁶³

Furthermore, it is clear that the reason Ford rejected the doctrine of the sanctuary and, particularly, the doctrine of the investigative judgment, ultimately relates to his soteriology and his specific understanding of justification by faith or the gospel.⁶⁴ Curiously enough, although Ford’s rejection of the sanctuary and the investigative judgment produced a significant reaction expressed in the papers published in the Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, those papers do not specifically address the problem of the relation between Ford’s understanding of justification and his rejection of the investigative judgment.⁶⁵

⁶² Ford, “Daniel 8:14,” A-183, emphasis added.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 670.

⁶⁴ According to Ford, “the teaching of an Investigative Judgment beginning in 1844 denies the finality of the cross, God’s omniscience, and the reality of saving faith” (Desmond Ford, *Seventh-day Adventism: The investigative judgment and the everlasting gospel; A retrospective on October 27, 1979* (n.p.: Desmond Ford, n.d.), 35.

⁶⁵ Daniel and Revelation Committee Series did not dedicate too much space to discuss Adventist understanding of justification by faith. For a partial exception see Ivan T. Blazen, “Justification by faith/judgment according to works,” in *The seventy weeks, Leviticus, and the nature of prophecy*, Daniel & Revelation Committee Series 3, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986), 339-368. This paper, however, does not offer an explicit evaluation of Ford’s position about justification by faith.

On the other hand, Ford's understanding of justification by faith and the investigative judgment would not be so crucial if it were not for the fact that, as an Adventist representative theologian has admitted, "most Adventist scholars and pastors today have accepted Ford's definition of righteousness by faith."⁶⁶ In the same line, this scholar evaluates that

the fact that Desmond Ford denied the pre-Advent judgment and was dismissed from the ministry does not change the positive impact his teaching on righteousness by faith had on the church. In this regard the church is indebted to him; and it behooves us to continue to preach the good news of righteousness by faith.⁶⁷

Statements like these suggest that a significant proportion of Adventist ecclesiastical leaders and even academicians are unaware of the issues involved in the connection between Ford's view of justification by faith and the investigative judgment.

A brief evaluation of this change and its implications for holiness

This brief assessment involves some remarks regarding the consistency of the current understanding of the purpose of the investigative judgment with the Adventist theological system in general and with Adventist soteriology in particular. Furthermore, some implications for the issue of holiness in the context of the investigative judgment are highlighted.

Seventh-day Adventists have gone a long way in order to clarify their soteriology. The journey has been confusing sometimes. This context seems to be behind the lack of clarity regarding the purpose of the investigative judgment. Some remarks are to shed light on this matter. First, a vital issue in understanding this complex landscape is the distinction between monergistic and synergistic views of salvation. The monergistic approach is the one followed by Augustine and his spiritual and

⁶⁶ Gerhard Pfandl, "Remembering Desmond Ford," *Adventist World* (March 15, 2018), under "The righteousness by faith controversy," accessed October 24, 2022, <https://www.adventistworld.org/remembering-desmond-ford/>.

⁶⁷ Gerhard Pfandl, "Desmond Ford and the righteousness by faith controversy," *JATS* 27, nos. 1-2 (2016): 351.

intellectual descendants, including Luther and Calvin. From this perspective, God unilaterally and timelessly decrees who will be saved and who will be lost. There is no real participation of human free will in salvation.⁶⁸ Naturally, a final judgment should be only a showing of evidence because no real decision can change God's decree of salvation or damnation. The judgment is essentially a revelatory event.⁶⁹ Those who are part of the elect (those chosen to be saved) are necessarily justified once and for all and cannot have a verdict of damnation in the judgment because their election cannot be modified.⁷⁰

Synergism, however, involves very different alternatives such as the ones of the Catholic Church, John Wesley, and Seventh-day Adventists. While Adventists reject salvation by works (as Catholics hold), they also believe that salvation involves a human response to God's initiative.⁷¹ For that reason, justification cannot be once and forever. Justification can be lost. Thus, a final judgment is required to determine individual human destiny. In the words of Darius W. Jankiewicz, "When theologians include an element of human free choice in their soteriology—thus leaving

⁶⁸ John Calvin's definition of predestination can illustrate well this view point: "By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death" (*Institutes* 3.21.5).

⁶⁹ See, for example, Millard J. Erickson, a Calvinist Baptist theologian, according to whom "as we study the final judgment, we should keep in mind that it is not intended to ascertain our spiritual condition or status, for that is already known to God. Rather, it *will manifest or make our status public*" (*Christian theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990], 1200-1201, emphasis added). See also Frank B. Holbrook, "Light in the shadows: An overview of the doctrine of the sanctuary," *Journal of Adventist Education* 46, no. 1 (1983): 33.

⁷⁰ Calvin understands that the judgment doesn't modify the condition of saved that the elect already have based on God's absolute predestination: "It is most consolatory to think, that judgment is vested in him *who has already destined us* to share with him in the honour of judgment (Mt. 19:28). [...] It certainly gives no small security, that we shall be sisted at no other tribunal than that of our Redeemer, from whom salvation is to be expected; and that he who in the Gospel now promises eternal blessedness, will then *as judge ratify his promise*" (*Institutes* 2.16.18, emphasis added).

⁷¹ Ellen G. White clearly holds a synergistic view of salvation. She affirms: "Let no man present the idea that man has little or nothing to do in the great work of overcoming; for God does nothing for man without his cooperation. [...] From first to last man is to be a laborer together with God" (*Selected messages*, vol. 1, 381).

the realm of monergism—they must be prepared to accept the next logical step: a review of human choices and their implication for salvation.⁷² Given that the Adventist view of salvation has been historically clearly synergistic, in line with its free-will anthropology, an understanding of the judgment should reflect consistency with Adventist synergistic soteriology. Therefore, flirting with the Protestant view of justification and judgment will not do Adventist theology any favors.⁷³

From a wider perspective, this synergistic view is also a consequence of how Adventists understand the relationship between God and humanity, particularly in the context of the great controversy. Adventists believe that God is love and relates to his intelligent creatures by valuing their free will and acting with them persuasively, not coercively, to restore the original harmony of the universe. The notion of an investigative judgment as a showing of evidence overlooks the data that Adventists find in the Scripture regarding the judgment as a synergistic event where intelligent creatures have active participation (Dan 7,9-10; cf. 1 Cor 6,3; Rev 20,4).⁷⁴ God condescends with his intelligent creatures to allow them to participate at the decision-making process during the judgment. As Sergio Celis rightly states, “The eschatological judgment involves a verdict or real decision because of divine condescendence. In His infinite condescendence and love, God postpones His decisions in order to reach a concerted action with His creatures at this point.”⁷⁵

⁷² Darius W. Jankiewicz, “The theological necessity of the investigative judgment: Albion Ballenger and his failed quest to subvert the doctrine—Part II,” *Theologika* 35, no. 2 (2020): 119.

⁷³ As Sergio Celis has pointed out: “One problem within Protestant theology concerning the judgment is that, by separating the application of personal salvation from its cosmic dimension, the last judgment has been reduced to a revelatory event in which no participatory process in making the decision about salvation is involved” (“Divine governance and judgment in history and in the context of the Seventh-day Adventist perspective of the cosmic conflict” [PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2017], 397-398).

⁷⁴ For a discussion of the biblical evidence for creature’s participation in the judgment, see Celis, “Divine governance and judgment,” 390-397. See also Miguel Patiño, “The divine judgment and the role of angels based on the ontology of God: An evaluation of two conflicting models” (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2019), 179-253.

⁷⁵ Celis, “Divine governance and judgment,” 414.

An vital remark, in this context, is that the Adventist synergistic view of the investigative judgment has been criticized because presumably it does not offer believers assurance of salvation, an assurance that some consider Protestant theology can offer.⁷⁶ Even some Adventists feel uncomfortable with their historical view of the investigative judgment because they consider that it puts at stake the confidence that believers should have in their own salvation.⁷⁷ Roy Adams evaluates that “the common denominator running through it all [the negative reaction to the investigative judgment] is the perception that the concept of an investigative judgment flies in the face of righteousness by faith and Christian assurance.”⁷⁸ However, those uneasy with the synergistic view of the investigative judgment may not consider that the Protestant monergistic view of salvation—the other theological option—doesn’t necessarily provide real assurance of salvation because of the simple fact that the believer doesn’t have an absolute way to know that he/she is part of the elect.⁷⁹ The election is an issue that

⁷⁶ See Protestant authors mentioned by Wallenkampf, “A brief review,” 593-594. See also Darius W. Jankiewicz, “The theological necessity of the investigative judgment: Albion Ballenger and his failed quest to subvert the doctrine—Part I,” *Theologica* 35, no. 1 (2020): 27-28.

⁷⁷ Actually, Guy perceives the change in the understanding of the purpose of the judgment favorably by suggesting that if “the traditional Adventist doctrine of investigative judgment produces long-termed spiritual anxiety [as sometimes alleged] by raising doubt regarding the reality of forgiveness, then the substance of the doctrine, or its presentation, or both, may require re-examination” (*Thinking theologically*, 105n31).

⁷⁸ Roy Adams, *The sanctuary: Understanding the heart of Adventist theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1993), 117.

⁷⁹ Erickson, for example, poses that “assurance of salvation, the subjective conviction that one is a Christian, results from the Holy Spirit’s giving evidence that he is at work in the life of the individual. And wherever the Spirit’s work results in conviction that one’s commitment to Christ is genuine, there is also the certainty on biblical grounds that God will enable the Christian to persist in that relationship, that nothing can separate the true believer from God’s love” (Erickson, *Christian theology*, 996-997). However, Erickson also admits, after considering biblical examples of apostasy, that “we conclude that those who appear to have fallen away were never regenerate in the first place” (*ibid.*, 996). One may wonder if a person who believes that he/she is a real believer is actually a person deceiving himself/herself and was never really regenerate. For additional discussion, see Woodrow W. Whidden, “Assurance of salvation: The dynamics of Christian experience,” *Salvation: Contours of Adventist soteriology*, ed. Martin F. Hanna, Darius W. Jankiewicz, and John W. Reeve (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2018), 385-388.

is entirely in God's hands and believers don't have direct access to God's decisions or any record of God's decisions.

Another difficulty with understanding the judgment as a showing of evidence—that assumes (usually implicitly) a view of justification that is more in line with a Protestant monergistic soteriology—is that it leads to the conclusion that believers are not really under an actual judgment. This idea can be found in Ford's writings, usually in connection with references to John 5:24,⁸⁰ and has been suggested in other Adventist literature. Wallenkampf, for example, says,

The purpose of the heavenly audit—not judgment—is not for the benefit of God. He is omniscient. He knows those who have accepted Jesus as their Saviour. [...] *Such do not come into judgment.* Jesus assures us: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who has sent me has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (Jn 5:24).⁸¹

In a similar way, another scholar has suggested more recently that “genuine Christians do not come into judgment. Rather, God reveals their loyalty as the basis of His decision to save them, and by doing so is seen to be fair.”⁸² Although these are well-intentioned statements, they involve some difficulties. First, they seem to assume, again, that God's real decisions regarding the destiny of believers are something in the past, presumably in their justification. Second, the idea that believers are not under judgment is in tension with statements like 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 14:10 (*cf.* Eccl 12:14) from where it is clear that all will go through judgment, including believers.⁸³

⁸⁰ See examples in Ford, “Daniel 8:14,” 368; Ford, *Seventh-day Adventism*, 35. MacPherson considers that “Ford used John 5:24 as a favorite proof text” (“Investigative judgment [judgement],” under “Issues in relationship to the gospel”).

⁸¹ Wallenkampf, “A brief review,” 597, emphasis added.

⁸² Gulley, *Creation, Christ, salvation*, 502.

⁸³ Regarding the misuse of John 5:24 in order to affirm that believers are not under judgment, Ivan Blazen explains: “The text does not say necessarily that believers do not come into judgment in any sense. The Greek noun for judgment here sometimes bears the meaning ‘condemnation’ in John (John 3:19; 5:29; see the same use of the Greek verb in 3:17-18; *cf.* Acts 13:27; Rom 14:22; and 2 Thess 2:12). Since judgment is the opposite of eternal life in John 5:24, the text must be saying that the believer does not come into a judgment of condemnation, meaning a judgment which issues in condemnation” (“Justification and Judgment,” 384-385). Of course,

On the other hand, an additional issue with the current understanding of the purpose of the investigative judgment is that it frequently seems to assume that, as God is omniscient and he foreknows the future, he doesn't need a judgment because he already knows who will be saved and who will be lost.⁸⁴ A problem with this way of seeing the connection between God's foreknowledge and judgment is that it implicitly identifies God's foreknowledge with God's decisions regarding salvation or damnation. Goldstein, for example, says that "an omniscient God doesn't need the investigative judgment; the onlooking universe, however, does" because "all those written in heaven have already been accepted by God."⁸⁵ In a similar way, Blazen suggests that "the books stand not for new knowledge that God has yet to acquire but for old knowledge that God now will expose."⁸⁶ The issue here is that, although God is able to know the future and, consequently, he knows the results of the judgment, foreknowledge and decisions made in the judgment are not the same thing: they two different actions of God. The activity performed during the judgment by God and intelligent creatures is the cause of God's foreknowledge (and not the opposite). As Celis explains, "while God already knows the final destiny of each person as brought to judgment, He condescends with His creatures in order to make a decision together with them."⁸⁷ So, foreknowledge and judgment cannot be identified. Such identification is reminiscent of the way Protestant theologians identify God's actions such as foreknowledge, predestination, justification, and judgment as just one action based on the classical view of God as timeless. This classical view of God builds

the believer is not under condemnation provided that he/she has remained a believer until the end of his/her life.

⁸⁴ See the quotation that corresponds to footnote 81. Ford also suggests something similar; see footnote 64.

⁸⁵ Goldstein, "Investigating the investigative judgment," 8.

⁸⁶ Blazen, "Justification and judgment," 383. For additional references, see Graf, *The principle of articulation*, 239n482.

⁸⁷ Celis, "Divine governance and judgment," 414.

on an ontology that allows to see justification as God's once-and-for-all favorable judgment.⁸⁸

Finally, some remarks are necessary here regarding the connection between the change in understanding the purpose of the investigative judgment and the life of holiness. As mentioned earlier, Ford was the Adventist theologian who crystallized the notion that the real judgment already takes place at the time of justification. From this perspective, the final judgment is essentially revelatory, a punctiliar event, that does not require a process, a view that makes the investigative judgment unnecessary. Although posterior Adventist theologians have tried to hold the historical position of the investigative judgment as a process, this was frequently achieved by emphasizing the vindicatory aspect of the judgment and by minimizing or ignoring the decision-making aspect. In this way, they (implicitly) offered the possibility to conciliate Ford's view of justification with the view of the investigative judgment as a process. Thus, there are no soteriological decisions involved. This view could easily imply that those who have been "evaluated" during the judgment don't need to be worried about their names being considered there. Nothing there is going to put their condition of already-saved believers at risk.

Adventists, however, have been historically aware that the Scripture frequently describes the final judgment as involving a real evaluation of believers' works (1 Pet 1,17; 2 Cor 5,17; Eccl 12,14). Ellen G. White, for example, says that "both the living and the dead are to be judged 'out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.'"⁸⁹ This view of the judgment as a final instance of decision involves some consequences for the Christians' lifestyle and their growth in holiness. According to Ellen G. White,

⁸⁸ According to this view, "When God is said to judge or to save humans, it is not God who changes. [...] God does not decide at a particular point in time to redeem the world. The judgment and the redemption are already decided at the moment of creation, which of course, from God's point of view, is the very same moment as the moment of the end of time—and as every other moment in between" (Keith Ward, *God: A guide for the perplexed* [London: Oneworld, 2002], 143).

⁸⁹ White, *The great controversy*, 486.

Our acts, our words, even our most secret motives, all have their weight in deciding our destiny for weal or woe. [...] Yet how little solicitude is felt concerning that record which is to meet the gaze of heavenly beings.⁹⁰

She also appeals to the typology of the day of atonement to explain the kind of preparation that is required from believers during this time of judgment:

We are now living in the great day of atonement. In the typical service, while the high priest was making the atonement for Israel, all were required to afflict their souls by repentance of sin and humiliation before the Lord, lest they be cut off from among the people. In like manner, all who would have their names retained in the book of life should now, in the few remaining days of their probation, afflict their souls before God by sorrow for sin and true repentance. There must be deep, faithful searching of heart. The light, frivolous spirit indulged by so many professed Christians must be put away. There is earnest warfare before all who would subdue the evil tendencies that strive for the mastery.⁹¹

This means, in other words, that holiness and lifestyle really matter in view of the judgment in progress. The ongoing judgment requires from us introspection, self-examination, revival, and reformation. However, this solemn view of the investigative judgment has become less important and sometimes even absent in recent Adventist literature. After all, if the judgment is only an audit, an essentially revelatory event showing a decision already made at the moment of justification or on the cross, one may wonder why a life of holiness really matters after the believer has been justified. The experience of believers, related to sanctification and lifestyle, loses relevance in terms of the experience of salvation. This problem has become evident in how the church tries to carry out its mission in many parts of the world. In several divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church today, the emphasis has been on the initial experience of the believer, his/her acceptance of Christ, and participation in baptism,

⁹⁰ Ibid., 486-487.

⁹¹ Ibid., 489-490.

disregarding his/her subsequent adequate preparation and consolidation in the truth and Christian lifestyle.⁹²

These remarks, however, are not an invitation to be terrified of the judgment. They are an invitation to elaborate a more balanced view of judgment and pay attention to the attitude that we as believers need to develop before it in connection with our growth in holiness and our Christian lifestyle. As Gerhard F. Hasel said,

The present “hour of His judgment” involves a call to remain faithful or to return to the Lord of life in preparation for the imminent Second Coming. The destiny of all professed believers is at stake, and the destiny of unbelievers is also involved. The former need to stay loyal to the “eternal gospel,” and the latter need to hear its powerful proclamation.⁹³

Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventist theology has experienced a substantial change regarding its understanding of the purpose of the investigative judgment. While Adventist pioneers emphasized the judgment as a decision-making process, where decisions regarding the final destiny of those who once declared themselves believers are made, recent Adventist theology has understood the investigative judgment more as an instance of vindication of God’s character, an audit, that exhibits what the Lord has already decided in the past concerning the salvation of believers. This change can be linked to a growing monergistic view of justification where justification becomes God’s final verdict of believers, a view crystallized by Ford.

However, the notion of an investigative judgment that is only a showing of evidence and doesn’t involve a real decision-making process doesn’t fit with Adventist theological system, including Adventist synergistic soteriology, Adventist’s free will anthropology, its view of God’s

⁹² See Roy E. Graf, “El santuario y la misión de la iglesia,” *El conflicto cósmico y la misión de la iglesia*, ed. Ezequiel González, Joel Iparraguirre, and Roy E. Graf (Glendale, CA: Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists – Hispanic Region, 2021), 38-39.

⁹³ Hasel, “Divine judgment,” 845. Hasel concludes this statement by saying that “The commission to preach the ‘good news’ in all the world as a powerful witness is seen in a new light in connection with the pre-Advent investigative judgment” (ibid).

nature and actions (offering space for the expression of human free will), and the understanding of the way how God relates to the world in the context of the great controversy. This lack of harmony with the rest of the system can potentially to disorient Adventist biblical identity and mission. Furthermore, the purpose of the judgment as a final instance of decision evaluating the life of believers has some implications concerning the importance of holiness in the context of the ongoing judgment in heaven. Believers must live this time without fear but with genuine concern for their growth in holiness and a Christian lifestyle.