‘Heroes of the Faith’

Ellen G White, A visionary Seventh-day Adventist

Introduction

Faith in God shapes the design of life’s journey. Often, the pathway meanders between loneliness and solitude, a search to understand one’s world and a process of creative evaluation of life’s meaning and purpose. This journey can involve the task of learning and unlearning, and a search for freedom yet paradoxically, a fear of that same freedom. In essence, such experiential faith leads to the joint recognition that God, and that each individual is unique with the potential to make a difference in his or her world. Such a journey gives birth to spiritual heroes.

This paper aims to explore the nature of Ellen G. White’s contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist faith tradition illustrating how her spiritual journey parallels with the various sojourns of heroes from other traditions, such as Mary MacKillop. In both cases, their robust visionary spirit and a sense of deep spiritual commitment to God were shaped by a variety of adverse life circumstances. It is evident that both Ellen White and Mary MacKillop stood bravely against the barriers of traditions, and in doing so made a significant contribution in areas such as education, welfare, personal spiritual experience and the practicality of one’s walk with God.

A brief overview

Nourished by the context of what is called the Second Great Awakening, Seventh-day Adventism emerged as a premillennial, eschatologically-focused movement in mid-nineteenth century North America. These stressful, confusing, yet exciting times provided the optimum soil for millennial movements to germinate and mature by providing new assumptions, new redemptive processes, new political and economic boundaries, new communities and models for measuring humanity and, in the majority of cases, a new 'visionary' voice to organise and articulate these new assumptions.[1]
In the prologue of their publication, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*, Bull and Lockhart contend that while relatively unknown, 'Seventh-day Adventism is one of the most subtly differentiated, systematically developed, and institutionally successful of all alternatives to the American way of life'.[2] The worldwide Seventh-day Adventist church today is a far cry from the fledgling North American movement which formally organised in 1863 and which consisted at that time of 3,500 adherents. At the commencement of 2009, the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church cited global church membership as rapidly approaching sixteen million with an average 2,800 new members joining the church per day for the past decade and suggesting that if current projections prove accurate, Adventism could reach thirty-two million members by 2020.[3] The church has a missionary presence in 232 countries illustrating its ethnic and cultural diversity and it runs one of the largest educational organisations in the world. The church also operates publishing houses, food industries (including Sanitarium Health Foods in Australia), media centres and a world-wide health-care system.

Ellen G White-a visionary

In spite of these organisational and institutional achievements, outside of Adventism, far less known is the contribution of Ellen G White to the development of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Ironically, it is impossible to understand Adventism without reference to Ellen White, one of three co-founders of the movement,[4] for her handiwork and influence are evident in every brick built into the Adventist edifice. The *Dictionary of American Biography* elaborates:

The ministry of Ellen White and the emergence of the Seventh-day church are inseparable. To try to understand one without the other would make each unintelligible and undiscoverable. Ellen White and the history of the Seventh-day Adventist church, in thought and structure, are as integrated as the union of the Anglo-Saxon languages in the formation of English speech.[5]

Ellen White was a charismatic leader not afraid to challenge the boundaries of religious and organisational traditions. Such heroes of faith or, as suggested by Henri Nouwen, people who have given us hope and strength, are not only 'advice givers, warners or moralists'. Rather, they are able to 'articulate in words and actions the human condition in which we participate' and they 'encourage us to face the realities of life'. The become heroes, 'not because of any solution they offered but because of the courage to enter so deeply into human suffering and speak from there'.[6] Such was Ellen White's contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist faith tradition. Her messages were to provide comfort, strength, encouragement, and guidance.[7] In the case of Mary MacKillop 'all she ever wanted to do was devote her life to God by helping people' in providing 'education for poor children, shelter to the sick and homeless and care and comfort for those in distress'.[8]

Ellen, with her twin sister Elizabeth, was born 26 November 1827, to Robert and Eunice Harmon. The family lived on a small farm near the village of Gorham, Maine, and with six other siblings in the family, life was rarely dull. Young Ellen exuded immense potential which included a love for study, a quick perception, buoyant disposition and perseverance.[9] Three significant events occurred in Ellen White's childhood years that would challenge her potential and exert a significant influence on the remainder of her life - physical injury and trauma, the preaching of the imminent return of Jesus by William Miller, and her deepening religious experience.[10]

At the age of nine, an unforseen accident turned Ellen White's world upside down. She was struck in the face by a stone thrown by a disgruntled girl and lay in a virtual coma for three weeks. The severity of the injury was such that her father had difficulty recognising his daughter on returning home from a business trip. Furthermore, as a result of the injuries sustained, Ellen's schooling ended prematurely.[11] Her physical and spiritual dilemmas were both evident when she later reflected on the incident:

Every feature of my face seemed changed. The sight was more than could bear… The idea of carrying my misfortune through life was insupportable. I could see no pleasure in my life. I did not wish to live, and I dared not die, for I was not prepared.[12]

As a child, Ellen was traumatised by the thought that she was unprepared for the Lord's imminent return, compounded by her deep feelings of unworthiness. 'There was in my heart a feeling that I could never become worthy to be called a child of God… It seemed to me that I was not good enough to enter heaven'.[13] Hearing William Miller's presentations on biblical prophecy in the early 1840s concerning predictions of the near Second Advent of Christ revived her sense of unworthiness, and her desire to understand the Bible. Records confirm that the Harmon family's acceptance of the Millerite teachings, resulting in their expulsion from the Methodist church in 1843, and also the fact that their Lord did not return as expected in 1844 engulfed them in what became known as the *Great Disappointment*.

Prior to the October 1844 disappointment, Ellen White experienced two dreams that would alter the trajectory of her life. The first dream involved a visit to the heavenly realms while the second changed her prior perceptions of Jesus. Of the second dream she wrote:

In a moment I stood before Jesus… As his gaze rested upon me, I knew at once that He was acquainted with every circumstance of my life and all my inner thoughts and feelings. I tried to shield myself from His gaze, feeling unable to endure His searching eyes; but He drew near with a smile, and laying His hand upon my head, said, 'Fear not'. The sound of His sweet voice thrilled my heart with a happiness it had never before experienced. I was too joyful to utter a word, but, overcome with emotion, sank prostrate at His feet. While I was lying helpless there, scenes of beauty and glory passed before me, and I seemed to have reached the safety and peace of heaven. At length my strength returned, and I arose. The loving eyes of Jesus were still upon me, and His smile filled my soul with gladness. His presence awoke in me a holy reverence and an inexpressible love.[14]

Ellen's mother encouraged her to share the experience with a Millerite minister and close family friend, Levi Stockman. After hearing her story, Stockman placed his hand affectionately upon her head, and with tears in his eyes, stated, 'Ellen, you are only a child. Yours is a most singular experience for one of your tender age. Jesus must be preparing you for some special work'.[15] During the eighty-seven years, Ellen White, although small in stature (five feet two inches) encompassed more than thought humanly possible. She was a deeply spiritual American pioneer, and her two constant themes were to point people to the Bible and a faith relationship with Jesus, while balancing her role as a wife, mother, friend, housekeeper, messenger, organiser, leader, prodigious writer, counsellor, communicator, public speaker, spiritual mentor, visionary and intrepid traveller. Arthur L White in *Ellen G White and Her Writings: A Brief Biography* makes reference to the extent and nature of Ellen White's literary contribution:

In brief, she was a woman of remarkable spiritual gifts who lived most of her life during the nineteenth century (1827-1915), yet through her writings she is still making a revolutionary impact on millions of people around the world. During her lifetime she wrote more than 5,000 periodical articles and 40 books; but today, including compilations from her 50,000 pages of manuscript, more than 100 titles are available in English. She is the most translated woman writer in the entire history

of literature, and the most translated American author of either gender. Her writings cover a broad range of subjects, including religion, education, social relationships, evangelism, prophecy, publishing, nutrition, and management.[16]

Ellen White's unifying principle – the struggle between good and evil

Seventh-day Adventists recognise that God communicated with Ellen White through experiences such as dreams and visions, for the purpose of bringing comfort to His people and to direct their minds to the Word of God. She also came to recognise that in spite of her human frailty, she was a child of God 'sent to bear a message from the Lord to His people…'[17] Her counsel and writings were not to function as a new rule of faith or doctrine. In her first book, *Early Writings*, published in 1851, she expressed her thoughts clearly, 'I recommend to you, dear reader, the Word of God as the rule of your faith and practice.'[18]

The struggle between good and evil became the most significant topic in her writings and represented the core perspective from which she understood and interpreted the Scriptures.[19] White's most significant historical works include five books collectively known as 'The Conflict of the Ages' series: *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan* (1888), *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890), *The Desire of Ages* (1898), *Acts of the Apostles* (1911) and *Prophets and Kings* (1917). These books trace the ongoing conflict between God and Satan, the struggle between good and evil from the initial rebellion in heaven before the creation of Adam and Eve through to ultimate victory at the end of time. George Knight suggests that the *Conflict of the Ages* series provided the theological framework for everything else Ellen White had to say.[20] Essentially, this theme informed and determined principles of theology, health, education, and numerous other topics that White unified into a coherent, interconnected and distinctly Adventist way of life that continues into the present.[21]

Ellen White's contribution to health and education reform

Ellen White's distinctive contribution to Adventism is nowhere more prominent then her role in the development of health reform and education, the evidence of which continues in Australia today. On 6 June 1863, a mere fifteen days after the formal organisation of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in America, Ellen White received her first major health reform vision that linked health reform with spirituality.[22]

Roger Coon in The Great Visions of Ellen White delineates ten significant themes in Ellen White's initial health vision:

1. Health care is a religious duty
2. The cause of disease is a violation of health laws
3. Vegetarianism is a viable and worthy ideal
4. Human intemperance comes in numerous forms, such as tobacco, stimulating beverages, highly spiced foods, indulgence of the base passions, and overwork
5. The role of the mind is vital in human wellbeing
6. Personal cleanliness is essential for a healthful lifestyle

7. Natural remedies play an integral role in the healing process
8. Adventists should focus on environmental issues
9. Control of the appetite is necessary for human health and functioning
10. Health education and reform is a Christian duty.[23]

A second vision in December 1865 declared that health reform was not isolated to individual concerns but that Adventists should establish their own health reform institutions. The rationale for the first vision was to connect healthful living within a holistic context. 'The moral powers are weakened, because men and women will not live in obedience to the laws of health and make this great subject a personal duty'.[24] Ellen White's health principles which have become integral to Adventist lifestyle are seemingly simple, yet simultaneously profound in view of the prevailing health and medical knowledge in the mid-1800s when the treatment of disease was rudimentary and crude, relying 'mostly on bleeding, purging, and polypharmacy.'[25]

The rationale for Ellen White's second health vision was twofold – to prepare individual Adventists to meet their Lord and, secondly, that Adventist health institutions would be a means of reaching the community both in terms of the restoration of health principles and spirituality.[26] Thus, Ellen White was both specific and practical as she applied the principles of the Great Controversy Theme by connecting spirituality with the physical and mental spheres that could be understood and applied by all. She consistently linked health reform with the gospel encouraging believers to understand the vital connection between health practice, spiritual commitment and character development suggesting that 'True religion and the laws of health go hand in hand.'[27]

Ellen White advocated, throughout her adult life, eight health principles: pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water and trust in divine power.[28] Arthur Patrick, a Seventh-day Adventist historian, describes two notable effects of Ellen White's health emphasis for Seventh-day Adventists. Firstly, the personal lifestyle and longevity of millions of Adventists bear witness to the continuing relevance of health reform and secondly, the mission of the Adventist church has been considerably enhanced due to its institutional emphasis on health and medical care.[29] From humble beginnings, 'Adventist health care has been able to cherish Christian values and at the same time embrace scientific medicine.'[30] Current statistics indicate the results of Ellen White's profound role and influence in the development of health principles and organisations. In 2010, the Seventh-day Adventist church operates over 300 hospitals, sanitariums, nursing homes and retirement centres, 429 clinics and dispensaries, thirty-three orphanages and children's homes, ten aircraft and medical launches.[31]

Similar to the development of health principles, Ellen White's contribution to Adventist education was also profound at both the philosophical and pragmatic level in view of the prevailing educational philosophy of her day. She was, in the words of Jack Provonsha, Adventism's 'first and major writer on educational theory'.[32] George Akers in his research on the role of Seventh-day Adventist

education in the formation of Adventist lifestyle argued that Ellen White's 'able articulation of the role of Christian education as a prime vehicle for the transmission of religious values and purpose constitutes a profound theology of Christian education'.[33]

Once again, the undergirding theme of the struggle between good and evil permeated White's educational principles and the restorationist impulse which lay at the heart of her educational philosophy is made manifest in the following quote from her book, *Education:*

To restore in man the image of his maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized – this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.[34] White recognized the value of education in pursuing intellectual greatness, self-development and the opportunity for developing occupational skills, but never at the expense or neglect of the spiritual experience. She consistently emphasized the important connection between education and Christian service and that ignorance does not increase the spirituality or humility of Christians, rather, the Bible can be 'appreciated by an intellectual Christian.'[35]

In 1872, James and Ellen White called for the upgrading of a Battle Creek school in Michigan, originated with GH Bell in 1868 into an advanced educational facility – the first attempt to have a school supported by the Seventh-day Adventist church. These were turbulent years during which both church administrators and teachers struggled to understand let alone implement the key themes espoused by Ellen White. In what would become a charter document, and one which continues to be studied by Adventist educators today, White wrote in 1872 an article entitled, 'Proper Education' in which she articulated the fundamental principles of Christian education: the interconnection between the physical, moral, mental and religious aspects of education.[36] Oftentimes White's counsel appeared at odds with her contemporary church administrators, and a great measure of faith and fortitude was required for the alignment of human and divine cooperation to succeed. Ellen White's practical understanding of the need to forge ahead into the unknown on the basis of faith is evident in her response to concerns by WE Howell, Principal of Adventism's first medical school at Loma Linda, California in 1906:

We cannot mark out a precise line to be followed unconditionally. Circumstances and emergencies will arise for which the Lord must give special instruction. But if we begin to work, depending wholly upon the Lord, watching and praying, and walking in harmony with the light He sends us, we shall not be left to walk in darkness.[37]

Nowhere more evident is White's ability to venture in faith amidst changing times, cultures and conditions than her instrumental leadership and pastoral concern in developing Adventist education, health and mission in Australia during the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Ellen White: her life and work in Australia

Ellen White's connection with the Seventh-day Adventist mission in Australia dates back to 1 April 1874. At that time, she challenged the church leaders in America to develop a broader view of mission. In *Life Sketches,* reference is made to an 'impressive dream' in which the messenger said,

'You are entertaining too limited ideas of the work for this time… You must take broader views.'[38] The challenge was clear. 'The message will go in power to all parts of the world, to Oregon, to Europe, to Australia, to the islands of the sea.'[39] Ten years later, the church's leaders decided to commence mission work in Australia. The first five missionary families arrived in Sydney in June 1885. Six years later, the combined Seventh-day Adventist membership in Australia and New Zealand had grown to 700 members.[40] Ellen White's arrival in Australia coincided with two major challenges that contributed to her initial indecision about the journey. The first was a request from the American missionaries in Australia for the 'opening of the school.'[41] They believed her interest in Christian education would add strength and inspiration and promote the opening of schools as training centres for missionaries. However, her plans were somewhat different. She was close to the age of retirement, in poor health and her major ambition was to complete the book on the life of Christ. Her intentions were clear. 'I long for rest, for quietude, and to get out the 'Life of Christ."[42] The second issue involved the attitudes of some leaders in America. She wrote:

This morning my mind is anxious and troubled in regard to my duty, can it be the will of God that I go to Australia? This involves a great deal for me. I have not special light to leave America for this far-off country. Nevertheless, if I knew it was the voice of God, I would go.[43]

Then she added an insightful and pointed comment. 'Some who are bearing responsibilities in America seem to be very persistent that my special work should go to Europe and Australia.'[44] No doubt, her visionary and spiritual leadership and progressiveness inflamed opposition. She commented, 'Reproof is unpleasant to the natural heart, and the reproof coming to the people as I know it will come to them with opposition.'[45] Nevertheless, the depth of her personal experience with God and her continual search to understand His involvement in human life empowered her confidence in God's leading. With this attitude she wrote, 'I am presenting the case before the Lord and I believe He will guide me.'[46]

She arrived in Sydney aboard SS *Alamenda* on 8 December 1891. During the trip, she celebrated her sixty-fourth birthday. On this occasion, she expressed her deep confidence in God's leading that enabled her to hold fast to her heavenly father.[47] The news of her expected arrival met with a spirit of anticipation and conference president, GC Tenney, encouraged believers to become acquainted with her person and work.[48] The anticipated two-year visit extended to a lengthy stay of nine years. During this time, Ellen White developed a strong intimacy with the infant Seventh-day Adventist church in Australia. Patrick compares this relational bond with the impact that a mother exerts on a young child.[49] Only a few months after her arrival, Ellen confirmed her conviction in God's leading in the following words. 'I now look at this matter as part of the Lord's great plan, for the good of His people here in this country, and for those in America, and for my good. I cannot explain why or how,

but I believe it.' With this conviction, she expressed her trust in God's providential guidance.[50] Ellen White's contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist church in Australia is formidable. Without doubt, her visionary spirit was instrumental in setting up institutions such as Avondale College, the Sydney Adventist Hospital and the Sanitarium Health Food Company. However, her major input rests on the depth and integrity of her spirituality shaped upon the anvil of life's trials. Through these experiences, she entered into the realms of human suffering, not only to give strength and hope, but to encourage Christians to confront the realities of life with deep spiritual authenticity and an implicit confidence in God.

She describes the early period of her stay in Australia as the time of 'the most terrible suffering of my whole life.' Constant pain limited her movements and ability to work. As she records, 'Physicians said I would never be able to walk again, and I had fears that my life was to be in perpetual conflict with suffering.' The force of such a setback intensified her reliance on God from whom she drew comfort and strength. 'I am thankful that I had this experience, because I am better acquainted with my precious savior. All through my sickness His love, His tender compassion, was my comfort, my continual consolation.'[51]

Dimensions of Ellen White's contribution

The magnitude of Ellen White's contribution to the Seventh-day Adventist church in Australia flows from her vision for Christian education, the depth of her spiritual ministry and her focus on the integrity of Christian leadership. Immediately after her arrival, Ellen White settled for a time in Melbourne. The following year, on 24 August 1892, she participated in the opening of the first Bible school aimed at preparing students for missionary work. During this time of social and economic challenges she focused on the unfinished missionary work in Australia, New Zealand, Africa, India, China and Pacific Islands.[52] With this passion, she paved the way for the establishment of the educational institution known today as Avondale College, officially opened on 28 April 1897 consisting of six staff and ten students. White coupled her pioneering and visionary determination with pragmatism. 'There must not be one day's postponement… if there is but one student present, we will begin the school at the appointed time.'[53]

However, the depth of her contribution moved beyond the visible structures made of bricks and mortar. In 1890, she began to prepare material for her second book on the subject of education, a work mostly compiled during her stay in Australia. In a letter written in 1900, she referred to her forthcoming book.

I want all our teachers and students to have this book as soon as they possibly can. I can hardly await the process of publication. I want the principles contained in this book to go everywhere. We must take a higher stand on education.[54]

Since she had already published a book on Christian education in 1884, one wonders why she was so eager to publish another book. Three key factors appear to have influenced her interest in what she identifies as the higher stand on education. First, she aimed to refocus Adventist education on biblical principles. She counselled the editors of *Christian Education* (1893) to 'attract the attention of their readers to the Book of books' and to focus on the principles that flow from the 'greatest

Teacher that the world ever knew.' Furthermore, she pointed out that such education is found in the Word of God.[55] Second, she maintained a deep sensitivity and concern for people's welfare. In 1898, she wrote a letter to her son Edson in which she referred to some parents' unkind attitudes towards their children. 'Children are treated like dogs, ordered about, scolded and beaten and the children are educated in such a rough manner they can but be coarse and rough… Satan is pleased to have this work going on in families.' She counselled, 'due respect must be given to children, for they are the Lord's heritage.'[56] Third, the most important contributing factor was the completion of her major work on the life of Christ, *The Desire of Ages* (1898) in which she enlarged the themes of God's involvement in the human drama. She wrote, 'In these days we hear much about 'higher education.' The true 'higher education' is that imparted by Him 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'[57] In her new book *Education,* she explored the principles of the higher view of education in the context of the controversy between good and evil theme involving God's plan of salvation and emphasizing education that will last through eternity.[58] From this stance, she discussed the dynamics of God's purpose for life, namely the development of the spiritual, mental, and physical faculties.

With this objective, White envisioned revolutionizing the ethos of Christian education. She wrote, 'The Bible contains all the principles that men need to understand in order to be better fitted either for this life or for the life to come.'[59] She explained 'We must receive a knowledge of God, the Creator, and of Christ the Redeemer, as they are revealed in the sacred word.' The first objective of Christian education meant to direct human minds to God's own revelation of Himself. Here, she does not refer to knowledge based on intellectual and philosophical gymnastics but to a relationally experiential knowledge of God.[60]

The intimacy of such a relationship provides an environment for the highest intellectual development. She explains, 'Whatever line of investigation we pursue to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen, mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all.' She concludes, 'In this communion is found the highest education.'[61] The nature of such education 'is as high as heaven and as broad as the universe.' Further, 'it cannot be completed in this life' but 'will be continued in the life to come.'[62]
White demonstrated that God's purpose for life has a transforming quality and the intimacy of a personal relationship with God leads to a reversal of human attitudes. In that sense, service has a deeper, incarnational meaning. It moves beyond the realm of activism. She wrote, 'He who seeks to transform humanity must himself understand humanity.'[63] Here, she upholds the example of the educator par excellence, Jesus. In her view the service which provides a force for the stability and uplifting of the society, needs to reflect the depth of Christ-like attitude. She wrote,

In every human being He (Christ) discerned infinite possibilities... Looking upon them with hope, He inspired hope. Meeting them with confidence, He inspired trust. Revealing in Himself man's true ideal, He awakened for its attainment, both desire and faith.[64]

For Ellen White, Christ's methodology demonstrates the incarnational, life-inspiring principles. First, He taught how to uplift human value and dignity. Second, He awakened new impulses and opened the possibility of a new life. In other words, through the principles of incarnational service, He helped individuals to discover their God-given uniqueness and inspired them to reach their highest potential. Third, she points out that 'it was not on the cross only that Christ sacrificed Himself for humanity' but His 'every day experience was an outpouring of His life.'[65]

The practical focus of spiritual ministry

On 29 October 1894, Ellen White published an interesting article in which she explored the dynamics of the spiritual journey where 'many lessons are to be learned from Christ, the Great Teacher.'[66] She confronted the readers with a thought-provoking challenge. 'Could our spiritual eyes be opened, we should see that which would never be effaced from the memory as long as life should last.' Her response unfolds her deep passion and sensitivity for people's welfare, not only in the physical sense, but also in their spiritual struggles. It suggests that a spiritual vision enables people to identify with what matters to God. She wrote, 'We should see souls bowed under oppression, loaded with grief and pressed down as a cart beneath the sheaves, and ready to die in discouragement.' However, she took the challenge a step further. 'We should see angels flying swiftly to aid the tempted ones who stand as on the brink of a precipice.'[67]
The depth of her spiritual integrity was reflected in her love and passion for people. Also, it reflected the spirit of God's love and role-modeled what it means to be God's extended hands in the community. In other words, she demonstrated the practical aspects of Christianity. The same year, she attended a camp meeting at Ashfield, Sydney. A short entry in her diary demonstrates her caring nature. 'With Emily, returned home to Granville to get more bedding, mattresses and quilts, for many people could not be accommodated.'[68] The people of Cooranbong, a small village in New South Wales, where she resided for close to five years, in like manner, felt the kindness of her loving care. Thomas Russell, an entrepreneur, reflecting on her presence in the community, wrote the following note:
Mrs White's presence in our village will be greatly missed. The widow and the orphan found in her a helper. She sheltered, clothed and fed those in need and where gloom was cast her presence brought sunshine.[69]

The heart of Christian leadership

The most challenging part of Ellen White's contribution involved her view of spiritual authenticity in Christian leadership. Patrick observes, 'Most females in the nineteenth-century knew their sphere, not places where important decisions were made.'[70] More risky were the attempts to address the spiritual conditions of a male-oriented domain. During a meeting held in Melbourne on 21 December 1891, White felt compelled to address the spiritual condition among the church leaders. She wrote, 'Suddenly and unexpectedly to me the Spirit of God came upon me and I was moved to give a decided testimony concerning the spiritual condition of many.' In the evening, she addressed the ministers 'calling them by name and telling them the Lord had shown me their dangers.' The results were surprising. 'The brethren confessed to one another and fell on one another's necks, weeping and asking for forgiveness.'[71]

A similar occasion arose three years later, in 1894. During the meetings, she felt compelled to address prominent church leaders. 'There is a coldness of heart, an absence of love for God and for those who are of the same faith.'[72] Her message was direct and clear. 'There is need for kindness, deference, courtesy, Christian politeness, fervent love for each other.' Again, with confession some leaders acknowledged they were mistreating other ministers and others admitted they lacked love and tender regard for each other. 'With tears they clasped each other's hands.'[73]

It is evident that for Ellen White, the integrity of the spiritual leadership focused on the heartbeat of God's principle of unconditional love. In this context she wrote, 'How essential that we cultivate love for God to our fellow men. Let all remember that upon these two principles hang all the laws and the prophets.'[74]

Conclusion

Ellen White provided a memorable contribution to the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist faith tradition and her impact in the Australian colonies was no less significant. Her ministry emerged from the depth of her personal relationship with God. She experienced the authenticity of His presence at the ground level of human pain, loneliness, discouragement, failures, disappointments, frustrations and the entire plethora of human brokenness. In the depth of human suffering, she turned to God's communicative silence, 'be still and know that I am God.' In the tranquillity of this place, she explored the full measure and unlimited compassion of God's love. From this vantage point, she voiced the hope and acceptance one finds in Jesus. Thus, she remains a spiritual hero for her voice continues to speak with integrity from the wells of human experience reminding us of hope and God's loving care. The depth of such a spiritual journey illustrates the sincerity, integrity, sensitivity to social injustice and boldness to confront the barriers of set traditions that heroes of many faith traditions have encompassed. In this respect, both Ellen White and Mary MacKillop reveal a bond of commonality and this insight provides a lens through which Seventh-day Adventists can appreciate the heroes of the many faith traditions throughout the world.

Notes

1. JM Butler, 'The Making of a New Order', in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* edited by RL Numbers and JM Butler (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 189.
2. M Bull and K Lockhart, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, second edition, 2007), X111.
3. For further details see: http://adventistarchives.org/docs/Stats/InterestingFacts2007.PDF
4. The other two co-founders were James White (1821-1881) and Joseph Bates (1792-1872).
5. *The Dictionary of American Bibliography*, (Vol XX: 99).
6. Henri JM Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 61.
7. Ellen White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 68.
8. Lesley O'Brien, *Mary MacKillop Unveiled* (Mulgrave, Vic: John Garratt Publishing, 2008), 9.
9. Life Sketches Manuscript 1915.
10. HE Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1998), 48,49.
11. Writing of the experience almost fifty years later, she wrote, "The cruel blow which blighted the joys of earth,was the means of turning my eyes to heaven. I might never have known Jesus, had not the sorrow that clouded my early years led me to seek comfort in him." *Review and Herald*, 25 Nov, 1884.
12. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol 2, 9.
13. Ellen White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 21.
14. *Ibid*, 35.
15. *Ibid*, 36.
16. AL White, *Ellen G White and Her Writings: A Brief Biography* (Silverspring, MD: Ellen G White Estate, Revised, February 1990).
17. Ellen White, *Selected Messages* vol 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1958), 34.
18. Ellen White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1882), 78.
19. J Battisone, *The Great Controversy Theme in EG White's Writings* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978), 113.
20. G Knight, *Meeting Ellen White* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), 94.
21. Douglass, *Messenger of the Lord*, 257-59.
22. Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, vol 3, 280.
23. Roger Coon, *The Great Visions of Ellen White* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1983), 90-117.
24. Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 140.
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