

Ellen White for Today: An Appeal

Seventh-day Adventists face a crisis. Over the last fifty years, Ellen White has lost much of her influence among us.

Adventists are now deeply divided, especially in the places where this “messenger of the Lord” lived and worked: the United States, Australia, and Europe.

Many claim to affirm her spiritual gifts but avoid the hard work of responsibly applying her counsel in new situations. They say they are defending a precious tradition, but they refuse to repudiate outmoded applications or to consider new evidence.

For them, it seems, Ellen White can do no wrong.

Other Adventists have demolished inaccurate claims for Mrs. White but have failed to rebuild on a sounder foundation. They invoke her language when convenient, but do not allow her writings to shape their choices. For too many, she has ceased to be a teacher.

Indeed, for a few, she can do no right.

Year by year, Ellen White’s prophetic voice loses its urgency and power. Soon she may be little more than a literary ornament in sermons—one that seldom moves hearts or changes minds.

As experienced scholars and administrators, we appeal to our fellow believers to reaffirm her value as a leader, preacher, and spiritual guide. Just as it is impossible to explain American democracy without Lincoln or to understand the Reformation without Luther, we affirm that the Advent movement will weaken its witness about the Sabbath, righteousness by faith, or the “Blessed Hope” if we leave out Ellen White, and God’s leading in our founding.

We do not pretend to have all the answers to this crisis. But we know that it is urgent for us to listen anew to Ellen White, using everything we have learned about her humanity, her historical context, her literary sources, and her spiritual development to create a better understanding of her ministry. Whatever her imperfections, we need to acknowledge our profound debt to her in how we live, work, and hope.

This remarkable woman has much to teach both Adventists and the wider world. If we heed her, she will tell us to put the Bible first. She can show us how to combine health insights with ethical impulses, to create schools that build character, to affirm God’s transforming grace, and to rebuke any power that persecutes in the name of God.

Above all, she would still direct our steps toward Christ, illuminate the fullness of salvation, and strengthen our longing for the New Earth—even as we seek to ease the suffering of this old one.