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"God Wrought Marvelously for His Penitent People"[1]

Ellen White and the Apocryphal Esther

Laurence A. Turner

Abstract

Recent research has established Ellen White's familiarity with the Apocrypha. This article focuses on her interaction with Esther, a book which exists in three versions. Two of these were available to White: the Hebrew version considered canonical by Jews and Protestants, and the apocryphal Septuagint Greek version containing various Additions which is canonical for Roman Catholics and some other Christian traditions. The Hebrew version never mentions God or human piety, while the Additions to the Greek version abound with such details. This article investigates whether White's comments on Esther correlate best with the canonical or apocryphal versions and assesses the degree to which she might have been influenced by the Apocrypha. It concludes that her frequent assertions of divine activity and human piety in Esther align better with the apocryphal rather than the canonical versions of the book. However, these similarities are not due to direct influence of the Apocrypha on White. Indeed, there is ample evidence to the contrary. Rather, White shares a common theological goal with the creators of the apocryphal Additions. Both wish to affirm divine providential involvement in human life and the importance of human faithfulness. To achieve this, each transforms the canonical version from its "Godless" form into a conventional biblical narrative of God saving his faithful people. However, while the apocryphal Additions achieve this transformation by recognising the absence of God and human piety, and counter that by adding to the text, White achieves a similar end by ignoring the absence of God and human piety and interpreting the text as if they were present.

[1] White 1917, 602.

In recent years Adventist scholars have demonstrated Ellen White's familiarity with the Apocrypha and investigated how she might have interacted with it. Their research demonstrates that Adventists, like Protestant Christians generally in nineteenth century America, were more familiar with the Apocrypha than most are today. The first to research this area was Graybill (Graybill 1987; 1994), followed by Fortin (Fortin 1998; 2013). These studies revealed that White utilised details from the Apocrypha, in particular 2 Esdras, in her writings. More recently, studies have shown that her indebtedness to the Apocrypha was probably greater than earlier researchers thought (e.g., Casebolt 2018; and in particular Korpman 2018; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2019d; 2019e; 2020).[2] The aim of this present study is to investigate White's comments on Esther, the degree to which these correlate best with the canonical or apocryphal versions of the book, and the implications arising.

1. Esther and its Apocryphal Additions

The Book of Esther provides an intriguing case study for investigating White's relationship to the Apocrypha. Esther has survived in one Hebrew and two Greek versions. The Jewish and Protestant canons contain the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT). It contains neither explicit references to God or gods, nor to any religious practices of Jews or Persians. However, there are two distinct Greek versions of the story, the Septuagint (LXX) and the Alpha-Text (AT), the latter found in four medieval manuscripts. These two Greek traditions are overtly theistic, and thus strikingly different from the MT. The LXX and AT follow the general progression of the MT's plot, though the AT is significantly shorter. The LXX and AT share six "Additions" absent from the MT, which are generally believed to be later than the main text. With one exception, all Additions are explicit about the presence of God and religious practices. Furthermore, the AT has additional theistic references in its main text.[3] Scholars

[2] An intriguing statement of unknown provenance cites Ellen White as saying, "I saw that the Apocrypha was the hidden book, and that the wise of these last days should understand it. I saw that the Bible was the standard Book, that will judge us at the last day. I saw that heaven would be cheap enough, and that nothing was too dear to sacrifice for Jesus, and that we must give all to enter the kingdom" (Anonymous 1850, 34)

[3] For example, "Haman went to his gods" (4:7) to learn the propitious time to attack the Jews; Mordecai makes explicit to Esther that if she will not go to the king "then God will be their help and salvation" (5:9); Haman's wife and wise men inform him that since he planned his revenge

continue to debate the origins of these two Greek versions, their interrelationships, and connections to the MT. (See Clines 1984; Fox 1991; Jobes 1996; LaCocque 1999, 320; Tov 1999; de Troyer 2005, 120; Ego 2017, 9). Such questions, however, are beyond the scope of this study. My focus is on White's interpretation of Esther and how this relates to the two versions of the book available to her – the MT and LXX, as found respectively in the canonical book and the Apocrypha of the KJV. Quotations from the Additions are from the KJV, White's default biblical text.

The LXX Additions transform the MT, not merely adding incidental details but also offering a clear theological perspective at variance with the MT's avoidance of references to God or religion. For example, the Apocrypha greatly expands the introduction to the book. In this, Mordecai has a dream which makes known "what God had determined to do" (Add. 11:12). This creates a backdrop for the rest of the LXX version where further Additions repeatedly invoke divine oversight. The Jews in general and Mordecai and Esther in particular, are observant and pious. For example, they offer prayers to God at the critical point when Mordecai has persuaded Esther to petition the king on behalf of the Jews. The opening words of their prayers are conventional statements of OT faith. Mordecai begins, "O Lord, Lord, the King Almighty: for the whole world is in thy power, and if thou hast appointed to save Israel, there is no man that can gainsay thee" (Add. 13:9). Esther says, "O my Lord, thou only art our King: help me, desolate woman, which have no helper but thee" (Add. 14:3).

Some argue that the Additions' introduction of God and Jewish piety into the text merely makes explicit what is implicit in the MT (e.g., Webb 1993, 30; Beller 1997, 13; Nagel 2008, 149). However, others argue that the Additions aim to counter perceived religious deficiencies in the MT. These include not merely the absence of God but also apparent ethical problems raised by lack of Jewish observance, such as Esther's marriage to an uncircumcised gentile and the hiding of her Jewishness, meaning she was non-observant (see Fox 2003, 58). The theological perspective of the Additions is deterministic, providing explicit evidence for divine presence and action in the narrative,

against Mordecai and the Jews "God is among them" (7:22); at the critical point when Esther unmasks Haman's treachery to the king "God gave her courage" (8:2). Translations are from Clines 1984.

and thus at variance with any understated implicit theology that some claim for the MT (Fox 2003, 60; Nagel 2008, 141).

However one judges the motivations for, or consequences of, the Additions, they make explicit that God is present with the Jews, his chosen people, and they faithfully serve him as he providentially guides the events narrated in the book. It is also clear that Mordecai and Esther are pious observant members of that faith community. None of this is explicit in the canonical MT.

2. Ellen White's Comments, the MT, and the Apocryphal Additions Compared

Do the characteristics of White's interpretation of Esther align better with the canonical (MT) or apocryphal (LXX) version? In the Additions, God's presence is obvious, significant, and providential. We find the same characteristics in White's reading of Esther. Not once does she mention God's absence from the canonical text, even though popular writers of her own time (e.g., Lawson 1870, 149; Williams 1872, 227; Raleigh 1880, 4; Burrows 1889, 2–3) commonly note this. Rather, she simply informs her readers that the positive outcome for the Jews was due to "a Power that reigns among the children of men", an example of "the providence of God" (1908b, 8).

God's absence from the MT means its narrative never invokes him as an actor in saving the Jews from Haman's genocidal plans. Yet the apocryphal Additions make this a feature. God is "the beholder and saviour of all things" (Add. 15:2). Mordecai declares "the Lord hath saved his people, and the Lord hath delivered us from all those evils, and God hath wrought signs and great wonders, which have not been done among the Gentiles" (Add. 10:9. See also 13:9, 15, 17; 14:14, 19). Likewise, for White, no human effort will avail in this crisis, and Esther "and Mordecai realized that unless God should work mightily in their behalf, all their own feeble efforts would be unavailing" (1908b, 9).

The threat to Jewish survival is the focus of the book. Yet the MT never mentions the role of the Jews as the chosen people of God. Indeed, how can it, for it never mentions God. However, the apocryphal Additions make good this lack. In his prayer, Mordecai calls on God to "spare thy people…that hath been thine from the beginning… which thou hast delivered out of Egypt for thine own self" (Add. 13:15–16). For Esther, God is "the Lord God of Israel" who chose them "from among all people" (Add. 14:4–5). At the end of the book Mordecai proclaims that "the Lord hath saved his people…the people of God…So God remembered his people, and justified his inheritance"

(10:9–10, 12). In line with this, White sees the promotion of Mordecai as giving him the opportunity "to promote the welfare of his people. Thus did God bring his chosen people once more into favor at the Medo-Persian court" (1908b, 9). She also uses the experience of the Jews as the people of God in Esther as an analogy for the future experience of Sabbath-keepers, as the people of God, in the last days. "Now, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate his truth and his people" (1908b, 9). Thus, for the Additions and for White, the status of the Jews in Esther as God's people is explicit.

How the Jews act in the narrative produces a similar contrast between the MT on the one hand and the Additions and White on the other. Given the "Godless" nature of the MT it is inevitable that in the narrative no Jew mentions God nor engages in any overtly religious act. As one would expect, however, the Additions present a different picture. In Mordecai's dream the Jews are "the righteous people" and "the whole righteous nation" who respond by "fearing their own evils", and consequently "cried unto God" (Add. 11:7, 9–10). They are a righteous, penitent, prayerful people. Mordecai's later prayer beseeches God on behalf of the Jews, to "'be merciful unto thine inheritance: turn our sorrow into joy, that we may live, O Lord, and praise thy name: and destroy not the mouths of them that praise thee, O Lord.' All Israel in like manner cried most earnestly unto the Lord, because their death was before their eyes" (Add. 13:17–18). Esther's prayer also alludes to the faithfulness of the Jews, for if they are exterminated it would "stop the mouth of them that praise thee" (Add. 14:9). White also asserts the piety of the Jews in Esther. It is they "who preserved the knowledge of the true God" and are truly "penitent" (1908b, 8, 9), for the Jews in Esther were "a people who acknowledged the Lord and served Him" (1910). Their example should encourage the people of God in the final stages of the great controversy, if only like the Jews "in the days of Mordecai", they "put their trust in Him, and by faith rely upon His power" (1899, 3; cf. 1908a, 12). More specifically, "the trying experiences that came to God's people in the days of Esther" will be repeated by the faithful who "keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (1908b, 9). That is, for White, both the Jews of Esther's time and the final remnant are pious and observant.

For the Additions, what is true for the Jews in general holds also for Esther and Mordecai in particular. Their prayers amply demonstrate this. Additionally, note how the Apocrypha puts to rest any unease on the part of readers

about whether Esther remains a faithful observant Jew in the court of Ahasuerus. "I hate the glory of the unrighteous, and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised, and of all the heathen…I have not…drunk the wine of the drink offerings. Neither had thine handmaid any joy since the day that I was brought hither to this present, but in thee, O Lord God of Abraham" (Add. 14:15, 17).

White concurs in general terms with this. Esther fears the Most High and takes time to pray to God when faced with Haman's edict (1908b, 8–9). Mordecai is "a godly man", his exemplary "character and conduct [express] reverence for the law of God" (1908b, 8, 9). Thus, according to White, he stands in the tradition of other faithful Jews who stood for the truth while in exile. Like Daniel and his three friends in Babylon, "bright beams of light shone out amid the darkness" of the Persian court, through Mordecai's witness (1896, 41). He and his family might have chosen to remain in the diaspora rather than returning to Judah but like Ezra and Nehemiah who did return, Mordecai is one of God's "chosen messengers – men through whom the pure light of consecration shone brightly" (1906).

Beyond these similarities, White includes supernatural details not found in the Apocrypha. While on one occasion in the Additions, Esther likens the king metaphorically to "an angel of God" (Add. 15:13), White reveals actual angelic activity. "Angels that excel in strength had been commissioned by God to protect his people" (1908b, 9). More significantly, she asserts the presence of Satan. Given the reticence of the OT to mention Satan it is not altogether unexpected that even the apocryphal Additions never mention him. But for White, Haman is "the one through whom Satan" acts "to counterwork the purposes of God" by exterminating his people. However, God defeated "the plots of the enemy". Not only that, but these dynamics will be played out again in the final persecutions of "the advocates of the Bible Sabbath…[in] the last great conflict of the controversy between truth and error" (White 1908b, 8–9). Given the ubiquity of Satan in White's great controversy paradigm, if she had omitted him from her comments on Esther, one would be as surprised by that as one is by the absence of God from the canonical text. She frequently introduces Satan into her readings of biblical texts that never mention him, just as the Additions incorporate God into Esther. For example, one needs White's insights to be aware that "Satan…had taken Samson captive" (White 1880, 569), "Satan employed [Peninnah] as his agent to harass [Hannah]

(White 1881, 469), or that "Satan was weaving a snare to compass [Saul's] ruin, and the ruin of his kingdom" (White 1888, 544).

While White's theistic and religious interpretations of Esther do occasionally go beyond those of the Additions, their similarities are greater than these differences. In contrast to the canonical MT, divine presence and action, as well as pious human observance, abound in White's exposition, as they do in the Additions. Perhaps most importantly, White never addresses, nor even shows awareness of, the main conundrum of the canonical Esther that has baffled readers for centuries: why is God absent from MT Esther? This situation raises several related questions. How can God, Satan, angels and pious devotion of the Jewish faithful appear everywhere in White's interpretation but nowhere in the canonical text itself? And how can any interpretation of the canonical book be complete if it never considers the "Godless" nature of the book itself? In a book characterised by divine absence why should divine presence simply be assumed? Could the nature of White's interpretation indicate that she was influenced by the overtly theistic apocryphal Additions? Or, does White simply make *explicit* what is already clear to any reader of MT Esther, through its numerous *implicit* indications of divine presence and Jewish devotion?[4]

Before addressing these questions, however, we should note how White's avoidance of the absence of God from Esther contrasts with the approach of her contemporary late nineteenth-century Adventist authors. Not only do they acknowledge God's absence, but some exploit it theologically. For example, Stephen Haskell notes "that God's name is not mentioned" and suggests the reason for this is to highlight "God's providence" – his understated actions in human history "vividly brought out in the book of Esther" (Haskell 1889b, 104). An anonymous contributor to *Signs of the Times* is aware that Esther "does not once mention God, though the Septuagint version does". The purpose of God's absence from the canonical MT is suggested by this author to be so that "it might the more readily be read by those who were not Jews, without prejudice against the people of God" (Anonymous 1893, 270). Citing Esther, Daniel Bourdeau refutes those who argue that Christians have no obligation to observe Sabbath because the New Testament does not condemn

[4] Rodriguez provides a convenient argument for this latter position which also deals comprehensively with arguments for the former Rodriguez 1995.

Sabbath-breaking. He asks, "the book of Esther does not mention the name of God. Is there, therefore, no God?" (Bourdeau 1876, 32). It is clear from these representative examples, that such Adventist authors presuppose the Hebrew version of Esther, and their logic requires God to be absent from the text they are commenting on (see also e.g., Anonymous 1890, 2; 1899, 15; 1908, 16).

3. Scholarly Responses to the Absence of God in MT Esther

The history of interpretation has developed two main approaches to the absence of God and Jewish piety from MT Esther. On the one hand, that God can be found quite easily in the text if one follows its implicit clues. On the other hand, that God's absence is significant and serves theological purposes. Consequently, for either approach, God, though absent from the text, is central to it. If so, White's exposition of Esther is not entirely misplaced. However, neither finding God in the text, nor positing a theological rationale for his absence, is straightforward.

The first approach, that God is there if one knows how to find him, has produced a bewildering array of suggestions. We have room here only for representative examples in abbreviated form. Popular proposals include those that find the divine name יהוה hidden in acrostics formed by initial or final consonants of consecutive Hebrew words (e.g., Bullinger 1894; Abadie 2009; Roux 2015), or by means of typology which reveals Christ and the gospel in numerous details (e.g., Vischer 1937; Beckett 2002; Wells 2013, 16–18). However, the claims made for the significance of alleged intentional acrostics are easily refuted and typological interpretation of Esther has been too subjective (see Turner 2013; 2016).

Other details in MT Esther might at first sight seem more persuasive. Foremost among these is the message Mordecai sent to Esther to persuade her to go to the king to plead on behalf of the Jews. "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this" (Esth 4:13–14 NRSV).[5] Surely, some argue, deliverance arising "from another place" (מִמָּקוֹם

[5] The rhetoric of v. 14b was cited frequently by White to encourage faithful believers to participate in the divine plan of salvation (e.g., 1882, 5:321; 1884, 65; 1903, 262).

אַחֵר) is a reference to God's salvation (Levenson 1976, 448; Berlin 2001, 44; Simon-Shoshan 1997, 16). Others object that while "place" was a rabbinic circumlocution for God, this usage is too late to occur in Esther (e.g. Blumenthal 1995, 80; Tomasino 2016, 250; Ego 2017, 250). So, rather than being an understated allusion to God, "from another place" could simply mean that deliverance will come from some unknown human source, such as a change of political regime or some other Jew who would step forward. However, a more fruitful approach is to observe that the traditional translation of Mordecai's words in v. 14 as a definitive statement, is likely incorrect, for his words understood this way are incoherent. Paraphrased, his words would mean that he tells Esther, a) you are as vulnerable as all the other Jews; b) if you remain silent the Jews will be saved in some other way; c) but you and your father's house will die; d) perhaps you have become queen for this very crisis. There are two clear problems in this rendition. First, if the Jews will be saved even if Esther does nothing, then there is no crisis. Second, if the Jews will be saved regardless, why will Esther and her father's house perish?

Wiebe (Wiebe 1991) was the first to suggest the following persuasive answer to this enigma, now accepted by a growing number of scholars (e.g., Dunne 2014, 35; Queen-Sutherland 2016, 308; Ego 2017, 251–52). He argues that rather than making a statement, Mordecai is asking a rhetorical question: "if you remain silent at this time, *will* relief and deliverance arise for the Jews from another place?" The implied answer is "No". Consequently, along with the rest of the Jews, she and her father's house will perish. That is, Mordecai believes that Esther is the only hope the Jews have. In most cases in biblical Hebrew, when an obvious interrogative such as "who?" (מִי) is not present, a Hebrew question is indicated by the interrogative particle הֲ. Nevertheless, some questions are obvious even in the absence of this particle. For example, Mal 1:8 contains three questions, but only the third has הֲ. The first two do not, but the context demands they are questions. Therefore, Wiebe's solution is true to Hebrew syntax, enables Mordecai's words to be coherent, and maintains the book's silence regarding God.[6]

[6] Macchi suggests a similar solution by taking the verbal form יַעֲמוֹד as a jussive ("Let relief and deliverance arise"). This understands Mordecai's words to be fatalistic – there is no hope (see Macchi 2004, 67–68; 2016, 305). Tomasino still argues for Mordecai's words as a statement, but his argument contains much conjecture. See Tomasino 2016, 247.

Many take Esther's response to Mordecai's words to indicate her piety and thus to infer the presence of God. She tells him, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast (צום) as you do" (Esth 4:16). Many assume that fasting aims to influence divine action; it is an act of intercession with God. "Clearly, Esther's request for her people to fast is asking them to petition God" (Beller 1997, 8). Some claim that "the presence of fasting indicates religiosity, because prayer was always associated with fasting" (Hummel 1987, 195). If fasting necessitates praying, then the Jews in general also pray, for "there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting (צום) and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes" (Esth 4:3). However, the biblical evidence suggests that fasting does not always demand prayer. For example, when Saul and his sons died, the men of Jabesh Gilead "took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted (צום) seven days" (1 Sam 31:13). A little later, David heard of the death of Saul and Jonathan and he and his men "mourned and wept, and fasted (צום) until evening for Saul and for his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword" (2 Sam 1:12). Both passages use the same term for fasting as Esth 4:16 and as there, do not mention prayer. This is presumably because as stated in 2 Sam 1:12, they are fasting for those who are dead. Fasting here is not aimed at interceding with God for Saul, his sons and the Israelite army, for they are deceased. Thus, fasting can be associated with prayer but not necessarily so. It appears to be a culturally appropriate response to bad news (see Macchi 2016, 308–9), especially death as seen above, illustrated also by David's response to Abner's murder (2 Sam 3:35). If so, then fasting with no mention of prayer in Esther, in response to the potential deaths of numerous Jews, would fit the same pattern. Indeed, if Esther's fasting did require prayer to God, then it would raise a problem for the narrative. Mordecai had told her to hide her Jewish identity, and she complied (Esth 2:10). But now, she and her maids at court fast together (Esth 4:16), which if coupled with prayer to God would

reveal to the court she was Jewish, thus disobeying Mordecai's instructions.[7] Therefore, given the absence of religious devotion elsewhere in the book, her fasting here cannot be taken as incontrovertible evidence of her piety in general or of her praying in particular (see e.g., Krygier 2003, 58; Day 2005, 85–86; Macchi 2016, 119; Ego 2017, 255–56).[8]

It is worth noting that many more alleged intimations of God and religious observance in MT Esther have been suggested. These include intertextual links with God's working with Moses (e.g. 2:10, 20 cf. Exod 2:10), Joseph and Daniel (exiled Israelites/Jews in a foreign court); Mordecai's assumed motivation for not bowing to Haman being religious (3:2); the conversion (?) of Persians to Judaism (8:17); statements made by Haman's wife and his advisers interpreted as a nod to the divine force working on behalf of the Jews (6:13), etc. Space prohibits further discussion but suffice to say, for every alleged example of divine presence or human devotion in the canonical text, there are persuasive counter-arguments (See e.g., Stern 2010, 44; Tomasino 2016, 216–17; Ego 2017, 313–17; Sun 2021, 271–72).

In contrast to those who find God easily in the MT, others see the absence of God as real and theologically significant. For example, some argue that belief in the holiness and transcendence of God developed until it reached an extreme position reflected in Esther. Over time, pious Jews no longer pronounced the divine name יהוה, seen in the permanent biblical Qere (what is spoken) of replacing it with אָדוֹן (LORD). Esther, it is claimed, takes this to a radical yet theologically understandable point of eliminating יהוה from the Kethib (what is written) itself. If so, then God's absence from the text of Esther is evidence of deep piety by the author and presumably also by the book's original hearers/readers attuned to this manoeuvre (see Schultz 1877, 16; Horwitz 1998, 98–99; cf. Ombrosi 1999). Its purpose is to flag the presence of the

[7] Tomasino sees this problem but tries to overcome it by assuming that Esther's maids must already have known that she was Jewish, Tomasino 2016, 248–49. But this manoeuvre simply underlines the problem caused. If they already know, then Esther has made her Jewishness known already – against Mordecai's express command (and if they do not already know, they soon will).

[8] Macchi notes that fasting had several purposes, including a corporate response to a crisis (e.g., Judg 20:26), which could include an appeal to God, an accompaniment to repentance, which presupposes confession to God (e.g., Isa 58:3–6), as well as a conventional accompaniment to mourning. See Macchi 2016, 308–309.

unmentionable God. However, while one can easily demonstrate that the pious avoided enunciating God's name, that they should also not mention acts of religious devotion or practice is problematical. One might think that extreme piety that cannot mention God himself, even by a circumlocution, would be more, rather than less likely to catalogue the faithful and Torah-obedient acts of believers. But MT Esther is silent. It eliminates not only God but also religious acts of any kind, not even giving a hint that the Jews might see return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple as aspirations. Consequently, many have argued that Esther, Mordecai and the rest of the Jews are presented not as worthy of emulation but rather as personifications of what occurs in Judaism when Jews turn their backs on God and his covenant (e.g., Stern 2010; Dunne 2014, 15–67; Tomasino 2016, 121). Similar negative assessments of the characters in Esther appeared in Adventist periodicals contemporary with White (e.g., Sutherland 1905, 99; Anonymous 1905, 674).

Thus, there are difficulties attending both major explanations for the "Godless" nature of MT Esther. Neither the view that God and Jewish piety are easily discoverable in many implicit textual allusions, nor that divine absence serves an obvious and understandable theological purpose, are without considerable difficulties. Each requires presuppositions that the text struggles to confirm. If God could be found easily, or his absence be so obviously theologically significant, one wonders why the theistic and pietistic apocryphal Additions were deemed necessary. Consequently, it cannot be argued that White's account of Esther, replete with divine action and human faithfulness, simply makes explicit what is clearly implicit in the text. If God's presence and human piety are indeed implicit in the canonical book, they are anything but clear.

4. Assessing Ellen White's Relationship to the Apocryphal Additions

Given the general similarities of theological perspective shared by White and the apocryphal Additions, one might be tempted to conclude that they heavily influenced her. But more telling than the general similarities are the large number of specific details in the Additions that she does not mention. For example, she ignores Mordecai's introductory dream (Add. 11:5–12). If the Apocrypha influenced her comments on Esther, this omission seems like a missed opportunity. For Mordecai's dream includes imagery appropriate to White's apocalyptic great controversy theological template. The dualism is

clear. He sees "two great dragons" preparing for conflict. Indeed, "all nations were prepared to battle" against "the righteous people". The fate of this righteous remnant is in the balance, but the powers opposed to the righteous people are overcome (Add. 11:7–11). The dualism continues in Mordecai's later interpretation of his dream. He identifies the two dragons as himself and Haman, representatives respectively of the "righteous people…the people of God", and "the Gentiles". The Lord saves his people from "all those evils" intended by the nations (Add. 10:9–12). If White can draw eschatological lessons for last-day Sabbath-keepers from Mordecai simply sitting at the gate (see her allusions to 2:19, 3:2; 5:9, etc, in White 1908b, para. 21. Cf. 1917a, 605; 1882b, 5:450), how much more would Mordecai's dream, replete with apocalyptic-like imagery, serve her purpose. But on this, she is silent, as she is on the information in the Additions that two maids accompanied Esther when she went to see the king, and that the king leaped to her aid when she fainted in front of him (Add. 15:7–8), or Esther's words saying she abhorred "the bed of the uncircumcised" and did not participate in the practices of Persian religion (Add. 14:15, 17), or the king's acknowledgement of God (Add. 16:4, 21). In line with the MT (3:12–13), White mentions that the king sent letters to his provincial officials to announce the pogrom against "a certain people", but she divulges nothing about its wording – found exclusively in the Additions (Add. 13:1–7). Likewise, the content of the king's second letter that reverses his first is summarised in the MT (8:9–13), followed by White (1908b, 8), but its wording is given only in the Additions, and there expansively (Add. 16:1–24). White could easily have exploited some of what the king writes for her characteristic theological schema. For example, "Almighty God hath turned to joy unto them the day, wherein the chosen people should have perished" (Add. 16:21). This affirmation of God's salvation of his people from the powers arraigned against them is also an essential motif in White's great controversy template. Yet she ignores this apocryphal detail.

Thus, on the evidence investigated so far, we may conclude that White's exposition of Esther exhibits similarities to the Additions in that they both mention God explicitly and highlight Jewish piety. *Yet, she does not follow the Additions by referring to any incident or by utilising any phraseology contained solely in the Additions*. However, there appears to be one exception to this rule: her assertions that Esther, Mordecai and the Jews prayed to God (e.g. 1908b, 8; 1911a, 6). Is this evidence for the direct influence of the Additions? Matthew

Korpman, for example, argues that it is. He notes, "One of the key markers for recognizing her dependence on this material [the Additions] is her reliance on one detail that the canonical book of Esther never included: prayer. Again and again, Mrs White refers to Esther's prayers, an idea absent from the canonical version of the book" (Korpman 2020, 131). We have already seen the truth of this broad observation – MT Esther never mentions prayer. Moving beyond this generalisation, however, Korpman claims that the apocryphal Additions are White's "most likely source or background referent" for Esther's praying. Specifically, "that Mrs White identifies one of Esther's supplications as having come directly before she saw the King appears to confirm that she is specifically referring to these [Additions], since Esther 14 provides a prayer with the explicit identification that it was given shortly before she visited the King (15:1)" (Korpman 2020, 132). While this might seem a reasonable conclusion to draw, further investigation renders it unlikely.

According to the MT, in preparation for going to the king, Esther calls on Mordecai and her fellow Jews to fast with her – nothing more (Esth 4:16). According to the Additions, before she goes to the king, Esther also prays (e.g., Adds. 14:3; 15:1). As we saw above, many simply assume, incorrectly, that to fast is, without exception, also to pray. Thus commentators, without any recourse to arguing from the Additions, frequently assert that prayer should be assumed in Esther's exhortation to fast (e.g., Duguid 2005, 52; Wahl 2009, 123; Goswell 2010; Tomasino 2016, 118, 249–50; Melton 2018, 158). The same is true of pietistic nineteenth-century American authors, writing in the same style and to the same readership as White, and restricting themselves to the canonical book. For example, like White, they affirm Esther's general piety, "[Mordecai] took her to his home, supplying her wants, giving her a suitable education, and training her in habits of obedience and piety" (Taylor 1891, 141); her trust in God, "Esther relied upon a power higher than that of Ahasuerus" (Burrows 1889, 259); and even the role of Satan, "But when the master passion of revenge took possession of [Haman], then by working upon it Satan transformed him into a very fiend" (Burrows 1889, 83). Mordecai also encourages Esther to have "faith in God, and in the spirit of prophecy" (Lady 1835, 35). None of these statements would be out of place in the writings of White, and like her, none relies on the Additions (See also, American Sunday-School Union 1852, 259–60; Lawson 1870, 240; Williams 1872, 227; Gough 1889, 177).

White's Adventist contemporaries make the same assumptions. For example, George Butler wonders why Mordecai refused to bow before Haman. "Why he did not, the record does not explicitly say, but leaves us to conjecture the reason" (Butler 1890a, 202). This comment shows careful attention to the canonical text. He clearly does not have the apocryphal Additions in mind, for there, Mordecai gives his motivation explicitly. That is, "I did this, that I might not prefer the glory of man above the glory of God: neither will I worship any but thee, O God" (Add. 13:14). However, despite his focus on the canonical text, Butler states in the second instalment of the same article that before going to the king, Esther "asks her friends to fast *and pray* while she and her maids do the same" (emphasis mine) (Butler 1890b, 217). Yet the canonical text makes no reference to prayer. Butler, like numerous others, has assumed that fasting necessarily includes prayer. Butler's claim that Esther prayed before going to the king is not evidence that he has changed focus from the canonical version, when discussing Mordecai's refusal to bow, to the apocryphal version when reflecting on Esther's fasting. Another careful Adventist reader of the canonical Esther, noting the general absence of God from the MT but not the LXX, continues that Esther's "fasting *implies* earnest seeking of God" (emphasis mine) (Anonymous 1893, 270). This commonly accepted implication, I would argue, explains Butler's reference to prayer, not his reliance on the apocryphal Additions. I would argue that it also explains White's assumption of prayer in the same context. (Further Adventist contemporaries of White who make similar assumptions include Canright 1872, 49; Waggoner 1882, 138; Haskell 1889a, 121).

Perhaps the most explicit example of an Adventist author assuming prayer solely because of the canonical text's reference to Esther's fasting, is found in an anonymous article from 1905. Commenting on 4:16, the writer simply asserts, "Esther requests that for three days all join with her in fasting and prayer" (Anonymous 1905, 138). That this claim is not based on the apocryphal Addition is self-evident because the article later informs the reader that "the Apocrypha states that the king looked fiercely upon her, and she fell fainting. God then changed the spirit of the king, and he sprang and lifted her up, and bade her not to fear" (Anonymous 1905, 138). That is, this author is at pains to point out the distinction between the canonical and apocryphal texts, even providing in their entirety chs. 14–15 of the Additions for comparison. Despite this careful separation, when commenting on the canonical text, the

article claims that Esther and Mordecai prayed, even though that detail is absent. The author has simply assumed that fasting always included prayer.
Finally, readers of White should also consider that she frequently recounts how biblical characters prayed on specific occasions when the texts themselves are silent. For example, after God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, she tells us "he bowed upon the earth, and *prayed*, as he had never *prayed* before". After Jacob left Laban and reached the Jabbok he "decided to spend the night in *prayer*, and he desired to be alone with God.… With earnest cries and tears he made his *prayer* before God." While Joseph was on his way down to Egypt he "then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he *prayed* that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile" (emphases supplied) (White 1890, 148, 196–97, 213–14). That White habitually pictures biblical characters praying at moments of crisis, often when this cannot be derived exegetically from the text, should dampen our enthusiasm for believing her references to prayer in her comments on Esther betray a dependence on the apocryphal Additions.[9]

[9] It also seems clear that Josephus, whom White cites elsewhere (White 1911b, 27), did not influence her presentation of Esther praying. In his account in *Antiquities of the Jews* 11.184–296, Josephus writes that Esther prayed when she fasted. Most probably the Apocrypha influenced him, for many details in his account show reliance on the LXX Additions. These include Esther swooning before the king (Add. 15:1–16), and specific details in the King's second letter such as the hope of the guilty to escape divine judgement (Add. 16:1–24). Josephus's explicit reliance on the LXX for details absent from White's exposition makes him an unlikely influence on her.

5. Conclusion

The canonical MT Esther never mentions God or religious practice. The apocryphal LXX Additions do so repeatedly, as does White in her comments on the book. Therefore, her exposition is closer to the perspective of the apocryphal rather than the canonical version of the book. Despite persuasive evidence that she read and alluded to the Apocrypha (e.g., 2 Esdras) in other places, the similarities to the Apocrypha in her comments on Esther are not evidence of its direct influence on her. She never alludes to any of the unique acts or speeches found in the Additions but not in the MT. She ignores material in the Additions that would fit into her great controversy theological paradigm. One apparent exception is her reference to prayer, and in particular, to the prayer offered by Esther before going in to see the king. However, the most plausible explanation for this is that the MT refers to fasting at this very point. The erroneous assumption of many commentators, scholarly and popular, is that fasting necessarily includes prayer. The great majority simply assert this point with no reference to the apocryphal Additions. Thus, White's reference to prayer in the context of fasting should be understood against this background. In addition, her habit of ascribing prayer to characters throughout Scripture when the biblical text does not mention it demonstrates it is not necessary to invoke the Apocrypha when she does the same in her comments on Esther.

The similarities shared by the apocryphal Additions to Esther and White's comments on the book are best explained by their sharing a common goal. Both assume that God governs human history providentially, projecting this conviction onto the theologically blank canvas of the Esther narrative. The Apocrypha achieves this by its Additions and White through her commentary. The LXX translators *recognise the absence of God and piety and add to the canonical text* by including six Additions, to ensure God and piety are seen. White *ignores the absence of God and interprets the canonical text* by assuming God and piety are present.

Those exegetes and biblical theologians who continue in the Adventist tradition cannot ignore White's contribution. Nevertheless, the enigma of MT Esther – the "Godless" nature of its text – deserves more attention from Adventist scholars. The main question should not be, where might we find God suggested by, alluded to, inferred or hidden in the text? But rather, what narrative or theological purpose is served by Esther not only omitting God but

failing to mention any human desire to know him? Neither the canonical text, nor the apocryphal Additions, nor Ellen White give us any explicit answer to that question.

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Zusammenfassung

Aktuelle Forschungen haben Ellen Whites Vertrautheit mit den Apokryphen nachgewiesen. Dieser Artikel konzentriert sich auf ihren Umgang mit Esther, einem in drei Fassungen vorliegenden Buch. Zwei Fassungen standen White zur Verfügung: die hebräische Version, die von Juden und Protestanten als kanonisch angesehen wird, und die apokryphe griechische Version der Septuaginta mit verschiedenen Zusätzen, die für die römisch-katholische und einige andere christliche Traditionen kanonisch ist. Die hebräische Fassung erwähnt Gott oder menschliche Frömmigkeit nie, während in den Zusätzen zur griechischen Fassung solchen Details sehr zahlreich sind. In diesem Artikel wird untersucht, ob Whites Kommentare zu Esther am ehesten mit der kanonischen oder der apokryphen Fassung übereinstimmen, und es wird erwogen, inwieweit sie von den Apokryphen beeinflusst worden sein könnte. Das Resultat: Ihre häufigen Behauptungen über göttliches Handeln und menschliche Frömmigkeit im Buch Esther stimmen eher mit den apokryphen als mit den kanonischen Buchfassungen überein. Diese Ähnlichkeiten sind jedoch nicht auf einen direkten Einfluss der Apokryphen auf White zurückzuführen. In der Tat gibt es allerlei Hinweise für das Gegenteil. Vielmehr teilt White ein gemeinsames theologisches Ziel mit den Verfassern der apokryphen Zusätze. Beide wollen das Eingreifen der göttlichen Vorsehung in das menschliche Leben und die Bedeutung der menschlichen Treue bekräftigen. Um dies zu erreichen, transformieren beide die kanonische Version von ihrer „gottlosen" Form in eine konventionelle biblische Erzählung, in der Gott sein gläubiges Volk rettet. Während die apokryphen Zusätze diese Umwandlung erreichen, indem sie die Abwesenheit von Gott und menschlicher Frömmigkeit anerkennen und dem Text etwas hinzufügen, erreicht White ein ähnliches Ziel, indem sie die Abwesenheit von Gott und menschlicher Frömmigkeit ignoriert und den Text so auslegt, als ob beides vorhanden wäre.

Résumé

Des études récentes ont établi la familiarité d'Ellen White avec les écrits apocryphes. Cet article se concentre sur son interaction avec le livre d'Esther, un livre qui existe en trois versions. Deux d'entre elles étaient à la disposition d'Ellen White: la version hébraïque considérée comme canonique par les juifs et les protestants, et la version grecque apocryphe de la Septante contenant diverses additions, qui est canonique pour les catholiques romains et certaines autres traditions chrétiennes. La version hébraïque ne mentionne jamais Dieu ou la piété humaine, alors que les ajouts à la version grecque abondent en détails de ce type. Cet article cherche à savoir si les commentaires d'Ellen White sur Esther correspondent mieux aux versions canoniques ou apocryphes et évalue dans quelle mesure elle a pu être influencée par les apocryphes. Il conclut que ses fréquentes affirmations sur l'activité divine et la piété humaine dans Esther correspondent mieux aux versions apocryphes qu'aux versions canoniques du livre. Cependant, ces similitudes ne sont pas dues à une influence directe des apocryphes sur White. En effet, il existe de nombreuses preuves du contraire. White partage plutôt un objectif théologique commun avec les créateurs des ajouts apocryphes. Tous deux souhaitent affirmer l'implication divine providentielle dans la vie humaine et l'importance de la fidélité humaine. Pour y parvenir, chacun transforme la version canonique de sa forme « sans Dieu » en un récit biblique conventionnel de Dieu sauvant son peuple fidèle. Cependant, alors que les ajouts apocryphes parviennent à cette transformation en reconnaissant l'absence de Dieu et de la piété humaine et en y remédiant par des ajouts au texte, White parvient à un résultat similaire en ignorant l'absence de Dieu et de la piété humaine et en interprétant le texte comme s'ils étaient présents.

Laurence A. Turner, Th.M., Ph.D., is the General Editor of *Spes Christiana*. He is also a Principal Lecturer Emeritus in Old Testament at Newbold College of Higher Education and Adjunct External Higher Degree Research Supervisor at Avondale University. E-mail: lturner@newbold.ac.uk