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## Lying for God: The Uses of the Apocrypha

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## Lying for God: The Uses of Apocrypha

Stephen E. Robinson

I must make it clear at the beginning of this paper that I am writing as a Latter-day Saint to an LDS audience. This means that I am liable to use terms and categories in a way that is familiar to the Latter-day Saints, but which might make my non-Mormon colleagues uneasy. This, however, is one of the liberties one must be allowed when addressing a body of co-religionists. I will be using the term *apocrypha* in the manner suggested by C. C. Torrey<sup>1</sup> to mean all extra-canonical literature, and examples will be drawn from the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, the New Testament apocrypha, the Nag Hammadi codices, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In this paper I intend to deal primarily with the element of deception in the production and employment of apocryphal literature, particularly as it is revealed by the devices of pseudonymity and pseudepigraphy. I am defining pseudonymity here as an

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author's intentional adoption of another persona, not merely as a pen name but as an assumed identity. Thus the Testament of Solomon is pseudonymous because the author has clearly adopted the persona of Solomon and speaks, as Solomon, in the first person. On the other hand, *Huckleberry Finn* would not be pseudonymous by my definition even though Samuel Clemens used the *nom de plume* Mark Twain, because Clemens did not adopt a persona other than his own; that is, we may assume that Clemens did not return royalty checks made out to Mark Twain, but rather cashed them unashamedly. Sam Clemens *was* Mark Twain, and there was no real possibility of confusing one person for the other.

Apocryphal literature may be either primarily or secondarily pseudonymous. That is, the false attribution may be due either to the author of the document, in which case the pseudonymity is primary, or it may be due to a copyist or redactor, in which case the pseudonymity is secondary. Secondary pseudonymity may even be accidental, since an originally anonymous work can be mistakenly attributed to some person or other by later tradition. Fortunately enough, this was often the case, as with the Odes of Solomon, for example. I say fortunately because it is unlikely that these documents would have been preserved if they had not been attributed to ancient heroes, and in the case of the Odes we would have been deprived of these beautiful early Christian poems.<sup>2</sup> The attribution to an ancient hero gave these books a stature they would not otherwise have enjoyed, and they became valuable or authoritative and could even enjoy the status of scripture by virtue of their claimed association with the prophet or patriarch. Much apocryphal literature is either primarily or secondarily pseudonymous, and often therefore intended by either the author or the editor to be accepted as something it was not. Herein lies the possibility of deception.

Of course, not all apocryphal books involve the possibility of deceit. Some of these documents were written anonymously for edification or entertainment, and were circulated in antiquity merely as good and useful books. They never were intended to be taken as inspired or as authoritative, nor were they pseudony-

mous. C. S. Lewis's fictional *Chronicles of Narnia* circulate in just this way among modern Christians and are read for both edification and entertainment, but they are seldom confused with the scriptures. Such an edifying and entertaining composition in antiquity was the book of Ahiqar, whose story was widely known to both Jews and Gentiles for centuries before the birth of Christ and had some small influence on the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Still, the rabbis excluded Ahiqar from the Hebrew canon at the end of the first century A.D., probably because they recognized its fictional character and wished to distinguish between *inspired* literature and merely *inspirational* fiction.

It is fashionable among some Latter-day Saints to blame the rabbis for excluding certain apocrypha from the canon of scripture and to accuse them of thereby removing "plain and precious truths" (cf. 1 Nephi 13:20–40). But it needs to be pointed out forcefully that if "plain and precious truths" were removed from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, as the Latter-day Saints believe, these "plain and precious truths" are *not* preserved in the apocryphal literature either. In fact, judging strictly from the extant books, I would say that the Jewish rabbis and the Christian fathers did a pretty good job of deciding what was inspired and what was not. I do not deny that "plain and precious" truths were removed from the scripture, or even that the rabbis and the fathers were probably responsible. However, I feel it is a mistake for Latter-day Saints to assume they will find what was removed secreted among the apocryphal books. It just isn't there! Besides, I suspect that what most of the Latter-day Saints are looking for in the apocrypha is not really the "plain and precious," but rather the "complex and mysterious."

A further example of literature preserved among the apocrypha that does *not* misrepresent its origins is the book of Jesus ben Sirach, also called the book of Ecclesiasticus. Here the author employs no pseudonymity and makes no claim for the authority of inspiration but clearly states that he has collected the wisdom and meditations of his revered grandfather:

My grandfather Jesus, having given himself much to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books of our fathers, and

having acquired considerable familiarity therein, was induced also himself to take a part in writing somewhat pertaining to instruction and wisdom. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Other devotional literature among the apocrypha might include the Syriac Hymn of the Pearl; the Hymns from Qumran (1QH); and, if we disallow the secondary attribution to Solomon, the early Christian Odes of Solomon.<sup>5</sup> Closely related to these are prose works probably intended by their authors to be understood as parables and allegories, or even what we might call “inspirational stories,” but which could later be taken by the credulous as reports of actual events. In this category we can probably place Judith and the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles from Nag Hammadi.<sup>6</sup> Also among the Nag Hammadi codices, the preservation of the Sentences of Sextus and of a passage from Plato’s *Republic* reminds us that even a religious community could preserve and use material it did not necessarily accept as scripture, and again we must guard against equating what might have been preserved as merely inspirational with what was revered as inspired.<sup>7</sup>

Other documents often classified as apocryphal are actually nothing more than historical works. To this category belong 1 and 5 Maccabees and some of the fragments of historians like Hecataeus of Abdera, or Thallus.<sup>8</sup> It is unclear in what sense some of these works can really be called apocryphal, since some of the writers may not even have been Jewish.<sup>9</sup> More suited to our discussion are the works of the Jewish “revisionist” historians, those authors who for religious or nationalistic motives recounted events not as they actually happened, but as they *should* have happened. In this way 2 Maccabees “improves” upon 1 Maccabees much as a Hollywood script generally “improves” the historical events that inspire it. In this category we might also include 3 Maccabees, 1 Esdras, or the fragments of the historian Demetrius. While these revisionist historical writings are certainly not objective, and although they do at times tax one’s credulity, they are not pseudonymous (though some other historical works are), nor were they intended to be accepted as scripture. Finally, an originally anonymous work might have been attributed in good faith to an ancient figure by mistake

(secondary pseudonymity), especially if that ancient figure were the subject of the document in question.

In apocrypha of the preceding types deception is not an issue. These documents are apocryphal only in the sense that they are “extra-canonical,” and not in the sense that they purport to be “hidden” scripture, or because they are deemed “spurious” (pseudonymous). And while some of the books in these categories had tremendous popular appeal and influence, they were probably not accepted *even in antiquity* as inspired by God in any way which would give them normative power. Nevertheless, even when these are set aside we are still left with a large number of apocryphal books which either *are* pseudonymous or *do* claim to be revelations from God, or both. It is in relation to these that the problem of deception is most at issue.

But to what extent must pseudonymity necessarily constitute a deception? Might there not be some legitimate reason why ancient authors would write pseudonymously without creating a deception? It has been suggested, for example, that authors wrote pseudonymously to escape governmental persecution. But this argument merely confirms that the device was adopted to deceive while failing to explain why a pseudonym adopted to deceive a government might not also deceive its other readers. Besides, in such a case, why would pseudonymity be preferred over anonymity? If an author is afraid of reprisals, why put anyone’s name on the composition at all? Furthermore, it is not merely the *name* of the ancient figure that is generally adopted, but his whole *persona*, and this can hardly be explained by a mere desire on the part of the author to remain unknown.

It has been proposed that in some cases material being reduced to writing for the first time might have had a long oral history, or might have been distilled from many different sources by an editor. In these cases the author or editor, it is claimed, would not want to take credit for the stories and so would name them after the person they were about: “the Book of So-and-so.”<sup>10</sup> While this explanation probably accounts for the attribution of *some* narrative compositions, or for the narrative components of some composite documents like the Ethiopic Enoch, it fails to account for those documents wherein the

ancient hero speaks in the first person or where the book is otherwise clearly represented as contemporary with the events it describes.<sup>11</sup> To say that the editor of the traditions received them in this form merely begs the question, for then we need another theory to account for the pseudonymous nature of his sources. In the long run, this explanation is inadequate for the whole of the pseudepigrapha, for it explains the pseudonymity of only part of the documents and leaves us still needing another theory to explain the remainder.

It has often been said that pseudonymity was an accepted literary device in antiquity, and that it deceived no one because everyone recognized it as a mere convention.<sup>12</sup> However, ancient sources have not yet been found which would directly support this contention.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the few indications that we have from the time of Herodotus to that of the Church fathers seem to indicate that those who passed off their own work under someone else's name were frowned upon. Herodotus, in the fifth century B.C., said of one Onomacritus:

He had been expelled from Athens by Hipparchus for inserting in the verses of Musaeus a prophecy that the islands off Lemnos would disappear under water—Lesus of Hermione had caught him in the very act of the forgery. Before his banishment he had been a close friend of Hipparchus.<sup>14</sup>

In the late fourth century B.C., Aristotle's doubts about the authenticity of certain Orphic hymns make it clear that pseudonymity was not a readily perceived or accepted literary device for him and his contemporaries.<sup>15</sup> In the New Testament, Paul seemed to take a rather negative view of letters circulating in his name and warned the Thessalonians against them:

That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means. . . . (2 Thessalonians 2:2–3.)

He also told the Thessalonians how they could recognize a letter he had written: "The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write" (2 Thessalonians 3:17). In the late second century, Tertullian wrote about an Asian



presbyter who had been tried, convicted, and removed from his office for writing the Acts of Paul According to the Apostle.<sup>16</sup> Clearly the orthodox church of the late second century did not look upon pseudonymity as an acceptable literary device. At the beginning of the third century, Serapion of Antioch prohibited the reading of the Gospel of Peter, branding it a forgery,<sup>17</sup> and one hundred years later Cyril of Jerusalem wrote against forgeries “which corrupt the souls of the more simple.”<sup>18</sup>

Until some unequivocal evidence from antiquity can be put forward to establish that pseudonymity *was* an accepted literary device, these few indications should warn us against that conclusion. Further, it would be difficult to explain the reaction of church and synagogue to the pseudepigrapha if the “literary device” of pseudonymity was indeed easily recognized. For these documents were either accepted as genuine revelations by or about the claimed ancient author or rejected as forgeries. There does not appear to have been any middle category for “pseudonymous but accepted.” The truth is that the device of pseudonymity fooled a great many persons in antiquity who, under the literary device theory, should not have been fooled. For example, Josephus, who certainly must have been familiar with Jewish literary devices, nevertheless seemed to accept the Apocryphon of Ezekiel as genuine,<sup>19</sup> and in the New Testament the author of Jude accepted 1 Enoch as proceeding from the antediluvian Enoch (Jude 1:14–15).<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Torm has shown that, in actuality, either the pseudonymous writings were accepted as genuinely ancient *because* of their attribution and were therefore highly respected, or else the misrepresentation was suspected and the documents were held in contempt.<sup>21</sup> Neither of these responses would seem to support the idea that pseudonymity was a familiar and accepted literary device.<sup>22</sup> In fact, there is not a shred of evidence to show that the real authors of these documents were known, that the device of pseudonymity was generally understood, or that the documents were appreciated as contemporary works of contemporary writers.

Other scholars have argued that the pseudonymous authors believed themselves to be writing in honor of, in the tradition of, or inspired by ancient figures, and therefore gave these ancients



pseudonymous credit for their works.<sup>23</sup> As attractive as this theory may be to some, and it may explain a few of the documents, it fails to solve the entire difficulty. For if the pseudonymous attribution is made in honor of so-and-so, it explains only the motive for the deception; it does not eliminate the element of deceit. The Greek physician Galen may have been flattered by those who wrote in his name for whatever reason, but he still found it necessary to publish a tract discrediting the forgeries.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, if the pseudonymous authors really *believed* themselves taken over by another personality, we must judge them at least deluded if not insane, and delusion and insanity are not adequate explanations for the amount of this literature produced in antiquity. Of course there is the third alternative: that these authors received genuine revelations, just as we believe Joseph Smith's revelation of the book of Moses was genuine. But this explanation is necessarily excluded by the scholars as supernaturalism.<sup>25</sup> Even from an LDS perspective, which would allow the possibility of genuine revelation, the contradictory teachings of the many books, the many teachings incompatible with LDS doctrine, and the omission of this material from the LDS canon of scripture and from the teachings of the General Authorities, warn us against explaining the bulk of pseudonymous literature as genuine revelation.

It has been my experience that Latter-day Saints are usually much too anxious to accept ancient documents at face value, and seldom bother to ask themselves whether the apocrypha they so readily employ to support modern arguments might not have been forgeries even when they were first written. The concept of forgery was well known in antiquity, and this is evidenced by the numerous Latin and Greek words that were used to describe it in all its varying degrees.<sup>26</sup> There are many examples of ancient forgery, with clear intent to deceive, in the areas of art, politics, literature, and so forth.<sup>27</sup> Why should religious documents alone be exempted from the possibility of deceitful intentions?

Much recent biblical scholarship also resists the use of negative terms like "deception" and "forgery" in connection with the pseudonymous apocrypha. This comes in part from a greater appreciation of the historical value of the apocryphal literature in

general, and also from the realization that the “orthodox” canon alone is inadequate for a complete understanding of biblical religion. Latter-day Saint scholars would, I think, agree with this. But we must bear in mind that non-LDS scholars also have at least two hidden assumptions behind their new interest in and acceptance of the pseudonymous apocrypha which conflict with the LDS view of scripture. The first of these hidden assumptions is that many or even most of the biblical books are themselves pseudonymous.<sup>28</sup> If one accepts this as given and also equates pseudonymity with forgery, then the conclusion is inescapable that many of the biblical books are forged. Since most scholars work on the assumption that the biblical books *are* pseudonymous, they must either adopt a positive theory of pseudonymity or declare biblical books to be forgeries.<sup>29</sup> Most have chosen the former alternative. A second hidden assumption behind the new acceptance of pseudonymous apocrypha is that all religious literature proceeds from the same source—the human mind. For most scholars there is no ultimate difference between “genuine” revelations and “forged” ones. The terms merely denote relative and subjective religious bias. Scholars resist calling pseudonymous apocrypha “forged” revelations because this would imply the existence of “genuine” revelations, and scholars have rejected the idea of literal revelation altogether.<sup>30</sup> Since there is no genuine there can be no spurious, and both canonical and apocryphal documents are treated equally. The only difference between the writings of true and false prophets is a little luck and the relative size of their audiences.<sup>31</sup> All of this should illustrate that in most cases the scholars’ positive evaluation of pseudonymous apocrypha has actually come at the expense of the biblical books; that is, in the one case they are seen as pseudonymous compositions themselves, and in the other they are seen as merely the products of human minds. For these reasons and others, it might be best for the Latter-day Saints to be cautious before sharing the new warmth of the scholars toward the pseudonymous apocrypha.

I believe the best approach to the pseudonymous apocrypha was first proposed some time ago by R. H. Charles, one of the greatest scholars of this literature.<sup>32</sup> Basically, Charles main-

tained that the device of pseudonymity was a pious fraud adopted in a time that no longer believed in continuing revelation by authors who nevertheless wished to effect religious changes.<sup>33</sup> Charles pointed out that from early intertestamental times most Jews had come to believe that the heavens were sealed and that the spirit of prophecy had departed from Israel.<sup>34</sup> This meant that in order to be accepted as having normative power, what we might call the authority of scripture, any new religious teaching must either claim to be a restoration of prophecy or be represented as a leftover from earlier prophetic times. The New Testament and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls represent the former alternative; the pseudonymous apocrypha represent the latter.

Charles's thesis can also be applied to patristic times, for once Christianity had decided that the period of apostolic revelation had ended, any new teaching, in order to have normative power, either had to claim to be a restoration or continuation of prophecy (as with the writings of Montanus, Elchasai, Mani, and many of the Gnostics) or else had to be foisted back upon the Apostles and prophets, as with most of the New Testament apocrypha. The same phenomenon can be seen in the history of Islam. Once prophecy was deemed to have stopped at the death of Muhammad, there was a proliferation of pseudepigraphical *hadith*. It is interesting that Western scholars do not hesitate to call these Islamic pseudepigrapha "forgeries."<sup>35</sup> In all three cases—in post-exilic Judaism, in sub-Apostolic Christianity, and in Islam after the death of Muhammad—pseudonymity was the result, not of a closed canon, for the canon continued to be flexible to a certain extent, but of the belief that prophecy had ceased and that the heavens were therefore sealed. Contemporary figures could write commentaries or devotional literature, as ben Sirach did, but they could not write normatively, with the force of scripture. For that they needed at least the appearance of communication with the heavens, and to get this they resorted to the deceit of pseudonymity.<sup>36</sup>

In this the pseudonymous authors were, I believe, rather like the comforters of Job. When Job's three comforters maligned his integrity, they did so for reasons rooted in their theology. Since Job was the most unfortunate of men, the theology of the com-

forters required that no matter what evidence existed to the contrary, Job *must* be a great and terrible sinner.<sup>37</sup> Job's insistence upon his integrity infuriated the comforters because to them it seemed an attack on God's justice. Notice that the comforters had only the highest motives for their intellectual dishonesty—they wished to be advocates for God and to use their cleverness in defending him. Nevertheless, at the end of the book God condemned them in these words: "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath" (Job 42:7). The comforters were forced by their theology to the dishonesty of ignoring the evidence and the testimony of Job and insisting upon a falsehood—all in defense of God. They were perfectly willing to lie in defense of the truth! Similarly, many of the pseudonymous authors, driven by the needs of *their* theology, or in their perceived roles as advocates for God and defenders of the faith, adopted the falsehood of pseudonymity to gain credibility for what they believed to be the truth. They deceived for the best of reasons, but they deceived. They were liars for God.<sup>38</sup>

I believe that Charles was absolutely correct in understanding pseudonymity as an intentional deceit practiced to gain normative standing for new ideas, and the polemic purposes to which the apocrypha were put seem to bear this out. The apocryphal literature was employed in basically four ways: to fill in the gaps in the scriptural account, to attack opposing theologies, to defend against the attacks of others, and to bring about or to legitimize theological change.

1. *Filling the gaps in the scriptural account.* It was noticed anciently that the scriptural narrative often omitted information it might have been nice to have. Moreover, these omissions were often the occasion for questions and doubts about the reliability of the scriptures. For example, where did Cain get his wife, and just which fruit was the forbidden one? Did Adam and Eve ever repent? (Genesis doesn't actually say so.) But if we turn to the Testament of Adam we learn that Cain married his sister Labuda, who incidentally was the real cause of the fight between Cain and Abel, and that the forbidden fruit was the fig.<sup>39</sup> And if we have any doubts about the repentance of Adam and Eve, we can read

all about it in the *Vita Adae et Evae*, in the Conflict of Adam and Eve with Satan, or in the Penitence of Adam.<sup>40</sup> The Book of Enoch explains what Genesis (6:1–4) meant by the “sons of God” going in unto the “daughters of men,” and the Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran can give us the details about the birth of Noah, or about Abraham and Sarah in Egypt.<sup>41</sup> In fact, for the pseudepigrapher every question can have an answer. In the early Christian church favorite subjects were the childhood of Jesus and, later on, the background of Mary.<sup>42</sup>

2. *Attacking opposing theologies.* Occasionally two groups with the same basic scriptural heritage would find themselves in theological conflict. For example, in the second century A.D., Jewish Christians rejected the idea that the law of Moses was fulfilled or that Gentiles could become Christians without observing the law. For them, what scholars call Pauline Christianity was a vile heresy, and they produced forged letters and statements from Peter and James to prove it. For instance, in the *Ascents of James* (Anabathmoi Jacobou), Paul was said to be a Gentile who converted to Judaism and was circumcised only because he lusted after the high priest’s daughter.<sup>43</sup> When his stratagem failed to secure the young lady, he was infuriated and became obsessed with attacking circumcision, the Sabbath, and the law of Moses. Other statements against Paul are found in the *Letter of Peter to James* and in the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* and *Homilies*.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, those in the gentile church who liked Paul could write books in which he was the hero and someone else was the bad guy. The *Apocalypse of Paul* describes Paul’s vision of hell and lets us know that the deepest pit and most horrendous punishments are reserved for “those who have not confessed that Christ came in the flesh and that the Virgin Mary bore him, and who say that the bread of the eucharist and the cup of blessing are not the body and blood of Christ.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the author of this apocalypse is saying: “The hottest spot in hell is reserved for those who don’t accept *my* theology” (in this case Docetists and any others who don’t accept the doctrine of transubstantiation).<sup>46</sup>



3. *Defending against attacks.* In the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., a heretical group called the Melchizedekians were competing with the “orthodox” church. Basically they claimed that Melchizedek was a divine being, or even an earlier incarnation of Jesus. To prove their point they quoted from Hebrews 7:3: “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.” To combat the arguments of the Melchizedekians, it would have been useful to be able to prove Melchizedek’s mortality from the scriptures and to explain the very difficult passage from Hebrews. Thus, it should be no surprise to us that at about this very time there appeared an apocryphal History of Melchizedek which provided him with a life story and a pedigree.<sup>47</sup> We are told how Melchizedek’s entire family was destroyed in a cataclysm. Lest the significance of all this should escape us, the following passage is added at the end of the book:

And again a voice came to Abraham, and he said, “What is it, my Lord?” And the Lord said to him, “Because no one of the family of Melchizedek is left on the earth, for this reason he shall be called ‘without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God he remains a priest forever.’ And I loved him as I have loved my beloved son, because he kept my commandments, and he will keep them forever. Don’t suppose, therefore, that he hasn’t a beginning of days just because no one knows when he was born or his genealogy, or his father and mother. This is why he is called without father, without mother, without genealogy.”<sup>48</sup>

4. *Legitimizing change.* An excellent example of how the apocrypha could be used to grease the wheels of change can be found in the Letter of Aristeas.<sup>49</sup> Around 200 B.C., Jews living outside Palestine who no longer spoke Hebrew began to use the new Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, known to us as the Septuagint. However, some questioned whether the new translation was trustworthy or appropriate for use in place of the Hebrew text. At about this time, the apocryphal Letter of Aristeas began to circulate in the Diaspora. Among other things, it tells us that the Septuagint was a royal project, that no expense

was spared in its undertaking, and that seventy-two scholars of unimpeachable wisdom and orthodoxy were employed on the project.<sup>50</sup> Finally we are told:

After the books had been read, the priests and the elders of the translators and the Jewish community and the leaders of the people stood up and said, that since so excellent and sacred and accurate a translation had been made, it was only right that it should remain as it was and no alteration should be made in it.<sup>51</sup>

Thus the new Septuagint got an apocryphal recommendation and seal of approval. Another example of apocryphal legitimation is provided by the story of Susanna and the elders that is found in the Septuagint version of the Book of Daniel. One theological motive behind the production and preservation of this story was probably legitimation of the principle of cross-examination in criminal proceedings, a practice which is not recommended in the law or the prophets and to which there had therefore been some resistance.<sup>52</sup>

Theological changes could also be legitimized by apocryphal supplements to scripture. For example, when the orthodox church grew uneasy that the firmly accepted doctrines of the perpetual virginity of Mary and of her assumption into heaven were not very well documented in the New Testament, it wasn't long before the Protevangelium of James and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared. The former contains gynecological testimony from not one but *two* attending midwives concerning the continuing virginity of Mary, and the latter describes her being taken, like Enoch, bodily into heaven.<sup>53</sup> Finally, the Treatise of Shem or the Revelation of Ezra reveal how even astrology and other occult systems could be legitimized by association with the name of an ancient patriarch or sage.<sup>54</sup> All of these examples illustrate how many of the pseudonymous books were really only sectarian propaganda pieces. As with most propaganda, the authors could justify their deceptive means by their intended ends—that people should believe “the truth.”

Now, I certainly don't want to leave the impression that, because much of the apocryphal literature was falsely attributed, it is all without value. In fact, whether the intentions of their authors were deceitful or not, these documents *do* reveal to us a



very great deal about the history and theology of the various sects of ancient Judaism and early Christianity. In fact, historically and linguistically speaking, these texts are vital. As R. H. Charles said, and as J. H. Charlesworth recently repeated, “It is absolutely impossible to explain the course of religious development between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100” without the apocryphal literature.<sup>55</sup> It is our richest source of information about the creeds of biblical antiquity, and its study pays the scholar rich, rich dividends. As pointed out above, not all the apocrypha are pseudonymous or would claim the authority of scripture, and even of the pseudonymous works it is unlikely that every single one is a calculated deception. Nevertheless, I feel confident that Charles’s theory of the pious fraud is still the best approach to understanding the bulk of the pseudonymous apocrypha. Certainly the varied polemical uses to which they were put illustrate the potency of pseudonymous books in the theological give-and-take of antiquity and illustrate their function as inter-sectarian propaganda.

Just as much of this literature was forged anciently out of a perceived need to defend God and the true faith (whatever that was felt to be by the writer), so some among the Latter-day Saints continue to use the apocrypha today for the same reasons. Finding the standard works and the revelations of the modern prophets inadequate for their purposes (although I do not know why), they turn to the apocrypha for more concrete “proof” that the Church is true. And in their crusade to defend the faith, they inevitably distort and misrepresent the texts, and so become as much as the original authors “liars for God.” Their interest is neither academic nor objective; they are not interested in finding out who really wrote these documents or why. Like the original authors, they are not concerned with the historicity of a text or its real *Sitz-im-Leben*,<sup>56</sup> but only with the mileage it may give their theology. Like the pseudonymous authors themselves, they often represent the apocrypha as “hidden” scripture that ought to be taken seriously. Particularly annoying is the practice of “proof-texting” from the apocrypha, that is, of selecting certain passages to prove a particular point while ignoring its context and the rest of the text. For example, I have heard it argued that the Acts of

Thomas supports LDS theology because it contains a beautiful poem called the Hymn of the Soul, or Hymn of the Pearl, which teaches the doctrine of premortal existence.<sup>57</sup> But the Acts of Thomas also teaches a transubstantiationist view of the eucharist, that celibacy is the goal of all Christians, that sexual intercourse is evil, and that baptism was performed by sprinkling.<sup>58</sup> These would seem to favor a more “orthodox” theology than ours; shall we all convert? Of course not. And why not? Because we recognize that any argument from apocryphal sources lacks real force. But is it not dishonest to represent an apocryphal book as being firm evidence for the truth when it agrees with us, and yet quietly look the other way when it does not? The truth is that it’s just as easy to support Catholicism or Lutheranism or Calvinism by proof-texting the apocrypha as it is to prove our views. It’s all a matter of which passages one decides to use.

The degree to which the apocryphal literature proves that the Latter-day Saints are right or supports our beliefs has been greatly exaggerated in the unofficial literature of the Church, and I believe that those who make these exaggerated claims either do so in ignorance or else perpetrate a “pious fraud.” Some of the tapes and other material that circulate in the Church on the subject are very misleading. The apocrypha *do* often prove that ideas peculiar to the Latter-day Saints in modern times were widely known and widely believed anciently, but this is not the same as proving that the ideas themselves are true, or that those who believed them were right in doing so, or that they would have had anything else in common with the Latter-day Saints.

Indeed, the apocrypha do have great value, but not because they teach Mormonism; for by and large they do not. For the most part they are the writings of men but are dressed up to look like scripture. From an LDS point of view, there are often elements of truth in this literature; but always it is truth mixed with falsehood, as the Lord tells us in section 91 of the Doctrine and Covenants.<sup>59</sup>

In conclusion, I want to affirm the importance of the apocryphal literature for our understanding of biblical history, of biblical languages, and of the background of the biblical books themselves. There is much valuable information here for the Latter-

day Saints if we understand the texts for what they really are and use them appropriately. It is not the *use* of this literature that is objectionable, but the *misuse*. For if we try to pass them off as “hidden scriptures,” and otherwise misrepresent them in misguidedly trying to prove that the Church is true, we shall, like the comforters of Job, “speak the thing that is not right,” and become as much as the original pseudonymous authors “liars for God.”

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## Notes

1. *The Apocryphal Literature: A Brief Introduction* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1945), pp. 10–11. Terminology is a major problem in the study of apocryphal literature.

2. See J. H. Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982) and J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, in press).

3. See J. R. Harris, A. S. Lewis, and F. C. Conybeare, in R. H. Charles, ed., *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 2:715–84, and James Lindenberger in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2.

4. Harris, Lewis, and Conybeare, in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:316.

5. The Hymn of the Pearl can be found in E. Hennecke, W. Schneemelcher, and R. McL. Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 2:498–504. A good translation of the Qumran hymns is available in G. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1975), pp. 149–201. For the Odes of Solomon, see note 2 above.

6. For Judith see A. E. Cowley in R. H. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 1:242–67. For the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles see D. M. Parrot and R. McL. Wilson in J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 256–70.

7. The Sentences of Sextus (CG XII, 1), trans. by F. Wisse in Robinson, *Nag Hammadi Library*, pp. 454–59, was a collection of maxims that was popular in the early Christian church in much the same way that *Poor Richard's Almanack* was popular in colonial and revolutionary America, although the Sentences have a more directly religious focus.

8. For the fragments see B. Z. Wacholder in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2; also found in M. Stern, ed., *From Herodotus to Plutarch*, vol. 1 of *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974), pp. 20–44 (for Hecataeus) and F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1929), 2B: 1156–58 (for Thallus).

9. See the discussion and references in J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research* (SCS 7; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1976), pp. 119–22.

10. Cf. D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), pp. 133f.

11. As, for example, in the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra, which begins: “It came to pass in the thirtieth year on the twenty-second of the month, I was in my house and I cried out . . . ,” and which continues (v. 3) “. . . Michael, the archangel said to me, ‘Prophet Ezra . . . ’” See M. Stone in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1:371ff.

12. For example, see S. Holmes, “The Wisdom of Solomon,” in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 1:525, or J. Fenton, “Pseudonymity in the New Testament,” *Theology* 58 (1955): 54.

13. It is well known that Thucydides, Josephus, and other ancient historians freely composed appropriate speeches for their historical characters, but only in the context of a larger work about whose authorship there was no doubt.

14. Herodotus, *The Histories*, 7.6.

15. Aristotle, *De anima*, 1.5.

16. Tertullian, *De baptismo*, 17. See also the discussion in Hennecke, Schneemelcher, and Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:323–25.

17. Quoted in Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.12.

18. From the fourth Catechetical Lecture (36).

19. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 10.5.1.

20. Cf. 1 Enoch 1:9.

21. Friedrich Torm, *Die Psychologie der Pseudonymität im Hinblick auf die Literatur des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1932), pp. 19f.

22. This is also the conclusion of B. Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972): 16.

23. See K. Aland, “The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries,” *Journal of*

*Theological Studies* 12 (1961): 39–49; or A. Meyer, “Religiöse Pseud-epigraphie als ethisch-psychologisches Problem,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 35 (1936): 277–79.

24. Galen, *On His Own Books*.

25. It is sometimes difficult to remember that the *academic* discipline of biblical studies is rightly *non*-theological, attempting to be scientific in its approach. Were it otherwise, scholars from different theological backgrounds would be unable to work together. Nevertheless, as a *scientific* discipline, biblical studies necessarily excludes any proposition that requires the exercise of faith. This means that from an LDS point of view, while the discipline of biblical studies may occasionally be useful for specific information, its very methodology ensures that it will never reach a full knowledge of the truth as the Latter-day Saints understand it through faith.

26. See the examples in B. Metzger, “Literary Forgeries,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 12f.

27. R. Syme, “Fraud and Imposture,” *Pseudepigrapha I* (Entretiens sur l’Antiquité Classique 18; Geneva: Vandoeuvres, 1971), pp. 5–17.

28. Examples of books most scholars would declare pseudonymous are Deuteronomy, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Daniel from the Old Testament, and Ephesians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Hebrews, and 2 Peter from the New Testament. The authorship of many other books is disputed.

29. This hidden agenda is particularly evident in J. Fenton, “Pseudonymity in the New Testament,” *Theology* 58 (1955):51–56. See also the humorous anecdote of M. Smith concerning this issue in “Pseudepigraphy and the Israelite Tradition,” *Pseudepigrapha I*, pp. 189–215.

30. Again, this is a necessary result of the historical method in biblical studies. Since the existence of God is a proposition which requires faith, so is communication with him. It is therefore excluded as supernaturalism. Latter-day Saints who pursue the discipline of biblical studies must bear in mind that often the method determines the conclusions. See note 25 above.

31. This is nicely illustrated by Aland’s statement in *JTS* 12 (1961): 49, about the Asian presbyter who was deposed for writing the Acts of Paul According to the Apostle: “If this presbyter had composed his work 100 or 50 years earlier, perhaps it would now be part of the canon. . . .” That is, Aland sees no *qualitative* difference between this apocryphal work and the scriptural books.

32. Charles stated his thesis in several places, notably in *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford, 1912), p. x; in *Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1913), pp. 193–205; and in *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:viii–ix. Charles's theory held the field for many decades and is still maintained in one form or another by many scholars, including L. Morris, *Apocalyptic* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 52f; E. Osswald, "Zum Problem der vaticinia ex eventu," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 75 (1963): 34–41; H. Balz, "Anonymität und Pseudepigraphie im Urchristentum," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 66 (1969): 433ff.; and W. Speyer, "Religiöse Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im Altertum," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 8/9 (1965/6): 119ff.

33. Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:viii.

34. For example, the Pharisees went so far as to ignore even a *genuine* heavenly voice on the grounds that God had already revealed to Moses on Sinai everything He could ever reveal (Babylonian Talmud, Baba Mazia 59b).

35. See A. Guillaume, *Islam*, 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1956), pp. 88–92.

36. Speyer, "Religiöse Pseudepigraphie," p. 120.

37. The principle that all fortune or misfortune is a direct and immediate reward or punishment from God is called the Deuteronomic Ideal. Jesus rejected this idea in Luke 13:1–5 and John 9:1–4, just as the author of Job rejected it in his day.

38. For Hellenistic readers the concept of the "noble falsehood" had already been enunciated and defended by the philosopher Plato, writing in the first half of the 4th century B.C. See the *Republic*, 382C, 414B, and 459D.

39. See Robinson, "The Testament of Adam," in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1:989–95.

40. See L. Wells, "The Life of Adam and Eve," in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:134ff.; S. Malan, *The Book of Adam and Eve* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882); and J. Issaverdens, *The Uncanonical Writings of the Old Testament* (Venice: Armenian Monastery of St. Lazarus, 1901), pp. 11ff.

41. See J. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I: A Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971).

42. See the sections on the infancy gospels and the relatives of Jesus by O. Cullman, A. Meyer, and W. Bauer in Hennecke, Schneemelcher, and Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:363–432.

43. This pseudepigraphon survives only as paraphrased by Epiphanius of Salamis in his *Panarion* 30.16.6–9 (in the edition of K.



Holl [Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1915]). It is related to a work which has survived in Slavonic under the equivalent title *The Ladder of Jacob*. See R. Rubinkiewicz, "The Ladder of Jacob," in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2.

44. Recognitions 1:70ff and Homilies 2:16–17; 11:35; 17:13–19. All of these may be found in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1868; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1951), vol. 8.

45. Hennecke, Schneemelcher, and Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2:786.

46. Docetists denied that Jesus was a real human being, insisting that he only appeared to be human. Transubstantiation is the doctrine that the bread and wine do not merely symbolize, but actually become in substance, the body and blood of Christ.

47. Actually, the story is borrowed from various Jewish traditions about the life of Abraham.

48. Unfortunately, the History of Melchizedek is not yet available in English. This translation is taken from the Greek text of J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: Garnier, 1894), vol. 28, cols. 525–30. Migne incorrectly attributes the History of Melchizedek to Pseudo-Athanasius.

49. Cf. H. Andrews, "The Letter of Aristeas," in Charles, *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, 2:94–122.

50. *Ibid.*, vv. 11, 28, 38–39, 46, 296, 302–4, etc.

51. *Ibid.*, vv. 310–11.

52. Cf. B. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 111; and S. Hoenig, "Susanna," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1962), 4:467f.

53. Protevangelium of James 19:1–20:3; see Hennecke, Schneemelcher, and Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 1:384f. For the Assumption of Mary, which has several different titles and is found in several different ancient languages and recensions, see C. Tischendorf, *Apocalypses apocryphae* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1866; reprint ed., 1966), pp. 124–36, and the discussion in Hennecke, Schneemelcher, and Wilson, 1:429.

54. J. H. Charlesworth, "The Treatise of Shem," in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1:473–86; and D. Fiensy, "The Revelation of Ezra," in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1:601–4.

55. Charlesworth quoting Charles in *Pseudepigrapha*, 1:xxix.

56. Literally "setting-in-life," the term means the complete back-



ground of both a text and its author and the circumstances which caused it to be written just the way it was and not some other way.

57. See note 6 above.

58. In sections 158, 84, 97, and 132, respectively (Hennecke, Schneemelcher, and Wilson, 2:526, 487–88, 493, 512).

59. We must bear in mind, however, that in section 91 the Lord is speaking only of the Apocrypha of the Old Testament, those books found in the Greek Septuagint and accepted by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox as scripture. The Old Testament Apocrypha are only one category of the apocryphal literature, and it is illegitimate to apply section 91 to the other categories, that is, the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Nag Hammadi Codices, or the New Testament apocrypha. Concerning these, Joseph Smith did not ask and section 91 has nothing to say.