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The Origin and Formation of the Corpus of Apocryphal Literature

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The Origin and Formation of the Corpus of Apocryphal Literature

C. Wilfred Griggs

In our modern world, we can observe that many of the characteristics of the society which George Orwell predicted in his book, *1984*, are indeed present today. One of the most obvious of those characteristics is his famous “Double-speak,” in which words have taken on meanings opposite to their historical and philological origins. One could cite numerous examples, such as “War Is Peace,” “Freedom Is Slavery,” and “Ignorance Is Strength”—the slogans of Big Brother’s party. It is nevertheless important to note that changing the usage of words to an opposite or near-opposite meaning is not new with the twentieth century. Even the meaning of *symposium* has changed from a drinking party to a gathering of day speakers, as anybody knows who has read Plato’s *Symposium*, in which Socrates arrived at the party and drank everybody else under the table. Students of

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antiquity know how such terms as *myth*, *empathy*, *idea*, and *mystery* have come to be used today in ways that would have astounded ancient authors. There are many occasions when the changes in meaning occur innocently enough, especially when a misunderstanding of the word or an extension of its meaning takes place (e.g., the term *mystery* changing from something which can and should be known, but which must not be publicly spoken about, to something which cannot be known or understood, much less communicated to others), but there are other occasions when, as we shall see, changes in meanings occurred through deliberate misuse of a word.

The term *apocryphal* and its related forms have acquired an interesting array of denotations and connotations which we should examine carefully. If I state that I heard an apocryphal story concerning Dr. Hugh Nibley, most readers would immediately categorize the story as unverified or perhaps even unverifiable, even before hearing the anecdote. The term *apocryphal* thus arouses in most people feelings of doubt, suspicion, and incredulity. It was not always so, and in point of fact ancient usage of the word conveyed the nearly opposite sentiments of special value and importance to the hearer. The roots of the word *apocrypha* are *krypto* and the prepositional prefix *apo*:

κρύπτω —hide, cover, bury,

ἀποκρύπτω —hide from, keep hidden from, conceal

The adjective ἀπόκρυφος is derived from the verb ἀποκρύπτω and has basically the same meaning. Before one can examine meaningfully the corpus of apocryphal literature, he must consider briefly what the term ἀπόκρυφος means in history, for the simple act of identifying books which have been designated *apocryphal* says nothing of what those books mean to those making the designation. Space constraints require that our survey of ἀπόκρυφος and its related forms in ancient literature be incomplete, but the following examples are representative:

αἶ γάρ μιν Θανάτοιο δυσηχέος ᾧδε δυναίμην νόσφιν
ἀποκρύψαι . . .

For I wish that I could thus hide him away from death
which brings woe . . .

Homer, *Iliad* 18.464f.

πάντας ἀποκρύπτασκε

Οὐρανός (Uranus) used to hide them (his children) all away

Hesiod, *Theogony*, line 157.

ἜΩ βασιλεῦ, οὔτε σε ἀποκρύψω . . .

O King, neither will I hide away (this thing) from you
Herodotus 7.28.

καὶ αὐτῶν αὕτη ἢ πλημμέλεια ἐκείνην τὴν σοφίαν
ἀποκρύπτειν

And this fault of theirs keeps hidden that (real) wisdom
Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 22d.

οὐ γὰρ ἐν σκότῳ ὑμᾶς οἱ Θεοὶ ἀποκρύπτονται

for the Gods do not hide you away in darkness
Xenophon, *Cyropaedeia* 8.7.23

καὶ περὶ ὧν ἀποκρυπτόμεθα μηδένα εἰδέναι

also concerning things which we hide away from anyone's
knowledge

Lysias, *Orations* 7.18

κρύπτω occurs in non-literary sources, with the same sense of *conceal* or *hide*, as noted in the following analysis of an inscription by Albrecht Oepke:

In a good sense *κρύπτειν* is used of the keeping of entrusted secrets, esp. the mysteries. Those in the so-called catalogue of Delphic rules of life from Miletropolis, which seem for a long period to have played almost the role of a “decalogue” in antiquity, we read: ἀπόρητα κρύπτει (“Conceal the things not to be spoken”) (Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*³, 1268, II, 16: quoted in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, III.959).

One also reads of a δχετὸς κρυπτός, or covered canal (SIG³, 973,5); κρυπτοὶ καρκίνοι, deep-seated ulcers (Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* 6.38); and even κρυπτοί, those involved in the

Athenian secret service (Bekker, *Anecdota Graeca*, p. 273, 33ff.). The Magical Papyri contain examples of the same usage, such as the following: ἀπάγγελε τὰ κρυπτὰ τῆς μυριωνύμου Θεᾶς Ἰσιδος, “Report (explain) the hidden things (mysteries) of the goddess Isis of the countless names” (Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae* 57.13).

This broad sampling of the term and related forms in ancient classical sources should establish convincingly the sense of concealment or hiding, with absolutely no indication given that *apocryphal* things are untrue or invalid. In most instances, *apocryphal* things are hidden or concealed because of the special value they have to the person hiding them.

Beyond a general sampling of the use of ἀπόκρυφος and related forms in ancient literature, a brief survey of the word and its meanings in Jewish and Christian writings will be instructive. The reader will observe that the use of *apocryphos* in this religious milieu is constant, and no significant changes in meaning are attached to the term.

THE JEWISH SOURCES

The Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures accomplished about 250 B.C. contains numerous examples of both the verb and the adjective forms.

(1) Samples of the verb forms:

καὶ κύριος ἀπέκρυπεν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ

the Lord hid (it) away from me

2 Kings 4:27

αἱ πλημμέλειαί μου ἀπὸ σοῦ οὐκ ἀπέκρυψαν

my sins are not hidden away from you

Psalms 69:5

καὶ οὐκ ἀποκρύψω ὑμῖν μυστήρια

I will not conceal mysteries from you

Wisdom of Solomon 6:22

ἀπεκρύβη ἡ ὁδός μου ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ

My way was hidden from God
Isaiah 40:27

(2) Samples of the adjective forms:

Θήσει αὐτὸ ἐν ἀποκρύφῳ

he will place it in (a) secret (place)
Deuteronomy 27:15

ἐσκέπασέ με ἐν ἀπόκρυφῳ τῆς σκηνῆς αὐτοῦ

he sheltered me in the secrecy of his tabernacle
Psalm 27:5

(Θησαυροὺς) ἀποκρύφους ἀοράτους ἀνοιξῶ σοι

I will open to you unseen and hidden treasures
Isaiah 45:3

αὐτὸς ἀποκαλύπτει βαθέα καὶ ἀπόκρυφα

he reveals deep and hidden things
Daniel 2:22

Of the numerous examples which could be cited, these few are sufficient to illustrate the consistent sense of the word as *secret*, *hidden*, or *concealed*. Despite the common usage of *apocryphos* in Old Testament works, there is no designation of the books themselves as apocryphal. To be sure, the books of the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) later designated apocryphal (to distinguish them from the modern Hebrew canon) use the terms with the same meanings as the canonical books, and those books are not given any special status or designation in the Septuagint collection of writings.

The difficulty of identifying canonical and apocryphal writings in Jewish circles in the first century A.D. can be easily illustrated in Josephus and the Dead Sea Scrolls and 2 Esdras. Josephus, claiming to be within the Pharisaic tradition of Judaism, gives a clear definition of the scriptural limits as he under-

stood them (*Contra Apionem* I. 37–40). With few difficulties the Josephan list can be made to correspond to the Old Testament of the Hebrew Bible as reflected in the King James Translation, although Josephus combines the books so as to have a total of twenty-two, corresponding to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. The usual number mentioned in Jewish sources is twenty-four, not combining Ruth-Judges and Lamentations-Jeremiah as does Josephus.

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, perhaps representing the Essene tradition within Palestine, all of the books of the Hebrew Old Testament have been identified with the exception of Esther. In addition to these books, however, others have been identified as being scriptural, including additional psalms, and perhaps Tobit, Ecclesiasticus, and a letter of Jeremiah, though there is some question concerning these last works. A number of fragments of 1 Enoch and Jubilees indicate the special regard which the Qumran sectaries had for those writings, and other writings may have enjoyed quasi-canonical status. Although Josephus does not use the term *ἀπόκρυφος* in his description of the Essenes, he implies that they had secret writings, or at least secret traditions, for he states that members of the sect would not divulge their secrets to outsiders, even if tortured to death (Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2.141). The burying of the sect's sacred writings in caves suggests that the books were considered too sacred or secret to be permitted to fall into heathen hands.

One of the most interesting accounts relating to Jewish scriptures and apocrypha is that found in 2 Esdras 14. According to the narrative, the holy writings had been destroyed by fire and Ezra prayed for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that he could restore the texts of the scriptures. Through five scribes he wrote some ninety-four books, twenty-four for public instruction and seventy to be reserved for edification within the community of believers. The bulk of the latter group likely consisted of revelatory, or apocalyptic, books which would have been understood by those initiated into the believing community. By ancient standards, they would have been the Apocrypha for the ancient believers.

In all three of these examples from Judaism, as well as from many other examples which could be cited (e.g., the Samaritans, Philo, and the Book of Mormon brass plates), no distinction is made in the sacred writings between the accepted scriptures and some other writings which might be deemed to be of lesser value. Rather, the distinction, if any, seems to be between writings which can be entrusted to the public and those which are to be reserved for the community of believers. The latter would merit the designation of being apocryphal, that is to say, works to be kept hidden or concealed from the public. Among the writings buried by the Qumran Covenanters to protect them from public exposure were such apocalyptic works as the *War Scroll*, a *Genesis Apocryphon*, and the so-called *Temple Scroll*. In 2 Esdras the work of Ezra and the five scribes, which took forty days to complete, was the restoration of scripture, and it is within that designation that one includes the seventy apocryphal and apocalyptic books that were hidden from the world and kept within the community of believers (2 Esdras 14:37–48).

THE NEW TESTAMENT

There can be no question that the classical sense of ἀπόκρυφος as *secret* or *hidden* plays a significant role in the New Testament. Jesus counsels men “not to fast openly as do the hypocrites of gloomy countenance, but rather to our Father in secret (ἐν τῷ κρυφαίῳ), and our Father who sees in secret will make recompense” (Matthew 6:16–18). When Jesus taught in parables, not even his disciples discerned the lessons of the comparisons, and they asked why Jesus was teaching through such cryptic analogies. The Savior’s response emphasizes the keeping of sacred doctrines within the community of believers: “To you it has been given to know the secret truths [mysteries] of the kingdom of the heavens, but to them [the non-believing crowds] it has *not* been given” (Matthew 13:11). When Peter later spoke for the Twelve in professing the messianic identity of Jesus, the Savior explained that such knowledge came through a heavenly revelation, not through human means, and he further commanded the

disciples that they were not to circumvent this manner of learning the messianic secret by proclaiming his identity among non-believers (Matthew 16:16–20). The clear implication of the passage is that each man would have to acquire his witness of Jesus the Christ in the same way that Peter and the other Apostles obtained their testimony. Jesus even placed a penalty (*ἐπιτιμῆσας*) upon the Twelve in the event that they should break the covenant established between them and Jesus by the revelation of his identity (Luke 9:21).

The Transfiguration is yet another example of Jesus' teaching his disciples matters which they were not to share with non-believers (Matthew 17:9). Peter commented on the significance of this or a similar experience in his second epistle, where he told his audience that he and his companions received the "more sure prophetic word" on the mountain with Jesus, to which believers would do well to pay heed until "the day dawn and the morning star arise in [their] hearts" (2 Peter 1:18–19). At least some of the sacred doctrines taught on that occasion had to do with the eternal destinies of man, for the Apostles were not to speak at all of the experience until Jesus was resurrected (Matthew 17:9; Mark 9:9). Later hints in the New Testament of what Jesus taught his disciples on the mountain, either before or after his resurrection, are found in Peter's first letter where he speaks of Jesus preaching to the spirits of deceased men in a spirit prison (1 Peter 3:18–20) so that they might be judged by the same standards as men still in mortality (1 Peter 4:6). Paul included baptism on behalf of those who had died unbaptized as an argument for the resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:29), and elsewhere he discussed the precedence of the righteous dead over men still alive on earth in being resurrected and raised to Christ in the Parousia, or Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:15ff.). In these examples the doctrines are stated without an attempt to establish or defend them, suggesting a general awareness and acceptance of them within the Christian church, although the experiences in which they were given and explained are not included in documents intended for public dissemination.

Specific uses of *ἀπόρχυφος* and related forms are harmonious with the idea of secret or concealed events and doctrines as discussed above.

οὐδὲ ἐγένετο ἀπόκρυφον ἀλλ' ἵνα ἔλθῃ εἰς φανερόν.

Neither did any secret thing happen except that it should become manifest

Mark 4:22 (Cp. Luke 8:17)

ἐν ᾧ εἰσὶν πάντες οἱ θησαυροὶ τῆς σοφίας καὶ γνώσεως ἀπόκρυφοι.

In whom are all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge

Colossians 2:3

ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ Θεῷ

the plan of the mystery which has been hidden from the world in God

Ephesians 3:9

ἀλλὰ λαλοῦμεν Θεοῦ σοφίαν ἐν μυστηρίῳ, τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην

But we speak the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery

1 Corinthians 2:7

The New Testament clearly makes reference both to the public proclamation relating to Jesus and the gospel and to the hidden wisdom and treasures of God available to the faithful and searching Saints. As in the case of the Old Testament, no distinction of canonical or apocryphal writings is made, but there is clear awareness and acceptance of an apocryphal (hidden or secret) tradition in the early Christian faith. What it was and what happened to that tradition are beyond the scope of this paper, but a very brief examination of two or three key figures and sources as they relate to the subject can be presented. Because Egypt is the most fruitful source of authors and writings which bear on the ancient Christian apocryphal tradition, the examples will be taken from that land. Clement of Alexandria (late second century) and Origen (first half of the third century) are the two major figures to be mentioned, and the Nag Ham-

madi Library (buried in the second half of the fourth century) is the best source of literary evidence.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Clement of Alexandria, attacking Marcion as a heretic, stated that the source of Marcionite doctrines was an apocryphal work ('Ερρύη δὲ αὐτοῖς τὸ δόγμα ἔκ τινος ἀποκρύφου, *Stromateis* III.29). Clement did not dispute the use of an apocryphal work, for he averred that if the Marcionites held the same views as the Valentinians (who also used apocryphal works) their views might be acceptable. It was the Marcionite perversion of sound doctrine that Clement found so reprehensible. Clement even anticipated the difficulty his own writings would face, and he intentionally cloaked his meaning on occasion in order to forestall possible criticism:

The *Stromateis* will contain the truth mixed up with the opinions of philosophy, or rather covered over and hidden, as the edible part of the nut in the shell. For, in my opinion, it is proper that the seeds of truth be kept for the husbandmen of faith, and nobody else.

(Clement, *Stromateis* 1.20–21)

Avoiding criticism of his teachings was not sufficient reason for Clement to write enigmatically, however, and a more significant reason for doing so is found in Eusebius's quotation from the *Hypotyposesis*:

The same writer in the seventh book of the *Hypotyposesis* also says this about him (James), 'After the Resurrection the Lord transmitted the knowledge (gnosis), to James the Righteous, John, and Peter. These passed it along to the rest of the Apostles, and the other Apostles to the Seventy, one of whom was Barnabas.'

(Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.1.4)

Clement thus is placed within the framework of a Christian faith which knows and accepts both a public and an esoteric (apocryphal) level of doctrine.

Wilhelm Schneemelcher could write in 1959 (*New Testament Apocrypha* I, pp. 25–26) that it was in the conflict with gnostics that Clement wrote of some gnostics appealing to βίβλοι ἀπόκρυφοί (*Stromateis* I. 15.69.6.). Schneemelcher infers that Clement contributed to the ecclesiastical rejection of the use of apocryphal works by the heretics; but the discovery in 1958, by

Morton Smith, of a portion of a letter from Clement of Alexandria to a certain Theodore makes such a position impossible. The primary purpose of Clement's letter was to warn the otherwise unknown Theodore against the corrupting influences of the Carpocratian gnostics. Clement was not polemicizing about gnosticism as such, however, but was railing against *false* gnostics and their pernicious apocryphal writings. Countering false claims the Carpocratians were making concerning the Gospel of Mark, Clement explained that indeed there were two Gospels according to Mark. The first was written in Rome during Peter's lifetime, when Mark was his companion in the ministry (folio 1, recto, lines 16ff.). The second was written, according to the newly found letter, after Peter's death when Mark went from Rome to Alexandria. Using his own notes, as well as those of Peter, Mark "composed a more spiritual Gospel for the use of those being perfected" (folio 1, recto, 11. 20–23). Even this more spiritual account did not, Clement assured Theodore, "divulge the things not to be uttered," although Mark did include sayings which would lead initiates "into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven veils" (folio 1, recto, 11. 23–27). The Secret Gospel was not available for public consumption in Clement's day, but was still carefully guarded in Alexandria and was "being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries" (folio 1, verso, 11. 1–3). In an all-too-popular (and modern) scenario, Clement further described how Carpocrates was able to infiltrate the Alexandrian church archives by compromising an elder in the church, through whom he obtained a copy of Mark's Secret Gospel. Corrupting both the text and the sense of the purloined document, Carpocrates used the polluted result to further his own gnostic ideas (folio 1, verso, 11. 5–10). It appears that the competition for genuine apocrypha was rather keen among numerous Christian congregations in second-century Egypt.

ORIGEN

Clement's successor as director of the Catechetical School in Alexandria was an extremely bright seventeen-year-old named Origen. This precocious individual had more influence on Chris-

tian theology from his own time to that of Augustine than any other writer, and his attitude toward an apocryphal tradition reflects the belief of many others from the third to the sixth centuries.

Origen was a prolific writer, but an evaluation of his theology with respect to many apocryphal texts is nevertheless quite difficult because many of his writings have perished, and of those which remain most are fragmentary or exist in Latin translation. While still in Alexandria Origen wrote a major theological work, *On First Principles*, which treats the subjects of God and heavenly beings, man and the material world, free will, and Holy Scripture. One observes that gnostic apocryphal writings deal with precisely the same topics, even if not precisely in the same way, as does Origen. The teacher also wrote five books of his *Commentary on John*, two volumes on *The Resurrection*, a *Commentary on Psalms 1–25*, eight volumes on *Genesis*, five on *Lamentations*, and ten volumes of *Miscellanies (Stromateis)*. His productivity continued at Caesarea, where he composed *Commentaries* on nearly every book of the Bible, sermons on scriptural passages (homilies), a *Discussion with Heraclides*, numerous *Scholia*, a treatise on *Prayer*, an *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, numerous *Letters*, and a defense of Christianity, *Against Celsus*, in response to an attack against Christianity by a Greek of that name about a half-century earlier.

He maintained that there are two congregations present for worship, one of men and one of angels (*In Lucam Homiliae* xxiii, “Duplex hic adest ecclesia una hominum altera angelorum”), a belief commonly found in later Byzantine orthodoxy. The church is even compared to parts of the temple, the earthly corresponding to the Holy Place, and the heavenly to the Holy of Holies (*Homiliae in Leviticum*, ix.9). Even the gospel is divided in like fashion, and it is to the spiritual church, not the one on earth, that the Eternal Gospel belongs, for the Eternal Gospel is to the gospel in the New Testament as the New Testament is to the Torah (see *De Principiis* iv. 25; *In Joannem* i.9.10; *In Romanos* i.4,ii.5; *Homiliae in Leviticum* xiii.2). The priesthood is also spiritualized, for in the heavenly church every true Christian is a priest (*Homiliae in Leviticum* iv.6, vi.5, ix.1.8, xiii.5; note the

difference in *Homiliae in Numeros* ii.1, where priests are said to be *in professione religionis*). Origen also taught that the earthly church had been corrupted by prosperity, stating that only a few of those professing godliness would attain to the election of God and blessedness (*Homiliae in Jeremiam* iv.3). Men were accused of conspiring to be bishops, deacons, and priests (*Commentariorum Series in Matt.* 12), and Origen argued that anyone could celebrate solemn liturgical functions before the people, but not many led holy lives and knew much about Christian doctrine (*Homiliae in Leviticum* vi.6). Not only were unworthy clergy chastised, but Origen berated those who were monks and teachers and yet only *professed* to be religious (*Homiliae in Numeros* ii.1). Thus, he argued, only the form of the church was given to the priests (*Homiliae in Numeros* ix.1).

Origen spoke of mysteries which could not be entrusted even to paper, including secrets of the Eternal Gospel, doctrines of angels and demons, and the history of the soul after death (*In Romanos* ii.4). These subjects happen to be foci of recently found gnostic apocryphal texts which claim to contain secret doctrines or mysteries.

Origen was as fond of apocryphal literature as was Clement, but he was aware that many apocryphal texts had suffered at the hands of corrupt scribes and teachers. While he admitted that many texts had been falsified, Origen made the point emphatically that rather than rejecting such writings, one must test each on its individual merits (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* III.994). In this matter, a Latter-day Saint may well consider Origen to be sixteen centuries ahead of his time in his approach to apocryphal writings (see D&C 91).

THE NAG HAMMADI LIBRARY

Though the historical circumstances relating to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library are essentially unknown and buried under a mountain of myths and legends, the texts themselves have received considerable attention as a major addition to the corpus of New Testament apocryphal writings. Two treatises in the library are actually entitled Apocryphon, though one of

them, the *Apocryphon of James*, is untitled in the original and takes the word ἀπόκρυφον from line 10 in the first page of the text. The other, the *Apocryphon of John*, is found in three different codices of the library (in both a long and a short form) and is clearly titled in all three codices. Many other tractates are entitled Apocalypses, and their secret and esoteric contents are without doubt meant to be included as having great value in the community of believers which copied and kept them. The same is true for works identified as Gospels, Acts, and doctrinal treatises written under the name of some great prophetic or apostolic figure. A very few texts, such as the fragment of Plato's *Republic* (*Nag Hammadi Codices* VI. 5) and the *Teachings of Silvanus* (*Nag Hammadi Codices* VII. 4), are arguably non-gnostic and therefore (?) non-apocryphal in the esoteric meaning of the term. But, taken as a whole, the library seems to be meant for limited use and exposure. It would most likely be a mistake to view the library as an attempt at replacing the so-called orthodox writings of the Old and New Testaments (none of which are found in the Nag Hammadi codices, although many are quoted or alluded to in various tractates); but in all probability its owners saw the collection as a sacred supplement to the more normative and widespread writings associated with contemporary Christianity. Irenaeus admitted as much in his refutation of the gnostics when he stated that he was able to learn the mysteries of the heretics only through intimate association with them, since they were not publicly available (*Adversus Haereses*, Preface 2). Tertullian was more emphatic on the matter of secrecy among heretics, as he stated that "not even to their own disciples do they commit a secret before they have made sure of them" (*Adversus Valentinianos*, 1). The two charges which Irenaeus laid against the heretics were that they perverted or misused accepted scriptures and that they brought in numerous writings unacceptable to the church (*Adversus Haereses* I. 19–20).

Walter Bauer, in his famous work *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, argues for a reversal of positions in the development of fourth-century Christianity. He posits that what became orthodox by the fourth century had earlier origins in heretical camps, and that what came to be seen as heretical in the fourth century was perhaps a more orthodox position in earlier

centuries (Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*). Bauer makes too sharp a distinction between orthodox and heretic, implying an exclusivity not supported by the evidence. He would have been more in keeping with the manuscript evidence in Egypt to allow an overlapping, wherein the “heretic” primarily “went beyond” the position of the “orthodox” believer. A further problem in this regard arises in the observation that the major heresy-hunters date from the last third of the second century. As can be seen from the observations given above regarding both Clement (second century) and Origen (early third century), prior to the major efforts of the heresy-hunters the use of ἀπόκρυφος was reserved among Christians for highly regarded works, and it was due to the activity of Irenaeus and his successors that the βιβλοι ἀπόκρυφοι gained an unsavory reputation among ecclesiastical leaders. It is not unlikely that the Nag Hammadi Library, buried in the latter half of the fourth century, may have been a casualty of the increasing disfavor expressed by ecclesiastical leaders toward the apocryphal tradition in Egyptian Christianity. The same scenario could also be repeated in other regions of the later Roman Empire, where the heavy blows of ecclesiastical censorship rained destructively upon that literary genre.

THE FATHERS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Having given a somewhat detailed survey of the meaning of ἀπόκρυφος and related terms in ancient literary history, we can take in conclusion only the briefest glance at the patristic rejection of this tradition and its literature. In the Christian sectarian wars of the second and third centuries, battles raged over claims of apostolic succession and the authority of various sacred texts. Individuals and groups who favored the apocryphal tradition eventually lost to the ecclesiastical authorities of that branch of Christianity which became the state church. Within its imperial control, the church first attacked and later suppressed this type of literature, finally attaching the term *apocrypha* to the Jewish writings of the Septuagint not contained in the Hebrew canon.

About the same time Clement of Alexandria was warring with the Carpocratians concerning the proper meaning and use of apocryphal texts, two contemporaries were attacking the *idea* of

apocryphal writings. Wilhelm Schneemelcher notes that “Irenaeus sets ἀπόκρυφος beside νόθος (forged) (Iren. *Adversus Haereses* I. 13.1), and Tertullian uses *apocrypha* and *falsa* as synonymous (Tert. *De Pudicitia* 10:12)” (*New Testament Apocrypha*, I, p. 26). Both authors were attacking those whom they considered to be heretics for harboring and fostering writings of greater (not lesser) value to their adherents.

After Origen the general estimation of apocryphal literature falls off sharply. “Priscillian (c. 380) meets with general disapproval when he tries to follow the Alexandrian approach (Tractatus III 58f., 68)” (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* III.995). As the major threat to the growing Catholic church from various gnostic groups declined in the fourth century, the usage of *apocrypha* was shifted by the church fathers to the Jewish books which had been rejected in the synagogue but were very popular in the church (Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, I. 26). The terminology of fourth-century patristic sources regarding Christian texts of questionable value can be observed in numerous instances, but most notably in Eusebius. This admirer of the Emperor Constantine, who was the bishop of Caesarea in the early part of the fourth century, wrote the first extant comprehensive history of the Christian church. In his account Eusebius designated the value of writings parading under the apostolic banner according to the usage of ecclesiastical authors (*H. E.* III.3.2; 24:17–25:7). He did not categorize writings thus considered as canonical or apocryphal, but simply noted whether they met with ecclesiastical approval (ὁμολογούμενοι), whether they sparked controversy and disagreement (ἀντιλεγόμενοι), or whether they had been universally condemned as spurious (νόθοι), disgusting (ἄτοπα), and ungodly (δυσσεβή). Although Eusebius mentioned stylistic variations in the last category of writings differing from those designated as apostolic (not a strange argument to the modern student of New Testament writings), the major force of his argument hinges upon the “unorthodox” doctrinal contents of the writings and the rejection of those works by those who belonged to the succession of orthodox churchmen (κατὰ τὰς διαδοχὰς ἐκκλησιασ-

τικῶν). Although the term *apocrypha* is not used here by Eusebius, one can detect the change in attitude he represents toward apocryphal writings, from sacred and special (for those who treasure them) to spurious and ungodly (to ecclesiastical leaders who oppose them).

Albrecht Oepke avers that the shift in usage of the term *apocrypha* by the church fathers from the gnostic writings to the Jewish writings was really an attempt to show that the church had its own secret books, even if they were exclusively from the synagogue (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* III. 998). The term ἀπόκρυφος had been used deprecatingly for some time in the church, however, and some of those residual feelings naturally were attached to the Jewish apocrypha after the year 400 (Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, I.26). Oepke concludes that this vacillating attitude toward the Septuagint books which comprise the Apocrypha led to the later Protestant usage, in which “apocrypha” refers to non-canonical writings of questionable value (Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* III.100).

CONCLUSION

One might lay the story to rest as finished concerning the function of the term ἀπόκρυφος in antiquity were it not for the modern recovery of many ancient texts from both Judaism and Christianity which have been added to the corpus of apocryphal literature. When the title *Apocrypha* was still being applied to the Septuagint books not found in the Hebrew canon, the Prophet Joseph Smith received a revelation which stated, in part, that “there are many things contained therein that are true . . . [and] there are many things contained therein that are not true” (D&C 91:1–2). The key to understanding the Apocrypha, as given in the revelation, is *not* either total rejection or uncritical acceptance of the texts, but reading them with the aid of the Spirit of the Lord (D&C 91:4–6). That has always been the real test in reading τὰ ἀπόκρυφα, for one cannot unravel the secrets and treasures of the heavens except through revelation. The same

key to understanding is also valid for the many additions to the body of apocryphal writings recovered in recent decades, with the result that “whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom; and whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited” (D&C 91:5–6).