

THE SECRET GOSPEL OF MARK

Morton Smith found an unknown letter transcribed into a book in a library in Mar Saba monastery. The book has gone missing but Smith translated and photographed the transcription for us. The letter is the Letter from Clement of Alexandria to Theodore. It is important for Clement was a major father of the Church.

He took photos and experts were reasonably united in the opinion that it had a style that would make 1750 AD a good year to pick for the writing. Lost Christianities says, "The scribe of the letter, it was widely thought, was a scholar who produced his text in a hurry." It is of a nature that you could write book and book about so anybody writing it in a hurry is definitely not making it up. He was transcribing something older. The book says, "This letter looks very much like something Clement would have written. In fact, it is so much like Clement that it would be well nigh impossible to imagine someone other than Clement being able to write it". One way that you can argue the authenticity is plausible is how the end of Mark has vanished and a fake ending has taken its place. The notion of Smith being the forger must be ruled out.

Incidentally, Lost Christianities tells us that Clement had strange notions about the kind of body the living Jesus had about how it could transform at will and that he did not need his food, "He ate, not for the sake of the body, but which was kept together by a holy energy, but in order that it might not enter into the minds of those who were with Him to entertain a different opinion of him; in a matter as certainly some afterwards supposed that He appeared in a phantasmal shape. But he was entirely impassible; inaccessible to any movement of feeling - either pleasure or pain" - Miscellanies 6.71.2. Where could such odd ideas come from except maybe hidden texts that belong to the New Testament? What we have got is clear that Jesus' humanity was real.

The letter alarmingly declared that Mark wrote a longer gospel than the one that is publicly used by the Church and which is to be kept secret and confidential among certain church leaders. The letter confesses that fake oaths were taken by the leaders of the Church to deny that the portions of Mark outlined in the letter existed.

The new material upsets Christians for it implies dishonesty by the Church. It says Jesus was asked to raise a dead boy in a tomb at Bethany but as Jesus goes to raise him the boy is found alive in the tomb which turns Jesus into a juggler and fool. And there are hints of homosexuality. Some rite took place involving the boy and Jesus in which he taught him the kingdom of God. The letter complains that a sect called the Carpocratians were lying about what was in the Secret Gospel and turning Jesus into a practicing homosexual. He says they are fabricating and distorting.

In Jesus, The Evidence, Ian Wilson implies that the secret gospel is probably authentic when he asks if the letter really came from Clement's pen and states that the majority of today's scholars concur that it is (page 27).

It is important that John Drane does not attempt to dispute the Clement letter's authenticity in his book, The Bible, Fact or Fantasy? Nor does he tackle it in his other book, Jesus and the Four Gospels.

Some hope that Smith forged it. Indeed if he had, he would not have written in a fake testimony from Clement that Mark wrote the gospel under Peter's guidance which contradicted scholarly opinion. The Church lied from the start about who wrote the gospels. In fact nobody knows for sure who wrote the four gospels (page 18, Decoding Mark). Decoding Mark shows the gospel is very hostile to the twelve apostles so it is hard to imagine Peter helping Mark with the gospel or Mark using his data. Jesus in Mark asks the disciples if their hearts are hardened which shows he thought they could be totally depraved monsters. Decoding Mark page 24 explains that this was extremely serious - in Jewish thinking and literature the expression hardened heart meant extreme disobedience, loss of salvation and made one dead spiritually. Mark especially has it in for Peter (page 41). No wonder we don't find any lies about Jesus saying, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church" or have Mark making a pope out of him.

Consider this, "The majority of the scholars consulted accepted the ascription to Clement" (page 301, The Canon of Scripture). Consider also, critics have been forced to falsely claim that the photos of the letter that Smith has which are the only evidence of the letter's existence are bad pictures and that parts of the text have been cropped. The owners of the manuscript have verified its existence though one of them is the Church leader Archimandrite Meliton of Jerusalem. He wouldn't want to help defend the secret gospel for his faith told him it was evil heresy. The way the secret gospel fits in with the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi codices indicates authenticity. Read The Strange Case of the Secret Gospel According to Mark by Shawn Eyer (Alexandria: The Journal for the Western Cosmological Traditions, Volume 3 (1995), pp. 103-129).

The monks who had the book which contained the letter were unlikely to have fabricated such a heretical letter. No forger

would have expected his forgery to get anywhere so it was not worth doing. And the other monks who read it must have accepted it as authentic when they did not destroy the pages.

The letter is incomplete which adds to it being likely to have been authentic. It stopped in the middle of the page of the book it was copied into.

The letter resembles what Clement would have written. It has lots of affinities with his style and choice of words. Many flourishes in the text that are characteristic of Clement and Mark have been found that Smith himself was not aware of. It would take a huge amount of work to see if the phrases and words in the Secret Gospel could be authentically from Clement. Morton Smith undertook that mammoth task over several years. This alone is proof that the text is real for it took an expert years to do the work. And as the work was so specialist and ill-paying, Smith proved his own sincerity. And the majority of experts said the text seemed real and that is a hard level of consensus to get.

The eighteenth century handwriting shows that the letter would have been transcribed a number of times since it was written by Clement. That is why nobody can point to this word or that sentence structure being unlike Clement to declare that it was not Clement's work. Changes and errors would have crept in. But they are so minor and few that they do not cast doubt on authorship. They would if they were serious and/or numerous.

The hidden gospel text does not clearly downgrade Jesus or add anything to Christian belief that doesn't belong to it. All it does is show that the Church gave us an edited version of the gospel and was hiding a lot of the data about Jesus. A forger would be expected to invent some clear heresy to put in it so that controversy would rage and scandalise Christians. Anybody who tried to add to the gospel could not like Christianity but the forger gave no real hint of that so there was no forger. Some would say the mere existence of the letter was a heresy for it said the Church was using scriptures that couldn't be depended on for there were bits dropped out of them and that the scriptures were tampered with. But it would only be a serious heresy for a Church that claimed to infallibly declare that scripture was complete like the Roman Catholic Church has done. It is wiser to believe that the portion belongs in Mark's gospel than to believe we miraculously have the whole Bible that is inspired by God.

The letter uses the Western Reading, of Mark 10:46, like Clement tended to do (page 305, The Canon of Scripture).

It is claimed that the gospel text is fake for it shares some words and parallels with the other gospels which came after Mark. It is as if memories of the texts of the other gospels were introduced. But the transcriber is likely to have done that when the text was near enough to a text he had read before and was familiar with. Perhaps Clement did that when he wrote out sections of the secret gospel. Anyway some of the same gospel phrases could have been put in by Clement by chance. For example, Jesus taking the young man's hand in the Clementine gospel may not have been remembered from the time in Mark and the other gospels when Jesus took the hand of the daughter of Jairus. People tend to use the same words when talking about somebody doing that.

The story of the man being found in the tomb by Jesus and learning the mystery of the kingdom reminds us of Lazarus who was raised from the dead in John's gospel. Smith uses this similarity to authenticate the gospel. But it could just as easily be a different story for there is a huge difference in detail. No it is more likely to be a different one because it is not said that the man was dead. The story gives the lie to any suggestion of the man being dead for it says the man shouted from inside the tomb when Jesus arrived whereas in the Lazarus story Lazarus does not shout. He rises when Jesus tells him. Jesus didn't tell him to arise on arrival. He waited a while. Of the man in the Mark gospel it is not said that that his sisters mourned for him, that he loved Jesus before then like was said of Lazarus and has different details from the Lazarus story in John. Also, there is no resurrection at in the Mark story but a man being taught the mystery of the kingdom of God. The man is the rich young man and not Lazarus and is not called Lazarus. Yet Bruce says that the Clementine text must be forged when it has this story that is so similar to the story of the resurrection of Lazarus in John's gospel. If it is another form of the Lazarus story then it is older than John's account for it has no miracles and is simpler. We see that it does not even say that the young man in the tomb was dead. Remember he must have been alive for he shouted before Jesus went in. This was some kind of symbolic ritual – the man was buried alive for a ritual reason like some people believed in being buried in water for similar reasons.

If the secret gospel account is the original Lazarus story, then consider this. The fact that in John, Jesus wept for Lazarus implying that he did not know Lazarus could be brought back to life and then had the tomb opened and Lazarus implies that Lazarus must have shouted to him. How else did he know Lazarus was alive? John then hints that Lazarus was not raised by Jesus but was buried alive. This would be an important unintended clue that the secret gospel was real.

Smith would not have forged the gospel when it claims to be a secret gospel. What forger makes the red light flash by saying his forgery is obscure for that means it is very likely to be fake? No forger does that.

Brown is by far the more persuasive - and better qualified to judge. His meticulously argued book presents many reasons

why the hoax theory fails to stand up. For example, many of the literary characteristics used to identify the letter as Clement's and the Gospel extracts as being from the same hand as Mark have only been recognised since Smith made his discovery public: neither he nor any other forger could have known about them when creating their hoax. Also, some of Smith's original translation is now recognised as wrong (even the term 'secret gospel' itself); which would be very odd for a forger. The evidence is very much in favour of Clement's letter being genuine. But much more significantly, it seems that the extracts of Mark he quotes are not just authentic, but actually come from the original gospel. It is the New Testament Gospel that was adulterated.

There is no real proof against the letter being real. It is real for the evidence says it is. The fact that Morton Smith has merely imagined the Lazarus connection and tried to twist the secret gospel into backing up his idea that early Christianity was a mystery occult religion and full of libertinism proves that he did not forge it. Yet many critics like to say he did for they have no other candidate for this alleged forging. Whoever wrote into the back of the book of the letters of Ignatius wrote it for himself and not for posterity for it was kept hidden so it was genuine.

The pages Smith found are no longer accessible and have gone missing. A librarian in the monastery photographed the pages of the book and while the pages are missing there are stain marks on them that line up that show that Smith truly did get the Clement letter in this book. Nobody can say it was another book. Librarian, made a set of color photographs of the manuscript pages, which had been removed from the printed book. It does not prove however that some forger did not write on the pages.

The critics seem so confident that the gospel is faked when they had to wait until Smith was safely out of the way in the grave before accusing him of trickery.

[Please read the book by Scott G Brown Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's Controversial Discovery.]

More recently, a book called Decoding Mark looks at how chaisms prove what parts of the gospel are Mark's work and which are the work of a possibly dishonest person and how the missing portion that is given to us in the Clement letter has chaisms that show it belongs to this gospel. Chaisms are poetic word patterns and contrasts. Luke used Mark to make his gospel and he left out a portion of it. Mark's work sticks to a pattern and a different pattern shows up in this portion. It wasn't in Luke's copy of Mark and the different pattern shows it was somebody else's work. In Mark's real writing, the pattern is broken at one point but if you insert the Secret Gospel portion the pattern becomes continuous. This book gives new evidence that the letter was not forged by Smith.

The way the contrasts and reverses of events are worked out in the chiasms would suggest to me to be too well done and that the stories were being made up. Scholar Mary Ann Tolbert of the Pacific School of Religion thinks that the construction of Mark shows that Mark is fiction and adds that the content and story indicates that too (page 144, Decoding Mark).

The Secret Gospel of Mark was kept only at Alexandria. This shows that the pope then was not considered to be the head of the Church. Top Christians alone were allowed to read the gospel and the exclusion of the bishop of Rome shows that the papacy was a later invention of the Church. The Secret Gospel shows that the Catholic idea that Jesus and Mary were very close and she was sinless is challenged by the refusal of Jesus to accept visits from her. Clement instructed in the letter that since the Secret Gospel has been leaked, those who inquire about these links and who ask if Mark wrote the gospel must be lied to. It is known that the early Church did resort to lying to promote the faith. Clement today is a saint of the Romish Church and the Orthodox Church. They honour fake saints and yet many of them believe canonisation is infallible.

The other thing that supports the letter's authenticity is how the ending seems to be missing from Mark. The endings we have are not authentic.

The secret gospel proves that the gospels were hidden so well – that even many harmless bits were hidden – that portions of them were lost forever. When the Church hid the story of Jesus being in the tomb with the young man it must have concealed the other ones with greater determination. We conclude that the early Church tampered with its scriptures to create a religion of lies.

Smith himself said that an imitator of Mark could have been at work. But the evidence of imitation is very subjective for something that could pass as Mark's work even if a little imperfectly could be really his work.

"Smith recognized that Markan vocabulary and sentence construction could point either to Mark's authorship or to imitation of Mark by another author. Smith noted three features that suggested imitation", Brown, 'Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's controversial discovery', p. 6 (2005). The fact is that nobody goes to that effort to put something in an old book that nobody may see.

Smith would be a suspect for he had the ability to do a good imitation but did not have the ability though to age the text as Brown agrees.

"The truth is that at least three other scholars and two members of the Greek Patriarchate handled the manuscript. The information obtained by various inquirers, moreover, corroborates Smith's account that he left the book containing the manuscript among the seventy items that he catalogued in the library at Mar Saba.", Brown, 'Mark's Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith's controversial discovery', p. 26 (2005).

When the letter reads like a text from the real Clement and the Mark text from the real Mark we should take them at face value and why go to that effort to forge lies in a book that is going to be found by chance if ever? There is a place for scepticism but this is not scepticism but obstinacy. A lot of scholars just care about the pay coming in from the Church.

A lacuna is a gap of some sort that indicates something has been possibly excised from a narrative or story. The text about the young man in the tomb in linen is felt to explain better why we have a young man mentioned seemingly for nothing when Jesus is arrested. It solves a lacuna. I would add that the Secret Gospel does not speak of libertine baptismal rites as Morton Smith would have you believe. In fact his distorting the material in his book The Secret Gospel shows he was sincerely telling the truth about how he first found the gospel stories.

Another portion Clement gives us of the secret gospel reads, "And the sister of the young man that Jesus loved was there, along with his mother and with Salome. And Jesus would not receive them".

Look at Mark 10:46 where this goes. "And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging." We are not told what Jericho was even mentioned for. Its a lacuna. It reads better if you add in the secret text.

"And they came to Jericho. And the sister of the young man that Jesus loved was there, along with his mother and with Salome. And Jesus would not receive them and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging."

My preferred lacunae are ones which clearly show something has been taken out of the text. Mark 7:31, NLT: "Jesus left Tyre and went up to Sidon before going back to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Ten Towns" is a waste of ink for what did Jesus do in Sidon? This is what happens with the Jericho text. We are given no secret text for this bit. There could have been one.

If you believe with the Matthew gospel that the Jews feared trickery at Jesus' tomb after he died could this trickery described in the secret gospel in a tomb near Jerusalem explain that fear?

The Secret Gospel of Mark needs to be called what it truly is - it is the Unedited Gospel of Mark. That drives home the point that the gospel we now have is a trick - as in hiding the real story.

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