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The Secret Gospel of Mark:
A 20th Century Forgery

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Abstract

In 1973, Morton Smith of Columbia University published a manuscript consisting of three pages inscribed in an 18th century hand in the blank pages of a 17th century edition of the letters of Ignatius of Antioch that he allegedly found in a Palestinian monastery in 1958. The manuscript consisted of the opening of a letter attributed to Clement of Alexandria addressed to a certain Theodore. The letter treats a “secret gospel of Mark” that was said to be in use in initiation ceremonies in the Alexandrian church. Two quotations from the secret gospel are given: a longer one depicting the raising of a young man in a tomb and his subsequent initiation by Jesus into “the mystery of the kingdom of God” and a shorter one in which Jesus refuses to meet with three women. In a lengthy commentary on the letter and the gospel fragments, Morton Smith depicts Jesus as a homosexual magician who practices a homosexual initiation ritual that frees the initiate from the trammels of the biblical law. Over the years, a number of scholars have accepted the authenticity of the letter and the secret gospel, while none have accepted Smith’s interpretation of them. Two books recently published now show conclusively that Morton Smith forged the letter to Theodore and the gospel fragments. There never was a “secret gospel of Mark” in ancient Alexandria or anywhere else.

In 1941, Morton Smith was a Harvard graduate student on an extended stay in Palestine, pursuing a doctorate at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In that year, Smith received permission from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem to visit the ancient and famous Mar Saba monastery in the Judaeen desert. He spent some two months there. During that visit, according to his own later recollections, he was not much interested in the Greek manuscripts held by the two libraries at Mar Saba. Instead, he was much taken with the worship life of the monks and was enthralled by the Byzantine chanting that was part of the daily services.

Smith had received a Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree at Harvard in 1940 and intended to pursue a doctorate in theology there; it was finally awarded in 1957. He was ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church in 1946 and served in several parishes on a part-time basis until 1950, when he ceased functioning as a priest. He held teaching positions at Brown and Drew and joined the History Department faculty at Columbia University in 1957, where he remained until he retired in 1985. He died in 1991. By the time he began at Columbia, he had become interested in studying ancient manuscripts in various libraries and eventually amassed a good collection of photographs.

In 1958, while on a sabbatical, he received permission from the Patriarchate to revisit the Mar Saba monastery, this time for the purpose of studying and cataloguing some of the manuscripts in its libraries. By that time, Smith was no longer interested in participating in the worship services. He reported that among the books and manuscripts he was studying, he found a 17th century Latin edition of the epistles of St. Ignatius. In a blank folio at the end and on the recto side of a sheet of binder's paper were inscribed, in a hand that Smith dated to the 18th century, a letter attributed to St. Clement of Alexandria, who was active in Alexandria at the end of the 2nd century. The opening lines read: "From the letters of the most holy Clement, the author of the Stromateis. To Theodore."¹ The text of the letter then follows, in which a certain Theodore is congratulated for "silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians." "Clement" goes on to condemn what the Carpocratians have done with the Gospel of Mark and a longer gospel that is said to be in use in the Alexandrian church for the instruction of "those who are being initiated into the great mysteries." "Clement" reports that this "more spiritual Gospel" was composed by Mark after he arrived in Alexandria, although Mark did not divulge in writing the "hierophantic teaching of the Lord," which is reserved only for those who have been initiated.

"Clement" then provides two quotations from what he calls the "Secret Gospel of Mark," a long one and a short one. The long quotation looks like a variant of the story of the raising of Lazarus in Chapter 11 of the Gospel of John,

¹ Smith's translation of the letter is found in the appendix at the end of this article.

with added material. At the urging of an unnamed woman, whose young brother is reported to have died, Jesus comes to his tomb and hears a loud voice. Jesus enters the tomb and raises up the young man, who then becomes enamored of Jesus. The young man invites Jesus to his home, and then after six days, he comes to Jesus clothed only in a linen garment over his naked body. They spend the night together, and Jesus initiates the young man into “the mystery of the kingdom of God.” “Clement” reports that the phrase “naked man with naked man” is not in the Secret Gospel but was added to the story by the Carpocratian heretics.

In the shorter fragment, Jesus comes to Jericho, and three women want to meet with him: the initiated man’s sister, his mother, and Salome. Jesus refuses to meet with the women.

After Smith’s return to Harvard, he circulated transcriptions and translations of the letter “To Theodore” to a select group of colleagues. Many of them accepted the genuineness of the letter and the gospel fragments. Among them was my own teacher at Harvard, Helmut Koester. A notable exception was Arthur Darby Nock, Smith’s teacher at Harvard, who never accepted the genuineness of the letter.

Finally, in 1973, Smith published a complete edition of the letter, with extensive commentary (Smith 1973a).² At the same time, he published a popular book in which he recounted his experiences at Mar Saba and presented his interpretation of the Secret Gospel (Smith 1973b).

The first chapter of Smith’s edition is a description of the manuscript. In the second chapter, Smith provides a word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase commentary on the letter, omitting the gospel fragments, comparing the letter with Clement’s genuine writings, chiefly the *Stromateis*. In the third chapter, he does the same with the gospel fragments, noting, among other things, parallels in other gospels and the Markan style of the fragments. The fourth chapter deals with the background of the Secret Gospel. In this lengthy chapter, Smith discusses such things as the use of secret teachings in early Judaism and the issue of Jesus’ secret teaching, the notion of the kingdom of God, and the role of baptism in Jesus’ practice and in early Christianity. In Smith’s view, Jesus’ baptism rite was a magical act in which initiates were put into an ecstatic trance and experienced an ascent to the heavens, where they were liberated from the trammels of earthly laws. Jesus’ initiation also involved physical union with him. In this view, the historical Jesus was a libertine Jewish magician who engaged in homosexual acts with his initiates. Jesus’ own practices stamped the earliest variety of Christianity, and the ancient libertine Carpocratian sect reflected that stage in the development of the Christian religion.

² The book is dedicated to Arthur Darby Nock.

The fifth chapter of the book presents Smith's view of the history of the text of the Secret Gospel of Mark. He argues that the Secret Gospel was suppressed by a growing orthodox church. Seven appendices are added to the book, including one that gives all of the ancient testimonies on the Carpocratians. At the end of the book are the Greek transcription of the letter, Smith's translation, and photographs of the manuscript.

Over the years, numerous New Testament scholars have accepted the authenticity of the letter "To Theodore" and have advanced various theories as to how the Secret Gospel of Mark should be understood in the history of early gospel traditions. Smith advanced the notion that the Secret Gospel represented an early stage in the development of the Gospel of Mark and that canonical Mark has expunged some of the material that existed in the longer gospel. Some scholars have followed him in this. However, as far as I know, not a single reputable scholar has accepted Morton Smith's interpretation of the letter "To Theodore" and his views of the historical Jesus and earliest Christianity.

In my book *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (Pearson 2004), I provided in the first chapter an inventory of literary sources that were written in Egypt through the 3rd century or arguably could have been written there. I included a discussion of the Secret Gospel of Mark. I called attention to the controversy over the authenticity of that gospel and the letter of Clement of Alexandria ("To Theodore") in which it is imbedded. I wrote, "I see no reason to doubt the authenticity of Clement's letter," and I argued that the Secret Gospel is dependent on the canonical gospels and can hardly have been written before the middle of the 2nd century (Pearson 2004: 43–44). Much to my embarrassment, my careless comment on Clement's letter was quoted in the recent book by Peter Jeffrey (2007), an important and decisive work to which I will return presently.

When I wrote my comments on the letter of Clement and the Secret Gospel of Mark, I should have remembered and reread the treatment by Per Beskow in his book *Strange Tales About Jesus*. Beskow devotes a chapter to the Secret Gospel of Mark in that book (Beskow 1983: 96–103), which deals with modern forgeries of "lost" gospels that were allegedly written in antiquity.

Beskow argues that the Secret Gospel of Mark (i.e., the two quoted fragments) "seems to have been composed from loose pieces of the Gospels of Mark and John, with some minor fragments from Matthew," and he cites the following examples (Beskow 1983: 99), to which others could be added:

"Son of David, have mercy on me" (Iv, 24–25)³
 "the disciples rebuked her" (Iv, 25)

Mark 10:47

Mark 10:13

³ I cite the passages from Morton Smith's Greek transcription by folio (recto and verso) and line number, and I use his translation (see Smith 1973a: 446–452).

“Jesus, being angered” (Iv, 25–26)	<i>Mark</i> 1:41 (“Western” text)
“seizing his hand” (IIr, 3)	<i>Mark</i> 1:31
“loved him” (IIr, 4) ⁴	<i>Mark</i> 10:21
“for he was rich” (IIr, 6)	<i>Mark</i> 10:22 ⁵
“a linen cloth over his naked body” (IIr, 8)	<i>Mark</i> 14:51
“the mystery of the kingdom of God” (IIr, 9–10)	<i>Mark</i> 4:11
“arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan” (IIr, 10–11)	<i>Mark</i> 10:1
“she prostrated herself before Jesus” (Iv, 24)	<i>John</i> 11:32
“the garden where the tomb was” (Iv, 26)	<i>John</i> 19:41
“remained with him that night” (IIr, 9)	<i>John</i> 3:2? ⁶
“the youth whom Jesus loved” (IIr, 15)	<i>John</i> 13:23, etc. ⁷

Beskow calls attention to the inappropriate contexts in which these gospel phrases occur in the Secret Gospel, conveying an impression of inauthenticity. Beskow suggests that both the Secret Gospel of Mark and the letter of Clement in which it is imbedded are modern forgeries. As already noted, I certainly wish I had reread Beskow’s book before I made those comments in my own book.

Beskow’s book is not well known, and therein lies a “strange tale.” He published the book in Swedish in 1979. I was living and working in Sweden at the time, and Beskow was a colleague of mine at Lund University and a good friend. He gave me a copy of his book, and I thought it was interesting and important enough to be published in an English translation. I recommended the book to Norman Hjelm, who was then Director and Senior Editor at Fortress Press in Philadelphia. Fortress accepted it for publication, and Beskow translated it into English, making a few changes in the process for an English-speaking readership. The book was published as *Strange Tales About Jesus* in 1983.

By that time, I was back in Santa Barbara. In January 1984, I received a letter from Norman Hjelm, which was also addressed to Krister Stendahl, the other scholar who had recommended the book for publication. Hjelm included a copy of a lengthy threatening letter from Morton Smith, dated November 16, 1983. Someone had called Smith’s attention to Beskow’s book, and Smith claimed that the chapter on the Secret Gospel was a “malicious libel.” He listed five points that were particularly objectionable. Smith demanded that Fortress delete from all copies not yet sold the offending chapter and then publish in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* a full-page advertisement, written by Morton Smith himself,

⁴ That is, the youth “loved” Jesus.

⁵ Mark has “for he had great possessions.” The Lucan parallel is closer: “for he was very rich” (*Luke* 18:23).

⁶ *John* 3:2: “came to Jesus by night”; *John* 1:39 “remained with him that day.”

⁷ A much larger list of parallels is provided by Edward Hobbes in his response to Reginald Fuller’s paper “Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?” (Wuellner, 1976: 19–26).

acknowledging that the chapter “contained many false statements about Prof. Morton Smith and his books, especially *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* and *The Secret Gospel*.” In his letter to me and Krister Stendahl, Hjelm reported that Fortress Press had also received a letter from Smith’s attorney, indicating that Smith was prepared to sue Fortress Press for \$1,000,000 if some agreement was not reached. Hjelm reported that Fortress’s attorneys were working on the matter and asked for our advice as to the possible legitimacy of Smith’s claims. I wrote a lengthy letter in reply, indicating my opinion that Smith didn’t have a leg to stand on. In a letter dated February 27, 1984, Hjelm thanked me for my advice and indicated that the people at Fortress were making a proposal outlining what they were prepared to do. What they did, unfortunately, was to withdraw the book from circulation. Obviously, I treasure my own copies of Per Beskow’s book, both the Swedish and English versions. I should add that Fortress published a “sanitized” version of the book in 1985, in which passages to which Smith had objected were removed.

The Secret Gospel of Mark, together with the purported letter in which it is “quoted,” is a 20th century fake. This has been conclusively demonstrated in books by Stephen Carlson and Peter Jeffery, neither of whom is a professional New Testament scholar.

It had already been argued, by Quentin Quesnel in 1975, that the Clementine letter is a modern forgery. This view has been reiterated over the years since then. In December 1975, I attended a colloquy on the Secret Gospel of Mark held at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. The featured presenter was Reginald Fuller, who presented a paper entitled “Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?” (Wuellner 1976: 1–18). Fuller took the fragments to be authentic and carried out a form-critical analysis of them. One of the responses to Fuller’s paper was by a classicist at the University of California, Berkeley, Charles Murgia (Wuellner 1976: 35–40). Murgia, who had worked on ancient Latin and Greek forgeries, described a practice used by forgers that he called a “seal of authenticity” (Greek, *sphragis*, seal) involving a (false) claim to authenticity. Murgia saw similar devices in the Clementine letter, beginning with the opening passage, “From the letters of the most holy Clement *Stromatēs* [i.e., ‘author of the *Stromateis* (Miscellanies)’. To Theodore,” which identifies Clement with the title by which he was only *later* known. Another such *sphragis* is what is said about the Carpocratians in the letter, who were a favorite target of the historical Clement. Murgia also argued that the lack of the usual scribal mistakes in the letter indicates that it is an autograph. Murgia’s article has not gained as much attention as it deserves.

Meanwhile, a number of New Testament scholars have continued to argue for the authenticity of the gospel fragments—most notably my teacher Helmut Koester (see, e.g., Koester 1990: 293–303). And now we have a full-scale

monograph by Scott Brown (2005), in which it is argued that the Secret Gospel of Mark and the canonical Gospel of Mark have the same author.

In 2003, Charles Hedrick published an article in the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* referring to a “stalemate in the Academy.” He argues that the Secret Gospel of Mark has not been taken seriously enough by scholars. He also suggests that some of the resistance to Morton Smith’s work might be based on homophobia. Bart Ehrman (2003), in a reply to Hedrick, reiterates the points made years ago by Charles Murgia and also points out that the style of the letter is “more like Clement than Clement ever was” (Ehrman 2003: 161, citing Criddle 1995). And the debate goes on.

In November 2005, at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in San Antonio, I visited the Baylor University Press booth in the book display and picked up a copy of Stephen Carlson’s *The Gospel Hoax* (2005). I returned to my room and began to read it. I could not put it down until I had read it through. Carlson is a patent attorney with considerable experience in the detection of forgeries. Fortunately, he has an excellent classical education and is interested in the study of the New Testament. He is now a Ph.D. candidate at Duke University.

In Chapter 3 of his book, Carlson shows that the cursive handwriting used in the “copying” of the Clementine letter is a 20th century attempt to imitate an 18th century hand. Carlson notes that forgers usually “imitate the handwriting of their exemplars by drawing the letters rather than by writing them naturally. As a result, this difference is visible in the execution of the strokes as shaky lines, blunt ends, and pen lifts in the middle of strokes” (Carlson 2005: 26). In the plates that are provided in the book, a number of close-up examples are provided that show this feature in the photographs of the Clementine letter found in Smith’s book, *Clement of Alexandria*. Smith’s “forger’s tremor” is abundantly illustrated.

The Clementine letter had been copied into the end pages of a 17th century edition of a Latin translation of the letters of Ignatius. Carlson plausibly suggests that Smith had purchased a copy of the book in the United States and added the Clementine letter to its end pages. He then planted the book in the Mar Saba monastery library on his visit in 1958.

In the fourth chapter, Carlson shows that the style of the Greek in the Clementine letter is “too Clementine to be true” and is dependent upon a thorough study of Clement’s works in the standard edition. In addition, the information provided in the letter “To Theodore,” including “quotations” from the Secret Gospel, would have been unnecessary for a 2nd century correspondent and is intended for modern readers. Carlson also provides examples of a number of anachronisms found in the letter.

In the fifth chapter, Carlson refers to the euphemistic suggestion in the Secret Gospel of a casual sexual encounter between the young man and Jesus. He also discusses Smith’s interpretation of the naked man in Gethsemane (*Mark* 14:52) as

one seeking a sexual encounter with Jesus, much as a homosexual in the modern era might visit a park restroom for the same thing. Indeed, the view of homosexuality that is found in the letter and the Secret Gospel is rooted in the mid-20th century and is totally inconsistent with attitudes toward what we call homosexuality that were found in ancient Greco-Roman culture.

I have provided here but a small sampling of the important points made by Carlson in his book. I cannot see how anyone, once having read this book, could entertain the possibility that the Secret Gospel of Mark plays any role at all in the development of the canonical Gospel of Mark. New Testament scholars of our time who have taken Smith's production seriously have been duped.

As I have already noted, I used to accept the authenticity of the Clementine letter and suggested a 2nd century date for the Secret Gospel. One of the reasons for this had been provided by the work of a liturgical scholar, Thomas J. Talley, who argued that the Secret Gospel of Mark and the Clementine letter provide evidence for the development of the liturgical year in ancient Alexandria (Talley 1991).⁸ But Talley's views concerning ancient Alexandrian worship, and any role played in it by the Secret Gospel of Mark, have been thoroughly refuted by Peter Jeffery in his book *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled* (2007).

Peter Jeffery is a musicologist and a specialist in liturgics. He begins with the premise that historians should read a text against the background of its historical context. That also goes for a forged text, for "the most ingenious forger is inevitably a person of his or her time" (Jeffery 2007: 43). Jeffery succeeds admirably in applying this method to the Mar Saba letter. He argues that in unraveling what the writer is really saying, one must keep track of five distinct layers or streams of transmission that are reflected in the text: (1) the gospel for those being instructed (Mark); (2) the "more spiritual" gospel for those being perfected, which Mark wrote in Alexandria; (3) the unwritten interpretation of these documents, that is, the "hierophantic teaching of the Lord," also traced to Mark; (4) the Alexandrian initiation rites; and (5) the Carpocratian gospel, with its interpolations (Jeffery 2007: 51–52).

Jeffery begins with the fourth stream and shows that the resurrection themes, a linen cloth, and a nocturnal initiation following a period of preparation have nothing to do with the Easter liturgy in 2nd century Alexandrian worship. According to Jeffery, "A second-century gospel read at initiations in Clement's church should show Epiphany themes" instead. "The resurrection and Easter themes implied in the Secret Gospel look more like early Christian worship as it was imagined by Anglican liturgiologists of the 1950s than like second-century worship at Alexandria" (Jeffery 2007: 70).

⁸ See especially pages 203–214.

In his fourth chapter, Jeffery takes up the issue of the Alexandrian lectionaries and the aforementioned work of Thomas Talley. He concludes, “Even if we assume that the letter ascribed to Clement was actually written a few centuries after his time, it cannot be made to fit at any point in the history of the Alexandrian liturgy” (Jeffery 2007: 90).

The gospel fragments are discussed next. Jeffery argues that the Secret Gospel is “a cento of words and phrases from the canonical gospels and other ancient writings, carefully structured to create the impression that Jesus practiced homosexuality” (Jeffery 2007: 91). The first excerpt “seems to include a series of double entendres that imply the author understood modern English” (Jeffery 2007: 121). The second fragment has Jesus being sexually tempted by Salome, who is abruptly rejected by him. Jeffery concludes that “the two excerpts of the Secret Gospel, the letter of Clement, and Smith’s interpretation” all imply that Jesus practiced homosexuality. Indeed, “all the layers had the same author” (Jeffery 2007: 122).

In subsequent chapters, Jeffery takes up what Morton Smith says in his popular book about the worship life of the Mar Saba monastery (Chapter 6), Smith’s troubled career as an Anglican priest and his views of Christian morality as taught in the church (Chapter 7), Smith’s untenable interpretation of ancient homosexuality (Chapter 8), the homoerotic subculture in English universities (Chapter 9), and the temptress Salome (Chapter 10). Jeffery shows that “Clement’s” reference to the hierophantic teachings of the Lord leading “the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven veils” and Smith’s interpretation of the figure of Salome are based on Oscar Wilde’s play *Salomé*, which was written in the late 19th century. In that play, Salome attempts unsuccessfully to woo John the Baptist. Her demand for John’s head, after her captivating “dance of the seven veils,” is Salome’s revenge.

In my view, Peter Jeffery has successfully penetrated the five layers in the Mar Saba letter and has demonstrated that the letter was composed by an American scholar in the mid-1950s, that is, by Morton Smith. In the final chapter of the book, Jeffery remarks, “All the experts and eminences whose endorsements Smith claimed to have obtained, and all the other scholars who became convinced that he had discovered a genuine ancient writing, will have good reason to feel abused, more than amused, by the whole sordid mess—arguably the most grandiose and reticulated ‘Fuck You’ ever perpetrated in the long and vituperative history of scholarship” (Jeffery 2007: 242).

Now that we know that the Secret Gospel of Mark, the letter “To Theodore,” and Morton Smith’s two books about the Secret Gospel of Mark have the same author, we have the possibility of reading the Secret Gospel of Mark with the author’s intentions in mind. As has already been noted, the author alleges that the

historical Jesus was a homosexual magician who conducted individual baptismal initiations involving sexual intercourse (see also Smith 1978).

In the first fragment, an unnamed woman whose brother had died prostrates herself before Jesus and says, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” The disciples rebuke her for her advances, and Jesus becomes angry but does follow her to the tomb where her brother lies. Jesus hears a loud voice from the tomb, indicating that the man is not really dead, rolls away the stone, and enters the tomb. Jesus takes the young man by the hand and raises him up. The youth is turned on by Jesus (“loved him”) and invites Jesus to his house. What they do there is not stated, but the two meet again after six days. The youth comes to Jesus “wearing a linen cloth over his naked body,” and they spend the night together. Jesus initiates the youth into “the mystery of the kingdom of God,” presumably involving sexual intercourse as well as a hallucinatory trip to heaven, where the youth is released from the trammels of the sexual and other constraints of the Mosaic Law, as described above.

In the second fragment, the youth’s sister and Jesus’ mother try to arrange for Salome, well known as a loose woman, to meet Jesus. Salome presumably wants to seduce him, but Jesus, who prefers men to women, will have nothing to do with her.

The upshot of all this is that there never was a “secret” or “mystic” (*mustikon*) gospel of Mark in ancient Alexandria or anywhere else. The two fragments were penned by a man who had come to hate the Christian religion that he had once served as an Episcopal priest. I can just see Smith laughing from his grave at having duped so many well-trained scholars with his cleverly composed “gospel.”

It is time now for scholars working on Mark and Markan gospel traditions to see Smith’s composition for what it is, as Adela Yarbro Collins has done in her recent commentary (Collins 2007).⁹

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⁹ See her excursus on the Secret Gospel of Mark on pages 486–493.

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Appendix

Morton Smith's translation of the letter "To Theodore" is presented here, with the gospel fragments in italics.

From the letters of the most holy Clement, the author of the Stromateis. To Theodore.

You did well in silencing the unspeakable teachings of the Carpocratians. For these are the "wandering stars" referred to in the prophecy, who wander from the narrow road of the commandments into a boundless abyss of the carnal and bodily sins. For, priding themselves in knowledge, as they say, "of the deep things of Satan," they do not know that they are casting themselves away into "the nether world of darkness" of falsity, and, boasting that they are free, they have become slaves of servile desires. Such men are to be opposed in all ways and altogether. For, even if they should say something true, one who loves the truth should not, even so, agree with them. For not all true things are the truth, nor should that truth which merely seems true according to human opinions be preferred to the true truth, that according to the faith.

Now of the things they keep saying about the divinely inspired Gospel according to Mark, some are altogether falsifications, and others, even if they do contain some true elements, nevertheless are not reported truly. For the true things being mixed with inventions, are falsified, so that, as the saying goes, even the salt loses its savor.

As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome he wrote an account of the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all of them, nor yet hinting at the secret ones, but selecting what he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed. But when Peter died a martyr, Mark came over to Alexandria, bringing both his own notes and those of Peter, from which he transferred to his former books the things suitable to whatever makes for progress toward knowledge. Thus he composed a more spiritual Gospel for the use of those who were being perfected. Nevertheless, he yet did not divulge the things not to be uttered, nor did he write down the hierophantic teaching of the Lord, but to the stories already written he added yet others and, moreover, brought in certain sayings of which he knew the interpretation would, as a mystagogue, lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven veils. Thus, in sum, he prepared matters, neither grudgingly nor incautiously, in my opinion, and, dying, he left his composition to the church in Alexandria, where it even yet is most carefully guarded, being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries.

But since the foul demons are always devising destruction for the race of men, Carpocrates, instructed by them and using deceitful arts, so enslaved a certain presbyter of the church in Alexandria that he got from him a copy of the secret Gospel, which he both interpreted according to his blasphemous and carnal doctrine and, moreover, polluted, mixing with the spotless and holy words utterly shameless lies. From this mixture is drawn off the teaching of the Carpocratians.

To them, therefore, as I said above, one must never give way nor, when they put forward their falsifications, should one concede that the secret Gospel is by Mark, but should even deny it on oath. For, "Not all true things are to be said to all men." For this reason the Wisdom of God, through Solomon, advises, "Answer the fool from his folly," teaching that the light of the truth should be hidden from those who are mentally blind. Again it says, "From him who has not shall be taken away," and, "Let the fool walk in darkness." But we are "children of light," having been illuminated by "the dayspring" of the spirit of the Lord "from on high," and "Where the Spirit of the Lord is," it says, "there is liberty," for "All things are pure to the pure."

To you, therefore, I shall not hesitate to answer the questions you have asked, refuting the falsifications by the very words of the Gospel. For example, after "And they were in the road going up to Jerusalem," and what follows, until "After three days he shall arise" [Mark 10:32-34], the secret Gospel brings the following material word for word: "*And they came to Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, 'Son of David, have mercy on me.' But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the*

youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan."

After these words follows the text, "And James and John come to him" [Mark 10:35] and all that section. But "naked man with naked man," and the other things about which you wrote, are not found.

And after the words, "And he comes into Jericho" [Mark 10:46] the secret Gospel adds only, "*And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them.*" But the many other things about which you wrote both seem to be and are falsifications.

Now the true explanation and that which accords with the true philosophy

[Here the fragment ends.]