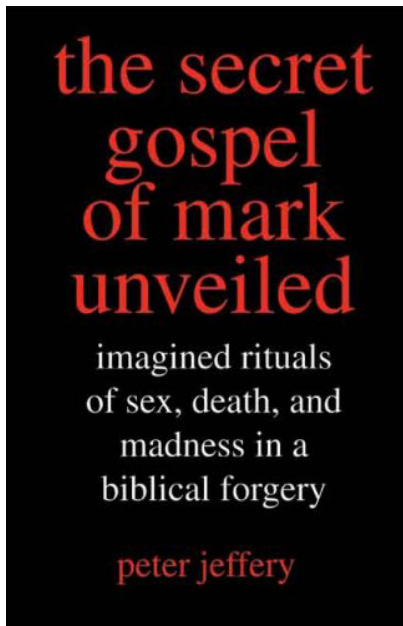


RBL 09/2007



Jeffery, Peter

The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled: Imagined Rituals of Sex, Death, and Madness in a Biblical Forgery

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. Pp. xi + 340.
Cloth. \$40.00. ISBN 0300117604.

Scott G. Brown
University of Toronto
Barrie, Ontario, Canada

THE SECRET GOSPEL OF MARK UNVEILED: AN ESSAY REVIEW

The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled examines a Greek manuscript discovered in 1958 at the monastery of Mar Saba by the late Professor Morton Smith of Columbia University. This manuscript, which was written in eighteenth-century handwriting at the back of a seventeenth-century book, contains a letter ascribed to the late-second-century church father Clement of Alexandria to an unknown Theodore. Clement answers Theodore's questions about a longer form of the Gospel of Mark being used by the Carpocratians, a libertine sect that originated in Alexandria around the third decade of the same century. Clement explains that, after Peter died, Mark came to Alexandria with his own and Peter's notes and there produced "a more spiritual gospel for the use of those who were being perfected." In Clement's church this text was still "being read only to those who [were] being initiated into the great mysteries." What the Carpocratians possess is not the true "mystic Gospel" of Mark, however, but an interpolated falsification made from a copy that their founder, Carpocrates, purloined from an elder. In order to prove this, Clement quotes a resuscitation story that Theodore enquired about, demonstrating that

the text as Mark wrote it does not contain “‘naked man with naked man’ and the other things about which you wrote.” This otherwise unknown pericope, inserted in two parts around canonical Mark 10:35–45, is a thoroughly Markan-sounding version of the raising of Lazarus that differs from John 11 in many respects, most notably in its description of what happened after the miracle. Jesus and the unnamed young man depart the tomb for the latter’s house. “And after six days Jesus gave charge to him; and when it was evening the young man comes to him donning a linen [sheet] upon his naked body, and he remained with him that night; for Jesus was teaching him the mystery of the kingdom of God.”

In 1973, Smith published not only a 454-page analysis of this letter, which included photographs of the manuscript, but also a popularized account of its discovery and the historical conclusions he reached during the years 1958 through 1966.¹ The manuscript itself remained at Mar Saba until 1976 or 1977, when three scholars transferred it to the Patriarchate library in Jerusalem; since then no Western scholars have seen the manuscript, and its location has not been known by the librarians since about 1990.² Most experts in Clement of Alexandria who have mentioned the letter accept it as authentic, but suspicion that it might be a modern forgery, possibly by Smith himself, has existed among some New Testament scholars since its publication. The present book by Peter Jeffery, a musicologist at Princeton University, attempts to prove the latter group right.

Jeffery claims that the issue of the letter’s authenticity has remained unresolved because “Almost all the discussion has been focused on the Secret Gospel and its relationship to canonical Mark, perhaps the very place where the forger (if there was a forger) wanted us to look, like a thimblerrigger playing the shell game” (42; cf. 51).³ He decides instead to investigate the life setting of the letter itself, asking what kind of person would have written it and in which historical period, an approach that he likens to police profiling of the suspect at a crime scene (43–47). Although the book is 340 pages long, it explores only two basic issues: the letter’s ecclesiology and its sexology. Following two introductory

1. Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); idem, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel according to Mark* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

2. Guy G. Stroumsa, “Comments on Charles Hedrick’s Article: A Testimony,” *J ECS* 11 (2003): 147–53; Charles W. Hedrick and Nikolaos Olympiou, “Secret Mark: New Photographs, New Witnesses,” *The Fourth R* 13/5 (September–October 2000): 3–16. For summaries and some additional information, see Scott G. Brown, *Mark’s Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith’s Controversial Discovery* (Études sur le christianisme et le judaïsme 15; Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 25–26; John Dart, *Decoding Mark* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003), 138–39.

3. References to *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled* will be given within parentheses throughout the body of this essay.

chapters, chapters 3 and 4 attempt to find a place for the letter's two Gospel excerpts within church history, arguing for a setting within twentieth-century Anglicanism (Morton Smith was an Episcopalian priest, i.e., an American Anglican). With chapter 5 the discussion shifts to the issue of where these Gospel verses fit within the history of human sexuality. Jeffery contends that, if these verses are read as an extended double entendre, they tell "a tale of 'sexual preference' that could only have been told by a twentieth-century Western author" (50) who inhabited "a homoerotic subculture in English universities" (213).

THE LONGER GOSPEL AND THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN LITURGY

Jeffery's attempt to situate the longer Gospel (I prefer this term to Smith's translation "the secret Gospel") within the history of Christian liturgy begins with the letter's description of how this text was used in the Alexandrian church of Clement's day: "and, dying, he [Mark] left his composition to the church in Alexandria, where it even yet is very securely kept, being read only to those who are being initiated into the great mysteries [τὰ μεγάλα μυστήρια]" (1:27–2:2).⁴ Equating the word *mystērion* or "mystery" with *sacramentum* or "sacrament," Jeffery infers that "the great mysteries" are "apparently clandestine initiation rites that provided the only occasions on which the Secret Gospel was read, or its existence even acknowledged" (17) and, accordingly, that the letter "says that the Secret Gospel had acquired a place in the liturgy of the Alexandrian church" (50). He believes that this inference is bolstered by features within the Gospel excerpts, namely, the six-day period of instruction preceding a vigil, the use of a special white garment, and the interpretive connection between this incident and the young man's death and resurrection. These elements suggest a baptism during the Paschal Vigil. This conception of baptism, however, precludes a setting within the history of Alexandrian liturgy. Rather, a pericope reflecting this conception of baptism finds a more plausible life setting within twentieth-century Anglican theories about early Christian baptism (60–70).

THE GREAT MYSTERIES

Jeffery follows Smith and many others in equating "the great mysteries" with Paschal baptism.⁵ Since Jeffery's liturgical case against the letter's authenticity rests on the validity of this equation, let us examine his grounds for making it. He asserts, "In Greek Orthodox Christianity the word *mysterion* corresponds to the Western Christian term 'sacrament,'

4. Translations of the *Letter to Theodore* are Morton Smith's, as modified in Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, xvii–xxiii.

5. Smith, *Clement*, 168.

so that ‘those who are being initiated into the great mysteries’ are presumably experiencing the three sacraments of Christian initiation: (1) baptism (water immersion), (2) chrismation, sealing, or confirmation (anointing with oil), and (3) Eucharist (receiving the consecrated bread and wine for the first time)” (17).

Evaluation: This unsubstantiated claim is immediately suspect, for it envisions a monolithic unity of practice and theology among Eastern churches in Clement’s day. In actuality, there was no fixed Christian meaning for the word *mystērion* in the late-second century, nor has there ever been one. Surveys of how Christian writers used *mystērion* in the early centuries reveal both variation among authors and general trends. In the Pauline corpus, for instance, *mystērion* sometimes denotes mysterious aspects of God’s plan for salvation, such as the “mystery” that “a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in” (Rom 11:25) and the “mystery” that those who are alive at Christ’s return will be transformed “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” into the resurrected condition without first dying (1 Cor 15:51–52).⁶ In other places *mystērion* refers more broadly to the divine plan for salvation (esp. of the Gentiles) through Christ, a theme that attains prominence in Colossians and Ephesians (e.g., Rom 16:25–26; Col 1:25–27; Eph 3:1–11), although in Eph 5:31–32 *mystērion* seems to denote the allegorical (Christian) meaning of the explanation for marriage in Gen 2:24.⁷ The sense of hidden symbolic meaning likewise occurs in Rev 1:20 and 17:5, 7, where *mystērion* is applied to enigmatic symbolism: “the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand”; “and on her forehead was written a name of mystery: ‘Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth’s abominations’”; “I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her.” The New Testament occurrences of *mystērion* are therefore not cultic but theological and eschatological.⁸

Among the apostolic fathers *mystērion* is rare but likewise denotes theological mysteries, such as Christ’s death and resurrection.⁹ For Justin Martyr (100–165 C.E.), *mystērion* “denote[s] the Christian revelation as a whole, the appearance and passion of Christ, and anything in the Old Testament which could be interpreted as prefiguring the new

6. All biblical quotations are from the RSV.

7. Günther Bornkamm, “Μυστήριον, μνέω,” *TDNT* 4:802–28, at 823; Raymond E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term “Mystery” in the New Testament* (FBBS 21; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 64–66.

8. On the New Testament use of *mystērion*, see, e.g., Bornkamm, *TDNT* 4:817–24; Brown, *Semitic Background*.

9. Bornkamm, *TDNT* 4:824. For discussion, see Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *Revelation and Mystery in Ancient Judaism and Pauline Christianity* (WUNT 2/36; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1990), 214–20.

salvation.”¹⁰ In the latter sense, wherein a mystery is a biblical statement with a hidden Christian meaning, *mystērion* is interchangeable with *parable*, *symbol*, and *type*.¹¹ Contrary to Jeffery’s assertion, Christian applications of *mystērion* and its cognates to the sacraments were uncommon “till well into the third century” and did not become normative until the fourth.¹² What matters most, however, is Clement’s own use of *mystērion*, for whether or not the *Letter to Theodore* is authentic, it presents itself as a letter written by Clement of Alexandria and must therefore be read in relation to his undisputed writings.

H. G. Marsh and Harry A. Echle published careful studies of Clement’s use of *mystērion*. Their categorizations are helpful. Marsh notes that thirty-one of the ninety-one instances of *mystērion* refer to the pagan mystery cults. Clement detested these rites, so these references tend to be polemical.¹³ Echle notes that in the remaining sixty instances, wherein Clement applied *mystērion* to aspects of Christianity, he often had in mind “hidden meanings in Sacred Scripture, in its words, events, or persons.” We find this sense well summarized in *Strom.* 5.10.61.1: “There are the mysteries which were hidden until the time of the apostles and were handed down by them as they received them from the Lord (mysteries hidden in the Old Testament) which ‘now are manifested to the saints.’” These mysteries are revealed through exegesis of a hidden, figurative meaning; hence, in Clement’s writings, as in Justin’s, *mystērion* is sometimes a synonym for *parable* and *symbol*. In addition, Clement used *mystērion* “of the truths of the Christian faith, either individually or as a group to which belong μικρὰ μυστήρια [small mysteries] and μεγάλα μυστήρια [great mysteries]—the μεγάλα alone at times called simply μυστήρια.”¹⁴

10. A. D. Nock, “Hellenistic Mysteries and Christian Sacraments,” *Mnemosyne*, 4th ser., vol. 5 (1952): 177–213, at 205.

11. H. G. Marsh, “The Use of Μυστήριον in the Writings of Clement of Alexandria with Special Reference to His Sacramental Doctrine,” *JTS* 37 (1936): 64–80, at 64. Bornkamm, *TDNT* 4:825.

12. Nock, “Hellenistic Mysteries,” 205, 210–11; Bornkamm, *TDNT* 4:826. For an excellent overall survey, see J. D. B. Hamilton, “The Church and the Language of Mystery: The First Four Centuries,” *ETL* 53 (1977): 479–94. These three studies should be required reading for anyone who studies the *Letter to Theodore*.

13. Marsh, “Use of Μυστήριον,” 64–65.

14. Harry A. Echle, “Sacramental Initiation as a Christian Mystery-Initiation according to Clement of Alexandria,” in *Vom christlichen Mysticism: Gesammelte Arbeiten zum Gedächtnis von Odo Casel OSB* (ed. Anton Mayer, Johannes Quasten, and Burkhard Neunheuser; Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1951), 54–65, at 54–56. The quotation from *Strom.* 5 is Echle’s translation. All subsequent translations from the *Stromateis* are my revisions of William Wilson’s translation in ANF 2, made with reference to the translations in the critical editions of SC 278 (trans. Pierre Voulet), 428 (trans. Alain Le Boulluec), 446 (trans. Patrick Descourtieux), and 463 (trans. Claude Mondésert).

The *Letter to Theodore* uses the exact words μεγάλα μυστήρια, so this is where we must direct our attention.

The concept of initiation into the great mysteries has a specific meaning in Clement's writings. It alludes to the great mysteries at Eleusis, but it does so as a common metaphor for the highest and most esoteric truths of a philosophy.¹⁵ What these mysteries consist of is evident from the contexts in which this phrase occurs:

When we have fully realized our plans with respect to these notes [i.e., the *Stromateis*], in which, if the spirit wills, we will attend to the pressing need—for indeed it is vital, before coming to the truth, to lay out that which must be said as preamble—we shall move on to the true gnostic science of nature [γνωστικὴ φυσιολογία],¹⁶ having been initiated into the lesser mysteries before the great [τὰ μικρὰ πρὸ τῶν μεγάλων μνηθέντες μυστηρίων], so that nothing will be in the way of the true revelation of divine mysteries [ιεροφαντία], our having completed the preliminary purifications and explanations of the things needing to be passed on and communicated. Thus, the science of nature according to the canon of the truth of the gnostic tradition, which is to say, the *epopteia*, begins with cosmogony and ascends from there to the department of theology [τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος]. Accordingly, we shall make the book Genesis written by the prophet our starting point for this account of the tradition, exposing in due course the doctrines of the heterodox and endeavoring as much as possible to refute them. But all of that will be written according to divine will and inspiration. For the time being, it is necessary to turn to the subject at hand and to finish the account of ethics. (*Strom.* 4.1.3.1–4)

This passage distinguishes the great mysteries from preliminary matters of instruction in ethics, called the lesser mysteries. The former involve the rational study of nature, which is founded on cosmogony and culminates in theology. The result of this study is *epopteia*, the name given to the highest degree of revelation experienced by initiates in the Eleusinian mysteries.

Clement returns to these ideas in *Strom.* 5:

It is not then without reason that the mysteries of the Greeks commence with rites of purification [τὰ καθάρσια], as also the washing in water [τὸ λουτρόν] among

15. For discussion of the metaphorical use of mystery language in Plato, neoplatonism, and Alexandrian theology, see Bornkamm, *TDNT* 4:808–10, 825–26; Hamilton, “Language of Mystery,” 479–82, 485–89.

16. On the meaning of this concept, see Laura Rizzerio, “La notion de γνωστικὴ φυσιολογία chez Clément d’Alexandrie,” *StPatr* 26 (1993): 318–23.

the Barbarians [i.e., Jews and Christians]. After these are the lesser mysteries [τὰ μικρὰ μυστήρια], which function to teach and prepare for what is to come after, then the great mysteries [τὰ δὲ μεγάλα], which concern the totality of things, in which nothing remains to be learned, but only to contemplate [ἐποπτεύειν] and comprehend both nature [φύσιν] and things. We shall understand the mode of purification by confession, and that of contemplation [ἐποπτικόν] by analysis, advancing by analysis to the first notion, beginning with the properties underlying it; abstracting from the body its physical properties, taking away the dimension of depth, then that of breadth, and then that of length. What remains is a point, a monad, so to speak, having position; if we take away position, we have the intellectual concept of unity. If, then, abstracting all that belongs to bodies and what are called incorporeal realities, we cast ourselves into the greatness of Christ, and from there advance by holiness into immensity, we may somehow attain an intellectual conception of the Almighty, knowing not what he is, but what he is not. (5.11.70.7–71.3)

Clement now explicitly compares the stages of Christian initiation to the stages of initiation in the Eleusinian mysteries, noting general similarities between the two processes. In the Eleusinian mysteries, the first step is a purification rite in the sea and a sacrifice; next comes *myesis*, the initiation in the lesser mysteries at Agrai, which was held in the month of February; initiation into these lesser mysteries was a prerequisite to (and, in Clement's view, preparation for) *epopteia*, the initiation in the great mysteries, which were held in September at Eleusis. Due to the fact that an initiate could not undergo both rites in the same year, the whole process of initiation took at least nineteen months.¹⁷ The corresponding elements in Christian initiation are baptism, the lesser mysteries, and the great mysteries.

This is a rare instance in which Clement compares Christian baptism to a stage of mystery initiation, but any support Jeffery might derive from this passage is negated by the fact that it explicitly distinguishes baptism from both the lesser and the great mysteries, the latter of which involves the highest form of revealed knowledge (*epopteia*) “in which nothing remains to be learned, but only to contemplate and comprehend both nature and things.” The great mysteries are something altogether different from the preliminary purification of baptism; indeed, as soon as Clement mentions them, he drops the literal comparison between Christianity and the Eleusinian mysteries and switches into a philosophical mode, describing how abstraction leads to an understanding of God

17. C. Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (trans. Ralph Manheim; New York: Pantheon, 1967), 48.

in terms of what he is not (apophatic theology). This is “the department of theology” and the subject matter studied by the true gnostic.

By comparing Alexandrian Christianity’s esoteric truths with the Eleusinian mysteries, Clement is elaborating a common philosophical trope that can be traced back to Plato, as Clement himself pointed out:

Now according to Moses, philosophy is divided into four parts: first, the historical; and second, that rightfully called the legislative, which two properly belong to the ethical treatise; the third, pertaining to sacrifice, concerns the study of nature [τῆς φυσικῆς θεωρίας]; and the fourth, above all others, the *epopteia* [ἡ ἐποπτεία], concerns the department of theology [τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος], which Plato predicates of truly great mysteries, while Aristotle calls this class metaphysics. (*Strom.* 1.28.176.1–2)

This passage explicitly connects the great mysteries with theology, *epopteia*, and metaphysics, and distinguishes them more clearly from the study of nature, which forms their foundation. In the writings of Origen, Clement’s successor in Alexandria, this division of human knowledge into ethics, physics, and theology corresponds explicitly to successive levels of Christian development: “For Origen the discipline of ethics concerns the acquisition of an honourable life through practice of the virtues. ‘Physics’ teaches both the nature of things and God’s purpose in bringing them into being, so that ‘nothing may be done contrary to nature.’ Finally, contemplation enables us to ‘rise above the visible to contemplate something of divine and heavenly things, gazing upon them solely with the mind.’”¹⁸ This gradual process of moral and intellectual growth through discipline and training in philosophy and (eventually) theology is essentially what Clement was talking about when using the mystery language of Eleusis.

The same is true of the mystery-initiation language in the writings of Philo, Clement’s Jewish predecessor in Alexandria (20 B.C.E.–50 C.E.).¹⁹ Clement’s conception of the great

18. Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 64, who is citing Origen, *Comm. Cant.* Prol. 3.3 (SC 375:130). For discussion, see Walter Wagner, “Another Look at the Literary Problem in Clement of Alexandria’s Major Writings,” in *Literature of the Early Church* (vol. 2 of *Studies in Early Christianity*; ed. Everett Ferguson et al.; New York: Garland, 1993), 165–74; repr. from *CH* 37 (1968): 251–60; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 57–74.

19. Cf. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), 1:49: “From all this we may gather that by those who have been initiated into mysteries he [Philo] means men of good native abilities and proper education

mysteries is firmly rooted in Alexandrian Judaism and literarily dependent upon Philo. Harry Wolfson explains that in Philo's classification, the lesser and great mysteries have both an ethical and a philosophical component. Initiation into the lesser mysteries involves keeping the commandments of Moses, but also the "indirect knowledge of God" obtained through observation of God's actions and his creations (i.e., nature). This is learning through philosophy and reason. Initiation into the great mysteries involves a higher form of virtue implanted in humans directly by God, but also "the knowledge of God as one who is directly 'visible apart from His powers'" —a "'clear vision' of God" analogous to *epopteia* at Eleusis. This is learning through revelation.²⁰ Philo explains very clearly in *Abraham* 24.121–23 that what distinguishes initiation into the great mysteries from all prior forms of initiation is the mystical comprehension of God apart from his powers, which is what Clement described in *Strom.* 5.11.²¹

Clement and Philo agree that the great mysteries of theology are available in the scriptures but have been concealed from the unworthy. Not long after his discussion of the lesser and great mysteries in *Strom.* 5.11, Clement returns to the mystery theme, quoting occurrences of *mystērion* in the New Testament that prove that knowledge about God is deliberately concealed in mystery:

And was it not this that the prophet conveyed obliquely, when he ordered "unleavened cakes" to be made, intimating that the truly sacred mystic word, concerning the Unbegotten and his powers, ought to be concealed [Gen 18:6; Exod 12:39]? Confirming these things in the Letter to the Corinthians, the apostle conveys plainly: "But we speak wisdom among those who are perfect, a wisdom not of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are passing away. But we speak the wisdom of God hidden in a mystery" [1 Cor 2:6–7]. And again elsewhere he says: "To the knowledge of the mystery of God in Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" [Col 2:2–3]. These things the savior himself seals when he says: "To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of the heavens" [Mark 4:11; Matt 13:11]. And again the Gospel says that our savior spoke the word to the apostles in a mystery. For even prophecy says of him: "He will open his mouth in parables, and will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world" [Matt 13:35]. And now, by the parable of the leaven, the Lord conveys concealment; for he says, "The kingdom of the heavens is like

who have succeeded in mastering their passions and in acquiring a true knowledge of the existence and nature of God" (elaborated on pp. 51–55).

20. Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:47–48, who is citing *Sacrifices* 15.60; *Alleg. Interp.* 3.33.100.

21. For translation and discussion of this passage in Philo, see Louth, *Mystical Tradition*, 22–23.

leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" [Matt 13:33]. (*Strom.* 5.12.80.3–8)

Clement derived his exegesis of the unleavened cakes from a discussion of the lesser and great mysteries in Philo's *Sacrifices*.²² In Clement's view, Paul's use of *mystērion* confirms that the subject of the nature of God ("the Unbegotten and his powers") ought to be concealed. Significantly, Clement's proof that Christ himself thought that the teachings about the nature of God ought to be concealed derives from the Gospels' picture of Jesus hiding the truth from outsiders by speaking in parables. The first of these proof texts, "the mystery of the kingdom of the heavens" (τὸ μυστήριον τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν; a conflation of Mark 4:11 and Matt 13:11), is of particular interest to us, for it shows how Clement would have understood the very mystery that Jesus teaches the young man in the letter's Gospel excerpt: "and when it was evening the young man comes to him donning a linen [sheet] upon his naked body, and he remained with him that night; for Jesus was teaching him the mystery of the kingdom of God" (*Letter to Theodore* 3.7–10). The plural *mystēria* in Matt 13:11 and Luke 8:10 probably facilitated Clement's association of "the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens" with the great mysteries, yet Clement uses the singular, *mystērion*, which in this expression is unique to canonical Mark 4:11 and the young man's instruction in longer Mark.

Clement inferred from Mark 4:10–12, 33–34 that Jesus taught the great mysteries of theology in parables so that the unworthy would not comprehend them, but explained these mysteries privately to his disciples, thereby creating an oral tradition of the true exposition of the scriptures:

For neither prophecy nor the savior himself announced the divine mysteries simply so as to be easily apprehended by just anyone, but expressed them in parables. The apostles accordingly say of the Lord that "he spoke all things in parables, and without a parable he spoke nothing to them" [Mark 4:33–34; Matt 13:34]; and if it is true that "all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" [John 1:3], then also prophecy and the law were through him, and were spoken through him in parables. "But all things are

22. Philo, *Sacrifices* 15.60–16.62 reads: "for the words of the scripture are, 'To make secret cakes'; because the sacred and mystic statements about the one uncreated Being, and about his powers, ought to be kept secret; since it does not belong to every one to keep the deposit of divine mysteries properly.... In reference to which, those persons appear to me to have come to a right decision who have been initiated in the lesser mysteries before learning anything of these greater ones. 'For they baked their flour which they brought out of Egypt, baking secret cakes of unleavened Bread' " [Exod 12:34]. As translated by C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo: New Updated Edition. Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 101–2.

right,” says the scripture, “before those who understand” [Prov 8:9], that is, those who receive and observe, according to the canon of the church, the exposition of the scriptures explained by him” [Mark 4:34; cf. 4:13–20]. (*Strom.* 6.15.124.6–125.2; cf. 1.12.56.2)

For this reason the holy mysteries of the prophecies are veiled in the parables, reserved for chosen persons, who were selected to pass from faith to knowledge. For the style of the scriptures is parabolic.... And now also the whole economy which prophesied of the Lord appears indeed a parable to those who do not know the truth.... But prophecy does not employ figurative forms in its expressions for the sake of beautiful style. But because the truth is not the prerogative of all, it is veiled in manifold ways, causing the light to arise only on those who are initiated into knowledge, who seek the truth through love. Thus, in the Barbarian philosophy, the proverb is called a mode of prophecy, and the parable is so called, and the enigma as well. (6.15.126.2–3, 127.1, 129.4–130.1)

Although Jesus concealed the great mysteries of theology from the unworthy by conveying them in parables and inspired scripture such that it has a parabolic style, knowledge of those mysteries is nevertheless available to anyone who has been taught “the exposition of the scriptures explained by him.”

Philo used the mystery language of Eleusis to describe the way scripture reveals the great mysteries to those who are capable of comprehending them: “For I myself, having been initiated in the great mysteries by Moses, the friend of God, nevertheless, when subsequently I beheld Jeremiah the prophet, and learnt that he was not only initiated into the sacred mysteries, but was also a competent hierophant or expounder of them, did not hesitate to become his pupil” (*Cherubim* 14.49).²³ For Philo, the experience of reading the Torah and the book Jeremiah was a metaphorical initiation by hierophants, whom he also likens to leaders of philosophical schools. The texts themselves are the hierophants, initiating their readers into their concealed truths. The *Letter to Theodore* expresses the same notion using the metaphor of the *mystagogos*, the person who led the initiates (*mystai agōgos*) to the *epopteia*:²⁴

Nevertheless, he [Mark] 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 traditions of which

23. As translated in Yonge, *Philo*, 85.

24. Kerényi, *Eleusis*, 75, 78–79.

he knew the interpretation would, as a mystagogue, lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth hidden by seven [veils]. (1.22–26)

As Wolfson points out, Philo described knowledge of the method of allegorical interpretation as an initiation. Those who had not been initiated into allegory were outsiders to the true meaning of scripture (*Flight* 32.179).²⁵ Had Philo been around to read Mark's Gospel, he probably would have construed Jesus' allegorical explanation of the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:10–20 in terms of Jesus *initiating* his disciples into a *philosophical mystery* by showing them how to discern the spiritual (i.e., concealed, inner) meaning of his parables through allegorical exegesis. And I think he would have been right.

Clement understood the mystery of the kingdom of God as a designation for the great mysteries of theology that are hidden within the scriptures, so it stands to reason that he would have construed the longer Gospel's story about Jesus teaching the young man the mystery of the kingdom of God as a philosophical initiation into theological mysteries and supposed that these mysteries are veiled in symbols and figurative language within the longer Gospel of Mark. Everything that the *Letter to Theodore* says about Mark's other Gospel makes sense within this framework. It tells us that when Mark came to Alexandria he incorporated into his Gospel "the things suitable to those studies which make for progress toward knowledge [γνῶσιν]. Thus he composed a more spiritual gospel for the use of those who were being perfected [τῶν τελειουμένων]" (1.20–22). This utility in connection with gnostic study is what distinguishes the longer Gospel from Mark's earlier, Roman Gospel, which he composed for catechumens (τῶν κατηχουμένων) in order to strengthen their faith (1.15–18). Accordingly, the audience of the longer Gospel is not catechumens who are preparing for baptism but baptized Christians involved in advanced theological instruction, the goal of which is gnosis. The letter agrees with Clement's conception of perfection as something attained gradually, through years of moral and intellectual training, as he explained at length in *Strom.* 7.10: "Gnosis is, one might say, a kind of perfection [τελειωσίς] of a person as a person, because it confers on the individual, by the science of divine things, the fullness of character, of life and of reason, in harmony and in reasonable accord with itself and with the divine word. For it is by gnosis that faith is made perfect [τελειοῦται], because it alone can make the faithful perfect [τελείου]" (55.1–2).

The letter also refers to "the hierophantic teaching of the Lord" that Mark prudently refrained from including in his second Gospel. At Eleusis, the site of the great mysteries, the hierophant was the high priest who made the sacred things appear, the *epopteia*;

25. Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:48.

hence hierophantic teaching is teaching that reveals the great mysteries. Because Clement equated the mystery of the kingdom of God with the great mysteries and believed that Jesus explained these mysteries in private to his disciples, Clement would have understood the longer Gospel's unelaborated reference to private nocturnal instruction in the mystery of the kingdom of God as depicting Jesus transmitting his hierophantic teaching to a disciple, the first link in a chain of secret oral transmission from Jesus through his disciples to the leaders of the church, and so on down to Clement.

That unwritten oral teaching is what becomes the basis for the proper interpretation of the longer text itself. Although Mark was careful not to include the hierophantic teaching in an overt form in the longer Gospel (as was Clement in his own writings; see, e.g., *Strom.* 1.1.14.1–15.1), he included special *logia* whose correct (figurative) interpretation would “lead the hearers into the innermost sanctuary of that truth [τὸ ἄδυτον τῆς ... ἀληθείας] hidden by seven [veils]” (1.25–26).²⁶ The same metaphors of veil and sanctuary of the truth occur in the *Stromateis* in reference to the hiding of mysteries in allegory:

It is to spiritual persons that we interpret spiritual things. That is why, in accordance with the figurative mode of concealment, the utterly sacred word,²⁷ which is truly divine and most necessary for us, deposited in the sanctuary of truth [τῷ ἀδύτῳ τῆς ἀληθείας], was by the Egyptians indicated by what among them were called sanctuaries [ἀδύτων], and by the Hebrews by what is cryptically called the veil [παραπετάσματος]. Only the consecrated, that is, those devoted to God, ... were allowed access to them. For Plato also thought it not lawful for “the impure to touch the pure.”²⁸ Hence the prophecies and oracles are spoken in enigmas, and the mysteries are not exhibited indiscriminately to just anyone, but only after certain purifications and previous instructions.... All people, therefore, ... who have spoken of divinity, both Barbarians and Greeks, have veiled the first principles of things, and handed down the truth in enigmas and symbols and allegories and metaphors and similar tropes. (*Strom.* 5.4.19.3–20.1, 21.4)

Through the metaphors of veil and sanctuary, the author of the *Letter to Theodore* indicates that the longer Gospel conveys its theological mysteries through enigmas and symbols and allegories and metaphors.

26. The word *λόγια* is not restricted to sayings in Clement's writings. In this context it means “passages.” See Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 125–27.

27. Cf. “the truly sacred mystic word, concerning the Unbegotten and his powers” in *Strom.* 5.12.80.3.

28. Cf. *Letter to Theodore* 2.18–19 (“for ‘All things are pure to the pure’”) as Clement's justification for quoting the longer text to Theodore.

The letter's more general descriptions of the longer text as "the mystic gospel" (τὸ μυστικὸν εὐαγγέλιον; 2.6, 12) and "a more spiritual gospel" (πνευματικώτερον εὐαγγέλιον; 1.21–22) likewise concern its ability to disclose hidden mysteries. Clement used the word *mystikos* numerous times in connection with scripture to describe its figurative or "mystic" level of meaning.²⁹ Clement likewise used the phrase "spiritual gospel" to distinguish the Gospel of John as a work that makes manifest the inner theological essence (the invisible spirit) contained and concealed within the outward facts (the body) of the Synoptic Gospels (cited in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.7). Hence a mystic Gospel is not a secret Gospel, as Smith thought, but a Gospel that was especially suited to disclose the great mysteries through figurative exegesis. Philo preferred the Torah and the book of Jeremiah for this purpose; Origen preferred the Song of Songs.³⁰

The various aspects of the letter's description of the nature of the more spiritual Gospel and its use within Clement's church coalesce to suggest that it was expounded allegorically to worthy, theologically advanced Christians as a means of transmitting the Alexandrian church's mysteries about the nature of God. This is a purely metaphorical initiation. The letter says nothing about liturgy or an annual ceremony, let alone "clandestine initiation rites that provided the only occasions on which the Secret Gospel was read, or its existence even acknowledged" (a rather strange account of Christian baptism, I might add). Indeed, the letter explicitly dissociates the longer Gospel from catechumens. Like most interpreters, Jeffery has confused Morton Smith's misinterpretation of the letter with the letter itself.

THE LIFE SETTING OF THE LONGER GOSPEL OF MARK

Jeffery's baptismal reading of the *Letter to Theodore* is based not only on the letter's description of how the Alexandrian church used the longer Gospel of Mark but also on the contents of the first Gospel excerpt itself. According to Jeffery, various features of this pericope imply a ritualistic life setting: "the weeklong period of teaching that ends with a nocturnal vigil," "the naked body covered by a linen cloth," and the connection between this instruction and the preceding incident of the young man's rising from the dead, which imparts a theological meaning of dying and rising that is appropriate for an initiation rite. More precisely, the initiation story depicts a baptism during the Paschal Vigil: "If 'after six days' refers to the period of Monday through Saturday, both the raising of the youth and his meeting with Jesus would have occurred on the first day of the week, or Sunday; the nocturnal meeting could have begun Saturday evening and lasted until

29. On Clement's use of *μυστικός*, see Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 131–35.

30. Dysinger, *Psalmody*, 65.

‘very early’ Sunday morning, the time of the resurrection in Mark (16:2).” The whole incident, moreover, is set after Jesus’ prediction of his death and resurrection in Mark 10:32–34. “The linen cloth or *sindōn* could suggest a towel used in conjunction with a water immersion, or a shroud or burial cloth.” Smith himself connected the linen sheet “with the white garments that, in some early Christian traditions, the neophytes or newly baptized would put on after emerging naked from the baptismal pool” (61).

If one accepts Jeffery’s premise that longer Mark’s raising and instruction story represents the liturgy for baptism in the Alexandrian church of Clement’s day, the pericope appears problematic, for it does not fit with our knowledge of Christian baptism in that period. Jeffery points out that second-century fathers did not associate baptism with death and resurrection but with such themes as illumination, fasting, and exorcism (62, 68). The use of white robes or any special clothing cannot be documented before the end of the fourth century (67, 116–17). Admittedly, the *imagery* of changing clothing occurs in various early Christian references to baptism, but these “are likely to be allegorical or metaphorical, imagistic rather than literal references to ritual practice” (116). There is no evidence in the second century of “a preparation period leading to a vigil” (62). For both Clement and the Egyptian church, the model for Christian baptism was Jesus’ baptism by John, not a story about Jesus baptizing others or anything related to the raising of Lazarus, and the time for baptism was Epiphany, not Passover (68–69, 88–89). As a baptism reading, longer Mark is out of place for Clement’s church.

Jeffery likewise cannot find a place for longer Mark as a baptism reading in the later history of Alexandrian liturgy (ch. 4). He points out, however, that Anglican liturgiologists of the mid-twentieth century envisioned the Paschal Vigil, white robes, and death-and-resurrection themes as part of the earliest Christian baptismal practices. Here Jeffery makes some unclear distinctions between Anglican practice and Anglican theory. He notes that the prayer of the day for Easter Even in the Book of Common Prayer used by Anglicans in the mid-twentieth century “alludes to Romans 6:3–11 in associating baptism with death and burial as a preparation for resurrection” and “seem[s] intended to recall (some aspects of) the pre-Reformation liturgy” in England, when “adult baptisms took place during the Paschal Vigil,” which ended “very early Sunday morning,” and the baptized Christians put on white robes after emerging from the baptismal pool (63). Jeffery does not specify which aspects of this practice are actually recalled in the Book of Common Prayer, but in an endnote he acknowledges that, “before the liturgical renewal movement that began in the 1970s, the official Prayer Books used in most branches of the Anglican Communion did not contain any sort of Paschal Vigil” nor any reference to a white robe (275–76 n. 21). What was lacking in the actual practice of Anglican churches in the 1950s, however, Jeffery finds in the writings of two Anglican liturgical scholars, Gregory Dix and Massey H. Shepherd, who attempted to reconstruct Christian baptismal

practices from a document called *The Apostolic Tradition*, which they dated around the time of Clement. Dix and Shepherd supposed that the earliest Christians baptized during the Paschal Vigil and that the rite included “Passover and resurrection typology” and “white ritual garments [that] were put on after baptism” (65–67). Jeffery concludes that the author of the *Letter to Theodore* may be someone who was familiar with these Anglican views about early Christian baptism.

Evaluation: Since this is an exegetical argument based on the letter’s Gospel excerpts, it is vital that we examine it against the text itself. Below is Morton Smith’s translation, with the versification used by the Jesus Seminar. Hereafter I will refer to the first excerpt as LGM 1 (longer Gospel of Mark 1), and the second as LGM 2:

LGM 1: (After Mark 10:34.) ¹ And they come into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. ² And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, “Son of David, have mercy on me.” ³ But the disciples rebuked her. ⁴ And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, ⁵ and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. ⁶ And going near Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. ⁷ And straightway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. ⁸ But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. ⁹ And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. ¹⁰ And after six days Jesus told him what to do, ¹¹ and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. ¹² And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. ¹³ And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.

LGM 2: (Within Mark 10:46.) ^{10:46a} And he comes into Jericho. ¹ And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, ² and Jesus did not receive them. ^{10:46b} And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples ...

Confronted with the actual text, it becomes apparent that the anachronistic liturgical features of which Jeffery speaks are unfounded projections. The narrative is silent about what happened during the six days and describes nothing but teaching occurring on the evening of the seventh, so there is no basis for Jeffery’s inference of a “weeklong period of teaching” corresponding to catechesis (61) or for his characterization of the one night of actual teaching as “worship” (70). His term *vigil* is tendentious, too. Perhaps LGM 1:11–12 describes a vigil in the general sense of religious activities that occur when the participants would normally be asleep, but Jeffery has in mind the more specific ecclesiastical sense of a watch kept during the night before a feast. Jeffery equates this

evening of teaching with the Paschal Vigil (the night before Easter Sunday), imagining that the instruction begins on a Saturday night and ends very early on Sunday morning, which is the same time of day as the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb (Mark 16:2). But nothing in LGM 1 indicates which day of the week Jesus arrived in Bethany (the last reference to a particular day of the week in the Gospel of Mark occurs in 6:2). It might be possible to work backwards from the next reference to a specific day of the week (15:42) to arrive at a date of Saturday night for the night of teaching,³¹ provided we presume, as I do, that LGM 1:13 refers to a westward crossing of the Jordan from "Bethany beyond the Jordan" to the vicinity of Jericho (cf. John 1:28; 10:40) and that Jesus arrives at Jerusalem in the evening of the same day on which he left the young man's home (Mark 11:11).³² This way of dating LGM 1 relative to passion week would create two problems for Jeffery's hypothesis, however. First, he would have to presume that Smith, the alleged forger, made a mistake in identifying "Bethany" in LGM 1:1 as the Bethany near Jerusalem, because Smith's assumption that the raising of the young man takes place in Judea implies that 1:13 describes a return to Transjordan for an indeterminate length of time, which would make it impossible to work backwards from the passion to determine the day of the week on which Jesus instructs the young man. Second, although this maneuver would turn the evening of nocturnal instruction into a vigil before a feast, that feast would be Palm Sunday, as Thomas Talley supposed, not the Paschal Vigil.³³ What is certain about this evening of instruction is that it is not the actual night before Easter, for this encounter occurs while Jesus is still journeying to Jerusalem, at least a week before Easter Sunday. The anachronistic Paschal Vigil that Jeffery purports to disclose is his own projection into LGM 1 of the pre-Reformation and premedieval baptismal practices that he described on page 63 of his book. The text itself depicts Jesus teaching a disciple on an unspecified night the same mystery that he privately taught his other disciples in Mark 4.

31. See Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 801, who works backward from the chronological marker of Mark 14:1. We run into the problem of whether the dating of the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread "after two days" in 14:1 refers to the very next day, as Gundry believes (on the basis of Mark's use of "after three days" to denote a day and a half in 8:31; 9:31; 10:34), or to the day after the next day, which better fits the wording and agrees with Mark's tendency elsewhere to use μετά to mean "after" when denoting a chronological sequence (13:24; 14:28, 70; probably also 1:14). We must also presume that all of 11:20–13:37 takes place on one day and that Jesus' objection, "Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me," has only three days in view (14:49).

32. See Scott G. Brown, "Bethany beyond the Jordan: John 1:28 and the Longer Gospel of Mark," *RB* 110 (2003): 497–516; idem, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 90–91.

33. See Thomas J. Talley, "Liturgical Time in the Ancient Church: The State of Research," *Studia Liturgica* 14 (1982): 34–51, at 43–48.

What about “the white garment(s)” to which Jeffery repeatedly refers (62, 77, 100, 116–18, 245)? Longer Mark’s description of the young man “wearing a linen [sheet] upon his naked body” (περιβεβλημένος σινδόνα ἐπὶ γυμνοῦ) gives no indication of the color of the material, nor is it explicit about its form. In some places Jeffery describes the linen (*sindōn*) not as a proper garment but as a flat sheet (63, 111, 113, 115, 119, 121). This inference is probably correct, for three reasons. First, the phrasing “wearing linen over his naked body” is an odd way to describe a person wearing an ordinary sown garment with sleeves. Second, when the identical phrase is applied to the young man in Gethsemane (14:51), it denotes something that came off in the hands of would-be captors. It is not as easy to imagine the young man wriggling out of a proper sown garment as out of a simple sheet that he had wrapped around his body in the form of a sleeveless tunic.³⁴ Third, and most importantly, the image of a naked body wrapped in a “linen sheet” occurs still later in Mark’s description of Jesus’ interment (15:46), where the same word (*sindōn*) refers to a flat sheet. Since the young man in longer Mark was likewise interred in a tomb when Jesus first encountered him, it makes good sense to suppose that the linen sheet worn during the night of teaching is (or is like) the linen sheet that he wore in the tomb, only now worn as a tunic. So we are not dealing with a special garment, like the ones given to baptized Christians, but with a sheet.

Nor are we dealing with something put on after baptism, for the timing and the symbolism are both wrong. The young man *comes to* Jesus already wearing the linen sheet, and the material symbolizes death and burial, not the state of resurrection and new existence that the white robe signifies. It would make more sense to associate this sheet with clothing worn before or during baptism than with the robe put on afterward. Yet even the notion of *afterward* has no place in the narrative, for the text gives no indication that the young man undressed then re-dressed during this evening of instruction, and the imperfect tense of the verb “was teaching” in the explanation for why the young man stayed with Jesus that night seems to rule out anything but teaching occurring while they are together.³⁵ As for the color of the sheet, it may well be white, since linen was usually bleached white, and Jewish burial sheets were often white.³⁶ But unbleached linen is gray or tan, and linen can be dyed any color, so we cannot make that presumption. Had the author wished to draw attention to the color of the material, he could have done so, as Mark did the whiteness of Jesus’ garments during the transfiguration (9:3) and the

34. See Howard M. Jackson, “Why the Youth Shed His Cloak and Fled Naked: The Meaning and Purpose of Mark 14:51–52,” *JBL* 116 (1997): 273–89.

35. Robert H. Gundry, “On the Secret Gospel of Mark,” in idem, *The Old Is Better: New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations* (WUNT 178; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 74–97, at 95; idem, *Mark*, 622.

36. Wilhelm Michaelis, “Λευκός, λευκαίνω,” *TDNT* 4:241–50, at 244–45.

whiteness of the robe worn by the young man inside Jesus' tomb (16:5). The author of LGM 1 repeated important phrases and story elements from both of these episodes for literary reasons,³⁷ so the fact that he did not use their shared adjective *white* suggests either that the color of the sheet was irrelevant or that he did not want his readers to associate this garment with heavenly exaltation, which is signified by the unearthly whiteness of Jesus' garments and by the white robe worn by the young man inside Jesus' tomb.³⁸

Jeffery's reading of LGM 1 is not entirely eisegetical, however, for the themes of death, burial, and resurrection are undeniably present in LGM 1. It is entirely reasonable to suppose that the young man's instruction is related in some way to the preceding raising narrative, for in the Gospel of Mark teaching incidents set inside a house always elaborate on the preceding incident (7:17–23; 9:28–29, 33–37; 10:10–12). An association between the linen sheet and attire worn before or during baptism (but not after) is reasonable as well, for sandwiched between LGM 1 and 2 is a discussion in which Jesus asks James and John if they are “able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized” (Mark 10:35–45). Mark liked to place one episode inside another in this way as a means of implying that the two episodes are mutually interpretive. In this instance, Jesus' allusion to the rites of Christian initiation (baptism and first Eucharist) in his reply to the sons of Zebedee endows the linen sheet with the symbolism of Christian initiation. Yet Jesus' “cup” and “baptism” are not those rites themselves but verbal metaphors for Jesus' passion. To be baptized with Jesus' baptism is to die *in a literal sense* for Jesus' sake and the gospel's (8:34–35). This figurative use of *cup* and *baptism* implies that the young man's linen sheet/burial wrapping symbolizes not the figurative death of baptism but the literal death of martyrdom. This clothing signifies to the reader that Jesus is teaching the young man the same thing he taught James and John in 10:35–40, that one must be willing to share in his violent fate if one wishes to share in his glory. When, therefore, the young man dons this sheet again in Gethsemane and tries in vain to follow Jesus after the other disciples have fled, he is indicating his resolve “to be baptized with the baptism with which [Jesus] is baptized.”

The knowledge that the baptism imagery in LGM 1 is symbolic has important implications for the question of whether this pericope was devised as liturgy for Christian baptism. Since there is no literal baptism in LGM 1, we have no more reason to view LGM 1 as a liturgical text than we do to view Mark 10:35–40 that way. In both cases, baptism imagery is used to elaborate the major theme of Mark's central section (8:22–10:52), that discipleship involves abandoning one's life for Jesus' sake and the gospel's.

37. See Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 195–97, 201–3.

38. Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 190–91, 201.

That theme is normally described in arresting symbolic analogies: one must take up one's cross and follow Jesus, become servant of all and slave of all, and drink Jesus' "cup" of wrath and undergo his "baptism" in tribulations (8:34; 9:35; 10:38, 44). Christians did not, of course, do these things in a literal way, and it would be silly to argue, for instance, that 8:34 is a medieval anachronism within the Gospel of Mark because no one in Mark's day retraced Jesus' route to Golgotha while carrying a wooden cross on his or her back. Likewise, the credibility of the baptismal imagery in LGM 1 does not depend on an actual practice of wearing linen sheets as baptismal garments/burial wrappings in the first or second century. Indeed, if we concede Jeffery's own point that the figurative use of dressing and undressing imagery by Paul and other Christian writers before the fourth century does not prove the existence of special baptism clothing in those centuries (113, 116), we must logically extend it to the figurative baptismal imagery in LGM 1 as well.

The fact remains that LGM 1 associates baptism with death and resurrection, whereas the fathers of the second century did not adopt Paul's theological interpretation of baptism as dying and rising with Christ. This observation does make a second-century life setting for the composition of LGM 1 and 2 less likely. But why does Jeffery here presume a second-century date for longer Mark? The letter tells us that these passages were composed by the (first-century) Evangelist Mark, and the Gospel of Mark makes precisely this connection between baptism and Jesus' death and resurrection.³⁹ The same association is found in 1 Pet 3:17–22, as Jeffery points out (63), and also in Col 2:12; 3:1. Thus the theology of LGM 1 is not only Markan but also characteristic of Mark's time. When employed without eisegesis, Jeffery's method of literary profiling leads us to an author of the first century for the Gospel excerpts and to an Alexandrian author of the late-second century for the letter.

All the details that Jeffery points out as anachronisms are either not in the text of the longer Gospel or are undeniably there but appropriate for the first century. This odd fact raises two questions: What secret Gospel is Jeffery reading, and where did he get it? Both are easy to answer. His secret Gospel is a mental pastiche combining elements of longer Mark with scattered elements of Anglican baptismal theory and various notions that Smith and other scholars read into LGM 1. Jeffery devised it himself in the course of seeking evidence of forgery. Jeffery denies this emphatically, of course. He tells us that he "[began] with the document, and [went] in search of the praying community behind it," "putting all presuppositions aside, assuming nothing about the original authors" (246); "While writing this book I stoutly resisted every temptation to delve into Smith's biography and psychological history, or even to read all of his writings" (242–43). I would expect, though, that if Jeffery had actually started with the document, he would be able to

39. See Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 187, 201–202.

distinguish between the text of the letter and Smith's interpretation. I find it much easier to believe that Jeffery proceeded from the assumptions that the text is a forgery and the forger was Smith and then studied mid-twentieth-century Anglican baptismal practice and theory in search of evidence that could place it in Smith's religious milieu.⁴⁰

Anyone who argues that Smith forged this text is bound to believe that it basically means what Smith claimed it meant, for the story of a forger who misunderstood his own proof text is a really hard sell. Few people would buy it if they knew a fact the Jeffery never mentioned: the baptismal theory did not originate with Smith. It was suggested to him by Cyril C. Richardson, a professor of church history at Union Theological Seminary who was in attendance when Smith announced his discovery of the manuscript at the 1960 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). After hearing Smith's presentation, Richardson asked for a copy of the *Letter to Theodore*, then two weeks later volunteered the following thesis in a private letter:

I should like to suggest that the perikope of Mk. 10.13–45 is that for the Paschal vigil in Clement's church. The purpose of the insertion would be to show that the rich man *can* be saved, and thus to off-set the previous story. If Clement's group were reasonably well-off, this part of the chapter would surely have been a stumbling block, especially if it were used at Christian baptism.

In favor of this thesis are the following facts:

- (a) The insertion was read only *in the course of* the "great mysteries." I take this to mean baptism, to which Clement applies all degrees of mystery language ...
- (b) The whole section [Mark 10:13–45] is suggestive of baptism:
 - (1) *Blessing of the children*. This story is surely told to defend infant baptism ...
 - (2) *The rich man*. Emphasis on the commandments.
 - (3) Passion and resurrection prediction.
 - (4) The insertion of a resurrection and a baptism [i.e., LGM 1] ...
 - (5) *The cup and the baptism* of the James and John story—highly appropriate to the Paschal vigil and first Eucharist.

Richardson concluded that "*Mark with secret insertions*" was used "for baptism at the Paschal vigil" in Clement's church.⁴¹

40. A comment in Jeffery's acknowledgements supports this inference: "I had always had my doubts about the Secret Gospel of Mark, but it was only in 2003, when the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* published a forum of three articles about it, that I realized how seriously this other Marcan gospel was being taken in some quarters" (ix).

41. Cyril C. Richardson, letter to Morton Smith, as cited in Smith, *Secret Gospel*, 64–65 (omitting Smith's bracketed explanatory additions). Smith presented his paper on December 29, 1960. According to

This excerpt from Richardson's letter demonstrates that the erroneous ideas that "the great mysteries" refer to the rites of Christian initiation and that LGM 1 depicts, and is the lection for, baptism during the Paschal Vigil did not originate with Smith at all. The text of Smith's SBL presentation gives no indication that Smith construed LGM 1 as a baptism and, more importantly, shows that prior to meeting Richardson he understood "the great mysteries" as theological mysteries. Smith wrote, "It [the letter] says the secret gospel was read pros autous monous tous mioumenous ta megala mistiria, 'only to those being initiated unto great mysteries' Clement says that scripture reveals the true sense monois tis eis gnosin memuimenois 'only to those who have been initiated unto gnosis,' and he speaks of Christians as ta mikra pro ton megalon myethentes mistirion, 'being initiated in the lesser mysteries first, and thereafter in the great mysteries.'"⁴² This equation of "the great mysteries" with gnosis and the true sense of scripture accords with Clement's conception of the great mysteries. So Smith was on the right track at the end of 1960. His training in form criticism, however, inclined him to agree that a literal ritual underlies LGM 1 and eventually led Smith to read the letter's ritualistic imagery in a literal way that is at odds with Clement's metaphorical usage. Richardson himself ultimately adopted an entirely different interpretation of the letter and the Gospel quotations after realizing some of the problems with his baptismal interpretation, including the fact that the great mysteries could not denote baptism because Clement explicitly dissociated these mysteries from baptism in *Strom.* 5.11.70.7–71.1.⁴³

But let us pause for a moment to consider a possible objection. Cyril C. Richardson was himself an Episcopalian priest. Is it not possible that Smith composed a text that was so similar to Anglican baptismal theology that a fellow Anglican first perceived its significance and sent Smith an unsolicited letter telling him what he secretly already knew? The most obvious problem with this scenario is the fact that the supposedly Anglican elements that Richardson perceived have no basis in the text. It is more likely that Richardson read his own conceptions about early Christian baptism into the text, and Smith found this scenario plausible.

The argument developed in the first half of *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled* will seem irrelevant to anyone who does not accept the premise that the letter presents LGM 1 as

Smith (*Clement*, 168), Richardson's letter was dated January 13, 1961. Richardson confirms Smith's account in his review of Smith, *Clement and Secret Gospel*, TS 35 (1974): 571–77, at 572, 574.

42. Morton Smith, "Text of paper presented by Dr. Morton Smith, associate professor of History at Columbia University, to the Society of Biblical Literature, Horace Mann Auditorium, 7:45 P.M., Tuesday, December 29," 14, in the Morton Smith Biographical File, Columbia University Archives. The text of this speech is full of typographical errors and bad or missing punctuation.

43. Richardson, review of Smith, 574–76.

the reading for baptism in Alexandria. Those who hold a different view might even cite Jeffery's case that LGM 1 finds no place in the history of Alexandrian liturgy as a reason to adopt their own theories. Scholars with the patience to separate the sound arguments from the ones based on eisegesis will find some useful information here, especially in chapter 4, which reassesses Thomas Talley's influential theory that LGM 1 was once read in Alexandria on Lazarus Saturday (the day before Palm Sunday). The liturgiologists who have incorporated Talley's theory into their own work will certainly need to examine for themselves the evidence that Jeffery adduces.

THE GAY GOSPEL HYPOTHESIS (ONCE MORE)

The remainder of *The Secret Gospel of Mark Unveiled* is very different from the first ninety pages. Jeffery now argues that the longer Gospel of Mark, the letter of Clement, and Smith's books about this subject all have the same purpose of depicting Jesus as a homosexual and are all written in the same cut-and-paste manner, which suggests that they have one author rather than three. Jeffery describes the longer Gospel as "a cento of words and phrases from the canonical gospels and other ancient writings, carefully structured to create the impression that Jesus practiced homosexuality" (91; cf. 181). The narrative does not do this overtly, however, but in the form of an extended double entendre—a gay joke (ch. 5). Its portrait of a homosexual relationship between Jesus and the young man does not fit any known pattern of "Hellenistic homosexualities" (ch. 8) but finds its life setting in a homosexual academic subculture "that encoded contemporary homosexuality in the vocabulary of Platonic boy-love" (ch. 9, quoting 214). The *Letter to Theodore*, too, endorses homosexuality, but only when read as proof of how "the orthodox church, led by people like Clement of Alexandria, knowingly suppressed" the fact that "Jesus practiced ritual homosexuality" (209–10). Like the pastiche construction of the longer Gospel, the letter was composed by someone who borrowed phrases from Clement's authentic works (181, 183). Smith's books likewise argue that Jesus offered a rite of initiation that allowed repressed homosexuals to become "free ... to engage in homosexuality for all eternity" (194). A similar cut-and-paste approach to composition appears in Smith's scholarly book *Clement*, which is a "montage of excerpts from ancient sources [that] markedly resembles the centonate construction of the Secret Gospel and the Mar Saba letter" (183; cf. 99). The entire enterprise represents "an astoundingly daring act of creative rebellion that aimed, against all odds, to prepare a place for the second love in the mystery of the kingdom of God, and give it at last a Christian name" (239). Smith was inspired by the gay martyr Oscar Wilde and his play *Salomé*, from which he derived the character Salome and the imagery of seven veils (ch. 10).

LONGER MARK AS A GAY JOKE

According to Jeffery, the Gospel excerpts were intended to be read as an extended double entendre. On the face of it, they tell a story about Jesus raising a young man from the dead and baptizing him after six days. But if we change Smith's translation of the verb *prosekynēse* in the sentence "And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus" to read "she bent down to kiss Jesus," then the entire incident takes on a sexual meaning in English translation. The woman no longer is a distraught mourner seeking Jesus' help but a hussy who orgasms as she approaches Jesus (the slang word is "coming"), then attempts to perform a sexual act on him in public, making Jesus very angry (92–93, 198). "We can read the entire story as an account of Jesus rejecting a woman in order to help an anguished young man 'come out of the closet' for his first (homo)sexual experience" (92). This change in the translation of *prosekynēse* is warranted because "in the mid-twentieth century it was thought that the word was related etymologically to the notion of kissing, as one might kiss an idol" (92).

Jeffery finds evidence for Jesus' sexual interest in the young man in the words "stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand":

The pointless duplication of hands is a sure sign that something's afoot.... The explanation that makes the most sense is ... that this is yet another element from canonical Mark, repositioned to suggest homosexuality, perhaps humorously. It could do that in at least three ways. First, in ancient times (as today), holding hands could be a sign of love and even marriage, though it also could signify other kinds of friendship. Second, the word "hand" can also be taken as a euphemism for another, more intimate body part. But there may be a more interesting explanation, for seizing an opponent's hands or wrists was one of the opening positions in ancient Greek wrestling matches, which ... were done *gymnos gymnō*, "naked [man] with naked [man]." In that case the relationship between Jesus and a young disciple, so hard to place within the history of early Christian liturgy, would seem to evoke the atmosphere of the ancient Greek palaestra or wrestling school, where ... naked youths were trained by adult men..., leading to the type of erotic mentor/protégé relationship that was known as *paiderastia* or "boy love." (93, 94–95)

The words "after six days," which introduced Jesus' transfiguration, now presage his transformation into his homosexual self (93).

The continuation of this story in LGM 2 reinforces Jesus' sexual orientation by establishing his disdain for women: "after Jesus' homoerotic nocturnal encounter with a

naked [*sic*], young, rich man, he refuses to meet some women who want to see him” (96). The name Salome is key, for she was depicted as a temptress in some apocryphal texts—or so Morton Smith mistakenly thought (97–98, 237). Yet “if we entertain Smith’s suggestions,” we end up with a text in which Jesus “refuses to meet with Salome, a woman who wants him. Indeed, he refuses to meet with three women of different generations, as if rejecting womankind in general” (98). Although the woman Salome is distinguished from the young man’s sister, the sister is also a Salome, in Smith’s opinion. Smith pointed out that in Matthew’s parallel to Mark’s reference to the female witnesses of the crucifixion, Salome is replaced with “the mother of the sons of Zebedee” (98–99; Jeffery does not explain how this is relevant to the name of the young man’s sister). Moreover, the character called Salome in LGM 2:1 is actually a hybrid of two different characters: the disciple Salome and the young daughter of Herodias who danced seductively for Herod (226, 237). Hence in LGM 2 Jesus is angrily rejecting a Salome who tried to have sex with him and another Salome who had a double reputation as a temptress.

Evaluation: The premise of double entendre depends entirely upon two dubious and wholly subjective interpretive moves. The first concerns the words that Smith translated as “she prostrated herself before Jesus” (προσεκύνησε τὸν Ἰησοῦν). The fact that the verb was thought to be (and likely is) related etymologically to a verb meaning “to kiss” (κυνέω) tells us nothing about what it means in this context (or any other). The verb *proskuneō* always connotes reverence or worship and often means simply “to prostrate before” or “to worship.” In Mark 5:6 and 15:19 it suggests prostration and gestures of worship, with no implication of kissing. When kissing is implied and the object is a human, the supplicant is prostrating on the ground and kissing the person’s feet or the hem of the garment as a display of complete dependence upon that person’s compassion. When the object of the verb is instead an idol or an altar, the form of kissing again conveys reverence and worship. Jeffery invents a new, irreverent meaning by treating a human object as an idol and imagining a sexual act that the verb never denotes.

This novel reading of *proskuneō* and its implication that Jesus became angry with and rejected the sister are all but impossible to reconcile with the subsequent detail that Jesus “went away *with her*” (ἀπῆλθεν μετ’ αὐτῆς) to the tomb (LGM 1:4). Clearly Jesus was not angry with the sister but with his disciples for rebuking her. The interpersonal dynamics are the same here as in Mark 10:13–16 and 10:46–52. In the former, people bring children to Jesus “that he might touch them,” but the disciples rebuke them, and Jesus becomes indignant with them. In the latter, “a blind beggar” cries out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” and “many rebuked him, telling him to be silent,” whereupon Jesus alone takes interest in him. Unless we apply a hermeneutics of perversion to the words “touch them” and “Son of David, have mercy on me!” we must suppose that in both cases the rebuke reflects a misunderstanding that the Messiah is too important to be bothered by

insignificant people such as children and a blind beggar and that Jesus reproves this elitist attitude in the act of granting the request. Jesus' decision in LGM 1:4 to leave his disciples behind and to go away with the sister to the tomb makes perfect sense as a third instance of showing compassion on a person whom his own followers dismissed as trivial. The story makes little sense in Jeffery's terms, for if Jesus shared his disciples' disdain for the sister, he would have left the sister behind and gone off with his disciples; likewise, if the sister's request were for sex, there would be no reason for Jesus' decision to go to the brother's tomb. Clearly, Jesus thought that she was seeking a miracle on behalf of her brother. There is no room for sexual double entendre here.

Jeffery's second act of exegetical violence is so implausible as to be disturbing. He asks us to perceive homosexuality in the mere fact that Jesus raised the young man by the hand. There is nothing "afoot" in the double reference to "hand." As John Dart pointed out to me, the repetition results from the author's use of chiasm to emphasize the words "raised him":

A ... where the young man was,
B he stretched forth his hand,
C and raised him,
B' seizing his hand.
A' But the young man ...⁴⁴

Mark's Jesus likewise raises three others by the hand, namely, Simon's mother-in-law, Jairus's dead daughter, and the epileptic boy who had lain so motionless on the ground that he appeared to be dead (1:31; 5:41; 9:27). Talk of romantic hand holding, of "hand" as a euphemism for genitals, and of nude wrestling in Athens moves beyond eisegesis into pure fantasy. How did a carpenter from Galilee and a young man from Peraea suddenly become Greek citizens wrestling naked in a gymnasium? The answer is—by necessity. Later in the book Jeffery uses classical Athens as his standard for judging longer Mark inauthentic in its presentation of social conventions pertaining to pederastic relationships. His argument that a boy in such a relationship would not take the initiative requires that the young man become a Greek schoolboy before the sentence, "But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him." So Jeffery must find in the act of raising itself some indication that Jesus and the young man are behaving like Greek lovers, and the double reference to *hand* is the best

44. A similar chiasm occurs within Mark 10:35–40, where the entire dialogue pivots around James and John's words "We are able."

evidence that Jeffery can come up with. There is a method to this madness—a hermeneutics of desperation.

Jeffery's references to "Jesus' anger at women in the Secret Gospel" (147; cf. 198, 203, 204, 205) extend his misattribution of Jesus' anger in LGM 1:4 to include all three women. In actuality, Jesus' anger was directed at his callous disciples, not the sister, and LGM 2 tells us nothing about what Jesus felt toward the women—or they toward him. It tells us only what Jesus did not do. Because the narrator gives no reason for their interest in meeting with Jesus or for Jesus' refusal to do so, the reader can imagine any number of scenarios, each entailing a different state of mind for Jesus. Supposing that he "angrily rejects all relationships with women" (183) is as arbitrary and silly as supposing that he disapproved of their sense of fashion or was too busy in Jericho saving Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector (Luke 19:1–10). Since the text does indicate that Jesus did not even meet with these women, Jeffery is compelled to introduce an atmosphere of sexual temptation from sources outside the text. Salome becomes a seductress through her role in two apocryphal texts, as misinterpreted by Smith. This is circular reasoning: Smith's interpretation of Salome's role in those works cannot be relevant to the meaning of LGM 2 unless he is the author of this Gospel and based its nondescript reference to Salome on those texts, so this argument presumes the very thing Jeffery is trying to demonstrate. The apocryphal texts themselves are relevant only if LGM 2 is demonstrably dependent on them. The two words "and Salome" reveal no such dependence, however, for they convey nothing about her and are an exact repetition of canonical Mark 15:40 and 16:1, where the words "and Salome" correspondingly introduce the last of three women. Thus Salome the temptress is another eisegetical projection of the mind of the alleged author into the text. Jeffery's remark that the sister, too, is Salome qualifies somewhat differently as an exegetical foible, and was certainly not Smith's opinion.⁴⁵ The fact that Matthew replaces Salome with "the mother of the sons of Zebedee" is irrelevant, because the young man's sister corresponds to Mary Magdalene in the lists of three witnesses to the crucifixion:

the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome (LGM 2:1)

Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome (Mark 15:40)

Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt 27:56)

45. See Smith, *Clement*, 120–21.

On the basis of this intertextual parallel, one could argue that the young man's sister is Mary Magdalene, that "his mother" is "the mother of James the younger and of Joses,"⁴⁶ and that Salome is not only a disciple of Jesus but also the mother of James and John. The latter identification would make Salome a mother, resulting in one sister/daughter and two mothers appearing in the list of three women in LGM 2. Jeffery, however, sees "three generations" of women in "the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome." He can make this claim only by imaging Salome not as Jesus' disciple but as the young daughter of Herodias, a character who is a Salome in the popular imagination but actually remains unnamed in Mark's narrative.⁴⁷ In fact, Jeffery alternates between imagining her as the mature female disciple in apocryphal texts and as the young daughter of Herodias in Mark, claiming that she is both. This position is of course gratuitous and impossible. These acts of eisegesis and violations of logic hardly establish the premise that "the Jesus of the Secret Gospel ... rejects women altogether" (212).

There are more basic problems with the premise of extended double entendre. Double entendre is produced by *words* and *phrases* that have more than one recognizable meaning. Those words allow the whole discourse to mean two things *on a verbal level*. Here is an example, modified from the television series *South Park*:

Randy Marsh: Your mom's monthly visitor is here, Stanley.

Stan Marsh: Aunt Flo? I hate it when Aunt Flo visits mom. Mom gets really bitchy.

Randy Marsh: I know, Stan, but Aunt Flo only stays for about five days or so.⁴⁸

Due to the ambiguous meaning of "Aunt Flo" and "monthly visitor," which are established euphemisms for menstruation, these sentences can be read either innocently as describing the character of Stan's mother's sister or crudely as describing his mother's menstrual period. LGM 1 does not function this way as an extended double entendre, for only one of Jeffery's proposed secondary meanings ("coming") is actually a recognized double meaning that could produce ambiguity, and the substitution of this alternative meaning does not result in the narrative *as written* having two possible meanings for a reader. Although Jeffery proposes that the verb *proskuneō*, which immediately follows the verb "coming," also has a double meaning, his alternative translation "bent down to kiss"

46. In other words, this parallel would suggest that "the mother of James the younger and of Joses" is Jesus' mother rather than the young man's, since Jesus' brothers included a James and a Joses in Mark 6:3, and ὁ Ἰησοῦς is the nearest preceding masculine proper noun in LGM 2:1.

47. Gundry (*Mark*, 320) notes that Herodias's daughter is probably about twelve years old, considering that Mark used the same word (κοράσιον) to describe both this daughter and Jairus's twelve-year-old daughter (5:41; 6:22).

48. "Spooky Fish" (episode 215), *South Park*, Comedy Central.

is not an established meaning that a real reader might recognize, but an unattested hypothetical meaning. Moreover, unlike “coming,” this alternative meaning is based in the original Greek rather than in Smith’s English translation. In order to perceive the double meaning that Jeffery imagines, one would have to alternate between the original Greek and the English translation.

The remainder of the alleged joke is not a double entendre produced by *semantic ambiguities* but rather a series of alleged conceptual similarities that cannot convey a different meaning through the words of the story itself. For instance, the Greek word for tomb (μνημεῖον) does not also mean closet in Greek, nor are the translations “tomb” and “grave” recognized terms for closets (or even for concealed homosexuality) in English. Rather, the connection between a tomb and a closet is the abstract similarity that a tomb and a closet are both dark, confined spaces with a door. This is a subjective personal association, not a double meaning that might enter a reader’s mind based on established use of the Greek word *mnēmeion* or the English word “tomb.” Hence no one would hear a reference to a closeted homosexual in the words “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.” In order to suggest that association, Jeffery must replace the text itself with his own paraphrase about the young man crying out in anguish from “the closet.” Jeffery’s attempt to construe a double meaning for “hand” (χεῖρ) is even more problematic. One could get a double meaning only if “hand” is read euphemistically as “genitals.” However, unlike “feet” in the Jewish Scriptures, “hand” was never a common euphemism for genitals,⁴⁹ so it is not clear why anyone, including Jeffery, would make that connection. There is no way of rationalizing the thought of naked wrestlers or romantic hand holding as semantic double entendres or even as visually similar to the action of lifting someone up by the hand. What Jeffery is describing as an extended double entendre is mostly a series of subjective visual associations that have no semantic grounding in ambiguous words and phrases

49. In my opinion, only two occurrences of *hand* in the Bible are plausibly read as euphemisms for the male sex organ. In Isa 57:8, a euphemistic reference is required by the sexual context, in which the word *hand* makes no sense. In Song of Songs 5:4, a sexual double meaning to “My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening [of my tent]” is made possible by the sexuality of the context. By contrast, nothing in the raising miracle in longer Mark invites or requires a euphemistic meaning. Jeffery’s endnote (288 n. 20) implies that William Loader’s discussion of Matt 5:30 (“if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away...”) affirms euphemism, but Loader’s point here is that the qualifier “right” *prevents* “hand” from being a euphemism for the male sex organ. Loader also casts doubt on a noneuphemistic reading of “hand” in reference to masturbation, noting that “handling the genitals and the nether region generally is a task assigned to the left hand in the culture of the time.” See Loader, *Sexuality and the Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 28–29.

that cause the sentences as written to have double meanings. Oddly, much of Jeffery's argument in the second half of this book consists of private associative reasoning presented as if it were exegesis.

HELLENISTIC HOMOSEXUALITIES

Jeffery is not content to suggest that longer Mark is a gay joke. He also wishes to show that its depiction of homosexuality is implausible for the period. He begins by arguing that ancient peoples put a high premium on social conventions where sexual behavior is concerned. With respect to homosexuality,

The best-known ancient paradigm, of course, is the Athenian model of "boy-love." Strictly speaking it belonged to the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, but to readers of Plato and other writers it remained a familiar benchmark all through late antiquity and down to modern times. Like the other "age-structured" Greek patterns, Athenian paederasty assumed a sharp division of roles between the adult lover (*erastēs*) and the young beloved (*erōmenos*). "The fundamental opposition between different types of sexual behavior was ... the active/passive contrast, the former category—activity—being characteristic of the adult male, while the latter—passivity—was reserved for women and boys"⁵⁰ and other low-status people such as slaves, foreigners, and prostitutes (male and female). (188–89)

Jeffery adds, "Athenian boy-love began with a lengthy process of courtship (today we might call it 'stalking'), as a mature man pursued a youth who, at the oldest, was showing only the first signs of puberty" (189; cf. 193; 313 n. 51). As the passive partner, the boy played hard to get until he was convinced that he was being pursued by a sincere male who had "the ability and motivation to train him in the mores of the culture" (189). It was shameful for the boy to appear to base his decision on sexual desire (191). In addition to outlining these social conventions, Jeffery claims that few Greek males were actually homosexual in the sense that they did not have sex with women (199), and he asserts that all forms of Hellenistic homosexuality in the ancient world "existed in some sort of dialogue with Plato's writings" (192), which convey the "ancient Greek ideal that a man should lead a boy to transcend mere sexuality for the sake of more spiritual goals" (198).

Against this model of expected behavior, longer Mark's story makes no sense: "The relationship between Jesus and the disciple is 'egalitarian': the partners do not have distinct roles of pursuer and pursued, with the older one wooing the younger one until he

50. Jeffery is citing Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* (trans. Cormac Ó Cuilleánáin; 2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xviii.

finally submits; in fact the younger one is the first to express love.... All possibility of heterosexual sex is excluded, as shown in Jesus' refusal to receive the three women" (235). And there is no consciousness on Jesus' part that there might be a spiritual goal higher than physical gratification (205).

Evaluation: Jeffery's case that longer Mark misrepresents ancient homosexuality collapsed three chapters earlier with his desperate attempt to read LGM 1 and 2 as an extended double entendre, but it would not stand even on a solid foundation. An obvious problem is the culture from which Jeffery derives his social norms about homosexuality: fifth- and fourth-century B.C.E. Athens. I am not the only reader to notice that the longer Gospel is set in first-century Palestine and populated with Jewish characters. The logical starting point for any study of first-century Palestinian social conventions relating to homosexuality would be first-century Palestine and the larger Near East. Jeffery cannot look there for social conventions regulating homosexual behavior, however, since the presence of social conventions requires some degree of social acceptability, which we do not find in Palestine or most other ancient Mediterranean cultures. Jeffery therefore turns to Athens and implies that the social expectations of classical Greece took root anywhere that people (or Gospel characters) speak Greek (192), even in places where homosexuality was abhorred. This notion misconstrues the phenomenon of hellenization, which was not the wholesale adoption of Greek attitudes and cultural practices by non-Greek peoples but a cultural symbiosis of Greek and Near Eastern ways that varied from region to region. An elite Jew living in an urban area in the Diaspora would normally be far more hellenized than, say, a poor Jewish carpenter living in a village in Galilee. In general, Jews were most inclined to adopt Greek practices that were undeniable improvements on their own, such as Greek sculpture and agricultural and business practices. They were more hesitant to adopt Greek legal and cultural practices and strongly disinclined to adopt Greek religion, literature, and philosophy as their own, especially within rural Palestine.⁵¹ Moreover, as Mark D. Smith points out, Greek pederasty was already in decline by the fourth century B.C.E. and was by no means the only form of homosexual activity in the first century C.E.: "The sources closer to [the apostle] Paul's time reflect a sexual mosaic, running the gamut from pure heterosexuality to indiscriminate bisexuality to homosexual marriage between adults to pederasty."⁵² Consequently, it makes little sense to suppose that rural Palestinian homosexuals would have adopted social etiquette that developed

51. Lee I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999), 18, 20–26; Morton Smith, "The Hellenistic World," in *The Columbia History of the World* (ed. John A. Garraty and Peter Gay; New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 181–89, at 188–89.

52. Mark D. Smith, "Paul and Ancient Bisexuality: A Rejoinder," *JAAR* 65 (1997): 867–70, at 869. See the section "Non-Pederastic Homosexual Practices in the Greco-Roman World" in idem, "Ancient Bisexuality and the Interpretation of Romans 1:26–27," *JAAR* 64 (1996): 223–56, at 232–38.

and flourished centuries earlier among the upper class in Athens, and it makes even less sense to suppose that a gay Jewish teacher from Nazareth would have discarded the tradition of interpreting the Torah in favor of pedagogical pederasty, complete with a Greek philosophical agenda and a commitment to its spiritual ideals about Beauty and Truth. Yet Jeffery expects Jesus and the young man to act like Greek lovers of the classical era:

The Jesus of the Secret Gospel ... has no use for women at all; he is angrier and more rejecting than Callicratidas. In a strange way he seems more like the mellower Menelaus: completely unaware of the philosophical advantages that can be achieved through the practice of sexual restraint. This would make Jesus even more benighted than Theomnestus, who at least has heard such claims, even if he doesn't believe them. Why would anyone write a gospel about someone like this—a man so annoyed by women that he will beget no heirs, so unaware of philosophy that he aspires to nothing higher than physical pleasure, seemingly teaching his disciples that sex with males is heaven enough? (205)

Jeffery has completely lost sight of the Jewish social world that LGM 1 presupposes (never mind the text itself). Needless to say, Jesus is the Messiah (“Son of David”), not “a kind of Socrates” (95); Bethany is an insignificant village in Peraea, not classical Athens; and the young man is a grateful recipient of a miracle, not a horny *erōmenos*. When the young man beseeches Jesus “that he might be with him,” he is doing the same thing as the Gerasene demoniac, who responds to his exorcism by “beg[ging] him that he might be with him” (Mark 5:18), meaning as a disciple (see 3:14). From Mark’s perspective, becoming a follower of Jesus is the ideal response to a miracle, as the example of Bartimaeus illustrates (10:52).

Jeffery’s belief that longer Mark depicts “a paederastic Jesus” (234) being pursued by a boy who wishes to be his *erōmenos* is refuted by both the meaning of the term applied to the young man in longer Mark (*neaniskos*) and the fact that Jesus had many older disciples of both sexes. As Jeffery acknowledges, the word *paiderastia* literally means “love of boys” (189) and denotes the training of pubescent boys in the mores and practices of elite male citizens (e.g., philosophy, arts, music, fighting). Paederastic relationships normally begin when the boy is “showing only the first signs of puberty” (189) and end when the boy sprouts body and facial hair.⁵³ The word *neaniskos*, on the other hand, denotes a fully grown man. As Marvin Meyer pointed out years ago, Hippocrates (ca. 460–370 B.C.E.) defined a *neaniskos* as a male between twenty-two and twenty-eight years

53. The normal age range for the *erōmenos* was between twelve and seventeen. See Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 36–40.

old (cited in Philo, *Creation* 36.105), and Diogenes Laertius (third century C.E.), citing Pythagoras, defined a *neaniskos* as between twenty and forty years old (*Life of Pythagoras* 8.10).⁵⁴ In the age categories described by Aristophanes of Byzantium (ca. 257–180 B.C.E.), *neaniskos* follows the years of an *ephēbos*, a period of military service that began at eighteen and lasted two years (*Peri onomasias hēlikion*).⁵⁵ A recent study of three Athenian inscriptions from the second century B.C.E. shows that within the age categories in a Hellenistic athletic contest, the *neaniskoi* were older than the two groups of *ephēboi* (the eighteen-year-olds and the nineteen-year-olds) and were therefore at least twenty years old.⁵⁶ Hence the *neaniskos* in longer Mark is past his twentieth birthday but still relatively young compared to Jesus and his disciples. The fact that he appears not to live with his family (his mother and sister are in Jericho when Jesus arrives there in LGM 2) but in his own house likewise indicates that he is no pubescent boy but probably around his mid-twenties. The young man's age cannot be the principal issue, however, since Jeffery, following Smith, envisions Jesus initiating all of his disciples into the mystery of the kingdom of God. This conclusion is hard to avoid in view of Mark 4:10–11: “And when he was alone, those who were about him with the twelve asked him concerning the parables. And he said to them, ‘To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables.’” Anyone who supposes that this mystery is an initiation rite must also suppose that Jesus gave it to “those who were about him with the twelve.” No one else in this extended inner circle is described as being noticeably younger than Jesus. Moreover, the same distinction between insiders and outsiders is made in the preceding pericope (3:19b–21, 31–35), where those “outside” are Jesus’ own family (3:31b; 3:32b) and “those who sat about him” (3:32a, 34a) include women: “And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother.’”⁵⁷ Since the young man is too old and independent to need instruction in how to be an adult, and the other recipients of this mystery include men and women of roughly Jesus’ age, how can one imagine the pederastic mode of teaching at all?

We can dispense with the premise that the young man is an *erōmenos* who is behaving too forwardly. Still, Jeffery finds a more general anachronism in the lack of social

54. Marvin W. Meyer, “The Youth in the *Secret Gospel of Mark*,” *Semeia* 49 (1990): 129–53, at 139.

55. Cited in Cantarella, *Bisexuality*, 29–30.

56. Nigel M. Kennell, “Age Categories and Chronology in the Hellenistic Theseia,” *Phoenix* 53 (1999): 249–62, at 252–55.

57. I infer from Jesus’ decision not to receive his own natural family when they came to take control over him that his refusal to meet with the young man’s mother and sister and Salome in LGM 2 presents a similar scenario. The young man’s mother and sister disapprove of his decision to leave everything behind to follow Jesus, and Jesus refuses to acknowledge their authority over the young man.

inequality in the supposedly gay relationship. Behind his discussion of Athenian social conventions is the premise that no early Christian writer would tell a story about Jesus or a disciple transgressing society's expectations concerning etiquette and social status. This premise is bound to seem humorous when LGM 1 is read in its literary context, for throughout this section of the Gospel Mark's Jesus relentlessly subverts people's expectations about how someone in his position should behave in relation to others, and he expects his disciples to follow his example. Thus, when Jesus' disciples rebuke the people who are bringing children (i.e., nobodies) to Jesus, Jesus becomes "indignant, and [says] to them, 'Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God'" (10:14). When the ten become indignant over James and John's attempt to secure the places of greatest honor beside Jesus, he tells them, "You know that those who are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:41–45). This teaching is a corollary of the coming eschatological reversal: the social hierarchy is going to be set on its head (10:31), so anyone who hopes to be great in the future must renounce that status now. Finally, when many people rebuke the blind man at Jericho for calling out to Jesus, Jesus alone takes interest in him and heals him (10:46–52). Like prophets in general, Jesus has little regard for human social conventions ("the precepts of men"; 7:7; cf. 8:33) and does not let society tell him what someone in his position is supposed to do. Jeffery's reasoning that an egalitarian sexual relationship between Jesus and the young man is implausible given the attitudes of Jesus' day mirrors the disciples' inability to see past issues of status and goes against the grain of most Jesus scholarship, which gives more credence to traditions that depict Jesus subverting societal norms than to those that depict him supporting the status quo.

Jeffery's interpretation of LGM 1 as an account of Greek pederasty has a serious internal problem, too, for he seems to have forgotten his two earlier interpretations. In the first ninety pages of the book, Jeffery reads this story as a literal account of Jesus raising a young man from the dead at the behest of a grieving woman; this miracle is followed by a week of catechetical preparation and a baptism on the night of the Paschal Vigil, for which the young man wears a white robe. After this point, Jeffery starts to read LGM 1:1–7 and LGM 2 as an extended double entendre depicting Jesus spurning the advances of a nymphomaniac and another temptress in order to rescue a young man who cries out in anguish from the closet. This concealed comical meaning is Jeffery's basis for alleging that longer Mark depicts Jesus as a homosexual. A few chapters later, however, Jeffery treats LGM 1:8–12 and LGM 2 as a historically misinformed depiction of a Greek *erastēs* educating an *erōmenos* in Greek philosophy. Apparently, this pederastic reading does not

extend the double entendre that Jeffery offered in chapter 5, for it would be pointless to take a deliberately silly alternate meaning, the perception of which depends on a modern reader's familiarity with contemporary English euphemisms ("coming" and "in the closet") and assumed propensity to translate *proskuneō* as "bent down to kiss," and compare it to the normal behavior of ancient Greek homosexuals in order to prove it anachronistic, and Jeffery's pederastic reading of LGM 1:8–12 and LGM 2 in chapter 8 lacks humor and a basis in semantic double meaning.⁵⁸ This creates a problem. A story cannot be about two completely different things on the same level of meaning, yet when Jeffery wishes to expose Anglican anachronisms in LGM 1:10–12, he treats it as a narrative about Jesus providing a week of catechesis and then administering the Christian sacraments of initiation (baptism, chrismation, and first Eucharist) on the night before Easter, but when Jeffery wishes to expose homosexual anachronisms in the nocturnal encounter, he treats these same sentences as an account of a man initiating his young lover into Greek philosophy. Jeffery's attempt at reading longer Mark as a double entendre is basically a transitional device. It allows him to justify the pederastic reading as a double meaning compatible with the baptismal one when in fact it is an incompatible serious reading.

Jeffery's attempt to have his cake and eat it too helps explain why the joke he expounds in chapter 5 is painfully contrived, inchoate, not funny, and not really an extended double entendre. Ultimately, his attempt at reading the story as a joke leads him into another serious contradiction, for although he wishes to argue that Smith devised "secret" Mark as serious Gospel evidence that homosexuality was originally part of Christianity (e.g., 212, 224, 242) and thereby "to provide for homosexuality a respectable history, and a literary and spiritual tradition" (239), he is also compelled to suggest that "the Secret Gospel was meant to be satirical, to ridicule Jesus as a mere pedophile and Christianity as his misbegotten offspring" (206). Jeffery manages to argue these mutually exclusive theories of motive by keeping them separate, although he is aware of the tension (205–6, 242, 243).

MORTON SMITH'S CONCEPTION OF JESUS' MYSTERY

Jeffery's gay reading of longer Mark is completely contrived. Is there any more truth to his claim that Smith's thesis about LGM 1 is about homosexuality? Jeffery's argument to that effect begins with his exegesis of a sentence in the following quotation from Smith's book *Clement*:

58. That is, apart from Jeffery's reading of "Salome" as denoting both Jesus' female disciple and Herodias's daughter, which is not a humorous double meaning.

Through the preceding studies of the relations of Jesus' work to that of [John] the Baptist and of Paul, we have arrived at a definition of "the mystery of the kingdom of God": It was a baptism administered by Jesus to chosen disciples, singly, and by night. In this baptism the disciple was united with Jesus. The union may have been physical (... there is no telling how far symbolism went in Jesus' rite), but the essential thing was that the disciple was possessed by Jesus' spirit. One with Jesus, he participated in Jesus' ascent into the heavens; he entered the kingdom of God and was thereby set free from the laws ordained for and in the lower world.⁵⁹

True to form, Jeffery begins with a highly subjective observation of sexual innuendo in the words "how far symbolism went in Jesus' rite." Smith must of course be "alluding to a common American euphemism for a teenager's first sexual experience" (100–101).⁶⁰ Jeffery then turns to the parallel to this sentence in *Secret Gospel*: "Freedom from the law may have resulted in completion of the spiritual union by physical union. This certainly occurred in many forms of gnostic Christianity; how early it began there is no telling."⁶¹ Jeffery comments, "And what was it that certainly occurred? 'Physical union,' showing that Smith's notion of 'freedom from the law' was really about the suspension of prohibitions against homosexual sex" (101); "The disciples of Smith's Jesus leave nothing behind: their first homosexual experience begins an ascent to a paradise where they are 'set free from the laws ordained for and in the lower world'—free, that is, to engage in homosexuality for all eternity" (194; cf. 32: "liberation from the moral law"; 110: "freedom from sexual taboos"). Jeffery then generalizes this inference so that it becomes the entire point of Smith's thesis about longer Mark: "In telling us what all this really means, Smith seems to have begun with the conviction that Jesus initiated his disciples through homosexual ceremonies—and then spelled this conviction out at imposing scholarly length, once again by reassembling numerous tidbits taken from other contexts" (119; cf. 50, 102, 110–11, 114, 242, 247). In this way, a tentative conjecture, which could be deleted without affecting Smith's argument, becomes the central thesis of his book.

Evaluation: The caricature of Smith's Jesus as a "gay magician" is a straw-man that Christian apologists have used for decades to discredit Smith and his research without engaging his arguments. This social fiction is based entirely on the tentative statements that Jeffery quoted. As I demonstrated in a previous article, Smith did no more than raise the question of whether the baptism he perceived to be occurring in LGM 1:11–12 involved physical symbolism of spiritual union with Jesus, in view of the fact that the other rite that Jesus instituted involved physical symbolism of spiritual union with Jesus

59. Smith, *Clement*, 251, as quoted by Jeffery (100).

60. Jeffery means, "Go all the way."

61. Smith, *Secret Gospel*, 114, as quoted by Jeffery (101).

in the form of ingesting bread and wine that represented his body and blood. The evolution of Smith's thinking on the Eucharist eventually led him to conclude that the Eucharist was not a ritual expression of libertinism and that both of Jesus' rites of spiritual union were intended to solidify his disciples' loyalty in the face of mounting opposition. To the best of my knowledge, Smith's last word on the subject, conveyed in a letter to Ian Wilson, was that no existing evidence, including the longer Gospel, could answer whether Jesus' baptism had a sexual element.⁶²

Jeffery's equation of freedom from the law with homosexual sex is complicated by the other 99.9 percent of Smith's published discussions of libertinism in early Christianity between 1967 and 1986.⁶³ These discussions concentrate on the Torah as a whole. The discussion of libertinism in *Clement*, a few pages after this speculation about physical union, focuses on the fact that there were at least five distinct views about the validity of the Torah within the earliest churches, ranging from the legalists, who held that the Torah was completely binding, to Paul, "a reluctant and sanctimonious libertine" who was as uncompromising on the issue of freedom from the law as he was intolerant of sin, to the immoral libertines, who made a point of sinning in order to demonstrate their freedom (e.g., 1 Cor 5:1).⁶⁴ Smith believed that the spectrum of early Christian positions on the Torah ultimately stems from two distinct positions in Jesus' teaching, one that treats the Torah as having come to an end with John the Baptist (e.g., Luke 16:16; Mark 2:21–22), the other as remaining valid "till heaven and earth pass away" (e.g., Matt 5:17–20; 23:2–3, 23; Mark 10:19). Jesus himself presumed that the commandments apply to any Jew who had not been initiated into the mystery of the kingdom of God. Jesus' own libertinism is evident in these undeniable facts: "He broke the sabbath, he neglected the purity rules, he refused to fast, made friends with publicans and sinners, and was known as a gluttonous man and a winebibber."⁶⁵ Whether Jesus engaged in immoral forms of libertinism was a question Smith never made up his mind about. So there is no simple

62. See Scott G. Brown, "The Question of Motive in the Case against Morton Smith," *JBL* 125 (2006): 351–83, at 353–65.

63. Morton Smith, "Jesus' Attitude towards the Law," in *Papers of the Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (ed. World Congress of Jewish Studies; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1967), 1:241–44; idem, "The Reason for the Persecution of Paul and the Obscurity of Acts," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to G. G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday* (ed. E. E. Urbach, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and C. Wirszubski; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 261–68; idem, "Early Christianity and Judaism," in *Great Confrontations in Jewish History: The J. M. Goodstein Lecture Series on Judaica, 1975* (ed. Stanley Wagner and Allen Breck; Denver: University of Denver, Dept. of History, 1977), 41–61, esp. 47–53; idem, "Paul's Arguments as Evidence of the Christianity from Which He Diverged," *HTR* 79 (1986): 254–60.

64. Smith, *Clement*, 254–63. The quotation is from idem, "Paul's Arguments," 257.

65. Smith, *Clement*, 262; idem, *Secret Gospel*, 130; cf. idem, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 43.

equation of freedom from the law with homosexuality or even immorality in Smith's thought.

Just as importantly, there is no equation of "physical union" with sexual orientation. Smith was thinking in terms of ritual symbolism of spiritual union. That he was not thinking of innate inclinations is suggested by his comment that "completion of the spiritual union by physical union ... certainly occurred in many forms of gnostic Christianity." Smith was familiar enough with the heresiologists' writings to realize that the allegations of ritualized sexual activity against the gnostics usually involved heterosexual intercourse and cannot therefore demonstrate a same-sex preference.⁶⁶ The point is proved by a statement that he intended to add to a corrected edition of *Clement*, which he requested his literary executor, Shaye J. D. Cohen, to complete for him using the addenda and corrigenda in his desk copy. On page 244 of this book, which now resides in the rare book room at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, Smith added the symbol + at the end of the sentence, "Thus the resurrection and ascension stories are reflections of the transfiguration experiences which were produced in 'the mystery of the kingdom of God.'" Smith then added the following in the margin:

+ Note that the first resurrection visions were seen by women—this is probably true, as the church would pretty certainly have preferred to adduce male witnesses had the tradition permitted. So if the resurrection visions were reflexes of the initiation experience, the women must have been initiated by Jesus during his lifetime.

Contrary to Jeffery's supposition (32), Smith was well aware that Jesus had female disciples, and when he took account of the fact that women were the first to see the risen Jesus, he realized that Jesus must have initiated them too. For Smith, this conclusion was academic—a noteworthy implication of his own argument. If Smith really wanted to prove "that homosexuality is the true Christianity" (212), he would have added a different sentence claiming that the absence of women as recipients of resurrection visions in 1 Cor 15:5 and Luke 24:13–53 is more reliable than the presence of women in Matt 28:8–10 and John 20:11–18. But Smith was not the secret gay activist of Jeffery's book, whose supposed moral struggles led him to forge a misogynistic Gospel presenting "a universal Jesus who was a homosexual," "the real Jesus, a homophile messiah" who "practiced 'Greek love,' where sex with other males was not a sin but a sacrament—even the basis for a Platonic mystical ascent to the highest heavenly beauty, finally freed of moral constraints" (121, 120, 224–25). Smith's inclusion of women as recipients of the mystery belies the grand

66. For a survey of these allegations, see Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 163–88.

thesis about social context and motive that Jeffery constructs in the last three chapters of his book.

THREE PASTICHE TEXTS

The claim that the letter, the Gospel quotations, and Smith's scholarship are all composed in similar ways is the closest Jeffery comes to offering circumstantial evidence connecting Smith to the document. Jeffery's proof that longer Mark is made up of pieces of other Gospels is Raymond E. Brown's comment that it "seems [*sic*] to represent an amalgam of Synoptic details" and "scattered memories gleaned from the Fourth Gospel, memories which the author retold in largely Marcan language" (91–92).⁶⁷ Jeffery's proof that the letter is a pastiche likewise consists of quotations from two scholars who have expressed amenable opinions. And his evidence that Smith composed his book the same way consists of Jeffery's own assertions to that effect.

Evaluation: A quotation of an opinion does not establish that opinion as correct. It establishes only that that scholar held that opinion. Jeffery could have cited over two dozen scholars who rejected Raymond Brown's opinion in favor of the view that longer Mark is based on oral tradition. He could have cited my *argument* that longer Mark preserves an independent version of the raising of Lazarus that lacks all trace of Johannine redaction and any certain indication of knowledge of Matthew and Luke.⁶⁸ Raymond Brown's article is an interesting choice as "proof," for Brown was perfectly aware that he had not proved anything. In fact, his precise thesis in that paper is that longer Mark's dependence upon the Gospel of John is "*not impossible*" (*italics original*), which is a far cry from "plausible" and tantamount to saying "unlikely but at least conceivable."⁶⁹ Conservative scholars by definition prefer theories that reinforce a traditional picture of Christian origins over theories that call that picture into question, so Brown felt no need to prove that his theory of literary borrowing was a better explanation than the alternative, and has subsequently been cited by other conservative scholars as having proved longer Mark's dependence on John and, indeed, all the canonical Gospels, just as Jeffery has done.

The problem with the pastiche theory is that the brief parallels between longer Mark and the other Gospels consist of vague similarities or commonplace expressions, which cannot prove literary dependence, and the lengthier verbal parallels to Matthew and Luke that

67. Jeffery is citing Raymond E. Brown, "The Relation of 'The Secret Gospel of Mark' to the Fourth Gospel," *CBQ* 36 (1974): 466–85, at 484.

68. Scott Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 75–104.

69. Raymond Brown, "Relation," 474.

could demonstrate a literary relationship are also found in canonical Mark, where they are often longer or more precise (the exception is the phrase “for he was rich,” which is closer to Luke 18:23 than to Mark 10:22). There is no way to prove that the author of the longer Gospel knew any Gospel besides canonical Mark, and the notion that he produced a thoroughly Markan-sounding narrative out of fragments of Matthew, Luke, and John is illogical. Morton Smith himself demonstrated the implausibility of this theory in response to similar claims by Helmut Merkel, and after thirty-two years not one proponent of the pastiche theory has attempted to answer his six main objections:

- (1) Most of these [parallel] elements are commonplaces of common speech; no one need go to a literary source for εἰς τὸν κήπον [“into the garden”] or the like.
- (2) Most have multiple parallels and cannot be derived from all of them, nor can the parallels be derived from each other; their multiplicity reflects common usage, not a common source.
- (3) More striking parallels between canonical gospels (e.g. the “Johannine” passages in Mt 11, 25ff; Lk 10, 21f) are not thought evidence of direct literary relationship.
- (4) To suppose that the author derived each element from its closest gospel parallel would entail the supposition that he jumped back and forth from the beginning of this gospel, to the end of that, to the middle of the next, to hunt out from diverse contexts details he could have had immediately from common Greek.
- (5) Sometimes the closest parallels come from one textual tradition, sometimes from another; the author hardly used both.
- (6) Similar phenomena result from formulaic composition in oral poetry and appear in the Iliad and Odyssey; presumably story telling in the early churches was largely formulaic.⁷⁰

The fact that Smith offered these arguments in defense of his view that longer Mark is earlier than, and independent of, Matthew, Luke, and John underscores how illogical Jeffery’s position is. It requires us to believe that Smith set out to forge a Gospel that would appear to be “genuinely early and reliable” (31), indeed, “earlier than any of the writings preserved in the New Testament” (29), but accomplished this task by randomly borrowing story elements and Markan-sounding words and phrase fragments from Matthew, Luke, John, and some noncanonical Gospels, and then defended the independence of his pastiche from those Gospels by noting how implausible it would be for anyone to have composed it that way. Certainly if Smith had set out to forge a Gospel story that appeared to be earlier than the canonical Gospels, he would have avoided using

70. Morton Smith, “Merkel on the Longer Text of Mark,” *ZTK* 72 (1975): 133–50, at 137–38 (see all of 136–49). See also idem, “Clement of Alexandria and Secret Mark: The Score at the End of the First Decade,” *HTR* 75 (1982): 449–61, at 453–54 and n. 13 (Smith’s reply to Raymond Brown). For Smith’s initial argument against longer Mark’s dependence on other Gospels, see Smith, *Clement*, 141–44.

phrases that occur in those Gospels. Jeffery's assertion that longer Mark is a pastiche undermines his claim that Smith is the author.

Jeffery's claim that the *Letter to Theodore*, too, is a pastiche of phrases from Clement's undisputed works is likewise supported by quotations from scholars who have proved nothing of the sort. The history behind this idea provides an interesting example of how academic folklore evolves. We start with a few sentences in a statistical study by Andrew Criddle. Criddle estimated from an (incomplete) index of Clement's undisputed writings the percentage of words that occur only once (37.5 percent). Applying an existing statistical model to this datum, he determined that any previously unknown work of Clement should have a particular ratio of new words to words Clement used only once before. After eliminating several of the letter's new words on questionable grounds, he asserted that the letter had fewer new words than would be expected from a random sample. Criddle could have interpreted this fact in a variety of ways. He chose, however, to interpret it in terms of forgery, postulating that "the author of the letter, in imitating the style of Clement, sought to use words found in Clement but not in other Patristic writers and to avoid words not found in Clement but present in other Patristic writers. In doing so the writer brought together more rare words and phrases scattered throughout the authentic works of Clement than are compatible with genuine Clementine authorship."⁷¹ This is a hypothesis, not a fact, and as a hypothesis it has a very tenuous relationship to the actual statistical analysis, which did not examine the relationship between the letter's vocabulary and the vocabularies of other patristic writers. And notice the reference to "phrases" in his explanation. Criddle studied individual words, so this conjecture about phrases has no basis in the data produced by his statistical analysis. He simply imagined what a forger might have done. The biggest problem with Criddle's conclusion, however, is that it is based on a statistical methodology that was tested on Shakespeare's writings and shown to be unreliable in determining authorship when only these two categories of words are considered. In fact, this method correctly identified the writer of only three out of seven poems tested, a success rate of 43 percent, which is about as reliable as a coin toss.⁷²

71. Andrew H. Criddle, "On the Mar Saba Letter Attributed to Clement of Alexandria," *J ECS* 3 (1995): 215–20, at 218, as cited by Jeffery (99).

72. Ronald Thisted and Bradley Efron, "Did Shakespeare Write a Newly-Discovered Poem?" *Biometrika* 74 (1987): 445–55. Allan Pantuck informed me of this study and observed that if Criddle's method had been applied to their data, it would have excluded at least two of the four undisputed poems of Shakespeare that Thisted and Efron used as controls. These statisticians concluded that tests based on words not previously used and words previously used once were unreliable and that "there is no consistent trend toward an

Unfortunately, the people who appeal to Criddle's study tend to confuse the data with Criddle's interpretation of the data and to interpret his interpretation in terms of how they themselves imagine that a forger would go about imitating Clement. Supposing, quite naturally, that a forger would imitate Clement's favorite words and phrases, they take note of Criddle's unwarranted reference to "phrases" but overlook the modifier "rare," then suppose that Criddle had proved that the letter has a higher than usual percentage of Clement's favorite words and phrases. Consider how Bart Ehrman summarized Criddle's study:

why is it that ... the vocabulary and writing style of this document are *so* much like Clement? One impressive study, in fact, has shown that this letter of Clement is more like Clement than Clement ever is. That may sound odd at first, so I should explain how it works. Suppose you have a friend who uses the word *awesome* a lot, and you want to impersonate her. It may turn out that if you were actually to count, she uses the term *awesome*, say, once every three hundred words. But when you imitate her, you use it once every fifty words so that anyone accustomed to hearing her speak will recognize this as one of her characteristic words and think, "Yes, sounds just like her." What we have here is a similar phenomenon: There is too much that is like Clement in this short letter, more than could be expected in any passage of comparable length elsewhere in Clement.⁷³

Which of Clement's favorite words are used too frequently in this letter? When you recall that Criddle's statistical analysis examined only two kinds of words—the ones Clement never used before and the ones he previously used only once—you realize how questionable this is as a characterization of Criddle's finding. One cannot demonstrate from a study of Clement's *least used* words that the letter sounds more like Clement than Clement ever sounded.

The next step in the evolution of this folklore is rhetorical exaggeration. Hence, Stephen C. Carlson refers to "Criddle's finding of a hyper-Clementine style in [the *Letter to Theodore*]" and to "the excessively Clementine nature of *Theodore*."⁷⁴ It is hard to imagine

excess or deficiency of new words" (451). For additional problems with Criddle's methodology, see Brown, *Mark's Other Gospel*, 54–57.

73. Bart D. Ehrman, "The Forgery of an Ancient Discovery? Morton Smith and the Secret Gospel of Mark," in idem, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 67–89, quoting 85–86.

74. Stephen C. Carlson, *The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2005), 52, 53. Carlson goes on to claim that "similar problems exist in *Theodore*'s use of prepositions and his [*sic*] biblical citations" (52). I disagree. Criddle did not perform any statistical analysis on the prepositions but merely suggested, with no theoretical justification, that "the fact that all the

a less accurate characterization of Criddle's study, but Jeffery goes one step further by referring to "the centonate construction of the Secret Gospel and the Mar Saba letter" (183). This description is purely bogus. Whereas the longer Gospel does contain several lengthy phrases from the canonical Gospel of Mark, the letter differs from the Gospel quotations in this regard, as Smith himself pointed out: "There is no passage of Clement's extant works from which it [the letter] could have been derived by adaptation. Nor could it have been made up as a cento by putting together snippets of sentences taken from Clement. Except for a few fixed phrases and a considerable number of syntactic expressions which Clement used over and over, it almost never uses Clement's exact words, though it consistently uses his vocabulary, his phraseology, and his metaphors."⁷⁵ Jeffery is aware of Smith's conclusion and even cites a different statement to this effect in the first epigraph to chapter 11. But he chose to ignore Smith's informed opinion and the primary data and instead to quote Criddle and Ehrman (23/266 n. 29; 99; 237/324 n. 51).

Since Jeffery believes that the Gospel is a pastiche, he might have considered Clement as his prime suspect, for Clement's undisputed works contain long stretches in which his argument consists of assemblages of disparate proof texts held together by brief introductory formulas. Instead, Jeffery's desire to connect the document to Smith led him to characterize Smith's scholarly book *Clement* as "an elaborate collage of ancient evidence and pseudo-evidence that betrays a notable resemblance to the way the new gospel, and the letter containing it, were also built up from ancient excerpts" (181; cf.

prepositions common in Clement appear at least once in this letter and that no other prepositions do, seems too good to be true" ("On the Mar Saba Letter," 218). This is an unsubstantiated impression, not a finding. Likewise, Criddle's claim that the letter does not have enough new biblical citations rests on his exclusion from the data of the letter's two longer Gospel excerpts *and* its three citations of their contexts in canonical Mark (2:21–22; 3:11–12; 3:14) on the grounds that these "are irrelevant to Clement's citation practice in free composition" (219). However, Clement's citation practice included not only "free" citations of scriptures as they occurred to him but also more purposeful citations of scriptures that prove or illustrate a point. As with the letter, Clement quoted passages used by heretics to justify their practices (e.g., *Strom.* 3.6.50.1; 3.6.54.1; 3.8.61.1), and he also quoted phrases from the larger contexts of those passages as part of his own exegesis of their true meaning (e.g., 3.6.50.2; 3.6.54.1–3; 3.8.61.2). All these forms of citation are lumped together in the index of Clement's scriptural citations from which Criddle derives his figures, so there is no legitimate reason to exclude the five Markan excerpts in the letter. When these are included, the ratio of scriptures previously quoted once to previously unquoted becomes what Criddle claims it should be: "less than half" (4:9). Whether there is any significance to this depends on whether this model, which measures diversity of words, is a valid measure of diversity of quotations from a particular body of writings. This needs to be established rather than presumed, especially since the model has proved unreliable in the application for which it was devised.

75. Smith, *Clement*, 76.

183). This is an absurd comparison, one that requires heaps of rhetorical humbuggery to make it sound incriminating:

That many of [Smith's] other claims remain equally vacuous can be confirmed by anyone who bothers to scrupulously check every citation in his more "scholarly" book, slogging through some three hundred pages of scattered indication upon scattered indication, irrelevant citation after misrepresented source. (116)

Smith's approach is amply illustrated by his attempt to show that early Christians were baptized wearing a flat linen sheet or *sindōn*, which also symbolized a burial shroud. He presented a vast assemblage of bits and pieces from countless Jewish, Christian, and Greek sources, most of them unquoted, none of which actually support the argument when fully examined on its own.⁷⁶ Yet this procedure is pervasive throughout his scholarly book—a relentless succession of stray facts, held together by quasi-facts, propped up by non-facts, painstakingly built up, like papier-mâché, into something that looks like a deliberate parody of scholarship itself, drumming the glassy-eyed reader into submission like some hypnotic ritual hymn. It is as if we have ascended to a lawless paradise in which all principles of interpretation and reasoning have been suspended, where almost anything can prove almost anything. (119–20)

Indeed the "evidence" Smith presented consisted of numerous "scattered indications" wrenched from their original contexts (and therefore from their true meaning) and reassembled into a daunting but actually specious pretense at substantiation. (123)

This argument would be interesting if (1) the longer Gospel and the *Letter to Theodore* really were pastiches and (2) Smith actually composed *his own sentences* out of phrases borrowed from other authors. But Jeffery did not establish (1) and did not even attempt to establish (2). Like his use of quotations to "prove" highly debatable points, this combination of sophomoric logic, over-the-top rhetoric, and defamation of character is an embarrassing substitute for research and argument.

76. Jeffery attempts to prove that Smith's documentation in *Clement*, 175–77, is bogus by showing that not one of his citations proves his contention that Christians wore a linen sheet as both the baptismal and burial garment (111–16). But Smith did not intend his citations to prove every aspect of his conclusion. His argument that Christians wore a linen sheet over the naked body as a baptismal garment was progressive and circumstantial, and at each step he clearly stated what the evidence he adduced shows. It is pure deception to criticize Smith's documentation for not proving things that it was not offered to prove and then make sweeping generalizations about Smith's entire book.

SMITH BASHING

The author's failure to produce evidence tying Smith to the document goes some way toward explaining Jeffery's relentless attempts to prejudice his readers with evidence of bad character. The denigration of Smith begins with the last line of the acknowledgments: "And I pray for the late Morton Smith—may God rest his anguished soul" (ix). It ends with a description of Smith's book *Clement* as "hundreds of slovenly pages filled with ignorance, foolishness, and angry jokes about the meaning of early Christian baptism [*sic*]" (251). Startling disparagements and dubious allegations of deceit occur throughout the book, but the attacks become disturbing when Jeffery attempts to get inside Smith's head. Jeffery deduces from a sentence in *Secret Gospel* that when Smith participated in the midnight worship services at Mar Saba in 1941 he indulged in homosexual rape fantasies (128–30, 301 n. 34) and even told a rape joke "in church—in one of the most renowned Christian monasteries!" (129). With the help of circular reasoning, these inferences about Smith's 1941 fantasies become Jeffery's proof that "the hints of sexual humor in the *Secret Gospel* ... have to be taken seriously" (129–30). Stranger still, Jeffery pulls this rug out from under himself by arguing that Smith made up his account of his experiences of the worship services at Mar Saba while writing *Secret Gospel* (138; see also 124–25). Similarly, from an article that Smith published in *The Journal of Pastoral Care* in 1949, Jeffery deduces other incredible things. He infers that when Smith was a priest he understood "the Christian ethical and pastoral tradition" as "a heartless and ruthless demand for unquestioning conformity at any price" (162) and that "he did not understand the counseling process, but saw his job as one of browbeating people into miserable submission to nineteen centuries of 'authoritarian religion'" (175); Smith therefore "would 'drive his penitent out of the Church, or even out of his mind,' rather than help him with 'a fair and honest facing of [his] peculiar difficulties'" (168).⁷⁷ Such deductions help Jeffery depict Smith as the type of person who would commit a fraud that is as twisted as Jeffery's reading of the evidence.

These attempts to bring Smith down to the level of Jeffery's interpretation are not entirely calculated, however, for they ultimately work against him. The caricature of Smith is so hostile that it undermines Jeffery's credibility and alienates him from potential supporters. Jeffery has no difficulty treating other scholars in a respectful way, so his persistent denigration of a man he never met and claims to know little about (236, 242–43) is surprising. What is clear, though, is that Jeffery's attitude toward Smith is a corollary of his attitude toward the longer *Gospel* and the *Letter to Theodore*. In the same

77. Jeffery is using phrases from Anomaly [pseudonym], *The Invert and His Social Adjustment, To Which Is Added a Sequel by the Same Author* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1948), 130.

way that he defames Smith, Jeffery vilifies longer Mark as “an obscene gospel” (250) whose messiah hates women and has his way with pubescent boys. Jeffery even attributes a coercive element of ritual hazing to longer Mark’s supposed baptism by appealing to the rape fantasies that he projects onto its alleged author (130–31). His discovery of sexual violence in the *Letter to Theodore* is equally unsettling. After associating the letter’s reference to the “truth hidden by seven [veils]” with the dance of the seven veils in Oscar Wilde’s play *Salomé* and transmogrifying the “woman” Salome in LGM 2 (so described in Mark 15:40) into the anonymous “little girl” who danced for Herod in Mark 6:22, Jeffery makes the following deductions:

And what is inside this innermost sanctuary, hidden by the seven veils? A selfish, vengeful teenager [Wilde’s *Salome*] who could have possessed the veil of the Holy of Holies, but chose necrophilia. A bloodthirsty temptress, even more terrifying than Walter Pater’s vampire *Mona Lisa*. A homicidal virgin, child of an incestuous adulteress, wantonly cooing to the Baptist’s head, “I know that thou wouldst have loved me, and the mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death” (cf. Song of Songs 8:6). Only Jesus is pure, for he has not defiled himself with women (cf. Revelation 14:4). Refusing to have anything to do with Salome [now the disciple of Jesus] and all her sex, he loves a man in the dark of night—something that only the initiated will understand. To find our way into the innermost sanctuary, past the seven veils, is to find conventional heterosexual morality turned inside out: a sanctimonious Christian [Clement] condemns the carnality of the Carpocratians, invoking an ideal of male-female attraction that, once unveiled, turns out to be nothing but violence and revolting depravity. (230)

Jeffery is not content with discrediting the letter as a forgery. He wants his readers to associate it with every form of “violence and revolting depravity” that he can imagine. Yet there is no justification in the letter itself for the “orgy of incomprehensibly murderous violence” that Jeffery reads into its stance against the Carpocratians (235). Like the modern anachronisms pertaining to baptism, sexual humor, and homosexual culture that he “unveiled” by misreading the letter’s Gospel excerpts in three incompatible ways, the violent depravity that Jeffery exposes is wholly the product of eisegesis. What could lead a person to imagine so much depravity and falsity in a noncanonical Gospel and the person who discovered it? That is the only question that this book leaves me pondering.

CONCLUSION

The *Letter to Theodore* describes a Gospel that was expounded allegorically to theologically advanced Christians as a means of transmitting the great mysteries of Alexandrian

theology. As such, it fits with what we know of Clement and the Alexandrian church. The theology of the longer Gospel similarly accords with that of canonical Mark. The mystery religion language in the letter is metaphorical, as it is in Clement's undisputed writings, and the baptismal imagery in the Gospel is symbolic, as befits a "mystic gospel." Unfortunately, Smith misinterpreted this imagery in a literalistic way, as describing a text used as a lection for baptism. His thesis that the historical Jesus offered a baptismal mystery rite that admitted his disciples into God's heavenly kingdom is a corollary of this mistake. It makes little sense to suppose that Smith forged a letter that he did not understand in order to prove a theory that it does not actually support. By repeating Smith's mistake, Jeffery built an equally fallacious argument against the letter's authenticity. Ironically, insofar as Jeffery has further undermined the assumption that longer Mark had a baptismal life setting, he has further exonerated Smith. Further, the pederastic and sexually violent interpretation developed in the remainder of Jeffery's book has no basis in the text and is logically incompatible with the sacramental interpretation developed in the first ninety pages. In the end, Jeffery's exposé of the longer Gospel as a forgery fails due to his persistent misreading of the evidence and falls under the weight of its own logical inconsistencies.