

Peter in the Apocryphal Tradition

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Students who take New Testament classes studying Acts through Revelation are often perplexed when they realize fully how much Paul's writings dominate class discussions. They study fourteen of Paul's letters (if one counts the Epistle to the Hebrews as part of the Pauline corpus) and only two of Peter's letters. They wonder why Peter, such an integral figure in the Gospels and the head of the church following Jesus' death, could have left such a minute accounting of his post-Ascension activity, especially compared to Paul, a latecomer to the church. At this point, I attempt to assuage some of their frustration by pointing out that Peter, while he may be somewhat underrepresented or marginalized in the New Testament epistles, is actually a popular figure in the noncanonical literature that arises during the second and third centuries of Christianity. Whereas 1 and 2 Peter represent the sum total of Peter's canonical work (with the possible addition of the Gospel of Mark),¹ there are at least fourteen different noncanonical, or apocryphal, works that either claim Petrine authorship or attribute a major role to Peter.²

However, there exists an added degree of difficulty when it comes to reading about Peter (or anyone, for that matter) in the apocryphal literature. Readers can

study the letters of Paul and find references to his life or gain insights into his temperament and character. They can gain a sense for who the man was and what he believed. This is not necessarily the case with the characterization of Peter presented in the apocryphal literature. If reading Paul's letters allows us to look through a window and see a possible reflection (however darkly) of truth, encountering the apocryphal Peter is like encountering a trick-or-treater on Halloween. While the young boy or girl may be dressed in the disguise of a vampire or a princess, and while he or she may even adopt a personality that matches the costume, observers know that once the disguise is removed someone completely different will be revealed. The vampire or the princess is simply a means of constructing a façade or a persona that fits the current occasion. Likewise, apocryphal narratives may contain a figure who is called "Peter" and who may even act or speak like "Peter," but this figure is no more the historical Peter than the child dressed as a princess is actually a princess. For this reason, it is unwise to read the apocryphal accounts of Peter hoping to find insights or revelations into *who* Peter was. However, studying apocryphal accounts of Peter can be extremely valuable in helping readers understand *what* he was and *how* he was viewed. While there may be little, if any, historical *truth* to the stories contained in the New Testament Apocrypha, they do preserve traditions popular in the early church. The purpose of this paper is to examine the various depictions of Peter, both positive and negative, that arose in the early Christian apocryphal literature as various Christian groups jockeyed for primacy and legitimacy in the early centuries after Christ in order to further understand the role and function of Peter in the early Christian tradition. Additionally, this paper will also argue that, while the apocryphal stories of Peter are valuable for analyzing the early centuries of the Christian church, they should not be viewed as repositories of "plain and precious truths" that somehow escaped the notice of the "great and abominable church" (1 Nephi 13:26). Latter-day Saint readers hoping to uncover new sources of sound doctrine in the extracanonical stories of Peter will find only disappointment.

As a way of illustrating the thorny nature of the Petrine tradition, consider two documents which bear the title *The Apocalypse of Peter*. One of them is extant in Ethiopic and Greek, while the other was written in Coptic and was found with the Nag Hammadi documents in 1945. The Ethiopic/Greek *Apocalypse of Peter* (mid-second century AD) demonstrates a great concern for the fate of the physical body. Peter, while in the presence of the Savior, views a grand vision of hell, witnessing the fate of those who have passed on from this life. This text stresses the positive and eternal nature of the physical body by envisioning a resurrection where the flesh literally returns from the beasts who have eaten it:

On the day of the decision of the judgment of God, all the children of men from the east unto the west shall be gathered before my Father who ever liveth, and he will command *hell* to open its bars of steel and to *give up* all *that is in it*. And the beasts and the fowls shall he command to give back all flesh that they have devoured, since he desires that men should appear (again); for nothing perishes for God, and nothing is impossible with him, since all days are his. (*Apoc. Peter* 4; *NTA* 2:627)³

The other text, the *Coptic Apocalypse of Peter* (third century AD) presents an opposite view of the physical body. In this text, Peter and Jesus discuss the true nature of reality and the role of the physical body. In a memorable scene, Peter observes the Crucifixion, which is narrated for him by Jesus. One of the striking images is that Jesus calls his body the “home of demons” and rejoices that his “incorporeal body” has been released from his fleshy prison:

And he [Jesus] said to me, “Be strong, for you are the one to whom these mysteries have been given, to know them through revelation, that he whom they crucified is the first-born, and the home of demons, and the stony vessel in which they dwell, of Elohim, of the cross which is under the Law. But he who stands near him is the living Savior, the first in him whom they seized and released, who stands joyfully looking at those who did him violence, while they are divided among themselves. Therefore he laughs at their lack of perception, knowing that they are born blind. So then the one susceptible to suffering shall come, since the body is the substitute. But what they released was my incorporeal body. But I am intellectual Spirit filled with radiant light.” (*Cop. Apoc. Peter* 82.17–83.10; *NHL* 377)

It is unlikely that both these texts were written by Peter, seeing as they promote drastically incongruous views of the physical body. What has likely happened in the case of these two texts is that two competing groups of Christians, each with an explicit, and very different, perspective on the nature of the physical body, have produced texts promoting their viewpoint and putting their words into the mouth of Peter, placing his stamp of validity upon their theological position.⁴ In the process, Peter’s name and prestige have been appropriated and employed as a mask, allowing for different groups of Christians with competing agendas to argue for their own legitimacy.⁵

Peter as Champion of the Faith (*Pseudo-Clementina*)

The *Pseudo-Clementina* (from the second through the fourth century AD) is the name given to a series of texts that claim to be an account of Clement of Rome and are written in his name.⁶ The two primary texts, the *Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* and the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions*, are commonly believed to be edited/expanded versions of an original text that is now lost. Because Clement of Rome would become, according to tradition, bishop of Rome, it is not surprising that the *Pseudo-Clementina* contain a repository of traditions regarding Peter, customarily named as the very first bishop of Rome and thus Clement's predecessor. The image of Peter constructed by the *Pseudo-Clementina* is one of a man passionate about Christianity, deeply concerned with the preservation of correct doctrine, unflinching in the face of opposition, and possessor of legitimate authority.

The image of Peter as the staunch defender of truth can be seen in one key theme depicted in the narrative—namely, Peter's disputation with a man named Simon, likely the same Simon who was from Samaria and who had attempted to buy the priesthood from Peter in Acts 8. Simon, readers are told, had gained quite a following through preaching a number of questionable doctrines, such as denial of the Resurrection, existence of a God higher than the creator of the earth, and Simon's own status as the Messiah. Unlike the *Acts of Peter*, where a similar contest between Simon and Peter will be depicted as something akin to a magical duel between the two men, the *Pseudo-Clementina* present Peter as the rational, level-headed speaker of truth who will go to great lengths to preserve truth. Upon his arrival in Caesarea to meet Simon:

There then Peter entered; and when he had looked on the multitude, every eye in which was fixed upon him in breathless stillness, and on the magician Simon, who stood in the midst, he began to discourse as follows. "Peace be with you all who are ready to commit yourselves to the truth of God, this his great and incomparable gift to our world! He who has sent us, the true prophet of good principle, has commissioned us, by way of salutation and before any instruction, to speak to you of this truth." (*Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 3,30.1–2; *NTA* 2:514–515)

Simon, bested by Peter after a lengthy debate, hastens away from Caesarea in order to continue spreading his teachings elsewhere. Peter, as the "defender of the

faith,” continues his pursuit of Simon, saying, “I must hasten after him that his lying assertions may not find a footing and establish themselves everywhere” (*Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 3.59.5; *NTA* 2:517).

Peter encounters Simon again in Berytus (modern-day Beirut), and there readers are granted a further glimpse at the lengths to which Peter will go to preserve truth. Simon, attempting to agitate the townspeople, who have just been through an earthquake, cries out “Flee, ye people, from this man; for he is a magician—you may believe me—and has himself occasioned this earthquake and has caused these diseases to frighten you, as if he himself was a god!” (*Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 7.9.2–3; *NTA* 2:524). Peter’s response reveals the high esteem the author of the text has for him: “Peter with a smile and an impressive directness spoke the words: ‘Ye men, I admit that, God willing, I am capable of doing what these men here say and in addition am ready, if you will not hear my words, to turn your whole city upside down’” (*Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 8.9.5; *NTA* 2:524). The response of those listening, understandably, was that they “took alarm and readily promised to carry out his commands” (*Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 8.10.1; *NTA* 2:524).

Integral to the struggle between Simon and Peter over correct doctrine is the question of authorized leadership within the church. Over the course of his travels, Peter is constantly authorizing men to assist in leading the church in his absence. Prior to his leaving Caesarea to pursue Simon, Peter calls together his followers and states, “Since now some one must be appointed to fill my place, let us all with one accord pray God to make known the ablest among us who may set himself in the chair of Christ and lead his church in the spirit of godliness . . . After these words he laid his hand upon Zacchaeus and said: ‘Ruler and Lord of all, Father and God, guard Thou the shepherd with the flock’” (*Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 3.60.1–3.72.1; *NTA* 2:517–520). Prior to his second encounter with Simon in Berytus, Peter “stayed for some days in Tyre and [after he] had instructed all the inhabitants and freed them from numerous sufferings, Peter founded a church and appointed a bishop for them from the number of elders who were accompanying him” (*Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 7.5.3; *NTA* 2:523).

One of the major purposes of the *Pseudo-Clementine* literature is to establish a fixed link between Clement of Rome and Peter, to demonstrate that Clement was simply acting as Peter’s authorized representative in his function as bishop of Rome.⁷ The transition from Peter to Clement as bishop of Rome is described in a letter included with the *Pseudo-Clementina* known as the *Epistula Clementis* (“Letter of Clement”). This letter, reportedly written by Clement to James the bishop of Jerusalem and brother of Jesus, relays the following account: “In those very days when he [Peter] was about to die, the brethren being assembled together,

he suddenly grasped my hand, and standing up said to the congregation: ‘Listen to me, brethren and fellow-servants. Since the days of my death are at hand, as I was taught by our Lord and Teacher Jesus Christ who sent me, I appoint to you Clement here as bishop and to him I entrust my teacher’s chair’” (*Ep. Clem.* 2.1–2; *NTA* 2:497).

In language echoing Matthew 16, Peter states, “Wherefore I convey to him the authority to bind and to loose, that all that he ordains on earth shall be decreed in heaven” (*Ep. Clem.* 2.4; *NTA* 2:497). Finally, “when he had said this he laid his hands upon me [Clement] publicly, in the presence of all, and constrained me to sit in his chair” (*Ep. Clem.* 19.1; *NTA* 2:502). In this, the “Letter of Clement” clearly hopes to validate the position of the “orthodox” branch of the church and its ecclesiology.⁸

Perhaps more than any other early Christian text, the *Pseudo-Clementina* present readers with the ideal Peter. He has no flaws. He is intelligent, a powerful speaker, tenacious in both his promotion of orthodoxy and his condemnation of heresy, a man who is endowed with divine power and who seeks to bestow that power upon the faithful. He is truly the champion of the orthodox, the defender of the faith. In the *Pseudo-Clementina*, Peter “is remembered as the keystone of the early Christian movement who concerns himself with the unity and purity of the church. His teaching is normative, and he faithfully interprets and passes on the law, fighting the threat of heresy embodied in Simon Magus. For the *Pseudo-Clementina*, Peter is both the repository and embodiment of the apostolic gospel tradition.”⁹ In many respects, this Peter closely resembles the Peter of the post-Pentecost church described in the book of Acts: outspoken, rational, a master rhetorician, and a possessor of legitimate authority.

Peter as Martyred Miracle Worker (*Acts of Peter*)

The narrative of the *Acts of Peter* (late second century AD) revolves around two dramatic events, both occurring in Rome, the historic site of Peter’s episcopacy and martyrdom. The first of these finds Peter in the midst of a competition with the same Simon encountered in the *Pseudo-Clementina*. Peter’s contest with Simon takes place in the forum at Rome. In a tale echoing that of Elijah and the priests of Ba’al, Peter is exhorted by onlookers, “Show us, Peter, who is your god, or what is his greatness, which has given you such confidence . . . We have had evidence from Simon, now let us have yours; convince us, both of you, whom we should truly believe” (8.23; *NTA* 2:306). Simon begins by putting a young man to death by whispering in his ear. In response, Peter cries

out, “O Lord, in thy power raise up through my voice the man whom Simon killed with his touch!” (8.26; *NTA* 2:308). The boy is instantly restored to life, causing the crowd to cry out, “There is but one God, the one God of Peter” (8.26; *NTA* 2:308). With the situations reversed, Simon is unable to give life to a young man who had recently passed away, and is defeated when Peter touches the boy’s side and rouses him with a simple “Stand up” (8.28; *NTA* 2:310). In a last-ditch attempt to win the favor of the Romans, Simon promises to prove the power of his god and astonishes the gathered onlookers by flying in the air around Rome. Unimpressed, Peter cries out, “Make haste, Lord, with thy grace; and let him fall from (this) height, and be crippled, but not die; but let him be disabled and break his leg in three places” (32.3; *NTA* 2:313). Simon instantly falls, his leg broken, and “from that time they all believed in Peter” (32.3; *NTA* 2:313).

In this version of the story, Peter’s miraculous deeds led to his death when many of the women he converts refuse to sleep with their husbands due to Peter’s promotion of a celibate lifestyle.¹⁰ When Peter hears that these men have conspired to kill him, he attempts to flee from Rome. In a scene Hollywood would later borrow in the 1950s movie *Quo Vadis*, Peter encounters Jesus, and they have the following exchange:

And when he [Peter] saw him [Jesus], he said: “Lord, whither [goest thou] here [Lat. *Quo vadis, Domine*]?” And the Lord said to him: “I am coming to Rome to be crucified.” And Peter said to him: “Lord, art thou being crucified again?” He said unto him: “Yes, Peter, I am being crucified again.” And Peter came to himself; and he saw the Lord ascending into heaven; then he returned to Rome rejoicing, and giving praise to the Lord, because he said, “I am being crucified”; [since] this was to happen to Peter. (35.6; *NTA* 2:314)

Peter jubilantly returns to Rome and, upon coming to the place of his execution, requests that he be crucified “head-downwards—in this way and no other” (37.8; *NTA* 2:315).¹¹ While the explanation often given for this method of execution is that Peter’s humility would not allow him to be crucified in the same manner as Jesus, the answer he gives in the *Acts of Peter* describes different reasoning:¹² “For the first man, whose likeness I have in [my] appearance, in falling head-downwards showed a manner of birth that was not so before” (38.9; *NTA* 2:315). In other words, just as Adam came into the world headfirst through the birth canal, so Peter would leave the world headfirst. Having thus rationalized his manner of death, Peter “gave up his spirit to the Lord” (40.11; *NTA* 2:316).

In the final lines of the text, readers are told that the Roman emperor Nero became furious upon hearing of Peter's death, primarily because he had wanted to inflict further suffering upon Peter. His reason for such animosity is due to Peter's impact upon Nero's own household: "But when Nero later discovered that Peter had departed this life, he censured the prefect Agrippa because he had been put to death without his knowledge; for he would have liked to punish him more cruelly and with extra severity; for Peter had made disciples of some of his servants and caused them to leave him; so that he was greatly incensed and for some time would not speak to Agrippa; for he sought to destroy all those brethren who had been made disciples by Peter" (41.12; *NTA* 2:316). Nero's desire to persecute Peter's converts is short lived, however, as he experiences a vision in which he is warned, "Nero, you cannot now persecute or destroy the servants of Christ. Keep your hands away from them!" (41.12; *NTA* 2:317). The result was that "Nero, being greatly alarmed because of this vision, kept away from the disciples from the time that Peter departed from this life" (41.12; *NTA* 2:317). The reality of this tradition, that Peter was both able to carry the Christian message into the imperial household and indirectly bring about a cessation of persecution by Nero, reveals the high estimation of Peter held by the early Christian church, as well as its revisionist historical tendency.¹³

While the veracity of events as relayed in the *Acts of Peter* may be in doubt, the stories themselves tell readers two important ways in which Peter was viewed. First, there is a strong correlation between Jesus and Peter throughout the *Acts of Peter*. By coming to Rome and battling with Simon Magus, Peter demonstrates an ability to perform miraculous deeds not unlike those of Jesus, such as the raising of the young man from the dead. With Jesus now removed to a heavenly sphere, God's power to act on earth now runs through Peter.¹⁴ While meditating upon the cross, Peter sees himself as a "second-Adam," just as Paul did Jesus (see Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15). Although he initially leaves, Peter accepts his fate and does not attempt to avoid his execution. Even the comment that "he gave up his spirit to the Lord" echoes the words of Jesus upon the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost" (Luke 23:46). Finally, the incident with Nero exhibits that Peter, like Jesus, continued to have an impact upon the nascent Christian church.

Second, Peter's slow but eventual acceptance of his martyrdom would likely have provided an example for those Christians encountering persecution during the second and third centuries of the church. While they, like Peter, may have felt the natural instinct to avoid death, they, like Peter, should embrace the opportunity they had to die for their beliefs: "His change of heart, and his address to the gathered faithful, however, laid down the guidelines for the future. Christians were neither

to *seek* martyrdom, nor *avoid* it.”¹⁵ Although Jesus provides the ultimate example of accepting one’s fate and a willingness to die for what one believes, Peter’s example, as a man rather than the son of God, may have proven even more significant, as the early Christians could see in him a figure they could relate to and a behavior they could imitate. To have a hero as revered as Peter accept his fate so calmly and rationally was likely a comfort to a church experiencing persecution, and thus the *Acts of Peter* presented a model to the church of the second century on how to handle similar trials in their own lives, even those resulting in death.¹⁶

Peter as Antagonist (*Gospel of Thomas* and *Gospel of Mary*)

While some texts, such as the *Acts of Peter* and the *Pseudo-Clementina*, depict a Peter who is the champion of the orthodox tradition and an example for all faithful Christians to follow, other early Christians texts portray a different Peter, namely Peter as an antagonist and opponent of true Christianity. This tradition is most prominent amongst the literature of the Gnostics, a “group” of Christians who taught basically that the acquisition of knowledge was of paramount importance and the primary means of salvation. While much of Gnosticism, including the appropriateness of the term itself, remains the topic of much dispute,¹⁷ what is clear is that by the second and third centuries many Gnostics found themselves labeled as heretics by the “orthodox” church.¹⁸ In response, they produced a series of texts aimed at discrediting the orthodox church and promoting their own beliefs. Peter, as the traditional head of the orthodox church, became the target for much of the Gnostics’ animosity.¹⁹ Two texts, the *Gospel of Thomas* (mid-second through early third century AD) and the *Gospel of Mary* (third century AD), both relay rather acerbic disputes between Peter, representing the “orthodox” tradition, and, interestingly enough, Mary Magdalene, representing the “heretical” Gnostic tradition.

The first of these, the *Gospel of Thomas*, is a collection of 114 sayings ascribed to Jesus and likely composed or compiled sometime in the second century.²⁰ *Thomas* opens by subtly undercutting the authority and competence of Peter as legitimate head of the church. Having assembled his disciples, Jesus asked them to “compare me to someone and tell me whom I am like.” Revealing just how little he understands Jesus’ true self, Peter responded with “You are like a righteous angel.” It is Thomas’ answer, “Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom you are like,” that ultimately wins Jesus’ favor and introduces three important revelations. When pressed by Peter regarding what Jesus revealed to him, Thomas responds, “If I tell you one of the things which he told me, you will pick up stones

and throw them at me; a fire will come out of the stones and burn you up” (13; *NHL* 127). The Peter depicted thus far is an ignorant believer, an individual who hasn’t yet reached the point of truly understanding Jesus’ message.

This negative portrayal of Peter resurfaces toward the end of the text. The final lines of the *Gospel of Thomas* find Peter harshly demanding that Mary be excused from the group of disciples listening to these secret sayings of the Lord: “Simon Peter said to them, ‘Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life.’ Jesus said, ‘I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven’” (114; *NHL* 138). While Jesus’ statement about Mary “making herself male” remains enigmatic,²¹ “the rebuke demonstrates that Peter has attempted to limit the circle of disciples,”²² a statement that would resonate amidst the ongoing dispute between the Gnostics and the orthodox who had likewise attempted to “limit the circle of disciples.”

This dispute between Peter and Mary is expanded upon in the *Gospel of Mary*.²³ This text focuses upon Mary, who has apparently been privy to a series of esoteric visions from Jesus. Peter asks her, “Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women. Tell us the words of the Savior which you remember—which you know” (10.1–6; *NHL* 525). Mary’s response, “What is hidden from you I will proclaim to you” (10.8–9; *NHL* 525), suggests that she possesses knowledge and information that has been withheld from Jesus’ male disciples. Frustrated, Peter responds to Mary’s recounting of her vision with “Did he really speak with a woman without our knowledge [and] not openly? Are we to turn about and listen to her? Did he prefer her to us?” (17.18–22; *NHL* 526). Mary, hurt by Peter’s disbelief, tearfully answers, “My brother Peter, what do you think? Do you think that I thought this up myself in my heart, or that I am lying about the Savior?” (18.2–5; *NHL* 526). At this point, Levi steps in and rebukes Peter: “Peter, you have always been hot-tempered. Now I see you contending against the woman like the adversaries. But if the Savior made her worthy, who are you indeed to reject her?” (18.7–12; *NHL* 526–27).

The text ends rather abruptly with the declaration that “they began to go forth to proclaim and to preach” (19.1–2; *NHL* 527). As with the *Gospel of Thomas*, readers of the *Gospel of Mary* encounter a Peter who stubbornly refuses to accept that other believers in Jesus could possess knowledge beyond what he himself has and who harshly demands the dismissal of those who don’t agree with him, even though he clearly doesn’t possess requisite gospel knowledge himself.²⁴ Taken together, the Gnostic texts represent a challenge to Peter’s authority in the early Christian church. Yet, by placing Peter in an antagonistic position, Gnostics

have positioned Peter once again as the upholder of the “orthodox” tradition over and against their own tradition. If there is any single individual who personifies firm opposition to alternate viewpoints and beliefs, it is Peter.

Peter as Ignorant Christian (*Apocryphon of James*)

Other texts questioned the legitimacy of the “orthodox” church while remaining much more understated in their negative depiction of Peter. Another Gnostic text found at Nag Hammadi, the *Apocryphon of James* (early third century AD), relays an account of Jesus’ appearance to the disciples 550 days after his Resurrection. Upon declaring that no one can enter into heaven without being “filled,” Jesus dismisses the disciples save for James and Peter and begins to instruct them privately. Peter is depicted as being rather shortsighted, insisting, “Three times you have told us, ‘Become full’ but we are full” (3.39–4.2; *NHL* 31). It is James who recognizes that what Jesus is offering goes beyond what they already possess, stating, “Lord, we can obey you if you wish, for we have forsaken our fathers and our mothers and our villages and followed you” (4.23–28; *NHL* 31). Following a lengthy pastiche of esoteric instruction intermixed with parables, a frustrated Peter responds to Jesus with “Sometimes you urge us on to the kingdom of heaven, and then again you turn us back, Lord; sometimes you persuade and draw us to the faith and promise us life, and then again you cast us forth from the kingdom of heaven” (13.28–36; *NHL* 36). After a brief response, Jesus departs “to the place from whence I came” (14.21; *NHL* 36), leaving James and Peter to answer the inquiries of the understandably curious disciples.

What is notable about the *Apocryphon of James* is the subtlety behind its depiction of Peter. While Peter is important enough to be privy to the secret teachings relayed by Jesus, he becomes more or less a passive witness throughout the text. It is James who quickly understands why Jesus has returned, James’ questions that prompt much of the dialogue recited by the Savior, and only James who really seems to fully grasp Jesus’ meaning. In a statement perhaps indicating that James has effectively supplanted Peter as chief Apostle, it is James who discharges the disciples to various locations while he alone remains in Jerusalem.²⁵ Peter hears everything James hears, yet fails to make the necessary connections. The positive depiction of James suggests a Jewish-Christian provenance for this text, and it may be that the text was meant to respond to a gradually diminishing role played by the Jewish-Christian members of the increasingly Gentile church.²⁶ By emphasizing Peter’s failure to fully understand Jesus’ teachings, the author is implying that the orthodox church itself has meandered off-course and thus missed out on the

true message of the gospel. As one scholar observes, “Unlike the more polemical writings, the *Apocryphon of James* seeks to demonstrate that Gnostic revelation is in fact coherent with the publicly known teachings of Jesus. It refers to lists of parables and to other sayings of Jesus throughout. Gnostics interpret the same canonical texts as other Christians do. Peter provides evidence for the authenticity of that interpretation, even if he is not completely enlightened.”²⁷

While it is unlikely that any of these three texts accurately relay information about what Peter may have said or how he may have felt, they are nonetheless crucial for understanding Peter’s role in the apocryphal tradition and in the struggle between competing brands of Christianity. The image of Peter clearly loomed large in the minds of early Christians, who saw in him a figure who would grant validity or legitimacy to their respective belief system through either endorsement or rejection. The prominent role played by Peter in literature seemingly intended to demean or at least tarnish his image suggests an additional insight into the legacy of Peter—he was too big to be ignored, too substantial to be pushed to the side, and too important to be forgotten.

Peter as Witness (*Gospel of Peter*)

The weight of Peter’s prestige is most fully reflected in the final text we will examine, a short document known as the *Gospel of Peter*.²⁸ This Gospel likely dates to the middle of the second century AD²⁹ and provides an alternate depiction of the Passion narrative. Many elements of the Passion story familiar to readers of the four Gospels can be found in the *Gospel of Peter*, such as the presence of Pilate, Jesus being crucified between two malefactors, the empty tomb, and the role of Mary Magdalene. However, there are a few additions to the story absent from the canonical Gospels, including the curious account of a talking cross:

And whilst they were relating what they had seen, they saw again three men come out from the sepulchre, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following them, and the heads of the two reaching to heaven, but that of him who was led of them by the hand overpassing the heavens. And they heard a voice out of the heavens crying, “hast thou preached to them that sleep?”, and from the cross there was heard the answer, “Yea.” (10.39–42; *NTA* 1:225)

A further curiosity of the *Gospel of Peter* is the almost complete absence of Peter, who appears only in the closing lines of the Gospel that bears his name: “But I, Simon Peter, and my brother Andrew took our nets and went to the sea” (14.60;

NTA 1:226). The text, then, presents itself as a firsthand account of the Passion written by Peter himself. The attribution of this particular narrative to Peter was likely done not to enhance Christianity's knowledge of Peter, but to grant legitimacy to the theological position taken by the author of the apocryphal text. The bestowal of legitimacy occurs both through the use of Peter's name as well as the usage of the first-person "I." It is Peter's prestige, not Peter's person, that matters to the author. This type of false attribution of authorship was not an uncommon practice in the ancient world, especially where religious literature was concerned: "One particular method of verisimilitude involves the use of first-person narrative, in which an author not only claims to be someone other than who he is, but also narrates events as a personal participant . . . The value of the first-person narrative is that it makes the writer an authority not only because of his name but also because of his firsthand experiences."³⁰ The intended result of this type of practice was that these texts "all function to authenticate the reports in which they are embedded."³¹

So what, then, would the author of the *Gospel of Peter* be attempting to "authenticate" by appropriating Peter's persona? In contrast to the *Apocryphon of James*, at several points in this narrative the author demonstrates a clear anti-Jewish bias. In a scene from the trial of Jesus, the author relates, "But of the Jews none washed their hands, neither Herod nor any one of his judges" (1.1; *NTA* 1:223). Several Jewish groups, including the "scribes," "elders," "priests," "Pharisees," or just simply the "Jews" are portrayed as the prime movers behind Jesus' execution.

Pilate emerges as a sympathetic figure who tries to convince Herod to return the body of Jesus to Joseph for burial.³² In a telling exchange, the Roman soldiers watching the tomb report to Pilate: "When those who were of the centurion's company saw this, they hastened by night to Pilate, abandoning the sepulchre which they were guarding, and reported everything that they had seen, being full of disquietude and saying, 'In truth he was the Son of God'" (11.45; *NTA* 1:225). Pilate's response is to disavow any responsibility in this miscarriage of justice: "Pilate answered and said, 'I am clean from the blood of the Son of God, upon such a thing have you decided'" (11.46; *NTA* 1:225). Finally, the Jews come to Pilate asking him to maintain secrecy regarding the true nature of Jesus: "Then all came to him, beseeching him and urgently calling upon him to command the centurion and the soldiers to tell no one what they had seen. 'For it is better for us,' they said, 'to make ourselves guilty of the greatest sin before God than to fall into the hands of the people of the Jews and be stoned'" (11:47-48; *NTA* 1:225).

Likely this text was produced in order to explicitly indict the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus, one of a larger series of texts that emerged in the second and third

centuries reflecting anti-Jewish sentiment.³³ By attaching Peter's name to his text and inserting him as an eyewitness, the author immediately gained credence for his theological position. This informs us that Peter's reputation and prestige were imposing in the minds of the early Christians across the board. Quite simply, his name carried weight.³⁴ However, it is also important to remember that the text likely tells us little of historical truth about Peter himself, and it seems difficult to believe that Peter would share the same level of animosity for Jews expressed in the *Gospel of Peter*.³⁵ Readers thus would be ill advised to search within the text of the *Gospel of Peter* for any glimpses into who Peter was or what he may have thought, particularly where such a clear agenda is present: "In short, the *Gospel of Peter* has attracted considerable attention in recent years and contains much that is of interest for an understanding of second-century Christianity—but its anemic figure of Peter is little more than a flag of ecclesial convenience adorning its derivative account of the passion."³⁶

Apocryphal Accounts and Latter-day Saint Interpretation

Having considered several apocryphal texts involving Peter, it is valuable at this point to discuss just how these types of stories and traditions could be interpreted by Latter-day Saints. As a church, we tend to be sympathetic toward literature such as this, seeing in noncanonical literature such as the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, or the New Testament apocrypha a potential reservoir for lost or forgotten truths. There are at least three possible reasons for this common attitude, all relating to the Book of Mormon. First, a crucial part of Nephi's vision of the apostasy of the early Christian church was the role played by an organization termed "the great and abominable church" (1 Nephi 13:6).³⁷ One of the major offenses committed by the "great and abominable church" is the removal of "plain and precious truths" from the scriptures:

And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away.

And all this have they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men.

Wherefore, thou seest that after the book hath gone forth through the hands of the great and abominable church, that there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book, which is the book of the Lamb of God. (1 Nephi 13:26–28)

It is tempting to see noncanonical literature such as that discussed above as a possible location for discovering these lost “plain and precious” truths. Furthermore, the fact that Nephi learns that what was lost from the Bible was “plain and precious,” including even “many covenants of the Lord,” may lead us to believe that what was lost may in fact be more important than what remained in the extant Bible we have today.

A second factor comes from the Book of Mormon’s discussion of additional records that exist outside the Bible. Nephi took from Laban a record known as the plates of brass, containing a record of the history of the Jews, their prophecies, genealogies, and law. A portion of the Book of Mormon, untranslated, contains the “sealed” account of the vision of the brother of Jared. Nephi prophesies that an exchange of “words” will occur among the Jews, Nephites, and lost tribes of Israel, suggesting that the lost tribes have also kept records of their own: “And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews” (2 Nephi 29:13). The Book of Mormon’s promise of multiple legitimate scriptural texts that lay outside the canonized Bible may prompt Latter-day Saints to accept the pseudepigraphic claims of apocryphal texts more readily than is necessary.

A third factor leading toward sympathetic reception of noncanonical literature is the existence and reality of the Book of Mormon itself.³⁸ The Book of Mormon is nonbiblical, yet is a source of true doctrine, the “fulness of the gospel” (D&C 20:9). Additionally, the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the gold plates, buried in a hill for over a thousand years, may lead us to view ancient texts discovered under similar circumstances, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi Library, as analogous.

All three of these points are valid, but this validity does not mean that every noncanonical text carries within it “plain and precious truths” or is a lost record of God’s people.³⁹ Often these texts may contain words, doctrines, or stories that parallel the restored gospel, such as the marvelous journey of the young man in the “Hymn of the Pearl” from the *Acts of Thomas*.⁴⁰ But texts such as this are often the exception rather than the rule, and common themes or doctrines do not necessarily indicate common origins. More accurately, what most apocryphal texts exhibit

is a church deprived of revelation, where individual authors or groups produced “truth” not through divine inspiration but through their own pens. According to Stephen Robinson, “Indeed, the apocrypha do have great value, but not because they teach Mormonism; for by and large they do not. For the most part they are the writing of men but are dressed up to look like scripture. From an LDS point of view, there are often elements of truth in this literature; but always it is truth mixed with falsehood, as the Lord tells us in section 91 of the Doctrine and Covenants.”⁴¹ For all we know, the apocryphal documents discussed above could be the product of the entity Nephi termed the “great and abominable church” itself, rather than the source for the “plain and precious truths” the great and abominable church excised. For these reasons, they ought to be explored with caution and a mind toward their original context.

Recent research done by prominent Latter-day Saint scholars has also cautioned against placing too much weight upon the stories preserved in the New Testament apocrypha. In an article investigating the *Gospel of Judas*, John Welch noted, “Filling in the gaps in traditional biblical stories, elevating the interests of one early Christian community over the others, and uncovering new or old secrets with the aim of enlarging the canonical corpus are all hallmarks of the disparate body of literature long referred to as the New Testament Apocrypha, . . . but despite any good intentions, the apocryphal writings are generally wrong-headed and unreliable nonetheless.”⁴² In an examination of the apocryphal acts of Jesus, John Gee concluded that “Like cream-puffs, most apocryphal accounts of Jesus, though they look enticing, have little nourishment and are usually not as good nor even as sweet as they look, being dusty pastry filled with imitation cream.”⁴³ Finally, Thomas Wayment reminds us that a serious gulf exists between the canonical texts of the New Testament and the apocryphal texts that claim a similar authorship:

The modern academic mindset has led us to believe that all or at least a significant part of the apocrypha was believed to be historically reliable and that people generally approached them in antiquity as credible sources. This assumption, however, does not hold up after careful scrutiny. The early Church never elevated the apocryphal texts to a status similar or equal to the canonical texts . . . It is safe to say, based on current research, that every apocryphal text that claims to preserve the teachings of a New Testament figure was forged. The same cannot be said of the canonical texts, which indicates that the early Church was quite successful at separating the wheat from the chaff.⁴⁴

This being said, what then can Latter-day Saints learn about Peter from these assorted documents? While it may be tempting to jettison the entire apocryphal tradition about Peter due to the unreliability of the texts themselves, this would be an overreaction. While these texts may be lacking in detailed information regarding the historical Peter, the value of such literature is that it reflects traditions about Peter and captures how the nascent Christian church perceived and understood him in different times and places.⁴⁵ Certain texts, such as the *Pseudo-Clementina* and *Acts of Peter*, depict Peter in a variety of positive functions: the leader of the church, the voice of reason, the expounder of doctrine, the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the nemesis of the heretic, the defender of the faith, and the martyr for Christ. Other texts, such as the *Gospel of Peter*, demonstrate just how viable Peter was as a witness, as if placing his name at the end of a text made all that came before valid and legitimate. Still other authors found Peter valuable as an antagonist, the ideal figurehead for the popular Christianity targeted by the authors of texts such as the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Apocryphon of James*. But even his antagonists viewed him as the head of the orthodox church and the defender of its tradition.

It becomes quickly apparent that when a group of Christians wanted to present their version of “true” Christianity, they would often employ the figure of Peter in promoting/validating it, either by holding him up as the champion of orthodoxy (i.e. their own doctrine) or by dismissing him as unenlightened or ignorant, opening up space for their own unique teachings and doctrine.⁴⁶ This is the crux of the argument: Peter simply could not be ignored or dismissed; his figure loomed large enough that he had to be either embraced or pushed aside. Ultimately, it is Peter’s prime position in the midst of these various theological skirmishes that grants modern readers the clearest indication of Peter’s legacy. As one scholar has written, “All in all, it is interesting how few of the Petrine texts—like the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, or the *Preaching of Peter*—reveal much for Petrine memory, except the *fact* of its importance.”⁴⁷ While readers of the New Testament apocryphal texts may struggle to discern fact from fiction, history from myth, one thing remains undeniable: Peter mattered. His role was crucial, his position hallowed. Additionally, these traditions about Peter preserved in the New Testament Apocrypha strongly confirm the primacy and authority of Peter in the first-generation church presented in the four canonical Gospels. If the sole purpose served in examining these texts is to remind readers of these points, then they warrant continued study, if only to encounter passages such as the one that closes the *Acts of Peter*. While it is unlikely that Peter ever said these words while hanging upside down on a cross, they stand as a striking

testament to the man who was wise enough to answer the Savior's inquiry of "But whom say ye that I am?" with "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15):

I thank thee, with silence of the voice, with which the spirit within me, that loves thee and speaks to thee and sees thee, makes intercession. Thou art known to the spirit only. Thou art my Father, thou art my Mother, thou my Brother, thou art Friend, thou art Servant, thou art House-keeper; thou art the All, and the All is in thee; thou art Being, and there is nothing that is, except thou. With Him then do you also take refuge, brethren, and learning that in him alone is your real being, you shall obtain those things of which he says to you "What eye has not seen nor ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man." We ask then, for that which thou hast promised to give us, O Jesus undefiled; we praise thee, we give thanks to thee and confess thee, and being yet men without strength we glorify thee; for that art God alone and no other, to whom be glory both now and for all eternity, Amen. (39:10; *NTA* 2:316)

Notes

1. Some early Christians believed that the source for the Gospel of Mark was Peter, for whom Mark served as translator. See Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.39.15. Modern scholars are unsure how much validity rests in this tradition and have advanced arguments on both sides of the question. As one scholar writes, "speculation, however intriguing, is not demonstration, and the fairest judgment . . . is the nonprejudicial Scottish legal verdict of 'not proven.'" Joel B. Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 24.

2. This list would include the *Acts of Peter*, the *Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Coptic Apocalypse of Peter*, the *Gospel of Peter*, the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*, the *Epistle of Peter*, the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, the *Kerygmata Petrou*, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Pseudo-Clementina*, the *Dialogue of the Savior*, the *Pistis-Sophia*, and the *Apocryphon of James*.

3. All quotations and dates for the documents discussed in this paper are from Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed., trans. R. McL. Wilson (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1991), hereafter *NTA*; and James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), hereafter *NHL*. Also useful is *The Apocryphal New Testament*, ed. J. K. Elliot (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). These works also contain lengthy bibliographies for those wishing to dig deeper into the respective texts.

4. For more on the relationship between the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Coptic Apocalypse of Peter*, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 450–51.

5. “Various Christian groups validated their teaching by declaring allegiance to a specific apostle or disciple and claiming him . . . as their spiritual founder.” Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003), 65. “With the Fall of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jerusalem church, and as Peter’s influence grew apace, . . . it became increasingly important, especially for encratic, legalistic and Gnostic groups, to enlist his support, and claim his authority.” F. Lapham, *Peter: The Man, the Myth, and the Writings* (London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 216.

6. For more on the *Pseudo-Clementina*, see Bernard Rehm, *Homilien*, vol. 1 of *Die Pseudoklementinen* (Berlin: Akademie, 1992), GCS 42; and *Rekognitionem*, vol. 2 of *Die Pseudoklementinen* (Berlin: Akademie, 1965), GCS 51. F. Stanley Jones is currently working on a new critical edition and English translation of the Syriac *Pseudo-Clementina* for the series *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Apocryphorum.

7. “It is by no means difficult, then, to understand the motivation for installing Peter as Rome’s first Bishop. Clearly, those churches which could legitimately boast apostolic foundation were in a position to claim superior authority and greater theological credibility.” Lapham, *Peter: The Man, the Myth, and the Writings*, 93.

8. The words “orthodox” and “heresy” are loaded terms and ought to be used carefully. They should not be viewed as elevating one church while denigrating another. By “orthodox,” I simply mean the church that emerges out of the second and third centuries as the dominant church and thus the definer of “official” church doctrine. By “heresy” I mean any church that stands outside the “orthodox” sphere, which Gnosticism eventually does. Important works on the topic are Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert Kraft and Gerhard Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); and Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). For a contrary opinion, see Andreas J. Kostenberger and Michael J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). These labels are scholars’ ways of recognizing that the winners write the history, and thus it must be carefully evaluated.

9. Markus Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 57.

10. Perhaps arising due to the furthered exposure to Hellenism, asceticism, with its denial of the body and sexuality, became a popular idea within parts of the Christian church, in particular many of the so-called “Gnostics.” The story of Peter influencing his converts in such a way that they reject their husbands is likely representative of this ascetic tradition. Thus, “the image of Peter as an ascetic who championed celibacy is an alien imposition.” Larry R. Helyer, *The Life and Witness of Peter* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 294. The popular stories preserved in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* attempted to promote a similar viewpoint. For more, see Wayne A. Meeks, *The Moral World of the First Christians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 105–8; and Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 21–83.

11. Josephus, *Wars*, 5.11.1, states that during the siege of Titus the Roman soldiers experimented with different methods of crucifixion, which may explain the

upside-down manner of Peter's crucifixion. For early accounts of Peter's death involving upside-down crucifixion, see Tertullian, *De Præscrip. Hæc.* 36; Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica.* 3.1. The idea that Peter's choice of upside-down crucifixion was a sign of humility seems to have its origin in a later text known as the "Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul," which includes the following statement: "And Peter, having come to the cross, said; 'Since my Lord Jesus Christ, who came down from the heaven upon the earth, was raised upon the cross upright, and He has deigned to call to heaven me, who am of the earth, my cross ought to be fixed head downmost, so as to direct my feet towards heaven; for I am not worthy to be crucified like my Lord.' Then, having reversed the cross, they nailed his feet up." Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Father* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 8:484.

12. See also Lapham, *Peter: The Man, the Myth, and the Writings*: "In popular tradition, it was because Peter believed himself to be unworthy of sharing the same form of death as his Lord that he begged his captors to reverse his position on the cross" (65).

13. The cowed portrayal of Nero depicted by the author of the *Acts of Peter* is likely due to the enmity the early church held for the emperor. It was Nero who initiated persecution of Christians during the 60s AD, and traditionally the deaths of both Peter and Paul are attributed to him. Eusebius records that Nero "gave himself up to unholy practices" but that "To describe the monster of depravity that he became lies outside the scope of the present work." *Hist. Eccl.* 2.25. For Roman accounts of Nero's persecution of the Christians, see Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.

14. "Stories of Peter besting Simon Magus in a series of miracle-working contests from the *Acts of Peter* illustrated the superiority of the proto-orthodox lineage of the Roman episcopacy over against the various groups of Gnostic contenders." Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 60.

15. Lapham, *Peter: The Man, the Myth, and the Writings*, 63.

16. "By concluding with the martyrdom account, the author of *Acts of Peter* has presented a schema in which the controversies stirred up by Simon Magus's false preaching have been overcome. The church has been strengthened by the death of its martyr hero and his companions." PHEME PERKINS, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 142-43.

17. See, for example, Karen L. King, *What Is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Michael A. Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

18. See, for example, Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 1-2; Hippolytus, *Refutation omnium Haeresium* 5.15; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 4.7.

19. This is not to say that all Gnostic literature targeted Peter. One short text, the *Letter of Peter to Philip*, preserves a supposed correspondence between a very Gnostically oriented Peter and Philip. In the case of this letter, the author is following the tradition of ascribing certain unusual doctrine and theology to Peter as a means of transforming the unorthodox into the orthodox. However, the *Letter of Peter to Philip* is more the exception than the rule. In addition to the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Gospel of Mary*, see also the *Dialogue with the Savior*, the *Gospel of the Egyptians*, and the *Pistis Sophia*.

20. For more on the *Gospel of Thomas*, see Marvin W. Meyer, *The Gospel of Thomas: The Hidden Sayings of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), which includes text, translation, and critical notes.

21. One possible explanation for the rationale behind this phrase is explained by Birger A. Pearson: "A variant on this theme is the notion of maleness as equivalent to perfection, and femaleness as equivalent to imperfection, an idea that goes back to Plato and is given wide expression in the writings of the first-century philosopher Philo of Alexandria." *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 265. See also a similar phrase from the *Gospel of Mary*: "Do not weep and do not grieve nor be irresolute, for his grace will be entirely with you and will protect you. But rather let us praise his greatness, for he has prepared us and made us into men." *Gospel of Mary* 9:14–21; *NHL* 525.

22. Perkins, *Peter*, 157.

23. For more on the *Gospel of Mary*, see Christopher Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), with text, translation, and commentary.

24. PHEME PERKINS identifies an alternate, more positive way of interpreting the "conflict" between Peter and Mary in the Gnostic tradition: "How one treats the conflict between Peter and Mary in *Gospel of Mary* depends on whether one presumes that its author has a hostile Christian majority in view or one assumes that *Gospel of Mary* has formulated a response to the kind of objection raised in Irenaeus about esoteric revelation and the universality of apostolic preaching. In the former case, Peter is the embodiment of orthodox dogmatism. In the latter case, his eventual conversion provides a foundation for a gnostic claim to the inner meaning of Christian teaching." *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 184–85.

25. "Inasmuch as Peter is also named in the *Apocryphon of James*, it is to assert the superiority of James and of the revelation made to him." John Painter, *Just James: The Brother of Jesus in History and Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 177.

26. James, as the bishop of Jerusalem, is often portrayed as the standard-bearer for the Jewish-Christian wing of the early Christian church. That Peter would be involved in a text arguing on behalf of Jewish-Christianity is not surprising, as "Peter became a battleground over which the Jewishness of Christianity was fought." Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 332.

27. Perkins, *Peter*, 160.

28. For more on the *Gospel of Peter*, see Paul Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition and Commentary* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2010).

29. This date depends upon the statement made by Serapion regarding his awareness of the "Gospel of Peter" being the same as the extant *Gospel of Peter* discussed here. See Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.12.2–6.

30. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 123. Ehrman adds, "the first-person pronoun (both singular and plural) was widely used in ancient texts, Christian and otherwise, precisely in order to provide authority for the account." *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 270.

31. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery*, 274.

32. "The tendency to minimize the guilt of Pilate which is found in the *Gospel According to Peter* shows the keen interest with which ancient Christianity regarded

his person. The prominent position occupied by Pontius Pilate in early Christian thought is further evidenced by the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Into this narrative have been incorporated the so-called *Acts of Pilate*, a supposed official report of the procurator concerning Jesus.” Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1995), 1:115. For more on the “Acts of Pilate,” see Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 35, and Tertullian, *Apology* 21, 24. This exoneration of Pilate extends even further in the Ethiopic church, where Pilate is considered a “saint” and June 25 has been assigned to him and his wife as a feast day.

33. “This appears to be part of an agenda that squarely fastens the blame for Jesus’ death on the Jewish leaders under Herod.” Helyer, *Life and Witness of Peter*, 291. See also C. H. Turner, “The Gospel of Peter,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 14 (1913): 161–87. For discussion of anti-Jewish sentiments within early Christian literature, see Paula Fredriksen and Oded Irshai, “Christian Anti-Judaism: Polemics and Policies,” in *The Cambridge History of Judaism Volume IV: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 977–1034; and L. T. Johnson, “The New Testament’s Anti-Jewish Slander and the Convention of Ancient Polemic,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (1989): 419–41.

34. “It is significant that the document does underscore this apostle’s specific role as an acknowledged broker of Jesus tradition.” Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory*, 52.

35. Although Peter’s harsh denouncement of the Jews for their role in Jesus’ execution in Acts 2 and 3 comes close, perhaps the anti-Jewish posture of Peter in the *Gospel of Peter* can in part be attributed to Luke’s record.

36. Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory*, 52.

37. See Stephen E. Robinson, “Warring against the Saints of God,” *Ensign*, January 1988, 34–39.

38. One could include the Book of Moses or the Book of Abraham in this discussion as well.

39. For an exploration of this topic, see Dana M. Pike, “Is the Plan of Salvation Attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls?,” in *LDS Perspectives on the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Dana M. Pike (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 73–94.

40. This is certainly one text that resonates with Latter-day Saints due to its elaboration upon the journey of a young man from a premortal state through a mortal and into a postmortal state. See John W. Welch and James V. Garrison, “The ‘Hymn of the Pearl’: An Ancient Counterpart to ‘O My Father,’” *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996): 127–38.

41. Stephen E. Robinson, “Lying for God: The Uses of Apocrypha,” in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1986), 148.

42. John W. Welch, “The Apocryphal Judas Revisited,” *BYU Studies* 45, no. 2 (2006): 46.

43. John Gee, “The Apocryphal Acts of Jesus,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, December 7, 2012, 178.

44. Thomas A. Wayment, “False Gospels: An Approach to Studying the New Testament Apocrypha,” in *How the New Testament Came to Be*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Frank F. Judd Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 298–300.

45. “These sources do attest the memory of Peter in the second century, even though there may be few if any biographical or other details of historical interest.” Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory*, 54.

46. “It must also be recognized that later writers would want to emphasize different facets of this key figure for their own particular purpose.” Lapham, *Peter*, 2.

47. Bockmuehl, *Simon Peter in Scripture and Memory*, 53.

