



Forgery AND
COUNTERFORGERY

*The Use of
Literary Deceit in
Early Christian
Polemics*

DAVID P. FURMAN

Forgery and Counter-forgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics, Bart D. Ehrman, Oxford University Press, 2013, 0199928037, 9780199928033, 628 pages. "Arguably the most distinctive feature of the early Christian literature," writes Bart Ehrman, "is the degree to which it was forged." The Homilies and Recognitions of Clement; Paul's letters to and from Seneca; Gospels by Peter, Thomas, and Philip; Jesus' correspondence with Abgar, letters by Peter and Paul in the New Testament--all forgeries. To cite just a few examples. Forgery and Counterforgery is the first comprehensive study of early Christian pseudepigrapha ever produced in English. In it, Ehrman argues that ancient critics--pagan, Jewish, and Christian--understood false authorial claims to be a form of literary deceit, and thus forgeries. Ehrman considers the extent of the phenomenon, the "intention" and motivations of ancient Greek, Roman, and Jewish forgers, and reactions to their work once detected. He also assesses the criteria ancient critics applied to expose forgeries and the techniques forgers used to avoid detection. With the wider practices of the ancient world as backdrop, Ehrman then focuses on early Christian polemics, as various Christian authors forged documents in order to lend their ideas a veneer of authority in literary battles waged with pagans, Jews, and, most importantly, with one another in internecine disputes over doctrine and practice. In some instances a forger directed his work against views found in another forgery, creating thereby a "counter-forgery." Ehrman's evaluation of polemical forgeries starts with those of the New Testament (nearly half of whose books make a false authorial claim) up through the Pseudo-Ignatian epistles and the Apostolic Constitutions at the end of the fourth century. Shining light on an important but overlooked feature of the early Christian world, Forgery and Counterforgery explores the possible motivations of the deceivers who produced these writings, situating their practice within ancient Christian discourses on lying and deceit..

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Studies in the life and ministry of the historical Jesus , Raymond A. Martin, Jan 1, 1995, Religion, 161 pages. In existing studies of the historical Jesus, it often appears that Jesus sets out with a fairly clear understanding of what he is to do, and maintains that basic understanding

The Biblical Illustrator - 1 Timothy , Joseph Samuel Exell, 1958, Bible, . .

Misrepresenting Jesus Debunking Bart D. Ehrman's Misquoting Jesus, Edward D. Andrews, Dec 29, 2011, , 436 pages. Edward Andrews boldly answers the challenges Bart D. Ehrman puts against the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible. By glimpsing into the life of Bart D. Ehrman and

Demythologizing Jesus of Nazareth: Was Jesus a Historical Or Mthical Person? , Robert W. Fuller, 2012, Religion, 590 pages. Some subjects are terribly complicated like Gravity, Dark Matter, Wormholes and the whole idea of Quantum Physics. Recently, though, these difficult subjects have taken a back

The Gendered Palimpsest Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity, Kim Haines-Eitzen, Dec 8, 2011, History, 197 pages. The book provides a thorough treatment of the roles of women as authors, scribes, booklenders, and patrons of early Christian literature, and of the ways in which the

James the Brother of Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls I , Robert Eisenman, 2012, Religion, 430 pages. In this new series of books: James the Brother of Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls I, renowned biblical scholar Robert Eisenman revisits the subject of James the brother of Jesus

The New Testament A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings, Bart D. Ehrman, 2004, Religion, 506 pages. This new edition of Bart Ehrman's highly successful introduction approaches the New Testament from a consistently historical and comparative perspective, emphasizing the rich

The Complete Works of Artemus Ward, Part 1, Part 1 , Charles Farrar Browne, Dec 1, 2007, Literary Collections, 264 pages. There is a story of two "smart" Yankees, one named Hosea and the other Hezekiah, who met in an oyster shop in Boston. Said Hosea, "As to opening oysters, why nothing's

easier

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True Christian Religion The Universal Theology of the New Church Foretold by the Lord in Daniel and the Apocalypse, Emanuel Swedenborg, Jul 1, 2012, Body, Mind & Spirit, . What are the true doctrines of Christianity? With this book, the author Emanuel Swedenborg sets out to describe the true doctrines of Christianity, based on scripture and

The Biblical Illustrator - 1 Corinthians , Joseph Samuel Exell, , Bible, 542 pages. .

The Pastoral epistles , Robert J. Karris, Dec 1, 1979, Religion, 126 pages. .

The Cambridge History of Christianity , Frances Margaret Young, Margaret Mary Mitchell, K. Scott Bowie, , , . .

Jesus Who? Myth Vs. Reality in the Search for the Historical Jesus, Dr James Gardner, May 30, 2006, , 280 pages. The most comprehensive and systematic review of the life of the historical Jesus critically examines myth vs. reality concerning his birth, family, childhood, ministry

The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament, Bart D. Ehrman, Feb 29, 1996, History, 328 pages. The victors not only write the history, they also reproduce the texts. In a study that explores the close relationship between the social history of early Christianity and the

The New International Lesson Annual 2012-2013 September - August, Abingdon Press, May 1, 2012, Religion, 463 pages. The standard resource for teachers of the Uniform Series.

Conversion in Luke and Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Exploration , David S. Morlan, Dec 20, 2012, Religion, 232 pages. This study explores the conversion theologies of Luke and Paul. For Luke and Paul conversion played an important role in the early Christian experience and Morlan offers a

"Arguably the most distinctive feature of the early Christian literature," writes Bart Ehrman, "is the degree to which it was forged." The Homilies and Recognitions of Clement; Paul's letters to and from Seneca; Gospels by Peter, Thomas, and Philip; Jesus' correspondence with Abgar, letters by Peter and Paul in the New Testament--all forgeries. To cite just a few examples.

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"This comprehensive study is a valuable addition to the field of scriptural literary criticism and will be

very useful to researchers and lay readers in that field. It is both an insightful study of the use and usefulness of forgeries in polemics during the first four centuries of Christianity, and a near encyclopedic survey of the forged texts themselves." -- Library Journal

"The book is excellent. It will make an enormous impact on the field of New Testament studies and also studies of pseudepigraphy in the ancient world. ... The book will make a huge contribution to the field. There are comparable books in German, but this one goes beyond them all. And it will be the only thing of its kind in English."

"The book tackles an important subject--the nature of ancient Christian pseudepigraphy--and makes a significant contribution to it... The author's contribution lies in updating Speyer's thesis that pseudepigraphy was usually, on the contrary, an attempt to deceive, and in establishing this thesis in a comprehensive English-language monograph. The greatest strength of the book is its comprehensiveness."

"Examining over fifty examples of early Christian forgery and their polemical contexts, Ehrman uncovers the varied motives that prompted ancient Christian authors intentionally to deceive their readers. Whether these authors forged their works to support or critique the Apostle Paul, to oppose or celebrate "the flesh", to promote their own views of doctrine and church leadership, or to defend Christianity against hostile critics, the sheer magnitude of early Christian forgery startles the modern reader. Ehrman demolishes the claim that forgery was an acceptable literary practice in Greco-Roman antiquity, as well as scholars' attempts to "explain away" its prevalence in early Christianity. Ehrman's remarkable and comprehensive account of a misunderstood practice is unparalleled in English-language scholarship."--Elizabeth A. Clark, John Carlisle Kilgo Professor of Religion and Professor of History, Duke University

"With *Forgery and Counter-forgery*, Bart Ehrman has decisively undermined the view that the early Christian pseudepigraphic writings are something other than forgeries. These works, however well-intentioned, were, quite simply, "bastards" and were viewed as such whenever their false authorial claims were discovered. Based in flawed or faulty scholarship, modern attempts to excuse the New Testament forgeries are therefore misplaced, revealing the longings of contemporary readers for secure canonical authorities capable of defending their own points of view. This deeply engaging, carefully documented and thought-provoking exposé of ancient forgery is required reading for anyone interested in understanding how, and why, so many Christian writers sought to pass off their works as the products of named authorities when they so obviously were not. Thoroughly convincing."--Jennifer Knust, Boston University

"The quality is very high; it is very thorough and well-researched. ... Ehrman has produced a learned and engaging survey of early Christian controversial literature from the vantage point of authorial identity and rhetorical deceit, asking why Christians lied about themselves when writing polemical works and why scholars are so resistant to acknowledging their forgeries. ... There is no other major scholarly study in English that tackles this subject with such thoroughness, and its usefulness to students of early Christian literature will be undeniable. ... There is no comparable work in English on forgery. ... I also think general readers will pick it up and find it fascinating. ... The prose is solid, the arguments are clear and effective, and the significance of this study is undeniable."

Bart D. Ehrman is the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Widely recognized as one of the world's leading authorities on the New Testament and early Christianity, he has lectured at major universities throughout North America and has been featured on CNN, BBC, the History Channel, National Geographic, the Discovery Channel, A&E, major PBS stations, and the Daily Show with Jon Stewart. He is the author of the New York Times best-selling book *Misquoting Jesus*.

This work should not be confused with *Forged: Writing in the Name of God*. Unlike *Forged*, *Forgery and Counterforgery* is a scholarly, academic, and advanced look at the practice of forgery in the NT and early Christian literature. The style is very different than Ehrman's NY Times bestsellers (*Forged: Writing in the Name of God*; *Misquoting Jesus*; *God's Problem*; *Jesus*,

Interrupted). It assumes an advanced knowledge of New Testament scholarship and issues. It's extremely comprehensive and makes a convincing case for calling falsely attributed/pseudepigraphic books in the NT and early Christian literature "forgery," looks at why certain NT and early Christian works are considered forged, and the broader phenomenon in Greek and Roman world. Strong engagement with scholarship with extensive footnotes. Yet it is very readable. Advances scholarly conversation regarding the practice of forgery in an original way. It is well-argued and detailed (over 600 pages). If you are looking for an introductory treatment look at his trade book "Forged: Writing in the Name of God."

Bart Ehrman has written a number of interesting books on the New Testament and early Christianity. I've found these books to be enlightening even if I don't always agree with his conclusions. Those of Ehrman's books that I have read to his point have been aimed at the average reader -- successfully aimed, because they have sold very well and made Ehrman perhaps the best-known writer on these topics. This book summarizes his scholarly research on a topic that he has also discussed at length in his popular books: The New Testament books that claim to be written by someone other than their actual authors (in this book he expands the discussion to include other early Christian writings in addition to those that appear in the New Testament). Ehrman has been forthright in labeling these books forgeries because he argues -- correctly, I think -- that the authors were trying to deceive their readers by claiming to be the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Peter, or another revered person. Other scholars have been reluctant to use the word "forgery" for these documents, but I think Ehrman is justified in doing so.

This book is aimed at a scholarly audience, so I assume that Ehrman expects most readers to be academics or graduate students. Although the result is a more densely written book, I didn't find it to be any more difficult to understand than his popular books. Ehrman notes that he was talked out of reproducing quotes in the documents' original languages. Had he done so, he would have lost at least this reader! Ehrman's arguments make for interesting reading and I found them to be convincing. I particularly profited by his discussion of the reasons for the "I/we" passages in Acts. So, although the book is definitely a harder and somewhat dryer read than his popular books, anyone with a strong interest in the subject matter should be able to get through it.

I do have one serious issue with the book: The binding is terrible. You would think that Oxford University Press when publishing a book aimed at a scholarly audience would use a sewn binding that would enable the book to lie flat. Unfortunately, they didn't; the binding is glued, making the book very difficult to open completely without cracking the binding. As leisure reading, the shoddy construction of the book was annoying but no more than that. But if I was a professor or grad student carefully studying the book and perhaps copying out passages from it, I would be upset that the book will not lie flat. No real excuse for a major university press to produce a book with this glaring shortcoming. Read more ›

Though this book is directed at scholars, I predict that it will be useful to and appreciated by non-scholars who have some familiarity with the issues concerning Early Christian Origins, especially the development of the "Christian canon" which took place during, at least, the first four centuries of Christianity, hence the reader will have to engage many non-canonical and some non-Christian works.

When Ehrman quotes foreign language materials, mostly German, with some French and Latin, he gives the English translation in the main text, and the original in a footnote, while most ancient texts are in English translation with the original language to be looked up elsewhere. However, there are times when he does not translate minor bits of Greek which those readers without Greek will have to pass over and so some readers may find that frustrating, but I doubt very much that it will detract from their understanding of his argument.

I will leave off engaging in any technical arguments for scholarly reviews elsewhere, but I think that the careful reader would do well to think about potential logical fallacies as she reads, in particular the fallacies of arguing from the part to the whole, and its reverse from the whole to the part.

Also, I predict that some readers will be very upset with what he has to say, while some others will absolutely love his overall arguments and agree with the assertion that forgery, that is lying, is part and parcel of the Christian canon and that this has significant implications for the Christian faith.

Hence, if one already thinks that Ehrman "is out to push the buttons of evangelicals and fundamentalists" - however, I think that a larger group of Christians will be unsettled by his arguments - then I do not think that too much in here will surprize a person, but can an effective counter to his charges of forgery, lying and deceit built right into the New Testament be made by those arguing for an essentially orthodox position??!! Read more ›

When John Mearsheimer investigated lying in international politics, what he found surprised him. Conventional wisdom suggested that taut international relationships spawn a frenzy of falsehoods between states and their leaders. But Mearsheimer discovered only a handful of demonstrable international lies. Leaders were more likely to lie to their own people than to other nations. Thatâ€™s at least in part because the odds of success are better: citizens of developed nations tend to believe in the moral uprightness of their own country and so often lean toward credulity in the face of their leadersâ€™ claims. (Weapons of mass destruction, anyone?)

Christian literature in the first few centuries after Christ is similarly littered with homegrown lies, deceptions leaders willfully foisted on the gullible faithful. So argues Bart Ehrman in his impressive and wide-ranging *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics*. Although related phenomena come into view at various points, he zeroes in on works bearing a false authorial claim. The number is startling. Ehrman offers each only a brief treatment, and he still needs more than 600 pages.

The phenomenon of early Christian forgery has been known and studied for centuries. Already in antiquity, Christian and pagan alike betray an anxiety over authenticity. Prolific authors like Galen or Augustine wring their hands over the fate of their books: had they been interpolated, forged, replaced by spurious works of the same title? Readers, for their part, were mostly defenseless against the wiles of deceiving authors, save when a fraudulent work came under the critical scrutiny of a grammarian or theologian who could authoritatively declare it a nothos — literally, a "bastard," though the term came more broadly to denote literary works with dodgy parentage.

Learned humanists exposed many more of these ancient frauds during the Renaissance, but the authenticity of the documents that compose the New Testament was not seriously questioned until the late eighteenth century. Since that time, there has been protracted debate about not only the presence of pseudepigrapha in the New Testament but also the possible motivations a pseudepigrapher might have had. Most critical scholars now acknowledge at least some pseudonymous texts in the New Testament, but the question of motive still rattles. Some contend that pseudonymity was practiced as an open secret, a transparent fiction, and that the audience was in on the ruse. Others claim that the students or co-workers of departed apostles wrote the letters, perhaps even with their blessing, the same way a philosopherâ€™s student might write in their name.

Thereâ€™s just one problem: this pretty much never happened in antiquity. Following a growing chorus of voices in recent years — though German Neutestamentler have been saying this a lot longer and with more consistency, significant voices have arisen in the Anglophone world as well — Ehrman rightly notes that whenever a forgery is uncovered in antiquity, it is condemned as deceptive. For too long, scholars have hidden behind the hazy notion that the idea of "intellectual property" didnâ€™t exist in the ancient world — as though authors lived in a golden utopia of verbal communism, untroubled by the very possibility of plagiarism per definitionem, until all this came to a screeching halt in 1710 with the first copyright statute. The intention of pseudepigraphers, as Ehrman and others have demonstrated in convincing detail, is to deceive. You donâ€™t begin a letter, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints â€¦," unless you want the audience to think youâ€™re Paul.

There is an obvious reason one may not want to conceive of pseudepigraphy as deceptive: there is

potentially a cognitive dissonance that comes from affirming a lying or misleading text as "holy scripture." Stanley Porter, a respected evangelical scholar, once argued, "If the church (and the scholars within it) is no longer willing to accept the Pastoral Epistles as written by Paul, perhaps it should, rather than creating strained theological justifications for their continued canonical presence, eliminate them as forgeries that once deceived the church but will do so no more." For Porter, this is a sort of *reductio ad absurdum* argument, since he believes the historical Paul authored the Pastorals; others, seized by the same type of historical foundationalism, argue similarly from opposite starting points. For many in this debate, the stakes are high.

Today most of us are more or less sloppy Augustinians when it comes to lying, or at least Augustinians filtered through a Kantian mesh (recall the latter's little essay *On a Supposed Right to Tell Lies from Benevolent Motives*): lying, we learn from an early age, is always and in every circumstance wrong. If we can recall times when we have fudged the truth, we console ourselves with the assurance that these are white lies intended to achieve some good (hence, the sloppiness). But it is difficult for us to imagine, in this age of internet sock-puppetry, a persuasive defense of plagiarism or false representation as a legitimate means of achieving some spiritual or intellectual good. Anyone who doubts this should consider the public uproar following Germany's series of high-profile plagiarism cases involving government officials who had the misjudgment of, erm, fuzzy attribution in their doctoral theses.

But some early Christians seem to have been gripped by a utilitarian logic rather than a deontological one. They may have justified their deception by appeal to Plato's "noble lie," or the widespread conviction that tactical deceit was acceptable in certain cases; as when a doctor misled patients for their own good, or a general employed tactical deception to best a military enemy. And after all, weren't the Jewish scriptures themselves full of examples of less-than-forthcoming behavior; from Rahab the prostitute to Abraham and Jacob, all the way to God himself? If Plato could argue that rulers "will have to make considerable use of falsehood and deception for the benefits of their subjects" (*Rep.* 459c-d, a text to which Ehrman draws attention), might the early Christians have followed Plato's lead? And, if pressed, would they have appropriated Aeschylus, claiming "there is a time for (a) god to honor the rightness of a lie"? We know less about the motivations of these early Christians than we would like, for the simple reason that for pseudepigraphers to discuss their aims would blow their cover.

What we do have, and what Ehrman spends most of his book discussing, is dozens and dozens of texts that seem to have been forged on lots of different subjects. Ehrman is relatively maximalist when it comes to identifying pseudepigraphal texts in the New Testament, and there is room for legitimate scholarly disagreement in some instances. (For example, the "consensus" about 2 Thessalonians is hardly as strong as he suggests.) Nevertheless, he displays an impressive control of the critical issues surrounding a dizzying number of sources, ranging from the first to the fourth century and so straddling the traditional boundaries between the disciplines of New Testament and Early Christianity (or Patristics, as it is still called in some quarters), a hallmark of Ehrman's career. And he demonstrates that the New Testament pseudonymous letters are merely the earliest examples of an ongoing literary practice in ancient Christian circles.

The texts chosen all display, according to Ehrman, a polemical edge, and, reminiscent of his earlier *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, he organizes the study into taxonomies of controversies. The focus on polemic prevents *Forgery and Counterforgery* from being a warmed-over and Englished version of Wolfgang Speyer's great work, *Die Literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum* (though, to be fair, Ehrman has surpassed Speyer on a number of fronts). But this concentration on polemic raises two questions.

First, by the time Ehrman has finished cataloguing the pseudepigrapha he considers polemical (by his rather capacious definition), we are left with very few non-polemical pseudepigraphal works. This could mean, as Ehrman prefers to take it, that polemic was a dominant mode of engagement with other ideas in early Christianity, and the volume of these forgeries simply attests to that prevalence. Or, one might suggest; as I would; that polemic is at least partially a distorting lens through which to view this literature, one that tempts an author to over-read the texts under

investigation. For example, Ehrman makes an interesting attempt to read the insipid Epistle to the Laodiceans as ultimately anti-Marcionite, but it would be difficult to find a more unspecific and bland forgery. If ever a forgery did not deserve to be called polemical, Laodiceans is it. And one would be hard-pressed to view many of his so-called "apologetic forgeries" as polemical. Most of Ehrman's examples are admittedly stronger, but even in more straightforward cases "polemic" often shades into "strongly asserted view." By the law of non-contradiction, any specific line of argument can be taken as a "polemic" against its opposite. But then the category begins to lose its analytical precision and its heuristic value.

This leads to a second, more substantive worry about the organizing category. Pseudepigraphal texts, as Ehrman deftly shows, achieve their rhetorical purposes through the legitimating strategy of verisimilitude. The Paul of 2 Timothy asks Timothy to bring Paul's cloak with him from Troas. The Peter of 2 Peter recalls seeing Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. And so on. These legitimating strategies lend an air of reality to the letters, and so attempt to prepare a place for them to be favorably received. But if pseudepigraphal texts — or letters, at least, which make up the largest generic category in the book — have fictionalized authors and fictionalized recipients, why should we assume they have real situations in view? Might the polemical language simply be part of the "reality effect," particularly since the authentic letters of Paul are not short on polemic? That something sounds specific does not necessarily mean it addresses an actual phenomenon; to hold otherwise may be making unsupportable assumptions. Polemical language in pseudepigraphal texts probably does sometimes have in view real-world situations, but the fraught process of mirror-reading — discerning a situation behind a letter by reconstructing the ostensible reality from the language the author uses — is clearly even more severe for these texts than for orthonymous letters (in which the author is correctly identified).

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