

## A THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CANONICAL STATUS OF LITERARY FORGERIES: JACOB'S DECEIT (GENESIS 27) AND PETR POKORNÝ'S *SOLA GRATIA* ARGUMENT

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More than 25 years ago, Petr Pokorný developed an innovative and promising theological vindication of canonical forgery.<sup>1</sup> His vindication is very attractive because Pokorný can refer to a key biblical passage on deception for scriptural support, has the teaching of the reformers on justification by faith alone on his side, and holds a position that differs favorably from the unhistorical understanding of revelation that is characteristic of the Muslim reading of the Koran.

Pokorný first published his thoughts on the justification of the canonicity of NT pseudepigraphy in 1984 in a German article entitled “The Theological Problem of New Testament Pseudepigraphy.”<sup>2</sup> Since then, he has repeated his view in his 1987 commentary on Colossians,<sup>3</sup> his 1992 commentary on Ephesians,<sup>4</sup> in a major contribution on pseudonymity to the *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, the leading theological encyclopedia in German, in 1997,<sup>5</sup> and most recently in an excursus on “The Problem of Pseudepigraphy” in his German *Introduction to the New Testament* in 2007.<sup>6</sup>

To my knowledge, Pokorný's theological argument concerning the canonicity of early Christian pseudepigrapha has not attracted much scholarly attention, either in German-speaking theology or in English-speaking scholarship. Therefore, in this paper I am going to (1) summarize Pokorný's decidedly theological approach; (2) refer to the few and relatively short comments others have made with regard to it; and finally (3) present my own evaluation of Pokorný's key arguments.

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<sup>2</sup> “Das theologische Problem der neutestamentlichen Pseudepigraphie,” *EvT* 44 (1984) 496; repr. in *Bibelauslegung als Theologie* (idem and J. B. Souček; WUNT 100; Tübingen: Mohr, 1997), 131.

<sup>3</sup> *Der Brief des Paulus an die Kolosser* (THKNT X/1; 2d ed.; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990) 11–14, 168–69 (ET S. S. Schatzmann, *Colossians: A Commentary* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999]).

<sup>4</sup> *Der Brief des Paulus an die Epheser* (THKNT X/2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1992) 41–42.

<sup>5</sup> “Pseudepigraphie I. Altes und Neues Testament,” *TRE* 27 (1997) 654.

<sup>6</sup> *Einleitung in das Neue Testament: Seine Literatur und Theologie im Überblick* (Uni-Taschenbücher 2798; Tübingen: Mohr, 2007) 619–23.

I. THE *SOLA GRATIA* ARGUMENT

Pokorný's total argument consists of two main elements, (1) a historical judgment about the production and reception of the NT pseudepigrapha; and (2) his theological reasoning on how to cope with the problem of pseudepigraphy in the NT canon.

1. *The deceitfulness of the NT pseudepigrapha.* Without a detailed presentation of the historical evidence, Pokorný takes three historical assumptions for granted:

First, NT pseudepigrapha have to be regarded as literary forgeries. Their authors wanted to deceive their readers. NT pseudonymity was not a transparent and innocent literary device.

Yet, second, the unknown authors of the pseudo-Pauline letters meant no harm to anyone. Rather, they forged their books in order to make the message of the crucified and risen Jesus available to their readers and to lead them into the presence of the grace of God which Jesus preached.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the NT forgers lied for a good cause. They made use of a white or pious lie.

Nevertheless, third, the ancient readers of the forged letters of Paul did not realize that they were being deceived. They accepted several of the earliest Christian pseudepigrapha into the NT canon because they assumed that Paul was their author. For the same reason, the NT letters under the names of Peter, James, and Jude were regarded as literarily authentic.

2. *The canonical status of the NT literary forgeries.* On this historical basis, Pokorný develops his theological vindication of literary forgeries in the NT canon. His theological approach consists of three arguments:

First of all, Pokorný distinguishes the Christian understanding of revelation from the Islamic concept: The apostolic pseudepigrapha must not be removed from the canon because, in contrast to the Muslim understanding of the Koran, the biblical canon should not be regarded as a direct revelation of God. Rather, the biblical canon is a human testimony to God's revelation:

That pseudepigraphic writings should be removed from the canon "would be the consequence if we regarded the canon as a direct revelation from God, somewhat as Muslims regard the Koran. The Biblical canon, on the other hand, is a human testimony to the revelation of God."<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, Pokorný refers to (the authentic) Pauline teaching on the justification of the sinner and to the Reformation teaching on God's free grace: The pseudepigrapha must remain in the canon because they obtained their place in the biblical canon *sola gratia*, by grace alone. According to Pokorný, Paul's teaching on the justification of the sinner must also be applied to the authors of biblical writings and to their sinful use of deceptive authorship attributions:

If the church has also received and canonized pseudepigraphical writings as apostolic witness that means for us ... that the biblical canon also obtains its valid-

<sup>7</sup> "Das theologische Problem" 496.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, trans. Bruce M. Metzger in *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 284–85 n. 35. The following two translations are my own.

ity by the grace of God and not by the works of men. *Sola gratia* applies here as well ... God has acknowledged them in his grace.<sup>9</sup>

Third, and most importantly, Pokorný makes use of one of the biblical passages on God's dealing with the dubious conduct of the patriarchs in Genesis 27. Just as God acknowledged Jacob who had obtained the blessing of the firstborn by fraud, he also acknowledges the fraudulent biblical pseudepigrapha. Just as the belated realization that Jacob had illegitimately acquired the blessings of the firstborn did not allow that blessing to be revoked, so the belated discovery that a book of the NT is a forgery cannot retroactively revoke its canonical status:

The canonical pseudepigrapha can be compared to the patriarch Jacob in the Old Testament. He acquires the blessing and the right of the firstborn through trickery by putting on Esau's garment and by covering his smooth neck and his hands with the skin of a kid, in order to appear before his blind father as the older, hairy brother (Gen 27f.). In the pseudepigrapha, the garment corresponds to the pretended authenticity of the writing, and the skin of the kid represents the fictitious personal remarks. The Jacob narrative does not endorse his actions and even depicts the steep price he has to pay for them. He does, however, retain the right of the firstborn which he takes more seriously than his brother. Similarly in our days, the discovery that a writing is pseudonymous does not mean that we have to exclude it from the canon.<sup>10</sup>

## II. THE PREVIOUS RECEPTION OF THE *SOLA GRATIA* ARGUMENT

I am not aware of any substantial scholarly evaluation of Pokorný's *sola gratia* argument, but the following authors have at least alluded to it. In a recent article, Harry Gamble misunderstood Pokorný's argument to mean that Pokorný was arguing that "if any canonical document could be shown to be pseudonymous it should be excluded from the canon."<sup>11</sup> But this misunderstanding is an infelicitous exception.

Other scholars have either approved of the *sola gratia* argument as a theologically sound and helpful answer to the thorny problem of canonical pseudepigraphy (a) or dismissed it as exegetically and hermeneutically inconclusive (b).

1. *Approving responses.* Bruce Metzger, in a footnote in his excellent book on the *Canon of the New Testament*, has translated three pivotal sentences on the difference between the Bible and the Koran and the validation of biblical pseudepigraphy through God's grace from Pokorný's original article.<sup>12</sup> Metzger appears to have quoted these statements approvingly in support of his conviction that "a pseudepigraphon is not necessarily to be excluded from the canon."<sup>13</sup> But

<sup>9</sup> "Das theologische Problem" 496.

<sup>10</sup> *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* 623.

<sup>11</sup> Harry Y. Gamble, "Pseudonymity and the New Testament Canon," in *Pseudepigraphie und Verfälschung in frühchristlichen Briefen* (ed. J. Frey et al.; WUNT 246; Tübingen: Mohr, 2009) 357.

<sup>12</sup> Metzger, *Canon* 284–85 n. 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 284.

whether Metzger actually agreed with Pokorný is not completely evident. What is clear, however, is that Metzger does not need Pokorný's justification of canonical forgery to complement his own approach to canonical pseudepigraphy since Metzger regards NT pseudepigraphy as a non-deceptive literary device.<sup>14</sup>

Hermann Josef Riedl's discussion of Pokorný's argument is similar. In his monograph on the theological problem of NT pseudepigraphy, he does not flatly deny the validity of the *sola gratia* argument and even defends it against (my earlier) counterarguments. On the other hand, Riedl himself does not regard NT pseudepigraphy as deceptive and views Pokorný's adherence to this assessment as the major weakness of his position.<sup>15</sup>

Mark Harding delineates his sympathy for Pokorný's approach in more detail. Harding holds that the pseudo-Pauline letters served to extend the influence of the apostle Paul by applying his message to new times and new situations. First Timothy and Titus, for instance, are church orders and contain material that goes beyond what Paul himself had written on this topic in his authentic letters. The pseudepigraphers wrote their pseudo-Pauline letters in order to defend their own orthodox interpretation of the Pauline tradition against rival theologians who based their unorthodox position on the authority of Paul and his letters. The pseudo-Pauline authors wrote in the interest of a holy cause and "for the salvation and eternal felicity of the faithful."

Harding believes that "God used the post-Pauline authors" and caused them to write their deceptive but at the same time orthodox letters which therefore have to be recognized as Scripture. In contrast to E. Earle Ellis, Harding disputes the idea that fraudulent writings should be removed from the NT canon. In his eyes, such a position would amount to "identifying the revelation with the New Testament itself instead of perceiving it as a human witness of the revelation of God in Christ." At this point of his reasoning, Harding refers to Pokorný's *sola gratia* argument.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike Metzger, Riedl, and Harding, Sven Grosse disputes the existence of pseudepigraphical or forged letters in the NT in his recent monograph on the "Theology of the Canon" but apart from that regards Pokorný's *sola gratia* defense of canonical forgery as convincing.<sup>17</sup>

b. *Negative responses.* In contrast to the above-mentioned scholars, Eckhard Schnabel regards Pokorný's approach as untenable since, in his eyes, the

<sup>14</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, "Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha," *JBL* 91 (1972) 22.

<sup>15</sup> Hermann J. Riedl, *Anamnese und Apostolizität: Der Zweite Petrusbrief und das theologische Problem neutestamentlicher Pseudepigraphie* (RST 64; Frankfurt: Lang, 2005) 113–17 (cf. my review in *Jahrbuch für evangelikale Theologie* 22 [2008] 205–8).

<sup>16</sup> Mark Harding, "Disputed and Undisputed Letters of Paul," in *The Pauline Canon* (ed. by S. E. Porter; Pauline Studies 1; Leiden: Brill, 2004) 164–66.

<sup>17</sup> Sven Grosse, *Theologie des Kanons* (Studien zu Theologie und Bibel 4; Wien: Lit, 2011) 116 n. 242: "Dem ist hypothetisch durchaus zuzustimmen ..."

justification of the canonical status of literary forgeries implies a general sanction of the so-called pious lie (*pia fraus*).<sup>18</sup>

In my own book on pseudepigraphy, which was published in 2001, I expressed, on less than one and a half pages, some doubts regarding the theological validity of the *sola gratia* argument.<sup>19</sup>

Martina Janssen, in her book-length study on the German research on pseudepigraphy, quoted my earlier objections to Pokorný's approach but did not dispute it outright.<sup>20</sup>

In his recent article on fiction and deception in the Pastorals, Jens Herzer went one step further by rejecting Pokorný's theological vindication of NT pseudepigraphy. He did so, however, without dealing with the details of Pokorný's general argument.<sup>21</sup>

In the same year, Gerd Lüdemann repeated my short argument against Pokorný's vindication of canonical pseudepigraphy and added that "it is almost heartwarming, how Pokorný ... points out that the presence of forgeries in the Bible does not permit us to fabricate contemporary forgeries."<sup>22</sup>

### III. A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE *SOLA GRATIA* ARGUMENT

Since the production and reception of pseudepigraphical texts in the ancient world was the main topic of my book on pseudepigraphy and literary forgery, which appeared in 2001, and since its main thesis has since then been affirmed by several other studies, I will only deal briefly with the historical question as to whether or not the NT pseudepigrapha were produced with the intention to deceive their readers with regard to the identity of their authors (1).

I will not respond to Pokorný's argument concerning the differences between Christian and Islamic concepts of revelation because his remarks are much too short and probably incomplete. Rather, my critical evaluation of Pokorný's approach to NT pseudepigraphy will focus on the moral implications of Pokorný's *sola gratia* argument (2); the role of deception and grace in the Jacob narrative in Genesis 27 (3); and the applicability of the Jacob narrative to the problem of canonical pseudepigraphy (4).

<sup>18</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Der biblische Kanon und das Phänomen der Pseudonymität," *Jahrbuch für evangelikale Theologie* 3 (1989) 88–90.

<sup>19</sup> Armin D. Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum: Mit ausgewählten Quellentexten samt deutscher Übersetzung* (WUNT 2/138; Tübingen: Mohr, 2001) 186–87.

<sup>20</sup> Martina Janssen, *Unter falschem Namen: Eine kritische Forschungsbilanz frühchristlicher Pseudepigraphie* (ARGU 14; Frankfurt: Lang, 2003) 164–68 with n. 616.

<sup>21</sup> Jens Herzer, "Fiktion oder Täuschung: Zur Diskussion über die Pseudepigraphie der Pastoralbriefe," in *Pseudepigraphie und Verfälschung in frühchristlichen Briefen* 492, 494–95.

<sup>22</sup> Gerd Lüdemann, *Die größte Fälschung des Neuen Testaments: Der zweite Thessalonicherbrief* (Springer: zuKlappen, 2010) 26–27: "Es ist geradezu rührend, dass Pokorný ... betont, die Existenz von Fälschungen in der Bibel sei kein Freibrief, heute Fälschung zu produzieren."

I will interact with these theological arguments in much more detail than I was able to do ten years ago in my book on “Pseudepigraphy and Literary Fraud in Early Christianity.”

1. *The deceptive intention of NT pseudepigraphy.*

a. *NT pseudepigraphy was not forgery.* To the question as to whether early Christian pseudepigrapha were written with deceptive intent NT scholarship has often given a negative answer. The composition of a pseudo-apostolic writing, it is argued, was *not considered a forgery* in earliest Christianity. Neither the author nor the recipients would have understood these writings in this way. Indeed, there existed a tacit agreement between authors and recipients that the fictitious authorial designation was carried out without deceptive intent.<sup>23</sup> According to Percy Harrison, the unknown author of the Pastorals “was not consciously deceiving anybody; it is not, indeed, necessary to suppose that he did deceive anybody.” The warm appreciation of the Pastorals in the church was not “tinged with any misunderstanding as to the way in which they had been written.”<sup>24</sup> James Dunn states that at least canonical pseudepigraphy should be regarded as non-deceptive and legitimate:

we have little choice other than to regard it as legitimate and to distinguish what we might call canonical pseudepigraphy from other kinds. It also follows that in such cases the charge of deceit and falsehood leveled against these writings becomes inappropriate; what we have rather is a legitimate speaking in and use of the great teacher’s name, recognized as such by the churches that first used the letters in question.<sup>25</sup>

Other proponents of the view that NT pseudepigraphy was non-deceptive have been identified by Gerd Lüdemann and Bart Ehrman in their recent books.<sup>26</sup>

b. *Some NT pseudepigrapha were forgeries.* A second very small group of scholars seeks to establish a more nuanced interpretation of the deceptiveness of NT pseudepigraphy. They propose that *only some* of the NT pseudepigrapha be classified as literary forgeries and that others be regarded as transparent literary fictions.

<sup>23</sup> A. Meyer, “Religiöse Pseudepigraphie als ethisch-psychologisches Problem” (1932), in *Pseudepigraphie in der heidnischen und jüdisch-christlichen Antike* 110; H. Hegemann, “Der geschichtliche Ort der Pastoralbriefe,” in *ThV*, vol. 2 (ed. J. Rogge and G. Schille; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1970) 48, 55; B. M. Metzger, “Literary Forgeries and Canonical Pseudepigrapha,” *JBL* 91 (1972) 3–24; J. Zmijewski, “Apostolische Paradosis und Pseudepigraphie im Neuen Testament: ‘Durch Erinnerung wachhalten’ (2 Petr 1,13; 3,1),” *BZ* 23 (1979) 161–71.

<sup>24</sup> P. N. Harrison, *The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921) 12.

<sup>25</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, “Pseudepigraphy,” *DLNTD* (ed. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1997) 984; cf. D. G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon: An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship and Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (WUNT 39; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986 = Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); R. Baukham, *Jude. 2 Peter* (WBC 50; Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 131–35, 158–62; H. Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (JSJ Supplements 77; Leiden: Brill, 2003); R. Zimmermann, “Unecht—und doch wahr? Pseudepigraphie im Neuen Testament als theologisches Problem,” *Zeitschrift für Neues Testament* 12 (2003) 27–38. Riedl, *Anamnese und Apostolizität*, is convinced that the pseudepigraphical Second Letter of Peter can be regarded as apostolic and canonical because its author made use of a non-deceptive “anamnetic” literary device.

<sup>26</sup> Lüdemann, *Die größte Fälschung des Neuen Testaments*, 22–36; B. D. Ehrman, *Forged: Writing in the Name of God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 119–21.

According to Karl Mathias Schmidt, 2 Thessalonians can be safely identified as a forgery, whereas it is at least possible to interpret the attribution of the two Petrine epistles to the apostle Peter (including 2 Pet 1:17–18) as transparent fiction that was not intended to deceive and did not actually deceive its original readers.<sup>27</sup> Jens Herzer regards 1 Timothy as an example of a non-deceptive school pseudepigraphon.<sup>28</sup> Jörg Frey claims that the attribution of 1 Peter was a transparent fiction whereas 2 Peter must be regarded as a literary forgery.<sup>29</sup>

c. *The question cannot be answered.* A less clear-cut position is taken by scholars who want to *leave open the question* (at least to a certain degree) as to whether NT pseudepigrapha should be classified as forgeries. Kent Clarke concludes that according to modern standards of authorship the NT canon contains forged letters but that it remains unclear whether these were considered as such according to ancient standards of authorship.<sup>30</sup>

d. *All NT pseudepigrapha were forgeries.* A fourth group of scholars is convinced that NT pseudepigraphy was *by no means innocent*. Rather, the pseudepigraphers wanted to deceive their readers about their true identity and often succeeded in doing so.<sup>31</sup>

In my own monograph on “Pseudepigraphy and literary forgery in early Christianity” I argued that the testimony of both direct and indirect sources confirms that in antiquity pseudepigraphical statements of authorship were considered attempts to deceive. It cannot be demonstrated that in Greco-Roman school traditions, early Jewish literature, or early Christian writings pseudepigraphical ascriptions were understood as non-deceptive. Rather, in the

<sup>27</sup> K. M. Schmidt, *Mahnung und Erinnerung im Maskenspiel: Epistolographie, Rhetorik und Narrativik der pseudepigraphen Petrusbriefe* (HBS 38; Freiburg: Herder 2003), 2–3, 295–96, 398–99, 401–5.

<sup>28</sup> J. Herzer, “Fiktion oder Täuschung: Zur Diskussion über die Pseudepigraphie der Pastoralbriefe,” in *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen* (ed. J. Frey et al.; WUNT 246; Tübingen: Mohr, 2009), 489–536.

<sup>29</sup> J. Frey, “Autorfiktion und Gegnerbild im Judasbrief und im Zweiten Petrusbrief,” in *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen*, 683–732.

<sup>30</sup> K. D. Clarke, “The Problem of Pseudonymity in Biblical Literature and Its Implications for Canon Formation,” in *The Canon Debate* (ed. L. Martin McDonald et al.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) 440–68.

<sup>31</sup> W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft I/2; München: Beck, 1971); N. Brox, *Falsche Verfasserangaben: Zur Erklärung der frühchristlichen Pseudepigraphie* (SBS 79; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1975); L. R. Donelson, *Pseudepigraphy and Ethical Argument in the Pastoral Epistles* (HUT 22; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986) 9–23; A. D. Baum, “Literarische Echtheit als Kanonkriterium in der alten Kirche,” *ZNW* 88 (1997) 97–110; J. Duff, “A Reconsideration of Pseudepigraphy in Early Christianity” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 1998); M. Frenschkowski, “Pseudepigraphie und Paulusschule: Gedanken zur Verfälschung der Deuteropaulinen, insbesondere der Pastoralbriefe,” in *Das Ende des Paulus: Historische, theologische und literaturgeschichtliche Aspekte* (ed. F. W. Horn; BZNW 106; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001) 239–72; F. F. Beatrice, “Forgery, Propaganda and Power in Christian Antiquity,” in *Alvarium* (Festschrift C. Gnllak; ed. W. Blümer et al.; JAC.E 33; Münster, 2002) 39–51; T. L. Wilder, *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception: An Inquiry into the Intention and Reception* (Lanham, MD: University of America, 2004); A. Merz, *Die fiktive Selbstauslegung des Paulus: Intertextuelle Studien zur Intention und Rezeption der Pastoralbriefe* (NTOA 52; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2004) 196–202; M. Tsuji, “Persönliche Korrespondenz des Paulus: Zur Strategie der Pastoralbriefe als Pseudepigrapha,” *NTS* 56 (2010) 253–72; Lüdemann, *Die größte Fälschung des Neuen Testaments*; A. D. Baum, “Revelatory Experience and Pseudepigraphical Attribution in Early Jewish Apocalypses,” *BBR* 21 (2011) 65–92; Ehrman, *Forged*.

ancient literature examined a simple principle served as the norm: A statement was considered authentic if its content could be traced to the person to whom the statement was attributed, even if the wording could not. However, a statement was not considered to be authentic if the content did not come from the alleged author.<sup>32</sup>

This view has been confirmed by recent monographs on related topics. Katharina Schickert has shown that, although extensive intellectual property rights were unknown in ancient Rome, literary property was protected by moral concepts that were perceived as binding: "It was very important to the writers that they be identified as the authors of their works and that no one else claimed the authorship of their books."<sup>33</sup> In 2008, Markus Mülke was able to demonstrate in a substantial monograph on interpolations and similar literary phenomena the prevalence of the conviction among ancient authors that the content and wording of an independent and original piece of work should not be altered. Interpolators were regarded as deceivers and forgers. After the author's official publication of his work unauthorized revisions by others were considered illegitimate. According to Mülke, there are no indications of a limited awareness of literary property in any period of Greek and Latin literature.<sup>34</sup>

In the last three or four decades the conviction that ancient and particularly NT pseudepigraphy was deceptive and must therefore be classified as literary forgery has become the majority view. The ancient source texts cannot be interpreted otherwise. Although a considerable number of NT text books and commentaries have not yet fully taken account of the current state of research,<sup>35</sup> Pokorný's presupposition regarding the deceptive intent of NT pseudepigraphy has to be regarded as well founded.

2. *The moral implications of the Sola Gratia argument.* A second and more problematic aspect of Pokorný's *sola gratia* concerns its moral implications. Pokorný himself is aware of the danger that his argument justifies the general practice of pious lying (*pia fraus*). However, with regard to this undesirable consequence of his position he points out that he accepts the holy lie exclusively within the biblical canon.<sup>36</sup>

Yet how can this restriction be accounted for? The judgment that the pious lie is acceptable only within the canon but remains illegitimate outside that context directly runs counter to the widespread moral feeling that to lie in a secular context is less problematic than to lie in the realm of religion and that a lie in books which claim to be revelation is more severe than a lie in Christian books which do not

<sup>32</sup> *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung* 31–93.

<sup>33</sup> K. Schickert, *Der Schutz literarischer Urheberschaft im Rom der klassischen Antike* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005) 134.

<sup>34</sup> M. Mülke, *Der Autor und sein Text: Die Verfälschung des Originals im Urteil antiker Autoren* (Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 93; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Janssen, *Unter falschem Namen* 250.

<sup>36</sup> Pokorný, "Das theologische Problem" 496; Harding, "Disputed and Undisputed Letters of Paul" 168, appears to have less reservations about an unlimited justification of deception "in the interest of a holy cause."

make such a claim. If the pious deceit of a pseudepigraphical letter is acceptable as a medium of revelation within the NT, by what moral right can an analogous lie be prohibited in a less normative utterance like a Christian sermon?

3. *Deception and grace in the Jacob narrative in Genesis 27.* The story of Jacob's deception of his father Isaac is well known. Before Esau and his younger twin brother Jacob were born, God predicted to their mother Rebekah that "the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen 25:23). When the two boys were grown up, Esau sold his birthright to his younger brother Jacob (Gen 29:29–34). When their blind father Isaac called Esau in order to bless him before he died, his wife Rebekah prompted their younger son Jacob to go to Isaac first and to pretend that he was Esau. After Isaac had ignorantly blessed Jacob, he told Esau that this blessing was irrevocable (Gen 27:1–40).

Pokorný has not been the first to make use of this OT story about Jacob's deceit as an illustration for the NT teaching on justification by grace. Both Ambrose of Milan and John Calvin used it as a very graphic description of the justification of the sinner:

The garments which were borrowed from his brother breathe an odor grateful and pleasant to his father. In the same manner we are blessed, as Ambrose teaches, when, in the name of Christ, we enter the presence of our Heavenly Father: we receive from him the robe of righteousness, which, by its odor, procures his favor; in short, we are thus blessed when we are put in his place.<sup>37</sup>

This statement makes it quite clear that Ambrose's and Calvin's soteriological application of Genesis 27 had a different intention than Pokorný's more recent application.

Apart from the soteriological use Ambrose and Calvin made of it, the OT story about Jacob's deceit has often been quoted as a justification for the use of the white or pious lie. As we shall see, ancient and modern Jewish and Christian interpreters of the narrative have quite often referred to it as a biblical justification of the right to lie under certain circumstances.

However, as far as I can tell, Pokorný was the first to use the OT story about Jacob's deceit as a justification for the canonical status of NT pseudepigrapha. In order to determine whether this is legitimate, it is necessary to outline the different types of interpretations the Jacob narrative has generated, then to classify Pokorný's exegesis of Genesis 27 accordingly, and finally to assess if his exegesis of the biblical text is tenable.

a. *Deception was not involved.* According to a rabbinic interpretation, Jacob's answer in Gen 27:19 to his father's question regarding his identity must not be translated "I am Esau your firstborn" but rather "It is I (who brings this to you) — Esau (however) is your firstborn."<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, Isaac's words in Gen 27:24 must not be translated as a question ("Are you really my son Esau?") but rather as a

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<sup>37</sup> John Calvin, *Genesis: Part II* (Calvin's Bible Commentaries; trans. J. King; 1847; repr. Forgotten Books, 2007) 87–88 on Gen 27:27.

<sup>38</sup> Thus a traditional rabbinic interpretation according to Meir Zlotowitz and Nosson Sherman, *Bereishit: Genesis* (ArtScroll Tanach Series; New York: Menorah, 1978) III.1130.

statement: “You are indeed my son Esau” or “You appear to be my son, Esau.”<sup>39</sup> The *Midrash Tanchuma* explicates: “You might think that Jacob lied, but he did not lie for Balaam said ‘there is no iniquity in Jacob’ (Num 13:21).”<sup>40</sup>

This exegesis of the Hebrew text, however, seems contrived. And even if it were possible to interpret verses 18 and 24 of the Jacob narrative in this manner, the rest of the story intends to convey the understanding that Jacob deceived Isaac. At the outset of the narrative, Jacob fears being exposed and cursed by his father (Gen 27:12). Further and most notably, after Jacob received the blessing of the firstborn Isaac felt duped and said so explicitly in his dialogue with Esau: “Your brother came deceitfully (μετὰ δόλου) . . .” (Gen 27:35).

If Jer 9:4 (“every brother is a deceiver”) alludes to the Jacob narrative in Genesis 27, it confirms the interpretation of Jacob’s course of action as a deception. The same applies to Hos 12:3: “The LORD has an indictment against Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways, and repay him according to his deeds. In the womb he tried to supplant his brother, and in his manhood he strove with God” (NRSV).

Augustine denied the deceptive character of Jacob’s deed in a different way. He alleged that in Genesis 27 Jacob appears to deceive his father but in reality what he says and does are parabolic, tropical, figurative, or prophetic words and actions. When Jacob covered his limbs with the skin of a kid, he did not want to lie to his father but rather to refer to Jesus who was going to cover himself with the sins of others. “The truthful signification, therefore, can in no wise be rightly called a lie.”<sup>41</sup> This patristic interpretation is no less artificial than the rabbinic one.

Accordingly, modern commentaries on Genesis 27 that offer an interpretation that acquits Jacob and Rebekah of any deceptive intention are, to say the least, extremely rare.

b. *Jacob was not (fully) responsible for the deception.* A second interpretative strategy to safeguard Jacob from the charge of deceit is to admit that deception was involved but to put (much of) the blame on Rebekah. Josephus, for instance, regarded Jacob’s acquisition of the blessing as fraudulent but added that “Jacob obeyed his mother, taking all his instruction from her.”<sup>42</sup> In addition, Josephus failed to mention the explicit accusation of Jacob as a deceiver in Gen 27:35.<sup>43</sup>

*Genesis Rabbah* offers an even more liberal paraphrase of Gen 27:14, maintaining that Jacob “went and took and brought to his mother under duress, bent, and weeping.”<sup>44</sup>

Yet, such an interpretation is impossible if the accusation of Jacob in Gen 27:35 is allowed to carry its full weight. Isaac’s complaint implied that Jacob should

<sup>39</sup> Cf. David Marcus, “Traditional Jewish Responses to the Question of Deceit in Genesis 27,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ed. A. O. Bellis and J. S. Kaminsky; SBL Symposium Series 8; Atlanta: SBL, 2000) 299–300.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted according to Marcus, “Traditional Jewish Responses” 300.

<sup>41</sup> Augustine, *Contra mendacium* 24 (NPNE<sup>3</sup> 3:492 [H. Brown]); cf. *De mendacio* 5–7.

<sup>42</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 1.269 (LCL, Thackeray).

<sup>43</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 1.274–275.

<sup>44</sup> *Genesis Rabbah* 65.14 (quoted according to Marcus, “Traditional Jewish Responses” 297).

not have obeyed the deceptive suggestion of his mother Rebekah. By virtue of his obedience, he was complicit and just as responsible as she.

c. *Jacob was entitled to deceive.* A third explanation of the text admits that Jacob's action was deceptive and recognizes his responsibility for it but points out that Jacob was the legitimate receiver of the blessing of the firstborn and that he was therefore entitled to deceive his father.

There are two variations of the argument that Jacob was the legitimate heir of Isaac's blessing for his firstborn. First, some interpreters deduce from Gen 25:33 ("So he [i.e. Esau] swore to him [i.e. Jacob], and sold his birthright to Jacob") that Jacob had become the legal heir in Esau's place and that therefore the birthright was rightfully his. Isaac ben Judah (1437–1508) explained in his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*: "After Jacob bought the birthright from Esau who had sold it freely, he was entitled to say to his father: 'I am Esau your firstborn' ... because he had the legal right of the firstborn."<sup>45</sup>

The second version of this same argument refers to the words of God in Gen 25:23 ("The one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger") and concludes that since God had prenatally promised to Jacob that his brother would serve him, Jacob was justified to receive the blessing of the firstborn because it was rightfully his.

Both versions of this interpretation of the Jacob narrative presume that, as the predetermined receiver of Isaac's blessing of the firstborn, Jacob was entitled to bring about the correct administration of this blessing by deception. The proponents of this kind of reasoning assume that in Genesis 27 the end justifies the means. Among them are the book *Jubilees*, the *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, the midrash *Genesis Rabbah*, Philo of Alexandria, the Church fathers Origen, Jerome, John Chrysostom, and John Cassian as well as Martin Luther.

In *Jubilees*, Isaac could not discern Jacob "because the change was from heaven in order to distract his mind."<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Esau's complaint that his brother has deceived him is repeated.<sup>47</sup> But at the same time, the Aramaic translation adds the explanatory remark that Rebekah heard the conversation between Isaac and Esau "through the Holy Spirit."<sup>48</sup> An angel provides the wine for Jacob's deceptive meeting with his father Isaac.<sup>49</sup> And "the Memra of the Lord withheld clean game" from Esau.<sup>50</sup>

In *Genesis Rabbah*, God delayed Esau in order to provide enough time for Jacob to receive the blessing.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Quoted according to Marcus, "Traditional Jewish Responses" 301–2.

<sup>46</sup> *Jubilees* 26:18 (OTP 2, 107 [O. S. Wintermute]).

<sup>47</sup> *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen 27:36.

<sup>48</sup> *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Gen 27:5 (quoted from Michal Maher, ed., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* [ArBib 1B; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992] 94).

<sup>49</sup> *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Gen 27:25.

<sup>50</sup> *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Gen 27:31 (quoted from Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 96).

<sup>51</sup> *Gen. Rab.* 67.2.

Philo of Alexandria was convinced that the Jacob narrative was in agreement with the platonic concept of the white lie. Just as a physician is allowed to lie for the benefit of his patients and just as a commander is authorized to lie for the benefit of his country, so Jacob was also entitled to lie in pursuit of a good end without incurring guilt: “He will seem to be a deceiver, although he is not to be thought (to be connected with any evil).”<sup>52</sup>

A similar exegesis was employed by some of the Church fathers. Jerome quoted a statement of Origen approvingly in which Origen had commended Jacob as a model that should be imitated:

A person who is obliged by necessity to lie must exercise extreme caution to use the lie as a remedy or as a form of medicine on occasions so as to preserve moderation in its use ... He should imitate ... in particular Jacob, the Patriarch, who, as we read, obtained the blessings of his father by means of an artful lie. Thus it is clear that, unless we use a lie in such a way that we derive some great benefit for ourselves from it, we must be judged as enemies of Him who says: “I am the truth” (John 14:6).<sup>53</sup>

In a similar way, John Chrysostom was convinced that in Genesis 27 God used Rebekah to bring to pass his own prediction about her two sons (Gen 25:23).<sup>54</sup> Rebekah made her plans according to God’s design (53:5). In his grace, God cooperated with Rebekah’s efforts by causing her deceitful plans to be achieved (53:7). Chrysostom said that the biblical text itself implies that God rendered Isaac unable to detect Jacob’s deceit and prevented Esau from returning before Jacob had received his father’s blessing (53:8, 10–11, 14). As a theological justification for Jacob’s deceit and for the disturbing observation that God himself supported Jacob’s deceptive enterprise, Chrysostom writes: “What’s this, then, someone may say—did God cooperate in such duplicity? Don’t idly pry into what happened, dearly beloved; rather, grasp its purpose in not being done for the reason of earthly greed but because he was anxious to win his father’s blessing.”<sup>55</sup>

John Cassian presented the same argument in more detail. He admitted that Jacob lied to his father. But Cassian qualified the biblical license to lie by saying that deception must only be applied, to put it positively, for the sake of the greatest good, or, to put it negatively, when some grave danger is threatening. In such extreme circumstances, and only then, God judges a person not according to his (deceptive) words but rather on the basis of his inner (positive) disposition and intentions.

In order to illustrate his distinction between a legitimate and an illegitimate lie, Cassian compares it to the effect of the herb hellebore, “which is useful if taken when some deadly disease is threatening, but if taken without being required by

<sup>52</sup> Philo, *Quaestiones in Genesisim* 4.206 (LCL, Marcus).

<sup>53</sup> Jerome, *Contra Rufinum* 1.18 (quoted from John N. Hritz, ed., *St. Jerome: Dogmatics and Polemical Works* [FC 53; Washington: Catholic University of America, 1965] 83–84).

<sup>54</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesisim* 53.3.

<sup>55</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. Gen.* 53.9 (quoted from Robert C. Hill, ed., *St. John Chrysostom: Homilies on Genesis 46–67* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1992] 83).

some great danger is the cause of immediate death.” When Jacob imitated the hairy appearance of his brother Esau, he was, according to Cassian, entitled to do so:

For he saw that in this way there would be bestowed on him greater gains of blessing and righteousness than by keeping to the path of simplicity: for he did not doubt that the stain of this lie would at once be washed away by the flood of the paternal blessing, and would speedily be dissolved like a little cloud by the breath of the Holy Spirit; and that richer rewards of merit would be bestowed on him by means of this dissimulation which he put on than by means of the truth, which was natural to him.<sup>56</sup>

In his commentary on the Pentateuch, Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (12th century AD) distinguished between two groups of prophets: those who reveal God’s commandments and those who foretell the future. According to Ibn Ezra, the prophets of the first group never lie. But if prophets who predict future events lie out of need, “there is no harm done.”<sup>57</sup>

Martin Luther regarded Rebekah’s and Jacob’s behavior in Genesis 27 as “an almost unsolvable problem,” since they made use of “very wicked deception in exceedingly important matters.”<sup>58</sup> But when Rebekah and Jacob deceived Isaac, they did so in obedience to the will of God and were driven by the Holy Spirit who accomplished God’s promises. God even brought about the result that Isaac did not recognize Jacob. According to Luther, since God was pleased with what Rebekah and Jacob did, their lying and deceiving must not be regarded as sinful. In this context, Luther states that the commandments of the first table of the Decalogue are more important than the commandments of the second table. If the first and the second table conflict with each other, only the commandments of the first table have to be obeyed. Therefore, Jacob was entitled to infringe on the commandment not to lie against the father (second table) in order to obey God and his promise (first table). From this exegetical insight Luther drew some very general conclusions: “To contrive a plot and to take away from another by deceit what God had given to you is not a sin.” Also, to deceive one’s enemies in the service of God is not a sin but rather “a saintly, legitimate, and pious fraud.” “Faith . . . can do everything; it can even deceive a saintly man and, in measure, the Holy Spirit.”

d. *Jacob was not entitled to deceive.* A fourth and final interpretation of Genesis 27 assumes that Jacob deceived his father, that he was fully responsible for this deception, and that he was not entitled to acquire the blessing by deception, but was nonetheless the legitimate receiver of the blessing of the firstborn.

John Calvin is a classic representative of this interpretation. He forthrightly dispenses with the rather widespread concession that under the circumstances

<sup>56</sup> John Cassian, *Conlationes* 17.17 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 11:465 [E. C. S. Gibson]).

<sup>57</sup> Quoted from *Ibn Ezra’s Commentary on the Pentateuch* (trans. H. N. Strickman and A. M. Silver; New York: Menorah, 1988) 262–63.

<sup>58</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 26–30* (ed. J. Pelikan; Luther’s Works 5; Saint Louis: Concordia, 1968) 110 (the following discussion and quotations are culled from pp. 111–50); cf. Heinrich Bornkamm, *Luther und das Alte Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1948) 17–21. For Luther’s defense of the white lie see Walther Köhler, *Luther und die Lüge* (Leipzig: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1912) 154–205: “Luthers Theorie der Lüge, insbesondere von der Notlüge.”

described in Genesis 25–27 the end justified the means: “Although it tended to a right end, it was not lawful to attain that end, through this oblique course.”<sup>59</sup> Jacob’s “seeking the blessing by fraud, and insinuating himself into the possession of it by falsehood, was contrary to faith.”<sup>60</sup> Calvin even intensified this reproach when he wrote about Rebekah that “as a lie is in itself culpable, she sinned more grievously still in this, that she desired to sport in a sacred matter with such wiles.”<sup>61</sup>

What, then, should (Jacob and) Rebekah have done? According to Calvin, “she ought rather to have waited till God should bring relief from heaven, by changing the mind and guiding the tongue of Isaac, than have attempted what was unlawful.”<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, says Calvin, although Jacob sinned when he deceived his father, “it happened *by the wonderful mercy of God*, that Jacob was not cut off from the grace of adoption.”<sup>63</sup>

Modern interpreters such as Gordon Wenham agree. They interpret the fact that Jacob and Rebekah had to suffer for their deeds as an indication that the narrator of the Genesis story did not endorse their deceptive behavior.<sup>64</sup> In their monographs on lying in the OT, Martin Klopfenstein<sup>65</sup> and Michael James Williams<sup>66</sup> arrived at the same conclusion. Similarly, modern Jewish interpreters like Nahum Sarna are convinced that the retributive elements in the Jacob narrative imply that Jacob’s behavior “was totally unacceptable to the biblical narrator.”<sup>67</sup>

e. *Conclusion.* This overview has demonstrated that Pokorný’s exegesis of the Jacob narrative has much in common with the interpretation of the Reformer John Calvin and the modern OT scholars Gordon Wenham and Nahum Sarna. Pokorný believes that Jacob received the blessing of the firstborn (1) although deception was involved; (2) although Jacob was responsible for the deception; and (3) although Jacob was not entitled to deceive his father. *Pokorný cannot, therefore, be accused of downplaying the moral offense of Jacob’s procedure.* In fact, Pokorný’s theological argument in defense of canonical pseudepigraphy rests on a very critical evaluation of Jacob’s deed.

In a next step of his argument, however, Pokorný proceeds by saying that Jacob’s deceitful behavior was covered by God’s wonderful grace. And Pokorný concludes by analogy that, in a similar manner, the deceitful act of a pseudo-Pauline forger and the literary forgery he has produced are vindicated by the free grace of

<sup>59</sup> Calvin, *Genesis: Part II*, 88 on Gen 27:11.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Genesis: Part II*, 86 on Gen 27:19.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *Genesis: Part II*, 83 on Gen 27:5.

<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Genesis: Part II*, 85 on Gen 27:14.

<sup>63</sup> Calvin, *Genesis: Part II*, 84 on Gen 27:11.

<sup>64</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Waco, TX: Word, 1994) 216.

<sup>65</sup> Martin A. Klopfenstein, *Die Lüge nach dem Alten Testament: Ihr Begriff, ihre Bedeutung und ihre Beurteilung* (Zürich: Gotthelf, 1964) 344–45.

<sup>66</sup> Michael James Williams, *Deception in Genesis: An Investigation into the Morality of a Unique Biblical Phenomenon* (Studies in Biblical Literature 32; New York: Lang, 2001) 18–19.

<sup>67</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (The JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 397–98.

God. Thus, we also have to take a close look at the analogy Pokorný draws between the Jacob narrative in Genesis 27 and the phenomenon of literary forgery.

4. *The applicability of the Jacob narrative in Genesis 27.* Pokorný's comparison of the narrative of Jacob's deceit and the use of a literary forgery is ingenious and in many respects tenable. But it is not clear that Pokorný's analogy does full justice to either of them in every aspect.

As a main point of reference for the ancient phenomenon of pseudepigraphy or literary fraud respectively, I will employ Tertullian's report about the exposure of a pseudo-Pauline forger. In his treatise *On Baptism* (c. AD 200), Tertullian relates that the *Acts of Paul* were forged by an Asian presbyter:

But the woman of pertness, who has usurped the power to teach, will of course not give birth for herself likewise to a right of baptizing, unless some new beast shall arise like the former; so that, just as the one abolished baptism, so some other should in her own right confer it! But if the writings which wrongly go under Paul's name, claim Thecla's example as a license for women's teaching and baptizing, let them know that, in Asia, the presbyter who composed that writing, as if he were augmenting Paul's fame from his own store, after being convicted, and confessing that he had done it from love of Paul, was removed from his office. For how credible would it seem, that he who has not permitted a woman even to learn with over-boldness, should give a female the power of teaching and of baptizing! "Let them be silent," he says, "and at home consult their own husbands."<sup>68</sup>

With reference to this ancient description of pseudepigraphy (and to similar ancient texts on the same topic),<sup>69</sup> I will assess in detail to what extent the analogy is satisfactory. I will do so by looking, first, at Jacob's deceptive acquisition of the blessing; and, second, at the outcome of Jacob's deceptive behavior.

a. *Jacob's deceptive acquisition of the right of the firstborn* forms a very close and impressive analogy to the venture of a literary forger.

(1) *Pseudonymity.* The patriarch Jacob corresponds to the author of a pseudo-apostolic epistle. Just as Jacob claims: "I am Esau" (Gen 27:19; cf. 27:24), the pseudo-apostolic author claims to be Paul, Peter, John, or Andrew.

Several other OT passages contain similar elements of deception. Saul pretends to be someone else (1 Sam 28:1–23); Jeroboam's wife tries to hide her identity (1 Kgs 14:1–18); Tamar pretended to be a prostitute (Gen 38:1–26); Joseph did not reveal his identity to his brothers (Gen 42:7–28); and Abraham and Isaac pretended that their wives were their sisters (Gen 12:10–20; 20:1–18; 26:6–11).

The main difference between the pseudonymity in the Jacob narrative and in a pseudo-Pauline letter is that the identity of pseudo-Esau is known to the reader of Genesis while the identity of the pseudo-Pauline author is usually not known to us. But this difference does not call the analogy into question.

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<sup>68</sup> Tertullian, *De baptismo* 17.4–5 (ANF 3:677).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. my "Authorship and Pseudepigraphy in Early Christian Literature: A Translation of the Most Important Source Texts and an Annotated Bibliography," in *Paul and Pseudepigraphy* (ed. S. E. Porter; PAST 8; Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

(2) *Verisimilitude*. The verisimilitude that is created by Esau's garments with his distinctive smell and the hairy skin of a kid (Gen 27:15–16, 23, 27) corresponds to the verisimilitude a pseudo-apostolic author might create by inserting pieces of information about Paul's travel plans or personal circumstances. Just as pseudo-Esau imitated Esau's smell and hairy skin some pseudo-Pauline authors counterfeit historical circumstances in the life of Paul.

The verisimilitude which ancient pseudepigraphers created cannot only be compared to the skin in the Jacob narrative but also to the biblical remarks that Saul "disguised himself and put on other clothes" (1 Sam 28:8) and that the Gibeonites "took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn-out and torn and mended, with worn-out, patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes" (Josh 9:4–5).

(3) *Deceitfulness*. The deceptive character of Jacob's claim to be Esau (Gen 27:35) corresponds to the deceitfulness of a pseudepigraphical authorship attribution in an early Christian text. Just as Jacob's acquisition of the blessing was regarded as deceitful by his father Isaac and his brother Esau, a text produced by a pseudo-apostolic author was regarded as a literary fraud by those readers who knew its real origin.

(4) *Motive*. The motive is in both cases (at least to a certain extent) a positive one. Just as Rebekah and Jacob wanted to promote the realization of God's promise (cf. Gen 25:23), so the producer of a literary forgery may have written his book in order to protect and propagate God's divine truth.

By way of summary, it can be said that Jacob's deceitful acquisition of his father's blessing forms in all relevant aspects a close analogy to the production and distribution of a literary forgery by a pseudo-Pauline author. As far as Jacob's procedure is concerned, Pokorný's analogy is watertight and illuminating.

b. *The outcome of Jacob's deceptive course of action*, however, is only in some respects equivalent to the effect an exposed literary forgery might have.

(1) *Biographical retribution*. In both cases, the deceiver has to pay the price for his deceptive behavior. Jacob went into exile (Gen 28:41–45), and the pseudo-Pauline forger of the *Acts of Paul* in second-century Asia Minor lost his church office. Genesis 27 can be used to show that, when they are detected, both the deceiver Jacob and the forger of a pseudepigraphical book have to bear their punishment.

(2) *Validity of the promised blessing*. At this point of his comparison, Pokorný equates the patriarch Jacob and the pseudo-apostolic letter: *Jacob* does "retain the right of the firstborn ... Similarly in our days, the discovery that a *writing* is pseudonymous does not mean that we have to exclude *it* from the canon."<sup>70</sup>

Strictly speaking, however, if we stick to the logic behind the analogy, it is not *Jacob*, the man of god, and the forged *book* that are commensurate with each other, so that God's pardon for Jacob can by analogy demonstrate God's approval of

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<sup>70</sup> Pokorný, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament* 623.

canonical forgeries and its acceptance into the canon. Rather, in both cases one has to distinguish between the *actor* and his deed or the *result of his deed*.

That means that, in the strict sense, *there is nothing in the production of a pseudepigraphical book that corresponds to the specific blessing that pseudo-Esau received from God before he was born* (Gen 25:23). Neither Tertullian's report about the unmasking of the forger of the *Acts of Paul* nor any other source text about ancient pseudepigraphy I know contains an element that is comparable to God's unconditional election of Jacob the deceiver.

Only in a more general way it could be said that, just as God's promise that Jacob would "be stronger" than his brother Esau (Gen 25:23) remains valid in spite of Jacob's moral failure (Gen 27:33), so someone like the forger of the *Acts of Paul* who was unmasked in the second century did not because of his deceit become unworthy of God's unlimited grace. That is to say, as it were, that God hates forgery but loves the forger.

(3) *Status of the pseudepigraphical text*. If, accordingly, Jacob, the pseudo-Esau of Genesis 27, corresponds to an anonymous pseudo-Paul of the early Christian centuries there is nothing in Genesis 27 that corresponds to a pseudepigraphical book. Therefore, strictly speaking, Genesis 27 has nothing to contribute to the justification of a literary forgery, let alone to the justification of the canonical status of a literary forgery. A close comparison of the Jacob narrative and (ancient) pseudepigraphy reveals the sobering fact that it cannot carry the weight of Pokorný's theological *sola gratia* vindication of canonical pseudepigraphy.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The innovative and promising *sola gratia* defense of NT pseudepigraphy that Pokorný has developed over the past 25 years rests to a very large extent on his exegesis and application of the story about Jacob's deception of his father Isaac in Genesis 27. So far, Pokorný's theological argument in favor of full canonical status for pseudo-Pauline literary forgeries has been dismissed by some and approved by others but has not yet been analyzed and evaluated in detail.

As a closer look at the Genesis narrative concerning Jacob's acquisition of the blessing of the firstborn demonstrates, Pokorný cannot be accused of having diminished the moral offense that was involved in Jacob's dubious procedure. However, the analogy he has drawn between the Jacob narrative in Genesis 27 and the production and canonical reception of a pseudo-Pauline letter is not conclusive. On the one hand, nothing in the distribution of a literary forgery corresponds to God's election and promise which Jacob had received before he was born (Gen 25:23). On the other hand, nothing in Genesis 27 forms a counterpart to the distribution of a pseudepigraphical letter under the name of the apostle Paul.

By equating the deceiver Jacob and deceptive pseudepigrapha, the conclusions which have been drawn from Genesis 27 in favor of canonical forgery are not in keeping with the inner logic of the analogy which is based on a distinction between the actor and his deed. From the exegetically sound observation that God does not withdraw his grace from the deceiver Jacob it can

logically be deduced that the producer of a literary forgery still has access to God's grace. However, the message of Genesis 27 that God does not recall his unconditional election even if the elect person tries to safeguard his election by deceptive means does not imply that the pseudepigraphical texts a forger has produced should be accorded canonical status. Such an application of the Jacob narrative has no sufficient exegetical basis in the biblical text of Genesis 27 and goes far beyond its actual message.

There may be other more convincing theological arguments in favor of canonical pseudepigraphy. The defense of canonical pseudepigraphy developed by Pokorný, however, cannot be regarded as successful.