

The Dead Sea Scrolls—Qumran Calmly Revisited

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Almost thirteen years have passed since the unearthing of the Dead Sea Scrolls. A great deal has been accomplished since that momentous event in 1947: texts from Cave I, which include the seven manuscripts of the original shepherd find, are now almost completely published and are available in several English translations.¹ In spite of early skepticism on the part of some scholars, the genuineness of these scrolls is now well established.² Most scholars have agreed that the manuscripts are authentic and that they are to be dated between the second century B.C. and the first century of the Christian era. In addition, the preliminary process of identifying the numerous bits and fragments from Cave IV, assumed to have been the chief cache of the Qumran community, is almost completed. However, the tasks of transcription, textual study, and interpretation are yet to be accomplished before these documents will be ready for publication.

The ruins at Qumran were carefully excavated. Aerial photography aided in the reconstruction of the site. Models of the settlement, diagrams, photographs and maps of the area have now been made available for study.³ In the meantime, research

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¹Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York, 1955) and T. H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1956) include most of the Cave I materials in English translation. More technical analyses of the various manuscripts have appeared in several technical journals: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, *Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Journal of Bible and Religion*, *Journal of Jewish Studies*, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, and others.

²Solomon Zeitlin, an eminent Jewish scholar, has been the chief exponent of the opposition. The reader is directed to the following articles: Solomon Zeitlin, "How Ancient are the Hebrew Scrolls from the Dead Sea?" *Judaism*, VI (1957), pp. 55-58; S. Zeitlin, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A Travesty on Scholarship," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, July, 1956, pp. 34-35.

³Note, for example, the maps and drawings in Frank Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1958). See also the excellent collection of photographs in John M. Allegro, *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday Publishers, 1958).

continues. Numerous caves in the cliffs along the northwest edge of the Dead Sea have been examined, but not all of them have produced manuscripts. As late as February, 1960, new caves were opened along the Israeli sector of the Dead Sea, some forty-three miles south of Wadi Qumran. The results and significance of these recent excavations have not yet been determined, or at least if they have been determined, their significance has not yet been made public.

No archaeological discovery of the past one hundred years has received the acclaim and publicity of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Literally hundreds of articles and books, both professional and popular, have appeared, not to mention numerous journalistic interpretations appearing in newspapers and magazines across the country. The spectacular details of the discovery aroused public interest, but the claims and counterclaims asserted by some denominational propagandists were the cause of unusual excitement. One writer, commenting upon this rash of scroll publicity, said, "The Christians are crazy; the Jews are crazy also. . . . All the world is scroll crazy."⁴ Another lamented,

The sectarians have already gathered on the fragmented
carcass like yellow jackets on the picnic ham, striving to
carry away such theological delicacies as suit their taste.⁵

Everyone, it seemed, was attempting to strengthen his own theological position. In some instances, lust for proof undoubtedly led to premature and unwarranted conclusions.

Bible scholarship has not been undone by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The experts have not panicked. On the contrary, new insights resulting from scroll studies have been received with enthusiasm. Some earlier theories concerning text families, problems of authorship and date of specific books have been re-examined and several such theories have already been revised. Scholarly views have differed. At times the controversy over particular issues has been intense, but disagreement was to be expected. During the initial stages of interpretation, it would have been unusual, indeed, not to have controversy. The caution on the part of some scholars, the theory and counter theory, the argument and the debate, should not have

⁴R. V. Flewelling, "Sea Scroll Madness," *The Personalist*, October, 1957, p. 341.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 342.

been interpreted as "panic" or "retreat." As A. L. Haberman pointed out, there has never been an important archaeological find in history which has not evoked a controversy.⁶ Already from the exchange of views, significant areas of agreement have been found.

What, then, is the current situation regarding the scroll studies? Have recent interpretations affected Christian theologies? What are scholarly opinions concerning the connection between the Qumran community and the New Testament church? It is time to examine these and other problems, not with the intent to prove a theology, but rather to inform ourselves concerning the latest and the most significant developments in scroll studies.

In this paper I propose (1) to review briefly the story of the scroll discoveries and to survey the contents of the Qumran library; (2) to discuss the people of the scrolls, their identity, origin, and teachings; and (3) to elaborate upon possible historical and theological connections between the Qumran community and the early Christian church.

I

The account of the exploration of the Qumran area, the purchase of fragments from the Bedouin tribesmen, and other details have been reported in numerous publications. It shall be sufficient for our purpose, therefore, to sketch only the high points of the story.⁷

The first scrolls appeared from Cave I in the spring of 1947. Apparently the discovery was accidental; the details are confused and contradictory. It would be impossible at this date to recover the true historical facts, for legend and myth have already entered the picture. Nevertheless, this basic historical outline persists: during the early summer of 1947, Bedouin

⁶A. L. Haberman, "The Dead Sea Scrolls. . . A Survey and New Interpretation," *Judaism*, V (Fall Issue, 1956), pp. 306-315. The discovery of the famous *Codex Sinaiticus* produced similar reactions among scholars of the nineteenth century.

⁷For a more detailed account of the circumstances of discovery see J. M. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Penguin Books, 1956), pp. 15-34. Other early accounts appear in the following: M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York, 1955), pp. 3-28; Mar. A. Y. Samuel, "The Purchase of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Biblical Archaeologist*, XII (May, 1959), pp. 26-51; John C. Trever, "The Discovery of the Scrolls," *Biblical Archaeologist*, XI (September, 1948), pp. 46-57.

youths, presumably herding goats in the wilderness between Jerusalem and the northwest coast of the Dead Sea, accidentally stumbled upon the cave and its contents. A second version of the story suggests that the discoverers were en route to Bethlehem with contraband merchandise. They had apparently followed a route through this desolate area in order to avoid legal points of entry. In any event, the cave was discovered. Speaking of these circumstances and of the events which followed, Frank Cross, one of the foremost American scholars working with the scrolls, said,

In the year between the Bedouin discovery and the first press releases announcing the discovery to the world, there was confusion, blundering and intrigue. . . . At least one, and probably several clandestine excavations ravaged the cave sites; additional materials came to light; there is evidence that a considerable amount of precious material was destroyed in the process.⁸

Almost a year passed before the manuscript material filtered out from Bedouin hands. The first collection came to the attention of E. L. Sukenik of the Hebrew University; the second came to light by way of the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of Jerusalem largely through the efforts of the American School of Oriental Research. On April 11, 1948, first announcements concerning the second lot were made public through the press. Professor Sukenik announced the existence of the Hebrew University collection two weeks later.

Arab-Israeli hostilities delayed official investigation of Cave I from 1948 until the early months of 1949. From January through March of that year, fragments from seventy different manuscripts were recovered from the debris piled outside the cave. Activity ceased momentarily at this date, for many assumed that Cave I was an isolated phenomenon. However, new documents appeared for sale in Jerusalem in the fall of 1951. Then it became obvious that Cave I was not an isolated cache but part of an elaborate pattern. At the same time, it seemed likely that there might be significant connections between the caves, the scrolls, and the ruins located nearby on the Qumran plateau. The location of these ruins had been known to archaeologists as early as 1851 and had been identified as the rem-

⁸Cross, *op cit.*, p. 4.

nants of an ancient Roman fortress. "Slowly," said Cross,

a new pattern began to emerge: the scrolls belonged to an ancient people who occupied the caves north and south of Khirbet Qumran, and the ruin was precisely the Essene desert retreat remarked by the Roman historian Pliny.⁹

The stories of subsequent cave and manuscript discoveries are complicated. Between the years 1951 and 1955, no fewer than five campaigns were carried out to excavate the ruins at Qumran. In addition, resources of the American, French, and British schools were combined and systematic exploration, directed chiefly by Lancaster Harding and Roland DeVaux, covered an area five miles in length along the cliffs some hundreds of yards above the Dead Sea. Also, Ta'amireh tribesmen, who had found the digging to be somewhat profitable, continued their patient search in the area of Wadi Murabba'at, approximately twelve miles south of Qumran. Scientific investigation followed through early 1952 both in this area and again among the cliffs adjacent to Qumran. Altogether, more than two hundred and thirty caves were examined. As an aid in classification, caves containing significant artifacts and scroll fragments were assigned numbers II and III. In the summer of 1952 tribesmen worked the marl caves at a lower altitude and discovered Cave IV, which subsequently proved to be the principal cache of the Essene community.¹⁰ Caves V and VI were located in conjunction with Cave IV, and after almost three years of quiet, in the spring of 1955 Caves VII through X were added to the already impressive list of discoveries. Cave XI, which contained materials almost as significant as Caves I and IV, was located still later about a mile to the north.

The library of Qumran was extensive. Some complete manuscripts were recovered, but most of the materials were fragmentary, decayed, and warped. Consequently, they were extremely difficult to handle.¹¹ The bulk of the material was far greater

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰The marl caves (Caves IV-X) were not natural caves, but were apparently dug by the Qumran settlers for use as living quarters. It is possible, however, that these caves were originally intended to be used as tombs by a much earlier people (9th-6th century B. C.).

¹¹Many of these fragments were purchased from Bedouin tribesmen at the rate of \$2.80 per square centimeter. Donors from many lands, including several universities in this country as well as in Europe, aided in the purchases. By agreement, the manuscript fragments are to remain in the Palestine Archaeologi-

than anyone had anticipated. Therefore, an international, inter-confessional team of eight scholars was assigned the task of analysis, identification, and translation.¹² The following is a survey of the major documents from the Qumran library based largely upon the excellent analysis of Frank Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran*:¹³

Cave I - Discovered: Spring, 1947.

Location: In the line of cliffs above Khirbet Qumran and north about two miles.

Contents: Isaiah Scroll.

Commentary on Habakkuk.

Manual of Discipline (A statement of the creed and conduct of the sect).

Fragment copy of Isaiah.

Collection of Thanksgiving Psalms.

The Order of Battle Between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness.

A Genesis Apocryphon.¹⁴

Additional manuscript fragments from Biblical, Apocryphal, and Apocalyptic writings.

Cave II - Discovered: February, 1952.

Location: A few hundred yards south of Cave I in the cliffs above Qumran.

Contents: A few fragments from the Apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus. Also other significant fragments, but minor in number.¹⁵

Cave III - Discovered: March, 1952.

Location: About three fourths of a mile north of Cave I in cliffs at a slightly lower elevation.

Contents: Two highly oxidized copper scrolls supposedly containing an inventory of the community treasures.¹⁶

cal Museum until editing is completed. Then, presumably, they will be released to the various donors.

¹²France was represented by Fathers C. Barthelemy and J. Starcky; England by John Allegro and John Strugnell; Germany by Claus-Hunno Hunzinger; Poland by Father J. T. Milik, and the United States by Monsignor Patrick W. Skehan and Frank M. Cross, Jr.

¹³Cross, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-36.

¹⁴An elaboration of the book of Genesis in Aramaic, mistakenly referred to by the title, *Apocalypse of Lamech*.

¹⁵An article in French which catalogues this material and is available in English translation: M. Baillet, "Editing the Manuscript Fragments from Qumran," *Biblical Archaeologist*, XIX (1956), pp. 75-96.

¹⁶The two copper scrolls, though actually one work, were highly oxidized and could not be manipulated on the spot without damaging the inscriptions.

Murabba'at - Discovered: Spring and summer, 1952. Additional materials were found in 1955.

Location: Caves in the vicinity of Wadi Murabba'at at approximately twelve to fifteen miles south of Qumran.¹⁷

Contents: A seventh century B.C. palimpsest script containing a list of names and numbers thought to be the earliest papyrus written in Hebrew ever found in Palestine.

Letters, contracts, and Bible fragments in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, some of which were left by the remnants of Bar Kochbah's army in 132-135 A.D.

A second century A.D. scroll of the minor prophets.¹⁸

Cave IV - Discovered: Summer, 1952.

Location: Approximately two hundred yards from the Essene settlement in the marl terrace facing Wadi Qumran.

Contents: Thousands of manuscript fragments.¹⁹

A. Biblical Text Fragments:

Manuscript of Samuel.²⁰

Chronicles.

Numbers.

Three very old manuscripts:

1. Fragments from Samuel (dated ca. 200 B.C.).

2. A section of Jeremiah.

3. Fragments from Exodus.

Five Pentateuchal manuscripts.

Fragments of Job.

Deuteronomy. (14 MSS)²¹

It was not until September of 1955 (three years later) that a workable plan was devised to unroll them. For a description of the technique used and a preliminary survey of the contents see J. M. Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (Penguin Books, 1956), p. 184; also J. T. Milik, "The Copper Document from Cave II, Qumran," *Biblical Archaeologist*, XIX (1956), pp. 60-64.

¹⁷The caves in this area were likely used by refugee and brigand bands in Old Testament times. David may have used some of these caves in his flight from Saul (I Samuel 22:1,2; 26:1 f.).

¹⁸As Frank Cross and others have pointed out, this document contains all of the minor prophets from the middle of Joel to Zechariah. It is probably the most significant manuscript to come to light from this area.

¹⁹By March, 1957, three hundred and eighty-two manuscripts had been identified, one-fourth of which were from Biblical texts.

²⁰This was likely the most significant as well as the best preserved Biblical document in the entire collection. For a detailed discussion see Cross, *op. cit.*, pp. 31 ff.

²¹On the basis of numbers of manuscripts represented by the fragments, it would appear that Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms, and the Book of the Twelve

Isaiah. (12 MSS)

Psalms. (10 MSS)

Book of the Twelve Prophets. (8 MSS)

B. Fragments from Bible Commentaries:

Psalms.

Hosea.

Isaiah.

Nahum.²²

C. Fragments from Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical Manuscripts:²³

Jubilees.

Psalms of Joshua.

Tobit.

Testament of Levi.

Testament of Naphtali.

Enoch.

Apocryphal materials on Daniel.

D. Remnants from Specifically Sectarian Works and Curiosities:

Recensions of the Manual of Discipline.

The Damascus Document.

Numerous fragments containing prayers, laws, blessings, hymns, and the wisdom of the sect.

Astronomical observations based upon the book of Enoch.

Exposition of the Book of Moses.

Calendrical works related to the calculations of feast days.

Caves V, VI - Discovered: Summer, 1952, in conjunction with excavations at Cave IV.

Location: Cave V - located in the marl terrace just north of Cave IV.

Cave VI - located above Cave IV near the waterfall of Wadi Qumran.

Contents: Significant scroll fragments, but minor in quantity.

Caves VII - X - Discovered: Spring, 1955.

Location: In the marl terrace near the Qumran site.

Contents: Water from the plateau and cliffs above collapsed the roofs of these caves and had washed

Prophets were the Old Testament books most important to the Qumran sect.

²²The fact that this work contained references to known historical persons of the Maccabean era established it as a significant document.

²³Pseudepigrapha, "false writings," traditionally included all non-canonical Jewish writings written between ca. 200 B.C. and ca. 100 A.D., with the exception of Philo Judaeus and Josephus, not included in the canon or the Apocrypha.

away the bulk of the scroll manuscripts. Only a few fragments were recovered.

Cave XI - Discovered:

Location: South of Cave III slightly more than two miles north of the Qumran plateau.

Contents: Book of Psalms (almost intact).

Copy of Leviticus.

Fragments from a copy of the "Description of the New Jerusalem."

A Targum of Job.²⁴

II

Who were the people of the scrolls? This question plagued the scholars, and to find the answer they commenced preliminary soundings on the Qumran plateau in November, 1951. Several tombs were opened in a nearby cemetery. Jars of the same type as those found in the caves were located among the fortress ruins, but most interesting were the remnants of several large water cisterns, a community building containing a kitchen, dining hall, workshop, and, most important, a scriptorium with ink stands and writing tables. As excavation proceeded, the connection among the buildings, the cemetery, the caves, and scrolls became clear. This was the site of an ascetic, communal-type, social order.

Khirbet Qumran proved to be the hub of a Hellenistic-Roman occupation, spreading nearly two miles north along the cliffs, and some two miles south to the agricultural complex at En Feskah. The people of this broad settlement lived in caves, tents, and solid constructions, but shared pottery made in a common kiln, read common Biblical and sectarian scrolls, operated a common irrigation system, and, as we shall see, depended on common stores of food and water furnished by the installations of the community center.²⁵

Pottery chronology and radio-carbon dating of cloth fragments, supported by the findings of more than two hundred coins of the period, indicated a three-phase occupation of the settlement:²⁶ (1) The earliest scroll community, built upon the

²⁴The term *Targum* originally meant "translation." It came to be used specifically for Aramaic translations of the Hebrew.

²⁵Cross, *op. cit.*, p. 41. The term *Khirbet* is Arabic for "ruin." The site has been referred to as "Khirbet Qumran."

²⁶For a detailed analysis of the history of the community see James L. Kelso, "The Archaeology of Qumran," *Journal of Biblical Literature* (September, 1956), pp. 141-146; Cross, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-48.

ruins of an old Israelite fortress of the sixth century B.C., was apparently established during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.).²⁷ This settlement continued through the early years of Herod the Great until it was partially destroyed by a severe earthquake (ca. 31 B.C.). It remained abandoned through the duration of Herod's rule (37-4 B.C.).²⁸

(2) The site was re-settled during the reign of Herod's son Archelaus (4 B.C. - 6 A.D.) and continued to prosper relatively unchanged through the ministries of Jesus and John the Baptist, until the dark days of the Jewish-Roman war (66-70 A.D.). The community was destroyed in 68 A.D. after seige by Roman troops led by Vespasian campaigning in the Jericho area.²⁹ Members of the sect were either trapped and destroyed, or else they fled. In either event, they left their library concealed in the caves nearby.

(3) Afterward, the site was remodeled and garrisoned by the Roman troops assigned to control sporadic resistance in the north Dead Sea area. It was abandoned near the turn of the first century, used again briefly by the army of Bar Kochbah in the second Jewish revolt (132-135 A.D.) and finally left desolate until recent excavations in 1951.

Numerous attempts have been made to identify the people of the Qumran community and almost every sect of the period of the Second Temple has been mentioned. Consensus today overwhelmingly favors the Essenes, the Jewish religious sect already partly known to scholarship through the writings of Philo Judaeus, Josephus, and Pliny the Elder.³⁰

The literature from the Dead Sea caves indicates that the Qumran community was part of a general Essene withdrawal into the wilderness.³¹ The presence of female skeletons in the

²⁷Eighty-six coins represented the reign of Alexander Jannaeus; fifteen were from the reign of John Hyrcanus I (134-104 B.C.).

²⁸The earthquake toppled the community tower, dropped the eastern side of the complex and opened a crevasse through the center of the building area. This was undoubtedly the quake reported by Josephus, *War of the Jews*, Book I; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, wherein thirty thousand men lost their lives.

²⁹Roman iron arrow-heads buried in the walls and blackened debris indicated seige and conflagration.

³⁰Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Books II, III, V; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Books XIII, XV and XVIII. Pliny contains only a brief reference.

³¹A pantry containing hundreds of bowls and dishes and the size of the cemetery located nearby suggested a community from two hundred to four hundred persons. T. H. Gaster, F. Cross, and others have maintained, from refer-

cemetery and at least one reference in the scrolls to women and children suggests to some scholars that strict asceticism was not required.³² The scrolls, however, are somewhat ambiguous on the subject of marriage.

This sect believed that it was the new Israel in the desert, that it was the faithful remnant spoken of by Isaiah.³³ The Mosaic-Exodus motif is clearly evident in their writings. The "Sons of Light" were to be encamped according to the priestly arrangement of Israel's desert encampment described in Numbers.³⁴ The sect maintained that the Mosaic law had been perverted by the Jerusalem priesthood and that it was their destiny to proclaim the correct interpretations of the Law, to preserve the covenant of God's chosen people, and, as a consequence, to guarantee for Israel the continuing guidance of Deity until the end of the age. Note, however, that while the Essenes opposed the Jerusalem culture, rejected its priesthood, its temple rituals and calendar, it was strongly Jewish in general orientation. Though interpreted differently by the sect, the Law remained central, as did priesthood, sacrifice and the concept of the covenant.³⁵

One of the most interesting features of Qumran theology concerns its doctrine of the end of the age. The abundance of apocalyptic expressions among the scrolls, obviously drawn from apocryphal and pseudepigraphical sources was not accidental.³⁶ Apocalyptic literature contained a definitive sense of group destiny which was undoubtedly attractive to the Essenes

ences in Philo, Pliny, and Josephus, that Qumran was but one encampment, though likely the chief encampment, of the Essenes in Palestine.

³²See William S. LaSor, "A Preliminary Reconstruction of Judaism in the Time of the Second Temple in the Light of the Published Qumran Materials," *Abstracts of Dissertations*, University of Southern California, 1956, p. 463. Cross suggests that there may have been two orders of Essenes within the community, one married and secular, and the other, a larger body, priestly and celibate.

³³Isaiah 8:16-18; 19:20-23.

³⁴cf. The Order of Battle 3:21; 4; 11; 7:3-7, and Numbers 2:1-5, 4; 10: 17-28.

³⁵The founder of the sect, The Teacher of Righteousness, was himself a priest of the legitimate Zadokite line.

³⁶Apocalyptic literature, widely circulated within the Jewish community in the period 200 B.C. - 100 A.D., but largely rejected from the canon by normative Judaism, strongly reflected a psychology of crisis and tension. Expectation of a cataclysmic, revolutionary end of the age, cast in vivid and visionary figures, was characteristic of this literature.

at a time when historical events suggested a negation of the whole of Jewish theology. They believed that the end was imminent, that during the final stage a mighty battle would be fought between the forces of good and evil and that ultimately this world and evil would be destroyed. It was not strange, therefore, that the document *Order of Battle for the Sons of Light* should appear.

To men who believed that the Final Age was indeed at hand, preparations for this war were a matter of imminent and urgent concern. They had to have a detailed Plan of Campaign. *The War of the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness* is such a plan—a kind of G. H. Q. manual for the guidance of the Brotherhood at 'Armageddon.'³⁷

III

The importance of the scrolls for Old Testament, New Testament, and Jewish studies can hardly be overestimated: fragments have been identified from every book of the Old Testament canon with the exception of Esther. Sir Frederick Kenyon's classical declaration, that Hebrew texts older than the Masoretic would never be found, has been invalidated. Some Old Testament materials of the Dead Sea Scrolls predate the Masoretic by at least eight or nine hundred years.³⁸ Also, variations from this standard text in fragments from the book of Samuel proved to be startling in that they appeared to follow the Greek version, *i.e.*, the Septuagint, rather than the Masoretic. This discovery has reopened the issue of the significance of the Septuagint, since it points to the existence of a different and possibly older Hebrew text than the one finally adopted by the Jews.³⁹

The problem of the Scrolls and the New Testament has been the catalyst responsible for the wide interest in the Qumran discoveries. It is as a potential threat to Christianity, its claims, and its doctrines that the Scrolls have caught the imagination of the laymen and clergy.⁴⁰

What then, is the relevance of the Qumran community for

³⁷Gaster, *op. cit.*, p. 276.

³⁸Sir Frederick Kenyon, as quoted by Allegro, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

³⁹The term *Masoretic* (from the Hebrew *Masorah*, "tradition") refers to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament established as the Standard or Accepted Text by the Jewish scribes (Masoretes) in the period 600 A.D. - 1000 A.D.

⁴⁰Krister Stendahl, ed., *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 1.

the Christian church and the New Testament? Do the scrolls establish historical connections between the two religious communities and, if so, to what extent did the early Christian church rely upon Essene theology and practices? It is to this and to related problems that we now turn our attention.

It has been generally conceded among New Testament scholars that Pharisaic Judaism represented the Jewish norm during the formative period in Christian history, that Pharisaic Judaism was the one central stream through which the Old Testament heritage was transmitted. But does this assumption oversimplify the actual historical situation? Have peripheral Jewish elements from a broader Jewish milieu been overlooked? Two aspects of early Christian life and practice, its communal life reflected in Acts and its end-of-the-age motif, for example, obviously did not originate in normative Judaism.⁴¹ It might be explained that these emphases were original to Christianity. It is interesting, however, that communal life and the apocalyptic view were strongly characteristic of the Essene community at Qumran, whose members lived under a communal order, sharing kitchen quarters, treasures, and clothing. Their library was unusual for its collection of apocalyptic literature. Commenting upon this phenomenon, Frank Cross says, "The Essenes proved to be the bearers, and in no small part the producers of the apocalyptic tradition in Judaism."⁴²

Two conclusions, therefore, seem to be borne out by the evidence: (1) That there was in the first century of the Christian era a broader complex of Jewish belief and practice than that which was prescribed by Pharisaic Judaism; and (2) the Christian church in some particulars stood closer to Jewish heretical sects than to normative Judaism. It may be, as Cross suggests, that the church was a continuation of the communal and apocalyptic tradition of the Qumran sect. According to Oscar Cullmann,

There had to be some link between early Christianity and the somewhat esoteric late Jewish Enoch literature. For the form of Messianic hope, in which the expectation of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven replaces the Jewish national expectation of a Jewish Messiah, is found only on the

⁴¹Acts 2:44 f; 4:34-35.

⁴²Cross, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

fringe of Judaism, especially in the Enoch literature; and this form of Messianic hope is the one to which the Gospels testify.

But until now, we have lacked the outer frame of reference within which it would be possible to conceive of a connection between primitive Christianity and this specially slanted sort of Judaism. Does the Essene sect, now better known, offer us this frame of reference?⁴³

Let us now examine a number of specific parallels between the two groups.

The Name. This is perhaps a minor point; nevertheless, it contributes to the total perspective. The Qumran community referred to itself as "The New Covenant," a term which immediately reminds one of the name "New Testament" in Christian literature. Both groups were followers of "The Way," although its connotations as a specific discipline undoubtedly differed.⁴⁴

The Organization. The Essenes appeared to have been a lay as well as a priestly organization. Priests regulated cultic affairs of the sect, but laymen apparently directed common religious practices as well as the secular life of the community. Mature members of the group constituted an over-all governing body or assembly called the *Rabbim*, "many." A similar council or assembly functioned in the early Christian church.⁴⁵

A special body consisting of twelve laymen and three priests functioned as a higher judicatory within the congregation. These men were schooled to "perfection in the Law" with the special assignment to set the standard "for the practice of truth, righteousness and justice."⁴⁶ The twelve and the three, Cross suggested, were types of the twelve tribes of ancient Israel and the three clans of Levi.⁴⁷ Also, in the hierarchy of officials was an overseer, with status comparable to that of high priest. He was the actual head of the assembly, the director of labor, and the teacher and examiner of the novices. Parallels with the "twelve" in Acts are significant, but attempts to associate the three priests with the inner circle of three (Peter, James, and John) and to claim connection between the "overseer" and the Christian bishop cannot be maintained with any degree of

⁴³Stendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁴⁴Acts 22:4; 24:14, 22.

⁴⁵Acts 15:12, 6:2, 5.

⁴⁶*Manual of Discipline* 8:1-19.

⁴⁷Cross, *op. cit.*, pp. 174, 175.

certainty from the *Manual of Discipline*.⁴⁸ It would be difficult to claim Christian dependence upon the Essenes in all of these particulars. There was ample precedent for such organization in the Old Testament, particularly from Jewish literature reflecting the Mosaic era.

Central "Ordinances." Two ordinances appear to have been basic to the Essene community at Qumran: baptism and the communal meal. The presence of several cisterns for water among the ruins suggested the significance of ablutions for the sect. References in the scroll texts support this contention. For the Essenes, Jewish society generally had become defiled. Baptism, preceded by two years of probation and repentance, was required of all initiates as a mark of ceremonial and moral cleanliness. It is significant to note, however, that ablutions were not sufficient for expurgation of all iniquities.

He cannot be cleared by mere ceremonies of atonement, nor cleansed by any waters of ablution, nor sanctified by immersion in lakes or rivers, nor purified by any bath. Unclean, unclean he remains so long as he rejects the government of God and refuses the discipline of communion with him Only by a spirit of uprightness and humility can his sin be atoned Only by the submission of his soul to all of the ordinances of God can his flesh be made clean.⁴⁹

John's baptism and his indictment of the Jews for their corruption are strikingly parallel.

You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our fathers."⁵⁰

There seems to be no doubt that the Qumran Essenes attached special cult meaning to the communal meal.

And at every place where there are ten men of the Council of the community there shall also be a priest, and each is to set before him according to his own rank . . . And when the table is prepared for eating or wine for drinking, the

⁴⁸The Damascus Document is the chief source on the overseer, *mebagger*. "In the Qumran Manual, taken by itself, the *mebagger* is not sufficient to justify such a comparison," from B. O. Reicke, "The Constitution of the Primitive Church in the Light of Jewish Documents," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 10 (1954), pp. 95-113, as translated in Stendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-156.

⁴⁹*Manual of Discipline* 3:3-12.

⁵⁰Matthew 3:7-9.

priest shall first raise his hand so that the first portion of the wine be blessed.⁵¹

This may appear to be nothing more than a recitation of a few rites of conduct, Emily Post style, including proper respect for ecclesiastical superiors. The adjuncts to the *Manual of Discipline*, however, clearly point to a ritual meal anticipating the Messianic banquet at the end of the age.⁵² Karl Kuhn is of the opinion that each communal meal was preceded by a bath of purification, but his reconstruction cannot be sustained without the additional evidence from Josephus.⁵³

There are remarkable similarities between the cult ritual and the New Testament accounts of Jesus' last meal with the twelve, particularly if it is true, as Kuhn suggests, that the earlier Christian communal meal was, in fact, a complete meal eaten daily in anticipation of the Second Coming. The church, Kuhn concludes, later eliminated the complete aspect of the meal and limited celebration to the Sabbath.⁵⁴

Common Theological Language. Very early in scroll research, points of contact between the Gospel of John and Essene concepts and terminology were noted. A modified dualistic orientation is prevalent in both John and the Essene documents involving a struggle between two opposing principles: light and truth versus darkness and evil. The phraseology is similar: such expressions as "light of life," "sons of light," "life eternal," and "spirit of truth," all familiar to the reader of the Fourth Gospel, are also available in Essene diction, as is the unusual emphasis given the symbols, "water," and "light."⁵⁵ Similarly, an esoteric, Gnostic-like treatment of revelation and knowledge also appears in Qumran thought.⁵⁶ The gift of revelation, for example, was not made known through the flesh, but through the spirit. Knowledge was revealed and be-

⁵¹*Manual of Discipline* 6:1-6.

⁵²Adjuncts to the Rule of the Community, 2:17-22, published by D. Barthelemy, J. T. Milik, *et. al.*, *Qumran Cave I. "Discoveries in the Judean Desert"* 1 (Oxford, 1955), pp. 111 ff.

⁵³Karl G. Kuhn, *Über den ursprünglichen Sinn des Abendmales und sein Verhältnis zu den Gemeinschaftsmahlen der Sektenschrift*, *Evangelische Theologie* 10 (1950/51), pp. 508-27, translated and revised in Stendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-93.

⁵⁴Stendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

⁵⁵cf. John 1:7-9; 3:15, 16, 21; 8:12; 12:36.

⁵⁶For a discussion of "Knowledge" in the scrolls see W. D. Davies,

longed to the community. Wicked Jews, however, operated only at the level of the physical and the literal. The parallels with John are readily discernible.

All of this points to a re-evaluation of the arguments for the date and origin of the Fourth Gospel. Many of the concepts and terms judged to be Greek in background and, therefore, late, now may be identified with earlier Jewish sources. Evidence to date is not conclusive, but the possibilities for a fresh approach are encouraging.

To this point we have dealt primarily with the parallels and we have noted some correspondence in institutional or organizational forms and ordinances, as well as similarities in theological language and concepts. I should like to point out—as some apologists have failed to do—that there were also significant differences between the Qumran community and the New Testament church.

1. Both groups lived in anticipation of the end of the age; in both, the figure of a Messiah was a prominent characteristic. However, for the Christian, that Messianic figure had been identified as Jesus. Such identification constituted a major theological break between the two groups. Observe, particularly in Paul's letters to the Galatians and to the Romans, how the legal and priestly framework of Judaism was completely transcended through the mission of Christ. For Paul, the Cross brought freedom from the Law. There seems to be no attempt on his part, as in Qumran, to preserve the sacrificial system and the Law or to return to the Temple. Galatians has long been accepted as the Christian declaration of independence from Judaism—including the Essene brand of Judaism. Granted, there were parallels in concepts and terminology, but the Christian focus on Jesus as the Son of Man, as the Heavenly Christ, produced a theological orientation markedly different from the doctrines developed by the Essenes.

2. While the Christian communal meal and its initiatory rites of baptism indicated certain possible points of contact with the Qumran sect, opposing emphases were rather prominent. For the Essenes, only initiates who had proved themselves for two years could participate in the meal. Moreover, the physically

"'Knowledge' in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Mt. 11:25-30," *Harvard Theological Review*, 46 (1953), pp. 113-129.

disabled, the maimed, and the blind were probably excluded from the rite. Such exclusiveness was not characteristic of Jesus. His mission concerned the healing of the sick and the gathering of the poor and the sinners. In addition, the Essenes seem to have been extremely sensitive about ecclesiastical rank. They sat at table, ate, and spoke according to prescribed rules of status.⁵⁷ In contrast, Jesus broke with all such legal formalities. He rebuked his disciples for their eagerness to be first and greatest.⁵⁸ He taught meekness and modesty. He denounced the scribes and Pharisees for their love of the places of honor at feasts and for their concern for the best seats in the synagogues.⁵⁹

In addition, note the requirement of a two year probation before baptism and the possibility that the Essenes re-baptized in connection with their annual renewal of the covenant; also, consider Kuhn's suggestion that members were required a daily ablution in preparation for the communal meal.⁶⁰

3. The most convincing evidence for the uniqueness of Christianity in contrast with the Qumran sect concerns the spirit of Jesus' teaching.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?⁶¹

Love, even for one's enemies, was basic in the message of Jesus. Compare this emphasis with statements from the *Manual of Discipline*:

It is the duty of members . . . to love whom God has elected, and to hate everyone whom he has rejected; . . . to hate all of the sons of darkness . . . lift their voices and speak, 'Cursed art thou.'⁶²

And these are the regulations of conduct for every man that would seek the inner vision in these times, touching what he is to love and what he is to hate.

He is to bear unremitting hatred towards all men of ill repute, and to be minded to keep in seclusion from them.⁶³

⁵⁷*Manual of Discipline* 6:1-8.

⁵⁸Matthew 20:26-28; 23:11, 12.

⁵⁹The Parable of the Chief Seats, Luke 14:1-24; also, Matthew 23:5.

⁶⁰Stendahl, *op. cit.*, pp. 67, 68.

⁶¹Matthew 5:43, 44, 46.

⁶²*Manual of Discipline* 1:4, 10; 2:4.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 9:21-23.

Nowhere are Jesus and the Essenes more sharply contrasted. The spirit of the two is diametrically opposed.

Were Jesus and John the Baptist members of the Qumran sect? It seems entirely possible that both of these New Testament figures were familiar with the practices of the Essenes and knew of their teachings. But, while there seem to be some points of contact between them, there is ample evidence that Jesus was opposed to their narrow exclusiveness, to their legal and priestly approach to the Law, to their excessive other-worldly views, and to their calculated and militaristic hatred of their enemies. While the evidence for John's identification with the Essenes at Qumran is inconclusive, there is no evidence whatever that Jesus was associated with this sect.

Thus Jesus by no means followed Essene thought in all and every particular, but on the contrary he sometimes taught and acted in diametrical opposition to it. He is also distinguished from the Essenes by the fact that he decisively rejected all excessive features Whenever the meaning of the rule had been perverted into its opposite by the Essenes' eschatological yearning, as in the case of the tightening of the Sabbath regulations, Jesus' words and deeds provided the sharpest rejection.⁶⁴

In summary, then, what is to be said for the scrolls?

1. They have been tremendously important for Old Testament, New Testament and Jewish studies. To date the major contributions, however, remain in the area of strict scholastic research: text studies, studies in the change of language, in historical connections and cultural settings. No specific theology has been proved.

2. There seems to be ample evidence that the stage for the early Christian drama involved peripheral Jewish elements as well as the central stream represented by Pharisaic Judaism. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the Essenes *were* a Jewish sect. They *were not* Christians.

3. Certain correlation between the Christian church and the Qumran community may be noted, particularly in organiza-

⁶⁴Kurt Schubert, "The Sermon on the Mount" trans. from *Theologische Quartalschrift* 135 (1955), pp. 32-327 in Stendahl, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

tion, some ordinances and theological language and concepts. However, the Christology of Paul, faith in Christ as the Messiah, and the centrality of love in the teachings of Jesus, sharply delineate the Christian gospel. Whatever is claimed for the Essenes as the prototype of Christianity, it most certainly must remain clear that the spirit of Jesus' teachings and the vitality of the early Christian church were not derived from the *Manual of Discipline*.