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THE DEAD SEA DISCOVERIES: RETROSPECT AND CHALLENGE*

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WHEN an Arab named Muhammed ed-Dib in the spring of 1947 stumbled upon the first of the manuscripts which have come to be known as the Dead Sea scrolls, he set in motion a series of events the consequences of which he could not possibly have foreseen. If he could have looked into the future, he would have seen sensational statements made by scholars and non-scholars, a great flood of learned books and articles, popular articles in magazines such as *The Reader's Digest*, *Life*, *The New Yorker*, and many others, four paper-backed books, and even a choral work by an American composer based on one of the Thanksgiving Psalms. Muhammed ed-Dib could hardly have predicted that the discoveries he started would some day be used as a basis for questioning the uniqueness and truth of Christianity and even the divinity of Jesus Christ.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of these initial discoveries, this is a good time to look backward and ask, Where do we stand now? and to look forward and ask, What are these discoveries likely to mean for biblical scholarship? I have used in the title of this paper "The Dead Sea Discoveries" and not simply "The Dead Sea Scrolls," because the proper assessment of the scrolls requires that they be studied in the total context of all the discoveries made in and near the original cave — all of the Qumran caves, Khirbet Qumran, the cemetery, the caves of Wadi Murabbaat, and some as yet unidentified sites. (The MSS of Kh. Mird apparently are from a different age and setting.)

I

Looking back, we can see a number of unfortunate circumstances and events. It is regrettable that the initial discoveries were made by accident rather than by trained archeologists, and that many of the subsequent discoveries have been at the hands of natives. This has led to varying accounts of the initial discovery; we shall probably never

* The Presidential Address delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis on December 27, 1956, at the Union Theological Seminary, New York.

know all of the details with accuracy. We may never know precisely where some of the documents were found. All of this, however, is not really important. Biblical scholars should gratefully accept archeological discoveries however they are made. In point of fact, many of the most important discoveries in archeology have been made by accident.

We may regret the failure on the part of some competent scholars to recognize the value of the Qumran scrolls. This must be attributed to the native caution and conservatism of responsible scholars, which has been offset by a few premature statements made by both experts and non-experts. It is unfortunate that some scholars have been led prematurely into taking positions, which they have felt constrained to maintain even when later evidence should have led to their abandonment. Far-reaching theories have been advanced by some scholars who have seemed to claim the possession of "inside information" concerning the contents of some of the MSS, when in reality they have not had such information.

From one point of view, this group of discoveries has had too "good" a press. When a writer of the stature of Edmund Wilson writes a popular article and book on the Dead Sea scrolls, he is bound to attract much attention. The widespread popular interest in the scrolls must be attributed partly to the revival of interest in our time in the Bible and in all things religious.

If there have been unfortunate elements connected with these discoveries, there have been on the other hand fortunate circumstances for which we are thankful. One of these is the courage of two young scholars, John Trever and William H. Brownlee, in carefully examining the scrolls when other scholars had turned away from them. We should be particularly grateful to Trever for his care and competence in making photographs of the scrolls under very trying conditions.

We should be grateful too for the prompt and efficient publication of materials by Millar Burrows, the late E. L. Sukenik, and others; and for the activities of responsible officials and scholars in Palestine who have sought to appraise all materials brought to them and purchase those that are authentic.

II

After looking backward in this way we may go on to describe the present status of the discoveries.

First, there should be no question now as to the genuineness of these MSS. At the outset some doubts were cast upon the authenticity of the scrolls (and even the word "hoax" was used), but such doubts should be completely dissipated by the great scope of the discoveries as we now see them, by the large number of different handwritings that

appear on the MSS, and by the fact that responsible scholars have found MSS under controlled scientific conditions. The Dead Sea scrolls will not suffer the fate of Piltdown Man! On the contrary, it has been claimed that these discoveries may lead to the authentication of the scroll of Deuteronomy offered for sale by Shapira seventy years ago, and declared at the time to be a forgery.¹

The question of the general date of the principal Dead Sea MSS and related materials should no longer be a matter for serious debate. They date from some time in the second century B. C. to approximately A. D. 70 for Qumran (with a few materials probably from the late third century B. C., and a few later than A. D. 70), and down to A. D. 135 for Murabbaat. This date is supported by converging lines of evidence: archeological context, paleography, the nature of the language (the Hebrew is like that of the latest books in the OT and Mishnic Hebrew), radiocarbon dating, historical allusions (though these are mostly vague and imprecise), and textual studies, especially comparison with the LXX. We should stress the primary importance of the archeological materials found in connection with the MSS, especially the 750 coins found at Khirbet Qumran. Ceramic materials of similar or identical nature bind together chronologically the caves, the community center, and the cemetery. There is nothing in any of the evidence which contradicts the dating by archeological context. Of course the exact dating of the composition or inscribing of particular documents is a problem for continuing debate.

The organization which built the community center at Khirbet Qumran and preserved the MSS was a Jewish community which was ascetic, eschatological, and bound together by common ownership of property. There is some kind of close relationship between this group and the Essenes.² We may call it "Essene" if we employ that term in a broad sense, and understand that some variations must have taken place in Essene practice and belief in the course of history; some of the variations arose from differences in time and some from differences in place. The Qumran documents span a period of at least two centuries, and these were crucial centuries in which many changes occurred. The evidence does not support the view that the Qumran sectaries were Jewish Christians or Ebionites.

¹ This celebrated case is being re-studied by Prof. Menahem Mansoor of the University of Wisconsin, who will publish the results of his investigations soon. See provisionally Geoffrey Wigoder, "The 'Shapira Scroll' Mystery," *The Jewish News*, August 17, 1956, p. 8 (reprinted from the *Jerusalem Post*).

² This is treated in most of the books on the Qumran discoveries; see most recently B. J. Roberts, "The Qumran Scrolls and the Essenes," *New Testament Studies*, III (1955), 58-65. On the other hand, cf. M. H. Gottstein, "Anti-Essene Traits in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Vetus Testamentum*, IV (1954), 141-47.

III

What of the future of studies in the Dead Sea materials? In speaking to a body such as the Society of Biblical Literature one naturally emphasizes the importance of patient, careful, and cooperative study by scholars in all the fields of learning which impinge upon these discoveries. Some of the problems can best be solved by OT critics, some by NT scholars, and still others by those who are versed in rabbinic learning. In the interest of objectivity, in an area in which objectivity may be especially difficult, studies must be carried on by both Protestants and Catholics, and by Jews as well as Christians. No single scholar is learned enough to pass judgment on all the problems involved. It is absurd to suggest — as has been done in popular books³ — that scholars are “afraid” to study the Dead Sea materials and face the problems they raise. That is not true, as anyone can attest who has seen even a small proportion of the articles and books that have been written. We ought to take special note of the large number of important contributions at various levels which have been made by Roman Catholic scholars, both in America and abroad.⁴

With some trepidation I want now to express my opinion as to the present status and the challenge of the Dead Sea discoveries in several specific areas. I do this with trepidation partly because of the remarks I have just made, and partly because my field of specialization is only the OT. These opinions are presented not in a spirit of partisanship or dogmatism, but largely as suggestions concerning the direction future research may take.

A. *Higher Criticism of the Old Testament.* The discoveries have contributed little of a direct nature in this area, but in the course of time they may contribute much indirectly.

At the time of this writing the only book which is not represented at all is Esther. This may support the view that the book is extremely late, perhaps as late as the second century B. C.⁵ Of course, its absence may indicate only that it was not recognized at Qumran. Further, the fact that Daniel is represented in what appears to be non-canonical physical form seems to support the widely held view that it was composed in the second century B. C., or partly in the third and partly in the

³ Edmund Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (New York, 1955), pp. 98–100; A. Powell Davies, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York, 1956), pp. 23–25.

⁴ See, e. g., the large number of articles in *Revue biblique* and *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, and the popular volume, Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm., *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Bible* (Westminster, Md., 1956).

⁵ R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York, 1941), p. 742, dates it about 125 B. C., under John Hyrcanus.

second. (Canonical books are usually written on leather, in the Jewish bookhand or in the paleo-Hebrew script, and the columns tend to be in length double their width.)⁶

Some scholars have maintained that the Dead Sea discoveries tend to disprove the Maccabean dating of any of the Psalms, and the late dating of materials in the prophetic books.⁷ As for the Psalms, if the fragments of MSS of the Psalter are from the second century B. C., a Maccabean dating of individual psalms is probably to be ruled out. As for the prophetic books, the dating of materials in them as late as the first century B. C., and probably the second century, must be excluded, but there is no evidence yet to rule out the dating of individual oracles in the Hellenistic age before the Maccabean revolt. In these matters we must await the further publication of materials, and more detailed studies.

B. *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament.* This is an area in which the discoveries are proving to be of tremendous value.

Because of the surprising degree of correspondence between the two Isaiah scrolls and the MT, we have overemphasized the value of the scrolls in supporting that text. The nature of the LXX version of Isaiah should warn us to go slowly, for it is one of the poorest translations in the OT. More complete study of the Isaiah scrolls, and of many fragments which have been published or studied in unpublished form, suggest that we may soon be able to set up several families of MSS, or text-types.⁸ Thus the OT textual critic may find himself in a position similar to that of the NT textual critic, yet without the abundance of riches possessed by the latter.

At present we can distinguish at least three pre-Masoretic recensions or text-types: 1) One is a proto-Masoretic type represented particularly in the Isaiah scrolls.⁹ 2) Another may be described as corresponding to the *Vorlage* of LXX; it is represented particularly by the fragments of Samuel and other historical books.¹⁰ 3) The third is like the Samaritan

⁶ Frank M. Cross, Jr., *JBL*, LXXV (1956), 122-23. A possible source of Daniel 4 is the "Prayer of Nabonidus" found in Cave IV, in Aramaic in fragmentary form; see J. T. Milik, *RB*, LXIII (July 1956), 407-15.

⁷ See, e. g., Charles T. Fritsch, *The Qumran Community, Its History and Scrolls* (New York, 1956), p. 47.

⁸ W. F. Albright, "New Light on Early Recensions of the Hebrew Bible," *BASOR*, No. 140 (Dec. 1955), pp. 27-33; C. Rabin, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the History of the OT Text," *Journal of Theological Studies*, VI N. S. (1955), 174-82; Moshe Greenberg, "The Stabilization of the Text of the Hebrew Bible, Reviewed in the Light of the Biblical Materials from the Judean Desert," *JAOS*, LXXVI (1955), 157-67.

⁹ Patrick W. Skehan, "The Text of Isaiahs at Qumran," *CBQ*, XVII (1955), 158-63.

¹⁰ Cross, "A New Qumran Biblical Fragment Related to the Original Hebrew Underlying the Septuagint," *BASOR*, No. 132 (Dec. 1953), pp. 15-26, and *JBL*, LXXIV (1955), 165-72.

recension of the Pentateuch.¹¹ In time other text-types may be identified, and by careful and complicated comparisons we may be able to get back to a Hebrew text that is prior to all of these. At Qumran there was considerable freedom, and some books appear in more than one form.¹² We cannot be sure that Jerusalem was as free in such matters as was Qumran.

This study will necessitate the extensive revision of all our editions of the OT, and will raise many problems. The most difficult question will be: When we have studied and defined the various text-types, which should we consider as "original"? Further, the question of the relationship of an "original" text to the ultimately canonical text will pose serious questions. The whole question of canonicity, and the date of the fixing of the canon, will have to be re-studied. Tentatively I suggest that there was a difference between the general acceptance of a book as canonical or authoritative on the one hand, and on the other hand the fixing of the text of that book so that it was considered sacrosanct. We shall probably find that the Academy of Jamnia had much more to do than we have usually thought, both in fixing the canon and in establishing the authoritative text. Before that time there was a great amount of freedom, among both Jews and Christians.

C. *The Nature of Early Judaism.* The Dead Sea discoveries have helped to reveal the fluidity, variety, and great vitality of Judaism in the period of the first two centuries B. C. and the first century of the Christian era. Previously it has been difficult for scholars to study Judaism before the year A. D. 70, partly because of the nature of the rabbinic sources. Now we have available materials which are clearly pre-70; they must be carefully compared with the apocryphal and pseudepigraphic materials, Josephus, Philo, tannaitic literature, etc. The Dead Sea discoveries have shown the importance in this period of the apocalyptic-messianic element in Judaism, which was to a large extent suppressed or obscured after A. D. 70, subsequent to the rise of Christianity.¹³

We should be careful in referring to the Judean Covenanters or Essenes as a "sect," if by that term we imply that they were heretical. This would be mistaken, because there was no generally recognized "orthodoxy," and because the Covenanters clearly lived by the Torah, as they interpreted it, and considered themselves the true Israel. There

¹¹ Skehan, "Exodus in the Samaritan Recension from Qumran," *JBL*, LXXIV (1955), 182-87.

¹² For example, Jeremiah is represented in two forms, one corresponding to the LXX, and one to the MT. See in general, "Le travail d'édition des fragments manuscrits de Qumrân," *RB*, LXIII (1956), 49-67.

¹³ Cf. Louis Ginzberg, "Some Observations on the Attitude of the Synagogue Towards the Apocalyptic-Eschatological Writings," *JBL*, XLI (1922), 115-36.

have been discussions as to whether they were Pharisaic or Sadducean in tendency. Paradoxical as it may seem, they were probably at the outset hyper-Pharisaical in many respects in their observance of the Law,¹⁴ but at the same time they were anti-Hasmonean Sadducees.¹⁵ They arose in a time before the differences between the Pharisees and Sadducees had crystallized.

D. *Christian Origins*. The significance of these discoveries for Christian scholars is greatest at this point. Yet it must be said, in all candor, that NT scholars and specialists in early Christian history — especially in America — have not made the most of the opportunities presented by the Dead Sea discoveries.¹⁶ Many of the books and articles dealing with them, and perhaps the most widely publicized opinions regarding their significance, have come from specialists in the OT field rather than from those who are most at home in NT study. This is unfortunate. The simplest explanation for this situation is the fact that these MSS are for the most part in Hebrew, and in “unpointed” Hebrew at that; many NT specialists are not able to study them at first hand. It has sometimes seemed to me that we are faced with a situation similar to that which prevailed a decade or two ago with respect to the problem of the Aramaic origin of certain NT books. Most of the scholars who held to the Aramaic origin of these books were Semitists and specialists in OT, who did not know as much as they should about the NT. Yet many of the NT scholars who criticized them were not able to control the primary sources.

In the course of time we should have editions of the Dead Sea MSS — those which are not altogether fragmentary — in vocalized Hebrew, even if we cannot be certain that the vocalization is wholly accurate. A. M. Haberman has made an excellent beginning in his book *‘Edah we-‘Eduth*.¹⁷ When this is done, NT scholars will be in better position to read the documents themselves.

In the area of Christian origins, some scholars have been altogether too imaginative in seeing parallels to or foreshadowings of Christianity;

¹⁴ Cf. Louis Ginzberg, *Eine unbekannte jüdische Sekte*, Erster Teil (New York, 1922), pp. 177–85, 228–32; and Saul Lieberman, “The Discipline in the So-called Dead Sea Manual of Discipline,” *JBL*, LXXI (1952), 199–206.

¹⁵ Cf. Robert North, “The Qumran ‘Sadducees,’” *CBQ*, XVII (1955), 164–88; and A. M. Haberman, “The Dead Sea Scrolls — a Survey and a New Interpretation,” *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought*, V (Fall 1956), 306–15.

¹⁶ Albright, commenting briefly on the volume of studies in honor of C. H. Dodd (see note 19 below), says: “Even the Dead Sea Scrolls are noticed in a few papers, though the volume as a whole reflects the prevailing unwillingness of Anglo-American New Testament scholars to admit that such disconcerting documents exist.” (*BASOR*, No. 142 [April 1956], p. 36).

¹⁷ Jerusalem, 1952 (Hebrew).

on the other hand, some have painfully denied the obvious. Historical objectivity in this area is not easy!

At the risk of departing from my own field, let me express a few opinions and raise some questions regarding the importance of the Dead Sea discoveries for Christian origins.

1. These discoveries reveal a Jewish sect whose beliefs and practices were seriously influenced by non-Hebraic sources, either Iranian or Hellenistic or both. The most obvious influence was on the dualism of the sect, presented clearly in 1QS 3.17–4.26. The sect may be described as syncretistic in very much the same sense that early Christianity was syncretistic.¹⁸ The Judean Covenanters held ideas deviating from OT beliefs, but on Judean soil and not far from Jerusalem. The significance of this for the origin of the Fourth Gospel¹⁹ and for Paul's theology²⁰ has been pointed out. The net effect of the Dead Sea discoveries will be to make it possible to place more books of the NT, and thus more of the basic Christian ideas, upon Palestinian soil rather than the soil of Diaspora Judaism.

2. The sect which preserved the documents was a "literal" apocalyptic sect. The members believed they were living in the end of time, and were expecting the day of judgment and the culmination of "this age." The very existence of such a sect in Judea tends to support the interpretation of the Schweitzer school which saw early Christianity as an apocalyptic community in a very literal sense. Yet this group did not have what would now be termed an *Interimsethik*, inasmuch as the Manual of Discipline (1QS) lays down specific and precise rules for the ongoing life of the community. This has considerable bearing on the nature of early Christian ethics, and the interpretation of a document such as the Sermon on the Mount. At the same time, an element of "realized eschatology" can be seen in the directions for the "messianic banquet" given in 1QSa. This was (in my opinion) a real meal, but it anticipated the messianic banquet of the future age.

3. Does not the existence of the Essene communities make it more probable that Jesus consciously sought to organize a community of his disciples and followers? Many NT scholars believe that Jesus did not intend to establish a "church" but consider its establishment as a development that followed the death of Jesus. Yet the early Christian

¹⁸ Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting* (New York, 1956), pp. 175–79, 213 f.

¹⁹ See especially Raymond E. Brown, "The Qumran Scrolls and the Johannine Gospel and Epistles," *CBQ*, XVII (1955), 403–19, 559–74; and Albright, "Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of John," in *The Background of the New Testament and Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 153–71.

²⁰ Cf. S. E. Johnson, "Paul and the Manual of Discipline," *Harvard Theological Review*, XLVIII (1955), 157–65.

community reminds one in a number of respects of the Essene community — not so much of the tight-knit monastic community of Qumran as the “third order” type which must have existed in many towns and villages of Judea, if Philo and Josephus are correct. The group surrounding Jesus had a body of twelve apostles, an inner circle of three most-favored disciples, and a large group of followers. Is it not even possible that the community of possessions described in Acts (2 44 f., 4 32–37), similar to that practiced at Qumran, goes back to the lifetime of Jesus? It has always been difficult to explain how Jesus and his immediate disciples made a living. Possibly they practiced community ownership of goods and wages. Passages such as Luke 12 33 and John 12 6 could be adduced in support of this view.

A study should be made comparing the names used by the Qumran sect for itself and its individual members, and the corresponding early Christian terms. One of the commonest words used at Qumran for the community as a whole was עדה; this is the proper word in the OT for the true community of Israel. The LXX usually translates it as *συναγωγη*, a word used once in the NT for a Christian church (Jas 2 2). This corresponds to the Aramaic כנישתא, which in the view of some scholars was the earliest word for ‘church.’ The Qumran sect apparently did not often employ קהל, which is the word usually rendered in LXX by *ἐκκλησια* (which is not used to render עדה).²¹

One of the commonest words used in the NT for an individual member of the early Christian community or church was “saint” (*αγιος*). This corresponds to three words in the OT: חסיד, frequently used in Psalms of pious, godly men; קדוש, used of men at least in Pss 16 3, 34 9, 106 16 (but employed for divine beings in passages such as Job 5 1, 15 15, Ps 89 5, 7); and the Aram. קדיש in Dan 7 18 f. The latter two are rendered in LXX by *αγιος*, חסיד usually by *σσιος*. In one passage of the Qumran *Hodayot* (1QH 4.24–25) סוד קדושים refers to human beings;²² in some other passages it signifies angels or divine beings. The clue is provided by the mystical idea expressed in 1QH 11.9–14, that God reveals to chosen men his mysteries, cleanses them of transgressions,

²¹ See J. Y. Campbell, “The Origin and Meaning of the Christian Use of the Word *ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ*,” *JTS*, XLIX (1948), 130–42. He disputes the commonly accepted view that the early Christians, in using *ἐκκλησια*, were borrowing an OT term (equivalent to קהל) to express their claim to be the true people of God. He says that *ἐκκλησια* was simply an obvious name for those simple “meetings” which the Christians held, with some precedent in Psalms and Ecclesiastes, and in Hellenistic usage. In the course of time it came to mean the body of people who habitually met together. Qumran usage should be studied carefully to see whether it supports this view.

²² “They that walk in the way of thy heart have hearkened unto me, and rallied to thee in the council of the holy ones.” T. H. Gaster translates “in the legion of the saints.” Cf. the same expression in Ps 89 7, used of heavenly beings. 1QH 3.21 speaks of men who are fashioned from dust “for the eternal council” (לסוד עולם).

and enables them to "share the lot of thy holy ones" (בגורל עם קדושיכה). The OT background for this is the belief that the true prophet was permitted to stand in the "council (סוד) of Yahweh," as expressed most clearly in Jer 23 18-22.²³

It has been pointed out that the organization of the early Christian churches may have been seriously influenced by that of the Essenes. Here we may note that the word פקיד, which is used at least once of an Essene overseer (1QS 6.14), is translated in the LXX by επισκοπος (Judg 9 28; Neh 11 9, 14, 22).

4. It is now generally believed that the vernacular language of Palestine in the first century was Aramaic. It may therefore seem surprising that most of the documents found at Qumran are in Hebrew. Even the letters of Bar Kochba are in Hebrew, not Aramaic. There must have been a revival of the use of Hebrew in Maccabean times, which continued for the following two or three centuries. A number of competent scholars have raised the question whether Hebrew may not have been the vernacular (or *a* vernacular) of first-century Palestine.²⁴ It may have been a Hebrew greatly influenced by Aramaic. At any rate, it would appear that many of the documents composed in the period of the first century B. C. and first century A. D. were in Hebrew, and that such writing was much more common than is often supposed. Is it not likely that τα λογια of Matthew "in the Hebrew language" (Εβραϊδι διαλεκτω) of which Papias spoke were really written in Hebrew, and that Hebrew documents lie back of passages such as the first two chapters of Luke?²⁵

5. The פשרים and the lists of prophetic *testimonia* which have been found among the Dead Sea discoveries give us excellent background for study of the early Christian use and interpretation of the OT. The פשרים were not commentaries in the modern sense, nor do they correspond closely to the early rabbinic commentaries. In Daniel, the word פשר means 'solution of a mystery.' The פשרים are apocalyptic works in which the reader is given a key by which to solve the mysteries of prophetic books or other OT passages, and understand how veiled predictions made in them were being fulfilled in his own time. The early

²³ See H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Council of Yahweh," *JTS*, XLV (1944), 151-57, and Cross, "The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah," *JNES*, XII (1953), 274-77. Cf. Phil 3 20 "our commonwealth (πολιτευμα) is in heaven."

²⁴ The question has been recently opened by Harris Birkeland, *The Language of Jesus* (Oslo, 1954), who believes that "the language of the common people in the time of Jesus was Hebrew." He thinks that Jesus "really used Hebrew"; however, he understood both Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic, could read the OT in Hebrew, and probably knew some Greek. Cf. M. H. Segal, *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew* (Oxford, 1927), p. 6.

²⁵ Is it not possible now to believe that τη Εβραϊδι διαλεκτω in Acts 21 40, 22 2, 26 14 really means Hebrew?

Christians made similar use of the OT, for they viewed it in much the same way. A great amount of *freedom* characterizes the early Christian as well as the Essene interpretation of the OT.

6. Many studies have been made suggesting influences of Essene ideas and beliefs upon early Christianity. In the future the documents must be very carefully combed so that these ideas may be fully studied and put in their proper setting. It should not be surprising that early Christianity was in one manner or another influenced by these ideas. It is not necessary to suppose that John the Baptist, Jesus, or any of his closest disciples had been Essenes or Judean Covenanters. In all likelihood, however, some of the early Christians had been connected in one way or another with Essene communities. However, the theory of "diffusion of ideas" is sufficient to account for the influence, since the communities apparently existed in many villages and towns of Judea; Qumran may have been the "headquarters," but not the only community.

IV

Finally, a few words may be said about the question of the originality or "truth" of early Christianity, and the bearing of the Dead Sea discoveries upon the question of the divinity of Jesus Christ. These matters have loomed large in many of the popular discussions of the scrolls. Two remarks are in place here.

First, it must be emphasized that the "truth" of the Christian faith does not rest upon the originality or uniqueness of the teachings of Jesus or of any NT writer. Scholars have long known that there is little in them that is truly original, and that in itself should not be surprising. The Christian faith rests not upon the uniqueness of Jesus' teaching, but upon belief in the incarnation, the belief that "the Word became flesh" in Jesus Christ. For the Christian the incarnation is a unique and unrepeatable event. It is a question of faith, not subject to historical verification. Genuine faith cannot be upset by anything which enriches historical understanding.

Second, I believe that all of us — whether Jew or Christian — should be proud to claim as a part of our heritage those people whom we now know as Judean Covenanters or Essenes. Nearly everything that we know about them shows that they were a people with high ideals, and genuine religious experience. In order to join the Qumran community, a person had to undergo rigorous examination and lengthy probation, make public commitment of himself to the order, renew his covenant annually, and be a constant student of the Scriptures and a faithful member of the order. The qualities emphasized were total commitment to the life and beliefs of the community, obedience to the

Torah, respect for one's superiors, love of the brotherhood, justice, humility, simplicity of living, and hatred of all evil. The Christian scholar cannot afford to praise such qualities when he finds them in a Christian group, and condemn the Essenes as narrow and legalistic. The three ancient writers who describe the Essenes praise them in extravagant terms. Philo describes them as "athletes of virtue," and says that many rulers had been "unable to resist the high excellence of these people."²⁶ Josephus says that "they exceed all other men that addict themselves to virtue, and this in righteousness."²⁷ Even Pliny speaks of them as "the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the whole world."²⁸

In spite of all we have said about similarities and influences, there were many significant differences between the Essenes and Christianity. It is not correct to say with Renan that "Christianity is an Essenism which has largely succeeded";²⁹ or with Dupont-Sommer that Christianity was "a quasi-Essene neo-formation."³⁰ The historian should be thankful for all the new light that has been shed on the history of religion by the Dead Sea discoveries, and the professing Jew or Christian should be proud to claim among his spiritual ancestors the devoted people who produced and preserved the Dead Sea documents.

²⁶ *Quod omnis probus liber sit* XIII (Loeb ed., IX, 61-63).

²⁷ *Ant.* XVIII. i. 5.

²⁸ *Natural History* V. xv (Loeb ed., II, 277).

²⁹ "Le christianisme est un essénisme qui a largement réussi," quoted by A. Dupont-Sommer, *Aperçus préliminaires sur les manuscrits de la Mer Morte* (Paris, 1950), p. 121 (English trans., p. 99).

³⁰ *The Jewish Sect of Qumran and the Essenes* (New York, 1955), p. 150.