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The Theological Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls

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Translated by David Zersen

I

THE DISCOVERY OF THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS¹

When the shepherd boy Muhammad ed-Deeb ("The Wolf") of the half-nomadic tribe Ta'amire threw a stone into a cave to pass the time, it clattered so

¹ An excellent translation of the text into German which is gratefully used in many places in the following material has been provided by J. Maier, *Die Texte vom Toten Meer, I: Übersetzung, II: Anmerkungen* (Munich-Basel: E. Reinhardt, 1960). [Trans. note: The reader should also be aware of the more recent translation by a former student of Jeremias, Eduard Lohse, *Die Texte aus Qumran* (Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1964). A comprehensive overview of the situation in research and of the literature is offered in the articles "Essener" and "Qumran" in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*,

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All quotations from and references to the scrolls are based on the translation by Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962).

strangely that he was convinced an evil djin was after him. He ran away in panic-stricken terror, never suspecting that his name would go down in the history of scholarship. He had discovered Cave 1 at Qumran on the northwest coast of the Dead Sea. On the next day of that summer — presumably it was 1947² — he ventured to climb into the cave with his pluckier cousin. They found eight clay jars which to their disappointment contained not the expected treasures, but rather "leather with scribbling on it."³ He wondered whether it was worth taking such things along. Then he remembered, so he reported, that they needed thongs for their sandals.⁴

3d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1958—65), II, 701—703 (Karl Georg Kuhn), and V, 740—56 (Millar Burrows, Roland de Vaux, Rudolf Meyer, Karl Georg Kuhn, and Claus-Hunno Hunzinger).]

² In the literature, 1947 is always given as the year of discovery because in this year the manuscripts turned up in Bethlehem, and Muhammad ed-Deeb himself first gave this year as the discovery date. In a description given in 1956 (W. H. Brownlee, "Muhammad ed-Deeb's Own Story of His Scroll Discovery," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 16 [1957], 236—39), however, he maintained that he found the scrolls in 1945 (see p. 236, sec. 1, line 1 of his report) and kept them for more than 2 years before his uncle brought them to Bethlehem (p. 237, sec. 2, line 6f.). Roland de Vaux, an authority in the field, still accepts Muhammad's first dating as correct ("Le manuscrits de Qumran et l'archéologie," *Revue Biblique*, LXVI (1959), 88, fn. 3).

³ Brownlee, p. 237 (sec. 1, line 12).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237 (sec. 2, line 2).

To these worn-out sandals scholarship owes the preservation of the scrolls of Cave 1. For the Bethlehem shoemaker and merchant named Kandu, a Syrian, to whom the shepherds gave the leather, showed one of the scrolls to his church's superior, the Metropolitan of the Syrian Jacobite Church in Jerusalem, Mar Athanasius Yeshue Samuel. After some hesitation the Metropolitan bought four of the seven scrolls. When soon afterwards the disorders of war erupted in Palestine after the British mandate ended at midnight of May 14, 1948, he brought them to safety in the United States at the end of the same year. The Hebrew University at Jerusalem bought the remaining three scrolls. Thus four of the seven scrolls reached America and three came to Israeli Jerusalem.

But fate brought them together again. On June 1—3, 1954 a small advertisement appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* under "Miscellaneous":

The Four Dead Sea Scrolls

Biblical Manuscripts dating back to at least 200 B. C. are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational or religious institution by an individual or group. Inquire under Box F 206 at the *Wall Street Journal*.⁵

A month later, on July 2, 1954, a black suitcase with four leather manuscripts exchanged owners for a check for over \$250,000. The purchaser was a bank which declined to name its client. Not until Feb. 13, 1955, was the veil of secrecy lifted. The Israeli Prime Minister called a press conference and surprised it with the news that all seven manuscripts from Cave 1,

⁵ Edmund Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 118.

"a national treasure of the century in this country," were in Israeli hands. That was the first discovery — 1947.

A few years after the discovery of Cave 1, in February 1952, there was a second sensation. The Bedouins offered manuscript fragments for sale which they had found in the same area on the northwest coast of the Dead Sea in one of the caves recently discovered by them, Cave 2. (With respect to the numbering: The caves in which manuscripts were found are numbered in the order of their discovery, to date 1—11.) In March 1952 scholars decided to explore systematically the numerous caves of this area. But the result was disappointing. Only one cave, Cave 3, furnished interesting material — among which was the famed Copper Scroll.⁶ So after searching 267 caves, the wearisome labor was broken off. The Europeans gave up, but the Bedouins stubbornly continued — and had success. In September 1952 they discovered Cave 4, which surrendered more than 25,000 fragments which came from about 400 manuscripts. How did it happen that seven generally well-preserved manuscripts were found in Cave 1, and in Cave 4 only these thousands of fragments? The answer is simple: the manuscripts in Cave 1 had been carefully wrapped in linen and packed in clay jars; the 400 manuscripts in Cave 4 had been thrown into the cave unprotected (evidently in great haste), and in 1,900 years the rats which gnawed the leather to build their nests effected a thorough work

⁶ A French translation is presented by J. T. Milik, "Le rouleau de cuivre de Qumran (3Q15): Traduction et commentaire topographique," *Revue Biblique*, LXVI (1959), 321 to 357. The edition by J. M. Allegro, *The Treasure of the Copper Scroll* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), is unfortunately loaded with fantastic hypotheses.

of destruction. More than 25,000 fragments, for the most part smaller than a fingernail, in part written in secret code! Even the layman can imagine what self-denying patience would be demanded by the attempt to piece them together! "And besides that, it is feared there will be new finds," one of the members of the international Jerusalem team which arranges and publishes the texts wrote me at that time.

That which was feared occurred. In January 1956 the Bedouins, employing their instinct, discovered Cave 11, containing new manuscripts which were fortunately almost as well preserved as those from Cave 1.⁷ These manuscripts have not yet been studied and remain in safekeeping, because their purchase has not yet been arranged.

All manuscripts from Qumran which are no longer in the hands of the Bedouins are to be found in Jerusalem today: The seven manuscripts of Cave 1 are in the National Museum of Israel, and the remainder, especially the many fragments from Cave 4 and the finds from Cave 11, are in the National Museum of Jordan. Both museums lie only a few hundred yards from one another, but until June 1968 the Palestinian iron curtain formed a partition between them.

We are dealing with about 600 manuscripts, a gigantic library for ancient times. Admittedly, only 10 scrolls have been relatively well preserved; the remainder exist only in fragments. All originate from a period of about 300 years between the 3d century before and the 1st century after

Christ. What is their content? About a fourth of them present Biblical texts. All books of the Old Testament, with the exception of the Book of Esther, are represented. The meaning of these Biblical texts for Old Testament research becomes clear when one considers that our hitherto existing Hebrew Biblical texts are dependent on manuscripts from the end of the 9th⁸ and the beginning of the 10th century of our era;⁹ now, however, we have an almost complete Isaiah manuscript from about 100 B. C.,¹⁰ indeed Biblical fragments from as early as the 3d pre-Christian century. The manuscript transmission of the Old Testament has thus been dated back more than a thousand years. And in this situation the surprising thing was that the hitherto existing text was proved to be essentially reliable. A second group of manuscripts contains the so-called Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, writings which originated in the intertestamental period. The third and most interesting group consists of manuscripts of a Jewish religious community which we now learn to know for the first time through the rules of their order, their psalms, their morning and evening prayers for each day of the month, their Bible commentaries, their texts on the calendar and astrology, and many other works.

Who hid the 600 manuscripts in the caves? This question gave archaeologists cause to look for signs of a settlement. Nine tenths of a mile south of Cave 1, in close proximity to Caves 4—10, lay the

⁷ Not mentioned above are Caves 5 (discovered during the scientific excavation of Cave 4 in September 1952), 6 (discovered by Bedouins in connection with Cave 4 toward the end of summer in 1952) and 7—10 (discovered during the fourth excavation campaign at Qumran in spring 1955). None of these produced significant manuscript fragments.

⁸ Cairo Codex, A. D. 895 (Prophets)

⁹ Alepo Codex, A. D. 900—950 (Complete Old Testament)

¹⁰ 1QIsa^a. A second Isaiah manuscript (1QIsa^b) probably originates from the first half of the 1st century of our era.

ruins of Khirbet Qumran. On Nov. 24, 1951, diggings were begun, and a large fortresslike settlement, 87.4 yards square, surrounded by a wall, and protected by a tower, was discovered. Included in the site were a square main building, annexes, 13 cisterns with inlet pipes, a cemetery with 1,100 graves, and finally, 1½ miles farther south along the coast of the Dead Sea, an agricultural complex with living quarters and storerooms by the well 'Ain Feshkha.

This settlement at the Dead Sea had long been known from the literature of antiquity. In A. D. 77 the Roman naturalist and geographer Pliny the Elder published his *Naturalis historia*, in the fifth book of which he describes the Dead Sea. There he says:

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the world as it has no women, and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to the same number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt [the Essenes'] manners. Thus, through the thousands of ages (incredible to relate) a race in which no one is born lives on forever.¹¹

There is no doubt that this cloister of the Essenes at the Dead Sea which Pliny describes now lies before us. In only one place did Pliny formulate it inexactly: He speaks of "a race which lives on forever" (*gens aeterna*). In reality, when his book

¹¹ Pliny, *Natural History*, V, 15, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 277.

appeared, the monks had been wiped out to the last man.¹²

Who were the Essenes? In 167 B. C. the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who wanted to abolish the Jewish religion, had desecrated the temple in Jerusalem and transformed it into a temple to Zeus. It was, say our texts, "the age of wrath" (CD 1, 5). The brave priestly line of the Maccabees ventured to sound the call to a seemingly hopeless battle. The Syrians were defeated, however, and the temple was rededicated after 3 years (164 B. C.). In 152, with the consent of the Syrians, the Maccabean Jonathan placed the high priest's tiara on his own head, even though the Maccabees were not of high-priestly ancestry.

An opposition among the priests directed itself against High Priest Jonathan. It was a movement of reform and awakening, whose members called themselves *chasidayya* "the pious" (Greek, *Essēmoi*, *Essaioi*). Strange to our minds is the fact that one of the main points of controversy was the calendar. The Essene priests promulgated a new solar calendar in contrast to the lunisolar one in use in Judaism. The new calendar was regulated in such a way that no feast fell on a Sabbath. Strict sanctification of the Sabbath was thus a main concern of the priestly opposition.

Their leader was a man about whom the scrolls speak with highest respect, the "Teacher of Righteousness," the great theologian and exegete among the Essenes. We have little concrete information about

¹² That Pliny knew nothing about this is explained by the fact that his presentation rests not on his own observation but on an oral or written report about the settlement at the Dead Sea, which meanwhile had been made obsolete through the events of history.

him. His name we do not know. We know only that he was a priest. Presumably under his direction the separation from the temple cult and the exodus from Jerusalem took place on the basis of Is. 40:3: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord" (10S 8, 12—16). His followers built a monastery with a farming community in which altogether approximately 200 monks¹³ lived as joint owners of all property. According to the evidence of coin finds, building took place after 134 B.C. There was a gap in colonization, presumably as a result of the earthquake in 31 B.C., during which—according to Josephus—30,000 people lost their lives.¹⁴ By the beginning of the 1st century of our era the monastery had been resettled.

The movement met with favorable response, and in many places Essene groups were founded, some of which allowed marriage.^{14a} Philo and Josephus speak of 4,000 Essenes.¹⁵ The center of the movement, however, remained the monastery at the Dead Sea—until in 68 A.D. its fateful hour struck. In the early summer of that year the troops of the Tenth Legion, which wanted to attack Jerusalem from the flank, pushed forward through the Jordan Valley to the Dead Sea. At first with great care, then in rash haste, the monks carried their great treasure, their library, to safety. Their books they could save, but not their

lives. A break in the wall, traces of fire, three-winged iron Roman arrowtips—these are the silent witnesses of what took place at that time. The monks must have been wiped out to the last man in A.D. 68. If only one of them had escaped, the caves would not have been able to preserve their secret until our day.

II

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SCROLLS

After this introductory overview of the manuscript finds and the excavations in Qumran, we stand before a decisive question: What is the significance of these discoveries for theology and, with respect to our discussion, for the interpretation of the New Testament? Let us attempt to explain this significance under three headings.

1. *The Expansion of Our Knowledge of Jesus' Environment*

The period before Jesus' appearance, the first pre-Christian century, belongs to a relatively obscure chapter of Jewish history. With the newly discovered Essene texts we are able to illumine a phase of this period—the priestly reform movement emanating from the temple at Jerusalem. People of Jesus' time speak to us. We hear their language because for the first time we are in possession of 1st-century B.C. texts in the Aramaic mother tongue of Jesus. We have learned how they interpreted the Scriptures, how they regulated their daily life, how they prayed, and what they hoped for. Thus the texts disclose something of the environment of Jesus and thereby help us to a better understanding of His message.

Let us briefly sketch the life in the mon-

¹³ Roland de Vaux, "Qumran," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d edition, V (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1961), 742.

¹⁴ Flavius Josephus, *The Great Roman Jewish War* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1960), I, line 370.

^{14a} *Ibid.*, book 2, lines 160—61.

¹⁵ Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), 75. Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, 20.

astery, the theology of the Essenes, and their piety.

It was a life of unheard-of severity. The foremost objective was the highest outward but also inward purity. The Essenes wore white priestly garments¹⁶ and by continual ritual washings and immersions had to achieve the highest standard of cleanliness. The mere touch by a novice required immediate bathing (B. S. II, 150). They lived as celibates because sexual intercourse was not permitted to priests during the period of their temple service.¹⁷ The day was filled with hard labor. A third of the night—that is, the entire evening from 6 to 10 p. m.—was spent in common Bible study and corporate praise (1QS 6, 7 f.). Whoever was received, after a 2-year¹⁸ trial and novitiate, had to swear a solemn oath that he would assume all the religious duties of the order, and that he would keep its teachings secret,¹⁹ even if it meant being tortured to death.²⁰ Before he was permitted to eat the daily common meal, he had to surrender all his possessions to the monastery.²¹ Thereafter he had to submit

to the rigorous discipline of the order. Whoever committed a gross sin was expelled, and because he had sworn to eat only the food prepared by the monastery, he would have been doomed to die of starvation if at the last moment merciful hands did not carry him back to the monastery.²²

A strict legal code determined life in and outside of the monastery. Under no circumstances, as we noted before when we discussed the origin of the Essenes, could the Sabbath be desecrated by work. "No foster-father shall carry a child whilst going and coming on the Sabbath" (CD 11, 11). "Should any men fall into water or fire²³ [on the Sabbath], let him [not] be pulled out with the aid of a ladder or rope or (some such) tool²⁴ (CD 11, 16 f.). An infant could cry! A man could drown! The sanctity of the Sabbath ranks above any consideration. From contemporary reports we know that the Essenes left a deep impression upon their environment due to their moral integrity and their strict ad-

¹⁶ Josephus, *The Great Roman-Jewish War*, II, 123.

¹⁷ K. G. Kuhn, "Qumran," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, V, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1961, col. 748.

¹⁸ 1QS 6, 13ff. According to Josephus, *The Great Roman-Jewish War*, II, 137f., it was a 3-year period.

¹⁹ B. S. II, 139. 1QS 5, 7 ff.; 9, 17.22; 10, 24, cf. 8, 18; CD 15, 8 ff.

²⁰ Josephus, *The Great Roman-Jewish War*, II, 141.

²¹ Reports about the meals are found in 1QS 6, 4—6, cf. IQSa 2, 17—21; Philo, *op. cit.*, 86. *Apologia pro Judaeis*, cited by Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica*, VIII, 11, in Jacques-Paul Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 21, 642; Josephus, *The Great Roman-Jewish War*, II, 129 to 133; Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, 22.

²² Josephus, *The Great Roman-Jewish War*, II, 144.

²³ The German has "a pit." The English translation by Theodor H. Gaster, *The Dead Sea Scriptures* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1957), p. 78, has "a dark place."

²⁴ The words in brackets have been added by the translator. "On the Sabbath" is not a part of the sentence although it is understood from the context. Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, used throughout this translation, does not use the "not" and Jeremias does. The conflict is caused by a partial corruption in the text. Jeremias renders the text as it stands, and Vermes bases his translation on a correction proposed by Ginzberg and Robin which mitigates the inhumanity of the ordinance. Cf. this passage in André Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings from Qumran* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1962).

herence to the Law.²⁵ How striking are the words of Jesus in comparison! "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:11), and "The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:28)

Basic to the theology of the Essenes is the doctrine of the two spirits, the spirit of God and the spirit of Belial, that is, the devil. Light and darkness are contrasted. They struggle against each other in the world, and the same battle takes place within man. This dualism presented in the form of psalms (see 1 QS 3, 13 to 4, 26), is unfolded in the rules of discipline which determined every detail of life in the monastery. In these psalms the three characteristics marking Essene dualism are clearly evident.

a) Essene dualism is consistently, indeed rigorously, monotheistic. God is the creator of both spirits, also of the spirit of darkness.

From the God of knowledge
comes all that is and shall be.
Before ever they existed,
He established their whole design . . .
He has created man to govern the world
and appointed for him two spirits
in which to walk
until the time of his visitation:
the spirits of truth and falsehood.

Those born of truth
spring from a fountain of light,
but those born of a falsehood
spring from a source of darkness.

²⁵ Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber sit*, 80 f.; Josephus *The Great Roman-Jewish War*, II, 150—53; Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, 20.

For it is He who created the spirits of light and darkness.

(1QS 3, 15. 17—19.25)

b) Essene dualism is ethically oriented. The characteristics of the spirit of truth are

a spirit of humanity, patience, abundant charity, unending goodness, understanding, and intelligence; (a spirit of) mighty wisdom, which trusts in all the deeds of God and leans on his great loving kindness; a spirit of discernment in every purpose, or zeal for just laws, of holy intent, with steadfastness of heart, of great charity toward all the sons of truth, of admirable purity which detests all unclean idols, of humble conduct sprung from an understanding of all things, and of faithful concealment of the mysteries of God (1QS 4, 3—6).

But the ways of the spirit of falsehood are these: greed, and slackness in the search for righteousness, wickedness and lies, haughtiness and pride, falseness and cruelty and abundant evil, ill temper and much folly and brazen insolence, abominable deeds (committed) in a spirit of lust, and ways of lewdness in the service of uncleanness, blaspheming tongues, blindness of eye and dullness of ear, stiffness of neck and heaviness of heart, so that man walks in all the ways of darkness and guilt.

(4, 9—11)

c) The third characteristic of Essene dualism is its eschatological orientation, that is, it points towards God's final victory. The Essenes were expecting the last great tribulation, which the scrolls describe in colorful language.

. . . the deeps of the Abyss shall groan
The land shall cry out because of the
calamity
fallen upon the world
and all its deeps shall howl.

And all those upon it shall rave
and shall perish amid the great
misfortune.

For God shall sound His mighty voice, . . .
The war of the heavenly warriors shall
scourge the earth;
and it shall not end before the appointed
destruction which shall be for ever and
without compare. (1QH 3, 32—36)

The Messiah will reveal himself along with
the high priest of the last days, and false-
hood God will destroy for ever. Then truth
" . . . shall arise in the world forever. There
shall be no more lies and all the works
of falsehood shall be put to shame. Until
now the spirits of truth and falsehood
struggle in the hearts of men" (1QS 4,
19.23). Into the present time as it hastens
toward the last days of battle between the
children of light and the sons of darkness,
God has sent the "Teacher of Righteous-
ness." He has reinterpreted the Torah and
has gathered about Himself the children
of light who prepare themselves in strict
obedience to the Law for the final revela-
tion of God.

More important than the theology of the
Essenes, however, is their *piety*. The heart-
beat of the movement is found in the
psalms, a glorious collection of songs of
praise, the essential ideas of which reach
back to the "Teacher of Righteousness."
Each psalm begins with the formula,
"I thank Thee, Lord." They are filled with
praise to God, who saves the supplicant
from sin and guilt, protects him against
enemies, endows him with wisdom, and
makes him a standard and a physician for
many. The following examples illustrate
the point.

A Song of Praise for Redemption

I thank Thee, O Lord,

for Thou hast redeemed my soul
from the pit,
and from the hell of Abaddon
Thou hast raised me up to
everlasting height.

I walk on limitless level ground,
and I know there is hope for him
whom Thou hast shaped from dust
for the everlasting Council.

(1QH 3, 19—21)

A Song of Praise to God's Glory

I (thank Thee, O Lord),
for Thou hast enlightened me
through Thy truth.
In Thy marvelous mysteries,
and in Thy lovingkindness to a man
(of vanity, and)
in the greatness of Thy mercy
to a perverse heart
Thou hast granted me knowledge.
For no spirit . . . can . . .
withstand Thy wrath.
Yet Thou bringest all the sons of
Thy truth
in forgiveness before Thee,
(to cleanse) them of their faults
through Thy great goodness,
and to establish them before Thee
through the multitude of
Thy mercies
forever and ever.

For Thou art an eternal God.

(1QH 7, 26 f. 29—31)

I believe we can sense it: The man could
pray! Another brief passage might be
mentioned. It is found in the great prayer
at the close of The Community Rule and
is characteristic of the piety of these as-
cetics:

I will bless Him for His exceeding
wonderful deeds . . .
in the abode of distress and
desolation. (1QS, 10, 15 f.)

2. *Similarities to the Early Christian Church*

When in 1948 the first discoveries at Qumran were published, the most daring hypotheses mushroomed forth. Everywhere analogies, indeed correlations, with the history of Jesus and the early church were found. As is always the case with discoveries, dilettantes seized upon the new material, coarsened the scholarly hypotheses, and trumpeted their theories around the world. They saw in the Essene community a forerunner, in fact, the very root of the Christian community. They believed, especially, that in the "Teacher of Righteousness" they had found a forerunner of Jesus. They were sure that the community had looked upon him as the Messiah, had ascribed to him a violent death, had even assumed that he was crucified and had spoken of faith in his resurrection and return—even though the texts themselves do not say one word about all of this. The antireligious propaganda of the communists went even further. The Russian Communist *Komsomolskaia Pravda* wrote on Jan. 9, 1958, that as a result of discoveries at the Dead Sea "indisputable evidence has established the mythical character of Moses and Jesus"²⁶ although it is not clear what Moses would have had to do with these findings.

Today the Qumran fever has given place to calmer contemplation all along the line, and it has become evident that those who from the beginning warned against exaggerating the significance of the discoveries for New Testament interpretation were right.

Even so, there are problems enough. At four points in particular the serious question must be raised as to whether Essene influence is evident in the early history of Christianity even though the Essenes themselves are nowhere mentioned in the New Testament.

a) There is, first of all, the notion that John the Baptist was a point of contact between the Essenes and Jesus. The nearness to Qumran of John's sphere of activity leads to this question. The Jordan is a raging river and has only a few fords. According to Mark 1:5, John may have baptized in the vicinity of one of these fords, that is, in the region of the southern Jordan ford near Jericho. From there it is only 3 to 4 hours walking distance to Qumran. There is, in fact, much to be said in favor of the suggestion that the Baptist had connections with the Essenes. Immersions played an important role among the Essenes. Like the Baptist, they too sounded the call to repentance. They also wanted to gather the saved community of the last days. And they likewise appealed to Is. 40:3 (see above p. 561) for their exodus into the desert, just as the Baptist did for his activity in the Judean wilderness.²⁷ We can go even further. According to Luke 1:80 John was "in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel." Could "wilderness" here refer to Qumran? When he was born, his parents were already along in years (Luke 1:7). Could it have been that John, the son of a priest (Luke 1:5), was orphaned at an early age and given by his relatives into the charge of the Essenes? John ate locusts and wild

²⁶ According to a press release in the *Göttinger Tageblatt*, May 24/25, 1958.

²⁷ John 1:23; cf. Mark 1:3 and parallel passages.

honey (Mark 1:6). Might he have been expelled from the order and, because he had vowed to eat only food prepared by the monastery, have denied himself ordinary sustenance? All this is not impossible, but we should be very careful about novel hypotheses. One thing is sure in any case: If the Baptist was an Essene, a matter about which the sources are silent, he must have broken with them. The unrepeatable public baptism practiced by him differs radically from the repeated baths of the Essenes, just as the broadness of his call to all men differed from their exclusivism—something about which we will hear more later.

b) The similarities between the external organization of the Essenes and that of the early Christian church at Jerusalem are striking. The most interesting fact is that in some instances the early Christian church practiced joint ownership of property (Acts 2:44 ff.; 4:32, 34-37; 5:1-11) as the Essenes did; moreover, they partook of a daily common meal (Acts 2:46) as the Essenes did; furthermore, the three-step system of church discipline (under four eyes, before one or two witnesses, before the gathered congregation, Matt. 18:15-17, cf. Titus 3:10) corresponds to the Essene practice. Here Essene influences may indeed be present. An appealing conjecture would explain them by suggesting that there were Essenes among the "great many . . . priests" who according to Acts 6:7 joined the church.²⁸

c) On the whole, contacts with Essene material are more meager in the letters of the apostle Paul. They appear most clearly

in 2 Cor. 6:4—7:1 and in the description of spiritual warfare which Paul loved and which he unfolded in detail in Eph. 6:11 to 20. In dealing with these and many other linguistic, stylistic, and material points of contact with the Qumran literature found in Ephesians, especially in chapters 4—6, we must be very careful. The possibility must remain open that the particular concepts and phrases in question were indigenous not only to Qumran but to other areas to which Paul had access. It may be stated with certainty that the assertion that St. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith was found already among the Essenes is untenable. The word *mishpat* (1QS 11, 2), which has been translated "justification," does not have this meaning anywhere in the literature; it designates rather the word of judgment. The Pauline teaching that the wicked is already now justified only on the basis of his faith (Rom. 4:5) finds no counterpart in the legalism of the Essenes.

The new texts were most important for the understanding of John's Gospel. The fourth Gospel is characterized by the dualism which permeates it; truth/falsehood, light/darkness, spirit/flesh, and life from above/life from below are contrasted as the two ways of life, the two possibilities of existence. Before the discovery of the Qumran texts, Johannine studies had the tendency to derive this dualism from Gnosticism and accordingly to interpret the entire Gospel of St. John on the basis of Gnostic thought patterns. The new texts have shown us that even in Palestine a dualistic world view existed, although it differed fundamentally from the Gnostic view. Gnostic dualism concerned itself

²⁸ Oscar Cullmann, "The Significance of the Qumran Texts for Research into the Beginnings of Christianity," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXIV (1955), 220—24.

with the fundamental difference between the divine world as the world of light and the universe as the world of darkness and death so that one might characterize this dualism as a material-physical dualism. Essene dualism, as we have seen on page 563, is monotheistically, ethically, and eschatologically oriented. There can be no doubt on which side John's Gospel belongs. Although the new texts have shown us that the fourth Gospel is to be understood not from the Gnostic, but from the Jewish world of thought, there is nevertheless a basic difference here also. The Essene literature describes the battle of light and darkness; John proclaims, as does Paul, that the day has already dawned, that Christ has overpowered the darkness. The theme is the same, but in Qumran it stands under the sign of expectation, while in the Gospel it stands under the sign of fulfillment. "In Him was life" (John 1:4). Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). He who hears His Word has already passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

Much more important than the isolated contacts between Qumran and the early church is yet another situation which united both movements. We find in Qumran, as nowhere else in the environment of the New Testament world, a movement of religious awakening which in its joy over salvation bestowed and in its seriousness and sacrifice and self-understanding nearly matched the spirit of the early church. The psalms of the "Teacher" and the psalms of the congregation overflow with the praise of God. These people, to whose prayers we may listen, knew something of the smallness and the nothingness of man before God, of guilt and sin and lostness before Him, but they also knew something

of the greatness and the incomprehensibility of His grace. They never tired of thanking God—their songs of praise began with the words "I thank Thee, Lord"—for having been merciful to them and having summoned them in the last hour out of a world fallen under the judgment of God, by teaching them the true understanding of the Law through the "Teacher of Righteousness." Now they would be able to achieve salvation by genuine fulfillment of the Law and by strict observance of the calendar.

The self-understanding of the Essenes corresponded to their consciousness of being the chosen ones. They knew themselves to be the saints of God (1QS 5, 13), the poor (1QM 11, 9), the children of light (1QS 1, 9; 2.16 and elsewhere), the sons of God's good pleasure (1QH 4, 32 f.; 11, 9), God's everlasting plantation (1QS 8, 5; 11, 8), the temple of God,²⁹ the members of the new covenant³⁰—all pictures and designations which the early church likewise applied to itself. Two expressions are especially impressive. The Essenes called themselves "the poor whom Thou hast redeemed" ('abhjone p^edhuth^ekha [1QM 11, 9]), i. e., the poor whom God rescued from destruction, and "the poor of steadfast love" ('abhjone chasadh [1QH 5, 22], i. e., the poor who are privileged to experience and comprehend the full glory of divine grace.³¹ In truth here we hear an early Christian ring, here the border of Judaism has been crossed with one step.

²⁹ 1QS 8, 5: "a House of Holiness for Israel."

³⁰ CD 6, 19; 8, 21 and its parallels, 19, 33 f.; 20, 12.

³¹ I am indebted to my son Gert Jeremias for this reference.

Is not the Essene movement then actually a forerunner of Christianity?

3. *The Gulf Between the Essenes and Jesus*

Precisely at this point, however, we see the depth of the gulf which separates the Essenes from Jesus. Herein lies the decisive theological significance of the new texts. The Essenes knew themselves to be the remnant (CD 1, 4; 1QM 13, 8; 1QH 6, 8). What does this mean?

The concept of the remnant, which would win ever greater significance in years to come, is encountered for the first time in the prophet Elijah in the 9th century B. C. It was the promise of the prophets that even in His most terrible judgments God will allow a remnant to remain. Thus we read in 1 Kings 19:18: "Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." This concept of the remnant is taken up by the literary prophets, first by Amos (4:11: "You were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to Me," says the Lord"), then by Isaiah (1:9: "If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah"), and by Micah (4:7). Later it was represented above all by Zephaniah (3:12: "For I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly. They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord") and Zechariah (13:7-9). This concept determined to an extraordinary degree the religious ideas of Judaism at the time of Jesus. In fact, one could go so far as to say that the concept of the remnant possessed fundamental significance for Hellenistic Judaism. The heart of the

pious at the time of Jesus found its stimulus in this concept.³²

The proof for this is the Pharisaic movement. Its members were predominantly laymen, who united in pious conventicles. The regulations of these Pharisaic groups show us that their concern was to represent the true priestly salvation community, the true Israel. This was also the concern of the Essenes. As we have already heard, they wanted to be the saints of God, "the perfect of the way" (1QS 4, 22), "the congregation of the people of perfect holiness" (CD 20, 2), "the sons of righteousness" (1QS 3, 20), "a holy of holies" (1QS 8, 5 f. 8 f. 9, 6), the true people of God, the Israel of the end times. They considered themselves called "to provide atonement for offending and trespassing, transgression and sin, to gain divine good pleasure for the land" (1QS 9, 4). In the impending final struggle between light and darkness they wanted to be the elite troops of God, the instrument of God's vengeance which would achieve the victory. This goal they attempted to achieve through strictest obedience to the Law. The Essene priests and the laymen who affiliated with them were determined to lead a life of priestly purity. Because the priests who lived scattered around the country and performed their one-week service at the temple in Jerusalem only twice a year were forbidden to have sexual intercourse during their week of service, the Essenes rejected marriage altogether. Because the priests on duty had to keep themselves in a state of highest Levitical purity, the Essenes wore white

³² Joachim Jeremias, "Der Gedanke des 'Heiligen Restes' im Spätjudentum und in der Verkündigung Jesu," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, XLII (1949), 184-94.

garments and purified themselves daily with ritual baths. They wanted to be a truly priestly community in their moral lives, in their community life, in prayer and meditation, but also in their strict observance of the Law, particularly in their keeping of the Sabbath, and in their austere monastic discipline. The earnestness of their demand for repentance, the rigorous asceticism which they enforced upon their members, the intense endeavor to achieve the highest degree of purity—in all this they pursued the one purpose of becoming the pure people of God. Their texts are impressive and moving documents that give evidence of the struggle to become the remnant community.

The presupposition for the attainment of this goal was the strictest exclusiveness, separation of the saints from the sinners. Upon entering the order, a man had to obligate himself

to love all that He (God) has chosen, and
to hate all that He has rejected,

and again:

to love all the sons of light in God's community, each according to his lot, and hate all the sons of darkness, each according to his guilt in God's vengeance. (1QS 1, 9—11, cf. 9, 16.21—24; 10, 19—21)

At the initiation ceremony, the curse of the "men of Belial's fate" took place; in other words, the curse of the unrepentant sinners standing under the lordship of Satan:

Be cursed without mercy because of the darkness of your deeds, be damned in the darkness of everlasting fire! May God not heed you when you call on Him, nor pardon you by blotting out your sin! May He raise His angry face toward you for ven-

geance! May there be no peace for you
. . . (1QS 2, 7—9)

A terrible prayer! The Essenes separated themselves from the great majority whom they saw as hopeless sinners consigned to destruction. They excluded even the physically disabled; for only those without physical blemish were permitted to officiate as priests in the temple, and they themselves wanted to be the priestly community of the last days. Thus we read: "No madman, lunatic, simpleton, or insane man, no blind, lame, limping, or deaf man, and no minor shall be received into the community, for the holy angels are in its midst."³³ Similarly, we read in the description of the community of the last days:

And no man smitten with any human uncleanness shall enter the assembly of God.

. . . No man smitten in his flesh, or paralyzed in his feet or hands, or lame, or blind, or deaf, or dumb, or smitten in his flesh with a visible blemish; no old or tottery man who is unable to stand still in the midst of the congregation—none of these shall come to hold office among the congregation of the Men of the Name, for the holy angels are in their congregation.

(1 QSa 2, 3—9)

Into this world came Jesus. Against all these attempts to realize the community of saints through human action He set His radical "No!" He came to bring home the lost children of God. He called the tax collectors and sinners, the ostracized and rejected, to His table. He called those along the highways and hedges to God's Great Supper (Luke 14:16-24). Unrelentingly He showed particularly the pious that

³³ 4QD^b = CD 15, 15—17 (CD is a badly damaged text), cf. Milik, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

their self-righteousness was separating them radically from God. We who have been acquainted with the Gospel since childhood are no longer able to fathom what a complete reversal of piety it was for the people of that time that Jesus preached a God *who was concerned with sinners*. Every page of the Gospels points out how offensive, exciting, and stirring it was that Jesus rejected man's every claim before God and called sinners to salvation. Again and again Jesus was asked why He dealt so incomprehensibly. Ever and again, especially in His parables, He gave the one answer: This is how God is! He is like the father who opens the door of the house to the straying and lost child. He is like the shepherd who rejoices when the lost sheep is found. He is like the host who invites the poor and the beggars to his table. He rejoices more over the one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous. He is the God of the lowly and the despairing. His goodness and mercy are without bounds. This is how God is!

And to that He added: Where this message is understood, where men no longer build on their own pious performance but rather on the grace of God alone, where hopeless prodigals are brought home and where lost children encounter the love of a father, there salvation is no distant goal which a man must earn for himself, but there—already here, already today—the kingdom of God is being realized. The joy of the wedding guests bursts forth, the joy of the man who has found the costly pearl, the great treasure, and who, overpowered, asks for nothing more, but senselessly surrenders all that he has because all other values have faded away in the face of the greater value. It is the joy of son-

ship, the joy of the day of salvation, which anoints the head with oil. It is the joy which is so great that God Himself shares in it: "There will be . . . joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7; cf. 15:10). In the message of Jesus this joy over the day of salvation is accompanied by love—love for the poor, love for the straying and the guilt-burdened, love even for enemies.

This is the theological significance of the new texts: They allow us to see more clearly than was previously possible *the contrast between Jesus and the piety of His time*. There in that monastery at the Dead Sea lived in extreme penitence the small band of ascetics, the saints of God, the elite troops of the Highest, concerned about perfect purity, obligated to the sternest legal code, relentlessly hating the enemies of God and separating themselves from the lost—yes, even from the lame and the blind. Here is He who proclaims to the poor and the miserable, the beggars before God, the incomprehensibility and the boundlessness of God's love and the dawn of the day of joy in which the blind see and the lame walk and the poor have the Good News preached to them. They are two worlds which stand in contrast to one another: There in Qumran the world of the Law and of legalism driven to its ultimate limits in its admirable earnestness but also in the narrowness of its love; here the world of the Good News with its proclamation of the boundless love of God and the joy of the pardoned children of God. That we are able to appreciate the glory and the uniqueness of Jesus' proclamation even better than before—that is the great service which the new texts render us.

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