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Edmund Wilson and The Dead Sea Scrolls

RICHARD J. CRONIN

THE ancient manuscripts discovered near the Dead Sea since 1947 and known today as the "Dead Sea Scrolls" have become the talk not only of biblical scholars but of the ordinary well-informed reader as well. This fact is attested to by the number and the popularity of books recently published on the subject. There is, for instance, the excellent and absorbingly-readable book by Professor Millar Burrows, formerly of the American School of Oriental Research in Palestine and at present connected with Yale University. His book is entitled *The Dead Sea Scrolls* and has gone through several reprintings.¹ Another is by the world-famous biblical and archaeological scholar of Johns Hopkins University, Professor William Albright, who was one of the first to give an authoritative opinion regarding the date of the manuscripts. His book is entitled *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands*.²

These two works are by noted scholars in the field. But the subject of the Dead Sea Scrolls has entered the field of the "best-sellers" in a work written not by a biblical scholar or archaeologist but by a well-known literary critic and book-reviewer for the magazine *The New Yorker*, Mr. Edmund Wilson. His book is entitled *The Scrolls of the Dead Sea*.³

¹ Millar Burrows *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York, The Viking Press, 1955). Cited hereafter as Burrows.

² William F. Albright *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands* (New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1955). Cited hereafter as Albright.

³ Edmund Wilson *The Scrolls of the Dead Sea* (New York, Oxford University Press 1955). Cited hereafter as Wilson.

This book is not only a best-seller: it has been one of the best-selling best-sellers since its publication last October. And no wonder, for Mr. Wilson is an accomplished writer who tells the story of the greatest manuscript find of modern times with the ease of a skilled reporter. Indeed it was as a reporter that Mr. Wilson wrote this book. It is an expanded form of his article in *The New Yorker* for 14 May 1955 entitled "A Reporter at Large: The Scrolls from the Dead Sea."

"At some point rather early in the Spring of 1947, a Bedouin boy called Muhammed the Wolf was minding some goats near a cliff on the Western shore of the Dead Sea. Climbing up after one that had strayed, he noticed a cave that he had not seen before, and he idly threw a stone into it. There was an unfamiliar sound of breakage..." Thus effortlessly begins Edmund Wilson's book (though a much more critical account, with greater attention to accuracy of detail, is given by Millar Burrows). Unfortunately, although Mr. Wilson gives us a highly readable account of undebatable facts about the scrolls, he also gives us a very debatable interpretation of those facts. The Dead Sea Scrolls (Mr. Wilson would have us believe) would so explain the origin of Christianity as to explain away its claim to be a divinely revealed religion.

Mr. Wilson's interpretation (and indeed much of his information) is not entirely original. Though its expression is highly personal, it is based on the work of a French scholar, an ex-priest, M. Dupont-Sommer, Professor of Semitic Languages and Civilizations at the Sorbonne. One of Dupont-Sommer's works was translated into English in 1952⁴ and another in 1955.⁵

Nor are Mr. Edmund Wilson and Professor Dupont-Sommer the only ones to advocate their interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In January 1956, in three radio talks over the

⁴ A. Dupont-Sommer *The Dead Sea Scrolls: a Preliminary Survey* translated from the French by E. Margaret Rowley (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1952). Cited hereafter as Sommer-Rowley.

⁵ A. Dupont-Sommer *The Jewish Sect of Qumran and the Essenes* translated from the French by R. D. Barnett (New York, Macmillan, 1955). Cited hereafter as Sommer-Barnett.

British Broadcasting Company, Professor John Allegro, Lecturer in Semitic Philology at the University of Manchester, advanced an interpretation of the scrolls very similar to that of Professor Dupont-Sommer and Mr. Edmund Wilson.

We believe that the interpretations of these three men are not borne out by the evidence. Since the information necessary to correct their viewpoint is not readily available to the average reader, we shall try in this article to outline their opinions and to show where these are inadequate. To do this properly, we should give a summary of the essential information regarding the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Our discussion might conveniently follow this outline: I. The First Discovery. II. Later Discoveries. III. The Date of These Scrolls. IV. By Whom Were These Scrolls Written? V. Mr. Wilson's Interpretation. VI. Professor Dupont-Sommer's Interpretation. VII. Professor Allegro's Interpretation.

I. THE FIRST DISCOVERY

In February or March of 1947, a young Bedouin boy of the Taamirah tribe named Muhammed "the Wolf" discovered eleven leather scrolls wrapped in linen in a cave near the North-West corner of the Dead Sea.⁶ The Scrolls had been stored in clay jars, most of which were by now broken. The cave was hollowed out of the face of a steep cliff a little over a mile from the shore of the Dead Sea and rising a thousand feet above the level of the water. About a half mile to the South was the ancient site of Khirbet Qumran near Wady Qumran (Khirbet and Wady being respectively the Arabic words for ruin and valley). Even though the scrolls were badly decomposed at the ends, Bedouin merchants decided due to the strange writing still visible on sections of them to sell them in Jerusalem.

In July of 1947, through two Syrian Orthodox merchants who were in contact with the Bedouins, the Metropolitan Samuel of the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of St. Mark was

⁶ The account of this first discovery will be found in Burrows 1-28 and Sommer-Barnett 1-13.

able to purchase five of the scrolls. These scrolls included: 1) a large scroll, twenty-four feet long, of the entire Book of Isaiah; 2) two scrolls, together about six feet long, which made up a single composition subsequently named *The Manual of Discipline*; 3) a five-foot scroll containing a commentary on the first two chapters of Habakkuk; 4) and a scroll in Aramaic which turned out to be a commentary on *Genesis* interwoven with legends of the Patriarchs, although it was originally considered the lost book of Lamech.

In November of 1947, the late Dr. E. L. Sukenik, then Professor of Archaeology at the Hebrew University, bought six other scrolls of the original find, together with two clay jars in which the Bedouins claimed to have found the manuscripts. These scrolls when finally unrolled proved to be parts of three different compositions. 1) There was a scroll containing sections of the Book of Isaiah. It had broken up into one large and several smaller pieces. The larger piece contained from Chapter 38 to the end of Isaiah; the smaller pieces contained excerpts from Chapters 10, 19-30, and 35-40. 2) A second scroll, about nine feet long, contained the whole of a composition which scholars entitled *The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness*, or, as it is more briefly referred to, the "War Scroll." 3) Finally four scrolls were purchased that contained twenty psalms of thanksgiving and praise. Although other smaller fragments were eventually acquired by the Metropolitan Samuel and Professor Sukenik from the Bedouins, these eleven scrolls made up the bulk of the first find.

With the exception of the St. Mark's Monastery manuscript and the Hebrew University manuscript of Isaiah, the remainder of the scrolls were non-biblical works. Habakkuk was one of the twelve minor prophets, but aside from the lines quoted from Habakkuk, the scroll which the Metropolitan Samuel purchased was mainly a "commentary" by some unknown author who applied the prophecies of Habakkuk to his own time. This scroll, as will be seen, is central to the interpretation of Mr. Wilson. This Commentary, together with the "War Scroll", *The Manual of Discipline*, and the *Thanksgiving Psalms* were all religious in nature and were apparently

copied out by some religious sect, who if they did not compose these works, sufficiently esteemed them to preserve them. *The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness* contains instructions for a war between the tribes of Levi, Judah and Benjamin (the Sons of Light) and the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites and Greeks (the Sons of Darkness). It is not clear whether these instructions were for a real war or an eschatological war, i.e. a war figuratively described in contemporaneous terms but predicted to take place at the end of time. The Manual of Discipline is a compilation of liturgical directions and rules of admission and government for the religious sect, while the Thanksgiving Psalms are a mosaic of biblical reminiscences.

II. LATER DISCOVERIES

Once the initial discovery of scrolls in Qumran I was publicized, scholars were anxious to attempt further discoveries. The outbreak of hostilities in Palestine, however, delayed any further work until early in 1949. Once exploration was again possible, fresh discoveries followed in rapid succession. These discoveries can be considered under two groupings: 1) the excavations which identified Qumran I and linked it with the nearby Khirbet Qumran, and 2) the discovery of additional manuscripts and manuscript fragments in other caves of the vicinity.

On 28 January 1949 Colonel Ashton, archaeological adviser to the Arab Legion, and Captain Akkash-el-Zebn, a member of the Legion, investigated what was reported to be the original cave Qumran I. Unfortunately, the cave had recently been ransacked by marauders so that an excavation by trained archaeologists was required to guarantee the identity of the cave. Father Roland de Vaux, O. P. of the Ecole Biblique and Mr. G. L. Harding, Inspector of Antiquities for the Jordan Government, undertook such an expedition in the beginning of February 1949.⁷ After three weeks' work, from the manus-

⁷ Burrows 33-36; Sommer-Rowley 14-17; O. R. Sellers "Excavation of the 'Manuscript' Cave at Ain Fashkha" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* No. 114 (April 1949) 5-9.

cript fragments, the potsherds and the linen wrappings that they had collected, Father de Vaux and Mr. Harding felt certain that the cave was Qumran I. An additional 600 manuscript fragments were found in the course of this investigation. From the many different compositions of which these fragments had once been part, together with the number of jars estimated to be in the cave, Qumran I must have contained at one time over 200 scrolls.⁸

With Qumran I identified, Father de Vaux and Mr. Harding made some preliminary soundings at the nearby Khirbet Qumran. It was originally believed to be the ruin of an old Roman fort from the Third or Fourth Century A.D. and to have no connection with the nearby cave. The preliminary soundings discovered nothing to change this opinion although a large cemetery of over a thousand graves was found between the fort and the shore of the Dead Sea. From November 24 to December 12, 1951, however, Father de Vaux and Mr. Harding made a more thorough excavation of the ruin and uncovered a building about 118 feet long and 94 feet wide, besides several auxiliary buildings.⁹ From the coins and pottery found at this level of excavation, it seemed certain that the building had been occupied in the First Century A.D. The series of coins discovered dated from the Procurators of the Emperor Augustus (6 A.D.) until the First Jewish Revolt (66-70 A.D.).

A later expedition of Father de Vaux and Mr. Harding from February 9 to April 24, 1953 revealed a still earlier level of occupation which had ended with an earthquake which occurred approximately in 30 B.C.¹⁰ Coins at this earlier level went as far back as the period of John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.). In one large room of this building were found long tables (suitable as desks) and copper inkwells, some of which still contained ink in a dried-up condition. From these excava-

⁸ Sommer-Rowley 17.

⁹ Burrows 54-56; Sommer-Barnett 167-171; Roland de Vaux, O.P. "Fouilles au Khirbet Qumran" *Reveu biblique* 61 (janvier 1954) 83-106.

¹⁰ Burrows 64-65; Sommer-Barnett 167-171; R. de Vaux, O.P. "Fouilles au Khirbet Qumran" *Revue biblique* 61 (avril 1954) 206-236.

tions it was evident that the ruin was not a Roman fort. The building must have been occupied both at the time when the scrolls were written and later when they were stored in Qumran I. It must have housed a large community, and the large room with desks and inkwells must have served as scriptorium. The large size of the cemetery also indicated that other members of the community may have lived in the nearby caves, coming to the central building for community functions.

Aside from the excavations at Qumran I and Khirbet Qumran, further valuable manuscript discoveries were provided by a thorough investigation of other caves in the Wady Qumran area. From March 10 to March 29, 1952 Father de Vaux and Professor William L. Reed of Texas Christian University led the Qumran Cave Expedition which investigated the caves within a five-mile radius of Qumran I.¹¹ Almost forty other caves which had been used for storage were discovered. In two of these caves were found manuscript fragments. In one of them were discovered two copper scrolls. When unrolled, their length was estimated to be about eight feet. Apparently from the holes at the end of each of these scrolls they had once been riveted together, or, as Father de Vaux conjectured, nailed to the wall of the central building. The scrolls were so oxidized by the time they were found that unrolling them presented a difficult problem. Also, one scroll was made up of two sheets that had practically melted together. They finally had to be cut apart by a special metal saw. This process has only recently been completed.¹² Their contents have not as yet been published, but the very material on which they were written indicates their composers must have placed a special value on their contents.

On 22 September 1952, a further expedition to this same Wady Qumran area discovered a chamber which contained thousands of manuscript fragments.¹³ This chamber was

¹¹ Burrows 59-61; Sommer-Barnett 171-174; R. de Vaux "Exploration de la region de Qumran" *Revue biblique* 60 (octobre 1953) 540-561.

¹² *Manchester Guardian Weekly* 74 (8 March 1956) 14.

¹³ Burrows 62-63; Sommer-Barnett 173.

named Qumran IV. At least 60 different compositions have already been recognized from among the fragments discovered in this chamber, and 330 different manuscripts have been identified, 90 of them biblical. The value of Qumran IV may even surpass the original finds in Qumran I. Besides these discoveries in the Wady Qumran area, numerous manuscripts and manuscript fragments, mostly from the early centuries A.D., have been located in the caves of Wady Murabbaat, 11 miles South of Qumran I,¹⁴ and in Wady en-Nar, 9 miles South-East of Jerusalem in a continuation of the Kedron Valley.¹⁵

Since the original discovery of 1947, many complete manuscripts and tens of thousands of manuscript fragments have been found. These fragments vary in size from pieces containing several columns to others containing only a few letters. At present these discoveries are housed in the Palestine Archaeological Museum where under the direction of Father de Vaux a small group of scholars is patiently cleaning, sorting and identifying them. The correlation and publication of all these fragments will at the very least take ten years.¹⁶

III. THE DATE OF THE SCROLLS

Once the Qumran Scrolls were discovered, scholars were faced with the problem of dating their finds. When were these scrolls of Qumran I written? The correct answer to that question would of course be a great help in answering the still more important question: how should these scrolls be interpreted? Fortunately, in recent years the methods of dating by archaeology, by the radio carbon-14 process, and by paleography have been greatly refined. All these methods have been brought to bear on the problem of dating the scrolls of Qumran I. Since the method of dating from the historical allusions in the texts of the scrolls presents special difficulties, it will be considered separately.

¹⁴ Burrows 57-59; Sommer-Barnett 8-13, 174-177; R. de Vaux "Les Grottes de Murabbaat et leurs documents" *Revue biblique* 60 (avril 1953) 245-267.

¹⁵ Burrows 61; Sommer-Barnett 178-179.

¹⁶ Wilson 108-110.

Although archaeology cannot answer precisely when the scrolls were written, it can tell us when the scrolls were deposited in Qumran I. This automatically determines the latest possible date for the composition of the scrolls. In the excavation of Father de Vaux and Mr. Harding at Khirbet Qumran in 1951 a jar was discovered which was identical in type with the jars used to store the manuscripts in Qumran I. From the coins found with it, this jar of Khirbet Qumran—and consequently the identical type of jar in the cave—could be dated between 6 A.D. and 70 A.D. Since the scrolls were probably stored in Qumran I when the building was deserted (the linen wrappings coated with pitch indicate they were not placed there for immediate use), the date when the manuscripts were placed in the cave would be close to 70 A.D.¹⁷

The linen wrappings in which the scrolls were found offered another confirmatory indication of the antiquity of the scrolls, although not as precise as the archaeological method just mentioned. Two different methods of dating were applied to these wrappings. First, sections of the linen were sent to the H.M. Norfolk Flax Establishment in England and to the Textile Museum in Washington. From a microscope examination of the weave, both of these independent investigations confirmed that the linen was an ancient Palestinian product, without however trying to establish any more precise date.

Secondly, in 1950 another section of the linen was sent to W. F. Libby of the Institute of Nuclear Physics of the University of Chicago to be tested by the radio carbon-14 process. By measuring the amount of radioactive carbon present in the linen, this process can estimate its age within a margin of error of 200 years. Dr. Libby determined that the linen was 1917 years old, which (taking into account the margin of error) placed its manufacture somewhere between 167 B.C. and 233 A.D.¹⁸

¹⁷ Cf. *supra* notes 9 and 10; also Burrows 73-83.

¹⁸ Burrows 82; Willard F. Libby *Radio Carbon Dating* (Chicago 1952) p. 72.

To determine when the scrolls were actually written, scholars turn to paleography, the science which studies the gradual modification of the script in which the manuscripts are written. By itself paleography cannot determine the date of a particular script. It can only say that one type of script is older or more recent than another. Yet, comparing the script of a manuscript of unknown date with that of a manuscript of known date, the date of the unknown manuscript can be estimated. Professor S. A. Birnbaum of the University of London has in this manner dated the St. Mark's Monastery Isaiah Scroll (the oldest of the Qumran 1 scrolls) between 175 and 150 B.C.¹⁹ Professor Albright of Johns Hopkins University has judged the script of the "War Scroll" (the most recent of the scrolls) to belong to the first decades of the First Century A.D.²⁰

The most disputed method of dating the Qumran Scrolls has been the attempt to identify the historical allusions in the texts of the scrolls with actual events or persons of Jewish history. Since the Habakkuk Commentary is rich in such allusions and plays an important part in Mr. Wilson's interpretation of the scrolls, it can serve to illustrate the difficulty of identifying historical events from the allusions made in this scroll. What is said here of the caution that is required for dating can equally apply to historical parallels drawn between the Habakkuk Commentary and the origins of Christianity.

The method of dating a manuscript from historical allusions depends on the clarity of the allusions made in the manuscript. In the Habakkuk Commentary the allusions in the text are not clear, and the period of Jewish history to which the Commentary refers is not as thoroughly known as historians would wish.

But even if the allusions in the Habakkuk Commentary were clearer, the very number of them would present difficulty.

¹⁹ Burrows 36, 89; Solomon A. Birnbaum "The Dates of the Cave Scrolls" *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* No. 115 (October 1949) 20-22.

²⁰ Albright 130.

Among his contemporaries to whom the writer of the scroll refers are: 1) the Kittim, the foreign enemies of the Qumran sect; 2) the Teacher of Righteousness, a priest of the sect with the power of interpreting the prophets; 3) The House of Absalom, opponents of the Teacher of Righteousness; 4) the Wicked Priest and the Preacher of the Lie, other enemies of the Teacher of Righteousness. These titles are so generic it is practically impossible to link them with certainty to a specific figure of Jewish history. Nor are single identifications enough. The period in which such an identification is attempted must also provide contemporaries to fit the other allusions as well. Since the Pre-Maccabean (332-168 B.C.), the Maccabean (168-63 B.C.), and the Roman (68 B.C. up to and beyond 70 A.D.) are all possible periods in which the people referred to by the commentator may have lived, Millar Burrows notes that no identification of the historical allusions in the Habakkuk Commentary is completely convincing.²¹

IV. BY WHOM WERE THE SCROLLS WRITTEN

Who precisely were the men who lived in Khirbet Qumran and copied out the Dead Sea Scrolls? Three historians of the First Century A.D.—Pliny the Elder, Josephus, and Philo have given a clue to the solution of this question in their description of the Essene sect. The many close similarities between their account of the Essenes and the description of the Qumran community in the scrolls have convinced most scholars that these two groups were essentially the same.

In his *Natural History*, the Roman historian Pliny gives this short description of the Essenes:

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 whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company²²

²¹ Burrows 185.

²² *Natural History* V. xv. 73 (Pliny, vol. 2, in the Loeb Classical Library).

Roman superiority reasserts itself when Pliny adds that the Essenes recruited their members from "men who, weary of life, have been driven by the vicissitudes of life to adopt their manner of living."

Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, gives a more sympathetic description of the Essenes in his *Every Good Man is Free*.²³ The Essenes' chief concern is the pursuit of virtue. To attain this, they refuse to swear oaths and they observe ceremonial purity. Their study is of morals and religion, particularly the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. They hold all goods in common and possess no slaves. In his *Hypothetica*, Philo further adds that the Essenes only admit adults to their sect and refrain from marriage.²⁴

In *The Jewish War*,²⁵ Josephus ranks the Essenes among the three major Jewish groups of his time. Since he had observed the group at first hand, and may have even lived with them for a while,²⁶ his account is of some value. The Essenes live in various cities and are noted for the brotherly hospitality that they display to visiting members of the sect. They have a piety peculiar to themselves which lays great stress on charity to the poor, on silence, and on moderation in speech. The group has a definite hierarchy of rank. Only after completing the two probationary periods and swearing the initiatory oath, is the candidate allowed to share in the common sacred meal. In the *Antiquities*,²⁷ Josephus mentions the priesthood of the sect which received the harvests of the other members and prepared the sacred meals. Also according to this account, there were about 4000 Essenes at the time Josephus wrote.

The similarities between this account of the historians and the description in the Qumran Scrolls, especially The Manual of Discipline, are striking. The major concern of both the Qumran group and the Essenes was the pursuit of virtue

²³ *Every Good Man is Free* 75-88. (Philo, vol. 9, Loeb).

²⁴ *Hypothetica* 11.1-8. (Philo, vol. 9, Loeb).

²⁵ *The Jewish War* II.119-161. (Josephus, vol. 2, Loeb).

²⁶ *Life* i. (Josephus, vol. 1, Loeb); F. J. Foakes Jackson *Josephus and the Jews* (New York 1930) pp. 6, 79.

²⁷ *Antiq.* xviii.1.

through a study of Scripture and the Law. For both, two probationary periods and an oath of initiation was required before the new member could partake of the common sacred meal. In the Qumran group (as among the Essenes) there were definite grades of membership; all goods were owned by the community; and the later members of the sect most probably were celibates. The two groups do differ, however, on certain points: for example, the prescriptions of sacrifice in the Temple.

Because of this and other differences between the two groups, Professor Burrows holds the following moderate position on the identification of the Essenes with the Qumran sect:

... if several related sects are included under the term Essene, the covenanters [i.e., the Qumran group] may be called Essenes; if by Essene we mean a particular sect, which we assume to be accurately described by the ancient writers, then the covenanters were not Essenes. For the present it seems to me best not to speak of the Qumran sect as Essenes, but rather to say that the Essenes and the covenanters, with other groups of which we know little or nothing, represented the same general type²⁸

V. MR. WILSON'S INTERPRETATION OF THE SCROLLS

With a review of the salient information completed, Mr. Wilson's interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls can now be considered. It should be noted in advance that Mr. Wilson is not a biblical scholar. He is a literary critic and editor, best known perhaps for such books as *Axel's Castle* and *To the Finland Station* and for his columns and book reviews in *The New Yorker*.

What is Mr. Wilson's interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls? Two passages from the fifth chapter of his book ("What would Renan have said?") sum up the essence of his position. They are both carefully, almost subtly, worded. Yet, although the words seem hesitant and diffident, the tone clearly reveals Mr. Wilson's own conviction. The first passage is made up of two rhetorical questions:

²⁸ Burrows 294.

. . . Or will the explanation of Jesus—as well as of Paul—in terms of preexistent factors, the placing him and visualizing him in a definite historical setting, inevitably have the effect of weakening the claims of divinity that have been made for him by the Church? . . . Will or will not this process of elucidation inevitably have the effect of making Jesus seem less superhuman till he has come to appear miraculous only in the sense, say, that Shakespeare is miraculous: in relation to his predecessors? . . . Yes: only the believer can answer this²⁹

A few pages later Mr. Wilson introduces this same thought in a slightly different form.

. . . and it would seem an immense advantage for cultural and social intercourse—that is, for civilization—that the rise of Christianity should, at last, be generally understood as simply an episode of human history rather than propagated as dogma and divine revelation. The study of the Dead Sea Scrolls—with the direction it is now taking—cannot fail, one would think, to conduce to this.³⁰

Reviewing Wilson's *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* for the *New York Times*, Dr. Frank Cross, Professor of Old Testament at McCormick Theological Seminary, clearly pointed out the flaw in Mr. Wilson's interpretation:

What Mr. Wilson is struggling to say, presumably, is that he wishes that people would give up theological interpretations of human history; that on reading the scrolls, the Christian will properly give up his faith once he understands that the primitive Christian community had direct connections with its Jewish past, and that its world view, institutions and so on, are derived from or at least have continuity with the historical milieu of the first century A.D. in Palestine. The presumption is that Christian doctrine regards revelation as the suspension of the normal historical process.

The author is merely expressing a confusion common to the era of the fundamentalist-modernist fights of a generation ago. And it is true that Christians (or *mutatis mutandis* Jews) who share his confusion will be badly shaken up as the implications of the scrolls are spelled out. On the other hand, those acquainted with contemporary theology or with critical biblical scholarship, are well aware that the events conceived in Christian (or Jewish) dogma as "acts of God" are continuous with, and indistinguishable from other events of history so long as they are viewed by the historian as historian. Indeed, the Chris-

²⁹ Wilson 102-104.

³⁰ Wilson 108.

tian doctrine of revelation means just this, that God chooses to give meaning to history, not to suspend it.³¹

Professor William F. Albright of Johns Hopkins University seconded the criticism of Dr. Cross in another review of Mr. Wilson's book:

. . . Mr. Wilson's impression (presumably gained largely from Dupont-Sommer), that theologians are not inclined to accept the new evidence because of dogmatic scruples, is questionable. The reviewer doubts whether any conservative theologian is in the least apprehensive as to what the Scrolls may bring forth, but he does know a number of liberals who are seriously worried about the fate of their pet hypotheses.³²

The criticism of Mr. Wilson's position by these two acknowledged experts is directed more against his ignorance of Christianity than against his misinterpretation of the scrolls themselves. Like so many modern intellectuals, Mr. Wilson links Christianity with "dogma" and hopes that once the light of history is brought to bear on this musty anachronism, all will be over for Christianity. Yet dogma, or Christian belief, has nothing to fear from history because in a true sense it is above history. It starts in history but it does not stop there. So far from fearing history, the whole of Christianity can be said to be based on one historical event whose full meaning is seen in the light of faith. In the simple words of an early Christian dogmatist, "The World became flesh and dwelt among us." The Dead Sea Scrolls do provide us with a fuller knowledge of the world in which this event took place, but they have nothing to say about the faith of Christianity in the central character of that event.

VI. DUPONT-SOMMER

In *The Scrolls of the Dead Sea*, Mr. Wilson compares Dupont-Sommer, Professor of Semitic Languages and Civilizations at the Sorbonne, to the Nineteenth Century rationalist, Renan.

³¹ *New York Times* (16 October 1955) Sunday Book Review Section, p. 31.

³² *New York Herald-Tribune* (16 October 1955) Sunday Book Review Section, p. 3.

Aside from a strong physical resemblance, the comparison is apt in other ways. Like Renan, Dupont-Sommer is an ex-priest. He also shares the same liberal, naturalistic viewpoint on the origin of Christianity as did the author of *La vie de Jésus*. This outlook, unfortunately, seems to have affected the objectivity of Dupont-Sommer's interpretation of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

One of the chief foundations for the parallelism Edmund Wilson finds between Christianity and the beliefs of the Qumran sect is the close link Dupont-Sommer has tried to establish between the "Teacher of Righteousness" and Christ. In his *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, Dupont-Sommer says: "The Galilean Master, as he is presented to us in the writings of the New Testament, appears in many respects as an astonishing reincarnation of the Teacher of Righteousness."³³ To bolster this comparison with Christ, Dupont-Sommer claimed that the Qumran sect believed the Teacher of Righteousness was a divine being who rose from the dead. Both of these claims are based on disputed texts in the Habakkuk Commentary and derived from disputed meanings of the vocabulary involved.

The claim that the Teacher of Righteousness was a divine being to the Qumran sect is based on the commentary following Habakkuk 2.7. The passage on which Dupont-Sommer bases his argument occurs in column 8 and column 9 of the scroll. Column 8 ends in the middle of a sentence; column 9 begins in the middle of a sentence. Between the two columns the original words of the text are missing. The passage as it appears in the scroll reads:

This means the priest who rebelled . . . [Here the words of the text are missing. The text takes up again halfway through a sentence in column 9] . . . his scourge with judgments of wickedness; and horrors of sore diseases they wrought in him, and vengeance in his body of flesh. . . .³⁴

³³ Sommer-Rowley 99. Miss Rowley uses the phrase "Master of Justice" instead of the now accepted term "Teacher of Righteousness." To avoid confusion, the latter term is adopted. Cf. Barnett's note in Sommer-Barnett 160.

³⁴ Burrows 368.

In the text as it stands, therefore, there is no mention of the "Teacher of Righteousness." The only one mentioned explicitly is "the priest who rebelled." Also, it is not clear who the person is who suffers the punishments mentioned in the second part of the text. To establish his argument, Dupont-Sommer conjectures what the missing words of the text were. By inserting his own words he makes the Teacher of Righteousness the subject of the second part of the text and then goes on to draw this startling conclusion:

From all the evidence this passage alludes to the Passion of the Teacher of Righteousness; he was judged, condemned, tortured. He suffered in 'his body of flesh': without doubt he was a divine being who 'became flesh' to live and die as a man.³⁵

Even aside from the dubious reconstruction of the text itself, an argument for divinity based solely on the phrase, "his body of flesh," is as flimsy as it is untenable. Father de Vaux notes that although Paul uses this phrase once to refer to Christ (Colossians 1.22), in the next chapter of the same Epistle (Colossians 2.11) he uses this same phrase without any possible reference to an incarnation since he applies it to the ordinary Christian. The phrase is also used in Ecclesiasticus 23.16 without any of the connotations Dupont-Sommer finds in the words.³⁶ To read Pauline meanings into the Habakkuk Commentary is a gross anachronism.

Dupont-Sommer's argument that the Teacher of Righteousness rose from the dead is also based on a disputed text and the disputed meaning this time of a single word. The word in question occurs in the commentary on Habakkuk 2.15: ". . . and at the time of their festival of rest, the day of atonement, he appeared to them to confound them and to make them stumble on the day of fasting, their Sabbath of rest."³⁷ In the scroll the subject of the verb "appeared" is not clear. Dupont-Sommer again assumes the Teacher of Righteousness is the subject of the verb, and then from the meaning of the verb "appeared" in Hebrew he argues to the resplendent reap-

³⁵ Sommer-Rowley 34.

³⁶ R. de Vaux, O.P. *Revue biblique* 58 (juillet 1951) 441.

³⁷ Burrows 370.

pearance of the Teacher of Righteousness who has risen from the dead to chastise the wicked city.

. . . Thus it is the Teacher of Righteousness, shining with a divine splendor, who himself chastises the wicked city. The verb used here, *hōphā*, 'he was resplendent', occurs several times in the Old Testament to describe the appearance of Yahweh himself. Furthermore the biblical text here commented on contains the words: *so that God may see their feasts*; and this text is applied by the commentator to the Teacher of Righteousness: what an extraordinary apotheosis!³⁸

Bonsirven,³⁹ Elliger⁴⁰ and Burrows⁴¹ all point out that although this verb was used in the Old Testament for the resplendent appearances of Yahweh, it had undergone a continual development in meaning until by the time the Habakkuk Commentary was written the word carried no overtones of a divine or supernatural appearance. Nothing, therefore, can be proved from the single word alone. That the Teacher of Righteousness was a divine being who rose from the dead is in no way proved from the arguments Dupont-Sommer advances to support this assertion. Actually, after these claims were so severely criticised by other scholars, Dupont-Sommer greatly modified them.⁴²

VII. PROFESSOR JOHN ALEGRO

Like Dupont-Sommer, Mr. Allegro in his radio broadcasts tried to establish a very close parallelism between the Teacher of Righteousness and Christ. His claims received such notoriety that they warrant brief consideration here.

Professor Allegro asserted that Alexander Jannaeus, the priest-king who ruled over the Jewish State from 103 to 76 B.C., arrested the Teacher of Righteousness and turned him over to mercenaries to be crucified. He then went on to claim:

³⁸ Sommer-Rowley 44.

³⁹ Joseph Bonsirven, S.J. "Dans l'histoire des origines Chrétiennes" *Études* 268 (février 1951) 217.

⁴⁰ Karl Elliger *Studien zum Habakkuk-Kommentar vom Toten Meer* (Tübingen 1953) pp. 213-218.

⁴¹ Burrows 156.

⁴² Sommer-Barnett 34-36; 150-151; 160-162.

When the Jewish king had left, [the community] took down the broken body of their Master to stand guard over it until Judgment Day. For they believed that the terrible events of their time were surely heralding the visitation of God Himself, when the Kingdom of Heaven [would] come in . . . They believed their Master would rise again and lead his faithful flock (the people of the new testament, as they called themselves) to a new and purified Jerusalem.⁴³

Mr. Allegro also declared that from the pre-Christian Qumran sect had come a document "setting out in full" a messianic banquet akin to the Lord's Supper. This document told of a priestly messiah laying his hands upon the bread and wine, blessing them, and distributing them to the assembly.⁴⁴

On 16 March 1956, in a letter of protest against these claims to the *London Times*, five scholars of the Palestine Archaeological Museum contested the validity of Mr. Allegro's statements.⁴⁵ The letter to the *Times* read:

We have reviewed all the pertinent materials, published and unpublished. We are unable to see in the texts the 'findings' of Mr. Allegro. We find no crucifixion of the 'teacher', no deposition from the cross and no 'broken body of their master' to be stood guard over until Judgment Day.

Therefore, there is no well defined Essenic pattern into which Jesus of Nazareth fits as Mr. Allegro is alleged in one report to have said. It is our conviction that either he has misread the texts or he has built up a chain of conjectures which the materials do not support.⁴⁶

Shortly after this letter, Harold H. Rowley, the senior professor in Manchester's Semitics Department and a former teacher of Mr. Allegro, joined these scholars of the Palestine Archaeological Museum in their protest:

I deplore as unscholarly the presentation to the world of what scholars everywhere have supposed—as I supposed—to be specific statements in an unpublished text to which Mr. Allegro alone had access,

⁴³ *Time* (6 February 1956) 88.

⁴⁴ *New York Times* (5 February 1956) 2, col. 3.

⁴⁵ The scholars who signed the letter to the *London Times* were: Roland de Vaux, Jean Starcky, Joseph Milik, Msgr. Patrick Skehan and John Strugnell.

⁴⁶ Reuter Dispatch, London, 16 March 1956.

when they were only his deductions from evidence which is capable of other interpretations . . . Important documents, for which scholars are eagerly waiting, should not be used to give immature scholars a spurious authority.⁴⁷

In the face of these protests of recognized scholars, Mr. Allegro admitted that his statements were not based on evidence contained in the Dead Sea Scrolls, but largely on inference. In justifying his claims, Mr. Allegro was much more hesitant in tone than he had been previously: "We do have certain vague reference in biblical commentaries from the sect's library which have to be interpreted as best we can."⁴⁸ Competent scholars, it was obvious, were not pleased with the interpretations which Mr. Allegro had made "as best he could."

CONCLUSION

The real tragedy of the sensational claims made by Edmund Wilson, Dupont-Sommer, and John Allegro is not that there is no evidence to support them, but that they obscure the true value of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In a recent symposium in the *New Republic*, Dr. Frank Cross said: "The discoveries are of such importance that one can scarcely exaggerate the force of their impact on textual and historical studies related to the Bible."⁴⁹ The advance in knowledge of the Old Testament text and the Jewish world immediately before the birth of Christianity which these scrolls will make possible is immense. Such solid contributions, however, will not be achieved by hasty popularizations but only by patient, painstaking, scholarly work.

There is no reason to be apprehensive about the knowledge the scrolls may reveal. Christianity, properly understood, has nothing to lose from these discoveries, rather it has much to gain. As Father Gustave Weigel, S.J. suggested in the same symposium of the *New Republic*, theologians should welcome

⁴⁷ *Time* (2 April 1956) 71.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Frank M. Cross "The Church is Precisely Israel" *The New Republic* 134 (9 April 1956) 17.

the new information the Dead Sea Scrolls will provide.⁵⁰ It is not the truth that is to be feared, but only its counterfeits.

Edmund Wilson may have succeeded in bringing the fact of these recent discoveries to the attention of a wide reading public, but the final assessment of their meaning must rest with the quiet, unromantic research of scholars like Father Roland de Vaux and those associated with him at the Palestine Archaeological Museum.

⁵⁰ Gustave Weigel, S.J. "Revelation Foreshadowed" *The New Republic* 134 (9 April 1956) 20.