Faith and Thought

A Journal devoted to the study of the inter-relation
of the Christian revelation and modern research

Vol. 92 Number 3 Summer 1962

F. F. BRUCE, D.D.

The Gospels and Some Recent Discoveries *

IT may well seem strange that the first of a series of lectures in memory of a distinguished surgeon should deal with a subject in the field of biblical criticism and archaeology. It is not so strange that a lecture in this field should be sponsored by the Bristol Library for Biblical Research. But why should an institution which aims at the furtherance of biblical research sponsor this 'Rendle Short Memorial Lecture'?

There is, I believe, another lectureship established in memory of Professor Rendle Short, one which deals with subjects within the range of his own professional interests. But some of his friends in this city have decided that his memory ought further to be honoured by a series of lectures not limited to medical or surgical themes. And let me say at once that I regard it as a high privilege to be invited to deliver the first of these lectures, for not only did I value the friendship of Professor Rendle Short, but I learned to respect his independent and penetrating way of thinking and expressing himself on biblical subjects.

From time to time he was kind enough to spare a few moments from an exceedingly busy life to write to me on some of these subjects. The criticism of the Gospels, for example, interested him greatly, and his studies in this field led him to some quite definite conclusions of his own. Instead of a two-source or a four-source hypothesis of Synoptic origins he preferred a multiple-source hypothesis. In a letter dated 6 December, 1942, he wrote to me as follows:

> I have never seen a convincing reply to Westcott's arguments for the oral theory, and, especially, his point that there is more 'word-for-word' accord in the narrative of the sermons than of the incidents. The variations in arrangement of the incidents in the Synoptists fit an oral source better than a *long* written source. I have seen the story of the healing of the sick of the palsy, where the English wording is so similar in three accounts, with the characteristic parenthesis 'he saith unto the sick of the palsy', quoted as proof positive of a written source; to me it proves the opposite,

* The First Rendle Short Memorial Lecture, sponsored by The Bristol Library for Biblical Research. Delivered in the University of Bristol on 2 March 1962.

> because the three Greek texts contain many little verbal variations. . . . I think . . . that Luke i. 1-4 almost proves that Luke knew of earlier unsatisfactory documents. My present view is that these were unsatisfactory because they were *multiple* and *fragmentary* and *brief*, probably in Aramaic (Torrey half convinces me of this; what say you?), and that the substance of the Gospels is stereotyped oral tradition, embodying, like pebbles in a conglomerate, short sections of written narrative or sermon-recollections. In John, the pebbles are few or absent.

From these words it will be seen that he remained unconvinced by one or two of the most 'assured results' of modern Synoptic criticism; but he had studied the data for himself and formed his conclusions without being influenced by irrelevant presuppositions.

A well-known educationist of our day has tried to account for the apparent paradox that men with a scientific training, when they are devout Christians, tend to be obscurantist in their approach to the Bible. Whatever may be said about this 'paradox', it may confidently be affirmed that Rendle Short was far from providing an example of it. Not only did he study the Scriptures intelligently in Hebrew and Greek but, firmly based as his own faith was, he vigorously contested the view 'that faith ought not to be supported by human learning or apologetics'. On the contrary, he wrote (I quote from a letter of 13 March, 1943):

> I think that those Christian workers who are able should endeavour to protect enquirers, and young Christians, from the unfounded notion that our faith must be believed in the teeth of proved facts to the contrary. Faith will be unstable, and for many persons impossible, if we cannot say that 'we have not followed cunningly devised fables'.

And he certainly carried his convictions into practice, by writing articles and books calculated to show University students and other thinking young people who were not theological specialists that the Christian faith rests on something much more secure than 'cunningly devised fables'. The firm basis of his own faith was always made plain in his writings—an intelligent and wholehearted commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour—and he reckoned no apologetic sufficient which did not bring readers or hearers face to face with the personal challenge of Christ.

It would be difficult to estimate how many people had their faith confirmed at a spiritual epoch in their lives through reading or hearing

Rendle Short. Students of theology as well as others are included in their ranks. I have even had him quoted against me in essays and examination answers written by students of my own. All that I will say on this point is that no teacher of surgery is ever likely to have any dictum of mine quoted against him by a student of his!

The title 'Recent Discoveries and the Gospels' is thus one right within Rendle Short's keenest interests. By 'recent discoveries' I do not mean more incidental discoveries like the discovery in June 1961 at Palestinian Caesarea of a fragmentary Latin inscription in which Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, dedicates a building in honour of the Emperor Tiberius—the first known occurrence of Pilate's name in any ancient inscription. I have in mind rather certain discoveries which underline the question of the total significance of the New Testament gospel. I am concerned in the main with two bodies of ancient literature which have come to light within the past twenty years in the Near East—one in the Nile valley and the other in the wilderness of Judea. The discoveries in Egypt were made before those in Palestine, although they were later in becoming public knowledge. These bodies of literature are the Nag Hammadi papyri and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

You may well think that the light thrown upon the Gospels by both these discoveries, and especially by the former, is disappointingly meagre. Yet it may be of interest to survey them both and try to assess what kind of relevant information they do yield.

I. DISCOVERIES IN EGYPT

The Nag Hammadi papyri are so called because their discovery was first reported in the small town of Nag Hammadi, west of the Nile, some twenty-five miles north of Luxor. The actual place of discovery was about five miles farther north, east of the river, at the site of the ancient city of Chenoboskion, where one of the earliest Christian monasteries was founded about A.D. 320.

In 1945 some peasants, engaged in digging operations at the foot of Jebel et-Tarif, dug into a fourth-century Christian tomb, in which they found a large jar containing thirteen leather-bound codices. These codices proved to contain forty-nine separate documents, amounting in all to about a thousand large folios.

The documents were written in various dialects of Coptic around the fourth century A.D., but many of them represent translations from earlier Greek originals. An examination of their titles was sufficient to

show that this was a Gnostic library; for many of these titles were mentioned in the anti-Gnostic writings of various orthodox Church Fathers as the titles of Gnostic works. Sometimes the Fathers gave not only the titles of these works, but also some indication of their contents; and it must be said that, for all their hostility to Gnosticism, the Fathers do appear to have given a reasonably fair account of the Gnostic books.

Gnosticism—or at least the particular Gnosticism that we are dealing with here—was an attempt to restate the gospel in terms of salvation by knowledge (Gk. *gnosis*). It had as its basic presupposition a world-view which envisaged matter as essentially evil and spirit as essentially good. Any such contact between the two as is involved in the biblical doctrines of creation, incarnation and resurrection was out of the question. The 'fall' in Gnosticism was the fall of particles of pure spirit from the upper realm of light to be imprisoned in bodies of matter; redemption was the liberation of these particles from their prison-houses so that they could ascend to their homeland of light once more. The redeemer must therefore be the revealer of the true knowledge, by which alone this liberation could be effective; the true and saving knowledge was believed to be accessible only to a spiritual élite. In Christian Gnosticism the role of revealer is filled by Jesus, and it is this Gnostic Jesus who figures in these documents.

The Secret Doctrine of John

For example, the *Secret Doctrine of John*[1] records a revelation purporting to have been made to the apostle John by the glorified Christ. It begins:

> One day, when John the brother of James (these are the two sons of Zebedee) had come up to the temple, a Pharisee named Arimanaios came up to him and said: 'Where is your Master whom you used to follow?' He said to him: 'He has gone back to the place from which He came.' The Pharisee replied: 'This Nazarene deluded you and led you astray; He closed your hearts and took you away from the traditions of your fathers.' When I heard that [says John], I came away from the sanctuary to a desolate spot, and with great sorrow of heart I thought: 'How then was the Redeemer appointed and why was He sent into the world by His Father who

[1] Known not only from the Nag Hammadi collection but also from the Berlin Coptic Papyrus 8502, on the basis of which its *editio princeps* was published by Walter Till in 1955. An English translation is given in *Gnosticism: An Anthology*, edited by R. M. Grant (London, 1961), pp. 69 ff.

> sent Him? And who *is* His Father? And what is the nature of that aeon to which we shall go? He said to us: "This aeon has taken on the form of that aeon which shall never pass away." But He did not teach us about that aeon, of what nature it is.' Straightway as I thought that, heaven opened, the whole creation was radiant with an unearthly light, and the whole world was shaken. I was afraid and fell to the ground.

Then John tells how the exalted Christ appeared to him in the role of the Gnostic Redeemer, and promised to be with John and his fellow-disciples always. This promise reminds one of Matt. xxviii. 19 f., but the trinitarian language of the canonical Gospel is replaced by the formula: 'I am the Father, I am the Mother,[1] I am the Son.' John goes on to describe how the Christ gave him an account of the origin of the world, of man and of evil, based on a Gnosticising interpretation of Genesis i-vi, and of the ultimate destiny of souls.

Unlike the canonical Apocalypse of John, which records a revelation by the risen Christ of 'things which must shortly come to pass', this apocryphon is more interested in that which was in the beginning. But as for any light on the original Gospel story, it affords us precisely nothing.

Gnostic Gospels

The titles of some other Nag Hammadi documents which have been published to date might encourage us, however, to hope that some new gospel material was now available—such titles as the *Gospel of Truth*, the *Gospel of Philip*, and the *Gospel of Thomas*. But when we get down to detailed study it appears that the only one which shows any signs of contact with the first-century gospel tradition is the last-named, and even the *Gospel of Thomas* has little enough to offer us.

The Gospel of Truth

The first of the Nag Hammadi texts to be published was the one entitled the *Gospel of Truth*. This was because, at an early date after the initial discovery, the codex containing this document parted company with its companions (which remained in Egypt) and was acquired by the Jung Institute in Zürich, whence it is known as the 'Jung Codex'. It will in due course go back to Cairo to rejoin its companions in the

[1] The 'Mother' is probably the Holy Spirit, since the word 'spirit' is feminine in Hebrew (*ruach*) and Aramaic (*rucha*). So, in the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, Jesus speaks of 'my mother the Holy Spirit'.

Coptic Museum there. The *Gospel of Truth* is the most important of the five documents contained in this codex, and was first published in 1956.[1]

Some of the early Christian Fathers refer to the *Gospel of Truth* as a manifesto of the Valentinian school of Gnosticism. Now that the document itself is at last available for study, its character can be clearly recognised. It is not only Valentinian in tendency, but could well be the work of Valentinus himself, founder of the school, who flourished in the mid-second century A.D. Valentinus did not stray far from orthodox Christianity; he appears to have been in and out of membership of the church at Rome more than once, and his standing in that church was so high at one time that there was a distinct possibility of his being made bishop of Rome. What we have in the *Gospel of Truth* is a series of meditations or speculations on certain aspects of the gospel. The work itself is not intended to be a 'gospel'; it is a treatise *on* the gospel. It was not designed to take the place of, or even to be added to, the canonical Gospels. So far as his attitude to the canonical books of the New Testament was concerned, Valentinus was completely orthodox, as even Tertullian, that ruthless opponent of the Gnostics, acknowledged. 'Valentinus', he said, 'accepts the whole [New] Testament.'[2] This statement is confirmed by the *Gospel of Truth*, which shows that 'round about 140–150 a collection of writings was known at Rome and accepted as authoritative which was virtually identical with our New Testament'.[3] But the followers of Valentinus seized on certain elements in his speculative treatment of the gospel and developed them in a distinctively Gnostic direction.

The Gospel according to Philip

Nor do we find more light on the gospel period from the document which is named, in its colophon, the *Gospel according to Philip*. This is a Coptic anthology of 127 *obiter dicta* and meditations reflecting the Valentinian outlook. Some of these are ascribed to Jesus;[4] others are

[1] A reliable English translation of the Coptic text, with introduction and notes, has been provided by Dr Kendrick Grobel (London, 1960).

[2] *Praescriptio* 38.

[3] W. C. van Unnik, in *The Jung Codex* (ed. F. L. Cross, London, 1955), p. 124.

[4] E.g. No. 18, 'The Lord said to the disciples: Ye sons of the kingdom, come into the Father's house and take nothing away!'; No. 57, 'The Lord said: Blessed is he who exists before he came into being; for he who exists both was and will be'; No. 69, 'The Lord said: I am come to make the nether equal to the upper and the outer equal to the inner.'

based on canonical sayings of His, without His being explicitly named;[1] some are reminiscent of other New Testament passages, outside the Gospels.[2]

If this document does not illuminate the gospel narrative, however, it is useful for the insight it affords into Valentinian mysteries and sacraments. Its chief themes are these four: (i) Adam and Paradise;[3] (ii) speculation on creation and generation;[4] (iii) the bride, the bridegroom and the bridechamber (a Gnostic variation on the canonical theme of John iii. 29);[5] (iv) the Valentinian sacraments—baptism, the eucharist, unction, and the 'mystery of the bridechamber'.[6]

The Gospel according to Thomas

More relevant to our quest is the document which immediately precedes the *Gospel of Philip* in one of the Nag Hammadi codices, a collection of about 114 sayings ascribed to Jesus, which is described in its colophon as the *Gospel according to Thomas*.[7] The significance of this title is made plain by the words with which the document opens:

> These are the secret sayings which Jesus the Living One spoke and Didymus Judas Thomas wrote down.

It is not the sayings themselves that are secret, however, but their interpretation; and that is seen to have been an interpretation in keeping with the general principles of Gnosticism, and more particularly with the principles of the Naassene or Ophite sect of Gnostics (so called because of the respect paid to the serpent—Heb. *nahash*, Gk. *ophis*—which imparted to mankind the gift of knowledge).

About half of the sayings preserved in the *Gospel of Thomas* bear a close resemblance to recorded sayings of Jesus in the canonical Gospels.

[1] E.g. No. 72, a meditation on the cry of dereliction; No. 126, a meditation on words similar to those of Matt. xv. 13: 'Every plant of heaven is planted by my heavenly Father, and cannot be plucked up again.'

[2] E.g. No. 37, 'What the father possesses belongs to the son; but so long as the son is small, he is entrusted with nothing that belongs to him; when he becomes a man, his father gives him all that he possesses' (cf. Gal. iv. 1 f.).

[3] Nos. 13, 14, 15, 28, 41, 42, 71, 78, 79, 80, 83, 84, 92, 94.

[4] Nos. 1, 29, 41, 84, 86, 99, 102, 120, 121.

[5] Nos. 61, 67, 82, 122.

[6] Nos. 24, 25, 43, 59, 66, 67, 68, 74, 75, 76, 90, 92, 95, 97, 98, 100, 101, 108, 109, 111. Since this lecture was delivered, an English edition of this document has appeared: *The Gospel of Philip*, by R. McL. Wilson (London, 1962). A German version with commentary by H. M. Schenke appeared in the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, **84** (1959), cols. 1-26.

[7] A fuller account is given in an article, 'The Gospel of Thomas', appearing in FAITH AND THOUGHT, **92**, no. 1 (Summer 1961), 3 ff.

Some of the others are known as quotations in early Christian writers, and some are known from the fragmentary sayings of Jesus found some sixty years ago on papyrus scraps from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. Of these fragmentary sayings seven appear on Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1, discovered in 1897, and six on Papyrus 654 and two or three on Papyrus 655, both of which were discovered in 1903.

It is now quite clear that these Oxyrhynchus fragments belong to the Greek original of the compilation which we now have in a Coptic version as the *Gospel of Thomas*, although the Coptic version represents a different recension from that represented by the Oxyrhynchus sayings—a recension in which the Gnostic emphasis is more pronounced than in the Greek recension.

Can we accept some of the uncanonical sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* as genuine utterances of Jesus? Perhaps we can, but only after the most critical scrutiny. Certainly this compilation has no real claim to be described as a fifth 'Gospel' alongside the canonical four. In spite of the language of its colophon, it is not, properly speaking, a Gospel at all. Even a compilation consisting entirely of sayings of Jesus of unimpeachable authenticity would not be a Gospel. *The Gospel of Thomas* does indeed encourage us in the belief that other compilations or digests of the sayings of Jesus circulated in the early Church. One of these—no doubt one of the earliest—has been thought to lie behind our canonical Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and to have been drawn upon by the writers of these two Gospels for the material which they have in common but which is not found in Mark. But even that early 'Sayings Source'—or, as it might well be called, 'The Book of the Prophet Jesus'—cannot be called a Gospel, if only because it did not include a passion narrative. The sayings of Jesus cannot be properly understood except in their historical context, and that historical context includes pre-eminently His ministry, death and resurrection. It is these events that constitute the good news; His sayings help us to interpret the events.

But the *Gospel of Thomas* contains no passion narrative. More than that, among the sayings of Jesus which it contains there is not one which speaks about His passion. This in itself is sufficient to suggest that the circle which preserved this tradition of the sayings of Jesus was one whose basic presuppositions were widely different from those of apostolic Christianity.

The sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* may go back in part to our canonical Gospels, in part to other written documents (such as the

Gospel according to the Hebrews), and in part to independent oral traditions. In a number of places where the Synoptic record is followed fairly closely, the resemblance is closest to the form found in Luke's Gospel. But, by whatever lines it was transmitted, the material in the *Gospel of Thomas* has been subjected to gnosticising redaction. Besides, such a compilation would have an inner development of its own, and we should like to have a second-century Greek text of the work, as complete as the fourth-century Coptic text which is now available, before making confident pronouncements about its relation to the canonical Gospels.

At one point it has been thought that the *Gospel of Thomas* reflects an independent tradition of the Aramaic wording which Jesus used; this is in its version of the Parable of the Sower (Saying 9), where it says that some seed fell *on* the road (not *by* the road, as the Greek Gospels with their Coptic versions have it), thus reproducing the sense of the Aramaic preposition which Jesus probably used. Another contact (of a different kind) with the Aramaic-speaking Church of Palestine or Syria may be recognised in that saying which points to James the Just as the authority whom the disciples must consult after Jesus' departure, because it was for James' sake that 'heaven and earth came into being' (Saying 12).

The most important question is this: What account does this document give of Jesus? Here we find ourselves no longer in touch, even remotely, with the testimony of eyewitnesses. The Jesus of the *Gospel of Thomas* is not the Jesus who 'came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister'; not the Jesus who taught the law of love to one's neighbour in the way set out in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The *Gospel of Thomas* is nowhere more Gnostic than in its repeated presentation of the ideal of the solitary believer; for it, true religion is an affair of the individual. The Jesus of the *Gospel of Thomas* expresses a real concern for the blindness and ignorance of men when he speaks of his mission in the world, but his concern is that of one who has come to impart true knowledge rather than of one who has come to bestow true life by laying down His own life.

Moreover, the knowledge which the Jesus of the *Gospel of Thomas* has come to impart is secret knowledge, intended for a select minority. This underlines an essential difference between apostolic Christianity and Gnosticism. There is indeed a place where Paul speaks of a 'hidden wisdom' which the Corinthian Christians are too immature to receive; but their immaturity has to do with ethics and not intellect, for it is in

love, not in knowledge, that they are deficient. To spiritually mature Christians this wisdom is freely imparted—not to a select minority, but to all (1 Cor. ii. 6 ff.). So also John's first epistle opens with a declaration that the writer is going to share with his readers all that he and his companions had seen and heard of the word of life. To all those readers without distinction he says, unlike the teachers of an incipient Gnosticism against whom he warns them: 'You, no less than they, are among the initiated; this is the gift of the Holy One, and by it you all have knowledge' (1 John ii. 20, N.E.B.). This 'initiation' which admits them all to the true knowledge is the anointing which unites them in the fellowship of that love which finds its crowning revelation in the self-offering of Christ. It is precisely the absence of this note of self-sacrificing love that puts the *Gospel of Thomas* and Gnostic writings in general into a class apart from the canonical Gospels and the other New Testament documents.

II. DISCOVERIES IN PALESTINE

From Egypt, then, we move to Palestine. Before we reach the Dead Sea let us halt for a few minutes at the monastery of Mar Saba, some twelve miles south-east of Jerusalem.

A Secret Gospel of Mark?

In December 1960, Professor Morton Smith of Columbia University, New York City, reported to the ninety-sixth meeting of the American Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis a discovery of exceptional interest which he made in this monastery in 1958 while he was cataloguing the contents of its library.

On the back of a Dutch book, printed in 1646,[1] he found a handwritten copy of a Greek letter. The copy was in a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century hand—probably, he says, mid-eighteenth century. But the letter of which this is a copy is a much more ancient document. The heading of the copy ascribes the letter to Clement of Alexandria, who flourished about A.D. 180,[2] although there is no mention of the identity either of the writer or of the addressees in the text of the letter itself. On stylistic grounds Professor Smith is disposed to regard

[1] A copy of Isaac Voss's edition of the Epistles of Ignatius.

[2] The copyist's heading runs: 'From Letters of Clement, the author of the *Stromateis*, to Theodore'. (John of Damascus, who lived at Mar Saba, refers to letters of Clement of Alexandria.)

the ascription of the letter to Clement of Alexandria as justified—of scholars to whom he has shown the text some agree with him while others disagree.[1]

The chief interest of this letter lies in the fact that it refers to a longer edition of Mark's Gospel (current at Alexandria), which included 'secret' sayings of Jesus not found in the canonical Mark. According to the author of the letter, Mark came to Alexandria from Rome, where he had already published his shorter Gospel (which was in essence Peter's witness to Christ). At Alexandria he expanded it and added some 'secret' sayings. The Gnostic leader Carpocrates took this expanded Gospel and mixed spurious material with it.[2] The expanded Gospel inserted after Mark x. 34 the story of the raising of a rich young man from the dead; this story has resemblances to the raising of Lazarus in John xi. The narrative then goes on to tell of James and John's request to Jesus (cf. Mark x. 35 ff.). At the end of this incident there is a reference to Salome.[3]

We shall have to wait until the full text is published before we can pass judgment with any confidence on this discovery. If, however, the expanded Gospel gives more details of the process of initiation into the mystery of the kingdom of God than are given in the canonical Mark, we may have to do with a Gnostic edition of the original Gospel. Early Alexandrian Christianity, which claimed Mark as its founder, had a decidedly Gnostic flavour about it.

Documents of the Second Jewish Revolt

Coming now to the shores of the Dead Sea, we consider first and briefly the manuscripts found in caves in the Wadi Murabba'at and other parts farther south, in the neighbourhood of Engedi, where Jewish insurgents of A.D. 132–135 made a last stand against the Romans.

[1] A. D. Nock would assign it to a date not later than the fourth century; J. Munck thinks it may have been composed to support the Church of Alexandria's claim to have a special association with Mark.

[2] According to Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* i. 25.4), the followers of Carpocrates had writings which claimed that Jesus gave secret teachings to His apostles and other disciples, and permitted them to hand these teachings down to others who would be worthy and faithful.

[3] A comparison of Mark xv. 40 and Matt. xxvii. 56 suggests that Salome was the mother of James and John who, according to Matt. xx. 20 ff., made on her sons' behalf the request recorded in Mark x. 35 ff. But in several Gnostic Gospels Salome plays a larger and more colourful part than she does in the New Testament.

These manuscripts have no direct bearing on the Gospels. They do show, however, that in the thirties of the second century A.D. Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek were used with equal facility by Jews in that area of Palestine; and there is every reason for believing that the linguistic situation was much the same in other areas of Palestine a century earlier—in the period with which the Gospels are concerned.

Discoveries at Qumran

But it is to the caves and buildings of Qumran, farther north along the western shore of the Dead Sea, that we must go for something more positive than we have found hitherto.

In his little book *Archaeology Gives Evidence*, published in 1951, Professor Rendle Short made reference to the discovery of the first cave of manuscripts at Qumran as being 'perhaps, the most sensational and unexpected archaeological discovery bearing on the Old Testament ever made' (p. 35). We need not quarrel with this assessment; it might indeed be argued that the discovery of manuscripts of Hebrew Scripture a thousand years and more earlier than anything of the kind previously known surpasses in importance as well as in unexpectedness all other archaeological discoveries bearing on the Old Testament. But it should now be added that subsequent discoveries have shown that the significance of the Qumran manuscripts for the study of the *New* Testament, and not least of the Gospels, may be even more 'sensational'.

To some aspects of the bearing of the Qumran documents on the Gospels, then, the remainder of this lecture will be devoted.[1]

The Fulfilment of Prophecy

When Jesus, on the morrow of John the Baptist's arrest by Herod Antipas, came into Galilee proclaiming that the time of fulfilment had arrived and the kingdom of God had drawn near (Mark i. 14 f.), He served notice that the days were at hand, as foretold in the book of Daniel, when the God of heaven would set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed but would endure for ever (Dan. ii. 44, vii. 14, 22, 27). This proclamation He described as good news, and identified it with the good news which is announced by the Spirit-anointed speaker of Isaiah lxi. 1—good news for the poor, comfort for the

[1] See also two articles, 'Qumran and the New Testament' and 'Qumran and the Old Testament', appearing in FAITH AND THOUGHT, **90**, no. 2 (Autumn 1958), 92 ff., and **91**, no. 1 (Summer 1959), 9 ff.

broken-hearted, release for the captives, and all the other blessings belonging to the year of divine favour (cf. Luke iv. 17 ff.). Implicit in all this is the claim that the kingdom of God would be set up by the fulfilment of the mission appointed for the obedient, suffering and triumphant Servant of the Lord introduced in Isa. xlii. 1 and further portrayed in a number of the following chapters. In Daniel's visions the Isaianic Servant reappears as 'one like a son of man' who is closely associated, if not completely identified, with 'the saints of the Most High' (Dan. vii. 13, 18, etc.). If the Servant 'deals wisely' (Heb. *yaskil*, Isa. lii. 13), and thus makes 'the many' righteous (Isa. liii. 11), so in Daniel the saints of the Most High are described as 'the wise' (Heb. *maskilim*, from the same verb as *yaskil* in Isa. lii. 13), who turn 'the many' to righteousness (Dan. xii. 3). On these *maskilim*, as on the Isaianic Servant, the brunt of suffering falls because of their loyalty to God: for an indefinite period they 'fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plunder' (Dan. xi. 33).

Christianity is what it is because of the way in which Jesus not only interpreted these and other Old Testament scriptures, but actually fulfilled them in His own person and ministry. Yet, in the period preceding A.D. 70, He and His followers were not the only teachers in Israel to declare that the time of fulfilment had arrived and the kingdom of God had drawn near, or to envisage the consummation of the divine purpose in terms which involved a unitive exegesis of the Isaianic Servant and of Daniel's Son of Man and saints of the Most High.

The 'new covenanters' who had their headquarters at Qumran for some two centuries preceding A.D. 70 are now clearly seen to have interpreted the Old Testament in these terms, and to have developed this interpretation along lines of their own. Their effective founder, regularly referred to in their literature as the 'Teacher of Righteousness', explained all biblical prophecy to them as being on the point of fulfilment, and taught them to see their own eschatological role clearly set out there.

The Roman occupation of Palestine from 63 B.C. onwards seemed to provide a setting in which they might expect to see the fulfilment of all that the prophets had spoken—the catastrophic collapse of 'this age' and the glorious dawn of the 'age to come'.

The Qumran literature, in fact, introduces us to a school of biblical interpretation strongly reminiscent of the early Christians. This appears most clearly, perhaps, in the way in which various eschatological and apocalyptic scriptures were applied to the community and

its leaders. The community was the righteous remnant, the true Israel within Israel, bound to God by a new covenant. Their purificatory ceremonies were the fulfilment of that divine sprinkling with cleansing water, that outpouring of a new spirit, promised in Ezekiel xxxvi. 25 f. —a baptism of 'water and spirit' (cf. John iii. 5), in which the external cleansing was worthless unless it was accompanied by purity of heart. They looked forward to a new Jerusalem and a restored temple, where acceptable sacrifices would be presented by a worthy priesthood, as outlined in Ezekiel xl-xlviii. But most striking of all is their understanding of the Servant Songs of Isaiah xlii-liii, especially the fourth Song (Isa. lii. 13-liii. 12).

The expiatory work ascribed to the Servant of the Lord they regarded as a duty lying upon the whole covenanting community. Or, if we use categories borrowed from the book of Daniel rather than from the book of Isaiah, we may say that they identified themselves with the *maskilim* who by their faithfulness and suffering 'turn the many to righteousness' (Dan. xii. 3). And as a matter of historical fact it is practically certain that they were the spiritual heirs of those godly souls who submitted to martyrdom during the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes rather than compromise or renounce their loyalty to God. Yet their propitiatory role is not inconsistent with the execution of judgment on the wicked; the Servant who justifies the many is also the Son of Man to whom has been given authority to execute judgment. So, in the Habakkuk commentary from Qumran, God will judge all the nations by the agency of His elect, and by their rebuke all those who kept His commandments in the time of their tribulation will condemn all the ungodly of His people. The Qumran community, that is to say, looked upon itself as called to fulfil corporately the twofold function of Servant of the Lord and Son of Man—the former by piety and suffering now, the latter by placing itself as a ready instrument in the hand of God when the hour of requital struck, as (they believed) it very soon would.

Qumran and the Gospels

The parallels and coincidences between the two movements—of Qumran and primitive Christianity—are sufficiently numerous and impressive to call for some attempt to account for them. One answer which immediately suggests itself is that the two movements shared a common historical background and ancestry. No doubt they did, but

the same might be said, in a general way, of the Pharisaic and Sadducean movements and others with which we are familiar in first-century Judaism. In a more particular way, however, Qumran and primitive Christianity may have a common ancestry which goes back to more remote times than is commonly thought.[1]

In a book published in 1961 under the title *The Scrolls and Christian Origins* (by far the best book on the subject known to me), Principal Matthew Black of St Andrews traces the Essene movement [2] back to the ancient ascetic strain in Israel—represented by the Kenites, Rechabites and Nazirites—which (he believes) survived in greater vigour than has usually been realised. This strain, he holds, continued to flourish in the post-exilic age as a 'nonconformist' tradition in two main groups—a southern and a northern. From the southern group came the men of Qumran; the northern group provided the milieu within which Christianity arose. Principal Black's thesis, could it be established (and there is much to be said in its favour), would account for many of the affinities which have been traced between the New Testament and the literature of Qumran.

In Luke's nativity narrative we are introduced to people who, like Simeon of Jerusalem, waited for the consolation of Israel or, like the aged prophetess Anna of the same city, looked for the redemption of Jerusalem. In his passion narrative we are told that Joseph of Arimathaea was one of those who were expecting the kingdom of God. People like these—among whom Zacharias and Elizabeth, Joseph and Mary, may also be reckoned with confidence—could well have been 'associate members' of one or another of those circles of nonconformist piety which flourished in Israel at that time. Some of those circles took the form of 'baptist' communities whose activity in the Jordan valley

[1] One feature of this common ancestry may have had to do with the calendar. The Qumran community regulated its life by a different calendar from that which was followed in the Jerusalem temple. The Qumran calendar, similar to one which we know best from the *Book of Jubilees* (a work held in high repute in the community), was not lunar: the months (of thirty days each) ignored the phases of the moon, and the annual festivals and other solemn occasions fell not only on the same day of the month but also on the same day of the week year by year. Attempts have been made to relate this calendrical divergence of the men of Qumran (which in any case was not peculiar to them) to the calendrical practice of the early Christians, and in particular to one of the knottiest problems of early Christian chronology—the date (and nature) of the Last Supper. See A. Jaubert, *La Date de la Cène* (Paris, 1957); 'Jésus et le calendrier de Qumran', *New Testament Studies*, 7 (1960-61), 1 ff.

[2] Of which the Qumran movement was a branch (possibly the principal one).

and its vicinity is well attested for that whole period. The canticles of Luke's nativity narrative (more particularly, the *Magnificat* and *Benedictus*) sound like manifestoes of such a circle, and they serve as a counterpart in the cradle of Christianity to the *Hymns of Thanksgiving* found at Qumran; despite their differences both breathe the genuine spirit of contemporary Jewish piety and hope.

A personal link between the two movements has been sought in John the Baptist. According to Luke's account, John lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry (Luke i. 80). If a youth who was born in 'a city of Judah' (Luke i. 39) and was later to be active in the Jordan valley found a congenial retreat in the wilderness, this would not have been far from the vicinity of Qumran. Nothing, of course, can be based on that consideration. But a closer connexion between John and the Qumran community might be looked for in their baptismal doctrine and practice. When we are told in the Qumran *Rule of the Community* (iii. 25 ff.) that the man who is impure and rebellious in heart cannot hope to be cleansed by lustral water, we are reminded of Josephus' account of John's teaching: 'he taught that baptism would appear acceptable in God's sight if they underwent it not to procure pardon for certain sins but with a view to the purification of the body when once the soul had been purified by righteousness' (*Antiquities* xviii. 117). But Josephus' interpretation of John's baptism, which differs from the Gospel account, was no doubt influenced by the Essenes' teaching about their ceremonial washings, with which he was more familiar. Josephus is probably right, however, in suggesting that John formed a community of his own: this is the natural sense of his statement that John bade people 'come together by means of baptism' (ibid.), and agrees with the Gospel statement that John's mission was 'to prepare a people that shall be fit for the Lord' (Luke i. 17, N.E.B.).

The opening chapters of the Gospel of John deal with an early phase of Jesus' activity, in the regions of Judea and Samaria, which was concurrent with the later ministry of John the Baptist, when John had not yet been imprisoned (John iii. 24). The dispute about purification between some of John's disciples and 'a Jew', mentioned in John iii. 25, is the kind of dispute which must have been very common in those regions at a time when so many competing 'baptist' groups were active there. The disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus were not the only people engaged in baptising—or at least in the practice of ceremonial washing—in the Jordan valley and Dead Sea areas in those days. The

Qumran texts and material installations have provided us with a new background against which we can view these chapters in a better perspective. Even the language in which John the Baptist, in the Fourth Gospel, speaks of Jesus as the Coming One who will baptise with the Holy Spirit because His own endowment with that Spirit is unlimited (John i. 26-34, iii. 27-36) has a striking parallel in the Qumran *Rule of the Community* (iv. 30 f.), where the hope is expressed that one man will eventually manifest in an unprecedented degree that purity of heart which accompanies the full impartation of the Holy Spirit.

Indeed, of all the Gospels, it is the Fourth which presents the most striking points of contact with the Qumran texts, to a point where some have spoken of a 'common conceptual world'. Such characteristic Johannine expressions as 'the sons of light', 'the light of life', 'walking in darkness', 'doing the truth', 'the works of God', are equally characteristic of Qumran literature. Like that literature, the Gospel and Epistles of John view the world, and especially the world of mankind, in terms of sharply contrasted light and darkness, good and evil, truth and falsehood. Professor W. F. Albright, who was one of the first scholars to draw attention to this relation between Qumran and the Johannine literature, concludes that John and other New Testament writers 'draw from a common reservoir of terminology and ideas which was well known to the Essenes and presumably familiar also to other Jewish sects of the period'. At the same time, he emphasises the 'wide gulf between the doctrines of the Essenes and the essentials of Johannine teaching'. Of these essentials he lists four (which appear in other New Testament writings as well); these relate respectively to the function of the Messiah, the salvation of sinners, the ministry of healing, and the gospel of love.[1]

The affinities in vocabulary and concept should not obscure the new element in John's use of the common terms. When he speaks of the 'true light', for example, he is not speaking of an abstraction, nor even primarily of a body of teaching or a holy community; for him the 'true light' is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Logos.

This at least may be said: the Qumran discoveries are a major cause of the 'new look on the Fourth Gospel'[2] to which a number of scholars

[1] W. F. Albright, 'Recent Discoveries in Palestine and the Gospel of St John', in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 153 ff.

[2] Cf. J. A. T. Robinson, *Twelve New Testament Studies* (London, 1962), pp. 94 ff.

have been referring of late, and have provided an additional, and weighty, reason for believing in its fundamentally Hebraic character. If we look for a closer contact between Qumran and the Fourth Gospel than the 'common reservoir of terminology and ideas' envisaged by Professor Albright, we may reflect on the high probability that the 'beloved disciple' of this Gospel may have been a disciple of John the Baptist before he became a follower of Jesus.

This brings us back to John the Baptist. With regard to him, let it be said that even if he did owe some debt to the Qumran community, it was a new impulse which sent him forth to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. His recorded ministry is essentially a prophetic ministry. He describes himself as a voice crying to Israel:

> In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the LORD;
> Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

The men of Qumran had found in these words of Isaiah xl. 3 their authority for withdrawing to the wilderness. John, himself the son of a priest, might at one time have found something specially appealing in a movement which attached so much importance to the preservation of a pure priesthood as the Qumran movement did; but when 'the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness' (Luke iii. 2), as it had come to many a prophet before, he learned and taught the necessity for something that went beyond the doctrine and practice of Qumran.

Even more evident is the impossibility of accounting for the mission and message of Jesus in terms of Essene or Qumranic doctrine and practice. 'Volunteers for holiness' as the members of this community were, they understood holiness in a very different way from Jesus. They tried to preserve their holiness by keeping themselves to themselves as far as possible, whereas Jesus deliberately sought the company of people who, as the saying is, were 'no better than they should be' because it was they who were in greatest need of His help as a physician of the soul. For this, as the Gospels relate, He was condemned by the Pharisees of His day; but the Pharisees themselves were condemned by the men of Qumran for their laxity, for being 'seekers after smooth things', people who chose an easy way of holiness.

The same contrast emerges in their interpretation of the law. To give but one example, Jesus asked the Pharisees and lawyers of His acquaintance who among them would not immediately pull out an ox or ass that had fallen into a pit on the sabbath day, implying that any one of them would, as a matter of course, give the animal a helping

hand, sabbath or no sabbath. But just such a humane action as this is expressly forbidden in Qumran literature as a breach of the sabbath law. No greater contrast could be found to this rigorism than the interpretation of the law in the Gospels, where the main criterion is an appeal to the original intention of each institution or commandment—an intention which reflected the Creator's care for the wellbeing of His creatures.

The Significance of Jesus

Our ancient sources of knowledge about the Essenes give us a fairly detailed description of their beliefs and practices; they tell us nothing about the founder of the Essene movement. We knew nothing about the Teacher of Righteousness until the Essene documents themselves came to light. Can we imagine any comparably detailed ancient description of Christians which made no mention at all of the Founder of Christianity? Why, the first extant pagan reference to Christians[1] cannot even mention them without adding at once that they received their name from Christ, 'who was executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor'.

This is not to undervalue the significance of the Teacher of Righteousness for the community of which he was the effective founder. It is rather to underline the still greater significance of our Lord for the community which *He* founded. The Teacher of Righteousness died—how, we do not know. It is not at all certain that his followers expected him to rise from the dead in advance of the resurrection of the just. But even if they did, of this we may be sure: he never did so rise, and no one ever thought he had done so. Jesus also died—how, we know very well. If He had remained in the power of death, it is doubtful whether the community which He founded would have survived in any form; it certainly would not have come to life again in the way that it did, to remain in being to this day. The abiding significance of Jesus for His community is that *its* life is perpetually dependent on *His* risen life.

The Christian scholar and scientist whom we are commemorating tonight was prone to end on this note. One of his books[2] has a chapter entitled: 'We must decide in some way about Jesus Christ'—about Jesus Christ not just as a great figure in history but as our eternal Contemporary. Let the present lecture end on this same note, with gratitude to God for every remembrance of His servant Arthur Rendle Short.

[1] In the fifteenth book of the *Annals* of Tacitus (chap. 44)—written in the early years of the second century A.D. but dealing with the events of Nero's reign (A.D. 54–68).

[2] *The Bible and Modern Research* (London, 1931).