

A Letter to Bible Scholars Everywhere:

Is a “Second Wave” Movement Needed to Free the Dead Sea Scrolls, This Time from Entrenched Theory?

The fight to wrench control of the Dead Sea Scrolls from the official editorial team in the 1980s and early 90s was partly waged by those who believed alternative theories to the Qumran-Essene hypothesis were being censored, theories such as a direct relationship between the scrolls and Jesus of Nazareth. When the scrolls were finally opened to public access, multiple translations and interpretations ensued and nearly all the scholarly establishment now believes that a direct relationship between the scrolls and Christianity has been discredited. However there is a small but determined group of scholars who maintain the scrolls do directly concern Christianity but that research of this question is underdeveloped, primarily due to sociological barriers in the scholarly community that are impeding the search for truth. I am one of those scholars. In this paper I will present facts and arguments to try and raise awareness of these barriers currently hindering scrolls research. The purpose of this petition is to assess interest among the scholarly community in forming a new section of the Society of Biblical Literature titled “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Early Christianity.”

Jesus the Wicked Priest

I published a book last year titled *Jesus the Wicked Priest: How Christianity Was Born of an Essene Schism*. The book was fourteen years in the making, and I encountered stubborn resistance from the Dead Sea Scrolls scholarly establishment all along the way. For a year preceding publication, I circulated review copies to most of the prominent Dead Sea Scrolls authors and I was ignored; with the sole exception of James Tabor who wrote me a glowing cover endorsement:

Marvin Vining has produced a fascinating and engaging book with a provocative thesis—namely that the Dead Sea Scrolls refer directly to Jesus of Nazareth and that the Essene movement that they represent opposed him as the character they called ‘The Wicked Priest.’ This sort of connection between Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls, both in terms of chronology and history, has been dismissed in its more extreme forms as represented by Barbara Thiering, and in a more sophisticated version represented by Robert Eisenman by almost all scholars in the field. Vining skillfully puts the case back on the table. Although he is technically a ‘non-specialist,’ his grasp of the sources and issues is as admirable as his thesis is provocative. I believe Vining deserves a careful reading by non-specialists and those in the academy alike. He writes in an engaging and skillful way and I look forward to the fruitful debates that can potentially ensue in the field, based on his work.

—James D. Tabor, Ph.D., chairman, Department of Religious Studies, UNC Charlotte, author *The Jesus Dynasty*

Unfortunately the “fruitful debates that can potentially ensue in the field,” based on my work, have not yet come about. So far, all my attempts to present my work in journals and conferences have been suppressed.

“Suppressed” is a strong word, but I believe I use it justly. After it became evident that none of the major scholars or journals were reviewing my book, and at the suggestion of Steve Kaufman of HUC Cincinnati who had been working with me, I prepared a [paper](#) summarizing my research so that scholars could better understand it and begin debating it. My paper was rejected, first by the Journal of Biblical Literature, then by the Society of Biblical Literature section editors for the 2009 Annual Meeting. That my paper was rejected for the 2009 Annual Meeting was especially disappointing

because Kaufman, former Aramaic Studies editor for the SBL/JBL, had assured me, “There is every reason to believe that your paper will be accepted.”¹ I could patiently submit my work to journals and conferences of lesser influence until someone finally publishes it, but my fifteen years of experience dealing with the scholarly establishment tells me there is every reason to believe I will encounter the same type resistance at every turn. An Australian scholar with whom I have corresponded tells me my work could probably be published in Australian religious journals where Barbara Thiering’s work is found these days. No offense intended to the Land Down Under, but Thiering is more marginalized now than ever. More to the point, if work of this potential importance cannot get a fair hearing at the SBL Annual Meeting—the biggest gathering of Bible scholars in the world—something is clearly amiss.

The Golb/Schiffman Scandal Brings Minority Scholars Together

An [article](#) ran in the Israeli newspaper *Ha’aretz* on March 13, 2009 about the Golb/Schiffman scandal.² For those unfamiliar with the scandal, Norman Golb’s son Raphael was arrested in early March 2009 for allegedly impersonating Lawrence Schiffman in online debates concerning his father’s work. In the *Ha’aretz* article, Golb said that his son so acted because he understood his father’s opponents were trying to silence him.

Canadian ancient historian Steve Mason forwarded me the *Ha’aretz* article because of comments therein by Yaakov Tepler that reminded him of some of my experiences we had discussed:

Dr. Yaakov Tepler, head of the history department of Beit Berl Academic College and a student of Christianity scholar Prof. Joshua Efron, hews neither to Golb’s opinion nor to the mainstream. Rather, he believes some of the Dead Sea Scrolls

were written by Christians and says they allude to Jesus.

“I wrote an huge M.A. thesis that was to have become a doctorate about the Teacher of Righteousness—a central figure in the scrolls. I built 300 pages of reasons why I think the allusion was to Jesus. But today no place in Israel will allow me to publish it. It’s just impossible to get an article published, not to mention a book, that expresses an idea that deviates from orthodoxy.”

Tepler says he thinks the scholarly establishment is silencing a connection between the scrolls and Christianity.

“At some point it was decided that the scrolls are part of Jewish history, as a basis for Zionism and anyone who undermines this is seen as undermining Israel,” he said.

I emailed my paper to Tepler and he, Mason and I began a long and fruitful discussion about the lack of academic freedom in the scholarly establishment to publish and present alternative Dead Sea Scroll theories—theories that connect the scrolls with Jesus in particular. When Tepler told me that he, too, had been unable present any of his papers at the SBL Annual Meetings we resolved that something must be done to raise awareness of this problem.

A Systemic Problem

I wish to make clear that I am not necessarily alleging a *conscious* and *deliberate* conspiracy to suppress theories that connect the scrolls to Jesus. This has always been a difficult suspicion to allay, for in the early days of Qumran study the scrolls were almost exclusively under Vatican control. I specifically address and refute this conspiracy theory in the last comment in my paper (p. 31). In fact, I cite a sermon the Pope preached in 2007 in which he stated he believed Jesus and his disciples were likely associated with Qumran because they appear to have followed the Qumran calendar.

Instead I believe alternative scrolls theories are suppressed for reasons that are deeply systemic. Israeli philosopher of science Edna Ullman-Margalit published a book titled *Out of the Cave: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Dead Sea Scrolls Research* (2006) that did an excellent job analyzing the systemic problems I now wish to address.

The fundamental problem, according to Ullman-Margalit, is how Dead Sea Scrolls scholars are so sharply divided into “insiders” and “outsiders.” She writes,

My experience with Dead Sea Scrolls scholars alerts me to the extent to which their opinion of anyone not of their ‘school’ is poor, often quite beyond the normal academic standards of mean-spiritedness. It is striking that the ‘outsider,’ the one who holds a rival theory, is for Qumranologists almost never simply wrong or mistaken: there are rarely disagreements as far as they are concerned, but rather profound misunderstandings, or more often lack of credentials and hence lack of proper standing. The outsider forever misunderstands, is not in the profession, or is a charlatan.³

For examples, note how two of the most prominent scrolls scholars disparage those of us who deviate from the norm:

Lawrence Schiffman

The public fascination with the scrolls is often linked to unrealistic and incorrect assumptions regarding their relationship to Christianity. Even worse, public interest is often accompanied by foolish claims about the relationship of Jesus or John the Baptist to the scrolls.⁴

James Charlesworth

Some misguided amateurs often conclude, without professional nuance, that Jesus was an Essene.⁵

We who believe the scrolls refer directly to Jesus or that Jesus was an Essene are

“foolish” and “misguided amateurs,” certainly not scholars to be taken seriously. Or so Schiffman and Charlesworth would have everyone believe. Schiffman and Charlesworth surely have the best intentions, but their theory-bias is evident; and it is this same bias among the scholarly establishment that is seriously impeding the search for truth.

How the Scholarly Establishment Marginalizes Dissenters

This insider/outsider problem Ullman-Margalit has identified is found in nearly every field of study. Philosopher of science Thomas S. Kuhn noted in his signature book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), that foundational beliefs are indoctrinated, literally, into scholars “in the educational initiation that prepares and licenses the students for professional practice.”⁶ Namely, unless students agree to advance the same foundational beliefs as their professors, the students’ papers and dissertations will be rejected and they will never enter the field. For example, Tepler was not allowed to present his 300 page MS that explored a connection between Jesus and the scrolls as his Ph.D. dissertation. And I have tried unsuccessfully to pursue doctoral work in Bible studies for nearly fifteen years now. Each time I explained my research interest to my potential professors I ran into closed doors. This is why, as Kuhn pointed out, revolutionary breakthroughs usually come from renegade entrance scholars or scholars from another discipline, such as myself (my formal educational background is in law and philosophy).

Even if Qumran scholars hold the recognized qualifications, however, they are still marginalized if their views stray too far from the norm. Ullman-Margalit writes,

[T]he very mention of some of the alternative theories in Qumran study and the very citation of some of the authors’ names is, to many within the mainstream,

like the waving of a red cloth in front of a bull. Since to the mainstream scholars the alternatives are by and large crackpot theories, the mere fact that I discuss such theories is liable to taint me by association. I stand the danger, in other words, that the respected scholars in the field will see me as unable to distinguish between real experts and sham experts; from there it is but a very short step in finding me suspect, too.⁷

One scholar Ullman-Margalit took care to distance herself from in order to maintain her credibility was Barbara Thiering, who first proposed the theory that Jesus was the Wicked Priest. Ullman-Margalit writes,

For my purposes [Thiering's theory] must be considered altogether initially outlandish, given the scientifically definitive dating (based mostly on paleographical and radiocarbon dating techniques) of the scrolls to a period well before the birth of Christianity. . . .⁸

I will address the supposedly "definitive" dating of the scrolls to a period well before Christianity shortly. The point I now wish to address is that Thiering's name has become so stigmatized among Qumran scholars that anyone who dares to advance and refine her work is instantly labeled a crackpot. The same is true of those who try and advance the work of Robert Eisenman, because both Thiering and Eisenman believe the scrolls allude to Christian events.

One of the harshest critics of Thiering and Eisenman was the late Tübingen scholar, Otto Betz, who wrote,

Was Jesus the 'wicked priest' of the Damascus Rule and the Habakkuk pesher?
Not at all. Thiering's late dating of the Qumran writings and identification of their main figures with John the Baptist and Jesus are as false as Eisenman's attempt to identify the anonymous 'Teacher of Righteousness' with James the

brother of the Lord. . . . Thiering's book is an insult not only to the Christian faith but to serious scholarship. She and Eisenman show the by-ways one gets into with the alleged transmuted meaning of the Qumran texts. Both claim to have cracked the Qumran code, but each solution excludes the other. Their methods do not open up the texts, but only make way for whimsy. By Thiering and Eisenman's methodological aberrations one can claim whatever one likes about Qumran, Jesus and the Early Christians, from whatever motives.⁹

As it happens, my version of the Jesus as Wicked Priest theory was based not on Thiering's work, *but on the work of Betz himself*. In his contributing chapter to Charlesworth's 1992 book *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, Betz followed the work of his predecessor on the Temple Scroll, Yigael Yadin, in identifying the New Testament's occasional references to Herodians as the Essene Dead Sea Scrolls authors. (The aim of Yadin's and Betz's work was to confirm the Qumran-Essene hypothesis of scrolls authorship.) Specifically, Betz identified the Herodians of Mk 3:6 as the Essenes based on his exegesis of the parallel verse Mt 12:11. The problem is, Betz was so blinded by his opposition to Thiering's Jesus as Wicked Priest theory he was unable to follow his own work through to its logical conclusion. Mark 3:1–6 was the inciting incident to Jesus's crucifixion, which implies enmity between the Essenes and Jesus in and of itself. Furthermore, if Betz's exegesis of Mt 12:11 says the Herodians of Mk 3:1–6 were the Essenes, Lk 6:7 says the Essenes/Herodians were the scribes and that logically makes the Essenes the scribes throughout the Gospels. The Essenes now emerge in the New Testament as the scribes, Jesus's major enemies who, alongside the Pharisees, relentlessly pursued Jesus throughout his ministry and ultimately crucified him. And that certainly supports the Jesus as Wicked Priest theory.

I tried to impress upon Betz that my version of the Jesus as Wicked Priest theory

was built on his work when I mailed him an early MS in 2003. But he evidently failed to understand. In his reply letter, Betz lumped my work in with Thiering and Eisenman and rejected both of them as usual.

I met [Thiering and Eisenman] at a Qumran meeting in Krakow, Poland. They both know the Hebrew and the Aramaic very well and are experts in reading the scrolls; I don't however agree with their Christian interpretation of the scrolls.¹⁰

After Betz died, I received an even firmer rebuke from Betz's close friend and colleague Hermann Lichtenberger, who wrote me in an email,

I must confess that I disagree with you in all major issues. I consider the work of Thiering and Eisenman as romance, not scholarship. Building upon them—even if you disagree in peculiarities—has no solid basis.¹¹

What bad faith! My work is *not* built upon Thiering and Eisenman but upon internal criticism of the work of Betz, Yadin and many other respected mainstream scholars. Thiering and Eisenman have been so marginalized, so defamed and their work so completely run into the ground, that even if one arrives at the some of same conclusions they did by “legitimate” means, most scholars are still unwilling to accept it—or even consider it.

Case in point: I emailed Steve Patterson, current head of the Historical Jesus division of the Jesus Seminar, to see if I could interest the Jesus Seminar in debating my work. Patterson wrote me that the Jesus Seminar “makes it a point not to entertain the special theories of individual fellows.”¹² Thiering is a fellow of the Jesus Seminar, so what Patterson was really saying is that the Jesus Seminar would never debate the Jesus as Wicked Priest theory because Thiering originated it. One can be sure the Jesus Seminar will continue to debate the “special theories” of its prominent fellows like John Dominic Crossan or Marcus Borg, as they often do. (In fairness, when I brought

Patterson's faulty reasoning to his attention he admitted he was wrong. The immediate barrier to me presenting my work to the Historical Jesus division of the Jesus Seminar now is that their agenda is set for the next two years: they will be exploring Syrian Christianity. Nonetheless, this initial exchange clearly illuminates that a theory-bias exists in the scholarly community against Thiering.)

The irony is that I probably offer more genuine criticism of Thiering's conclusions and methodology than any other scholar in the field because I have actually bothered to study her work. To dismiss her work in its entirety because some of her conclusions and methodology are questionable is ludicrous. Even the devil can sometimes speak the truth, if only by accident.

Lack of Objectivity in Framing the Evidence

Ideally Dead Sea Scrolls theories should be evaluated objectively on the strength of the evidence, not on the reputation or popularity of the scholar who authored the theory. But here again there are major systemic obstacles to overcome.

When James VanderKam wrote me that my paper had been rejected for JBL publication, he was kind enough to send me the review notes of my anonymous referee, or in this case shall we say my anonymous censor. For it is obvious when one reads these notes that very little attempt was made to improve my paper or to weigh the evidence I presented objectively. Rather, my referee wrote a lengthy apologetic in favor of existing theory, misconstruing my work in every way possible so as not to deal squarely and fairly with my new evidence.

For example, I earlier quoted Ullman-Margalit's belief, a belief shared by most Qumran scholars, that the scrolls that mention the Wicked Priest have been definitively dated earlier than the birth of Christianity. This is a common misunderstanding based

largely on comments by Geza Vermes about the Accelerator Mass Spectrometry radiocarbon dating tests run at the University of Arizona in 1994. Thiering and Eisenman have been trying to set the record straight on radiocarbon dating of the peshar scrolls for years now, but so far their pleas have fallen on deaf ears because Qumran scholars do not recognize them as radiocarbon dating experts.¹³ I got lucky. I emailed a copy of my paper to physicist A. J. Jull, the director of the Arizona AMS lab who actually performed the 1994 tests, and asked him to confirm my suspicions that Vermes misinterpreted the data. The 1994 AMS tests dated 1QpHab, a scroll that mentions the Wicked Priest, from 120 to 5 BCE within two standard deviations. Vermes's candidates for the Wicked Priest (either Jonathan or Simon Maccabeus) fall slightly outside the two standard deviation range, just as my candidate, Jesus, falls slightly outside the two standard deviation range. Jull confirmed my suspicions: Vermes was entirely wrong in claiming the 1994 AMS dating of 1QpHab definitively support his theory; in point of fact, the test results of 1QpHab were formally inconclusive as to either theory. However Jull confirmed that another scroll submitted for testing, 4Q171, was reliably dated to Christian times, from 5 to 111 CE (2 sigma). This is important because Vermes's own translation of 4Q171 IV, 6–10 speaks of the Wicked Priest in shifting verb tenses (describing what he had done was about to do), which means the Wicked Priest must have been living when the author drafted 4Q171. When I asked Jull to assess the accuracy of all my comments in the radiocarbon dating section of my paper, he wrote me, remarkably, "I think your statements are good."¹⁴ I say Jull's assessment is remarkable, for in this section I write, "*The radiocarbon dating estimates do not support the Maccabean theory nearly as well as consensus scholars say they do; in actuality radiocarbon dating supports the Jesus as Wicked Priest view*" (p. 3). My referee did not once

acknowledge Jull's consultation in my notes. Ironically, my referee also ignored the comment in my paper that mainstream scholars seem to be completely ignoring that 4Q171 was reliably dated within the Christian era!

Even more aggravating was my referee's unwillingness to embrace my analysis of parallel pericopae in order to flesh out the details needed to correlate the underlying historical gospel event with Dead Sea Scrolls passages. In particular, my restoration turns on whether the pericope where Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath correlates with a scrolls passage where the Wicked Priest disrupted a Yom Kippur service involving the Teacher of Righteousness (Mk 3:1–6=1QpHab XI, 3–8). My referee claimed, "There is no mention in Mark that this Sabbath healing occurred on Yom Kippur." But I did cite evidence, which my referee ignored, that the Mk 3:1–6 pericope occurred on Yom Kippur by closely analyzing verses 6:6–11 in Luke's account of the story. Since when did Mark become the only historically reliable Gospel? Curiously, in order to dismiss my Jesus as Wicked Priest theory as unscholarly, my referee was forced into rejecting the commonly held view of most informed New Testament scholars that the Synoptic Gospels are in literary dependence with one another; the most popular theory being that the authors of Luke and Matthew were in possession of Mark and a theoretical source document such as Q that might explain their many redactional variations.

And when it came to my new model for understanding the Essene pesher method, forget it. In my paper I offer a new model (new to Qumran studies, at least) for understanding pesher based on the anthropological study of how primitive cultures viewed time cyclically. I grew up in a culture that still somewhat maintains this cyclical view of time: in the Bible belt we call such pesher-like Midrashes "newspaper exegesis."

This conceptual model is taken for granted by most anthropologists and primitive religion scholars, but my referee seemed to think I was talking Martian!

In short, not only was my anonymous referee unwilling to objectively evaluate my theory, *s/he was unwilling to consider even my methodology by which my theory could be objectively evaluated*. Ullman-Margalit pointed out that this problem often closes the door to consideration of alternative Dead Sea Scrolls theories. She writes,

[Qumran scholars] who start out with very different assessments about how probable a given theory is will generally be unable to agree about the description and interpretation of almost any piece of evidence that is adduced in support of the theory. Their very description (or ‘framing’) of the evidence will depend on their degree of belief in the theory being tested.¹⁵

According to Ullman-Margalit, this leads to an even more vicious circle.

And so we get to yet another underlying interpretive circle: one’s description of the evidence that is adduced in support of a give theory will depend upon the prior probability one assigns to this very theory, which is in turn influenced by one’s background beliefs and general outlook. I believe this conjecture applies, beyond Qumranology, to the human sciences in general.¹⁶

These “background beliefs and general outlook” include not only the seemingly unbreakable norm that the scrolls cannot possibly refer to Jesus that has now been indoctrinated into a whole generation of Bible scholars; they include various other religious and scholarly beliefs that form a scholar’s worldview.

For instance, one of the central problems for New Testament scholarship has been the relationship between Jesus and Paul. The view held by many continentally trained New Testament scholars of the last century is that Paul made Christianity into a universal religion, not Jesus. This view is clearly held by Geza Vermes who originated

the Maccabean Wicked Priest theory now the norm.¹⁷ My Jesus as Wicked Priest theory asserts that Paul was not responsible for making Christianity into a universal religion, Jesus was. Jesus understood himself to have a universal messianic mission when he broke from the Essenes, and in fact that is *why* he broke from them. I address Vermes's criticisms at length on pages 41–51 of my next book's [MS](#).¹⁸ The point is that Qumran scholars who rigidly adhere to Pauline view of Christian origins are not likely to entertain my Jesus as Wicked Priest theory, not realizing that my research sheds new light on the Jesus versus Paul question altogether.

A Long and Troubled Transition Period: Must It Be?

For the above and many other reasons, the shift between established paradigms is rarely smooth and rapid in any field. Physicist Max Planck commented at the end of his career: "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it."¹⁹ Prophetically, Frank Cross wrote this about the present state of Dead Sea Scrolls scholarship:

There are stunning things that we still have not assimilated—the scholars, much less the laymen. It will be at least two more generations before this stuff is really assimilated. There's so much richness, and there's so much drag of scholarly position on seeing the new and seeing the synthesis of what we have now.²⁰

What a sad commentary: one of the world's leading Qumran scholars admits we are on the brink of stunning new discoveries, yet believes it will take at least two more generations to realize this promise because scholars are unable to disenthral themselves from existing theory. Unfortunately I was unable to complete my MS before Otto Betz's death so he never fully understood how I advanced his work. How many more Qumran

scholars will die and how many more of their potential valuable insights will be lost forever before the scholarly establishment finally realizes the error of its ways? Also, after nearly thirty years of constant ridicule by her peers, does not Barbara Thiering deserve some accolade in her lifetime for originating the Jesus as Wicked Priest theory?

One last comment: not only does the suppression of alternative Dead Sea Scrolls theories waste valuable time and resources, it undermines public confidence in the integrity of the entire process. Without taking sides in the Golb/Shiffman debate: I think it is a disgrace that Qumran scholarship has once again devolved to the point where we are settling our differences in court instead of the lecture hall. And I say this from the perspective of a criminal defense lawyer with twenty years experience in the courtroom. Regardless of the outcome of the Golb/Schiffman scandal one thing is clear: until and if scholars begin exercising humility and start seriously debating all Dead Sea Scrolls theories, there will continue to be scandals and allegations of conspiracies in the popular media, just as there was before the “first wave” to free the scrolls succeeded.

Solutions?

As Ullman-Margalit points out in her book, the type of sociological barriers to new theory advancement I have outlined in this paper arise in most fields of study, and it has never been easy to deal with them. Here are some possible solutions and some strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

1. Lobby SBL/JBL editors to be more open minded

This sounds great in theory, but as a practical matter SBL/JBL chief editors have very little to do with the actual selection of papers: they assign them to referees who judge them blind. The bias I have identified affects virtually the entire scholarly community. Widespread scholarly opinions are not likely to change until enough

convincing scholarship is published by the SBL/JBL supporting a direct connection between the Dead Sea Scrolls and early Christianity; and until said scholarship is published widespread scholarly opinions are not likely to change. This is a classic case of Catch-22.

Thomas Kuhn observed that every time there has been a major paradigm shift it was preceded by a political shift among scholars willing to do what Kuhn called the “normal science” needed to establish and advance the new paradigm. In other words, no one scholar will ever outperform a community of scholars, and a community of scholars is necessary to perform the tedious research necessary to validate the new theory. Thus some degree of political unity is necessary among alternative Qumran theorists in order for us to make any progress. For some odd reason, Thiering and Eisenman never formed that strong of an alliance, nor have any other scholars ever joined together who have alternative views on the scrolls. I think Ullman-Margalit put her finger on this problem in her book: any association with a scholar the mainstream has branded a crackpot taints oneself a crackpot. So successful has the scholarly establishment been in branding alternative scrolls theorists the lunatic fringe we have been afraid to form alliances with one another.

2. Form a counter-advocacy group

This would serve the immediate purpose of helping me and like-minded scholars advance our theories, but in the long run it could realign scholars to a different theory-bias. Good biblical scholarship should be governed by questions and methods, not by conclusions. That is precisely what is wrong with some styles of Qumranologists now: they have married their work to particular conclusions. Having theories is not the point. Theories come and go, conclusions even more so. Analogies are only ever partial, and

often misleading if we become too wedded to them. Our focus should be on the questions a new hypothesis raises, much more so than the power of a hypothesis to explain the meager surviving evidence. That whole line of theory-wedded commitment is misguided.

Dead Sea Scrolls research would fare much better if the scholarly establishment were not wedded to theories of any kind. All evidence needs to be carefully weighed, all questions considered. This “tribal warfare” that has characterized Qumranology from the beginning is not true scholarship; it is the antithesis of scholarship. Rigid loyalty to this or that school invariably impedes syntheses of insights within the schools that could lead to a higher understanding. A careful reading of my Jesus as Wicked Priest theory will reveal that it is mainly a synthesis. I believe I have successfully synthesized the mainstream Qumran-Essene hypothesis with some of the views of Betz, Yadin, Thiering, Eisenman, Golb and many others—including Geza Vermes who authored the very theory I am opposing. I never would have been able to realize this synthesis had I been wedded to particular school.

3. Form a new SBL section

Now we are talking. But there are some serious obstacles to overcome at the start-up: one, because we scholars who believe the scrolls directly concern Christianity are by definition deviants, we lack the political power within the SBL to form a new section so easily; two, in forming a new section there would be boundary/definition problems that might further alienate other alternative theorists. Nonetheless, I believe a new section should be attempted.

As to the fact we scholars who believe the scrolls directly concern Christianity lack political power: that is the whole point of this petition, to reach out to the community of

Bible scholars at large and ask for your support. The present hierarchy may not support research along these lines, but my experience is the general public intuits the Dead Sea Scrolls are directly linked to Christianity and the public will not rest until they believe this question has been fully addressed.

As for boundary/definition problems: Steve Kaufman recommended that the new section be titled “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Early Christianity.” This would seem to pitch the right sized tent. For instance, this section title would encompass the work of Robert Eisenman who does not necessarily believe the Dead Sea Scrolls mention Jesus directly. Furthermore, I believe it is possible to incorporate many of Norman Golb’s observations into a modified Qumran-Essene hypothesis involving early Christianity (see p. 19 of my paper), so I would very much like to see debate of Golb’s work in this new section.

The important thing to understand about this proposed section is that it is not intended merely as a counter-advocacy group. This section would explore, in an open-ended manner, all questions involving the relationship of the Dead Sea Scrolls to early Christianity. And it would be composed of those scholars who have an interest in pursuing such questions and believe said pursuit would be fruitful. So yes, it would be an “advocacy group” in that narrow context, but no more than every other SBL section now in existence. For instance, the Historical Jesus section is composed of scholars who believe that a fruitful historical investigation of the life and times of Jesus using modern scholarship is possible—quite a radical idea before Renan and the other pioneer Jesus historians came on the scene in the late 1800s. In order for that paradigm to take hold, alliances had to be formed among those who believed it was possible. The purpose of this section would be to bring together like-minded scholars so we can compare our

research and develop new methodologies. I believe there is an enormous amount of work to be done, and I cannot possibly do it alone.

Respectfully submitted for your consideration,

/s
Marvin Vining
April 23, 2009

Click [here](#) to voice your support for forming a new SBL section titled “The Dead Sea Scrolls and Early Christianity.”

Notes

¹ Email from Steve Kaufman dated February 9, 2009.

² An online copy is available at <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1070455.html>.

³ Edna Ullman-Margalit, *Out of the Cave: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Dead Sea Scrolls Research* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 2006), 18.

⁴ *BAR* 33 no. 4 (July / August 2007), 61.

⁵ *BAR* 33 no. 5 (September / October 2007), 63.

⁶ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed., Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1970), 5.

⁷ *Out of the Cave*, 19.

⁸ *Out of the Cave*, 20.

⁹ Otto Betz & Rainer Riesner, *Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican* (New York: Crossroads, 1994), 112–13.

¹⁰ Personal letter from Otto Betz dated November 4, 2003.

¹¹ Email from Hermann Lichtenberger dated September 13, 2007.

¹² Email from Steve Patterson dated June 5, 2008.

¹³ For example, Thiering has been closely analyzing dating recalibrations discussed in articles of *Radiocarbon* (41, 2 [1999]: 182; 43 [2001]). See Garry W. Trompf, “The Long History of Dead Sea Scrolls Scholarship,” *Journal of Religious History* 26, no. 2 (2002), 137 n. 76.

¹⁴ Email from A. J. Jull dated July 28, 2008.

¹⁵ *Out of the Cave*, 22.

¹⁶ *Out of the Cave*, 22.

¹⁷ See Geza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (New York: Penguin Compass, 2002).

¹⁸ An online copy is available at <http://www.marvinvining.com/files/TruthIsOursRev.pdf>. See pages 41–51.

¹⁹ *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 151.

²⁰ *BAR* 33 no. 3 (May / June 2007), 43.