

St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

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A parish in the classical Anglican tradition

7 June 2016

FROM THE RECTOR

Biblical theories that 'ain't necessarily so'

'It ain't necessarily so. It ain't necessarily so. Things that you're liable to read in the Bible, they ain't necessarily so.' So goes one of the most popular hits from the 1950s musical *Guys & Dolls*.

These words, however, didn't necessarily spring forth unprompted from the depths of a cynical secular mind. 'It ain't necessarily so' would be a most appropriate theme song for some of our most prestigious seminaries and schools of theology. Indeed, such institutions have been the source of scholarly skepticism about the integrity of the scriptures for more than a century.

I don't mean to question the established process of skeptical scholarly inquiry. But the problem is that in the realm of scriptural studies much of the skepticism is a matter of pure conjecture. Empirical evidence is decidedly lacking, yet skeptical theories are taught as incontestable fact.

The skeptics have been proven wrong on many occasions. For example, the story of Abraham and the patriarchs was dismissed as fable on the grounds that no such place as Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham's hometown, had ever existed. When Ur was unearthed by the archaeologist's spade, the skeptics were red faced, but there were no recantations. Scriptural critics simply don't work that way.

It was claimed, for example, that the Torah – the Books of Moses – were not put into written form until the Babylonian Exile, which took place about 585 BC.

This claim was based partly on the conjecture that the Jews first learned the art of writing in Babylon and partly on arguments that the fact the pre-exilic Israelites flagrantly flouted Mosaic Law was proof that it didn't then exist.

However, there is a rapidly expanding body of evidence that the Jews were able to read and write in pre-exilic times, including monuments bearing the names of King David and his successors. This has forced skeptics to push back their theoretical date of Israelite literacy back past 700 BC to Davidic times at least.

Don't, however, anticipate the public consumption of humble pie to take place any time soon.

One of the clearest examples of how, in the realm of scriptural studies, the wildest conjecture is miraculously translated into empiric fact can be seen in the putative origin of the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls.

Respectable scholarship attributes the production of the scrolls to Essenes, members of a hitherto obscure Jewish ascetic sect who allegedly lived in a monastic community at Qumran near the Dead Sea.

The Essenes, however, are neither mentioned in the Gospels nor the Epistles. As Essenes, by this scholarly reckoning, played such an important part in Jewish religious life at the time of Christ, their absence from the New Testament record, thus, calls it into question as a reliable historical source.

But how do we know that the Dead Sea scrolls – in which all the Books of the Old Testament are represented, as well as many Jewish sectarian writings -- were the product of Essenes?

The answer is that Father Roland de Vaux, the archaeologist who first handled the Dead Sea scrolls and who excavated the Qumran monastery, declared it to be the case. And he did so on the basis of the wildest conjecture.

Among the first scrolls Vaux, a Dominican friar, studied was one that contained a prescription for spiritual living that struck him as closely resembling a monastic rule of life. Having declared the book to be a monastic community's 'Rule of Life', Vaux set out to identify that community.

The best candidates, he decided, were the celibate Essenes. While there is no record of them in the Bible, the Jewish-Roman historian Josephus mentions them briefly, as does Claudius Ptolemy, the Graeco-Egyptian polymath who was one of the Roman world's most authoritative geographers.

Indeed, Ptolemy reported that there had been an Essene settlement somewhere in the Dead Sea region. But as he was writing several centuries after the events he recorded, Ptolemy is not an entirely reliable witness.

In any event, not long after Vaux declared the Essenes to be the scribes who produced the scrolls, he started excavating a settlement in the neighbourhood of Qumran where the scrolls had been found.

Naturally enough, he interpreted his findings in the light of his Essene hypothesis and declared he had found an Essene 'monastery'.

Soon he had 'identified' a large refectory, the 'scrollery' where he theorised the Dead Sea scrolls had been written and a large network of cisterns that he identified as vast complex of Jewish ritual baths.

A number of scholars, however, found Vaux's theorising less than

convincing, and by no means solely because of the collateral damage it inflicted on the New Testament.

The building, they argued, looked more like a fort or a large fortified estate. Vaux's ritual baths seemed actually to be storage tanks for watering animals and for irrigation.

What's more, the Essenes' pacifist beliefs notwithstanding, alleged monastery had been destroyed by the Romans during the Second Jewish War of 125 AD. And in apparent contradiction to the Essenes' celibate practices, women and children were among the 1,200 people buried in the extensive graveyard.

It was also difficult for Vaux's critics to swallow the notion that a small First Century AD sectarian community's library would resemble that of a modern Western university, with a collection of books reflecting the whole gamut of Jewish religious thought.

Vaux's critics have offered rather more plausible alternatives to his theory. One of the most persuasive is that the scrolls were in fact hidden in the caves around Qumran by Jewish fugitives from Jerusalem fleeing the Romans during the First Jewish War of 66 AD to 70 AD.

The Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List as well as the guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or to the visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, ring the parish office on 410 560 6776.

FOR RECOVERY: Hilarie, Phyllis, Edie, Jim, Adele, Linda, Judy, Neal, Sheila, Nelson, Aida, Nathan, Hobie, Eunice, Raymond, Rosemary, Todd, Sophia, Bobby, Pam, Charlotte, Ellen, Mary, Janet, Bea, Kelley, Mike, John, David, Nancy, Warren

FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE: Stephen, Melba, Scott, Vinnie, Doug, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Ned, Cindy

ON ACTIVE SERVICE: Lt Alex Bursi, Capt. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; Lt Cdr Emma Hawkins, RN

Lending credence to this is the fact that, in addition to scrolls, many caches of valuables dating to the same period have been found in the region.

Israeli archaeologist Yizhak Margan advances another no less plausible interpretation of the ruins at Qumran. Unlike most of Vaux's critics who have mainly reviewed his notes and data, Margan actually excavated the site.

Margan determined the 'ritual baths' were in fact a network of sedimentation tanks designed to collect large amounts of fine potters' clay swept up in the streams flowing from Qumran's surrounding gorges. No streams in the area, other than the ones that serve Qumran, bear such clay.

In addition to large stores of potters' clay in the 'tanks', a considerable quantity of pottery, including 700 clay bowls, were found at the site. And this, together with a hoard of more than 1,400 coins found there, indicates, according to Margan, that the Qumran settlement was a commercial pottery factory.

Vaux's monastery, Margan theorises, started life as one of a chain of forward military command posts set up during the Hasmonean period to guard the Judean frontier. When the Romans took over in 63 BC, it would no longer have served any military purpose, so they sold off as surplus to a pottery maker.

As a theory, it seems rather more plausible than Vaux's monastery, but don't expect it to be accepted any time soon – or without a major academic blood bath.

No matter the persuasive nature of the skeptics' arguments, Vaux's theory is treated as incontestable fact. Even so, one can't help wondering how Father de Vaux would have interpreted the scrolls had he been, say, a farmer, a civil administrator or a soldier instead of a Dominican friar.

GPH✉

FROM THE PARISH TEA PARTY

Afternoon Teas resume on 9 June

Saint Stephen's Afternoon Teas will resume on Thursday, 9 June at 2pm.

We left April and May off the 2016 calendar as Holy Week and the Garden Party are busy times for the church. The Afternoon Teas are served on the second

Thursday of the month. There is no fixed price for our teas, however free-will donations

are accepted. We are only able to comfortably serve 40 guests, so we ask that you please make a reservation using the sign up sheet in the main reception area, leaving your name and a contact number. If you later find yourself unable to attend, please contact the Parish Office immediately so we can offer your place to the next person on the standby list.



FROM THE LADIES WHO LUNCH

The Ladies will lunch on 15 June

This month the Ladies Who Lunch will meet at Barrett's Grill on Wednesday, 15 June at noon. Barrett's is located on the second level of the Hunt Valley Towne Centre. Why not join us for a convivial get-together over a delicious meal? Good food and good fellowship – what more could you want? Please ring Sara Douglas on **410 560 9026** if you are able to attend; she will need a final count by Monday the 13th in order to place the reservation.

FROM THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Vacation Bible School 2016

St Stephen's Vacation Bible School, for children ages 4–10, will take place once again this summer during the week of 20–24 June from 9am–Noon. The cost is \$20, and there are scholarships available upon request. This year's theme is *Creation Days*. We will explore the seven days of Creation in the Book of Genesis. Please phone the church office on 410 560 6776 and speak to Happy Riley to begin your child's registration. We hope you will bless us with your children, and please have them bring a friend!

St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093

Office: 410 560 6776 · Rectory: 410 665 1278

Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

www.ststeve.com

The Ven. Canon Guy P Hawtin, *Rector*

The Ven. Michael Kerouac, *Vicar* · The Rev. Michael Belt,
The Rev. John Novicki, The Rev. Robert Ludwig, *Associate Rectors*

The Rev. M Wiley Hawks, *Pastoral Care Chaplain*

Mrs Happy Riley, *Director of Pastoral Care & Wedding Coordinator*

SUNDAY SERVICES

8 am: Said Eucharist

9.15 am: Choral Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11 am: Choral Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

6 pm: Choral Evensong (as announced) – evensong.ststeve.com

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6 pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5 pm: Family Eucharist

Calendar of Events

WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30 pm: Bridge Club

Tuesday, 7 am: Fellowship Breakfast (Nautilus Diner)

Thursday, 10 am: Knitting Circle

Friday, 10.30 am: Bible Study

MONTHLY & SPECIAL

Thursday, 9 June, 2 pm

Afternoon Tea

Tuesday, 14 June, 7–8 pm

Parish Life Meeting

Wednesday, 15 June, 12 noon

The Ladies Who Lunch meet at Barrett's Grill

Monday–Friday, 20–24 June, 9 am–Noon

Vacation Bible School

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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