

## Whose Scrolls?

"The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Perspective" by Norman Golb, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1989), 1811 Q Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

When Edmund Wilson published *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea* in 1955, he popularized—and, indeed, helped to cement—the established scholarly interpretation of their origins. Only 8 years before, in 1947, a young Bedouin shepherd boy had been roaming through the Qumram caves near the Dead Sea when he chanced upon seven Hebrew scrolls. Many archaeologists and historians quickly concluded that they were the work of a tiny renegade Jewish sect called the Essenes.

Noted for their extreme asceticism, the Essenes embraced doctrines, including the duality of flesh and spirit, that resembled early Christian beliefs—one reason why some historians propose that Jesus himself was an Essene. True or not, Essene doctrines represented a departure from mainstream Jewish teachings.

But were the Dead Sea scrolls really written by the Essenes? Golb, professor of Jewish history at University of Chicago, has doubts. For one thing, many more scrolls of similar doctrinal cast have been discovered since 1947, some as far away as the fortress of Masada. Scholars, with procrustean zeal, have forced the new evidence to fit the Essene thesis. But Golb proposes a more elegant explanation: The scrolls, written in Jerusalem, contained a new strain of thinking within mainstream Judaism that was "radically different from its biblical predecessor and the rabbinic Judaism that followed." If that is so, the scrolls are far more important in the history of

culture "than writers have been wont to suggest."

But why were documents containing this important, if only transitional, shift in Jewish thought buried throughout the Judaean wilderness and the plain of Jericho? In an effort to preserve them, Golb argues. When the scrolls were buried during the first century A.D., the Second Jewish Commonwealth was fighting and losing a war with the Roman Empire. Between the fall of Galilee in 67 A.D. and the siege of Jerusalem in 70, Golb suggests, Jerusalemites

### Joseph Campbell's Mythology

The list of unlikely bestsellers from the academic world grows ever longer. Add *The Power of Myth*, based on Bill Moyers' dialogues with Joseph Campbell on public TV. In *The New York Review of Books* (Sept. 28, 1989), Brendan Gill speculates about Campbell's sudden popularity.

*Some of his listeners assumed that the message was a wholesomely liberal one. In their view, he was encouraging his listeners not to accept without examination and not to follow without challenge the precepts of any particular religious sect, or political party, or identifiable portion of our secular culture . . .*

*What I detect concealed within this superficial message and ready to strike like one of the serpents that are such conspicuous inhabitants of the Campbell mythology is another message, narrower and less speculative than the first. And it is this covert message that most of his listeners may have been responding to, in part because of its irresistible simplicity. For the message consists of but three innocent-sounding words, and few among us, not taking thought, would be inclined to disagree with them. The words are "Follow your bliss . . ."*

*Plainly, to follow one's bliss is advice less simple and less idealistic than it sounds. Under close scrutiny it may prove distasteful instead of welcome. For what is this condition of bliss, as Campbell has defined it? If it is only to do whatever makes one happy, then it sanctions selfishness on a colossal scale—a scale that has become deplorably familiar to us in the Reagan and post-Reagan years. It is a selfishness that is the unspoken (the studiously unrecognized?) rationale of that contemporary army of Wall Street yuppies, of junk-bond dealers, of takeover lawyers who have come to be among the most conspicuous members of our society. Have they not all been following their bliss?*

tried "to sequester the city's wealth as well as literature and other possessions of a spiritual nature." And after the spring of 68, the only areas open to them were to

the east and south of the city—"that area, in other words, where Hebrew scrolls were discovered in the third, ninth, and 20th centuries."

## Rome's Crusade For Democracy

"Catholicism and Democracy: The Other Twentieth-Century Revolution" by George Weigel, in *The Washington Quarterly* (Autumn 1989), 1800 K St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

It seems entirely natural today to find the Catholic Church in the forefront of the struggle for human rights everywhere from Poland to South Korea. In fact, writes Weigel, the president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, the Church's "conversion" is relatively recent, and it is not without problems.

As late as 1864, Pope Pius IX rejected out of hand in his *Syllabus of Errors* the notion that "the Roman Pontiff can and should reconcile himself to and agree with progress, liberalism, and modern civilization." And Pius IX was considered a reformer!

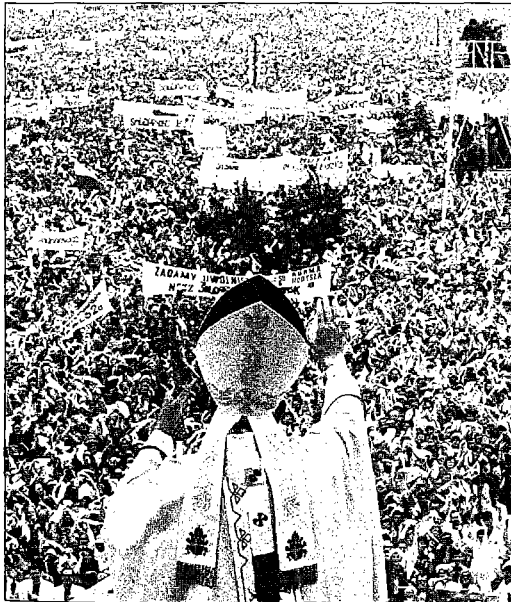
The Vatican was appalled by the French Revolution, and the idea that man rather than God was the proper focus of earthly government. Above all, says Weigel, it was

convinced that religious liberty "would inevitably lead to religious indifference and, given the right circumstances, to hostility toward religion on the part of governments." Thus it favored the restoration of close church-state ties, along the lines of Europe's traditional altar-and-throne monarchies. In 1895, for example, Pope Leo XIII acknowledged that the Church was thriving in America but added that "she would bring forth more abundant fruits if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority."

Ultimately, the American experience, along with the rise of communism and fascism and the decline of anti-clericalism among European liberals, persuaded the Vatican to reconsider. An important step came in 1931 with a social encyclical by Pope Pius XI recognizing the importance of what sociologists call "civil society." Pius called it "both a serious evil and a disturbance of right order to assign to a larger and higher society what can be performed successfully by smaller and lower communities."

But the threshold was not crossed until 1965, when the Second Vatican Council officially embraced freedom of conscience, abandoning once and for all state-sponsored religion. Today, Polish-born Pope John Paul II stumps for democracy around the world. It is, Weigel notes, a secondary mission. And the Pope advocates a Whiggish sort of democracy that might make some Americans squirm. As Weigel puts it, the Pope believes that "freedom is not a matter of doing what you want, but of having the right to do what you ought."

Some issues remain to be worked out. How do various theologies of liberation fit



Pope John Paul II's visit to Gdansk, Poland in 1987: Religion or politics?