

REPORT ON THE VATICAN. By Bernard Wall. (Weidenfeld and Nicolson; 21s.)

It is useful when considering a report to bear in mind the credentials of the reporter. In this respect Mr Wall might be supposed to be well equipped: he is a Catholic journalist who has a close knowledge of Italy, and from the pre-war days of his editorship of *Colosseum* he has had an almost proprietary interest in continental Catholic opinion. He belongs unquestionably to the category he calls by the loathsome name of 'intelligentsia'.

His book is a slick and readable account of what the reader of *Time* might want to know: how much Cardinals are paid, how Popes are elected, the allegedly inside story of the affair of the worker-priests, the prospects for a non-Italian Pope. But a report is only valuable when it attempts to be objective, and Mr Wall's prejudices are all too apparent. It may be diverting to know that Mr Wall dislikes Curia cardinals, that he finds the psalms unsympathetic, that he considers the Index preposterous: but all this tells us more about Mr Wall than about the Vatican. His book is in fact a Harrods (or perhaps a Marks and Spencers) of ecclesiastical odds-and-ends, carelessly displayed and irresponsibly marked down for bargain-hunters. It has obviously been written in a tremendous hurry: he couldn't have realised that closing-time was so close upon him.

The serious criticism of *Report on the Vatican* is not so much its mood, which is mocking and mildly anti-clerical. It is that its lack of seriousness reflects a lack of understanding of the perennial function of the Vatican, which means so much more than the tabulation of its curiosities. There is little indication that the Holy See is concerned with spiritual issues at all. The list of Congregations, the account of papal diplomacy, the details of financial provision: all this might be the affair of some creaking principality encumbered with precedent and protocol. Is this all there is to the Vatican? And is this really the secret of the authority of the Holy See, never so high in all its long history as now, as the implacable guardian not simply of the Church's 'interests' but of the essential dignity and freedom of men?

The inaccuracies of Mr Wall's report are far too numerous to list: over fifty misprints strike one on a first reading. But it is extraordinary to read that 'by the sixteenth century, in prayers, God had become "His Divine Majesty" . . . a King, an Absolute Monarch, and remote from the common people'. It is news that God's monarchy was ever conceived as constitutional, conferred by the will of his people. It is news too that 'the Douai version of the Bible, used by English Catholics until recently, perpetuated grotesque mistranslations'. The Douai version is still used, and scores of thousands of copies of it have just

given it an enhanced circulation. And which are the mistranslations? And in a Dominican review we may be pardoned for drawing attention to a particularly misleading account of the events of 1954 which led to disciplinary measures taken against four French Dominicans. The whole episode is grossly distorted and it should have been perfectly easy to have secured the true facts. A passion for inserting bits of Italian leads to such lapses of taste as references to 'papa Pacelli' and to the unexpected—and of course wrongly-spelt—name of 'Padre Tyndal-Atkinson' (*sic*). *Sic*, indeed, is the summary of what one would want to say.

I.E.

THE SCROLLS FROM THE DEAD SEA. By Edmund Wilson. (H. W. Allen; 10s. 6d.)

This little book is an extremely well written account of the famous discoveries made beside the Dead Sea. The author, a distinguished literary critic, visited the Holy Land at the expense of the *New-Yorker*, in which his essay first appeared (May 14, 1955). In this way he was able to get a lot of first-hand information about the discoveries and the discussions which followed them. Further, he devoted much personal study to the question, and had part of his manuscript read before publication by some high authorities on the subject. The stage was elaborately set, one might have thought, for a highly reliable report.

After the fascinating story of the first finds, Mr Wilson gives a vivid picture of what according to classical sources 'the Essene Order' was. He then takes the reader to the Dead Sea shores in order to have a look at the Essene 'monastery' where the process of excavation is still going on. From about the middle of his essay onwards he discusses the contents of the new documents, their dates and their importance for our interpretation of Christian beginnings.

Mr Wilson treats the whole subject with the highest skill of an accomplished journalist. He allows the reader not a moment's boredom. This is achieved by an incessant flow of anecdotes, of descriptions of personalities by whom he was struck and of all kinds of personal reflections. The Syrian metropolitan, for example, seems to have won the author's sympathy, and perhaps a little too much value is attached to his version of the facts. He provides a portrait of Fr de Vaux's external appearance, which although clever cannot but appear anything less than faintly ridiculous to one who is better acquainted with this Dominican. But it is quite evident that it is to M. Dupont-Sommer that Mr Wilson feels much more akin.

Only the latter, as '*pur savant*', without any religious affiliations . . . is really quite free to grapple with the problems of the Dead Sea