

The Essene revolution

The issue

In the first century of our era, two major religions were born. Both started in the Roman province of Judea, the homeland of the Jewish people. Both religions, however, developed elsewhere: Christianity was essentially formed in the eastern Mediterranean provinces of the Roman empire; the great centres of rabbinic Judaism, while beginning in Yavneh near Joppa, then Galilee, finally flowered in ancient Iraq, where the Babylonian Talmud was committed to writing.

As the two religions developed, and increasingly confronted each other philosophically, theologically and politically, they grew more and more distinct. Each was aware that they had a common matrix and each therefore was concerned to distinguish itself from the other. Both religions finally established some kind of orthodoxy through the production of canonical texts and, in the case of Christianity, through creeds. Each orthodoxy claimed direct descent from antiquity, from Moses or Ezra, from Jesus or Paul. This is how orthodoxies work, of course.

But, at least in the case of Christianity, the doctrinal struggles involved in converting a form of Judaism into the categories of Greek philosophy produced a copious literature in which the doctrines that were defeated—and so came to be called ‘heresies’—were described in the process of being refuted. And in a rare direct glimpse of such alternatives, the papyri from Nag Hammadi in Egypt have revealed a type of Christianity that we call ‘gnosticism’. ‘Gnosticism’ embraces a number of related systems, all sharing a basis in the doctrines of salvation through esoteric knowledge. These systems were generally implicitly or explicitly dualistic and presented a view of the universe divided between good and evil, or spirit and matter. They might also differentiate between the god of the Jews and the god of Christianity, and thus between the value of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures.¹ The roots of this gnosticism are still a subject for debate, and it is also disputed whether such systems (as opposed merely to tendencies) existed within Judaism prior to the development of Christianity as a separate entity.

Some direct evidence of alternative theological systems within post-70 CE Judaism is found in, for example, the texts known as *Hekalot* literature. The term *hekal* means

¹ Editor’s footnote: the Hebrew Scriptures refers to the text many Christian know as the Old Testament; the Christian Scriptures includes the texts often referred to as the Old and New Testaments by Christians.

temple or palace, and such texts focus on descriptions of mystical ascents to the throne of God situated in the centre of the heavenly temple courts. While the rabbis were suspicious of such tendencies, they did not formally condemn these practices as heretical; indeed, some of the famous practitioners of this mysticism were notable rabbis themselves. Nevertheless, it can be argued that we have here a kind of religion that is formally quite different from rabbinic Judaism. In rabbinic Judaism, knowledge of God is mediated through Torah, and the law and the goal of religion is obedience to God and not direct knowledge of the supreme deity.

These other systems—the gnostic and the mystical—are not like rabbinic Judaism and Christianity: they have no defined canon, and no agreed set of public and private practices. They also seem to have had no developed independent social organisation, though individual teachers had a personal following. Potentially, perhaps, they were religions, but most historians do not regard them as such, given the form they attained historically. The sources we have also make it difficult to establish with much precision where they really originated, what their practices were, and what happened to them. Some scholars nevertheless have suggested that they represent something like a perennial philosophy, and that an ancient religion underlay some of these marginalised systems of belief.

Mysticism is, after all, a phenomenon that manifests itself in all of the Western monotheistic religions. Where it does so, it usually appears in a form adapted to that religion: Jewish, Christian and Islamic mysticism can usually be distinguished, if only by the vocabulary in which it is expressed. Yet there is a great similarity between the forms that mysticism takes both within and outside formal religions. Hence an ongoing and probably insoluble debate: should we treat mysticism as a coherent religious system that often adopts the forms of an established religion, or as a manifestation within specific religions that happens to share some similarities with its manifestations elsewhere?

The same is the case with esoteric knowledge. Can we relate such elements in Christianity, Judaism and Islam to roots that belong also to the orthodox developments of these religions? Are they extrinsic invasions from ongoing religious currents, or are they tendencies that can under certain circumstances emerge from 'orthodox' religions?

The relevance of the Dead Sea scrolls

I want to contribute something very specific to this ongoing debate: an analysis of some of the Dead Sea scrolls. The analysis—which in a short lecture can only be rather superficial—will, I hope, demonstrate a specific instance of a movement from the categories of thought and expression that characterise other Jewish systems, through a sectarian Judaism that still reflects these categories, to something that is hardly Jewish at all. In this example I think we can see, at least in outline, the

formation of a potentially new religion—one that apparently did not persist. I think we can also discern in these scrolls the social and religious factors at work in this process. I am calling the process ‘the Essene revolution’, perhaps rather dramatically. But taken from a disinterested point of view, this movement deserves to be considered alongside those other great revisions of early Judaism that became rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, even though it did not survive as they did, or at least in the form that they did.

Am I right to call the Dead Sea scrolls and their authors ‘Essenes’? Yes—and because the arguments to substantiate this position would take longer to develop than is warranted in this paper, I will only briefly outline the key points here. Basically, the Essenes were described by the first-century CE Jewish historian Flavius Josephus as one of the main parties within early Judaism. They lived in villages and cities of their own, and had slight dealings with the Jerusalem temple. The lifestyle of the Essenes included a stringent initiation system, communal meals, and a strict view of marriage as being only for procreation. Indeed, they were divided into marrying and non-marrying kinds. Each of these practices can be precisely paralleled in the Dead Sea scrolls. I see no reason to call these scrolls anything other than Essene, despite possible minor differences between the evidence in the scrolls and in Josephus, which can be explained much more easily than the similarities.

Where the Essenes came from is another question—and I have no answer. Indeed, it does not greatly matter what we call this Jewish group or what they called themselves. What is interesting is their religious system and how it evolved—at least in one particular direction that is the focus of this lecture.

I am going to tackle the complex question of untangling the scrolls into a history of religious and social evolution as follows. I will start with an important distinction between two kinds of community described in these documents. One is presented fairly fully in what we call the *Damascus document*—or sometimes the *Zadokite fragments*²—the name ‘Damascus’ comes from a reference in the text to a new covenant in the land of Damascus. This text was in fact first discovered in two medieval manuscripts in a synagogue in Cairo at the end of the nineteenth century. With the publication of the Dead Sea scrolls in the 1950s, these manuscripts were quickly identified as being from the same source; copies of editions of the work in caves 4, 5 and 6 have confirmed that conclusion. I refer to this group as the ‘Damascus Essenes’. The other kind of community apparently called itself the *yahad* or ‘union’, and is dealt with especially in what we call the *Community rule* or *Manual of discipline*. I refer to this group as the ‘Union’.

² The name ‘Damascus Document’ is most common, and employed by Florentino García Martínez & Eibert J C Tigchelaar *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden, Brill/Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1997); ‘Zadokite Fragments’ is preferred by L H Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), while G Vermes *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, New York and London: Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1997 calls it the *Damascus Rule*!

The nature of the relationship between the two communities is disputed. The earliest view was that the Essenes started out as a single small group, described in the *Community rule*, then expanded and formed other colonies, described in the *Damascus document*. Others, of whom I am probably the most vociferous, argue the opposite: that the *yahad* of the *Community rule* is a splinter group of a wider movement. All scholars agree that there is a close relationship between the two communities; obviously for the purposes of describing the evolution of these movements I have to take a view, and until an equally detailed defence of the alternative position is available (which seems unlikely at present), I am going to adhere to my own view, for which I have given the arguments on various occasions.³ You will see, I hope, that while the *Damascus document* describes a recognisable form of Judaism, the *Community rule* contains something much more radical. This is just one reason why I think the *Damascus document* describes a sect, while the *Community rule* describes a sect of that sect.

Now, how shall I analyse the two documents and their contents in a clear and simple way to illustrate my theory? I shall do it by treating topics that define Judaism. These are 'Israel', 'Torah' (law), 'Jerusalem temple' and 'messiah'. I'll briefly describe how each text understands these categories, then try and account for the differences in a systematic way. Finally, by the end of this process of analysis, I hope I will have given you a portrait of how one religion gradually evolves, or is shifted, into another: how—to put it dramatically—from a Judaism comes something that is really not a Judaism at all. The phenomenon has been exhaustively dissected in the case of Christianity. But this is a quite separate process—although some aspects described in the Christian Scriptures are reflected in the scrolls, as might be expected since both deal in part with the history of a Jewish messianic sect.

A. The Damascus Essenes

Israel

The *Damascus document* (including the Qumran fragments) represents the community for which it speaks as 'Israel', and specifically in the sense of the true remnant of Israel, an Israel within an Israel. This is one reason why I choose to regard it as a sect; the other reason is that this sub-set of Israel segregated itself socially from other Jews. So it speaks of the historical 'Israel' that has gone astray in the past and continues to be in error. The document reviews Israel's history and shows it to have come to grief through its disobedience to the divine will. As a result of this disobedience, historical Israel was punished at the time of the exile under Nebuchadnezzar. But a remnant of survivors was reconstituted by a new covenant, a new law, and a new lawgiver; these Essenes claimed to be the true Israel that is

³ See *The Damascus Covenant: An Interpretation of the Damascus Document* (JSOT Supplements, 25), Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983; 'Judaisms in the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Case of the Messiah', in T Lim (ed.), *The Dead Sea Scrolls in their Historical Context*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), pp. 219-32.

directly the successor of the Israel of the Scriptures, living under its renewed covenant 'in the land of Damascus' (which may be a literal or symbolic name).

So here is a true Israel, situated within a broader historical 'Israel'—the Jews as a whole, who are destined for imminent divine destruction. The present time is an 'age of wrath' extending from the time of the Babylonian exile onwards. During that long period, the Jewish people as a whole has been led astray by Belial and by its leaders, while the true Israel, the members of the 'Damascus' covenant, has been preserved to be vindicated and rewarded in the coming judgment.

But why are the Jews as a whole still disobeying the divine will? Why is the true Israel a minority? Here the answer is twofold. First, 'Belial'—the name often given in the Dead Sea scrolls to Satan—tempts Israel to stray, aided by his host of spirits. Second, there is one passage in the *Damascus document* in which God is said to have chosen some people and rejected others 'from eternity', and to foreknow their existence, so that in each generation a chosen remnant has been left. There is no developed dualism expressed here, either in the existence of Belial or in the belief in divine predestination of good and wicked; both predestination and the existence of a tempter are common mechanisms whereby members of a minority religious group explain to themselves why they **are** in a minority and why the majority reject them, and are nevertheless in the wrong.

Torah

The Israel of the Damascus Essenes is constituted by scrupulous obedience to the Torah, the law of Moses, though of course, according to their own interpretation. Here the claim is that this law was, like the original one, revealed—but in fact it is undoubtedly not a new law but a set of interpretations, viewed as a proper understanding, of the old law. Part of the *Damascus document* consists of sets of laws of this kind, which show that the Damascus Essenes were among the first Jews to try and create a society based on the law of Moses. There is a rule that the law of Moses must be learnt by every potential member and that, in order to be accepted into the group, they must pass an entrance examination.

So while there is a theoretical distinction between the old and new laws revealed by God, in practice we have only a particular understanding of the biblical laws. There are no instances of new non-biblical laws assigned to Moses or anyone else. Examples of differences between the Israel of the Essenes and the old sinful historical Israel are given, and they are all cite cases of interpretation of biblical law, not of different laws. One key issue in regard to fulfilment of the law is the calendar, which for the Essenes was different from that which became the norm in mainstream Jewish practice: one dividing the year into 12 lunar months, including a thirteenth month every now and then to catch up with the solar year. The Essenic calendar had 12 months of 30 days each, giving a total of 364, divisible exactly by seven, and meaning that festivals and Sabbaths occurred on the same dates every year. The calendar is undoubtedly a major concern of this Judaism, and it is something to which historical

Israel is said to have been 'blind'. Other legal differences involve the banning of a second marriage, and laws about the highly technical business of transmission and removal of impurity.

The understanding of sexual relations is particularly crucial to the Damascus Essenes. Josephus says the Essenes did not trust women, and ensured that they were fertile by not allowing a marriage until after the woman's first menstruation. This is consistent with the view expressed in the *Damascus document* that 'one man one woman' was the law of creation, citing among other texts the two by two of each species that Noah took into the ark. The document, according to a cave 4 manuscript, also states that it is possible to commit fornication with one's wife (ie if sexual intercourse is not for the purpose of procreation) and stipulates that sexual intercourse may not take place in the 'city of the sanctuary', ie Jerusalem. These may appear as if they are new laws, but actually they are only logical implications of biblical laws that regard sexual intercourse as defiling holy places and objects. Sexual intercourse is inherently a source of uncleanness, therefore, and permitted only for the necessary purpose of continuing the species. This attitude, it can be seen, could easily lead to some abandoning marriage entirely, and even to the formation of a celibate male society. If there was an Essenic settlement in Jerusalem, it must, then, have been a celibate one.

Another important feature of the (interpreted) law of Moses, as understood in the *Damascus document*, is that it is valid during a specific period of time ie from the exile and subsequent revelation of true law to the appearance of a future teacher who will 'teach righteousness at the end of the period'. I will say more about this figure under the heading of 'messiah', but it is interesting to note that the law functions within an epoch characterised by human wickedness and divine anger. It is called the 'era of wrath' or the 'era of wickedness'. We may surmise that during this period, because of the wickedness of the Jerusalem temple priests, the law as scripturally prescribed could not be completely obeyed. The validity of this law will be terminated by the arrival of this 'teacher' and, implicitly, by an accompanying restoration of the true temple cult when he appears. There is, additionally, some evidence of a calculation of this 'era of wickedness/ wrath', and thus of the timing of the appearance of the messiah-teacher. The total figure may well have been 490 or perhaps 500 years, or ten jubilees (a jubilee being seven cycles of seven years, 49 years, or perhaps 50 years if an extra 'jubilee year' was intercalated); in Daniel 9 a similar total is achieved by calculating 'seventy weeks of years'.

Jerusalem temple

The second part of the *Damascus document* consists of sets of community laws, derived from Scripture or scriptural principles, and presumably comprising the 'law for the period of wickedness' under which the true Israel was to live. Some of these reveal the extent of participation in the Jerusalem temple cult by the Damascus Essenes. They include sending offerings to be given at the altar: burnt offerings, incense, wood and sin offerings. Participation in the major festivals may have occurred, but presumably according to the Essenic calendar; individual vows may

have extended participation in the Jerusalem temple cult to private and even voluntary acts. So the Damascus Essenes did not reject the Jerusalem temple. Quite the opposite: They respected the sanctity of the Jerusalem temple but regarded the cult as invalid because of the wickedness of the contemporary priests. The *Damascus document* (CD 6.12–14⁴) says:

All who have entered the covenant are not to enter the sanctuary ‘to light my altar in vain’ unless they follow the observances of the law prescribed for the period of wickedness.

If this translation is correct (the passage reads awkwardly and may have been emended), we are faced with a link between participation in the Jerusalem temple cult and the ‘law for the period of wickedness’. However, the Jerusalem temple lies at the centre of the ‘wickedness’—there is an allusion to a ‘period when Israel sinned and made the sanctuary unclean’ (CD 20.22–23). But that did not mean that those who possessed the (true) law should totally abandon it. Israel (specifically its priests) might ‘light the altar in vain’, but it could still be lit in some way by those who observed the law exactly.

Yet the Damascus Essenes partly replaced the function of the Jerusalem temple by their own institutions. The text from Amos 5.26–7, rendered as ‘I will exile the booth of your king and the pedestal of your images from my tent to Damascus’, is taken to mean that the law resides not in the Jerusalem temple but in the assemblies of the sect. The Jerusalem temple was thus still a vital institution, though since the administration of its cult was in the hands of a sinful and erring priesthood, it could not be fully used by the true Israel.

Messiah

The word ‘messiah’ appears only a few times in the *Damascus document*. The Essenes expected only one messiah, in opposition to those contemporary Jews who thought of two messiahs: one priestly, one lay. In the *Damascus document* the messiah is not specifically named as a priest, though he is said to arise ‘from Aaron and from Israel’. He is not linked with David nor is he a royal figure or a warrior. He is a teacher and his function is to restore the true and full law so that righteousness will be complete. This is an unusual profile, but one that in fact we find echoed in the Christian gospel of Matthew, where Jesus is more than hinted at as a second Moses. According to the *Damascus document*, the messiah will appear when the period God has preordained for anger comes to an end and will, presumably, also arise within the sect. Perhaps he is to be the high priest of a restored Jerusalem temple—we don’t know. But his main function was restoring the law and, by his arrival, announcing the return of divine favour.

⁴ CD means C[airo] D[amascus] and refers to the two major manuscripts found outside Qumran. The Qumran manuscripts are referred to simply as ‘D’.

Synthesis: the Judaism of the Damascus sect

So let me summarise. The Damascus Essenes comprised a Jewish sect living in camps and in quarters of Jewish cities. They believed they were the true Israel, though they were only partly in touch with the Jerusalem temple cult. Some of them practised celibacy, and all obeyed the law of Moses as they interpreted it, and followed their own calendar and their own regime of holiness. They calculated an imminent end to the time of divine anger, a time to be announced by a messianic teacher.

This is a sect in which all the main categories of Jewish religion are observable, defined on the whole by a different understanding of the law of Moses which, for some reasons, I suspect, had been outlawed by the authorities, forcing the adherents to live separately. There is some evidence that these Essenes were happy to accept new recruits. Josephus, like Philo of Alexandria (early first century CE) who also mentions them, suggests that they were even respected by other Jews. Philo also gives their number as 4000, which makes them a respectably large movement, though still a small minority among the Jews of Judea.

B. The Union

Now I turn to the group described in the *Community rule*, which referred to itself as the *yahad* (a term I translate as ‘Union’). What appears to complicate the task of differentiation is that all the manuscripts we have of the *Damascus document* have been edited by this group. But precisely as a result of the alterations made by them in the text, we can clearly see why and how this group broke away from the parent Essene movement, and in the process began to abandon or redefine the major categories of Judaism in formulating their account of the world and their place in it. To begin with, the beginning of one of the two major manuscripts (which were found first not at Qumran but at the end of the nineteenth century in an ancient Cairo synagogue) and the end of the other—respectively the beginning and end of the first section of the *Damascus document*—talk about the messianic teacher as having arrived, and indeed, of having died as well (rather like the Christian texts). The animosity displayed by the Damascus Essenes towards the fallen Israel outside their communities is now directed, by the dead messiah’s followers, again those Essenes themselves who did not accept his status as messiah and therefore did not accept that the end of history was now already upon them.

The new group found itself, then, as a sect of a sect. With its boundaries redefined, its structures revised and its world view refocused, it moved sharply away from even the redefined Judaism of its parent community. But also, as time goes on and the messiah dies and the end of history does not materialise, we find the development of new ideologies to cope; again, this also occurs in early Christianity. A term often used for the trauma of unfulfilled expectations in religious sects is ‘cognitive dissonance’, and many millenarian sects have had to face it. It refers to the crisis among believers brought on when what is seen or experienced, and what is believed, do not match. Thus, in other Dead Sea scrolls from the *yahad*, such as the commentary on

Habakkuk, the teacher is presented as a victim of persecution, whom others, led by one called a liar, deserted—though the truth is more probably that he and his group were rejected by the majority of Essenes.

So the *yahad*, the Union, transformed the already modified Judaism of the Essenes. We can observe this by looking again at the four categories: ‘Israel’, ‘Torah’, ‘Jerusalem temple’ and ‘messiah’.

Israel

The term ‘Israel’ ceases to have much meaning in the *Community rule*, because the traditional opposition of Israel and gentiles is abandoned in favour of a formal dualism coupled with an inherited (as we have seen earlier) but much more emphasised predestinarianism. The *Community rule* defines its members as ‘children of light’ or ‘children of truth’, with (apparently) the remainder of the human race, whether Jew or non-Jew/gentile, as children of darkness or falsehood. This dualism is described simultaneously as a cosmic and a psychological state, in which at first two ‘spirits’ of good and evil appear as subordinate deities to the ‘god of knowledge’ (this version looks rather close to Zoroastrianism); a second version sees the two forces as internalised dispositions within the human will (similar to the later, rabbinic notion of good and evil inclinations).

Thus, the **category** ‘Israel’, maintained and intensified among the Damascus Essenes, had a diminished role in this breakaway group: the Jewish perspective is effaced by being universalised both cosmically and psychologically. And the predestination that plays on the fringes of the *Community rule* and the *Damascus document* plays a **structural** role in this dualism, while the interim ‘period of wrath’ of the *Damascus document*—which lay between the revelation of God’s true law and the final revelation by the messiah of true righteousness—now becomes an interim period of ‘dominion of Belial’, lying between the creation of two spirits at the very beginning of time, and the final destruction of Belial and his heavenly and earthly followers. Time is thus ‘dualised’ into two epochs: the rule of Belial in the past and present, and the rule of God in the future. In all this, the notion of a chosen people, and the nature of its relationship to the god (of Israel? see below) has clearly been greatly transformed.

Torah

While the importance of the ‘Torah of Moses’ is retained in the *Community rule*, much less importance is attached to obedience to the new covenant of the Damascus Essenes. Obedience is replaced by ‘knowledge’ as the instrument of salvation. In the *Damascus document*, ‘Torah’ connotes a single body of revealed law as the basis for communal living. In the *Community rule*, although the will of God and the law of Moses are invoked, the language is overwhelmingly of esoteric ‘knowledge’ (eg 1QS 1.1⁵); ‘insight’ (eg 1QS 2.3); ‘counsel’ (eg 1QS 3.6); and ‘truth’ (eg 1QS 1.5). These

⁵ 1QS refers to the major manuscript of the *Community Rule*, found in Qumran Cave 1 (hence [Cave]1, Q[umran] S[erekh]=Rule).

words all relate to intellectual activity, to perception and understanding. There is a decisive movement beyond the notion of a specially revealed Torah to a true remnant of Israel. Rather, secret teachings are imparted to the members of the sect by an appointed leader: 'The Master shall instruct all the children of light and teach them the nature of all humans according to the kind of spirit they possess'. Evidence that the *yahad* was a more rigorously regimented society is apparent in the emphasis on the allotted status of each member, on the repetition of the word 'authority' in the document, on the practice of sharing goods in common (not practised among the Damascus Essenes), and on the presence of rules relating to internal discipline and not based on scriptural laws (contrary to the *Damascus document*). This fits the profile of a small group founded on the teachings of a charismatic leader and especially one threatened by a larger parent movement. In the section of the *Damascus document* edited by the Union we find the 'voice of the teacher' set alongside the 'law of Moses' with equal authority. Even after the death of this founding leader, this authoritarian ethic persists.

Jerusalem temple

The hostile attitude of the *Damascus document* towards the defiled Jerusalem temple cult, which was a product of high reverence for the sanctuary, is replaced in the *Community rule* by a more thorough rejection of the Jerusalem temple: a group of men constituting a 'council of the community' are described in terms that present them as a human sanctuary:

the community council shall be built on truth, like an eternal plantation, a holy house for Israel and the foundation of the Holy of Holies for Aaron...to atone for the world...the tested rampart, the prized cornerstone...the most holy dwelling for Aaron ...a house of perfection and truth (1QS 8.5–9).

Similarly, the Jerusalem temple cult will be superseded:

to atone for guilt of rebellion and for sin of unfaithfulness so as to win [divine] favour for the land without the flesh of burnt offerings and the fat of sacrifices...rightly-offered prayer shall be the fragrance of righteousness and perfection of way, a delightful freewill offering...the men of the Union shall set apart a house of holiness for Aaron (1QS 9.4–6).

In a text called the 'Angelic liturgy' (or 'Songs of the Sabbath sacrifice'), we can actually see how the notion of participation in the cult of the heavenly temple came to fill the gap left, or created, by the total abandonment of the Jerusalem temple as a necessary site of atonement and a source of holiness and communion with God.

Finally, in an even more radical manner, the function of water as a cleansing agent is downplayed: 'it is by the holy spirit of the *yahad* in [God's] truth that [a man] can be cleansed from all his iniquities'. Even circumcision is downplayed, for 'he shall rather circumcise in the *yahad* the foreskin of his inclination, his spirit'. The conclusion to

be drawn is not that these basic institutions of every form of Judaism were abandoned, but that their efficacy was confined to the Union. Every Jewish symbol is strictly disciplined into a single ideological and social construction: the *yahad* itself.

Messiah

Here we have to bear in mind a process of development. At first, the Union believe its true messiah had come and, as the Damascus Essenes expected, he had the full authority of God to lay down the law, literally. But he died. What do you do with a dead messiah?

Well, there seem to have been several options, and it is possible that the Union itself went in different ways—some members may even have gone back to the parent movement. There is some sign of a revival of a belief in two messiahs, or even that the present leaders of the sect were to be regarded as the messiahs, rather like some forms of *Shi'ite* Islam. Or they abandoned such hopes and looked to God alone. The scrolls are unable to provide us with a clear picture of what choices were made by Union members.

But it also seems to me that in its dualistic teaching the Union had already prepared itself to do without a messiah at all; everything was the outcome of divine planning, and every event was preordained. The chosen were chosen and would get their determined reward. I suspect, in fact, that this dualism was itself not part of the initial ideology of the *yahad* but something that developed in response to the loss of the messiah.

Synthesis: the Judaism of the *yahad*

The *yahad*, while no doubt formally continuing to regard itself as a sort of Judaism, in fact developed a system that abandoned or overturned the categories of Jewish religion. Israel, Torah and the Jerusalem temple, at least, were overturned in the new system. The two core elements of the system were fanatical devotion to a tightly bound group practising an ideology of communion with angels, and a belief in a universe in which everything was divided into light or darkness and so had been preordained. If this part of the *Community rule* had not been found in the caves by the Dead Sea and had not been written in Hebrew, it is debatable that there is extant material in the edited text that would have led us to identify the *Community rule* as the product of a Jewish sect.

Conclusion

It seems to me that we have indeed found in the theology of the *yahad* the elements of a system reflected in the alternatives discussed earlier that lurked within rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. This element posed a threat—a considerable one in the case of Christianity—to the prevailing orthodoxies. In these gnostic systems, whether or not they were coupled with mystical tendencies, we may have the continuation of the

religion that here, in the scrolls, we can see emerging from within Judaism itself and becoming, under the pressure of exclusion, a fanatical belief its own rightness and tight sectarian discipline. In the scrolls we have, indeed, evidence of a new religion. Whatever happened to the Essenes, the theological system of the *Community rule* seems to have had a long and influential afterlife, and elements of this system can be traced in the teachings of Mani, among the Bogomils, the Cathars and other groups regarded as heretical by the prevailing Christian and Jewish orthodox traditions.

I have not been able to answer the question of whether we have in such a system something that is perennial or something with a discrete origin. It would be possible, and indeed useful, to go in the opposite direction and ask whether we have in the theology of the *yahad* some kind of intrusion into Jewish thought of aspects of another religion, Zoroastrianism. However, a positive conclusion to this question would not necessarily undermine the process I have sketched here.

Perhaps the truth is that perennial tendencies usually require discrete historical circumstances in order to emerge or, alternatively, to migrate from one religion to another. All I have been able to show here is the manner in which an apparently orthodox Judaism can become its 'other' with remarkable ease. This is a useful lesson, perhaps, for all students of religion to ponder. Religions can take interesting turns and, regardless of their tightness of control and rigidity of doctrinal categories and systems, the occasional 'revolution' can occur. The scrolls offer an interesting and instructive example of such a revolution within Judaism.

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