

CHRISTIANITY AND QUMRAN

The Relationship Between The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christianity

Some see Christianity borrowing from concepts accepted by the Essenes and illustrated in the literature at Qumran. There is, however, very little evidence to substantiate this supposition.

Their major similarities stem from the fact that both Christian and Essene philosophies keyed heavily on prophecy. This approach has major theological implications and accounts for many of the similarities between each of their literatures.

But there is a critical difference in their interpretations. The sectarians of Qumran did not see the prophets modifying the Torah, an essential tenant of Christian thought. They ascribed a descending order of importance to the Hebrew scriptures and it was a hierarchy determined entirely by age. The older the document, the more credence it carried.

The Essenes were quite visible at the time of Christ and all the people knew them; they were scattered throughout Palestine, in every village. Yet Christ never found it necessary to single them out as objects of falsehood the way he did the Pharisees or Sadducees.

In fact, if the works prescribed by the Jewish Law could save, the Essenes would have been the proof of it. The fact is, Christ prescribed a completely different theological formula for God's salvation; one based on faith and coming outside the Law.

The Essenes proliferated in Palestine in the first century and were called into Christ's Way in the same manner as all other Jews were. The fact that they were as unable to make the transition as the Sadducees and Pharisees underscores the differences between their views and Christ's.

Because the Essene focus concentrated on 'works of the law', Christ's teachings were just as foreign to them as to the others. The Jewish philosophers and historians may have considered the Essenes the paragons of virtue in the Palestinian theocracy, yet Christ detailed a virtue that was different. True virtue, he said, is a matter of God, not a prescription by men, however holy.

The Dead Sea Scrolls show us that the Essene's were exclusive and secret; they believed in

a kind of Gnosticism: a secret knowledge known only to privileged insiders. They hated women, were intolerant of children, frowned on marriage, forgave each other but hated their sworn enemies, and practiced rigorous fidelity to infinite refinements of the physical Law.

They were fatical in their ideas of clean and unclean; bathing even before sitting down to meal as a matter of theological ritual. They were afraid even to cook a meal on the sabbath. Yet they fed the poor and helped widows and orphans, wedding the themes of the prophets to the restrictions of the Torah.

A major focus of Qumran literature is their discipleship with the prophets and their obsession with prophecy. This contrasts markedly with the focus of the Rabbi's of orthodox Judaism.

The Essene idea of an immortal soul was only a modest refinement of the pharisaic philosophy expressed in the writings of Josephus, and both ideas stemmed originally from the Greek philosopher Plato who introduced the doctrine some 400 years earlier.

The Essenes can be seen in two contexts. One, they were convinced that they could work their way into God's favor and had developed one of the most sophisticated Jewish systems for such an endeavor up to that time.

Numerically they were not that successful, gaining only about 4000 adherents over a period of at least two centuries. Their small numbers in relation to the other people of Palestine at the time of Christ were almost certainly the reason why no mention of them is found in Christian literature.

Their's was only one of a chorus of voices that heralded the coming of the Messiah to Palestine at the time of Christ. This time in the history of Palestine was called the 'Messianic Age' because of the fervor of the people in expectation of the fulfillment of the prophetic writings.

As such, they helped put the people of Palestine in readiness to receive the message that God had ordained to send them at that time. Their teaching was a counterbalance to the philosophy of the pharisees and sadducees; refocusing attention on the social themes of the prophets at a time when justice was becoming a theological orphan.

Although these were voices of prophecy, and a part of the Messianic fervor of the times, the Essenes were not to be the fulfillment of the prophecy that they heralded. Many of their prophecies were wrong and much of what they taught was inaccurate.

Along with everyone else in Judea, they were held captive to the tight bondage that characterized the physical restrictions of the Jewish Law.

Christ alone was God's instrument to break this bondage. His was the one voice that would

define virtue perfectly. He introduced a new epoch for civilization. Not as a new philosophy, but as the 'constant' for all philosophy -- a 'proclamation of an act of God in history, the culminating act in a long series' of preludes that collectively make up the Old Testament.

The Essene theology looked forward to the coming of the kingdom. Jesus brought the kingdom. In the Qumran writings the Teacher of Righteousness was not considered the Messiah; he was a herald who taught that the Messiah's coming was imminent, and that preparations needed to be made for the sake of being able to stand before that appearance in a state of worthiness.

The members of the sect of Qumran cherished messianic expectations. We know from the New Testament that such anticipations were widespread in Judea during this period. And in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., a number of works were written in which these expectations were expressed.

In the New Testament we have only one messiah expected: the descendant of David. In the Scrolls at Qumran, however, we find the expectation of **two** Messiah's; one Davidic and the other Aaronic. In other words, one a king and the other a priest.

In the Manual of Discipline we find the expression "the messiahs of Aaron and Israel" used, i.e., a Messianic Pair. Greater status, in fact, at Qumran was given to the priestly Messiah -- who was termed the 'Anointed One'.

Such a preference is not surprising. The Jewish focus has always been on the priesthood. Christians, on the other hand, from the beginning, have concentrated on the royal kingship. The holiest lineage in Jewish theology in this regard is descendancy in the priesthood of 'Zadok', a term used liberally by the sectarians of Qumran. For them, Zadok defined the Hebrew priesthood, and with it, the core of messianic expectation.

Christians, ignore this high priest of Hebrew history, and concentrate their entire focus on 'David', the source of royalism in the Old Testament, and under whom Zadok co-governed (with Abiathar) the religious ritual of Israel.

Abiathar was defrocked by Solomon, David's son, and from that point on, the sons of Zadok came into complete control of the Hebrew priesthood, forming a ruling aristocracy that continued down through the centuries until the stormy days that surrounded Antiochus Epiphanes IV.

The 'Zadokite Work', found at the beginning of this century in the Cairo Genizah and now generally recognized as having emanated from Qumran, shows that there was an expectation that the two Messiah's would come within 40 years of the death of the Teacher of Righteousness.

'For the Christian church Jesus is the only Messiah, and it has no place for a second. He is

believed to be the Davidic Messiah, the idea of which is drawn from the Old Testament, not from Qumran; and there is no indication anywhere in Christian writings that a priestly Messiah was ever contemplated, or would have precedence over Jesus.

Christ, in fact, is considered to be a priest in himself, but his priesthood derives from Melchizedek, not from Aaron. He is of a far higher priesthood than the Aaronic priesthood whose preeminence mesmerized the sectaries of Qumran. It is a priesthood the Bible tells us went from Father to one Son exclusively.

This issue is so fundamental, and the differences between Christians and the Qumran sect so diverse in this regard, that it makes any thought of Christianity growing out of Qumran doctrine virtually impossible to seriously accept, even if no other differences existed between them.

In his 'Manual of Discipline', The Teacher of Righteousness outlined the behavior necessary for the community to undertake in order to prepare for the two Messiah's he had convinced himself, was coming.

The amazing thing is that Christ did come, just as the sectarians had predicted, perhaps even within the time-frame that they had predicted; yet, they failed to recognize either him, or John the Baptist who had come to prepare the way for him. There they stood, alert -- waiting and watching while Jesus and John walked among them and they saw nothing.

The people of Qumran called their priestly members "Sons of Zadok". The aristocracy of the Jewish priesthood changed under the direction of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. Onias was assassinated, and a new, non-Zadokite lineage was implaced by the Greeks.

Growing out of this upheaval, a great rivalry was born, with the Sons of Zadok out of power and the newcomers trying to solidify there new position. It was a rivalry that the Essenes apparently carried into the first century A.D.

It may be that they rejected all other families of the priesthood or they may have spiritualized this one family above the others in terms of their own interpretation of 'zeal for the Law' -- the highest ethic in the Jewish religion.

Zadok, as we have seen, was the High Priest of David and Solomon and was descended from Phineas, Eleazar and Aaron. Because of this background, this lineage is widely recognized as the aristocratic descendency of the Jerusalem High Priesthood.

'The Essene's at Qumran did not offer sacrifices in the Temple. It has been suggested in the literature that this may have been because they refused to recognize the priesthood in Jerusalem during these turbulent times as being in the true line of succession from Zadok, not because they rejected the Temple or its ritual in itself. They looked, perhaps, for a rightful priest.'

According to the scrolls, in the Qumran organization the priests were accorded the place of highest honor. Jesus, came just the opposite. He was not a priest, and did not function as a priest in his association with his disciples.

His priesthood came to be recognized only at the end of his ministry when he exercised it in one single act; and it took place not in the Temple, but on a hill outside the city of Jerusalem where he offered himself up for the salvation of all men.'

'We know very little about the Teacher of Righteousness. He lived in a violent era and was opposed by one who is called in the scrolls, the 'Wicked Priest', who persecuted him. In the Zadokite Work he is said to have been 'gathered in'. This expression is used in the Old Testament for natural death.

There is an obscure passage in the Habakkuk Commentary which is believed by many scholars to mean that he suffered martyrdom.

In another text there is a reference to an enemy of the sect, called the Lion of Wrath, who hung men alive. While it is probable that this refers to crucifixion, this text makes no reference to the Teacher of Righteousness at all, so it cannot be assumed that crucifixion here relates to the Teacher of Righteousness.'

Actually, the passage almost certainly applies to the 'Lion of Wrath' described by Josephus who crucified 400 pharisees in retaliation for their appeal to 'Demetrius the Ready', his arch rival.

Was the teaching of Jesus influenced by the Essenes? The two teachings are so different, there is serious question that an Essene could even be converted by Christ, let alone emanate from the community.

In the New Testament, the death and resurrection of Jesus is not buried in a single obscure passage; these two momentous events are transcendent throughout the whole, and they are fundamental to an understanding of the entire theology of the Church from its earliest days.

'The death and resurrection of Jesus completely dominates the thought and faith of Christianity, while nothing of the kind comes from Qumran. They move in two entirely different theological worlds.'

In the New Testament we read "You have heard it said "you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Many biblical commentators have shown that not even in the Old Testament do we find the command to hate enemies, and so this command by Jesus has always been considered a kind of enigma to scholars. Yet In the Qumran Scrolls we do find such a command.

Whether or not Jesus had the Qumran community in mind when he uttered such sayings, it is certain that his attitude on these questions and issues was quite different from theirs.

'The contrast between his attitude concerning Sabbath observance and that of the sectarians of Qumran is also notable. Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for what they regarded as his laxity about Sabbath matters.' And if the Pharisees considered Jesus lax on this issue, the men of Qumran would have thought Him positively revolutionary.

'The Scrolls teach a sabbatarianism that was much more strict than that even of the Pharisees -- to such an extent, in fact, that the members of the sect would have been shocked by the saying of Jesus: "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath."

When Jesus was watched to see if he would heal the man with a withered hand on the Seventh Day, he said "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?" According to the teaching of the sectarians at Qumran, neither should be helped up on the Sabbath.

The Essenes refused to offer sacrifices in the Temple and in the Qumran writings there are no references whatsoever to animal sacrifice, which was so basic to the Jewish religious life in these times. This, despite the fact that the priesthood was the highest ranking office in the Qumran community.

Its break with the sacrificial rituals is seen by most scholars to be the result of priestly rivalry. Qumran was at odds with the Jerusalem priesthood and had boycotted the Temple. This is not true of Jesus and his disciples, however.

Jesus visited the Temple and taught there often. The Jerusalem Temple, in fact, was a central focus in his ministry to the Jews. When he cleansed a leper, Jesus told the man to go to the Temple and offer the prescribed sacrifice.

Even after Jesus had been crucified and risen, the Early Church did not stay away from the Temple, but worshipped God there regularly and often. We can see references to this in the Acts of the Apostles. And when Paul made a vow he fulfilled it by offering sacrifice in the Temple.

The whole idea of status among believers is another area where Qumran and Christianity are at odds. There was a defined hierarchy among the sectarians at Qumran. There were four distinct classes or ranks. These included priests, levites, lay members and proselytes. And every year there was a review of the conduct of all the members, leading to advancement to a higher place or relegation to a lower.

'The disciples of Jesus were also interested in questions of precedence, and we read that they so argued among themselves concerning claims to the highest place. His response to these questions shows beyond doubt that Jesus had nothing of the Qumran attitude in mind.' He rebuked them for even discussing such matters, and said: "If anyone would be

first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

Before a sectarian could become a fullfledged member of the Qumran community, he had to undergo a series of probationary periods lasting 3 years. By contrast, only the single sacrament of baptism separates a Christian from the non-Christian community.

There has never been a probationary period in Christianity. At Qumran, before the proselyte could be admitted to fellowship he underwent an unspecified period of examination by the 'Many,' (the term used by the sect to describe those who had attained full membership in the community) and if found acceptable, was admitted to a one-year first probationary period where he was not permitted to touch "the purity of the Many", which touch was regarded by senior members as the touch of filth.

At the end of that year he was again considered by "the Many" as to his understanding of the Law and his way of life and if regarded as satisfactory, he underwent another year of probation during which time he was not permitted to touch the food of the members.

Josephus describes the first unspecified period of probation as being one year. Thus it took 3 years for a Qumran proselyte to come into full Essene fellowship. There is not a hint anywhere that Jesus or his disciples ever copied any of this, even in the Jewish Christian Church in Jerusalem.

One of the most profound differences between Christianity and the Qumran sectarians is in the question of baptism and ritual purity. In Christianity the Law has been supplanted by faith, so cleanliness relates to the soul. But to the Essenes, who lived by the Law, it related to the body.

The "purity of the Many" was perpetuated by full-body bathing at least twice daily, before each meal. This was a religious ritual event. For them, if the body was not perpetually cleansed from head to foot, the conversion of heart was useless.

On the subject of ritual ablutions, the attitude of Jesus stands in complete contrast to that of the sect. There are references in the scrolls to purificatory waters, and from Josephus we learn that they bathed completely as a matter of ritual before each meal.

That Jesus and his disciples did not follow even the slightest hint of such practices is clear. 'When the disciples were criticized for not even washing their hands before eating, Jesus defended them.

In fact, the only ritual washing that occurs in the New Testament., besides baptism, is a single event when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples as an example of the service, God demands: The highest will serve the lowest. "If I, your Lord and Master, do such to you, you must do the same for each other." "Whoever is the greatest must behave as if he is the youngest."

The attitude at Qumran was the opposite. The youngest (newest) members of the sect were not even allowed to participate in the purificatory baths, and if a member of greater stature even so much as touched a junior member, the elder member was obliged to wash himself in a ritual purification as having touched filth.' Such behavior is the antithesis Of everything Christ taught.

The scrolls show that in the Qumran community there was no special significance attached to the first bath; there was no defined "baptism" per se. The whole character and significance of John's baptism was so different from anything that is known from Qumran that correlation between the two is a contradiction of terms.

At Qumran, the washings were ritual events, repeated over and over again. As we have seen, the disciples of Jesus were not even instructed to wash their hands before meals, let alone bathe their entire bodies and put on ritual 'purification garments' as did the Essenes.

When confronted with far less stringent ideas of bodily purity put forth by the Pharisees, Jesus said "Leave them alone, they are blind men leading blind men. It is not what goes into the body of man that makes him impure, but what comes out of him: fornication, theft, lying, hating, and all manner of corruption."

'There was no duplicate event among the Qumran sectarians to baptism. This event in Christianity is a unique onetime ceremony. It is a sacrament that in its essence concerns only a man and his Maker. It is the signal act of a new contract.

Baptism seals the contract: the New Covenant. It is a moral event. A pledge to repentance and conversion by man and the promise of everlasting life by God. It is the initiation into the spiritual 'Passover,' the fulfillment of the original passover. And because it is the passover's fulfillment, it borrows the water of the Exodus, where the Israelites passed from slavery to freedom through the divinely parted waters of the Red Sea. In this journey, they were saved 'by water'.

Peter used the same kind of illustration with Noah. "Now it was long ago, when Noah was still building that ark which saved only a small group of eight people 'by water'..." "That water", said Peter, "was a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt, but a pledge made to God from a good conscience..."

While the Essene purifications borrow from Levitical ideas, the Christian act is the fulfillment of the introductory event in the act of salvation. 'John's baptism prepared the people for the coming of the new kingdom; ushered them into a state of readiness to accept it.'

Covering the convert in the grace of divine forgiveness, it is a preparation for the two additional baptisms that Christ, himself must supply: i.e, the baptisms of fire and of the Holy Spirit. Thus baptism by water in Christianity is a symbol that the inside of the vessel

(the heart of man) has been made pure for the indwelling Spirit of the Gospel to take its place there.

In the 'Manual of Discipline', purification to 'meet the Messiah' takes place through a complex and arduous ritual of actions which try to cleanse the flesh. In Christ, it is accomplished instantly by a baptism of repentance. And in that moment of baptism, every sin is forgiven and the vessel (the heart) is made totally pure.

The one event in Christianity which is repeated over and over again in the manner that Essenes perpetually bathed their bodies, is Communion. If the first Essene bath had any kind of significance above the others at all, it would be for them what first communion might be for Christians, i.e., the first of a perpetual series of events.

The Essenes had nothing that compares with communion (the memorial of the crucifixion), and its hope -- which, for Christians ties up all the sacrifices of the Jewish Law into a grand recapitulation of Christ's death for the salvation of mankind.

The Essenes expected to establish the kingdom on earth physically, waging the war between light and darkness with carnal weapons, killing their hated enemies. Jesus, on the other hand, offered himself up passively as the signal example of the spiritual defense of the kingdom.

Darkness was to be defeated by the spiritual warfare of Christ, not with guns, bullets or swords. There would be no carnal killing in the establishment of Christ's kingdom, and if such violence did occur, it would be a contradiction of terms and without spiritual justification.

According to W.D. Davies, 'Christian Origins and Judaism', 1962, p.113: "There is no real parallel in the Scrolls to Christian baptism, because they lack any real counterpart to the dying and rising with Christ which Paul and other early Christians took to be the essence of baptism."

The death and resurrection was the 'sine qua non' of Christianity. i.e., 'without which, nothing!' Everything comes back to this. Christians do not celebrate all the meals that Jesus took with his disciples; only one! The last one pointed to the Cross.

He was giving his life for the salvation of the world. "Here is my body, eat it. Here is my blood, drink it!" "Do this in memory of me." The death of Christ in the body points to the uselessness of bodily purifications. Just as he died in the body, we die with him to the flesh and to its carnal laws.

The purification rites relating to the 'outer tent' point, not to the body, but to the spiritual heart of man -- to the inner soul. That is the purification Christ brought. One that makes a person convert from one way of life to another.

He lay his life down for our salvation and communion perpetuated our memory of this, binding inseparably the act of the Cross with the Words He spoke and the Life He lived.' Here was the cleansing and here was the path. Resurrection from death is the entire reason for the Old Testament!

While the Essenes were culling ideas from the Old Testament, piecemeal, they were entirely lacking in the immense concepts which drive Christianity as a powerful force. 'While fascinating and mysterious, the concepts of Qumran are not momentous.'

'Philo tells us that the Essenes were a pacific sect. But there is no reason to suppose that they conceived the Davidic Messiah in any other than the conquering terms that characterized the popular expectation in the time of Jesus.

They cherished the text described as the War Scroll, which described the war of the sons of light against the sons of darkness and which kept alive dreams of the day when the nations of the world should be successively destroyed in battle.

They looked forward to the day when Judea would be established as the preeminent ruling nation on the earth. Jesus discouraged any reference to himself as the Messiah and promoted his divine royalty in quite different terms. It Was not by killing but by dying that he proposed to save his people.

'The Qumran sect seems to have abandoned their pacific way of life in the war with Rome, where they seemed to have joined with the rebel forces in the belief that the long-dreamed-of time for the establishment of the kingdom had finally come.

It was during the war with Rome that the Qumran center was destroyed, and Josephus tells us that the Romans persecuted the Essenes with the utmost cruelty, which the latter bore with superhuman fortitude. One of the Essenes became a commander in the rebel forces. All of this stands in the sharpest contrast to our Lord's conception of the way His kingdom would be established.

'It has been claimed that Jesus and his followers used the Essene calender, the calendar of the Book of Jubilees, to which there is a reference in the Zadokite Work from the Cairo Genizah, and which calls for the celebration of Jewish festivals on days different from the orthodox calendar used in Temple worship at Jerusalem.

But nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus show the slightest interest in calendar questions. In the first chapter of Acts, the angel of God warned the disciples, when they had started to look into the matter of dates, to cease and desist in these matters, saying: "It is not for you to know the times and dates that God has fixed."

When Jesus is reported to have attended the Temple, he is shown to have done so in conjunction with the official dates.' This is in marked contrast to the Qumran teachings, which had an entirely different calendar'.

For Christianity the Temple was made for Jesus. It was the very symbol of Jesus. As it states in Revelations, He **is** the Temple. "Tear this building down and in three days I will rebuild it," he stated categorically.

Jesus was the Testimony for which the Temple existed. Just as the first Temple had been built by Solomon to house the Testimony contained in the Ark of the Covenant, Herod's Temple, to Jesus existed to house the Gospel -- the completion of the word inside the Ark.

Here was the point of Christianity's break with the Jerusalem heirarchy. Refusing to accept the Testimony for which it was built, the Temple of Herod was discarded by God and rebuilt invisibly inside the hearts of those who accepted the Gospel. In this way, a spiritual Temple replaced the physical Temple.

'The sectarians of Qumran referred to themselves as people who had entered into the new covenant. This recalls Jesus' reference at the Last Supper to the new Covenant.' Yet both draw this reference from the prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer.31:31) which promised that the Covenant of Moses would soon come to an end and be replaced by 'a new covenant' which would be written on the people's hearts.

'There is a great difference between the Scrolls concept of this new covenant and that taught by Jesus in the New Testament. The new covenant of Qumran was not a new covenant at all, but a renewal of the obligation to observe the old. And, indeed, in its strictest interpretation. Qumran reaffirmed the old covenant.

The Christian covenant was completely new, abrogating the myriad Levitical restrictions by reinterpreting them in spiritual terms and thus providing a clean break with the legalistic religion of the past, and under the spell of which moralism was held in bondage.'

Christ freed moralism by spiritualizing the Law of Moses, and by defining ethics absolutely, not just by Word, but in his lifestyle as well. He gave moralism both a definition and an example. Under his hand the old legal system was made to pass away, replaced by its ethical counterpart.

Jesus introduced a true New Covenant between man and God into the world. One which replaced the violence of revenge with the peace of forgiveness.

'Qumran were dedicated to the old covenant; to the legalisms of Leviticus, and its members measured their devotion to God by their obedience and fidelity to these legalisms. Their austere lifestyle and concern for sabbatical and legal ritual were, while worthy of men's admiration, not a reflection of a new covenant, but a much stricter reaffirmation of the old.'

In this respect, the confrontation between Qumran and Christianity is a classic illustration of the clash between 'works of the law' and 'faith'.

'The concepts that Christ brought must have been just as much a shock to the Essenes as they proved to be to the Pharisees and Sadducees. While many of their beliefs should have made it easier for them to make the conversion to his new way, other facets of their belief probably actually made it much harder.

For all their feigned humility and vows to poverty, the Essenes were internally imperious and aristocratic. They thought of themselves as being better than the rest of the Jews.'

It was precisely to this attitude that Christ spoke the parable about the two men coming to the Temple to pray. One thanked God for his fidelity to the Law and for his goodness, while the other stayed way back and, with his head bent to the ground, begging God for mercy because he was a sinner. Christ said that it was the second man who went home justified by God rather than the former.

In Luke 18:9 there is a passage which states that Jesus spoke a parable "to some people who prided themselves on being virtuous and despised everyone else." This description could fit the Pharisees, but it involves a special uniqueness that far better points to the sectarians of Qumran, which the contemporary writers of the time have said were scattered liberally throughout the population of Judea during the years that Jesus taught.

Almost all of the similarities between Christian concepts and those of the Essenes stem from the Old Testament and from the prophets. The white garments, the new covenant, the moral intensity, feeding the poor and caring for widows, the relationship of a man for his friends, the desire for peace, the rituals of sabbath and purity, the concepts of light and darkness and the coming of the Messiah all are recorded in passages distributed throughout the Old Testament.

These issues are especially prevalent in the writings of the prophets. Even the idea of two Messiah's, a key tenant held by the sectarians of Qumran, can be culled, if one bends the prophecy far enough, from the words of Zechariah.

'In the isolation of Qumran, in the silence of the torrid desert days and the crisp black nights, these people must have felt themselves very close to God', with the stars so bright that the heavens seemed close enough to reach out and touch.

With such isolation and with so much of their time dedicated to a meticulous word by word sifting through every statement in the ancient literature, it is no wonder that they came into a partial union with the major symbolic concepts awaiting discovery in the Old Testament.

For them, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Habakkuk and all the other prophets were truly messengers from the Holy One of Israel, bringing into their view actual prophecy from God.

But how different are the manifestation of these prophecies in their Christian fulfillment

than the way the sectarians envisioned them to be? In Christianity the visions are given so that we might look back and thereby understand the Christ God had sent to us, but the Essenes tried to bring it all forward in order to foresee it and to fulfill it in themselves. This was not to be.

'The admission of new members into the sect is provided for in the Zadokite Work and in the Manual of Discipline, and is described by Josephus. The Zadokite Work probably comes from a time early in the history of the sect, and the Manual of Discipline from a later time. (c.f. Rowley, 'Some Traces of the History of the Qumran Sect').

The procedure was simpler as described in the Zadokite Work, while that in the Manual of Discipline is closer to that described by Josephus. The Zadokite Work tells us that the candidate for membership was examined by the Inspector as to his works, his understanding, his might, his strength, and his wealth. If the Inspector was satisfied, he was enrolled in the membership.

According to the Manual of Discipline, a candidate was examined by the Overseer, and if he was satisfied, the candidate was admitted to the covenant, but was not yet admitted to the fellowship.' He underwent three years of probation.

The relationship between John the Baptist and the Essenes has been the object of controversy. Since the scrolls discovery in 1947, many scholars have claimed a connection between John the Baptist and the Qumran sect. Their arguments center on geography and ritual ablution.

The Qumran community was thriving at the time of John the Baptist preached and its location was centered in an area somewhat to the south of where John was conducting baptisms. There were major differences between them, however.

John taught and baptised along the Jordan river between the Sea of Galilee and Jericho. The Qumran community was located below Jericho, on the western edge of the Dead Sea.

The population of Palestine was easily able to reach the areas where John taught. Due to the fresh water of the river, the area was habitable, populated and supportive of life. The Essene community on the other hand was isolated and desolate and extremely difficult to reach.

The doctrines taught by John the Baptist and the Essenes were quite different from one another, and, as we have seen, the ritual ablutions practiced by the community of Qumran were nothing like the baptisms that John was initiating in Galilee.

The Gospel states that John, and Jesus after him, preached a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'. Bodily purification was never an issue with John.

Building on the Book of Leviticus the Essenes developed an entire 'system' of purificatory

baths that related to the length of time a member had been a part of the group. The Essene bathing was secret and private and it was exclusively for males, designed to bring members into and maintain members inside a monastic lifestyle.

John's baptism did not lead to a monastic existence and was not followed by any further ritual lustrations or ablutions. According to Paul, the baptism of John was a public vow of an act of internal faith where the water symbolized a moral cleansing. It put the participant in readiness to receive the holiness of Christ.

Paul said that it was the faith rather than the water that accomplished the cleansing. As such, John's baptism is a single event, an essential preparation for the reconciliation of man with God. For this reason, as stated before, it compares with the Jewish ritual of circumcision far more than it does with ritual bathing.

Women are as important as men in the practice of Christianity. Circumcision excluded women and so had to be replaced by a ritual that was universal. The Essenes could never have comprehended this because they were so single-minded in their rejection of women.

In fact, such a substitution could only have come from the Lord because even Paul, for all his wisdom, and the Apostles who had been enlightened by long contact with Jesus were often condescending toward the opposite sex. They were following social mores that were so absolute in their time, it was unthinkable for them to view females as equals.

In fact, it has taken 2000 years of Christian teaching for women to gain even a semblance of equality with men in human civilization. The Essenes could never have contemplated the admission of a woman to their group, let alone, introduced a ritual that gave them instant and full equality within the inner circle of their community.

'Although John the Baptist lived and taught in the Judean wilderness, his relationship with the Essenes cannot have been close. John preached out loud and publicly to the masses. The Essenes considered the masses to be so unclean that even the slightest contact with one of them required ritual washing.

Instead, the Essenes taught privately and in secret. The Essenes considered it a grave sin to reveal their teachings to outsiders, with death preferable by comparison.'

Since the discovery of the scrolls at Qumran, additional scrolls have been discovered in caves up and down the cliffs bordering the Dead Sea. All of these, however, are later documents than those at Qumran and, for this reason show the marked influence of Jamnia.

The material found at Masada, for instance, are the actual documents of Simon ben Kochba proclaimed by Rabbi Akiba of the Jamnia School in 132 A.D. to be the long awaited 'Messiah of the Jews'. Rabbi Akiba renamed ben Kochba 'Simon bar Kochba', i.e. the 'Son of the Star' (of Numbers 24:17).

From this ecclesiastical endorsement and platform, bar Kochba launched the final rebellion against Rome, fighting a war that lasted from 132 A.D. until his death in 135 A.D. So devastating was the Roman retaliation against the Jewish community for bar Kochba's rebellion that Jews were forbidden thereafter even to enter the city of Jerusalem under pain of death.

Because of this ban and its consequences, the Jewish leaders have defined that date (135 A.D.) as the beginning of the Jewish Diaspora which has continued all the way to this century (coming to a partial end in 1947).

The sect at Qumran was a cult of Judaism. It entertained none of the enlightenment or freedom of thought necessary to produce a movement like Christianity. Like every cult, it was a dead end because of its imperious restrictions and lack of insight.

In many ways it has close parallels with the cults of our time. The war scroll and its events bear an uncanny similarity to the teachings of the Seventh Day Adventists who insist that the end of the world is imminent and that it will be ushered in by a great war in which those who worship God on Saturday will be saved and those who conduct their worship on Sunday will be destroyed.

Almost all cults envision themselves the sole beneficiaries of God's inheritance, and the sole survivors of the terminal warfare that the Bible says is destined to usher in the Messiah's new kingdom.

Like every cult, the sectarians of Qumran were meticulously legalistic and ritualistic. They loved each other, but they hated their enemies. Pious and arrogant, they saw themselves as better than anyone else. They were obsessed with washing and cleansing their bodies in order to remove the stain of any touch with the people around them.

In the end, they were destroyed because they picked up weapons and tried to institute the coming of the kingdom by a force of arms. Nothing is heard of the Essenes after the Roman War, and the community of Qumran has lain empty since the Romans destroyed it in 70 A.D.

Their obsession with the biblical prophets cannot be overstated. Especially with Zechariah and Daniel. Looking for truths in their own time, they tried to open visions that God had placed far into the future. Intermingling these with the Messianic revelations that were for their own era, they failed to understand either.


Only now, and in retrospect, can we comprehend the depth of the prophecy they missed, and, at the same time, appreciate their insight. Christians have been struggling to understand many of the same visions the sectarians wrestled with, and some have fallen victim to the same delusions. But for most, the light of Jesus has led them into a community service marked by love and humility -- to a peace scroll; not to a war scroll

with its ritualistic fanaticism and social intolerance.

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