

CHAPTER ONE  
JOHN THE BAPTIZER AND THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

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One fascinating question has preoccupied experts since the beginning of the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which were first discovered in the winter of 1947. It is the relationship between John the Baptizer (or the Baptist) and the community of religious men who lived at Qumran, not far from where the Baptizer was active. The purpose of this paper is to present a hypothesis that appeared to me as I was preparing a critical edition of the twelve manuscripts of the *Rule of the Community*. I am persuaded that this document, the quintessential composition by the Qumranites, helps us understand the most likely relation between John the Baptizer and the Qumranites.<sup>1</sup>

INTRODUCTION

Since 1956 I have been reading the speculations on how John the Baptizer must have been an Essene or could not have been related in any way to the Qumran Community. I am not interested here in providing a report of published research on this question. If one were contemplated, it might begin with the excessive claim by H. Graetz in 1893 that the first Jews who announced that the Messiah is coming were the Essenes. Graetz claimed that the Essene who sent forth this call to the Israelites was John the Baptist (whose name doubtless meant the Essene), he who daily bathed and cleansed both body and soul in spring water. Graetz contended that John appears fully to have entertained the belief that if only the whole Judean nation would bathe in the river

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1. The present paper is a revision and expansion of one that was published in Donald W. Parry and Eugene C. Ulrich, eds., *The Provo International Conference on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Technological Innovations, New Texts and Reformulated Issues* (New York: Brill, 1999). I am grateful to the editors and publisher for permission to publish this revised version.

Jordan, acknowledge their sins, and adopt the strict Essene rules, the promised Messianic time could be no longer deferred.<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, no Qumran expert today would defend such a position in light of what is now known about the Qumranites and their library. The reference to Graetz illustrates that a report of research on the relationship between the Baptizer and the Qumranites would entail a large monograph, and that would blur my focus. Presently my concern is turned to the primary texts from Qumran.

### APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

My approach is appreciably different from most of the research published on this focused question. Frequently, those who are interested in John the Baptizer begin with the New Testament evidence and seek to comprehend what can be known about this pivotal figure in both Jesus research and in the study of Christian Origins.<sup>3</sup> I, rather, begin with an interest in John the Baptizer and his place within Early Judaism (Second Temple Judaism).

John the Baptizer is only the most prominent member of a wide and diverse baptist movement including Bannus, the Nasoreans, Ebionites, Elkasites, and the groups behind the *Apocalypse of Adam* and *Sibylline Oracle* book 4. It is important to keep in mind how the Baptizer relates to this wider baptist movement.<sup>4</sup> As Adolf Schlatter affirmed, John was given the name “Baptizer” not by Christians but by Jews and probably by members of his movement.<sup>5</sup> I shall approach this intriguing figure in light of what I have learned from preparing the first critical edition of all manuscript witnesses to the *Rule of the Community*. This and other editorial work awakened in me a special appreciation of the Qumranic laws and lore for admitting or excluding a prospective member—or even a full member—of

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2. Heinrich Graetz, *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1893), 2:145–46.

3. B. Chilton portrays Jesus as a “*Talmid*” of the Baptizer. He mastered John’s “*mishnah*,” learned to “embody” the imagery of Ezekiel, and in an apocalyptic manner saw the vision of the chariot. See Bruce D. Chilton, *Rabbi Jesus: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 41–63.

4. A helpful book, now dated and in need of expansion, is Joseph Thomas’s *Le mouvement baptiste en Palestine et Syrie (150 av. J.-C.–300 ap. J.-C.)* (Gembloux: Ducolot, 1935).

5. I am indebted to Hermann Lichtenberger for discussing this issue with me. See Adolf von Schlatter, *Johannes der Täufer* (ed. W. Michaelis; Gütersloh: Mohn, 1956), 61.

the community.<sup>6</sup> I wondered how and in what ways my reflections might provide a better understanding of the striking similarities between the Baptizer and the Qumranites.

Second, it is clear that the Qumran Community was a social group with unusually high barriers for admission and strict rules for promotion, temporary exclusion, and even permanent expulsion. I have endeavored to enrich our understanding of the Qumran Community by learning from sociologists about purity and social barriers, and applying sociological studies, obviously refined by a sensitivity to different phenomena,<sup>7</sup> so that sociological and anthropological methodologies and insights can help us understand pre-70 Jewish sectarian communities. Surely by now, Qumran experts realize that sociological analysis must be used to deepen historical research and our perception of ancient social phenomena.<sup>8</sup>

Third, I am convinced that it is time to continue exploring how John the Baptizer may relate to Qumran. Research seems to have been in a stalemate that has polarized into two mutually exclusive groups. On the one hand, certain scholars conclude that the Baptist was an Essene or profoundly influenced by them (Harding, Brownlee, Robinson, Daniélou, Scobie, and Dunn), and these experts employ quite different categories and present subtle differences.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, other

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6. I am still uneasy about using the term “*halakot*” for nonrabbinic texts. It is not used even in *Some Works of Torah* (4Q394–399 = 4QMMT) in anything like a rabbinic sense.

7. We need to heed S. K. Stowers’s warning: “In the use of social scientific models, the new approach too readily assumes commensurability between ancient and modern societies and ancient and modern thought.” Idem, “The Social Sciences and the Study of Early Christianity,” in *Studies in Judaism and its Greco-Roman Context* (vol. 5 of *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*; ed. W. S. Green; BJS 32; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 150.

8. See Gerd Theissen, “Zur forschungsgeschichtlichen Einordnung,” in *Studien zur Soziologie des Urchristentums* (2d ed.; WUNT 19; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 3–34. Also see Bengt Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 6–17.

9. Gerald Lancaster Harding, “Where Christ Himself May Have Studied: A Monastery at Khirbet Qumran,” *London Illustrated News* (Sept. 3, 1955), 379–81; William H. Brownlee, “John the Baptist in the Light of Ancient Scrolls,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (ed. K. Stendahl; new introduction by J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Crossroad, 1992), 33–53. Brownlee connected John the Baptizer “with the Essenes in his youth” but did not insist that he must be located “specifically at Qumran” (53); William H. Brownlee, “Whence the Gospel according to John,” in *John and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Crossroad, 1991), 166–94, esp. 174: “John the Baptist... may have resided at Qumran (or at some other centre of Essenism).” Brownlee concluded that Essene influence on the Fourth Gospel came from John the Baptist, either directly to Jesus or to the Evangelist—but most likely to both. See also the following publications: John A. T. Robinson, “The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community: Testing a Hypothesis,” *HTR* 50

experts contend that the Baptist had no significant contact with Qumran (Baidi and Bagatti, Lupieri, Kazmierski).<sup>10</sup>

Two recent studies help to frame our present explorations into discerning how and in what ways, if at all, John the Baptizer might be related to the Qumranites. L. H. Schiffman concluded that John the Baptizer could have been a member of the Qumran Community, and that he only “shared certain ideas and a common religious milieu with the sectarians at Qumran.”<sup>11</sup> H. Lichtenberger is convinced that Josephus portrayed John the Baptizer as an Essene, but he cannot “produce a conclusive answer as to whether John was an Essene at any stage of his life.”<sup>12</sup> Lichtenberger ends his article confronting two questions: (1) Was the Baptizer “at one time” an “Essene, but by the time of his public preaching had separated himself from the sect, and could no longer with accuracy be called an Essene? (2) Had John the Essene become John the

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(1957): 175–91; Jean Daniélou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity* (trans. S. Attanasio; Baltimore: Helicon, 1958), 16; Charles H. H. Scobie, *John the Baptist* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), 207: “John may be regarded as an Essene in this broad sense.” More recently, Hans Burgmann was convinced that John the Baptizer had been an Essene. See his “John the Baptist Was an Essene!” in *Mogilany 1989: Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls Offered in Memory of Jean Carmignac. Part I: General Research on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran, and the New Testament. The Present State of Qumranology* (ed. Z. J. Kapera; Proceedings of the Second International Colloquium on the Dead Sea Scrolls [Mogilany, Poland, 1989]. *Qumranica Mogilanensia* 2; Kraków: Enigma, 1993), 131–37. This is a rather unsophisticated paper, but Burgmann did make some interesting points. Also, see Stevan L. Davies, “John the Baptist and Essene Kashruth,” *NTS* 29 (1983): 569–71; James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (London: SCM, 1970). Dunn contends that John the Baptizer almost certainly had some contact with the sect, even if only peripheral—sufficient at least for him to adopt (and adapt) some of their ideas (9–10).

10. Donato Baidi and Belarmino Bagatti, *Saint Jean-Baptiste dans les souvenirs de sa patrie* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1980), 61. I am grateful to Edmondo Lupieri for numerous conversations in Princeton on the possible relation between the Baptizer and the Qumranites. See his *Giovanni e Gesù: Storia di un antagonismo* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editori, 1991), 67–68; and his “Halakhah qumranica e halakhah battistica di Giovanni: Due mondi a confronto,” *RStB* 9, no. 2 (1997): 69–98. Carl R. Kazmierski, *John the Baptist: Prophet and Evangelist* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996). Kazmierski recognizes “some striking parallels” between John’s preaching and the Qumran traditions, but he concludes with skepticism about any “Qumran connection” (30).

11. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls: The History of Judaism, the Background of Christianity, the Lost Library of Qumran* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994), 404.

12. Hermann Lichtenberger, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist: Reflections on Josephus’ Account of John the Baptist,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research* (ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport; *STDJ* 10; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 340–46, with quotation from 346. A fuller version of Lichtenberger’s article appeared in German: “Täufergemeinden und frühchristliche Täuferpolitik im letzten Drittel des 1. Jahrhunderts,” *ZTK* 84 (1987): 36–57.

Baptist, or better: the Baptizer?” For Lichtenberger, the answer to both questions is most likely yes. Such questions indicate the necessity of continuing to investigate the relation of the Baptizer to Qumran, especially in light of the new research on the Dead Sea Scrolls.

#### PERSPECTIVE

Along with many Qumran experts I am convinced that the similarities between the Baptizer and the Qumranites are too impressive to be dismissed as merely an example of a shared milieu. To conclude that the Baptizer could not “have been at home in a community which had broken off all relations with the Jerusalem priesthood to which John’s family belonged”<sup>13</sup> is hardly a solution to the complex and striking similarities between the Baptizer and the Qumranites. J. VanderKam gives voice to a widely held opinion among established Qumran experts:

The series of similarities between the Qumran sect and John amount to something less than an identification of John as an Essene or Qumranite, but they are certainly suggestive and have led some to make strong claims for the Essene connections of John the Baptist. Yet, if he ever was a member of the Qumran community or visited the site, he must have later separated from it to pursue his independent, solitary ministry.<sup>14</sup>

VanderKam frames the most probable historical possibility: the Baptizer might have once been connected with Qumran but, if so, he also must have abandoned any ties he had with the Qumranites.

Historians will demand, in light of fuller documentation available now, that we explore such possibilities. They must seek to discern probabilities, even though they may never be able to produce definitive or fully convincing solutions. Reconstructing the relation between John and the Qumranites is difficult, because of the nature of historiography, the paucity of our sources, and the redactional and tendentious nature of all extant sources. Given such caveats, it is necessary to seek to discern what is the best, or most attractive, explanation for the shared similarities between the Baptizer and the Qumranites. It is prudent to proceed further since the shared similarities are recognized by most Qumranologists

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13. Julio C. Trebolle Barrera, “The Qumran Texts and the New Testament,” in *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Writings, Beliefs and Practices* (ed. F. García Martínez and J.C. Trebolle Barrera; trans. W. G. E. Watson; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 206.

14. James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 170.

and New Testament historians. Obviously, as I continue to seek the answers now in focus, I must leave my preoccupation with fragments to seek some synthesis and to use some historical imagination.

#### SIX STRIKING SIMILARITIES

The evidence for some relationship between the Baptizer and the Qumranites derives from six striking points of similarity. First, they both come from the same geographical area: John baptized Jews in the Jordan River and, at least some of the time, at the north end of the Dead Sea, where the Jordan flows into it (Mark 1:5; Matt 3:5; Luke 3:3). The Qumranites lived and worked less than three hours walk to the southwest. And there is sufficient data, both in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in Josephus, to imagine that Qumran Essenes may have lived on the outskirts of Jericho. Perhaps they lived there only after the initial success of Herod the Great. Furthermore, an ostrakon found at Qumran by James Strange's team in January 1996 mentions "Jericho" in line 2.<sup>15</sup> It seems *prima facie* evident that this ostrakon belonged to one who was planning on joining the Qumran Community.

Second, both the Baptizer and the Qumranites shared a preference for prophecy, especially Isaiah (Mark 1:2–3; Matt 3:1–3; Luke 3:4; and esp. John 1:23). The Qumranites clearly and the Baptizer most likely focused upon a stunning and unique interpretation of Isa 40:3: "A Voice is calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of YHWH.'" Many Jews, as did the Baptizer and his followers, probably interpreted the text to mean that someone's voice, or the Voice, was in the wilderness: "A Voice is calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord.'" The Septuagint understands the verse to mean, "A voice crying in the wilderness..." The *Targum of Isaiah* shifts the meaning so that what is to be expected is not the coming of the Lord but the coming of God's people to Zion: "The voice of one crying, 'In the wilderness prepare a way before the people of the Lord.'"<sup>16</sup>

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15. I am grateful to Esti Eshel for allowing me to study and read the James Strange ostrakon long before it was published. See now Frank M. Cross and Esti Eshel, "Khirbet Qumran Ostrakon (Plate XXXIII)," in *Qumran Cave 4:XXVI: Cryptic Texts and Miscellanea, Part 1* (DJD 36; Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 497–507.

16. See the excellent study by Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40.1–5 and Their Adaptation in the New Testament," *JSNT* 8 (1980): 24–45; repr. in *New Testament Backgrounds: A Sheffield Reader* (ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; The Biblical Seminar 43; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 149–68.

The Qumranites clearly understood the verse to mean that the Voice calls the elect ones to come into the wilderness for a purpose (1QS 8.14):<sup>17</sup> “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord” (״רר) (or “the way of truth,” ״רר ״רר; cf. 4QS MS E frag. 1, col. 3:4). For the Qumranites Isa 40:3 has an eschatological purpose: they are to prepare “the way” for the final act of the Lord *in the wilderness* (1QS 8.13; cf. Luke 3:7–9; Matt 3:7–10). The Qumranites have separated “themselves from the session of the men of deceit in order to depart into the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord” (1QS 8.13).<sup>18</sup> This interpretation of Isaiah is explicit in the *Rule of the Community*; it is implicit in the life and teachings of John the Baptizer. Note especially John 1:23: those sent by the priests and Levites in Jerusalem asked the Baptizer who he was and what he thought about himself. The Baptizer replied, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”<sup>19</sup>

Third, both the Baptizer and the Qumranites shared a concern for eschatological purification by means of ritual cleansing in living water (running, fresh, water that is salvific). Both the Qumranites and John needed an abundance of water. At Qumran there are numerous cisterns and *mikva’ot* (ritual baths), and the *Rule of the Community* frequently enunciates the eschatological and salvific importance of purifying water. Likewise, John the Baptizer is reported to be baptizing where there was much water (John 3:23).

Both the Baptizer and the Qumranites connected water with sins. A few texts suggest that both seem to see immersion as symbolizing purity already obtained. At Qumran one had to undergo testing before being

17. See James H. Charlesworth “Intertextuality: Isaiah 40:3 and the Serek Ha-Yahad,” in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders* (ed. C. A. Evans and S. Talmon; BibIntS 28; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 197–224.

18. Translation and text in James H. Charlesworth et al., eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Rule of the Community* (Philadelphia: American Interfaith Institute/World Alliance, 1996), 36–37. This passage, 1QS 8.13–14, is preserved in 4QS MS E; but it is not preserved in, or was never extant in, 4QS MS B; 4QS MS C; 4QS MS F; 4QS MS G; 4QS MS H; 4QS MS I; and 4QS MS J. It was probably not part of 4QS MS D, which in frag. 2 is parallel to 1QS 8.6–21. Note esp. frag. 2, lines 6–7: “They shall separate themselves from [the midst of the session] of the men of [deceit in order to depart into the wilderness to prepare there the Way of truth. This (alludes to) the study of Torah] which he commanded through [Moses to d]o everything [revealed]....” Thus, 4QS MS D does not have the reference to Isa 40:3. Does it represent another community? Is it a later recension? It dates palaeographically fifty years later than 1QS.

19. This is an intertext, so it should not be translated too literally as “I (am) a voice crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as said Isaiah the prophet.”

admitted to enter “the waters,” and he must not enter the water if he is impure (1QS 5.13). Note how the Qumranite can be cleansed:

It is by the Holy Spirit of the community in his [God’s] truth that he can be cleansed from all his iniquities. It is by an upright and humble spirit that his sin can be atoned. It is by humbling his soul to all God’s statutes, that his flesh can be cleansed, by sprinkling with waters of purification, and by sanctifying himself with waters of purity. (1QS 3.7–9)

Immersion seems to be the end of a process; it does begin the process for purification. Before entering the “waters of purity,” one first must have entered the community, be cleansed by the Holy Spirit, and then obtain “an upright and humble spirit.”

According to Mark and Luke (but not Matthew), Qumran’s concepts are different from those of the Baptizer. He preached “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3).<sup>20</sup> According, to Josephus, however, the Baptizer—like the Qumranites—presupposed a life of piety before baptism. As at Qumran, what was needed was a ritual cleansing of the body after the spirit had been cleansed of its impurities. Note the words of Josephus: “In his [John the Baptizer’s] view this [leading righteous lives] was a necessary preliminary if baptism was to be acceptable to God. They must not employ it to gain pardon for whatever sins they committed, but as a consecration of the body implying that the soul was already thoroughly cleansed by right behavior” (*Ant.* 18.117).<sup>21</sup> Has Josephus read Qumran ideas into the teaching of the Baptizer? That is possible, but unlikely. If there has been any distortion of the message of the Baptizer, it seems more likely that the Evangelists have portrayed the Baptizer in light of Jesus, who called Jews to “repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15).

For the Qumranites and the Baptizer, immersion symbolized entering into a community that awaited and was prepared for the final cataclysmic day of judgment. Within this broad similarity, there is—as a historian might expect—much dissimilarity; for example, only at Qumran is the immersion repeatable, indeed frequent.<sup>22</sup> While it is conceivable that for the Baptizer some might have been immersed twice in their lifetime, at

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20. We should recognize that this is clearer for the Baptizer than for Qumran.

21. Josephus, *Ant.*, 9.82–83. See Lichtenberger, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and John the Baptist,” 340–46 in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, 18–26.

22. Ben Witherington seems more impressed by the differences and is “vexed” by the relationship between the Baptizer and the Qumranites. See Ben Witherington, “John the Baptist,” in *DJG* (ed. J. B. Green and S. McKnight; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 383–91.

Qumran ritual immersion occurred each day (and frequently more than once a day).

Fourth, John as well as the Qumranites stressed the impending doom of the final judgment (see 1QS 4; Luke 3:9; Matt 3:10). Both the Baptizer and the Qumranites held a radical vision that was both prophetic and apocalyptic, and both condemned the religious leaders of Jewish society with a vengeance.<sup>23</sup>

Fifth, both the Baptizer and the Qumranites were ascetic, and even celibate (Luke 1:15; 1QS 5.1–6.8).<sup>24</sup> Both the Baptizer and the Qumranites stood out in Early Judaism because of this extreme aspect of their utter devotion to God.

Sixth, Luke and Matthew recorded that the Baptizer called the multitudes—many among them Pharisees and Sadducees, according to Matthew—a “brood of vipers” (Luke 3:7 = Matt 3:7). Did he make up this term, or did he inherit it from some tradition? Because of its uniqueness in Second Temple Judaism, it is likely that he learned it from the Qumranites. They also talked about their adversaries, especially the Pharisees and Sadducees, as those born of a viper (or asp). And when they chanted their sectarian hymnbook, the *Thanksgiving Hymns*, in the deeply metaphorically complex column 11 (= Sukenik col. 3), they thought about how Sheol had been opened “[for all] the works of the viper.”<sup>25</sup> The “works of the viper,” as A. Dupont-Sommer and O. Betz observed long ago, denoted in this hymn the “creatures” or offspring of Belial.<sup>26</sup> The woman is pregnant because of the “viper,” and her offspring are those damned for Sheol. The Greek (γέννημα) means “offspring,” and the Hebrew (״שׁע״) is a plural construct that is familiar in the Dead Sea Scrolls, having many meanings, including “offspring” when it refers back to the “works” of the woman; this means her offspring—and here

23. See Paul W. Hollenbach, “John the Baptist,” *ABD* 3:887–99; see esp. 898.

24. There should be no longer any doubt about the celibate nature of the Qumran Community. See Joseph E. Zias, “The Cemeteries of Qumran and Celibacy: Confusion Laid to Rest?” *DSD* 7 (2000): 220–53. Also, see my discussion of celibacy at Qumran in James H. Charlesworth, *The Pesharim and Qumran History: Chaos or Consensus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Also, see Joseph E. Zias’s chapter in *Jesus and Archaeology* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

25. See the insights shared by Menahem Mansoor in his *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (*STDJ* 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 115n8.

26. André Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings from Qumran* (trans. G. Vermes; Cleveland: World Publishing, 1962), 209n1; Otto Betz, “Die Geburt der Gemeinde durch den Lehrer (Bemerkungen zum Qumranpsalm 1QH III, 1ff.),” *NTS* 3 (1957): 314–26; idem, “Die Proselytentaufe der Qumransekte und die Taufe im Neuen Testament,” *RevQ* 1 (1958–59): 213–34. I am indebted to Otto Betz for numerous conversations on this Qumran text.

“[all] the creatures of the viper” is parallel to “all the spirits of the viper.” The Hebrew and Greek texts are close enough to raise the possibility that the Baptizer inherited from the Qumranites the concept of hatred and the portrayal of the Jewish establishment as a “brood of vipers.” Is that not tantamount to talking about the “creatures of the viper”? And is this tradition, shaped by the liturgy of the Qumran Community, perhaps the source of the Baptizer’s vocabulary and venom?

#### ASSESSING THE DIFFERENCES

Certainly, some differences between the Baptizer and the Qumranites are also obvious. There is no indisputable evidence that John was ever at Qumran. The reference in Luke 1:80, which contains the tradition that John was “in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly in Israel,” does not necessarily indicate Qumran. Nevertheless, that possibility still remains intriguing. As already mentioned, John baptized those who came to him only *once*, which is not to be confused with the repetitive ritual cleansings at Qumran. Most importantly, John the Baptizer was a missionary prophet calling all Israel to repent, as David Flusser pointed out.<sup>27</sup> The Qumranites were not interested in any mission to Israel; rather, they separated themselves from all others and constructed high social barriers to keep purity within the community and the Sons of Darkness outside of it.<sup>28</sup>

Entrance into the Baptizer’s community, which was not localized, was immediate; and no one was punished or expelled from his community. There were no rigid social barriers. However, the social barriers of the Qumran Community were extremely high and wide. One could not be born into the community; instead, it took over two years to become a full member. Once inside, there were grave and altogether real possibilities of being expelled for one or two years and even permanent expulsion. Upon entering the renewed covenant, a member gave up *all his possessions*; they now belonged forever to the common storehouse of the community. The biblical laws, especially those pertaining to purity, and the additional

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27. David Flusser, “The Baptism of John and the Dead Sea Sect,” in *Essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 209–33 [in Hebrew]; and idem, “The Magnificat, the Benedictus and the War Scroll,” in *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 143.

28. See Hannah K. Harrington, *The Impurity Systems of Qumran and the Rabbis* (SBLDS 143; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

laws were interpreted strictly and administered severely. Even within the community there were barriers, and each person was isolated from others in terms of his “lot” in a rigid hierarchy; each year one was retained, advanced, or demoted publicly. Even after a possibly full night of meditation or reading Torah or one of Qumran’s compositions, a member was punished if he fell asleep in the assembly (1QS 7.10). Rules, restrictions, and severe barriers separated one Qumranite from another and—most importantly—this group of Jews from all other Jews.

The *Rule of the Community* presents a system for understanding the cosmos and the human. The cosmos is electrically alive with a war between the Angel of Light and the Angel of Darkness. On the earth the struggle continues through the bifurcation of humanity into Sons of Light and Sons of Darkness. Not only are these two sides of humanity separated, but also within the community the Sons of Light seem to be separated from the Sons of the Dawn, perhaps the initiates. And all members of the *Yahad* (יהאד) are apparently afraid of pollution from other members who are not of the same advanced “lot.” Josephus even reports the fear of the advanced members being touched by other Qumranites, or Essenes: “And so far are the junior members inferior [ἐλαττοῦνται ὥστ’] to the seniors, that a senior if but touched by a junior, must take a bath, as after contact with an alien.”<sup>29</sup>

The sociological insights of Mary Douglas surely assist reflections on the sociological and anthropological meaning of the community. Extremely important is her insight that “the only way in which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a total structure of thought whose keystone, boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation.”<sup>30</sup> Qumran clearly had developed “a total structure of thought,” which defined pollution and purity; moreover, each year the Qumranites reenacted a liturgy that separated the pure from the impure. As J. Milgrom has shown, for the Qumranites “impurity is dangerously ‘alive and well,’ obsessively dreaded as the autonomous power of demonic Belial (1QS 1.23–24; CD 4.12–19), intent on wiping out the entire community.”<sup>31</sup>

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29. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.150.

30. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge, 1966; repr. 2002), 41.

31. Jacob Milgrom, “First Day Ablutions in Qumran,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Madrid, 18-21 March 1991* (ed. J.C. Trebolle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner; 2 vols.; *STDJ* 11; Madrid: Editorial Complutense; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 2:570.

## DETECTING A CONSENSUS

In *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism*, J. A. Taylor assesses, inter alia, the possibility of any relation between the Baptizer and the Qumranites. She points out that the Baptizer's life, teaching, and habits are not grounded in the Diaspora but in the Land of Israel. She correctly identifies Qumran with a form of Essenism, and wisely judges that Josephus was most familiar with a group of Essenes who were celibate and may have lived in Jerusalem.<sup>32</sup>

Taylor contends that the Baptizer, since he baptized "as close as ten kilometers or so away from Qumran," may "likely" have known "about a community there and about Essenes in general, and he may have been familiar with some of their beliefs."<sup>33</sup> This admission is an exception to her penchant to deny any similarities between the Baptizer and the Qumranites; so she continues to argue that "geographical proximity does not in itself require influence or connection."<sup>34</sup> She is surely right, strictly speaking, and there are texts that suggest the Baptizer was active in other areas far removed from Qumran (e.g., John 3:23).

Taylor's work thus is intermittently marred by the desire to deny any "close connection" between the Baptizer and the Qumranites.<sup>35</sup> She claims that the Baptizer's exhortation for those who have two garments to share one with any who has none (Luke 3:11) cannot have any connection with Qumran's "communism." This position is not adequately defended and supported by careful exegesis. She is content merely to point out the obvious; for the Baptizer "this sharing" is not "to be done within some group of John's disciples or in a wider Essene movement." That may be true, but the Baptizer did not establish a community like the Qumran Community.

Taylor claims that the Baptizer's exhortation should be perceived in light of Ezek 18:5–9. This passage does not, as Taylor's hypothesis would require, suggest anything beyond a moral code of sharing with others. Is that what Luke was reporting when he made the above comment about the Baptizer? Here is the Lukan text; the quotation is attributed to the Baptizer:

"Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And the

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32. Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 20.

33. *Ibid.*, 42.

34. *Ibid.*, 43.

35. *Ibid.*, 77.

crowds asked him, “What then should we do?” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.” (3:9–11 NRSV)

What was Luke attributing to the Baptizer? Was it not radical? Was Luke not clearly reporting that, for the Baptizer, one must give all to others and be content with only *one* “coat?” If so, the Baptizer, like the Essenes, radicalized the moral code; hence, it would follow that some connection with Qumran might be, and probably is, likely.

Despite Taylor’s claim, scholars have not assumed that the Baptizer “advised people to live communally with entirely shared resources, as we find in the *Rule of the Community* 1QS 6.19–23.”<sup>36</sup> The Baptizer cannot be simply seen as one who lived within the *Yahad*. Hence, Taylor’s claim that the Baptizer wore sackcloth and was not dressed in white like the Essenes, according to Josephus (*J.W.* 2.123; 2.137) misses the point, or is beside the point.<sup>37</sup>

In comparing groups, similarities that reveal relationships do not need to be identical. If the Baptizer had any connection in the past with the Qumranites, he also developed some unique features, thoughts, and habits. As historians we should not miss the uniqueness of the Baptizer.

I would tend to agree with Taylor that a relationship between the Baptizer and the Qumranites should not be based on a shared condemnation of incest and, explicitly, the marrying of nieces. Thus, the Baptizer’s teaching, according to Mark 6:17–18, is not based solely on the *Damascus Document* 4.17–18. When the Baptizer condemned Antipas for marrying his niece (his brother’s wife), he could be assuming the well-known law in the Torah that condemns marrying the wife of your brother (Lev 20:21; cf. 18:16).

Without exegesis and explanation, Taylor asserts that the Baptizer, unlike the communal Qumranites and Essenes, was “a loner,” and this “key characteristic of John” would “be completely out of place if he were (or had been at one time) part of the Essene movement” or “community.”<sup>38</sup> Taylor needs to explain why no one can become a “loner” once he leaves some form of “communal living.” Did not the Egyptian anchorites, only a century or so after the burning of the Qumran Community, leave a religious community and live as hermits? Is that not clear in the life of St. Antony when around 310 C.E. he left a religious community he had organized and retired to solitude in the desert? Was such a move impossible for John, the son of Zechariah?

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36. *Ibid.*, 24.

37. *Ibid.*, 38.

38. *Ibid.*, 20.

Taylor admits that the use of Isa 40:3 by the Baptizer and the Qumranites constitutes the “most significant potential evidence for any connection.”<sup>39</sup> But she is convinced that the verse is interpreted differently. The Qumranites used it to justify their existence in the wilderness. The Baptizer “did not use the verse to justify the establishment of an actual wilderness community.”<sup>40</sup> That seems irrelevant and misleading; the Fourth Evangelist in 1:23 does claim that the Baptizer was “in the wilderness” because of his understanding of Isa 40:3. The Synoptics, when they present the Baptizer and quote Isa 40:3, mix together his habits and interpretations of Torah with their own interpretations. One cannot simply assume that what the Evangelists state about the Baptizer’s understanding of Isa 40:3 contains nothing that goes back to him and is only a Christian redaction of traditions from the Baptizer (see Mark 1:2–8; Matt 3:1–12; Luke 3:1–20).

Taylor’s methodology is so rigid that possibilities are not allowed to seep in: “Only if the interpretation is precisely the same can we suppose that the two may have been linked.”<sup>41</sup> This quotation raises two questions: (1) Is Taylor striving to prove that no relation is possible between the Baptizer and the Qumranites (or Essenes)? and (2) does she understand the need to avoid inflexible methodologies? Using her positivistic methodology, it would become clear that Hillel and Shammai could not have had any “connection” or belong to the same type of Judaism since they habitually interpreted Torah differently. As S. Sandmel stated, it is the “distinctive which is significant for identifying the particular”<sup>42</sup>; hence, the distinctive interpretation of Isa 40:3 indicates that a relationship most likely did exist between the Baptizer and the Qumranites.

Taylor makes sweeping generalizations that are both surprising and unlikely. For example, she claims that “priests and Levites were found in all the major Jewish sects.”<sup>43</sup> Given the diversity within Second Temple Judaism, it is wise to avoid the “all” fallacy; that is, almost never use “all.” Surely, there were no Levites among the Samaritans, and probably none

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39. *Ibid.*, 24.

40. *Ibid.*, 29.

41. *Ibid.*, 25.

42. Taylor also cites Sandmel’s quotation but seems to misunderstand him. See Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 3. I note a failure in recent publications to comprehend what Sandmel was combating. He did not want to give the impression that parallels cannot indicate a relationship. To the contrary, he wisely pointed out that “parallelomania” was the label appropriate for those who saw parallels and immediately, without exegesis, *assumed* these were proof of a connection or dependency.

43. Taylor, *ibid.*, 22.

within the Enoch groups. She contends that the “notion that there was a ‘Baptist Movement’—to which the Essenes and John belonged—out of line with ‘mainstream Judaism’ rests on outdated presuppositions regarding Second Temple Judaism.”<sup>44</sup> Her unsupported conclusion can scarcely be taken seriously; she neither mentions nor discusses the texts on which such a “Baptist Movement” is based (e.g., *Sibylline Oracles 4*, *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Odes of Solomon*, *4 Baruch*, *Book Elchasai*, and Gospel of John), and she seems ignorant of the arguments that gnostic Sethianism derives from a Jewish baptismal background.<sup>45</sup>

Taylor is convinced that “a basis for linking John and the Essenes” (= the Qumranites) demands that the “parallels between John and the Essenes” must “be unique and explicable only in terms of direct relationship.”<sup>46</sup> This methodology is too wooden, fails to recognize the fluidity between the concepts “direct” and “indirect,” and ignores all possible relationships except the one that would make the Baptizer a member of the Qumran Community. Despite the vast number of scholars who have indicated some relationship, but not “direct relationship” or identity, between the Baptizer and the Qumranites, Taylor seems to choose a model for connection from positivistic historicism and remains blind to possible indirect influence or the hypothesis that the Baptizer had once been a Qumranite but left the *Yahad*.

Does Taylor represent a consensus, or does her position denote a challenge to a consensus? Should we imagine that her conclusion is valid? She says that the Baptizer “should probably not be seen as having any direct relationship with the Essenes, least of all the isolated group at Qumran, whether prior to or during his own prophetic activity by the river Jordan.”<sup>47</sup> It is clear that she reiterates what some scholars have concluded, that there has been so far no reason to postulate a connection between the Baptizer and the Qumranites.<sup>48</sup> Her conclusion is supported

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44. *Ibid.*, 48.

45. See Hans-Martin Schenke, “The Phenomenon and Significance of Gnostic Sethianism,” in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism* (ed. B. Layton; SHR 41; New York: Brill, 1981), 588–616; and Jean-Marie Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal séthien* (Quebec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 1986), esp. 284–94.

46. Taylor, *The Immerser*, 16.

47. *Ibid.*, 48.

48. See, e.g., the following who deny a connection: Harold H. Rowley, “The Baptism of John and the Qumran Sect,” in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson, 1893–1958* (ed. A. J. B. Higgins; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 218–29; Edmund F. Sutcliffe, “Baptism and Baptismal Rites at Qumran,” *HeyJ* 1 (1960): 179–88; Josef Ernst, *Johannes der Täufer* (BZNW 53; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 325–30; Bruce D. Chilton, *Judaic Approaches to the Gospels* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 17–22; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew* (ABRL;

by R. L. Webb, who is convinced that there was “no direct link between John and the Qumran community,” and that “the similarities are better explained as deriving from a common milieu.”<sup>49</sup>

Many scholars who have focused intense research on trying to explain the Baptizer’s relation to the Qumranites or the Essenes either see some striking link or suggest that he may have been a member of the community but left it.<sup>50</sup> These experts have tried to show that the differences are not as impressive as the similarities between the Baptizer and the Qumranites.

To mention “similarities” or parallels causes a knee-jerk reaction among some scholars. It seems odd that some researchers think they have made a point by contending that similarities do not indicate a connection.<sup>51</sup> It seems patently obvious that similarities can denote a relation, provided—as I have stressed since the late 1960s—that any possible connection is examined and understood within the pertinent contexts. Yet, the assertion that “similarities do not establish a connection” looks too much like a claim that a connection must not be sought via similarities. It is very close to a naive method that implies a connection cannot be related to similarities. Such thinking leads to flawed logic; denying a connection in light of similarities seems an absurd assumption or predilection behind such pronouncements. Thus, when one finds similarities between Jewish phenomena, one should neither assume a connection between (or among) them nor imagine that a connection is impossible.

In fact, there are impressive similarities between the Baptizer and the Qumranites, and they do make sense in a *unique* way within Second Temple Judaism, as leading experts have shown.<sup>52</sup> These similarities are so strong and revealing that a consensus may be detected among distinguished Qumran scholars. Numerous leading Qumran experts tend to concur that some relationship most likely existed between the Baptizer

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New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1:25–27. Also, see G. Vermes’s judgment that the Baptizer was probably not an Essene; Geza Vermes, “The Qumran Community, the Essenes, and Nascent Christianity,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Fifty Years after Their Discovery: Proceedings of the Jerusalem Congress, July 20–25, 1997* (ed. L. H. Schiffman, E. Tov, and J. C. VanderKam; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Shrine of the Book, 2000), 581–86.

49. Robert L. Webb, “John the Baptist,” *EDSS* 1:418–21.

50. It seems odd that there is no entry on or discussion of John the Baptizer (or Baptist) in the *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (ed. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000).

51. See esp. Robert L. Webb, *John the Baptizer and Prophet* (JSNTSup 62; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 351n4; and Taylor, *The Immerser*, 22n11.

52. L. H. Schiffman rightly rejects “the simplistic assumption that Jesus or John the Baptist was actually a member of the sect,” but he does “recognize that these men shared certain ideas and a common religious milieu with the sectarians at Qumran.” Schiffman, *Reclaiming the DSS*, 404.

and the Qumranites. D. R. Schwartz, for example, concludes that the Qumran Community “shows us the setting according to which he (the Baptizer) is to be understood.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, J. A. Fitzmyer asks, “Could John have spent some of his youth as a candidate for membership in or as a member of the Essene community of Qumran? My answer to that question is yes, as a plausible hypothesis, one that I cannot prove, and one that cannot be disproved.”<sup>54</sup>

I concur that some relationship between the Baptizer and the Qumranites seems to have existed; but the vast and complicated data do not lead to the hypothesis that John the Baptizer was simply a Qumranite and worked in the scriptorium. Note the following select examples of what seems to be the scholarly consensus: S. L. Davies reports that “a connection” between the Baptizer and the Qumranites or “Essenes is now becoming a commonplace.”<sup>55</sup> Schwartz is so convinced of a consensus that he would remove from this quotation the word “becoming.”<sup>56</sup> It is obvious to me, as it is to VanderKam, Steinmann,<sup>57</sup> O. Betz,<sup>58</sup> Flusser,<sup>59</sup> and D. Sefa-Dapaah,<sup>60</sup> that if John the Baptizer can be imagined living the life of a Qumranite at one stage in his life, it is also imperative to picture him leaving the community. But, why would the Baptizer feel compelled to leave the Qumran Community? This question has not been adequately examined; let us then focus on this crucial question.

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53. Daniel R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1992), 3.

54. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 19.

55. Stevan L. Davies, “John the Baptist and Essene Kashruth,” 560n1.

56. Daniel R. Schwartz, “On Quirinius, John the Baptist, the Benedictus, Melchizedek, Qumran and Ephesus,” in *Mémorial Jean Carmignac: Études Qumraniennes* (ed. F. García Martínez and É. Puech; Paris: Gabalda, 1988), 644n30.

57. Jean Steinmann, *Saint John the Baptist and the Desert Tradition* (trans. M. Boyes; New York: Harper, 1958), concluded that John “was not simply an Essene; he appeared rather as a dissenter from the Essene community.” In contrast to my thesis, Steinmann claims that the reason the Baptist left the Qumran Community is because he “was driven into the desert by the Spirit as Jesus was to be.” This hypothesis is too theological; any solution today must take account of sociology and the politics of first-century Jewish life.

58. Otto Betz, “Was John the Baptist an Essene?” *BRev* 18 (1990): 18–25, claims that “the Baptist was raised in this community by the Dead Sea and was strongly influenced by it, but that he later left it to preach directly to a wider community of Jews” (18). My own conclusion, derived from some different observations and methodologies, is virtually identical to that defended by Betz.

59. David Flusser with R. Stevan Notley, *Jesus* (2d ed.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998), 37–38.

60. Daniel Sefa-Dapaah, “An Investigation into the Relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth: A Socio-Historical Study” (PhD diss., Coventry University, 1995).

## A KEY QUESTION NOT YET ANSWERED

Thus, we confront a key question: What could have been the major catalyst for John the Baptizer's leaving the Qumran Community? The Qumranites developed the concept of predestination in a way that marks their theology as distinct and unique in Judaism.<sup>61</sup> A human was created either a "Son of Light" or a "Son of Darkness," with fixed portions of light and darkness (4Q186; 4Q534). The Qumranites allowed no free will to alter one's destiny. If one was born a Son of Darkness, then no repentance, acts of contrition, or forgiveness could help him become a Son of Light. Damnation was tied to one's creation. John the Baptizer certainly did not share such rigid determinism. From what we learn about the Baptizer, it is obvious that he would have left the community to urge all Israel to seek God for forgiveness. All extant sources clarify that his message was focused on calling *all* Israel to repent in the face of God's impending judgment. Such a mission certainly entails the concept of free will for those who hear the Baptizer's words. These observations lead to my thesis, which has already been adumbrated in a few preceding comments.

## THESIS

My thesis is rather simple, and at least to some extent it is novel. Working on the critical edition of all the manuscripts of the *Rule of the Community* and thinking about life at Qumran has convinced me that one cannot be fair to all the data regarding the Baptizer and the Qumranites and conclude simply that he was a Qumran Essene. At the same time, it is also apparent that this mass of primary evidence does indicate that *some relationship* did exist between him and the Qumran Community.

The unique exegesis of Isa 40:3 alone makes it *prima facie* apparent that there is some significant relation between the Baptizer and the Qumranites. Both chose a prophetic book, the same chapter, the same verse, and virtually the same interpretation. The geographical proximity

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61. See esp. the insights by Magen Broshi in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Reproduction Made from the Original Scrolls Kept in the Shrine of the Book, Jerusalem* (ed. M. Šekine; Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979), esp. 15: "Perhaps the most important theological point differentiating the sectarians from the rest of Judaism was their belief in predestination, coupled with a dualistic view of the world (*praedestinatio duplex*). Also see Armin Lange, "Wisdom and Predestination in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *DSD* 2, no. 3 (1995): 340–54.

of the Baptizer to the Qumranites is evident. They were in the same area in Judea—the wilderness near the northwest section of the Dead Sea. And they are situated there for the same reason: they are living out their exegesis of Isa 40:3, to prepare *in the wilderness* the way of the Lord. These observations indicate that there is most likely some influence from the Qumranites on the Baptizer. Further reason to explore and refine a perception of how the Baptizer and the Qumranites may be related is encouraged by J. A. Fitzmyer’s judgment that supposing John the Baptizer to have been a member of the Qumran Community is a “plausible hypothesis.”<sup>62</sup> Pondering the interpretation of Isa 40:3 by the Baptizer and the Qumranites, Flusser affirmed the hypothesis that the Baptizer’s words are “so close to that of the Essenes that it is possible that at one time he may have belonged to one of their communities.”<sup>63</sup>

Now, it seems pertinent for me to explain fuller my thesis. John the Baptizer was probably the son of a priest who officiated in the Temple, as Luke indicates (Luke 1:5–80). The author of the *Gospel of the Ebionites* claimed that the Baptizer was a descendant of Aaron.<sup>64</sup> If that report is accurate, and it is harmonious with what we learn from the Gospels, it would make pellucid sense for him to leave the Temple and live with those at Qumran, who were Aaronites. It is conceivable that he went into “the wilderness” (Luke 1:80) to the Qumran Community, where priests dominated, as we know from the *Rule of the Community* and the *Temple Scroll* especially.<sup>65</sup> John would then have progressed through the early stages of initiation, which took at least two years (1QS 6.21). He would thus, almost surely, have taken the vows of celibacy and absolute separation from others. John may have taken the vow but not yet become a full member of “the Many” at Qumran.

Adding historical imagination to what we have been told about the Baptizer by Josephus and the Evangelists,<sup>66</sup> it is clear that during the two years of novitiate he would have been attracted to many aspects of Qumran theology. He most likely would have admired the Qumranites’ dedication and devotion to God, their love for one another, the brotherhood

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62. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Responses to 101 Questions on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 106.

63. Flusser, *Jesus*, 37–38.

64. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 30.13.6.

65. Josephus reported that Essenes “adopt other men’s children” (*J.W.* 2.120). I am persuaded that although the *Temple Scroll* may antedate Qumran, it was edited there and influential on the Qumranites.

66. Of course, the evangelists portray the Baptizer primarily to elevate Jesus. See Josef Ernst, “Johannes der Täufer und Jesus von Nazareth in historischer Sicht,” *NTS* 43 (1997): 161–83.

of the *Yahad*, the calendrical and cosmic dimension of prayer, the perception of angels being present on earth during Qumran worship, the pregnancy of the eschatological epoch, and the final judgment.<sup>67</sup> He would thus have rejoiced at reciting the ritual of covenantal renewal, especially the refrain at the end of the following excerpt:

Then the priests shall enumerate the righteousness of God along with its wondrous works, and recount all (his) merciful acts of love toward Israel. Then the Levite shall enumerate the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their guilty transgressions and their sins during the dominion of Belial. [And all] those who cross over into the covenant shall confess after them (by) saying:

We have perverted ourselves,  
 We have rebel[led],  
 We [have sin]ned,  
 We have acted impiously,  
 We [and] our [fath]ers before us... (1QS 1.21–25)<sup>68</sup>

In light of the habits and ideas attributed to him, there is no reason to doubt that the Baptizer would have felt comfortable reciting these words. It is precisely this confession of guilt and need for God's forgiveness that he would have experienced in the Temple, perhaps when his father was one of the leading priests.<sup>69</sup> This piety also characterizes one aspect of Qumran theology. In making this confession of sin collectively among the Qumranites, the Baptizer might have felt comfortable. He would not be cursing his parents and others whom he loved.

He would also have felt at home, perhaps, the first time he heard or recited the subsequent liturgy in which the Qumranites praised God's elect. The following probably would have appealed to him, at least initially:

Then the priests shall bless all the men of God's lot who walk perfectly in all his ways, and say:

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67. See James H. Charlesworth's foreword and introduction, "The Theologies in the Dead Sea Scrolls," in Helmer Ringgren's masterful *The Faith of Qumran: Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; trans. E. T. Sander; New York: Crossroad, 1995), ix–xiii, xv–xxi.

68. For Hebrew text and English translation of 1QS, see James H. Charlesworth, "Rule of the Community," in *The Rule of the Community and Related Documents* (PTS-DSSP 1), 9.

69. We know about the liturgies in the temple primarily because of passages in the Torah (Old Testament) and the Mishnah. See esp. Patrick D. Miller, "Sacrifice and Offering in Ancient Israel," *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (London: SPCK, 2000), 106–30; and Efraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (trans. I. Abrahams; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), esp. 420–36 (on sin) and 649–90 (on redemption).

May he bless you with all good and keep you from all evil;  
 May he enlighten your heart with insight for living,  
 May he favor you with eternal knowledge.  
 May he lift up his merciful countenance toward you for eternal peace. (1QS  
 2.1–4)<sup>70</sup>

Initially, the blessing following a heartfelt confession would have been appealing. And it would even be more attractive when one not only perceives but also experiences how the blessing is fashioned upon the memory of reciting with other priests the Aaronic (or priestly) Blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
 The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;  
 The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace. (Num  
 6:24–26 NRSV)

When the Baptizer would have heard the blessing on “all the men of God’s lot,” during his early years at Qumran, he might have conceived that these also included Zechariah, his father the priest. Eventually, he would learn that his father would have been perceived by the Qumranites as one of the Sons of Darkness and one who did not belong to “the men of God’s lot.” I have no doubt that there were additional words in the ceremony for covenantal renewal that would have disturbed the Baptizer. This assumption seems to be a reliable historical insight, if we can trust the portrait of the Baptizer given to us by Josephus and the Evangelists.<sup>71</sup>

I have no doubt that eventually the Baptizer would have been disturbed by the words that followed the blessing just quoted from the *Rule of the Community*. Possibly, he would have first recited these words, and then, over time, mouthed them, and then finally refused to say them. Subsequently, he would have been signaled out for severe punishment because he would not say the requisite “Amen, amen.” Here is the section of the liturgy of covenantal renewal that John the Baptizer would most likely have found difficult and eventually impossible to affirm:

Then the Levites shall curse the men of Belial’s lot; they shall respond and say:

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70. Charlesworth, “Rule of the Community” (PTSDSSP 1), 9.

71. See esp. Walter Wink, *John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); and Paul W. Hollenbach, “John the Baptist,” 887–99. Hollenbach rightly thinks that John may have lived at Qumran “for a while” (898).

Cursed be you in all your guilty (and) wicked works.  
 May God give you up (to) terror through all the avengers.  
 May he visit upon you destruction through all those who take revenge.  
 Cursed be you without compassion in accordance with the darkness of  
 your works.  
 Damned be you in everlasting murky fire.  
 May God not be compassionate unto you when you cry out.  
 May he not forgive (you) by covering over your iniquity.  
 May he lift up his angry countenance to wreak his vengeance upon you.  
 May there be no peace for you according to all who hold fast to the  
 fathers.  
 And all those who cross over into the covenant shall say after those who  
 bless and those who curse: "Amen, amen." (1QS 2.4–10)<sup>72</sup>

These words turn the famous Aaronic blessing on its head. They were probably disturbing and finally shocking to the Baptizer. They reveal a hate-filled and closed society with high barriers, exclusive to the extreme.

In the history of Jewish thought it is virtually impossible to match such venomous hatred for other Jews. Only one who was convinced of double predestination, who held the Qumranic doctrine of creation as a Son of Light, and who believed that he was among the few elect ones fighting the final battle against Belial and the Sons of Darkness—only such a person could have recited such a liturgy. It is clear from 1QS 2.4–10 that Qumran theology does indeed devolve, in some passages, into a theology of hate and exclusion.

Given the portrait of the Baptizer provided by Josephus and the Gospels, he most likely would have become silent during the covenantal renewal ceremony. He would not have been able repeatedly and ceremoniously to curse all others to eternal damnation, without some concomitant call to repentance, which obviously became the hallmark of his eloquent preaching (*Ant.* 18.116–19). His compassion for others was celebrated especially by Luke and Josephus. The great historian of the first century called him "a good man," who "had exhorted the Jews to lead righteous lives" (*Ant.* 18.117); that means he did not reserve his preaching for only God's so-called predestined elect. The Third Evangelist informs us that the Baptizer instructed the crowds to share their clothes with the needy, the tax officials to collect only what is required, and the soldiers to rob no one, make no false accusations, and be content with their wages (Luke 3:10–14). This exhortation to share one's goods is reminiscent of Qumran's storehouse, in which all possessions were

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<sup>72</sup>. Charlesworth, *ibid.*, 9–10.

placed, and the allocation of only one garment for a Qumranite. The links between the Qumranites and the Baptizer are extensive and sometimes impressively significant. It has become difficult to deny that the Baptizer is related in some ways to Qumran.

If my scenario is plausible, then the Baptizer's refusal to say the mandatory "Amen, amen" would not have gone unnoticed. Perhaps the reason the repetitive affirmation was added to this curse was to isolate any who did not fully espouse Qumran hatred. Such a person would have been exposed as in nonconformity with Qumran laws and lore. He would have been punished and probably expelled from the community. He would perhaps have been considered as one who slandered "the Many" and so would "be banished from them" so as "never" to "come back again" (1QS 7.16–17). In fact, a passage in the *Rule of the Community* may be directed to those who did not say such benedictions correctly: "If he blasphemed...while he is reading the Book or saying benedictions—he shall be excluded and never again return to the Council of the Community" (1QS 7.1–2).

The publications of L. H. Schiffman and M. Weinfeld have deepened our understanding of this aspect of Qumran's penal code.<sup>73</sup> Any refusal by the Baptizer to say "Amen, amen" or any refusal to be in full compliance with Qumran's exclusive dualism would surely have been judged harshly. He would be branded as one who grumbled against "the authority of the community"; then he would "be banished and never come back" (1QS 7.17).

The truncated fragment called *Decrees* (4Q477) lists men who were reproached because of their attitude, behavior, or disrespect of the community. While none named are reproached for failing to say "Amen, amen," this action could well be subsumed under generic categories. John the Baptizer's refusal to say "Amen, amen" could have been condemned

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73. Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony, and the Penal Code* (BJS 33; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 168–73. I disagree with Schiffman that expulsion from the Qumran sect resulted only from "the total rejection of the teachings of the sect" (173). I am convinced that refusal to participate with other Qumranites in the liturgically ordered cursing of all others would also have branded a Qumranite (or potential Qumranite) unfit for the community. Even so, I am persuaded that the Baptizer left the community, although he may have been excluded or exiled for one or two years. See Moshe Weinfeld, *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect: A Comparison with Guilds and Religious Associations of the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (NTOA 2; Editiones Universitatis res Friburg Suisse; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986). Weinfeld rightly reports that absolute expulsion resulted from any slandering of the sect (1QS 7.16–17), any refusal to accept the sect's authority (1QS 7.17), or any action or nonaction that might be construed as betrayal by any leader of the sect (1QS 7.22–25).

because, in the eyes of the Many, he had “the evil eye,” possessed “a boastful spirit,” or especially reduced “the spirit of the community.”

Such so-called “backsliding” in the minds of the men of the community led to *post factum* legislation; some of it is found in 1QS, especially columns six and seven. For the Qumranites there was a decidedly Kierkegaardian either/or; if one was not a Son of Light with full devotion to the community, he was simply accursed, a Son of Darkness. It is thus enlightening to observe how the covenantal renewal ceremony continues immediately after the words previously quoted from 1QS 2.10:

And the priests and the Levites shall continue and say:

Because of the idols of his heart, which he worships, cursed be he who enters into this covenant and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before him so that he backslides, (stumbling) over it. And when he hears the words of this covenant, he blesses himself erroneously, saying: “Peace be with me, for I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.” May his spirit be destroyed, (suffering) thirst along with saturation, without forgiveness. May God’s wrath and his angry judgments flare up against him for everlasting destruction. And may all the curses of this covenant stick to him. May God set him apart for evil that he may be cut off from all the Sons of Light because of his backsliding from God through his idols and the stumbling block of his iniquity. May he put his lot among those who are cursed forever. And all those who enter the covenant shall respond and say after them: Amen, amen. (1QS 2.11–18)<sup>74</sup>

In light of what Josephus and the Evangelists report about the Baptizer, it is clear that at this point the Baptizer would not—and could not—continue to say, “Amen, amen.” His preaching did not condemn virtually all humanity. Rather, he called all Israel to forgiveness. Perhaps thinking of anyone who was not—or no longer—a member of the community (אֲחֵי), the Baptizer would obviously find it impossible to continue to utter such curses. He would then be labeled for all time one who “backslides” and would be accursed and damned by the Qumranites.

Expulsion from the community had devastating results. The Qumranites vowed to “separate themselves from the congregation of the men of deceit” (1QS 5.1–2). Such would now include the Baptizer. If he refused to participate in the liturgy that condemned all others, he would be expelled from the community. He would be one of the outcasts, and that would be his category whether he had been thrown out or sauntered away disheartened. To the Qumranites, he would not have failed in

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74. Charlesworth, *ibid.*, 11.

mastering Qumran lore because of their inability to teach it; the only explanation is that God from the beginning had determined human ways (1QS 5.7), and he had decreed that nothing can be changed (1QS 3.16). That is, God had not created the Baptizer a “Son of Light.” The men of the *Yahad* would judge that John had more portions of darkness than light (cf. 4Q186; 4Q534), and that his “lot” was now beyond their social and cosmic barriers and in the lot of darkness. For the Qumranites, he was one who had not been elected, since they held a unique Jewish concept of double predestination.<sup>75</sup> He would thus receive the hatred and cursing specified for the Sons of Darkness. Words such as the following would have been directed now at him: “Cursed be you without compassion” (1QS 2.7) and “Be damned in everlasting murky fire” (1QS 2.7–8).

This insight dismisses the logical possibility that Qumranites would have left Qumran to visit with the Baptizer near the Jordan. According to their developed rules, they could not in any way relate to him again.

The hatred of all the Sons of Darkness is a result of the conviction that God has established a bifurcated humanity and put perpetual enmity between the two irreconcilable sides (1QS 4.16–17). The Sons of Light hate all the Sons of Darkness in imitation of God’s hatred of them (1QS 4.1). The Baptizer, who once had been considered one of the Sons of Light and beloved, would now be the object of Qumran hate.

The Baptizer, as a partially or fully initiated Qumranite, could not even receive a gift of food from another Jew. There is every reason to assume that he had made a vow to God to “keep far away from others in everything” and never to “eat or drink anything of their property” (1QS 5.15–17).<sup>76</sup> Interpreting Isa 2:22, the Qumranite swore not to have anything whatsoever to do with others, especially “all those who are not accounted within” the Qumran covenant (1QS 5.18). And Qumranites were sworn not to give a “backslider,” as the Baptizer would have been branded, anything to eat; anyone who did so would also be banished (1QS 5.16; 7.24–25).

This point is enunciated by Josephus, who reported that one who is expelled “from the order” is bound by his “oaths” and thus cannot “partake of other men’s food, and so falls to eating grass and wastes away and dies of starvation.”<sup>77</sup>

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75. See also Josephus: The Essenes declare that “Fate is mistress of all things” (*Ant.* 18.172).

76. Recall Josephus’s comment that the initiated Essene “is made to swear horrendous oaths.” Among such oaths is the promise “that he will forever hate the unjust ones” (*J.W.* 2.139).

77. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.143. Also see Schiffman, “Swearing of Oaths,” in *Sectarian Law in the Dead Sea Scrolls: Courts, Testimony, and the Penal Code* (BJS 33; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 136–41.

Surely, now—for the first time—we have a cogent explanation for the Baptizer’s eating habits. During the beginning of his attempt to enter the community, he would have sworn an oath to obey Torah according to the interpretation of the priests (1QS 1.16–20; 5.1–6.1; 6.13–23). After being banished from the community, he ate only locusts and wild honey, which would indicate that he did not accept food from others, even though many who came to him from Jerusalem would have brought adequate food to share with him.

The description of what the Baptizer did eat has a decidedly Qumran or Essene ring to it. That is, locusts and honey were acceptable foods for the Qumranites and the Essenes. The most important text for obtaining this insight is the *Damascus Document*; although it was intended for the Essenes who lived outside of Qumran, it most likely also informs us of the dietary laws at Qumran. According to this text, locusts could be eaten if they were cooked while alive: A man may eat of “all species of locusts [וכל החגבים במיניהם] provided that they are “put into fire or water while still alive” (CD 12.14–15).<sup>78</sup>

The reference to honey precedes this passage in CD but is more opaque. According to CD 12.12 one is not permitted to eat “the larvae of bees [מעגלי הדבורים], and that might mean it is permissible to eat honey that has been filtered.<sup>79</sup> This exegesis is suggested, though not demanded, by Philo’s comment that some Essenes [Ἐσσαῖοι] “superintend the swarm of bees [σμήνη μελιττωῶν].”<sup>80</sup> Thus, the honey should be filtered.

Some first-century Jews thought the bee was an unclean animal because it may have been born or worked in a defiled carcass.<sup>81</sup> Hence, according to the ancient reports, the Baptizer ate only what had been permitted by Qumran or Essene lore and law. The most probable explanation of all we have learned about the Baptizer, especially his diet, thus seems to warrant the speculation that he had almost completed the more than two-year initiation at Qumran, was expelled (or most likely left), and continued to observe the vows and oaths he had made before God.

According to his Essene vows, he also could not receive anything from others. If he had been nearly fully initiated into the community, he would have sworn to God not to “accept anything whatever from” the hand of

78. Joseph M. Baumgarten and Daniel R. Schwartz, “Damascus Document,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek Texts with English Translations, Vol. 2, Damascus Document, War Scroll, and Related Documents* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth et al.; PTSDSSP 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

79. I am indebted to Chaim Rabin for this insight. See Chaim Rabin, ed. and trans., *The Zadokite Documents* (2d, rev. ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 61.

80. Philo, *Hypoth.* 11.8.

81. See Philo, *Spec.* 1.291.

one who was not a Son of Light (1QS 5.16). Hence, upon expulsion—or voluntary departure—he must make his own clothes. Also, we learn why he did not wear the clothes that Jews living in Galilee, Jerusalem, Jericho, and elsewhere would have willingly offered him. He could not accept anything from others. He thus wore only the skins of animals: “Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist.” (Mark 1:6; Matt 3:4). The isolation of one who had almost become a fully initiated Qumranite is emphasized in the liturgical hymn that now completes the *Rule of the Community*: “I will not have compassion for all those who deviate from the Way” (1QS 10.20–21). He was thus isolated in the interstices between two segments of pre-70 Jewish society.

In the late 1950s, J. A. T. Robinson suggested that the Baptizer and his group may well have thought of themselves as making atonement for Israel’s sins.<sup>82</sup> He also indicated that they obtained this idea from Qumran. He contended that this atonement movement helps explain why Jesus of Nazareth would be attracted to John.<sup>83</sup> The hypothesis is attractive, and the Qumranites did claim to be atoning for the Land (1QS 5.6; 8.6, 10; 9.4), but the historical records do not suggest that the Baptizer led a movement that was atoning for Israel’s sins. Rather, the Baptizer was most likely an eschatological prophet who claimed that one needed to repent and be baptized because of the coming day of judgment, as Josephus (*Ant.* 18.117–18) and Luke reported (Luke 3:10–14).

Another probable Qumran influence on the Baptizer seems to have been missed by scholars. It is clear to me that the Righteous Teacher, or another genius at the beginning of the Qumran Community, developed the concept of the Holy Spirit. They developed, or created, the concept of a hypostatic being, separate from God, called “the Holy Spirit”; this concept is not found in rabbinic writings, the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament), or the Old Testament Apocrypha. It is found in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha only in passages that seem to indicate Essene influence.<sup>84</sup> When the Righteous Teacher and his little group left

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82. John A. T. Robinson, “The Baptism of John and the Qumran Community,” *HTR* 50 (1957): 175–91.

83. See now Robert L. Webb, “John the Baptist and His Relationship to Jesus,” in *Studying the Historical Jesus* (ed. B. D. Chilton and C. A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 179–229; W. Barnes Tatum, *John the Baptist and Jesus: A Report of the Jesus Seminar* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1994). According to the Jesus Seminar, John the Baptizer was not a member, or former member, of the Qumran community. Tatum, *John the Baptist and Jesus*, 12.

84. See James H. Charlesworth, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Historical Jesus,” in *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 1–74, esp. 20–22, 58–60.

the Temple, they eventually felt that God's Holy Spirit had gone with them into the wilderness. There, in "the House of Holiness," they were "the Holy Ones" because "the Holy Spirit" dwelt only with them. Thus, the appearance of the concept of "the Holy Spirit" in the Baptizer's words, if they are authentic to him, probably indicates some Qumran influence. It is singularly important, therefore, to observe that according to Mark, Matthew, and Luke, the Baptizer is reputed to have said that the Messiah will baptize you "by means of (or with) the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8; Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16; cf. Luke 1:67). It seems clear that the most obvious source of the Baptizer's concept of "the Holy Spirit" is Qumran; most likely he learned about the Holy Spirit during his time at Qumran.

#### SOCIOLOGY, THE BAPTIZER, AND THE QUMRANITES

We might obtain a better perception of the Baptizer's life if we learn from sociologists. Using the terminology of A. van Gennep in his *Rites de Passage*,<sup>85</sup> I am persuaded that the Baptizer apparently found himself checkmated between the second and third phases of his rite of passage into the Qumran Community. He had moved beyond *separation* and even *transition* but could not move on to the final stage, *incorporation*. Perhaps his rite of passage stopped short of incorporation into the *Yahad*, because he was hindered in proceeding further by the Maskil, "the Master." More likely, it seems to me, that the Baptizer had refused to curse into eternal damnation those whom he had loved for years, including his parents, his relatives, and others whom he admired (perhaps many in the Temple cult). He could not morally curse these loved ones without their having any opportunity to repent; and repentance is not possible for one who was created to be damned (as is clear from Qumran theology). Most important, the Baptizer had likely completed the phase called separation, meaning he had made certain irreversible vows that moved him permanently away from all forms of normal Jewish life. However, he could not proceed further and enter into another paradigmatically different world of meaningful symbolism, even though it promised a world in which space and time were defined as sacred. In the language of sociologists, the Baptizer was mired at that time in a "liminoid" phase: he had left one social status but had not yet taken up the meaning of acceptable status in another group. Now, due to his expulsion or act of leaving, he never could. I can imagine that he had listened approvingly to the teachings found in 1QS 3.13–4.26 and had been instructed in the sacred language

and regulations of “Rules for Life in the Community” (1QS 5.1–6.23). Thus, it appears the Baptizer was caught in a liminal stage; he was no longer outside the Qumran Community, but he could never be inside it.

As Victor Turner points out, an initiate into a sacred community undergoes a change in the quality of time and enters “a cultural realm which is defined as ‘out of time,’ i.e., beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines.”<sup>86</sup> Hence, sociologists who have focused on what occurs when people live in societies, as in the Qumran Community, help us reconstruct a probable scenario between the Baptizer and the Qumranites. They also provide insights that help us comprehend why the Baptizer’s message was primarily centered upon sacred time. His teaching was almost exclusively the proclamation that the end of time was now (Luke 3:7–9, 15–18; Matt 3:7–12; Mark 1:7–8; John 1:26–27).

This insight regarding the importance of time for the Baptizer is enriched by the observation that on entering a temple a devotee crosses over into sacred space and time. The Qumranites thought of their “House of Holiness” as an antechamber of heaven, in which angels dwell during ritual, and as a replacement of the Temple; thus, the Baptizer had learned and experienced a concept of time that would be with him forever. He was focused on the pregnant moment of present time: the present was the dawning of the future eschatological day. There is every reason to conclude that the Baptizer inherited some of his eschatology from Qumran theology.

We should strive to perceive, as M. Shanks and C. Tilley show in *Social Theory and Archaeology*, that individuals like the Baptizer obtain self-understanding, or consciousness, because they are “situated in a social and symbolic field.” That is, the Baptizer obtained meaning that he was able to articulate to the many who flocked to him, because his society that provided him with symbols, signs, and concepts. These symbols provided meaning for his activity and preaching.<sup>87</sup> As Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann stress, “Man is biologically predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for him the dominant and

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85. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (trans. M. B. Vizedom and G. L. Caffey; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960).

86. Victor Turner, *Process, Performance, and Pilgrimage: A Study in Comparative Symbolology* (New Delhi: Concept, 1979), 16.

87. Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley, *Social Theory and Archaeology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 71.

definitive reality.”<sup>88</sup> And so we come to a probable scenario with the Baptizer: his world was shaped by his formative interaction with the Qumranites.

As numerous sociologists have demonstrated, groups or sects can have low or high barriers to entry. It is extremely difficult to enter a social group with high barriers and monumentally catastrophic to leave it. The Qumran Community had and maintained an exceedingly high social barrier. One could not be born into the group, and it took over two years to enter—to cross over into—the covenant community. Once inside, all private possessions belonged to the community. The difficulty of becoming a member of the *Yahad* is accentuated by the Qumranites’ choice of words for entering: one “crossed over into the covenant [עָבְרוּ בְּרִית]” (1QS 1.16).

Thus, it becomes easier to imagine how John the Baptizer had been caught in the interstices that separate two social groups. When he began to *cross over into* the Qumran Community, he had left one social group behind; that is, the religious culture of most Judean Jews, whose world was defined by the Temple cult. He had not yet entered the *Yahad*, and so he was lost in a world of ambiguity in which he had only a liminal social status. The Baptizer was thus in a “liminoid” phase. He was outside one meaningful social group to which he could never return, and he was not able to enter another one that promised meaning and sacred status. Being expelled, or leaving voluntarily, left him permanently in liminality.

So far in this paper I have avoided labeling the Qumran Community a “sect.” In the history of Western culture, it has become a disparaging term. Through an insensitive application of comparisons, the word “sect” isolates a group that is depicted to be theologically unacceptable in light of dogma and doctrine. Divested of pejorative overtones, as Ernst Troeltsch endeavored to do long ago,<sup>89</sup> and of theological baggage, the concept “sect” seems applicable to the Qumranites. This follows from the sociological research by Bryan Wilson on sects. He concludes that a sect is a group that tends to be exclusive, claims a monopoly on religious truth, and is “generally anti-sacerdotal.”<sup>90</sup> The first two of these three criteria fit Qumran and suggest that it can be described as a “sect.” When one adds

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88. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 183.

89. Ernst Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1912); ET: *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. O. Wyon; 2 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1931).

90. Wilson adds to the latter third category that sects “also tend to be lay organizations.” This criterion does not apply to Qumran. See Bryan R. Wilson, “The Sociology of Sects,” in *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 91.

another criterion,<sup>91</sup> then there should be no doubt that Qumran fits the definition of a sect. The final criterion is that a sect can be discerned within Judaism when one Jewish group leaves the larger body, especially the Temple establishment and its leaders, polemicizes against it, and is subsequently harassed or persecuted by the larger group. The Qumranites meet all these criteria, and do so in a stunning fashion. They were intellectually and sociologically exclusive and composed exclusive lore and laws. They claimed to monopolize truth (especially the contention that all the mysteries of the prophets were revealed to no one except the Righteous Teacher [1QpHab 7]).<sup>92</sup> The Qumranites were vehemently against the Wicked Priest and the Temple cult. The Wicked Priest persecuted the Righteous Teacher on the Day of Atonement observed by the Qumranites. This latter report indicates that the Qumranites even followed a calendar different from the establishment in Jerusalem (1QpHab 9; esp. 1QpHab 11.4–8).<sup>93</sup>

These reflections on the Qumran Community as a sect help us understand the life of John the Baptizer. He almost became a sectarian, but his ministry and the group he gathered around him did not constitute a sect.<sup>94</sup> We have seen how helpful it becomes to think about the Baptizer's relation to the Qumranites in terms of the insights and observations learned from sociology—surely not simply imposing sociology on ancient phenomena. I am led to wonder if the Baptizer's call for other Jews to abandon their proud claim to be children of Abraham (Luke 3:8) is a reflection of his own crisis of alienation and period of liminality. John the Baptizer called those who came to him to break free of the usual social categories and enter into a community prepared for and awaiting God's act and the day of judgment. The Baptizer offered a new sign, baptism, although as H. C. Kee and many scholars suggest, this new sign “may have had precedent in ceremonial washings among the Dead Sea community at Qumran.”<sup>95</sup> The Baptizer was certainly shaped by the social forces of his day; and as Shirley Jackson Case stated in the 1920s, he desired “social change,” and he expected a new social order to be set up through the catastrophic intervention of the Deity.<sup>96</sup>

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91. I am indebted to Alan Segal for private discussions on this subject.

92. See Charlesworth, *The Pesharim and Qumran History*.

93. For the critical edition of these texts, see Maurya P. Horgan, “Habakkuk Peshet,” in *Pesharim, Other Commentaries, and Related Documents* (PTSDSSP 6B).

94. For the reasons given above for considering the Qumran Community a sect, it would follow that the Palestinian Jesus movement was also a sect.

95. Howard C. Kee, *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 33.

96. Shirley J. Case, *The Social Origins of Christianity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1923; repr., New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1975), 49.

My thesis is simple. It synthesizes most of what we know about John the Baptizer and the Qumran Essenes. The Baptizer probably had been one of the Sons of the Dawn, if that *terminus technicus* denotes a young man attempting to enter the Qumran Community. As one who wished to “cross over into the covenant” at Qumran, he took vows that explain his later lifestyle. During his years of training as a potential member of the Qumran Community he had sworn never to receive food, clothing, or anything from one who was not a Son of Light. He probably was almost fully initiated into the community, but he refused to accept the utter condemnation of all those who were not members of the community. As D. Flusser stated, John the Baptizer was “certainly not a member of the Essene community,” but he was “evidently a dissident Essene, who opposed the sectarian and separatist followers of Essenism, both in their ideology and in their social organization.”<sup>97</sup> The Baptizer thus was banished from the community or left it voluntarily. He took with him much that he had learned from the Qumranites. Being a *homo religiosus*, he would remain faithful to the vows he had made to God. His teaching continued the eschatological fervor—and a prophecy of doom on those who are not faithful to God—he had learned from the Qumranites, and he remained in the wilderness because he felt called, like the Qumranites, to prepare in the wilderness the way of YHWH.

If the Baptizer had learned from the Qumranites about the eschatological importance of “wilderness,” then Luke has helped us understand why he was in the wilderness before his mission to Israel began. Recall again the text: And the Baptizer “grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness (ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις) until the day of his manifestation to Israel” (Luke 1:80).

Luke reports that the Baptizer told the multitudes of people who came to him to share their possessions with others. Recall again the exhortation attributed to him: “He who has two coats, let him share with one who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise” (Luke 3:11). This is a unique exhortation. It has parallels only with the Qumran concept of a common storehouse for all members of the community. Most likely, the Baptizer had learned this teaching from the Qumranites.

John the Baptizer may well have rejected the Qumranic, liturgically institutionalized hatred of all who were not Sons of Light, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that he was a man of love. The hatred he may have learned from the Qumranites reappeared in his fiery denunciations of Jews who did not grasp the singular importance of repentance and preparation

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97. Flusser, *Judaism and the Origins of Christianity*, 143.

for God's final salvific act. Only a few decades after his preaching began, John is reputed to have said to the crowds who came to him for baptism: "You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?...Even now the axe is laid to the root of the tree; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:7-9; cf. Matt 3:7-10). The Baptizer reputedly warned that he was "sent" (John 3:28) before the Messiah; and when he comes he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire (Luke 3:17).

How was John the Baptizer able to move on to a meaningful life near the Jordan? How was he able to move from being almost a Qumranite to becoming a powerful orator for the crowds? The answer seems to reside in his prophetic consciousness. He believed he was sent by God to proclaim that "the axe is laid to the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Luke 3:9). Using the insights obtained by Max Weber, it seems appropriate to recognize that John the Baptizer was a charismatic. He was in no way dependent on a social structure; there was no agency to control him or dictate what he was allowed to say. John the Baptizer acted out of "inner determination and inner restraint." He demanded obedience to and acknowledgment of the truth he proclaimed because of his divine mission and the sheer power of his own personality, which was enthusiastically supported by the crowds. John did not derive his power from the vote or support of the crowds, but it was "the *duty* of those to whom he addresses his mission to recognize him as their charismatically qualified leader."<sup>98</sup>

It seems relatively certain, therefore, that John the Baptizer was deeply influenced by Qumran theology, but that he was expelled or left the community during the final period of full initiation, or after he was a member of "the Many" at Qumran for a relatively short time. There is a possible sequel to this attractive scenario.<sup>99</sup> Bannus, with whom Josephus lived for "three years"—during the formative years of 16 to 19—in the wilderness (τὴν ἐρημίαν), may well have been a former Qumranite or Essene. As with the Baptizer, Bannus may also have once been a member of the Qumran Community but left it, or was expelled from it (*Life* 11-12). Bannus not only lived in the wilderness (which reminds us of the Qumran interpretation of Isa 40:3), but also wore only what trees provided, ate only what grew of itself, and frequently washed in cold water

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98. Max Weber, *Essays in Sociology* (trans. and ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills; New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 246-47.

99. I am grateful to Stephen J. Pfann, with whom I have spoken about my thesis both near the Qumran caves and in the Rockefeller Museum. I found his insights and support especially helpful as I developed this thesis.

“for purity’s sake.” Perhaps these descriptions suggest that Bannus also had taken vows at Qumran.

The noun “Bannus” is not a name;<sup>100</sup> it is a description. It signifies that this man, like the Baptizer, was defined by his preoccupation. Bannus, which probably derives from *bnn’h* (בַּנְיָה), “bather,”<sup>101</sup> means that this desert ascetic was defined by cleansing. In fact, “Bannus” may mean “baptizer.”<sup>102</sup> Bannus’s occupation and lifestyle remind us of what was allowed to prospective members after the Qumran vows had been uttered; they are also reminiscent of the Qumranites’ devotion to ritual purification by immersion. If Bannus had been an Essene, then it is clear how and in what ways Josephus knew so much about the Essenes; he had been with Bannus, a former Essene.

#### CONCLUSION

The present thesis explains the striking similarities between the Qumranites and John the Baptizer and also the paradigmatic differences between them. Many key aspects of the Baptizer’s teaching are appreciably different from Qumran theology. He “preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; cf. Matt 3:2). He refused to reject the vast majority of Jews; they were not “Sons of Darkness.” They were not predestined to eternal damnation (cf. 1QS 3–4; 4Q186; 4Q534). The Baptizer did not develop or belong to a social group with strict laws and high social boundaries. He did not espouse a rigid determinism nor predestinarianism. All these ideas, and his less-rigid social barriers, make him decidedly non-Qumranite. Unlike the Qumranites, John the Baptizer was an eschatological preacher of doom to whom large crowds flocked. Unlike the Qumranites, he was defined by a mission to the lost of Israel. He urged them to repent and to prepare for the final act in God’s drama of salvation (Mark 1:5; Matt 3:5, 7–10; Luke 3:7–9).

There seems no reason to doubt that the Baptizer adopted at least some of the teachings of the Qumranites. He probably inherited from the

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100. It should not be equated with the latter rabbinic name “Bannai.” Cf. *b. Ketub.* 50b and *b. Ber.* 38b.

101. See Marcus Jastro, *Dictionary of the Targumim* (New York: Pardes Pub. House, 1950), 1:176; *Tg. Esth.* 2.6.12; also see *bny* in Michael Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Judean Aramaic* (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2003), 105; and Syriac *banā*, “bath.”

102. This suggestion was published long ago by Robert I. Eisler in *The Messiah Jesus and John the Baptist* (London: Methuen, 1931), 23n2.

Qumranites at least the interpretation of Isa 40:3, the concept of the Holy Spirit, a belief in the impending doom of the end of time, and the concept of the lost as a brood of vipers. But probably, John the Baptizer was one who refused full initiation because of the institutionalized hatred of all who were not within the Qumran Community. The Baptizer thus seems to be one who was expelled from—or better, left—the Qumran Community.

Both John the Baptizer and the Qumranites lived at the same time and place and evidenced some striking similarities. The historian must attempt some synthesis and use some historical imagination that accounts for all the relevant data. The present thesis, I am convinced, best accounts for the complex similarities and dissimilarities between John the Baptizer and the Qumranites. In summary, the Baptizer was not an Essene, but—most likely—he had been almost fully initiated into the *Yahad*. He apparently refused full initiation and left the Qumran Community because of their rigid predestination and their institutionalized hatred of all the Sons of Darkness. My thesis explains many otherwise inexplicable aspects of the life of the Baptizer, as we hear about him from the ancient authors like Josephus, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Most important, for the first time the thesis explains two key dimensions of the similarities between the Qumranites and the Baptizer. First, it helps us comprehend the Baptizer's choice and interpretation of Scripture, especially Isa 40:3, his location in the wilderness not far from Qumran, his apocalyptic eschatology, and his use of water in preparing for the day of judgment. Second, it helps us understand his concept of having only one coat, eating only what was allowed by Qumran lore and not accepting food from other Jews, and also his hatred of the unrighteous and unrepentant.