



Collins, John J.

Beyond the Qumran Community: The Sectararian Movement of the Dead Sea Scrolls

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Collins's account, as the title hints, expounds the theory of more than one community but a single movement behind the Qumran scrolls. After a brief introduction, he commences with the "Damascus" community, or, as he terms it, the "new covenant" (ch. 2). He accepts the consensus that the D ("Damascus") texts reflect an earlier phase of this movement than the *yahad* of the S ("Serek") texts. In discussing D's legislation, he notes the distinction between the laws for "cities" and for "camps": both are mostly derived by scriptural exegesis and exhibit "affinities" with Sadducean halakah, but the former seem to apply to "all Israel," while the latter imply membership of a specific association. These observations lead naturally to a consideration of 4QMMT, which is also halakic and widely thought to be pre-"sectarian." Although Collins agrees that the Damascus movement emerged from halakic disagreement, he is reluctant to align the two documents, concluding only that "*the kinds of issues* that lead to sectarian separation" are "quite similar" (21, emphasis original). Having summarized the organization of the Damascus group, which is seen as family-based, he then notes precedents in the "exiles" of Ezra and Nehemiah but refrains from any historical connection between these two phenomena, regarding "Damascus" as merely a symbol for a place of exile (but not physical exile). He is similarly cautious about reconstructing a history of the movement from clues in the Admonition and about the exact role of the "Teacher of Righteousness,"

observing that the title is absent from D (which is strictly correct but not the whole story!). This community did not call itself “sons of Zadok” and should be identified neither with “Enochic Judaism” of Sacchi and Boccaccini or with the Essenes, but connections with Jubilees and the Temple Scroll, which seem to share the same calendar as the Enochic literature, are acknowledged. Collins doubts the evidence of a split within the community, suggesting that the “Liar” “was a rival teacher who rejected the Teacher’s claims and won over some of his followers” (50).

Chapter 2, on the *yahad*, starts with its relationship of S and D texts. Collins compares admission procedures, property owning, celibacy, and attitudes toward the cult, all of which show both similarity and development. The *yahad* should not be identified with “the Qumran community,” because it existed in several places; it emerged from the Damascus community as some kind of “elite group” (69–75) in which a mystical element, the “angelic life,” became important. The Rule of the Congregatio” (1QSa), which bears resemblances to both S and D, shows “the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of assigning these rules to different movements” (78). Finally, the significance of the analogies with either Greco-Roman associations or the *haverim* is unclear.

The historical context of the “movement” forms the third chapter. Collins reviews the “eroded pillars” (his phrase) of the early consensus, opting for a first- rather than second-century date for the foundation at Qumran. The 390 years of CD 1 are symbolic, and high-priestly disputes are probably not relevant. Arguments against the historical value of the pesharim are given but without any converse arguments Collins asserts that they are nevertheless of value (102–3). Hence we are offered a discussion of passages about the “Wicked Priest” in the pesharim, concluding with a stated preference for Hyrcanus II but also for Alexander Jannaeus in a number of cases.

Chapter 4 discusses the identification of the movement with the Essenes, in which Josephus and his sources figure prominently alongside appendices on the etymology of “Essene” and Philo’s “Therapeutae.” The conclusion is rather negative: these writers’ accounts have little to tell us about history rather than their own rhetorical interests.

The final chapter discusses the site of Qumran, dealing first with the phases of occupation, then the possible functions of the site in these phases: villa, pottery factory, fort, or religious settlement. Largely on the basis of the cemeteries and reservoirs, Collins concludes that two different groups may have occupied the site: one in the Hasmonean period, followed by settlements of the *yahad*.

In his concluding epilogue Collins—unexpectedly, given his earlier comments—concludes that the sectarian movement probably *is* to be identified with the Essenes, consisting of

two harmonious branches, celibate and noncelibate, and that not all of the scrolls were written or copied there but were brought from various Essene settlements, mostly but not exclusively, in the prelude to the revolt against Rome in 66. Collins finds it remarkable that the sect persisted for so long, but believes it disappeared quickly after the Roman victory.

The fundamental problem with this book is not with Collins's scholarship or writing, which is for the most part a faithful rendering of the view of the majority of scholars, although there remains controversy on most issues. In view of this, Collins's frequent reluctance to deliver positive verdicts is quite understandable if at times frustrating. But this reviewer felt a deeper frustration. I cannot think of anyone to whom I would recommend it. The topic touches on so many issues and implicates so many more that it cannot really be coherently or cogently presented in such a brief review. The discussion is neither rigorous enough to satisfy the scholar nor broad enough in scope to really inform the student. The problem manifests itself especially in the occasions when Collins offers detail and where he does not and where he decides between committing himself and not committing himself.

For example, the identity of the "Wicked Priest" receives over ten pages, although—whether or not there is any identifiable figure behind this sobriquet—his relevance to the movement is dubious, especially since Collins agrees that the high priesthood had nothing to do with the formation of the *yahad*. The discussion of Josephus's sources on the Essenes likewise occupies ten pages that its relevance hardly merits, especially since Collins agrees that the movement probably *is* to be identified as Essene. Among matters that should have been discussed at more length is the question of why the "new covenant" adopted a sectarian character when it did, given that its calendrical and halakic differences go back well beyond the second century B.C.E. Here Collins might have balanced his dependence on Baumgarten's Hasmonean take on Jewish sectarianism with a discussion of Blenkinsopp's theory of a longer history going back to the fifth century. Also, the central question of how and why the *yahad* emerged from the "Damascus" movement is not very thoroughly worked over: the evidence of CD Ms B, which appears to emanate from soon after the death of the "Teacher," is but one of many issues that are not properly explored. Finally, is it really plausible that the "Liar" might be a rival to the "Teacher" from *outside* the movement? How does Collins envisage this? The evidence of conflict should not be dismissed without much better analysis and some vestige of argument. The lame and superficial conclusions here leave a hole at the center of the entire discussion.

There are also cases where Collins might have overcome his natural caution and reached a more positive assessment. If 4QMMT merely reflects the same sort of issues as D in sectarian formation, why is it among the Qumran texts? Are the "camps" of the

(apparently nonsectarian) 4QMMT really different from the (sectarian) “camps” of CD—each having Jerusalem, the “city of the sanctuary,” at the center of its organization? And while the title “Teacher of Righteousness” is absent from D, we have the figure “who will teach righteousness” in 6:11, which Collins takes as a description of the messiah. Yet he denies that the historical “Teacher of Righteousness *was* regarded as a messiah? Is it really true that “the movement described in the *Damascus Rule* is not messianic in the sense that early Christianity was: the movement does not arise because an actual messiah was believed to have come”? Much more analysis is needed for such sweeping conclusions.

Collins rests part of his case for a harmonious coexistence of the two communities on the observation that we have texts that relate to both. But is Christianity to be regarded as part of the same movement as Judaism because it retains the Jewish scriptures alongside its own writings? Collins states that he is not dealing here with the “thought world of the sectarians” (11), but that is precisely where the core of the sectarian mentality rests. There may be little reliable history in the Scrolls, but sectarian memory, like catechism, highlights the reasons why they remained a sect.

In short, the relative beginner will find some of the discussion rather abstruse, and yet without adequate context. The identity of the movement cannot really be isolated from wider questions. The scholar will respect the learning that this book represents but wish that the conclusions could be better considered and argued. Though, to be fair to Collins, in this sort of format probably no Qumran scholar could have done much better.