

Social Scientific Approaches

a. Sectarianism

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It is an empirical question as to when and why sectarianism in society leads to the formation of an actual exclusive group, and it is not always the case that collective drives to exclusivity will crystalize into formal institutions or that the central feature of membership will revolve around religious values, practices and behaviours. When a social movement does institutionalize and utilizes religious values as gate-keeping devices, we are dealing with what sociologists call a sect. A sect can produce literature that has a sectarian worldview but not all literature produced is 'sectually explicit' (Newsom, 2004); equally, writings produced outside of a formal sect can express sectarian ideology and these need not lead to the formation of an exclusive religious community. What constitutes a sectarian worldview will of course depend upon the sociological ideas being deployed by the researcher.

When sectarianism and sect are employed in Second Temple studies today the social sciences are consciously drawn upon. It is no longer sufficient to use such labels loosely or to presume that merely common-sense assumptions are adequate. It is very useful indeed to turn to the sociological tradition for further guidance on how to conceptualize sects and analyse the social factors that contribute to the emergence of sectarian tendencies, the consolidation of movements into sects, and the impact of those organizations on individual members and on the wider society. Using the label sect in Qumran studies is probably a reflection of the fact that many scholars see this description as being the most relevant (Collins, 2010). However, this does not mean that all alternatives (types of sect) have been explored or that each scholar using the label sect or sectarianism means the same things by it. There is still a place for viewing the data through the lens of other ideal types of social movements such as communes, monasteries and even 'total institutions,' a technical term utilized in the social sciences to apply to a prison or a mental institution but also to a monastery or a leprosarium (Goffman, 1961). The point to grasp in these sociological experiments is that the issue is not to 'get the label correct' but to find a way of appreciating the full variety and complexity of the social phenomena being explored: in this case the Qumran movement and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Exploring the disconnections between various ideal types and the data at hand is precisely where explanatory attention can be focused (Chalcraft,

2010). A fit between minority religious movements in the present and ancient sects should not be expected. It is perhaps more helpful to consider social movements and institutions as evidencing degrees of sect-like-ness or of total-institution-likeness and to use our sociological imaginations to access the warp and woof of dynamic systems of social relations and belief. In order for discussion to advance it is essential to use concepts that are based on sound research and conscious and critical use of sociological ideas. Further, what is now realized in the field is that using the concept sect without locating the source and explaining the use, and moreover without following through the consequences of the use of that sociological idea for the reading of the texts and the history of the movement, can hardly be satisfactory (Jokiranta, 2010).

The Weberian Sociological Tradition

By far the most exciting classical theorist who can guide us is Max Weber (1864–1920). Yet it is only recently that the full import of Weber's writing on sects and sectarianism has begun to be entirely appreciated (Chalcraft, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2008, 2011; Kim, 2004). A thorough examination of Weber's writing realizes that his contribution is not to be dismissed as a simple binary of Church-Sect. Rather, Weber places sectarianism within the wider contrast between compulsory (e.g. a universal Church) and voluntary (e.g. a sect, club) forms of association. In this way he is able to draw out the significant sociological point that a sect, on the basis of its principles of admission and ongoing discipline of the sect member, radically impacts on the formation of personality and is thereby transformative of culture and society (Weber, 1948). For Weber a sect is a religious community founded on voluntary membership achieved through qualification (Chalcraft, 2007b, 2011). In order to join a sect and to remain a member the individual needs to demonstrate in front of their peers those very qualities deemed to be of upmost importance to members and which indicate that the member has the requisite degree of charisma or virtuosity required. The individual member then needs to develop those qualities for admission and maintain those qualities whilst within the organization on pain of expulsion if they fail. For Weber this social process is of great importance and cultivates what he labels 'self-assertion' alongside, of course, the very qualities felt to be at a premium by the group. For Weber, there can be no better way of people getting together to further their values and visions for the world and seek social change. It was this quality of self-assertion (*Selbstbehauptung*) and the development of particular traits valued by the sects that played a large role in the rise of individualism which was central to modernity, and hence – for Weber – for the development of modern capitalistic culture. In a similar vein, those working with early Jewish materials will approach the data with questions about the manner in which a movement's values and organization impacted on individual personality and indeed whether a strict hierarchical priestly leadership, for example, would tend to restrict these kinds of developments (Chalcraft, 2007d). For Weber, Judaism itself was a sectarian world religion (he used the questionable concept of a pariah people) and so any sects within the sect, so to speak, would have had less external impact in the course of Western history (Weber, 1952). In terms of the formation of sectarian movements Weber's

approach is also highly suggestive since he breaks away from definitions of sects which rely on their size, their dualistic and world abnegating ideologies, and, in particular, views which only posit a sect in a situation of a reaction to and withdrawal from orthodoxy in belief and practice. From a Weberian point of view there need not be orthodoxy against which to protest for sects to exist. Rather, in his view, all movements have sectarian tendencies, and the more the members feel themselves to be an aristocracy or to hold abilities that are rare the more likely exclusive practices will develop. Weber applies these ideas to all forms of voluntary associations, all of which can develop exclusive practices and when they do, the values and behaviours which they esteem will be utilized by gate keepers. The values need not be religious values. So for Weber we can say that sectarianism is an aspect of group life, and exclusive social action is not restricted to sects but is operative in all spheres of cultural life.

Bryan R. Wilson (1926–2004) is the other sociologist who has most often been made use of in biblical studies in relation to sects and sectarianism. Wilson felt himself to be working in the Weberian tradition and this is most evident in his commitment to value-freedom and to treating sects as voluntary movements. Wilson's ideas also appealed because he sought to distance the sociology of sects from the apparent Western or Christian bias in Church-Sect typologies that were associated with Ernst Troeltsch and Weber. It is true that Weber's sociology was always enquiry-driven and that he was seeking to answer cultural problems that were of relevance to his location as an European sociologist. He did, nevertheless, seek to apply his conception of sects to non-Western societies and religious traditions (Chalcraft, 2011). However, Wilson's work has largely been misunderstood in biblical studies, and this is chiefly on account of failing to recognize that Wilson, like Weber and sociology in general, sharply distinguishes between modernity and previous social formations (but see Craffert, 2001). Wilson developed a seven-fold typology of sectarian responses to the world in order to broaden the analysis of sectarian religion to include new religious movements which flourished in various parts of the globe. He lists the following types of sectarian response: introversionist, thaumaturgical, revolutionary/millennial, manipulationist, conversionist, reformist and utopianist (Wilson, 1973). What is often forgotten by biblical scholars is that the description of the ideology is not all that Wilson offers by way of differentiation and explanation. Alongside these points are observations about the typical social conditions that provide the needful context for these responses, and some of those responses are reactions to conditions of modernity, including high levels of structural differentiation and also, disenchantment.

Many biblical scholars have applied Wilson's so-called seven-fold typology of sectarian 'responses to the world' to ancient social contexts, without realizing that the majority of responses were typical of the world of modernity and in contexts where there was no religious orthodoxy for sects to protest against (e.g. Esler, 1994; Regev, 2011). For Wilson, sects were a sub-set of minority religious movements, and sects in the pure sociological sense of the term were not emergent in a context of secularization. In other words, because of major sociological differences between past and present and between ancient and modern societies, Wilson would not expect to find manifestations of many of the types of minority religious movements that New Testament and Qumran scholars thought they could identify when looking at their materials with Wilson in mind

(Chalcraft, 2010). Wilson's work therefore, for Qumran scholars, needs to be utilized with a sense of caution, even though there are very many ethnographic and conceptual insights in Wilson's writings that we ignore at our peril. Wilson's list of generic attributes of sects applies, as did most of Weber's ideas, to the classic sects of Western sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history. For Wilson (1959) the following attributes are generic: a sect operates exclusivity and believes itself to have a monopoly of truth in religion and in all areas of social, political and natural life; it is a lay organization which denies any special religious virtuosity within its membership; it operates voluntarism, admitting potential members through marks of merit; it has expectations of high standards which are monitored and operates expulsion for the wayward; it demands total allegiance, so that sect membership becomes a master status; and, finally, it is a protest group. When studying new religious movements in the developing world, Wilson felt that these generic attributes did not apply to the phenomena and that the approach needed to be refined to study religious movements in these contexts (Wilson, 1973, 1990). He would have sought a similar solution to the problem posed by non-Western and non-modern sectarian movements in the ancient and classical worlds.

Way Forward

For scholars now wishing to work on sects and sectarianism in the Weberian tradition – building on the best of Weber and the best of Wilson (Chalcraft, 2011) – one next step is to engage in dialogue with other studies of the Qumran material that concentrate, for example, on identity-formation of self and community (Jokiranta, 2010; Newsom, 2004); a further next step is most probably to design an ideal type of sects in the ancient world (as opposed to the Western seventeenth century or the new religious movements of Postcolonialism), and one that places sectarianism within a history and sociology of group formation that recognizes experiences and traditions of exclusivity in many different spheres of life which, from time to time, tend to crystalize into social figurations that radically exclude others on the basis of ethnicity, gender, stigma or religious belief and practice (cf. Piovanelli, 2007; Hempel, 2011). What is striking is less that sects form than that they do not form more often.

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