

THE NUMINOUS EXPERIENCE AND  
SELF-UNDERSTANDING IN IQH

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The Numinous Experience and Self-Understanding in 1QH

by

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## Abstract

This study has aimed to examine one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Thanksgiving Hymns (1QH), in terms of the method outlined and put forth by Rudolf Otto in his book, Das Heilige (The Idea of the Holy). It focuses primarily on whether the complex categories and characteristics of the "holy" found in numinous experiences can be discerned in these texts; and if so, can this lead to a discussion of the self-understanding of the community responsible for the text?

Otto believed that through the unfolding expressions of holiness which he saw as brought about by the numinous experience we could learn many things about the "holy" including how those who have had experiences of the "holy" wished to be understood as to their religious identities. This study looks at both aspects of what the "holy" or God was for the sectarian and the community and what can be said about the community responsible for the text.

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## Introduction

Qumran scholarship is a most engaging, lively, and venturesome field from an academic perspective, but an examination of most of the volumes written on the texts from the Dead Sea still reveal an area of religious studies research in its infancy. Research has tended to be along the lines of palaeography, archaeology, and philology which represent the initial or discovery stage of an area. These areas are important and answer some fundamental questions about the dating of the texts, textual reconstruction and authorship, but another approach may also seek to understand the community in terms of their religious experiences and feelings. These are also questions which are aimed at achieving a suitable picture of how religious groups of people wish to be understood. Ninian Smart tells us that unless we look to genuine examples of the religious experience, "we shall fail to understand the heart of religion."<sup>1</sup>

Dead Sea Scroll research has generally been overshadowed by many contentious issues that have plagued the area, leaving academics and lay persons alike remembering only these issues.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, attention has been diverted from an

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<sup>1</sup> Ninian Smart, Philosophers and Religious Truth, (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> I am referring here to controversies surrounding everything from the origins of the scrolls, see Norman Golb, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Perspective", American Scholar, 58 (1989), pp. 177-207, to dating of the scrolls, see Geza

understanding of the way in which the community at Qumran viewed itself in terms of a relationship with God. In other words, we need to refocus our attention from the sensationalism surrounding the scrolls and onto the religious experiences recorded in the scrolls themselves. Then, we may ask ourselves what these experiences reveal about those who had them and about the God in which they believed.

Focusing on religious experience as a primary datum or method for a study in religion or a phenomenological approach has been put forth by scholars such as Rudolf Otto. Otto had this to say about the importance of examining religious or, as he called them, numinous experiences:

For if there is any single domain of human experience that presents us with something unmistakably specific and unique, peculiar to itself, assuredly it is that of the religious life...And so it is salutary that we should be incited to notice that religion is not exclusively comprised in any series of "rational" assertions; and it is well worth while to attempt to bring the relation of the different "moments" of religion to one another clearly before the mind, so that its nature may become more manifest.<sup>3</sup>

This present study aims to examine one of the Dead Sea

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Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987). and also to the supposed suppression of some of the scrolls, see Hershel Shanks, "Is the Vatican Suppressing the Dead Sea Scrolls?", BAR, (November/December, 1991); and see Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh's, The Dead Sea Scroll Deception, (England: Corgi Books, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. J.W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 4.

Scroll texts in terms of the method outlined and put forth by Rudolf Otto in his monograph Das Heilige.<sup>4</sup> It will focus primarily on whether the complex categories and characteristics of the "Holy" found in numinous experiences can be discerned in these texts; and if so, can this discernment lead to a discussion of the self-understanding of the community responsible for the text?

We will return to putting our aims in a more specific context, but first it would be generally beneficial to consider the attraction of an approach which seeks to evaluate recorded religious experiences in terms of a notion of holiness or the "Holy", and then in terms of what this evaluation might be saying about those who claim to have had the experience.

With inquiries of any nature we must realize that the question with which we approach a given subject area will determine the outcome. The asking of a specific question limits what the material will yield, and, while this seems at first a little restrictive, we realize that this limitation must exist. Studies in any given area are like building blocks, each with its crucial role and well-defined parameters.

In attempting an understanding of a subject area within a certain field we immediately find ourselves immersed in

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<sup>4</sup> The Idea of the Holy.

methodological concerns. This is particularly the case in religious studies where we can point to a pluralism in approaches. We find that academically, religious studies employs historical-critical, psychological, philosophical, literary, sociological, phenomenological approaches and others. It is also very common to find almost any combination of the above approaches. These seek to analyze the information by asking two or more types of questions. While a phenomenological approach does ask pertinent questions for studies in religious experience we must remain aware that all these methodologies with their specific questions are, in some sense, fundamental and necessary. As can be imagined then, the choice of methodology is important as it will determine, as does a question, the outcome of an inquiry as well as its parameters and scope.

What Otto and other phenomenologists have argued is that an approach which is aimed at understanding religious experiences for what they are, not what we want them to be, is what should be sought.<sup>5</sup> Following from Kant's system of categories which he developed to make sense of the world of experience, Otto developed his notion of the "Holy" which became a category with which we could make sense of religious experience. As Ninian Smart tells us, "This apprehension in

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<sup>5</sup> Daniel L. Pals, "Is Religion a 'Sui Generis' Phenomenon?", Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 55 (1987), p. 260.



experience of the holy is the primary datum in religion, and theological ideas are secondary to it."<sup>6</sup> In other words, we must first look to the religious experience which is prior to the theology or morality which may have developed from it. Here, as we will see later, is a point of divergence between Kant and Otto. Just as Kant argued that morality was an autonomous principle and that it did not rely on religion or science for its status as an independent faculty of the mind, Otto claimed this status for religion based on religious experience. Religion was also not dependent on morality.

The field of religious studies sees many reductionistic methodologies or approaches that have a "determination to prove it [religion] other than what it appears" instead of allowing it to be "understood in accord with what it claims to be."<sup>7</sup> These theories give us great insights from the perspective of their methodology, but we also question if something is not lacking or if a particular viewpoint is too narrow in scope. In the theories of Freud and Marx, for example, there are attempts to trace the origin of religion respectively to psychotic fear alleviated by the protection of a father-figure<sup>8</sup>, or to the socio-political alienation of

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<sup>6</sup> Smart, op. cit., p. 118.

<sup>7</sup> Pals, op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, James Strachey, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton and Comp., 1961), pp. 18-19.

humans in a heartless world alleviated by the "opium" of religion.<sup>9</sup>

Charles Long has summed it up well when he says that in many of these theories, scholars see religion as:

an irrational stage gradually being supplanted by the rationality of modern thought and life. What they failed to grasp was that their ideals of rationality and objectivity, rather than being the self-evident properties of critical method, reflected an ideological bias which prevented them from seeing the phenomena they were studying.<sup>10</sup>

More recently we have the views of social anthropologists who maintain that religious practice and belief were, and are functions of, the social fabric of civilizations.<sup>11</sup> However, religion often becomes secondary to other social concerns, and while this secondary placement is sometimes necessary because of the approach, method, or question of the investigator, we must still consider carefully any approach which says that in order to talk about religion we must first discuss social issues, psychology and other fields. This is not to say that social issues and concerns

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<sup>9</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, On Religion, (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Charles Long, "Human Centers: An Essay on Method in the History of Religions", Soundings, 61 (1978), p. 400.

<sup>11</sup> Edwin O. James, "The Sacred and the Secular in Primitive Religions", The Modern Churchman, 1 (Oct. 1957), p. 73.

are not important to religious studies because one also realizes religion does not "occur" in a vacuum nor should it be studied as such.

Rudolf Otto elaborated a system of explaining religious phenomena by which our intellectual systems or conceptual frameworks were not sacrificed. In order to accomplish this Otto developed the notion of the non-rational "Holy" to serve both as a "methodological principle and as a description of his data."<sup>12</sup> According to Otto this involves no sacrifice because, first of all, what the scholar of religion should try to do is find a way to speak about the phenomena which is not preoccupied with the question of truth or falsity. Secondly, the non-rational, as we will see more clearly in Chapter One, is not to be confused with the irrational. Otto points this out in the foreword to The Idea of the Holy:

In this book I have ventured to write of that which may be called "non-rational" in the depths of the divine nature. I do not thereby want to promote in any way the tendency of our time towards an extravagant and fantastic "irrationalism", but rather to join issue with it in its morbid form. The "irrational" is today a favourite theme of all who are too lazy to think or too ready to evade the arduous duty of clarifying their ideas and grounding their convictions on a basis of coherent thought.<sup>13</sup>

This statement is no less true today. At first glance, the

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<sup>12</sup> Long, op. cit., p. 408.

<sup>13</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. xxi.

notion of the non-rational "Holy" may seem like a fundamentalist approach, relying on revelation and mystery. This, however, is not the case. Otto attempted a description of religious phenomena and its structures. It is an "investigation of the concept of the holy."<sup>14</sup> At this point it should be stated that while Otto's proposals for categorizing religious experiences are accepted for the purposes of this study, his theologically conditioned apologetic for Christianity is not. I am not suggesting that Otto was personally prejudiced in any way, but a developmental scheme such as the one he deals with lends itself to the notion that Christianity is superior. This type of delineation certainly dates Otto and should be avoided. This delineation does not, however, render useless or impractical the categories and characteristics by which we can examine various traditions.<sup>15</sup> Otto believed that, by unfolding expressions of holiness which he saw as brought about by the numinous, we could learn many things about the "Holy" primarily, but also about the persons who have had the experience. As we will see in Chapter One, Otto's concept of the "Holy" is indeed a complex one which has many component parts. Each of these must be examined as

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<sup>14</sup> David Bastow, "Otto and the Numinous Experience", Religious Studies, 12 (June 1976), p. 165.

<sup>15</sup> It also should be pointed out that we are not condoning Otto's use of non-inclusive language. This same consideration should be kept in mind when we begin discussing the Thanksgiving Scroll.

outlined in The Idea of the Holy. Otto's classic discussion of the objective "Holy" and its influence on those suitably moved by it did not include the material from Qumran since Otto himself lived prior to the discovery of the Qumran scrolls. Nevertheless, he argued that his category of the "Holy" was appropriate to any discussion where people or groups of people claim to have felt the presence of the divine.

At this point it would be beneficial, in light of the present study, to briefly examine the notion of holiness and expressions of it in the Jewish tradition, particularly how it is used in the Hebrew Bible.

דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל ואמרת  
אלהם קדשים חזקו כי קדש אני יהוה  
אלהיכם<sup>16</sup>

Say to all the congregation of the people of  
Israel, you shall be Holy, for I the Lord your God  
am Holy. (Leviticus 19:2)

The idea of holiness for the Israelites of the Hebrew Scripture tradition was tantamount to the supreme goal or objective to be strived for by the entire nation. After all, as the above passage from Leviticus suggests, because God is holy and He entered a covenant with the Israelite nation,

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<sup>16</sup> All Hebrew biblical quotations are from, Rudolf Kittel, ed., Biblia Hebraica, (Württembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart), 1966. It should also be noted that references from English translations are from the Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise stated.

holiness was to be expected from them in return. In the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy where there is a clearly elucidated plan for achieving holiness,<sup>17</sup> we see not only concern expressed for purity, but a desire to fulfil the will of the "Holy" as experienced by Israel. In other words, there is much more happening in these codes of holiness than legalistic concerns. These rules and regulations express in everyday language the result of encounters with the "Holy". H. H. Rowley tells us that these demands "spring from the conception of God. If God demanded righteousness, it was because He Himself was righteous."<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, the people believed that certain rituals, words, and ideas were part of the "Holy" because of their encounters with God. We must examine materials in which the experience recorded seems to be of the intensity and reality which is characteristic of an encounter with a Holy God. Through this process it will become evident how, in this study, the sectarians at Qumran viewed the "Holy", how they interacted with it, and also how they were defining themselves in their world.

Michael Knibb tells us that the holiness code of Leviticus (and holiness in general) were very much part of the

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Knibb, The Qumran Community, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> H.H. Rowley, The Faith of Israel, (London: SCM Press, 1956), p. 128.

concerns of the group of Jews at Qumran<sup>19</sup> who became dissatisfied with Jewish affairs at Jerusalem over this issue.<sup>20</sup> After distancing themselves from the "sons of darkness",<sup>21</sup> their concern for holiness or **קדש** increased. And, in their subsequent writings, "the influence of the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26) may be discerned in a number of places..."<sup>22</sup> But what may also be seen in some of the documents from Qumran besides laws and regulations are clear expressions of holiness encounters or experiences of the divine, which are distinctly discussed in terms of **קדש**. The encounters with the "Holy" then give rise to a reciprocal love between the "Holy" and people and also a sense of loyalty and mutual aid between people. This can be termed **חסד**.

The one thing, **קדש**, inspires the other, **חסד**. The experience of the "Holy", properly termed **קדש**, gives rise to the actions of loyalty, kindness and devotion, which are, in Hebrew termed **חסד**. Again, the actions of **חסד** are evidence that something was experienced beforehand which can be termed **קדש**. Nelson Glueck comments on Job 6:24 and says the following about the relationship between **חסד** and God: "The

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<sup>19</sup> Knibb, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>20</sup> Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 151.

<sup>21</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>22</sup> Knibb, op. cit., p. 52.

*hesed* one must practice toward one's friends and fellow men is the basic condition and the first proof of the fear of God."<sup>23</sup> This is not to say, however, that **חסד** is reserved for actions between people; it is also part of God's covenantal relationship towards followers.<sup>24</sup> God must show **חסד** to his followers if they are upholding their part of the commitment or covenant. Since what is meant by the term **קדש** is our main concern here, it would be useful to look at the usages in a few instances in the Hebrew Bible.

In Leviticus, the so-called Holiness Code (Lev. 17-26) amply demonstrates that, for the term 'holy' or **קדש** to be used, it must be referring to things made holy by God.<sup>25</sup> Or else it must refer to things made holy by people who, in turn, have been made holy by God.<sup>26</sup>

Holiness is also properly understood as an attribute of something possessed by God. Leviticus 20:3 speaks of God's holy name, **שם קדשי** ("My holy name") and Psalm 93:5 speaks of the holiness of God's house, **לגיתך נארה קדש יהוה לארך ימים** ("Your reminders are very sure; to your house belongs holiness, O Lord, for all days."). We see this term

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<sup>23</sup> Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, (Cincinnati: KTAV Publishing House, 1975), p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>25</sup> Leviticus 22:10 (RSV)

<sup>26</sup> Leviticus 22:2-4 (RSV)



used also in reference to God's mountain, **הר קדש** ("My holy mountain"; Isaiah 11:9); his holy people, **ויקרא להם עם קדש** ("And they will be called the holy people"; Isaiah 62:12a); his holy throne, **אלהים ישב על כסא קדש** ("God sits on his holy throne"; Psalm 47:8); and his holy spirit, **רוח קדש** ("His holy spirit"; Isaiah 63:10).

It is this encounter with the "Holy" which is substantially and fundamentally different from other human experiences. The holiness of Isaiah's "Holy One" of Israel<sup>27</sup> (6: 1ff) points to a "God who completely transcends the human world and is therefore beyond all human analogies or categories."<sup>28</sup> This is not to say, however, that we cannot come to an understanding of the experiences of people and then to suggest characteristics or categories which, although perhaps imperfect, may then be applied to the "Holy". We may also come to an understanding of how the authors of such experiences wished to be understood in terms of a religious

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<sup>27</sup> It should be pointed out that some take issue over this designation because it is an abstraction. John J. Schmitt in his article, "The God of Israel and the Holy One", Hebrew Studies, 24 (1983), argues that, "It must be stated from the start that the five books of Torah offer no hint of the abstraction, 'the Holy One'. Although holiness is a major preoccupation - the holiness of God, his dwelling, the things he requires of Israel - the title is never claimed by God or given to God. The Israelites are to be holy because their God is holy, yet this God is not seen in Torah as 'the Holy One' who epitomizes holiness" p.27.

<sup>28</sup> Bernhard Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1986), p. 362.

identity. These understandings, as was mentioned, are presented and illustrated in Otto's The Idea of the Holy which we will closely examine in Chapter One.

As we will also see, holiness, and concern for knowledge of the divine, is a priority for the sectarians at Qumran. It is important to understand that these documents, full of lacunae as they are, reveal a very real awareness of the presence of the "Holy" and a sensitivity to what it means to experience what is called וִּיָּהוּ. Geza Vermes points out,

The sentiments expressed in the hymns, of love and gratitude and awareness of God's presence, represent a true religiousness and must have helped the sectary not to allow life--governed as it was by laws and precepts--to slide into one of mere religious formalism.<sup>29</sup>

Broadly speaking then, this study has two questions: first, can Otto's complex category of the "Holy" be useful to understand a document from Qumran; second, does this discernment lead to a further discussion of the religious self-understanding at Qumran?

More specifically, this study is divided as follows. Chapter One will focus primarily on Otto's thinking which culminated in The Idea of the Holy. Here we will give some attention to other works and authors which have influenced his philosophical and phenomenological approach. We will also consider The Idea of the Holy and what Otto has to say about

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<sup>29</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 174.

the recognition of the "Holy", particularly in the Old Testament. We will then consider if Otto's categories, drawn from his analysis of the numinous experience, help us understand a particular group's interaction with what they perceived was the "Holy"; and if so, what does this tell us about the way in which the group wished to be understood?

We will then move to the consideration in Chapter Two, of one of the major scrolls from Qumran. This will be the *Hodayot* or Thanksgiving Hymns. This scroll will also be briefly introduced in terms of dating, length, and origins. The Hymns have been chosen for this study primarily because archaeological evidence points out that this scroll existed in many copies suggesting it was used widely by the community and therefore gives us insight into its self-understanding in a unique and significant way.<sup>30</sup> Finally some closing remarks will be made.

Through the course of this study it is hoped that the following aims will be met. First, that we recognize the need for a systematic approach to religious experience that gives insight into the nature of the religious experience for the community rather than accentuating psychological or social categories. Second and most important, that we come to grasp the self-understanding of the sectarians of the text in this

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<sup>30</sup> Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 34.

study. And, finally, that we realize that a discussion of self-understanding of these scrolls based on a systematic discussion of the categories of the "Holy" may point the way to further comparison with earliest Christianity.

## Chapter One

### The Idea of the Holy

In 1917, with the publication of The Idea of the Holy, Rudolf Otto established himself among those who claimed an objective reality as the basis of revelation. In doing so, Otto entered an age-old debate of whether the divine had an essence and whether this essence could be grasped rationally. His argument is that the divine, or "Holy," is an objective reality and essentially non-rational, but through rational analysis an understanding of it can be gained, imperfect as that understanding may be. The rationalization process attributes a manifestation or expression to what Otto calls the numinous experience, or that encounter with the non-rational "Holy."

Otto presents us with a phenomenological approach to religion.<sup>1</sup> For him there is very definitely an object or "numen" that is "wholly other", and characterized to a large extent by the expression of our interaction with it. In other words, our reaction to this numinous object, for the most part, helps us to define this object. Otto's program involves grasping this objective in religion by different means from

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Otto is not a phenomenologist of more recent persuasion. In fact, as David Bastow points out, "Otto rejected what he saw as a reduction of religion to non-religious categories by so-called phenomenologists." David Bastow, "Otto and the Numinous Experience", Religious Studies, 12 (June 1976), p.160.

those of the "ideograms" of myth, enthusiasm, inspiration, or love.<sup>2</sup> Otto does not wish to reduce the object of religion into one system of knowledge, or compartmentalize religion. This will give religion the greater domain where Otto believed it belonged. As Philip Almond notes, this attitude was long held by Otto:

The religious feeling has rightful claim to its own scope, unimpaired and unobstructed. It should not allow itself to be curtailed in favor of other plausible trains of thought; and it may well be the task of theology to reexamine that crushing claim of empirical relationships until it can find place for an answer to the question how religion is possible-and possible, moreover, in uncurtailed form.<sup>3</sup>

Otto was concerned not only to give religion a basis in legitimate thought but to establish his notion of the "Holy" as "wholly other", as objective, as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and all which this phrase entails. This concern comes from his desire to recover what he calls the *sensus numinis* or an essential feeling of holiness or sanctity. Otto credits, for example, Schleiermacher for bringing back the older, traditional notions so we could then reestablish the "divine marvel instead of supernatural miracle and living

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<sup>2</sup> Philip C. Almond, Rudolf Otto, (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

revelation instead of instilled doctrine."<sup>4</sup>

The question which Otto deals with in The Idea of the Holy is on what grounds do we reestablish this living divine marvel and how can we describe it? Otto claims that there is the objective religious numen that elicits ambivalent responses from human beings following from a religious, or more accurately, a numinous experience. It is a "thing" which is both a fascinating mystery and a terrifying reality. This is what Otto calls "the Holy". When Otto speaks of the fascination and the terror, he is speaking of our responses to this "Holy". Our souls are awed, fascinated, and terrified because the thing experienced is awful, fascinating, and terrifying.<sup>5</sup> For Otto, this concept of the "Holy" is a distinctive religious category and its nature is *sui generis*. Otto tells us,

Holiness or the "Holy" is a category of interpretation and valuation peculiar to the sphere of religion. It is indeed applied by transference to another sphere- that of ethics- but it is not itself derived from this.<sup>6</sup>

There are analogies to this feeling, as Otto notes, but there is no awe quite like that which is appropriate to the encounter with the numen. Fear, terror and fascination can be

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Rem B. Edwards, Reason and Religion. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovenovich, 1972), p.312.

<sup>6</sup> Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 5.

found elsewhere, but says Otto, there is no fear quite like the fear of the Deity; there is fascination but none quite like the fascination with the "Holy".<sup>7</sup>

Before we can apply Otto's category of the "Holy" to the Dead Sea Scroll material, it is first necessary to examine more closely the details and intricacies of his notion of the "non-rational wholly other" and the umbrella phrase, *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. We must then ask, how the category of the "Holy" and its characteristics illuminates the Hebrew Scriptures, as he deals with this area in his text, concerning the self understanding of those standing behind the tradition?

In The Idea of the Holy, Otto argues that religion consists of both rational and non-rational elements. He focuses specifically on how these different elements are related. Even more specifically he wants to investigate the non-rational factor in religious experience. These two terms are not to be confused with objectivity and subjectivity where the two are opposites. But, for Otto, "the referent of religion, which is 'the Holy', is both a rational and a non-rational object".<sup>8</sup> It is rational in the sense that it has features that people have applied to it such as powerful, knowledgeable, etc. But it must be recognized that these

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Almond, op. cit., p. 56.



features are only applied analogously to the "Holy" in an attempt to grasp it. However, understanding never fully comes because the "Holy" is essentially non-rational. We only come to an imperfect understanding of the "Holy" through rational concepts. It is in this way that the two are linked. The "Holy" is preeminently a non-rational object, and is inaccessible in any complete sense to our conceptual thought. This aspect of it must be felt. When we discuss feeling, it is an uncomfortable area because it is seen as subjective, pure and simple. But as Philip Almond points out:

Feeling can refer to both rational and non-rational objects. Insofar as feeling is referable to an object which can be identified in precise conceptual terms, it comes within the domain of the rational. But when feeling is evoked by a non-rational object, that is, the non-rational side of the divine, it is qualitatively unique. While there are analogies between non rational and rational feelings, the uniqueness and irreducibility of the former is due to its being evoked by a nonrational object.<sup>9</sup>

To expand on what Almond says here we can point to the "reality" and irreducible nature of such universal feelings as betrayal, love, trust, and so on. Moreover, we can understand Otto's point that the above mentioned unique, non-rational, and objective "Holy" is somewhat apprehended by a unique set of feelings. In other words, the *sui generis* nature of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

religious feelings stems from the *sui generis* nature of the non-rational object which incites them. As we have mentioned, it is based on this notion that Otto argues that religion and religious feeling is a valid system of apprehension and should be used to evaluate itself. As Ninian Smart writes:

His insistence on the non-rational element is connected, for Otto, with the idea of autonomy of religious experience and thought. The sense of the "Holy", or sacred, does not yield knowledge about the empirical cosmos; it does not yield the kind of knowledge which we gain in scientific inquiry. Neither, on the other hand, is it simply an apprehension of a moral command. But dimly and dumbly it points towards the transcendent.<sup>10</sup>

The autonomy of religious knowledge is a point where Otto differs from his philosophical roots in the Kantian tradition. Kant had argued for the autonomy of the moral life and experience as a separate and distinct range of knowledge not to be judged from a scientific perspective. Morality, being a fundamental base and faculty for human life, was therefore seen by Kant as the basis for religion,<sup>11</sup> something which Otto could not accept. The phrase "numinous experience", coined by Otto, speaks of religious experience in more precise and distinct terminology. Later we will consider some of these experiences, as Otto sees them, illustrated in the

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<sup>10</sup> Ninian Smart, ed. Philosophers and Religious Truth, p. 118.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

Hebrew Scriptures.

The numinous experience defined as an experience through which or by which we come to recognize the "Holy", or the transcendent, is problematic for some. At this point it is appropriate to deal with these concerns. Many have argued that the numinous is problematic for religions which have as their goal an inner peace, and which reject the notion of a creator God or Deity as such. Specifically, the Buddhist notion of Nirvana does not fit neatly into Otto's description of the numinous experience. In his article, "Numen, Nirvana and the Definition of Religion", Ninian Smart says:

Given Otto's analysis of his own illuminating expression "numinous", nirvana is not, strictly speaking, numinous; but nirvana is the key concept of (at least the Lesser Vehicle) Buddhist doctrine and practice; hence it is unsatisfactory to define religion by reference to the numinous or analogous notions.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps, as Smart notes elsewhere, the significance of Otto's program of analysis may lie in its illumination of an "important type of religious experience,"<sup>13</sup> namely those religious experiences which are predominantly theistic as opposed to his analysis being a description of some basic religious truth. The weakness in Smart's argument, as he

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<sup>12</sup> Ninian Smart, "Numen, Nirvana and the Definition of Religion", Church Quarterly Review, (April-June 1959), p. 216.

<sup>13</sup> Smart, Philosophers and Religious Truth, p. 120.

himself points out, is that one can interpret the features of Nirvana, given the "plasticity of religious language" as "loosely resembling some of the attributes ascribed to God."<sup>14</sup> Otto stated that the description and characteristics of the "Holy" and of the numinous experience are only analogies which approximate religious experience, feelings and characteristics.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, it is difficult to maintain the opinion that Otto's program should be abandoned based on this argument.

On a deeper level, problems may arise over the fundamental question of whether or not we can say anything which resembles religious "truth", but these must be dealt with on an individual level. From this notion then, it is often problematic when we establish criteria in order that we may say that "something will be a religion to the extent that it reflects, or gives expression to"<sup>16</sup> these criteria. In other words, when we start speaking of an essence to religion, we are almost forced to use some sort of yardstick by which we may analyze religions. This practice, as Peter Byrne argues, which may result in ranking religions as pure or less pure, must be abandoned because "such rankings can only reflect

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<sup>14</sup> Smart, "Numen, Nirvana and the Definition of Religion", p. 224.

<sup>15</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Byrne, "Does Religion have an Essence?" The Scottish Journal of Religious Studies 1 (1980), p. 62.

conventions about the application of the word 'religion' and not substantial truths about the essence of religion."<sup>17</sup> Otto faces this problem, as does anyone who attempts to go past the mere recording of religious data to provide a normative explanation of the phenomena. Whatever approach we may take, at least we can concede that the issue of an essence to religion is not as simple as, for example, the scientific explanation of the essence of gold.<sup>18</sup> The point that Byrne and others seem to have missed is that religious questions, as opposed to scientific questions about gold or other substances, must also come to terms in some real sense with the notions of origins and purpose and how we can make sense of the world.

Religion is concerned with a more basic kind of truth than natural sciences, and must go beyond physical and biological questions to see through them and in them something of the mystery and to sense something of the purpose.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Byrne, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Byrne notes that many philosophers of religion, in an attempt to develop a science of religion, look to the processes of natural science. Here, scientists "seek to account for the manifest properties of natural substances in terms of their hidden essences or mechanisms. For example, most people are aware of the manifest properties of the metal gold...But it is distinctively the task and province of the scientist to tell us what is the essential nature of gold..." Byrne, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>19</sup> Robin Minney, "The Development of Otto's Thought 1898-1917: From Luther's View of the Holy Spirit to the Holy", Religious Studies, 26 (1990), p. 512.

Built into Otto's definition or description of the numinous experience then is an attempt, in a systematic way, of explaining an area of our lives that deals with basic questions of purpose.

When Otto considered what effect a religious experience had on people or how they described the encounter, he also felt he had raw data of the experience itself and could discuss it accurately. From this phenomenological approach Otto saw that there were similar responses to religious experiences. As we said earlier, this stems from there being a numinous object which elicits these *sui generis* responses. Otto also makes the point that it is an impossibility to fully grasp the "Holy" since we come to know it imperfectly through analogy. He says, "The sublime, like the numinous, is, in Kantian language, an idea or concept that cannot be unfolded or explicated. Certainly we can tabulate some general rational signs that uniformly recur..."<sup>20</sup> According to Otto, the person who encounters the objective "Holy" will have the psychological responses of awe, fascination, and fear in kind and degree which is appropriate and unique. There are other types of awe, fascination and fear, says Otto, but there are none quite like those appropriate to the encounter with the "Holy", properly characterized by the Latin phrase *mysterium tremendum*

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<sup>20</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 41.

*et fascinans*."<sup>21</sup>

Otto analyzed numinous experiences with reference to this *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* phrase which is his approximation and/or analogy for the experience of this "Holy". In Otto's estimation the response to the "Holy" could be characterized in terms of a mystery which is both terrifying and fascinating. Of the *tremendum* aspect, Otto says:

Let us consider the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion. Faith unto salvation, trust, love--all these are there. But over and above these is an element which also, on occasion, quite apart from them, profoundly affect us and occupy the mind with a wellnigh bewildering strength... If we do so we shall find we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression, *mysterium tremendum*.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to remember before we consider the elements of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, that although Otto is characterizing the numinous experience in what seems to be specific terms he does point out that it is difficult to "entirely think through and clarify it by means of ordinary concepts."<sup>23</sup> In Otto's work there is the recognition of the difficulties surrounding the nature of

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<sup>21</sup> This phrase is used by Otto throughout The Idea of the Holy.

<sup>22</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Smart, Philosophers and Religious Truth, p. 118.

religious language. First of all, how can we adequately speak about things which are essentially "felt"? The most we can hope for is that we will discover something that will help us understand our feelings and in some way make them clearer to us conceptually.<sup>24</sup> And, secondly, the language system which tries to help us clarify our experiences can only be cast analogously through metaphors. Otto himself, in speaking of the doctrine of predestination, explains that:

The above interpretation of the notion of predestination gives at the same time our estimate of it. It is an attempted statement, in conceptual terms and by analogy, of something that at bottom is incapable of explication by concepts. Fully justified in this sense as an analogical expression, it is wholly unjustified (*summum jus becoming summa injuria*) if its character as analogy is missed so that it is taken as an adequate formulation of theological theory.<sup>25</sup>

Before we examine the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* a further point of clarification must be made about Otto's definition of the word "feeling." Otto does not use this term loosely. Instead he adopted the philosophical perspective of a Kantian thinker, Jacob Fries to help clarify the meaning of the term.

We will consider Fries briefly while noting that the intention of The Idea of the Holy was not to present the

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<sup>24</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Almond, op. cit., p. 67.



Friesian philosophy of religion, but to make application of a methodology which was largely formulated upon Friesian theory.<sup>26</sup>

For Fries there were three ways in which we acquired information. First, through our day sense experiences, we acquired factual or scientific data which Fries called *Wissen*. Second, and much more complex, is information acquired about metaphysics, cause and affect and other non-empirical data. This information is more difficult to come by since it is not merely the gathering of facts. This, for Fries, was a *priori* information or information that exists independent of sensory experience. This he called *Glaube*. The third mode of knowing, which is the most pertinent for our discussion, is the one dealing with feeling. It is the "feel for truth or the presentiment of certainty"<sup>27</sup> which Fries called *Ahndung*. It is this third type of knowing which link the other two, *Wissen* and *Glaube*. *Ahndung* assumes that we, as human beings, can reach some certainty about things our senses cannot tell us, and then be able to express them in terms of ordinary knowledge and experience (*Wissen*).

*Ahndung* provides the bond between the spatio-temporal and the changeless-eternal, and by this means we can know

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<sup>26</sup> For Otto's last analysis of Fries' philosophy, see Rudolf Otto, The Philosophy of Religion, (London: Williams and Norgate Ltd., 1931).

<sup>27</sup> Minney, op. cit., p. 516.

(*erkennen*) the eternal within the finite... The method involves working backwards from empirical knowledge, or rather empirically derived knowledge, sensation organized by concepts, to the basic sense or feeling for which Fries and Otto claim objective validity... The claim to direct truth through *Ahndung* is vital and yet is one we must simply accept or reject, because it is quite incapable of proof.<sup>28</sup>

Feeling, therefore, becomes an important means of knowledge, and a way to connect things which can be verified by our senses with things which cannot. The issue then becomes one of the primacy of feeling over rationality since, without the feeling, or *Ahndung*, we would barely make sense of the world. Obviously, this is not an easy issue but it is acceptable, even from today's perspective, to see the close association between religion and feeling. For Otto, numinous feelings, particularly the ones we will discuss shortly, brought about the more rational characteristics of God or the "Holy". When we consider any act which we determine to be religious its origins may very well be traced, not to a rational concept, but to a feeling that this act is appropriate to do. For example, the act of praying is not about a "rational" proposal set forth by a church as an effective means of communication with God, but a spontaneous conversation which says that the person believes in God and feels that this action is appropriate.

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<sup>28</sup> Minney, *op. cit.*, p. 516.

It is through *Ahndung* that religion arises, for piety may be identified (according to Fries) with the enthusiasm, devotion, and self-surrender to God which result from it, and the consciousness of eternal destiny, of good and evil, of sin and responsibility that are inescapably connected with it.<sup>29</sup>

The feelings which arise out of the numinous experience can be conceptualized and characterized, although imperfectly, according to Otto, and seem to be well served by the phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

The elements of the numinous are explained in The Idea of the Holy in Chapter Three and following. They are dealt with here in the same order as Otto did.

The first element Otto discusses is what he has called "creature-feeling," or "creature consciousness," and this particular characteristic is loosely based on Schleiermacher's "feeling of dependence" which he isolated in religious experiences. Otto criticized Schleiermacher for not being specific enough when expounding upon this feeling, saying there is much more going on in such a state of mind than merely a feeling of dependence.

Otto states that when we encounter the "Holy" we immediately become aware, as did Abraham in Genesis 18:27, that we are "but dust and ashes". It is a feeling of baseness and ultimate profanity stemming from just being a created

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<sup>29</sup> Almond, op. cit., p. 53.

thing faced with that which is "supreme above all creatures".<sup>30</sup>

At the same time that we become intensely aware of our "nothingness", we come to appreciate in a unique way that which has caused us to feel so insignificant. Otto says,

And at the same moment that he passes upon the numen a judgement of appreciation of a unique kind by the category diametrically contrary to "the profane". The category "Holy", which is proper to the numen alone, but to it in an absolute degree, he says: "Tu solus sanctus."<sup>31</sup>

Saying "you alone are holy" to the "Holy" is more than attributing to it human characteristics such as "good", "perfect", "beautiful", etc ... but it is saying that the "Holy" is in a very real sense the "ultimate" and is worthy of praise. Otto also points this out by saying that when it is realized that this "sanctus", or קדוש in Hebrew, is not described adequately by such terms as "good" we need to reevaluate our terminology.<sup>32</sup>

Under the *mysterium tremendum* Otto first analyses the *tremendum* aspect and isolated three component features. The first is the element of "awefulness". According to Otto, the "Holy" is encountered as awe inspiring, tremendous and overwhelming, and the person is awe struck. In the expression

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<sup>30</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

of the inexpressible, if you will, phrases such as "the wrath of the Lord" or the "omnipotence of God" are used which try to convey this aspect. We will see these phrases again when we consider the Hebrew Scriptures and the Qumran material.

For Otto the awefulness is akin to what early forms of religion called dread, particularly the dread of demons and ghostly apparitions. The analogy which we have given this feeling is fear, but it is not ordinary fear:

There are in some languages special expressions which denote, either exclusively or in the first instance, this "fear" that is more than fear proper. The Hebrew *higdish* ('hallow) is an example. To "keep a thing holy in the heart" means to mark it off by a feeling of peculiar dread, not to be mistaken for any ordinary dread, that is, to appraise it by the category of the numinous.<sup>33</sup>

Otto notes that this dread, or peculiar type of fear, was first held towards demons and the like but it then reached higher levels and was directed towards "gods". It has since developed into what may be called "shuddering" before the wrath of God. For Otto, "wrath" became the "ideogram" or symbol by which we express this daunting character of the "Holy".

The second element under *tremendum* is *majestas*, or majesty, and Otto defines this as "might, power, and absolute

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

overpoweringness."<sup>34</sup> The "Holy" is encountered as majestic or as the most royal of the royal, and this of course leads to very real feelings, on our part, of again being very insignificant. Otto points this out:

It is especially in relation to this element of majesty or absolute overpoweringness that the creature-consciousness, of which we have already spoken, comes upon the scene, as a sort of shadow or subjective reflection of it. Thus, in contrast to the overpowering of which we are conscious as an object over against the self, there is the feeling of one's own submergence, of being but dust and ashes and nothingness. And this forms the numinous raw material for the feeling of religious humility.<sup>35</sup>

The third element is energy or urgency. The "Holy" is depicted as having energy or being the ultimate source of all things and feelings that we know. Symbolically, this often translates as "wrathful, vital, passionate, emotional, wilful, forceful, exciting, active, and ultimately alive as in the notion of the 'living' God".<sup>36</sup> The analysis of this element points to the fact that, for Otto, the "Holy" is not seen as a philosophic principle that can be entirely explained or defined within the confines of a rational definition, but a living, divine force which is capable of things analogous to

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

our vigour, energy and love.<sup>37</sup>

The analysis of *mysterium* is best served, for Otto, by the phrase "wholly other". The objective "Holy" is encountered as something outside our usual and familiar range of experiences, and therefore the subjective reactions to this is analogously referred to as "stupor". Otto defined this reaction as one of "blank wonder and astonishment".<sup>38</sup> With the phrase "wholly other", the "Holy" becomes much more than what words such as "infinite" or "perfect" suggest. Although these words do suggest otherness in terms of humanity, the "Holy" is seen with more mystery, unusualness, unintelligibility, unfamiliarity, and uncanniness than we can conceive or conceptualize. The "Holy" is to be seen in contrast to the categories of humanity and wholly unmanageable for human reason. Otto rejects the mere notion of "mystery" for this element because it implies that an answer will become available to us in time. He says,

It might be objected that the mysterious is something which is, and remains, absolutely and invariably beyond our understanding, whereas that which merely eludes our understanding for a time, but is perfectly intelligible in principle, should be called, not a mystery, but merely a 'problem'. But this, by no means, is an adequate account of the matter. The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other'.<sup>39</sup>

The next major element is the *fascinans* or fascination. While the *mysterium tremendum* characterizes the fear, awe, and daunting nature incited in us by the "Holy" and through the numinous experience, there is at the same time, an attraction which we feel towards it. Again, this attraction is *sui generis*. The person is held in a trance and is overwhelmed and captivated by the "Holy":

The mystery is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him; and beside that in it which bewilders and confronts, he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzying intoxication; it is the Dionysiac-element in the numen.<sup>40</sup>

This subjective reaction of attraction and fascination for the "Holy" is elicited by the final characteristic that Otto recognized, namely, *augustum*. This is an objective element belonging to the nature of the "Holy". It is augustness which demands our respect and ultimately our captivation. When it is recognized that the "Holy" is deserving of our respect and homage, says Otto, we find that *august* is the appropriate term insofar as our language

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 31.



allows.<sup>41</sup>

*Augustus*, in Otto's scheme, is a designation of supreme worth and value appropriate only to numinous objects. We recognize this term as the ancient Roman appellation meaning venerable and we can be sure that Otto wished us to make the connection as it enhances the *majestas* element of the "Holy".

The next aspect of the "Holy" which should be discussed is general means of expression. We leave behind the subjective and objective elements and characteristics of the "Holy" to examine the ways in which it is communicated outwardly, and how we become aware of it. For Otto, it is generally expressed either directly or indirectly. Direct means of expression involve an awakening of the spirit. The actual numen and numinous feeling cannot be taught. Its essence must be "induced, incited and aroused".<sup>42</sup> What can be taught, however, is much of the theory and dogma about the "Holy" as others have perceived it. In other words, we experience the "Holy" partially through ideograms but the essence must be felt. Otto points out,

Little of it can usually be noticed  
in theory and dogma, or even in  
exhortation, unless it is actually heard.  
Indeed no element in religion needs  
so much as this the "viva vox", trans-  
mission of living fellowship and the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

inspiration of personal contact.<sup>43</sup>

How do we come to hear this living voice? According to Otto, it is an innate capacity that might or might not be within us. Here, Otto is seemingly setting up a special category for the mystic consciousness and, again, this is in line with his agenda for establishing religious experience as a valuable category in and of itself. Otto himself says, at the outset of his book, that those who have not had a religious experience need not read further.<sup>44</sup> We recognize that Otto knows that what he has to say will not be understood unless there has been some sort of religious experience.

The second means of expression is indirect and this one seems to be directed at those not in a mystical category. Here, the arousal must come from kindred or analogous natural feelings which are "like" that of the numinous. It seems the rest of us need proddings of the spirit before we can experience the "Holy". Otto points out, for example, that one of the more primitive indirect means of inciting the numinous consciousness are things which today seem revolting and loathsome. These are objects or pictures which inspire feelings of horror, fear, dread and eventually some sort of religious awe. Otto says that this is the case with the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

dreadful character of primitive images and pictures of gods in ancient civilizations. The purpose is to put fear in the person, which can be considered analogous to the *tremendum* aspect of the "Holy". The specific example Otto uses is "the hard, stern and somewhat grim pictures of the Madonna in ancient Byzantine art which attract the worship of many Catholics more than the tender charm of the Madonnas of Raphael."<sup>45</sup>

There are also indirect means of experiencing the *mysterium* element and in this regard Otto points to miracle. He says that it is in this incomprehensible action that we find the closest analogy to the *mysterium*.<sup>46</sup> Miracle can also serve as an analogy to the entire phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* if the miracle is mixed with mighty and fearful acts. These acts arouse in us feelings of the unutterable mystery, the absolute other and the enigmatic "thing". We often refer to the miracles of nature or otherwise as both terrifying and baffling and they set in us wonderment and astonishment. Otto says "such things have ever aroused in men, and become aroused with, the 'demonic dread' and numinous feeling, so as to become 'portents', 'prodigies' and 'marvels' ". Thus, and only thus, is it that

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.63.

the "miraculous" rose."<sup>47</sup>

In The Idea of the Holy Otto goes on to make application of all which we have been discussing and he does so by examining the "Holy" through numinous experiences recorded and found in various religious traditions. For the purposes of this study we will briefly consider what Otto saw as expressions of the numinous found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Also, in terms of this study, we must ask what the discernment of these expressions in the Hebrew Scriptures tells us about how the authors or community wished to be understood.

It is obvious in the discussion of the Hebrew Scriptures that Otto argues for a religious evolutionary process. In doing so, he does not intend a system whereby moral ideas evolve into religions, but an evolution in our conceptualization, rationalization, and moralization of the ever present and unchanging "Holy". It is important to recognize in Otto's work that there is a developmental scheme but the development is with the rational and moral aspects of the "Holy" as opposed to its non-rational and essential side. What we notice when Otto examines the Hebrew Scriptures is that the conceptualization of the "Holy" changes. From the beginning to the end of the recorded Hebrew Scriptures, changes occur in the rational aspect of the "Holy", or we may say, that aspect of the "Holy" which we try to grasp

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

conceptually through analysis or ideograms.

Otto gives more definition to this evolutionary process in the following quotation:

The venerable religion of Moses marks the beginning of a process which from that point onward proceeds with ever increasing momentum, by which the numinous is throughout rationalized and moralized, i.e. charged with ethical import, until it becomes the "Holy" in the fullest sense of the word. The culmination of the process is found in the prophets and in the Gospels.<sup>48</sup>

What Otto is saying is that what we conceive as the "Holy" may change but we are not doing anything to the immutable, non-rational essence and we get the impression from Otto that to think we do so is the ultimate in arrogance. As we will see in the case of Job there were discrepancies between the rationalization of God and the actual essence of God and we must remain mindful of this. Early in the Hebrew Scriptures we are able to detect that the "daemonic dread" feature of the *tremendum* where allusions to Yahweh seem more appropriate to some sort of ghostly apparition. Otto points out the story in Exodus 4:24 where Yahweh is seeking Moses out to kill him.<sup>49</sup> There are also other stories which lend themselves to this eerie feature such as those of sacrificial killings in order to appease Yahweh or give him

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

thanks (Genesis 22; Exodus 12:24).

What changes in this evolutionary process are the manifestations of our interaction with the "Holy"? According to Otto, primitive people gave what we think of as crude and primitive expressions to their experience whereas we would give more modern refined expressions. Otto uses the example of primitive music which is almost unrecognizable to our more refined tastes but satisfies the expression of the impulse for primitive people. It is this impulse for music which is the constant and can be considered similar or analogous to the innate religious consciousness which "is the same for the first human as it is for the last."<sup>50</sup>

In speaking of how a "savage" tribe had a ready appreciation for modern music, Otto says,

This endowment did not first enter their minds at the moment they heard the music by a "heterogony", "epigenesis", or other miracle; it simply existed all the time as a natural predisposition or latent capacity. It was aroused and began to develop as soon as the proper incitement came to stimulate it, but to the end it was yet the selfsame disposition that had been formerly excited to such primitive and crude manifestations.<sup>51</sup>

The manifestations of the "Holy" for the Hebrew Scripture's period develop into what Isaiah preaches as the

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<sup>50</sup> Long, "Human Centers: An Essay on Method in the History of Religions", p. 403.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.74.

"Holy" one of Israel, and this conceptualization, as Otto points out, is the expression "par excellence, for the Deity."<sup>52</sup> It is the development of this "living" God which is seen as the perfect conceptualization of the "Holy" because it expresses, better than a philosophic principle or the like, the non-rational essence as a living thing. In other words, in order to express the feeling or the impulse that the "Holy" is objective, aweful, majestic, the Hebrew Scriptures have attributed living features to it. Otto cautions people at this point about confusing the symbolic or analogous quality of these features with a literal evaluation.

This point brings us to the discussion and example Otto uses from the Hebrew Scriptures, namely the story of Job. We will also see how this example of Job illustrates this study's agenda for discussing self-understanding.

The story of Job is at its most fascinating and enlightening after the appearance of Yahweh to defend himself. Beginning with Job 38 then, we have the words that have been put into the mouth of Yahweh that express all of the characteristics suggested by the phrase *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. In all the questions that the author of Job attributes to Yahweh, we get the sense of the power, awe, majesty and mystery with which Yahweh is seen. And there is on the part of Job certainly fascination and astonishment at

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

all the things for which Yahweh claims responsibility.

הנאת ער-גבכי-ים רבחקר תהום התהלכו :  
 הנלו לן שערי-מרת ושערי צלמרת חראה :  
 התנצבת ער-רחני-ארץ הגר אמ-ירעת כלה :  
 (Job 38: 16-18)

Have you entered into the springs of  
 the sea,  
 Or walked into the recesses of the deep?  
 Have the gates of death been revealed to you  
 Or have you seen the gates of deep  
 darkness?  
 Have you comprehended the expanse of  
 the earth?  
 declare, if you know all this.<sup>53</sup>

According to Otto, Job and his friends have been arguing about the way in which God was supposed to act and treat his people as opposed to what was actually happening to Job. The rational conceptualization of God which Job held did not allow for God's transcendence of it nor did it fully allow for the *mysterium* aspect.

The answer Job gave, that he is in the right, is based purely on his rational powers and depended on his being able to know things about the nature of God which is eventually proven to be impossible. Otto points out,

If you start from rational ideas and  
 concepts, you absolutely thirst for  
 such a conclusion to the discourse.  
 But nothing of the kind follows: nor

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<sup>53</sup> The English translations of all of the following Hebrew quotations will appear immediately after the Hebrew in the text. The English translation of Biblical quotations are from the RSV. The English translations of the Qumran material are from Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English. (England: JSOT Press, 1962).



does the chapter intend at all to suggest such theological reflections or solutions. In the last resort it relies on something quite different from anything that can be exhaustively rendered in rational concepts, namely on the sheer absolute wondrousness that transcends thought, or the mysterium, presented in its pure non-rational form.<sup>54</sup>

Not only does Job discover that he is wrong in assuming that he knows God's ways but he feels his profanity and baseness strike at his very core. This sheer absolute wondrousness serves to convict Job and his friends inwardly for thinking they could fully know the "wholly other."

Job answers the Lord in a manner which displays another feature of the subjective aspect of the numinous experience, namely that of creature-consciousness. His answer also helps us understand the theme of the entire story which is inextricably tied up with the idea of the self-understanding of those behind the story, represented by Job and his friends.

ויען איון את-יהוה ויאמר : ולא יבצר ממך מזמרה :  
 ירעת כי-כל חורב : לכן הגדתי ולא אבין :  
 מי זה מעלים עצה בלי דעת : שמע-נא ואנכי אדבר :  
 נפלאות ממני ולא אדע : לשמע-אזן שמעתיך :  
 אשאלך והודיעני : על-כן אנאם ונחמתי  
 ועתה עיני ראתך :  
 על-עפר ואפר :  
 (Job 42: 1-6)

Then Job answered the Lord:  
 "I know that thou can do all things,  
 and that no purpose of thine can be  
 thwarted.  
 Who is this that hides counsel without  
 knowledge?

<sup>54</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 79.

Therefore I have uttered what I did not  
 understand,  
 things too wonderful for me, which I  
 did not know.  
 Hear and I will speak;  
 I will question you, and you declare  
 to me.  
 I had heard of thee by the hearing of the  
 ear,  
 but now my eyes sees thee;  
 Therefore I despise myself,  
 and repent in dust and ashes."

The lesson that Job learns is indeed about his impatience and his arrogance in protesting God's actions. He also learns that he has been motivated in life by self-interest and that when put to severe tests he too proved to be anything but a paragon of virtue, patience and obedience.

According to Otto, the vehicle for such a lesson is the numinous experience, expressed in terms of the *mysterium tremendum, fascinans et augustum*. It is this story of the numinous experience, and Job's response to it, which allows us to make some general assertions about Job, his friends and those in the religious tradition which accepted this story as part of their identity and religious self-understanding.

There are perhaps three major, interrelated points with regards to self-understanding which the story of Job's numinous experience illustrates. First, Job's experience of the non-rational "Holy" helps him understand that his previously held theodicy, or views on the nature of God, needed correction. But the question arises, correction to

what? This, however, is left open and is left a mystery. It is unresolved because "the eternal creative power...incalculable and 'wholly other'...mocks at all conceiving but can yet stir the mind to its depths, fascinate and overbrim the heart."<sup>55</sup> The answer is that there is no answer, at least not in human rational conceptualization and this, of course, lends itself to the *mysterium* category of Otto's program.

Second, Job's encounter with the "Holy" brings up a fundamental point of self-understanding in that it points to the basic questions of the human condition. How is Job, and by extension, all of us, to understand problems such as suffering, disease and death? Otto's category of creature-consciousness helps us to understand the response which Job eventually realizes and states, that he is but dust and ashes. This is seen therefore, as part of Job's new self-understanding. He realizes as well, that he is "overpowered, truly and rightly overpowered, not merely silenced by superior strength."<sup>56</sup> Again the answer is unsatisfactory if we approach the discourse with the expectation of a 'rational' outcome or the imparting of divine purposes. This is the message which the author of Job wished to communicate about his own religious identity and the role which he saw people as

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<sup>55</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

playing.

The third related point that is communicated about religious self-understanding that is brought to the surface by having this story analysed in terms of the numinous experience concerns the relationship between people and the "Holy". This is a much more complex issue than that of the correct theodicy or the human condition because the nature of faith is explored. In analysing Job's numinous experience in terms of its rational and non-rational aspects, and then by examining the various elements of each, we get a picture of the author's point of view. God is portrayed a certain way and Job's response to the situation can be interpreted as the appropriate human response.

The categories which Otto saw operating in numinous experiences help us to see and understand what kind of religious identity that the author of such traditions as Job wished to project. Obviously much more can be said about the story of Job but what we have said is sufficient to show that the complex category of the "Holy" can illuminate a discussion on self-understanding.

In summary then, the purpose of this chapter was to introduce us to Otto's The Idea of the Holy and his investigation of the nature of the non-rational "Holy". We have seen that there is a complex system of rational and non-rational elements which make up the category of the "Holy".

It was also pointed out that religions should be studied and analysed in terms of religious categories instead of psychological or social categories which are aimed at reducing its essential nature to those which are external to religion. This is due largely to the contention that there is an essence of religion to which we can refer and which we can discuss analogously.

We also saw how Otto's phenomenological program was based on certain philosophical theories adopted from thinkers such as Kant, Fries and Schleiermacher. Otto's analysis of religious experiences in terms of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* has been shown to be useful and insightful for the interpretation of religious phenomena.

Finally, we saw briefly how we could apply Otto's category of the "Holy" and the characteristics of the numinous experience to a particular story in the Hebrew Scriptures and then how this could lead to a general discussion of the self-understanding of those who generated the tradition. In the next chapter our program is twofold; first we must analyse the Qumran document 1QH in terms of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and then we will discuss what this points out about the self-understanding of the Qumran community.

## Chapter Two

### "The Numinous in 1QH"

One Dead Sea Scroll found near Khirbet Qumran in 1947 became known to the world as the *Hodayot*, or the Thanksgiving Hymns. This large scroll, which belonged to a collection of the non-biblical material, was previously unknown. Scholars have given it a composition date of "the last pre-Christian century"<sup>1</sup> and have called it Hymns of Thanksgiving based on the first line of most hymns; אֲדַכָּה אֲדֹנָי ("I thank you, O Lord").

The question of authorship of this scroll is a point of debate on two levels. The first general level is the question of whether the entire Dead Sea collection of non-biblical writings can be attributed to a separate sect that lived outside Jerusalem. In an article entitled "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Perspective," Norman Golb suggests we need not attribute these non-biblical texts to a group of Essenes living at Qumran. Instead, he raises the distinct possibility that these texts were taken from Jerusalem and vicinity and placed in the caves near Qumran when word came of the impending Roman siege.<sup>2</sup> His argument is quite convincing; he cites notions such as the unbelievable number of texts or

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<sup>1</sup> Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Norman Golb, "The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Perspective", American Scholar, 58 (1989), p. 187.

scrolls detailing excessive wealth for a small community and other specific points that do seem to damage "the Qumran-Essene hypothesis."<sup>3</sup> The problem with Golb's argument is his insistence that all of the finds near Qumran originated in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> This is especially problematic given the nature of many of the non-biblical texts. One of the most prominent themes in the majority of non-biblical scrolls is that the community of the Sons of Light are to remain separated from the rest of the people of Israel.<sup>5</sup> These outsiders are referred to as Sons of Darkness and are spoken of in less than flattering terms. This leads one to suspect that, even with Judaism's tolerance of other religious groups of Jews, it would be difficult realistically for the Sons of Light and Darkness to be within miles of each other. It is difficult to think of the Jews of these non-biblical texts of being relatively close to Jerusalem without fearing the possibility of mass destruction. It would perhaps be more reasonable to assume that a number of communities, including Jerusalem and Qumran, used the caves near the Dead Sea for preserving their writings.

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<sup>3</sup> Golb lists eight points that have been put forward in support of the Qumran-Essene hypothesis but, in his opinion, taken collectively, these points are an impossible combination of ideas which point to Jerusalem origins for the scrolls.

<sup>4</sup> Golb, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> See CD column I and 1QS column 5; 4Q 181 and 1QpHab.

The second level of the question of authorship is brought out by the nature of the hymns themselves. Many scholars have argued that these poem-like verses are highly individualistic, chronicling the suffering and deliverance of the founder of the sect, the Teacher of Righteousness. This character is not identified in the hymns as such but a similar person who suffers and is delivered is documented in several places in the other scrolls and called the Teacher of Righteousness. This has lead scholars to suggest that the collection of hymns was also written by this teacher. In speaking of the authorship problem, Bonnie Kittel tells us:

It would seem that in the case of the *Hodayot* the problem is compounded by the absence of the historical references of the other scrolls. Undaunted by such sober warnings, many scholars have concluded that since the Teacher of Righteousness is described as suffering and persecuted, and the author of the *Hodayot* also speaks of suffering, the two must be the same.<sup>6</sup>

It would be an obvious mistake to base such a historical statement on such evidence for at least three reasons. First, the community at Qumran had existed for two centuries during which time there could have been a number of such teachers. Second, any individual scribe duly moved by the story or legend of the Teacher of Righteousness could have written the hymns. Third, the "I" of the hymns could have been a symbol

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<sup>6</sup> Bonnie Kittel, The Hymns of Qumran, (Michigan: Scholars Press, 1981), p. 9.



representing the entire community and its struggles for religious freedom. While it is possible that this Teacher of Righteousness could have written these hymns there is no evidence for definitely attributing these to a particular individual.

For the purpose of this study, knowing the specific historical identity of the author is not as important as discovering the religious self-understanding of the believer or believers who wrote this scroll. These hymns in terms of the author's encounter and reflective response to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* will yield us the greatest insights into the very heart of the believer and namely his religious identity. By extension then, if we can assume that these hymns function as part of the worship of this sect, we will be able to say something of the overall self-understanding of the community.

In order to accomplish this it is necessary first to establish whether the Thanksgiving Hymns reflect what may be considered the characteristic responses to numinous experiences as Otto has outlined. In other words, can it be said that the author had encountered the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* in his life?

To decide this we must first consider the vision of the Deity that the sectarian held. This conceptualization and rationalization of the "Holy" plays an important role in

Otto's scheme of discovering aspects of the non-rational core. In reading the hymns, it is clear that the sectarian at Qumran envisioned a God more powerful and impressive than all other gods:

מי כמרכה נאלימ  
איוני ומי כאמתכה<sup>7</sup>

Who is like Thee among the gods, O Lord,  
and who is according to Thy truth? (column VII,  
Hymn 12)<sup>8</sup>

הנה אתה טר אלים ומלך נכרים וארון לכול רוח ומרטל  
בכל מעשה

Behold, Thou art Prince of gods  
and king of majesties,  
Lord of all spirits,  
and ruler of all creatures. (column X, Hymn  
15)<sup>10</sup>

We can imagine in these examples, Isaiah's vision of the "Holy One" of Israel. This warrior and kingly God is quite capable of "stretching out his hand over the sea and making its kingdoms tremble." (Isaiah 23:11a) Isaiah gives us, as do the above few verses from the hymns, a God we can clearly

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<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew quotations from the Scrolls are quoted, in unpointed form, from: Eduard Lohse, Die Texte Aus Qumran, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971, p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 192.

conceptualize because the attributes are familiar to us, "all-powerful", "good", "wise" and "true". According to Otto, this is the rationalization process which must take place before we, as human beings, can come to any understanding of the non rational "Holy." It is also obvious from the above verses that the sectarian is praising God in a very specific way. The impression is given that what the sectarian is saying is truth and we can imagine the vigour and assurance with which each of these verses is written and perhaps proclaimed. We will see such verses again because they also allow us to claim that the sectarian experienced his God as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

What is important for us about the characteristics given to the Deity in the above passages is that they are "living" qualities. The vital and living God is praised for placing the sectarian in the lot of the living, which is synonymous with what the community calls holiness and goodness. These appellations are also designations of distinction. The sectarian frequently points out that he is a disciple of this living God:

אורכה ארונני כי שמתה נפשי  
נצור החיים<sup>11</sup>

I Thank Thee, O Lord,  
For Thou has placed my soul  
in the bundle of the living. (column

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<sup>11</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 116.

II, Hymn 2)<sup>12</sup>

It is also through this "living" quality that the Deity is expressed as one with strong emotion. One of the emotions written about in the hymns is God's wrath against the unrighteous:

ורשעים בראתה לן קץ חר[ו]ן נכה  
 ומרחם הקדשם ליום הר[ג]ה<sup>13</sup>

But the wicked Thou didst create  
 for [the time] of Thy [wrath],  
 Thou didst vow them from the womb  
 to the Day of Massacre. (column XV, Hymn  
 22)<sup>14</sup>

But wrath is not the predominant emotion that the sectarian attributes to God, rather it is loving kindness and a fatherly love. The sectarian's encounter of the "Holy" includes the feeling that the Deity must be understood more as councillor, teacher, comforter, care-giver and father in a more intensely personal way as opposed to notions of the Deity as provider, defender and disciplinarian.

כי אתה אב לכול [נצח] אמתכה ותגל  
 עליהם כמרחמת על עוולה וכארמן בחיק תכלכל לכול  
 מעש[י] כה<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>13</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>14</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>15</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 148.

For Thou art a father  
to all [the sons] of Thy truth  
and as a woman who tenderly loves her babe,  
so dost Thou rejoice in them;  
and as a foster-father bearing a child in his  
lap  
so carest Thou for all Thy  
creatures. (column IX, Hymn 14)<sup>16</sup>

17 אַתָּה אֱלֹהֵי נִתְּנוּ לַעֲבָדֶיךָ לְעֵצַת קֹדֶשׁ

Thou hast placed me, O my God,  
among the branches of the Council of  
Holiness; (column VII, Hymn 11)<sup>18</sup>

The last of these passages above is a very typical expression found in the hymns suggesting a special relationship with the Deity. There is much value in being separated and designated a "council of Holiness." God has taken special care of these holy ones in the same manner a father would care for his child. The participation in God's "holiness", or קֹדֶשׁ in Hebrew, was an essential requirement for praising God or the perfectly "Holy" for the sectarian and was much more, in his opinion, than could be experienced by anyone outside this council. If we assume that this council of holiness refers to the community at Qumran we have an obvious difference between these Jews and those whose centre of holiness was Jerusalem and the Temple. The sectarian's

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<sup>16</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 192.

<sup>17</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>18</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 185.

vision of the "Holy" included acceptance of the community as a new place of holiness and themselves as the true covenanters. Vermes points out that:

supported by the infallible teaching of the community, the sectary believed himself to be living in the true city of God, the city of the covenant built on the Law and the Prophets. Again and again the architectural metaphors used in the scrolls suggest security and protection. The sect is a 'House of Holiness', a 'House of Perfection and Truth', a 'House of the Law' and a 'Sure House'.<sup>19</sup>

We do see this sort of self-understanding again when the early Christians try to define themselves as the church built on a rock (Matthew 7:24, 16:18). Also with this comparison, Otto points out that the earliest Christian disciples were referred to as *oi agioi* (holy ones or saints), and this can be seen as similar to the sectarian's self-designation as 'sons of light' (1QS, Col. III)<sup>20</sup>, 'sons of truth' (1QH, Col. VII)<sup>21</sup>, and 'sons of grace' (1QH, Col. XI)<sup>22</sup>. The Qumran sectarian no longer believed that all Jews were to be part of God's covenant as was previously held.

For the Qumran Essenes such a notion of covenant membership was far too elastic. Consistent with their approach to legal matters, their attitude in regard to the covenant was

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<sup>19</sup> Geza Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 168.

<sup>20</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

that only the initiates of their own "new covenant" were to be recognized among God's elect and, as such, united already on earth with the angels of heaven.<sup>23</sup>

It was not the doing of the sectarian to be separated, in his view, it was the work of God. It was God who sanctioned the move and who blessed the new community of the righteous.

Already we can speak of some general points of self-understanding of which the sectarian makes us aware. Perhaps the first would be how the sectarian has distanced himself from the Old Testament Covenant and now believes that he is part of a new order. The second would be the sectarian's more personal relationship with God. The belief in God's fatherhood is very varied in these hymns. If the Old Testament Covenanters felt they had a special relationship with God as the chosen ones, then, for the sectarian, that relationship was paled or even nullified by the new covenant which God made with him and the other sectarians. A third and related general point would be the emphasis the sectarian placed on his community as the true "Place of Holiness". A fourth general point that can be made is one which the sectarian does not point out but we may do so from our historical vantage point. It relates the points of self-understanding of the sectarians with that of the self-understanding of the earliest Christians. Nascent

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

Christianity was a community which set itself apart as special, first within Judaism and then outside it. And also the earliest Christians were referred to as "Holy Ones" not in the sense of moral perfection but in the same sense as the Qumran sectarians' vision of themselves as true covenanters participating "in the mystery of the final days."<sup>24</sup>

We now move to a more detailed treatment of the hymns where we will consider passages which reflect the specific characteristics of the numinous experience. We will proceed by examining instances of Otto's categories of creature-consciousness and the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* then, at the end of each analysis we will discuss the various ideas of the sectarian's self-understanding which the analysis points us toward.

### 1. Creature-Consciousness

In the numinous experience, or that encounter with the non-rational "Holy", Otto described a very real feeling on the part of the individual who had the experience, namely that of the creature before the created. This feeling, which he called creature-consciousness, is a feeling of "submergence and prostration and of the diminution of the self into nothingness."<sup>25</sup> It is the mental reaction upon encountering

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<sup>24</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 50.



ultimate holiness. It is the awareness that compared to the creator the creature is weak and sinful. Otto certainly points out and describes something which is essential in religion with this notion. In any religious context it is the confession that we are weak and sinful which in turn sets us free because it points out the way we should not be. But this is only the surface meaning of what Otto intends here and we may find it difficult to accept the deeper significance. True creature-consciousness involves accepting that in spite of everything human beings are "nothing" or "valueless" in the presence of the "Holy". Otto writes:

Again something which the 'natural' man cannot, as such, know or even imagine. He, only, who is in the spirit, knows and feels what this 'profaneness' is ; but to such an one it comes with piercing acuteness, and it is accompanied by the most uncompromising judgement of self-depreciation ... upon his own very existence as creature before that which is supreme above all creatures.<sup>26</sup>

The community at Qumran was very familiar with creature-consciousness and relates this in vivid form. The community behind the Thanksgiving Hymns accepted this subjective feeling as part of their daily lives as they express their unworthiness to be favoured. The following passages are typical of verses found in nearly all of the hymns we have.

ראני יצר החמר מה אני מגבל במים ולמי נחשבת רמה

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

And yet I, a creature of clay,  
 what am I?  
 Kneaded with water,  
 what is my worth and my might? (column  
 III, Hymn 5 )<sup>28</sup>

ומה ישיב עפרו [ומה] ינין [גמל] טיר  
 ומה יתיצן לפני מרכיו<sup>29</sup>

How then shall dust reply [to its Maker,  
 and how] understand His [works]?  
 How shall it stand before him who reproves it?  
 (column XII, Hymn 19)<sup>30</sup>

The sense of profound unworthiness evident in these passages can be arrived at through the numinous experience. It is the "Holy" which incites such feelings. It is not fear or guilt which causes such emotions but the encounter with God. The sectarian immediately and overwhelmingly recognizes his imperfections and sinfulness and the proper description of these subjective feelings would be creature-consciousness as Otto had explained it.

How then, does the discernment of creature-consciousness in these hymns allow us to speak of the self- understanding of the community? It helps us understand the religious identity

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<sup>27</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>28</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 173.

<sup>29</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>30</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 198.

which the community hoped to achieve for itself. Analysing the hymns in this instance, in terms of creature-consciousness, allows us to make some specific comments about thematic concerns of each of these sections of the hymns.

First, the community firmly believes that "man as a mortal creature is frail, sunk in sin, and utterly dependent upon God."<sup>31</sup> This concept of humanity is presented in this scroll with such emphasis that it must have been an essential religious perspective for the community. This concept is partly based on the Hebrew Scripture's view of humanity but in few books of the Hebrew Scriptures is it stressed as in these hymns. Helmer Ringgren makes the following observation:

In itself the awareness of man's insignificance and nothingness is, of course, a general religious phenomenon, and many of the thoughts in the Qumran writings can in this regard be traced back to the Old Testament. But these ideas are presented here with such emphasis that they almost become the leading motif in the Qumran concept of man. In any case, they are repeated so often in the psalms that there is an overwhelming impression of man's nothingness and depravity.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly enough, Ringgren goes on to say that this emphasis on man's nothingness can be explained partially by

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<sup>31</sup> Menahem Mansoor, The Dead Sea Scrolls, (Leiden:E.J. Brill, 1964), p. 102.

<sup>32</sup> Helmer Ringgren, The Faith of Qumran, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), pp. 94-95.

reference to the sectarian's "radical personal experience."<sup>33</sup> Ringgren does not guess as to the experience but it is clear that such feelings are not caused by experiences that we may have on a daily basis. Here we would have to agree with Otto in saying that there is much more happening in such a situation. The creature-consciousness in such an experience is a proper reaction to what the sectarian believed was the "Holy". In other words, the sectarian gives the only reaction which he can give after the encounter with his God.

Directly related to the theme of humanity's nothingness in these hymns, is the community's view that "sin cleaves to all that is human."<sup>34</sup> In the hymns there is no mention of original sin or that humanity's sinful state is an inherited lot from Adam and Eve but that it is the only state which stands in opposition to God's perfect righteousness. The sectarians at Qumran upheld the notion of dualism in every aspect of life so that the world was seen as either black or white, good or evil. Obviously God would be the perfectly sinless and people would be the necessary sinful counterpart.

ואני ידעתי כי לרא לאנרש צדקה ולרא לכן אדם  
תום ורץ לאל עקרון כול מעשי צדקה

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>35</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 126.

Righteousness, I know, is not of man,  
 nor is perfection of the way of the son of  
 man:  
 To the most high God belong all righteous  
 deeds. (column IV, Hymn 7)<sup>36</sup>

The awareness of sin as a condition of humanity is also one which strikes very deep in the heart. It is not, as Ringgren points out, just a theory or dogmatic statement or belief.

This sinfulness of man is in no way just a theory or teaching that is of purely theoretical interest. The author of the Thanksgiving Psalms has in any case experienced his sin as a frightening reality. He speaks of it with constantly new expressions, pursues it in all its nuances, exhausts the whole rich vocabulary which the Bible has put at his disposal.<sup>37</sup>

In recognizing the community's reaction as creature-consciousness we are also made aware that the community sees itself as an intensely religious group with a deep sense of humility and meekness. The sectarian constantly repeats that nothing can be done without God's help and guidance. (Hymn I)<sup>38</sup> In the daily battle between good and evil, for example, goodness will only win if God intervenes. (Hymn II)<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> Ringgren, The Faith of Qumran, pp. 102-103.

<sup>38</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 166.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

According to these hymns and other documents such as 1QS or the Community Rule, the community believed that it was in the middle of this struggle between good and evil. The earth was the battleground and the community knew that it was at the mercy of these forces. It believed that in "the last days" God would be victorious. (Hymn V)<sup>40</sup> Also the sectarian knew in his heart that when the time arrived it would be crucial for those who are to be saved to be standing with the "sons of Zadok" or the "Sons of Righteousness." This whole idea is also graphically depicted in 1QM, 4QM or the War Rule where there is a visionary, theological battle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness. Victory will only go to the Sons of Light if God assists them. Vermes remarks:

The opposing forces are equally matched and only by the intervention of the "mighty hand of God" is the balance between them to be disturbed when he does an "everlasting blow" to Satan and all the hosts of his kingdom.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. *Mysterium*

We move away from creature-consciousness now and onto a consideration of that which caused or incited such feelings. Earlier we spoke, in general, about the vision of a Deity which the sectarian held but we should move to an examination

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

of the elements of the objective *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Obviously these features only come to us analogously through the recorded experience or reflected-upon experience of the sectarian but we can still determine, from such things as the intensity of the recorded emotion, if the author truly was aware of the non-rational 'Holy'. This is determined, as with creature-consciousness, by the reaction which is presented to us as well as the analysis of the sectarian's experiences in terms of the category of the 'Holy'.

The first major characteristic which Otto explained as belonging to the 'Holy' is the *mysterium* aspect. As we discussed earlier, the *mysterium* feature is that which is mysterious or wholly other. But even more than this ideogram of mystery, this aspect points to something beyond what we normally can experience. As Otto explains, it "falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny'."<sup>42</sup> We are also reminded that the *mysterium* is not merely a problem which eludes us for a time but something which is "beyond our apprehension and comprehension."<sup>43</sup> When the "Holy" is not seen as beyond our comprehension it becomes a problem for which a solution is sought. Throughout the Middle Ages God was conceived of as a Being who was involved with the processes that kept the earth,

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<sup>42</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

stars and sun moving. When science began to take root and started to explain some of these astronomical processes God became a "God of the gaps." In other words, God was responsible for those things which were not yet explained by means of scientific investigation. If the "Holy" is not seen as incomprehensible we assign certain duties for it to do, and thus it is open to judgement and criticism. These duties and attributes are what Otto referred to as the rational aspect of the "Holy" but its essence, or the non-rational aspect, stands back from all criticising and conceiving. This does not mean, however, that we can say nothing about the "Holy", but it does mean that we cannot say anything definitely about it. We can still make our rational assertions allowing for the notion that they are analogies based on experiences with the "Holy".

Trying to discern this aspect where the sectarian is grappling with the feeling that the "Holy" is wholly other proves to be more difficult. But the few instances to which the wholly otherness is alluded gives us the impression that what the community is expressing is beyond the "sphere of the usual, intelligible, and the familiar."<sup>44</sup>

כי אל עולם  
אתה וכול דרכיכה יכונו לנצח (נ) צח (נים) ואין זולתה  
רמה הרג איש תהו<sup>45</sup> ובעל הנל להחזר בן במעשי פלאך  
(הגדר) ל (י) ם

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>45</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 140.



For Thou art an eternal God;  
 all Thy ways are determined forever [and  
 ever], and there is none other beside Thee  
 And what is a man of Naught and Vanity  
 that he should understand Thy marvellous  
 mighty deeds? (column VII, Hymn 12)<sup>46</sup>

ואהבה נדבה ונכרל לבי אנכי  
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And I have loved Thee freely  
 and with all my heart;  
 [Contemplating the Mysteries of] Thy wisdom... (column  
 XIV, Hymn 22)<sup>48</sup>

In recognizing the above sample of passages as the  
 sectarians' expression of an encounter, at some point, with  
 the wholly otherness of God, we are provided with more vital  
 clues as to the religious identity of the community. First,  
 we see in these and other passages that there is absolute  
 reverence for God. This might seem rather obvious, but it is  
 a point worth making. Scholars have long been telling us that  
 the texts from Qumran will provide us with information about  
 a relatively obscure time in religious thought and practice,  
 namely that of the intertestamental period. Of particular  
 interest is how Judaism was changing during this period, but  
 one thing that did not change was the respect and reverence  
 which the sectarians believed belonged to God alone. For

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<sup>46</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p.186.

<sup>47</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>48</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 202.

example, the Hymns generally reflect how God's proper name יהוה, or Yahweh, is avoided and replaced by a number of words or phrases. The most common replacement is the familiar אדוני or Lord. Others are שמך, or your name, and אל or אלהים translated as God in a more general sense so as to be a non-personal designation.

This great respect for God comes from the Qumran community's belief in the "transcendence of God"<sup>49</sup> which is another way Otto has of saying God's wholly otherness. As the passages indicate, part of God's mystery is his plan for the world. The sectarians at Qumran believed that they and all other human beings fit into a divine scheme which had been ordained by God since the beginning of time. This plan remained, for the sectarians, a mystery. The exception is in these instances where a great teacher or prophet revealed God's plan.

A major point of self-understanding of the community, connected with what they considered a "revealed mystery", is the notion of predestination. We see this idea throughout the hymns that God's ways are determined for ever and ever and there is a resignation to this mysterious plan. The community believed that their founder had gained some insight into God's plan and saw that people were either destined for good or

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<sup>49</sup> Ringgren, The Faith of Qumran, p. 48.

evil.<sup>50</sup> The Hebrew Scriptures, especially Psalm 139, had told us that God knew the words a person would speak before they were spoken but as Helmer Ringgren points out:

The Qumran sect goes further: that God knows man's deeds means not only that he foresees them but that he has predestined them. God's reign over the world is dependant on his eternal council and predestination. Everything is fixed beforehand by him from the beginning.<sup>51</sup>

The fact that the community believed that this determinism was revealed to them did not lessen their views of the mystery of God but heightened it. It allowed them to speculate, as they did, on the future of both the wicked and the righteous.

ראיכה יוכל כרל להשבות את דבריכה רק אתה  
[בראתה] צדיק ומלחם הכינרתו למרעו רצון להשם  
בביתך ולתהלך נכרל ולהגדיל עליו בהמון רחמיך  
ולפתח כול צרת נפשו לישועת שלום ושלום עד ראון מחסור  
ותום מבטל כבודו ורשעים בראתו לנקץ חורונכה  
ומלחם הקשתם ליום הדין כי הולך בדרך לא טרם<sup>52</sup>

And how can any man change Thy words?  
Thou alone didst [create] the just  
And establish him from the womb for the time of goodwill  
That he might harken to Thy covenant  
And walk in all Thy ways,  
And that Thou mightest show Thyself great to him  
in the multitude of Thy mercies,  
And enlarge his straitened soul to eternal salvation,  
to perpetual and unfailing peace.

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<sup>50</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 166.

Thou wilt raise up his glory  
 from among flesh.  
 But the wicked Thou didst create  
 for the time of Thy wrath,  
 Thou didst vow them from the womb  
 to the Day of Massacre  
 for they walk in the way which is not good.  
 (column XV, Hymn 22)<sup>53</sup>

The notion of predestination is related to creature-consciousness in that the sectarian feels he is not in control of his life, further adding to a very real sense of nothingness. The sectarian feels this nothingness not only in the presence of God but now also in terms of God's plan. The sectarian accepts all that he is dealt as part of the mystery of the Deity.

Otto also speaks to the idea of the development of predestination among religious groups saying that it is "an immediate and pure expression of the actual religious experience of grace."<sup>54</sup> In other words, the believer feels strongly that it is not his effort that he is favoured by God, but God's intervention alone.

Otto also points out an important distinction between predestination proper (or the feeling of grace from an experience with the "Holy") and predestination as a "product

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<sup>53</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p.202-203.

<sup>54</sup> Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 87.

of philosophical speculation."<sup>55</sup> Otto remarks that the latter form can be found in the Protestant Christian reformer Zwingli, and that this type of theory is not based on the religious experience of the *mysterium*, but based on the philosophical principle "of the all-causing nature of God."<sup>56</sup> For the sectarians at Qumran God had predestined the world and people according to a plan, but as we see from the Hymns, humanity can make choices. The predestination of the Hymns is to be understood then in terms of a double system instead of one which states that one is either damned or saved. Wicked are predestined for destruction and the righteous are predestined for God's favour and salvation. But one can give up the ways of the wicked, repent, and follow the new covenant which the sectarians believed they shared with God. The predestination of the hymns is thus not as stringent as it first appears. This could very well indicate that the community was not actually settled on one view or the other. This would make sense considering the community depended on converts for its existence.<sup>57</sup> We can also be reasonably sure that each viewpoint had its proponents and opponents. In any case, Ringgren reminds us that "within the frame of a living

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 7.

religious experience these two ideas may coexist."<sup>58</sup> In several sections of the hymns we find examples which suggest the immutability of one's future course:

ואני ירעתי בבינתך כי לא ניר נשך  
ולא לא אדם דרכך<sup>59</sup>

I know through the understanding which comes from Thee  
that righteousness is not in a hand of flesh,  
[that] man [is not master of] his own way... (column XV,  
Hymn 7)<sup>60</sup>

At the same time, and often in the same hymn, we find the sectarian dwelling on God's compassion, mercy and forgiveness:

נשענתי בחסדיכה והמון רחמיכה כי תכפר עון  
ולטוהר אנן ש מאשמה בצדיקתכה<sup>61</sup>

I lean on Thy grace  
and on the multitude of Thy mercies,  
For Thou wilt pardon iniquity,  
and through Thy righteousness  
Thou wilt purify man of his sin. (column IV,  
Hymn 7)<sup>62</sup>

It is reasonable to assume that the sectarians felt that there was hope because in several cases the author mentions that certain people "choose" to walk in wicked ways when alternatives are clearly available. According to the

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<sup>58</sup> Ringgren, The Faith of Qumran, p. 110.

<sup>59</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 166.

<sup>60</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 202.

<sup>61</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>62</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 177.

sectarians, God's spirit would allow them to convert to God's laws. In this scheme conversion was possible but the convert must be sincere, and, as we know from the community rule, postulants were severely tested and tried.<sup>63</sup>

This notion of conversion then becomes our third major point about the sectarians' self-understanding brought about by their vision of the Deity. Conversion is understood by the community as a gift of God's grace made possible only through an actual experience of the *mysterium*. The believer, according to Otto, experiences peace "that passes understanding and of which the tongue can only stammer brokenly."<sup>64</sup> It is through this positive experience that the believer implicitly "knows" that God has allowed for conversion and other such gifts to take place. Otto explains this more fully:

... The *mysterium* is experienced in its essential, positive, and specific character, as something that bestows upon man a beatitude beyond compare, but one whose real nature he can neither proclaim in speech nor conceive in thought, but may know only by a direct and living experience. It is a bliss which embraces all these blessings that are indicated or suggested in positive fashion by any 'doctrine of salvation', and it quickens all of them through and through; but these do not exhaust it.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-69.

<sup>64</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

There are several examples in which the sectarian tries to express this positive experience:

אֲרִכָּה אֲדַרְכִּי  
כִּי אֵל הֵייתָה לִּי לְחֻמַּת עִרְזִי ] כְּרֹל מְשֻׁחִיתִים<sup>66</sup>

I thank Thee, O Lord,  
for Thou art as a fortified wall to me  
[and as an iron bar against] all  
destroyers... (column III, Hymn 6)<sup>67</sup>

וְאֵרַעָה כִּי יֵשׁ מְקוֹרָה לְשָׁנִי פֶשַׁע וְעִרְזִי חֲטָאָה<sup>68</sup>

And I know there is hope  
for those who turn from transgression  
and for those who abandon sin... (column VI,  
Hymn 10)<sup>69</sup>

It is through such experiences of the *mysterium* that the sectarian gains this special type of knowledge that allows him to confidently say that God has not forsaken him. It is only by such positive feelings after an experience of the Deity that the sectarian's faith is confirmed. The statements of the sectarian and, by extension, the community, have grown from religious experiences of the "Holy". These statements, beliefs or doctrines are not the result of the philosophical speculation of Judaism as we might be lead to think but the outgrowth of "living" experience.

Finally, just as Otto's category or feature of creature-

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<sup>66</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 124.

<sup>67</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p.174.

<sup>68</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>69</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 181.



consciousness led us to realize four points of the sectarians' self-understanding, the *mysterium* aspect also leads us to develop three further points. The first was that the community had a deep reverence for the Deity and, for example, this materialized in the community's continued respect for the divine name. The experience of the mystery of the Deity also led the community to think of itself as predestined for glory. Second, while a doctrine of predestination does exist in these hymns, a closer examination reveals that it is not the case whereby a person is saved or condemned from birth but that particularly chosen paths, namely those of righteousness or wickedness, will be saved or condemned respectively. And our third related point of self-understanding illuminated by the recognition of the *mysterium* in these hymns is that conversion is possible for the sectarian and that generally God looks favourably upon the community.

### 3. Tremendum et Fascinans

Many of Otto's admirers and critics alike share the opinion that one of his most original contributions to religious studies was the insight that the numinous experience was both daunting and fascinating. In other words, the reaction to the experience of the "Holy" was not only characterized by "awe" but also a fascination that gripped the

believer. Philip Almond remarks, "the moment of awe and terror is, as it were, balanced by a simultaneous moment of longing and desire."<sup>70</sup>

The *tremendum* aspect, as we saw earlier, is the apprehended feelings of fear at the awfulness of the "Holy", nothingness at the overpoweringness and majesty of the "Holy" and the general feeling of the energy or vitality of the "Holy". The first of these is fear but not the fear of ordinary things. As Otto explains, it is very much a sacred fear with absolute respect and reverence built-in as well. He uses the Hebrew word *hqdish* or "hallowed" to point out that when something is considered holy it is to be separated from other things by a "feeling of dread."<sup>71</sup> We saw this in operation when we considered the reverence the sectarians at Qumran had for the divine name. This special type of fear can be seen in the following quotations from the hymns:

ואני רע ורתת אחזוני וכול גרמי ירוע<sup>72</sup>

As for me, shaking and trembling seize me  
and all my bones are broken... (column IV,  
Hymn 7)<sup>73</sup>

ויתחולל לבי בחלחלה ומותני ברעדה ונזהמתי ער תהום  
תברא ובחורדי שאול תחפש יחד ואפחדה בשדמעי

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<sup>70</sup> Almond, Rudolf Otto, p. 70.

<sup>71</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>72</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>73</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 177.

My heart is stricken with terror,  
 and my loins with trembling;  
 my groaning goes down to the abyss,  
 and is shut up in the chambers of Hell.  
 I am greatly afraid when I hear of Thy  
 judgement... (column X, Hymn 16)<sup>75</sup>

The fear that the sectarians express in these passages reflects the encounter with the "Holy" as *mysterium tremendum*. This feeling is qualitatively different and much more enhanced than the fear of an enemy or anything that would threaten the sectarian. From this, we see clearly the deep sense of attachment the community feels towards the "Holy". Even more fundamental than this, the sectarian fears the "Holy" because he is totally dependent upon it for everything. In the sectarian's world view, every single incident, whether in natural phenomena or in people's actions, had repercussions in terms of God's overall plan or design for the world. We often encounter in the hymns the term "transgression" and it is used in reference to a violation of God's law. If there are enough transgressions then God's wrath is brought on them. The sectarians feared the judgement of God to the extent that they claimed that there were physical reactions, namely those of shaking, trembling and something described as a "heart stricken with terror." The idea that the sectarians feared

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<sup>74</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>75</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 194.

God is actually quite a simple point of self-understanding which we may draw from these hymns. It is also not a new concept or one which can be claimed exclusively for the Qumran sectarians. Otto's categories, however, allow his concept of fear, as well as other ideas, to be contextualized. In other words, understanding the feeling of fear and nothingness in terms of a reaction to the *mysterium tremendum* gives us an insight to the religious context in which these feelings were uttered and expressed.

The second general aspect of the *tremendum* is what Otto called *majestas* or majesty. We have dealt with the subjective feeling of nothingness which this feature of the "Holy" incites when we considered creature-consciousness. This feature can be seen in the Hebrew Scriptures in various descriptions of the "Holy" when God is described as a king.<sup>76</sup> The feeling that the objective "Holy" is encountered as majestic and overwhelming in terms of power and might can be seen in several instances in the hymns. Some of these we have already noted when we considered generally the vision of the Deity which the sectarians held, but we can also add the following:

ראין זרלעך ראין עמכה זכרה ראין לנגד  
בְּזֶרְעָה<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See for example, Isaiah 44:6; Psalm 24:7-10; Psalm 47; And there are many others.

<sup>77</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 150.

Beside Thee there is nothing,  
and nothing can compare with Thee in  
strength;  
In the presence of Thy glory there is  
nothing...(column X, Hymn 15)<sup>78</sup>

Again, the dependence on God's strength and might is what is emphasized and we learn that the sectarian fully believes that God alone is in control of the world and everyone in it.

If we pursue the analogy between the "Holy" and a king rich in majesty and might we are lead to another point of self-understanding of the sectarians at Qumran. In a number of the hymns the sectarians expressed a belief that the righteous or those successfully following God's law will stand before God, the divine majesty in an everlasting council of holiness. It is their understanding that this is their future. We must be careful here so as not to jump to conclusions about some sort of Christian concept of "heaven", but to determine what this everlasting council might be. First we should examine the passages for these references and then ascertain some of the characteristics of this council, and the envisioned role the sectaries play in it.

רוח נכרה טהורה מפשע רב להתיצב  
במעמד עם צבא קדושים ולברא ביחד עם ערת נבי  
טמים ותפל לאיש גורל עולם עם רוחות רעות<sup>79</sup>

Thou hast cleansed a perverse spirit of great sin

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<sup>78</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 192.

<sup>79</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 122.

that it may stand with the host of the Holy  
 ones,  
 and that it may enter into community  
 with the congregation of the Sons of Heaven.  
 Thou hast allotted to men an everlasting destiny  
 Amidst the spirits of knowledge... (column III,  
 Hymn 5)<sup>80</sup>

הַשְׁכִּיחַ לְהוֹנִיָּא בְּיָרִית עִמָּהּ וְלַעֲמֹד [ ]  
 בְּמִסְכָּן עֵלָם לְאֹרֶךְ אֲדוֹרָתָהּ עַד צִצְחָ [ ]<sup>81</sup>

Thou hast caused [the straying spirit] to return  
 that it may enter into a Covenant with Thee,  
 and stand [before Thee forever]  
 in the everlasting abode,  
 illuminated with perfect Light forever,  
 with [no more] darkness,  
 [for un]ending [seasons of joy]  
 and un[umbered] ages of peace. (column XVIII,  
 Hymn 25)<sup>82</sup>

Jews standing behind the Hebrew Scripture tradition paid little attention to the question of what happened to them after they died. As Vermes points out, "They believed with most peoples in antiquity that after death the just and wicked alike would share a miserable, shadowy existence in Sheol..."<sup>83</sup> But this does not seem to be the case in these hymns from Qumran. In the above passages and in others, terms "everlasting" and "forever" are used in reference to how long the righteous can expect to be standing in God's presence. We

<sup>80</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 173.

<sup>81</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 174.

<sup>82</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 207.

<sup>83</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls: Qumran in Perspective, p. 186.

get the impression that the righteous can expect this as a reward for a faithful life. Josephus also tells us that the Essenes, assuming that the Qumran sectarians were Essenes, did have a doctrine or belief in immortality.<sup>84</sup> The hymns do suggest rewards which involve what they have termed "eternal" or "everlasting".

It should also be pointed out that "eternal" may be interpreted in a second way. It is evident from other scrolls such as the Community Rule and the War Scroll that the sectarians believed there would be a final battle between the forces of good and evil where the Messianic age would be instituted.<sup>85</sup> This age they believed would last forever but it was not "out there" in another world or space as is the Christian notion of heaven, but on earth. This heaven for them involved returning to a "cleansed" Jerusalem. All of this was tied closely to the eschatological fervour or the intense notion the sectarians had that the world as they knew it was coming rapidly to a close and God would institute His kingdom.

The evidence does not exist to claim without a doubt that one or the other of these views of the "eternal" is what the

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<sup>84</sup> William Whiston, trans., The Works of Josephus, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), war ii. 154-8, p. 607.

<sup>85</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, pp. 103-104.

sectarians held but the important point is that we recognize the possibility of both when we consider the self-understanding of the community.

The paradoxical nature of our responses to the "Holy" lies in the idea that we not only find the "Holy" awe-inspiring in a fearful sense but that we are also drawn towards it and attracted by it. Otto says that we are fascinated (*fascinans*) by the objective "Holy" in our encounters with it. The fascination is our subjective response yet what we are fascinated by is its *augustum*. This can be defined as the aspect of the "Holy" that claims our homage while giving us the benefits of "grace". And it is this "grace" which attracts us; The possibility of forgiveness, atonement and salvation. Otto tells us,

Mere love, mere trust, for all the glory  
and happiness they bring, do not explain to  
us that moment of rapture that breathes in  
our tenderest and most heart felt hymns of  
salvation... also in... eschatological hymns  
of longing... <sup>86</sup>

We know that the sectarians too reacted to the "Holy's" *augustum* through rational signs of "love, mercy, pity and comfort."<sup>87</sup> They felt loved, forgiven, pitied, and comforted as a result of their encounter with the non-rational "Holy". These feelings, however, are not to be mistaken for ordinary

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<sup>86</sup> Otto, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 31.



human love and forgiveness, for example, but in a much more complete and absolute sense. We find the sectarian expressing this aspect in the following passages:

אֲרֹכָה אֲרֹכִי כִי  
סִמְכַתִּי בְעֻזָּה וְרוּחַ קִדְשָׁהּ הַנִּיפְרָתָה נִי בִל אֲמַרְם <sup>88</sup>

I Thank Thee, O Lord,  
for Thou hast upheld me by Thy strength.  
Thou hast shed Thy Holy Spirit upon me  
that I may not stumble. (column VII, Hymn  
11) <sup>89</sup>

וְאֲנִי בְשִׁעְבָּתִי בְּרֹחַ רַחֲמִיכָה וְנִהְמֹן חֲסִדָּה אֲרֹחִיל לְהִצִּיץ  
(מִטָּע) עֵרְלָגוּל צֶצֶר לְהַעִיץ בְּנֹחַ <sup>90</sup>

But I lean on the [abundance of Thy mercies]  
and hope [for the greatness] of Thy grace,  
that Thou will bring [salvation] to flower  
and the branch to growth,  
providing refuge in [Thy] strength  
(column VII, Hymn 11) <sup>91</sup>

We have already stated that the sectarians believed they were totally dependent on God and this was true also of their salvation. When we spoke of predestination the evidence was lacking to totally support either the view of the after-life as Josephus stated or an earthly kingdom, as the sectarians final reward. The point that we can be sure about is that the sectarians believed that they would only be justified by the grace of God. It had little to do with the sectarians

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<sup>88</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>89</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p. 184.

<sup>90</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>91</sup> Vermes, op. cit., p. 184.

attempts at guaranteeing salvation for themselves. That being said, there is the qualification that they must walk in the ways of righteousness. According to these hymns then, what does the sectarian understand to be the ways of righteousness or, in effect, the means to salvation?

This apparent contradiction whereby the sectarians believed that salvation was in God's hand alone and yet they wrote about and believed that there were ways of righteousness that lead to salvation, is best understood in terms of a covenantal conditional system. Ultimately God would or would not save the person, but the sectarians had an obligation to perform certain duties in order to fulfil his end of the covenant. H. Bardtke whose work has been translated and examined by Helmer Ringgren, has dealt with this notion of ways of salvation based on what he saw as a type of Qumran catechism found in Column XI, hymn 17. He says that there are basically three sets of concepts which the sectarians understood would bring them closer to God. First, knowledge of God's truth and insight into his mysteries. Second, cleansing from sin, and consecration to God, or being set apart from impurity and faithlessness. Third, unification with the children of the truth i.e. joining the community and participating in the "lot" of the holy ones.<sup>92</sup> If we examine the hymns closely and especially this "catechism" section of

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<sup>92</sup> Ringgren, The Faith of Qumran, p. 113.

hymn 17 it becomes clear that we cannot immediately consider these points as ways of salvation because, in certain instances, it seems that the sectarian is speaking of the conditions and expectations of already being saved. In other words, the sectarians thank God for already favouring them, giving them knowledge about His mysteries and for placing them in the council of holiness. Actually, it is part of the sectarians experience of the "Holy" that they "know" they are already chosen. They claim to know things that those not favoured by God cannot know because they believed they had made a new covenant with God. These points that Bardtke has outlined can be seen as both the way to continued salvation by which is meant standing before God after death and also the conditions of being the chosen ones or God's elect. So it is the sectarians self-understanding that they are already chosen by God and receiving certain favours but they must also continue a new way of life which involves the ideas that Bardtke has pointed out. As chosen ones they must separate themselves from evil. They must enter the community and they must seek knowledge of God and forgiveness for their sins.

צבא דעת לספר לבשר גבורות וחוקי נבוכדנאס לילור  
 (אשה) הדי ארונה כנרית עמכה וחגלה לנ עפר  
 להשמר [ ] מפחי משפט לערמת רחמיכה<sup>93</sup>

[Thou hast created] the host of knowledge  
 to declare [Thy] mighty deeds to flesh

<sup>93</sup> Lohse, op. cit., p. 174.

and the right precepts to him that is born  
 [of woman].  
 Thou hast [caused the perverse heart to enter]  
 into a covenant with Thee,  
 and hast covered the heart of dust that it may  
 be preserved [from evil  
 and saved] from the snares of judgement  
 in accordance with Thy mercies. (column XVIII,  
 Hymn 25)<sup>94</sup>

By way of a conclusion we should point to a statement made by Helmer Ringgren which concerns the sectarians' general religious self-understanding. He says,

It is striking that this deep reverence and submission is coupled with joy and confidence in the consciousness of being elect and saved and participating in God's wonderful knowledge.<sup>95</sup>

What Ringgren is pointing out is that the material from Qumran generally reflects the paradoxical nature of religious behaviour. Throughout this study we have been saying that religious behaviour and beliefs are formed to an extent by the believers experience of the "Holy". Other beliefs are derived from the subjective feelings incited in the believer after an encounter with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*.

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<sup>94</sup> Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, p.207.

<sup>95</sup> Ringgren, p. 112.

### Conclusion

The Thanksgiving hymns, analyzed in terms of creature-consciousness and then the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* do yield many interesting points of self-understanding of the sectarians at Qumran. As was pointed out in the introduction, there may be many approaches to the discovery of aspects of the Qumran sectarian's religious self-understanding. However, an approach which allows for a systematic treatment of religious responses will reflect more accurately how the sectarians wished to be understood. The categories of Otto's "Holy" give us a possible grasp on the language and thinking of this religious community.

Creature-consciousness, the feeling of nothingness in the presence of the "Holy", and its language of humanity's depravity was evident in the hymns allowing us to make several statements about how the sectarians saw themselves. First, the sectarians believed that they were sinful, frail and dependent on God. This is not an ordinary feeling of sinfulness but an overwhelming experience of the self as nothing in God's presence. Second, that sin for them was to be understood as the only condition that was appropriate for the creature created by God. It is clear from the Thanksgiving hymns that humanity's sinful state is the only possible complement to God's holy state. Third, through creature-consciousness we saw the humility of the sectarians

who believed they were dust and ashes in the presence of the "Holy" And fourth, along with the humility we saw that the sectarians were also people who believed in and accepted the vast differences between God and Humanity.

When we considered the elements of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* and we saw the sectarians describing God in these similar terms there were further points of the sectarians' self-understanding that were illuminated. Fifth, the way they spoke of the mystery of the "Holy" showed that they had absolute reverence for God. God's transcendence or "wholly otherness" commands the respect of the community. The sectarians at Qumran felt they had to give back to God the respect that they felt other Jews had lost towards God. In their new covenant which the community felt it made with God many of such "wrongs" would be corrected. Sixth, because of the positive experience of the "Holy" the sectarians felt that God had favoured them enough to predestine them for glory. Seventh, also because of this essentially positive experience the sectarians felt they had the possibility of conversion, through God's mercy. This led us to consider the Qumran sectarian's doctrine of predestination to be one that was somewhat flexible. The paths of the Just and the Wicked were determined forever but one could choose either path. It was suggested that this relaxation of a predestination doctrine was most likely due to the community's dependence on converts

for survival.

Finally, when we considered the *Tremendum et Fascinans* aspect of the "Holy" we saw that this was also very much evident in the language of the hymns and it allowed us to speak of these points. Eighth, the *tremendum* aspect allowed us to understand the fear which the sectarians felt about the "Holy" which was mainly caused by their total dependence upon it. Ninth, the sectarian believed that God was in total control, not only of the natural world but also of people's lives. Tenth, when we examined the hymns for the *majestas* aspect of the *tremendum* we saw that the sectarians believed that they would, one day, stand before the "divine majesty" in the royal court of the after-life.

Finally, our eleventh point illuminated by the *fascinans* aspect is about salvation and forgiveness for the sectarians. The attraction to the "Holy" is an attraction to the benefits of grace which the sectarian believed were available.

What was attempted in this brief study was to show that an insight into the religious self-understanding of the sectarians at Qumran can be gained by an application of the categories and features of the "Holy" as Otto had explained them. We have shown that by making use of religious categories such as creature-consciousness or the particular complex category of the "Holy" we may not only deal with religions systematically but we can also gain insight into

such topics as the self-understanding of a group. And finally, as we alluded to earlier, this type of approach might be useful in illuminating the self-understanding of other groups such as the earliest Christians.



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