OLD TESTAMENT WISDOM LITERATURE AND DUALISTIC THINKING IN LATE JUDAISM

BY

BENEDIKT OTZEN

Aarhus

It is well known that at the end of the second volume of his Theology of the Old Testament Gerhard von Rad has tried to show that the idea of Apocalyptic ought first and foremost to be regarded as a descendant of Wisdom thinking. Among the arguments he adduces, the most important refers to the conception of a divine order which permeates nature and history, a conception that has deep and firm roots in Wisdom thinking, and which in Apocalyptic is developed into the idea of determination of the exact time of the end. From here there are—still according to von Rad—lines to eschatology as a secondary element and further on to the “period-thinking” and to the apocalyptic-dualistic thought of the two aeons, the latter idea being dependent upon the notion of the division of time into periods of weal and periods of woe, which is also found in Wisdom tradition.¹

Von Rad only touches on dualism in this apocalyptic form. But the idea of the two aeons is not the only representative of dualistic thought in Late Judaism, and Apocalyptic is not the only genre in Late Judaistic literature. Both in apocalyptic texts and in texts not belonging to Apocalyptic proper, we meet with a kind of dualism that is not, principally, cosmic and eschatological, but which should rather be characterized as psychological and ethical—even if it also has cosmic and eschatological connotations. Conspicuous traits in this kind of dualistic teaching include the following: “the two ways” mentioned more or less clearly in Ethiopic Enoch xci 4,

19; xciv 1-4; Sirach ii 12; xxxiii 11; Testament of Asher i and Slavonic Enoch xxx 15. Further: the antithesis "light-darkness" as it is found in Ethiopic Enoch xli 8; cviii 11-15; Sirach xxxiii 14; Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs passim; Slavonic Enoch xxx 15; Book of Wisdom vii 29f; Fourth Ezra xiv 20.  As a third example of such dualistic ideas we could refer to the notion of "the two inclinations in man", a conception dominating the Testament of Asher and occurring also in Sirach xv 14-20 (where, by the way, the Hebrew text uses the word דדי and thus indicates the relationship to the later Jewish idea of the two פנימי).  

Everybody knows that since the discovery of the Qumran texts scholarly interest in the dualistic thought of Late Judaism has grown immensely. The reason is not that dualism is a Qumran invention—we have just seen that dualistic ideas of different kinds are quite widespread in texts known long before 1947. But the remarkable thing about Qumran is the fact that we have here a whole theological system that is so to speak founded on dualistic thinking. In the Qumran texts dualism is present not only as certain conceptions lying on the fringes of religious thinking; it is the very foundation of the theological system and can be considered under three aspects, namely as a psychological-ethical dualism (the nature of man is constituted of two opposite powers or "spirits"), a cosmic-ethical dualism (man and the world divided into two groups led respectively by the "prince of light" and the "angel of darkness"), and an eschatological dualism (the present world, under the rule of Beliar or the "angel of darkness", will be succeeded by a new world under the dominion of God). This third aspect, by the way, is next to the apocalyptic idea on which von Rad concentrated. The whole system is set forth in the Qumran Manual of Discipline page III-IV.

---

4 About the different aspects of Qumran dualism see B. Otzen, "Die neugefundenen hebräischen Sektenschriften und die Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen", SJTh VII, 1953, 135-36. Not least P. Wernberg-Møller, "A Reconsideration of the Two Spirits in the Rule of the Community (1Q Serek III, 13-IV, 26)", RQ III, 1961-62, 413-41, has tried to show that the dualism in 1QS is to be conceived totally on the psychological level. His attempts have been criticized