There is a wide acknowledgement of the role of innovation in religious traditions. Religions always contain conflicts, small-groups, and novel beliefs that challenge them to reform, renew, and reinvent. Religious movements are rightly called movements: they are part of a constant and ongoing movement in religions whereby religions react to and effect cultural changes. To approach the study of Qumran and early Christian groups from this perspective is to study groups that resisted or promoted religious and cultural change, and were part of the “normal” flow that takes place in all traditions—which are in fact necessary for the traditions to stay alive. Scholars have noted a particular rise of sectarian movements in Second Temple Judaism, and while religious movements may, at a certain period, appear more rapidly and be more numerous, the process is continuous.1

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One of the most popular sect typologies utilized in both Qumran and New Testament scholarship has been that of the sociologist Bryan R. Wilson (1926–2004). Wilson became known for his vast surveys of non-Christian religious sects and various patterns of sectarianism. In his early scholarship, Wilson concentrated on modern Christian groups and provided lists of typical sectarian characteristics for them. Many biblical scholars have utilized these lists of attributes. As Lester Grabbe notes, “these various lists of attributes are the sort of thing that non-sociologists tend to latch onto and try to apply to a quite different context.” However, the attributes are never identical for every group analyzed. In order to find more universal applicability, Wilson distanced himself from the traditional church-sect typology: a sect is not a protest against the church but against the greater society. Sects


