

MARTYRDOM, VIOLENCE, AND IMMORTALITY: THE ORIGINS OF A RELIGIOUS COMPLEX

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From a religio-historical perspective, the Maccabean Revolt of 165 B.C.E., as depicted in the first two Books of the Maccabees and in the writings of the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, should be counted among the truly epochal events in world history. The particular dynamics of this event reveal the workings of a number of interrelated religious phenomena that had never before arisen, let alone simultaneously. They are as follows:

1. The phenomenon of zealotry, that is to say, the act of killing for God.
2. The phenomenon of martyrdom, the inverse of zealotry, namely, the act of dying for God (Hebrew *kiddush ha-shem*).
3. The belief in the immortality of the soul and deliverance from suffering and death in a heavenly paradise.
4. The first purely religiously motivated war, which is to say the first religious war in which human beings were killed in the name of the true God and His laws.
5. A religious war carried out according to the principle of fulfilling Scripture, that is, on the basis and following the precepts of a holy text (i.e. Deuteronomy). "God's law" was realized through historical action.

My argument in these pages will be that the above five phenomena are inextricably linked; each one presumes the other. This "interconnectedness" of religious actions and beliefs in the Maccabean Revolt constituted a unique historical phenomenon, the influence of which has reverberated down through the centuries to the present day. The parallels between the Maccabees and present-day militant Islamicists are readily apparent. Present day society, however, is more sensitive to such issues as zealotry and religious violence than were earlier periods, which had read the accounts of the Maccabees' heroic struggle against Seleucid oppression with undivided sympathy. This is all the

less surprising in that the accounts we have of the relevant events are all friendly to the Maccabees.

The fact that the above cited phenomena – killing for God, martyrdom, the hope for immortality, religious war, and carrying out divine laws in history – first appear in the context of the Maccabean wars, endows them with a high degree of interest. We must, of course, distinguish these wars as historical events from the literary accounts that describe them. The four Maccabean books were written long after the events themselves; the first towards the end of the second century B.C.E., hence two generations later at the earliest, and the others between the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E.

The texts comprise anything but objective historiography. The first two books narrate the same events from different angles. The first book is a Greek translation from an original Hebrew account; it sees itself as the continuation of a traditional Jewish historiography intent on using the events to represent divine rule. The second book, transmitted in the original Greek, is a summary of a five-volume work by the Jewish historian Jason of Cyrene; it is an example of a typically Hellenistic “pathetic” historiography.¹ 3 Maccabees is a historical narrative such as Esther or Daniel, with strong homiletic tendencies (and no mention of the Maccabees), and 4 Maccabees is a pious diatribe over martyrdom in view of reason and its rule over the instincts.

In addition we have the above-mentioned reports about the Maccabean Revolt in Josephus’ two historical works, written towards the end of the first century C.E. In any event, I am not concerned here with the historical events themselves, but with their significance in religious history as an epoch-making shift: the emergence of a new form of religiosity. I am interested in the later literary depiction of these events and how they have left their stamp on history. In this light, it seems striking that in their internal mutual connection, these five phenomena later play no role in either Christian or Jewish transmission. For example, the Maccabees were evoked either as martyrs or as warriors for faith, but never as both at once. The conjunction of martyrdom and zealotry is thus not in and of itself a fact to be gleaned from the history of reception and influence but rather a complex structure, whose

¹ Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Situation Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jh. v. Chr.* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), 176ff.

entirety one sees, moving through the extant documentary sources, for the first time in the Maccabean wars and which may therefore be called the “Maccabean complex.”

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I would like to first review the five phenomena both on their own and together. Among these phenomena, that of pious zealotry, killing for God or religious violence, will take up by far the greatest space, since I consider it the most important precisely because of its topicality. It was this intense desire to fight for religious freedom that sparked military conflict in the first place.

In this respect we need to note an important distinction. The Maccabean Revolt was a two-front war, directed outwardly and inwardly. It was at once a Jewish resistance movement against Seleucid persecution and a Jewish civil war between a modernizing reformist faction and an orthodox faction of those faithful to religious law.² Above all, it is the latter, inward, aspect of the conflict that reveals the stamp of pious zealotry; it will therefore be the main focus here. I will not discuss the details of this civil war, but analyze the inner conflict in relation to the general situation in Jerusalem in the early second century B.C.E, which I will sketch shortly. In the process, I will disregard external political entanglements with Seleucids, Ptolemies, and Romans. I am concerned with this general historical situation only to the extent that it forms the context for what I have referred to as the “Maccabean complex”. I hope that my brief sketch will help bring the decisive contours of the revolt into focus.

It appears that Jerusalem had an upper social stratum inclined toward reform and toward opening the Jewish religion to Hellenistic culture. According to Peter Schäfer, confronting this reform were “conservative strata faithful to the Torah”; these were “preponderantly from the poorer urban and especially rural population,”³ a situation that sociologically draws parallels with many present-day Islamic countries, for

² Alongside Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, see Erich Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Jonathan Kirsch, *God against the Gods: The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism* (New York: Viking Compass, 2004), 78–82.

³ Peter Schäfer, *Geschichte der Juden in der Antike: Die Juden Palästinas von Alexander dem Großen bis zur arabischen Eroberung* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches

instance Iran. But as Erich Gruen has indicated, the conflict's traditional interpretation as a confrontation between Hellenizers and Judaizers is not supported by the texts, which never juxtapose Hellenism and Judaism as alternative options. The opponents of those adhering to the law were in fact not Hellenizers but antinomists, opponents of the law.⁴ Hellenistic culture as a widely held way of life, *ho koinos bios* as Josephus put it, was perceived not as Greek in particular but as Pagan in general. It received a varying degree of acceptance throughout the ancient Mediterranean: while some aspired to it (e.g. participated in the building and use of gymnasia, baths, and civic structures), some partly fought against it (i.e. strived to maintain traditional markers of native cultures). For Gruen, this is the only explanation for the later Hasmoneans giving themselves Greek names, clothing themselves in Greek style, and taking on the Greek way of life. The actual point of dispute was not so much assimilation into Greek customs but deviation from Jewish law. It was possible to be Greek in both outward appearance and intellectual formation and adhere to the law, following the principle of *Torah im Derech Eretz* ("Torah with the way of life of the [host] country"), as recommended by Samson Raphael Hirsch in the nineteenth century. Hence not especially being Greek, but leaving Jewish law behind in favor of modern inter-national culture, was the actual core of the conflict.

This conflict extended back some time before the outbreak of violence and was intensified through an alliance of the reformist faction with the Seleucid government against the conservative faction. We thus read in 1 Macc 1:11–15 that

In those days there came forth out of Israel lawless men, and persuaded many, saying: Let us go and make a covenant with the nations that are round about us; for since we separated ourselves from them many evils have come upon us. And the saying appeared good in their eyes; and as certain of the people were eager (to carry this out), they went to the king, and he gave them authority to introduce the customs of the Gentiles. And they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem according to the manner of the Gentiles. They also submitted themselves to uncircumcision, and repudiated the holy covenant; yea, they joined themselves to the Gentiles, and sold themselves to do evil.

Bibelwerk, 1983), 53. See also Heinz Kreissig, "Die Ursachen des 'Makkabäer'-Aufstandes," *Klio* 58 (1976): 249–253.

⁴ See Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 1–41.

It seems, then, that the initiative for Jerusalem's Hellenization stemmed from the Jewish reform faction, not from the Seleucid authorities. Jason thus had to obtain permission from Antiochus IV to build the gymnasium and take up the Hellenistic way of living; this step signified a turn from royally sanctioned, hence legally binding, Jewish law. Cultural, that is to say, legal and religious homogenization did not generally play any established role in the imperial policies of ancient powers. To the contrary, already the Persians and later the Romans placed great value on ruling subjected peoples according to their own local laws, with their customs often first needing to be legally codified for this to be possible.⁵ What mattered was guaranteeing peace and order in the dependent territories, something best obtained, it was believed, through enacting native laws instead of imposing foreign ones. For a long time the Seleucids were no exception to this rule.

Violent measures were first taken by Antiochus III's notorious successor, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in 170 B.C.E. in the context of the war being fought between the Seleucid monarch and Ptolemy VI (i.e. the sixth Syrian war). At the end of this conflict, Jerusalem was captured and plundered. The city suffered even worse when following his second Egyptian campaign, Antiochus was reprimanded by the Romans and sent home. He now erected an *Akra*, a citadel with a non-Jewish garrison, and transformed Jerusalem into a military colony with a mixed population. A short time later, we read, Antiochus issued an "edict on religion", the authenticity of which remains a subject of dispute.⁶ If the ancient sources are to be believed, the edict brought the

⁵ Hans G. Kippenberg has defined this procedure as a general principle of imperialistic policy: "When colonizers wish to make an imperium out of the territories they have conquered, then they have to make themselves into protectors or even into inventors of the traditions of the subjugated ethnic groups." See Hans G. Kippenberg, "Die jüdischen Überlieferungen als patrioi nomoi," in *Die Restauration der Götter: Antike Religion und Neo-Paganismus*, ed. Richard Faber and Renate Schlesier (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1986), 45–60, here 51, with reference to *Traditionale Gesellschaften und europäischer Kolonialismus*, ed. Jan-Heren Grevemeyer (Frankfurt a. M.: Syndikat, 1981), 16–46; Gérard Leclerc, *Anthropologie und Kolonialismus* (Munich: Hanser, 1973). See also Peter Frei and Klaus Koch, *Reichsidee und Reichorganisation im Perserreich*, vol. 55, *Orbis biblicus et orientalis* (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1984); Reinhard Gregor Kratz, *Translatio imperii: Untersuchungen zu den aramäischen Daniel-Erzählungen und ihrem theologie-geschichtlichen Umfeld*, vol. 63, *Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 161ff., 225ff.

⁶ See above, n. 5.

conflict to a head by simply forbidding practice of Judaism on pain of death. Thus we read the following in 1 Maccabees (1:41–53):

And the king wrote unto his whole kingdom, that all should be one people, and that every one should give up his [religious] usages. And all the nations acquiesced in accordance with the command of the king. And many in Israel took delight in his (form of) worship, and they began sacrificing to idols, and profaned the Sabbath. Furthermore, the king sent letters by the hand of messengers to Jerusalem and to the cities of Judah [to the effect that] they should practice custom foreign to [the traditions of] the land, and that they should cease the [sacrificing of] whole burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and drink offerings in the sanctuary, and that they should profane the Sabbaths and feasts, and pollute the sanctuary and those who had been sanctified; that they should [moreover] build high places, and sacred groves, and shrines for idols, and that they should sacrifice swine and [other] unclean animals; and that they should leave their sons uncircumcised, and make themselves abominable by means of [practicing] everything that was unclean and profane, so that they might forget the Law, and change all the [traditional] ordinances. And whosoever should not act according to the word of the king, should die.... And many of the people joined themselves unto them, all those [namely] who had forsaken the Law; these did evil in the land, and caused Israel to hide in all manner of hiding-places.

It seems that we could here add nation-building, in the sense of forced integration or ethnic homogenization, to our list of phenomena appearing for the first time in this context. For where previously do we read of a ruler deciding to make a single people out of a state with many peoples? But this episode may well emerge from the realm of legend: the break with the imperialistic policy of ruling subject people according to their own laws seems simply too blatant; we find such persecutions in no other Seleucid realm. For these reasons the authenticity not only of the “nation-building” phenomenon but of the identification of those generally responsible for the persecution has been called into doubt. Steven Weitzman, for instance, has offered new – and to my mind illuminating – arguments disputing the edict’s historicity,⁷ arguments pointing to its status as an invention of the Hasmoneans meant to justify their brutality towards the assimilated Jewish populace. If Weitzman is correct, the phenomenon of martyrdom as a historical

⁷ Steven Weitzman, “Plotting Antiochus’s Persecution,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 123, no. 2 (2004): 219–234. I thank Gadi Algazi for drawing my attention to this article.

rather than a literary occurrence can be called into question: after all, martyrdom presupposes persecution. It is the case that in their present form the accounts of the martyrdom of Eleazar and of Hannah or Salomone (2 Macc 6 and 7) are purely literary; but this of course does not mean they are not based on historical experiences here rendered into a more complex literary form. In any case, what is decisive for understanding the conditions in which the ideas of both martyrdom and religiously motivated violence could emerge is the presence of persecution and this was certainly present, even if the impetus for it did not stem from the state but from the Jewish reform faction collaborating with it.⁸

The special problem informing the history of Judea in this period is precisely that Jewish religious laws were disputed among the Jews themselves. However we judge the edict's historicity, a conflict had doubtless emerged, as suggested, between a reform faction that wished for an opening of Judaism to the *koinos bios* and a conservative faction that wanted to maintain the traditional laws at all costs.

The extant Jewish sources represent the conservative viewpoint, presenting the reformist faction as composed only of law-breakers (*anomoi*), deserters (*phygades*), and sinners (*hamartoloi*), all of whom were solely intent on living luxuriously and enriching themselves unhampered. In contrast, the alternate interpretation advocated above all by Elias Bickermann and Martin Hengel,⁹ sees the reformist faction as representing an authentically Jewish-monotheistic movement that hoped for a redefinition of Judaism, one that would place less restrictions on the affiliation of God's chosen people with foreign cultures. While the question of the nature of the reform faction would appear

⁸ Already Elias Bickermann, *Der Gott der Makkabäer: Untersuchungen über Sinn und Ursprung der makkabäischen Erhebung* (Berlin: Schocken, 1937), saw the reformist faction as constituting the impetus to the persecutions: "Since the persecution was locally limited, it seems likely that it was initiated by the local authorities." Bickermann considered Antiochus IV's edict on religion as historically authentic; he interpreted it as issued through prompting of the Hellenists. Victor Tcherikover (*Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews* [Philadelphia-Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961], 159ff., 404ff.) then argued against Bickermann that the edict reflected a reaction to a revolt of the orthodox against the reformers. But this interpretation itself sees the reformers as offering the first initiative; it simply assigns more initiative to the king. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 464–564 (chap. 4) then furnished more arguments for Bickermann's interpretation.

⁹ Hengel may well remain the pre-eminent specialist in both the conflict-laden relations between Hellenism and Judaism and zealotry.

open-ended, it seems to me that the arguments of Bickermann and Hengel are well worth considering.

Jewish monotheism can be viewed as constituting two opposing discourses, namely, universalism and exclusivism. On the one hand, late biblical or early Jewish monotheism proclaims the uniqueness of God as lord of the world, of history, and of all peoples;¹⁰ on the other, however, it lays stress on the difference between the chosen people and other peoples (Hebrew *goyim*, heathens) and defines affiliation with this people in terms of strict adherence to the Jewish way of life grounded in Mosaic law. For its part, the Jewish reformist faction favored the universalistic perspective, recognizing in the Jewish God the same deity broadly designated in the Hellenistic world as *Hyp-sistos*, "highest being."¹¹ This faction perceived exclusivism as baneful believing that Jewish People had been fairing poorly ever since they separated themselves from the Gentiles.¹²

According to Hengel, the reformers' guiding principle was in fact not "Away from Judaism!" but rather "Back to Abraham!"¹³ meaning away from Moses, in the sense of strict, "puritanical," Deuteronomical observance of the law. They wanted to go back to a form of Jewish life *ante legem*: a life that, in relation to both the mores and ideas of God, was grounded in a profound belief in engagement with its surrounding socio-cultural environment.¹⁴ Later, that would also be

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Isaiah 44:24–45:8.

¹¹ See Aristeeas' information as conveyed by Josephus, Ant. 12.2 (II p. 62): "Through intensive research I have found that the same God who gave the Jews their laws also rules your realm. We ourselves honor this God, creator of the universe, and name him 'the living one' because he endows all of us with life."

¹² 1 Macc 1:11. We can presume that God's remarkable statement in Ezekiel 20:25, "Moreover I gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live," also plays a role here. According to Ezekiel 20:26, this refers to the law of sacrifice of the first-born. But it could also refer to laws of demarcation, especially dietary laws. See also Rainer Kessler, "'Gesetze, die nicht gut waren': Eine Polemik gegen das Deuteronomium," in *Schriftprophetie: Festschrift für Jörg Jeremias*, ed. Friedhelm Hartenstein et al. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2004), 253–263.

¹³ Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 552ff.

¹⁴ On the puritanism of the law, see following passage from Aristeeas' letter: The legislators, equipped by God for comprehensive knowledge, surrounded us with impenetrable palisades and iron walls, so that we came into no contact with other peoples in any respect, and were pure in body and soul, free from deceptive ideas, and honored God who is alone God and powerful, in contrast to creation... So that we did not soil ourselves with anything nor pollute ourselves through contact with what is bad, he surrounded us on all sides with purity regulations, commands regarding food and drink and hearing and seeing. (*Letter of Aristeeas*, 139 and 142, cited in Gerhard

a guiding principle for Paul, who emphasizes the lord's conversation with Abraham in the fifteenth chapter of *Genesis* over the one later on in the seventeenth chapter, which contains mention of circumcision as the sign of the covenant.¹⁵ In the context of post-exilic Judaism, there is much to commend understanding Abraham and Moses as not only standing for two epochs in Jewish history but also for two alternative interpretations of Judaism, the one centering on origins, the other on law.¹⁶ This understanding corresponds to the thesis that the Abrahamic narratives must belong to a rather recent layer of the biblical texts, since Abraham is very rarely mentioned outside the *Book of Genesis*.¹⁷

Along with the question of ethnic identity, a question of theology needs to be addressed here. One of the key scenes in the stories of Abraham involves his encounter with Melchizedek, the Canaanite king of Salem (= Jerusalem) and priest of the highest god, whom Abraham blesses in the name of this highest god (*El Elyon* = *Hypsistos*), creator of heaven and earth. This is the same god honored by the Phoenician cities in the Maccabean period as *Ba'al-Schamem* ("lord of heaven");¹⁸ an all-encompassing heavenly deity whose cult the reformist party wished to introduce to Jerusalem under the name *Zeus Olympios*. They apparently recognized this deity as their own god, following the example of Abraham. In their eyes, the dedication of the temple to *Zeus Olympios* signified not the rededication of the Temple to a foreign god, but the recognition of an additional appellation for Yahweh (*Adonai* not having been an actual name, but a periphrasis for the tetragrammaton).¹⁹ The Jewish God was understood by the Greeks in just this way. Hekataios of Abdera, as recorded in Diodorus Siculus, reported that for the Jews, "heaven alone, embracing the earth," was

Delling, *Die Bewältigung der Diasporasituation durch das hellenistische Judentum* (Göttingen et al.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 9.

¹⁵ Jacob Taubes, *Die politische Theologie des Paulus: Vorträge, gehalten an der Forschungsstätte der evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft in Heidelberg*, 23.–27. Februar 1987, ed. Aleida Assmann (Munich: Fink, 1993), 69f.

¹⁶ Thomas Römer, "Recherches actuelles sur le cycle d'Abraham," in *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History*, ed. André Wénin, vol. 155, *Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum Lovaniensium* (Louvain: University Press, 2001), 179–211.

¹⁷ Hermann Spieckermann, "Ein Vater vieler Völker: Die Verheißungen an Abraham im Alten Testament," in "Abraham unser Vater: Die gemeinsamen Wurzeln von Judentum, Christentum und Islam," ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Tilman Nagel (Göttingen: Wallstein-Verlag, 2003), 8–21.

¹⁸ Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 542f.

¹⁹ Bickermann, *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, 92–96.

“god and lord of the whole”;²⁰ likewise, according to Poseidonios, as recorded in Strabo, the Jews taught that “that one being is God, which comprises us all and land and sea, which we name heaven and earth and the nature of things.”²¹

Just as Jewish monotheism hovered between exclusivism and universalism, Jewish identity hovered between political, religious, and ethnic definitions. This is, as far as I am aware, a rather unique case in human history. Traditionally, ethnic identity has been by and large a question of origin (of, as Herodotus puts it, *to homaimon*, “the same blood”);²² *political* identity is a question of association and dissociation, of integration and exclusion, of group formation and outward demarcation; and *religious* identity is a question of cult and custom – Herodotus thus speaks of “the same rites (*thusiai*) and customs (*ēthē*)”. The special quality of the situation in ancient Judaism was, as indicated, the fusion of these three criteria of identity. The symbolic figure of Abraham represents the fusion of religious and *ethnic* identity, that of Moses, the fusion of religious and *political* identity. Through the latter sort of fusion, religion itself became for the first time a question of social association and dissociation; this new type of religion then became the model, over time, for the new world religions such as Christianity and Islam. Its defining feature was its political nature, which involved a founding and defining of group affiliation and a demarcation of outer borders as a way of distinguishing between “insiders” and “outsiders”, believers and non-believers, Israel and the nations, Christians and Pagans, *dar al Islam* and *dar al harb*.

²⁰ Hekataios in Diodorus Siculus, 40.3, cited in Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 466.

²¹ Strabo 16. 2.35–37, cited in Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 470.

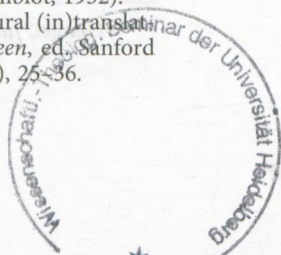
²² Herodotus VIII 144: “And then there is Hellenism (*tò hellenikón*), the equality of blood and language (*homaimón te kai omóglosson*), the shared holy places and rites and identical mores (*etheá te homótropa*).” See Moses I. Finley, “The Ancient Greeks and their Nation,” in idem, *The Use and Abuse of History* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975), 120–133. In the present context, it is important to note that once Jewish political independence belonged to the past it of course became possible to enter, precisely, the *ethnos* through conversion; hence according to Talmudic law one is fully a member of the *ethnos* (not only of the religion), with no distinctions whatsoever, following conversion. This might perhaps be considered a “positive” outcome to the “negative” identity-forming process being pointed to here: in a very different period than the Maccabean-Hellenistic, the rabbis – practically concerned, to be sure, with communal survival in the Diaspora – refused to reduce Jewish ethnic identity (or, say, the principle of communal solidarity) to a question of origin (or matrilineal descent), or “the same blood”.

The purely political dichotomy of association and disassociation is something different than the sort of friend-foe dichotomy proposed by Carl Schmitt.²³ The individual who does not politically belong to a community need not be an enemy. To the contrary, treaties, alliances, and various forms of cooperation can be entered into with other groups without these groups actually being accepted into the body politic. The borders between territories, nations, or peoples allow for many forms of traffic in both directions. In the ancient world, religion typically protected and regulated this border traffic. Treaties were typically sworn into existence. The oaths being sworn by the different parties often called on their own local gods, who were then often afforded equivalent statuses. One example here is the reference to the weather god of the Hittites and the sun god of the Egyptians in the state treaty between Hattushilis III and Ramses II. The gods become sponsors of the treaty and watch over its strict observance. That a foreign people worship gods other than one's own does not establish grounds for enmity, but rather promotes understanding.²⁴ The principle of association therefore had not been defined by cult but rather by political rule and descent.

However, it was precisely this principle that underwent a change in the context of the new religious form that emerged in Israel or Judea in the centuries between 750 and 150 B.C.E. and that became historically manifest for the first time in the Maccabean wars. The principle of affiliation with the nation of Israel in the sense of the God's chosen people now no longer centered around rule and descent but around adherence to the law. Being Jewish in the religious sense was defined by such adherence. Those who abandoned the law no longer belonged to it but rather to the *goyim* (Greek *ta ethnē*), the heathens. Religion in this new sense was neither a cult nor a *weltanschauung* and belief system, but above all a form of life. In Palestine of this period, Flavius Josephus explains, two ways of life stood opposed, the Jewish and the "general." For the first time there were Jews no longer recognized as such but disassociated, that is, counted among the heathens. In the context of persecution such disassociation turned into enmity, into a *casus belli*.

²³ Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1932).

²⁴ See Jan Assmann, "Translating Gods: Religion as a factor of cultural (in)translatability," in *Translatability of Cultures: Figurations of the Space Between*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 25-36.



The dissociative tendency of this new form of religion was simply the other side of its associative strength. The stronger faith binds, generates solidarity, brings together, the sharper its capacity to draw distinctions and exclude those who are different. We can only speak of heathens, heretics, and apostates in connection with this religious form. This dialectics of inclusion and exclusion was unknown to the old religions; it was impossible to abandon or to convert to them. Apostasy and loyal submission were purely political categories standing in relation to rulers, not gods. The new form came into being through a polarization of the relation to God by becoming a principle of association and disassociation, thus entering into competition with the political sphere or else subjugating it completely. In the traditional sort of state, religion, which was cultic in nature, was subordinate to the political sphere – it was a governmental instrument and therefore a governmental sphere of responsibility. To the extent that the new form transcended the cultic sphere and encompassed the legal sphere, it came to determine affiliation with what was defined as “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). In short, the nation was now a religiously defined and politically organized community, under the rule of law as codified divine will.

To return to the question of the zealotry of the Maccabees: as already emphasized, it is possible that what was here in play was not only a reaction-formation to radical efforts at modernization but beyond that, to violent persecution. In any event, for the first time in history the circumstances had here emerged for a tradition to alter, as it were, its aggregate condition and take on the *status confessionis*. What previously had constituted pious religious practice now became a question of life and death. Interestingly, in this context Martin Hengel speaks of a “zeal against the law” that would itself spark the “zeal for the law” of the authentic Zealot movement as a reaction-formation.²⁵ Although the historical assessment is surely correct here, the terminology perhaps needs some rethinking. One can only be “zealous” (Hebrew *qana'*, Greek *zeloun*) for the law, faith, and God. As far as I know, the reformers are never termed *zelotai* or *qana'im*. Being zealous is a sacred activity in that it is modeled after God's jealousy (*qin'ah*; *El qanna'*). This mirror-relation between divine jealousy and human

²⁵ Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 532–545.

zealotry is expressed especially clearly in the story of Phinehas, the model for all zealots. It is found in Num 25:6-9:

Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman into his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the Israelites, while they were weeping at the entrance of the tent of the meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he got up and left the congregation. Taking a spear in his hand, he went after the Israelite man into the tent, and pierced the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly. So the plague was stopped among the people of Israel. Nevertheless those that died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the Israelites by manifesting such zeal among them on my behalf that in my jealousy I did not consume the Israelites."

This scene has the status of a primal scene, a straightforwardly compulsory model for Maccabean zealotry. In 1 Macc 2:26 we thus read how Mattathias is seized by zeal for the lord when he sees a Jew about to carry out the same sacrifice demanded by the king that he, the high priest, has steadfastly refused to offer (1 Macc 2:24-28):

And when Mattathias saw it, his zeal was kindled, and his heart quivered (with wrath); and his indignation burst forth for judgment, so that he ran and slew him on the altar; and at the same time he [also] killed the king's officer who had come to enforce the sacrificing, pulled down the altar, and [thus] showed forth his zeal for the Law, just as Phinehas had done in the case of Zimri the son of Salom. And Mattathias cried out with a loud voice in the city, saying, "Let everyone that is zealous for the Law and that would maintain the covenant come forth after me!" And he and his sons fled unto the mountains, and left all that they possessed in the city.

That is the beginning of the Maccabean revolt and the origin of zealotry.

Those on the opposing side naturally were also zealous, but not in the unambiguously positive sense of the Hebrew concept of *qana'*. The antithesis of "being zealous for" would apparently not be "being zealous against" but "persecute"; the concept of "being zealous against the law" would imply a readiness to die in opposition to the law or for the reforms, apparently an inherent contradiction. But more important than this semantic question is Hengel's interpretation of the Zealot movement as a reaction-formation.

This interpretation can be applied to modern zealotry, which is often referred to as “fundamentalism”. In many Islamic countries such as Iran or Turkey, for example, wearing the veil was nothing more than a pious custom; it only gained the rank of a *status confessionis* by being banned under Kemal Atatürk and Shah Reza Pahlavi in the 1920s. The zealotry of the Iranian mullahs is, among other things, a reaction-formation to Iran’s forced modernization under the Pahlavis. In its elements of modernization, enlightenment, and religious reform, the Jewish reformist faction was concerned with resembled what the modern Islamic states brand as “Westernizing.” The Maccabean measures against that faction have the character of a bloody counter-reformation. It is important to note here that the conflict was internal to Judaism and hence inner-religious. Through the reformers’ ties to state power, the counter-reformers had no choice but to turn themselves to violence. Zeal for God is an inner-religious phenomenon.²⁶ Originally it was directed not against the other monotheisms but against the heathens, heretics, and apostates within Judaism’s own ranks. The anti-Islamic crusades and anti-Jewish massacres of the Mediaeval period would mark the first turn against other religions.

2

To be zealous does not only mean being ready to kill; it also means being ready to die. Murder and martyrdom belong together like two sides of a coin. As indicated above, this is the main reason we should not speak of zealots against the law. None of the people involved would have been willing to die for abandonment of the law. Assimilation has no *status confessionis*.

Martyrdom comes from the Greek noun *martys*, “witness.” Bearing witness in this context has a double meaning. On the one hand, it refers to dying while bearing witness and on the other hand, it refers to things (i.e. death) to which ones bears witness. Martyrs bear witness to the pre-eminent truth and validity of their belief or law by preferring death to renouncing either. Regarding bearing witness to their martyrdom, in the Talmud we find the stipulation that in the case of

²⁶ I note in passing that as his title reveals, Peter Sloterdijk does not recognize the introverted nature of zeal for God in his book *Gottes Eifer: Vom Kampf der drei Monotheismen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2007).

forced conversion martyrdom is only to be incurred if at least ten Jews are present to witness the act; otherwise conversion is to be preferred (BT *Shabbat* 130a).²⁷ In addition only three of the 613 commandments and interdictions have the highest *status confessionis* requiring martyrdom: murder, fornication, and idolatry. Those forced to commit any of these things should rather suffer death. Practically, however, the sole matter at issue here is idolatry, understood to include the eating of pork and the abjuration of faith. The Hebrew expression for martyrdom, *kiddush ha-shem*, literally means "the sanctification of the name." Its opposite is *chillul ha-Shem*, "profanation of the name." As Verena Lenzen has indicated, the idea of the name's sanctification forms the central meaning of Judaism as a religion; it also plays a prominent role in the Christian *Lord's Prayer*. It is clear that for the most part, Christians no longer think of martyrdom in this context; but according to Lenzen, in Judaism as well, the focus is not only on dying but on living: on life as devotion, the question of martyrdom only arising when, in the context of persecution of the pious, a choice is posed between *kiddush ha-shem* and *hillul ha-shem*. In Christianity, just as martyrdom stands under the sign of the cross, it also stands under the sign of *aqedat Yizhak*, the binding of Isaac, for that scene formed the antitype or pre-figuration of Christ's crucifixion. Abraham and Isaac are the original martyrs, just as Phinehas is the original zealot; but in the ancient Jewish imaginative world, the *aqedah* has an entirely different status than the scene from Num 25.

The Maccabean examples of martyrdom are narrated in 2 Macc 6 and 7 and shaped into a resplendent model of piety in 4 Macc 8–18. The two protagonists are old Eleazar (2 Macc 6:18–31; 4 Macc 6:7) and the mother Hannah and her seven sons (2 Macc 7; 4 Macc 8–18); in the latter instance, the choice is between either eating pork or willingly undergoing death by gruesome torture. The mother proceeds according to the Abrahamic model, pushing her sons towards martyrdom. For their part, the sons proceed according to the model offered by Isaac, joyfully and steadfastly submitting to the torture.²⁸ We here have historiography meant to serve as example, the two scenes being meant

²⁷ See Verena Lenzen, *Jüdisches Leben und Sterben im Namen Gottes: Studien über die Heiligung des göttlichen Namens (Kiddusch HaSchem)* (Munich: Piper, 1995), 102.

²⁸ See Aharon Agus, *The Binding of Isaac and Messiah: Law, Martyrdom, and Deliverance in Early Rabbinic Religiosity*, SUNY Series in Judaica (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988).

in a sense as beacons for Jews in periods of intense persecution. The purely literary nature of these narratives is certain; but it is possible that such cases occurred at the time (and for the first time).

3

Just as dying for God is part and parcel of zealous killing for God, dying for God comprises the idea of personal salvation. This notion is something completely new in the history of biblical religion. The Hebrew Bible knows no immortality of the soul. The realm of the dead into which all must descend is a realm distant from God. The prophet Isaiah says "For Sheol cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness" (Isa 38:18). The same idea appears repeatedly in the Psalms. Even in Sirach (*Ecclesiasticus*), written in close temporal proximity to First and Second Maccabees, we read: "Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades in place of the living who give thanks? From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased; those who are alive and well sing the Lord's praises" (Sir 17:27–28).

This changed with the Maccabees. The clearest profession of immortality and of reward and punishment in the beyond are located in the scenes of martyrdom in 2 Macc. Each of the seven sons articulates his expectation of immortality, most clearly the second: "Thou dost dispatch us from this life, but the King of the world shall raise us up, who have died for his laws, and revive us to life everlasting." (2 Macc 7:9). The fourth son puts it thus: "Tis meet for those who perish at men's hands to cherish hope divine that they shall be raised up by God again" (7:14), and the youngest thus: "These our brothers, after enduring a brief pain, have now drunk of everflowing life, in terms of God's covenant, but thou shalt receive by God's judgment the just penalty of thine arrogance" (7:36). According to the traditional biblical conception, God's promises are fulfilled within history, as the generations unfold, not in the beyond. But for the martyr, whose self-sacrifice represents the highest imaginable deed, such distant historical fulfillment is not acceptable. In the martyr's case, the deficiency of meaning within this life is experienced as so unsustainable that it sends forth a command for immediate fulfillment. Maintaining a sense of God's justice here means believing in a beyond where the martyrdom will be rewarded. From this time onward, the idea that martyrs immediately enter paradise took on strength within Judaism. At the time of Jesus,

the Pharisees already generally believed in immortality, the Sadducees rejecting the idea as they had before.

The emergence of the ideas of martyrdom and immortality is interwoven with the arrival of apocalypticism,²⁹ understood as both a literary genre and a perspective on the world, which we can define as an absolute and impatient expectation of the end of the present world and the coming of a new world. The earliest apocalyptic text is the Book of Daniel, written circa 165 B.C.E., hence in the middle of the Maccabean crisis, which appears to be referred to repeatedly. We see then, that in the context of persecution, Jewish messianism, the expectation of a salvational king at the end of history, is converted into apocalypticism, the expectation of an imminent end of the world. In light of that imminent end, the apocalypticists warn, prepare yourselves for the world to come. Two paths lead there – the patient path of law and the immediate path of martyrdom, martyrs being directly redeemed into the coming world. This defines the great temptation of martyrdom. Martyrs and zealots are apocalypticists. Suffering from the weight of this world, they place all their hopes on the coming world (Hebrew, *ha-olam ha-ba*). For this reason, since the time of its emergence, apocalypticism has been a typical religious form among oppressed peoples and social strata. Persecution, martyrdom, and apocalypticism (or the expectation of the imminent end) are also closely connected in Christianity. Apocalypticism is a central element of the phenomena that coalesced for the first time during the Maccabean Period and can be seen today as well in acts of Islamistic Fundamentalism. This linkage is eloquently encapsulated in the title of a recent film directed by Hany Abu-Assad, “Paradise Now!”

4

We have arrived now at the fourth and fifth phenomena manifest in the “Maccabean complex”: religious warfare under the sign of scriptural fulfillment.³⁰ This phenomenon was itself historically unprecedented.

²⁹ *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and in the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr, 1983).

³⁰ In chapter two of this book, Kai Trampedach very accurately summarizes the elements involved in holy war as follows: 1) the killing of apostates and heathens; 2) the destruction of pagan places of worship, 3) the justification and interpretation of the actions by recourse to holy texts.

Religious wars are waged for the sake of correct belief and its triumph on earth, typically with appeal to a holy text. The end of the Maccabean campaigns was marked by the founding of the first theonomic Jewish state: the theocracy that Josephus praised as a specific Jewish accomplishment.³¹ This is what the Maccabees strived for and what distinguishes their actions from those characterizing an ordinary resistance movement or guerilla war and renders them so similar to those of the modern jihadists. Religious wars are civil wars. They are not aimed primarily at conquest, power, and enrichment, but at the political realization of divine will. Central to this aim, above all, is the idea of purity, a “puritan” element already emerging very markedly with the Maccabees.³² What they were engaged in was a form of religious cleansing, which for them included not only purifying the temple but also the forced circumcision of Jews who had partly assimilated into the *koinos bios*.

Beyond that, it included the annihilation of those Jews who had assimilated fully: if we are to believe the account in 1 Maccabees, Judas Maccabeus eradicated entire Jewish cities that had accepted complete Hellenization. He waged his war – and here we arrive at the last phenomenon in the Maccabean complex, the fulfillment of Scripture – according to a sort of holy screenplay, the laws of war stipulated in the twentieth chapter of Deuteronomy. We there find a distinction between normal warfare and exterminatory warfare. Normal rules of war apply to distant cities and anticipate their subjugation or conquest, with the male population killed and the women and children enslaved in the case of conquest.³³ In contrast, Canaanite cities, that is, those that

³¹ See Hubert Cancik, “Theokratie und Priesterherrschaft: Die mosaische Verfassung bei Flavius Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.157–198” in *Theokratie*, ed. Jacob Taubes, vol. 3, Religionstheorie und politische Theologie (Munich-Paderborn: Fink, 1987), 65–77.

³² See article by Kai Trampedach in this volume.

³³ “When you draw near to a town to fight against it, offer it terms of peace. If it accepts your terms of peace and surrenders to you, then all the people in it shall serve you at forced labor. If it does not submit to you peacefully, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it; and when the Lord your God gives it into your hand, you shall put all its males to the sword. You may, however, take as your booty the women, the children, livestock, and everything else in the town, all its spoil. You may enjoy the spoil of your enemies, which the Lord your God has given you. Thus you shall treat all the towns that are very far from you, which are not towns of the nations here.” (Deut 20:10–15).

are heathen, are meant to be anathematized.³⁴ This means that nothing living is to be left alive and no booty is to be taken, but everything is to be burnt. The same ban [*herem*] has to be applied to cities that have abandoned the law and had once again taken up Canaanite mores.³⁵ But the actual target of the biblical polemic is not "alien" heathenry, in other words Egypt or Babylonia, but rather Canaan heathenry in the land of Israel. Present in the stipulations regarding how to act with the Canaanites is the same puritanism that Judas Maccabeus would practice: no alliances are allowed, no marriages, indeed no sparing of life; what is mandated is annihilation of the heathen holy places,³⁶ which represent a trap, a source of temptation, incitement, even contagion: "They shall not live in your land, or they will make you sin against me; for if you worship their gods, it will surely be a snare to you" (Ex 23:31ff. here 32–33.). In plain words, this amounts to the following principle: you shall annihilate heathenry within your own ranks. In this manner, Judas Maccabeus already saw the emerging Torah as the highly compulsory codification of God's will, to be carried out with all the strength one had. This represents, I would argue, a fundamentalist principle strongly evident in Maccabean ideology.

³⁴ "But as for the towns of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them – the Hittites and the Ammorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites – just as the Lord your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things that they do for their gods, and you thus sin against the Lord your God." (Deut 20:15–18).

³⁵ "If you hear it said about one of the towns that the Lord your God is giving you to live in, that scoundrels from among you have gone out and led the inhabitants of the town astray, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods,' whom you have not known, then you shall inquire and make a thorough investigation. If the charge is established that such an abhorrent thing has been done among you, you shall put the inhabitants of that town to the sword, utterly destroying it and everything in it – even putting its livestock to the sword. All of its spoil you shall gather into its public square; then burn the town and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. It shall remain a perpetual ruin, never to be rebuilt. Do not let anything devoted to destruction stick to your hand, so that the Lord may turn from his fierce anger and show you compassion, and in his compassion multiply you, as he swore to your ancestors, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God by keeping all his commandments that I am commanding you today, doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God." (Deut 13:13–19).

³⁶ "You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree. Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles with fire, and hew down the idols of their gods, and thus blot out their name from their places." (Deut 12:2–3).

The idea of fulfilling scripture not only steered the Maccabees' active zealotry but the passive variety as well, their readiness for martyrdom. This readiness is, to be sure, not expressed in the Maccabean texts themselves, but is confirmed later in a midrash on the lamentations of Jeremiah written in the Talmudic period. Here the sons go to their deaths accompanied by a verse from the Torah (Exodus and Deuteronomy) referring to the first commandment, that of absolute fidelity to God. The youngest son is drawn into a long conversation about religion by the emperor, who wishes to save him; in that context the youth introduces no less than eighteen scriptural passages. We here find a third element joining the spirit of heroic sacrifice and absolute fidelity: a total interiorization of Scripture. We might here speak, with Thomas Mann, of a "citational life," or rather citational death: the sealing of a life led in fulfillment of Scripture with a scriptural citation in the face of death.³⁷

In all of its various motifs and facets, the unique coalescence of religious phenomena on the Maccabean Period is rooted in the idea of an exclusionary monotheism that took on its normative contours in the period of religious and social delimitation in the Hellenistic Era, basing itself on a corpus of holy writing elevated into a canon. Both as historical events and in their literary shaping, the Maccabean wars would have not been conceivable without the idea of the canon as a codification of divine will. They would also not have been possible without the idea of a monotheistic *theology of will* demanding fidelity, obedience, and practical attentiveness extending into all realms of life in return for a salvational promise. But does this mean, inversely, that monotheism is inconceivable without the new Maccabean ideology? Was violence the necessary, unavoidable, and logical consequence of monotheism?

Such a conclusion, it seems to me, should be emphatically rejected. Already the rabbis made considerable efforts to suppress this ideology, which had gained enormous momentum during the Jewish wars in the time of Vespasian and Titus (e.g. the Sicarii) and which later, during the Bar Kochba revolt, had cost countless human lives.³⁸ The

³⁷ *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:16, cited in Aharon Agus, *The Binding of Isaac and the Messiah*, 17–20. Mann uses the expression "zitathafte Leben" in his essay Thomas Mann, "Freud und die Zukunft," in *idem*, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. IX, (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1974), 478–501.

³⁸ Richard A. Horsley, "The Sicarii: Ancient Jewish 'Terrorists,'" *The Journal of Religion* 59, no. 4 (1979): 435–458.

Maccabean books were not taken into the canon, the account of Josephus slipped into oblivion, and at times rabbis contemplated imbuing the Festival of Chanukah with another meaning. Maccabean ideology is highly ambivalent. It had its moment during the persecutions under Antiochus IV, Trajan, and Hadrian, and the heroes and martyrs emerging from those conflicts merit the highest admiration; but the ideational complex first manifest in the Maccabean books neither suits our age nor the essence of monotheistic religions. It presumes the monotheistic idea but does not necessarily follow from it.³⁹

In conclusion, I would like to again emphasize that the characteristic linkage of motifs and ideas first emerging historically in connection with the Maccabean wars was not a real category of historical memory. Well into the modern period, the Maccabees, together with what Katell Berthelot chose to term their “ideology,” were in fact no living part of either Christian or Jewish memory.⁴⁰ They were of course always celebrated in the Chanukah festival, but their victory and valor, while acknowledged and pedagogically transmitted as important in preventing a vanishing of Judaism into the Hellenistic world, was given less celebratory weight than the miracle of the oil. With the emergence of secular, Zionist-oriented Jewry, the Maccabees, together with the fall of the Massada fortress, were in a sense re-endowed with an important mnemo-historical role. But where Jews now mainly view the Maccabees as heroes, and Christians view them often as martyrs, sometimes as champions of faith, they have not been connected to the complex of zealotry, martyrdom, salvational hope, and “fundamentalist” adherence to Scripture pointed to in these pages: a complex that continues to make itself manifest in our present age.

³⁹ On the connection between monotheism and violence see Jan Assmann, *Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt: Vortrag im Alten Rathaus am 17. November 2004*, vol. 116, Wiener Vorlesungen im Rathaus (Vienna: Picus-Verlag, 2006) and the book's critical evaluation in Hans G. Kippenberg, *Gewalt als Gottesdienst: Religionskriege im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (Munich: Beck, 2008). Kippenberg's summary: “There is a connection between monotheism and violence; but it must be considered a contingent connection: it is neither necessary nor impossible.” (p. 22) This, in any event, corresponds to my own frequently published argument. The crucial point in my view is to once and for all block this contingent connection. See also the collection *Religion, Politik und Gewalt: Kongressband des XII. Europäischen Kongresses für Theologie 18.–22. September 2005 in Berlin*, ed. Friedrich Schweitzer, vol. 29, Veröffentlichungen der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft für Theologie (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2006).

⁴⁰ Katell Berthelot, “L'idéologie maccabéenne: Entre idéologie de la résistance armée et idéologie du martyr,” *Revue des Études Juives* 165/1–2 (2006): 99–122.