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THE PHARISEES IN THE RELIGIOUS SCENE



A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity



by

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and utter. The Pharisees questioned Jesus' authority and
condemned His teaching as directed against the sacred Torah.

CHAPTER I

PHARISAISM: A RELIGIOUS PHENOMENON

It is not possible to make a study of primitive Christianity and the environment in which it grew, without coming into early contact with Pharisaism. One quickly becomes aware of a vigorous movement, the influence of which was quite disproportionately great to the numbers who openly and actively espoused it; reaching out, as it did, far beyond the boundaries of its own membership.

It becomes evident also that Pharisaism was a movement constantly involved in conflict--a fact which possibly accounts, to some extent at least, for its vigour. Within the confines of the Judaism in which it developed it had from the beginning met with opposition from other elements. On the other hand, Pharisaism set itself in opposition to those religious movements which found falsehood and danger in the doctrines and ideals it propounded. Our Lord, early in His ministry, found Pharisees among His most determined opponents. In the years of its infancy, it was the Pharisees who made the most persistent attempts to destroy the Christian Church. The early Christian writings make it quite evident that the struggle between Pharisaism and Christianity was determined and bitter. The Pharisees questioned Jesus' authority and condemned His teaching as directed against the sacred Torah.

He, on the other hand, called them "hypocrites"¹ and "blind leaders of the blind."² The early leaders of the Church attacked the legalism of the Pharisees; and the Pharisees retaliated by putting them out of the synagogues and persecuting them. Paul, the ex-Pharisee, preached the Crucified Christ, and speedily found himself locked in combat with Pharisaic elements wherever he went.

And the end is not yet. Odeberg states that the great fathers of the Church always emphasized that Pharisaism

is not something that can be combined with Christianity, but something that, if it is permitted to extend its influence, will work as a deadly poison which is bound to destroy the Christian life;³

and he points out quite correctly that, in spite of this, "Christianity has repeatedly been in danger of incorporating Pharisaical lines of thought . . ." into itself.³

Hence, Pharisaism was a movement that cannot be ignored in any study of the religious scene of that age when our Lord brought His message to the world.

While--perhaps, just because--the picture of the Pharisee that emerges from the literature of Primitive

¹Matt. 23:13.

²Matt. 15:14.

³Hugo Odeberg, Pharisaism and Christianity, trans. by J. M. Moe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 7.

Christianity, particularly from the New Testament, does little justice to him, there have been many attempts in recent years to paint the picture in different, generally more glowing colours. Some have concentrated on defending the Pharisee. Others have preferred to condemn Jesus and the early Church as uncharitable and over-critical. Still others have tried to prove that no real cause of conflict existed; that basically Christianity and Pharisaism are one. Thus the issue has become somewhat confused.

The purpose of this thesis is to clarify some of the issues; to portray Pharisaism as it really was; and to determine its place in the religious scene. The subject will be considered with respect to the rise of Pharisaism, its theology, and its influence upon and place in human relations. One premise is accepted from the outset: Pharisaism was essentially a religious movement.

¹ W. E. Gladstone, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (London: S. & S. Clark, 1886), sub *Pharisees*.

² W. E. Gladstone, *Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method* (London: S. & S. Clark & Sons, 1912), p. 45.

CHAPTER II

THE PHARISEES: A PRODUCT OF THEIR RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

Appearance on the Jewish Scene

The name "Pharisee" is derived from the Hebrew verb פָּרַשׁ, to divide, or separate. The "Perushim" were a group divided from their fellows. Essentially this was a separation on religious and moral grounds by certain Jews, who, in particular directions, abstained from practices that were generally common, with respect to diet, ritual purity and the like.¹ However, the name also came to indicate the division that existed between the two influential groups of the days of our Lord--the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It is probably in the struggle between these two groups that the name was ultimately given. Herford states that the name persisted just so long as the Sadducees existed, and fell into disuse after the fall of Jerusalem and the disappearance of the Sadducees. Then, to all intents and purposes, Pharisaism became identical with Judaism.² It is certain that during the period when this struggle

¹J. H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), sub φάρισαῖος.

²R. T. Herford, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1912), p. 45.

developed the name was given; and, while they did not choose it for themselves, resented it somewhat, and preferred such names as "Haberim," companions, colleagues, they did come to wear it as a badge of honor, indicating that they had been separated from the wicked Sadducees.

The Pharisees were then a strict, religious, legalistic society of Jews who appeared after the Exile, and who separated themselves from their less strict fellow-Jews for a definite purpose and programme of religious observance. They pledged themselves to follow a precisely prescribed way of life, which, they believed, would enable them to observe faithfully the will of Jehovah. By dress, custom and observances they gave evidence that they had separated themselves from others in order to give themselves "to the study of the law, and an extra-ordinary devotion to God and sanctity of life beyond all other men."³ Certainly there was considerable variation within the group itself. Yet there was a general similarity of religious thought; and they shared certain basic principles on account of which they separated themselves. Therefore all are grouped under the title "Pharisee."

The act of separation from their fellow-Jews was a deliberate and purposeful act for which the Pharisees

³T. H. Horne, Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (11th edition; London: Longman & Roberts, 1860), III, 391.

themselves were primarily responsible. That at a certain point in their historical development others caused them to separate into a distinct and clearly recognizable group to which they gave a specific name, was in reality a reaction to their own course of conduct over a long period of time. And even then it is quite conceivable that this would not have occurred had not a particular set of historical circumstances forced the issue.

Unlike the Sadducees, who drew their membership almost exclusively from the aristocratic and priestly classes, the Pharisees were prepared to receive members from almost any tribe, family or class,⁴ who would promise in the presence of three members to remain true to the laws governing the association.⁵ The number of full members never appears to have been large. Josephus states that at his time there were about six thousand pledged members.⁶ In addition, however, there were always many other Jews, who, while not prepared to take their pledge, recognized their authority and followed their lead.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Hon. Edward T. B. Twisleton, "Pharisees," Dictionary of the Bible edited by Wm. Smith (Albemarle St.: John Murray, 1863).

⁶Flavius Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews, trans. by Wm. Whiston (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1871), XVII. 2 4.

There is no reference to the Pharisees prior to the reign of John Hyrcanus I (135-105 B.C.). By then, however, they had become a strong influential party, enjoying the patronage of the ruling family.⁷ That they appeared on the scene with somewhat dramatic suddenness as a powerful, well-organized party argues forcibly for much earlier beginnings. It is generally accepted that their origin must be sought in the events following immediately upon the Exile.⁸ The reaction to the experiences of the Exile gave a certain direction to the religious thinking of the returning Jews. This was crystallized by later events, particularly those connected with the rise of the Maccabees; and, as a result, Pharisaism emerged as a distinct and influential movement.

Factors contributing to the Rise of the Pharisees

The Pharisees were reactionaries, struggling against elements they saw as threats to Judaism; determined that what had happened should not occur again. In this reactionary atmosphere two factors can be recognized as contributing more than any others to the development of Pharisaism. The first was a new reverence for Jehovah and His Torah.

⁷Adam Fahling, The Life of Christ (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1936), p. 45.

⁸Thayer, sub *φορισαῖος*.

The second was the internal clash with liberal elements in which Pharisaism found its identity as a separate movement.

The New Reverence for Jehovah and His Torah

The Story of the Pharisee is the story of the newly-emerging Jew returning from the Exile. From the experience of the Exile emerged a person very different from the one who entered it. H. E. Dana rightly calls the Jews a "renovated people." They were now concerned with three objectives. First, they were determined to pursue the nationalistic aims of promoting the theocratic state--Jehovah's own provision for their physical and spiritual well-being. Secondly, they were resolved to be faithful to the Torah and thus to promote the theocratic state. Thirdly, they dedicated themselves to a new reverence for the priesthood as the focal point around which the nation could once more unite--the heart of the theocratic state.⁹ Jerusalem became the hub of this new Jewish world, including the world of the Diaspora. Babylon, Alexandria, indeed, became important centres of Judaism; but none could displace Jerusalem, for here was the temple, Jehovah's shrine.

The Jew returned from Babylon with a new awareness of

⁹H. E. Dana, The New Testament World (Third edition revised; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), pp. 67-75.

what he had almost lost--the divine covenant. Much more meaningful became Jehovah's promise: "I . . . will be your God, and ye shall be my people."¹⁰ He saw himself as a divinely chosen citizen of the theocratic state and, therefore, as the object of special divine favour.

But a prerequisite to the restoration of the covenant relation was the reassembling of the nation in its ancient home, its Holy Land. Here, the nation would once more dedicate itself to Jehovah and His Torah. Thus the theocratic state, Israel's special destiny, would be re-established. To achieve this was the aim of the returning Jews. Here is the motive behind their struggles to return and to restore the ancient way of life; the seed of that nationalism that sometimes rose to heights of the most extreme fanaticism, and made the Jews one of the most difficult nations to control. The foreign over-lord was a hindrance to the development of the theocratic state; and, therefore, a servant of the Evil One, to be resisted to the death, if necessary.¹¹

These nationalistic ideals were inseparably bound up with religious tenets. The theocratic state was Jehovah's gift to His Chosen people. But the enjoyment of it was conditioned by faithful observance of the Torah; and the

¹⁰Lev. 26:12.

¹¹Dana, p. 68.

external evidence of its existence was the temple and its ritual as administered by the priesthood.¹² Thus the new Jewish spirit of nationalism was intrinsically a religious phenomenon.

While it was a chastened nation that returned to Jerusalem desiring earnestly to uphold the Torah, it might well have lapsed back into paganism had it not been for the zeal and influence of one man. Ezra, the Scribe, was primarily responsible for gathering the nation around the Torah and making it the motivating power of the Jewish way of life.

When Ezra first visited Jerusalem eighty years after the return of the first exiles he was horrified to find conditions deteriorating rapidly to the pre-exilic state. The people were spiritually apathetic; crushed and dispirited by the difficulties they had to face; uninspired by aim or purpose. Indiscriminate association with neighbouring nations had helped to bring about the Exile. Now the same conditions were threatening the restoration of the theocratic state. Ezra set to work energetically to alter the situation. His programme was a two-fold one. He reminded the nation that the Torah is Jehovah's revelation of His will, and that it is incumbent upon every Jew to observe it.

¹²Dana, p. 67f.

In the second place, he proceeded to remove the evil pagan influence that was proving so harmful, requiring the people to separate themselves completely from non-Jewish elements into a "closed corporation."¹³ In this way he aimed to preserve them from their former folly and give them an opportunity, undisturbed by outside influences, to follow the way of the Torah.

Harsh, uncompromising his measures certainly were; but they were mightily effective. He saved Judaism in its hour of crisis. He set a goal before his people, and provided them with a spiritual motivation that made them ready to die, if necessary, in the attempt to reach it.¹⁴ The Jew became a man of the Torah.

To promote his aims Ezra encouraged the establishment and development of two institutions which, to the present day, have influenced Jewish life most powerfully. These were the Scribe and the Synagogue.

Scholars disagree as to the origins of the scribes; but they are mentioned as far back as the days of the Judges.¹⁵

¹³ Herford, Pharisaism, p. 10.

¹⁴ R. T. Herford, The Pharisees (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924), pp. 18f.

¹⁵ 2 Sam. 8:17; 20:25.

The name given to them-- 750¹⁶--indicates that they were men of some learning and ability. Probably they were originally scribes in the literal sense; but, because of their ability, were early selected for positions of trust and responsibility. It is quite plausible to assume that their services were employed for the copying of the Torah, and that they gradually came to be regarded as authorities with respect to it.

In the period of the Exile, when the reawakened nation, deprived of its temple and its ritual, was seeking a way to give expression to its devotion, these scribes became increasingly important in the religious scene, so that eventually they came to be recognized as the official teachers. By the time of the return from Babylon the religious significance of their duties had begun to take precedence, and the scribe became a permanent feature of Jewish religious life; being so thoroughly incorporated with it that the priesthood which, not without reason, claimed the teaching prerogative never regained it. Henceforth, the office of the priest became restricted more and more to the ritual; while the scribe became the teacher.¹⁷

¹⁶ from 750, to write.

¹⁷ Substantiation for this line of reasoning is found in the fact that Ezra himself is spoken of by that time as "a ready scribe in the law of Moses . . ." (Ezra 7:6).

Ezra gave a definite direction to the profession of the scribe, so that he came to fit more and more snugly into the pattern of life which the great leader had initiated for his people. Encouraged to devote himself to the instruction of the nation in the Torah, he became a recognized student and interpreter; the authority who was expected to determine in difficult cases "how . . . the divine command was to be fulfilled."¹⁸

Dana declares that the scribe was the chief agent for moulding Jewish thought, and so, Jewish character.¹⁹ He is right. Living with the people instead of in the isolation of the temple, he became the guide to whom the common man looked for spiritual help, and eventually he came to wield much of the spiritual authority that had once been the exclusive right of the priest.²⁰

It was the scribe who gave to the Synagogue, the second post-Exilic institution of note, its important place in the Jewish way of life.

The Synagogue²¹ was the local Jewish community

¹⁸Herford, Pharisaism, p. 17.

¹⁹Dana, p. 73.

²⁰Henry Hart Milman, The History of the Jews (fourth edition; London: John Murray, 1866), II, 411.

²¹From *בְּרַיְוֹ*, I bring together; *בְּרַיְוֹ*, an assembly.

gathered together to practise its religion through worship and instruction. Scholars generally agree that it had its origin in Babylon.²² Certainly the conditions were ideal. The Jew had lost the temple, and that loss was a calamity.

Herford remarks:

While the temple stood, the Jew, wherever he lived, knew that the worship of the God of Israel was being offered in the ancient sanctuary, on behalf of and in the name of all the people.²³ With the Exile that assurance came to an end.

It is not unthinkable that under such circumstances earnest Jews would meet for mutual comfort and encouragement; and that such meetings would gradually become organized as they grew in popularity, until the regular institution was established by which the Jews sought to preserve the remnants of their heritage, to commune with God, and to receive instruction in His Torah from the men who later became their scribes. Certainly, a well-established institution was transplanted into Palestine by the returning Jews. The Synagogue became their meeting place, the centre of their communal life, the place to which they came to worship, to pray and to study the Torah.

The Synagogue was ideally suited to Ezra's programme

²²Herford, The Pharisees, pp. 89-92, lists many telling arguments of the origin of the Synagogue in the Exile.

²³Ibid. p. 89.

of reform, and he made full use of it. Herford draws attention to the fact that just at this time the Synagogue became a highly esteemed institution, and that its influence has never waned. He remarks that

although, as long as the temple stood, that was regarded as the most sacred shrine and most glorious embodiment, or rather culmination, of the national religion, yet the religion of the Torah learned to do without the temple, but it never dreamed of doing without the Synagogue.²⁴

And here the scribe reigned supreme, influencing the life of the common man in a way the priest never could do. The Synagogue, then, has been primarily responsible for moulding Judaism into the form it possessed in the days of our Lord, and which it possesses today.²⁵

From the time of Ezra the Jew became a man apart: God's man; His servant, a subject in His kingdom; the chosen recipient of His blessings and of His special care. He was a man of the Torah: dedicated to observe it; centering his life about the Synagogue; bowing to the authority of the scribe. Moved by this new reverence for the Torah and for his citizenship in the theocratic state, which faithful

²⁴Herford, Pharisaism, pp. 30f.

²⁵Whatever the priest may have become, the temple ritual was completely a demonstration, a type, of the promise of the Messiah. Is the emphasis of the Synagogue, somewhat at the expense of the implications of the temple ritual, the reason why Judaism became a religion of law rather than promise? It is probable.

observance of the Torah guaranteed, he strove to be separate to the greatest possible degree from pagan influences.

But the Synagogue was, after all, a local institution. It did, indeed, foster the ideals common to the nation, but it did so within the limits of the particular locality. The focus of Judaism, the unifying influence, the magnetic force that held the nation together was the temple with its priesthood. So it had always been; and it is understandable that the returning exiles gathered about their priests to rebuild their national and religious life. This was the institution in which man came to God with his sins and God came to man with His forgiveness; man came to God with his petitions, and God came to man with His blessings; man came to God for instruction, and God came to man with the revelation of His wisdom, through the teachers He had chosen to impart it. The temple and the priesthood had always been a symbol of Israel's relation to Jehovah, and of the fellowship of His people with each other. So it was to be after the Exile. But events moved in a different direction. A study of post-Exilic history reveals that, while the nation was apparently gathered around the priesthood, in actual fact the priest and the common man no longer knew one another. The priesthood had ceased to make any appreciable impact upon the religious life of the nation, and was no more a unifying influence. Here lies an important reason for

the ultimate destruction of the theocratic state.

It is in this environment that Pharisaism developed, though there is no evidence that an organized party existed prior to the reign of John Hyrcanus I. Pharisees were part of that nation-wide movement to restore the theocratic state. Convinced that success could only follow upon faithfulness to the Torah, they exhibited a deep reverence for it. Consequently, they were, from the outset, closely associated with the Synagogue, rather than with the Temple. It was an institution that suited admirably their temperament, their beliefs and their aims.²⁶ That is why we usually find the Pharisees aligned with the scribes rather than with the priests; although a complete identification must not be made. Not all scribes were Pharisees; nor were all Pharisees scribes. The Gospels frequently distinguish between them,²⁷ and some of the criticisms passed upon the Pharisees by scribes are more trenchant than any that came from the mouth of our Lord.²⁸ Generally, however, the two stood side by side; and their beliefs were so similar that

²⁶ Herford, The Pharisees, pp. 97-100.

²⁷ Luke 7:30; 14:3; 11:44, int. al.

²⁸ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah (New American edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Erdmanns Publishing Company, 1947), I, 312 lists examples.

rabbinic literature gives a very faithful picture of Pharisaism as it was in the days of our Lord. It was the religious persuasion of the great majority of those who occupied the office of scribe. The scribe was the theorist of the Torah while the Pharisee was the practitioner.²⁹ The office of the scribe was the instrument that enabled the Pharisees to gain such effective control over the religious thinking and acting of the nation.

At the same time, the Pharisees did wish to be loyal to the priesthood, the unifying factor of the nation. Earnestly and honestly they sought in their local communities and in the homes to engage in the common, holy task of the nation by supporting and furthering the aims and ideals of Judaism inherent in the temple. The priest was regarded as the divinely appointed minister; the scribe, as his lay helper. The temple was the symbol and centre of worship; the Synagogue, the institution of instruction.³⁰ The temple was the altar, the Synagogue the hearth, as Herford says, "and the sacred fire burnt on each of them."³¹ The parting of the ways came when the temple ceased to be true to the

²⁹F. Sieffert, "Pharisees and Sadducees," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. by Samuel MacAuley Jackson (New York & London: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1911)

³⁰Dana, p. 108.

³¹Herford, The Pharisees, p. 89.

national ideal. To join them in the crassest form of id-

There is no evidence that the formation of a separate and clearly defined party was ever intended. Within the nation there was a certain variation of opinion. Some Jews were stricter than others. Some were conservative; others, more liberal in their outlook. Some were concerned with the Torah; others took a greater interest in the nationalistic aims of the nation. Some believed that the Jews could realize these aims only through a complete submission to Jehovah's will as revealed in the Torah; others believed that the nation could not separate itself entirely from the world about it, and that the future of the theocratic state was somehow bound up with it. But just in these differences lay the germ of those dissensions which brought about the disastrous division that split Judaism into two parties of bitterly opposed to each other. This division seems to have begun about the third century B.C., and to have developed from a clash between opposing elements with differing aims and ideals. favour and advancement lay through its adoption.

Ultimate Identity established in clash with liberal Elements. Some of the nation were not disposed to allow their devotion

In the first place, this was a clash with pagan influences; and the principle threat came from Hellenism. The Exile had been God's punishment meted out to His people because they had been too ready to associate with the nations

round about and to join them in the crassest forms of idolatry. Much more subtle was the threat that faced them when Alexander the Great included Palestine in his newly-won Empire. Palestine, too, was included in his plan to impose the Hellenistic culture upon his world. It was not designed to be--and, generally, it was not--a harsh policy. Through familiarity and example rather than by any show of force the people were to be weaned away from their native cultures and encouraged to adopt that of their overlords.

Generally the policy was successful; but in Palestine it struck opposition. Naturally, the laxer, more liberal elements, those more materialistically inclined, were prepared to make concessions, and to accept, to a greater or lesser extent, the Hellenistic way of life. The aristocratic Sadducees, so closely connected with the government of the land and so closely identified with the temple were the most profoundly influenced of all the Jews, since, as Herford shows, Hellenism was the culture of the court, and the road to favour and advancement lay through its adoption. Hence, those who were most concerned with the political affairs of the nation were not disposed to allow their devotion to the Torah to restrict their freedom in furthering the political interests of their people.³²

³²Herford, The Pharisees, p. 28.

Though Hellenism exerted its greatest influence over the nobility, the greater portion of the nation was affected at least to some degree. Eventually it became so widespread that it "threatened the very existence of Judaism."³³

Gradually three separate trends became discernible in the pattern of Judaism. On the left were the Hellenists, strongly represented in the priesthood and the aristocracy, who developed into the Sadducean party. In the centre was the great mass of the people of various classes, influenced to a greater or lesser extent, yet remaining faithful to the Torah. On the extreme right were the conservatives, opposed to every form of Hellenism. These became known as the Chasidim, the righteous. To this party the scribes generally belonged; and they were the fore-runners of the Pharisees.

The faithful core that championed the Torah, unflinchingly loyal to the ancestral faith, the Chasidim opposed the liberal elements in the nation, since they saw even in the mildest forms of Hellenism a threat to the traditional faith and the promotion of the theocratic state.³⁴

Under Macedonian and Egyptian rule the activity of

³³Herford, Pharisaism, pp. 34-37.

³⁴Ibid, p. 37f.

the Chasidim was little more than a mild reaction to the prevailing Hellenistic spirit, which was influencing more and more people. However, when the Seleucids began with fanatical enthusiasm to force Hellenism upon the reluctant and resisting Jews, opposition grew until it burst into the open violence of the Maccabean revolt. The Chasidim, until then a rather loosely knit body of men with similar ideals, became united into a resistance movement of formidable strength that came to wield tremendous influence as the conflict grew in bitterness and intensity. In the alliance of the Chasidim with the Maccabeans the Seleucids found themselves facing a truly formidable body of solid opposition.

The Chasidim are not to be identified with the Maccabean party. They would have been quite content to live under the rule of the Seleucids provided they had been allowed to practise their religion undisturbed. The Maccabees, also staunch adherents of Judaism, especially in the earlier years, were not so minded. Herford writes correctly,

Mattathias rebelled because the royal power was being used to undermine the national religion, and he wished to throw off the royal power. He would not have been content with permission to practise his religion undisturbed . . . he would have the Jews free to serve God, independent of any permission from a foreign ruler."³⁵

³⁵Ibid., p. 39.

That is why the Chasidim laid down arms as soon as success had been achieved, while the Maccabees continued the struggle until one of them ascended the throne. So serious were these differences that they eventually brought the two parties into opposition.

It is not surprising that the Chasidim became early supporters of the Maccabees. Both were champions of the Torah, supporters of the theocratic state; both out to destroy Hellenism. The alliance of the two virtually meant a united Judea. Nor is it surprising that they parted again. When the Chasidim, satisfied with the victory that had been gained, saw that the Maccabees were not willing to make peace, they realized that the aims of the Maccabees were not identical with their own. Now it became apparent how powerful and influential the Chasidim had become. They were able to defy both the pro-pagan Hellenists and the politically ambitious Maccabees; and neither could ignore them.

From this time relations became more and more strained until the alliance became, on the part of the Chasidim at least, little more than an expedient arrangement to enable them to carry on the struggle against Hellenism. From time to time relations improved; but, from the moment that political and ecclesiastical authority were combined in one person by Jonathan and Simon, all hope of a genuine reconciliation disappeared. The Maccabees moved towards the left

and the Chasidim towards the right. And each struggled to be the influential party in the policies of the nation.

From these events the Pharisees emerged as an organized party. The struggle for independence had ended with a Jewish prince occupying the throne. The religion of the Torah could be practised without hindrance, and was "nominally at least, the religion of all Jews, from the palace to the cottage."³⁶ Theoretically the purpose of the Chasidim had been accomplished and the name dropped out of use. But the movement did not end. The principles of the Chasidim lived on as the principles of conservative Judaism; and they had very many supporters, ready to rise in opposition to any sign of a revival of Hellenism. Then, suddenly, in the reign of John Hyrcanus I, there appeared on the religious scene a strong, active, closely knit body, holding the principles of the Chasidim, fighting the battle they fought and contending with the Hellenistic party for the favour of the rulers in the struggle to establish the theocratic state. And these were known as the Pharisees.

Whether the Pharisees were merely the Chasidim renamed or a new body that originated from them is a moot point. Davis believes they were virtually the Chasidim at a later

³⁶Ibid., p. 40.

period.³⁷ However, the events of the Maccabean wars suggest that the Chasidim were numerically stronger than the Pharisees ever were. In addition, it has to be proved that they developed a system such as was the essence of Pharisaism. The Pharisees were an off-shoot of the Chasidim, committed to the same principles. But they differed from them in this that they developed a particular religious and ethical system, which they believed to be the most satisfactory method of upholding the principles of Judaism, and which they imposed upon all who were prepared to join their group. While the old Chasidim were eventually lost in the larger body of conservative Judaism, the Pharisees, through the turn of events, came to the fore and received their distinctive name. Gradually their influence increased, and it made its impact on the Jewish national life for almost three centuries, until, in the reign of Hadrian the Jewish nation came to an end. Pharisaism, then, was the continuance of the reaction of conservative Judaism of the extreme right against the Hellenizing spirit that was leading some people away from the Torah.³⁸

³⁷ John D. Davis, A Dictionary of the Bible (Fourth revised edition, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1936-), sub Pharisees.

³⁸ Ibid.

While the fundamental reason for the rise of the Pharisees was this reaction against Hellenism, their appearance as an organized body, with a distinctive name, was due to a clash of ideals and interests within the nation itself-- between the liberal and the conservative; the priest and the scribe; the Temple and the Synagogue.

For the primary cause of the clash we must look to the rise of the scribe. Until the time of the Exile the temple was the sole director of the religious instruction of the Israelite. The priest, as the temple minister, was also the teacher. During the Exile the office of the teacher rose to prominence, and, after the return, when the priest was once more able to function, tended to remain separated. Despite his struggle to retain it, the priest saw the ministry of teaching passing gradually but surely into the hands of a class which he believed had no right to hold it. Enmity resulted, and, eventually, schism. Instead of co-operating for the well-being of the people each party tended to over-emphasize its own ministry.

The breach was widened by the difference with respect to doctrinal authority. Just when this divergence of opinion began is difficult to determine precisely. However, two sources of authority came to be recognized: the Torah, the revelation of Jehovah given to His people through Moses, and Tradition, the body of opinion built up over the years,

consisting of applications of the Torah to specific cases, and the opinions of rabbis concerning such matters on which the Torah was silent.³⁹ The Temple, while recognizing Tradition as a lawful human commentary, accepted the Torah alone as the authority for doctrine. The Synagogue, on the other hand, accepted in addition to the Torah the authority of Tradition.⁴⁰ In other words, the scribes accepted the principle of a continuously unfolding revelation.

Later another factor entered--the change in the aims and ideals of the priesthood. Instead of remaining a unifying factor, the priesthood became a disturbing influence in the Jewish national and religious life. Before the Exile the national and the religious life of the Jews, while fairly closely related, each had their separate place. After the Exile, however, the authority and power of the priesthood gradually increased.⁴¹ The secular and the religious aspect of Jewish life were identified to an increasing degree. The promotion of Judaism became a political as well as a religious ideal. The priesthood became

³⁹Infra, p. 40.

⁴⁰Kaufmann Kohler, "Pharisees," The Jewish Encyclopedia edited by Isidore Singer (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc. n.d.).

⁴¹Dana, p. 74. Dana mentions that already at the time of Zerrubabel secular authority was wielded for a time by the high-priest.

involved in a constant struggle for political power. The temple, instead of being a house of worship, became a centre of political scheming and intrigue. The symbol of national unity became the symbol of nationalism. Dana declares:

The position of high priest was debased from its exalted place of custodian of the religious life of the Hebrew people, and became the prize of carnal yearning and the object of the most disgraceful trickery and conflict.⁴²

In the period of the Maccabees the climax of infamy was reached when one person became both king and high-priest. Thus the temple was aligned more and more closely with the aristocratic elements interested in the affairs of government.

While the conservative with his firm belief in the theocratic state could not be entirely free from nationalistic ideals, he could not accept so close an identification as was now taking place. Loyalty to the Torah was the only way to promote the theocratic state. The priest and the king, while both serving it, had their specific and completely separated functions. To have a priest on the throne, and one who was not of the house of David, as was the case from the Maccabean period, was extremely obnoxious to the conservative Jew.

⁴²Ibid., p. 75.

This involvement with political aims brought the priesthood into closer contact with the outside world; for the conviction grew in the temple that the nation could not separate itself entirely from its world. In fact, there were those who believed that the nation could only achieve its divinely determined destiny in relation to other nations. Hence, when Alexander the Great conquered Palestine, the priesthood early aligned itself with the Hellenistic party and eventually came to lead it. And through this infiltration of Hellenism the priesthood lost its influence over the nation.

By the time the Seleucids took control of Palestine two clearly defined parties were locked in combat. On the one hand, there was the liberal party, seeking to establish the theocratic state by political means in association with the Hellenistic world. This was the aristocratic and priestly class, which developed into the Sadducean party and was identified with the temple. On the other hand, there was the conservative party, seeking to establish the theocratic state by devotion to the Torah, and regarding the methods of the temple as an "unpardonable compromise."⁴³ This party represented chiefly the scribes and the Chasidim, and developed into the Pharisaic party, which

⁴³Ibid., p. 117.

became identified with the Synagogue. By the time of the Maccabees the Temple and the Synagogue, which should have been united in the pursuit of their common aims and ideals, were "pitted against each other in perpetual schism."⁴⁴ Thus a dual struggle was raging. The nation was joined in combat with the foreign aggressor. At the same time the opposing parties within the nation were engaged in a bitter conflict.

While the Maccabees favoured the Chasidim the Hellenists made little headway. As the breach between them became wider, the Maccabees realized that if they were to survive and achieve their ambition they would have to seek the support of "the great families to whom belonged the chief positions of wealth and rank, especially those connected with the temple."⁴⁵ Thus the Hellenists gained the ascendancy. The conservatives became even stricter and the gulf between the parties widened.

It is generally believed that the final breach between the Maccabees and the Chasidim came in the reign of John Hyrcanus I. Certainly, from that time the Maccabees were aligned with the Hellenists rather than with the Chasidim. At this time, also, the two parties took their places in

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Herford, Pharisaism, p. 40.

history as the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Josephus records the following incident as the final cause of the rupture. Hyrcanus was giving a banquet when a Pharisee, evidently possessed of more courage than discretion, declared that the king should give up the high-priestly office and concentrate on his civil responsibilities. When asked for a reason, he replied that Hyrcanus' mother had been a captive and that this, because of its obvious implications, disqualified him legally from holding the office. Angered by this baseless rumour, Hyrcanus demanded that the slanderer be punished. When only a light sentence was imposed, he took it as an insult. The conservatives lost favour and Hyrcanus joined the Hellenists.⁴⁶ However, the dating of the incident is too uncertain for serious consideration,⁴⁷ and can hardly be admitted as the cause

⁴⁶Josephus, Antiquities, XIII, 10, 5-7.

⁴⁷G. H. Box, "Pharisees," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Edited by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930). Box states that scholars like Schuerer and Israel Friedlaender do not accept the incident as the cause of the rupture. Josephus himself declares that the reign of Hyrcanus was peaceful and happy. The Talmud (T. B. Qiddashin 66a) places the incident in the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (104-78B.C.). Friedlaender believes it fits better into this unhappy reign and writes: "The whole story points clearly to the unfortunate conditions as they existed in the time of Jannai, and when looked at in this light, the Talmudic account . . . receives its proper historical setting such as we would seek in vain in Josephus." (The Rupture between Alexander Jannaeus and the Pharisees). Box himself states that "this is probably the correct setting."

of the division at this particular time. It is more likely that the breach was not caused by any particular incident, but was an inevitable development in view of the steady movement of the Maccabees towards the Hellenists. Eventually the day arrived when all pretense was thrown away and Hyrcanus received the Hellenists to favour. Such a time, when the bitterness of defeat and the pride of victory set emotions aflame, is a time when labelling is apt to occur. It is most likely that in this way the Pharisees and Sadducees emerged as identifiable bodies.

The later history of Pharisaism carries on this pattern of conflict, with the Pharisees gradually, but surely, strengthening their influence over the masses. Though they claimed to be interested only in the religious affairs of the nation, they were not averse to wielding also political authority when given the opportunity to do so. However, their political fortunes wavered from reign to reign. But because of their powerful hold upon the masses they could never be ignored. When, at the destruction of Jerusalem the Sadducees disappeared, the Pharisees survived with the Synagogue. "The orthodox Jewish synagogue today is the historical progeny of the ancient Pharisee."⁴⁸

⁴⁸Dana, p. 87.

Pharisaism, then, was an element in the development of post-exilic Judaism. Developing "from the principle laid down by Ezra . . . the Pharisees take their place in consistent historical progression, having a strongly marked character of their own, and a very definite purpose."⁴⁹ Here was the ultra-conservative; the champion of the Torah; the guardian of the religious privileges of the people.

⁴⁹Herford, The Pharisees, pp. 15f.

This does not mean that there was no theology of Pharisaism. There was no unrestricted licence with respect to doctrine. On the contrary, there was a definite basic substratum of beliefs concerning God, the world, the God-man relationship, human relationships, virtue and vice, the nature of sin, the function of prayer and the like.³ Hence,

³K. V. Herford, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: W. P. Putnam & Sons, 1912), pp. 228-237.

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in rabbinic writings, doctrinal statements are found in
great number. But, the Pharisees never did require that
anyone should accept their views as a condition of membership.
For this reason the rabbis never attempted to con-
struct a theological system, a corpus of official teaching.

CHAPTER III

PRINCIPLES AND SOURCES OF PHARISAIC THEOLOGY

The Principles.

It is not possible to speak of a system of theology with respect to Pharisaism in the same sense as one speaks of it in connection with Christianity.¹ Strangely wedded to a rigid and narrow insistence upon the authority of the Torah was powerful urge for freedom of expression. Consequently, the Pharisees were not prepared even to accept a creed; and when Maimonides, as late as the twelfth century, framed one, many considered his action as "uncongenial to the spirit of Judaism."²

This does not mean that there was no theology of Pharisaism. There was no unrestricted licence with respect to doctrine. On the contrary, there was a definite basic substratum of beliefs concerning God, the world, the God-Man relationship, human relationships, virtue and vice, the nature of sin, the function of prayer and the like.³ Hence,

¹R. T. Herford, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1912), pp. 228-237.

²Ibid., p. 235.

³Ibid., p. 250.

in rabbinic writings, doctrinal statements are found in great number. But, the Pharisees never did require that members conform completely in their religious beliefs.⁴

For this reason the rabbis never attempted to construct a theological system, a corpus of official teaching. Nevertheless,

It is possible to observe that in Pharisaism certain beliefs were almost universally held; and thus it is possible to arrive at a presentation of Pharisaic theology which would not rest on a de facto agreement, but always with the reservation that there never was any official definition of a doctrine, to be accepted on pain of excommunication if it were rejected.⁵

This made Pharisaic theology a somewhat fluid thing. Certain elements of their common beliefs attracted some more than others, and so individuals varied considerably in the strength of conviction with which they held particular beliefs.⁶ Pharisaic theology was what the individual deduced from the Torah, even if it was inconsistent with the findings of others. This attitude, they argued, was quite logical. The Torah was given by God. Each deduction was one of many lessons, many interpretations, many meanings of the divine revelation; and this revelation was

⁴Ibid., p. 234.

⁵R. T. Herford, The Pharisees (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924), p. 148.

⁶Herford, Pharisaism, pp. 256f.

considered so sublime that it could not be exhausted by one interpretation. Even contradictory conclusions were considered to be divine truth. If a competent and recognized teacher, using legitimate methods, arrived at a particular conclusion, that conclusion was received as valid, even though at variance with the conclusion of an equally competent teacher employing the same methods.⁷

To the Pharisee personal opinions on theological questions were of no great importance. Much more important was the divine will; and the crucial question was: How can I best serve God according to it? Hence, the aim of the Pharisees was concerned primarily with the Torah, to draw from it the will of God, and, upon this foundation, to build an acceptable rule of life for the Jewish people. To apply the Torah to the practical affairs of everyday life: this was the task of the Pharisees. This aim has been well summarized in a phrase frequently found in the literature of the Rabbis: "penitence, prayer, and charity"; these 'avert the evil doom'.⁸

⁷ Ibid., p. 2238. Herford shows that the schools of Hillel and Shammai were in constant controversy; yet J. Ber. 3b says of them: "The words of each are the words of the living God."

⁸ G. H. Box, "Pharisees," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Edited by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930).

Sources of Pharisaic Theology

The Torah

It is important that it be understood from the outset that the term "Torah" is not to be restricted to "Law." It means "Teaching"--any kind of teaching. In Judaism, Torah was teaching received from Jehovah, His will and whatever else of revelation He determined to give His people.⁹ The term came to be associated with the instruction Jehovah gave through Moses and recorded in the Pentateuch. This was His revelation to His people and, therefore, their guide of life.

Ezra's great work for the Jews, says Herford, was "the establishment of the Torah of Moses as the dominating factor in the life of the Jewish people."¹⁰ The Torah as Ezra understood it was, of course, all divine teaching, all Jehovah's revelation given to the Jews to be the foundation of their faith. His programme of spiritual enlightenment envisaged that the Torah should become the dominant factor in their way of life. That the Torah might be brought to bear on the problems of Jewish life by men of experience and

⁹Herford, The Pharisees, p. 54.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 58f.

insight, he promoted the office of the scribe. Whether he wished it or not, the fact remains that his programme became the foundation upon which the Pharisaic theory of Tradition was built; for, as Herford points out, in applying the Torah to life situations the scribes gave utterance to precepts never previously taught and not expressly contained in it.¹¹ It was on the authority of such statements that the Pharisees and the Sadducees were sharply divided. The latter restricted authoritative Torah to the written text of the Pentateuch. The former maintained that interpretations and applications made by recognized teachers could legitimately be added. Hence, their concept of Torah was far broader than that of the Sadducees. It embraced the whole body of teaching: the written revelation given by Jehovah in the Pentateuch, together with the unwritten interpretations and applications which came to be known as Tradition, and which were later collected in the Talmuds. Therefore, the Pharisee, observing the precepts of his brotherhood, believed that he was obeying the Torah and serving Jehovah even when those precepts went beyond the Pentateuch.

This theory of the Torah throws considerable light on the attitude of the Pharisees towards the prophets.

¹¹Ibid., p. 60.

Rightly they regarded them as Jehovah's special messengers sent to call the nation back to the Torah. Their teaching, however, was not accepted by the Pharisees as revelation given by divine inspiration, but merely as their elaboration and application of the Torah under divine guidance. In other words, they were simply teachers obedient to the Pentateuch, and their message was part of the wider Torah based upon it. The prophets were earlier representatives of that long line of teachers to which the Pharisees themselves claimed to belong. At the same time they were convinced that the prophets had failed. Lofty their declamations might have been; but they did not succeed in bringing the life and character of their people into harmony with the Torah. And the key-note of Pharisaism is that teaching must be applied. The Pharisees believed they were employing another method to achieve what the prophets had failed to do--lead the nation to an obedient life. Consequently, Herford, who deals extensively with this whole matter, believes that between the two there was no difference in principle; merely a change of method. In fact, the Pharisees, he claims, actually supported the message of the prophets and made it more effective. The prophets had called the people to obedience; the Pharisees believed they were providing a system which could help them to be obedient, thus making the message of the prophets effective in the

lives of the people as it had never been before. Herford even maintains that, "If there had been no Prophets, there would have been no Pharisees. If there had been no Pharisees the Prophets would have perished as though they had never been."¹² With this statement any Pharisee would have agreed completely.

Tradition

Tradition was the standard of doctrine and life which the Pharisees recognized, and used alongside of, and together with, the Old Testament. It originated, as Tradition generally does, in the desire of the teachers of each age to make the sacred writings speak to the people of their time.¹³ Its foundation was the Written Torah, which, they believed, was made known by Jehovah to Israel through Moses implicitly rather than explicitly. The task of the scribe, they maintained, was to interpret the implicit Torah; that is, he had to render "explicit what up till then had

¹²Ibid., pp. 135-138. Herford, too well disposed, as always, towards the Pharisees, overstates the position. They did rise as the result of an attempt to keep the Jews close to the Torah. The prophets had failed. The lesson did have to be learnt the hard way. But he fails to recognize that the prophets had been sent not only to warn, but also to comfort with the promise of the Messiah. The Pharisees did nothing to bring this part of the message into the lives of the people. If anything, they tended to disparage it.

¹³Ibid., pp. 69f. *Life of Christ* (Popular edition; London, 1906), p. 212.

been implicit, drawing forth some meaning or lesson unknown till then, which had been in the Torah all the time."¹⁴ Since the divine revelation can never be exhausted, every new interpretation, they held, is in reality, old; and, having been drawn from the Torah given through Moses, a divine message appropriate to the age. While the Torah of Moses remained the same, Tradition was constantly growing. Teachers of every age interpreted and applied; and their opinions, handed down from memory from generation to generation, was the heritage of tradition preserved for the nation by the scribes.¹⁵

That the Pharisees distinguished carefully between Torah and Tradition is evident from this statement of Josephus, "that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the Law of Moses . . ."¹⁶ They distinguished between Written Law, Torah Sheleketeb, and Traditional Law, Torah Shebeal pih, the "Law upon the lip,"¹⁷

¹⁴Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁵ Alfred Martin Rehwinkel, New Testament World (Third revised edition: St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1950) II, lllf.

¹⁶ Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, trans. by Wm. Whiston (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1871), XIII, 10 6.

¹⁷ F.W. Farrar, The Life of Christ (Popular edition; London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1886), p. 212.

and laboured to relate the two.

Herford states that the Jewish tradition can be traced back to the early Sopherim, not far distant from the days of Ezra, and shows how its development coincides with the rise of the Pharisees.¹⁸ After the Exile the scribe superseded the priest as the guardian, interpreter and teacher of the Torah. While the scribes did not set forth their expositions and applications as anything but their own views, the opinions of great teachers of the past came to receive a certain reverence, and were, with increasing frequency, referred to as precedents in similar situations. Since, as the Pharisees held, the nation was bound to obey the Torah alone, every religious duty had to be part of it or require its sanction, and not merely the direction of the priests or the leaders of the nation. To test the religious ordinances and duties that had come down to the new Judaism was considered a vital necessity by the more conservatively-minded. But the Torah belonged not to the priesthood, but to the nation. Therefore, the right to make such tests--to interpret, in other words--was not to be restricted to the priests. Gradually the body of lay-teachers, the scribes, was accepted as the authority to which was given the task of examining and interpreting. In

¹⁸Herford, The Pharisees, pp. 57-87.

the results of this process of investigation Oral Tradition found its beginning. Succeeding generations of rabbis contributed the results of their studies. To the Pharisees all this was genuine Torah, since it consisted of truths drawn from the divine revelation given through Moses. Thus they defined Torah as the written Word received from Jehovah, together with Tradition, the results of interpretation and application drawn from it.¹⁹

Of course, not every idle opinion of a rabbi was accepted as Tradition. Each new contribution had to have some previous authority to support it. Edersheim declares,

there was no principle more firmly established by universal consent than that authoritative teaching required previous authorization. . . . All teaching must be authoritative, . . . approved by authority, and handed down from teacher to disciple.²⁰

That is why Jesus was so often asked concerning His teachings, "By what authority . . .?"²¹ That is why the people early differentiated between His teaching and that of the scribes. They consistently based their teachings on previous authority. He spoke on His own.²² And that is why so

¹⁹Herford, Pharisaism, p. 94.

²⁰Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah (New American Edition; Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Erdmanns Publishing Compan, 1947), II, 381.

²¹Matt. 21:23.

²²Matt. 7:29.

much of His teaching was condemned. There was not--and could not be--the kind of authority for His teaching that the rabbis demanded.

Such authoritative teaching eventually received veneration it did not deserve. Some even believed that it had been handed down orally from Moses himself; regarding it as that Torah which he had received from God, but had not reduced to writing.²³ Though generally regarded as an illustration and expansion of the written Torah, it was held in equal reverence.²⁴ In fact, most rabbis came to prefer it to the Written Torah. Rehwinkel declares that Tradition "came to be superimposed in ever-increasing proportions, upon the body of the law, and to take precedence over the Word of God itself."²⁵ Even Herford, who is an apologist for the Pharisees, admits, "Their interpretation went beyond the written word of the Torah, and called in the aid of the unwritten tradition."²⁶ He likewise admits that the Pharisees regarded the Torah "not merely as the written text of the Pentateuch, but as the divine teaching

²³Rehwinkel, New Testament World, II, 114.

²⁴J. H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), sub ἡ παράδοσις

²⁵Rehwinkel, II, 111.

²⁶Herford, The Pharisees, p. 35.

contained in the Oral Tradition, finding there its only true interpretation."²⁷ The argument put forward in defence of this position was that if each new deduction was a lesson, an interpretation or a meaning of the divine revelation, then it ceased to be human opinion, and became a part of revelation.²⁸

It was this Tradition that gave to the theology of the Pharisees its distinctive characteristics; for it was Tradition, rather than Scripture, that determined their beliefs. They saw it as the "hedge about the Law,"²⁹ its protection, without which the Law could hardly have been preserved. Herford attempts to prove that Tradition helped to keep Judaism a living religion.³⁰ Actually, of course, the opposite was true. Certainly there was much flexibility with respect to interpretation; but such interpretations and applications extended to the most trivial matters; and when once established they bound the Pharisees with fetters as of steel.³¹ This worship of Tradition also led the

²⁷Ibid., p. 29.

²⁸Herford, Pharisaism, p. 238.

²⁹H. B. Dana, The New Testament World (Third edition revised; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), p. 72.

³⁰Herford, Pharisaism, p. 43.

³¹Matt. 23:4. Jesus attacked just this unbearably legalistic rigidity.

most rigid exclusiveness. Pride in their theological acumen and the degree of righteousness to which they fancied they had attained, led them to spurn those who were not of their persuasion--a position condemned by the very Law they professed to observe.³² Many came to believe that only by following scrupulously the products of their own interpretation could religion be properly observed. Rehwinkel observes correctly,

This embittered attitude of superiority with its resultant over-bearing contempt for strangers and foreigners was the most obvious, and at the same time the most baneful manifestation of the effects of the Rabbinical teachings."³³

The effect of Tradition, then, was to oust Scripture from its place of authority. The Pentateuch itself forbade additions;³⁴ but the rabbis went blithely on spinning the webs of their own imaginings about it until the Torah itself was hardly approachable; and they insisted that all submit to their interpretations, applications and regulations.³⁵

³²Lev. 19:33,34; Ex. 22:21.

³³Rehwinkel, New Testament World, II, 112.

³⁴Deut. 4:2.

³⁵Our Saviour Himself uncovered this evil. In Matt. 15:1-6 He shows how traditions of the elders or fathers made the Law of God of none effect. In Mark 7:3,5,9,13 He denounces the Pharisees and Scribes for extolling Tradition above the Law. p. 54.

The Talmud

For all practical purposes the Talmud and Tradition can be regarded as identical concepts, since the Talmud is Tradition reduced to writing. Herford calls it the storehouse in which is collected all that is worth preserving from the traditions of the elders. And the Talmud is the principal source of our knowledge of what Pharisaism meant and taught.³⁶

Tradition was transmitted orally until long after the time of our Lord. With the disintegration of the nation as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the cessation of the Temple worship there was a very real danger that Judaism might ultimately perish altogether. To prevent this, and to enable Jews to practise their religion wherever they might be, under the new conditions under which they were obliged to live, some of the leading teachers determined to reduce Tradition to writing, and thus to make it available to Jews everywhere. From these beginnings there grew the College of Rabbis, which, together with the Synagogue, became the focal point of Jewish worship and study. In this College of Rabbis was begun the huge task of collecting and collating the various

³⁶Herford, Pharisaism, p. 54.

lines of Tradition and reducing them to writing.³⁷

Herford traces the origins of the Talmud back to Johann ben Zaccai, who had been permitted by Vespasian to live in Jabneh. A group of renowned rabbis gathered around him, including the great Akiba, who participated with him in the task. When Akiba was slain in the revolt of Bar Cochba (135 A.D.), Rabbi Jehudah ben Baba took six young men to a secluded spot and ordained them. Upon his death these became the teachers of the next generation. In these later years, as the dispersion of the nation broadened, it became increasingly evident that the great work must be brought to finality. What ben Zaccai and Akiba had begun, Rabbi Meir, one of ben Baba's six young men, continued; and about 210 A.D. Rabbi Jehudah ha-Kadosh completed it.³⁸

This "Mishna,"³⁹ or second law, as the completed work was called because it was intended to supplement the first law, the Law of Moses, is the only true Jewish dogmatics.⁴⁰ Here is the corpus of authoritative rabbinical commentary on the written Law of Moses, and on the Oral Law, supposed

³⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁹ From $\eta \zeta \psi$, repeat.

⁴⁰ Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, I, 11.

by the rabbis to have been given to him on Mt. Sinai, and handed down by "uninterrupted tradition."⁴¹ Here are the decisions of the wise; the opinions of individuals on questions on which the various schools were divided, and on which there was no recognized teaching; notable sayings of great men. And here are preserved the ancient usages and customs handed down from generation to generation. The Mishna is the foundation of the Talmud.

An outgrowth of the Mishna was the Midrash.⁴² This was the name given to a certain Scripture together with any commentary upon it; in other words, the investigation of it. Herford describes it as the huge contemporary literature, traditional in nature, that bears on the religion of the Torah, and designates it "the written deposit of Pharisaism, the mark which it has left upon the literature of the world."⁴³

The Mishnah itself became the object of study in the schools of the rabbis. The purpose was to verify its connection with the Torah and bring it up-to-date. The results of these studies were called Gemara, and consisted

⁴¹Henry Hart Milman, The History of the Jews (fourth edition; London: John Murray, 1866), II, 479.

⁴²From שָׁרַף, seek, search for, investigate.

⁴³Herford, Pharisaism, p. 55.

of commentaries on the Mishna, together with "accretions of every kind having any sort of connection with Judaism as a living religion."⁴⁴ The Mishna, together with the Gemara, constitutes the Talmud.

These studies were carried on principally in Babylon and Jerusalem, and two distinct forms of Gemara were developed. The two Talmuds accepted by the Jews received their names from these two centres in which the respective Gemara were developed. The Talmuds were never completed, and no additions were made after the sixth century A.D.⁴⁵

Jewish theology as presented in the Talmuds consists of two branches: the Halachah and the Haggadah.

Halachah was the name given to the rules of conduct deduced when general principles of the Torah were applied to particular life situations, and presented the actions required of a Jew if he would rightly serve God.⁴⁶ It purported to set forth the divine will in given situations for the guidance of the Jews. Edersheim defines it concisely and well as "the Rule of the Spiritual Road."⁴⁷

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 53.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁶Herford, The Pharisees, p. 76.

⁴⁷Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, I, 11.

Halachah resulted from the application of the principle that there must be a right way of acting in every particular circumstance. This could be determined from some Scripture text, discovered in some existing Halachah, or else deduced from it. The determining of a Halachah was never the right of an individual. He could initiate action and inquiry, or express an opinion; but only after careful study and application by a number of authorities, the issue was decided by a majority vote. The system was not so rigid that a decision was not alterable. The Halachah of one generation could be modified in another if changes of circumstances or opinion warranted it.⁴⁸

The Pharisees believed that man does not exist for himself. He is created to live in a particular relationship with God and his fellowmen⁴⁹--a relationship which requires certain modes of action, a definite way of life. It was this relationship and the way of life it demanded that determined the character of the Halachah. Herford remarks, "The essence of the Halachah was doing an action exactly in the appointed way, because that was what God commanded".⁵⁰

⁴⁸Herford, The Pharisees, p. 74.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 147

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 76. Such a theory lends itself readily to the formalism which came to characterize the Pharisees.

Hence, the task of the rabbis was to answer as exactly as possible the question: How can God be served most perfectly in this present world? The Halachah was intended to assist the faithful by providing a detailed plan of action that would cover the entire practical life of both the individual and the community, with respect to God and man, and that would serve as an outward expression of their inward resolve. And, following this plan, they could know that they were coming as close to perfection as it is possible for mere man to come.⁵¹ The Mishna was essentially a collection of Halachah, and eventually came to be accepted as the authoritative standard.

It was this part of the Talmud that bound the Pharisees so rigidly; for, as part of the progressive revelation, it had to be observed when once determined, until superseded by a new revelation better suited to the age. Undoubtedly the Pharisees intended that following after the Halachah should be a blessed and joyous experience. Probably most believed it was. However, it cannot be denied that in actual fact it was difficult and burdensome, beyond human endurance. None knew this better than those who had been released from it, and had entered into the freedom that is in Christ Jesus.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 113-126.

A more flexible medium of religious thought was the Haggadah. It was that branch of theology which dealt with all questions not directly concerned with conduct. Therefore it was not vested with authority such as that given to the Halachah. In fact, that authority was purposefully withheld. Questing intellects, such as many of the great rabbis unquestionably possessed, could not be completely bound by the rigidity of the Halachah, and the Haggadah provided an outlet. It was the repository of the personal opinions of eminent teachers on a great variety of questions, the products of private meditation, of the noblest and most beautiful of all Jewish religious thought. As an example of the difference between the Halachah and the Haggadah Herford offers the following. Fundamental to the Halachah was a belief in the existence of God and the important relationship between Him and mankind. However, questions concerning the nature and attributes of God and the nature and characteristics of man belonged to the Haggadah.⁵² On such questions no agreement was required, and in this realm the rabbi could roam at will. That is why it is so difficult to define Pharisaic beliefs with respect to doctrines which Christian theology can state with great exactitude. One can only compare the utterances of teachers

⁵²Ibid., p. 147.

and draw from them certain similar or commonly accepted beliefs.

The Haggadah was the product of one of two methods of interpretation. Using the one, the interpreter sought to present systematically what Scripture revealed about a doctrine. Using the second, he tried to find Scripture sanction for some belief he already accepted--a method rejected by the Christian exegete. The slightest hint given by some passage would be seized upon in support of some pet idea. He did not regard this as reading something into the text, but considered it a legitimate method by which to draw out of the text ideas and thoughts which He believed could well be contained in it as the vehicle of divine revelation.⁵³

In Haggadic interpretation, then, the Pharisees felt themselves to be completely free. Edersheim remarks, "A man might hold or propound almost any views, so long as he contravened not the Law of Moses, as it was understood, and adhered in teaching and practice to the traditional ordinances".⁵⁴

Because of the difference in the Haggadah and the

⁵³Herford, Pharisaism, p. 240.

⁵⁴Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, I, 105.

Halachah, in their nature and purpose, a sharp distinction could exist between personal faith and what Edersheim calls "the most minute punctiliousness in all matters of outward observance."⁵⁵ This is surely one reason why there were those Pharisees who were not self-righteous hypocrites. Eventually the Haggadah became the main body of Jewish doctrine, was revered and followed, although recognized as having no real authority. Edersheim maintains that the Haggadah had greater popular influence than the Halachah, and became the source of almost all doctrinal teaching.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Ibid., I, p. 106.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 11f.

²Deut. 6:4.

²A. T. Herford, Phariseeism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1913), p. 265. Herford quotes Rabbi Abahu's interpretation of Is. 44:6, "I am the first, I have no father; 'and I am the last,' I have no son; 'and beside me there is no God,' I have no brother."

CHAPTER IV

SOME SELECTED BELIEFS OF THE PHARISEES

This chapter outlines briefly the opinions held by the Pharisees on some important questions of theology.

The Doctrine of God

"The Lord our God is one Lord,"¹ is the sum and substance of Pharisaic beliefs regarding the God-head. God is a Spirit, one undivided Being. The concept of the Trinity was foreign to them, incomprehensible and wholly unacceptable. In later times, in defence of their position, they gave out a statement opposing the doctrine of the Trinity, which they believed destroyed the concept of unity.²

This denial of the Trinity determined their beliefs regarding the Holy Spirit. They said much about the Spirit but without much consistency. Some identified Him with God while others regarded Him as the Divine Influence; but none regarded Him as a Person distinguishable from the

¹Deut. 6:4.

²R. T. Herford, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1912), p. 265. Herford quotes Rabbi Abahu's interpretation of Is.44:6, "'I am the first,' I have no father; 'and I am the last,' I have no son; 'and beside me there is no God,' I have no brother.'" p. 218.

Father. To the Pharisee the Holy Spirit was God as He influences the lives of men and communicates with them; when, for instance, through the Prophets He makes known His Torah, and when He receives the righteous as they commune with Him and serve Him. The Holy Spirit is God, the Approachable, to Whom man may draw near and never be turned away. Herford regards the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as "the key to the whole Pharisaic conception of the relation of man to God."³

Pharisees who were not prepared to give up their beliefs regarding the unity of God could not accept the conception of Him presented by Jesus. A Son--especially One Who stood before them in human form--and a Spirit, Who is a Person distinct from the Father, contradicted the concept of the divine unity.

The Pharisees identified the essence and the attributes of God. In the attributes revealed in the Old Testament--justice, righteousness, love, kindness, goodness, mercy, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence--they saw God as He really is. They recognized Him as the sovereign Ruler of the Universe: its sole Creator; its Lord, Whose will is supreme and always just, Who rewards those who obey Him and punishes those who refuse to submit themselves

³Ibid., p. 218.

to His holy will; its Provider, Who supplies the wants of all His creatures; but in an especial manner attends to even the most minute details of human life.⁴

The Doctrine of Man

With the Old Testament the Pharisees believed that man was created in the image of God; but they differed from it in holding that this divine image has been retained. Man possesses soul and body. Both are created by God; but the soul is the more important. In fact, man is essentially "a soul dwelling in a body,"⁵ the body designed as a dwelling place for the soul and created for its service. Therefore, the body is "in its structure . . . perfect, and has nothing to do with moral merit or guilt, virtue or defect."⁶

The Pharisees called the soul "Nesama," the divine spark.⁷ Josephus states this very clearly and explicitly, and actually defines the soul as "a portion of the divinity

⁴H. E. Dana, The New Testament World (Third edition revised; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), p. 119.

⁵R. T. Herford, The Pharisees (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924), p. 155.

⁶Hugo Odeberg, Pharisaism and Christianity, trans. by J. M. Moe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 76f.

⁷Ibid., p. 74.

that inhabits our bodies."⁸ Hence, it is "indestructible spirit . . . which guarantees a state of belonging together with God."⁹

Man has received from God certain precious gifts to be used in His service. One of the most important of these is the power of moral judgment. Man was created "a conscious moral agent, able to look up to his Maker, to own the authority of his Lord, and to love Him Whom he learned at last to call his Father."¹⁰ He can, therefore, discern and comprehend the divine commandments and will. Of course, what that will is, he does not determine by his own independent judgment. It is found in the Torah, written and oral. The man who submits to it places himself "under the guidance of the divine spark."¹¹ Thus he becomes capable of judging what God wills.¹² Man, therefore, is able to

⁸Flavius Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, trans. by Wm. Whiston (Everyman's Library; London: J. M. Dent & Sons, n. d.), III. 8. 5.

⁹Odeberg, p. 82.

¹⁰Herford, The Pharisees, p. 155.

¹¹Odeberg, p. 83.

¹²The Pharisaic doctrine of the soul, and of man's consequent power of moral judgment, helps to explain why the Pharisees laid such emphasis on Tradition. They considered it to be the sum-total of moral judgments made by such as were guided by the "divine spark." Hence, it possessed the authority of the divine.

distinguish between right and wrong. However, coupled with moral judgment is moral responsibility. Consequently, the Pharisees believed also that man is endowed with free-will.

Freewill is the second important gift man has received from his Maker. The Pharisees regarded the Torah not so much a book of statutes as God's revelation of a way of life which He urges men to follow. Whether they comply with it or disobey is entirely in their own hands. As they have the ability to judge between right and wrong, so they have also the ability to choose right or wrong.¹³ The judgment passed upon their actions--and moral responsibility makes them liable to it--is determined solely by their own decision of action. Obedience wins the Lord's approval; disobedience, His anger and punishment. Repentance always draws His forgiveness and restores peace with Him.¹⁴

There is some difference of opinion as to whether the Pharisees were fatalists or protagonists of freewill. Milman, for instance, sees a certain tendency to fatalism, as appears from his statement, "The Pharisees were moderate

¹³Herford, The Pharisees, p. 142.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 167.

Predestinarians: the Sadducees asserted Free Will."¹⁵ Odeberg quotes R. Akiba to show how the two ideas were often connected. "All things are foreseen, and free will is given, and the world is judged by goodness."¹⁶ Josephus agrees with him. "These ascribe all things to fate or providence and to God, and yet allow, that to act what is right, or the contrary, is principally in the power of men, though fate does co-operate in every action."¹⁷ The Pharisees certainly believed in a special providence that affected every area of their existence. This they identified with fate; and this fate they associated closely with free will. However, there was considerable variety of thought on the matter; some tending to emphasize providence or fate, while others stressed the freedom of the will.

The God-Man Relationship

The Pharisees believed that because of His essence God is transcendent. At the same time, because of Nesama, man and God belong together. Therefore, the Pharisees were firmly convinced that God is at all times near to His

¹⁵Henry Hart Milman, The History of the Jews (fourth edition; London: John Murray, 1866), II, 31.

¹⁶Odeberg, pp. 57f., quoted from Aboth. III, 19.

¹⁷Josephus, The Wars of the Jews, II. 8. 14.

children.¹⁸ Therefore, they taught the Universal Fatherhood of God, whose pity, loving-kindness and providence extend over all--not only to Israel--and give to all the right of direct access to Him.¹⁹

The God-Man relationship is also one of Lord and subject; of Master and servant. Man is morally accountable to his God, whether he acknowledges Him or not; whether he recognizes this accountability or denies it. Hence, he is in duty bound to obey God. When he does, he lives in harmony and peace; when he fails, that is, when he sins, harmony and peace are disturbed.²⁰ But harmony is restored at once when he repents, seeks forgiveness and returns to the way.

God and Israel

While the Pharisees did not altogether deny the universal fatherhood of God, and insisted on His Lordship in relationship to the Gentiles, they believed that he had

¹⁸Herford, The Pharisees, pp. 151-159. Herford quotes from Debar R. II, 10 to indicate something of the Pharisaic insistence on the immanence of God. "From earth to heaven is a five hundred years' journey; yet when a man whispers or even meditates a prayer, God is at hand to hear it."

¹⁹Ibid. Though the doctrine is not found frequently in rabbinic literature, neither is it specifically denied. In practice, however, the Pharisees did generally tend to restrict their teaching of the relationship of God to the Chosen People.

²⁰Ibid.

chosen Israel to enjoy a unique relationship to Himself, and bound her to Himself by a special covenant. Therefore, the Fatherhood of God could be "effectively realized" only "by those who belonged to the community of Israel."²¹ This was rightly regarded as a noble privilege and a cause for special joy. The Rabbi Akiba said, "Happy are Israel in that they are called children of the All-Present; but it was by special love to them that it was made known to them that they are called children of the All-Present."²²

The Pharisees, however, do not appear to have understood that this selection was purely a choice of divine love and grace. They regarded it as Israel's reward for accepting the Torah, which other nations had rejected when it was offered to them, thus cutting themselves off from God's power. Israel, having received the privilege, retains it by taking to heart all that it has to teach her, and setting it before herself as the divine will to be fulfilled by her. Only by associating himself with Israel, either by joining the community or by sharing with Israel the revelation made to her in the Torah, could the Gentile once more be received into divine favour.²³ It is, then,

²¹Ibid, p. 158.

²²Ibid. Quoted from Aboth. III, 18.

²³Herford, Pharisaism, p. 252.

not the grace of God but the worthiness of Israel which determined the relationship, and earned the gift of the Torah. Enjoying this unique relationship under the immediate care of God, nothing, they believed could happen to them without God's permission, and all must eventually work out for their spiritual good.

This relationship, they maintained, implied a mutual communication. On God's part this consisted in the revelation of His will in the Torah. Revelation, according to the definition of the Pharisees was the divine mind communicating to the human mind its nature and will; and this revelation was not restricted to the written record. Herford says that

the real Torah was that which was apprehended in the minds of those to whom the revelation had been given. The written word was the record of it, a priceless record, but not to be so read that its literal meaning exhausted all that there was in the Torah.²⁴

The mind of an Israelite, meditating upon the Torah, became attuned to the mind of God, and received some of the truths inherent in the written record. Here is the reason for the profound reverence which the Pharisees felt for the sayings and writings of the rabbis. Both in the written Torah and in the constantly developing Tradition God is communicating continually with men.

²⁴Herford, The Pharisees, p. 160.

On man's part, this communication with the Divine is demonstrated in prayer. Because God is always near, man can always pray to Him confident that He will hear. Herford emphasizes that the Pharisees were well aware that prayer is a spiritual exercise; and that formalism, where it appeared, was a departure of individuals from true Pharisaic doctrine.²⁵

This mutual relationship God had intended for all men; but only Israel, because she placed herself under the Torah, enjoys it. Nevertheless, because God is in reality the Father of all, and desires to be so in the fullest sense of the term, no one is excluded from it who is prepared to submit to the Torah. God desires to communicate to the world through His Torah so that all men might communicate with Him in prayer.

The Doctrine of Sin

The corruption of the human race was not denied by the Pharisees. It was evident to them not only in the Gentiles, but also in the moral defects of their own people. They realized as they took cognizance of the "ignorance, blindness, superstition, degradation, cruelty, lust, selfishness, and all other evil propensities of mankind," that

²⁵Ibid., pp. 161f.

this could not be accounted for merely by individual sin. Mankind shows "but faint traces of the divine image and likeness in which it was made" ²⁶

The Pharisees accounted for the evil in the human race by means of their doctrine of Yetzar. ²⁷ They believed that man has been created with two jetzars: ha-Tobh, the good inclination; and ha-Ra, the evil propensity, which begins to function immediately after birth. ²⁸ It is the influence of Yetzar ha-Ra which causes moral corruption, since man tends to follow this inclination rather than Yetzar ha-Tobh. ²⁹

Both inclinations are placed in man by God to assist him in his upward climb. ³⁰ Ha-Tobh is the ideal to which man is to aspire--the complete conquest of ha-Ra, Odeberg defines it as "the direct motive power for the performance of useful and necessary things." ³¹ Ha-Ra is the challenge. Here is something man can fight to prove his moral worth;

²⁶ Ibid., p. 167

²⁷ וְיָצַר, something formed, a frame. From the future of וְיָצַר, form, fashion, create.

²⁸ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah (New American edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Erdmanns Publishing Company, 1947), I, 52.

²⁹ Herford, The Pharisees, pp. 167f.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 155f.

³¹ Odeberg, p. 78.

to strengthen his moral back-bone. Because it is present in him, man can learn to exercise his will in the performance of good and avoidance of evil; and thus become more like God in Whose image he was created.³² "The evil inclination," says Odeberg, "has as its purpose to exercise and strengthen man's power of resistance, so that his determination to do good will be motivated by actual moral strength."³³ While both yetzars influence men, they are not, because of the gift of free-will, helpless slaves to either. They are free to choose, and every victory over the Yetzar ha-Ra is a moral victory that has merit before God.

Sin comes into a man's life when he fails to control, for his own moral growth, the two yetzars within him. He does not follow Yetzar ha-Tobh as the ideal in a given situation. On the contrary he follows Yetzar ha-Ra, instead of regarding it as the directive to be consciously avoided. Quite correctly the Pharisees regarded sin as the failure to measure up to God's standards, either by doing what he forbids or failing to do what he commands; by neglecting to pursue the virtues and practising the vices instead, not only in deed, but also in thought and desire.³⁴ But they

³² Herford, The Pharisees, p. 155.

³³ Odeberg, p. 78.

³⁴ Herford, The Pharisees, pp. 163ff

made a tragic mistake in thinking that in solving the problem of evil in his life man is his own master.

Original Sin

While there is an apparent connection between the theory of Yetzar ha-Ra and the doctrine of Original Sin, there is none in fact. "So far as their opinions can be gathered from their writings, the great doctrines of original Sin and the sinfulness of our whole human nature, were not held by the ancient Rabbis."³⁵ Unlike Original Sin, Yetzar ha-Ra was not something apart from God, but His gift; not designed for man's destruction, but for his moral uplift.

Actually, rabbinic concepts of the soul precluded the idea of Original Sin. The soul is pure³⁶ and indestructible. Therefore, the idea of a Fall that could destroy man is inconceivable, so that there can be no natural corruption. The Fall of Adam and Eve was a purely personal experience, an instance of the disobedience of which man is guilty. But the consequences of their disobedience were confined to

³⁵Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, I, 165.

³⁶Odeberg, p. 75 Odeberg says that in the liturgy of the morning worship in the Synagogue there is a prayer, the so-called Elohai Nesama, which begins: "My God, the soul (nesama) and Thou hast given me is pure."

themselves, and did not affect their descendants in any way.³⁷ Adam and Eve had the ability to choose, and they suffered because they chose to follow Yetzar ha-Ra.

In every man good and evil impulses are constantly opposing each other, and continue to do so as long as he remains upon earth. Man fulfils his destiny when he allows Nesama to control him. He fails when he allows Yetzar ha-Ra to overcome him. But as soon as he turns again to the right path, the power and guiding of Nesama is at his disposal. He is living under the influence of Yetzar ha-Tobh. So, a man can, if he desires, so study and work that he overcomes sin and gains life.³⁸ This means, of course, that a man is responsible for his own actions.

Sin and Punishment

The Pharisees were reluctant to speak of punishment in connection with a man's actions. Even death was not generally regarded as a result of the Fall. Since sin is a result of Yetzar ha-Ra, which was created by God, no blame can be

³⁷ Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, I, 165. Edersheim states that the rabbis ascribed the Fall of Adam and Eve to the envy of the angels, who were cast out as a result. Samael and the angels who followed him tried to prevent the creation of man. Having failed, they tried to ruin him, using the serpent as their instrument.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 166f.

attached to a man for his misdeeds.³⁹ The only real consequence of sin, they held, was disease. Abrahams states that "Rabbinic Judaism took over from the Old Testament a belief that disease was a consequence of sin," and that "obedience prevented disease, just as disobedience produced it."⁴⁰

This throws light on the question of the disciples concerning the man born blind.⁴¹ Such disease, they believed, was not a capricious result of some particular evil, but was permitted for the spiritual well-being of the sufferer.

The only practical conclusion that the Rabbis drew . . . was for the sufferer himself, who otherwise might be inclined to blame Providence, or even to blaspheme, but would now look upon his affliction as a reminder from heaven that there is something wrong in his moral state⁴²

The Doctrine of Salvation

The Pharisees accepted a particularistic conception of salvation. The Gentile was not completely deprived of it. However, he could receive and enjoy it only in

³⁹Ibid., pp. 166f.

⁴⁰I. Abrahams, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels (Cambridge: University Press, 1917), I, 108.

⁴¹John 9:2.

⁴²Abrahams, I, 109, (quoted from Schlechter, Studies in Judaism, I, p. 209).

fellowship with Israel.⁴³

Since they did not accept the doctrine of Original sin and natural corruption, the Pharisees did not consider man a helpless being in the presence of God. In fact, their doctrine demanded the participation of man. There is no need, they held, for a divine-human--or any other--intermediary; no need for a Vicarious Sacrifice; no redemption from sin. Salvation is a matter between each man and his God, and concerns no other. Salvation is the effecting of the communion between God and man for which man was created; or, as Herford puts it, "the influence of God slowly working in all human lives, to bring about in the course of ages, the harmony which ought to be between the Creator and His creatures; the Father and His children."⁴⁴ The individual either helps or hinders God by submitting to Yetzar ha-Tobh or Yetzar ha-Ra; or to put it differently, by obeying or disobeying the Torah.

While the establishment of his own relationship with God is man's primary concern, the Pharisees did not believe it ended there. God would have all men enter that fellowship, for He is Creator and Father of all. Therefore, they

⁴³Herford, Pharisaism, pp. 221f.

⁴⁴Herford, The Pharisees, p. 169.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 166.

acknowledged a mission, viz., "the duty of every true servant of God to work with Him towards that great end, by spreading the knowledge of God, and winning men to His service."⁴⁵ And this, of course, was to be done by bringing the Gentile into the fellowship of Israel and under the guidance and influence of the Torah.

Repentance and Restoration

The Pharisees did not believe that the original harmony existing between God and the human race has been destroyed by universal sin; nor that it could be restored only by the sacrifice of the divine-human Mediator taking on Himself the responsibility for the world's sin. They did, however, recognize that individuals, influenced by Yetzar ha-Ra, do from time to time disturb, destroy or prevent that harmony. When this occurs, the restoration of it is a purely personal matter, and can be achieved through repentance and forgiveness.

Repentance they defined as the sinner's part in restoring the fellowship; "the act of the soul seeking to return to God after having, through sin, turned away from Him."⁴⁶ Repentance was vitally important to Pharisaic religious

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 166.

thought. Without it harmony could not be restored and spiritual disaster inevitably followed. But repentance is always possible and is always acceptable to God. Of course, it had to be a real turning back to God; hence, accompanied, where possible, by reparation and amends. For instance, the inflictor of an injury could count upon forgiveness, but not if he failed to seek the pardon of him whom he had injured, even at his grave if the injured one had died. Likewise, the injured party was under the obligation to forgive. Refusal to do so made him also a sinner. The rabbis were strong in their denunciations of those who refused to forgive others.⁴⁷

God's part in the restoration of harmony is forgiveness. Man can always repent; God will always forgive. But He will forgive only the true penitent.⁴⁸ The Pharisees, however, did not view forgiveness as the "cancelling of a debt . . . ," but rather as "the renewing of the personal relations between the soul and God, the restoring of the harmony which sin had broken."⁴⁹ Man turns to God in repentance; and, as a result, God receives him back into fellowship. So, then, God's motive for forgiving is not so much

⁴⁷Abrahams, I, 152-167.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 145.

⁴⁹Herford, The Pharisees, p. 167.

love as His justice. God owes it to Himself to forgive. He is the Father and men are His children. He will always forgive all who come to Him in repentance and try to please Him. He will do it because forgiveness is the attribute of a father.⁵⁰ He will do it because His justice as Father demands it. And that forgiveness is possible for every human-being; for in reality He is the Father of all. Justice requires, therefore, that He act towards all alike; that He receive all who turn from their evil ways.

As in their doctrine of Salvation, so also in their teaching regarding repentance and restoration the Pharisees found no place for the Messiah. The Father-child relationship requires no Mediator. Pharisaism knew nothing of the justice that must punish sin--only of the justice that must forgive the penitent. Hence, it knew nothing of love so perfect that it could move the Father to sacrifice His own Son in order to satisfy His own justice and enable Him to forgive His wayward children as He yearns to do. Pharisaism was deeply aware of the fact of sin; but it had no real conception of its horror. Only when a man recognizes sin as complete separation from God can he have a true appreciation of the magnitude of God's love.

This readiness to forgive the Pharisees called God's

⁵⁰Abrahams, I, 143.

grace. Grace to the Pharisees was the reward of repentance. It was God's part in the plan to effect the true God-man relationship. Abrahams puts it this way.

Man's part in the divine scheme of mercy must be real. He must turn and live. But the world is nevertheless judged by grace. This does not mean that man can or ought to escape the consequences of sin. Man must pay: but God is a lenient creditor, and he himself provides the coin for the remission of the debt.⁵¹

That coin is repentance, and it purchases forgiveness. So here is salvation by grace that is not salvation by grace, because what is called grace is not unmerited love, but a reward. Salvation is by the work of repentance and not by faith in Jesus. This is work-righteousness pure and simple.

This doctrine of the Pharisees is an attempt to reconcile man's duty with his inability and excluding a mediator. In fact, that is just what Abrahams declares. He admits that the Pharisees "tried to hold the balance between man's duty to strive to earn pardon, and his inability to attain it without God's gracious gift of it."⁵² Ideally considered, the Pharisaic scheme was, as Abrahams puts it, that "Israel must work without pay; God must pay without work."⁵³ Practically considered, however, forgiveness

⁵¹Ibid., p. 146.

⁵²Ibid., p. 147.

⁵³Ibid.

and restoration became the reward for the work of repentance. The Pharisees realized that God must come into the problem at some point if man is to survive. But to what extent? He will be satisfied, they declared, if man repents. A Messiah, Who is Immanuel, Who, in fact, has spiritual significance, they did not know, and did not need. If He had any place in the spiritual scheme at all it could be but as another prophet who would lead the people to repentance and place them into an environment in which, under his guidance and encouragement, they could live more faithfully under the Torah. That is why they had such a tragically confused conception of grace. Pharisaism, as every religion that deprecates Christ must necessarily be, was essentially synergistic.

Sanctification

Pharisaic teaching on Sanctification is based on the doctrine of Yetzar. The two opposing tendencies are there in every man. Free-will enables him to choose between them. If he chooses evil, God will not prevent him. If he elects to do good, God will help him all the way. The way to grow in sanctification is to fix one's mind on the Torah and to become saturated with its teaching; for it is through the Torah that a man is protected against evil influences and induced to follow after right. That the Torah presented so

great a number of precepts was to the Pharisees not a reason for frustration, but a source of joy; since there was so much to remind them of God and there were so many opportunities given to serve Him.⁵⁴

For the Pharisees, then, the Law and not the Gospel was the motivating power in sanctification. It could not be otherwise, for the Gospel of grace was foreign to their theology. Likewise they made no real distinction between Justification and Sanctification, since, through their striving after the sanctified life they believed that they justified themselves before God.

Baptism

The meagre evidence that exists indicates that Baptism as a rite was well established by the time of our Lord. He simply took it over and endowed it with His own purpose and promise. Of course, ablutions of various kinds had been used from earliest times. Certain of these, related particularly to ceremonial defilement, were prescribed by God Himself.⁵⁵ But Baptism differs from these in that it was administered by another and required witnesses to attest to the fact that the ceremony had been properly

⁵⁴Herford, Pharisaism, pp. 254f.

⁵⁵See Lev. 14-17; Num. 19.

performed.⁵⁶ It does not seem to have been practised on Jews, for whom circumcision and sacrifice were sufficient, and, in the case of women, sacrifice alone. Abrahams declares⁵⁷ and Edersheim agrees with him⁵⁸ that it was a rite reserved for proselytes, by which they became ceremonially clean prior to, and in preparation for, reception into the Jewish communion. The general consensus of opinion was that total immersion was practised. Abrahams declares, "In all cases, the bathing was most probably by total immersion . . . Total immersion is clearly implied by the Zadokite Fragment"⁵⁹ Edersheim cites numerous examples to support the contention.⁶⁰ It was to be administered once and for

⁵⁶Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, II, 745, Appendix XII.

⁵⁷Abrahams, I, 36f. He quotes from the Mishnah, Pesahim VIII. 8. The citation is a question on which the schools of Hillel and Shammai differed: whether a man made a proselyte on 14th Nisan, who has then been baptized, must wait days before he is regarded clean, or whether he may eat the Paschal lamb the same evening.

⁵⁸Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, I, 273. "Again, it was prescribed that such Gentiles as became 'proselytes of righteousness,' or 'proselytes of the Covenant' . . . were to be admitted to full participation in the privileges of Israel by the threefold rites of circumcision, baptism, and sacrifice . . ."

⁵⁹Abrahams, I, 38.

⁶⁰Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, II, 745. Appendix XII.

all time, except when a proselyte reverted to his former way of life, when rebaptism was considered necessary.⁶¹

There is some doubt as to the significance the Pharisees attached to Baptism. Some saw little or no difference between it and the ceremonial ablutions of the Jews. Others believed that spiritual purification was involved. Abrahams believes that the two ideas of physical and spiritual purification are both inherent in it.⁶² He maintains that the Spirit of God entered the heart of the baptized proselyte and helped him in the struggle against the Yetzar ha-Ra, which constantly drags the child of God towards sin.⁶³ Edersheim claims that it was regarded as a symbol of an inner spiritual cleansing; "the immersion being, as it were, the acknowledgment and symbolic removal of moral defilement, corresponding to that of Levitical uncleanness."⁶⁴ The Pharisees certainly knew nothing of

⁶¹Abrahams, I, 42.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 39-42. Abrahams cites passages, some from as early as 800 A.D. that infer that Baptism is for repentance; though he admits no earlier references are extant. He argues further that in the Psalms of Solomon cleansing and forgiveness are identical. Finally, he states that in both rabbinical and Biblical Hebrew the same word is used for both spiritual and physical cleansing.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 42f.

⁶⁴Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, I, 273.

Baptism as a means of grace in the Christian sense. Yet for some, at least, it did imply a certain moral cleansing, and the implanting of new powers in preparation for the struggle towards perfection. However, it was not a true sacrament; but, at best, a symbol of inner consecration.⁶⁵

Some Human Relationships

The Man-to-Man Relationship

Theoretically the Pharisees held a doctrine somewhat akin to that taught by Paul: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."⁶⁶ They insisted that it is man's duty to be kind to his fellow-men, never to wrong another, and to perform acts of charity. It was self-evident, they maintained, that a Jew would act thus towards a fellow-Jew; but he should not forget that he owes a like obligation to the non-Jew.⁶⁷

In practice, however, the matter was generally different. All too frequently Gentiles were regarded as beneath consideration. The possession of the Torah certainly did

⁶⁵Abrahams, I, 42.

⁶⁶Gal. 6:10.

⁶⁷Herford, Pharisaism, p. 253.

influence the Pharisees greatly in their attitude towards non-Jews. If the Torah was God's revelation, then there could be no real bond between those who did, and those who did not, accept it. Consequently, though the attitudes of individuals varied widely, definite restrictions were in force with respect to the Jew-Gentile relationship. Some segregated themselves so completely that they shunned association not only with Gentiles, but also with the Am-ha-Aretz--the Rabble, as they believed them to be,--who did not know and observe the Torah as perfectly as they fancied they did themselves. At the other extreme were those who merely experienced "a tolerant regret for those who were deprived of the unspeakable blessings of the divine revelation." There were those who felt no concern about the fate of the Gentile, believing that he was rejected by God. But others, deeply concerned, believed that the Spirit could work also in the Gentile heart, if only he could be brought to submit to the Torah.⁶⁸

Abrahams insists that the Pharisees made a definite distinction between Christians and pagans. Concerning Christianity he writes,

It is . . . not the case that the Pharisaic liturgy enshrines any vindictiveness against Christianity . . . As a Jewish heresy, early Christianity

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 323f.

was the subject of antipathy, as an independent religion it was scarcely assailed at all.⁶⁹

With paganism it was different, for "against idolatry the Synagogue waged war, and sometimes idolaters . . . were, in moments of stress, regarded as outside the pale of the brotherhood of man"; though Abrahams is quick to add that the opposition was directed against idolatry rather than the idolater.⁷⁰ In spite of this the fact remains that they were involved in a very personal campaign of persecution not only against idolatry, but also against Christianity.

However, it would be unjust to maintain that all Pharisees were involved in this antipathy against non-Jews. Likewise, it would be unfair to identify Pharisaic practice with principles. On this question Abrahams remarks, "Here, again, we have a fact of human nature, not of the Pharisaic nature only, and it is a pity that the Pharisees are made to bear the burden which should be put on the shoulders of mankind."⁷¹ Certainly these factors must be

⁶⁹Abrahams, I, 159.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 159-162. Abrahams quotes in support to following prayers from the Jerusalem Talmud (Berachoth IV. 2). "May it be Thy will, O Lord my God and God of my fathers, that hatred and envy of us enter not into the heart of man, nor hatred and envy of any man enter into our heart." And, again, "Bring us near to what thou lovest, and keep us far from what thou hatest."

⁷¹Ibid., p. 159.

taken into consideration when forming an opinion.⁷²

Marriage and Divorce

Rabbinic literature presents marriage as a highly honorable estate, and to be preferred to celibacy. A man is to love and honor his wife, and the procreation of children is a religious duty.⁷³

At the same time there was a wide divergence in practice. The Essenes were celibates. The Zadokites forbade divorce, or, at least, remarriage after divorce. The aristocrats of the court circles adopted the lax attitude of the Romans.⁷⁴ Generally the Pharisees were inclined to adopt a moderate attitude.

With respect to divorce the Pharisees took up a negative attitude, though practice did vary, and varied, too, from age to age. The divorcing of the first wife, in particular, was frowned upon. Abrahams writes, "Jewish

⁷²It is not difficult to understand the horror the Pharisee must have felt when he saw Gentiles received into the Christian community. Likewise, one can appreciate the difficulty of many Jewish Christians--lately released from the Pharisaic influence of the Synagogue--with respect to the mission to the Gentiles which Paul and the other apostles had come to accept; a mission that no longer required the Gentile to enter into some kind of association with the ancient Jewish practice.

⁷³Abrahams, I, 68.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 66.

sentiment was strongly opposed to the divorce of the wife of a man's youth . . . The facilities for divorce seem mostly to have been applied or taken advantage of in the case of a widower's second marriage"⁷⁵ Rabbis, while not opposing divorce, Abrahams maintains, did all they could to prevent it, so that in Jesus' day, while easy to obtain, it was not as frequent as might be supposed. Most marriages were terminated by death. Nevertheless, Pharisaic law did not object to divorce by mutual consent. Pharisees argued that when the ideal of marriage had been shattered

It seemed to accord best with the interests of morality to admit this, and to afford both parties to the calamity a second chance of lawful happiness. The marriage bond should be inviolable, but must not be indissoluble.⁷⁶

While there was little dispute about the lawfulness of divorce, there was much about the grounds. The Torah of Moses had named as the ground for divorce some unclean, shameful, unchaste action.⁷⁷ But what constitutes such an action? Shammai restricted it to "some action which was really infamous, and contrary to the rules of virtue."⁷⁸

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 68.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 66.

⁷⁷Deut. 24:1.

⁷⁸Alexander Cruden, A Complete Concordance of the Holy Scriptures (London: Ward, Lock & Co., Ltd., 1909), sub Divorce.

Hillel, on the other hand, interpreted the term in the very widest sense, allowing divorce for as trivial a reason as dissatisfaction with a wife for her manner of preparing food. Akiba even allowed such a reason as the desire for another woman.⁷⁹ The application of principles by each of these teachers was decidedly elastic, so that even Shammai considered appearing unveiled in the street as an in chastity that provided a valid ground.⁸⁰

Divorce was procured by the drawing up of a proper document known as a Bill of Divorcement. Usually this was done in the presence of two witnesses, though at times it became a much more public affair. Abrahams declares that this was designed as a protection for the wife, and not as a simple means for the husband to rid himself of her. It became necessary to bring some order into the situation created by human wickedness. The ideal of faithfulness was disregarded, and wives were wilfully and capriciously cast off.⁸¹ It was to such a situation that Jesus was undoubtedly referring when He explained the purpose of the Mosaic Bill of Divorcement and advocated a return to the original

⁷⁹R. C. H. Lenski, Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel. (Columbus, Ohio: Lutheran Book Concern, 1934), p. 261f.

⁸⁰Adam Fahling, The Life of Christ (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1936), p. 497.

⁸¹Abrahams, I, 66f.

ideal of marriage.⁸²

By 100 B.C. divorce had become so common and so easy to obtain that the estate of marriage became quite unstable. A woman could be divorced at any time, and in addition, lost all her possessions. Increasing numbers of women refused to be married; and, as Abrahams remarks, "men grew grey and celibate." The Pharisees, he claims, were responsible, at least in part, for the improvement that had been effected by the time of our Lord. He states that Simon ben Shetah, reputedly the brother of Queen Alexandra,

enacted that the wife's Ketubah or marriage settlement was to be merged in the husband's estate, that he might use it as capital, but that his entire fortune, even such property of his as had passed into other hands, should be held liable for it.

This, he declares, did much to check hasty divorce and to stabilize the estate of marriage.⁸³

While in Jesus' day marriages were much more stable, divorce was still easy to obtain. In the case of in chastity the husband virtually had no option but to divorce his wife, though a woman possessed no similar right.⁸⁴ How easy it was to obtain a divorce becomes apparent from the remark of the disciples that if Jesus applied such rigid rules

⁸²Mark 10:4-12.

⁸³Abrahams, I, 68.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 66-73.

marriage would become undesirable.⁸⁵

While the Pharisees were undoubtedly more rigid in their attitude than many others, it remains to be proved that Jesus' strictures⁸⁶ were directed at the nation as a whole, and did not actually apply to them. Their practice, too, was lax according to His standards, and not at all in accord with the original ideal.

Government

The Pharisaic theory of government was based on their concept of the theocratic state. Since the Jews are God's people, they argued, no one has any genuine right to rule them except God. That is why Jews were in duty bound to foster the theocratic state. Alien rule could at best be tolerated; or, maybe, submitted to as an indication of the anger of God over the sins of His people.

In practice, of course, the Pharisees had long ago learned, by force of necessity to live under alien rule; and they believed in submission to the government whatever it might be. Jeremiah, already in his day, had taught them to "seek . . . the peace of the city."⁸⁷ Hence, Abrahams

⁸⁵Matt. 19:10.

⁸⁶Matt. 19:3-12; Mark 10:2-9.

⁸⁷Jer. 29:7.

states correctly that in general they were not inclined to rebellion against alien authority per se. They were concerned primarily with religion; and, generally speaking, they became involved with the authorities only when there was interference with it.⁸⁸

While holding to their theory of the theocratic state, the Pharisees had learnt to accept alien rule on sufferance and to live under it, provided they were given liberty to practise their religion. They were even prepared to accept persecution until the breaking point was reached. When rebellion broke out, generally, though not always, the responsibility lay with unruly elements, such as the Zealots, who were more deeply concerned with political than with religious issues, and took every opportunity to fan any spark of opposition into the flame of open rebellion.

The Sabbath

The Sabbath laws of the Pharisees constitute a study in themselves, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to give more than a brief outline of Pharisaic beliefs and

⁸⁸Abrahams, I, 62-64. Cases in point are the actions of the Seleucids; the attempts of some Roman governors to enforce Emperor worship; the error of identifying the head of Caesar on coins as an idol. Some wiser governors, sensing the tenderness of the Jewish conscience, minted special coins.

practices.

While there was some difference of opinion among the rabbis regarding the Sabbath regulations, they agreed unanimously that the Sabbath was sacred and that laws concerning it were to be rigidly observed, especially that which referred to the avoidance of any kind of work.⁸⁹ Some of the rabbis, especially those of the school of Shammai, went to absurd lengths in determining what was and what was not permissible.⁹⁰ Shammai was even of the opinion that it was out of place to give comfort to the sick and the sorrowing, or to preserve life if that involved some kind of toil. Other rabbis, however, allowed works of necessity, or labour when some life was endangered. So rigidly was the law enforced that at times Jews had allowed themselves to lose battles, to be cut in two, even to see Jerusalem itself captured by its enemies, rather than infringe it.⁹¹ Edersheim sums up well the purpose behind it all.

if we rightly apprehend what underlay the complicated and intolerably burdensome laws and rules of Pharisaic Sabbath observance, it was to secure,

⁸⁹ Lev. 23:3.

⁹⁰ F. W. Farrar, The Life of Christ (Popular Edition; London: Cassel & Co. Ltd., 1886), p. 177. Farrar gives examples. No mailed shoe must be worn, since a nail is a burden. One man might carry a loaf, but not two between them.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 205f.

negatively, absolute rest from all labour, and, positively, to make the Sabbath a delight.⁹²

Immortality and the Resurrection of the Body

The immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body as conceived by the Pharisees is also a study in itself, and an extended treatment is beyond the scope of this thesis.

That there is a life beyond the grave was never doubted by the Pharisees, because of their firm belief in the immortality of the soul. There was, however, much difference of opinion as to the nature of that life. Some seem to have believed only in a continuing life for the soul-- a life akin somewhat to that of the angels.⁹³ Generally, however, the Pharisees confessed to a belief in the resurrection of the body. An interesting, early, and, therefore, important reference is found in the second book of Maccabees, which attests to the fact that belief in the resurrection was held as early as the days of the Maccabees. The writer records that Judas Maccabaeus sent a sum of money to Jerusalem for a sin offering on behalf of certain Jews

⁹²Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, II, 52.

⁹³Abrahams, I, 168. He quotes Hilch. Teshubah VIII. 2 in support.

who had been slain in battle; and he approves of Judas' action,

in that he was mindful of the resurrection: For if he had not hoped that they that were slain should have risen again, it had been superfluous and vain to pray for the dead.⁹⁴

This doctrine is recorded in Scripture as one of the major points of disagreement between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.⁹⁵ But within the framework of this belief there was a variety of opinion. Some limited the resurrection to the "righteous in Israel."⁹⁶ Hillel and Shammai agreed on a "restoration of the material form."⁹⁷ Some went as far as to say that the body would be raised with the same defects it possessed in the former life; but that these would be healed immediately.⁹⁸ Some opinions were decidedly materialistic, as for example, the notion that a man would rise in exactly the same clothes in which he was buried.⁹⁹ Others spoke of the life of the resurrected body in terms that remind forcibly of the New Testament--a

⁹⁴2 Macc. 12: 43-44.

⁹⁵Acts 23:8.

⁹⁶Dana, p. 119.

⁹⁷Abrahams, I, 168.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Fahling, p. 544.

light; a banquet; a crown.¹⁰⁰

There is strong evidence that some Pharisees believed in a form of transmigration of souls, generally of righteous men. This is supported by the following passages from Josephus. "They say that all souls are incorruptible, but that the souls of good men only are removed into other bodies, but that the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment."¹⁰¹ The second is even more explicit.

Do not you know that those who depart out of this life, according to the law of nature, and pay that debt which was received from God, when he that lent it us is pleased to require it back again, enjoy eternal fame; that their houses and their posterity are sure, that their souls are pure and obedient, and obtain a most holy place in heaven, from whence, in the revolution of ages, they are again sent into pure bodies, while the souls of those whose hands have acted madly against themselves are received by the darkest place in Hades, and while God, who is their father, punishes those that offend against either of them in their posterity; . . .¹⁰²

Hints of the prevalence of this belief are found also in Scripture, in the opinions expressed concerning the person of Jesus.¹⁰³

Finally, the Pharisaic doctrine concerning the

¹⁰⁰Abrahams, I, 169.

¹⁰¹Josephus, Wars of the Jews, II, 8, 14.

¹⁰²Ibid., III, 8, 5.

¹⁰³Matt. 14:2. Herod considers Jesus the re-incarnation of the Baptist. Also, Matt. 16:14. Many believed Jesus was a re-incarnated prophet.

resurrection was generally connected closely with the Messianic hope. When the Messiah established His reign, the faithful of long ago would not be forgotten. They would rise to enjoy it as the reward of their faithful service.¹⁰⁴

It is difficult to determine just what the Pharisees taught with respect to the resurrection. This wide variety of thought is to be expected when it proceeds from theological principles such as those outlined above.¹⁰⁵ However, the belief was generally accepted that the righteous of all ages would enjoy the Messianic era. Whether the soul entered the kingdom in its original resurrected body or in another body after a series of transmigrations was not a matter of real concern.

¹⁰⁴ Herford, The Pharisees, pp. 169-175

¹⁰⁵ Supra, p. 53.

¹ Hugo Giesberg, Pharisaism and Christianity trans. by J. H. Hoe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1954), pp. 167.

CHAPTER V

THE ETHICS OF PHARISAISM

Pharisaism is a tragic, but quite familiar, example of a system displacing the object or purpose it is intended to promote. The ethical system of the Pharisees was designed to help those who observed it to remain true to the Torah and, therefore, safe from the idolatry that had once destroyed the nation. Nor can it be denied that behind it all was a deep sincerity of purpose. One could not, for instance, justly have accused Paul of insincerity. Although there were arrant hypocrites among the Pharisees, it is only fair to mention also those nobler, more earnest souls who remained unsatisfied by their way of life and came to Jesus for instruction--some even receiving Him into their hearts. But, as so often occurs when a system is devised, the ethical system of the Pharisees, designed to promote the religion of the Torah, itself came to be identified with it. To all intents and purposes their system became their religion.

Odeberg states that the real norm of the Pharisaic system of ethics was love for mankind.¹ Certainly this

¹Hugo Odeberg, Pharisaism and Christianity trans. by J. M. Moe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 16f.

appears to have been the case with the scribe who admitted to Jesus that to love God

with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and, to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.²

And Jesus recognized this with His reply, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."³

The writings of the rabbis also show that the system was not intended to promote a merely formal observance of the Torah. Mere formal prayer, for instance, was never regarded by them as satisfactory. The various religious observances, the habits which the system was designed to help them to form, were regarded as methods of education whereby "religious ideas could be impressed upon the people's mind and heart."⁴ That many Pharisees earnestly desired to observe the Torah, that they sincerely sought to act out of love to others, and believed that their system helped them to do just that, can hardly be denied. But experience shows that when an attempt is made to achieve a spiritual object by means of some specially prepared,

²Mark 12:33.

³Mark 12:34.

⁴G. H. Box, "Pharisees," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930).

clearly defined, more or less rigidly enforced system, the system tends to take over from the object it is intended to promote. The means become the end.⁵ Consequently, for many Pharisees it became all-important to follow the system itself, rather than to use it to achieve a purpose. Here is to be found the cause of all those aberrations that have become so closely associated with the term: Pharisee.

Several characteristics of Pharisaism can be traced back to this misuse of a system. The first is a wrong attitude towards Revelation. The letter came to replace the spirit. Schirlitz remarks,

Sie erklarten das Schriftliche Gesetz mit grosser Strenge und meist buchstaeblich, und legten auf die Ritualvorschriften groesseren Wert als auf die Forderungen des ethischen Gefuehls. Daher war ihre Sittenlehre im allg. lax, wenn es auch einzelne besser denkende Pharisaeer gab.⁶

Farrar refers to the 248 commands and 365 prohibitions, both "light" and "heavy", which the Pharisees had listed in the Mosaic Law, and maintains that

to one and all alike--not only in the spirit but in the letter--not only in the actual letter, but in the boundless inferences to which the letter might lead when every grain of sense and meaning had

⁵ Roman Catholicism provides a modern example; as also does the Puritanism of various shades that has appeared in Protestant circles from time to time.

⁶ S. C. Schirlitz, Griechisch-Deutsches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testamente (Fuenfte Auflage neu bearbeitet von Th. Eger; Giessen: Verlag von Emil Roth, 1893), sub *φορβαιος*.

been crushed out of it under mountain loads of 'decisions'--a rigidly scrupulous obedience was due, This was what God absolutely required. This, and this only, came up to the true conception of the blameless righteousness of the Law.⁷

This literalism led to some ridiculous absurdities. For instance, the injunctions contained in Deuteronomy, Chapter six were taken literally. Certain Scripture passages were inscribed on pieces of parchment and placed in small boxes which were tied upon the forehead or upon the left arm. Thus the divine words were constantly between their eyes; and, when the arm was bent, over the heart.⁸ By this action many of them believed they had complied with the divine will. In addition the Pharisees generally failed to distinguish between Moral and Ceremonial Law. That is why one of them criticized Jesus so unjustly for not performing the prescribed ablutions before sitting down to a meal.⁹ Insisting on externals, they tended to be deficient in a sense of right and wrong with respect to the things that really mattered. "Outside purity was stressed, while the heart was filled with sin."¹⁰ As a result, tradition ultimately

⁷F. W. Farrar, The Life and Work of St. Paul (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1897), p. 37.

⁸Adam Fahling, The Life of Christ (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1936), p. 550.

⁹Luke 11:38.

¹⁰Fahling, p. 439.

came to replace Revelation in importance.

Secondly, the importance of laws came to be greatly over-emphasized, as even a casual study of the Talmud makes abundantly clear. As generally occurs when a system is over-emphasized, a grand discussion was carried on among the rabbis about all kinds of minutiae, and a great multiplication of laws followed as they surrounded each of the recognized 248 commands and 365 prohibitions of the Mosaic Law with as many ordinances as they could think of, to cover every life situation that might arise or occur to them.¹¹ So great was this multitude of ordinances that no one, not even the most scrupulously exact, could ever be sure that he had not violated one of them. Jesus was guilty of no exaggeration when He said, "they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."¹² Likewise Peter summed up the situation with a neatness, conciseness and clarity born of his own profound experience, when he asked the Synod at Jerusalem, "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither your fathers nor we were able to

¹¹Farrar, The Life and Work of St. Paul, p. 36. The Talmud, for instance, devotes whole treatises to hand-washings, killing fowls, and stalks of legumes respectively.

¹²Matt. 23:4.

bear?"¹³

A few examples of this mania for law-making are in place. Writing of Sabbath observance, Farrar declares,

We know the minute and intense scrupulosity of Sabbath observance wasting itself in all those aboth and toldoth--those primary and derivative rules and prohibitions, and inferences from rules and prohibitions, and combinations of inferences from rules and prohibitions, and cases of casuistry and conscience arising out of the infinite possible variety of circumstances to which those combinations of inference might apply--which had degraded the Sabbath from "a delight, holy of the Lord and honorable," partly into an anxious and pitiless burden, and partly into a network of contrivances hypocritically designed, as it were, in the lowest spirit of heathenism, to cheat the Deity with the mere semblance of accurate observance.¹⁴

This trenchant comment indicates what a hopeless snarl of tangled web they had contrived to spin about the holy Law of God.¹⁵

There is also the ritual of the washings: washings before meals, on returning from the market, on any other suspected occasion of ceremonial uncleanness; and a Pharisee had to be prepared to travel at least four miles in search of the required water if not obtainable near at hand.¹⁶

¹³Acts 15:10.

¹⁴Farrar, The Life and Work of St. Paul. p. 35.

¹⁵Another example is the incident in the corn-field, Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5.

¹⁶F. W. Farrar, The Life of Christ (Popular edition; London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1886), p. 211.

Each ablution had to be accompanied by an appropriate prayer.¹⁷ To such extremes did some of them go, not only in the matter of personal ablutions, but also in the washing of common utensils and the like, that the Sadducees remarked scoffingly that the Pharisees would wash the sun if only they could get the chance.¹⁸

The Jews of later times related with intense admiration how the Rabbi Akiba, when imprisoned and furnished with only sufficient water to maintain life, would have preferred to die of starvation rather than eat without the proper washing.¹⁹

Although no divine authority could be produced for this extravagant attention to washings, many of them proudly, scornfully, even ostentatiously avoided contact with the very shadow of their fellow human-beings;²⁰ and if by mischance this calamity should befall them, they rested not until by the ablution proper to the occasion they had restored themselves to their former ceremonial purity.

There was a similar pre-occupation with respect to foods and fastings. They prescribed minutely what might, of the fruits of the field and of trees.²¹ They had to

¹⁷ Ibid., "The treatise Schulchan-Aruk or "Table arranged," a compendium of Rabbinical usages drawn up by Joseph Karo in 1567, contains no less than twenty-six prayers by which these washings were accompanied."

¹⁸ Farrar, The Life of St. Paul, p. 36.

¹⁹ Farrar, The Life of Christ, p. 211.

²⁰ Farrar, The Life of St. Paul, p. 36.

and what might not, be eaten or drunk. Likewise, they prescribed frequent periods of fasting. Abrahams makes a strenuous attempt to defend this practice. He states that fasting was an accepted form of supplication and mourning, especially in times of calamity. He insists that true repentance had to be associated with it if it was to be effective, and maintains that there was a determined and continuous effort to prevent it from becoming a mere external ritual. He declares that the Monday and Thursday fasts were the exception rather than the rule.²¹ But the fact remains that fasting was not a rite commanded by God, and did not deserve the importance attached to it. Whatever their theory regarding fasting may have been, the Pharisees practised it rigorously, and prided themselves on doing it. There was always the compulsion with them to go further than was required.

This same tendency is evident in their practice of tithing. The Mosaic Law required the tithing of herds and of the fruits of the field and of trees.²² They had to

²¹I. Abrahams, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels, (Cambridge: University Press, 1917), I, 122-128. He states that in the Autumn, when drought threatened, Pharisees would carry out a programme fasting twice each week. He admits that later this programme appears to have become more regular.

²²Lev. 27:30, 32; Deut. 14:22.

improve upon this and tithe all they possessed, even to the cheapest herbs.²³ With absolute seriousness they considered such questions as whether the stalk should not be tithed as well as the seed.²⁴ Thus tithing, always a troublesome concern, was, in addition, made ridiculous.

All this, and much more, can be learnt not from biased, antagonistic Christians, but from an admiring Talmud, the record of Judaism itself.

Thirdly, the ethical system of the Pharisees produced a wrong personal attitude, both towards God and towards the fellow-man. It did tend to nurture the belief that a rigid compliance with a prescribed way of life would suffice to please God, and so to encourage formalism. Certainly such a system would--and did--produce a wide variety of types. There were ascetics, reaching the extreme in the Essenes. There were many austere Pharisees, who practised mortifications not specifically commanded even by Pharisaism, in an attempt to come closer to the goal.²⁵

²³ Matt. 23:23; Luke 11:42.

²⁴ Farrar, The Life and Work of St. Paul, p. 35.

²⁵ T. H. Horne, Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (11th edition; London: Longman & Roberts, 1860), III, 395. He tells how some struggled to keep their bodies pure, especially before marriage, even depriving themselves of sleep lest involuntarily they become unclean and polluted.

Others followed a strict routine particularly at table, though Abrahams claims that generally in this respect they steered a middle course, having no time for "excess in table luxury"; yet believing "that enjoyment was possible and laudable without excess."²⁶ Then, there were the earnest, noble souls, anxiously concerned about what they must "do to inherit eternal life."²⁷ Finally, there were the hypocrites, quite content to follow a system and to be rewarded for doing so; quite content, at the same time, to ignore what was not specifically enjoined by some rabbinic ordinance, even if it meant discarding a divine direction. These were the Pharisees who could interpret the ordinances of the rabbis so adroitly as to enable them to by-pass the Decalogue itself; who could swallow up the properties of widows by a show of right;²⁸ who could regard death as the only just reward of such as opposed and spoke against their

²⁶Abrahams, I, 121.

²⁷Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18.

²⁸Abrahams, I, 80. Abrahams considers the general charge unjust. He does not deny that there were some cases in which, for religious reasons or political aims, some abuses did arise; when the civil law was harshly applied. He points out that the Pharisees themselves criticized such abuses severely. Of course, our Lord never did declare that every Pharisee was guilty of this evil. But He did state that it existed; and it was against such instances that He directed His denunciations.

system;²⁹ who could call their Messiah a devil;³⁰ who could escape their filial duty by designating as corban the money available for the purpose.³¹ These were the Pharisees who could consider as morally right certain things which the Mosaic Law tolerated and regulated in civil life because of human weakness;³² who could distort the meanings of God's laws in favour of their own views;³³ and yet could seek the adulation of men and demand the approval of God.

And so, whatever the intention might have been, and whatever the inner attitude of the individual, the religion of the Pharisees tended to parade itself in outward show, and their morality tended towards formalism and work-righteousness. It was not without reason that Jesus

²⁹ Approving of the crucifixion of Jesus, their Messiah, and participating in the slaughter of Stephen.

³⁰ John 8:48.

³¹ Mark 7:11.

³² The laws on divorce are an example.

³³ Examples are the following. Love of the neighbour excluded all but friends and those of the Jewish race. For that reason the Priest and the Levite could satisfy themselves that they had no obligation towards the man on the Jericho road (Luke 10). Likewise, an oath that did not specifically include the name of God could be sworn with the lips and annulled in the heart. Again, it could be sin to heal the sick or pluck an ear of corn on the Sabbath, but not to help an ox or ass out of a pit. Finally, a ceremonial law sanctioned by a penalty was considered weightier than a moral precept without a penalty expressly attached.

rebuked the Pharisees for their lack of genuine piety, even while He commended some for their earnestness.

Devout souls found the observance of this system an unbearable strain.³⁴ Yet, it was claimed that he who failed lost his right to life. The only incentives it could offer were fear of divine wrath upon the tiniest infringement and the hope of eternal reward for the faithful. But in the diligent observance of their system the Pharisees saw the salvation of Israel. The reward would be the fulfillment of the hope every loyal Jew had cherished since the return from the Exile--the restoration of the theocratic state, when the nation would take its rightful place among the nations, the old fire would be rekindled on the altar, the holy oil be poured again, the Ark be restored and the Shechinah rest once more between the Cherubim. If they kept the Law as they saw it applied in their system, they would, indeed, be God's people and He would be their God. Then Israel would be restored and the Messianic age which they identified with restoration would be ushered in.³⁵

³⁴Acts 15:10.

³⁵Farrar, The Life and Work of St. Paul, p. 37. "If but one person could only for one day keep the whole Law and not offend in one point--may, if but one person could but keep that one point of the Law which affected the due observance of the Sabbath--then (so the Rabbis taught) the troubles of Israel would be ended, and the Messiah at last would come."

It is in place here to delineate the character of the Pharisee and to try to see him as he appeared to the average man of his day. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

Pharisees were fundamentally legalists. Herzfeld emphasizes that in theory they did not desire to identify Torah and precept, maintaining that "while they took a delight in glorifying it on its imperative side, as embodying divine commands, they never dreamed of saying that the Torah was precept and nothing more."¹ Yet, that is what in actual fact they did. Law, and the observance of laws, became of prime importance. As a result they became binders of consciences, with little sympathy for those who failed to reach the standard they had set.

Being legalists they tended to become formalists. In a theology that stresses doing, and doing in a particular way, there is always a strong tendency to overlook the inner motive for one's actions; to allow the disposition of the heart to become less vital than the outward act. This concern for externals gave to Pharisaism that note of unreality that is so frequently the base of formalism.

¹R. F. Herzfeld, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1912), p. 72. Support for this claim is found in the opposition of the Pharisees of the Samaritans for rejecting all books except the Pentateuch.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHARACTER OF THE PHARISEE

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¹R. T. Herford, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1912), p. 76. Support for this claim is found in the opposition of the Pharisees to the Samaritans for rejecting all books except the Pentateuch.

The Pharisees frequently fell victims to that other evil, that curse of legalism and formalism--hypocrisy. Horne describes them as "proud, arrogant, avaricious, consulting only the gratification of their lusts, even at the very moment when they professed themselves to be engaged in the service of their Maker."² While such a sweeping charge undoubtedly does injustice to individuals, the fact remains that the Pharisees themselves were not unaware of the situation. Farrar lists the seven classes of Pharisees described in the Talmud, six of which it condemns as a "mixture of haughtiness and imposture."³ Since this is the evaluation of Pharisees themselves, it is not only a significant commentary on the dangers involved in a system such as theirs, but it also reveals one aspect which they

²T. H. Horne, Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (11th. edition; London: Longman & Roberts, 1860), III, 396.

³F. W. Farrar, The Life of Christ (Popular edition; London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1886), p. 358f. They are:

- (a) "Shechemite"--obeying the law from self-interest.
- (b) "Tumbling"--so humble that he is always stumbling because he will not lift his feet from the ground.
- (c) "Bleeding"--always hurting himself because his modesty will not allow him to walk with open eyes lest he should see a woman.
- (d) "Mortar"--covers his eyes for the same reason.
- (e) The "Tell-me-another-duty-and-I-will-do-it" Pharisee.
- (f) "Timid"--actuated alone by fear.
- (g) "Pharisees from love"--who obey God because they love Him from the heart.

presented to the people of their time.

Odeberg, in his extended discussion of the matter, arrives at the conclusion that while they must be called hypocrites, they cannot fairly be condemned as conscious hypocrites as a class. They were generally not aware of any contradiction between their doctrine and their life. They even condemned hypocrisy as base sin. Odeberg's opinion is worth quoting.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that the Pharisees also in practice--considered as a class and as a group, in other words, in the degree in which they were actually Pharisees--were by no means conscious hypocrites.

However, he continues,

Nevertheless the personal attitude which characterizes the Pharisees must, from the point of view of primitive Christianity, appear as hypocrisy. It might be expressed in this way: Pharisaic ethics must of necessity lead to an actual, although of necessity also an unconscious, hypocrisy. For what does a man do who, although he belongs to one environment in life, attempts to act as if he belonged to another environment? He attempts to be something which he is not, and never can be, so long as he remains what he is. He plays the part of someone else than he is. A hypocrite (hypokrites) in the New Testament really also means, as we know, an actor, one who seeks to accustom himself to something he himself is not. Now, an actor can certainly to some extent enter into another intellectual life and in this way at least reproduce, and for a brief time even be, what constitutes his role. However, there are limits beyond which he cannot go. Even as a person who does not experience love cannot with his perception comprehend what love is, even so a person who belongs to the world apart from God cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God. The more divine he seeks to be, the more intimately will he enter into alliance with the satanic, and will pray and labour

for the advancement of the devil.⁴

Essentially Odeberg's argument is that the Pharisees were hypocrites in the same sense as all are hypocrites who seek to reach God by their own attainments, and are not brought to Him by the Gospel.

However, within this framework of hypocrisy it is necessary to make distinctions. Among the Pharisees there was a Nicodemus, a Gamaliel, a Paul. And Paul's own strictures do not condemn Pharisaism as hypocrisy per se. He spoke of the Pharisees as "the most straitest sect of our religion."⁵ It is not with shame, but with a certain pride that he admitted, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee".⁶ Furthermore, his own deep-seated dissatisfaction with the manner in which he himself had kept the prescribed regulations, so clearly revealed years afterwards in his epistles, shows a man of honest mind. He speaks so feelingly of "the curse of the law"⁷ because for so many years he had felt its weight. He knew so well the struggle between the flesh and the spirit--a "law in my members,

⁴Hugo Odeberg, Pharisaism and Christianity, trans. by J. M. Moe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 64-66.

⁵Acts 26:5.

⁶Acts 23:6.

⁷Gal. 3:10,13.

warring against the law of my mind,"⁸ he calls it--from the bitter experiences and struggles of earlier years.

"O wretched man that I am: Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"⁹ That is a cry from the heart of a Pharisee whose Pharisaism failed him, and who ultimately found peace outside it. It is well to remember, as Davis reminds us, that while great danger was to be incurred by joining the party, "the Pharisees were men of strong religious character. They were the best people in the nation."¹⁰ When conditions changed and Pharisaism became popular, it attracted men of much inferior character. Then those vicious elements developed that received such devastating rebukes from the Baptist and from the Lord Himself. Yet, there were always those who received the approval and kindly concern of Him Who will draw all men unto Himself;¹¹ and it is because of these that in spite of the others, Pharisees stood so high in the estimation of the people of their day.

⁸Rom. 7:23.

⁹Rom. 7:24.

¹⁰John D. Davis, A Dictionary of the Bible (Fourth revised edition; Philadelphia; The Westminster Press, 1936), sub Pharisees.

¹¹John 12:32.

CHAPTER VII

THE PHARISEES AND THEIR MESSIAH

Development of Messianic Beliefs

Jewish notions regarding the Messiah were so varied that it is difficult, if not impossible, to present a clear picture of what was Pharisaic teaching concerning Him.¹ This, of course, can be understood when it is borne in mind that beliefs concerning the Messiah belonged to the Haggadah rather than the Halachah.

One fact stands out clearly. The Messianic beliefs were closely bound up in almost every case with the nationalistic ideal of the theocratic state. The Messiah would be Jehovah's instrument to bring to fruition His plans once more to rule His people directly. Essentially, that was also the position of the Pharisees, although their views were generally of the less militant type.²

In earlier times the hopes of Jews tended to be directed towards a Messianic kingdom rather than towards a personal Messiah; "a future Golden Age for Israel, rather than

¹H. E. Dana, The New Testament World (Third edition revised; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), p. 130.

²Ibid., p. 129.

the definite conception of an individual deliverer who was to come." In later Judaism the emphasis began to shift to the advent of a particular individual, "a great, divinely appointed leader who should become the national champion against Israel's foes," and so usher in the golden age; restore the theocratic state. This conviction began to develop particularly after the Exile, when the chastened Jews were determined to keep their part of the covenant by promoting the temple ritual and strictly enforcing the Torah. Then, they believed, Jehovah would perfect His part of the covenant by becoming the direct, supreme and complete Ruler of His people.³

Though one foreign power after another--all out of sympathy with Jewish aspirations--inflicted itself upon the nation, these convictions were strengthened. Were they not Jehovah's people? Was not their cause just and their ideal correct? Would He leave His own to suffer forever? So, far from becoming frustrated and discouraged by the succession of alien rulers, they became more and more certain that God would establish His kingdom in His own good time by some direct intervention that would bring to naught the wicked schemes of their enemies. Thus the eyes of faithful Jews turned from the present to the future; to the

³Ibid., pp. 129-131.

Messiah, the focus of their ideals and hopes.

While these convictions grew, no clear pattern of belief emerged. There was a general agreement that God would intervene to "deliver His people from heathen bondage and elevate them to the supreme place of power and influence among the nations."⁴ But there was a variety of theories concerning the nature and the policies of the Messiah; the method by which God's plan would be carried out.

From the first century B.C. there was less tendency to stress the material side of the Messianic concept, and a growing disposition to emphasize the spiritual;⁵ though the former was not completely set aside. More attention, however, was paid to the writings of the prophets, and the theocratic state came to be regarded as the terrestrial environment in which Jehovah's spiritual purposes would be achieved.⁶ But here, too, there was much divergence of belief, for "although this hope was very wide-spread and held powerful sway over the religious sentiment and expectation,

⁴Ibid., p. 131 (Author's italics).

⁵C. von Orelli, "Messiah," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. by Samuel MacAuley Jackson (New York & London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1911).

⁶This seems to have been the idea of the disciples, and, probably, of all those who became permanently attracted to Jesus.

it had neither clear outlines nor well-defined unity."⁷

Briefly, then, while the belief in the Messiah was almost universal, and while His mission came, to an increasing degree, to assume a spiritual character, no clearly formulated doctrine emerged.

The Advent of the Messiah

There was general agreement that the advent of the Messiah would be sudden and unexpected. Frequently it was identified with the final judgment, when the Jews would be saved and all Gentiles condemned,⁸ and "the heavens and the earth" would be "renewed and all their creation according to the powers of the heaven, and according to all the creation of the earth, until the sanctuary of the Lord" would be "made in Jerusalem on Mount Zion, and all the luminaries be renewed for healing and for peace and for blessing for all the elect of Israel. . . ."⁹ But the choice of that time

⁷C. von Orelli, "Messiah," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge.

⁸A concept like that of Jesus, which included Gentiles in the kingdom, was abhorrent to most Jews, though there were always those who believed that some pious Gentiles might have a place in the kingdom of the world to come.

⁹The Book of Jubilees, I:29.

The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah (New American edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1947), I, 167.

was in the hands of God.¹⁰

There was general agreement, also, that the advent of the Messiah was being hindered by the sin of the world, and by the unfaithfulness and hypocrisy of so many of the chosen people themselves.¹¹ This was a powerful incentive to every faithful Pharisee to practise diligently what his system demanded of him. Thus, he believed, he was doing his part in hastening the day of the Messiah's advent.

The Person of the Messiah

It is possible to isolate four basic concepts which are fundamental, either singly or in various combinations, to all beliefs concerning the person of the Messiah held by various groups and in different ages.

The Prophetic Concept

The notion that the Messiah would be a great prophet was based upon the utterances of the prophets themselves; and particularly upon the prophecy of Moses: "The Lord thy God will raise up into thee a Prophet from the midst of

¹⁰R. T. Herford, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putman & Sons, 1912), p. 254.

¹¹Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah (New American edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Erdmanns Publishing Company, 1947), I, 167.

thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."¹² The significant utterances of Malachi, also prophesying immediately after the return from Exile, were frequently and confidently quoted in support.

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.¹³

Again, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."¹⁴ This concept was held as early as Maccabean times. The priests directed by Judas to cleanse the sanctuary decided that the best way to cleanse the altar which had been profaned, was to pull it down.

wherefore they pulled it down. And laid up the stones in the mountain of the temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to shew what should be done with them.¹⁵

Again, "For he had heard say . . . that the Jews and Priests were well-pleased that Simon should be their governor and high priest forever, until there should arise a faithful

¹² Deut. 18:15.

¹³ Mal. 3:1. Taken by some to refer not to the Forerunner, but to the Messiah Himself.

¹⁴ Mal. 4:5.

¹⁵ 1 Macc. 4:45-46.

prophet".¹⁶ This notion persisted to the days of our Lord. John the Baptist is faced by the delegation from Jerusalem with the question, "Art thou that prophet?"¹⁷ And, indeed, a ministry like his would have appealed with particular force to such as held the expectation of a Messiah-Prophet. Considerable speculation attended the beginning of Jesus' ministry; but there was a fairly general agreement as to the nature of it. "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."¹⁸ The Messiah-prophet was expected by many, particularly the more spiritually-minded.

The Priestly Concept.

In the later period after the Exile the belief gained popularity that the Messiah would be a priest. This was the period when the Maccabees were at the height of their power. Undoubtedly, their influence helped to foster the idea. They were Levites themselves. What was more probable than that the Messiah should spring from their noble family--itself of the priestly caste--that had done so much for the nation? This belief reached the peak of its

¹⁶1 Macc. 14:40-41.

¹⁷John 1:21.

¹⁸Matt. 16:14.

popularity when Jonathan and Simon combined the office of prince and high-priest, although it lost to the Maccabees the support of the Chasidim; but after the Maccabean era it declined. In point of fact, this notion could not well be reconciled either with the dogmas of the Pharisees, which, were becoming increasingly important, or with the material concept of the kingdom which was gaining in popularity, and which fitted more closely the Biblical prediction that the Messiah would rise from the house of Judah.¹⁹

The Royal Concept.

Side by side with the priestly concept--eventually superseding it--the idea developed that the Messiah would be a warrior-king, who would restore the ancient kingdom. This idea fitted exactly many of the Messianic prophecies and supported the material concept of the theocratic state. In addition, as foreign domination increased, the need for a military hero who would lead the nation to victory, was felt more and more urgently. Considerable impetus was given to this notion when it was discovered that the prophets taught that the Messiah would be a descendant of David, and a king.²⁰ Hence, devout Jews began to look for a

¹⁹Dana, pp. 132f.

²⁰For instance, Is. 9:27; 11:21; Jer. 23: 5-6.

Prince of the House of David.²¹ By the time of Christ this was by far the most popular opinion. The Pharisees when questioned by Jesus concerning the ancestry of the Messiah did not hesitate to reply, "The son of David."²² Spontaneously the multitude welcomed Him to Jerusalem as "the son of David," the Messiah, coming "in the name of the Lord."²³ The five thousand, satisfied with the food He had provided, betrayed their conception of the Messiah when they prepared to make Him their King.²⁴ The disciples, to the very last, persisted in holding the idea that He had come to "restore again the kingdom to Israel."²⁵ To the prevalence of this notion non-Biblical literature also bears abundant testimony.²⁶ This was the belief generally held by the Pharisees. It was widely accepted for generations after the time of our Lord, and so dominated Jewish religious thought that

²¹I. Abrahams, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels (Cambridge: University Press, 1917), I, 136. He lists as one of the few exceptions Akiba's recognition of Bar Cochba, since there is no evidence of his Davidic descent.

²²Matt. 22:42.

²³Matt. 21:9.

²⁴John 6:15.

²⁵Acts 1:6.

²⁶Dana, p. 134 cites 1 Macc. 2:57; Psalms of Solomon, esp. 17:5,23; Targums on Is. 11:1; 14:29.

it contributed not a little to the ultimate destruction of the nation.

The Supernatural Concept

The concept of a supernatural Messiah was rarely found alone. Usually it was combined with one of the foregoing. This concept became increasingly popular and more clearly defined as the sufferings of the nation grew in intensity and dissatisfaction mounted. As one leader after another failed to achieve his goal--and some of them showed great promise--leaving the nation in a worse plight than before, the conviction grew that only a supernatural being could rescue God's people from their enemies.²⁷

There were few, if any, however, who expected a divine personality. Some expected an angelic being; some, more; some, less. Edersheim declares that from the writings of the rabbis it is possible to draw two inferences concerning the supernatural personality of the Messiah.

First, the idea of a Divine Personality, and of the union of the two Natures in the Messiah, seems to have been foreign to the Jewish auditory of Jesus of Nazareth, and even at first to His disciples. Secondly, they appear to have regarded the Messiah as far above the ordinary human, royal, prophetic, and even Angelic type, to such an extent that the boundary-

²⁷ Dana, p. 133.

line separating it from Divine Personality is of the narrowest²⁸

As a result, he continues, many found little difficulty in stepping over the boundary-line and confessing of Him: "thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."²⁹ Such as these, however, came to this conviction only after a fuller revelation had been made to them, or they had received a deeper insight into Jesus' mission. Few, if any, came to understand it through a study of the Prophets. And a Messiah Who was God incarnate, Prophet, Priest and King, was completely unknown to them until He came.

Pharisaic Concepts of the Messiah and His Age

It is not possible to isolate and identify any particular conception as specifically Pharisaic. All that can be said is that their beliefs were circumscribed by the limits that confined most Jewish conceptions of the later inter-testamental era.

As typical Jews, their world concepts were limited by the boundaries of their land and nation. Nothing outside had any real importance for them. Hence, their ideals, their world-view centred around the restoration and the

²⁸Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, I. 171.

²⁹John 6:69.

glorification of Israel. This was the mission of the Messiah; and, in all essentials, it was limited to the Jews.

Within this framework their concept was a politico-spiritual one. God would intervene in the affairs of Israel, for He had chosen the nation as His own and could not repudiate His covenant. Israel was, they confessed, suffering not only because of the wickedness of the world, but also because of her own unfaithfulness.³⁰ But the Messiah, God's chosen representative, would come. Whether he would be supernatural or human was of little import. But he would be a conquering hero, breaking the power of alien rulers and re-establishing the theocracy. Then would Israel reach her destiny and the golden age begin. Whether this would be a temporary or an eternal age, whether it would precede or follow the final judgment--these were questions on which there was no agreement, and to which little importance was attached. But this was important that the Pharisaic ideal of perfect harmony between God and man--the Pharisaic conception of salvation--would be reached at last.³¹ Then would the ultimate victory be won over the powers of evil, the nation would be renewed, healing,

³⁰Book of Jubilees, XXIII:9,11-15,17-19,22-25.

³¹R. T. Herford, The Pharisees (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924), p. 169.

blessing and peace would come upon the faithful people.³² Then the Torah, as they interpreted it, would be promoted through Israel in the world. Then the temple would be restored and the full ritual observed once more. Once again the golden candlestick would shine; the Ark and the Cherubim occupy their former place; the heavenly fire burn upon the altar; and the Shechinah rest upon the House of God.³³

To sum up, then, the Messianic hopes of the Pharisees were fundamentally and, perhaps of necessity, mundane. They did not--they could not--grasp the spiritual nature of His mission. They did not even understand the full implications of the Messianic promises in the Torah itself. For them Law had become the prime concern. All else was Haggadah. Nor could they think otherwise because of their limited conception of the problem of sin. Edersheim sums up the position correctly.

In the absence of felt need of deliverance from sin, we can understand how Rabbinic tradition found no place for the Priestly office of the Messiah, and how even His claims to be the Prophet of His people are almost entirely overshadowed by His appearance as their King and Deliverer.³⁴

³²Book of Jubilees V:12; **XXIII**:26-31.

³³Edersheim, Jesus, the Messiah, II, 437.

³⁴Ibid., I, 167.

The Pharisees wanted a king: no more, no less.

It is easy to understand how oppression gave this colouring to their thinking. How can God and man live in harmony if such wickedness is allowed to prevail and such foes pour out their hatred on Israel unavenged? The Zealots tried to solve the problem by force. The Essenes turned their backs on the situation and sought to create a community in which the Messiah would feel at home. The Pharisees went to neither extreme. They continued to hope. They waited for God to fulfil His promise in His good time. Meanwhile, they strove by living the Torah to do their part to hasten the day of His coming.

The Influence of the Messianic Hope

The Messianic hope was the very core of Pharisaic religious thought. "At the dawn of the Christian Era no other element held a larger place in Jewish life at large than this Messianic expectation."³⁵ Earnest, diligent as they were in performing all the duties, observing all the requirements of their system, the Pharisees had before them at all times the vision of the Messianic age. One Pharisee was profoundly religious, another more politically-minded; one was impelled by a deep spiritual-mindedness, another was frankly

³⁵Dana, p. 138.

carnal, earthly in his outlook; one looked for the salvation of the nation from within humanity, another awaited a supernatural champion. But at the centre of the faith of each was the Messianic hope. Dana calls it "the vital centre of the Jewish religion" the one element which could--and did--produce "a far more spiritual type of religious experience than could have been otherwise possible in the midst of Pharisaic formalism."³⁶ Baur states that

no important movement could take place upon the soil of the history of the Jewish people and religion without either being introduced by the Messianic idea or becoming involved with it at a later stage.³⁷

It was the "note of hope" that "has . . . always sounded in Rabbinical Judaism in regard to the future of mankind, an unconquerable optimism based on unshakable trust in the goodness and righteousness of God."³⁸ It is the hope that has sustained the Jew throughout his many, and often severe, adversities, and has occupied so much of his religious thinking even to the present day.

There were times when the Messianic hopes "rose into exceptional prominence, and were held with more than usual

³⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 138f. Quoted from Baur, Church History in the First Three Centuries, I, 39.

³⁸ Herford, The Pharisees, p. 169.

fervour."³⁹ At such times fanaticism frequently took control and often resulted in violence. It was these expressions of the Messianic hope that contributed so largely to the political disturbances that characterized the post-exilic era.

The Pharisees and Jesus

From their very earliest contacts with the Lord the Pharisees found themselves in opposition to Him. The question of His person and His authority came to the fore immediately. In examining His claims to be the Messiah they were not, of course, exceeding their authority. This was their duty.⁴⁰ But, with few exceptions, they prejudged Him and took up a consistently hostile attitude towards Him. One misses the unbiassed, dispassionate open-mindedness which might have been expected in so important a matter.

The reason, of course, is obvious. The Pharisees had long ago made up their minds about the Messiah; and their convictions were not founded upon Scripture. Actually, no Pharisee true to the dogmas of his fraternity could have accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Those who ultimately did so

³⁹ Herford, Pharisaism, p. 256.

⁴⁰ Adam Fahling, The Life of Christ (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1936), p. 356.

were the more spiritually-minded members, who, shaken in their convictions through their contacts with Him, were prepared to concede the possibility that they erred. Jesus simply did not measure up to the standard of a warrior-king. That branded Him immediately as an imposter. In addition, His mission was entirely too spiritual for most of them, entranced, as they were, by the vision of the glorious earthly kingdom and the glory of Israel. Thirdly, most of them were repelled by His readiness to accept Gentiles into His kingdom directly rather than through the doorway of Judaism. Again, His message of salvation was decidedly unpalatable. Accept the righteousness of another? They preferred to bask in the glory of their personal victory over Yetzar-ha-Ra. Fifthly, His claims of divinity were too definite for them. That the Messiah might be a supernatural being they were prepared to allow; but that He would be God Himself they would not admit. Finally, their differences with respect to the Torah became an insurmountable barrier. They were so sure that their theory of the Torah was correct and that in their system they had discovered a way--the best way--to observe it faithfully. It was conceivable to them that the message of the Messiah might in some respects supersede the Torah; but they were certain He would never oppose it. When Jesus definitely and unmistakably condemned some of their attitudes and denounced

some of their practices--particularly when He hurled His Woes upon them⁴¹--they interpreted His words as an attack not only on themselves, but also upon the Torah. From that moment He was a condemned man, a heretic. From that moment they rejected Him.

It is interesting to note that the Pharisees never did actually take up with Jesus the question of His Messiahship. Their minds had been made up early--in fact, as soon as His attitude towards the Torah became apparent. It was a Sadducee, the high-priest, who finally, at His trial, set the issue squarely before the Lord, and drew from Him the reply that sealed His fate.

⁴¹Matt. 23:13ff.; Luke 11:42ff.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PHARISEES IN THE JEWISH ENVIRONMENT

The Environment of the Common Man

The place of the Pharisees in the Jewish environment becomes more clearly defined if it is compared with that occupied by the Sadducees. Generally speaking, the Sadducees represented the aristocratic section of the nation, while the Pharisees, though in theory they did not deny membership to any who were prepared to accept their system, had no great representation from that class. Secondly, the Sadducees were more closely associated with the temple; the Pharisees more deeply concerned with the Synagogue. Thirdly, the Sadducees were closely connected with the ruling class; the Pharisees with the people. Finally, the Sadducees were generally interested in promoting Hellenism; the Pharisees sought to cultivate the ancient culture of the Torah.¹

It is clear that the environment in which the Pharisees thrived, in which they exerted their greatest influence, was the environment of the common man, with whom the Sadducees had little contact and over whom they exercised scant

¹Supra, chapter I, passim.

authority. Consequently, as far as the nation was concerned, the influence of the Pharisees far outweighed that of the Sadducees. In the policy-making area of the national life the Sadducees certainly held their own. The Pharisees were the power among the people, and therefore, could not be ignored, if the ruling class would have the support of the nation. It is a fact that the Pharisees moulded the thinking and acting of their nation rather than the Sadducees.² The average Jew in the day of our Lord was at heart a Pharisee; and the Jew continues to be such to this present time.

It is obvious, then, that the influence of the Pharisees was very great in all areas of Jewish life--religious, political, social. It is, of course, not easy to make a distinction between the three. The Jews never really considered them outside the framework of the theocratic state. Within it, the three were closely related. Jewish political theory could hardly be considered apart from the social structure; and fundamental to both were their religious tenets. For convenience, however, we shall treat the three separately.

The Pharisees in the Religious Environment

Though comparatively few in numbers, the Pharisees

²Infra, p. 136.

were the most prominent group; the predominating influence. They were the actual representatives of the Jewish religious world. Even Edersheim, who is not disposed to treat them gently, says, "In very truth they mostly did represent, in some one or other degree of their order, what of earnestness and religious zeal there was in the land."³ By diligently fostering the Torah and applying its principles "to the practical affairs of everyday life,"⁴ they became the principal and most successful opponents of Hellenism.

The Pharisees are usually described as the party of narrow legalistic tendencies, and it is forgotten how strenuously they laboured against the hellenizing movement for the maintenance of Monotheism.⁵

Thus they laboured successfully to keep Israel true to the old religion of the Torah. These facts should not be overlooked. The Pharisees, through their adherence to the Torah and the national traditions, and their promotion of the Messianic hope, as they understood it, were chiefly responsible for maintaining the faith and the spirit of the nation in its tribulations, and thus giving it a character

³A. Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ (London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1961), p. 226.

⁴G. H. Box, "Pharisees," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Edited by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930).

⁵Ibid. Quoted from Elbogen, Die Religionsanschauungen der Pharisaeer mit besonderer Beruecksichtigung der Begriffe Gott und Mensch, (Berlin, 1904), p. 2.

distinct from that of any other nation influenced by Hellenism. At the same time the legalism that emerged from their interpretation and application of the Torah became the peculiar characteristic of Judaism to such an extent that Pharisaism and Judaism became identified; and were, to all intents and purposes, so identified by the time of Jesus. The Pharisees, therefore, have a right to be regarded as "the inner core of Jewish life."⁶

The Pharisees and the Temple

While from early times the influence of the Pharisees was sufficiently powerful to enable them to have the mitre and the crown separated once more, yet it is generally correct to say that the Sadducees controlled the temple. Likewise, it is generally true that the priests were Sadducees.

There was a constant state of tension and struggle between the two, from which the Pharisees emerged with many a victory. Bitter though it was for them to do so, and opposed as they were to the traditionalism of their opponents, the Sadducees were forced to accept many of their interpretations and recognize their wishes. Josephus writes, "they are able to do almost nothing of themselves;

⁶H. E. Dana, The New Testament World (Third Edition revised; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), p. 119.

for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly and by force sometimes obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the Pharisees because the multitude would not otherwise bear them."⁷ While they claimed to control the temple, it was the Pharisees who interpreted the laws pertaining to worship and ritual; and with these they had to comply as a condition of holding office. Indirectly, the Pharisees controlled many aspects of the temple cultus. By the time of our Lord members of the fraternity had actually managed to gain seats in the priest-controlled Sanhedrin. While the temple was not their particular preserve, even here they were able to exert considerable influence, and reduce correspondingly that of the Sadducees. At the time of Christ the Sadducees were still in virtual control of temple affairs;⁸ but about 50 A.D. the Pharisees appear to have become supreme even here.

⁷Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, trans. by Wm. Whiston (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1871), XVIII, I, 4.

⁸G. H. Box, "Pharisees," in Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. Box finds here an important commentary on the trial of Jesus. He maintains that the Pharisaic criminal law as set forth in the Mishnah was completely violated; and deduces from this fact that in this act the Pharisees were overshadowed, and that the chief responsibility lay with the Sadducees. One wonders, however, whether they could have got away with such a glaring infringement without the connivance of the Pharisees. In any case, the events recorded in John 11:47-53 do not bear out that contention.

The Pharisees and the Synagogue

It was outside the temple, however, particularly in the Synagogue, that the influence of the Pharisees was supreme. It cannot be proved that they founded the Synagogue and its associated schools. But there is no doubt that they gave their imprint to both its teaching and practice;⁹ and that they developed it into a powerful instrument for moulding religious and moral life. This was the influence they desired, for they shrewdly recognized its importance. With their influence over the people they would exercise a worth-while control over the temple without having to shoulder too many of the responsibilities. This left them ample time to develop the functions of worship and instruction within the Synagogue, according to their theories, without hindrance from the temple.¹⁰

Briefly, then, the Pharisees controlled the educational aspect of Judaism. Consequently, in their hands lay the responsibility for safe-guarding the Jewish morals and the more personal side of the religion of the nation.

⁹Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, p. 226.

¹⁰R. T. Herford, The Pharisees (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1924), p. 88.

The Pharisees and the People

The Pharisees made Judaism a religion of the hearth. This the temple could not have done. It was still the hub around which religious life rotated,¹¹ and the priest was still held in respect because of his office; but the temple was too far removed from the lives of most people, and the priest held too little communication with them. The Synagogue with its schools, and not the temple, was the institution with which the people lived.¹² The rabbi, not the priest, was the spiritual father, "present at all times, a guide in the most intimate details of life, the source of enlightenment in every problem, the last appeal in every mooted question."¹³ Little wonder that he was often regarded as the chosen representative of God and His will. In the Synagogue with its day-by-day influence in every village, the centre of the village communal life, the Pharisees sat entrenched.

Here we have an important reason why Judaism did not die out with the destruction of the temple. The Sadducees, who stood for it, fell with it and lost the little influence

¹¹Ibid., pp. 97f.

¹²Dana, p. 128.

¹³Ibid.

they had retained. That for which the Pharisees stood, the religion of hearth and home, was independent of the temple. It remained unharmed; and the Pharisees, who promoted it, survived with it.

Conscientiously, undauntedly, untiringly the Pharisees spent their energies instructing the people in the Torah, combatting secularism and seeking to make religion the dominating influence in their lives. So devoted were they, and so successful, that their interpretations came to be regarded as the standard in Jewish religious thought, which even the aristocracy and the priesthood had to accept. Dana comments that while their system was basically evil, it did set the Jews apart as patterns of moral rectitude in a world that was anything but moral.¹⁴

In addition, the Pharisees strove to relate the worship side of their religion more closely to the life of the nation. They stressed the fact that the temple was for the people, not the sacred preserve of the priests; and that the priests were the deputies of the people, acting at the altar on their behalf. Therefore, they insisted that the people should take a greater part in the sacrifice. Sacrifices should be provided by the people and not bought out of the temple treasury. The accompanying prayers

¹⁴Ibid.

should be recited beside the sacrifice where all could participate; and the custom was established that the Ma'omadoth, a deputation of laymen, should be present at the daily sacrifices. Thus the temple service became more democratic and more meaningful.¹⁵

The worship aspect of Judaism also became more intimately associated with the Synagogue. A liturgy and service of worship was provided for use in the Synagogue, so that the worship side of their religion should not be overshadowed by the instructional side--a possibility not to be over-looked with the temple so far away and the Synagogue so near. The Sabbath and the holy days, so long regarded as temple festivals, were related to the Synagogue, so that they could be observed also by those who could not attend the temple services. Thus they became more personally significant than they could otherwise have been for most of the Jews.¹⁶

Thus the Pharisees did make religion a much more personal matter--a necessary influence when the centre of religious life was so far removed from most Jews.

It is not difficult to understand why the Pharisees

¹⁵G. H. Box, "Pharisees," in Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.

¹⁶Ibid. 1314.

were generally held in such reverence. They certainly were dedicated men, untiring in their efforts to preserve and propagate the Torah. They were the only "models of virtue and holiness,"¹⁷ the only source of inspiration the common man could find in a corrupt age. They were the standard-bearers of the ancient religion. Whatever might be said of the religious beliefs they represented, it cannot be denied that they were the most zealous guardians of religious vitality among the people.¹⁸ Without them the ancient religion might well have been swallowed up in the wave of Hellenism that was rolling over the world. To these men the common man looked with profound admiration, not unmixed with a certain despair for himself. How could he hope to reach such a standard of purity and dedication?

And how did the Pharisees react? They continued enthusiastically to bind heavy burdens and lay them on the shoulders of their fellow-Jews; but they refused to raise one finger to help some poor despairing soul to bear his burden.¹⁹ They gloried in the adulation that was heaped upon them; but they held in contempt the very people who

¹⁷Henry Hart Milman, The History of the Jews (Fourth edition; London: John Murray, 1866), II, 109.

¹⁸Dana, p. 118.

¹⁹Matt. 23:4.

admired them but could not reach their height, scornfully dubbing them the Am-ha-aretz.

This is the religious persuasion that survived when the nation itself was crushed. The Sadducees virtually disappeared with the fall of the temple. The Zealots were crushed with Bar Cochba. The Essenes isolated themselves out of existence. The Pharisees alone remained,

as the only guides and teachers who had a word for the people; and they, and none others, saved from the ruin of the Jewish nation all that could be saved, and spoke to the stricken hearts of their countrymen the words of comfort and hope.²⁰

That is why the Judaism that has survived to the present day is in all essentials Pharisaism.

The Pharisees in the Political Environment

In a certain sense the Pharisees believed in the separation of Church and State. They were men of religion, interested in moulding religious character. They were avowedly non-political, not prone to participate in either religious or political intrigue. At the same time they would brook no interference in their religious pursuits. Then they were prepared to enter even the political arena and to fight back. Generally, when the Pharisees were forced by historical developments to participate in

²⁰Herford, The Pharisees, p. 52.

political affairs, religious issues were involved. Otherwise they tended to be a non-resistance party.²¹

On the other hand, the Pharisees could never really separate Church and State. Their principle of the theocratic state made them of necessity intensely nationalistic. They were convinced that a Jewish state could be rightly governed only according to the principles of the Torah. Only the theocratic state had the right to exist by divine authority. No Jew could feel completely happy in any other environment. Hence, alien powers were only tolerated and there was always a deep, smouldering hatred for foreign over-lords; though the Pharisees were not disposed to allow it to flame into open rebellion unless a threat was directed against their religion. At the same time, they prayed that the Lord would deliver the nation.

Meanwhile, they sought to hasten the day by peaceful means; firmly believing that if Israel observed the Torah faithfully, God would fulfil His part of the covenant. Thus their religious influence became their political weapon. Their religious concepts determined their political ideals and actions. The well-being of the State, they

²¹As in the struggles with Vespasian, 68-70, A.D., and with Hadrian, 132-135, A.D. In both cases disaster was brought about by fanatical elements.

R. T. Herford, *Pharisees, The Aim and Its Method* (London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1912), pp. 43-45.

believed, would be advanced to the extent that the nation was faithful to its religion. This is the influence which they tried to wield in the political sphere.

This influence they exercised very largely within the framework of the Pharisee-Sadducee struggle for power. The significance of this struggle, also in the political arena, cannot be over-estimated: "The entire history of the Jews and of their literature from the Maccabean wars until the destruction of Jerusalem is dominated by this partizan antithesis."²² The Sadducees struggled grimly to retain the governing authority and the judicial power. The Pharisees struggled just as grimly to wrest it from them. They never did gain permanent political mastery; but they did obtain representation in the Sanhedrin, and eventually succeeded in seizing the power of judicial decision.²³ Rarely, if ever, were the Sadducees able, either in internal or in external politics, to act with complete independence of Pharisaic opinion for fear of antagonizing the nation. So the battle raged: the Sadducees battling for unrestricted control; the Pharisees determined not to lose the influence

²²F. Sieffert, "Pharisees and Sadducees," The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, ed. by Samuel MacAuley Jackson (New York & London: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1911).

²³R. T. Herford, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putman & Sons, 1912), pp. 43-45.

they exerted as the champions of the common man.

Indirect though their influence was, the Pharisees and not the Sadducees gave to the nation its political colouring. Theirs were the politics of the man in the street and the field; for their religion was his religion, their theory of the theocracy his vision of the ideal state. For this reason, though they refused to consider themselves a political party, they were the true political leaders.²⁴

These same theories were responsible for the resentment which other nations felt towards the Jews. Gentiles, with the exception of those few who were prepared to submit to the Torah, were excluded from the theocratic state and its benefits. In fact, they were to be sacrificed to assure to the Chosen People their heritage. This attitude no Gentile would tolerate. Hence, the Jews, with their Pharisaic leaders, were largely responsible for the violence they suffered from time to time. Rehwinkel states correctly that it is in the teachings of the Pharisees as contained in their traditions that

we are to discover the prime and root cause of the Jewish problem. This wretched system infected the greater part of Jewry with the contagion of an inordinate national and religious pride and deceived

²⁴T. H. Horne, Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures (11th edition; London: Longman & Roberts, 1860), III, 391.

them with hallucinations of a self-inflated exclusiveness. Its effect was to kindle in the breast of the non-Jew the spark of resentment and vindictiveness which was liable at any moment to be fanned into the flame of anti-Jewish rioting and persecution.²⁵

On the Pharisees, therefore, who survived the holocaust, must be laid a large share of the blame for the final destruction of their people; brought about by the very means they had devised to save them.

The Pharisees in the Social Environment

In the Jewish social system the Pharisees lived as men apart: a distinct religious caste, living their lives within the society to which they belonged; convinced that in the theocratic state only the social precepts and regulations set down in the Torah had any right of place, and seeking to make them the guiding principles of the society in which they lived. In this society they were conspicuous on account of their exclusiveness and because of their arrogance over their achievements. The pre-eminence which they claimed, their fellow-Jews were generally prepared to accord to them as men who had attained to a status which they themselves felt they could never--or were not prepared to attempt to--reach.

²⁵ Alfred Martin Rehwinkel, New Testament World (Third revised edition; St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1950), pp. 112f.

Yet they were vitally concerned with the society in which they lived. As the religious leaders of the nation, they were also the moulders of the social environment. The attempts to foist Hellenism upon the Jews helped rather than hindered them. For a pagan Hellenism possessed a mighty appeal. To a Jew it could only be obnoxious. Hence, despite the inroad of Hellenism, Jewish society remained in all essentials the society of the theocratic state as the Pharisees conceived it.

But the situation must not be over-simplified. Complicating the issue was the never-ending struggle with the Sadducees, who believed just as firmly that the nation could only be saved by a closer alignment with the overlords, and that Hellenism would have to be accepted to a greater or lesser degree. The Pharisees never did succeed in winning them over to an acceptance of their theories of the theocratic state. The Jewish social environment was, therefore, characterized by a state of tension. Hellenistic and theocratic social systems existed side by side: each struggling with the other; each appealing to a particular group; each influencing the other in some area or another. But it was the influence of the Pharisees that affected the greater portion of the nation. The Pharisees, not the Sadducees; the Synagogue, not the temple, moulded Jewish thought and character, and became the determining

factor with respect to the Jewish social structure. This influence the Hellenistic aristocracy might not accept; but neither could it stem it.

Conflicts with Jesus

Very early in His ministry Jesus came into contact with the Pharisees. It could not be otherwise, for no rabbi could hope to teach without attracting their notice. Very early, too, a deep and bitter antagonism developed between them. On occasions Jesus criticized them in no uncertain terms. They on the other hand, condemned Him just as positively and repudiated utterly both His claims and His mission.

Jesus and the Pharisees did not, of course, differ on all matters of doctrine. They would not, for instance, have opposed—in fact, they would have approved most heartily—some of His ethical principles set forth in His Sermon on the Mount.¹ They agreed with His summary of the Tables of the Law.² While they did not have a complete and clear teaching in all details, they would certainly have aligned themselves with Jesus on the question of the reality of the resurrection. Jesus, on the other hand,

¹Matt. 5-7.

²Matt. 22:36-40.

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CHAPTER IX

THE PHARISEES AND THE CHRISTIANS

Conflicts with Jesus

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¹Matt. 5-7.

²Matt. 22:36-40.

could have recognized the deep, sincere piety behind such prayers as those that follow--prayers so different from that of the Pharisee in the temple³--even if He could not have approved completely of every underlying theological principle.

May it be Thy will, O Lord our God and the God of our fathers, that Thou wouldst put it into our hearts to offer sincere repentance before Thee, that we may not be ashamed before our fathers in the world to come.⁴

And again,

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, Who quickenest the dead. Lord, I have sinned against Thee; may it be Thy will, O Lord my God, that Thou wouldst give me a good heart, a good portion, a good disposition, a good understanding, a good name, a good eye, a good hope, a good soul, a humble soul, and a contrite spirit. May Thy name not be profaned among us; and make us not a by-word in the mouth of the people; may our latter end be not to be cut off, nor our hope the giving up of the ghost. Make us not to depend on human gifts, and give us not our sustenance by the hand of men; for their comfort is small and the shame they inflict is great. And grant our lot to be in Thy Torah, with those who do Thy will. Build Thy house, Thy temple, Thy city and Thy sanctuary, speedily, in our days.⁵

On more than one occasion our Lord recognized a sincere and earnest attitude of mind. To one who had answered

³Luke 18:11f.

⁴R. T. Herford, Pharisaism, Its Aim and Its Method (London: G. P. Putnam & Sons, 1912), p. 308. A prayer of R. Hija b. Abba.

⁵Ibid., p. 307f. A prayer of the disciples of R. Jannai on rising from sleep.

discreetly, He said "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God."⁶ There was no harshness in His treatment of the rich young man.⁷ Nicodemus found Him so tender and kind, and became His disciple.⁸ And Joseph of Arimathea must also have seen His loving heart. But these were spiritually sincere and honest men, who had not as yet moved as far from the truths made known by God concerning His will and His saving promises as most of their companions had done. For Jesus knew well that Pharisaism was not essential Judaism, but a system super-imposed upon a foundation of belief in which both He and the Pharisees could still find some common ground.

Yet He called them hypocrites.⁹ He hurled His Woes at them.¹⁰ Ruthlessly He exposed their self-righteousness, their barren formalism; their pride, avarice and ambition; their hollow reliance on outward works; their affectation of piety to gain notoriety; and He condemned them with all the fervour and fiery indignation of His own pure soul. Yes, there were Pharisees who deserved it all: Pharisees

⁶Mark 12:34.

⁷Luke 18:18ff.

⁸John 3:1-21.

⁹Matt. 23:13 et al.

¹⁰Matt. 23:13ff.

who shut up the kingdom of God to men by their opposition to Him; who used prayers as a "cloak of maliciousness," especially for covetous purposes; who were zealous to make proselytes, but could not point out the way of life to those they won; who split hairs over the most trivial matters; who replaced "the weightier matters of the law," like justice, mercy and faithfulness, with their own miserable regulations regarding oaths and tithes; who were extremely careful about outer cleanliness, but left a mass of seething, festering filth within; who erected memorials to the prophets, lamenting the ill-treatment meted out to them by the fathers, but were themselves murderers at heart;¹¹ who were so entangled in the meshes of oath and tithe that they were incapable of any true spirituality.

Defenders of the Pharisees maintain that the New Testament picture has been over-drawn. Abrahams, for instance, offers evidence of some quite different attitudes towards sinners from those condemned by the Lord. He claims that Pharisees did not hesitate to bring sinners to their own tables where they could be brought into contact with religious conversation. He admits, however, that Pharisees were not prepared to sit at the table of the sinner lest they be drawn into ungodly conversation and ways. Because

¹¹Matt. 23:13ff.

Jesus was prepared to share the tables of publicans and sinners as well as those of Pharisees, they saw in Him an indifference to sin that shocked them and turned them from Him.¹² But Abrahams does not see the self-righteousness lurking behind this attitude.

Again, He senses a certain unfairness in Jesus' action in cleansing the temple.¹³ He maintains that the properly controlled use of the temple courtyard to provide facilities for pilgrims enhanced rather than detracted from the sacredness of the sanctuary. He believes that the service was generally carried out in an orderly manner, though he does admit that abuses crept in from time to time, which would have justified Jesus' indignant action and did call forth the denouncement of the Pharisees themselves. He contends that it is unfair to confuse a system with its abuse.¹⁴ But the fact remains that abuses did exist. That Pharisees pointed them out is not to their discredit. That Jesus did so is not to His discredit either. That He acted to remove the abuse adds to His credit. The Pharisees,

¹²I. Abrahams, Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels (Cambridge: University Press, 1917), I, 54-61.

¹³Matt. 21:12f; Mark 11:15ff; Luke 19:45f.; John 2:13ff.

¹⁴Abrahams, I, 82-89.

for all their vaunted authority, were not able to do so. One senses in these attempts at defence the desire and the determination to exalt the Pharisees at the expense of Jesus.

The question arises, then, Just what did Jesus condemn? He did not condemn the party as a party; nor the Pharisee as a Pharisee. He condemned the unscriptural doctrines and ethics that had come to be associated with Pharisaism; the casuistry and hypocrisy and ostentation that characterized so many members of the party. He condemned all who stood for and by these things. And He had every right to pass those strictures, for the truths He had come to reveal were in complete antithesis to the doctrine held by the Pharisees.

Was there a real Antithesis?

Jewish writers of modern times, particularly of the liberal school, like to believe that no real disharmony existed.

Among others may be mentioned the English Jew, C. G. Montefiore. He has compiled a large work on the Synoptic Gospels in which he attempts to prove step by step and verse by verse that all the teachings of Jesus are to be found in the utterances of the rabbis, at any rate those teachings and words of Jesus which really are of any significance. He, of course, admits that there are some utterances of Jesus that do not have a counterpart in the rabbinical writings, but says that these utterances are all such as have no connection with reality; they are fantastic and

eccentric and even the Christians themselves could never apply them to practical life.¹⁵

Odeberg admits that there is "no major difference between the teachings of the Pharisees and those of Jesus as they later are generally interpreted and systematized in the scientific and homiletical exposition."¹⁶

But between Pharisaism and genuine Christianity a very serious and fundamental difference exists.

For it is self-evident that so fundamental an anti-thesis as the one to which the history and original records of these two forms of religion testify would be inexplicable if the activity of Jesus had consisted in nothing more than to proclaim, in the main, what the Pharisees proclaimed.¹⁷

The fact remains that Jesus' attacks were launched not at slight divergences of opinion or practice, but at fundamental doctrines and attitudes. A close study makes it clear that the clash came because the basic concepts of the two religions were diametrically opposed. Odeberg points out that the acceptance of the basic concepts of either religion by the other, results in a complete loss of identity. He states that

if this new interpretation of the words of Jesus is

¹⁵Hugo Odeberg, Pharisaism and Christianity, trans. by J. M. Moe (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), p. 12. (Odeberg's Italics).

¹⁶Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁷Ibid.

so easily adapted to the doctrines of the Pharisees, this is precisely an indication that one has already absorbed so much of the Pharisaical way of thinking that one is no longer able to think as a Christian.¹⁸

In addition he shows that

The antithesis is also fundamental in the sense that a Pharisaism which assumes Christian lines of thought ceases to be Pharisaism, and a Christianity which incorporates Pharisaic lines of thought likewise ceases to be Christianity.¹⁹

Some of the principle points of antithesis will now be examined.

Authority for Doctrine

To accuse the Pharisees of deliberately setting aside divine authority for human would be unfair. To them the Torah was an inexhaustible source of divinely given teaching. But that revelation, they believed, goes on in the mutually accepted results of the meditation of teachers upon the Torah and their application of its principles to contemporary situations and needs, which, for them, became new divine revelation from the Torah for their time.

Herford agrees that Torah and Tradition provided the authority for the doctrine held by the Pharisees, and he is prepared to admit that, ultimately, "the Torah and its

¹⁸Ibid., p. 14. (Odeberg's Italics).

¹⁹Ibid., p. 7.

injunctions . . . derived their binding force in fact from human enactment."²⁰ For the Pharisees, then, human interpretations and applications mutually agreed upon became divine revelation--the voice of God.

For Jesus the only authority for doctrine was God speaking to man. That voice is heard in the entire Holy Scripture of the Old Testament: The Pentateuch, the Prophets and the Hagiographa. But it is not heard in the multitude of interpretations and applications added by men. In the second place, the voice is heard in His own doctrine, which, He always emphasized, was not merely His own, but the doctrine determined within and received by Him in the eternal counsels of the Godhead;²¹ That is why He went directly to the Scriptures for authority, and did not fasten His doctrine to some rabbinic saying as the scribes were wont to do. And that is why He made so clear a distinction between His own teaching and that of the rabbis. He denied to them the right to offer their interpretations as doctrine. But He upheld His own authority as the Son of God to proclaim His teachings as the voice of God. Of this claim His hearers quickly became aware; but few were ready to recognize it.

²⁰Ibid., p. 204.

²¹John 7:16; 12:49; 17:8.

Until this important difference came to light there does not seem to have been any great conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees. The break came when He refused to appeal to traditional authority, substituting for it His own and claiming that it was divine; when He set aside on that authority matters which they had included in the Halachah; when He dubbed their tradition as purely human. They, on the other hand, failing to accept His claims of deity, were horrified at His refusal to recognize tradition, and regarded His appeal to His own authority as sheer blasphemy. This was the "irreconcilable difference which admitted of no compromise."²²

Messianic Conceptions

"Pharisaism and Christianity faced each other in an opposition which was fundamentally irreconcilable, and the disturbing cause which created the opposition was Jesus."²³ Nowhere does this become more evident than in connection with His Messiahship. On this issue the Pharisees early parted ways with Him.

As demonstrated in a previous section,²⁴ there was a

²² Herford, The Pharisees, p. 204.

²³ Ibid., p. 201.

²⁴ Supra, p. 112.

wide divergence of opinion regarding the person and mission of the Messiah, although most Jews were agreed that his mission was concerned with the restoration of the theocratic state. But at no point did Jesus seem to fit in with their theories. Christians adored Him as their God; but the Pharisees saw no reason for a divine Messiah. Christians recognized the spiritual nature of His mission; the Pharisees were interested in an earthly kingdom. Christians trusted in Him as their Saviour from sin; the Pharisees wanted no Saviour. Therefore, they considered Jesus an imposter, and called Him a devil. As long as both parties held to their views there could be no hope of reconciliation. The Pharisee who became a Christian first gave up his Pharisaism, and vice versa.

Herford maintains that the Pharisees were taken by surprise at the advent and claims of Jesus, and that they could hardly have been expected to receive Him. He lays the blame at the feet of the prophets, who, he declares, failed to draw a picture of Him from which He could be recognized.²⁵ But the truth is that the Pharisees failed to read the Prophets aright. They misread their predictions. They refused to recognize that the Prophets foretold the advent of a spiritual Leader and Saviour. They did not

²⁵Herford, The Pharisees, p. 201.

accept the Prophets' words as God's direct revelation, but merely as haggadic Torah. Never did they envisage that the Messiah would make claims anything like those that Jesus made. Their Messiah would be subject to the Torah as they interpreted it. When Jesus began to attack their position the die was cast. Here was no Messiah, but a dangerous heretic, who must be opposed and exposed.

The Doctrine of Salvation

Christianity and Pharisaism resembled each other in their common and very strong belief that man has direct access to the Father, that "no sinner need ever remain cut off from God by the barrier of his sin." The way back to the love of God is always open.²⁶

There was agreement also on the point that repentance is the approach by which access is obtained, that when a sinner truly repents, forgiveness always follows.²⁷

But here the resemblance ends. The Christian looked to Jesus, Messiah, Saviour, as the Mediator between God and man; man's Medium of Communication with the Father. The Pharisee believed no medium was needed. The Torah was "the guide to show the way, and the light to shine upon it,"

²⁶ Herford, Pharisaism, p. 215.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 215f.

as Herford calls it.²⁸ Repentance itself was believed to be the act by which communion with the Father was restored; and in that communion a man could go on living the life of the Torah. That, of course, is work-righteousness. Even Herford admits that Pharisaism "put the doing of God's will in the first place, and faith in the second place."²⁹ It could hardly be otherwise. The Pharisee had concentrated so completely upon the Law that he had lost the Promise. That is why he had disregarded the spiritual meaning of the Messianic hope and divorced the Messiah's mission from his doctrine of salvation.³⁰

The Christian knows that repentance can be effective only when it turns a sinner to the promise of forgiveness available to and offered to the world. Jesus, the God-Man, the Mediator, the Medium of Communication between God and man, fulfilled the Law perfectly for all. He sacrificed His life for the sins of the world. In this way God and man have become reconciled, and in the new nature and power given by God in Christ Jesus, the forgiven sinner begins

²⁸Ibid., pp. 216f.

²⁹Herford, The Pharisees, p. 231.

³⁰There seems to have been a certain tinge of perfectionism about Pharisaism. While the Pharisees did admit to failures, they did not understand to the full the horror of sin, and did not appreciate its fatal effects. Repentance would do. A Saviour was not needed.

once more to live according to the divine Law. If Pharisaism put the doing of God's will in the first and faith in the second place, Christianity puts faith in Jesus Christ first; and, in a sense, the life of the Law in the second place--the second resulting from the first.

The fundamental issue, of course, is whether righteousness is of works or of faith. The two are irreconcilable. The one can be satisfied with an earthly guide. The other must have a spiritual, divine, mediating Messiah. That is why Christianity could be meaningful only for that Pharisee who disowned the entire Pharisaic doctrine of salvation.

Moral attitudes

It cannot be said justly that in theory Pharisaism gloried in externalism. Rabbinical writings emphasize consistently that the attitude of the heart is all-important. Nevertheless, the outward observance of certain prescribed actions was stressed as being of serious concern; and this always carries with it the danger that the disposition of the heart will be made less vital than the outward act. Just this occurred with respect to Pharisaism. Too many considered their outward observances as conclusive demonstrations of a right attitude of heart.

Christianity, on the other hand, has always stressed

that the right attitude of the heart is of the greatest importance. Nor does it prescribe a particular code as a necessary evidence of it. It does emphasize, of course, that where the heart is ruled by Jesus a very definite way of life will follow. Edersheim states the matter correctly and well.

Rabbinism started with demand of outward obedience and righteousness, and pointed to sonship as its goal; the Gospel started with the free gift of forgiveness through faith and of sonship, and pointed to obedience and righteousness as its goal.³¹

When Jesus dared to point out the evil results of their approach the tempers of the Pharisees flared.

Exclusivism

While in theory the ranks of the Pharisees were open to all, in actual fact they had become a very exclusive and selective fraternity. The Gentile, of course, had no place at all in the kingdom of God, let alone in the ranks of the Pharisees. But they were selective even with respect to their own race. They separated themselves very decidedly from the Am-ha-aretz. They were not "as other men are."³² Publicans and sinners they condemned

³¹ Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus, the Messiah (New American edition; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Erdmanns Publishing Company, 1947), I, 106.

³² Luke 18:11.

whole-heartedly. Yet it was just with these that Jesus so often associated in His loving effort to save them; while they, the Pharisees, so often received His rebukes. It was from the Am-ha-aretz that Jesus drew most of His followers. All this was at the same time an offence and a cause for cleavage.

So there could be no fellowship between the Pharisees and Jesus. It was not His fault. He would gladly have gathered them to Himself; but they would not be gathered. A Pharisee might well have spoken those sad words recorded by Isaiah: "He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him . . . and we esteemed him not."³³ Likewise, there could never be a real point of contact between Pharisaism and Christianity. Either a Christian or a Pharisee; but not both.

Conflicts with the Early Christian Church

The conflict between Pharisaism and Christianity did not end with the departure of the Lord. His followers were also involved. Violent hostility was not evident at first. Rather there was a steady opposition to Christian doctrine. It is interesting to note that the first persecutions were

³³Is. 53:2-3. R.S.V.

not the work of Pharisees, but of Sadducees together with the temple authorities.³⁴ In fact, when Peter and John were haled before the authorities on the second occasion, it was a Pharisee--Gamaliel--who was primarily responsible for their release.³⁵ G. H. Box asserts that there was no violent hostility towards Christianity on the part of the Pharisees until Stephen, and men like him, found themselves constrained to follow the example of their Master and to attack the legalism which He had also opposed so strongly.³⁶ Saul himself appears as a persecutor only after the death of Stephen.

From this time on, however, the antagonism became more bitter and outbreaks of violence more numerous. Wherever Christians and Pharisees came into contact opposition flared. Conflicts with Judaism in later New Testament times were actually conflicts with Pharisaic elements. The opponents Paul met in the synagogues in Asia Minor; the Judaizing elements he had to combat and expose in his epistles, were Pharisees or fellow-travellers. If it had not been for these the Church would have met with very little

³⁴ Acts 4:1; 5:17.

³⁵ Acts 5:34.

³⁶ G. H. Box, "Pharisees," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, edited by James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930).

opposition from the Jews.³⁷

Such opposition was but to be expected. The religious system which the Pharisees had carefully built up over the centuries, and which they had come to love so dearly, was being threatened by a religion diametrically opposed to it. In addition, Christianity, following the direction of the Master that the fulfilment of promise should first be made known to the Chosen People, directed its mission initially towards the Synagogue, the Pharisees' own sacred preserve. This could bring but one reaction.

Conversions from among the Pharisees

Paradoxically, these fanatically anti-Christian Pharisees contributed in no small measure to the spread of Christianity. This was due largely to their great influence among their fellow-Jews. The Pharisees, not the Sadducees, were responsible for making the Jew a deeply religious man. The Pharisees instilled into him his profound reverence for the Law and his strong faith in a bodily resurrection. The Pharisees fostered in him the hope of the Messiah; and, if they did not encourage, they did not oppose the spiritual concepts which more and more were beginning to hold concerning His mission. Thus they provided from their own ranks

³⁷Herford, The Pharisees, p. 213.

and from among the great mass of the nation which they influenced, a most fruitful source of converts to the Christian faith.

At the same time, they posed one of Christianity's earliest and most difficult problems. This, again, is not surprising. It could not have been easy for converts who had for decades been steeped in Pharisaism to throw off its incubus. Hence, extreme types of Pharisaism early entered the Church in the form of Judaizing Christianity.³⁸ Consequently, the apostles, and especially Paul, had constantly to defend the mission to the Gentiles and to emphasize the universality of the saving promise. Constantly Paul had to battle against those who wished to introduce into the Church the old Jewish prohibitions, to foster legalism, and to devise ways of life and courses of action which, they insisted, all true Christians were in duty bound to observe. The epistles of the great apostle reveal how persistently and strenuously he had to wrestle with the problem to the very end of his life. And, because it is essentially a problem of human personality and not specifically a problem of the Pharisee, it promises to trouble the Church to the end of time.

³⁸H. E. Dana, The New Testament World (Third Edition revised; Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1951), p. 120.

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CHAPTER X

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Pharisaism is an example of a worthy movement gone wrong. One cannot justly criticize the purpose the Pharisees had in view; nor can one altogether condemn the ideals they set themselves. Their fore-runners were, in the main, devout and earnest men committed to the divine revelation, which the nation had once so basely despised and rejected. They emerge as the noblest elements of the nation in their day.

But they were reactionaries; and they became entrapped in the snares that so consistently threaten reactionaries. The first danger is the tendency to go to extremes under the stresses and strains to which they are subjected. The Pharisees, too, made this mistake. When they saw the threat looming ever larger that the nation might once more be deprived of the heritage which it had sworn to treasure forever, they began to place an emphasis upon the observance of the Torah of Moses that relegated other divine truths to a position of relative unimportance. Vital spiritual issues came to be overlooked; and the most important of these was the true Messianic hope.

The second danger is the tendency to misuse the power

that comes with success. The reactionary easily becomes intolerant of others, refusing to recognize another point of view or to accept the possibility of error in his own. Likewise, he tends to become domineering in his attitudes, insisting that all must share his views, and even forcing them upon others. He is in danger of developing a one-track mind, rigidly confined by a particular line of thought and ignoring as of little importance what is not directly concerned with it. This is what happened to the Pharisees. The zeal which had at first been directed towards the preservation of the Torah, was gradually turned towards the preservation and propagation of their personal attitudes towards it and the way of life they had evolved from it. In their zeal to define, preserve, interpret and apply the Torah, they overlooked those other important elements of revelation. They maintained that only what they had determined had genuine religious worth; and they refused to accept any direction except that which came from among their fraternity. Thus they held tenaciously to that distinction which they had made between the importance of the Pentateuch and the Prophets and Hagiographa. Through this error they became guilty of those tragic misinterpretations of clear revelation that caused them to reject their Messiah and His way of salvation. Becoming increasingly intolerant of any other way, many of them came to

despise others and even to brand them as enemies of God. "Thus the generous and self-devoted Assideans, or Chasidim, degenerated into the haughty, tyrannical, censorious Pharisees" ¹ Had they not given way to these tendencies they might well have become the party that helped Judaism to a proper understanding of the Messianic hope and to a joyful readiness to receive Him when He came. They might well have led Israel in the fulfilment of the destiny which God had desired for her--to go into the Gentile world and "preach the gospel to every creature." ²

The Pharisee, intolerant, domineering radical that he generally became, was primarily the product of a deep religious experience. Had not those external influences of paganism, particularly of Hellenism, been brought to bear so powerfully upon the Jewish religious scene, it is probable that no such party as the Pharisees would have risen. Again, though Pharisaism was a reaction to pagan influences within and without Judaism, had the religious experience of the reactionaries been of a different kind, Pharisaism, as we know it, might not have developed.

A full religious experience involves all three

¹Henry Hart Milman, The History of the Jews (fourth edition; London: John Murray, 1866), II, 30.

²Mark 16:15.

elements of the human personality--the intellect, the will and the emotions. This is the experience of the Christian. His is an experience of the heart. His heart is dedicated to a Person: the Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world; and all He means to them, and all He brings to them. The revelation made to mankind has appeal for the Christian intellect because of Him Who made it, rather than because of the revelation itself. Revelation has authority because of its Author. The spiritual inspiration to submit to that authority, and the power to receive and to follow it as the guide of life, comes from the attachment of the Christian heart to the Author. Essential to the Christian experience, then, is a person, the Person, the Messiah, Who can be no other than "Immanuel." Paul, the ex-Pharisee, expresses it so simply, so beautifully. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."³

The Pharisee did not enjoy so complete a religious experience. Though he himself might have denied it, a study of the Pharisee would indicate that the emotional element of his personality was not greatly involved. His was not a

³Gal. 2:20.

real heart-experience. It tended to be restricted mainly to the intellect and the will. He made the mistake of giving his devotion to an idea rather than a person. The Torah made its appeal to his intellect because it was Torah. He recognized its authority primarily on intellectual grounds, on the basis of his understanding of it and his application of it to his life situation. Then it became for him the authority that alone was binding, and which, because of his own personal conviction, he came to consider as binding upon all. Thus, in the final analysis, not the Giver, but the Torah itself, became the source of his spiritual inspiration. His spiritual experience--such as it was--could only be enjoyed in connection with the Torah. Hence, a Pharisee could never have said, "Christ liveth in me."⁴ At best he could have said, "the Torah controls me." Therefore, the Pharisee had to exercise his intellectual powers to the full if he would gain the knowledge he needed to conform as nearly as possible to the Torah, and so to act morally and devoutly. Pharisaism is the example par excellence of what ultimately occurs when conformity to the Law comes to be regarded as a true religious experience, and God's grace is regarded as the reward earned by those who conform to it. A person is not

⁴Ibid.

essential to such an experience, much less a Messiah; certainly not "Immanuel."

Here is the seed that produced Pharisaism--an over-intellectual religious experience that failed to appreciate the important truth that a full religious experience is also an emotional experience; that the true religion of Jehovah is such an emotional experience whereby the heart of a man is joined in fellowship with Him through the fellowship of His Son. Consequently, from the very outset the Pharisees failed to appreciate the necessarily spiritual nature of the Messianic hope. Thus they deprived themselves in their religious experience of everything that could in any way compare with the hope fulfilled that is the blessed experience of the Christian.

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