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JESUS AND THE PHARISEES

By

Rev. H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

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THE VICTORIA INSTITUTE

21 LOWER BELGRAVE STREET, LONDON, S.W. 1

# JESUS AND THE PHARISEES

By Rev. H. L. ELLISON, B.A., B.D.

## SYNOPSIS

The traditional belief of Christendom has been that the Pharisees were hypocrites and their religion an arid legalism. It is comparatively easy to show that this belief is both illogical and contrary to the recorded facts of Judaism. Modern scholarship has tended to reconcile these facts with tradition by various unsatisfactory means, which are being increasingly abandoned. Normally relief is now sought from the difficulty by suggesting that only certain types of Pharisee were being attacked by Jesus. But it is clear that the Gospels cannot fairly be made to bear such an interpretation, so by most Jewish and many Christian writers the blame is put on the evangelists, who are considered to be reflecting the prejudices of the Church some fifty years later. If this were true, it would mean that the Gospels cannot be relied on to give an objective picture of the life of Christ. Since it is impossible to put all the blame on the evangelists, Jewish writers go further and accuse Jesus of grave defects of character in His dealings with the Pharisees.

The only satisfactory solution lies in recognizing the high quality of Pharisaic religion, and that Jesus was not charging them with deliberate hypocrisy but with play-acting. They had created their own setting for their religion in which self-satisfaction was genuinely obtainable. In this they were typical religionists, and we shall only judge the position correctly as we are prepared to see ourselves mirrored there as well.

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TO some it may seem strange that a subject like *Jesus and the Pharisees* should be included among the Transactions of the Victoria Institute. On the one hand it may be felt that there is little new to be said about it, on the other that it is more suited to the pulpit or the lecture hall than to the Institute.

So much fresh information on the Inter-Testamental period has been gathered during the past few decades that it would be easy to write a paper on the Pharisees containing a mass of material unknown to any but specialists. Such, however, is not the purpose of this paper. Rather it would draw attention to one of the subtler modern attacks on the Christian faith and to suggest an answer. This is the more necessary as the attack comes in the form of a correction of obviously biased and distorted views held by the Church about the Pharisees through most of her history.

Several quotations from standard writers of about fifty years ago will serve to show in a moderate form what these views were and indeed are for most educated Christians. Edersheim, a Hebrew-Christian, wrote: "Modern ingenuity . . . should own the terrible contrast existing side by side: Hebrewism and Judaism, the Old Testament and traditionalism;

and it should recognize its deeper sense in the absence of that element of spiritual and inner life which Christ has brought . . . there is not a difference, but a total divergence, of fundamental principle between Rabbinism and the New Testament, so that comparison between them is not possible" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. I, p. 107). "Thus, tried by its own tests, Pharisaism terribly failed. It was hypocrisy . . . and that both negatively and positively: the concealment of that which was, and the pretention to what it was not" (*ibid.*, vol. II, p. 212).

Schürer is perhaps less incisive but he is even more critical (*History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 4th German edit., vol. II, p. 548): "What were the results reached by this zeal for the Law? They corresponded to the motives. Since these motives were essentially external, the result was an incredible externalization of religious and moral life . . . the whole of religious and moral life was dragged down into the sphere of law. . . . Everything had now to be looked at from the same standpoint; the sole criterion was law, and that a law claiming divine authority. As a result the content of action became relatively indifferent. Everything had the same value, both purely conventional behaviour in externals and ceremonies, and the fulfilling of the highest religious and moral duties. The former was exalted to the level of the latter, the latter was lowered to the level of the former. . . . All thought and action were concerned with satisfying the letter of the law. . . . The goal was not the doing of good as such, but merely formal correctness in the fulfilment of the letter of the law . . . (p. 569) As we have seen, this external formalism is far removed from true piety. But for all that it might just have been able to exist under such a load. But when the centre of religious life, prayer itself, was imprisoned in the shackles of an inflexible mechanism, it is hardly possible to speak any longer of living piety."

Eaton is even more critical (*Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. III, p. 828b): "One evil consequence of this 'idolatry of the law' was the externalizing of religion. God was conceived of mainly as Lawgiver and Judge. The religious relation between God and Israel was purely legal; it was founded on a purely legal compact. Religion was not a fellowship with God, but a strictly legal walk before God. Their zeal for the law was consequently a service of God for the sake of reward; more especially for the supreme reward of sharing in the glory and bliss of the Messianic age. . . . Their attitude to their almost deified law was external, formal, mechanical. . . . They made the law 'only a manual of religious etiquette.' Their righteousness was thus mere formalism; their righteous man was one who kept the law, written and oral, in an external, but formally correct manner. . . . The purely formal ethics of the Pharisees led to a great many other evils. They paid no attention to the ethical content of a law. . . . They divorced morality and religion. . . . There were doubtless in our Lord's time many good men among the Pharisees, but the tendency of the whole system was to produce hypocrisy . . . or in the case of earnest and sincere souls, self-torture and a sense of estrangement from God."

These lengthy quotations have been necessary in order to allow the reader of this paper to decide how far he has always shared these views. But although they have been almost universal in Christendom since at least the time of John Chrysostom (c. 344-407), they bear their refutation

within them. If they were a rounded picture of Rabbinic Judaism, it would be impossible to explain either its vitality or the very real saints it has produced. The various efforts made to avoid this difficulty, *e.g.* that a difference must be made between the scribe and the rabbi and the average Pharisee, that the Rabbinic Judaism of after A.D. 70 was not the same as the Pharisaic religion of the Second Temple, that the simple piety of New Testament times was apocalyptic rather than Pharisaic in its inspiration, that the vitality of Judaism is due to its mystic movements, have sometimes a grain of truth in them, but they remain unsatisfying for all that.

The first of these is to some extent supported, though not with this intention, by Edersheim (*ibid.*, vol. I, p. 312). While the rabbis may at times have despised the crudity with which the rank and file carried out their teaching—a weakness religious teachers are always prone to—it is impossible to drive such a wedge between the Pharisaic party and the rabbis. Such slighting remarks (see Edersheim, *supra*) were probably a by-product of that disunity within the Pharisaic ranks which is best known to us by the controversy between Hillel and Shammai.

The case for a distinction between Pharisaic religion and the Rabbinic religion of the Talmud is strongly argued by A. T. Robertson (*The Pharisees and Jesus*, pp. 10ff.), but we consider that this theory has been fully answered by Lukyn Williams (*Talmudic Judaism and Christianity*, ch. II) and that his conclusion, “The outlook and attitude of Talmudic Judaism is identical with that of Palestinian Rabbinic Judaism of the first century,” is unassailable. Development there was, but it was in the same direction. This is amply borne out by the many examples of the practical problems of Palestinian life before A.D. 70 with their Pharisaic solution given by Finkelstein (*The Pharisees*).

The influence of apocalyptic on popular piety in New Testament times was stressed by Charles (*e.g. Between the Old and the New Testaments*) and A. T. Robertson (*ibid.*, p. 48 ff.), and has found many popularizers. But the suggestion long put forward that Jewish apocalyptic is connected mainly with the Essenes, or similar sects outside the main stream of Jewish life, has been strongly reinforced by the Ain Feshka discoveries, now apparently known as the Qumran MSS. (cf. Dupont-Sommer, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, and Bleddyn Roberts, *The Dead Sea Scrolls—Towards a Perspective*, Victoria Institute, 84, 1952). True there is some apocalyptic which is indubitably Pharisaic, but this only tends to show that Pharisaism was not as narrow as is often pictured. In fact much of the picture of the narrowly legalistic Pharisee is due to the average Christian scholar's excusable ignorance of the wide sea of Midrashic literature in contrast to the Talmud, an ignorance that should gradually vanish as the mass of material in Strack-Billerbeck's commentary becomes better known.

The normal conception of the Pharisees' hypocrisy is really self-contradictory. The New Testament picture of them as the recognized religious leaders of the people is amply confirmed by extra-Biblical sources. Although the members of the temple aristocracy and the ruling circles were drawn with few exceptions from the Sadducees, and though the Pharisees were comparatively few in number—Josephus gives their number in the time of Herod the Great as something over 6000 (*Ant.*

xvii. 2. 4)—we find that sooner or later the Pharisaic rulings both in matters of religious and secular law were forced on their bitterly hostile Sadducean opponents. We can only explain this by recognizing that they had the bulk of the people behind them.

The extraordinarily bitter strife in the second and third centuries A.D. between the Pharisees and the *am ha-aretz*, the common people unversed in the law (cf. Moore, *Judaism*, vol. II, pp. 157 *seq.*; for some of its worst expressions see McCaul, *The Old Paths*, ch. LIX), and the normal refusal of the *am ha-aretz* to observe the laws of purity outside Jerusalem, while the temple still stood (cf. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees*, pp. 25 *seq.*), show that the bulk of the people admired rather than obeyed them. It seems incredible that this should have been the case had the Pharisees, or indeed any high proportion of them, been recognized as hypocritical humbugs—hypocrisy is one of the hardest of vices to hide over a long period of time.

That Rabbinic Judaism is a 'legal' religion is obvious; it glories in the fact. But it does not follow that we are justified in calling it legalistic. The New Testament does not object to law as such, but to the belief that the law can be so kept as to bring acceptance before God; once a man is justified, he is expected to keep the perfect law of love, not that he may be justified, but just because he is justified. No one familiar with the liturgy of the Day of Atonement could imagine that Rabbinic Judaism ignores the need for divine forgiveness and grace; though there is much in Rabbinic literature that teaches a doctrine of merit, it is balanced, or almost so, by a stress on the mercy and forgiveness of God (cf. Moore, *Judaism*, part III). In measure the difference in emphasis between Rabbinic Judaism and Evangelical Christianity comes from the fact that the cross is replaced by the Sinai covenant. There can be no "new birth" with all its emotional and spiritual connotation for the Rabbinic Jew.

Not only does the Divine mercy find its place in Rabbinic Judaism, but it is repeatedly stressed that our acts must have the right intention (*kavuwanah*) and be done for their own sake (*lishmah*), not for the reward they may bring. "It matters not whether you do much or little, so long as your heart is directed to heaven;" "R. Meir said: All depends on the intention of the heart;" "If one studies the Torah for its own sake, it becomes to him an elixir of life; but if one studies the Torah not for its own sake, it becomes to him a deadly poison," are typical expressions of this conviction—for a representative selection of quotations see Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, ch. X.

The rabbis do speak constantly as though the commandments were all on the same level, but in practice there is never any suggestion that a man may commit crimes against his fellow men, because he has kept ritual prescriptions. It is very probable that the rabbinic stress on the equal importance of all commandments, a stress that led to the elimination of the Decalogue from public worship, is a reaction against Christianity with its distinction between moral and ceremonial. In any case the maxim, "If you become slack about one commandment, you will end by becoming slack about another; if you despise one, you will end by despising another," is sound common sense—compare too Matt. 5: 19; James 2: 10. It is a simple historic fact that the ethics of the synagogue have normally tended to be higher in practice than those of the Church.

Jewish criticism of the New Testament and its expositors has concentrated on the suggestion that the keeping of the law was a burden. We must concede that they are right where the Pharisee and his successors are concerned. For the *am ha-aretz*, or for the synagogue member whose religion had become mere ritual it could be a burden not to be borne—Peter was an *am ha-aretz* (Acts 15: 10)—but for those truly in the Pharisaic tradition it was a joy. As R. Chananya Ben-Aqashya used to say, “The Holy One, blessed be He, was pleased to make Israel worthy, wherefore He gave them a copious Torah and many commandments.” For a man like him the more commandments the greater joy.

Whatever our judgment on Rabbinic Judaism, these considerations should keep us from the judgments quoted at the beginning of this paper. There have been many manifestations of Judaism of which they may well have been true, but they were as certainly perversions of Judaism as many of the things that Jews object to are perversions of Christianity.

There is a great deal to be said for Finkelstein’s contention developing a remark of Huxley’s (*The Pharisees*, pp. xvii ff.), that there is a link of kinship between Pharisee and Puritan. In spite of the many similarities he points out, he seems to miss the most important. No commoner charge than that of legalism has been levelled at the Puritans. Their answer was that it was no more than taking the will of God seriously. If faced with evidence of genuine legalism among them, they could always plead truthfully that it was a corruption of true Puritanism. *Mutatis mutandis*, and bearing in mind that Judaism had perforce a stronger bias towards the law, one could affirm much the same of Rabbinic religion.

The realization of these facts among scholars has led to a radically changed attitude towards the Pharisees on the part of many. Entirely typical of a mediating school of thought is Lev Gillet’s statement (*Communion in the Messiah*, pp. 3 seq.): “Modern research has confirmed more and more the truth of Wernle’s assertion: ‘One thing is certain—that Jesus and his Gospel are intelligible from Judaism alone.’ The attitude of Jesus towards the faith of Israel can be summed up in the *logion* of Matt. 5: 17–18. . . . The rebukes by Jesus of the Pharisees are directed against a hypocritical section of narrow, exclusive and exacting men. What Jesus opposed in such Pharisees was not the fundamental element in Pharisaism, but rather a deviation from and a distortion of Pharisaism itself. ‘The impression is almost irresistible that the denunciations of the Pharisees occurring in the Gospels are directed primarily against a Shammaitic section, and that the incident described in Matt. 7 is an episode in the controversy between Jesus and the Shammaites.’\* The Talmud denounces as violently as the Gospels the perversions of Pharisaism. . . . Jesus Himself was nearer to genuine Pharisaism than to any other religious school in Israel. He knew that the Pharisees were the *élite* of the nation. His own piety and teaching were often identical with theirs. . . . Thus the meeting of Jesus with Pharisaism was not a fruitless encounter, but the assimilation by Jesus of what was best in the Judaism of His time and the elevation of this ‘best’ to its utmost.”

There is no reconciling this with Edersheim’s dictum, “There is not a difference, but a total divergence of fundamental principle between

\* Quoted from Box: Hastings’ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. IX, p. 835.



Rabbinism and the New Testament, so that a comparison between them is not possible." The four volumes of Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (1922-1928), suggest by their very existence that Gillet is certainly nearer the truth. In this, in some ways the most illuminating work ever published on the New Testament, light is thrown on almost every angle and thought of the New Testament by quotations from early rabbinic writings.

Indeed adequate parallels to the bulk of our Lord's public teaching—this does not apply in the same measure to that in John—have been discovered in Rabbinic writings, and have led to a profitless debate on priority in time. Few later rabbis would consciously have used the teaching of Jesus; and if the parallels may in some cases be due to unconscious borrowing, it still shows that there was a fundamental similarity between the teachings. Montefiore in his study of the more important of these parallels (*Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teaching*) recognizes on at least ten occasions the distinct originality and superiority of Jesus in certain points, but originality and superiority do not imply "total divergence."

Quite other is the suggestion of Gillet and Box that Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees did not apply to them all but either to those of their number whom they condemned themselves, or to the Shammaite rigorists in contrast to the more moderate school of Hillel. We consider that this widely held view is open to a fatal objection: neither Jesus' words, nor their setting can reasonably be so interpreted. It is quite out of the question that the mainly non-Jewish readers of the Gospels could have been expected to have known so much about the Pharisees that without guidance they could have divided them into two groups to the major of which our Lord's words did not apply. This is the usual modern explanation by Jewish and Christian writers alike; there is no point in our giving all the minor variations of the view that have been proposed. But repetition is not proof, and it does not meet the simple fact that the theory does not do justice to Jesus' words.

Many realizing this have gone further and accuse the evangelists of perverting Christ's teaching either out of ignorance or deliberately. Guignebert writes (*The Jewish World in the Time of Jesus*, p. 165): "In fact, it is increasingly clear that the long-established habit of looking upon the religion of Jesus as a reaction against Pharisaism is erroneous. It was in reality the Christians who edited the Gospel stories, who conceived the idea of setting up the 'hypocritical' Pharisees in such strong contrast to Jesus, and their attitude is explained by the resistance which they had encountered from Pharisaic orthodoxy in their own efforts to win the support of the Jews." Parkes attributes the stronger sayings to an intensification of what Jesus really said in the interests of the rapidly growing antisemitism of the first century Church (cf. *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*). Jewish writers generally either accuse the evangelists of deliberate perversion of Christ's words (e.g. Loewe), or of ignorance and confusion (e.g. Büchler, Klausner, Montefiore), and link this with a late date for the Gospels.

Here then, whether the terminology is used or not, we find ourselves in the atmosphere of the form-historical school, where the gospels are evidence rather for the beliefs of the later first-century Church than for the life and

teaching of Jesus Christ. If moreover these beliefs can be shown to be definitely erroneous in one direction, it means that we are left without any definite and certain evidence for the foundations of our faith.

The Jewish writer is prepared to go further, and in this he finds support from some Christians. We quote from Montefiore (*Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teaching*, p. 103) just because he is far more drawn to the person of Jesus than most Jewish writers of recent years: "Yet how much more telling his [Jesus'] injunction would have been, if we had had a *single story* about his doing good to, and praying for, a single Rabbi or Pharisee! One grain of practice is worth a pound of theory. . . . Windisch . . . says that one must not judge a prophet, full of justified indignation with hypocrisy, etc., as one judges an ordinary man. But if Jesus was so marvelously perfect and sinless as his adherents maintain, should he not have been *more* able than other men to exercise patience, self-control and love? Should we not rightly demand *more* from him than from ordinary men, and not *less*? . . . Towards his enemies, towards those who did not believe in him, whether individuals, groups or cities only denunciation and bitter words! The injunctions are beautiful, but how much more beautiful would have been a *fulfilment* of these injunctions by Jesus himself."

However unpalatable these words, can we really criticize Montefiore for them? It is unfair and unscholarly to lay on the evangelists and the first-century Church the blame for words which we consider untrue or exaggerated and by so doing evade the real problem raised by Jesus' words. It is precisely teaching such as the Synoptic theory assigns to Q that would be most accurately remembered and transmitted. Even if, for the sake of argument, we were prepared to allow of the possibility of development and modification, it is impossible to believe that "Scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites!" are not *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. How then are we to justify them, if we accept the modern picture of the Pharisees as even approximately true?

There is no reason for trying to deny a fundamental similarity between the teaching of Jesus and of the Pharisees; they both drew from the same spring, the Old Testament. Jesus gave honour to the Pharisees as teachers (Matt. 23: 2 f.); it is not the teaching of the Pharisees that Paul objects to, but their ignorance of the goal of their efforts (Rom. 10: 2 f.) and the powerlessness of their creed. Indeed fundamentally Christianity rests on what Jesus Christ did rather than on what He taught. We do not add to the glory of Christ by needlessly depreciating others.

This recognition of the real spiritual quality of Pharisaic teaching will, however, not mollify the Jew and those that take his part. The sting in our Lord's words lies in, "they say, and do not" (Matt. 23: 3), in the accusation of hypocrisy. But here it must be looked on as most doubtful whether Jesus ever made the accusation which most take for granted He made.

A hypocrite is a man who being evil does good that men may consider him good and does so consistently; his motive in so doing is immaterial, though it may be presumed to be far from praiseworthy. *Hypocrite* is, however, merely a transcription of the Greek word used in the Gospels, and we have no right to assume that our modern understanding of the word represents its meaning in the first century A.D. Lukyn Williams

(*Talmudic Judaism and Christianity*, pp. 67 seq.) argues that it is impossible so to understand the word ὑποκριτής. In the LXX it is used to translate *chaneph*, i.e. profane. Neither in the secular nor religious literature of the time is it used in the modern sense of hypocrite. Indeed there is every indication that it first acquired this meaning from the later Christian interpretation of Jesus' words. The most suitable of a number of meanings the word bore at the time is *play-actor*. While neither the actor nor the hypocrite is in reality the character he is representing, the motive in the acting is normally completely different. It is interesting to note that Lukyn Williams' view is being increasingly accepted, or is being reached by others quite independently.

Perhaps the best evidence that the attacks on the Pharisees are a true reproduction of Christ's teaching and are not to be attributed to the conceptions of the first-century church is that they are virtually without parallel in the rest of the New Testament—Paul's hard words, I Thess. 2: 14 ff., Acts 28: 25-28, are addressed to Jews generally. Furthermore "hypocrite" is only found on Christ's lips, and that in the Synoptic gospels. In John, which is later, it is completely lacking!

That the disciples should be so much milder than their Lord, that Paul, who had so much to suffer from the Pharisees, his former companions, should treat them so much more gently calls for comment and investigation. The only explanation that satisfies us is that just as with His language about hell and the after-life, Jesus was recognized as having a knowledge and insight which His followers did not claim. They knew that they were not dealing with mere charlatans, people using religion for their own gain and reputation, evil livers who covered their baseness with a mask of outward observances, but rather with the very *élite* of the people, who so far as human judgment could go stood religiously higher than the disciples themselves.

The Word of God had to become incarnate as a Jew, for no other people had been prepared for His coming; by Jews He had to be rejected and given up to death, for only so could the exceeding sinfulness of sin be made known. It was essentially because of their religion that they rejected Him, and it was the Pharisees who were the first to do so, even though it was not they who were the prime movers in His death. One outstanding merit of Sholem Asch's *The Nazarene* is the way he shows, in spite of his warm sympathy for the Pharisees, that they could not do otherwise than reject Jesus, unless indeed they abandoned their whole position.

For the poverty-stricken proletariat of His day, for the struggling farmer and the small-town artisan Jesus has words of welcome and comfort but none of condemnation; to the worldly priest and the self-important dynast He has nothing to say, unless indeed they needlessly cross His path (cf. Luke 13: 31 f.); it is the truly religious man who has to hear His condemnations.

It is a commonplace that in few points do Judaism and Christianity diverge more widely than in their conception of sin. As Jocz puts it (*The Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, p. 275): "It is then obvious that for Judaism there can only be sins, but no sin in the Christian sense. . . . Original sin was unknown to the old Synagogue and it is of no consequence

in the teaching of Judaism." While we know of no rabbi who claimed perfection for himself, it is clear that perfect righteousness was not simply a theoretical possibility, for, in spite of Loewe's note, the quotation on p. 601 of Montefiore and Loewe's *Rabbinic Anthology* can hardly mean merely the academic possibility when it says: "On the day of judgment there will be three classes, one consisting of the perfectly righteous. . . ." So we need not be surprised at Paul's saying of himself, "as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless."

When we look at it from this angle, it is not difficult to understand our Lord's use of "hypocrite," play-actor. The Pharisee lived normally—for there were also genuinely bad and hypocritical Pharisees—a harmonious life in which inner desires and outward actions blended; sincerity, consistency and self-sacrifice awoke the admiration of men of good will, even if it did not normally spur them to emulation. But this was only possible because they themselves had dictated the framework in which their lives were to be lived and the terms on which they would serve God.

This is naïvely expressed in the legend of R. Eliezer who after failing to convince his fellow rabbis even by various miraculous signs finally appealed to heaven and was affirmed to be right by a *bat qol* (a voice from heaven). In spite of that one of his colleagues replied, "The Law was given us from Sinai. We pay no attention to a *bat qol*. For already from Sinai the Law said, 'By a majority you are to decide'" (for the full text see the already cited *Anthology*, p. 340). This means quite simply that the rabbis believed that God had so delivered Himself into the hands of men by the revelation of the Law, that it was for them to decide how He was to be served, provided that decision was consistent with the Law.

So they lived in a fools' paradise in which they missed both the extreme majesty of God and the extreme fall of man. They were not deceivers, though we may well look on them as self-deceived, if we will, and they played their part well on the stage of their own creating. The fallen man knows he is a sinner, and the worldly man knows he has turned his back on God, but the truly religious man needs the sternest words that the Son of God can speak in love, and which only He dares to speak, if he is to awaken from his dream and face God and His claims as they really are. That the Pharisees realized that Jesus spoke neither in anger nor bitterness seems to be suggested by the fact that, so far as we can judge, it was His acts rather than His words they objected to.

However we interpret the details of the story of the Fall in Gen. 3, there will be general agreement that the power of the temptation was the desire to be "as God" (Gen. 3: 5, R.V.), the desire of the creation to be autonomous, independent of the Creator. It is this desire which characterizes the whole history of man. When man is in open revolt against God, both the fact and its inexorable results are so obvious, that few are long deceived. The real danger is when we meet autonomy in religious man.

Many are the ways in which religious man has tried to maintain his freedom as he faced God. Perhaps the crudest, and most widespread is magic, where by the right word and action it is sought to bend the Deity to one's will. We would do well to remember that magic is no prerogative of the savage, and that it has left all too many traces in the thought of religious man to-day. More dangerous, because more subtle and respect-

able are many of the esoteric practices of mysticism, whereby a man gains union with the ultimate reality, however conceived, by actions of his own doing and willing. Even though it means the end of the man's individual existence, he has reached "salvation" by his own action, by his annihilating of his own self. There is no suggestion that this is true of all mysticism, for the term is used to cover an exceptionally wide range of beliefs and experiences that have very little, if anything, in common.

It is, however, in the Pharisees that we see man's desire for autonomy at its subtlest. Though there are traces of both magic and theosophical mysticism in the early rabbinic writings, it is clear that they are both as alien there as they are in Christianity. The Pharisee never doubted that God was infinitely high above all His creation including man. Immanence has little place in his theology, much less than it has in Christianity. Though he minimized the reality of sin, if we judge him from the Christian standpoint, he had no doubt about the sinfulness of mankind, and indeed of Israel taken as a whole. His diminishing of the sin of certain individuals is almost in full measure compensated for by his much greater feeling for the reality of corporate sin. He knew that this world and mankind in it only existed by the mercy of God and that it was ruled and governed by His will. The story of R. Johanan b. Zakkai's death-bed (*Ber. 28b*) may have few parallels in Rabbinic literature, but his words are worthy of the Pharisee at his best: ". . . but now, when I am being led into the presence of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, who lives and endures for all eternity, whose anger, if He be wrathful against me, is eternal, whose imprisonment, if He imprisoned me, would be everlasting, whose sentence, if He condemned me to death, would be for ever, and whom I cannot appease with words or bribe with money—nay, more, when before me lie two ways, one towards the Garden of Eden and the other towards Gehinnom, and I know not towards which I am to be led—shall I not weep?" (for complete text see Montefiore and Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*, p. 478).

With all his recognition of his dependence on the power and mercy of God, the Pharisee yet carved out his sphere of autonomy. He believed that when the fear of the Lord was there and the right intention, the religious man had his autonomy in the keeping of the Law. By giving the Torah at Sinai God had yielded up something of His own authority. The knowledge of good and evil was now man's, provided he was willing to accept it and pay the heavy price for knowing it. From now on man knew God's will, the principles of action that gave life. If he followed them he was bound to experience the grace of God.

This autonomy did not deprive God of His prerogative of mercy, as the following extract shows: "'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious' (Ex. 33: 19). In that hour God showed Moses all the treasuries of the rewards which are prepared for the righteous. Moses said, 'For whom is *this* treasury?' And God said, 'For him who fulfils the commandments.' 'And for whom is *that* treasury?' 'For him who brings up orphans.' And so God told him about each treasury. Finally, Moses spied a big treasury and said, 'For whom is *that*?' And God said, 'To him who has nothing I give from *this* treasury'; as it is said, 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy on whom I

will show mercy ' ' ( *A Rabbinic Anthology*, p. 224). Let us repeat: for the Pharisee man was dependent on the grace of God; the giving of the Law was an act of the grace of God; *but* this very grace had made it possible for certain men to be autonomous. They were able to do the will of God apart from the grace of God and were able to claim His grace as a right.

It may seem that the reduction of the sphere of autonomy to such small limits robs it of sufficient importance to justify Christ's language about the Pharisees. But Pharisaic principles are in direct contradiction to Christ's statement: " This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent " (John 6: 29). It is not the area over which man is in rebellion that matters, but the fact that he is in rebellion. The smaller the area of rebellion, the easier it is for man to deceive himself about his standing before God.

Christianity has developed exactly the same attitude among very many of its members. There can be no doubt that one of the commonest popular errors in the Church is that once a man has become a Christian—however this is interpreted—he then keeps the favour of God by the keeping of a certain code of conduct and of certain ecclesiastical rules and regulations, far easier to observe, be it said, than the code of the Pharisees.

Far more subtle and far-reaching in its effects is the belief that in Christ Jesus God set the pinnacle of a revelation of Himself to accept which means salvation. It is indifferent whether that revelation is conceived to be contained solely in the Bible, or whether it is equated with the opinions of some theological expounder of Holy Scripture, or even whether it is considered that this revelation has been authoritatively developed and interpreted in some church. It is held that salvation or damnation depend on a man's mental reaction to this revelation, and that should the need arise man may take on himself the prerogative of Divine judgment and decide whether a man is saved or damned.

God has revealed Himself to man solely that man might have fellowship with Him, and this fellowship is salvation. Though a certain type of behaviour must perforce accompany such fellowship, it does not create it. Though a certain intellectual knowledge of God is inseparable from this fellowship, yet it can be held without the fellowship; and indeed the knowledge that springs from fellowship may express itself in ways that those without fellowship consider heretical. In this fellowship God is always giving Himself in grace; no man can say " I have God " or " I can have fellowship, when I please." The very basis of the fellowship is the renunciation of autonomy. The knowledge of good and evil has become an experience worked out in the daily experience of life, not a knowledge imparted once and for all.

Whenever the Christian would carve out for himself an area of autonomy however small, whenever he knows in advance what he should do or what he should believe, in that moment he stands on the same ground as the Pharisee. Whenever he thinks that he has in some way, however small, acquired any merit before God, in any way deserved His thanks and His rewards, the condemnation of the Pharisee is his condemnation. Whenever he sees in actions and habits that can be done and developed by human will signs of holiness, then there is nothing to distinguish him from

the Pharisee in the parable, except that the Pharisee was more excusable.

So then we can only justify the words of Christ about the Pharisees, if we are willing to apply them to ourselves as well, and to see depicted in them not merely a Jewish sect but any respectable Christian, if he succumbs to the temptation that he is most prone to. Perhaps it is just because the descendants of the Pharisees saw too much second-rate Pharisaism in the Church that they were all too often not drawn to Jesus the Messiah, the Lord of the Church.