

GROWING TENSIONS

There is every reason for accepting as correct the account in 1 Macc. 14:25-49 of the appointing of Simon as high priest and civil leader—in fact, it speaks of confirmation, not appointment, since he already effectively held these offices. The account, however, even though it is probably derived from a contemporary document, is too late to reflect the feelings of those who proposed and accepted this agreement. We can, therefore, reconstruct the scene only from our imaginations.

Doubtless there were many present who re-echoed the psalmist's words, "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongues with shouts of joy" (126:1, 2). They will have believed that the days of the Messiah were about to break in on them. This is borne out by the willingness in some circles to think in terms of a Messiah from the tribe of Levi, e.g. Jubilees, Testaments of the XII Patriarchs (though it is not clear how far the influence of Qumran is to be seen here). Doubtless those who so thought tended to expect that the Messiah would be a son or descendant of Simon.

Others, however, and among them many of the more spiritual elements among the people, must have had their misgivings and doubts from the first. There had been so much in the Maccabean struggle which had exhibited human nature on a very low level alongside those that had sanctified the Name by their sufferings and death. Indeed, the position was very similar to that of the modern State of Israel. There are many today, even in Israel, who genuinely and in all good faith question whether the setting up of the state can have been the expression of God's will because of the many evil acts and injustices that accompanied it.

The sequel showed that there were some who were most unhappy about Simon's position as high priest. From the time that Solomon had deposed Abiathar from his position as joint high-priest the position had descended from father to son among the descendants of Zadok, and Ezekiel had taught that only this family had a right to function as priests (40:46, etc.). Though Ezekiel's teaching was not accepted after the return from exile, and all who could prove their Aaronic descent were allowed to function as priests, it must have come as a profound shock to find that the proud representatives of the Zadokites had been replaced by the house of Hasmon, whose family tree has not even come down to us.

The shock must have been the greater because Jonathan, Simon's elder brother had been appointed to the post by Alexander Balas, who was a

common adventurer claiming to be the son of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. As Oesterley says, "It may be that at the time Jonathan did not realize that acceptance of this high office from such a contemptible usurper was derogatory to the office itself; and probably if he had it would have made no difference—the end was too important to him to care about the means—but in looking back one cannot fail to see that the whole transaction was rather sordid".*

It could be that Simon's succession to Jonathan as high priest would have been widely questioned, had Onias IV, the legal heir to his father Onias III as high priest, not fled to Egypt after Menelaus had instigated his father's murder. There he was able to obtain permission from Ptolemy VI to build a temple after the Jerusalem pattern at Leontopolis in the eastern delta. † Here the same ritual as in Jerusalem was carried out by Zadokite priests until after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in A.D. 70 (*Ant.* XIII. iii. 1, 3; *War* VII. x. 2–4), when it was closed on instructions from Vespasian.

We know very little about this temple, for none of the dominant groups in Palestine had an interest in publicizing it. We do not even know how far it was patronized. There does not seem to be any evidence that the synagogue community in Alexandria was interested in it. At the same time it should be clear that it would not have continued for over a century had there not been a considerable number of worshippers.

Though Onias IV had forfeited the allegiance and admiration of the legitimized, that did not mean that they were satisfied by Simon and his successors. Already before the Qumran discoveries Oesterley could write in 1932, "Nevertheless, as the subsequent history shows, it is certain that a great undercurrent of feeling against the Hasmonaean High-priesthood among a very considerable section of the anti-Hellenistic Jews was already running at this time."‡ The discoveries at Qumran have revealed that the basic motivation for the existence of the movement was its dissatisfaction with the Jerusalem high priests, whom they considered to be illegitimate because of their descent and manner of life.

The next shock was caused by Simon's son and successor John Hyrcanus. He was a good ruler, even though the first six years of his reign were troubled ones. Shortly after his accession in 134 he was attacked by Antiochus VII. He held out in Jerusalem for a year but had then to become tributary. Judea did not become completely free again until 128, when the Seleucid king fell in battle. This must have opened the eyes of many to see that the Messianic age was further off than they had hoped. It was not this, however, that led to his rupture with the Hasidim, or Pharisees, as Josephus now calls them, even though he had been their disciple. The story is found in *Ant.* XIII. x. 5, 6. It is not easy to understand, but the only reasonable explanation is that Hyrcanus had in fact assumed the royal power, even though we do not find this directly attested

* *A History of Israel*, Vol. II, p. 252.

† This suggests that the leading priests did not interpret the Law of Moses as demanding one sanctuary only.

‡ *op. cit.* p. 266.

before his son Aristobulus I.* The Pharisees could condone his high-priesthood, though they disliked his combining that office with leadership in war, but for him to claim kingship was to fly in the face of God's choice of the house of David. There is no evidence that there was any known Davidic claimant to the throne; the Pharisaic objection was purely, so far as we know, on principle.

Hyrchanus turned his back on the Pharisees and accepted the policies and outlook of the Sadducees. In itself this was quite natural and might have happened in any case, for in his position as High Priest he must have been brought into very close contact with this group of priestly traditionalists. In addition he probably had often to chafe under the burden of Pharisaic interpretations of the Torah, which must have complicated the burden of government. The results, however, were far-reaching.

At the time when Hellenism was making its inroads in Judea the position of the Hasidim seemed almost desperate, even when they were headed by the high priest Onias III. During the Maccabean struggle they were clearly willing to submit to foreign overlordship so long as they were allowed complete freedom of worship. Under Hyrchanus, however, they were allowed to influence national policy—we do not know how it was under Simon—and power went to their heads. When they saw power passing to the Sadducees, they became for the time being as much a political party as a religious one.

It may well be that in writing of them as Pharisees, Josephus is indicating that the Hasidim had already split. It seems difficult to believe that the priestly traditionalists we find later at Qumran could ever have co-operated as closely with John Hyrchanus as it is clear the Pharisees did to begin with.

The Teacher of Righteousness and Qumran

Ezra's reforms contained within them an unresolved element of ambiguity. What was he really stressing in his enforcement of the Torah? It is usually assumed that the Torah was uppermost in his mind. But we saw earlier what care he took that those who returned with him should be representative of all Israel. This tension may be briefly expressed by putting two Rabbinic passages side by side. "If it were not for My Law which you accepted, I should not recognize you, and I should not regard you any more than any of the idolatrous nations of the world" (R. on *Exod.* 30:11-34:35). "R. Hananiah b. Aqashya said, 'God was minded to give merit to Israel. Therefore He multiplied to them Torah and commandments, as it is said, It pleased the Lord for His righteousness' sake to make the Law large (*Isa.* 42:21)" (*Mak.* 3:16). While these two passages are not contradictory, it is clear that the main weight of the first is on the Torah, of the second on Israel. We should probably be near the truth, if we suggest that the men of Qumran stressed the former, the Pharisees the latter, though probably neither side recognized that the tension was there.

Among the Hasidim there were apparently those who were prepared to let Israel perish provided the Torah was kept strictly and without compro-

* The story is dealt with in some detail by Oesterley, *op. cit.* pp. 282-287; a similar view is taken by a number of Jewish writers, e.g. L. Finkelstein, *The Pharisees*³, pp. 762f. and literature cited there.

mise—more fairly put, they were certain that God would intervene before Israel was destroyed. Others, however, stressed that the Torah was given that men might live by it. They were willing, if necessary, to suffer martyrdom, but for the sake of Israel they were prepared to moderate the demands of the Torah, though they doubtless expected that it would finally be kept perfectly.

The men of Qumran seem to have belonged to the former group. The Pharisees were prepared to compromise with the manifest shortcomings of Simon and John Hyrcanus in the hope that they might gently be led into better paths. The men of Qumran called them “speakers of smooth things”, because they were willing to call black grey in the hope that the grey might some day turn to white. For the other wing of the Hasidim, however, compromise was excluded.

They might have remained no more than a protest, an attitude of mind—there were always a few such among the earlier rabbis—had it not been for a remarkable man whose name has not been transmitted to us and whom we know only by the title “The Teacher of Righteousness”. So little do we really know about him, that we are not certain even how his title should be rendered; some suggest “the rightful teacher” or “the right guide” and that the designation was held by more than one man. Be that as it may, we are clearly dealing in the first place with a definite historical individual.*

Twenty years after the beginning of this movement of protest God raised up a Teacher of Righteousness who taught them the true way of life, for he had been given special insight into the purposes of God, so that he was able to make known to the “last generations” what God was going to do in the “last generation”. He clearly believed that God had given him a special illumination and he rejoiced in it. In one of the *Hymns of Thanksgiving* it is doubtless he who says, “These things I know by understanding from Thee, for Thou hast opened my ears to receive wonderful mysteries”. In brief, he claimed a Divinely given understanding of the prophetic books, which enabled him to recognize the situation he and his followers were passing through and the right course of conduct to follow, a course justified by the fact that they were living in what was clearly the final period before the breaking in of the Day of the Lord.

Over against the Teacher of Righteousness in the Qumran literature there stands the figure of the Wicked Priest. Though other identifications have been suggested, there is little doubt that he was Alexander Jannai, or Jannaeus, who was high priest and king from 103 to 76 B.C. That such a title was given him was not just a mark of prejudice, for though he was a relatively successful ruler, he was by any standards a bad man. The activity of the Teacher of Righteousness may very well have started in the time of Hyrcanus, but the active evil and opposition of Jannai—we know that he was a persecutor of groups of the pious—caused the Teacher of Righteousness to withdraw with his disciples to Qumran.†

* The first news of Qumran and its scrolls in 1947 was so unexpected that some suspected an elaborate hoax. There is still no unanimity on many points and complete ignorance on others. See F. F. Bruce, *Second Thoughts on the Dead Sea Scrolls*² as the best introduction.

† The main ruins at Qumran can be dated in the time of Jannai, but there was already a smaller settlement some time earlier, which could go back to the time of Simon, or possibly even his brother Jonathan, who

Behind this withdrawal lay the concept that Israel had clearly been rejected by God. Not merely was there an inadequate loyalty to the Torah, but the high-priesthood was illegitimate as well as defiled by Jannai's semi-pagan life, and the kingship had been usurped by those with no right to the title. So the group in Qumran, in their own eyes at least, were the righteous remnant, the Servant of Jehovah, and their sufferings bore witness to the validity of their claim.

Our purpose here does not call for a closer investigation of the reason why the community at Qumran differed in various ways from the description given by Philo, Josephus and Pliny of the Essenes, with whom they are normally identified. It may be that others were moved by their example but did not wish to be members of a community so predominantly priestly. Equally we need not ask what proportion of the members lived in Qumran itself. After all Josephus, writing of the Essenes, tells us (*War* II. viii. 4), "They have no one certain city, but many of them dwell in every city." While this almost certainly exaggerates their numbers, it supports the impression that Qumran was their headquarters and rallying place on special occasions.

The main points of importance in their views are the extreme stress laid on physical purity, the most rigorous observance of the commandments, especially those connected with the keeping of the Sabbath, where they went far beyond the Pharisees,* the primacy of the priesthood even over the Messiah expected from the house of David, and the possession of a different calendar. Too much stress should not be laid on a partial sharing of property, ascetic living, and apparently abstinence from marriage by at least some of the members. All these were probably not basic but a consequence of the conviction that they were living in the last days.

In some ways the calendar is perhaps the most significant of the points mentioned. It automatically separated them from the official religion of Jerusalem, because by it the great feasts and the fast of the Day of Atonement fell on other dates than in the calendar followed by both Sadducees and Pharisees and maintained to this day. The calendar is the one demanded by the books of Enoch and Jubilees, which are probably older than the Qumran movement itself. Whether this calendar was ever used we do not know, but it seems that the concepts behind it are old, and have, perhaps, left their traces on the Old Testament. It seems clear, however, that the men of Qumran believed that it was ancient and willed by God Himself. By adopting it they proclaimed both their continuance of ancient tradition and their loyalty to God.

It must remain an open question whether sacrifices were brought at Qumran, or whether they considered that when God permitted His temple to be polluted, it implied the end of sacrifice for the time being.

We need not be surprised then that the men of Qumran play no part in the New Testament. Even John's baptism will have repelled them, for the accept-

died in 142 B.C. This fits with the statement that the Teacher of Righteousness came some twenty years after the beginning of the movement.

* A small and isolated community can always apply rules of behaviour more strictly than those who mingle freely with their fellow men.

ance of the multitude and their baptism on no more than verbal repentance with no period of probation went against their most cherished principles. But when Jesus of Nazareth was prepared to consort with the scum of society, with the Quisling tax-collectors and harlots, He had placed Himself outside any serious consideration as a teacher of the truth. It may be noted also that He did not use any of the far-fetched prophetic interpretations of Qumran.

Even though Qumran and its adherents lived on the fringe of Palestinian life, they had a far-reaching influence on Jewry as a whole. The ancient priestly traditions they represented, the strictness of their keeping of the Torah, the asceticism and purity of their lives, all raised them far above any normal censure. That they could disassociate themselves from the Temple and its sacrifices helped to undermine its authority. In spite of their high position the Sadducees were seen as those who had been untrue to an older priestly tradition. Even though the Pharisees made the keeping of the Law humaner than did the Qumran tradition, the ordinary man, who was in any case no friend of undue strictness, saw the possibility of questioning Pharisaic authority. In other words Qumran represented not a heresy, but an unhealable schism which weakened all religious authority.

This helps to explain why the religious leaders, whether priestly or rabbinic, found it so difficult to deal with Jesus. There was no all-powerful authority that could silence Him. Equally, when the Church appeared on the scene after Pentecost, it demanded tolerance in a society which had already had to tolerate a schism which the authorities probably considered fundamentally more dangerous.

It is worth adding that there is fairly wide agreement that the Qumran survivors of the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 were drawn to the Church. If that is so, it will go far to explain the rise of the Ebionite heresy among the Hebrew Christians towards the end of the first century.