

Jesus and the People

With respect to Galilee, Sean Freyne has emphasized a distinction between city and country which endured despite hellenization.¹ In addition to this urban and rural social distinction, there was also the economic reality of class distinction. A. N. Sherwin-White notes the absence of a middle class in the socio-economic world of Galilee.² Freyne points out that the economic developments which did take place in Galilee in the second and first centuries B. C. E. were to the advantage of the few rather than the many.³

In Galilee, agriculture was the most important occupation and the basis of economic life. The fishing industry was confined to the region around the lakes. Even given the fact of increased urbanization, Galilee's population was largely rural. Sepphoris and Tiberias were the only two urban centers. Since Galilee remained so rural and agricultural, a key to the economic situation was the question of land ownership. The Galileans were for centuries a fairly stable

Sean Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B. C. E. to 135 C. E., a Study of Second Temple Judaism* (Co-published by Michael Glazier and University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 195.

²A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 139-43. Also see Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, 165, 176; Harold Hoehner, *Herod Antipas* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 70-73.

³Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, 1976.

population. There was no great change in land ownership patterns in the Ptolemaic and Seleucid periods. This trend was altered during Herodian times as more and more land was confiscated by or distributed by Herod the Great and Herod Antipas. Herod the Great may have owned over half the land in his kingdom.⁴ Thus there developed the two classes of wealthy landowners and impoverished peasants. By the time of Jesus this was the dominant picture.

The situation in Judea was not the same. Whereas Galilee remained influenced by agriculture, Judea was dominated by the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's sphere of influence as a "Hellenistic" city gave her a unique character and position. In Jerusalem there was not only a growing distinction between the rich and the poor, but also the semblance of a middle class.⁵

The rich of Jerusalem included not only large property owners, but also tax farmers, merchants, a priestly "aristocracy," and the royal family. Wealth manifested itself in one's homes, clothing, monuments, servants, banquets, and in the number of wives. Within the middle class in Jerusalem, many working with trades and crafts owned homes and shops in the bazaars. Some of the priests were middle class; others were very poor. Only the priestly aristocracy belonged to the wealthy class itself, for example, Ananias, Annas, Caiaphas. Many of the ordinary priests lived in poverty, as did the majority of the people.⁶

The economically poor included the domestic servants in the homes of the rich, an even larger number of day laborers, and an increasingly large number of beggars concentrated around the holy places - the blind, the lame, the lepers. Also among the poor were many scribes, teachers, and scholars of the Law who were forbidden to be paid for their services. Some of these had other trades, but most had to depend on subsidy.

⁴Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 70.

⁵Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 27-30, 51-57, 73-84, 100-108.

⁶*Ibid.*, 96-119.

The Jewish Aristocracy

The Sanhedrin reflected both Jewish self-rule with respect to internal and judicial affairs but also a power elite within Judaism. Although by the time of Jesus it included representation from a larger, more popular, and Pharisaic base (after 76 B.C. E., the rule of Salome Alexandra), it was predominantly aristocratic. According to Joachim Jeremias, its seventy-one members fell into three groups: chief priests (the priestly aristocracy), elders (the lay aristocracy), and scribes (of the Sadducees and of the Pharisees, an emerging power base of some of the scholars).?

The clergy or priesthood in Judaism manifested both higher and lower ranks, a priestly aristocracy in contrast to the majority of priests who were less powerful and often poor. All the priestly offices were hereditary. The aristocracy comprised both the reigning high priest and the chief priests; the others were simply known as the priests and Levites. According to tradition, the Zadokite family, named after Zadok, the chief priest under Solomon, held the high priesthood in unbroken succession since Aaron (actually probably only since Solomon). This uninterrupted succession lasted until the appointment of Menelaus (172-162) under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, an appointment which ended the Zadokite line of high priests in Jerusalem. In 152 Jonathan the Hasmonean took the high priesthood to himself, a descendant of a priestly but non-aristocratic, non-Zadokite priestly family. His assumption of the high priestly office met with criticism and resistance. The Hasmoneans retained the high priesthood until the time of Herod the Great who put to death all the males of the Hasmonean line. During the Herodian and later Roman period high priests (most of whom were considered illegitimate, not from high priestly families) had come to be appointed by will of the king or the procurator.

The reigning high priest was the head of the priesthood and president of the Sanhedrin. He was the only human

¹Ibid., 197, 222; see I47-245.

being entitled to enter the Holy of Holies, once a year on the Day of Atonement. Even if no longer functioning as a high priest, he retained the title of high priest. In rank after the high priest were, in order: the captain of the Temple, the directors of the weekly course, the directors of the daily course, the overseers of the Temple, and the treasurers. The captain of the Temple was chosen from among the aristocratic priestly families and could well succeed to the high priesthood itself. The Palestinian Talmud indicates that the high priest would not be elected high priest if he had not first been captain of the Temple. The captain was, in general, in charge of the cult and the officiating priests. After him came the 24 directors of the weekly courses, then up to 156 directors of the daily courses. The director of the weekly course had a week of duty once every twenty-four weeks and during the three pilgrim festivals. He performed rites of purification. Each weekly course consisted of four or more daily courses. The directors of weekly and daily courses lived throughout Judea and Galilee and not necessarily in Jerusalem. The next officers, the overseers and treasurers, were permanent appointments. There were at least seven overseers and three treasurers who administered finances, revenues and expenses.

The chief priests who were permanent in the Temple formed an aristocratic elite with seats and votes in the Sanhedrin. Thus within the priesthood itself there existed a social gap between the chief priests and the others. The high priest and Jerusalem chief priests came from special priestly families. In the first century C.E. there were two groups of high priestly families, the legitimate descendants of the Zadokites serving in Leontopolis (in Egypt, where Onias III had founded a Temple), and the illegitimate Jerusalem group. The Jerusalem group exercised great power. Of the twenty-eight who were high priests between 37 B.C.E. and 70 C.E., two were legitimate, one was the last of the Hasmoneans, and twenty-five were illegitimate or from non-high priestly families who rose quickly to power in the Herodian-Roman period. Twenty-two of these twenty-five came from four Jerusalem families, the two most powerful being the

families of Boethus and Annas, with eight high priests each. Annas, his five sons, his son-in-law Caiaphas, and grandson, Matthias, were all high priests.

In contrast to the priestly aristocracy were the "ordinary priests" and "Levites." The "priests," all the priests of Judea and Galilee, were divided into twenty-four groups or classes by tradition. Each group was responsible for one week of duty every twenty-four weeks, and each group was further divided into four to nine families who took turns with daily duties during that week. These priests came to Jerusalem only for their duties which involved two weeks of the year and the three pilgrim festivals. Still lower on the social scale were those simply called Levites. They too were divided into twenty-four groups. They were singers and musicians in the Temple and performed other responsibilities including that of a police force for the Temple.

All of these offices were hereditary. All were descendants of the tribe of Levi. Some were also descendants of one Levite in particular, Aaron. Thus there was already a distinction among the descendants of Levi, the "Levites" so called, and the Aaronites or priests. Within the priesthood there was a further distinction among the descendants of Aaron. The high priests were descended from one prominent Aaronite, namely Zadok. The "Levites" (the non-Aaronite Levites) were a lower order than the "priests" (the non-Zadokite priests) who were lower than the high priests (the Zadokites). With the flight of the Zadokite family and the destruction of the Hasmoneans, the priestly aristocracy continued with the new wealthy Jerusalem families.

In addition to the priestly aristocracy, there had also developed a lay aristocracy. In post-exilic times, without a king, ancient ruling families had become the basis of social order. These heads of the prominent families began to play a new role in a new society. In the post-exilic world, the Sanhedrin, the supreme assembly, represented both the leading priestly and lay families of Judaism - the aristocracy. The lay aristocracy, heads of the leading Jerusalem families, were the "elders" of the people. They were large land-owning families and mainly Sadducees.

In addition to the chief priests and the elders, the scribes were represented on the Sanhedrin. Some of them were priests but most were not. They had given their lives to study and scholarship and usually began these studies at an early age. Scribes were also called rabbis, but this title had not become fixed in the time of Jesus nor was it limited to those who had undergone formal study. Apart from the chief priests and elders, only scribes were members of the Sanhedrin. This group represented a less aristocratic portion in the Sanhedrin, since theoretically any male could become a scribe if he gave himself to a life of study. There were Sadducean scribes, but a large number were the scribes of the Pharisees.⁸ This was the only way the Pharisees were represented on the Sanhedrin. The aristocratic families were Sadducean.

Taxation

During the Ptolemaic and Seleucid periods tax collecting was taken away from a specific representative of the king (the practice in the Persian period) and given to the highest bidder, a practice known as tax farming.⁹ Opening tax collection to a bidder opened the door to widespread abuse. Whatever revenue the collector could gather over and above what he owed became his own income. Hence most tax collectors were both wealthy and despised. During the Roman period the system of tax farming continued. The Roman officials in Palestine had responsibility for collecting taxes, but the taxes were frequently farmed out. These tax farmers were sometimes Roman, sometimes Jewish, and

⁸There is some dispute about who the scribes were. I have followed Jeremias here, *Jerusalem in the Time Of Jesus*, 233-45. Yet it has also been argued that the scribes and Pharisees were co-terminus or synonymous. See Ellis Rivkin, "Scribes, Pharisees, Lawyers, Hypocrites: a Study in Synonymity," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 49 (1978), 135-42. Also, Ellis Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978).

⁹For further background on taxation, see Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings Of Jesus* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 31-33; Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 183-194*; F. C. Grant, *the Economic Background Of the Gospels* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 87-110; Hoehner, *Herod Antipas*, 73-79.

they hired others, often Jews, to do the actual collecting. Zaccheus evidently was a Jewish tax farmer in the Jericho region. The Jewish tax collector was generally despised both for the wealth which he collected at the expense of others, his fellow Jews, and also for the service which he performed for the oppressive foreign power, an act of disloyalty for Jewish nationalists. From the Jewish perspective, the tax collector was a public sinner.

In addition to the method of collection, another major problem was the burden imposed by two sets of obligations. Both sets affected the farmers the most. There was a civil or political tax imposed by the foreign political power as well as the religious tax or tithes required of the Jews by the Law. F.C. Grant writes, "Under the Romans, therefore, there was a twofold taxation of the Jewish people, civil and religious; each of these had been designed without regard to the other, and therefore could not be modified in its favor." ¹⁰

In addition to the Roman/ Herodian taxes, the Jews were taxed as part of their religious obligations, and varied tithes existed, such as on agricultural produce. These supported the priests, Levites, Temple treasury, and some went to the poor and to the scribes. F. C. Grant lists twelve such religious tax obligations which had accumulated and describes the sum total as "nothing short of enormous." ¹¹ For example, the Law required every year an offering of "first fruits," which ranged from one to three percent of the produce. Also, every year, there was the tithe of ten percent for the support of the priests, Levites, and Temple. In the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the seven-year sabbatical cycle, there was a second tithe of an additional ten percent. In the third and sixth years, there was a tithe of ten percent for the poor. Thus the amount required by Law on agricultural produce alone was over twenty percent. There was also the annual Temple half shekel tax (about a day's wage).

To these religious (divinely revealed) taxes, the Romans had added their own crop, land and poll taxes. The taxes due

¹⁰ F. C. Grant, *The Economic Background of the Gospels*, 89.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94-97.

Rome were over and above the requirements of the Law. Grant estimates that "the total taxation of the Jewish people in the time of Jesus, civil and religious combined, must have approached the intolerable proportion of between 30 and 40 percent; it may have been higher Still."¹²

The Religious Situation

It is a mistake to think of early Palestinian Judaism as a unified whole. The many cultural, economic, political, and religious factors at work between 200 B.C.E. and 70 C.E. manifested themselves in pluralism and sectarianism. There was the earlier split between the Hellenists and the Hasidim over how much of tradition could be compromised with the new Hellenistic civilization, and this was followed by pro- and anti-Hasmonean forces, as well as Herodian and anti-Herodian factions. By the first century C.E., there were at least three major "parties" - the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes - as well as other varied ascetical, baptist, messianic and resistance movements.

Although we think of the *Sadducees* as a religious party, they were a social, economic, and political party as well.¹³ Socially the Sadducees were the aristocratic members of society, the economically wealthy. Politically they were those who had sufficiently benefited from Roman presence to be politically favorable to the status quo. In 66-70 C.E., however, the uprising began with some of the aristocrats, but they soon lost control as the movement was given direction by the Zealots.

In Roman times the high priest was ordinarily Sadducean. The later Hasmoneans as well as the families of the illegitimate high priestly aristocracy were Sadducean. The

¹²Ibid., 105.

¹³See Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 222-32. Also "Sadducees," vol. 14, *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), 620-22; and Emil Shurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, revised and edited by Geza Vermes, et al, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1979), 404-14.

lay aristocracy was mostly Sadducean. The Sadducees were the aristocracy. They lacked the popular support of the people. They were a small group, but significant, an elite, centered in Jerusalem. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., they disappeared.

From a religious point of view, the Sadducees were a more conservative party than the Pharisees, their major rival. The major point of theological difference between the Sadducees and the Pharisees was that of the oral tradition and oral Law, accepted by the Pharisees, rejected by the Sadducees. The Law had been and still was the Torah, the books of Moses, the first five of the Hebrew Scriptures. But many writings had developed since that time and were considered Scripture as well. In addition, through the centuries, the Law had been in need of interpretation. Thus there had developed in addition to the written Law, an oral Law, later codified into the Mishnah in the latter half of the second century C.E. The Sadducees considered this oral Law as lacking in authority.

A rejection of the development of the oral tradition included a rejection of the later angelology, resurrection and afterlife, and thus a rejection of the system of future punishments and rewards. Of course, Sadducees did not need to look toward heavenly rewards; they had received theirs in this life. Their denial of the resurrection is the issue that Paul used to split the Sanhedrin when he was brought before them, gaining the support of the Pharisees by proclaiming that what he preached about Jesus was a problem only because he preached Jesus raised from the dead (Acts 23:6-10). We hear of the Sadducees after the reign of John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.E.) who had supported them since the Pharisees had become critical of his illegitimate high priesthood. Later Alexandra (76-67 B.C. E.) shifted her support to the Pharisees.

The *Pharisees*, in contrast to the Sadducees, were a popular party, more representative of the people.¹⁴ They were

¹⁴John Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973).
Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety; the Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*

essentially but not exclusively a lay group and staunch supporters of the oral Law including the doctrines of resurrection and rewards or punishments. Although the theological differences with the Sadducees are significant, the Pharisees are probably better understood as those who upheld a strict observance of the Law.

There are many questions about Pharisaism which are difficult to answer and yet are of great interest because of its link with post 70 C.E. Rabbinic Judaism and its frequent role as foil in the New Testament where Pharisaism was concerned for the purity of Israel. Some have held that the Pharisees were descendants of the Hasidim who were perhaps also the ancestors of the Essenes before they broke with worship in Jerusalem because of the illegitimate Hasmonean priesthood. During the rule of the Hasmoneans, from John Hyrcanus (135-104 B.C.E.) to Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E.), the Pharisees grew in support among the people but were prevented by the Hasmoneans from having any effective political power. They were critics of the illegitimate Hasmonean priesthood but did not reject it as completely as did the Essenes. By the time of his death, Alexander Jannaeus recognized the growing strength of the Pharisees and advised his wife, Salome Alexandra (76-67 B.C.E.), to reconcile herself with them. They then grew in political significance. It was probably at this time that their scribes were allowed seats on the Sanhedrin prior to which the Sanhedrin would have been exclusively Sadducean. Herod the Great recognized their power as well and tried not to push them too far.

The Pharisees became guardians of racial purity and a symbol for the true Israel. Yet the Pharisees were not as separatist as the Essenes (who completely refused to worship in Jerusalem) nor as the later Zealots (who refused to accept the Roman occupation) nor aristocrats like the Sadducees. In one sense, they were political and religious mod-

(Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973). A classic is Louis Finkelstein's *Pharisees*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962). Also see the article and bibliography, "Pharisees," vol. I3, *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), 363-66a; Emil Schurer, vol. 2, 388-403. Also see n. 8 in this chapter.

erates. In the beginning it seems as if they may have been closed communities of brotherhoods not unlike the Essenes.¹⁵

While the Pharisees can be somewhat defined over against the Sadducees, they saw themselves as the racially pure ones in Judaism over against the am ha-aretz and thus, socially speaking, represented a middle segment in society. Thus the first centuries, B.C.E. and C.E., saw something of a shift from the power of the old ruling aristocratic families to the more popularly based Pharisees, a shift which represented a struggle for political power where religious issues played a major role. Although it is common for Christians to associate all Pharisees with hypocrisy, there were many good Pharisees. The later Talmud speaks of seven kinds of Pharisees. Jesus was a friend of some Pharisees, and in Luke 13:31 some Pharisees warned Jesus about Herod's seeking his life. Pharisaism in itself manifested a variety of views with respect to the interpretation of the Law. The two most prominent schools of opinion in the age of Herod the Great were those of Hillel and Shammai (c. 20-10 B.C.E.)¹⁶

Given the extensive amount of material made available and the number of articles since the discoveries at Qumran and in the Judean desert as a whole, it is difficult to present any adequate summary of the *Essenes*.¹⁷ They, like the Pharisees, may have had a relation to the ancient Hasidim. They may indeed have broken away from the Pharisees when the Hasmoneans usurped the high priesthood. The

¹⁵See Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 251-54; Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 161; Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran in Perspective* (Cleveland: World Pub. Co., 1978), 120-21.

¹⁶Sandmel, *Judaism and Christian Beginnings*, 237-42. Also "Sages," vol. 14, *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), 636-56.

¹⁷See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Judean Desert," in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Robert A. Kraft and George W. E. Nickelsburg, vol. 2 of *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, forthcoming; and "Qumran and the New Testament," in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. Mac Rae, vol. 3 of *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, forthcoming. Also Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran in Perspective*. Also see "Essenes," vol. 6, *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), 899-902.

movement seems to have been a Palestinian phenomenon originating in conjunction with the religious persecution of the Seleucids.

The Essenes seem to have been a movement or sect located in the varied towns of Judea and in the wilderness west of the Dead Sea, especially at Qumran. Both the desert and town members followed the same leader and Qumran was the site of the leadership. At Qumran they lived a fairly communal or monastic life, without private property, with a three year period of probation, and with the practice of celibacy, although some married. Having repudiated the illegitimate worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, they were seen as having withdrawn from the larger Jewish society. Their *Community Rule* describes the way of life at Qumran.¹⁸ Their religious life involved ritual washings and baptism, common prayer, and the study of the Hebrew Scriptures. Their interpretation of the Law was stricter than that of the Pharisees. The Essenes were both politically and religiously non-compromising.

It is almost unanimously accepted today that the people associated with the Qumran scrolls are the Essenes. The Qumran manuscripts antedate 68 C.E., when the community was dispersed during the Jewish War after which time the Essenes fade from history. The movement existed for approximately twenty years before the coming of the Teacher of Righteousness who became its leader. This leader was a particular individual and contemporary of Jonathan (161-143 B.C.E.). The manuscripts speak not only of this teacher but also of the wicked priest whom the Teacher and sectarians opposed. This wicked priest has been variously identified as Hyrcanus 11, Alexander Janneus, Simon Maccabeus, but the brother Jonathan presently has the most support. There also seems to have been another wicked figure other than the priest, the Man of Lies, who seems to have been an Essene himself but one who broke away from the group that followed the Teacher of

¹⁸See Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, second edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1975), 71-94.

Righteousness. The Man of Lies gives evidence of hostile groups and a split within the Essene movement. Such a split may have followed upon the Teacher of Righteousness insisting on a complete break with the Temple or proposing to move to Qumran.

The Sadducees were a socio-economic elite in contrast to the Pharisees who were more the party of the common people. The Essenes represented a religious conservatism or radicalism with respect to the Pharisees; they were uncompromising about the illegitimacy of the cult in Jerusalem. In addition to these three major "parties," there were other ascetical as well as resistance movements. The anti-Roman political stance was taken up by resistance fighters.¹⁹ They manifested a "Maccabean spirit," opposed the payment of taxes to the foreign oppressors, gave themselves to the cause of Jewish independence, and were frequently armed militants and nationalists. They were especially involved in the 66-70 C.E. war. Today we are very conscious of their patriotic spirit symbolized in their final stand at Masada, Herod's old fortress, where Zealots held out for three years after the fall of Jerusalem.²⁰

The Am ha-aretz

It has been sufficiently recognized that from a social point of view the whole community of Judaism at the time of Jesus was dominated by the fundamental idea of the mainte-

¹⁹Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus*, 27-49, argues against seeing the resistance movement as already an organized party at the time of Jesus. Resistance fighters came from a cross section of society. Also see Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 38, 48-58, 61, 80-81. Also see Martin Hengel, *Die Zeloten* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961); Sean Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, 208-09.

²⁰Yigael Yadin, *Masada* (New York: Random House, 1966). For a recent study on the unreliability of Josephus at this point, see Shaye Cohen, "Masada: Literary Tradition, Archaeological Remains, and the Credibility of Josephus," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 33 (1982), 385-405.

nance of racial purity.²¹ Social stratification existed not only at the top of the ladder with the aristocracy, but throughout the society, culminating with the *am ha-aretz*.²²

The principle for social status was that of racial purity, which led to a tri-partite division: pure ancestry, slight blemish, grave blemish.²³ The first rung of society comprised those of pure ancestry, the priests, Levites, the laity with pure descent. The ordinary Jew knew his immediate ancestors and the tribe from which he descended. In the post-exilic period there was great interest in family trees and genealogy and not only within the aristocracy. Most families at this time came from either the tribe of Judah, in which the line of David was of particular significance because of its messianic implications, or the tribe of Benjamin. Mordecai of the book of Esther, Paul, Paul's teacher Gamaliel 1, were all Benjaminites. Only a few could trace lineage to one of the ten lost tribes. Even for the laity, genealogical tradition was not only kept but frequently recorded. Family ancestry was not curiosity or nostalgia; it carried with it social and legal implications. It was a social and legal privilege for one's daughter to be able to marry a priest. Only those of pure descent could do so. Pure ancestry was also demanded for members of the Sanhedrin, for public offices, for signing marriage contracts. Also, only those of pure ancestry could be *assured* of future salvation.

Next on the social ladder were the socially impure, but those only slightly so. This included the illegitimate children of priests (children born of a marriage between a priest and a woman who was not of pure descent), the proselyte converts (Gentiles converted to Judaism who had been both baptized and circumcised if male, and baptized if female), and freed Gentile slaves (Gentile men and women who had become

²¹Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 270. Also see Borg, 51-72.

^{22A} Oppenheimer, *The Am Ha-Aretz. A Study in the Social History of the Jewish People in the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977). Also "Am Ha-Aretz," vol. 2, *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971), 833-36.

²³See Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 275-344.

slaves in service of Jews and then accepted baptism and circumcision, and for some reason later freed). These slightly blemished people could not marry a priest or hold an important office, but in everyday life the restrictions were not burdensome.

On the bottom of the social scale were those seriously blemished, the "excrement of the community," not only those forbidden to marry priests, but also forbidden to marry Levites or any Israelite of pure ancestry or even an illegitimate descendant of a priest. These included bastards (children conceived in adultery, who could then only marry Gentile converts or freed Gentile slaves or other Jews seriously blemished), the fatherless (those whose father was unknown) and eunuchs. These indeed were outlaws, social outcasts, kept apart. The social importance of racial purity was also manifest in the attitude toward the Samaritans.

Although racial purity was the major principle determinate of social status, it was not the only one. Independent of ancestry was the question of certain professions and the role of women. There were a series of despised trades with varying lists of such occupations. The most serious of these were the gamblers, usurers, and tax collectors, all public sinners. But for varied reasons, and with varied degrees of stigma, also mentioned are launderers, barbers, weavers, peddlers, tanners, and dung collectors. The social position of a woman was also that of an inferior?⁴ When she was in public, her face and head were hidden and covered and she was not to converse with anyone. Her education was restricted to the tasks of domestic life. Her father and later her husband had rights over her. In marriage the man "acquired" the woman. Polygamy was permitted and the wife had to accept concubines. Only the husband had the right to divorce.

As we look back over the socio-economic picture, we find within Judaism itself an aristocratic power elite, priestly and lay; an increasingly burdensome system of tithes and taxes

⁴Ibid., 359-76. Also see Benedict Viviano, *Study as Worship* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 11.

carried by the many, with a growing gap between rich and poor; a carefully acknowledged system of social status based on racial purity, with many social outcasts. In addition to these phenomena within Judaism, there was the continuing presence of foreign domination, the Roman occupation with its additional burden of taxes. The situations in Galilee and Judah were not exactly the same. After 6 C.E. there was a more direct Roman presence in Judah; Galilee remained under Herod Antipas. An emerging middle class in Jerusalem accompanied urbanization in general. In Galilee, a strong gap continued between the large landowners and the peasants, whether tenants or holders of family farms. Given the inseparable social and economic problems, F. C. Grant's description is apt: "the little land of Palestine with its poverty, overpopulation, declining food supply, wasteful government, and recurrent rebellion."²⁵

The majority of Palestinian Jews were not directly affiliated with any of the three major groups or parties. Population estimates for this period must be taken as just that - as estimates.²⁶ The population of the whole of Palestine during the first century C.E. has been estimated as having been between one and a half to two million. Of these the Jewish population in Palestine may have numbered from 500,000 to 600,000. The Jewish population would have been far less than half of the total population of Palestine (anywhere between 25 and 40 percent). The Sadducees, a significant socio-economic and political group, were a small number numerically. The number of Essenes has been estimated at approximately 4,000. There were perhaps no more than 150 to 200 of these at Qumran at any one time. The Pharisees

25F. C. Grant, "The Economic Background of the New Testament," *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology*, ed. W. D. Davies and D. Daube in honor of C. H. Dodd (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), 114. This essay, 99-114, provides a good summary of the literature pertinent to the economic background.

²⁶ emphasize that our figures are estimates. See Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 27, 83-84, 203-5, 252; Bruce Metzger, *The New Testament, its Background, Growth and Context* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 39-45; Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Qumran in Perspective*, 88, 119, 125.

have been estimated at approximately 6,000. These figures provided by Josephus refer only to adult males. It is difficult to provide any estimate for the Zealots since it is difficult to determine when they came into existence and whether they were in fact a unified movement or whether the term is an umbrella term covering several movements. Their numbers varied with the times.

A good guess with respect to the three "parties" is no more than 10,000 to 25,000, while the entire Jewish population of Palestine may have been **500,000 to 600,000**. Thus probably more than ninety-five percent were not directly affiliated with these "major Jewish parties."²⁷ It is best, however, not to think of all of the others as *am ha-aretz*. These "people of the land" failed to observe the whole of the Law. In some cases it was someone whose Judaism was mixed and with whom the more strict Jew would not intermarry, or someone uneducated and hence ignorant of details of the Law from whom exact observance could not be expected, something of a religious lower class which often included many of the poorer sections although even a rich person could be one of these religious outcasts.

Both Sean Freyne and Benedict Viviano have pointed out that the term *am ha-aretz* changed meanings. Freyne distinguishes between pre-70 C.E. and post-70 C.E. usage while Viviano indicates a lengthier history.²⁸ In general, however, it had the connotation of the common people, the ignorant and uneducated, the unobservant of the Law and ritually unclean. This segment would certainly have included much of the Galilean peasantry but would not have been limited to them alone. In general, the religious pluralism must simply

²⁷If we consider the two larger groups, the Essenes and Pharisees 4000 and 6000, then 10,000 is a base estimate. If we take an estimate including women, we could double the figure. We could estimate the Sadducees as a much smaller group. Given previous estimates, if we take 25,000 as a high figure for membership in the three parties, and 500,000 as a low figure for the Jewish population, it seems as if at most the population of the three groups may have been only 5% of the total.

²⁸The pre-70 C.E. implication is failure to observe the purity laws; the post-70 C.E. implication is failure to study the Torah. See Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian*, 307; Viviano, *Study as Worship*, 42.

be seen to have included a large number of outcasts, marginals for diverse reasons and on diverse social and religious grounds.

Jesus seems to have had a widespread following of widely diversified people cutting across both social and religious barriers. Indeed, his following was so diversified that some have come close to identifying Jesus with the Pharisees²⁹ while others have maintained that he was one of the *am ha-aretz*.³⁰ Jesus was a man of the people, for the people, sought after for a wide variety of reasons, even by Samaritans. Not all of his following can be considered disciples who accepted his teaching and considered him the one for whom they had been waiting, who accompanied him on his journeys or even preached and healed in his name. But the wider group of his associates included the spectrum of Israel and Palestine. Gradually there emerged, in addition to the wider circle of followers and the narrower circle of explicit disciples, a growing circle of opposition as well, coming from the upper class and especially from the religious establishment. But even after the emergence of an opposition, his following was large. The sociology of those who interacted with Jesus leads to three groupings: (1) the multitudes and crowds, which include many *am ha-aretz*; (2) the disciples, various people who followed after Jesus; and (3) the opposition, which must be variously interpreted, perhaps more from the Pharisees in Galilee but more from the Jerusalem aristocracy in Judea.

Those who were attracted to Jesus, who longed to hear him, who chose to follow him as their prophet and teacher were not one homogeneous group. Yet what emerges is how popular Jesus was, how sought after by the poor or the

²⁹Viviano, 43, suggests the possibility that Jesus may have maintained a Pharisaic level of observance of the Law.

³⁰At least it is maintained that Jesus would have been classed as one of the *am ha-aretz* by the Pharisees. See G. F. Moore, in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, eds. Jackson and Lake, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 445; S. S. Cohon, "The Place of Jesus in the Religious Life of His Day," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 48 (1929), 82-108.

common and ordinary people, the religiously marginal people, by the masses, simply by the people, by those without status from economic, social, or religious points of view. They loved him. He made them laugh. He respected their tears. He knew their pain. He associated with them, respected them, enjoyed their company. They listened to him, learned from him, believed in him, had hope because of him, and he lived for them. He taught them, spoke of the nearness of God to them, made them feel holy and righteous. He reached out to them, compassionately, generously, faithfully, humbly, joyfully. He healed their sick. He made them feel human again. He preached an impending social reversal. They were his people, and he was their teacher.

Albert Nolan in his portrait of Jesus before the "theologization" of Christianity has described these disparate associates of Jesus: "The people to whom Jesus turned his attention are referred to in the gospels by a variety of terms: the poor, the blind, the lame, the crippled, the lepers, the hungry, the miserable (those who weep), sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, demoniacs (those possessed by unclean spirits), the persecuted, the downtrodden, the captives, all who labor and are overburdened, the rabble who know nothing of the law, the crowds, the little ones, the least, the last and the babes or the lost sheep of the house of Israel."³¹

We may not be able to situate Jesus within the *am ha-aretz* himself. Nor can we easily and precisely specify who the *am ha-aretz* were at differing periods in Judaism's history. But we can say that Jesus was "for them," manifested by his willingness to be "with them," and to be with them gladly. Jesus was a religious man, a man of prayer, of religious observance, of God. He was a learned man, however he acquired that learning, knowledgeable with respect to the Law, the Scriptures. It would not have been noteworthy that Jesus had associates or followers from among the Pharisees. What evidently stood out was that he was so

³¹ See Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1978), 21. See esp. 21-42.

present to and spoke to the social and religious outcast, those on the margin of society and periphery of Judaism. That *he*, a *religious* man, one who spoke so authoritatively on behalf of God, that this man, this particular practicing, learned, holy, prophetic messenger of God *associated with them* was the significant reality. It evidently was unusual, unexpected and notorious that "religion" could actually be "for the people."

The Opposition

Jesus' following appears to have been large and varied. As he increasingly became good news for many people, however, he also triggered the development of a growing opposition. How gradual, pronounced, or widespread the opposition was is difficult to determine. Eventually, however, a gulf developed between Jesus and many of the "leaders" of Judaism. This opposition cannot be identified with Judaism as a whole. Jesus himself was Jewish and saw himself as a faithful and practicing Jew. It appears as if the Jewish people as a whole respected him as a prophet and teacher. Nor can the opposition to Jesus be identified with the Pharisees.³² One of the great injustices of Christian preaching has been to identify the Pharisees with hypocrisy. Not all, not even the majority of Pharisees, were hypocritical.

Two factors have led Christians to think wrongly with respect to Pharisaism. The first is that it ordinarily appears as if the charges or condemnations were directed by Jesus against them as a whole body (Lk 11:42-44). I agree with T. W. Manson that such was probably not Jesus' intention, given his friendly association with them and also a certain commonality with them in many instances.

³²For clarification with respect to Jesus' relation to the Pharisees, see in particular John Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973); Benedict Viviano, *Study as Worship*, 40-44, 171-175; Paul Winter, on *The Trial of Jesus*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1961), 111-35.

The woes against Pharisees are all concerned with the practice rather than with the interpretation of the law. As the Greek text stands, the sweeping denunciations are directed against the whole Pharisaic party. Whether this was the case in the original Aramaic is a question which cannot be answered. All that can be said is that "Woe unto you Pharisees! for ye tithe. . ." represents Aramaic which could equally well be rendered "Woe unto you Pharisees who tithe. . ." . . . The reference could thus be not to the whole body of Pharisees, but to those among them who were Pharisees only on the surface... The Pharisaic ideal was a genuine religious ideal; and the men who gave themselves to it were mostly sincere and earnest. To maintain that all Pharisees were ipsofacto hypocrites is as absurd as to claim that they were all saints. The truth is that some of them were men of eminent saintliness, many kept a worthy standard both in piety and morality, and some were complete frauds. It is to this last class that the woes really apply .³³

The second factor distorting Christian perception of the Pharisees is that the writing of the Gospels took place to a great degree after 70 C.E., after the destruction of the Second Temple, and during the formative period of Judaism, a time when Judaism and Christianity were separating from each other, when Judaism was attempting to rebuild itself, and when the Gentile mission had obviously become central to Christian preaching. It is particularly after 70 C. E. that the Pharisaic party becomes more or less coterminous with Judaism. Essenes and Sadducees did not survive the war and the future of Judaism was in the hands of the rabbis and Pharisees. Thus Christian anti-Jewish polemic was at that time anti-Pharisaic polemic. One cannot simply identify the anti-Pharisaisms of the Gospels with the teaching of Jesus himself. Jesus' teaching in the first third of the

³³T. W. Manson *The Sayings of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich. William B. Eerdmans Co., [1937] 1957), 97-99.

first century had a different social context than the Christian preaching in the latter third of that same century.

The Synoptics do not attribute any negative role to the Pharisees in the trial and passion of Jesus. Thus it is probably accurate to say that they were not overly involved in it. Morton Smith writes, "Given the hostility to the Pharisees already apparent in Mark, and the demonstrated practice of adding references to them for polemic purposes to the gospel texts, it is incredible that, if any of the synoptic evangelists had heard anything of Pharisees participating in the actual proceedings against Jesus, he should not have reported it."³⁴ Thus it appears as if the "enemies" of Jesus ought not be quickly identified with "the Pharisees." The anti-Pharisaic attitude of the Gospels manifests the *Sitz im Leben* of the Church.

Yet Jesus' integrity and single-mindedness, his radicality and faith, his love of God and neighbor, his uncompromising attitude toward *religious* hypocrisy and its failure to practice the central command of Scripture and tradition to love neighbor, all these aspects of his teaching attracted opposition, an opposition bound to be even greater in Jerusalem than anywhere in Galilee. The outcome of this opposition will be the starting point for the next volume in this series. This present volume is concerned with the mission and earthly ministry of Jesus.

One of Us

Jesus was a human being just as we are human beings. This does not imply that he was a sinner in the way that we are sinners, but rather that he searched and struggled and suffered as we all do. One characteristic of Jesus' humanness, or consequence of his identity with us and our struggle, was his compassion. His humanity was not an abstract humanity, but the sweat and blood and fear and joy within

³⁴Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 156.

which he worked out the direction and meaning of his life. No docetism here. Whatever else we may say about Jesus on the pages ahead, we cannot let go of his identity and solidarity with us. He had the limitations of a physical body. He felt the feelings we feel. He learned by experience. He relied upon faith and prayer. He was culturally and socially situated.

As a human being, Jesus was inevitably a historical being, rooted in a particular culture and ethos at a particular period of human history. He was a Jew, a Palestinian Jew, a Galilean, who lived some time between 6-4 B.C.E. and 30-33 C.E., during the Roman occupation of Palestine.

The world into which Jesus of Nazareth was born and in which he grew up was quite varied - politically, economically, religiously. There were both hasidic and hellenist groups. On the hasidic side there were the Pharisees and Essenes with their own differences. Many, but not all, were influenced by a wide variety of expectations for the future of Judaism - eschatological, messianic, and apocalyptic hopes.

Although Jesus' joys and sorrows, fears and insights, friends and family, mission and message and experience of God were peculiar to him and not exactly the same as any other human being's, he shared totally in the burdens and the privilege of what it means to be one of us. The purpose of a theology of Jesus is to understand more fully the life of this particular human being, and such a theology begins with the awareness that Jesus is human, someone like us, the compassionate one who feels our weaknesses with us (Heb 4:15). We now move into our first christological task, Jesus research and interpretation, but we are already aware of the humanness, historicity, and Jewishness of Jesus.